ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Once A Plumber – by Edgar Franklin

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Warren Hartle

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXXIX CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 25, 1920 NUMBER 1

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

FIVE SHORT STORIES

GREAT STORIES IN 1921

will make Argosy-Allstory Weekly a wonderful investment for the reader. Space fails to print particulars, but among the authors to be represented by serials and novelettes will be

Achmed Abdullah	*George M. A. Cain*	*Hulbert Footner*	*Elizabeth York Miller*	*George C. Shedd*
Richard Barry	*Captain Dingle*	*J. U. Giesy*	*Frank L. Packard*	*Perley Poore Sheehan*
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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.

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Classified Advertising continued on page 2, back section.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CXXIX SATURDAY, DECEMBER 25, 1920 NUMBER 1

Once a Plumber—

by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Beware of the Bride," "Everything but the Truth," "Face Value," etc.

CHAPTER I:

ALL THINGS BEING RELATIVE.

BY nature an almost criminally inquisitive soul, Samuel Topp stood for a matter of fully five minutes on the veranda of his "Olmford Bakery and Tearoom," and squinted through the brilliant morning sunlight toward the sign directly across Olmford's main street.

The bold gold lettering proclaimed the establishment of "Blyn & Wilson, Plumbers and Steamfitters," with a smaller explanatory "Joseph Blyn" and a "William Wilson"; but it was by no means the sign itself that held Samuel's earnest attention. He had been entirely familiar with that gilded legend for several years; the thing he studied so intently was the shaggy spot just above the oak partition in the left window of the store.

Obviously, this was a head. It appeared —went down out of sight for a little—bobbed up again, occasionally showing a suggestion of starched white collar beneath. Obviously, since a hand came up now and then and scratched it with the dull end of a penholder, it was the head of one who worked over the desk, invisible from this point. Obviously also, the owner of the head was engaged in a long and arduous task—because the head had been there last night when Samuel shut up shop, and it had been there again at half past seven this morning, and it was now going to ten.

Further, the cranium belonged to Joseph Blyn; he was the rather blond member of the firm, and the more accomplished bookkeeper; and since to-day was nowhere near the first of the month, and Joe, as a consequence, could not be making out bills all this time, Samuel Topp pushed along his mental path toward a definite conclusion. Having come within sight of it, he smiled meditatively and permitted some of the curiosity to gleam in his eye. Meditatively, too, he considered his young brother-in-law clerk, who trotted busily between the shiny, tiny little delivery wagon at the curb and the big window at the rear of the store, where a white-capped person pushed out trays of freshly baked wares.

"Pete," murmured Samuel, "this is the second week in June, ain't it?"

Peter paused and shook the perspiration from his brow.

"Huh? Yes. Why?"

"That's what they're doing, then!! That's just what it is. Pete, you got all the water rolls I'm going to need on the wagon now. Don't forget them lunch rolls for the hotel—and put in them three extra French loaves for Mis' Saunders, up to the Elms. Be sure you get in them two mince pies for the Fergusons, and mark 'em plain, so's I don't mislay 'em. I'll be back shortly."

"Well, where you going?"

"Just across the street to 'tend to some business," Samuel stated, as he started off.

"Well, ain't you goin' to give me a hand loadin' this wagon?" Peter demanded indignantly.

"I ain't," Samuel answered simply, and stepped from the curb.

In the most casual way he paused and surveyed the sky; he turned down the street and paused again, as if undecided just where to go for the killing of the next few minutes. He shrugged his shoulders then and loitered across the drowsy main street, to hesitate again and finally to move through the doorway of Blyn & Wilson's.

Bill Wilson, rather long and lean, engaged just then in the gloomy perusal of a supply catalogue, glanced up and grunted, evincing no overwhelming joy at the visitation. Joe Blyn, though, from his stool behind the desk, grinned cheerily with:

"Hello, Sam!"

"Morning, Joe," said Samuel, and yawned. "Busy?"

"Day and night," Bill Wilson submitted tartly. "What can we do for you? Something busted over in your bakery?"

"Only the help's temper, from too darned much work," said Samuel with a smile. "Two or three hours' overtime every blessed day. Amazin' the way business keeps on growing in this little town, ain't it?"

William returned to his catalogue, Joseph nodded assent.

"You boys find it about the same way, I take it?" the visitor pursued.

"We're not kicking," said Joseph.

"Having a pretty good season?"

"Oh, good enough."

Samuel yawned again, demonstrating greater unconcern.

"Hi—ho—hum!" said he. "This must be just about the end of your business year, ain't it? You boys started up here in June, five years ago."

"Got a wonderful memory, haven't you?" William muttered.

Rather expectantly, Samuel was looking at Joseph. Joseph only dipped his pen and jotted down a figure or two in the big ledger before him—and presently Samuel frowned a little, accepted without invitation the odd chair, and tilted back against the wall.

"Yes, sir," said he, "I guess you boys have been doing pretty well, right here in the little old home town. I ain't saying you didn't do it yourselves; they wa'ant much to the business when you took it over from old Beard, was there?"

They neither agreed nor disagreed.

"No, sir; what you done, you done yourselves, and you done it noble!" Samuel ambled on. "I'm plumb glad to see it so, too. You ain't got any competition at all in the county now, have you?"

"Nope," Wilson responded briefly.

"That's right; no competition at all. Godley died, over there to Pennsville, and nobody started up in his place. You run them two Brown boys straight out of business. Got every durned bit of the plumbing trade around here, you two young fellers have. It must pay pretty good."

Bill Wilson was deep in his catalogue again. Joe Blyn merely smiled once more, and rather mysteriously—and this was odd, because as a rule Joe talked freely. Samuel Topp hitched about to face him and grew more direct.

"You boys took in a pretty tidy sum this last year, I shouldn't wonder?" he ventured.

"Neither should I," grinned Joseph.

"I see you're—ah—making up the books for the year, Joe. Er—around how much does a business like this clear, in a good year?" Samuel asked flatly, because hints seemed to land nowhere at all this morning.

With a sudden scowl, William Wilson

tossed his catalogue to the counter behind him.

"Listen!" he commanded.

"Huh?"

"You really want to know how much we've made, Sam?"

"Well, I'm always interested and—"

"Then I'll tell you just how we figure it. We take all the money we've collected and then subtract all the money we've had to spend — and there you have the answer. That's precisely what we've made during the year. Simple? Yes? Good morning!"

"Well—er—what I meant—"

"I know what you meant. You know what you've got," snapped the junior partner. "If there's anything else you want to know about our business, go ahead and ask it."

Samuel considered him briefly.

"Got quite a grouch this morning, ain't you, Bill?" he queried.

"No more than usual, when people come prying into my business."

"I guess just plain 'no more'n usual' 'd be nearer right!" Samuel said nastily as he arose and sauntered to the door.

It is possible that he contemplated further queries, for he glanced at Joseph from the corner of his eye. Joseph, however, was writing again, and Samuel, with a sniff, strolled out and across to the wagon, where a superheated Peter waited — and only when he was visibly conversing with Peter did Joseph say gently:

"Well, the village gossip being gone, are you ready for a shock, Bill?"

William stared blackly.

"Say, didn't we make anything at all last year?" he demanded.

"It isn't that kind of a shock," Joe grinned. "I just put down the last figure as he came through the door. Get this!" He smiled quite excitedly at the page before him. "Bill, this last year, after deducting everything — your wages, my wages, labor, materials, taxes, interest, everything—we've cleared twenty-two hundred and forty-seven dollars and eight cents, apiece!"

"Oh!"

"*Apiece!*" Joseph repeated.

"I heard."

"Well, don't you get it?" the senior partner demanded, quite warmly. "That's the biggest year we've ever had, Bill! That's nearly nine hundred dollars apiece more than we've ever cleared before!"

Bill Wilson nodded, unsmilingly.

"Well, what's nine hundred dollars?" he inquired.

"*What?*"

"It's no fortune, Joe."

"Maybe not, but it's a darned good big lump of money—and twenty-two hundred is just that much bigger. That's almost forty-five hundred dollars clear profit we've taken out of this little shop in one year and—" He paused. He glanced toward the street and smiled. "Here's Kate!"

"Aha?" said William, rising slowly.

"Yes, and—there's Mary with her!" Joseph cried, and beaming, slid from his stool.

You, who are not at all familiar with Olmford affairs, might have been mildly horrified at the informal manner in which the very pretty black-eyed girl tripped into the Blyn & Wilson establishment, glanced around to make sure that no patrons were present, and then, hurriedly but squarely, kissed William Wilson. Again, you might have known further shock at the sight of the smaller, very blue-eyed maiden; her Joseph approached swiftly and, with never a look about, drew her to him and kissed her thrice!

But be sure that it was quite all right. Kate Beard, according to present arrangements, was to become Mrs. William Wilson in a matter of two months or so, and at the very same time, and in the very same church, Mary Foster had every intention of losing herself forever, to be replaced by Mrs. Joseph Blyn.

Nevertheless, even in Olmford, the conventions obtain, and Kate drew quickly from her fiancé and glanced about again, gently relieved that nobody had been passing; while little Mary, with a perfectly genuine blush, pushed Joseph away with a startled:

"Don't, Joe! People—"

"People be hanged!" Joseph cried. "People don't cut any ice this morning,

Mary. We've been balancing for the year."

"Was it as good as you hoped, Joe?"

"It was good enough to put that red-tiled stucco porch on the new house, Mary, and still leave a little change for the furniture. Over twenty-two hundred apiece—net, clear money!"

"Joe!"

"Fact!" said Joseph, and, quite irresponsibly, kissed her again, for he was very much in love with Mary.

More than this, he swung Mary into a dance, furnishing the music in a series of reasonably restrained la-la-la-la's, while Mary struggled and Kate laughed at them—and then, when Mary, breathless, managed to break away, it chanced that they looked at William, who seemed to have omitted himself from the general hilarity. William, just then, was leaning against the counter, his hands in his pockets; his eyes directed gloomily through the transom seemed to be examining space and finding it not at all what he had expected.

Kate sped to him and caught his arms.

"Why—why, Will!" she cried. "What is it?"

"Huh, dear?" said William. "What's what?"

"The matter with you, of course! Don't you think you've had a wonderful year?"

"Good enough."

"But aren't you—aren't you happy over it?"

"Oh, I'm happy," William sighed heavily.

"Is there something else? Something wrong?" Kate asked quickly.

This time, at least, William straightened up, sought to smile, and shook his head.

"Certainly not. What should be wrong?"

"Nothing in the whole world!" Mary Foster cried merrily. "Some day you'll learn that that's Will's way of taking things, Kate."

"It's not a way that I like so very much!" Miss Beard said rather acidly. "I—"

"It's just Will's way, though," Mary laughed, rather hurriedly. "What are we going to do to celebrate?"

"When?" William asked.

"Why—to-night, I suppose. You boys will be busy all day."

William laughed sadly.

"Well, if we start celebrating in this town," he said, "I suppose we'll all walk down to the Baptist church and chat a while, and then go over and sit in the Methodist graveyard and watch the moon come up. What else is there?"

"Well, there are a lot of big towns within thirty or forty miles, Will, and you have a nice little car, and Joe has another," Kate suggested, almost dangerously, as it seemed to Joseph, who came in enthusiastically with:

"That's the idea! We'll start early and have dinner at a hotel and then go to a show afterward!"

"Really?" Mary cried.

"You bet!" said Joseph. "You girls decide on the town and the hotel and the show you want. We'll get out of here by five—or maybe a little before that. That 'll give us three hours of daylight to go wherever we like. And just for once we'll whoop her up!"

"Whoop her up!" William echoed dismally.

Miss Beard stood quite erect and allowed her eyes to sparkle in his direction.

"You know, if—for any reason I don't understand—*you* don't care to go, Will, Mary and Joe will be quite happy without us!"

William stared at her, and at last, be it said, he smiled. Further, William seemed to shake himself together for a moment, for he stepped to Kate and slipped an arm about her, and if she glanced up with faint, unformed suspicion he did not seem to notice.

"I beg your pardon, Kate. Of course I want to go; you know that as well as I do, honey. Only don't mind if I don't boil over like Joe."

"I'd like to know *why* you don't. That's all."

"There isn't any reason, except that he's got a sort of childish nature and I was born serious," said William. "Will you be ready at five?"

"If you want me to be."

"I do," said William, and just stifled another sigh.

"And I think that now we'd better run along," said the intelligent Mary, "and let the boys attend to business."

So Mary glanced behind her once more and then glanced at Joseph; and with a little whoop Joseph gathered her into his arms and bade her farewell in his own demonstrative fashion.

Then they were gone — and William leaned back against his counter again, while Joseph stood on the step and waved gaily until they reached the corner, and grinned happily. But he did not grin when they had turned the corner; with the sort of scowl that rarely appeared upon his sunny countenance, Joseph turned back into the store, closed the door behind him, and marched directly to his partner.

"Say, what the devil's the matter with you this morning?" he asked, rather pointedly.

"Eh?"

"Y' know, Bill, sometimes you act like an infernal ass, and this is one of the times. You came near to starting something with Kate just now. She was mad all through!"

"Nonsense!"

"You go on acting like this to-night and you'll find out how much nonsense there is about it before we get home," Joseph laughed shortly. "What's wrong with you, anyway?"

"Nothing!"

"You've made more money this year than you ever made in your life before, haven't you?"

"I—yes."

"And we'll make more next year, and more every year hereafter, live on the wages we pay ourselves, and tuck away the surplus for our old age!"

"Well?"

"And you're going to marry—with one possible exception—the best and prettiest little girl in the whole darned State of Connecticut, aren't you?" Joseph went on hotly.

"I—hope so."

"And we're building the two nicest little houses in this town, and when they're done they'll be paid for, free and clear! You've got wonderful health; you've got a dandy home and a dandy girl; you've got all the money you need; you—"

"What's the idea of all this?" William yawned.

"I'm sick of watching you moon around here as if you'd lost your last dollar; I'm sick of listening to your groans. I'm trying to find out what's the matter with you and get it out of your system. That's the idea!"

His pink countenance had grown decidedly red, and his voice was high. Examining the countenance first with some astonishment—for Joe, as a general thing, was a pretty calm soul, and not given to these outbursts—and then with a growing sneer, William Wilson only shrugged his shoulders and maintained complete silence.

"Well? Well? What is it?" Joseph cried, quite violently. "You've got everything now that any man needs. What else is it that you want?"

Unquestionably, he was waiting for a specific answer, and he meant to take nothing else. William smiled faintly and unpleasantly and considered.

"Do I really have to tell you again?" he inquired.

"Eh?"

"What I want, I mean. What a poor little weasel like you hasn't brains enough to want!"

"You mean—"

"Oh, come over here with me!" snorted William, and laid a heavy hand on his partner's shoulder.

Directly across the plumbing establishment he led Joseph, and to the back of the oak partition.

With considerable solemnity he pointed upward—to the hills behind the village of Olmford, to one hill in particular, and, slowly, up that one; until the finger rested steadily in the direction of the white dot atop the second mountain, possibly two miles distant.

"See it?" said William.

"The house?"

"The house! See it?"

"Of course I see it."

"Been there, haven't you? Looked it over?"

"We've driven by there dozens of times, going over the mountain," Joe said more mildly. "What of it, Bill?"

The hand upon his shoulder tightened its grip emotionally. Perhaps the pointing finger shook a little; certainly William Wilson's voice had grown somewhat deeper.

"That! *All that stuff!*" William said cryptically, and turned and shuffled back to his desk in the farther corner of the store.

CHAPTER II.

BY THE BREAKING OF A PIPE.

THE volatile had been altogether omitted from Joseph's make-up; mentally and physically, he was solid, substantial and wholesome. Almost entirely had he escaped the blessing or the curse of imagination; symbols meant nothing at all to Joseph Blyn.

Hence, with a frown and some inward contrition, he studied his partner in silence for many seconds. He regretted his recent outburst, for its effect on William seemed to have been downright weird. He wondered whether old Dr. Ketcham was at home, and if so, and supposing that he could persuade William to take a little walk over in that direction, if the doctor really could do anything in a case like this.

It was not drink; even in the old days when red liquor passed as a commodity, William had never indulged. It was not tobacco, because William's brand was milder than Joseph's, and Joseph felt quite all right. Nor could he believe it to be genuine insanity. Those things, as a rule, come down in families, and Joseph knew, or knew of, William's ancestors for generations back—and there had never been a queer one among the lot of them!

There was always the possibility, to be sure, that this puzzling moment might be some acute manifestation of that peculiar discontent which surged to William's surface about every so often, and of which, hitherto, Joseph had taken so little real account, but—

"What are you talking about?" Joseph demanded sharply.

"The house!"

"Henry Hoban's house, up there?"

"You have grasped that much, Joe," his partner laughed, unpleasantly.

Joseph drew nearer.

"I guess I'm getting it," he stated, with some curiosity and more relief. "You're still sore because we didn't get the plumbing contract when he built the place last year?"

"I'd forgotten all about his blasted plumbing! I'm sore because *we* ought to be in a house like that, as well as Hoban. *We* ought to have everything that goes with a plant like that!"

"Who, Bill? You and me?"

"Yes!" William snarled.

"But—er—why, Bill?" Joseph asked quite blankly.

"Because we've got brains enough to make as much money as Hoban has made and to live as he lives!"

Joseph shook his head and smiled faintly.

"I guess not," he concluded quite logically, "if we had brains enough to make the money, we'd have made it."

"Here in Olmford?" William asked bitterly.

"Anywhere, Bill."

"Not in a million years. Where did Hoban make his money?"

"New York, I suppose."

"You've said it all!" snapped Bill Wilson.

Joseph no more than resumed staring at him; mentally, Bill was really in an odd way this morning. Why, all through Joseph Blyn's anatomy pleasant little thrills were still running at the thought of the twenty-two hundred real dollars that had accrued to him as a result of good business management and unflagging industry—whereas Bill, possessed now of the same amount, only drummed on his desk and could have scowled no more blackly if the sheriff had been pasting a bankruptcy notice on their door at that moment!

It was puzzling and—it was Bill's own affair, of course, if he chose to act like that. In time he would get over it; and as the silly scene seemed to have reached its close, Joseph shrugged his own shoulders and climbed back to his stool, only to find that

William's finger was pointing at him as William said:

"Listen!"

"I'm listening."

"Hoban's supposed to be worth about thirty million dollars, Joe."

"What of it?"

"He has money enough to buy anything on earth he wants. He has a house in New York, they tell me, that cost pretty near a million dollars. Then he comes up here in Connecticut and builds a summer home that cost almost another million—more than any other two hundred houses in the county put together—and with 'em both he's hardly made a dent in his bank account!"

"Well?"

"Well, how did he come to make it all—while we're here and supposed to cheer and dance around over a measly couple of thousand? What's Hoban that we're not?"

This, apparently, was an argument from which there was no escaping. Joseph smiled almost soothingly at his partner and searched for a proper answer.

"Well—of course a man has to be pretty bright and sharp to make all that money and—" he began.

"Hoban isn't!"

"Isn't he?" muttered Joseph.

"Everybody that's ever been close to him—and I've made a point of talking with two or three of them—says that he's slow and stodgy. He seems to have to take a long time to think out everything, and he has a hard job doing it at that!" William announced. "Well, I'm not like that, and, if I have to say it for you, you're not, either!"

Joseph sighed imperceptibly.

"Probably he has a gift for some special line, then, Bill," he said hopefully. "A lot of people are like that. They know just one thing and—"

"But Hoban isn't!" Mr. Wilson interrupted again. "He's made money at fifty things — manufacturing shoes in the first place, then making motor tires, then monkeying with mines and stocks and buying real estate and oil!"

Joseph scratched his head with the penholder.

"It must be luck, then."

"Rot! There's no such thing as luck!"

"Isn't there?" mused Joseph, rather drearily. "Then the only thing that I can see is that Hoban had the education to—"

"Hold on! I've been waiting for you to say that! How much education have we had, Joe?"

"Eh? Why, we went through high school, of course."

"Right! Hoban didn't!"

"He didn't?"

"He did not! He went through grammar school, part way only, at that, and then took a job selling cream separators!" William said triumphantly. "That's as much education as he ever got!"

"I give it up, then. I don't know," muttered his partner. "Do you?"

"You bet I do!" the junior member said impressively. "This is it: Hoban was where he had the chance to make money!"

"Ah?"

"New York!"

"Oh!" Joseph commented intelligently. "You're not going off on that strain again, Bill?"

In the most remarkable way William curled his lips.

"No, I'm not!" he snapped. "There's no use trying to talk sense into you, Joe. You're a small-town guy. Olmford, Connecticut's your speed. But it isn't mine! Get that: *it isn't mine!* There's no way in this village for a man like me to make real money. But I'm telling you that if I ever got the chance to reach outside the village, I could pile it up quicker than Hoban ever piled it up, and I could carry you along with me and make you pile it up quickly, too!"

He ended with a puff. Joseph laughed gently.

"And then we'd build some houses like Hoban's?"

"But better!"

"And fill 'em up with gold furniture and everything?"

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing, because we'd probably trip over the furniture and smash it, and get our feet tangled in the Persian rugs and tear 'em all up, and likely enough get

lonely and start playing pinochle with the butler or something like that, and then—"

"You're dead wrong there, Joe! We could rise to all that stuff in fifteen minutes and stay up forever!"

Joseph laid aside his pen.

"Perhaps we could and perhaps we couldn't. We'll never have occasion to find out, so it doesn't matter. But you just listen to me for two minutes, and then let me close up this ledger and start it off for the new year."

"What?"

"You're all right, Bill, except in one particular—you're a little bit crazy at times," Joseph said steadily. "About once a week you get the idea that you were born for a millionaire. Well, you were not, Bill. You were cut out for a plumber. You're a good plumber and you're making money—nowadays without even doing any real plumbing, you know. You're making a good living and putting away money. Let it go at that. You know, most of us find out where we belong and stick there pretty comfortably. Once a plumber, always a plumber, so long as you're a good one—that's sound sense and it's my idea."

"Oh, no!" barked William.

"And there's another thing, Bill. People who are doing pretty well and still keep on kicking, get a pretty severe jolt every now and then. It—it's just fate, I guess, but it happens pretty nearly every time."

He waited for this wisdom to sink into William. William, however, only laughed harshly, even contemptuously.

"Say! Even the idea of being anything but a third-rate plumber scares the wits out of you, doesn't it?" he observed.

"Oh, it isn't that. But I don't believe for one second in getting sore at things in general when you're doing pretty well, Bill. You're too likely to tempt Providence into handing you something hard and sour."

William Wilson rolled his eyes to heaven and was silent. Joseph picked up his pen again.

"So forget the millionaire stuff," Joseph said in conclusion. Let me finish this job and—you answer that telephone, if you're not too proud."

Once more he wrote, whistling softly the while. William, with a scowl, took down the receiver; and presently Joseph, absorbed, caught his snarled:

"Sorry! Can't help it! Won't have a man here all day that we can send out! Well, I can't help it! Good-by!"

"Who—er—was it?" Joseph inquired.

"Somebody wanted a plumber. I dunno who!" William snapped.

Joseph reached for his blotter.

"Bill, I think I'd be a little more courteous when people telephone. I—"

"That's because you've got the soul of a plumber!" William stated, as he walked to the window and stared out again.

He was past any reasoning. Joseph turned to his index and set down the details of the coming year. William continued his staring up-hill.

"We're here in our little shop. *He* just started out for a ride!" he announced unexpectedly.

"Who did?"

"Hoban! I just saw his limousine coming down that white patch of road below the house. Do you know what he paid for that car, Joe?"

"No."

"Fourteen thousand dollars!" young Mr. Wilson stated bitterly. "More money than you and I will spend for automobiles if we live to be eighty!"

Joseph stared at his partner's back. He was far from being superstitious, yet a vague uneasiness came over him. So indefinitely that he could not have put the thing into words, Joseph sensed that if one harp sufficiently upon a given theme one can produce a sort of materialization, particularly if the theme chance to be unpleasant. William, whatever might have started him, was certainly harping this morning, and—Joseph set his teeth and returned to his ledger, and so another quiet five minutes passed, until:

"Well, well! He's condescending to drive through our humble village this time, isn't he?" muttered William. "Can't be that he's going to spend a nickel right here in Olmford, can it?"

"Who?"

"Hoban!" said the junior partner. "Look at that car, Joe! Well, you can

have a good look at it! He's stopping here!"

This, as Joseph discovered by staring over the partition, was the simple fact. Hoban himself was pausing before their establishment; yes, and at the moment he was descending from his magnificent motor.

With only the faintest interest, Joseph examined him at really close range for the first time. This Henry Hoban person might have been a millionaire—or he might have been a successful real-estate man or a prosperous life-insurange agent or a lawyer or almost anything else. However ornate his car might be, there was nothing strikingly millionairish about Hoban himself. He was of medium height and rather plump and puffy; he might have been fifty or a very little more; his hair was streaked with gray and, save for his eyes, his features were not impressive. The eyes, however, which were small and light, gave some hint of the craft behind them and the reason for Hoban's wealth; they were sharp as steel drills.

Also, they showed considerable perturbation just now. They shot up at the sign above the door and their owner nodded; they shot toward William Wilson and their owner beckoned imperiously—and William Wilson, staring at him with entire calm, remained precisely as he was until Hoban had jerked open the door and entered.

"You the boss here?" he asked crisply.

"One of them."

"Well, I want you!"

"Ah?" William said strangely, and, hands in his pockets, rocked back and forth on heel and toe and studied the man of money.

Joseph slipped hurriedly from his stool and came around the end of his long desk.

"Good morning!" said he. "What can we do for you, sir?"

Hoban's stare, which had been resting upon William with distinct and warranted astonishment, turned to young Mr. Blyn with plain relief.

"I—I want a plumber, of course!" he said. "I phoned down here ten minutes ago and somebody said you couldn't send a man. A pipe's broken in one of my bathrooms, up there, and the water's going through to the floor below. I want a man, *quick!*"

"We can't give you one," William stated.

"What? Why not?"

"Because we haven't a man to send. Our whole force is working on some new buildings, over near Tarvale, and they'll be gone until to-morrow night. If you can wait until then possibly we—"

"But I can't!" Hoban cried. "Don't you understand? This water-pipe has broken and the water's pouring through the floor! We've got pails and buckets and mops working, but it's getting ahead of us, man! There's a fifteen-thousand-dollar ceiling under that room."

"Is that possible?" smiled William.

Henry Hoban's jaw dropped.

"Well, of course it's possible!" he said rather wildly. "What's the matter with you? Can't you grasp it or—oh, see here, you'll *have* to give me some one!"

"We can't give you what we haven't got."

"You're plumbers yourselves, aren't you?"

"We dont' work at it any more," William smiled.

"But I mean you—you're able to do that kind of work?"

"We were—when we had to."

"Then get your tools and pile into my car! I don't care what you charge for the job!" said the gentleman from the hill. "Come! Come along!"

William shook his head.

"Sorry," said he. "It can't be done. You wouldn't sweep out your own office, would you, if the porter didn't happen to turn up? No, you'd leave it for him to do when he came. Well, it's the same way with us, Mr. Hoban. We've quit the manual side of the plumbing business. Along about to-morrow evening we'll have a man we can send and—"

"Is there any other plumber in town?" the caller turned to Joseph.

"There isn't, but—"

"And by the time I've telephoned to one of the big towns—" Hoban began, and broke off. Visibly, too, he controlled himself, forced the indignation and impatience

from his voice and brought a seductive smile to his lips.

"I—er—understand, I think," he said gently. "You gentlemen won't bother with it because I didn't give you the original contract. That was my architect's fault. I'm sorry; I suggested that he have all that sort of work done by local contractors. However, I'm making a good many alterations over winter, and you'll have them all—that I can promise. So, in regard to the immediate emergency, if you'll just get your tools and come with me, as quickly as possible—"

William shook his head. Joseph, however, spoke quickly:

"Why not, Bill? It isn't much of a job, I imagine."

"Nevertheless, when we quit odd jobs we—"

"Well, it 'll never do any harm to oblige Mr. Hoban in a case like this," Joseph laughed. "You get some tools together, Bill, and I'll see if I can't locate a couple of pairs of overalls."

He bustled away to the back room, whistling blithely. William gazed after him. As a general thing, when it came to matters of business policy, Joseph led and William followed. This time he hesitated, glancing at Hoban—and then William, too, without any blithe whistling and with no comment, also headed for the back room. Henry Hoban, owner of a fifteen-thousand-dollar ceiling, removed his hat and lightly dabbed his brow.

At the curb, Hoban's chauffeur gazed ahead with that perfect imperturbability used only by the chauffeurs of millionaires. William stared truculently at him as he pushed in a rather greasy bag of tools upon the cream-colored carpet; Joseph, rather hastily, arranged a clean newspaper beneath the bag and kept the aged overalls rolled under his arm; while Hoban, in the background, urged them gently into the car.

He seemed to be a democratic soul. The big seat was wide enough for three; he insisted upon their entering, and the car, with a swift swirl, turned on Olmford's main street and headed homeward at a clip rather better than fifty miles an hour.

It was a wonderful car, too, Joseph noticed. Steep though the hill, it held its pace perfectly, with never a shift of the gears—up the white road, with the two white pillars that marked the entrance to the Hoban estate coming ever nearer and nearer.

Ah, and now they had whizzed between them, and there was lawn on either side such as grew nowhere else in the neighborhood of Olmford. Joseph appreciated it all; William only stared blackly at its perfection—and at the little summer-houses and the big rose-arbor in the distance; at the hedges and the shady little bypaths, with their benches and nooks, and at the tiny artificial lake on the little plateau over there.

They paused by the side door of the great home. Hoban himself stepped out rather hurriedly, and seemed to be receiving the latest bulletin of the great leak excitement from the sad-appearing, lean manservant in black who opened the door. William sat quite still, regarding the little group of people under the big maple to the left; William poked his partner harshly in the ribs.

"See 'em?" he asked from the corner of his mouth.

"Eh? Yes, of course. Bill, we'd better hustle—"

"His gang!" snarled William. "That's the crowd Hoban travels with, Joe. *We're* here to fix his damned pipes!"

"Well, we'd better—"

William caught his breath as one of the little group rose.

"Look at that blond girl!" hissed William, who was to marry Kate Beard in a month or two. "Joe! *Lookut her!*"

CHAPTER III.

RIGHT OR WRONG.

UNDENIABLY, the young woman in question was beautiful to a degree. She might have been a little past twenty; the golden wealth of her hair was glorious in itself, her features still more glorious, her slender form perfection. Not, to be sure, that there wasn't something

cold and unpleasant to the tilt of her head, to Joseph's way of thinking; she looked like one of those supercilious girls who might get a lot of contemptuous amusement out of one. If it came to preference, Joseph preferred the other girl, who was very dark indeed, and still more slender. At closer quarters, Joseph could picture those black eyes as having a certain snap —but the cold fact was that she interested Joseph no more than did the two men of the group, and they interested him not at all. Somewhere up-stairs a broken pipe was pouring water from the Olmford reservoir all over Hoban's elegance!

" Isn't she a wonder?" William muttered enthusiastically.

" Probably, but we'd better—"

" I suppose they're all like that, more or less, in this crowd. All the same, for sheer looks, I'd back that blond one against anything that ever came into these parts or ever—"

" I think we can go right up, gentlemen," Hoban suggested agitatedly, as his head came through the open doorway. " They say matters are getting decidedly worse, and the whole place is aflood. If you'll just come with me—"

He was all but dancing now. Joseph snatched out his tools and started off quickly. William followed almost languidly.

" Have you turned off the water in the cellar?" he inquired.

" Eh? Could—could that have been been done in the first place?" Hoban gasped. " I never thought of that."

" I believe it. It proves what I said to my partner a little while ago," said the peculiar plumber. " Where's your cellar door?"

" Why—er—there! But—"

" Well, your water 'll stop in about thirty seconds," concluded William.

" And I'll go up and attend to the pipe itself," Joseph said hastily, for Mr. Hoban was staring after Wilson and seemed almost tempted to further questions.

The millionaire himself led the way, and Joseph, after his own quiet fashion, took in the pleasing and expensive details of the establishment—the glimpse of huge lower corridor and magnificent staircase, the little side corridor and the smaller side stairs they were using now, and then the big hallway of the second floor, with its tall, wide doors and artistic little jogs and the superb bay-window at the end.

From the third of these doors excited voices were floating. Joseph followed through the sitting-room of a wonderful private suite and across the huge bedroom beyond, to the white-tiled zone where a stout lady in calico perspired over the mop and another stout lady emptied a pail into the bathtub.

Things were all but floating, surely enough. A stream of sparkling water gushed merrily from the pipe beneath the beautiful porcelain basin—gushed and sparkled and sizzled and splashed, and then, even as they stared at it, dwindled suddenly, grew less and less enthusiastic, became a mere sickly drip—and stopped altogether!

" Well, upon my word!" muttered Henry Hoban. " If I'd stopped to think—"

" Every man to his trade, sir," Joseph laughed cheerily. " If they'll give me room here I'll get right at the pipe and we can turn on the water again. You'd better tell them not to put any more coal on your hot-water heater for a while, if you've got one. That's about all."

Urged by Hoban's nod, the stout ladies gasped their way out of the picture. The moneyed person himself watched Joseph for a little as he drew on his overalls and opened his bag.

" Call for anything you need," he suggested.

" There's nothing," Joseph mused. " I can handle this alone, sir. You don't have to stay here getting your feet wet unless you want to."

He turned his smile on Hoban. As a rule, the smile found reflection; it did not in this case. It seemed to Joseph, in fact, that with the water once turned off, Hoban's thoughts had flitted away to realms remote from any plumbing; he was frowning heavily at the perfectly innocent medicine-cabinet on the far wall. His upper lip was indrawn, too, and he seemed to be chewing on it, and the fingers of his right hand, twitching rather restlessly as it hung

at his side, were snapping silently. He started, too, after that odd five seconds and gazed at Joseph as if at first unable to place him.

"Eh? What?" Hoban muttered. "I—I won't remain, of course. There's nothing I can do here, and other matters—"

He did not conclude the sentence. His frown returning, Hoban turned and walked quickly through the suite and out of sight, and Joseph, squatting, surveyed the seat of the recent disaster and laughed gently to himself.

As a leak, the thing was a joke. He whistled softly to himself and rummaged through his bag for a wrench, and then for some wick; whistling still, he tinkered for a matter of perhaps ten minutes—to squat again and chuckle, and then to turn quickly toward the unsmiling face of William Wilson, just entering.

"Bad?" queried the junior partner.

"Nothing to it at all," Joseph said. "It's just one of those freak couplings you have to pack—we had one of 'em down in the public library, Bill—and they screwed up this one without so much as a washer. The wonder is it ever held water at all. Go down and turn her on again and let's see if she's tight this time."

"*Now?*"

"Certainly."

"Not on your life," said William, as he pushed the bath-room door until it almost closed. "This is no ten-minute job; this job takes one hour of the hardest kind of work, at the very least."

"But—"

"And you know what we soak him for, don't you?"

"It might pay us to charge him nothing at all, Bill."

"It might, but it never will!" snapped William, as he squatted on the damp floor beside his friend and partner. "This costs him one hundred dollars, even money, cash on the spot."

Joseph shook his head.

"There's no sense in that, Bill."

"Isn't there? Well, there is! I've been looking over this outfit, Joseph. This guy has more money than fifty men could spend. He's got a painting down-stairs that costs sixty thousand dollars! The butler—I guess he is—just told me."

"What of it?"

"And part of that hallway down below he brought from some blasted palace in Italy. It stood him forty thousand dollars before he had the stuff all shipped here and set up."

"Well?"

"Well, a man that hasn't got brains enough to turn off the water in his cellar when it's ruining his house can buy all that!" William said hotly. "What could you and I do, if we had the chance to get at the big money?"

"I dunno, Bill," sighed Joseph. "I'm not worrying about it or—"

"And his family, too! I've been looking them over from a distance, sitting out there and—"

"They're not his family, Bill."

"Why not?"

"Because, in the first place, he hasn't any daughters, and, in the second place, his whole family's in Europe."

"Who are they, then?"

"House-party of some sort, I suppose."

"Well, whoever they are, look 'at 'em!" William churned on. "They're wearing more clothes, counted in dollars and cents, than you and I and the two girls 'd ever buy in a year. The yellow-haired pippin—"

"Oh, forget her, Bill!" Joseph said quite disgustedly, for he had his own ideas of implicit fidelity to one's chosen mate.

"I'll never forget that one, now I've seen her," retorted William, with an odd, sour smile. "Anyway, I've been looking at her, and she's wearing—rings alone—diamonds that must be worth ten or fifteen thousand dollars, boy. And that's the gang Hoban travels with! That's the kind he *can* travel with!"

"Yep," said Joseph, gathering some of his tools. "What of it?"

"It's not right!" Bill Wilson answered. "I'm no Bolshevik, but it's not right for a man with his brains to be enjoying it all while we stick down at the bottom and fix his cursed leaks. That's all. That's the whole thing."

"You may be right," Joseph began, with

a grin—and stopped, because in the doorway, just behind William, Hoban himself was standing.

He was not in motion, as he would have been had he just arrived. He was standing with one hand resting upon the door casing and regarding the pair with a peculiarly thoughtful expression. Obviously he had overheard—and Joseph found himself blushing slightly and suddenly growing quite occupied with his tools.

Yet there was not the suggestion of annoyance on Hoban's countenance, which struck Joseph as odd. Rather did he seem interested in what he had heard, for he stepped into the bath-room with a brief: "Go on!"

William started violently and turned.

"Oh, you sneaked up to listen, did you!" escaped him savagely.

"I didn't sneak up; I chanced to overhear what you were saying," Hoban answered, with the most even smile. "Continue, please. Let me in on the argument. I'm interested, you know."

"There was no argument."

"Nevertheless, there was a discussion going on," the millionaire smiled. "Do I take it, Mr.—er—what was the name? Oh, yes—Wilson, to be sure. Do I take it, Mr. Wilson, that you feel yourself fully capable of—er—occupying the position I happen to occupy, shall we say? Socially and financially and all that sort of thing? Was that the gist of it?"

"Given the chance—*yes!*" snapped William. "What of it?"

"Nothing at all, in the sense of a challenge, if that's what you mean," Hoban laughed quite frankly. "Go on with your case."

"There's no more to be said!" grunted Mr. Wilson.

"But I'm positive that there is. You—ah—just what shall I say?—you actually feel you're capable of vastly bigger things than happen to have come your way?"

"I don't feel it—I know it!"

"That you were born to gather in the big money rather than bother with the little money, eh?" pursued the owner of the house; and his smile grew more and more curious.

"Exactly!"

"Quite so," mused Hoban. "And to handle big business rather than little business—to live in a big house among a lot of people rather than in a little house among a few people? All that idea?"

"Yes!" William grunted, for one could not forever ignore that warning eye of Joseph's and his idiotic gestures under cover of the bag, imploring silence.

Mr. Hoban removed his cigar and sighed lightly. There was in his sharp eye an odd little light that was by no means a twinkle. He spoke more softly:

"You—er—*know* these things to be so, Mr. Wilson?"

"I do!" William Wilson came near to shouting. "What about it?"

The cigar went back between Mr. Hoban's teeth. He gazed at William—he gazed at the ceiling—he examined the medicine cabinet and sighed again and took another glance at William.

"Nothing," he said quietly. "You may be right. Do you expect to be here, on the job, I mean, very long?"

"One hour at least!" William said defiantly.

"Well, don't hurry. Time's no object, so that the thing isn't leaking," the owner of the house murmured. With that he turned upon his heel and walked out of the suite.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OTHER SIDE.

WHATEVER glamour the wealth idea had cast upon William's mind, opulent surroundings appeared to have brought no overwhelming joy to the four who sat under the big maple-tree on Hoban's west lawn. Among the four there was not one single smile!

The tall, dark man, addressed by the dark girl as "dad," smoked cigarette after cigarette, lighting each on the remains of the last. He seemed unable to remain seated for more than one minute at a time, too. He bounced from his rocker and walked—sat down again and smoked—bounced forth once more.

The shorter, red-faced gentleman was no more jubilant. Working steadily on a thick, black cigar, he grunted now and then; he shook his head at regular intervals and sighed heavily. His plump fingers thumped the wicker arms of his chair for a little—interwove for another interval, that his thumbs might twiddle agitatedly—parted and snatched the cigar from his mouth, and then, since a full two inches of the weed had been chewed to an unwholesome pulp, he cast the thing away from him and went fumbling about his pockets for another.

Something of all this agitation seemed to have infected the young women, too. At her father's every spasmodic move, the black eyes of the dark girl flashed questioningly. The deep blue eyes of the blond girl, which were far cooler and lazier, seemed unable to concentrate upon the magazine she held; they roved to the more distant hills and back again to the red-faced man. She shifted uneasily, and for a moment faced the dark girl, who shrugged her shoulders faintly and shook her head. Over all rested a great, almost oppressive silence.

This, then, was the sort of thing that William Wilson envied and of which he felt himself justly a part—society's upper circle.

Or it may not have been that at all. Examined closely, a keen observer might have found them all of rather flashy stamp and lacking in that subtle something which tells of breeding and really blue blood.

That is as may be.

The blond girl laid aside her book and studied the red-faced man again.

"Uncle!"

Uncle started quite energetically.

"Yes, Gertrude? Er—yes, what?"

"And you, too, Mr. Fenelon," the blond girl went on. "I wish you'd stop walking and lighting cigarettes for just a moment and listen."

"I'm listening," the dark person said briefly.

"Well, what I want to say is just this: I'm not a child. Ethelyn over there isn't in the infant class, either. If anything serious is really afoot, we're able to stand it without going into hysterics or anything like that."

"What do you mean, Gertie?" the gentleman puffed at her.

"Simply that if anything's really wrong, it would be a lot better to tell us just what it is and—"

"Nothing's—er—wrong!" the dark Mr. Fenelon snapped.

"Nothing!" the blond girl's uncle echoed. "Absolutely nothing!"

"Then why does your voice sound as if it were coming out of a tomb?" Gertrude inquired irritably. "Why in the world—"

"Psst!" said Mr. Fenelon.

"Hush, Gertrude!" her uncle cautioned.

"Why—"

"Hoban's coming!" her uncle whispered.

Whatever the deep significance of the proceeding, Hoban certainly was coming. He had emerged from the house by way of the side veranda and was approaching across the greensward with peculiar, hasty little steps—steps of such evident haste that Fenelon stopped short and stared at him.

For a moment, too, something very like hope seemed to light Fenelon's face; but, as swiftly as it had appeared, the light died out again.

Thirty feet from them Hoban paused and beckoned.

"Fenelon!" he called. "You, too, Parker!"

"What is it?"

"I want just five minutes' private chat with you—with both of you! You girls will excuse us?"

"We will, if it's necessary," the dark Ethelyn suggested pointedly. "We'd rather like to come and listen."

"Ah, but not to this—this is business," said the owner of the premises, and shook at her what was meant to be a playful finger. "Here, you two—suppose we go down by the lake?"

He slipped a compelling hand through an arm of either and walked them away—aye, all but hustled them away!—until they were beside the little sheet of water and fifty yards from the nearest bush that might have concealed an eavesdropper.

There Henry Hoban spoke again, and his voice was almost a whisper.

"I have it!" he announced.

"What?" Fenelon asked.

"The answer. Listen to this: I've got a pair of plumbers up-stairs—you saw them arrive? Well, one of them, at least—"

Here his voice dropped to the faintest little croak and went on and on and on, ever more rapidly and more earnestly. Now and then Hoban gestured, too, and the stout man wagged his head in rather stupid assent, while Fenelon listened with little comment. Occasionally he smiled for an instant; once or twice he shook his head dubiously.

Until at last Hoban reached the end of his discourse and straightened up and drew breath with:

"Well? Well?"

"I don't like it!" Fenelon said flatly.

"Why not?"

"Well, with a couple of—er—aviators, say, or two good carpenters, it might possibly work out; but not with a pair of plumbers, Hoban. They're a predatory race from the bones out—all of them, all of the time. Plumbers, old man, are born to scourge and ravage and—"

"You're not trying to be funny, Fenelon?" Hoban asked, with exceeding sharpness. "This is far from being a time for humor, you know."

"I'm well aware of that," Fenelon sighed. "But all the same, I don't like the idea—not with plumbers, Hoban. History fails to cite a single instance where plumbers, once anchored in a household for whatever purpose, didn't eventually do more damage and cost more money than they ever—"

"What do you say, Parker?" Hoban snapped.

"I think it's a stroke of genius," the fat man said.

"So do I. That's enough. We're two to one in favor. Let's get the cooperation of the young women—and let me do the talking, by the way. I have a pretty clear idea of what should be said to them."

He led the way back to the big maple. He was rubbing his hands genially now, was Mr. Hoban, and chuckling as if the world's one best joke tickled him from within.

Quite airily he perched upon the arm of Gertrude Parker's chair and addressed the group in a merry undertone for a matter of five minutes.

And when he had concluded the dark girl was laughing animatedly and the blond girl was smiling lazily.

"I'm not so very keen about it," she remarked, "but it 'll be fun, in a way, I suppose."

"And you'll get considerably more amusement out of it, I think, if you'll just keep in mind how much it may mean to yourselves in the way of possible future comfort," Hoban said, with a touch of grimness. "We're all agreed?"

"With the proviso that you remember my saying in advance that plumbers invariably wreck at least three times as much as they—" Fenelon essayed.

"I can afford to pay for what they wreck, if you mean furniture and that sort of thing," the owner of the property muttered. "I'll get back to them."

CHAPTER V.

THE CHANCE.

ONLY when Hoban's footsteps had died out did Joseph Blyn speak, and then with a sigh:

"You've got a great head for business, Bill."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Antagonizing Hoban!"

"What the—"

"There's a lot of work to be done in this house—there 'll always be a lot of it, with all this junk plumbing. He's got eleven bath-rooms, among other things, and his steam work's probably just as rotten as this stuff! We might as well have had all that repairing."

William sneered.

"We'll have it; don't fret about that. I shot a little real respect for us into that guy!"

"What did you do?" Joseph asked blankly.

"You saw him walk out. Why did he do it?"

"He was mad."

"He was anything else in the world, Joe! He was stumped! He had absolutely no answer—so he quit!" the junior partner laughed. "He knows enough to know when to quit—I'll give him credit for that."

"Yes, and he probably knows enough to hire a plumber next time who doesn't hand out a line of fool talk," Joseph sighed.

"Say, would you like to make a bet?"

"No."

"I would!" declared William. "I'd like to put up about ten dollars to your ten-cent piece that the next time something smashes here Hoban sends down his own car for us, with an autograph note. You know, Joseph, you're a sort of humble bird; you never get a line on a thing like this. If you did, you'd know that I knocked that old boy cold the second he realized that he wasn't wise enough even to turn off the water in his own cellar and—"

"Well, look at that collar loosening up down there!" muttered Joseph, whose attention was wandering back to the under part of the basin. "I'll fix that, too, while the water's off."

His tools came out and he sighed again as he went to work. This mansion, with its rather tinny piping, was a regular goldmine of future work. And William, to the best of Joseph's belief, had blown the shaft to bits and wrecked all the machinery. As a joke, Hoban might tolerate William for one visit; as a regular plumber he would look for some more taciturn, less original person.

These wealthy people have theaters and concerts, billiards and cards, friends and books, when they need amusement. Carefully, Joseph tightened the collar that had caught his eye and sat back again.

"You may as well go down and turn on the water, Bill."

"In a little while."

"Why not—"

"We'll sit here and let the time mount up. We could be in worse places."

"Yes, and we could be in a darned sight better!" Joseph snapped impatiently, as he arose. "I haven't gone crazy to-day, if you have. I want to get back to the office and finish those books."

He slapped his tools into the rusty old bag and closed it with a jerk. He nodded to William, quite sharply—and then he jerked his head toward the door and laughed as he said softly:

"*He* hasn't, either! He's coming back to find out why the job isn't finished."

It was Hoban, coming across the bedroom just now.

William stood erect and also smiled; it was in his mind to address one or two parting remarks to Mr. Hoban—but they died on his lips as he caught the expression of the millionaire person, pausing now in the doorway.

Ten or fifteen minutes back he had been the consciously rich and powerful man; without a word or gesture to mark it, the vast gap between him and themselves had been yawningly apparent. Yet now Hoban had changed, so completely, so startlingly, that Joseph stood stock-still and stared at him with parted lips.

Where Hoban had been stiff and rather aloof, he was smiling warmly now. Where his eye had lighted with just the suggestion of contempt, perhaps, it was all friendliness at present—not the friendliness of a wealthy person for a couple of skilled laborers in his employ, but the friendliness of a man for his equal. These things Joseph sensed; Hoban's voice—which was altogether different from his former voice—confirmed the sensing.

"All through?" he asked heartily.

"All through, and just going," Joseph answered.

"Not that last," Hoban corrected.

"I beg pardon?"

The millionaire perched on the little white stool and—yes, grinned at them!

"Not for a time, at least," he went on. "We were having a rather interesting discussion, gentlemen. I've come back to renew it."

"It's finished!" William remarked rather tartly.

"By that, I assume, you mean that

you're convinced the world has done you a considerable injustice and has no immediate, intention of undoing it?" Hoban laughed.

"You—you might put it that way," William muttered.

"Well, you may be entirely wrong, Mr. Wilson. Let me tell you something and then I'll get down to what I came here to say. You know—or possibly you do not—that as a youngster I was very poor indeed. Not just comfortably poor, you understand, but the poorest kind of poor, with all that that implies."

"Aha?" said William interestedly.

"At twenty I had an extremely modest job, with no future whatsoever, and no apparent way of making one. I might have remained there to this day, had it not been for a certain gentleman with whom I happened to come in contact; he seemed to see that I was capable of bigger things. He put me on the way to them—and I went the rest of the distance by my own efforts. Nevertheless, I'm frank to say that if we had never met and he had never given me my chance, I should probably be working to-day over a set of books at twenty or thirty dollars a week."

William nodded further friendly interest; Joseph shifted uncomfortably. Beyond question, the world was somewhat askew this morning. A little casual conversation from such a man was right enough and to be expected; but why in the name of common sense was Hoban sitting there and reciting his biography to a couple of perfectly strange plumbers? It was all wrong and—

"In a word, that man saw what was in me, and gave me the opportunity of developing it. I have often wondered just how many neglected geniuses are working on tall stools who might have risen high in the financial world."

"Now you've got the right idea!" William exclaimed energetically. "So have I! I've wondered that same thing, and in our case, right here, I—"

"Just a minute, Mr. Wilson," the millionaire laughed. "Perhaps we're both coming to the same point. I'm not trying to impress you with the keenness of my perceptions, but I'm bound to say that I've been looking at both you young men, and I believe that I'm right—and that, incidentally, *you're* right, Mr. Wilson: you were both cut out for bigger things than a plumbing establishment in a small Connecticut town."

Joseph was dumb. William's eye glittered and his throat was dry as he inquired:

"Where is this all—leading?"

"Oh, in a perfectly definite direction, my boy," Hoban pursued, and laid a kindly hand upon his knee. "I'll back my judgment of men. I'll back my judgment of you two. You lack—what?"

"The chance to get the big money!"

"And to move among the big people?"

"That, too!"

Hoban shifted his cigar and let his eyes twinkle at them.

"Correct yourself, Mr. Wilson. You lack the chance no longer. I am going to give it to you!"

He paused quite impressively, as well he might have paused. The brief giddiness passed from Joseph's brain; he was more himself now, even after only five seconds. He cleared his throat.

"Sure!" said he lucidly. "And now I think we'd better—"

"I'll make the suggestions for a little while," the millionaire smiled. "I mean precisely what I said, no more and no less: *I'll give you every chance in the world!* not next year or next month. *Now!*"

This time he thumped emphatically on his own knee and nodded at William, who stared entranced. "Whatever may be in you I'll bring out. If you're capable of making a million, you'll make a million. If you're capable of making a billion, you'll make a billion! I'll show you the road and furnish the transportation, not to mention cranking the motor for you and giving an extra push for good measure. Well? Has it a good sound?"

"*Good!*" William muttered thickly.

"Yes, it sounds very nice indeed," Joseph agreed soothingly. "It's—it's mighty kind of you, Mr. Hoban, and I—we'll hustle back to the shop now and talk it over and think it over; and I'm pretty sure—"

"You're the less positive character of the two, aren't you?" Hoban inquired, looking him over carefully. "That doesn't matter, though. I'll give you a little special attention later on, Mr. Blyn. And you're not going to talk it over and think it over, by the way. If what I have to offer isn't good enough to accept on the spot, it isn't good enough to accept at all. Do you want to hear the details or not?"

Joseph had offended him slightly. There was an almost piteous crack in Bill Wilson's voice as he said hurriedly:

"Don't pay any attention to him! He's a—well, don't pay any attention to him, anyway. Just go on with what you were saying."

"You'll understand that I have not had time to give much thought to the matter as yet," Hoban continued more slowly. "Nevertheless, I have worked out a pretty clear program. For the first item, you've definitely ceased to be plumbers. Is that understood?"

"Yessir!" breathed the fascinated William.

"I have a little house-party here, of three or four people. You will join them at once. I shall introduce you as friends of mine, and you'll be established in the household."

"Yes, but we haven't got any clothes fit for a household like this," Joseph protested. "You see, these clothes are all right for a plumber store, and we've got a couple of good Sunday suits we can go down and get and—"

"Mr. Blyn," the lord of the place interrupted gently, "I said that I meant to give you every chance, did I not?"

"I—yes."

"Then just assume that that includes all the stage settings, will you, please? My three boys are in Europe just now, but there must be two dozen suits of their clothes in the rooms here, I should say. Arthur is just about your build, Mr. Wilson—and I should imagine that Herbert was within half an inch of you, Mr. Blyn, in every dimension. Sims, my valet, will attend to all that."

He rose abruptly and smiled again. "I know when I'm right, and I'm right about you two. You've both got every element of big success. Are you going through with my little scheme, or does it impress you as mere wild nonsense?"

"It strikes me as the kind of chance any man fit to be outside a lunatic asylum would grab with both hands and hold onto until somebody brained him!" the junior partner rejoined huskily.

Hoban smiled gravely.

"That, essentially, is what I wanted you to say, Mr. Wilson," he observed. "It justifies my estimate of you perfectly. Good enough, then! We'll consider that you're part of my household, and that you've taken the social jump, however great that may be.

"The business part of my idea will come a little later—only a very little later, possibly—when you're accustomed to the different atmosphere, if of course that process needs any time at all. Are you quite content to let that rest for the moment and permit me to present it at the proper time?"

"Quite," William stated, apparently from a great distance.

"And understand just one thing more," the millionaire concluded. "When it's over you'll owe me nothing. Meanwhile, from this minute onward, you'll both have a free hand to go just as far in any direction as may lie within you—in a commercial way, in a social way, in any way that means quick progress for yourselves. All I ask is to do the initial steering of you. You'll leave that to me?"

"Absolutely!" William choked.

"Shake!" cried the friendly millionaire as he extended a hand to each of them in turn.

They shook—William with enthusiasm and an iron grip, Joseph limply as a man might shake hands in a dream. Then the wealthy person had dropped their hands and was moving briskly away.

"I'll send Simms to you at once, gentlemen," he said over his shoulder. "Give him whatever orders you chose about the minor details. When he's finished with you—come down and I'll present you to the folks."

"You might better let me go down and turn on that water again," Joseph suggested.

In the farther doorway Hoban turned with a frown.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," he corrected crisply. "I'll have the chauffeur locate the valve and attend to that. You'll have to remember, Mr. Blyn, that you have no further concern with such matters. You're done with such things, now, forever!"

"*Forever?*" Joseph cried piteously, because he really loved the plumbing business. "Why? Can't we ever—"

Here he ceased, for William's hand had closed over his mouth. Tensely William held him—but Hoban did not turn back again. He was out of the suite now and audibly walking down the corridor; and William released his partner with a savage:

"What 'r you trying to do? Queer it all?"

"Queer—queer it?" Joseph echoed, and then, with a rush, regained his full, normal senses. "Bill! Let's go!"

"Where?"

"Out! Home! Leave the tools; they might clank and start him after us again. We can duck down the side stairs and out tthrough the kitchen; I saw the door when we were down there and—"

"And why duck?" William queried coldly.

"Why—why, it isn't safe here, Bill!" his partner said wildly. "Can't you see that, Bill? This guy's not right—he's a plain nut. He doesn't really mean any of that stuff, Bill. He doesn't know what he's talking about. You stay here for another five minutes, and the chances are he'll be up with some red-hot iron for you to eat or a bowl of goldfish for you to play tag with and—"

"Joe, you—"

"He will, I tell you! This isn't real, Bill. Sane people don't do things like that."

"Not as a rule, maybe; this one did," William said briefly.

"You're not taking it all seriously?" Joseph gasped.

"Why not? The man's a prince, Joe. He's the man I've been looking for all my life—and you want to run back to the store and hide from him!"

Joseph swallowed the peculiar something in his throat, and inquired:

"Bill, you're not really going to *stay?*"

"Eh?" William raised his eyebrows in a chilly smile. "Yes; aren't you?"

"I am not!"

"Good-by, then, old man," said the junior partner and held out his hand. "Kick yourself a couple of times for me, when you're through doing it on your own account—later on."

He waited. The hand, ignored, dropped into his pocket. William laughed again.

"Well?" he said. "There are the stairs. Going to get started?"

Within Joseph Blyn a mighty struggle was taking place. Silently, through many long seconds, he stared at his old friend. Since earliest childhood they had been side by side—through school in the little white schoolhouse, through the high school, through the days of their apprenticeship in the plumbing establishment, later their own, of old Wallis Beard, Kate's father. His extrication from more than one wild mess William owed to Joseph—and Joseph, on the other hand, owed a good many assorted things to William.

Now they seemed to have reached the parting of the ways and—

"Bill, on the dead level, you're not fooling? You mean to stay with this lunatic?" he asked thickly.

"I do! There are your stairs, Joe."

A great sigh escaped the calmer partner.

"Let 'em stay there," he said sadly. "I don't need 'em. I've never deserted you yet, Bill, and I'm not going to begin now."

"Because—"

"Only because you're not yourself today, and, whatever might happen to you here, if I went away and left you alone, I might have to think about it all the rest of my life," Joseph supplied simply. "If Hoban's planning to shoot you, I want to be here to get the gun away from him—or to tell the folks what happened, if I can't beat him to it. Or if he—"

"That 'll do, Joe," William ordered sternly, and laid a heavy hand on his partner's shoulder. "Just say that you're over the first scare now and you've got brains enough to stick to the best thing you ever saw. I understand fast enough. Now cut out the low comedy and let's make the most of it. What's keeping that valet?"

He stared around with an impatience so purely patrician that Joseph gazed his simple wonder. Perchance his stare may have materialized the lean figure in black just entering the bedroom; it was there, at any rate—a pale, tall, crushed-looking, lugubrious man of forty-five or so, who bowed before them in utter humility.

"Simms, gentlemen, if you please," he murmured.

"The valet?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Hoban's man, thank you, sir. Will you be so good as to step this way, gentlemen, to Mr. Arthur's rooms?"

He backed through the door and waited for them in the corridor. William, clearing his throat, swaggered after quite jauntily. Joseph dragged behind his partner.

To some extent at least the peculiar situation was quite real. By no stretch of the imagination could Simms be put into the lunatic class, nor did he look like the sort of person who would be found working for a lunatic. So far as Joseph could judge—which was entirely by such fiction as he had read that dealt with valets—Simms was the perfectly conventional man servant.

He was opening the door at the end of the corridor and bowing them into a huge bedroom, with a high, windowed alcove on one side and a bath on the other. He was stepping across now, to the bed, and indicating the collection of white-flannel raiment so smoothly spread thereon.

"A suit of Mr. Arthur's," he sighed in William's direction. "The flannels he wore, in fact, the day he broke his arm."

William merely nodded and slipped out of his own coat. Simms turned to Joseph Blyn and shook his head drearily.

"Ah, a most unfortunate affair that was, sir!" he observed. "The young man's arm 'll never be quite the same again, they tell me. He suffered so frightful, too, for weeks and weeks! These things of Mr. Herbert's will do you perfectly, sir."

Joseph started slightly. There were, to be sure, uncommonly few kinks in his nervous make-up—yet the fact remained that Joseph had always been highly sensitized to unpleasant associations.

"No—ah—misfortunes connected with these clothes, eh?" he muttered as he looked at them.

The valet smiled faintly at him, rather as a man smiles who suspects that he has found a kindred soul.

"Why, yes, sir, in a way there are!" he said almost brightly. "That is to say, this is the very suit of clothes Mr. Herbert wore last summer, when his car went over the bank above here!"

"Ah!" Joseph breathed.

"Killing the chauffeur," Simms explained further. "Mr. Herbert always vowed and declared that every blessed time he wore this suit something—but perhaps I'd better not mention that now. Will you try the trousers, sir?"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

POLLY LOVES ME

POLLY loves me! That I know;
She herself has said it;
Blushed and sighed, tho' long ago
In her eyes I'd read it.
Breezes, as you whisper by
Through the garden portal,
Bear to all the world that I
'M a most lucky mortal!

Polly loves me! Happiness
Surely is my portion.
Yet, alas, I must confess
I rejoice with caution.
Blossoms gossip in their glee,
Knowing well what bothers:
Polly loves me! Yes, but she
Loves a dozen others!

R. H. B.

Let's Forget

by

Captain Dingle

"I DON'T see any reason for all this hard talk, Martin. We been good pals until Rosa come between us. Let's forget it, play fair, and the best man wins," protested Joe Willat, his strong, brown face overclouded with distaste for the subject that had arisen.

"Forget nothing!" his companion retorted angrily. "You've said too much to be forgot. Just you leave my gal alone if you don't want more to be said."

Martin Fogarty swung on his sea-boot heel and marched off, leaving behind him a reeking streak of smoke from a cutty pipe that was all but red-hot from the force of his agitated drafts. Joe stared after him for perhaps thirty seconds before he could control his speech, then laughed scornfully:

"Your gal? Hey, you poor squid, when did you take lien an' lease on Rosa Chiappa?"

Martin stopped, dropped his pipe, the stem bitten through, and his retort was almost a shriek.

"Never you mind when, where or how! You speak to her again, and it's me and you for it, see?"

The two salvage-tug pilots had been born on the same day, on the same tiny islet in the Bermudas, had chummed and fought as boys at the same little school, and had grown up together in the ancient and honorable calling to whose followers many a stout ship owed continued existence around the still vexed isles.

As rival pilots their comradeship had strengthened rather than diminished; and in all their many races offshore, each keen to be first to reach a distressed vessel in their separate owners' interests, nothing but honest competition had entered. Neither self-interest nor loyalty to employers could induce Joe or Martin to bring into play any trick save the tricks of clever seamanship.

But into the Eveless Eden of two clean, strong men's lives danced Rosa Chiappa, and she brought her own serpent. Modern usage might sanction the word "jazz" to describe her entry into the peaceful, age-mellowed town of St. Georges; but since jazz is only known by disrepute in the Blessed Isles, let's say that this Dame Discord arrived with a bang by way of the shilling stage from Hamilton, in which city a Portuguese schooner had just deposited her along with several more compatriots from the Azores.

It is not necessary to make a picture of Rosa, because she plays a very small part on the stage of this tale; but since she does hang in the wings and pull strings which would be better left alone by her slim fingers, it is well to mention that she was just big enough to hold a heap of sin, and small enough to make people believe her only capable of innocence; she had soft, red lips, and hard, black eyes; the manners of a kitten, and the morals of a cat. But of this last feature be it said neither Joe nor Martin knew. They saw the softness of

her lips, and missed the hardness of her eyes; noted the small, trim body which seemed only capable of holding innocence, and forgot that sin may be packed tight.

This is enough of Rosa, except that she had soon singled out the two successful, unmarried pilots as her prey, and, as the record shows, had succeeded in starting something.

Joe Willat walked past the town and along the shores of the New Cut, puzzling over the strange thing that had darkened the lives of himself and Martin. He had time to spare, for his tug, the Racer, lay at the shops, having a new radio set installed; so he continued on until he reached the outer rocks of the narrow Cut, and sat there smoking and staring fixedly seaward as if seeking in the face of old Ocean an answer to his puzzle.

After awhile he heard the well-known whistle blast behind him which called for a clear channel for an out-going tug, and soon the Strong, commanded by Martin Fogarty, foamed out through the narrow passage bound to sea. Instinctively Joe waved a salute as she passed him; Fogarty shook a threatening fist from his pilot-house window, then turned his back. The action did more to convince honest Joe of the true seriousness of their quarrel than any amount of wordy argument could have done.

He slumped into deeper despondency, his pipe cold and comfortless. How many times had he given Martin the channel on the way out, glad to start the race a little astern rather than take advantage of his tug's speed when the other happened to be foul with grass? How many times had Martin given him right of way under the same circumstances? That was all there was between the two big tugs: a slight difference in speed when one was clean and the other foul. And now, for a black-eyed, saucy imp of a girl, the friendly wave of the hand was answered by a knotted fist shaken in anger. Joe slid nearer to anger himself as he thought of it.

"Hello Joe, sweet'art!"

A hand light as hibiscus bloom fell on his shoulder as he sat, and a laugh, mocking as Satan, musical as swirling waters, sounded close to his ear, and Rosa Chiappa slipped into a seat on the rock beside him.

"'Lo, Rosa," he replied. No more.

Quick as a cat the girl sprang up, flung a handful of loose rock-dust at him, and clambered away across the rocks to a point from which she could watch him unseen. As she left him her face was dark with rage at his reception. As she waited for him to crawl contritely after her, waited fruitlessly, her expression changed, to a pout, to a puzzled frown, to dawning alarm. She suffered an impatient hour, then returned to Joe.

"Wassa matter, Joe dear?" she whispered, running her hot hand over his unsmiling face. Out behind the jutting rocks sounded the bellow of a tug's whistle. Joe stood up, glanced once seaward, and started to walk back to town, taking no heed to the raging girl beside him, whose hot blood almost suffocated her in her effort to hold back the fury that scorched her.

"Spik to me," Joe," the girl said, her hard black eyes glittering in fierce contrast to the softness forced into her voice.

Joe marched on, and Rosa, desperate from fear that she had lost one of her men, seized his hand and thrust her lithe body close to his, gazing up into his face with panting breath. And down the channel foamed the returning Strong, with a dancing madman in her pilot house as he caught sight of the couple standing in sharp silhouette against the sky on the rocky summit.

That night, in Market Square, a battle of the giants was waged which is still spoken of when the World War is but a memory. Nobody remembers anything passing until Joe Willat's outstretched hand was knocked aside, an oath was spat, and Martin Fogarty's fist smashed home into his friend's amazed face.

The response was swift and convincing. No word was uttered as those two sea-hardened, wind-toughened, life-long chums clashed in terrific fight. Across the square they reeled; a store window was shattered to shivers, a strong door splintered and fell under the impact of furiously hurled bodies; and crimson drops marked a maze

which crisscrossed the white coral square like holly berries on snow.

Once, when a blind, headlong collision sent both combatants crashing backwards half unconscious, a woman's scream rang out on the quiet night, and a crouching, hard-eyed little figure half emerged from the shadow of the nearby hotel veranda; but a swift recovery, bringing the fighters back to stubborn feet, still blood crazed, sent the small figure back behind the dodging crowd of spectators.

Then police arrived, the crowd melted, and Joe and Martin were taken to the station. Their characters saved them from any serious results; but the encounter intensified the bitterness in Martin's breast, and the shame of appearing before the police engendered a similar feeling in Joe, where it had never dwelt before. A sharp warning from their individual employers prevented another open break between them, and Rosa, perhaps a little overawed for the moment by the tremendous forces she had stirred up, was less bold in her advances; thus many days went by without bringing further strife to the old town.

A period of storm came, however, which kept both tugs busy night and day seeking for steamers short of fuel, and sailing vessels shorn of spars; towing ships in, and helping ships out. The town was full of mariners of all nations, and Rosa found no difficulty in filling the places left by the almost continuous absence of her two greater flames. On the return to port of either tug, her skipper would be slily made aware of the carryings-on of a certain vivacious young lady; but when was there ever a fair schemer who lacked the skill to keep two suitors quietly dangling if only she could see them one by one?

"You are a big silly boy," she told Joe, her small dark face upturned to his, her red lips pouting. She had perfected the trick of veiling those hard black eyes behind entrancingly long silken lashes. Joe Willat's vital fluid was as warm and humanly susceptible as any man's; though, as he often laughingly claimed, he was fitted with a safety valve, which other men lacked usually. Now he swept the girl into a bear-hug and kissed her lips bruisingly.

"Then let's have yes or no, right now!" he demanded.

"Oh, you are too rough!" she protested, with a show of displeasure. "Besides, I've told you many times, Joe, I like Martin as well as I like you—sometimes," she added quickly, seeing the danger signal in his eyes. "I will make a bargain with you, though," she went on, scanning him narrowly from under her veiling lashes. "At the end of one month I will marry one of you, the one who—"

"Want to set us fightin' again, eh?" Joe broke in with a harsh laugh.

"There are many ways of fighting," she retorted, turning to leave him shortly. "If I'm worth wanting, I'm worth fighting for, anyway. Good-a-night, Joe faint-heart!"

Within four hours Martin Fogarty heard much the same decision, but he did not receive it as Joe did. He swept the girl into a hug, it's true, but his lips only snarled; it was with upraised fist he sought to force better terms from her mocking lips, and for once her true nature proved too strong for her to repress.

"You do that to me?" she panted, furiously, fumbling wildly in her hair. "There! Pig!" she gasped, and struck a dagger-shaped pin deeply into his suffused cheek.

"Little devil!" swore Martin, letting her go and clapping a hand to his face. Then he started forward, but she fled from him, and over her shoulder came the taunting challenge:

"If you fought a man as bravely as you fight a woman, I would perhaps—" The sentence was abruptly cut off as she darted around a corner; but a rippling laugh echoed for a breath when words could not be heard, and Martin turned away, seeking the water-front with a new vision before him, and a resolution which would brook no more obstacles in the path of his desire.

On his return to the tug he found incipient trouble. The Strong's radio man had picked up an urgent call from a steamer eighty miles off to the north-east; the steamer was out of fuel, a storm warning was flashing broadcast over the seas, and, to cap the tale of urgency, Martin Fo-

garty's powerful tug was helpless with suddenly developed boiler trouble.

"Nothing for it but to give it to the Racer people," the owner of the Strong remarked in annoyance. "It's like handing them the bank in a hat, by gosh!"

The Strong's people, owner and crew, stared at each other blankly. It was not necessary to rush at such a conclusion as that, surely. They watched while the engineer's crew plunged again into the task of patching up the defect sufficiently for offshore work in a breeze, and faces lengthened with the time. Then a voice shrilled down the voice pipe.

"Wanted on the phone, Mr. Dawson."

The owner clambered on deck and ashore. In his wharf office he took up the telephone receiver. The Racer people were speaking to him, and as he got the message in full his eyes opened wide, and astonishment made his lips drop.

"What's that?" he shouted. "Fogarty taking your tug out? Why no, I didn't send him. Where's your own pilot?"

Linking up the broken parts of the message, it amounted to this: Martin Fogarty had appeared at the office of the tug Racer just ten minutes after Joe Willat had jumped into a hack and driven off at a fast pace in the direction of Hamilton, thirteen miles away. He had told the office manager of the distressed steamer offshore, told of his own tug's helplessness, and said that they'd better get after the job.

Then, Willat's absence remarked, Fogarty had placed himself at the Racer's service, and the tug was now steaming down the harbor.

"What's your pilot gone away for, just when our tug is disabled?" fumed Dawson. If, by a miracle of engineering, his own tug should be made serviceable quickly, here he was left now without a pilot. And Saint Georges was never overstocked with deepwater pilots of her own.

"Got a message that our missing radio parts were ready. He's gone for them," came the reply.

Back on his own tug, Dawson watched morosely while the Racer stormed into the distance: a plum gone into his rival's basket, and his own man helping to pick it. But Mr. Dawson was a clean business man in spite of his keenness; when the Racer vanished from his sight he returned to the engine room and helped the perspiring toilers there who greeted him with sweaty grins of renewed hope.

Half an hour after he went below the patch was complete, and he went on deck for air while eager firemen began to raise steam in the boiler. And to the owner came the inevitable sycophant to be found wherever favor is to be had, in the shape of a junior clerk from his office.

"Fogarty's acting queerly, isn't he, Mr. Dawson?"

"How? What d'ye mean?" snapped the owner, impatiently. Fogarty was at that moment a sore point with him.

"Oh, perhaps it's nothing, but I wondered why he came to the office, just before I went to supper, and phoned to Joe Willat that his radio stuff was ready. It seemed he might have stuck to his own business instead of helping the opposition these busy days."

For once a sycophant scored, though only a fluke directed his shot. Mr. Dawson left him without a word, and rushed to the telephone again. He called up the shop where the Racer's radio gear still lay, and found that the work would not be done for a week yet. He roared a peremptory order over the wire to have Joe Willat sent back without a moment's delay, and, further, to have a boy dispatched on a bicycle along the road to turn Joe back if possible before he reached town.

Before the steam sent the white feather to the tug's pipe, another radio message from the distressed steamer urged speed in sending assistance. Utterly out of control, her master unacquainted with those seas, with a strong gale increasing from the northeast and a falling barometer in hurricane time, she was in a bad plight unless speedily picked up. And her position, as now given, indicated that she had either given an erroneous position previously, or that she was in the grip of a strong current. The last presumption was most likely; though as the weather was such, and seemed likely to be such for miles offshore,

as to preclude any observation being taken for position, her situation must, in any case, be a matter of guesswork; and the Racer, speeding out to her aid, could not receive a radio message to warn her of the new or doubtful position.

"And Fogarty's but a damned poor navigator once he thinks he's lost!" muttered Dawson, peering along the dark road for sign of Joe Willat returning.

It was late that night when the tug Strong steamed out past the Fairway buoy, her boilers leaky but capable, with puzzled Joe Willat at the wheel and Mr. Dawson standing beside him in the darkened pilot house.

It had cost Joe a struggle to accept Dawson's story of Fogarty's trick. For all their recent quarrel, Joe regarded Martin as his friend deep down in his heart; and he could not believe this thing of him. Perhaps had he not run into Rosa, lurking around the wharf, and seen for himself the look of scorn she flung at him, her small head erect, her lissome fingers flicking contempt at him in real Carmen style, he would never have taken the Strong to sea, for all Dawson's offers and entreaties. But—

"What is worth winning is worth fighting for, Joe!" she had laughed at him with a flirt of skirts. "I wait for my man!"

"Oh, forget it!" he had growled back, his welcome smile for her suddenly wiped out; and now he was steering his rival's tug into howling darkness with a fiercer resentment in his breast than had ever dwelt there before.

To the sailor who has attempted the approach to the Bermudas on a black night in a gale, in a crippled vessel, there is nothing to add to the plain statement that all the sixteen-mile-wide reefs off North Shore were crooning welcome, that the two big lights lost their visibility at half their stated range, and the south-westerly current ran doubly strong under an opaque sky which blinded the stars.

"Where's the deviation table?" growled Joe, when open water lay ahead. It was a new ship to him. He knew his own tug's compass vagaries.

"There is none," replied Dawson, himself a manager and not a navigator. "There's a standard compass on top of the pilot house."

Joe gave the wheel to the tug's mate, a mud pilot, and climbed out into the storm. In two minutes he was back.

"Might as well sell it," he snapped.

"Why?"

"Try to get up to it. How d'ye expect a man to get to it with no rail around the house, a wet canvas deck, and the tug rolling gunnels under? Yer radio wires come down to a nutted bolt in the deck, without any protection, and that's all ther' is to stop a feller rolling overboard. Damned cheap outfit to ask a man to come to sea with! Here—"

He took the wheel from the mate and swung the tug around.

"What are you doing?" demanded Dawson, anxiously. "You are not going back?"

"I'm goin' to try to figger out this compass's error before we lose them lights," stated Joe emphatically. And for an hour, rolling giddily, her decks sluiced to the rails, the tug was turned all about the compass, and Joe laboriously took down her compass readings of the fixed light on every bearing.

"There!" Joe announced at last. "Ain't much good, anyhow. But, close as the light is, it's the best we'll get to-night. Now we'll carry on till you say back, Mister Dawson. It's a fool's trip at that."

A sudden shift of wind towards morning proved the gale to be developing into a real hurricane. It set up a cross sea of devilish whim; one nine-inch towing hawser snaked away over the rail like a mammoth sea-serpent before the battered deckhands could claw aft to save it; high up on the house a rearing sea kicked in two of the pilot-house windows and filled the tiny navigating chamber knee-deep. Half of the crew, hardened seamen, were murmuring; grim Joe Willat took turn and turn about with the mate at the wheel, disdaining even to glance at the white-faced owner for fear that he would see in his drawn face a hint of uneasiness.

Six hours they had reeled the miles astern, and no radio message had come to

assure them. Joe knew that the prevailing current, aided by the first wind of the gale, must have brought the drifting steamer down close to the islands; and here they were, fifty miles offshore, and never a sign or signal.

"Suppose the Racer's found her?" queried Dawson at last.

"No," grunted Joe. "I don't think Martin can get the old Racer over this hell-broth like I could. He ain't makin' more'n about seven knots in this, I'll bet. Maybe the steamer's wireless is busted. Where's yer searchlight? Same place as yer standard compass?" he asked the mate.

"I can work it from here."

"Then get it started—"

The radio operator burst in at that moment with a fresh bearing of the steamer.

"He reckons St. David's light bears forty-eight miles due south-west of him at the time of sending," the operator said.

"Then the damn fool's about run over us!" growled Joe, sourly. "Hey, mate, send that searchlight straight up in the air! You, Sparks"—to the radio man—"send him a call to start all his lights goin', deck, cabins, and cargo lights, and to look out for our flash in the sky, then radio us our bearing from him."

Mr. Dawson settled back on the settee with a little sigh of relief. Joe Willat's worth as a seaman was a household word in Bermuda; but proof such as this made the word convincing to an anxious owner.

Sparks returned in ten minutes. The searchlight sent its vivid beam aloft like a column of pale blue moonlight against the hellish blackness.

"He gives our light plain in sight, cap'n," said Sparks. "Bears due south of him—distance uncertain, but close."

"True south, or magnetic?"

"True, he said."

"Take the wheel," Joe told the mate. He went out, clawed forward by hands and teeth, and started to mount the spidery pole of the foremast. Inside the pilot-house three men stared from the windows in amaze to see a heavy, oilskinned, booted figure slowly climb up to the bracket of the towing lights. They held their breath as the tug rolled like a cask in a cataract, whipping the mast back and forth like a reed. Then down bellowed Joe's voice, rising above the shriek of the wind and the roar of a frenzied sea.

"Blaze o' lights three points to port! Sta'bo'rd yer helm! More yet—more—stiddy—hold that!"

Like a great ape he descended and reappeared in the pilot-house, dripping and hoary with flying spume, but with a light in his keen eyes which reflected a nerve unshaken. At half speed a mile was covered, then the steamer's lights were seen from the pilot-house. And at the same moment a deckhand aft bawled out:

"Light on port quarter! Searchlight or somethin'."

The new light flickered awhile, then steadied and fell on the Strong's upperworks. Presently a masthead light and two side lights appeared, and a tug's shrill siren shrieked upon the storm.

"That's the Racer!" announced Joe, with a grim smile.

"Want the mate to handle her, Cap'n Willat?" asked Mr. Dawson anxiously. "Close work getting that steamer's line, y' know, and you don't know this tug very well, perhaps."

"I can handle this one a dam sight better'n Martin 'll handle my old Racer, mister," retorted Joe with a queer expression.

"Oh, Fogarty's a good man," protested Dawson.

"He is. But he ain't handled a tug with a rudder 'leven foot by fourteen on hand-steerin' gear, Mister Dawson. You'll see, when he begins to back. Goldang it, I wish he wasn't in that pilot house!"

"You don't have to feel anxious about him. If he had stuck to his own business he wouldn't be there, would he? You took charge of my tug for this job, and I expect you to look to my interests only."

"Don't worry, Mister," laughed Joe, shortly, "I'm here to do what's right, that's all. Frini"—to the mate—"have two hands stand by with heavin' lines on the house, and the rest o' the hands aft at the towing gear. Looks as if there's work for both tugs this night. God! look at that!"

Joe whirled the wheel, gave the engine-

room four bells, and thrust his wide shoulders through a shattered window, while Dawson and the mate exchanged glances of rising doubt.

The engines began to go astern, and the loom of the steamer ahead grew thick and ominous. The Strong, circling, had brought the Racer abeam, and both lay to leeward of the plunging, wallowing steamer whose decks were glaring with lights and whose rails and bridge were black with anxious men.

Over the seething water the Racer's bells tinkled as Martin Fogarty saw his peril, and rang to stop and back his engines. Out of her pilot-house window jutted Fogarty's head and shoulders, and he shook his fist at Joe, who gesticulated wildly from his own pilot house. The Racer's sharp stem was within twenty feet of the Strong's rail, which in turn was close under the swooping hull of the steamer; and all old Atlantic's bottled-up wickedness was poised for pouring out.

"Damyersool!" roared Fogarty furiously, "get out o' that! Back her! Th' tow's mine, by—"

"Hell!" bellowed back Joe, in a frenzy of fearful knowledge misunderstood by everyone about him as well as by Fogarty. "I don't want the blasted tow! Watch yerself, Martin, fer th' love o' Gawd! Don't back her brutal like that!"

A gasp went up from both tugs, and a yell of alarm from the steamer. Both tugs were bathed in the blazing radiance cast down by the steamer's many lights; and in the glow the Racer's pilot house was as open as day. In response to Fogarty's angry tug at the bell his vessel went suddenly from full ahead to full astern, and for perhaps one moment the tug merely slowed and stopped; but then she began to go fast astern, and in a breath all Joe's fears were realized. Martin did not consider the boat he was handling; all boats were alike to him just then; and the Racer, built for an ice breaker on the Great Lakes, had indeed that eleven-by-fourteen-foot rudder Joe had spoken of; she had, too, primitive hand-steering gear which required a strong man to hold going ahead. Going fast astern in that turbulent sea, with a pilot who was unaware, that great rudder flung broadside with the irresistible force of a hydraulic ram, the big hand-wheel spun with a whir! and the spokes rattled against Fogarty's chin and chest, carrying him bodily over the wheel and out of the broken pilot-house window a huddled, unconscious heap.

While yet mouths gaped wide and eyes popped, Joe Willat sent his tug full astern out of the mess, steadied her, then brought her alongside the Racer with a smash. Gone for all time was the memory of their quarrel; nothing existed in all the wide ocean then for Joe except the bleeding shape hanging over the Racer's rail helpless, while shocked mate and deckhands stood like statues, unable to lift a hand. Mr. Dawson touched Joe's arm, fearful for his property as well as for his seemingly lost tow.

"Let-go!" snarled Joe, savagely, and held his sternwise course until, crashing heavily to the splintering of wooden rails, the two tugs ran alongside each other, still backing.

Then, with a backward-flung—"Course to th' light is sou-sou-west by compass!" he leaped to the other tug's rail, seized the gaping mate and half flung him aboard the Strong with a fierce order to lend a hand, then gathered Martin Fogarty in his powerful arms and laid him down on the pilot-house locker.

With one sweeping glance outside he determined the relative positions of the vessels, and rang his engines ahead. His tug swung about, headed on her course for home, and when Joe had got his own deckhand to stand a trick at the wheel he bawled down the tube for all the steam available, and bent over his friend in fear.

Martin had paid a stiff price for his trickery, even then, while home lay far off. His left jaw was smashed, his temple was a purple pulp; one side of his powerful chest and throat looked as if he had been crushed in a granite crusher.

Joe bade fair to pay a price, too, for he had forfeited his claim to any reward coming when he left the tug he had brought out before she got a line to the steamer. But that worried him little.

"I picked up th' tow," he muttered,

" an' if Dawson's the sort o' man to beat me out for this, well—" A shrug of the shoulders said, plainly as speech—" Let him!"

Tireless as his own engines Joe stood in the pilot house through the night, conning the course in the intervals permitted him between giving ease to the pitiful figure on the lockers. And in the dawn, when the great St. David's light winked and went out before the greater light of day, the Racer sped through the narrow Town Cut, ignoring all channel and harbor laws, with a flag flying for medical aid.

It was daylight, with people and birds stirring busily, when Joe helped the sailors ashore with Martin on a hatch cover. Outside the wharves the doctor had left his own buggy, and to this the stricken man was borne, sensible now, suffering torment.

At the gate a little, fluttering, hard-eyed figure waited, and as Joe passed a feverishly impatient hand fell on his arm.

" Didn't none of youse bring home the steamer?" panted Rosa, her black eyes flickering coldly over Martin's form. " What's the matter with him? Hey? Did you get it, Joe, dearie?"

Joe glanced at his friend. Martin had heard, and seen. Under the gateway arch the bearers paused while the horseman brought his vehicle around; and for a full minute Martin's gaze rested unwaveringly on the girl.

She glanced once at his drawn face, and turned to Joe again, peering up into his grim visage with something of fright in her eyes.

And a low, pained, but bitterly understanding laugh burst from Fogarty's bruised breast.

" Took a whale of a wallop to open my eyes, Joe," he said. " I'm sorry, lad. She wasn't worth—"

The bearers placed him inside the carriage, the doctor got on the box seat, and Rosa seized Joe's arm again with an air of relief.

" Come along now, Joe, dearie," she chattered. " He'll be all right. I want to speak to you. Did you find that—"

Joe stepped into the carriage, slipping one stout arm around Martin's shoulders. With the other he gently, but firmly, removed Rosa's hand from the door.

" Let's forget it, kid," he grinned.

U U U

CHRISTMAS

WHAT wouldn't I give to go back to the days
When Santy Claus wasn't a hoax;
When nobody knew that the tall Christmas tree
Was trimmed, after dark, by " the folks ";

When maybe a doll, with open-shut eyes,
And beautiful, curly, brown locks,
Was sitting up straight at the foot of the tree,
Or tied in a long paper box;

When maybe your stockings was crammed to the top
With all of the treasures so dear,
Or maybe the annual peppermint cane
Would be even larger that year.

What wouldn't I give to go back to the days,
The days before hard-hearted Truth
Had taken the place of the old fairy tales
And the wonderful Christmas of Youth!

Nan Terrell Reed.

The Buster

by William Patterson White

Author of "The Owner of the Lazy D," "The Brass Elephant," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

WILLIAM CORYELL, cowboy owner of a small outfit, receives a telegram from Mrs. Amanda Rowland, owner of a neighboring ranch, offering him a job as guide when she returns from the East. Puzzled, he, as a joke, wires he will take the job at one hundred dollars a week, and to his amazement she takes him up. It appears, however, upon her arrival that her real object is to "make over" her spoiled but beautiful Eastern niece, for which job she has drawn in Bill.

The two meet and develop a certain amount of antagonism. The next day while alone on the ranch, a stranger rides up. He proves to be a desperado, and after torturing her in a vain effort to get the combination of the safe, he brutally attacks her.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BLACK BEAR CUBS.

"GUESS I won't take my Winchester," Coryell had remarked to Ranger as he swung up in the early morning. "Won't need it, will we, ol' tiger-eye?"

Several miles out from the Two Bar Coryell had reason to reverse his decision concerning the Winchester. For, as Ranger dropped down the reverse slope of Long Ridge into the valley where the alders grow, two black bear cubs, a snarling, squalling, clawing, and biting ball of furry anger, tumbled into view from behind an outcrop and rolled directly under Ranger's feet.

Ranger was a sensible pony, and invariably good as gold, but in common with most horses possessed an instinctive horror of bears. It was natural then that he should shy widely and with despatch. Terror-stricken, he took no thought to the placing of his feet, stepped on a round and rolling stone and went down with a thump.

Coryell saved himself from being caught and pinned under the horse only by the most extreme agility. He warded off a possible broken leg, but sustained damage otherwise when he slid face down into a hatful of small rocks strewn in precisely the proper positions to tear his shirt, skin his hands, scratch his face, and deal one eye a bump replete with stars.

Coryell rose hastily and in time to seize the horse, which was scrambling to its frightened feet, by the bridle.

The cubs had disappeared. He heard them crying somewhere behind the outcrop. Then he sprang into the saddle without touching the stirrup, whirled Ranger on a dime, and was off. For, at that instant, issued from behind the outcrop the mother of the cubs. She was coming on the jump, too. And she was without exception the largest and angriest black bear he had ever seen.

Of course Coryell realized that the bear was laboring under a misapprehension. She thought that he had attempted to molest her cubs. He wished fervently that he had brought his rifle. No one, when looking along the barrel of a Winchester, need ask odds of any bear. Still, in circumstances such as those of Coryell at the moment a six-shooter is better than nothing.

He glanced over his shoulder and reached for his gun. But no smooth butt met his fingers' touch. The six-shooter must have slipped out of the holster when he threw

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himself from the saddle there by the outcrop.

And the bear was apparently as full of enthusiasm as in the beginning. At least she was proceeding in great bounding leaps that covered the ground like a prairie fire in a gale of wind. Ranger was gaining on her, naturally, and there was nothing of the quarter-horse in his make-up. But Coryell was not cheered. He knew that he would have to keep straight along Alder Valley till the bear tired or gave it up.

Climbing Long Ridge was out of the question, as was taking to the alders. For a bear can mount a rough slope or travel through young growth, brush, or timber faster than any horse can, except a broomtail.

For two miles the chase endured. Then the bear stopped to pant and blow. Coryell, a half-mile in the lead, pulled up. At last the bear, having regained in a measure her breath, shook her heavy shoulders and started to waddle back to her cubs. Coryell began to follow the bear—at a respectful distance, a very respectful distance.

When the bear reached the outcrop and her waiting cubs she soundly cuffed them both, and herded them before her into the alder growth that covered the valley bottom.

Coryell moved forward to seek his six-shooter in the vicinity of the rocks that had damaged his face and torn his clothes. He found the gun at the end of a ten-minute search, partly concealed by bunch-grass at the edge of the alders.

He found something else, too—the half-eaten foreleg of a cow. He knelt and examined the leg.

"Cow was shore alive couple o' days ago," he muttered. "That bear—" He broke off, an odd pucker between his brows.

He picked the leg up by the hoof and straightened. Eyes crinkling, he stared at the hoof. It had been knife-cut almost to the quick. Now a cow-killing bear does not cut away the horn of a victim's hoofs, but a rustler desirous of running off a calf and preventing the mother from following is prone to commit that very deed. For, be it known, men in the cow-country are given furiously to think when a cow lavishes affection and sustenance upon a calf whose brand does not agree with hers. And when men in the cow-country begin to think, they do not go through the motions indefinitely. They hunt them with a rope—and the rustler.

Coryell dropped the leg and flirted the looped reins down from the hollow of his elbow to his hand and led the reluctant horse in among the alders. He knew that this was a foolhardy proceeding, for the bear might have remained in the neighborhood, but he had glimpsed that within the young growth which he wished to inspect at close range.

"That" was the gnawed and torn carcass of a cow—a cow with one foreleg missing. It lay some forty or fifty feet in from the edge of the little trees. So mangled was the body that earmarks and brand were alike undecipherable. Coryell stooped to inspect the hoofs. He found that every one had been cut by a knife.

"Lamed 'em all," said he aloud, rolling a slow cigarette. "They wasn't leavin' nothin' to chance, the lousy pups!"

He flung the reins over Ranger's neck, mounted, and rode out into the open.

Thuck! Something struck the ground and ricocheted with a tearing whine into the alders. Another something sang cheerlessly under the brim of his hat. Crack! Crack! The reports of the rifle, flattened by distance, were mere pinpricks of sound.

At the buzz of the second shot Ranger was in full motion on the back trail. Coryell, bending low over the horn, called himself names. He certainly should have brought his Winchester. With it he was a match for any bushwhacker. Without it he was a useless encumbrance on the face of the earth.

Zing-g-g! The lead buzzed like an angry bee. The shot was a foot high at least. But Coryell ducked his head and felt no shame. He tore into the shelter of the trees, halted and looked back. He saw a small gray, hazy cloud flecking the green of a distant hillside. Smack! A bullet bored a tree at his right hand. Coryell continued his retreat at once.

"That feller shore can shoot!" he admitted resentfully. "Think of him seein'

me way back in these alders. An' me plumb afoot for far-shootin' artillery! Mr. Colt, sir, you are mother's lil helper like always, but a Winchester certainly has the call today."

He shook his head sadly and lifted Ranger over the trunk of a windfall.

"They's only one thing to do," he went on as the horse bored crashingly through a patch of brush, "an' that's go back to the Two Bar for my own rifle. I'll gamble I'll save a lot o' time an' my own life thataway. Which bein' decided on it's allurin' to wonder who it was cut down on me. Swing Kyler? Not at that distance. He never was much of a Winchester shot over five hundred an' he knows it. We'll chop out Mr. Kyler. The gent who rustled the et cow's calf? Maybe—but not likely. They'd be no sense in downin' me just for lookin' at a dead cow with cut feet. Can't prove nothin' definite against said gent by that. Not the rustler then. Who else don't like me? Who else has Swing workin' for him that could—naw, not one. Not a jigger in the Slash K outfit is anythin' extra with the rifle. None better than Swing. *Shucks*, who've I made hot under the collar long ago or lately for him to lie out an' bushwhack me at nine hundred yards? Nine hundred yards! He had field-glasses all right."

Jack Lander had a pair of field-glasses. Coryell resolved to ride the additional miles to Lander's and borrow them on his way back from the Two Bar. At present the more necessary article was his own Winchester. With the spur he stirred Ranger to greater exertion.

"Come out o' yore trance, feller," he adjured the animal. "Keep a-movin', keep a-movin', an' we'll drift in before lunch—helluva name that is to call dinner—an' wrap ourselves round a pack-load of Pot Luck's best."

The shadows showed nearly noon when Coryell loped round a bend of Cottonwood Creek and sighted the browny-gray buildings and corrals of the Two Bar Ranch sprawling across the flat. A horse with reins dropped stood in front of the ranch-house. Coryell was a hundred yards from the house, he caught sight of Pot Luck coming out of the woods at the other end of the flat. The Chinaman carried a basket on his arm.

Coryell shifted his gaze to the standing horse.

"Cantinas an' saddle-pockets just a-bulgin' an' slicker tied on. Wonder who is he. Nobody on the porch."

Riding closer that he might see the brand on the horse's hip Coryell perforce passed near the dining-room windows. Ranger, now walking sedately, brushed his hoofs through the young blue stem with scarcely a sound. But there were sounds in the dining-room — strange sounds, as of one fighting for breath and choking in the process.

Coryell's head snapped to the right. Through a window he saw Miss Rowland held fast in the arms of a man. The girl was straining her face away from the tainting touch of the thick lips that were so near. It was she who fought and choked for breath. A segment of white shoulder was visible above the man's imprisoning arm. He was bending her backward across the table. He had almost pinned her shoulders down. That the two were sidewise to the man on the other side of the window was the complex mercy of Heaven.

Coryell was not conscious of drawing his six-shooter. He was not conscious of aiming or pulling the trigger. All he could ever recall of that soul-racking instant was a snap-sight of two heads in profile and those same heads disappearing behind a cloud of smoke. Nor does he recall how, whether by door or window, he entered the house.

It may be said, however, that the stranger was shot accurately through the ear and skull. It is to be deplored that his death was unattended by the slightest pain.

Coryell looked down at the crumpled body, perceived that life was extinct, and holstered his six-shooter. Miss Rowland, her face drawn with the horror of what might have been, pulled herself to her shaking legs. Her eyes, wide as a sleep-walker's, stared at Coryell. He went to her.

Instantly, careless of her torn frock and bare shoulders and breast, she flung her arms round his neck and clung to him, sobbing wildly.

"Yo're all right," he assured her, starting to pat her shoulder, but, finding firm flesh instead of silk under his palm, he hastily transferred his hand to the small of her back, where the gown still held together. "Yo're all right," he went on. "I—I got here just in time. You ain't hurt bad."

She shuddered. "I'm not hurt at all—except where he hit me."

"Hit you!" Coryell growled the words deep in his throat, and would have said more on the subject, but he saw Pot Luck's frightened face peering from the pantry. "You heathen!" he cried to Pot Luck's address. "What did you go off an' leave her alone for? Where is everybody.

But Pot Luck, his slanting eyes glazed with fright—the dead man was not an attractive object—gibbered incoherently and fled back into the kitchen. The Chinaman was poignantly aware that he had disobeyed orders, been false to his trust, and that consequently dreadful things had come to pass. Another dreadful thing would come to pass when Mrs. Rowland returned from Rockerby's. Certainly he would lose his good job. He would be lucky if he were not kicked off the place. Mournfully, he began to prepare lunch.

In the dining-room Coryell was gently endeavoring to persuade Miss Rowland to go to her room.

"Y'oughta rest up," he told her. "Yuh—yuh need it."

But she only clung the tighter to him and shivered.

"Don't leave me," she implored. "Dud—don't leave me. I'll—I'll be all right after a while, but now I'm sus-scared. Dud—don't—you mustn't leave me. I'll have hysterics if you do."

"Now, listen," he said soothingly, "now, listen to me. You go to yore room like a good girl an' get yoreself fixed up an' rested a lil bit till yo're ready to come down an' eat lunch. I'll see the Chink has somethin' tasty to eat, too. They's some nice corned beef."

"I don't want to eat corned beef," she told him without raising her head from its position against his shoulder. "He—*he* ate corned beef. He tore the slices with his teeth and his fingers. Corned beef! I never want to see corned beef again! I—I—"

"Yeah, I know. But you gotta go upstairs right now. If you can't walk I can carry you. Here, stand easy, an' I'll do it anyway. Yo're pretty weak in the knees yet."

"I—I can walk," she protested, but without his supporting arm she would have fallen.

At once, swinging her body so that she could not see that which lay upon the floor, he scooped her up in his arms and carried her stairward. She laid her head on the curve of his neck and shoulder and relaxed her aching muscles as naturally as a child. And with her torn dress and great mop of disordered hair she looked like a child. Not knowing which bedroom was hers, he carried her into the one nearest the head of the stairs—Mrs. Rowland's.

He laid her on the bed and looked about for something light to spread over her—the torn dress of whose condition she seemed absolutely oblivious, had worried Coryell from the beginning. He spied a summer shawl trailing across the back of a chair. He covered her with the shawl from throat to toe.

He stepped back and nodded. "You'll do now. Have a good rest. Light in yore eyes? I'll fix them shades. You want anythin' now, you just holler. I'll be right down-stairs."

She smiled at him wanly. He went out, closing the door softly.

He returned to the dining-room, spread-eagled the dead man and thoroughly searched his clothing.

He found besides the usual articles carried by men of the country—six-shooter, pocket-knife, tobacco, matches and the like—a few dollars in assorted silver, and a thumbed and filthy letter. The envelope and address were missing. It ran:

> DEAR BILL:
> I have a job for you and Squinteye. Six months' work and tripel pay. Bring your rifles.

The last sentence was underscored three times. The signature was so smutched as

to be illegible. Coryell, rubbing gently with an eraser, only made bad worse.

"Tripel equals triple," he mused. "And 'bring yore rifles' spells trouble for somebody. I wish I knew his last name or the name of the party who wrote the letter. Also, where is 'Squinteye.'"

He went outside and searched the saddle-pockets and cantinas on the dead man's horse. But their contents were as devoid of information as had been the personal belongings in the man's pockets. There was no name stamped or carved on the saddle, a center-fire Ladesma tree. The horse brand, a plain C on the right jaw and hip told him nothing. Many, many outfits between the Canada line and Old Mexico used the C iron.

Coryell thoughtfully led the horse to the corral, stripped him and turned him in with the Two Bar horses. Then he went back to the dining-room, heaved up the dead body on his shoulder and carried it to the bunk-house, where he laid it on the floor. And, because of the flies, he covered it tidily with one of Tommy Barnes's blankets.

A prey to speculation he returned to the ranch-house and sat down on the porch railing. Absently he rolled himself a cigarette. The cool, efficient rage that had possessed him from the time he looked through the dining-room window had long since passed. The sole effect upon him of having killed a man was that he felt tired out. To sit down was grateful. Of regret for what he had done he was much too matter-of-fact to entertain a thought. Regret in such case is not the custom of the country. The man had deserved death. He was dead.

But the letter he had left behind him. What was the inner meaning of that? That it meant trouble was sufficiently obvious. But "trouble" is a loose term. It is difficult to guard against the indefinite.

Five minutes later a horseman drifted up to the porch, pushed back his hat, and nodded.

"'Lo," was his greeting.

"'Lo," said Coryell, and perceived that the stranger was afflicted with a sharp-featured, rattish face and a most villainous squint. Squinteye? He resolved to find out. Sometimes Providence takes kindly to a little crowding. This seemed to be one of the times. "Lookin' for Bill?" he asked softly.

The squint of the stranger's pale-green eyes became even more pronounced. "That's a question," he enunciated carefully.

"I sort of meant it for one," drawled Coryell.

"An' s'pose I am lookin' for him?"

"Then you'd like to see him."

"Which comes next as natural as the bridle on a hoss. You seen him—Bill?"

"I saw him."

"He's rode on, hüh?"

"He ain't feelin' so well." Thus Coryell, breaking the news gently as possible. "Le's slide down to the bunk-house. I guess maybe Bill would like to see yuh."

They went down to the bunk-house. They entered, the stranger in the lead. At sight of the quiet face protruding beyond the edge of Tommy Barnes's gray blanket, the stranger gave a perceptible start. Turning slowly he focused as well as he could his peculiar squinting stare on Coryell's face.

"Who killed him?" he demanded calmly.

"I did," replied Coryell with equal calm, and hunched a shoulder in step with the stranger. In step, the shoulders, but Coryell's gun shaded that of the other. And a shade is all that is necessary on the draw. The stranger's bullet scored the side of a bunk, Coryell's bored the stranger's upper right arm.

The stranger's six-shooter thudded on the floor. The stranger sat down on the nearest chair and tenderly clasped the flesh below the wound. Blood oozed out through the flannel and stained his fingers. It trickled out from beneath the leather cuff on the injured arm and dripped on the floor—spat, spat, spatter.

The stranger's complexion turned to gray mottled with brown. He licked his lips, stared dazedly at Coryell, then quietly toppled forward out of the chair to the floor.

Coryell, properly disgusted at this exhibition of lackadaisiness in a two-legged man, turned the fellow over on his back and returned to the ranch-house for bandages. He

observed the precaution, however, of taking with him the stranger's six-shooter.

Within five minutes he came out of the ranch-house to discover that the world without was not as he had left it. The stranger's horse, which its master had led to the bunk-house and left standing beside the wash-bench while he went in with Coryell, was not in sight.

Coryell ran hot-foot to the bunk-house. Save the dead man, the bunk-house was untenanted. Coryell swore frankly. For he had hoped, while the stranger was recovering, of learning exactly what meant "Bring your rifles." Now—he swore again to think how easily he had allowed himself to be taken in. He might have known the man would sham a faint. It was the obvious thing to do.

A prey to mixed emotions Coryell returned to the ranch-house.

CHAPTER VIII.

LANDER'S.

FROM the wash-bench beside the bunk-house door came splashing sounds mingled with hard swearing. A puncher named Dale winked at Coryell.

"I didn't think nothin' would ever make Tommy wash that blanket," he observed in a loud, cheerful tone.

Tommy Barnes poked his head through the doorway and fixed Coryell with an irritated eye.

"Whyn't you use Dale's blanket to wrap that corp in?" he demanded for the seventh time. "I can't get that blood out, an' I've used everythin', includin' Pot Luck's floor-brush. If I'd knowed the feller I wouldn't mind so much, maybe, but I got objections to sleepin' with the blood of a perfect stranger next my chin."

"That's easy," Coryell said helpfully. "Turn the blanket end for end. Maybe yore feet ain't so finicky as yore lil pink chin."

"Nemmind my lil pink chin! Next time you use more consideration. They's plenty old *saddle*-blankets layin' round without yore havin' to make free with folks' *bed*-blankets."

"S'funny nobody knowed him," Coryell changed the subject. "Tommy, are you shore you *dunno* him?"

"Shore, I'm shore," vowed Tommy Barnes indignantly. "Think I know all the tough customers in the territory?"

"Well, yuh see," said Coryell mildly, "bein' a stray man yo're used to seein' a heap of the world, an' spendin' all yore time in saloons thataway—"

"Here comes Sam Reed," interrupted Tommy Barnes hastily. "Maybe he'll know him."

But Sam Reed did not know the dead stranger, nor to his knowledge, had he ever run across any one resembling in any way the squint-eyed second arrival. So, when they buried the remains in the cool of the evening, they did not erect a head-board.

Pot Luck assisted them in the labor of digging. In fact, he did most of it. He was a greatly chastened Celestial since the return of Mrs. Rowland and the interview during which she had metaphorically stripped the flesh from his bones. He had not lost his job, but he was on probation for an indefinite length of time. That night he, of his own accord, chopped kindling till midnight.

Next morning Coryell made a fresh start homeward. It was his purpose to stop at Lander's on the way, both to acquaint the ranchman that rustlers had begun operations and to borrow a pair of field-glasses.

The L Up-and-Down ranch-house lay at the head of a draw branching out from the long valley where the alders grow. Mr. Lander was not at home when Coryell rode in. But Mrs. Lander was. She was frying doughnuts. The odor made his mouth water. He decided to wait. Mrs. Lander surveyed him critically, as she deposited a "done" doughnut, still sizzling to itself, on a square of oiled paper.

"Whatever you been doin' to yore face?" she asked. "Huh? Well, they's the basin outdoors on the wash-bench. You better wash it. Yo're skin's all over dust an' you want to keep them scratches clean. I'd sew up yore shirt if I wasn't busy with these doughnuts."

"I wouldn't trouble yuh for a lot," he told her, going out to puff and splutter over

the wash-basin and wish that women weren't so fussy about a couple of scratches.

"That's better," the lady informed him when he returned with hair finger-parted and slicked down. "You got nice hair, Bill, so black an' shiny. Lander's beginnin' to lose his some. Whatcha flushin' up for? Don't mind a old woman like me, do yuh? As if you really did! Shucks, I'll bet you wouldn't even wait if I wasn't fryin' doughnuts."

"Why, Mis' Lander, how you talk," protested Coryell, his mouth stuffed like a squirrel's. "As if I'd have to be fed to stay here an' talk to *you*. Not sayin' these fried holes ain't almighty easy to eat."

"So I see," said the lady with a sharp smile. "Lot's o' time you young fellah's got for anybody over thirty 'less she can cook. It's the young ones catch yore eye. Can't fool me. I ain't been married to Lander goin' on now twenty-two year for nothin'. Which I should say not. Men are all alike, if you ask me."

"I guess yo're right," was Coryell's easy endorsement as he helped himself to another doughnut. He would cheerfully have agreed with the devil for his fill of the Lander doughnuts. They were truly delectable.

"You bet I'm right," Mrs. Lander declared viciously, dipping another doughnut. "I've always said it's a whipsaw whether men or packrats is the most worthless."

"Well," said Coryell mildly, his blue eyes twinkling, for he well knew that Mrs. Lander's bark was much worse than her bite, "you can eat a packrat—if yo're hungry enough."

"Then I guess men win. Have another doughnut?"

"Thanks, not to-day, ma'am. Twelve in a bunch is my limit. I don't wanna spoil my appetite for dinner."

"Don't you worry none about that appetite. We got fried ham to-day, an' that 'd give most anybody a appetite."

"*Yo're* fried ham shore would," Coryell averred gallantly. "But I wasn't exactly figurin' on eatin' here. I—"

"Where would you eat, I'd like to know? An', anyway," she added archly, "they's somebody here who'd raise the roof if yuh didn't stay."

"Yeah," grinned Coryell. "Who?"

"Connie."

"Yeah?" He liked Connie Dawson—in a friendly way.

"Yep, Connie. Come out from Hatchet, so she did, to keep her aunt company. She's out in the spring-house now. Be back in a shake."

CHAPTER IX.

CONNIE DAWSON.

"I THOUGHT I recognized yore hoss, Bill," said Connie, wrapping the butter crock she carried in a wet towel and setting it on the window-sill that it might obtain the full benefit of the fitful breeze. "An' how's Bill?"

"Middlin'," he told her gravely. "Don't do no good to complain."

"It's a wonder you wouldn't come in an' see a fellah now an' again," Connie complained coyly, her hands on her hips and her chin tilted alluringly. "Now, don't tell me yo're too busy. I wouldn't believe you."

"I wasn't gonna say nothin' like that," denied Coryell. "But what chance have I got a-comin' to see you, Connie? Lordy, like as not when I did come in I'd find forty other men a-hangin' round yore kitchen door. I'd have to beat off half the town with a club to get a word in edgewise with yuh, an' then by that time the other half would most likely have yuh out walkin' or ridin' some'ers. 'S' no use, Connie, a out-of-town jigger never has no luck goin' to see a in-town girl."

"Oh, I dunno," smiled Connie, running the can-opener round the top of a can of corn. "If I knowed you was comin' I guess maybe you wouldn't have to break yore arm beatin' off the other men."

"He's shy," put in Mrs. Lander, sliding the last doughnut from her dipping-spoon. "Or maybe he likes to be coaxed. Some do. Where djuh put the long butcher-knife, Connie?"

"Left it on the shelf after I cut the bread. I saw you in Hatchet the other day, Bill. You—you wanna keep away from the saloons more."

"Dew on a duck's back!" snapped Mrs. Lander, vigorously slicing thick slices of ham. "Tickle a mule's hind heel with yore finners, Connie, take a bone out of a bulldog's mouth, but don't tell a man to keep away from the saloons."

"I only had a couple o' drinks," defended Coryell warmly. "Short ones."

"That shore has a familiar sound," sniffed Mrs. Lander. "Lander has looked me spang in the eye and said the same thing a million times. Short ones! They're always short. Connie, yo're gonna get fat as pig if you gobble doughnuts like that. Whyn't you bring me in a pail o' water from the spring while you was about it."

"I'll get it now. Bill, they's the pail yonder."

Within a few minutes after Coryell's return from the spring-house came the sudden gallop of a horse and Lander whirled past the kitchen door on his way to the corral.

"Thank Gawd!" exclaimed Mrs. Lander, hastily forking slices of ham into the frying-pan. "I was gettin' so hungry myself I could eat a raw dog if he was buttered."

Coryell went out to water Ranger and take him to the corral.

"I wondered whose three-legged accordeen that was a-makin' so free with the shade o' my cottonwoods," grinned Lander, who knew Ranger quite as well as he knew his own horses. "Why don't you try a real animal, Bill? Even a burro now—"

"Nemmine about this accordeen," said Coryell. "If he couldn't run ahead of any or all o' them goats a-sportin' *yore* brand I'd give him away. I shore would. I'd even give him to you."

"Not if I knowed it," denied Lander. "I ain't got a bit o' use for a hatrack. Djever try feedin' him, Bill? They say a hoss goes better if he's fed once or twice. Me personal—"

"Listen," interrupted Coryell, his head under a stirrup fender as he flapped out the cinch strap, "yore cows use Alder Valley much?"

"Yep," nodded Lander, his face losing its expression of heedless fun. "Why?"

Coryell explained why. Lander snapped together the twin lashes of his quirt and whistled.

"I like their nerve," he cried indignantly, even if it mightn't be my cow. Too dam' bad the brand an' earmarks were all gormed up thataway. It's either mine or the Two Bar or the Rocker B's."

"Kind of out of the way for Rockerby's, seems to me."

"I've seen a few there. I guess this here cow is the first, 'cause I ain't missed any to know it, an' I met up with Rock himself yesterday, an' he didn't say nothin'. Maybe the Two Bar—"

"I just come from there, an' losin' cows is the last thing Sam Reed had on his mind."

"Well, we gotta keep our eyes a-slidin' round all so brisk an' careful." Lander bunched saddle, blanket and bridle across one arm.

"'Sall we can do—now," said Coryell. "Wait a shake, Jack. Stirrup's caught on the gate. There y' are. Lookit, Jack, you still got that pair o' field-glasses you used to have? 'Cause if so, I'll borrow 'em—Yeah? That's clever of yuh."

"I declare!" Mrs. Lander cried in exasperation, upon Coryell's third refusal of another helping of ham and fried potatoes, "I declare I never see such a appetite as yore's, Bill! Good fried ham like this, an' you a great big two-legged man an' y' ain't eatin' enough to keep a sick fly alive. It plumb discourages a body to cook for folks that don't eat!"

"You don't see me passin' nothin' up," said Lander, reaching across the table to spear two slices of bread with his fork.

"Oh, you!" snapped his wife. "You always eat like a hawg anyway. Nothin' could spoil yore appetite 'less you was dead."

"I should hope not. Li'l gravy, honey, right out o' the fry-pan on top o' this bread. Bill, you better try you some. No? Connie, you like gravy-bread. Last time you was here you hardly ate anythin' else. Don't—Shucks! You ain't even ate yore hogans. Whatsa matter with *you?*"

"I ain't hungry," was the short answer.

"She's worse'n Bill," averred Mrs. Lander disgustedly. "She ain't even drank her coffee. You'd think she was in love or somethin'."

Connie's face flamed. Without a word she pushed back her chair and rose to her feet. She piled her cup, saucer and plate, slid them into the washpan on the side table, turned a remarkably straight back on the company and went outdoors.

"You oughtn't to said that, honey," remonstrated Lander. "You've made her mad."

"Stirrin' up's good for her," Mrs. Lander justified herself. "Alla same," she added with a slight frown, "I never see her get a sulk on before like that."

"She's got one on now, y' betcha," said Lander. "Coffee, honey, an' pass the sugar, will yuh, Bill?"

Bill passed the sugar and decided that the present was an excellent moment for departure.

He did not see Connie as he cinched the hull on Ranger and rode away.

But Connie saw him. From the cool shelter of the spring-house she watched him go. And when he had gone she sat down on the box and stared at the opposite wall. After a time she began to plait and unplait a corner of her checked apron.

CHAPTER X.

THE CALF.

WHEN Coryell reached his own corral he was astonished to find it harboring half a dozen strange horses. He was still further astonished when Wat Pickett, the sheriff of the county, slid round the corner of the house and requested that he elevate his hands above his head.

"What the hell?" demanded the wrathful Coryell, obeying promptly.

"Nothin' much," replied the sheriff, deftly possessing himself of the Coryell artillery. "Let's go in the house, huh?"

They went into the kitchen. There Coryell found the two deputy sheriffs, a cattle association detective named Coombs, the county coroner, his brother the gambler and Light Laurie. The latter, his holster empty, was sitting on a chair in a far corner of the kitchen. The others sat about in calculatedly strategic positions.

"This is shore a social event," grinned Coryell, simulating an animation he did not feel. "Even Tom Jones, the coroner, I see. Are you figurin' on settin' on my mortal remains, Tom?"

"Not if yore sensible, Bill," answered the coroner, smiling broadly. A round-faced, jovial man, he radiated a lively cheerfulness even when working at his trade. "Me'n Trip," he added, flicking a thumb toward his brother, "only come along for the ride."

"That's good," declared Coryell. "I'm shore a heap relieved. But say, Wat, I'd admire to know what I'm arrested for."

"You ain't arrested—yet," replied the sheriff, carefully placing Coryell's six-shooter beside that of Light Laurie on the shelf behind the stove.

"Then I'm dreamin' a fond, fair dream," said Coryell. "I was mistook when I thought I seen you take my gun away, an' that ain't Light Laurie sittin' over yonder a-smókin' cigarettes with a empty holster."

"Why no," said the sheriff, "you ain't dreamin' as hard as all that. Yore gun, Bill, has been took along with Light Laurie's just in case. We got a li'l investigation to investigate, an' we might want to ask you a few questions, you an' Light, an' we don't want nothin' to put the kybosh on the proceedings."

"That's it," said Coombs, who knew Coryell in a casual way. "No call to get het, Bill. We're just avoidin' trouble."

"That's good again," was the Coryell endorsement. "I'm glad, a heap glad, that we're all li'l friends together. Let's get down to cases. Speakin' frank, I want back my gun. I feel sort o' naked without it."

"Fair enough," said the association man. "You see, Bill, I ran across a calf with a bunch o' yore cattle."

"Only one? I won't get rich very fast at that rate."

"This partic'lar calf was branded with yore iron, an' wearin' yore earmarks."

"Nothin' strange about that. Me'n Light have branded an' marked several."

"But yore brand on this partic'lar calf was the L up-an'-down worked over."

"That's different."

"We think so."

"Looks bad, don't it, gents, when I tell yuh that this mornin' I found a dead cow over in Alder Valley with knife-cut feet."

The detective and his associates looked at each other. The sheriff rasped a slow hand across a stubby chin and coughed. He tugged once at his graying mustache.

"What brand?" he asked gently.

"Couldn't tell, Wat. She'd been mostly et by a family o' bears."

"Bears!"

"Bears! Four-legged animals with stubby tails an' lots o' fur an' teeth."

"Howdja know it was bears?" persisted Wat Pickett stolidly.

Coryell told him how he knew and added indignantly that he didn't think it mattered who ate the cow—she was eaten.

"I just wanted to find out why you was so certain, Bill," explained the sheriff mildly. "Shore she wasn't shot, that cow?"

"Fairly shore. Why don't you go off up Alder an' find out for yoreself if yo're so anxious? Guess you'll find some of her left."

"Maybe we will, maybe we will," intoned the sheriff mildly. "They's nothin' like lookin' at a deal like this from all sides an' findin' out all we can right at the go-off. You'd be surprised, Bill, how li'l things count in law. Sometimes a drapped hair or a lost handkerchief will hang a man. Yessir, I've knowed it to happen."

"That's right cheerful-soundin' information, Wat. I hope you ain't hintin' at nothin'."

"No, not me," disclaimed the sheriff. "While we're waitin', would yuh like to see the calf?"

"Waitin'? Waitin' for what? Hells bells, man, you either arrest me or you don't! Why wait?"

"For Lander."

"You sent for him?"

"Hour ago. Sent Slimmy."

"Funny I didn't meet him. I just come from the L up-an'-down."

"Likely he went another way. It don't matter. Wanna see that calf?"

Coryell went out with the sheriff, Coombs and Luke Travis, the younger and taller of the two deputies and inspected the calf tied by the neck to a cottonwood behind the house. It was a perfectly good calf, given to tail-switching and, with the cottonwood's assistance, hide-scratching.

Coryell gazed with narrowed eyes upon the raw burns of the newly-made brand.

"That Staple Box was never made with my branding-iron," was his pronouncement. "A gent with a runnin'-iron did that."

"'S what we thought," nodded the association detective, rolling a careless cigarette.

"That brand is bigger than my brand every which way," pursued Coryell. "Any fool can see that. Wait! lemme get my iron, an' I'll show yuh."

"I'll get it," said Luke Travis. "Where is it?"

"Kitchen—hangin' up under the shelf behind the stove. They's three of 'em there. Bring 'em all."

When Luke Travis returned with the three branding-irons, each in turn was placed upon and comparison made with the brand on the calf. In each case the brand was larger than the iron.

"You always use one o' these irons, don't you, Bill?" queried Coombs, weighing one of the heavy irons in his hand.

"Always." Shortly.

"An' Lander nearly always uses a runnin'-iron—even on roundup," supplied the sheriff.

Coombs nodded. "See, Bill," he pointed out, "where the L up-an'down was worked over?"

"I got eyes. Only they's this about it, the rustler never rebranded the old brand none. He just added three new lines to make it mine, so's anybody takin' a look at that brand would see the old one plain as day an' know it had been blotted. My Gawd, gents, do you guess for one minute if I had switched this brand I'd a left it for the first gent come along to scratch his head over? If I was a rustler an' had as li'l brains as that I'd deserve to be lynched."

"That's the part stumps me," the sheriff said generously. "When I seen it I didn't know what to think."

"Me neither," agreed Coombs. "Everybody knows you ain't a fool, Bill."

"Thanks," said Coryell dryly. "Yo're workin' out my case fine an' dandy. Why not call it a day an' lemme go?"

"Not yet. We'll wait awhile."

"Lookit," said Coryell, "you'll admit I ain't a fool, an' this is the work of a fool. The answer is easy."

"I know, I know," the sheriff cut in smoothly, "but rustlin' is a serious offense, anyhow you look at it. We gotta sift through this thing a heap careful. We don't wanna do nobody an injustice, but—"

"Course you do," Coryell told him heartily, "an that's just why you wanna look at this thing more'n one way. So far yo're bullin' along a-ridin' the idea to death that somebody got joyful with this calf for my benefit."

"We ain't decided that none yet," declared the sheriff stiffly.

"Not open out maybe, but in yore minds you got the sneakin suspicion that Bill Coryell has fell from grace. Shore yuh have. I know. If you hadn't you wouldn't come pouncin' down on Light an' me an' take our guns away an' the like o' that. We'll say yuh wouldn't, just to be sociable. Now didja ever stop to think that maybe that brandin' was done to dump me?"

"No," said Coombs, glancing at the sheriff, "I dunno as I thought of it that way exactly."

"It's another way of lookin' at it," the sheriff said slowly.

"It shore is another way of lookin' at it," Coryell declared warmly. "S'pose now some gent was out to colddeck me thisaway. What would he do, huh? What's simpler than a trick like this—always s'posin' it ain't seen through?"

"Sounds reasonable," admitted Coombs.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RIDERS.

LANDER and Slimmy arrived when the shadows were long. With them rode Lander's four punchers, Whittle, Bower, Kling and Coburn. The four men dismounted at the kitchen door. All greeted Coryell and the others with gravity. But Lander added a smile for the benefit of Coryell and Laurie.

"Lessee that dam' calf," said Lander. Then, having seen the calf, he swore disgustedly. "I never branded that calf," he declared.

"Maybe Whittle or one o' the others did," suggested the sheriff. "How about it, gents?"

Each "gent" denied vigorously having branded that qualified calf. In support of these denials they adduced testimony varied but sufficient.

"Which I should say not," supplemented Lander. "When my calves are branded they're always earmarked at the same time. Don't see any holes in that calves ears, do yuh? Yuh don't. An' that brandin' is rough — most Gawd awful rough. Looks like either a child—a left-handed child at that—done it, or else a jigger with a purpose under his hat. Speakin' natural, if Bill had a enemy—which he might have a corral-ful for all I know—I'd expect him to do somethin' like this. It's so easy—if it is moth-eaten. Lordy, man alive!" he added to the detective's address, "can't you see they's some hidy-hole fox-work behind this?"

"Blottin' is always crooked," Coombs remarked sententiously.

"I don't mean that. I mean some sneak has got it in for Bill. That's what I'm tryin' to beat into yore head."

"You don't need to use a hammer, Lander." Huffily.

"I shore hope not, but I want you to see this straight. I ain't gonna have no injustice done round here."

"They won't be no injustice done nobody," denied the sheriff. "We just wanna get to the bottom of the business, an' we're gonna get there if it takes a week."

"The way yo're goin' at it, it'll take longer'n that," chipped in Coryell.

"That'll be about all from you for now, Bill," the sheriff told him. "Yo're only hurtin' yore own case."

"My case! I like that! I shore do! I thought you said I wasn't arrested."

"You ain't—yet. We ain't decided what we're gonna do."

"Take yore time, sheriff," said Lander softly. "We all know yuh'll do the right thing."

A peculiar intonation in the Lander delivery caused the sheriff's ears to prick up.

"Yes," Lander continued, "I wouldn't want no hardship worked on Bill Coryell, none whatever. An' I guess as a member in good standin' of the Hatchet County Cattle Association I got somethin' to say."

"Shore, Lander, shore," Coombs hastened to assure him. "But I got my duty to perform. I'm afraid—"

"Yo're afraid to use what yore head's stuffed with between the ears," said Lander. "Which you ain't doin' it a-tall when you come round a-ropin' at Bill Coryell, who is likewise a association member in good standing same as me."

"Lander," said the sheriff, "yo're a-wastin' time—"

"Me!" interrupted Lander with heat. "Me waste time! You got yore nerve! I'm a-tryin' to help you out, only you an' Coombs can't see it seemin'ly."

Faint and far away, a confused tuckety-tuck struck their eardrums at the tail of the words. Coryell permitted himself to smile. He thought that he knew why Lander had been so verbose.

"Who's a-comin'?" said the sheriff, staring at Lander.

"Rockerby," promptly replied Lander. "Leastwise, I guess it's Rockerby an' some of his boys, or else it's Sam Reed an' the Two Bar boys, or maybe both."

The sheriff, stung and scowling, started to speak his mind, but thought better of it. Votes are votes, and Lander controlled not a few. The scowl smoothed itself out and he conjured up a smile, a crooked smile to be sure, but passable.

"Y' old fox," he said, "it wasn't necessary to bring in the whole county."

"Why no," said Lander simply, "only the Two Bar an' the Rocker B. I thought likely they'd be interested in this case too. Besides," he added naively, "Slimmy didn't say how many men you'd brought with yuh."

Five minutes later arrived Rockerby and five punchers. The owner of the Rocker B was discussing the situation with those first on the scene when, within the half hour, came galloping the Two Bar contingent, Sam Reed and three punchers. The newcomers, the sheriff and Coombs did not fail to observe, were as quick to take their cue from Lander as had been the earlier arrivals from the Rocker B.

"I can't see," said Rockerby, stubby fingers slowly combing his long gray beard, "where they's anythin' for you to do yet, Coombs. I said so at first, an' I say so again. I'm as anxious as the next feller to stop rustlin', but you can't arrest *anybody* now. Yore evidence wouldn't hold good in any court."

"I wasn't gonna have nobody arrested now," Coombs denied aggrievedly.

"I didn't think you was," Rockerby said diplomatically. "I was just sayin' you couldn't s'posin' you wanted to."

"Shore," contributed blunt Sam Reed, "anybody can see Bill didn't blot that brand. Some lousy sneak's a-gettin' right active, that's whatsa matter. You skirmish round, Coombsy. You keep a-burnin' the ground an' you'll dig him out all same woodchuck. We're all with yuh."

"An' a-wishin' me luck," Coombs said.

"Of course," flashed Lander. "Why not?"

"If the funeral is over, sheriff," drawled Coryell, "I guess Light Laurie would want his gun back, an' I know I want mine."

"You saw me put 'em on the shelf behind the stove," capitulated the sheriff. "Help yoreself."

When the representatives of Law and Order had departed, Lander plucked Coryell by the sleeve and drew him to one side.

"Who do you guess?" asked Lander.

"I dunno."

"In yore own mind, Bill—not meanin' no offense—or just sayin' so?"

"Both."

"You got a *notion?*"

"Yeah, I guess so. But notion ain't proof."

"Give it a chance, Bill. I've noticed that a notion has a habit of growin' like a calf, an' sometimes faster. I got a notion too. Lookit! how did Coombs come to find that calf so soon an' providential?"

"Aw, Coombsy's all right," protested Coryell.

"I ain't sayin' he ain't. I'm just sayin' how come it? Three hells an' a damn, Bill, lookit that brand! 'Tain't a week old, an' Coombsy runs across it almost immediate. It may 'a' been luck, an' it may 'a' been somethin' else. Nobody mightn't 'a' said nothin' to Coombsy about where to *look* for this calf, an' then again—" Lander broke off, and searched Coryell's face.

"You mean they might 'a' been loose talk—or somethin?"

"'Or somethin'," nodded Lander. "Of course, like a fool I didn't think o' sayin' anythin' about this to Coombsy till after he'd went."

"I'll be seein' him maybe one o' these days," said Coryell. "That was shore thoughtful of yuh, Jack, to send after the Two Bar bunch an' Jim Rockerby's outfit. I—"

"Forget it," smiled Lander. "You'll do as much for me some day."

Lander did not stay to supper and, after the meal, with Light Laurie sloshing the dishes round in the washpan and singing "The Kansas Line," Coryell withdrew to the outer air and the wash bench to consider his trouble more fully.

"I say that Coombsy jigger oughta be lynched!" Light Laurie's full-lunged shout shattered his reverie.

"Huh?" Coryell looked blankly at Light Laurie. "Oh yeah," he continued hastily, "shore he oughta."

The puncher laughed. "Done spoke to yuh four times 'fore yuh heard me, Bill. You must be in love or somethin'."

"You can put down a bet," Coryell grinned back, "that it's more 'somethin'' than 'in love.'"

"Which I should shore hope so," said Light Laurie, who had no desire to witness the setting to rights by feminine fingers of the loved and topsy-turvy interior of the Staple Box ranch-house—at least not till he was safely married himself, he hadn't. Not that he formally expected anything like that, for lately he had differed with a certain hasher in Hatchet. However—

"Funny how Coombsy got on to that calf so quick," Coryell said.

"Ain't it? That sport thinks he owns the earth, he does. Marches in large as life he does, throws down on me, takes my gun away, an' plants me in the corner before I can wink. I wasn't thinkin' no harm when that bunch sifted in. Betcha if I'd knowed what was up he wouldn't 'a' got it so easy."

"Just as well you didn't know, Light. S'pose you had? S'pose you downed him or got downed. You'd be dead or in jail. Yo're better off outside an' alive. Didn't he hold me up? I guess we can stand it."

"Guess we gotta. But the nerve o' the gent tryin' to pin that brandin' onto us! Well, you bet Lander an' Rockerby an' Sam Reed understand. They got sense. They ain't like that witless Wat Pickett. An' I'd always thought Wat an' his crowd was our friends."

"They are—what most of a man's friends are anyway. They ain't wishin' him any ill-luck exactly, but it's interestin' to suspect him. Gives 'em somethin' to talk about. Maybe he did do it after all, you can't tell. Who'd 'a' thought it of Bill Coryell. I always had a idea they was somethin' fishy an' slanchin' about that feller. He don't come to town so much, does he? An' another feller winks an' wets his finger in the sloppin's on top the bar an' starts drawin' out brands an' a-alterin' of 'em while you wait. An' from halfway believin' they go on to believin' pretty energetic, some of 'em. So it goes."

"Aw, they wouldn't," demurred Light.

"Wouldn't they," sneered the cynic. "You don't know the general run o' folks. It ain't what's good that's talked about. It's what's crooked. When you get a-hold of a paper do you read how the Reverend Slinger saves seven souls over to Circleville? You do not. You din't give a damn for nary soul. You start right in full split to read how Sammy Squinchmore is arrested an' suspected of cuttin' the throat of another gent in a ruction over Kansas Kate in a honkatonk. An' you lap it up like a drunkard does whisky. An' when yo're through yo're a-bettin' Sammy turned the trick an' oughta be stretched forty ways. You can't get away from it, Light. It's human nature."

The student of human nature stretched out his long legs and crossed one ankle over the other. Light Laurie regarded him with a tinge of awe. Never in his life had he heard Coryell make such a long speech, nor one so philosophical. Light did not know what philosophy was, but one does not need to be a student of first principles in order to be impressed by their presentation. And Light was impressed.

"I—I guess yo're right," he ventured.

"Shore I'm right."

"But what are we gonna do about it?"

"Wait. Thassall we can do. Bimeby Mister Sneak will make a mistake, an' then we'll glom onto him instanter."

"Suppose he don't make no mistake?"

"He will. They all do."

"I'm hopin' I see him a-makin' it, an' I guess I could name the right gent right now without strainin' myself."

"Nemmine doin' it," Coryell enjoined him. "Guessin' is a right non-payin' business anyhow you look at it. To-morrow, Light, we gotta round up the blue mare, Wall Eye, Cupid, Nipper, the bold-faced hoss, Eli an' Skip. Think you can get 'em all to the Two Bar by yore lonesome?"

"If I can't you can gimme my time. I'll be deservin' it."

"Then that's all right. I gotta go after Smoky myself, an' if you get to the Two Bar ahead of me, tell Mis' Rowland I'm a-comin'."

CHAPTER XII.

THE BEGINNING.

SMOKY NIVETTE not being at home when Coryell arrived at the half-breed's cabin beyond Wingo Flat, Ranger was forced to travel extensively for three days and a half. The halfbreed was finally run to earth at Morgan's.

Approaching the Two Bar, they met Connie Dawson coming away. She did not stop, but her greeting was without a trace of sullenness. She smiled impartially upon both of them. Coryell grinned back. He had always liked Connie—in a friendly way.

Not till after she had passed was it borne in upon his consciousness that Connie's hat was hooked over her saddle-horn and that Connie's hair was dressed in a new mode, a vaguely familiar mode, it seemed to him.

When he had turned his mount into the Two Bar corral and gone up to the ranch-house and set his eyes on Miss Rowland lazily swinging in the porch hammock he immediately perceived why Connie's style of coiffure had stirred his memory. It had been copied from that of Miss Rowland. This was to be wondered at. For Connie had never been given to imitating any one, least of all another woman.

Miss Rowland surveyed him with lazy dark eyes. One slim ankle clad in a stocking of sheer bronze silk that almost matched the girl's hair swung pendulum-wise over the edge of the hammock. The high-heeled slipper on the well-shaped foot matched the stocking in hue. It was that most difficult of all styles for the average foot to look its best in—a slipper with a large buckle and a flaring Colonial tongue. It says much for the comely grace of Miss Rowland's foot that the slipper rendered it even more attractive. Coryell thought so.

"Howdy," said Coryell, taking off his hat and seating himself on the railing.

"Good afternoon, Mister Coryell, good afternoon."

Was she mocking him? There was that in her tone—but she gave him glance for glance and continued to swing lazily. His eyes shifted elsewhere. He fished out the makings and rolled him a cigarette.

"If I should spend my time staring at your feet—" said the lady suddenly and sharply.

Coryell started, reddening. "You've got such a pretty foot," he told her simply.

It was her turn to flush. The foot disappeared beneath the hem of her gown.

"Shucks," said Coryell, "just like a woman."

"Just like a woman!" she echoed.

"Yes, just like a woman. You put on yore best lookin' socks—stockin's I mean—an' yore most splendiferous moccasins, an' then when a man looks at 'em you get mad an' call 'em right home, so there."

She considered this a moment. "I'll

tell you something," she said slowly. "A woman doesn't object to a man's admiration—his honest admiration, but she likes him not to be quite so open, not to stare her out of countenance as it were."

"In other words," drawled Coryell, "she prefers a trifle more subtlety."

"That's it." Miss Rowland nodded vigorously before she thought. Then she sat bolt upright with a jerk. "What was that you just said?" she demanded.

"Me? What?" He stared bewildered.

"What you just said? Repeat that last sentence of yours." Impatiently.

"'Me? What?'" Obediently.

"No, no, the one before. About 'subtlety.'"

"'Subtlety'? Oh yeah, fine feller he was. Used to live next door to the li'l red schoolhouse in them old New England hills. Shore, o' course, 'subtlety.' I ain't heard his name in years. Know him well, Miss?"

Baffled, she sank down again among her pillows. "In other words," "prefer" and "subtlety" from a puncher, a man who habitually employed the most atrocious grammar and shaved not as often as he might. To say the least, it was unusual. She was properly intrigued. But she was too wise to pursue the subject further that day.

"I've been seeing a good deal of one of your friends lately," she told him casually.

"Yeah? Who?"

"Miss Constance Dawson."

"I know her." Shortly.

"She'd be complimented to hear your tongue," was Miss Rowland's comment.

"She's a nice girl," he said evasively.

"I think so. She came first the day the sheriff"—she broke off in confusion.

"You needn't bite your lip in two," he said kindly. "The day the sheriff an' ol' Coombsy come near arrestin' me for rustlin', you was gonna say. 'Sall right. I don't mind. Canter on to the finish."

Again Miss Rowland sat upright. But now she swung her feet to the floor, planted her slipper soles solidly and faced him squarely. Her dark eyes were snapping, her arching eyebrows drawn together in a most unladylike scowl.

"Before I do go on," she exclaimed, "I want you to know that I don't believe a word of it. The sheriff is one idiot and that man Coombs is another. The very idea! Accusing you of a thing like that!"

"Why, Miss," he said gently, "that's shore good-natured of you. But you dunno nothin' about me. I might—"

She pounded a pillow with impatient fist. "You must think I'm as big a fool as the sheriff!"

He slipped from the rail and went to her and held out his hand. "I'm thankin' you—hard."

Her white fingers disappeared within his grip. It was all she could do to choke back a gasp of pain. But not for worlds would she have allowed him to see her wince. When he released her hand, it and the forearm were well-nigh numb.

"I was speaking of Miss Dawson," she said hurriedly, dropping her hand behind a friendly pillow and surreptitiously working the tingling fingers to restore the impaired circulation. "She's been here several times since—that first day."

"I guessed maybe she had been," he said with a meaning glance at Miss Rowland's coiffure.

"I showed her a new way of doing her hair," rattled on the unconscious Miss Rowland. "She seemed to like the way I do mine."

"Yeah, she would." The man on the rail allowed his slow gaze to travel across the dark green bulk of Rack Mountain.

"I found her awfully interesting, and not at all hard to talk to. I think she has the most beautiful dark blue eyes I ever saw, and as to her hair—I never saw anything like it. It almost reaches her knees. It was a joy to work with it, a positive joy. I revel in hair-dressing anyway. I should have been born a lady's maid. Tell me, did your ears burn the past few days?"

"Ears burn?"

"They should have. Miss Dawson mentioned you a good many times. She seems to be a great friend of yours. Have you known her long?"

"Several years."

"And you haven't fallen in love with her!" marvelled Miss Rowland.

He shook his head. "Why for should I?"

"'None so blind—'" murmured Miss Rowland, and shook a pitying head. "Auntie's gone to Hatchet," she went on. "Take me fishing, will you?"

He took her. They did not catch many fish, but they had a most pleasant conversation.

Over the hills in the sunset Mrs. Rowland returned with gossip on her tongue. It was rumored in Hatchet that Swing Kyler had found three of his cows suffering with knife-cut feet. Had Swing found any calves with blotted brands? No, he had found no calves so treated. But weren't the lame cows enough to indicate that rustlers were operating in Hatchet County?

Coryell acknowledged the logic in this, but—

"What does Coombsy think?" he asked Mrs. Rowland.

"Coombs hasn't the sense the Lord gave chickens!" exploded Mrs. Rowland.

"So he thinks I done it," Coryell offered calmly, smiling at the angry lady.

"How did you know?"

"By the way you spoke."

"Conceit! Lord, I should say so! Well, he has been hinting round something to that effect. I gathered that much before I'd been talking to Bud Thompson ten minutes. There wasn't any one else in the store, and Bud opened his heart. He didn't like it, either, and he thinks as I do about Coombs. The trouble with that detective is that he's out for a record. Arrests look well. It doesn't matter whether the man's guilty or not, or whether the evidence is good, bad, or indifferent. Coombsy! Bah! I shall certainly make it my business to write to the president of the association and the secretary too, and tell them a few things.

"Every year since I joined I've sent them a check for my dues weeks before it was necessary, and I want something to show for my money besides a tomfool and his tomfoolishness. I tell you, Bill, what we need in this association is a little brains. I wish I was running the business end of it. I'd show 'em a thing or two. I would indeed. I'd fire Coombs and the other nincompoops on the pay-roll so quick they'd think a cyclone had hit 'em."

"I'd shore admire to see you do it, ma'am," Coryell assured the irate lady. "Them cows Swing found now—when was it he found them?"

"Day before yesterday, I heard."

"Then I'll have to take a day or two off before startin' out on the trail with yuh."

"Oh, Bill, is it necessary—*absolutely* necessary? I do so want to get away before Charlotte tires of this place. I think she's growing a little restless already."

"Well, of course, you've done hired me, but this here business I got to mind is important. She's so crackin' important they's no droppin' it at all. It's open-an'-shut with me. I gotta go."

"All right, go ahead. But come back as soon as you're able, Bill. It is so necessary, you know."

He nodded a slow head. "I know. I won't waste no time, you can gamble on that."

When they two approached within earshot of Miss Rowland on the porch, they were discussing with experts' earnestness the merits of the Morgan strain.

Early in the morning Coryell and Light Laurie rode away from the Two Bar. Two Bar horses were between their legs, for their own animals were tired, and the matter required a certain amount of endurance and haste.

"Y' ought 'a' took that iron-gray," said Light Laurie, eying Coryell's mount with frank disfavor. "I never did like straw-b'ry roan."

"If you knowed anythin' about hoss-color, which I frequent doubt," Coryell stated pleasantly, "you'd know roan is a strong, tough color. Course I ain't sayin' she's anythin' like so good as a red chestnut like my Ranger, but she's anyways better than that painted yaller hoss yo're straddlin'. Black eyes, black tail, yellow hide an' a white face! He looks like a joke to me."

"Laugh all you wanna. This is shore a *hoss*, a real four-legged hoss. Tha's why I picked him out, y' betcha. Did I hear you hintin' somethin' about knowin' all

they is to know about hosses? Did I? My Gawd, Bill, don't show yore ignorance thataway round me who's forgot more 'n you'll ever learn. You can't tell *me* nothin' about hosses."

"How about calves?" smiled Coryell.

"I reckon you'll have to ask Swing Kyler for all the *latest* news," grinned back Light. "They say he's a real authority."

"Yeah, we're a goin' to him."

"You think Swing—" began Light, the words treading on each other's heels in his effort to get them out.

"I ain't thinkin'," interrupted Coryell. "But what would you think if we found the calves of them cutfoot cows shut up some'ers?"

"Branded Staple Box?"

"Not so soon. That 'd be facin' too many trumps at once. It's a good policy when folks is guessin' a lot just to feed 'em only a lil bit at a mess. Like huntin' dogs, they'll do more work thataway. Hatchet County is already makin' bets on the Staple Box as a rustlin' outfit. Along comes some cutfoot Slash K cows on top of the Alder Valley cutfoot an' her brand-blotted calf.

"'Where's them Slash K calves?' folks wanna know, an' Coombsy runs round all same bloodhound with his tongue hangin' out a foot. But Coombsy don't turn up nothin' for a while. An' alla time Hatchet County's gettin' worked up an' worked up. Final, Coombsy finds another calf or severial calves wearin' my brand an' Slash K earmarks worked over real careful so any gent can see they've been changed to fit the Staple Box earmarks."

"How do you know?" demanded Light Laurie.

"I don't say that's the way it 'll be exact, but it 'll be near enough to come close to lynchin' us."

"That's cheerful. Well, we're here first, as the feller says."

"An' you betcha we gotta look almighty sharp if we're gonna stay here."

The two men rode directly to Hatchet. They talked with Bud Thompson and patronized several saloons. Oddly enough, they drank nothing. But they bought cigars and gossiped with the bartenders. More than one Hatchet citizen eyed them askance as they passed along the sidewalks of Main Street. They caught the glances, but were not annoyed thereby. They were content to wait.

From the last saloon they returned to Bud Thompson and the Open Eye Store.

"Smokin', Bud," said Coryell. "Four sacks. Forgot her when I was in first. Y' ain't seen Swing round town to-day, have yuh?"

"No," replied Bud, his expression carefully non-committal, "I ain't."

"Guess I'll have to go out to his ranch," said Coryell. "I wanna buy three good hosses off him."

"Hosses?" Thus Bud Thompson, stupidly.

"Hosses," lied Coryell. "I hear he's got some good ones. How much for the tobacco, Bud? An' gimme box matches while yo're about it."

From Hatchet they rode to the Slash K. Coryell would have welcomed a fight to settle his affair with Swing Kyler. But he had no intention of forcing the issue himself. He left that to Swing. Man and man, he knew himself to be a shade better than Swing's equal. His was a confident soul. But he was at a disadvantage. To successfully combat Machiavelli, a Machiavelli is required. He hoped most fervently that his enemies would make some mistake. Some little, little mistake was all he asked. He would know well how to turn it to account.

When they reached the Slash K ranchhouse they found Swing Kyler loafing on the porch. He greeted them politely if with reserve, and asked what he could do for them.

"Wanna buy three good hosses," lied Coryell.

"You've shore come to the right place," averred Swing, his black eyes lighting up as they always did at any opportunity for corraling the elusive dollar.

"They gotta be good, remember," enjoined Coryell.

"They will be. Come along over to the big corral an' take yore pick. Wait till I get my hat."

Three minutes later, Swing Kyler walk-

ing, Coryell riding, they crossed to the big corral. Light Laurie did not follow. He rode over to where a Slash K puncher was breaking a wild one. On the way he contrived to pass a small corral within whose confines some calves were bawling their heads off.

Light was sufficiently inquisitive to inspect the corral and its inmates as he rode by. He observed that there were six cows and three calves, and that the three calves were paying no attention to any of the six cows, but stood bunched and facing in the same direction as they rent the air with their lamentations.

Light checked his horse near the corral, slipped one foot from the ox-bow stirrup, and slouched sidewise in the saddle. This that he might watch both the buster and the large corral whither Swing had taken Coryell at the same time. Any one glancing at Light would have seen in him a veritable picture of drowsy indolence. Any one would have been seriously in error, too. There was no hint of sleep dulling Light's active brain. He sat and smoked on his hip-shot gray horse, his right hand close to where it would do the most good at a moment's notice.

Swing, at the large corral, drew Coryell's attention to a good-looking specimen of horseflesh done up in a sorrel hide.

"There's a hoss," said Swing, hooking a tactful thumb in an armhole of his vest. "Not too leggy, an' well ribbed up."

"Pasterns too straight up an' down," objected Coryell. "He'll get clergyman's knee before his time."

"Well, maybe yo're right," admitted Swing. "But those pasterns ain't so awful straight at that. Nothin' to worry about, I sh'd say."

"They ain't worryin' me, not for a minute," Coryell said cheerfully. "I wouldn't have him on a bet. Looks to me like he's got a spavin comin'."

"A spavin! That! Why, that's just a lil bump where maybe he's barked himself or somethin'. He's right, that hoss is, Bill, an' I'll make the price right. Quick turns an' small profits is my motto."

"Yeah, I know," drawled Coryell, moving slightly so that Swing should be between him and the gate. "But I never did like sorrel as a color. Too washy. Never saw a sorrel yet had bottom. They blow up, Swing—blow up an' bog down. No, I guess this sorrel an' me can't become acquainted. You got somethin' else?"

"They ain't a thing in the place I won't sell—if I get my price. How about that black chinkapin with the white socks? *His* pasterns oughta suit yuh."

"His chest don't. Too narrow, an' his head's misshaped. Can't teach that kind nothin'."

"Yuh got time to teach him anythin'. He's only three an' a smidgin. Look at his teeth, man, look at his teeth, an' see for yoreself. Cinch a hull on him an' take him home for a round hundred. One hundred hard simoleons takes that black, an' I'm givin' him away at the price. They ain't a mean hair in his hide. Course he ain't never carried a petticoat, but I'll bet a woman could ride him inside a week."

"Maybe, but he ain't what I want exactly. I'm lookin' for somethin' real extra. Looks, bottom, speed, the whole box o' tricks."

Swing Kyler surveyed the string in the corral a moment. Then he turned. A spade-bearded man was approaching from the direction of another corral. The man was Slow Baker, a person of talent on the draw. Which might be said to have been his single redeeming trait. Certainly of the more domestic virtues he possessed not one. Coryell had not been aware of his employment at the Slash K.

Slow Baker was leading a handsome, showy, small-hoofed dun horse with a bright and rolling eye—an eye that showed more white than is compatible with a gentle nature. The dun was bridled but not saddled.

"There's bone an' muscle for yuh," said Swing, jerking his head toward the dun. "But he ain't none too easy natured. I dunno as he'd suit yuh, Bill."

The Kyler expression was darkly suave, but the Kyler tone was sufficiently insulting.

Coryell cocked an eyebrow at him.

"No?" he said placidly. "An' why not?"

"He pitches some."

"Bad?"

"Pretty active now an' again. It's all I can do to ride him."

All Swing could do! And Coryell was well aware that as a rider Swing did not rank in his own (Coryell's) class. Coryell critically eyed the dun.

"He certainly would be apt to pile yuh soon an' hard," the contemptuous voice went on at his ear.

"Would he?" said Coryell. "Now, I wonder. Lookit, Swing, I'm likely to be a lil rough sometimes. S'pose now this hoss gets hurt while I'm a ridin' him—no blame to me, huh?"

"The hoss get hurt!" laughed Swing. "That's shore funny! Listen, Bill, if that hoss gets hurt I'll give him to yuh free gratis, an' that's the kind o' hairpin I am."

"Puttin' it that way," smiled Coryell, "looks like business. I'll just go yuh. Nemmine sendin' for no saddle. I'll just use my own."

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO WOMEN.

WHILE Mrs. Rowland and Miss Rowland were at breakfast Connie Dawson drove up in the Lander buckboard. "'Lo," said Connie from the buckboard, when Miss Rowland came out on the porch. "I'm drivin' to town to-day. I thought maybe if you didn't have anythin' better to do you'd like to go along."

"I would indeed," said Miss Rowland, and ran in to get her hat.

While the Eastern girl was in the house the black-eyed, level gaze of Connie Dawson swept the vicinity of corrals and bunkhouse with an intensity that missed no slightest detail. After which she chirruped to her team and drove slowly round the corrals. She stopped near the gate of the smallest corral.

Within the stockade Tommy Barnes was smearing salve on the near hind leg of a restive bay horse.

"Tie him shorter, Tommy," called Connie, "and rope up one of his fore legs. He'll kick the lights out of you in a minute."

"I've been jukin' 'em so far," returned the stray man, neatly sidestepping another vicious swing of the hind hoofs. "He's only shod before, anyway."

"He ain't really mean, I guess," said the girl, inspecting the bay with an expert's eye.

"Naw, only playful."

"Yeah. Good-lookin' horse, too. Almost as good-lookin' as that red chestnut of Bill Coryell's. Ain't that Ranger now standin' hipshot over yonder?"

"Shore, that's him. Bill took one of our hosses to-day."

"Where'd he go—Staple Box?" Oh, the casual tone of Connie Dawson as she looked upon Tommy Barnes.

"I don't guess so. Seems like I heard him say somethin' about goin' to Hatchet."

"Yeah? Heard anythin' more about the cows with cut feet?"

"I ain't. Have you?"

"No." Connie shook her head, stripped off a gauntlet, and tucked in the stray locks behind her pretty ears.

"Coombsy 'll get him," was Tommy's confident statement.

"He won't unless he uses slightly better judgment," flared Connie. "You heard how he went and tried to saw off that funny business on Bill Coryell, didn't you? Well, I'm sayin' right out loud and I don't care who hears me say it, that Coombs is an ory-eyed idiot, and anybody that thinks like he does is another! What do you think?"

"It's a cinch I don't think Bill Coryell had anythin' to do with it," Tommy cried hastily. "So you needn't look at me thataway, Connie. Bill is a friend o' mine, an' I'm for him, an' between you an' I an' this lil bay hoss they is some skulduggery goin' on som'ers."

"I know there is," said Connie Dawson. "An' the somebody at the bottom of this skulduggery is headin' straight into a necktie party, too."

"He'd oughta," was the cordial indorsement of Tommy Barnes.

"He will." It seemed to the stray man that Connie Dawson gritted her teeth at the tail of the two words, but he could not be certain, for at that moment came a "yoo-hoo" from the ranch-house, and Connie puckered her lips and "kissed" to her team.

Tommy Barnes stood looking after her as she skilfully wheeled off a fish-hook turn on her way back to the house.

"She shore is as pretty as a lil red wagon," he murmured to himself. "I wonder now does she really like Bill like they say. Connie, Connie, Con-nie—that's shore a pretty name. Damitall, some fellers have all the luck."

Sentimental Tommy, suddenly observing that Mrs. Rowland was watching him from a kitchen window, hurriedly stooped and thrust his fingers into his lard-can of salve.

"It certainly is good of you to drive miles out of your way to take me driving," said grateful Miss Rowland, settling herself beside Connie.

"I like you," said straightforward Connie, swinging the team into a sharp trot. "You're nice, and you can talk, and you do. I haven't many girl friends," she added wistfully.

"I don't suppose there are many girls out here." Thus conventionally Miss Rowland.

"I should say not. It's a hard country for women."

"It's a beautiful country," defended Miss Rowland. "Just look at those trees. I don't know when I've seen straighter or taller cedars."

"Yeah," drawled Connie, tactfully refraining from telling Miss Rowland that the "cedars" were in reality spruce. "But a girl has to be a tough proposition to last it through out here. I like it, though. I wouldn't live anywhere else for any amount of money. I'd die on the plains or the desert country. Mountains, trees, grass, and a creek—you can't beat that combination."

"If you're a tough proposition," supplied Miss Rowland with a smile.

"You need all your health, that's a cinch. Gets good and lonesome sometimes in the winter. I've been snowbound at Aunt Ella's three weeks at a clip. Froze and snowed and blowed—blew, I mean—for God's sake for ten days and a half. Then came a chinook and melted the snow so fast and soon Uncle Jack lost twenty-eight head drowned alone. We never did know how many cashed out in the snow. But there was a big jag of 'em; we knew that much."

Miss Rowland visualized the cattle slowly freezing to a lonely death, and shivered. "And you like that sort of thing?"

"You get used to it," shrugged Connie Dawson. "Life's all a gamble, anyway, like poker. You can't expect to win all the time. There's this difference to poker, though. You can sometimes work a cold deck in poker, and you can't in life. You've got to play your hand out as it's dealt you after the shuffle without drawing."

"That's philosophy," said Charlotte.

"It's the truth," said Connie. "That's a right pretty hat you're wearing."

"You like it?" Miss Rowland, with satisfaction, biffed aside one of the flaring wings of the black ribbon bow she had tied in front of and below her right ear.

"You surely know what to wear," Connie continued without envy. "That poke shape shows off your face and your hair just right. And those cute little slippers! I couldn't ever wear anything like 'em, not in a million years. I've got a *foot*."

"You've got a good-looking foot," corrected Miss Rowland, glancing down at the somewhat generous length of brown-booted leg paraded by the shortness of Connie's riding-skirt. "I adore riding-boots. I have a pair. We bought them in St. Paul coming through."

"My bones are too big," mourned Connie. "I'll be huge by the time I'm forty."

"I'm not so sure about that. Big-boned people don't always put on flesh with age. I've seen small-boned people that weighed over two hundred. And anyway your figure— My dear, I know girls who'd give their father's bank accounts for your figure. Personally, I'd give my soul for your hair."

"My hair! My ugly, hateful black mop! You like it?"

"Like it? I think it's beautiful. I love black hair, and yours is so soft and long and bluely shiny. If it was my hair I'd comb it and brush it and experiment with it all the time. You're the lucky one. Just look at me—Carrot-Top, Red-Head, Brick-Dust, they used to call me at school. Mine's truly awful, and after it's washed I can't do a thing with it, not a thing. If it was only curly I wouldn't mind at all."

"Quit your foolin'," Connie said with a crooked smile. "You're just tryin' to make me feel good. I know. You're almighty easy to get along with. I feel like I'd known you forever and ever. I—I wish you'd call me Connie."

"Why—I will if you want me to. I'd like to. My family call me Charlotte, but if you do I'll slay you. I hate the name. It sounds like a dessert."

"Lottie, huh?"

"Or Lot. Either. I don't care."

"I like Lottie better. We're coming to a dusty patch o' trail along here. If you don't button up that duster you'll be sorry for your dress."

Arrived in Hatchet, Connie drove to her own home. Bub Dawson, bullet-headed and coming twelve, sat astride a stitching-jack behind the house, working two needles through and through a heavy trace. A silent, biddable youngster, he came promptly at his sister's call and took charge of the team.

"My brother," said Connie. "Bub, this is Miss Rowland, Mis' Rowland's niece."

"H' are yuh?" muttered the bashful Bub, and was immediately reduced to speechlessness by Miss Rowland's shaking hands with him. This to the ruin of a white glove and the winning of a willing slave.

"Gosh!" whispered Bub under his breath, his eyes following the white-clad figure of Miss Rowland—she had left her duster on the seat of the buckboard—into the kitchen. "Ain't she purty!"

He remained staring at the kitchen door till one of the horses, nipping his arm, recalled him to duty. Bub smacked the horse over the nose and led the team across to the shelter of the lean-to abutting against the side of the Dawson stable.

In the kitchen Mrs. Dawson, an older edition of her daughter and without a sign of gray in her black hair, was apologizing to Miss Rowland for the torn-up state of the kitchen. The room was neater than a paper of the proverbial pins. But that was the Dawson method of putting the visitor at ease.

"Bakin' day shore does make a mess o' things," charged on Mrs. Dawson. "I got four pies in the oven an' six loaves o' bread. I declare, it keeps a body on the jump to cook for a family, an' with Connie out at Ella's I only got a man an' a boy, but Lawzy me, how they do eat! You'd think they was hollow clear down to their toes. Lookit Bub yonder peekin' in the door. Just soon's my back's turned he'll rope him a pie. What you want, Bub?"

Bub gulped—twice. His face was read as a beet. He did not reply to his mother's query. Instead he addressed Miss Rowland.

"I got a pony," he announced in a tone that squeaked with stage fright.

He was sweating with embarrassment, but he stood his ground against Mrs. Dawson's slightly derisive laugh.

Miss Rowland's impulsive heart went out to the child.

"Have you, d—Bub?" Miss Rowland's tongue almost turned a somersault in the effort to change "dear" into "Bub." Her instinct was good. It ordered her ways with this boy. "Show me your pony, will you?" she asked, bestowing upon him her most attractive smile.

Bub beamed like the Wonderland Cat.

"C'mon," said he, and Miss Rowland went with him, despite Mrs. Dawson's horrified objections.

"She ain't dressed right for this country," was the expressed opinion of Mrs. Dawson when Miss Rowland and Bub were out of ear-shot. "She don't look like she could stand much neither."

"She's all right," Connie straightway informed her mother. "She's fine, and I like her forty ways. She's been awful nice to me."

"Then," said Mrs. Dawson, "she can wear as fool clo'es as she likes. I always did like Mis' Rowland of the Two Bar, anyway. Say, Connie, who do you think was in town to-day?"

"Who?"

"Bill Coryell."

"What's that got to do with me?" asked Connie, languidly lifting a hand to conceal a yawn.

"Why, nothin'—naturally. Why should it? Only, Connie, when I sent our Bub down to the Open Eye for can tomatters he heard Bub Thompson tell Tom Jones that Bill Coryell had told him he—Bill Coryell, I mean—was goin' out to the Slash K to buy hosses."

Connie Dawson's mask of indifference dropped in a flash. She sprang to her feet, her lips parted to draw a panting breath.

"Ma!" she cried, terrified. "You ain't sayin' Bill's gone out to the Slash K alone?"

"Thompson said Light Laurie went with him. I seen Light an' him together myself. Where you goin', Connie?"

But Connie was past speech. She was racing toward the shed where the team was tied.

"That fool girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Dawson, standing in the kitchen doorway. But she was sufficiently wise not to attempt to block her headstrong daughter in any way.

Miss Rowland, standing at the corral gate with Bub, heard the creak and scrape of wheels as Connie backed out her team. She looked up and saw that hatless Connie was pale-faced beneath her heavy tan. Sensing that all was not as it should be, she instantly resolved not to miss any part of what was toward. For she had already learned the lesson that it is the grasper of every opportunity that gets the most out of life.

Miss Rowland kilted up her fluffy skirts with both hands and fled toward the turning buckboard like a frightened deer. Connie did not cramp the wheels to give the other girl room to get in. She did not even appear to be conscious of her presence. But this did not daunt Miss Rowland. She hopped up on the rear of the buckboard and scrambled over the back of the seat just as Connie swung her horses toward the gate and started them through it on the jump. The consequent jerk slammed Miss Rowland against the seat back with a force that made her blink and knocked her hat over one eye.

She gripped the iron seat guard with one hand, clutched her hat with the other, and braced her feet against the dashboard.

"G' on, you Kitty!" Connie was calling as, guiding the animals one-handed, she poured the leather into them. "C'mon, you Frank! Step along! Step along!"

And the horses stepped along. Buckboard careering and rolling behind their streaming tails, necks outstretched, ears flat, they scuttled down Main Street at a rocking gallop. The stirring clatter filled doors and windows with faces in a breath. Then folk laughed and went on about their business.

All they saw was Connie Dawson in a hurry. The tomboy! That was the way she did things. Everybody knew Connie Dawson.

Back at the Dawson house, however, Mrs. Dawson was not taking things so easily.

"You Bub!" she shouted as the buckboard whirled through the gate. "Fork yore hoss an' git yore dad. He's down at Mason's. Flit!"

Bub Dawson whipped an Indian bridle round the lower jaw of his pony, flipped aboard, and shot through the gate in the rear of the buckboard.

Twenty minutes later Mr. Dawson pulled his panting mount to a sliding halt at his kitchen door. Mrs. Dawson ran out to him before he could dismount.

"Bill Coryell's gone out to the Slash K an' Connie's trailed after. Git—"

"Why didn't you stop her?" demanded Mr. Dawson.

"Talk sense!" flashed back his wife. "You get right after 'em, Dave. Connie's got her shotgun under the seat, an' like as not she'll kill Swing if he does anything to Bill. Take Grove an' get a goin'."

Mr. Dawson wheeled his horse with a force that showered the house with pebbles and was off. Bub, agog, with curiosity, had had the wisdom to remain down

street and beyond the sweep of his mother's vision. Now, as his father sped past, Bub kicked his heels against his pony's ribs and followed.

Meantime the Lander buckboard was making heavy weather of it on the trail outside of town. It was a good trail as trails go, but its surface was not suitable for high speeds. The buckboard leaped and bounced across level spaces, swayed sickeningly round curves on two wheels, and ducked in and lurched out of washes and draws, all to the accompaniment of squeaks and creaks and groans of complaining wood and leather that kept Miss Rowland's heart in a continual state of suspense somewhere in her throat. She actually expected a grand smash at any moment.

"Hang on!" yelled Connie, and turned the horses into the grass-grown trail that led to the Slash K.

Up, up, up climbed the inside wheels. For one awful, soul-searching instant Miss Rowland, a grimly clinging atom on the whirling rim of the universe, saw the flying earth rising to meet her. A crack, a thumping rebound, and the buckboard righted itself with a jerk and straightened out on the Slash K trail.

Twenty minutes more of this head-spinning travel brought them to where the trail dipped through Salt Creek. It was in and out in a shower of spray and on again without the slightest slackening of the terrific pace. A mile beyond the creek they topped the saddleback of Lone Soldier Ridge and opened up the broad stretch of open country that sweeps so grandly between the hills to the Slash K and far beyond to where the good blue line of the Longhorns cuts the eastern sky.

Here, on the reverse slope of Lone Soldier, with a trail before them that became worse by the yard and apparently terminated at the bottom in a wash carpeted with loose stones, Miss Rowland hoped and prayed that her set-featured companion would slow down to at least a trot. But Connie did nothing of the sort. She whooped the ponies down the declivity with shrill yells, hauled them sharp to the right at the bottom, and sent them off again full tilt along the narrow wash.

Miss Rowland gritted her teeth and held on with both hands. She could use both now, for she had parted company with her hat at the Salt Creek crossing. She was beginning to feel a little sick. Every jarring bump of a wheel, and there was at least one a second in that stony wash, was a hammer-blow the shock of which permeated her entire being.

It seemed to her that she had been enduring this racking nightmare of a ride for ages, and that she would continue to endure it for eons untold.

The wash became a draw, the draw became a flat, and straight across the flat the trail led to a grove of cottonwoods. Through the grove reeled the buckboard, and then Miss Rowland glimpsed again what she had seen from the top of Lone Soldier, the scattered buildings of the Slash K.

She was not aware of their identity; but the trail, she could see, led to them, and she indulged in a fervent hope that they were Connie's objective.

A hundred yards from the ranch-house, with the group of men at the big corral under her eyes, Connie pulled her badly blown team down to a trot. Between the ranch-house and the corral she stopped the horses and cramped the wheels.

Instantly Miss Rowland slipped from the seat to the ground. She stood with one hand gripping the felly of a wheel and looked about her with dazed eyes. She saw a dark-faced man at the corral gate. She saw a man with a spade beard holding a dun horse by the head while another man cinched on a saddle.

She did not know two of the men, but the third man was Coryell. She wondered what he was doing here saddling a dun horse with a wickedly rolling eye. Then suddenly the face of the landscape appeared to tilt in the strangest manner. The figures of man and beast began to dance. She was frightened.

"Mr. Coryell!" she cried out, and slumped down between the wheels in a dead faint.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Kilkenny Cat

by Kenneth Perkins

JIM TERHUNE had a little score to settle. It was not a serious matter on the face of it. No shots had been fired; not even a blow struck. Terhune liked the kind of fight Irishmen described when they told the tale of Kilkenny cats who clawed each other up till nothing but the tails remained. A fight of that sort had a completeness about it that was soul-satisfying. But his present grievance was infinitely more complex. It was incomplete: there might be a redress, but it was not the kind of redress that could heal wounded vanity. Jim Terhune, braggart and bad man, had been jilted by a woman.

A woman—not a girl—Terhune made that point clear to himself: a little schoolteacher at Oil Wells, without a speck of color to her face; without sense enough to rouge; not a curl to her hair—not even a ring on her fingers. Imagine a woman like that turning down Jim Terhune. And what was the reason?

"A drab little stuck-up flirt," he fumed to himself, "who couldn't draw a drunk cholo if there were any other girls around. And she turns me down. Why. 'Cause she's crazy. That's why. What's wrong with me—eh? I've got money. I ain't bad looking. I've got a dead eye. I'm six foot one. And look at that fist—and that arm."

He turned back his greasy flannel and studied the hairy, heavily veined muscles. There was nothing particularly beautiful about it, or about his lanky figure or long face. The receding chin, although always well shaved, could not counterbalance the tremendous mop of black hair which was, as Terhune realized, his greatest charm. Doubtless, Miss Finfrock's only reaction concerning Terhune's hair was the scent of hair-oil, and the beet-red, almost raw ears that thrust themselves out of the curls. Miss Finfrock had heard that Terhune would have made the best foreman at the Wells if it hadn't been for that mop of hair.

Terhune parted the thick, shining curls as he stepped into Pete's lunch-wagon. There was a tiny fly-specked mirror above the counter which had pleased him many times. He sat upon one of the greasy stools and ordered a tamale, for there was a curious hunger gnawing at him. He did not eat the tamale—he merely opened the husks with fingers that trembled slightly. The pungent odor met his nostrils, but the only reaction it evoked was a mumbled phrase: "I'll get even on her even if they tar and feather me."

At this moment two unshaven cowmen lumbered into the chow cart. Terhune knew and hated them. They brought in a heavy waft of prune-juice whisky, which was stronger than the garlic Pete was paring. One of them stumbled up to the counter, overturning a high stool. Another ordered a cup of coffee, smashing his hand

down on the oilcloth so that every dish on the board rattled.

Pete cut his finger with his paring-knife and let the blood trickle down his arm as he poured another cup. The drunks guffawed, shouting greetings to Terhune. But the latter had set his jaw and was staring out of the window. Even though there were cobwebs on the pane he was visioning many things far beyond the glass.

"I'm a fighting man!" He was focusing all his attention on that thought: "I'm a man that's never been beat—except by a drab *woman!*"

Wop Hoag ceremoniously took the tip of his bandanna and rubbed the coffee he had spilled on Terhune's puttees. He dabbled it delicately, cautiously with long, spider fingers. His companion snickered wetly.

"What the hell 'r' you doing there?" Terhune snapped.

"Just a bit of coffee on yer cordovan," Wop wheedled. "I'll fix it—coffee and cordovan don't mix. There you go."

Terhune glared again at the pane. He was like a huge dog trying to ignore the yapping of a pup. Wop was too small to hit. If any man in town would hit little, half-witted Wop he was branded a coward.

"Haw, haw, haw! Look at him shining you up!" Soggy McCabe jeered through tobacco-stained teeth. "Getting him spick —for his wedding—eh, Wop? Haw, haw! Look, Pete, Wop's shining the gentleman up for his wedding."

Terhune glared at every sign on the wall. "They could not be talking about Miss Finrock—rot!" It was unbelievable that she would tell of his proposal. And yet he had once heard that women always do that. He read furiously: "Coffee, fifteen cents; Chile and Beans, fifteen; Chile Con Carne, fifteen!" The signs misted up to a burning, speckled pink.

"How about this here marriage of yourn?" Soggy McCabe, the taller and drunker of the cow-men taunted.

"Sure," Wop interposed excitedly, "the schoolmarm, the dainty schoolmarm!"

Terhune held his breath. Wop's audacity was like a freezing shock. Yet Terhune could do nothing about it. Half-witted Wop, according to the decrees of the sheriff, could never wear a gun. Terhune rather wished that a real man had said what Wop Hoag had said: the consequences would have been infinitely more satisfying.

"They've been gabbing at the barber-shop that she wouldn't have yer!" Wop went on. "But there, boy! She'll come round. Take my word, she'll have yer when she comes to her senses. The surprise and pleasure as yer might say, was too much for her. It scairt her like. Lookee here: How could a woman refuse a man like you? Them puttees, them cordovan shoes!"

Terhune jumped off his stool. It tumbled to the floor noisily.

"No harm intended!" Wop fawned. "I mean what I says—you're too good for her. They was laughing at yer at the barber's—the town's laughing at yer! But I ain't laughing! No, sir, I ain't laughing."

"Laughing at me?" Terhune whispered in horror. "You scurvy old drunk! Telling me the town's laughing at me—eh?"

Wop hid behind the huge, swaying figure of Soggy McCabe. The latter, who had a good streak of yellow in him which even alcohol couldn't drug, put out his hand and grinned with hideous teeth. "Shake, Jim, we're for you!" As Terhune refused the hand McCabe flushed hotly.

"All right, Terhune," Pete, the dog-man, commented. "Don't start cleaning those guys up in here. I don't allow it."

"He ain't going to clean up nobody!" Soggy McCabe asseverated to the surprise of the other three men. He had just seen several of his ranch mates crossing the street. "I say he ain't! He's sore because he got turned down by a girl. Thinks he wants to beat us up—eh? Because we're laughing, eh?" He thrust his prune-perfumed mouth up to Terhune. "We are laughing at yer—get it? Laughing, haw, haw, haw! And the girl laughed at yer, too, 'cause of yer mop of hair and Adam's apple." Wop joined his audacious companion in a hilarious, drunken guffaw.

But McCabe, in the climax of his ecstasy, felt a bony fist crash into his laugh. The chow cart spun around and the window seemed to break into a myriad of tangled rainbows. Wop caught him as he was falling and dragged him down the steps.

"There ain't room for fighting in here," Pete declared. "There's a good place behind the wagon." He pointed through the opaque web with his thumb.

Pete was right. Just as Terhune slipped off his coat a sunburnt, wrinkled-necked rancher stepped up into the lunch-wagon.

"Kinder crowded in here," Chief Andrade remarked without a smile.

Pete took a comfortably long breath. "Terhune here wanted to clean up on them greasers."

"They ain't greasers," the big ranchman retorted. "They're a couple of my cowmen—good men, except they've been drinking to-day."

Terhune looked at him defiantly. "What about it if they're good or bad—what about it?" he demanded.

"Just this." The huge man set his bristled jaw so that the words came out incisively. "You've got a reputation around here as a bad hombre. They say you've killed men in Lower California—that you stay in one town till it gets too hot, then you shag over to some place else and pick new fights."

"A damn good review of my past you're giving," Terhune remarked, not without pride. "But I never shag out till I've plugged somebody. Get that? Plugged somebody!"

"You're getting out to-day," the rancher decreed softly. There was not a foot of space between the two men—just a broken stool, some scattered china, and at one side Pete's white face and the buzzing flies. "If any of my men find you after three this afternoon, they'll wale you!"

Several faces staring in at the window, big-jawed and small-eyed, together with the advent of the deputy, persuaded Terhune to unclose his raw, bleeding fist, to unpurse his tight lips, to shrug his shoulders, and leave the chow cart and the scene.

The tiff was not as mortifying to him as it might have been. The raw knuckle which had split on McCabe's jaw tickled his vanity. It was the kind of conclusive quarrel dear to his heart. But as he brooded over the real meaning of the incident his other grievance—Miss Finfrock's jilt—assumed gigantic importance. His humiliation was accentuated to a galling crisis that fisticuffs could not remedy.

Yet he realized that Chief Andrade's warning was final. Terhune had threatened "plugging"; Andrade had struck back with the decree of exile. When Terhune left the town he knew he could not turn back.

His immediate plan was to take the twenty-mile ride across the cañon of chaparral and mesquite into the desert beyond. He rode, nervous with his unappeased anger, keeping his knees constantly pressed into the pinto's flanks. As he rode his excitement grew, so that his long face flushed feverishly with the sun, the sand and his consuming, unsatisfied hate. He began to feel a hunger gnawing at the pit of his stomach. It was not a hunger for food; it was an obsession for revenge. He had been exiled before squaring his account with the girl who had jilted him!

At three o'clock Terhune found himself on the rim of the cañon. He looked westward to where an interminable line like the horizon at sea defined the desert. Barrel cactus and ocotillo dotted purple stretches. Sage and the sand blended into dull mauve and then into the low, shimmering sky.

A trail crawled down the foothills—a trail known only to a few of the oil men, to prospectors and Apaches. Terhune estimated that if he rode for about an hour on that trail he would come to a mesa where he had long intended to examine a claim. It was an eminence far famed among the medicine men of the Apaches and Yumans, hallowed by the Crow Dance and the New Fire and the singing of the Hundred Songs. Anthills now embossed the grounds where ancient tribes had powwowed. When he reached this height Terhune beheld only a seared waste except for a sprinkling of thin sage and the sinister yellow of cholla cactus. The panorama was immense and desolate.

He shaded his eyes from the low sun and looked beyond miles and miles of a boundless west. There in the distance he saw near a clump of pronged saguaro, a horse lying prostrate, and by it the tiny figure of a girl. When Terhune rode down and came within a quarter of a mile, he knew that the girl was Abby Finfrock.

He watched her running toward him, her arms waving frantically. When they met each other half-way Terhune remained seated on his horse and looked down at her with an inscrutable coolness.

For a moment he wondered how this helpless thing could have given him such concern—this frail body, this pale, oval, delicate-featured face, streaked with tears, and lit with such a helpless, beseeching smile. She put up her hands and grasped the cantle of his saddle like some one drowning in a storm who has found a raft. Jim Terhune did not touch her.

He saw that she was trembling and too breathless to speak because of her frantic running toward him.

"What's got you?" he finally asked.

She looked up, puzzled for a moment at the cool tone.

"I was lost," she sobbed. "I was lost for three hours and I'm stranded now because of my mare." As Terhune showed no inclination to speak she went on hurriedly: "She's soft. I thought it was drink she needed, so I gave her some saguaro sap—"

"Good for donkeys—but sap for a horse!" Terhune showed the first trace of a reaction.

"I had heard a horse could drink it."

"Some can't any more than a man."

"Anyway, the mare is suffering," the girl cried piteously.

"If your mare is suffering, she's poisoned. Better kill her."

"She's got the heaves. You can see where she laid down over there."

"The mare 'll die," Terhune adjudged coldly.

Abby looked again into his face. "Thank God, then," she said, "that you have come!"

While Terhune waited for her to go on, her fast breathing and the horse pawing at the sand bridged a long silence.

"I thought it would only be a two-hour ride," she finally went on. "I wanted to see Skeeter Kelp's little boy who was in my school last winter and—"

"I know. He's sick." Terhune dismissed that part of the subject.

"I lost the trail and became turned so completely around that I would have gone on foot further into the desert if"—she looked up again—"if it hadn't been for you."

Terhune caught her eye and she searched excitedly for words.

"Because you told me how much you—" She saw him suddenly wince. "Well, when I saw you up there on the mesa I was mighty glad I had my revolver. It might have been a Mexican. I was glad—more glad than I can tell—that it was you."

Terhune looked down at the distant row of pronged cactus to where the sorrel mare lay.

"Better kill her."

"Isn't there any hope? She's a good horse. Is she suffering?"

"Kill her. They always do that. I'll kill her for you. You being a woman maybe it would hurt you. It would hurt me if I knew the horse."

The girl let go of the cantle and sank down upon the sand and pebbles. She buried her face in her small, chapped hands and continued to sob softly.

"By the way," Terhune looked down from his majestic height, "you better let me do it with your gun."

The girl's stare brought a flush to Terhune's face and a tight, unpleasant smile to his lips.

"You're wondering why I can't use my six-shooter," he said. "It's dirty. The cylinder sticks on me. I forgot all about cleaning it when I left this afternoon."

Abby, who was not listening to him, turned her wobegone face to the cactus, where her mare lay heaving. Without answering him a word she put her little black revolver into his hand. Terhune slipped it into his khaki shirt without taking his eyes from the girl, and his face suddenly cleared. The forehead which had been wrinkled with anxiety and anger smoothed out to a triumphant blandness. The whole situation—white sage, the tawny, cruel desert, the riotous sunset, seemed suddenly to be on his side. Terhune dismounted.

"You said a minute ago," he remarked dryly, "that you thanked God for my coming here. I don't exactly get the meaning of that."

The girl glanced quickly at him, to find a purport in the new modulation of his voice. She did not think for a moment of what he said. It was the tone which had startled her.

"The mare," she stammered, rising, "I thought you were going to—"

"Not now. Let the mare be. It occurs to me I will be going this way to-morrow and I'll ask one of the Indians about it. What I was saying is this—"

"Then we can go home now? Whatever you came into the desert for can—" She found herself suddenly pleading with dry, staring eyes. "Can't it wait—your errand here—so we can go home?"

"There's a little point I want to explain to you first," Terhune began firmly. "If you go home with me you won't get there till—"

"Nine o'clock," the girl interrupted quickly. "It's only a four-hour ride from here."

"Yes, through the cañon it's four hours. But I'm not going that way."

"Not going that way!" she cried. "Why, if you go around the rim—"

"I know it 'll take till to-morrow."

Terhune touched her arm leading her to the horse. She turned about bewildered—baffled at the firmness about his thin lips. She stammered a muffled word or two.

"But—I—don't—I don't see—" Terhune saw her circle completely around, as if losing her balance.

"Just get in my saddle. I'll walk till we get to the county road, and we'll have a little chat. Then I'll tell you why I'm not going home till morning—"

"But I don't want to know," the girl began.

"Oh, yes, you do. When I'm through you'll understand; you'll call it square. I'm always square in anything I do—always."

They started back while the sun threw their grotesque shadows before them on quartz and salty sand and thickening mesquite.

"It's this way," Terhune began. His sulkiness had vanished and left the two together as if a curtain with which the girl had protected herself had been drawn away. "It's like this. Down there on the cañon road is Chief Andrade's ranch. I had a little trouble with two of his men this morning—Wop Hoag and Soggy McCabe. They plagued me about "—he checked himself, blushing hotly—"well, I lammed one of them, and they're gunning for me. Old Chief Andrade himself would drop me in his cañon."

"But when I'm with you—" the girl objected. "There would not be a fight when I'm—"

"That's the point exactly. You're with me. Now I'm not fool enough to go down there hunting for trouble and having a woman behind my saddle. We'll take the long road home!"

When they came to the fork of the county road, Terhune led the horse into a secluded gulch of boulders, mazanita and madrone. He helped the girl dismount, and answered her white questioning look. "We'll have supper here."

The girl stood apart immobile and silent while Terhune unpacked his kit, collected dry sticks of madrone limbs and started a fire. She heard him humming and saw the flame reflected, gleaming, in his ugly eyes. The mere fact that she was looking so fixedly at him elated him. He knew he did things efficiently. He even prided himself on his voice. At times he let it swell jubilantly. Night and the crescent moon were new forces on his side. He was blithe; he was triumphant; he was supremely satisfied.

When Abby finally did speak it did not mar his satisfaction. It came as a copingstone to his triumph.

Her voice had changed so that the tearful pleading gave way to a cool yet woful challenge.

"There's something I'd like to tell you," she said, "something I don't believe you would be apt to think about. If I stay out in the desert all night with you I'll be talked about. I'll have a hard road for a long time to come."

Terhune fumbled noisily with his kit.

"The town supports me as a teacher of its children," the girl went on, "I've got to please the town because I get my bread from it. I can't make my living any other way than by teaching—"

"Sure, I realize it." Terhune stopped tearing open the can of enchiladas. "But what's that got to do with our eating supper together?"

"What will the women say? What will the school board say?" she went on.

"Damn' if I know," Terhune rejoined pleasantly.

"They know you've been coming out to see me. They're eager to get something against me—particularly those women. If I spend the night in the desert with you it 'll mean disgrace—the kind that will keep me from ever teaching again."

"You can explain it," was Terhune's blithe retort.

"Explain it? We take a long road home because you're gunning for Hoag and McCabe?"

"That sounds plausible to me all right enough!"

"Then you prefer breaking my name to meeting those drunken cow-men?" The girl's voice rose sharply in the attack.

Terhune dug the enchiladas out with his knife and smeared them on the little aluminum pan. Presently he showed his face. The fire revealed it alert with an assured retaliation. "If you put it that way, I'll tell you something, and maybe after I tell it you'll admit I'm a just man."

The girl turned away a step. She did not want to look into the reddened face. But Terhune followed her.

"I fought with Wop Hoag and McCabe because they taunted me about you. They said the town was laughing at the way you turned me down! Now, I'd like you to explain a little point right here. Why is it if a woman turns a man down she'll go and tell the town about it?"

"I didn't tell the town about it," Abby retorted defiantly. "I didn't tell a soul about it and I never would. But when you proposed you did it so dramatically and loudly that people on the veranda heard you."

"All right, all right, we won't blame you for that then. I'll take the blame for that. I'll be fair." Terhune's magnanimous tone hardened. "But look at it this way: after I'm made a laughing-stock on your account, you come along now and ask me to turn aside from a prospecting trip to take you home. Not only that, but you demand that I take you home a certain way even though I'd have to risk my hide doing it."

Abby saw that the fight was hopeless. She sank down upon the sandbank a beaten, tragic little figure. But she did not weep. Self-pity was not her dominant emotion. She realized her smallness, everything pointed to that—the giant cactus with huge threatening arms, the interminable miles of windrows, the splendid sky, the hulking, darkening figure of the man.

Each detail of that vast desert scene accentuated her loneliness. The man was against her. The town would be against her. The world would be as void of friends as that huge circle of desert and sky.

The dusk had changed the picture of Terhune. It had erased the red color of his face; it had darkened his eyes; and his long fingers, which had given the whole figure a touch of animation, were now visible only as two big fists. All that Abby saw in him was a hulking, black beast. He stood there in the firelight, surrounded by the night moths, the tallest and darkest thing in the landscape.

All the emotions that had confused her focused now into one dominant and distinct fear. It gave expression in a random, half hysterical laughing sentence. "You borrowed my six-shooter and forgot to—"

"To kill the mare?"

"To give it back!"

He came over to her with his sizzling pan of enchiladas and his aluminum cup hot with black coffee from his flask. Even though she was looking away she knew that he was inclining his head toward her. She turned and, in the gleam of the fire, could see certain exaggerated features: the whites of his eyes, the relaxed under-lip, and a new kind of smile. She had withstood his sulkiness and then his sarcasm—but this smile! It sent a chill through her.

She realized the situation in a flash. She had humiliated an inordinately proud man. Now he had found a way to satisfy his pride. That very thought suggested a final card. His vanity was enormous—it was almost an obsession. If she played upon that she might escape.

He sat down close to her. The whiff of the enchiladas struck in hideously upon the fragrance of the black sage and the desert air.

"I'll say this is pretty good in the big, comfortable old desert—ay?" he cajoled.

"Comfortable!" she echoed. "It's terrifying!"

"What's there terrifying about greasewood and buckeye?" he laughed.

She found an opening for the attack. "There is one kind of man I could worship," she said bravely. "And that is a man who knows nothing of fear."

For a moment Terhune responded. Surely she must have heard of his fights. But the ruse was too raw; she was playing with him shamelessly.

"I guess you don't know about my gun-fighting down in Lower California," he sneered. "Perhaps then you wouldn't have refused me."

"I've heard—but it was only after many men had tossed the tales about until they had no meaning—no picture. I have never really seen you fight. That's where a woman gets the thrill—seeing her man—watching the combat right before her eyes."

"Yes, I wish you could have seen me down there," he remarked, dismissing the subject reluctantly as he started in upon his meal.

"It occurs to me," the girl said carefully and directly, "that you are steering clear of a fight down in the valley right now. Wop Hoag and McCabe are down there waiting for you and you're avoiding them, even though it means the disgrace of a woman. In other words, you're scared—you're afraid—you're a coward!"

Terhune drew the breath in between his teeth as if he had been keenly stabbed.

"If we went down now," she pursued relentlessly, "we would meet them. They would attack and the town would hail you as a hero."

"As a hero? Where do you get that? The town's on their side, not mine. If I used a gat on Andrade's men I'd be strung up. Hero! Bunk!"

"But it's this way: you're risking your life," she argued eagerly, "just to save the name of a woman. Isn't that hero stuff? It's the kind they'd have in the pictures. And you'd fight just like the movie bad men: you've got two six-shooters now."

"Yep, it would be an easy fight," Terhune declared. "I know the road. There's a clump of Spanish sycamore where they'll hide. I'd get in around the adobe bank and leave you with the horse."

"Can I see you while you're fighting?" the girl asked eagerly.

"You'll be with the horse," he said, "and they'd watch you—not knowing I was climbing down the adobe banks. There's soap brush and pepperwood there where I can hide. Moonlight would make it easy. You'd see a fight like they have at Croon's nickelodeon. And then, let me see—"

Terhune suddenly realized what he was doing. His chance to destroy the girl had to this moment developed toward a perfect consummation. He had almost won and his wronged vanity was just about to be avenged. He looked at the girl—a strange, cold little figure. Her eyes, which seemed so large in the moonlight, appeared to be looking upon him with a worshipful wonder. To have her watching him in the midst of a mortal fight would be a greater consummation than his vicious, small revenge. He was a big man, not a small one.

Then he argued to himself that he had never fought while a woman watched. He evoked the age-old thrilling picture of cavemen in terrific combat before a frail, frightened woman. He visualized himself shouting splendid oaths at Wop and McCabe, who were already cowed by his threats. By moonlight the fight would be splendid and dramatic.

Of course if he took the short road the girl would get home by ten o'clock and his chance to satisfy his grudge would be lost. But then the glory of the fight! He began to pack his mess-kit.

"Put the bridle on the nag," he said gruffly. "I'm in a hurry. We're going to take the short road home!"

When Terhune and the girl dropped into the cañon they followed jagged slopes of manzanita and madrone. Ravines pitch-dark with Spanish sycamore and sorrel afforded momentary lapses in the dreadful tension of their ride. But the open spaces

were unavoidable. Terhune clung to the black sage patches, even though they gave merely a protection of color.

"I'm going to sneak up on 'em. It 'll be a fight—ten guys to one. But the one guy will win."

A long stretch of red loam against which the moon etched the two riders clearly was almost certainly disastrous. After that stretch the end was preordained no matter how eagerly he hugged the black gulches or how skilfully he chose his background in the sheep sorrel and the skunk-weed.

"They know we're coming unless they're blind. But I guess they're watching for Jim Terhune. They're afraid of Jim Terhune, every Cholo and greaser down there."

Rounding the scarp of a hill they came full upon the checkerboard of corrals surrounding Andrade's ranch-house. The girl could feel the warmth of Terhune's shoulder as she clung behind him. Her hands were clasped in front of him so that she knew the very moment that his heart began its heavy pounding.

Terhune suddenly rode upright, almost rigid, as the dull drumming of the night herd caught his ears. He knew when he saw the dim mass of backs and horns moving in the distance that the cow-men were bringing the herd on a road which led directly below the adobe banks.

He drew in his horse and stood waiting while the vanguard of the herd drew closer to the foot of the little mesa, where he had stopped. There was a little ravine that cut into the mesa and led down between narrow mud walls so as to open suddenly upon the road. It afforded an excellent place to hide, but Terhune did not want to hide. Yet, even if he desired to fight, it was just the place for a man to stand when the number of his adversaries was too great to meet in the open. Since it afforded complete flash-defilade he could perhaps hit several men as they passed by on the road without revealing his position.

But this was not the kind of fight he had pictured as he rode with the girl behind him. He did not want to hide in a mud cleft and shoot into a herd of cows when he had a chance to fight before a girl. What he wanted was a situation on some cliff, where she could see him surrounded by greasers. He wanted her to see the enemies creeping about and hurling their streaks of light at him. He had given up his first puny revenge upon the girl so that he could show her what kind of a fighting-man she had scorned!

At the edge of the banks a solitary sycamore tree afforded a secluded vantage-point. Terhune knew that from that shelter he could look down upon a long stretch of the road. If he saw just exactly where each cow-man was he would have a good chance to hit several of them before they could surround him. All they could do when they did come to a decision would be to shoot wildly at the sycamore. The girl would be with him. If she screamed, the cow-men would probably quit firing. The dramatic possibilities of this situation appealed to him strongly. The girl, at least, would be watching him in combat with many men. He knew the move was foolhardy, but then he had won in other foolhardy fights. His blood was hot and his heart pounded gloriously within him.

Terhune dismounted from his horse and helped the girl down. "You will come with me as far as that sycamore," he said. "I want to look over the road from there."

She followed him as he clutched viselike at her slender wrist.

No sooner had they walked into the black shade of the tree than Terhune regretted what he had done.

"Just to show off to a drab little flirt!" he said to himself. "Yet Jim Terhune will fight—a big fight with big men!"

He took out his own six-shooter and turned the cylinder slowly as he peered down on the road. At the moment he crouched a heavy weight suddenly fell upon the small of his back. And yet it was not so heavy as a man; it was a lithe, fighting catamount which clutched him by the throat and sent his gun flying into the darkness emitting a streak of fire. Terhune fell and wrestled wildly with the little squirming body. It *was* a man, yes, but a man who bit and clawed like a puma. Terhune tussled and fought blindly with him in the soft clay until suddenly both tumbled over the edge of the bank and rolled down

an interminable distance with mud and rocks scattering about them.

When he drew his other gun, Terhune found himself in a miry slough of kicking hoofs and stamping cows. He shot wildly into every direction, bringing big steers lurching to the ground and kicking frantically. As he half ran, half crawled from amidst that battery of hoofs, hatless, with shirt torn and both guns lost, he was struck with the wild panic of the herd. He sprawled up the banks and ran terror-stricken across the fields. The girl saw him fleeing from the cows. A sardonic glow of moonlight touched her smiling face. There was nothing heroic about him now—just a boy who had lost his hat running from a cow.

"Look at him scootin' out there after his nag!" said a croaking voice. Abby turned around to see a little man scrambling up over the edge of the bank. She recognized the little bald head and the tremendous grin of Wop Hoag.

"Andrade and the boys 'll be up here directly," Hoag vouchsafed. "They're riding behind with the big herd. They saw Terhune coming down the cañon on his horse."

"But how in the world did you get up in that sycamore?" the girl asked.

"I was ridin' with the beef herd," Wop explained proudly. "They told me when I got to the banks I should look out for Jim Terhune. When I got up here, sure enough, there he was a hundred yards away, so I scoots into the sycamore tree to hide, and he comes after me. Then I jumps him, and we roll into the steers. The big herd's a-coming now."

Wop Hoag and the girl climbed down to the road.

"A good fight I put up—eh?" little Wop suggested humbly. "Me savin' you from Jim Terhune—sounds pretty good, eh? Me licking Jim T.! Kinder good story hereabouts from now on—eh—what? And I didn't have no guns. Get the point? No guns—see? Honest! When I fights," Wop asseverated just as Andrade and his men arrived, "I fights with me bare hands."

"Can you beat that!" Andrade exclaimed when the herd had passed and the two six-shooters were found. "Wop Hoag here saves a girl and breaks Terhune. Get that! *Breaks* him, sending him away without his shooting-irons! Breaks Jim Terhune—"

Wop Hoag waved his raw knuckles in the air. "With me bare hands!" he reminded every one dramatically.

"A great fighter, too—that fellow Terhune," Andrade remarked. "Always a rip-snorter till we began gettin' women round here and he took to putting sheep-dip on his hair." Abby laughed with all the cowmen. "All right, Miss Finfrock. Climb up here and we'll take you to town."

THE WINE OF LIFE

THREE cups the Fates before me set,
And bade me choose;
One I might drink, the other two refuse.

Fame filled the first—a blood-red wine
Sweet to the taste,
A bubbling cup I might not pass in haste.

Next wealth—a wine of sheer delight,
Mellow and old;
All dreams were answered in that cup of gold.

Beauty was last—a clear, white wine;
Ah, doubt was past!
I was a woman, and I chose the last.

Lucy Eleanor Johnston.

Treasures of Tantalus

by Garret Smith

Author of "After a Million Years," "Between Worlds," "On the Brink of 2000," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

TOLD in the early years of the twenty-first century by one Blair who was in at Professor Fleckner's first experiment with his famous all-seeing, space-eliminating telephonoscope on New Year's Eve of 2000. The professor is backed by the immense fortune of young Tom Priestley, and with the assistance of the professor's secretary, Miss Stimson, the three are investigating the operations of a gigantic crime trust with no less a personage than Mortimer Chandler, President-elect of the United States—Centralist party—at its head. The ray-senders have detected Chandler in the act of starting to dispose of a van load of treasure, illegally obtained, when Miss Stimson gives a cry of horror and clutches at the control-board. In the excitement Blair's figure is projected in such a way that Chandler sees it and takes alarm. In the ensuing excitement, the screen is not watched as carefully as may be and the van load of treasure is spirited away. Mean time Chandler reports to his associates that some one has been acting the traitor, and it is determined to execute a man named Gersten. Priestley protests that this murder should be stopped, but Fleckner objects, and Miss Stimson presently reports that the crime trust have caught Priestley in an attempt to save Gersten himself and that she has lost the trail of the cab in which he was carried off. Thereupon she sinks down in a faint.

CHAPTER XIII.

AT GRIPS WITH THE CRIME TRUST.

WE stared in doubt and amazement at the limp figure of the girl. Then by common impulse we searched the screen to verify her startling announcement of the kidnaping of Priestley. All was quiet around the apartment house in which Gersten, the condemned trust agent, lived. There was no sign of disturbance in the apartment itself. Gersten was still sleeping peacefully without any appearance of having moved since we last looked at his reflected image.

Fleckner began frantically trying out all the telephonoscope connections we had—the young assassin chief in his home, the underground club, Tanner, even Chandler. No sign of activity. He even swept the ray up and down the quiet streets radiating from Gersten's home peering in every taxicab, hoping to find the one in which Priestley had been taken prisoner. But that was a futile proceeding begotten of panic and he quickly abandoned it.

Certain it was that Priestley had not arrived home. He made doubly certain of that by searching the house and calling the drowsy butler on the telephone.

Meantime, I was doing what I could to restore the girl to her senses. She revived presently, but it was some time before she could tell a coherent story. Even then she was strangely reticent and evasive at some points in her narrative.

"I heard Mr. Priestley arguing with Professor Fleckner about trying to keep the trust from murdering this man Gersten," she said. "When Mr. Priestley went by my desk something in the way he looked and walked made me think he was going to try to interfere with those murderers all by himself. I knew he would be

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in great danger. I thought I might help him or at least warn the police if necessary.

"I followed without his knowing it. I don't believe he knows me anyhow with my hat and coat on and my eye-shade off. He went to the public phone booths on the corner and called up Mr. Gersten. I listened in. I can't tell you how I managed it. I learned the secret when I was a telephone manager before I came here. Do you know that Mr. Gersten, this No. 72 we've been watching, is an old friend of Mr. Priestley?

"'Hello, John, this is Tom Priestley,' he said when he got his connection.

"'Why, hello, Tom,' Gersten answered, 'where you been keeping yourself and what do you mean pulling a man out of bed this time of night?'

"'Listen, John,' he said, 'your life's in danger. I've just overheard a gang you've got mixed up with plotting to kill you. They think you've been betraying them. They're watching your place now. I can't tell you any more. You'll know best how to handle it. I advise you to call up the district attorney himself in the morning and get protection. Stay off the street. You'll know how to handle it better than I, anyhow. You know the gang. I'll help you if I can. I think I know a way. I can't tell you more. I'm surprised to find you're in with such a gang, but I can't see you killed!'"

"But," Fleckner broke in, "Gersten didn't talk with any one on the phone. We've been watching him right along. He's been asleep."

"Then it's just as I thought," the girl exclaimed. "One of the trust tapped his phone circuit with an instrument as soon as they located him at home. He disguised his voice and answered instead of Gersten when Mr. Priestley called. That's how they trapped him.

"Mr. Priestley came out of the telephone station and started to walk back here. I watched him from across the street. A man hurried along by him in the same direction and must have sprayed an anesthetic in his face, because Mr. Priestley stopped suddenly and staggered. The strange man turned and caught him before he fell. Just then a cab whirled up. A man stepped out and helped the other man put Mr. Priestley in the cab. Then they both got in and drove away. I started to scream, but saw a policeman coming and knew I mustn't attract the police. They'd kill Mr. Priestley right away if they thought the police were after them. As it is they'll keep him alive for a while and try to discover what he knows. I couldn't find a cab to follow in so I came back here. That's all, but you must find him quick. You must!"

She showed signs of becoming hysterical. We tried to question her, but all she would say was—

"Get your rays to work. Don't bother with me! I don't know any more."

There seemed to be nothing to do but follow her advice. But though we searched for the rest of the night we accomplished nothing more than to verify Miss Stimson's belief that the trust agents had killed the telephone antennae connecting with the instrument in Gersten's apartment by the use of a high power wave sender which burned out the delicate connections. They had then evidently tuned their own outlaw instrument into the same wave length and, as she had surmised, answered his calls. We tried the expedient of calling up his number, but apparently the listeners-in now suspected a trap and refused to answer.

At half-past eight in the morning our screen showed Judge Tanner appearing for breakfast in the private dining-room at the Riccadona. Immediately he called the underground club and got a report from the assassin chief.

"I identified No. 72 and have him trailed. He'll die a natural death within twenty-four hours if you say the word. But something happened again. Things are going wrong and it's getting on my nerves. I'm even beginning to wonder if 72 is guilty. Anyhow he isn't the only one. You know young Tom Priestley, the Priestley millionaire? Well, it seems he's a friend of 72 and tried to call him up late last night and warn him. We cut in and caught Priestley and are holding him for orders.

"The question is now, is Priestley a

member of the organization? If he is he's a traitor. If he isn't then there's a leak to the outside and we've got to find it and see how far it's gone and kill as many people as is necessary to stop it or our whole game is up."

Judge Tanner turned pale and trembled visibly as he got this startling information. He thought for some moments before replying.

"I'll call you back," he managed to say at last.

He cut off the assassin chief and rang on Chandler. In a halting manner strangely at variance with the suave judge's usually assured address he broke the news to his unknown chief who was hardly less affected by it than his subordinate.

"This connects up with the disappearance of the van-load of money," Chandler ruminated. "It's a deeper plot than we thought. Tell your men to keep this Priestley alive till they've got all they can out of him. Find out, if possible, if he belongs to the organization. Try the supreme sign on him. No use to try tracing back through the recruiting chain. Every one is bound to name no names unless of a proven traitor. They'd suspect trickery and refuse for the most part. Get at it quick. Meantime let 72 live till this is cleared up."

Tanner transmitted these orders back to the assassin, who promptly left the club-room. We followed this fellow closely all day with our ray, but learned nothing of Priestley's whereabouts. He talked with numerous people and telephoned frequently, but apparently when treachery was afoot all members of the trust used excessive precautions. All communications were strictly in a code and quite differently from the one he had previously unraveled.

By evening we were in the depths of despair and alarm. Professor Fleckner and I managed to preserve a moderately calm exterior, but Miss Stimson was frankly hysterical over the situation. We sat in the laboratory by the telephonoscope screen all that night, dozing at intervals from sheer weariness but for the most part trying many new but futile angles of ray-search and debating various schemes of learning Priestley's whereabouts and effecting a rescue.

I was all for trying a scheme of scaring some one of the members higher up in the trust into revealing Priestley's hiding-place, by using our ray projector and presenting one of our images, carefully disguised, to the right man.

"But," Fleckner objected, "whom would you approach? Chandler? Tanner? Any of the others whom we have identified positively as concerned in Priestley's disappearance? I doubt if any one of them, even the chief assassin, knows where he is. That detail has been left to agents whom we haven't placed yet. If any one, excepting Chandler himself, was frightened into trying to find Priestley they'd simply kill him and Priestley as well. Wait a little and see if we can't locate Priestley's jailer. Then maybe your suggestion might work. Failing that I'll try the lever on Chandler. I'm not hopeful of the result. Conditions aren't ripe yet for a direct approach to that gentleman, but we can't afford to risk leaving Priestley with them until he breaks down and gives us all away."

I had a feeling as he spoke that the old man was more concerned for his own safety and the success of his schemes than he was for Priestley himself. Nevertheless his argument appealed to me as sound.

It was nearly eight in the morning when I awoke with a start after a longer doze than before. Miss Stimson had arisen and crossed over to where Professor Fleckner sat moodily studying the screen. Her hysteria had passed. There was in its place an air of calm determination.

"Professor Fleckner," she announced coolly, "I'll release Mr. Priestley."

"You!" he shouted in amazement.

"How?" I demanded.

"I can't tell you how, not at present anyhow. Just let me go for a while. Meantime keep Mr. Chandler covered closely. You remember he is to be out at conferences all day to-day."

She went out before we recovered sufficiently from our amazement to make any comment.

"What do you make of it?" Fleckner demanded. "Is the girl crazy? She's cer-

tainly acted strangely ever since that night when she warned Chandler away from that van-load of money."

"I don't know," I admitted. "I do think she admires our friend Priestley greatly and his danger may have unbalanced her a little. I think it would be wise to keep one of the rays on her while she is out. If she goes wild altogether we can warn a policeman to take her in charge and pay no attention to what she says."

"Good idea," he agreed.

He got Miss Stimson on the screen before she reached the street. We watched her progress from then on with such absorbing interest that it became almost impossible to keep our other rays adjusted properly on all the persons we were trying to watch at once.

The girl went first to her home in an apartment a few blocks away and when she came out again she was veiled and dressed so differently that it was hard to recognize in her the demure little office mouse of the green eyeshade. She went by subway up to the street corner nearest to Chandler's home. There she ascended to the upper street level and took a position in a public telephone station opposite the Chandler home where she could watch it through an open window.

In a little while the President-elect came out, got into his car and was driven away. We had half expected the girl to waylay and plead with him or make some wild threat. Fleckner was on the point of projecting my image before a police officer on the next corner and having the girl apprehended before she took any such disastrous step. But to our relief Chandler was driven off without any move on her part.

Instead we were amazed to see her calmly cross the street and push the announcer button at the Chandler front door.

"I wish to see Mrs. Simmons, the housekeeper," she announced with quiet dignity when the butler appeared. "I am a friend of hers."

A few minutes later a gray haired woman of about sixty appeared and regarded her caller with considerable perplexity.

They were in a small reception room off the main hall. The girl stepped past the housekeeper and to that good woman's obvious amazement, softly closed the door.

Then she turned back to the housekeeper and before the latter could protest she raised a warning hand.

"Don't give me away, Mrs. Simmons. Some one might overhear."

With that she raised her veil.

The woman choked back an exclamation. Her face showed mingled affection and alarm.

"You? Here?" she whispered.

"I had to look inside once more. I watch for him sometimes. I saw him drive away just now. I couldn't resist one more peep. Can't you take me up to his study where he lives so much? If any of the family see me say it's a young friend of yours you're taking up to your rooms and wanted to show around a little."

The girl's voice trembled and there were tears in her eyes. If she was acting it was an exceedingly clever bit of work.

Fleckner chuckled dryly.

"Another dark chapter in the good Chandler's life. I certainly am surprised at Miss Stimson, however."

The housekeeper hesitated.

"It's a risk," she said, "but you know I'd do anything for you, Ruth."

The good woman was weeping quietly.

"That's the same dear old Mrs. Simmons!" the girl exclaimed, patting her on the shoulder.

Mrs. Simmons opened the door and peered out. There was no one in the hall. She motioned the girl to follow and they went cautiously out and up a rear elevator that led directly into Chandler's study on the top floor.

The girl sank in a chair and gazed raptly about her for some minutes. Finally she roused herself with an effort and glanced at her watch.

"Oh, I promised to phone a friend at ten!" she exclaimed. "May I use this one?"

She indicated the booth containing the phone with the secret attachments through which we had so often watched Chandler issue orders to his followers.

"Why certainly, dearie," the housekeeper agreed.

Miss Stimson entered the booth, closed the sound-proof door and then, to our sudden illumination, twisted the ring that threw on the secret connection with the little dining-room at the Riccadona where Judge Tanner was just finishing his breakfast.

A moment later she was giving orders to the deluded agent of the crime trust in the same husky half-whisper in which the real head of that disreputable band was wont to issue his mandates.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS STIMSON USES DIRECT METHODS.

THE sheer audacity of the girl took our breath away. What had been her former connection with the Chandler household I could not imagine, for the sinister suggestion made by Fleckner somehow did not ring true. My instincts rebelled against it. Then there was the evident respect of that manifestly conventional Mrs. Simmons.

But another possibility flashed into my mind. Had this girl all along been an agent of the crime trust spying upon us? Would that account for the episode of the treasure van? If so why had she not betrayed us long before? On the other hand she was now evidently working against the organization. Had her devotion to Priestley, which I had been quietly noting, converted her to our side? I wondered if Professor Fleckner had thought of these startling possibilities and what action he might take.

But be all that as it might, her quick feminine mind had grasped a simple and direct plan of action and she had the courage to carry it out promptly. We gasped in admiration at her boldness and ingenuity as we listened to the orders she was giving to Judge Tanner over the secret telephone.

"I've just got some important information about our latest prisoner, young Priestley?" she whispered, and from Judge Tanner's expression it was evident that he was entirely deceived by the disguised voice. "He is refusing to give information about the rest of his crowd because he expects to be rescued soon. They had advanced information somehow as to where he was to be hidden and they have a number of our men spotted. We've got to make a quick shift and get him in the hands of an entirely new group that they're not yet wise to. My plan is to let him escape and pull the old crowd off his trail altogether. Then while he's free he'll go straight to his men. My new bunch of trailers will follow and we'll grab the whole gang. What do you think of that scheme?"

"An excellent one!" Tanner agreed, enthusiastically.

"That girl has a great head!" Fleckner exclaimed. "I never half appreciated her before. But I don't quite understand it all yet. I don't think I can ever quite trust her again. She's too clever and women are flighty, variable creatures at best. And there's been some sort of tie between her and Chandler. That's evident."

Fleckner was too absorbed in present happenings to follow out his reasoning but for me a sudden light was shed on her hysterical performance that had frightened Chandler away from the treasure van that night when he was about to lead us to the main treasure. The girl, I was convinced, had acted with a purpose on that occasion. She had not wanted Chandler to guide us to the Treasures of Tantalus. Was it sentiment for Chandler that prompted her or had she an interest in the treasure itself? That was what bothered me. At any rate she seemed now to be acting in our behalf.

But was she? That was another question that popped into my head a second later. Priestley released from the trust would be in her power? Was he safe there? Or was the girl a deserter from the trust who was now a member of a rival gang which, through her aid, had stolen the treasure van and was now cleverly using Professor Fleckner's great invention for its own ends?

That last fleeting suspicion seemed at that moment so fantastic that I instantly dismissed it and gave my undivided attention to the screen again.

"This is my plan," the girl was saying. "Follow closely and act quickly. There's no time to lose. Get your present attendants on Priestley out of the way as far and fast

and secretly as you can. Look out for trailers. Have a new man convey in a cab down to the Esplanade in Van Cortlandt Park, arriving there exactly at noon. My new men will be on hand to trail him to his gang. Right at the center of the Esplanade in front of the Wright Statue have him slow down and tell Priestley that he had been ordered to take him away and kill him, but that he couldn't commit murder, so he was going to rebel and let him escape. Then have him untie Priestley and turn him loose. Have the man drive away as quickly as possible. My other men will do the rest.

Tanner agreed without comment as was his custom on getting commands from Chandler. His careful repetition of the orders to his agent in the underground club made it evident that he suspected nothing wrong.

But again from there on we lost the trail in the confusion of multiple messages all in code. This time, however, it was of no importance that we should trace the orders further, as it turned out.

For promptly at noon we enjoyed the immense relief of seeing Miss Stimson's directions carried out to the letter.

Van Cortlandt Park Esplanade even in those days was thronged with noon-hour strollers from the factories along its southern margin, and a steady stream of motors filled its roadways. Miss Stimson could not have chosen a better place in which to carry out her scheme than this spot where any slightly unusual occurrence would pass unnoticed in the throng. Nevertheless for a half hour before the appointed time we swept the locality with our ray, studying every loiterer to see if we recognized a known trust agent, but we failed to glimpse any familiar face or suspicious character.

It was exactly twelve o'clock when a cab which had been circling slowly around the Esplanade drew up and stopped for a moment in front of the Wright statue.

The door opened and Priestley stepped out, a pale and haggard Priestley, but with bearing undaunted. He stood for a moment in front of the statue and looked about him suspiciously. The cab drove rapidly away.

Just then he noticed for the first time Miss Stimson strolling toward the statue. She was dressed differently than in the morning but was still veiled. Catching sight of Priestley she stepped up to him briskly.

"Good morning," she greeted him cheerily. "You are a little late." Then she added quickly in an undertone. "It's Miss Stimson. Don't look surprised. You're safe now but we can't be too careful."

Priestley rose to the occasion and checked his momentary confusion with a laugh.

"I didn't see you coming and you startled me," he said. "I'm sorry I'm late. What can I do to atone?"

"You can buy me a nice luncheon at Briarcliff Inn. My car is right over here. I'm going to show you how fast a real lady can drive."

This debonair, easy-speaking young woman was still another Miss Stimson to us. I realized more than ever that the girl was a consummate actress.

She led the way across to the parking station and they entered a swift-looking little coupé. The girl backed the car skilfully out of the line and it glided swiftly away northward.

Then just as we swung the ray forward to follow the speeding coupé there flashed on the other side of the screen a cab breaking all speed limits in defiance of the traffic officer at the southern entrance of the Esplanade.

"Better throw on another ray and investigate that cab," Professor Fleckner directed anxiously as he adjusted the ray he was controlling so that we kept a close-up of Miss Stimson's coupé on the screen.

I swung in a second ray and as I picked up the interior of the cab my instinctive fear was realized. It was the cab which had brought Priestley to the Wright statue just now and still driven by the man who had released him. This man's face was a picture of desperate fear. Beside him sat another man registering both anger and alarm in his pugnacious countenance. They were both straining their eyes toward Miss Stimson's fleeing car into which they had evidently seen Priestley enter.

The situation was as evident as though

it had been told me in words. Miss Stimson's haste had been justified. Somewhere along the line the crime trust's momentarily deluded gang had discovered the trick played on them. The second man in the pursuing cab had evidently been sent in haste to undo the error and arrived near the scene in time to meet the man who had just released Priestley.

And for the moment it seemed that Miss Stimson's clever artifice had been wasted. All unconscious of pursuit, she was driving northward as fast as speed regulations permitted but far too slowly to make her overhauling by the pursuing cab more than a matter of minutes.

The crime trust's agent in his desperation hurled speed regulations to the winds. Pedestrians fled in every direction. Vehicles shot toward the curbing to the right and left.

"Warn the girl! I'll get a traffic officer after the cab!" I shouted to Fleckner above the tumult of the crowd and the snorting of motor-horns that filled our little room from our sounding screen as though we were actually on the edge of the throng.

Fleckner projected his voice into the coupé, warned the girl with a word and in terror she threw her car into full speed and shot out of the Esplanade into a park road with the swiftness of an airplane. At that she was barely holding her own against the skilfully urged cab.

I located a motorcycle traffic-officer in less than a minute some quarter of a mile away, trundling his machine leisurely along, the speeders hidden from his sight by a clump of shrubbery.

To avoid creating public consternation by a seeming miracle I projected my image first among the bushes and seemed to step out of them into the path of the officer.

"There's a speeder playing havoc with the crowd over there!" I shouted excitedly, pointing across the Esplanade.

Without a question he jumped on his cycle and was gone like a flash. Hopefully I drew my image back into the bushes and cut off the projector. If the officer should overhaul and arrest the driver of the cab it would give our friends a chance after all.

Breathlessly Fleckner and I followed the triple race on our screen; the coupé slowly losing its lead over the recklessly driven cab, but—thank Heaven!—the motor-cycle gaining on it much more rapidly.

They left Van Cortlandt Park behind and flew up the Yonkers Boulevard. A few minutes later they were swinging perilously around the sharp curves of the Westchester Park drives.

Meantime Miss Stimson behind the screen of her car top had been ordering a lightning change act that seemed rather futile under the circumstances. Under her directions Priestley had hauled from under the seat a feminine outfit, cape, skirt, hat, veil and gloves, and put them on over his own clothing. Without too close inspec- he looked like a large-framed middle-aged woman.

Miss Stimson turned the wheel over to him while she changed her own hat, veil and jacket for an assortment of entirely different style. She looked fifteen years older and a dowdy contrast to the trim, stylish figure of a few minutes before.

She evidently hoped to get out of sight of her pursuers long enough to turn about and, in these disguises, give them the slip. Fleckner heartened her by telling her that the motor officer might give her that chance, though a dubious one at best.

Within five minutes that hope seemed about to be realized. The motor-cycle drew along side the cab and its rider signaled the driver to stop. Then our hopes were dashed again.

The second man in the cab turned back his coat lapel and, to our consternation, displayed the badge of a Central Office detective. He shouted something to the motor-cycle officer and the latter, instead of insisting on stopping the cab, let his cycle's speed out another notch and shot by in pursuit of the coupé.

By invoking the aid of the law we had merely made the capture of our friends doubly sure. The trust had played the same game. It was only a matter of minutes now when the motor-cycle would overtake them and Miss Stimson's pitiful little subterfuge would avail them nothing. The pursuers had long since noted the number and style of the car.

But just as I was in despair the genius of Fleckner again came to the rescue.

"Let me handle your lever a minute, Blair," he exclaimed suddenly. "Get one of those spare lengths of power cable out of the storeroom."

"Now," he directed, when I had brought the small roll containing about a rod of half-inch wire cable, "bend one end so it will hook over that window-catch, then carry the other end across the room stretching it in front of the screen. I'll turn on the magnifier and then project this cable so it appears in image like a two-inch hawser stretched across the road in front of that motor-cycle and cab. That'll stop 'em for a minute, I'll guarantee."

The scheme worked. The motor-cycle and the cab flew around the bend and their drivers saw across the road a few rods ahead what appeared to be a heavy cable stretched taut at a height that meant a sure wrecking for both vehicles. Brakes screeched and they came to a dead stop within two yards of the apparent obstruction.

All three men swore roundly and stared stupidly at the cable. The speeding coupé in the meantime lengthened its lead by a quarter of a mile.

"They've stopped," Fleckner told Miss Stimson, again projecting his voice into the coupé. "Better slip off on a by-path and trust to throwing them off the scent. They'll be on again in a moment."

"I'll do better than that," replied the girl calmly.

She brought the car to a grinding halt, reversed and turned squarely around. She threw over the lever beside the seat and the coupé top folded down out of sight leaving the car looking like an ordinary open roadster. Thereupon she pulled out false number plates from under the seat, hooked them over the old ones and was back in the car in barely a minute.

At the same instant the motor-cycle officer, who by good chance had not yet attempted to touch the unsubstantial cable image started to shove his machine under the obstruction to go on with the pursuit.

"Snatch it loose and pretend to run," Fleckner directed me.

I jerked the end of the cable off the window-catch and went through a pantomime of running. Professor Fleckner threw my projected image across the park green apparently dragging the cable after me.

"I'll get him! You two go on," shouted the pseudo detective leaping from the cab.

He raced after my image pouring a stream of automatic pistol bullets at it till Fleckner ran it into a thicket and dissolved the thing. How long my supposed pursuer beat about that bush in search of a mirage I don't know, for I had more important matters to watch.

The fellow was barely out of the cab when it leaped into full speed with the motor-cycle already gaining on it in an effort to make up for lost time.

And around the next bend they barely avoided collision with an open roadster containing apparently a pair of middle-aged ladies to whom they accorded hardly a glance as they swept by.

CHAPTER XV.

A CHAMBER OF HORRORS.

AN hour later, to our immense relief, we welcomed Miss Stimson and Priestley, still in their outlandish disguises, back into the safe shelter of the laboratory. Immediately after meeting their deluded pursuers they had turned off the road over which they had been fleeing and worked south over a circuitous route until they reached the Getty Square garage where Miss Stimson had rented the car, a new interchangeable model that had admirably suited her purposes. The false number-plates she had made herself with cardboard and a little paint.

In returning the car, disguised as she was, she avoided the garage-man's suspicion by saying that she was bringing it back for her sister who had rented it.

In the meantime, as our following ray showed, the motor-cycle officer and the man in the cab ran on for over a mile before they became convinced that they had lost the scent. Then they turned back looking for clues, but of course, in vain. Finally they came to the point where they

had dropped the supposed Central Office man. There the motor-cycle officer left them and so did we, for we saw no profit in following them further.

Priestley was too worn and exhausted with his experience to talk at first. Fleckner's man brought him some food which he ate in silence. Then he retired to the room he had been using and slept for twelve hours straight.

Meantime Fleckner, Miss Stimson and I took turns at watching the screens and resting, but whatever action the chief men of the crime trust had taken on Priestley's escape had been put through while we were distracted by the chase. We never did learn how Chandler found out so soon the trick that had been played on him. By the time we got him and Tanner and the others back on the screen whatever excitement it had caused had subsided or been suppressed.

Nevertheless appropriate action had been started as we were about to learn presently.

When Priestley finally awoke about six the next morning, I had also just finished my last nap of the night. He followed me out into the laboratory where Fleckner sat in front of the screen which at this hour in the morning portrayed nothing but a series of pictures of still life, a choice assortment of sleeping villains.

"Where is Miss Stimson? I want to thank her properly for rescuing me. I was too groggy last night," were almost his first words.

"I sent Miss Stimson home about an hour ago," said Fleckner. "She insisted on watching with us on and off all night and she was pretty well worn out to begin with. Too excited to sleep, I guess. I made her go home where she could get away from the atmosphere for a while, get her rest out."

"She's a remarkable young woman," Priestley declared. "Do you know, I've paid so little attention to her that at this moment I hardly know what her face looks like. She wears that confounded eyeshade all the time around here and has a veil on whenever she goes out."

"She's a good deal of a mystery," Fleckner admitted. "I don't suppose she explained to you what connection she had with the Chandler household in the past?"

"No, she told me only the barest details of how she fooled Judge Tanner. She said she knew Chandler's housekeeper when she was a little girl and that helped her in getting in. What do you mean?"

Fleckner related in detail what took place in Chandler's house when Miss Stimson entered it the morning before.

"Strange, isn't it?" was Priestley's only comment, but I saw he was deeply disturbed and that he resented Fleckner's innuendoes.

"But come!" the professor demanded impatiently. "What about you? You have the story we're most anxious to hear. What happened when they grabbed you?"

Priestley shuddered. It was some minutes before he answered. When he did it was slowly, falteringly as a sufferer speaks between spasms of pain.

"It's an experience hard to talk about!" he said at last. "What I have to tell won't help us much. It's merely an exposition of what the crime trust will do to a man when it gets him in its clutches."

He paused for a moment and then with visible effort continued:

"During all the time I was in their hands I saw no one, and talked to no one directly excepting the man who let me go. I saw him for a moment or two only just before he left me and he was evidently so disguised that I wouldn't recognize him again. They're exceedingly clever in their disguises. I'm convinced that when they have to work together in the open, as when they robbed the trust company they were disguised even from each other. I haven't the slightest idea where they kept me or how I got there and came away.

"To begin with, I believe Miss Stimson has already told you that No. 72, the man named Gersten, whom the trust condemned as a traitor is, or rather was, an old friend of mine. We were chums in college and for a time I was engaged to his sister, but we broke the engagement by mutual agreement and later she married Paul Tilford, another close friend of mine. Gersten became an electrical engineer and has appar-

ently been quite successful. His wife is an intimate friend of my sister. So you see how close is the tie between us and how great a shock it was when I found, not only that he was a criminal but that he was about to be murdered.

"It's one thing to view a prospective murder impersonally, especially when you feel that the world will be better off with the victim out of the way. My instincts revolted against allowing it to go on and as you remember, I protested. But when I realized how helpless I was in the matter and how much greater things were at stake, I gave in, much as it went against the grain.

"But when I found the victim was to be John Gersten I had to do something. To think that he is one of the criminal defectives! And the others we have discovered in the last few months! It's appalling! It makes one wonder whom he can trust, if the whole world isn't crime mad under its snug cover of conventional respectability. It makes one distrust his very self.

"At any rate I rushed out from here and did the utterly reckless thing of trying to call up and warn Gersten, with results you know.

"I came out of the phone booth and started down the street. I vaguely recall meeting a man who passed me so closely that our elbows almost grazed. I was too preoccupied to notice him at all. At that instant I had a sudden dizzy feeling and then everything went black. That's all I know about my kidnaping. Of course the man who passed me must have sprayed an anesthetic in my face.

"When I came to I was in total darkness and absolute silence. I might have been in an old-fashioned grave for all I could tell. In fact the close air added to that impression. I was lying on my back on what seemed to be a slab of stone or concrete. I tried to move but found that my hands and feet were shackled.

"About my head was fastened some sort of contraption that seemed to consist mainly of pads over my ears and mouth. I jumped at the conclusion that this was to keep me from either hearing sounds or calling for help, but I was quickly undeceived.

"Following the instinct to call for help I tried to cry out and, to my surprise, succeeded amazingly. The sound that I emitted was a thunderous one and seemed to be concentrated in my own ears. It nearly burst my ear drums.

"At that I heard a low chuckle. I stiffened and wrenched at my shackles, but was unable to break free.

"'So you are awake, are you, Priestley?' some one said in a low casual tone that came apparently from right beside me. I strained my eyes to see him but couldn't make out the slightest thing in the dense blackness.

"'No use in yelling your head off or in straining yourself trying to break out,' the voice warned; 'that outfit on your head is a telephone receiver and transmitter so that you can hear what we have to say and tell us what we want to know. That's your only connection with the outside world, excepting a tube through which we'll feed you a little air if you want to use it to talk with and talk right.'

"'Where am I?' I demanded.

"Again came the taunting chuckle, but somewhat louder.

"'I can't give you the street and number very well. It isn't allowed, but, if it'll be any consolation to you, I can tell you that you're in a strong aluminoid coffin buried under ten feet of earth in an unused subcellar. I'm the only one in the world who knows where you are, and I own the building, so you can see what a lively chance of rescue you have.'

"For once in my life I nearly fainted away with horror. I believed instinctively that he was telling the truth though I never got further proof of it than his bare statement and my own impression of my surroundings.

"'Now, whenever you are ready to tell us who are the rest of your friends who think they know some of our secrets, I will listen and if what you tell me is true your situation will be made easier for you,' went on the voice.

"Just what I said in reply doesn't matter. I gave him to understand he had better kill me at once and save his time as I wasn't the kind of yellow dog who would

find life tolerable after I had betrayed my friends. That wasn't, as a matter of fact, as heroic as it sounds for I knew how badly they wanted to know the names of their enemies. They could gain nothing by killing me, for as long as they kept me a prisoner I could do them no harm. On the other hand if they did kill me they'd lose their only present chance of learning the names of those who were endangering their whole organization. If I gave them the information they'd have no farther use for me and would doubtless promptly kill me. So as long as I held out I knew they would try to keep me alive in the hope of finally breaking down my resistance. Every moment gained was giving you people so much more chance of rescuing me. I didn't realize the chances against that rescue or the torture I would go through meantime or I think I would have wished to die right then."

Priestley paused and shuddered again at the recollection of it.

"Did either of you ever happen to use that instrument of torture, the old-fashioned wired telephone whose connections were made by hand at switchboards, one of those complicated contrivances, generally out of order and at best working in most haphazard fashion, from which our fathers suffered a century ago? You may remember them as a boy, Professor Fleckner. Blair may have seen one in a museum. Well, when I was a youngster about fifteen I ran across a short line of that sort while traveling with my father in a back-woods section of northern Alaska. I remember well the mixture of buzz, clack and rattle that nearly split my ear-drums while the so-called 'Central' was trying, quite often in vain, to 'get a number,' with an especially violent attack preceding her frequent announcement that 'the line is busy.'

"Well, the telephone instrument that was attached to my head had the same set of tricks. Whether it was really an old-fashioned early twentieth-century affair, I don't know. You have read of the ancient practise of torturing prisoners by a steady drip, drip of water on the shaven skull, or of the amiable art of tickling a victim to death, or driving him insane by continuous light taps on the soles of his feet. I am sure I would have welcomed those methods —any or all of them—in preference to that infernal crackling in my ears that kept up hour after hour, broken only at intervals when my torturer paused to ask me if I was ready to talk.

"Finally I seemed to lose all sense of hearing as such. Each click of the instrument was marked by a sharp pain that seemed to shoot through my skull and down every nerve in my body to my very toes. I tottered on the verge of delirium, but fought against it with all my remaining will.

"But at length I must have lapsed into momentary unconsciousness. I came to again with a name on my lips. I knew that in my half-consciousness I had spoken aloud the name of some acquaintance, but whose I did not know, nor do I know now. But I am half crazy with the fear that I may in that instant have betrayed one of you. Who, I wonder?"

He stopped again and rubbed his head slowly like a man still in a daze, his face a picture of utter misery. Fleckner and I looked at each other, and each read in the other's face an uneasy echo of Priestley's question.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CRIME TRUST INVOKES THE LAW.

THE rest of Priestley's story made little impression on me. I was too absorbed in speculation as to what he might have said in that moment of half-delirium. Had we after all been betrayed, and could we expect at any moment some insidious attack by the gang?

I gathered, half hearing, that when Priestley came to with the unrecognized name on his lips, the clicking of the telephone instrument had ceased. It must have been at about that moment that word came to the watcher above his prison-grave to release him, for he became conscious of a sweetish, suffocating vapor, evidently an anesthetic sent down through the tube mentioned by his tormentor. He lost consciousness completely this time, and

did not recover it again until he had been carried in the cab almost to the point where he was let go.

His story completed, he sat back exhausted and listened apathetically to Fleckner and myself discussing our next steps. The possibility that one or more of our names in addition to Priestley's was in the possession of the crime trust was the most serious thing to consider and prepare to combat.

We were keeping the crime trust principals on the screen as usual, but recent events had made them more than ever cautious, and we gleaned nothing of value as to their information and plans. Our chief dread was that Priestley had let slip the name of Professor Fleckner. In that case we could expect an attack on the laboratory at any moment. What insidious form it would take we could not imagine, and hence could not prepare very intelligently to meet it.

One thing was certain. If Fleckner had been betrayed and the secret of the telephonoscope discovered by the trust, our game was up.

"At the least," I said, "we must all stay hidden here at the laboratory. Priestley certainly can't show his face in public until we've got this bunch nipped. I advise keeping even your servants shut in on some pretext or other."

"Right!" Fleckner agreed; "and we must use extreme caution in answering both the door and telephones. I'll have Miss Stimson stand guard over those matters."

"But Miss Stimson is out!" Priestley cried in sudden alarm. "We must get her back at once. They may have her name and be after her now."

He sprang for the telephone, unmindful of his physical weakness.

Fleckner made a move as if to stop him, but immediately seemed to think better of it.

"Don't say who's calling," he warned Priestley instead. "I instructed her when I hired her to keep her employment absolutely secret."

Miss Stimson lived alone at an apartment hotel. In a moment Priestley had the desk clerk there on the phone and asked for her.

After listening to the clerk's report he hung up and turned back to us, his face even paler than before.

"They say she isn't there, and hasn't been in her room for several days."

"Then they've got her!" I exclaimed.

Priestley sank into a chair, dropped his face in his hands too overcome to speak.

Professor Fleckner was lost in thought, but said nothing, and his masklike countenance as usual betrayed no emotion.

"The poor girl!" I exclaimed. "They'll torture her horribly! There must be some way of rescuing her!"

"I'll give myself up in exchange," Priestley declared. "Let me at the instrument."

He went to the switchboard of the telephonoscope and threw over the control lever. Professor Fleckner watched him with a sardonic smile.

But to our bewilderment nothing happened in response to Priestley's manipulation of the levers. The screen remained blank.

Fleckner chuckled.

"It won't work, will it?" he taunted. "You see, I have noted that you boys didn't quite approve of my methods and might get rebellious. So while you slept I changed the combination of the instrument so that no one but I can work it hereafter.

"Furthermore, I had this apartment built over some years ago when I began making secret inventions. I didn't propose to have my ideas stolen. The doors and windows have secret electric locks, steel bars that thrust across them out of the interior of the adjacent walls, so that it's as impossible to get out as in. I've just pressed a secret button that puts those locks in operation. I've also pressed another button that put our phone out of commission and another summoning James and his able assistant. Here they are."

Into the laboratory came James, the gigantic ex-athlete whom Fleckner employed as butler and valet. With him was another man equally competent-looking from a physical standpoint.

" James," said his employer, " some gentlemen on the outside are trying to get at our secrets or kidnap us or both. I've told you already a little about it. I've thrown all the outside locks and cut off the phone. You may break the news to the cook. He will get his regular food supplies up the delivery tube as usual and send back a written order for each day, so we won't starve. These two young gentlemen are friends of mine, but don't quite agree with me just now. Keep them under guard especially while they are in the laboratory. They'll have access to this and their two bedrooms only. You take the day watch and John the night watch."

Then he turned to us.

" I think I understand some things a little better than you boys," he said. " I think I can guarantee that Miss Stimson will suffer no serious harm before I rescue her. I also think I can control the crime trust pretty well from now on, and I don't propose to have any misguided interference."

Priestley threw up his hands and gave in without further words, and I followed his example.

At that moment the newspaper delivery tube clicked and dropped the morning papers on the table back of us. We each picked up one and sat down to read it, not expecting much of interest in the news that found its way into print, tame stuff in comparison with the secret happenings we were following. It served rather as a welcome distraction from the tension.

But on this particular morning we found that, instead of furnishing distraction, the news bore vitally on our troubles. At last the crime trust's activities had broken into public print.

Not that the startling tales on the front pages would reveal to the initiated the handiwork of that evil coterie. Even I read for some distance into the first that caught my eye before I suspected it. The heavy three-column head ran:

TWELVE RICH MEN VANISH;
VICTIMS OF KIDNAPING PLOT.

In the last twenty-four hours, it seemed, reports had come to police headquarters, one after the other, of the mysterious disappearance of a dozen of the best known business men or bankers in the city. Ten of them had responded to mysterious telephone calls at their offices and hurrying out, saying they would be back within an hour or so and making no explanation. None of them had been seen or heard of since.

The remaining two, so office associates testified, had received calls of a mysterious nature to which they had refused to respond. One of them was driving home from the theater that night when his car was stopped in a quiet spot by a pair of masked men. He had been dragged out of his car and carried off before his frightened family who were with him could raise help.

The other had been called to his door just before retiring by a thick-set, bearded man, as the butler described him, who refused to come in. When the master failed to return after some time the butler went to the door to find him gone. He had not been heard of since.

I read the list of the victims over twice before its significance dawned on me. I had copied the list of names on my memorandum pad in this very room less than a year ago. It was a complete catalogue of the men Fleckner had invited to witness the first exhibition of the telephonoscope on that memorable New Year's Eve.

" Why," I exclaimed, " this is the crime trust's work! They've caught every man, excepting ourselves, who knows anything at all of the existence of the telephonoscope."

" Huh?" grunted Fleckner. " Oh, you are reading the other story. I was reading the one on the right-hand side of the page."

The old man had turned deadly pale. I saw him visibly frightened for the first time.

Then, before I could turn to the account that had caused this remark, I heard a groan from Priestley. He, too, was staring at head-lines opposite the ones that had just bowled me over. I noted them now for the first time, and my own feelings

were hardly less acute that my companions'.

This is what caught my eye:

THOMAS PRIESTLEY, MULTIMILLIONAIRE, FLEES JUSTICE AFTER INDICTMENT

Accused of obtaining huge fortune by fraud he escapes officers after thrilling auto race through city parks

The crime trust, defeated in its purpose to hold Priestley an illegal prisoner, had laid a clever plot and invoked the aid of the law against him.

CHAPTER XVII.

FLECKNER USURPS THE CRIME THRONE.

PRIESTLEY controlled himself with difficulty while we read the two stories through. According to the second article, a cousin of Priestley's—evidently the one whose life we had saved from the Bolshevik outlaws on that Pacific island last New Year's Eve—had just returned to civilization after long isolation in the South Seas. He had learned for the first time that Thomas Priestley held the family fortune by virtue of the signatures of the other descendants. Thereupon he had gone to the district attorney's office and declared he had never signed the release.

It was significant that he fell into the hands of Assistant District Attorney Winter, accredited member of the crime trust's inner councils. Winter investigated the alleged signature of the returned cousin on the release document, and his expert had pronounced it a forgery. Moreover, it was shown that on the date the signature was signed, December 31, 1999, the cousin was in the South Seas and the paper had been filed long before it could possibly have reached New York from there. The reader will remember that this cousin, like the other two, signed the projected shadow of the release and that the signature was actually recorded by a photographic process on real paper in New York.

The grand jury being in session, an indictment had been jammed through immediately and an order for arrest obtained. Priestley not being found in his usual haunts and not having been seen there for several days, a general alarm had been sent out for him. A detective had seen him that noon getting into a car with a heavily veiled young woman whose identity was unknown. He had summoned help and given chase.

Then a strange thing had happened, proof of a carefully worked out conspiracy. The story went on to tell how the detectives had been foiled by a heavy cable stretched across the road.

It was a plausible tale and sensational in the extreme. It not only ruined Priestley's reputation both by direct statements and countless cleverly put and evidently inspired innuendoes, but from a legal standpoint seemed to present a pretty clear case against him, that could be contested only by exposing the secret of the telephonoscope, which in the present circumstances would do more harm than good.

Further than that, the only persons who could testify as to the genuineness of the signature of Priestley's cousin, barring Fleckner, Priestley, and myself, had been kidnaped so that nothing of that sort would interfere with the trust's plans. I pointed this out to Fleckner.

"And in addition to that," I went on, "if they knew enough about us to capture all the men who are in the secret, they certainly know your connection with it and will be after us at once. I only wonder they haven't been here already."

"Quite so," Fleckner agreed. "Their delay is probably caused by the necessity for keeping such moves secret. Well, we'll prove an alibi as far as this place is concerned."

"James," he directed, "tell the cook to order enough food staples sent up this morning to last about a month, together with the canned and concentrated supplies we have on hand. Then you bring a couple of trunks and a bag out here, and you and John and the cook put on your own things and get your valises. Then call up and have a big motor hack down at the door in half an hour. Tell them we want to

catch the ten thirty at the Pennsylvania Station."

Priestley looked up in amazed alarm.

"You're not going to attempt to leave," he exclaimed, "and keep me locked up here alone?"

"Keep your seat, Thomas," Fleckner reassured him. "I'm going to do nothing of the sort. The management of the building and the crime trust sleuths are simply going to think they see us departing. Oh, by the way, James—also call up the superintendent and tell him we're going away for a month or so, taking a trip down through the Andes or any other remote place that sounds good to you."

A half-hour later Fleckner turned on the telephonoscope and got the front entrance of the building on the screen. The motor hack he had ordered stood waiting. Fleckner's two men brought one of the trunks in front of the screen and went through the motions of walking while the professor turned on the projector and sent their images out into the hall down the elevator and out to the hack. He held the image of the trunk in the hack while, with another ray, he brought the images of the men back up to the laboratory to go through the motions with the other trunk.

Then all four of us carrying bags were projected in image down aboard the hack. Fleckner told the chauffeur to draw down the curtains and drive to the Pennsylvania Station. The professor kept our images and those of the trunks and bags aboard the hack all the way to the station.

"This is on my account at the livery," he said to the driver on the hack's arrival at the station. He could not, of course, satisfy the man with shadow money. "By the way, while I'm having the baggage taken in would you mind telephoning for me? I've just time to catch the train. Call up the superintendent of my building and tell him that my attorney, Mr. Forsyth, will attend to my rent while I'm gone. I forgot to tell him. Add a dollar for yourself to my bill."

This, of course, was mere by-play to get the driver away long enough to dissolve our images without causing him undue astonishment.

All this time Fleckner had kept another ray playing about, watching for trailers of the hack, but if the trust had any emissaries watching our supposed movements we failed to catch them at it.

"Well," Fleckner said at last, "it looks as if we were all snug and could defy the trust indefinitely. If they try breaking in here illegally, they'll get an unpleasant surprise. If they try invoking the law through a permit to secure evidence, I have another sort of surprise.

"As for your case, Priestley, don't worry about it. I will arrange to have no further action taken in it until you are caught, which will be never unless I see fit. When we're good and ready, provided you make me no more trouble, we'll clear your name in such spectacular fashion that there'll be no doubt left in the public mind."

"Do you mind telling us how you expect to accomplish all these marvels?" Priestley asked rather sarcastically.

"You'll see, little by little," the professor replied imperturbably. "From now on I am the real head of the crime trust. I'm going to rule with a lightning rod. I'm going to stand it on its head. And all not without profit to myself. For the Treasure of Tantalus is mine to have and to hold."

Priestley and I remained silent. We had learned by now the unwisdom of arguing with him. There was a wild, almost mad, gleam in the old man's eyes. I wondered if the vision of too much power had unbalanced his reason. Or had we, in our desire to root the hidden criminals from society, put ourselves in the hands of a master criminal?

Priestley and I discussed these questions cautiously by ourselves many times during the coming weeks when we were alone together in one of our rooms and were sure the old man was preoccupied with his screen.

And as the days went by evidence piled up that this old genius who had so enthusiastically started on the hunt for high-grade defectives had himself developed a defective streak. I began to wonder more than ever who of us was immune from this obscure mental malady. There were

times when I found myself applying tests to myself to see if I was morally normal.

All that day, after Fleckner had put his house in order for a possible siege, he sat by his desk in deep thought, now and then making notes on a pad. During that time he made no use at all of the telephonoscope. He was evidently, as we came to learn later, planning out the details of one of the most ambitious bids for power that the world has ever known, a campaign that had for its aim making society do his bidding by holding its privacy for ransom.

At six o'clock that evening he sprang suddenly into action. He retired to his bedroom for a moment, and when he returned we were amazed to see him attired in a black robe and mask like those worn in the crime trust's secret clubroom.

"I'm going to pay some of my new subjects a visit," he remarked casually as he sat down at the telephonoscope switchboard.

He then switched on the ray by a new and complicated combination device of which we could make nothing, though we watched closely. At once the private dining-room at the Riccadona was on the screen. Then we sat and waited.

A half-hour later Dorgan and Winter entered. They removed their overcoats and sat down. They had just turned to their menu cards when Professor Fleckner arose, turned on his projector, and clapped his hands.

The trio of rascals at the little table miles away leaped to their feet in startled amazement just as the heavy draperies of one of the windows seemed to melt silently into the frames and a black-robed, masked figure stepped off the sill and stood before them.

"Pray, sit down, gentlemen. Don't be alarmed," he commanded in a good imitation of the hoarse whisper Tanner had heard so many times over the secret telephone circuit.

The three obeyed, pale and shaken.

"I am the Man Higher Up, before you in person at last," announced the apparition solemnly. "I never expected to give you a personal view like this. You remember I said to you, Judge Tanner, on election night that I would like very much to thank you in person, but that it was not possible. You and Mr. Dorgan made it clear when you initiated Mr. Winter here that it wasn't done."

The three winced at hearing their names pronounced in this offhand manner. They had evidently believed that the Man Higher Up was as ignorant of their identity as they were of his.

Priestley and I, standing behind the black-robed figure of the real Fleckner and peering over at his projected image on the screen, hardly dared breathe lest the slightest sound from us be likewise projected into the tense atmosphere of the little dining-room, miles away, and mar the illusion the professor was creating.

"But new conditions have arisen," the black-robed image went on while his hearers, their first terror subsiding, stared at the blank mask in hypnotized fascination. "Somewhere in this carefully worked out organization a leak has sprung. It has proven so mysterious and baffling that I dared not use our regular indirect methods in conducting a conference. So I am here, though you will appreciate the wisdom of my concealing my personality.

"In the first place, Judge Tanner, don't use this secret telephone circuit again. I'm afraid it's unsafe. Recent events make me think some of our telephone communications have been tapped. When I need to confer with you I'll call you on the regular telephone at your home or your chambers and simply ask: 'Has there been a decision in that last case yet?' You will simply answer that there has not and hang up.

"Then you will come immediately to this room. I'll be here. When you have orders to transmit to your helpers below, I'll see that they get there. I'm explaining to them also that they must not use the phones for organization business till this mystery has been cleared up."

Priestley and I looked at each other, unwilling admiration in our faces. At one clever stroke Fleckner had cut Chandler off from all communication with the crime trust of which he had been the head.

"Now," the apparition went on, "I've decided on a different course toward the prisoners we are holding. We'll have no executions and no more tortures. We'll keep them comfortable. Make each one think some one else has confessed and promise him immunity if he'll corroborate the confession."

"Prisoners?" Tanner asked, finding his voice for the first time. "We have only one prisoner—Gersten—and I was about to report to you to-night that we've proved him innocent and ask your permission to release him."

"Ah!" Fleckner exclaimed. "I'm glad to hear it. Release him, by all means. By prisoners I meant also Priestley. I forgot for a moment I had not yet told you my special corps has just recaptured him. So we are safe from him personally, but he has friends we must catch. By the way, Winter, let that indictment lie idle until I give the word. I may decide to have it quashed. Have you learned anything new as to the methods by which our secrets are leaking out or how Priestley escaped?"

"Not a thing," Tanner admitted. "We are still absolutely in the dark."

"Didn't Priestley make any remark under torture that could give you a clue?" pursued the pseudo crime trust chief.

Tanner looked distinctly uncomfortable, and hesitated.

"I trust you are not trying to conceal anything," Fleckner went on sharply.

"I won't conceal anything," Tanner admitted, "but first may I beg immunity from the usual punishment for having obtained forbidden knowledge? I can't believe anyhow that what Priestley said was true."

Priestley clutched my arm convulsively. We were about to learn what my friend had revealed in his delirium, that half-remembered shouting of a name which haunted him ever since with the fear that he had betrayed one of us.

"Have no fear," Fleckner consoled Tanner. "This is an unusual occasion. We must grasp at any straw of information we can get. I'll see that all precedent is waived in this case."

"Well, then," Tanner faltered, "the young man shouted once just as he was coming out of a semidelirious stupor brought on by his suffering. The attendant heard him clearly, so there's no mistake. 'Mortimer Chandler, President-elect of the United States, is the real head of the crime trust,' is what he said."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHANDLER SPRINGS A SURPRISE.

PROFESSOR FLECKNER started visibly at this announcement that Priestley in his delirium had revealed to the members of the crime trust the carefully guarded name of their mysterious chief. Priestley and I, as well as the three uneasy figures around the table in the little dining-room, waited breathlessly for his reply.

He was not quick to make it. For some moments he stood in silence, evidently debating how he should meet this unexpected situation. At length he spoke solemnly, deliberately.

"It has been our policy neither to affirm or deny guesses as to the identity of any of our members, but to punish swiftly those who venture to guess. This case is different. I feel that I should set you right.

"I am troubled to know that young Priestley has learned so much as to guess rightly at the existence of our secret organization, and that we are interested in Mortimer Chandler, who for our purposes we have put up for President of the United States. For the rest of his delirious statement while he was buried alive and under nerve racking torture, it's at most a very bad guess. Chandler and I are not one and the same person at all, nor does he even dream who I am. I am head of the crime trust, as our prisoner was pleased to call it. Therefore Chandler is not. That's all for now. Follow my instructions, and I'll appoint another meeting soon."

His image backed to the window. Again the draperies seemed to melt and he vanished. He threw off the projector, snatched off his black mask, and turned to us, wiping beads of sweat from his face.

"Well," he remarked with great satisfaction, "I've spiked Chandler's guns and found out what I wanted to know. The gentlemen of the crime trust haven't learned a thing about the telephonoscope, and never will, for every one who knows anything about it is safely out of their reach."

"But," Priestley protested in bewilderment, "what about Miss Stimson and the twelve men who were present at the demonstration on New Year's Eve? I thought we were satisfied they were in the power of the trust? Have they escaped?"

"You mean you were satisfied," Fleckner chuckled. "I might as well tell you about that now. They have not escaped. They were never kidnaped by the trust, for the simple reason that I took good care that they shouldn't be by kidnaping them first myself."

"What!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean to say that all this time you have known where Miss Stimson was?"

"Exactly," he agreed. "Miss Stimson never left this building that night I said I sent her home while you and Priestley slept, nor has she since. She is perfectly safe and comfortable, though rather closely confined. You see, I rent four adjoining apartments in this house. The twelve missing gentlemen are here also. Ten of them came unsuspectingly in response to my telephone invitation of which the papers spoke; the other two dallied so they had to be carried here by my two men, James and John, incidents which the papers also told about luridly. The safety of all of us depended on such precautions, to say nothing of the success of my future plans."

The feelings of Priestley and myself were too mixed to allow us to speak. We stared at the professor in amazed silence. Then another suggestion intruded itself in my mind.

"And the disappearance of the two-million-dollar treasure van after Chandler was scared off? Was that also engineered by you?" I asked.

"Exactly," he agreed. "When we were watching Chandler on his way to meet the treasure van, I had John and James—who, by the way, are expert aeronauts—in a swift plane of mine in my hangar on the roof of this building, ready to fly to the spot the moment Chandler revealed to us the hiding-place of the main treasure. When I saw there was no hope that Chandler or any agent of his would dare try to go back to the van after he was frightened by Miss Stimson, I decided I wouldn't let an unclaimed treasure, even a paltry two million dollars, lie around idle. So after you and Priestley were asleep, I directed the boys to fly out and retrieve the van and take it to a good hiding-place of my own, where it now lies safe."

This boasting confession, too, Priestley and I received in silence. I remember wondering at this in Priestley's case, such a sharp contrast to his usual vehement protests against Fleckner's doubtful methods which now had passed quite beyond the doubtful stage. I was disturbed, too, by my own acquiescence.

I no longer had any doubts that Fleckner had passed into the ranks of pronounced criminal defectives. What disturbed me almost as much was the fear that Priestley and myself were to some degree infected with the germs of the same defectiveness.

Professor Fleckner was now busy with further plans. After consulting his notes and spending a few minutes in thought he turned again to the telephonoscope control board and brought the home of Mortimer Chandler on the screen. Chandler was shown alone in his study hard at work over some reports. A hasty search about the house with the rays made it apparent that the family and his secretary were out for the evening. The servants were in their own quarters in a distant part of the house.

"A very opportune moment for visiting my predecessor on the crime trust throne and letting him know he is out of office," chuckled the professor. "Also, I may add, this is the evening in which I take over officially the custody of the Treasures of Tantalus."

He slipped on his black mask again, got a heavy automatic pistol from the storeroom, which he held conspicuously before

him, stepped in front of the screen, and threw on the projector.

Chandler, bent over the papers at his desk, heard a soft step and looked up to find himself face to face with the black-robed, masked image that had so startled the council of three a little while before.

The President-elect leaped to his feet, his face showing amazement and anger rather than fright.

"Who the devil are you, and how did you get in?"

"Quiet! Stand where you are! Don't press any call-buttons! If any one finds us together you'll die first, he next!" Fleckner rapped out. "Sit down over in that chair, out of reach of push-buttons."

Chandler obeyed, as any reasonable man would. But he still showed no sign of fear. He already had himself in hand and was eying the apparent intruder coolly.

"That's better," the apparition went on. "Don't be alarmed. You won't suffer the slightest harm if you are reasonable, as you will be, I'm sure, when I've shown you that your life and reputation are entirely in my hands.

"Now, as to your questions. To answer the second one first, I got in by a method I shall use here a good many times from now on, for it will be necessary for us to confer often.

"And who am I? Well, we don't name names, as a rule, in our organization, do we? I'll just keep mine to myself, as you have up to now. I am, however, a member of the secret organization of which you have been the head, a member who was not afraid to use his brains and inquire into things instead of blindly taking orders.

"I have located you, for instance, and can expose you at will if I choose. I know the machinery of the organization from A to Z. I have in my possession a complete list of the members and records of every order you have issued for a year back. Where you have allowed a leak to break out in the system which nearly wrecked it, I have found the leak, stopped it, and altered the system so that you can no longer handle it and I can.

"In short, I am the new head of the organization and have come in here to-night to announce my assumption of leadership and offer to retain you as my first lieutenant, provided you are amenable to reason."

My admiration for the poise of Chandler increased as I watched him while Fleckner pronounced this remarkable mixture of truth and fiction. There was not the slightest flicker of expression in his face as he replied.

"This is very interesting!" he said, with sneering emphasis. "Some secret fraternity, I suppose, and this is the rather original and startling method of installing a new officer. I fancy you had a little too much to drink and got in the wrong house. Otherwise I haven't the remotest notion of what you are talking about. Now, just go out quietly the way you came, and we'll overlook it this time."

Fleckner's answer was to draw a packet of photographic prints from a pocket of his robe. His counterfeit image seemed to lay them on Chandler's table, at the same time keeping the automatic ready with the other hand. He picked up the prints one by one and held them before Chandler's face.

There was a photograph of Chandler in his telephone booth followed by a close-up of the mechanism of the secret circuit and a picture of the council of three in the private room at the Riccadona, Judge Tanner at the phone taking Chandler's orders. Several views of the underground clubroom followed.

There were photos of the robbing of the trust company, showing Chandler's part in it from start to finish. There were views of the counterfeiting plant under the cotton mill at Fall River, and others showing how the bogus money reached Chandler.

It was a pretty complete and unanswerable argument. Chandler's eyes widened a little as he watched the pictured story unfold. But otherwise he showed no signs of emotion.

"Now," Fleckner announced as he slipped the prints back in his pocket, "in addition to this I have phonograph records of the conversation that went with these photographs, so there isn't much evidence

lacking. I have other photos, too, if you aren't satisfied yet.

"I must be brief and get away before I am interrupted," he went on, when Chandler made no sign. "In a nutshell the situation is this: I have learned the system by which you held your power. That alone ends your usefulness as head of the organization. Further, certain outsiders began to get a clue to your system of communication with subordinates. You know that already. That renders that system useless. I've therefore been around and established a new system, which I know and you don't. I've explained to the leaders that the old is unsafe and that they must acknowledge no more orders over it. So you are entirely cut off and helpless.

"Still further, I have built up my own secret inner circle of assistants within the organization and broken up yours, as you will learn if you try to give any more orders.

"Now, all this has happened without a man but you and I learning that the headship of the organization has changed. And they won't know. You will be surprised to learn, though, that one of your recent prisoners knew you by name for the head of the organization, and under torture told it."

For the first time Chandler showed signs of alarm.

"I thought that would startle you," Fleckner laughed. "Well, don't worry as long as you obey me. I have assured them the prisoner was crazy and altogether in error. Meantime I have put the fellow where he will do no harm unless I choose. But mark me. If you are rebellious, I have only to expose you and the old machinery you controlled, and go right on with the new one I have created. Will you act as assistant and obedient adviser to me, or face disgrace and residence at Ossining Farm?"

Chandler stood in thought for some moments. He was now controlling his emotions with evident effort.

"You have me," he admitted at last. "I yield. There's nothing else to do. now, what do you wish first?"

"There's only one thing to-night," said Fleckner, triumph in his voice. "And that is to complete the transfer of authority by turning over the custody of the secret treasure."

Chandler was studying him curiously as he said this. His own face had become a complete mask again.

"I noticed that you had no photo of the big treasure chest. I suspect that you, with all your knowledge, know no more about the treasure's hiding-place than I."

"What do you mean?" Fleckner demanded sharply.

"I mean that you've made the natural mistake of assuming that I was the ultimate man higher up. I was not. I was head of the working organization, it is true. But above me was the only man who knows the secret of the treasury. I haven't the remotest idea who he is or where he keeps the treasure."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Lombardy Haggard's Wife

by Robert Justin Roe

THE sea lay like a huge blue jelly, quivering slightly in its chrysolite bowl of sky, shooting back the sun's rays cruelly from the dead, white sails, dazzling along the white paint on the poop.

The heat radiated in palpable waves from the deck.

"My God!" murmured the man at the wheel in a husky voice.

Captain Lombardy Haggard was leaning against the life-boat near the starboard quarter-rail. He straightened up, conscious that the mate, standing by the boat's stern, regarded him obliquely. He looked at the mate fixedly, but the other turned his gaze away toward the squall that they had been regarding longingly. Lombardy Haggard turned to the helmsman, regarding him critically.

The man was yellow. His skin was tightly stretched over its facial framework. His lips were almost purple, cracked. They fell outward as though in an unceasing gasp for air—a fish's pout.

But it was not air, thought Lombardy, it was water the man wanted.

He turned back to the boat, planted his elbows firmly in the cover and, resting his chin on his palms, resumed his scrutiny of the squall that hung like a purple cloud off the starboard bow: there wasn't any *weather* bow, he reflected grimly, none to speak of.

"Seems like she's moved some," he remarked.

The mate grunted a negative. "Ship swings," he explained. His voice was like the man's, dry and rasping.

They continued to regard the hanging curtain of rain. The sea blazed. The ship rolled as though water-logged or coal-loaded. She had no buoyancy, no life in her. The big sails, peaks slacked down, went slat-slat, slat-slat-slat, with a deadly, unceasing monotony. The topsails, clewed half-way up to the truck, but not made fast, swished as they swung against the poles. Every now and again the sailor repeated his exclamation, without vigor, in a husky voice.

"My God!" he said.

The continual repetition jarred on Lombardy Haggard's nerves. He turned finally.

"You can go forward, Hal." He tried to give the command in a crisp voice, but was conscious that his tone, like man's and mate's, was dead, husky. He wondered if he looked like the sailor, yellow, pouting. He obtruded a cautious tongue and found that his lips were puffed out, rough. They felt like blotting paper. He hastily withdrew his tongue.

The man did not stir.

"Well, deaf, Hal?" asked Lombardy.

The man, he was a Swede, his name being a contraction for Hjalmer, stood stubbornly by the wheel, though he had taken his hands off it.

"I get water, skipper?"

"Water rations at six bells. Not before."

The man's face became more ugly if that were possible. He raised his hand for em-

phasis, but let it drop back to the wheel, as though he suddenly found the weight of it unendurable.

"By God! I bat you have got plenty water--"

Lombardy Haggard was again conscious of his mate's scrutiny.

"Shut up and get forward or I'll log you!"

The occasion made him summon a clearer tone for the issuance of the command.

Hal stumbled out from behind the wheel and went forward. He was a short, square fellow with slippers of plaited sennet on his feet; he shuffled these across the deck with the motions of a skater and joined four other men forward, who were standing in the shade of the foresail, gazing, like skipper and mate, at the squall.

"What skipper say?" asked one of them as Hal joined the group. He was a tall, raw-boned Finn in a checked shirt and answered to the name of Mike.

"Notting. Yust tell me go forward."

"You get water?"

"Six bells, maybe."

"Better he gives it. I would 'reak ship's 'roperty."

"Better you break his woman," said Hal dully.

"His woman, yes. I bet you she have 'lenty water."

"Yes, I bat you."

There were murmurs of assent from other members of the crew. They turned and stared aft at the apparently unconscious figure of their captain. Lombardy Haggard had not moved his position. He was staring, apparently, as fixedly as ever toward the squall which had now moved aft. Presently he felt their gaze and looked forward. The crew immediately and obviously shifted their gazes elsewhere. Lombardy stared down at them with a puzzled and doubtful expression on his brooding face.

He turned to the mate. "Sea-lawyering," he murmured briefly.

"Can't blame them," said the mate, "if it was thirty odd year ago, like when I first went to sea, they would 'a' been aft long ago to have the woman thrown overside. Thirty year ago—" he mused to himself.

"This isn't thirty years ago, Mr. Mallet, and the woman you are talking about is my wife, remember that."

The mate walked away toward the wheelbox and returned.

"You can go below if you want to," said Lombardy with a change of tone, "I'll keep the deck."

This amounted to a command, and the mate shambled away without clearly spoken word, but muttering to himself and shaking his head.

"Boozer!" thought Lombardy Haggard contemptuously. Mr. Mallet had the habit when ashore of being too liberal in his potations. It was for this reason that he spoke of thirty years ago to his superior instead of to a subordinate.

With the poop clear Lombardy Haggard was able to pursue his thoughts without interruption.

These were mostly concerned with the woman in the cabin below him—his wife, but she was inextricably bound up in the confusion of other thoughts, the ship's predicament and its cause or possible cause; the mate's attitude: the probable outcome of the adventure—mutiny, death, disaster: or if not through mutiny, then death anyhow—a death by slow torture, the yellow, crawling torture of thirst. Was there reason for this? If there was a God in Heaven why did he not take pity on the mean straits of his creatures, relieve them? 'Retta believed in God, or had. She had always sung hymns until her mouth and tongue got too dry. That was probably the French superstition mingled with the Society Island that made her blood.

II.

No man can be master of a vessel, especially of a vessel trading among the islands, without evolving a philosophy upon which to base the conduct of his life. It is as much a necessity for him to inquire into the processes of life, determine the effect that his character must have on his success or failure to win it, as it is for him to be well-grounded in the science of which he is presumably master. He must be the navigator of his soul as well as captain of a

ship, keep both off the reefs, physical or moral.

Lombardy Haggard had formulated a philosophy. Boiled down it was this: Don't allow outward circumstances to influence you. This was sufficient for himself, easily comprehensible. But others put it in another way. They said that he never permitted the flesh to overcome reason. He was, in a sense, ascetic. Not that he was a religious man. He laughed at such for canting hypocrites who excused their shortcomings by prayer and outward observances of decorum, and hoped for a heaven.

The strict observance of his creed had, he believed, conduced greatly to his success. This is explicable on the surface by the fact that owners trusted him. They could rely on him to sail at the earliest moment, to steer clear of all the irregularities that make captains lose money for their owners.

Lombardy Haggard was known in most of the ports of the South Pacific as a woman-hater. The Kanaka girls, with flowers in their hair, had made naive proposals to him, lured him with their rich brown bodies, without effect. He went among them, tanned, clear-eyed, quiet, amiable, but utterly regardless, apparently, of their charms.

It was only by chance that Mr. Mallet, the mate, and Hal had together disappeared to seek the pleasures of cognac and cards on the water-front of Papeete the night before the Lombardy Girl was due to sail for the Japan Islands.

Haggard, knowing that it was necessary that they be sober and capable in the morning, had set out to seek them about seven o'clock in the evening.

It had rained a little, just enough to cool the air. He knew where they would be—Marcel Alouette's place on the opposite shore of the harbor. It was a stiff walk, but Lombardy Haggard was in the mood for it. He felt rather irritable—there had been some trouble with the agent over cargo, a matter of stowage on which they could not agree, and he, Lombardy, had strangely permitted himself the indulgence of an outburst of temper.

It was unusual for him and had silenced the agent instantly. He had got no satisfaction from the victory, however, rather an increasing irritation. The fact that he had allowed his temper to get the best of him incensed him farther—but at himself.

Perhaps it was the islands; perhaps his stern fiber was deteriorating down here among these lax-minded people, fond of whisky and women. Perhaps he belonged in the same class with his mate and the sailor; would soon be wanting a "dictionary."

He smiled ironically at the idea.

Nevertheless, he had a qualm when, later, he stopped by the water-front near the Alouette place and looked around him. The lazy, bright stars smiled down at him. The warm odors that came across the bay, mixed odors, but a tropical essence; the high, black backbone of the island towering above the city; the scent from women going past him with men, black figures in the night; the very movement of unseen bodies around him, women's bodies, seemed somehow, natural to him. He had always felt aloof from this. He had held himself both inwardly and outwardly erect and contemptuous of the sensual charm of it.

Still, he told himself, standing there gazing across the star-shot waters of the bay, it was a lonely thing for a man like him—no wife. Men were unsatisfactory. It wasn't pleasant to sit in the cabin of some other captain and hear him tell of his conquests, or tell about his wife and kids at home.

A soft hand was laid on the sleeve of his white silk shirt and a soft voice whispered an invitation to him. He looked down at the woman, caught the reflection of a star in her eyes, was powerfully assaulted by the scent that rose from her—patchouli. She stood close to him. He began to feel that she was stronger than he. The force of life in her at higher tide.

She enveloped him in pleasurable sensations. After all, why not? He almost said that he would go with her. Had opened his mouth to say it when a sudden breeze blew in from the sea, swept the scent away and with it the cloud of emotion. He shook off the woman's arm, but not ungently, and walked on to Alouette's place, musing. Certainly he would have to discipline himself. He was getting lax. He would try for a voyage to some less tempting place—to

Suva, in the Fijis, where the women had thick lips and wore nose-rings; or the Solomons.

Perhaps he would get a wife—when he went home. He paused at the doorway to the Alouette place and looked across the bay. Did he know anybody at home? There was Minnie, old Captain Estven's daughter. His sister had told him that Minnie cared for him. He had laughed—but, perhaps she did still.

The idea had not been far from him, he realized, just before he had left. It had been old Captain Estven himself who had spoiled the thing by the utterance of his sole aphorism: "Women play *more* hell with shipmasters than all the hurricanes, typhoons, whisky, and doldrums put together."

This was one reason—and then Minnie—Minnie was a bit colorless after the women he had seen in the islands. Lombardy appreciated female beauty, though he did not subscribe to it.

Thinking of Minnie he stepped into Alouette's place.

III.

UPROAR greeted him as he stepped inside. Cries of "He lose! He lose!" in varying tones of excitement and accents of English made a pandemonium. It was the ordinary interior of a barroom—a bar along one side and a wide space with tables, a sanded floor. Farther back the room widened out. There were more tables. These could be cleared away and a dance held. Mostly men were present. A few native women in white clothes and with flowers in their hair moved among the men, clung to their arms. Three lamps along the bar gave light. Another lamp, burning coconut-oil, swung from the ceiling. Around this floated gaudy moths. Most of the tables were unoccupied. The bar was tenantless. Even the bartender had come from behind it to join the crowd around the table under the pendant lamp.

The four lamps gave insufficient light. Men's faces were only half illumined. Staring excited eyes; high-lights on cheek-bones; an oily gleam across the cheek of a native woman; a white flower—these moved and the light died from them. They seemed to emerge from a sea of shadow and, unable to endure the light, sink back.

The massed humanity around the table began to disintegrate; resolved itself to its units. The bartender came behind the bar.

"Step up and get your drinks, gents," he called. "The new owner sets 'em up for the house."

Most of the crowd came over to specify the beverage they were drinking. Lombardy caught his mate by the arm as he stepped to the bar and ordered cognac.

"Make ready to return to the ship, Mr. Mallet," he ordered. "We sail in the morning."

"Hello, skipper," cried the mate, gloriously drunk and paying no heed to the order. "See the old fool—got drunk, gambled, los' ev'ything—lost the house—nothin' more to lose—ever'body glor-glorious'y drunk—all 'cept me. Sober I am. Have a drink, skipper!"

"You'd better come back with me to the ship," said Lombardy in a more severe tone.

"Sure, sailin' in morning. I know. I'll be there. Don't forget"—with boozy solemnity—"I'll be there."

"I am aware of it," said Lombardy shortly. "Where's Hal?"

"Playin' cards—poker."

"Did he win the house?" asked Lombardy, wondering if he would have to look for a new hand.

"No. Other fellow; dago. Name's Beri-Beri Paduca. Hal won little. Not much."

Lombardy Haggard looked over at the table where his sailor was sitting. The man sat solidly and squarely in his chair, a heavy oak chair that looked as though it might have come out of a Georgian-English house. It had stout, carved arms; strong, square legs, and a high back. Owing to the high back the sailor looked dwarfishly short. He was seated at table with two other men; one, with his face to the bar, carefully counting stacks of money, silver, and gold, was Paduca, the winner. Hal sat, the table clear in front of him, his arms resting on the arms of his chair, regarding the other man, the loser.

This was Marcel Alouette, proprietor or ex-proprietor of the house. Lombardy did

not need to ask his story. Every one in Papeete knew it.

He was the son of a French *emigré* who had been driven out of the Island of Raiatea when the natives reestablished native government in that island, Bora-Bora and Huahine. With the remnants of his fortune he had striven to make his way in the commercial trade in Papeete. Unfortunately for himself he had married a half-native woman in Raiatea and this precluded his association with the French colony of that period.

Stubbornly honorable according to his own ideas he had refused to put the half-breed woman away and had died almost in straits. His son, Marcel, had inherited little more than the old house and money enough to furnish it as a barroom, the shifting of the residential center having made it no longer profitable as a rent property. Quarter-kanaka himself, he had married, like his father, a half-breed kanaka woman and had had one child, a girl, phenomenally beautiful, it was said, but too proud to marry a kanaka, and of course the pure-blooded Frenchman would have nothing to do with her in the way of marriage.

While Lombardy was recalling these things about him, Marcel Alouette suddenly leaned over and whispered to Paduca. The man looked up and nodded, a sudden detestable light coming into his eyes that inspired Lombardy Haggard with disgust and hatred.

Marcel Alouette rose, seemed to hesitate a moment. All eyes in the place were fixed on him, as though with an intuition of some superlative happening about to follow. There was not a sound in the barroom. In the fleeting hush a woman's voice was heard, somewhere above, singing what might have been a hymn.

The idea was fantastic, unbelievable in those surroundings. The words were indistinguishable, but the strongly marked primitive cadences that characterize most hymns was clearly recognizable. The pendant lamp flared and smoked and cast a remote, reddish glow over the faces, the flowers, the women's hair.

Conscious of the attention of the gathering the Kanaka glanced around him suddenly, almost defiantly. The nostrils of his bulbous nose quivered. There was an immediate resumption of the hubbub. Alouette nodded to himself. A smile played over his debased features. He slipped from the room.

A man who might have been another Italian or a Frenchman, it was hard to tell in that uncertain light, slipped across the room and spoke to the Italian at the table. Paduca whispered a few words in return to a palpable question. The detestable light was communicated from one to the other. Lombardy Haggard, determined to leave, lingered a little to see what the outcome of this affair was to be.

He was prepared for anything exotic, exaggerated, unreal. The fantastic and impossible, he ruminated, were the only realities possible in these surroundings. The Latin who had spoken to Paduca now sauntered around the room, speaking to an acquaintance here and there and gradually drifting to the bar, taking a place next a third Italian. They were Italians; Lombardy recognized their whining speech, and they talked together apparently casually.

The barroom was at its liveliest. Men sang, danced clogs. A girl in a corner was doing an impromptu hula dance to the slow monotonous chanting of "Mariana hoy!"

English was the speech ordained by Marcel Alouette to be spoken in his bar. All who came must speak, or try to speak, English. He had made the rule in order to draw the trade of the English and American vessels and had been successful insomuch that his place was spoken of throughout the South Seas, wherever English-speaking crews foregathered.

Nevertheless, most of those who frequented the place, as did most of the crews of English and American vessels, had another language, and it took only a moment for rumors to spread.

"*Sua figlia—*"

"*C'est sa fille qu'il—*"

"His daughter—against the house—"

"She is a beauty."

"The old man is a fool. It should be stopped."

"No. Let's have some fun. There's time enough."

"What you mean, stop it? Ain't he got the right?"

"Aw, shut up—they're coming. I think I heard her squeal."

As Lombardy Haggard felt the import of these exclamations he experienced a distinct and not unpleasant shock. He awaited the developments with keen interest. As he waited there occurred to him the words of Captain Estven: "Women play more hell—"

IV.

THE barroom rushed again suddenly. Every glance focused on the door. "Mariana hoy!" ceased, and the dancer crowded through the circle of her admirers to see what was going on.

Marcel Alouette appeared, tugging at a girl. Though she had resisted him all the way, as was apparent by his short breath and vile language, once in the room she shook off her parent's hand and walked forward to the table under the pendant lamp without compulsion.

The assembly heaved a sigh of envy as it looked at her. The Italian rose from his chair and leaned forward, his eyes gleaming with licentiousness. Even Lombardy Haggard caught his breath at this apparition of loveliness.

She was slim, with a golden skin, blue-black, straight hair, an oval face, the features cameo-cut. In that creamy, golden face, fringed with long, black lashes, were two eyes of a gentian blue. Her lips were just sufficiently full to proclaim her ripe womanhood, but firm, clean-cut, crimson. She wore a dress of yellow stuff, with a narrow collar of gold and black. Guiltless of stockings her narrow feet wore sandals.

There was a second audible sigh. The lamp flickered, a moth had dropped into the flame. Marcel came forward. The onlookers listened to him, but they watched the girl, whose eyes seemed to chill as they glanced calmly from one to another without seeming to find what they were seeking. Then she saw Lombardy Haggard. She sustained his gaze for a short moment. Behind her the gamblers bartered.

"The girl against the house?" asked the Italian.

"The girl for de house," assented Marcel, hesitating.

"How you play it—best from three?"

Marcel Alouette shook his head.

Lombardy Haggard only half heard this. He was staring at the girl. There was no shame in her eyes. Merely appeal. She dropped her gaze from his momentarily and he had space to think. This could not go on. Foolish! Insane! He anathematized himself. What could he do? The spectators wanted the excitement of watching this girl played for.

But it could not go on.

He glanced at the mate to see what help he could expect. Mr. Mallet, having taken in the girl with a glance, was watching the gamblers. He was swaying soddenly—too drunk! No help there. Lombardy was half glad. He was not used to asking for help.

Hal, then, the sailor; no, not Hal either. It was his game. He would play it alone. Perhaps, though as he saw his plan laid out before him, he would have to let it go on for a little while.

The golden woman—he did not know her name—raised her eyes and looked at him. She made a palpable step forward.

Lombardy smiled, then shook his head, trying to convey the idea that he had a plan to help her. But she did not understand. Her gaze traveled on.

The game began. They were playing poker. The Italian laid down hand after hand. Lombardy moved across the room. The girl stood as before, behind her father's chair. She glanced around her occasionally. Several times she reverted to Lombardy. But he was not watching her. He had an idea the Italian who had stood at the bar had been signaling to Paduca. It could very easily have been so, for Marcel Alouette was seated, his back to the bar, under the hanging lamp and the Italian sat opposite him, facing the bar. Hal had kept his seat, but he was not playing.

Lombardy Haggard was disappointed. He could discover no traces of signaling. His plan seemed out of joint. He began to regret that he had stayed. He could do nothing. It was none of his business anyhow. Why had he decided to meddle

in a matter of this kind? He could not decide.

There were sharp breaths now. The Italian was showing his hands and drawing to them. Suddenly the crowd drew back a little, then surged forward again.

"He lose, he lose!"

"He have the girl!"

"By Gott—"

"Paduca have her!"

Lombardy Haggard, curious to see better, stood on a chair, telling himself that now he was unmoved by what might chance.

He could see Marcel sitting, his face in his hands. Paduca leaned back. He shouted and pointed, and a man made his way through the crowd toward the girl, who was on the farther side. As Paduca's confederate touched her on the arm, she looked up toward Lombardy Haggard. Their gazes met and clung for a moment.

Lombardy Haggard leaped from his chair to the center of the crowd. He was a big man and he pushed the others aside unceremoniously. He took the man who had the golden girl by the arm and literally threw him across the table.

The uproar quieted. Men stood as though frozen, waiting the outcome of this new development. Big things were in the air. A new chapter of the drama to unfold. Their lust had only been sharpened, not sated. They crowded closer around the table.

"Alouette," said Lombardy Haggard, "you've been cheated. That Italian at the bar was signaling to Beri-Beri, here. The whole thing's a fraud!"

"What!" cried Alouette, springing up.

The Italian was ready for him.

There was a united sibilant inspiration of breath; the crowd stood as though stunned. Understanding came to them and they curled back as a wave curls back from the reef.

"Lookoot!"

"Knives!"

"Get clear!"

The Italian and the quarter-breed faced each other across the table. Hal had sprung to his feet, but remained standing; gripping the back of his chair. Lombardy Haggard also stood near fascinatedly watching the result of his madness. He was not appalled by what he had done, merely surprised. The knives flashed. He realized that he was not sorry that Marcel Alouette had got the worst of it. He was a bad father: a degenerate. But he was sorry that he had broken his promise to himself to mind his own business. He told himself he would have to pay for this rashness.

Having knifed the father, Paduca turned toward him, Lombardy. Hal, standing by, thrust out a foot and the running man stumbled and fell, scrambling.

"Look out behind you, Hal," said Lombardy, seizing the chair that its owner would use no more. Hal took the hint and turned, head down, like a bull. Lombardy was conscious that he charged Paduca's friend, the little man whom he had thrown on the table earlier—then he had other business to think about.

The Italian was coming toward him with a slow walk, and the knife held point foremost for an upperthrust. Lombardy leaned against a chair that Marcel had vacated. It was like Hal's, heavy and brown and solid. He got a good grip of it and waited.

The golden woman touched his elbow.

"Not too long," she said, "he'll spring."

Her voice was like the clink of water falling back to the sea from the chain-plates when the ship rolls.

Paduca was six feet away when Lombardy swung his chair. He swung it high. There was a shattering of glass as the swinging lamp was broken, and there was a throbbing scream as he brought the chair down in the half-darkness cast by the lamps on the bar, into something soft that crushed and screamed and lay still. Swinging his chair Lombardy Haggard rushed forward, conscious, he knew not why, that the golden girl was at his elbow. The crowd melted away. The barroom door vomited them in a hurly-burly of frightened men, who called to find friends, cursed things they stumbled upon and melted away in the darkness.

They were alone in the cool night.

V.

THE clear air, the silence, the stars flaming with enhanced splendor in the dark

harbor water, restored the sanity that Lombardy Haggard had lost in the dive, with its reek of tobacco and whisky and the viler, intangible effluvia of men's passions.

Reason and sanity returned together. As before, he was not sorry for the deaths. They had been a means to an end and justified by it. But his own fall from the stand he had occupied, as he thought, near the throne of reason appalled him. He considered: two men dead and himself saddled with a woman that he didn't know what to do with. He had dimly thought of sending her to his sister, when he had first decided to take her away from the Italian.

Now he realized that this had been a mad scheme. What would Rebecca Haggard do with a Kanaka-bred woman, even a golden woman. What would she think of him? The girl, he felt sure, would never learn to make her living. He would have to support her—and Rebecca's neighbors: Rebecca thought a lot of her neighbor's opinions, too. Scandal! There was only one thing to do with his incubus—marry her and take her away with him. It was just. He had been responsible for the death of her father and the man who had won her. He must take on himself her support. But why, why had he done it? He asked the question aloud.

The golden woman pressed his arm.

"*Le bon Dieu* sent you to me," she said adequately.

They were walking along the harbor back toward the ship. A dark figure loomed abruptly out of the darkness of the wall of a house. Lombardy Haggard started.

It was Mr. Mallet, the mate, now sober. He joined pace with them.

"You busted things up to-night, skipper," he observed.

Lombardy Haggard frowned, unseen in the darkness.

"But you got the woman," went on the mate serenely. "Two men dead a'ready account of her. There'll be another. Two calls for three."

"Did Hal get away?" asked Lombardy.

"Through the back door. He'll be at the ship afore us. What are you going to do with what's-her-name?"

"You'd better get back to the ship," said Lombardy. "We're going out in the morning at five forty-five. I've ordered the tug for that time."

"Yes, providing that they let you leave. A man on the floor with his brains beside him, bashed out with a chair—well, well, I'll be going. You're dangerous company, Mr. Skipper."

Mr. Mallet lengthened his stride and left them. He stopped a little farther on, where there was a light, and gazed back. Then, shaking his head, he resumed his march to the ship.

Lombardy Haggard looked at the woman beside him. Mr. Mallet had strangely quieted him. So the man was dead!

"By the way," he said, "if I'm going to marry you, I must know your name."

"Amourette."

"Amourette Alouette!" he repeated the name several times to himself as he went along. There was an exotic quality about it that he liked the tang of. He did not want to like it, but he could not deceive himself; it pleased him—further proof that the tropics were demoralizing him. It was not like—well, Minnie, for instance. Any more than the girl was like Minnie. Or the circumstances under which he had got her like the circumstances under which he would have got Minnie, provided that he had seen fit to try and do so.

An unexpected obstacle to marriage developed when they reached the Roman Catholic priest to whom they had come. The banns would have to be published.

"Protestant marriage is just as good as any," declared Lombardy, and dragged the girl off. A sudden qualm took him.

"Do you mind being married by a Protestant?" he asked doubtfully.

"All ministers alike serve God. If it is your wish you—need not marry me." She enunciated the words clearly, without apparent emotion, turning and looking up at him. A faint sweetness came to him: her breath. She did not load herself with heavy perfumes nor put flowers in her hair. She had spoken but little. There was a fatalism in all she said, a lack of protest that he opined must come from her French ancestry. There was no braggadocio about her. But it was as though she signified

by her attitude that nothing mattered to her. That she was above caring about the trivialities of earth.

"Don't you want to marry me?" he asked, immensely relieved, stopping beneath a flowering tree that dispersed incense like a great censer. If she did not care to marry him then the problem was solved—he had done what he could.

"If you wish it."

"I do not wish it unless you do; what I mean is, what else can you do?"

"I do not know. Nothing."

He jerked his head impatiently.

"Have you no wishes? Can't you feel?" he almost shouted at her.

"Yes. I feel—that you are strong. That you have—sympathy for me. I felt that—back there. You signaled, but I did not understand."

"You don't know anything. You don't feel anything definite. Yet, you will marry me. You are a strange creature."

"Yes," simply. After a moment or two she said: "Do not marry me if—I would not have you unhappy—" Her voice trailed out. She looked back over the way they had come.

It suddenly occurred to him that he was making a boor of himself. He was making her feel that by marrying her he was discommoding himself. He took her hand decisively and put it through his own.

"Come," he said, and it puzzled him to find that there was a certain triumph audible in his tone.

They stopped again before a Protestant minister's rectory.

"You are satisfied to do this?"

"I am frightened."

"What! Afraid of me?"

"No, not of you; of myself. I do not know myself. I am what you call—puzzled." For the first time she hesitated for an English word.

He was again in a maze of doubt. Many things pulled him, this way and that way. He could not decide what was right and what wrong. He did not know yet if he wanted this woman. She was an encumbrance. Surely he did not love her. What would Rebecca say? What would Rebecca Haggard say to her brother's wife? Captain Estven's aphorism to which he had subscribed occurred to him: "Women play more hell—" he repeated it softly to himself.

"What do you say?" asked the golden woman.

"You're no more puzzled than I am," he said, and knocked on the rectory door.

VI.

THE clock in the cabin companionway struck three bells. Lombardy Haggard went to the brass bell that hung on the skylight and made the time. There was no answer from the bell forward, but he saw the men move slowly toward the forecastle and emerge with platters and pans, going toward the galley.

It was significant that they did not carry a coffee-pot, or cups.

It was his fault that the men did not carry a coffee-pot, he reflected. Had he not been overwrought by the happenings that had culminated in his marriage with Amourette he would have sounded the after-storage tank before sailing. It had been filled, he knew that, had seen to it himself. They had left Tahiti in the expectation of a quick trip to the Japan Islands and he had allowed the men to use the forward tank liberally, wash themselves in fresh water and the like.

It was not until they were a week out that the mate had reported the after-tank empty. There had been an immediate stoppage of the free use of water. Lombardy had locked the forward pump. There should have been enough, even then, to carry them. He had not been much concerned. They would get rain in the doldrums. He had had rain sails rigged a dozen times. But in some unaccountable way the squalls missed the ship.

Mr. Mallet had croaked: "Hard luck!" until he, Lombardy Haggard, had sudden spells of apprehension.

He wondered, under the influence of an attack of superstition, whether he had not offended—well, whatever it is that has the affairs of men in charge. He put the thought aside with a laugh. But it returned again and again. The days succeeded one an-

other. It was now the tenth day, cruelly hot, the men slowly shriveling up with thirst. They were acting mutinously.

Old tales of the sea came back to him. He had heard that many captains, when a ship was becalmed in the doldrums for longer than the usual period, had found that the killing of a shark brought wind. He had mentioned this one day to Mr. Mallet. The mate nodded.

"Yes. A shark—or a man," he added. "Two calls for three, skipper. Somebody else's got to die account of that woman."

Lombardy had shut him up.

A bell tinkled below. The mate came on deck.

"Supper, Captain Haggard." he said. He was more respectful than he had been when sent below.

Lombardy Haggard nodded and went.

Supper was not a pleasant meal. Lombardy and his wife sat on opposite sides of the table in the bare mess-room. The cook, a Jap, in a maculate apron, waited on them. The thirst did not seem to touch him. He was impassive as ever. Like a yellow idol. He smiled. But there was a huskiness in his voice when he apologized for the poor meal. Everything was fried. He couldn't boil potatoes without water.

"No got watee, no can cook," he explained pleasantly.

Amourette nodded. She smiled in response, as though at some pleasant thing. Her husband, watching her, thought there was a good deal in common between her and the cook. An impassiveness. A placid acceptance of evil.

"It's hard lines, Retta," he told her. She looked at him smilingly; her blue eyes were cool.

"*Dieu nous punit,*" she said slowly, almost with difficulty.

The cook went out to the pantry, where they heard him rattling dishes, trying to wash them in salt water.

"God punishes the evildoer," she translated her French phrase.

"We have done evil then?" he asked.

"Perhaps."

"But why should God punish the guilty and the innocent alike?" he asked, thankful for the opportunity of discussing the subject.

"The rain falleth alike on the just and the unjust," she made reply.

"Pooh! A rotten system," he snorted.

It was hard to believe that an omnipotent Deity could not punish one without punishing all.

"Why don't he punish me at least a little harder than the rest?" he asked.

"Perhaps he does. Can you measure suffering? You are greater than these others. It is harder for you, no?"

He admitted this to himself. It was hard to see all these others suffer because he had done something that his reason had rebelled against. He was punished harder than these others. They had merely physical sufferings. He had mental pangs as well.

Amourette rose. "I cannot eat," she protested and went into the cabin, closing the door softly.

Lombardy Haggard lingered a few moments. He stirred the potatoes on his plate. With sudden decision he sprang up and went into the alleyway next the mate's cabin. The alleyway ended in a ladder leading to the mess-room companionway on the break of the poop. It could be lifted and the aperture thus formed was the door to a storeroom, where were canned goods. He had been saving these against the time when there might be no more water.

He glanced back at the pantry. There was no sound there. The cook had gone forward to prepare mess for the other watch. Lombardy felt guilty. He moved with caution. A case of canned tomatoes was open. He took a can and backed out under the low transom. As he straightened and replaced the ladder he was conscious of some one looking at him. He looked up at the window in the afterpart of the mess-room companionway.

The mate was staring down at him. As he met his superior's eyes, Mr. Mallet tried to look as though he had seen nothing. Even tried to smile. It was a ghastly and threatening grin.

VII.

LOMBARDY started back to the cabin with the stolen can. On second thought he went

back, raised the ladder and carried the whole case out. He set it softly in the corner of the cabin. Then moved it under his own bunk.

It was growing dusk now. Amourette had not lighted the lamp on account of the heat. He saw her lying on the couch, her yellow dress making a light splotch against the dark upholstery. She watched him incuriously while he hacked open the top of the can with his pocket-knife.

"Here," he said, "eat this. It's a bit better than fried potatoes and canned jack-rabbit."

"Thank you." She sat up and consumed the can of tomatoes, drinking the juice thirstily in great gulps. She mutely offered him some. He shook his head.

"I'll go on deck. Have to give the crew their ration of water."

He went up, conscious that he had shown a surprising amount of fortitude in refusing the tomatoes. The thought of the cool, sweet juice and the fresh, pulpy fruit made his jaws ache, though no moisture started.

There was a dim thought in the back of his mind that perhaps by denying himself thus he would propitiate the cruel God that required sacrifice. It was not blood, though. He brushed the wild thoughts that surged up in him from his brain.

The mate was standing by the starboard quarter-rail, gazing at the setting sun that shone through a far squall, making a luminous bow of colors. The approaching twilight showed up the unevenness of the sea; the high spots, silver, the depressions, lavender. The tints changed swiftly as the light deepened. Now it was a checkered plain of rose and purple.

Four bells chimed in the companionway. The mate made the time and went below. He did not look at his captain. Four bells in slow strokes came from forward. A man left the forecastle and started aft.

Lombardy Haggard met him by the mizzen mast.

"You needn't take the wheel, Mike," he said. "Stand by on deck is enough."

To the men in the forecastle he sang out: "Water!"

There was an answering stir. Cups rattled.

"Hey, there, Stavanger, wake up. Skipper say water whack!"

The gloom gathered over the sea and the rolling vessel. The men clustered around the galley door. They were like wolves for water.

"One at a time," said Lombardy to a half-dozen cups thrust through the door at him.

"Come in the galley and get your water, then go up the alleyway so the rest can have a chance."

He served them one after another.

The six cups were filled and he was filling a small pitcher for the after-cabin when the man, Mike, presented himself a second time with outstretched tin cup.

"You had your whack," said Lombardy. "No more."

"Yust little bit, 'kipper," pleaded the Finn.

"No more," repeated Lombardy decisively.

"By Gott!" said the Finn. "You have 'lenty water aft, I bet. You don't feel like uns. Your woman—"

Lombardy charged him. The man retreated hastily, stumbled, and fell. His empty cup tinkled along the deck, rolled into the scuppers and came to rest.

In the gloom Lombardy Haggard made out the figures of the rest of the crew, watching. As he moved, maddened by this continual harping on his wife, to annihilate the Finn, the men took one united step forward and stopped.

Lombardy hesitated. The anger that had surged through him faded. He reentered the galley, picked up the pitcher, and went aft.

VIII.

THINKING it over the next day, in the afternoon watch, with his thirst becoming agonizing in the slow, hot, after part of day, he wondered why the mention of Amourette should stir him so. He was not certain that he loved her—or that she loved him. He had married her because it had seemed the only thing to do; a penance to pay for a momentary madness. Her attitude toward himself he could not determine. She seemed merely complaisant in a reserved fashion.

He was at a standstill, as becalmed as his ship.

The thought occurred to him that there might be some connection between the spiritual state of a man and his material welfare. He had heard such theories advanced. What if, his doubts cleared away and his understanding and reason once more functioning normally, his ship should move, too?

There was no more wind that day than the preceding twenty-four, forty-eight, fifty-six hours—he counted on his fingers. Before that, for six days there had been occasional puffs, but no rain to amount to anything. Scarcely enough to wet the sails.

The wheel was in the beckets. The rudder-post creaked with the slow lift and fall of the schooner. The creak and slat of boom and sail was not intermitted. None came aft to take the wheel when the watch was changed. The crew did not stay in the forecastle during the day, but lay on deck following the meager patch of shade cast by the sails.

They did not talk much now. There was something satisfied in their look as they sprawled on the deck. They looked aft occasionally and smiled nervously when he caught them at it.

Seven bells went. Then eight. He made them. Shortly afterward Mr. Mallet came on deck. He approached the captain with the air of one who has come to a decision. Then he palpably weakened. They remarked on the weather. The mate hemmed once or twice, glanced obliquely at Haggard and abandoned whatever his project had been.

"Well?" asked Lombardy Haggard.

"What?"

"You were going to say something?"

"No. Yes, the men—"

"Yes?"

"Last night—"

"Well?"

"Have you been forward?"

"What do you mean?"

"The—pump—"

"What?"

"Broken!"

"Broken! Who broke it?"

"Crew—last night—about six bells."

"Take all the water?"

"Dry as a bone."

"Why didn't you report this. Why didn't you stop it? You must have heard them at it. They made a racket—"

"I went forward all right."

"Well?"

"They gave me some—" The mate looked out over the sea.

Lombardy was infuriated. "You weak thing, you! You jellyfish, you spineless, brainless fool, can't you resist any sort of temptation!"

"We ain't all like you, Captain Haggard," said the mate sullenly. Then with mounting anger: "What right you got to call me down or them, either? Whose fault is it? Whose fault we're out o' water? You were too crazy about your woman—"

Lombardy's fist flew out and struck the mate on the mouth. Blood flew. The mate staggered backward. A foam came on his lips. He wiped it off with the back of his hand, spat blood and stood looking menacingly at his captain.

"Well, it's true," he declared, backing away.

The anger faded out of Lombardy Haggard. He lowered his fists. Forward he saw that the men were grouped, standing, looking aft curiously.

He went below.

IX.

AMOURETTE was sleeping. The thud of his bare feet on the stairs apparently had not awakened her. He stood over her for a moment, looking at the straight, fine nose, with indented nostrils, the chiseled sweep of the chin. Her mouth drooped slightly, pathetically. He had not seen that before. There were hollows under her eyes. Her skin, too, had that drawn look.

He lay down on his bunk. So they knew, or guessed, that it was his absorption in Amourette that had caused his negligence. The thought stung him. He would not have her accused. But it was himself they were blaming, after all. That was just. He was blameworthy. He would not have cared if he had been sure that he loved Amourette, or that she loved him.

He was lying perfectly quiet, breathing regularly. His burning eyes closed. A faint moan came from the bunk where his golden woman lay. It came and went, almost imperceptible, scarcely more than a regular sighing, like the sucking back and forth of a breeze between two doorways. The sound made him choke. He rolled over. Immediately the moaning stopped. He got out of his bunk and stood over her.

"Retta," he said. "Retta!"

"Yes?" She opened her eyes slowly, drowsily almost. The pupils were dilated as if in fever, her eyes were sick.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Feverish?"

"I thought you slept," she answered indirectly. She reached up and touched his forehead. "You should not be pained that I am badly," she went on. "God punishes the evildoer."

A spasm of emotion shook Lombardy Haggard. He thought it was pity. He could not stand her gaze. He turned blindly and groped under his bunk, dragging out the case of tomatoes. Only one board was off the top. He could not get a can out. Savagely he tore another strip off. It made a rending racket in the quiet, dark cabin. Placing a can on top of the box he dug his knife into it and cut around. The door into the cabin was flung open abruptly and the mate entered.

He took in the situation in a moment.

"Cheating us!" he exclaimed. "Guess we'll have to say something about that."

"Mr. Mallet!" cried Lombardy Haggard.

The mate kicked suddenly. Lombardy Haggard dodged. The heavy boot struck him a glancing blow. He rolled off the case to the floor, scrambling to get up. He felt the impact of a heavy body on his back. His eyes were full of blood. He twisted, grabbed wildly at the mate, caught his shoulder, but there were hands around his throat, strangling him. He knew that he was getting the worst of it. He felt the world growing dimmer. Queer thoughts came to him. "Two calls for three!" he thought. He saw Captain Estven smoking peacefully and ponderously pronouncing his aphorism: "Women play more hell with shipmasters—"

He wondered what the crew would do when he was gone. If there should not be a squall soon they would all die of thirst anyhow. Perhaps, though, his death would bring wind. "A shark—or a man"—Mr. Mallet had said. Amourette—was she watching him with those calm, impersonal eyes—not those sick, tired eyes—dying.

An abrupt vivid realization that he was being strangled to death vitalized his dimming senses. He jerked away from the clutching hands—they slipped a little. The world, the ship, Amourette drew imperceptibly nearer, more real. He struggled wildly, but the hands regained their grip. He could hear the drawers in his desk being rattled. He kept his revolver there. If he had it now.

He heard a voice, a voice rich, vibrant. "You kill my husband!" It was the first time that he was conscious of Amourette's voice. She was anxious about him. Trembling. He could feel it in her voice. By God, he wouldn't die. He wrenched away again. There were thunders in his ears.

He heard Mr. Mallet explaining in a curious, impersonal voice. "You see, I got to kill him. Never mind. I'll make as good a husband as him. You see, it don't hurt him much. He's going fast. He don't struggle—"

There was a thudding crash. The world shook. The heavy, tense body on top of him seemed, to Lombardy Haggard, to drop on him with dead weight. The hands at his throat relaxed.

He knew. Amourette had shot the mate.

X.

THE Lombardy Girl was hove-to. Lombardy Haggard stood one side the plank, the crew on the other. The mate's body lay between them.

Amourette Haggard stood by her husband's side, her face as impassive as ever. Lombardy shifted nearer to her, touched the stuff of her yellow gown. He was amazed by the occurrences of the night. After the mate had attacked him the crew had come aft and been stood off by the golden woman. Then had come the squall. It had rained tremendously. Even Lom-

bardy, only half conscious, had been aware of it. Amourette, in intervals between tending him, had seen that the barrels were filled and emptied into the forward tank.

But more marvelous than this was the thing she had done once, during the night, when she thought him sleeping. She had put her arms around him and kissed his bruised throat.

It was very marvelous.

The crew stirred restlessly, waiting for him to speak. He was not going to read the burial service for those dying at sea. The only Bible or prayer-book on the ship was Amourette's. And that was in French.

He should, however, say something. The only thing that came to his mind were the mate's own words. He stepped closer to the rail.

" Two calls for three, Mr. Mallet. Let go, boys."

The plank tipped. There was a rich splash. The body of the mate gyrated slowly through the sun-shot depths of blue water followed by curious eyes. It was out of sight.

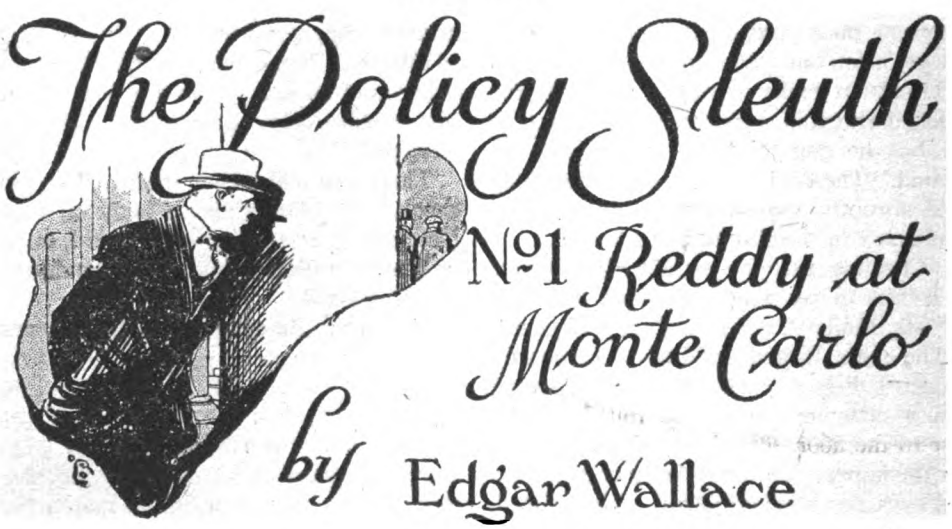
" Man the wheel. Slack out the spanker-sheet and stand by to set your topsails," commanded Lombardy Haggard. The crew drew back from the rail. There was a pad-pad of bare feet. The spanker boom groaned as the sheet was slacked out. The boom tackle was put in the pennant. Main and mizzen and foretopsails were set to the singing of Hal:

Hand over flippers
Yan-kee skip-pers
Way, hay, ay-y
Up she comes
An-da-lay
Handily.

" Full and by," directed Lombardy Haggard and " Full and by, sir," answered the helmsman.

The sails drew. Way gathered. The wake poured. The Lombardy Girl heeled down, slipped into the northeast trade. Left the doldrums behind.

(The end.)



SCOTLAND YARD is good, but Scotland Yard is slow. Campbell fingered his chin for three days, wrote on and destroyed fourteen cable blanks, and finally, in a spirit of recklessness, wired to " Brewerston, New York:"

Come take charge our detective department. Salary big. Expenses reasonable. Campbell. Federated Assurances.

To all outward appearance Douglas Campbell was a dour and possibly a short-tempered man of forty-eight, tall and broad of shoulder. He had what women describe as a bad-tempered face, since, through no fault of his own, his eyebrows met, and that, as everybody knows, is an infallible indication of the choleric temperament.

As president of the Scottish Federated

Assurances, it was only right and proper that he should be credited with a total absence of any sense of humor. He was, as all who have met him will testify, a grave and serious man, who used precise language cautiously.

He sat at his table one spring morning reading his correspondence. Presently he put the letters down and looked at his watch.

"I am expecting Mr. Robert Brewer in a few minutes," he said. "Show him straight in and see that we are not interrupted."

"Very good, sir," said his secretary.

There was a tap at the door, and the secretary took from the hands of the clerk a visiting card.

"Mr. Brewer, sir," he announced.

"Show him in." Campbell rose expectantly.

Mr. Robert Brewer was young, perfectly and fashionably attired, and carried in his very presence the hallmark of "good tone." Clean shaven, big-jawed and bright-eyed, there was about him that air of buoyant freshness which can only come from the consciousness of youth.

He advanced to Campbell with outstretched hand.

"My dear old Highlander, you're glad to see me!"

"I'm not so sure about that," said Campbell. "Sit down. That will do, Mr. George. You're looking very bright and beautiful this morning."

"Aren't I?" rejoined Mr. Bob Brewer delightedly. "Dear old top, I feel positively pretty. Now let us get down to the horrible business. I gather you haven't brought me from New York to hand me compliments."

Mr. Campbell drew up his chair close to the table and lowered his voice.

"Bob, the presidents of three of our companies have advised our sending to you. I represent six of the biggest insurance companies in this country, mostly burglary, accident, and that sort of thing. You know the kind of business; you've been connected with it yourself."

Bob Brewer nodded.

"We insure society against their follies and carelessness," Mr. Campbell went on, "and frankly, it hasn't paid. Bob, you've heard about the sins of society? Well, I'll tell you what its principal sin is—lack of gray matter. We've got the finest and the best clients in Britain—the cream of the whole bunch. Everybody with money and personal adornment is insured with us. But, Bob, their trouble is that, whilst they had enough brains to get their money, they haven't enough to keep what they buy with it.

"You know what they are," he went on; "they move like automatons from one fashionable place to another, and they move in a crowd like a flock of sheep. We've got to put a man on specially to watch over these sheep and see that they are not torn limb from limb by the wolves. We are going to offer you a very big salary to take this job on, and give you permission to accept any private commissions that may come your way. Is it a bet?"

"It all depends upon what your idea of a handsome salary is," said Bob with a little grin. "In the old days it used to be somewhere in the region of fifteen hundred or two thousand dollars per annum."

"We are more broad-minded now," Campbell assured him, "and we never talk under ten thousand."

Brewer nodded.

"Take in the board," he said, "I am engaged."

Campbell walked to the door and turned the key.

"I'll introduce you to the names of the kingbird of all the birds of prey that rend my lambies," he said; "he's the boss man of the Big Four of Crime—'Reddy' Smith."

Bob laughed quietly.

"Reddy, eh?" he said. "Why, I need no introduction to Reddy! You couldn't live in the seams of New York City and not know him."

"Does he know you?" asked the other quickly.

"He does not," replied Bob. "We've never met in the way of business, but I know him. You see in New York I was on the commercial side of insurance — trade frauds and that sort of thing. Reddy was

a con man, an advertisement faker — he used to sell non-existent shares to the deluded agriculturists of the Middle West. I have seen him exercise in a prison yard, but I doubt if he knows me. As a matter of fact, I was on his track about a year ago before he sailed for Europe."

Mr. Campbell nodded.

"All I know about him," he explained, "I have secured from the police. He has been working with a swell crowd in France, but they never brought any charge home to him, although it is pretty well known he was concerned in one or two bad robberies. I had information that he is at Monte Carlo. Unfortunately a number of our clients are there also, including a selection of our brightest muno-profiteers."

"From which effort of word-making I gather you mean gentlemen who have made profits out of munitions," suggested Bob.

"Exactly," said Campbell. "Reddy doesn't work alone. There's a whole gang. You will find them and their women folk there, incrusted with precious stones and clothed in rainbow raiment. They will be eating ice-cream with diamond spoons and new peas with golden knives, and you will possibly interrupt Mr. Reddy just as he is telling the most bloated of them about a diamond mine that he has discovered in Sicily. Reddy always carries a few spare diamonds as a convincing proof."

"What help do I get from the French police?" asked Bob, and in reply his new employer pulled open the drawer and took out a small leather-bound book.

"Here is your authority, signed by the Minister of the Interior and countersigned by the Minister of State of Monaco. The authorities in Monaco are more anxious to keep out the crooks than we are to pinch them."

Bob took the book, examined it, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Now off you go. You will live at the best hotel—"

"You needn't tell me that," put in Bob briskly. "I can attend to such little things without any assistance whatsoever."

Campbell nodded.

"I will give you a list of the ladies and gentlemen who are at present relieving the Monte Carlo ratepayers, and who are also clients of ours. And for the Lord's sake don't forget, Bob, when you see a diamond as big as a brazil nut sparkling and scintillating in the overhead lights of the casino, that it is nine thousand to one that behind that diamond is a fat policy, and behind that policy is me, sitting with quivering knees waiting for a claim."

"Trust me, old one," said Bob. "Do I draw my salary in advance or when I can get it?"

"I knew your father before he committed the unpardonable sin of naturalizing himself American," said Mr. Campbell, eying Brewer severely, "and he was a good and thrifty Scot. I knew your mother, and she was a Macleod, and a thrifty soul. But you, Bob, you have just developed into a spendthrift Yankee—one of the younger set I'm always reading about in the best American leaders. Shall I give ye a little on account?"

"A lot's a little," said Bob. "I will take six months salary and I will let you know what I want for expenses. I shall stay for a few days in Paris, and Paris costs money."

Mr. Campbell sighed and drew a check.

II.

Two men sat outside the Café de Paris in Monte Carlo. They were both well-dressed, both clean-shaven, and had the appearance of citizens of the world, which meant that they may have been of any nationality but were probably American. The elder of the two was sucking a cigar thoughtfully and nodding his replies to the other. Presently he said:

"I've never met him, but I've heard about him. Jimmy, this place is not going to be healthy after Monday. I think we'll skip by the Sunday morning train. That gives us four days to draw dividends. What's this Brewer like?"

Jimmy shrugged.

"Search me," he said. "I know as much about him as you do."

"You are sure he is coming?" asked Reddy.

"Sure." The other nodded emphatical-

ly. "I saw the telegram engaging rooms on the clerk's counter this morning. It was sent from Paris, and asked for the best suite overlooking the entrance to the Casino. He said he would arrive on Monday, but if he didn't the rooms were to be held over for him until he did arrive."

Reddy nodded again.

"That gives us four days, and I think we shall get the stuff," he added confidently.

"Little William certainly looks like easy money."

He nodded toward the hotel, on the steps of which stood a resplendent figure in a shepherd's plaid suit and Homburg hat of dazzling whiteness.

"He almost sparkles from here," said Reddy admiringly. "Gee! That fellow is the nearest approach to cash in hand that I've ever struck."

"Who is he?" asked Jimmy curiously. "I saw you talking with him in the rooms last night."

"He's William Ford. His pa made enough to settle the British national debt out of fuses. When the war finished so did pa. He died off and left a car-load of money to Willie, and Willie's seeing life for the first time."

"What did you get him with?" asked Jimmy.

"With my Montana silver mine," replied the other. "He just fell for it. Come over and meet him."

The easy mark aforesaid was affixed to a long garden seat facing the Casino when they accosted him.

"Good morning, Mr. Ford, I want you to shake hands with Mr. James Kennedy, one of our millionaire ranchers from Texas."

William Ford blinked up at the newcomer and offered a limp hand.

"Good morning, Mr. Redwood," he said. "It's beastly hot, and I can't read this beastly French newspaper. Do you understand the beastly language?"

"Why, sure, Mr. Ford," and the other took the paper from the young man's hand. "I've seen it, and there's nothing at all worth reading about unless you are interested in French racing."

"I hate racing, I think it's beastly." Mr. Ford adjusted an eye-glass with apparent difficulty. "I am a business man, y' know, Mr. Redwood; gambling doesn't appeal to me. My dear old governor was a business man, too, and I am what you might call a chip of the old block. Haw! Haw!"

They joined in his laughter politely.

"Yes, I'm a business man," Mr. Ford went on in a tone which suggested that the last word had been said on the subject. "I risk a few thousands at the beastly table, but it bores me."

"Quite right, too," agreed Mr. Reddy heartily; "that's a fool's way of spending your money."

"Of course," admitted Mr. Ford modestly, "I can afford to lose. I brought a million francs in ready money."

"Which I hope you keep in the hotel safe," said Reddy warningly. "There are a great many dishonest people about in Monte Carlo."

"Not much," retorted Mr. Ford scornfully. "I always say if a man can't look after his beastly money he doesn't deserve to have it. No, I keep it my room." Mr. Reddy drew a long breath. "I haven't come to Monte Carlo to learn how to protect myself."

"Quite right," said Reddy heartily, "and I hope you are not going to lose it at the tables."

"I'll watch it!" replied Mr. William Ford. "No, sir. Gambling isn't any attraction to me."

He changed his tone suddenly.

"As a business man," he went on, "and without any beastly beating about the bush, what do you want for this fifth share in your mine?"

Reddy removed his cigar and looked at it.

"Well, I don't know that I want to sell," he answered modestly. "I have come to Monte Carlo to enjoy myself and not to deal in stocks and shares."

"You do too much of that at home, Mr. Redwood," chimed in Jimmy, feeling it was his turn to speak. "Why, Mr. Redwood is known from one end of Colorado to the other—"

"Montana," whispered Mr. Redwood.

"From one end of Colorado to the other end of Montana," amended Jimmy obligingly, "as the biggest man in the mining world. I suppose you deal in five million shares a year, don't you, Mr. Redwood?"

"About that," confessed the modest Reddy. "Probably not so many, but somewhere about that figure."

Young Mr. Ford was staring at him with an amused smile.

"You can't frighten me with talks of millions," he said. "I understand that your Montana mine is capitalized at a million dollars."

Mr. Redwood nodded.

"You say you want two hundred thousand dollars for a fifth interest?"

Mr. Redwood nodded gravely.

"The shares stand at two dollars and fifty cents in the open market," he said, "and a fifth share is worth more than twice as much as I am asking for it. I'm tired of mining; tired of making profits. I am going to get out of my holdings, Jimmy," he added, turning to the "rancher." "This gentleman wants to buy a share of the Montana Deep. He's a business man, and there's something about him that I like."

"But surely," said the shocked rancher, "you are not going to sell out your holdings in the Montana Deeps. Why, they are the richest mines in the West. There would be a sensation if this was known in Wall Street."

Reddy made no reply. He took from his inside pocket a thick package, and unrolling it, disclosed some beautifully printed share certificates stamped and sealed. These he looked at musingly, even regretfully.

"When I think," he said, "of the trouble I have taken to make this mine a success, why, I hate the idea of parting with them. I shall be giving them to you, Mr. Ford, for a mere bagatelle. Exactly the amount you have brought to Monte Carlo in ready money expecting to lose!"

"Of course I haven't made up my mind that I am going to buy them," rejoined the young man hastily.

"And I haven't made up my mind that I'm going to sell them, either," smiled the other. "Come and have a drink."

He was too wily a bird to press his victim, and made no further reference to the deal for two days.

"The time is getting short," quoth Reddy on the Saturday after lunch. "Did you hear from Paris?"

Jimmy nodded and produced a telegraph form.

"Brewer is staying at the Hotel Maurice," he said. "At least that was where his telegram was sent from. I wired him last night in the name of the hotel to ask if he still wanted the rooms, and I watched the counter all the morning to see if he replied. Here is a copy of the telegram. It came just before lunch."

He handed the scribbled slip of paper to the other, who read:

Yes, of course, I want the rooms. Brewer.

"The hotel people were a bit puzzled by the wire, but that's nothing. We shall be gone anyway before he arrives. Now what about this boob?"

"He's bitten but he looks like taking a few days to land," said Reddy. "I had a chat with him, and exchanged confidences, told him that I always kept my money under my pillow, and went out this morning forgetting to take it with me. He said he kept his money in the bottom drawer of his bureau under his clothes. If we don't get his stuff to-day legitimately, Jimmy, we are going to get it to-night by coarse and violent methods. Don't trouble to cancel the sleeper, but we are going to get away by another route."

"How's that?" asked Jimmy.

"I have ordered a car from Nice to meet me outside the post-office at two o'clock to-morrow morning. We will take the road as far as Marseilles, slip on through Narbonne across the frontier into Spain, and lie low at Barcelona for a little while. I fixed another car to meet us at Marseilles on Sunday afternoon outside the Hotel d'Angleterre."

"Good," said Jimmy.

"Our room is on the same floor as his. It is easy to swing from one balcony to another, and he sleeps with his windows open.

I will get into the room and open the door. You will come in, and if he gives any trouble, put him to sleep. We ought to make Marseilles before midday."

"Perhaps he'll buy the goods," suggested Jimmy hopefully.

"He'd better," retorted the elder man with a grim smile. "Look, there he goes, over to the rooms! Let's see what he is doing."

They went through the big pillared hall. passed through the doors into the *salle,* and spent the next half-hour wandering from table to table in the track of their victim, who occasionally hazarded a louis upon a number, but was not apparently engaged in any serious betting.

The rooms are open from ten in the morning till eleven, but most of the best class gamblers patronize the *cercle privée,* a handsome saloon leading from the main hall, admission to which can only be secured by subscription.

Into this room they followed Ford, and found him standing at the *trente et quarante* table watching some exceptionally high play. *Trente et quarante* is a game played with six packs of cards. The dealer lays out in one line as many cards as will make something over thirty and under forty. The first line of cards stands for black, the second line he deals stands for red. If the top line counts thirty-one and the bottom line thirty-two, black wins, and those who have laid their money upon the space on the table have their stakes doubled.

Mr. Ford turned, saw the two Americans, and favored them with a pitying smile.

"Beastly nonsense, don't you think?" he said. "I say, let's get out of this place. It makes me ill to see people wasting their money."

They followed him obediently and he went back to his favorite garden-seat before the Casino.

"I've been thinking about that mining proposition, and do you know I nearly decided to buy your shares, then it struck me that Montana was a beastly long way off, and I know nothing about mining."

"Fortunately you don't have to know," replied Reddy. "There's just nothing for you to do but to sit tight in your beautiful home in London and watch the dividends pile up."

"That's all right, my friend," said the young man in a superior tone, "but suppose they don't pile up, hey? I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll write to a friend of mine, my broker, a beastly clever chap, and I'll get him to telegraph me. Or suppose I wired him—yes, that's a wonderful idea. Telegrams are so much quicker. I'll telegraph to him. You don't mind, do you, Mr. Redwood? We business people have to be very cautious."

"Not at all," said Mr. Redwood calmly, "and if he replies favorably, as of course he will, you will give us a check?"

"Oh, no," said the young man, "I will pay you cash."

"I thought you might have put the money into the bank." Mr. Redwood was greatly relieved.

"Not a bit of it, I always say that if a fellow can't look after his beastly money himself he doesn't deserve to have it."

"Those are my sentiments, too," said Mr. Redwood with genuine heartiness.

"Oh, by the way, I have had a telegram from a fellow named "—Ford fumbled in his pockets—"from a fellow named Brewer. A beastly impertinent telegram, telling me to do nothing until I have seen him. Who the deuce is Brewer?"

"Brewer," said Mr. Redwood with great earnestness, "is one of the worst crooks on the Continent. Whatever he lays his hands on is as good as lost."

"You don't say so!" gasped Mr. Ford. "Well, of all the cheek! Do you think I ought to notify the police?"

"It is quite unnecessary." Reddy was thoroughly enjoying the humor of the situation.

Mr. Ford looked at his watch.

"I'm going up to La Turbie. I have ordered a motor-car. Would you two gentlemen like to join me?"

"No, thanks," answered Reddy, "I have a lot of work to do this afternoon—letters to write and all that sort of thing."

The work that Reddy had to do was peculiar to his profession. He had to study road maps and improvise time-tables. He

had to telegraph to one of the Big Four of Crime who was in temporary retirement at Montdidier to fix a passport which would enable him to cross the frontier. He had to pack his scanty belongings and make a further reconnaissance of Mr. Ford's room. He had already discovered that it was impossible to get into it by day. By special arrangement with the hotel proprietors a man stood on guard in the corridor all the time Mr. Ford was out—a guard which, owing to the young man's confidence in himself, was removed at night.

At midnight the rooms closed and a big crowd flocked out, the doors of limousines banged, there was a great melting away of people, and presently the space before the Casino was clear. Mr. Ford was one of the last to leave the rooms.

Observing him from an upper window in the hotel, Reddy nudged his companion.

"There he is," he said. "He will have his glass of lemonade in the lounge and then he'll come up. He was boasting to me that it took him less than ten minutes to get to sleep. We will give him an hour. That will allow for the hotel quieting down. By the way, I have rearranged the time-table, and the motor-car will be on the corner at one."

By one o'clock most of the regular habitués of the Casino had either gone home or had passed across to the Sporting Club, which did not close till four in the morning, and where baccarat was played for high stakes, and when Reddy stepped out onto the balcony there was not a soul in sight. He waited until he saw a big limousine come slowly into the square and take up its position at a corner of the hotel block.

"I think we can afford to leave our trunks," he said, with a touch of humor. "I guess if we attempted to hustle 'em through the lounge to-night there would be some commotion. Did you tell that guy on the door that we were going over to the Sporting Club?"

"Sure," said the other.

Reddy made another reconnaissance.

"It's all right," he said; "stroll into the corridor in three minutes' time. I'll have the door open ready for you."

He waited till Jimmy disappeared, then swung himself over the iron rail of the balcony, reached out for the next, and in this way traversed the three balconies which separated him from Mr. Ford's room. The windows were wide open, only the wooden jalousies being closed, and these he opened noiselessly. He slipped into the room and closed the wooden doors behind him. To make his way across the floor and unlock the door leading to the corridor was the work of a few seconds. He had listened intently on entering the place, and had been rewarded by hearing the regular breathing, not to say occasional snore, of his victim.

As Reddy unlocked the outer door, Jimmy slipped in, closing it noiselessly behind him and turning the key. Reddy felt for the bottom drawer of the bureau, and he had pulled it open and his hand was dexterously searching amidst a mass of clothing when the room was suddenly flooded with light.

Mr. Ford was sitting up in bed, balancing a wicked-looking Browning pistol on his knees.

"Put up your hands, Reddy," he said.

"What do you mean?" Reddy waxed indignant. "I've got into the wrong room. I'm surprised at you, Mr. Ford."

Mr. Ford slipped from his bed, and Reddy noticed he was fully dressed, save for his coat.

"I've been waiting for you, Reddy," Mr. Ford went on. "I am taking you into custody on a charge of burglary, attempted fraud by misrepresentation, and upon impersonation. I'm taking your pal, too."

"Who are you?" demanded Reddy.

"My name is Bob Brewer," replied the young man, "you may have heard of me. I am a notorious crook who takes everything I can lay my hands on. Put up yours. I'm going to lay hands on you."

THE GRUMBLING CLOCK

I'M tired of working day and night
  And seven days a week;
I'm not appreciated here
  Because I've been too meek.
Sometimes they wind me up so tight
  That all my innards shriek,
And then again forget me, till
  I can but faintly squeak.

Enshrined upon the mantelpiece
  Imposing, if you please,
Daytimes, I'm nearly roasted,
  But all the night I freeze.
The log fire burns so fiercely
  I feel just like a Krupp,
Oh dear! why doesn't some one come
                    up!
  And wind me

I've warned of hours of parting
  And struck the time for rest.
When wedding bells were ringing, I've
  Joined in with merry zest.
I've ticked the minutes madly
  For father's train to town
And clearly chimed the hour, but now
  I'm
    run ning down!

They'll be sorry in the morning
  When Johnny's late for school.
Father will miss his train for town,
  But I am no one's fool!
How can I work forever, with
  No oil, no, not a drop;
I'm rusty, old, and all worn out,
  I'm going to stop!

What's happened? Oh, how young I feel!
  New life, new power I've found.
I'm almost dizzy with delight,
  My wheels are going round.
Some one has oiled my inward parts
  And wound me up to time;
What bliss it is to work again—
  Just hear me chime!

. . . . . .

When we are all discouraged, and
  No joy in life have found,
A little oil of kindness
  May make the wheels go round!

Ray H. Gross

That Affair at the Cedars

by Lee Thayer

Author of "The Unlatched Door," "The Mystery of the Thirteenth Floor," etc.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HULL COTTAGE.

ON their way down the overgrown path through the woods, the two men spoke little, giving all their attention to the uneven footing. The spot of light, guided by the doctor's hand, picked out the varying surface of the path, showing here black patches of loam where stray pebbles gleamed white, there clumps of arbutus leaves and fairy couches of soft moss, unbelievably green. Farther on, against a background of silver-yellow beech leaves, a few maple leaves glowed, red as blood.

The air was still and brooding. Not a leaf stirred. It was cold and damp in the wood, and it was with a feeling of relief that Peter and the doctor stepped out onto the sandy road.

"I want to tell you more about George Hull," said Stephen Pryor as they went on, side by side. "I don't think you have any idea, yet, what a decent chap he is."

And anxious to give the old sailor every advantage possible in the circumstances, the doctor went on to tell of how much Hull had been trusted at the Cedars in the old days, and how well he had deserved that trust.

He told of the elder Wainwright's deep and almost lifelong friendship for the poorer man. Of how it had been strengthened, years ago, by the fact that George had jumped overboard in the wild water at the outlet of Potonquet Bay to rescue Billy Wainwright, then a little boy, when he fell from the deck of a careening sailboat in one of the heavy squalls, so common in those waters.

"He risked his life without an instant's hesitation, without a thought! I was there, myself, and saw it. It's deep, out there, and very treacherous. The tide was running in like a mill race. We were trying to beat in against a heavy wind before the tide turned. It's impossible to get past the breakwater in a sailboat with both wind and tide against you. We had to make it, because it was even more dangerous outside. The storm was getting worse every minute, and on both sides of the fairway the place is full of big, sunken rocks. As we went about, Billy, for some reason, stood up. The boom struck him when it swung over and knocked him into the water. His father was at the tiller, and George was forward on the little deck. The boy made no sound when he went overboard; the blow from the boom had made him insensible.

"But George saw him go. He was in the water after him like a flash. A splendid dive! The boat was racing away from them, and we couldn't come about again for a minute, we were too close to the breakwater. Thank God, the current caught them and drove them our way, or we never could have got 'em in the sea that was kicked up by the wind and tide running counter to each other. I threw George

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a rope, and we managed to get them aboard after a long time, more dead than alive, both of them.

"It made a tie between George and the Wainwrights that nothing ever broke. And that—and other things—have made me enthusiastic about George—as you see," the doctor concluded, a little lamely, embarrassed, perhaps, by the emotion he had shown to an almost perfect stranger.

At that moment they came within sight of the lonely house on the marsh. They could just distinguish it, standing black against the ghostly fog which drifted in from Saint's Orchard Bay. It looked sinister and depressing, and the doctor shivered when the first cold breath of the fog struck their faces. As they picked their way along the sandy wagon track, they could hear the incoming tide, feeling its way with stealthy fingers, among the stiff grasses of the creek.

The house looked more deserted than ever in the darkness. Not a light showed, and the stillness was unbroken save for the faint, secret whispering of the water and the muffled sound of their slowly advancing feet. By the time they had reached the house, the drifting fog enveloped them like a clammy sheet, hiding them from the world.

They had spoken little after they had sighted the house, and it was in absolute silence that they passed its corner and stood beside the open window, open still as the boy, Stanley, had described it.

There was no sound within, and the doctor hesitated.

"He may be asleep. Seems a pity to wake him," he said in a low tone, as if to himself. It was not so low, however, that it failed to reach the man within, for a hoarse, unnatural voice said:

"Who's there?" in an accent of alarm.

"It's Dr. Pryor, George. I came as fast as I could. How are you feeling now?"

"Oh, I guess ain't nothin' much the matter o' me, doctor. It's a damn shame t' make you come all this way in the night. That fool boy—" The voice mumbled on, and there was a movement inside the room.

"Hold on a minute an' I'll show a light, doctor. Come roun' the back way."

"Don't get up, George. Stay where you are. I have a light. I can find the way."

"N', no. Wait a minute. The door's locked. Where 'n hell are those damn matches?" This in an undertone.

He found them at that moment and struck a light. Peter, looking through the window, saw it flaring weirdly on the old man's flushed face and bloodshot eyes. He caught the doctor's arm and drew him back a little way into the misty darkness.

"Go on around alone," Peter whispered in Stephen Pryor's ear. "Don't say anything about me. No use scaring the old bird if he's all on the square. I'll go through the window. Don't let him come back in there. Now go, quick!"

He pushed the doctor from him as he spoke and went back to the window. The room was again in darkness, but a faint light at one side showed the outlines of a doorway.

Stephen Pryor disliked his task intensely, but he felt the force of Peter's statement, which, surely, could be interpreted as a kindly wish to avoid causing unnecessary pain. He, therefore, made his way at once around to the back of the house, his electric torch boring a bright hole in the eddying fog.

When he reached the door a hand was already fumbling with the lock. A key was turned, a heavy bolt drawn back, and the door swung open. George Hull stood upon the threshold. He was partly dressed in shirt and trousers, though his feet were bare. He held in his hand a smoky oil lamp, the light of which threw his chin and nose into sharp relief, but left black shadows in his hollow cheeks and eyes.

"Damn good of you to come out, doctor," he muttered, looking past the doctor into the gray mist. "Hell of a night t' be out in. An' my little girl, lyin' out there in the fog, God help her."

Talking softly to himself, he closed the door and made it fast.

Dr. Pryor threw off his hat and coat. The room seemed stifling after the damp and cold outside. It was a living-room, dining-room, and kitchen combined, and the dying embers of a fire showed redly through the chinks of a rusty range.

As George Hull put down the lamp on a plain, deal table in the center of the room, the doctor glanced sidewise at the open door of the old sailor's bedroom. He had heard no sound, but he knew that Clancy must be there, and it gave him a horribly helpless feeling of complicity which filled him with disgust. He had been powerless to keep Clancy from coming with him, and his good sense concurred with the detective's plan of keeping Hull in the dark if the old man should prove to be entirely innocent, but the necessary deception of his old acquaintance cost him a bitter pang. He would do his work of mercy and get it over as quickly as he could.

"Let me take a look at you, George," he said, grasping the old sailor's hand.

It was so hot that the doctor's lips compressed and his practiced fingers swiftly sought and found the pulse. He drew out his watch and counted, his eyes fastened on the dial. In a moment he closed the watch with a snap.

"You've got a fever, George," he said crisply, "and I'm going to take a look at that."

He pointed to the man's shoulder. Under the woolen shirt the outline of a clumsy bandage was plainly discernible. There had been no sign of it in the morning, for Hull had been working with a coat on, which was an odd thing, now the doctor came to think of it, for a man of Hull's habits to do.

"That?" said the old sailor slowly. "Oh, that's all right, doctor. 'Tain't nothin' but a scratch. I'll take any medicine ye tell me to. I've fixed 'er up fine, myself."

"George, I'll stake my reputation that that scratch is the seat of the trouble. I'll have to see to it."

The doctor's tone was a strange mixture of stern authority and regretful apology. Had he already guessed, from the old man's manner, what he would find?

He did not wait for permission, but pushed Hull gently but firmly into a chair beside the lamp. Then he helped him off with his shirt. The light revealed the man's rough, hairy chest. The line of demarcation between the gray-white skin of the shoulders and the tanned neck was sharply drawn. The body might almost have belonged to a man of a different race. The doctor was not thinking of this. He was intent on the rough bandage which passed under the left arm and over the shoulder. With deft fingers, he unfastened the pins which held it in place and carefully lifted it.

"O-u-c-h!" cried Hull as Dr. Pryor endeavored to draw it away at the shoulder.

The homely monosyllable sounded incongruous in the gloomy room. It was not otherwise that a boy would exclaim over some small hurt. There was something pitifully reminiscent in it coming from the lips of the strong old man, in dire straits. For he was "up against it, hard," as Peter, peering from the shadows of the next room, could well perceive. The scratch, if scratch it could be called, was deep and long, and the bandage adhered to it tightly.

The doorway, just behind the old sailor, gave Peter a position of advantage from which, himself unseen, he could see and hear all that passed.

"I'll get some water. We'll have to soak it off. Stay where you are, George," the doctor admonished.

Rapidly he caught up a clean bowl from the dresser shelves and filled it with warm water from the kettle on the stove. Carefully he soaked the stiffened bandage.

After his one exclamation, the old man said no word, but sat with shut lips until the bandage came free. Even then he did not say anything, only looked up at the doctor with the diffident, pleading eyes of a child who has been caught trying to hide something from his stern parent.

Dr. Pryor looked at him in silence, grief and a bitter compassion in his eyes. He turned away quickly and busied himself with his instruments.

From the doorway, Peter could plainly see the wound, ugly and inflamed, lying like the mark of a devil's accolade across the bony shoulders. Peter's eyes narrowed and his lips shut into a straight line. He was right, then. Hull had been there, in that fatal room. His track in the woods and this bullet wound which he had tried, at the possible risk of his life to hide, were

capable of only one interpretation. But had the bullet been intended for Hull, and had he fired the shot which had put an end, forever, to the depredations of that smooth and cruel beast up there on the hill? This, in Peter's mind, would bear question.

He waited, silent and unperceived, until the doctor had finished cleansing and dressing the wound. Then he stepped boldly across the threshold.

CHAPTER XX.

A CONFESSION.

At the sound of Peter's footstep, the old man, with a muttered oath, leaped from his chair, sending it crashing across the room. He turned and faced Peter, swaying on his feet like a drunken man.

The doctor, who was at the sink, turned also, and springing across the room, caught the old man in his arms. Peter swiftly pushed forward a chair and Dr. Pryor let Hull down into it with the gentleness of a woman. Peter met the doctor's accusing eyes.

"Can't help it, doctor. The man's sick, I know, but I've got to get the truth out of him. I've kept my end of the bargain. If that had been a scratch, as he said, he'd never have known there was anybody here but you."

Hull looked, dazedly, from one to the other. Suddenly he caught Clancy's sleeve.

"You was here with the doctor this mornin', wasn't ye?" he asked, peering into Peter's face. "What 're ye after, now? What d'ye want?"

"Just a little quiet talk with you, Captain Hull," said Peter, soothingly. "Nothing to get in a sweat about. Sit down, doctor, if you please," he added, sternly. "I'm going to get to the bottom of this, here and now, and it may take some time."

The doctor subsided, helplessly, into a chair. Clancy's manner had quite changed and the pleasant, good-humored face had become stern and hard, with eyes as keen and sharp as a sword.

"Now, I'll tell you some things, and you'll tell me some more, Captain Hull," said Clancy, drawing up a chair directly in front of the old sailor. "In the first place, I'm a detective, and I'm here working on the Austin case."

George Hull drew a long, shuddering breath. The doctor moved uneasily in his chair.

"That's fair, doctor," said Peter, turning to him. "I said I'd keep mum if I didn't make out a case, but I have. I've only got to find out a few things more, get a few proofs together, and it's all over." He made an expressive gesture with his hands.

"Now," he went on, turning back to Hull, "this is how I make it out. You were almost crazy when your daughter died—and I'm sorry for you. Any man with blood in his veins would be." His sincerity was evident from his tones. "You thought it over all day, and you got wilder and more bitter the longer you thought. Then you went in and looked at her." His eyes held those of the old man, fascinated. "When you came out you shut the door, softly. Your mind was made up. The beast that was the cause of her death shouldn't escape scot free. You went out and shut the back door and locked it. Then you went on to the road and up through the woods."

"How did you know?" breathed the old man. Peter's words sounded as if he had seen it all.

"Never mind how," said Peter. "I know, and that's enough. You went up by the old path that you knew like the back of your hand. There was the little stairway up to the library—you knew that, too. You hoped he would be there or in his bedroom next to it. He might not be there—he might not be alone, but it was your best chance, and you couldn't wait. Your mind wasn't any too clear. You had just one thought—to put him out of the world he wasn't fit to live in."

Hull's hands gripped the sides of his chair and he breathed hard. His head was thrust forward, his eyes riveted on Clancy's.

"You found the outside door unlocked and you went softly up the stairs and opened the library door."

Clancy paused and fixed the old man with a piercing glance.

"Then you went inside. Raymond Austin was there—but he was not alone."

For the first time Hull's eyes wavered.

"The boy you had saved from drowning, young Wainwright, was with him."

"No, no," said Hull, catching his lean throat in his hand. "Not then. He was alone when I opened the door."

"But Wainwright came in afterward," said Clancy, swift to cancel his mistake. "There were words. Austin fired and hit you." His tone altered, and he added, very slowly, "and Wainwright shot him dead."

A gasping oath choked its way through Stephen Pryor's throat. He started from his chair.

"Sit down, Dr. Pryor," said Peter severely, without turning his head.

Hull had shrunken together in his chair. He sat for many minutes like a man stunned. At last he roused himself and lifted his head. There was something noble, commanding, in his look.

"Ye're wrong," he said firmly, though his lips were white. "William Wainwright never come near the place. It was me as done it. I give myself up." And his gray head dropped again upon his breast.

Clancy sat suddenly forward in his chair. His hands gripped his knees. His head was drawn in on his hunched shoulders. He had the look of one who was about to spring. The silence in the room was deathly. At last, the tenseness of Clancy's body relaxed. He drew a long sigh.

"One point more, Hull," he said quietly. "Where did you get the weapon?"

The old man started.

"The weepin', the weepin'," he repeated dazedly. "Where'd I get it? What 'n hell does it matter where I got it? I killed him all right. That's enough fer you 'n' fer everybody. Don't let 'em touch little Billy. He had nothin' to do with it, I tell ye! Nothin' at all, don't ye see? Nothin' at all! How could he, when he wasn't nigh the place? He wasn't nigh the place, I tell ye!" His voice had risen almost to a scream.

Peter leaned far forward, bringing his compelling eyes close to the brilliant, feverish eyes of the old sailor. He spoke slowly and uncompromisingly.

"Then who was there besides you? Who was it that came in?"

"Nobody, nobody, I tell ye! There wasn't nobody there but that damned devil and me. And he went straight to hell! I saw him crumple up." Hull put the fingers of his left hand between his clenched teeth and bit down upon them, savagely. His lips drew back from his bared gums. His eyes were fixed and awful. He was living again that scene of crime and horror.

Suddenly he rose to his feet, lifting his hands, clenched and shaking, high in the air.

"God's justice!" he cried. "God's justice! A life for a life! I don't care a damn what happens to me. He's gone to burn in hell! That's all I care about!"

Slowly his tensely clenched fists were drawn down to the level of his shoulders, then as if suddenly deprived of all life, they fell at his side.

"My little girl," he murmured in a heartbroken voice. "My little Alice—" and dropped back into his chair. His head fell forward.

Dr. Pryor started up.

"Enough of this!" he cried. "He's confessed. Isn't that sufficient for your purpose? For God's sake, leave him alone, now. I'll be responsible for him!" He turned, fiercely, to Clancy.

Peter had risen also. A strange look was on his face. He spoke in an undertone.

"Can you be sure that he won't do himself any harm in the night? Will you—"

"I'll watch him," returned the doctor bitterly. "He'll be here when you want him."

"Is he very sick?" asked Peter. "Is there any danger—"

"No, I don't think so. The wound should have been attended to before, of course. He's feverish, now, but he ought to be much better in the morning. I'll give him something to make him sleep—"

Peter regarded the doctor steadily for a moment. Then, satisfied with what he saw in the other man's face, he drew a long breath and straightened his shoulders.

"All right, I'll trust you, Dr. Pryor. I wouldn't have anything happen to him tonight for a million dollars. Will he be well enough to be bought up to the house tomorrow, do you think? It would be better—"

"I think so," replied the doctor hurriedly. "Can't be sure, of course. But he comes of a tough race. Go, now, and let me attend to him."

They had been talking softly, their backs to the old sailor who seemed oblivious to everything.

"Can't I help you put him to bed," asked Peter, glancing commiseratingly at the bowed head.

"Would only worry him," said the doctor pityingly. "I can manage alone. The sooner you go, the better. You'll need this," he added, holding out his flash-light.

He followed Peter to the door. "Send my car over in the morning with something for him to eat. Ask Mrs. Norman to see to it. She'll know what will be needed. You can trust her for anything."

Peter nodded. He looked back, once more, at the bent head of the old man on which the thick thatch of rough gray hair shone dimly in the smoky light of the lamp, at the scarlet geranium in the window which flaunted one brilliant spot of color in the dim interior.

"I'm damned sorry," he said, turning back to the doctor, "but it couldn't be helped, you can see for yourself. You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs. But I'm damned sorry, you can take it from me."

And the blank fog closed round him, in secret and impenetrable folds, shutting him from the doctor's sight.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MEETING IN THE FOG.

CLANCY found his way back with some difficulty, even with the aid of the flash-light. He almost missed the entrance to the path, but found it after searching for some time among the dripping laurel bushes which edged the road. From there on, the way was easier to distinguish, for a path, once well trodden, remains firm to the feet long after the unceasing encroachment of vigorous, growing things has partially masked it from the eye. In the thick wood, the dense moisture of the fog dropped sadly from the leaves, like cold tears falling on a dead face. In spite of the effort necessitated by the steep ascent, Peter was shivering when at last he came out on the gravel path.

As he neared the door, he heard a faint sound behind him, something between a whistle and a hiss.

"Clancy!" The voice was raised just above a whisper.

Peter turned quickly. "That you, Murphy?" he asked in the same guarded tone.

"Yis, damn it, it's me. Oi've been waitin' fer ye a helluf a whoile." And a man's figure disengaged itself from the fog and came toward him, stepping softly on the thick turf.

"Sorry as the devil, old man," said Peter, shutting off the light after having flashed it once over the man's pleasant, ruddy face on which the look of annoyance changed to a grin in response to Peter's friendly smile.

"Phwat was the matther, Clancy?" asked Murphy. "Oi was here at tin to the minnut, loike ye tould me, an' the place above was dark as me hat. Oi watched fer the loight in the winder loike a bye comin' home to his owld mother in a story, an' divil a loight was there, an' me drippin' here loike a wet ambreller."

"I had to go out. Didn't know beforehand, and I couldn't put it off or let you know, Jim," said Peter apologetically. "Anyhow, I knew you'd wait." And he put his hand on the heavier man's shoulder.

"Course ye couldn't lave me know, and aqually, av course, Oi'd have waited till the burrds begun to thwitter. Oi ain't no lemon-drop to melt an' run away in the wet."

"You're all right, Jim. You're all to the good! Now, did you find him?"

"Aw, sure," said Murphy, easily. "He sthuck out among these hayseeds loike a policeman in a posy bed."

"Well," said Peter eagerly, "what did you get?"

"He's sthoppin' at a farmhouse round the other soide of that there little village they calls Saint's Orchard, over beyant the little bay." Murphy spoke rapidly. "He's been sthikin' round about a week or so. Lets on he's sthayin' there fer his health. Seems to have plinty av money an' no poor relations. He don't seem to be hidin', either, specially, at least not from the gay villagers. He come into the post-office, which is a grocery-sthore, calm as you plaze, phwin Oi first seen him. Oi sphotted him roight away, from yeer dayscription. He had an the same red tie, and looked loike a rat the way ye said.

"Oi passed the toime av day and got into talk wid him. He was buyin' some cigarettes, an' Oi took the same koind, lanin' an the show-case 'long soide. Oi said they was the best cigarettes fer a steady diet, an' he says 'Yis,' an' so forth —jist casual, ye see. He didn't say much, but I could tell he wasn't from anny place round here. He wint out in a minnut, an' Oi folleyed him phwin Oi'd let him get a clear sthart. He wint straight along to the place he was sthoppin' at, Richardson's farm, it's called, an' into the house.

"Oi waited, out av soight, till Oi'd seen 'em all at supper. Afther that he come out onto the porch an' took a look round. He didn't see me. Oi was behoind some thick bushes, th' other soide av the road. He didn't seem to be lookin' fer nuthin' exactly, an' afther a bit he goes insoide an' up to his room. Oi seen him loight a lamp an' pull down the shade. Oi waited awhoile till the loights wint out all over the house. Gee, but they goes to bed airly in these parts! Oi was jist makin' up me moind that he was safe fer the noight, phwin Oi heard a little sound in the dark, jist the laste little noise, but it come from the house, an' Oi ducked fer cover."

Peter moved suddenly, but said nothing, and Murphy went on—

"The fog was comin' in be that toime, but it wasn't very thick, an' he passed me close. It was yeer man all roight. He didn't waste no toime, but shlipped along down the road loike a shadder. It was hard kapin' him in soight, but Oi done it, though Oi had to come closter than Oi loiked. He sthopped wanst an' listened, but Oi wasn't belavin' in advertoisin' jist thin, an' he didn't get onto me follyin' him. Ye can lay to that!"

"Yes, yes," said Peter hastily, "I know you were careful all right, Jim. Well, where did he go?"

"He wint through Saint's Orchard widout sthoppin', an' around the head av the bay. Oi seen he was headed this way, an' Oi was glad, fer it was gettin' late. Oi'd sthudied yeer little map that Oi got at the Potonquet post-office, so Oi knew pretty well where Oi was, an' Oi figgered out the iron gate you sphoke about couldn't be very far away. Oi was goin' awful slow an' cautious fer fear Oi moight miss it, an' it was lucky fer me Oi was, fer suddint loike, Oi heered a shmall little whistle not twinty fate ahead. The guy had sthopped widout me knowin' it, an' it was plain bull luck Oi didn't blundher roight into him. The fog was thick an' all, but Oi'd ought to 've been more careful.

"Annyhow, no harrum was done, fer Oi'd sthopped as if Oi was shot, an' Oi was near enough to hear another man come out av the bushes an' sthep into the road. Oi could jist see him, an' that was all, but Oi couldn't get a glimp of yeer man. Phwere he'd got to, Oi didn't know till Oi heerd his voice, low down, near the ground, an the other soide av the road.

"'Oi got the dhrop an ye,' he sings out, soft loike. 'Hould up yeer hands!' he says.

"The man in the road obliged roight away. 'Come an out ov there, Warty,' he says, cold an' keerless. 'Oi ain't armed, ye can see fer yersilf. Oi ain't agoin' to waste good lead on a man that's goin' to be hung, annyway,' he says.

"'All roight, but kape yer hands as they are,' says our man, crawlin' out av the bushes.

"They stood close together fer a minnut, an' Oi guess Warty found his friend as harrumless as he said, fer it wasn't but a second befure he took a sthep back an' the other man dropped his hands.

"'Come out av the road, Lightnin',' says the little wan then, an' they sthepped in under the threes an the other soide. Oi

didn't dare to move, an' Oi couldn't hear phwat they said. Pretty soon they come back into the road agin.

"'Don't you play me none av yer thricks, Lightnin',' the little wan says as he stharted toward me. 'Oi'll wait the two wakes. Oi'm a raysonable man,' he says, 'an' Oi kin see how ye're fixed. Phwat Oi've got out av ye'll last me that long,' he says, 'but if ye don't cough up at the end av them two wakes, God help ye,' he says."

Peter gripped Murphy's arm.

"What was the man like, Jim; the one he called Lightning? Could you see him at all? Would you recognize his voice again?"

"Oi tink Oi would know his voice again," said Murphy slowly. "He sphoke low, an' Oi only heerd it wunst—but it's the koind av voice ye don't fergit. Sounded loike a gintleman; koind av Godalmighty to a little black beetle, ye know, whin he sphoke to the feller he called Warty. That ain't the name he goes by here, though. He give the name of Thomas Hooper over to Saint's Orchard. I found that out at the post-office."

Did he get any mail there?" asked Peter quickly.

"Yis, I fergot to tell ye. He got wan letter. He put it roight in his pocket so Oi didn't see what it was."

"All right. Now, cut along. What happened after that? Did you follow them?"

"Well, Clancy, ye see Oi was kind av up ag'in' it. They parted roight there, an' Oi didn't know wich wan to go afther. Oi knew they was some devilment afut. Nobody's walkin' round the woods a noight loike this fer their healths. Oi didn't dare to move fer a minute er two an' be that toime Oi'd made up me moind that me own burrd was goin' home to roost. It was a long way to the station an' not many thrains runnin' at that toime av noight in case he was plannin' to go into the city fer a spree wid the dough he'd grafted. Then if he was t'inkin' to make a getaway to-night an' come back at the end av the two wakes, he'd have gone to Potonquet instead av Saint's Orchard, Potonquet bein' so much nearer. Takin' it backards an' furruds, Oi dacided he'd be in Richardson's farmhouse the noight, at laste—so Oi wint afther the other wan."

"Good boy, Jim! Good old scout! Your brains don't rattle around in your old bean. Where'd he go?"

"Well, Clancy," said Murphy, scratching the head thus eulogized, "Oi hate to disapp'int ye, an' that's a fact, but Oi don't know phwere he wint. W'ether it was because Oi'd waited too long fer fear he'd hear me, or w'ether it was that he lift the road somewhere, Oi can't tell, but Oi couldn't foind hide er hair av him. Oi only passed wan house, a little wan an the roight, befure Oi sphotted this gate, that ye wrote me about, at the end av this path. Oi wint a long way past, thinkin' Oi'd hear him anny minnut, but Oi didn't. Afther a whoile Oi seen the loights av Potonquet an knew Oi was done. I wouldn't av knowed him unless Oi'd caught up wid him befure there were anny more people about. Ye see that, don't ye, Clancy? I done me best."

"Sure you did, Jim. I'm damn sorry you lost him, but it couldn't be helped."

"Oi was late, too, an' Oi didn't want to kape ye waitin'," said Murphy in further extenuation of his failure, "so Oi beat it back here as fast as Oi could."

"All right, all right, Jim," said Clancy absently. He was thinking hard. After a pause he roused himself and clapped Murphy on the back. "You're all to the good, Jim. Now get back to Saint's Orchard and don't let Warty, or Hooper, or whatever his name is, slip through your fingers. I want him here to-morrow at eleven o'clock. Savvy? You bring him, Jim, if you have to kidnap him, see? I'm depending on you. It's important. Don't you fail me, now."

"Oi won't, Clancy, Oi swear Oi won't. Oi'll bring him, all roight. He's loikely to come along quiet whin Oi gits a holt av him. His hair's cut too short fer me taste an' his hands are somethin' turrible. Oi'll bet he's been acceptin' the hospitality av some State er other not long since. D'ye t'ink he's got anyt'ing to do wid this here 'suicide,' Clancy?"

"Yes," said Peter slowly. "Yes—in a way— think he may have, Jim."

CHAPTER XXII.

OVER THE WIRE.

A FEW minutes later Clancy quietly entered the library. It was dark and silent. The windows had been closed for the night and the curtains drawn. He turned on a light beside the telephone desk and took up the receiver. Not the faintest buzzing of wires reached his ear.

"Sounds dead," he said to himself and moved the hook rapidly up and down without eliciting any response.

"Oh, damn it, I suppose the extensions have been switched off for the night," he decided after several vain attempts to get a connection. "They said there was a phone in the hall. The switchboard is probably there. I'll have to go down."

Without wasting any more time, he kicked off his shoes and swiftly and silently descended to the main floor. The house was in total darkness. Evidently the household had retired early, for he saw and heard no one. He found the instrument and board in a cleverly constructed booth under the stairs, and having ascertained that the wire was not out of order, he connected No. 4, which was marked "Library," with the main wire and hastily retraced his steps.

As he neared the top of the stairs he was aware of a thin thread of light under the door of Mrs. Austin's bedroom and the faint murmur of voices within. He passed the broad hall quickly and gained the shelter of the narrow passage leading to the library. Here he paused, for his quick ear had caught the sound of a door being opened.

Then he heard the deep, quiet tones of Mrs. Norman's voice.

"Good night, dear. Sleep well, dear Betty," and a faintly murmured response from the interior of the room.

He heard Mrs. Norman sigh deeply as she passed near him in the dark on her way to the upper floor. He waited until the soft click of a closing latch told him that she had gained her room, then he went quickly back to the library.

He seated himself again at the telephone and hastily called his office in town. It was several minutes before the connection was made and Peter fidgeted in his chair. At last—

"That you, O'Malley?" he asked sharply.

"Of course it's me," came a deep voice over the wire. "My God, lad, d'you want to keep me up all night? Don't you care anything for gray hairs?"

"I'm sorry to be so late, but I couldn't help it, O'Malley. I'll explain when I see you. Wish to the devil you were here now, but I know you can't leave. Never mind, I'll put it off O. K., I guess. Now listen, O'Malley. Got anything to tell me?"

"Nothing," the voice drawled, "except that I've found the lad you wanted to speak to."

"The hell you say! Gee, but you're a wonder! How'd you do it?"

"Looked in the right place, that's all. Nothing simpler."

"Go on, O'Malley. Tell me, quick."

The succeeding conversation became quite unintelligible to the night operator, who was accustomed to help while away the weary hours by listening in whenever a call came through which sounded in the least promising. She yawned sleepily, disengaged a large wad of gum from under the shelf, picked up a luridly colored magazine, and, with slowly ruminating jaws, proceeded to immerse her consciousness in the joys and sorrows of a number of titled aristocrats of great beauty and splendor to whom a very large number of astonishing things happened between the graphic title and "Continued in our next."

Had she been able to follow the conversation passing rapidly over the wire, she, perhaps, knowing Frank Baker, would have found it more engrossing than the vicissitudes and adventures of the beautiful Lady Imogen, for, being interpreted, it ran:

"Well, we certainly played in luck from the start." This in the gruff voice, speaking through the miles of darkness from the deeply throbbing, restless town. "There

wasn't any chance at this end to speak of, so I put Rollins on, and he hopped onto the first train for Potonquet. That was a little after noon. When the conductor came through to punch the tickets Rollins kept his weather eye open. He saw that a man in the seat in front of him had a ticket for your place.

"The man was a kind of a pleasant-looking, middle-aged chap and Rollins was pretty sure from his get-up and the fact that he had the last half of a return ticket, that he was going home. He knew that they had to change at Jamaica, so when they got there he let the man go ahead of him into the Potonquet train. He followed him into the smoker and sat in the seat alongside.

"The man took out a cigar and was fumbling in his pocket for a match when Rollins, who had just lit a cigarette, offered him a light and they got into conversation.

"When the conductor came through again, Rollins passed the man's ticket over and remarked on the queerness of the name.

"Potonquet, Potonquet—he said it over a couple of times. Then he said casually that he'd never met but one man from there, that he'd seen him over in France, and mentioned Baker's name.

"The man bit, right away. Said what a nice boy Frank was. Sorry that he'd left Potonquet, but what was there for an ambitious lad in a place like that? Rollins drew him out carefully, and found that this man, Smith his name was, had gone into New York the night before with young Baker."

"Some luck, I'll tell the world!" interjected Peter.

"I'll say so! And that isn't all. It seems that Baker had opened his heart to Smith to some extent. At least he had said that he wanted a job in New York, and Smith was tickled to death because he could help him. Smith is in the drug business and knew that the people from whom he bought most of his stock were very short handed. He gave Baker a note to 'em, and had a phone from him some time in the morning, saying that he'd landed a good job. Smith even mentioned the name of the concern, Forster & Marwell, on Pearl Street.

"Like taking money from a blind man," said Peter. "Can you beat it? Fire ahead, old man."

"I said we played in luck," O'Malley continued. "Well, Rollins had been careful not to let Smith see his ticket for Potonquet, just in case— They were this side of Huntington when he found out all he needed, so he hopped off there and took the next train back. He phoned me from the Pennsylvania Station, and I met him at the Wall Street subway station.

"We beat it over to Forster & Marwell's, but it was after five and we found that almost everybody, including Frank Baker, had gone home."

"Oh, hell!" said Peter feelingly.

"I thought our luck had turned—it seemed too good to last—but a boy who was putting on his coat at the back of the office heard us inquiring for Baker. He stopped on his way out and told us that Baker had been asking around for a boarding house and that he'd given him an address.

"He thought Baker had gone there direct from work. We'd represented that we were old friends of the boy and I guess we looked the part, right enough, for this lad came across with the street and number. So I sent Rollins home and beat it up there by myself. Didn't think we needed a crowd."

"Darn decent of you, old man. Well," eagerly, "did you find him?"

"Sure; he was there, right enough, but I think you're barking up the wrong tree, Peter. He's got an alibi."

"But how good is it? There are alibis and alibis."

"I know; but nobody can be in two places more than a mile apart at the same time. He says that he was over at a farm, a mile and a half away, at sunset last night."

"'Sunset' is not so devilish definite. Was he with anybody?"

"Yes—a man named John Davis."

".Davis," Peter repeated. "Is he a deputy sheriff, do you know?"

"No, I don't. Just said he was a farmer."

"Well, the deputy sheriff was a farmer, too. Maybe I'll call him up."

"I think you'll find the boy told the truth, Peter. He's a nice, honest-looking lad."

"This from you, O'Malley!" exclaimed Clancy. "How often have I heard you get off 'You never can tell!'"

An abrupt chuckle came over the wire.

"Right you are, my lad. One on me," said O'Malley. "But you listen to the old man. You'll find that Baker was at Davis's farm at sunset."

"Maybe he was," rejoined Peter. "But a mile and a half isn't far. Suppose he caught a ride in a car? It wouldn't take him long to get here."

"Peter," said O'Malley solemnly, "you are crabbing my act."

"Well, you know, old man, I couldn't do better. Who trained me but you? Glad you think I've got some of your form."

"Don't go making remarks about my form, Pete. You may be as fat as I am when you're my age. Oh, go on, I know what you mean. You can't hurt my feelings. But, Peter—"

"Yes."

"If young Baker was implicated, would he have taken the place Smith sent him to? Wouldn't he have just accepted the old chap's recommendation and then quietly vanished?"

"The papers said it was suicide, didn't they? Wasn't it that way in the first editions, even before the inquest? Was there any hint of anything else?"

"No, not a thing that I saw."

"There ought not to have been. I phoned the story in to Lawrence on the *Sun* last night, and I was very particular. I wanted to be sure that nothing would leak out till I was ready."

"Nothing did, Peter, and I can see what you're driving at. It would have been a dead give away if young Baker had disappeared and anything had come out later. Still, at the same time, it would take nerve to stick around as if nothing had happened."

"Hasn't the kid got nerve?"

"He's got courage, I should say. But he isn't slick a bit. And there another thing, Pete. Baker says, could it have been the man with the red tie?"

"What?"

"Yes. You seem to know whom he means."

"I think so. Did he describe the man further? You know the guy you sent Murphy down to find wore a red tie."

"Yes," said O'Malley. "It's the same man, Pete, I'm sure."

"Well, go on," said Clancy eagerly. "What about him?"

"Nothing, except that Baker saw him, skulking in the woods over near there that evening, when he was on his way home. Baker had never seen him before, was sure he was a stranger, and his movements were suspicious. Baker said he dodged behind a tree and got out of sight as quick as he could."

"H-m," said Clancy. "Well, we'll keep on the job. Thanks for the tip. Only maybe Baker's just trying to throw dust in our eyes."

"I don't think so, Peter. I think the boy's all right."

"That's what you said before, O'Malley. But how can you tell?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe I just want to believe that a nice, honest kid like that is O. K. Maybe I'm getting old."

"Oh, can the sob stuff, O'Malley. You're getting old, nothing!"

And with a laugh at having gotten a rise out of the wary old ex-police captain, and with an assurance from him that he'd see that Frank Baker didn't get away, Peter hung up the receiver.

After that he rapidly sought and found a local telephone directory. The pages flashed through his fingers till he came to the name Potonquet, at the head of the page. He ran swiftly down the columns.

"Davis," he read. "Here we are. Good Lord—two Davises in Potonquet, six in Saint's Orchard, and four of 'em named John." He was surprised, for he was not, as yet, sufficiently versed in Long Island nomenclature to be aware of the fact that Davis is as common a name there

as Smith. "Some family tree!" he exclaimed. "Well, it's a cinch I can't call 'em all up to-night. It 'll have to keep till morning."

Peter rose and stretched himself wearily. Then he went over to the hall door and pressed the light-switch. A soft, brilliant glow flooded the room. He stood with his back to the door for a long moment. Then he slipped his hand into his pocket and drew out the bundle of letters. He looked at them and at the ribbon with which they were tied.

After scrutinizing them for a time, he nodded his head and put them back in his pocket. He crossed the room and dropped into the swivel-chair beside the table in the drawer of which he had discovered the letters. He sat there for quite a long time, thinking.

Then he rose, moved restlessly about the room, and went over to the wall, where he began to take out one book after another from the shelves, evidently looking for something that would quiet his nerves so that he could sleep after his strenuous day. He seemed satisfied at last, for he held two beautifully bound volumes of Marcus Aurelius in his hands, studying them for some time. One of the volumes had fallen open as he took it from the shelf and a word caught his eye. He read:

> In the whole constitution of man, I see not any virtue contrary to justice—

He closed the book and stood looking at it absently for many minutes. Then, once again, he repeated the word "justice," and put the books back on the shelf. Apparently he had decided that he could go to sleep without a mental sedative, for he crossed the room at once, switched off the lights, and opened the door. The knob must have slipped out of his hand when he closed it, for it swung to with considerable noise.

Peter did not seem particularly disturbed by this. He passed through the halls and up the stairs to the floor above with a quick and confident step.

Upon reaching the room he had selected with such apparent carelessness earlier in the day, Peter turned on the light, closed the door and locked it. His face was flushed and his eyes sparkled with excitement. He drank eagerly of the ice water which had been placed in a carafe on a small table at the head of the bed, and, tipping some of it on his handkerchief, he bathed his face and neck. The reviving coolness was evidently very grateful, for he raised his head with the air of a man refreshed.

He seemed to have changed his mind about going to bed. After having taken off his shoes, he made no further move toward undressing. Instead he sat very still for a moment, listening intently. Then he rose, switched off the light, and, with meticulous care, opened a small door in the south wall of the room. There was nothing but darkness, almost palpable in its density, upon the other side.

Again Clancy stopped and listened.

"All clear," he said within himself, after a pause, and snapped on the light of the electric torch which he held ready in his hand.

Its pale, clear ray showed, some distance below him, the floor of the library. It was as if he looked from the first balcony of a theater down upon an empty stage. The resemblance caught his fancy as he passed with noiseless feet along the narrow balcony and down the circular stair at the end.

"Unless I'm much mistaken, the curtain is about to be rung up on the third act," he thought, crossing the room swiftly and locking the hall door. "I'll see to it that only two of the cast are on in this, and that I am one of them."

He quietly shifted the position of a large winged chair and buried himself in its depths.

Silence and utter darkness followed the snap of his flash-light.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FRIENDSHIP.

UPON leaving the dinner table that night, Betty Austin had gone directly to her rooms. Mrs. Norman and the two young people had accompanied

her, and for a while they sat all together in her sitting-room, talking on indifferent topics, striving by every means in their power to help her through the time until the hour of sleep and forgetfulness might claim her.

After a time Paul Elliot went downstairs to look for Dr. Pryor. He could find no one, not even his friend Clancy, and Parker informed him that Dr. Pryor had been called out. Paul's questions elicited the reason for the doctor's absence, for Parker had not retired far beyond the pantry door while the boy, Stanley, was there, and had heard his story. Parker thought Mr. Clancy was in the library, sir. He said this in good faith, as he had not known that Peter had gone with the doctor, since they went out from the library by the private door.

" Captain Austin's in his room, sir. I seen his light some time ago," volunteered Parker in an effort to be of service. To even his semiopaque mind, the boy's weary longing for companionship was apparent.

" Thank you, Parker," said Elliot, turning to ascend the stairs. He did not care so much about seeing Jack, who was never very sympathetic with his tastes, but he would have liked a chat with Clancy. He started toward the library, then changed his mind. The room was too gruesome to him. He felt that he could never enter it again except under strong compulsion, and especially not at night. He shivered at a horrible recollection, and, almost like a child afraid of the dark, he regained in a few steps the congenial companionship of lovely and cultivated women.

" Dr. Pryor's gone out, Mrs. Norman," he said as he entered the rosy light of the sitting-room. It was she who had sent him to look for the doctor, and it was to her that he addressed his brief story of George Hull's sudden illness.

It roused Betty Austin from her somber abstraction, and her face was full of pity when Jane Norman told her of Alice Hull's death. She had known them both in the old days, and, like all the Wainwrights' intimate friends, had felt a strong attraction toward the old sailor and his beautiful child.

No least hint of the cause of Alice's death escaped Jane Norman, and Betty's pity was unmixed with any other feeling. The slow evening wore on. Betty's young cousin had long ago been sent to bed, and Paul Elliot did not remain long after she had gone.

At Jane's earnest entreaty, Betty prepared for bed, and, for a long time, Jane sat beside her, striving with soothing fingers to quiet the troubled blood beating beneath the throbbing temples. Listening for Stephen's return, she heard the house sink into gradual silence.

They spoke little, for the sympathy between these two lay too deep for the necessity of words. Betty had said nothing to Jane Norman of the dreadful and abiding anxiety which disturbed the very roots of her soul, but the older woman, by some almost occult sense, divined it, and its cause, at least partially. She would have given worlds to bring Betty's fear out into the open and discuss it without reserve, but she dreaded the suggestion which would, of necessity, be implied if she brought up Billy Wainwright's name in connection with the tragedy—the suggestion that she herself possessed knowledge of certain facts which made his complicity an inferential possibility.

Her own faith in Billy's innocence was entirely unshaken by Stephen's disclosures of the morning. Why, then, was Betty so bitterly, restlessly anxious? Betty must know something. She must be absolutely sure of some damaging circumstance, capable of but one interpretation, or, knowing and loving him as she did, she could never imagine Billy Wainwright capable of—

Why didn't Stephen come home? He was such a comfort always—to everybody. " The shadow of a great rock in a dry and desolate land," she thought unsteadily, her grave eyes suddenly blinded by tears. She dashed them away and looked up with a smile as Betty spoke her name.

" Jane, dear, I want you to go to bed now. You're tired out and I can sleep after a little, I think. There's some of Stephen's medicine left, and I promise to take it if I don't fall asleep as soon as you

go. No, not now, dear. Put it on my night table. I'd rather sleep naturally, if I can."

Jane Norman sat down beside her on the edge of the bed, and Betty put both hands on her friend's shoulders.

"What a dear you are, Jane," she said. "It's absurd to say you've been a mother to me when the difference in our ages seems nothing at all now that we're both grown up. But you've been more than an ordinary sister to me. Do you remember, in the old days at the Cedars, when mother first brought me out here with her, how you were the only one who found out that I was terribly afraid of the dark? I was a proud little kiddie and never mentioned it to a soul—but you knew."

Jane nodded her head and smiled.

"And you left all your beaux every evening and came up to read to me until I fell asleep. And some of your sweethearts were so nice! I liked Dr. Stephen best of all of them even then. Oh, Jane, why—"

"Hush, dearest," said Jane, closing her eyes in pain for an instant and shaking her head. "Don't worry about me and my little troubles. I'm going to let you sleep now," and she leaned tenderly over the girl.

"You've been an angel to me, Jane." Betty Austin raised her slender white arms to clasp them about the older woman's neck. "I couldn't live through it without you, dearest," she whispered as their lips touched, "you and Stephen. Oh, Jane, Jane!" Her clasp tightened convulsively. For several moments they remained in a close embrace. Then she kissed Jane and released her.

"Good night, dear Jane." And added, with a touch of the whimsical humor which was hers by nature: "They say that women can't be friends to each other, you know."

The soft, dark eyes looking into hers smiled gently.

"'They' say a lot besides their prayers, my dear. Are you all comfy? Can I get you anything?"

Upon the assurance that she had everything to her hand, Jane Norman at last bade her "good night" and went to seek a much-needed rest.

Deeper and deeper fell the silence in the house. Outside, no breath of wind stirred. Betty Austin pulled the cord of the light on her night-table, reducing it to a glowing red filament, and waited with wide-open eyes. Time passed, immeasurably long to her straining senses. At last she could bear it no longer and, throwing aside the light, warm coverings of the bed, she caught up a dressing-gown which lay across the foot and, wrapping herself in it, stepped to the floor.

As she did so, the hollow reverberation of a closing door brought her heart into her mouth and she sank back, trembling in every limb. Pushing her heavy hair back from her face, she waited, wild-eyed, staring, every sense on the alert.

She heard footsteps passing from the library, across the hall and up the stairs and the closing and locking of a door above. She realized, after a moment's thought that the noise was probably made by the detective who had quartered himself upon them, on his way to bed. She breathed a prayer of thanksgiving to the power which shapes the destinies of men that she had not made her attempt sooner and thus betrayed herself to the watchful eyes whose covert regard had made her so uneasy all through dinner. What did he know, this pleasant-faced young Irishman? He looked so cheerful and kind and yet there was a sudden sword flash in his glance which boded ill for the person who attempted to deceive him. When would he find out—

Frozen into immobility, she sat for a long time listening, listening. The French clock on the mantelpiece, with frivolous, unconcerned little footsteps, paced off the time. There was no further sound, and after a while she concluded that the detective, worn out by his long exertions, must certainly, by this time, be fast asleep.

With a deep sigh, she rose wearily to her feet and passed, like a white wraith into the adjoining room, the room which had once been her husband's. There she began a systematic search which extended to the dressing-room. Every drawer and box and cupboard she ransacked, noiselessly, with an intensity of purpose that never faltered. And as she looked, her face changed from

expectancy to doubt, from doubt to fear and, when she had examined the last hiding-place, to blank despair.

She stood for a long time thereafter, in the middle of the room, her clenched hands straining downward in agony. There was more of wild tragedy in her still attitude than if she had screamed aloud.

At last she moved and in sheer desperation, went to the door which led from the bedroom into the library. She had caught up a bunch of keys as she passed the dressing-table.

"One last hope," she whispered as she opened the door.

The library was in darkness, except for the ray of light from the pocket flash which she held in her left hand. She passed at once along the wall to the hall door to lock it and uttered a faint exclamation when she found the key gone and the door fast.

She stood still for a minute, thinking. Then she flashed her light all about the room. She breathed a sigh of relief when she found it empty.

"The hall door must have been locked from the outside," she considered, "and that young man, the detective, probably has the key." In which latter surmise, she was perfectly correct.

"I must take the risk," she thought, determination showing in her narrowed eyes and clenched teeth.

Without further hesitation, she crossed the room to a closed writing-desk which stood at the far end. Swiftly and quietly she turned the key and dropped the lid. With ardent haste she went through the papers in the pigeonholes. Then she unlocked a small drawer in the center, but found that it contained nothing but a checkbook and a mass of current bills and memoranda.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LETTERS.

"ARE you, by any chance, looking for these?"

She sprang aside with a choking cry. The keys dropped from her hand and fell with a clear, metallic crash to the floor. She turned slowly, all in one piece, like an automaton.

The face of the man who stood before her wore a frank and ingenuous smile. His thick, red hair was slightly mussed, but he was still dressed as she had seen him at dinner. Behind him, the heavy curtain at the window swung a little as if it had just been moved.

He stepped toward her, holding something in his extended hand.

She saw at once what it was. The packet of letters she would have given her life to have found before he saw them. Now, since he must know what they contained, it would be better, far better, she decided, not to admit that they were dangerous. Her thoughts raced wildly through her tense brain, but she was intelligent and resourceful and her fear for the safety of the man she loved filled her with a new and unaccustomed cunning.

She had drawn herself up steadily before he reached her and looked down at the letters coldly.

"No," she said in a frigid voice. "I was looking for something quite different. Where did you find these?" she added as if it were a matter of supreme indifference.

"In the drawer of the table over there." Clancy motioned toward the other side of the room without taking his eyes from her face.

He saw the pupils of her eyes dilate with surprise and incredulity, but she made no other sign.

At length she stretched out her hand.

"I'll take them if you have no further use for them. They were written many years ago, but they belong to me still, as you have probably ascertained," she said in a cutting tone.

Peter flushed slightly.

"We have to do many things in my profession that other people are lucky enough to be able to avoid," he said slowly. "But my job is necessary so that innocent people may sleep in peace. Only the guilty have any need to be afraid of me. If there is any doubt, any in the world, I give the suspected man or woman the benefit of it. In this case," he spoke with stern gravity, "there is none. Every piece of the puzzle

drops into place. I knew you would come here some time to-night. I knew what you would look for—and I have them ready in my hand."

Her face paled to the lips, but she held her ground.

"You are quite mistaken," she said firmly. "I was looking for—"

"Don't trouble to invent anything," Clancy interrupted sharply. "You can't put it across. I know too much. And the little I'm not sure of, I will find out. You can trust me for that. Listen—"

He took a step nearer and his face was stern and compelling.

"These letters are from William Wainwright, written some time ago, it is true. There was another letter, undated, which has disappeared; you, perhaps, could tell how—and I know why. You were afraid that if these turned up, they might make somebody sit up and take notice. They were sure to if it was murder. They would have been taken for a reason for suicide, too, but that wouldn't have meant any danger to the man who wrote them. You knew it was murder! You knew it from the start. That's why you would risk anything to get them and destroy them."

He paused a second. The woman before him seemed to have been turned to stone with no sign of life save for her burning eyes. In the passion of his desire to get all the truth, Clancy was ruthless. He went on remorselessly:

"Mr. Raymond Austin sent for Wainwright yesterday afternoon and told him to come by the private way, that he would be waiting in the library. Wainwright wrote him that he would be there and at the same time sent a note to you that he was coming. You were anxious because of what you knew about the letters and you pretended to have a headache and came up to your room. The story of your having been asleep wasn't true. Dr. Pryor is a poor hand at lying, though he did his best. You were awake—and you listened at that door." He pointed to the one through which she had come. "You listened and you heard Wainwright's voice. You knew it to be his—and you heard the shot. Wainwright had killed your husband!"

At that her eyes blazed on him. Her whole body sprang into instant, intense life. Her clenched hands dropped to her sides. She drew herself up and raised her head high, with a fierce and awful purpose.

"You are wrong! William Wainwright had gone. It was I"—she moistened her dry lips—"it was I who fired the shot!"

There was a long silence. Clancy looked at her blankly. She bore his gaze steadily, without flinching, without a tremor.

At last he moved and spoke.

"Tell me how it happened," he said, a mixture of strange emotions showing on his face.

The room had been illuminated only by the bright ray from the hand torch which Betty Austin had placed on the top of the desk when she began her search. She had moved so that it was behind her and for some moments her slender body had been in sharp silhouette, outlined with a clear gleam of white on one side. Clancy could not see her face. He took his own flashlight from his pocket and, pressing the button, turned it full upon her. She bore the searching ray without a quiver, but she moved slightly and rested her hand on the back of a chair, gripping it so tightly that her knuckles showed, pearly white.

"Tell me," Clancy repeated.

She spoke slowly, monotonously, pausing every now and then to moisten her pale lips.

"I received his note and I listened at the door. You were right that far. I could hear bitter voices and I could distinguish a few words. I heard William Wainwright's voice arguing, pleading—" She stopped an instant, closing her eyes. A sharp spasm contracted the muscles of her throat, but when she went on her voice was as controlled as before.

"I heard Mr. Austin say: 'Never come into my house again!'

"Just then some one came into the dressing-room. I didn't want to be seen by any one, Mr. Austin's servant least of all. It could be no one else. I went back into my own room and in a few minutes the valet closed the dressing-room door and crossed the hall. I had been very

quiet. I'm sure that he could not have heard me. I waited until I was certain that he had gone, then I came back to the library door. I heard Mr. Austin's voice raised furiously.

A long pause.

"After that there were footsteps on the stone stairs and I knew that he"—a slight stress on the pronoun—"had gone."

A heavy silence fell between them. Neither of them moved. Betty Austin's eyes were staring straight ahead, fixed and unwinking. Her voice seemed to come from far away.

"Then I went in—and killed him," she said.

Clancy gazed at her intently for a moment.

Then he said:

"It was a high-powered pistol that was used, an unusual thing for a woman to have. Where did you get it, Mrs. Austin?"

There was the faintest twitching of her eyelids before she answered.

"It was Mr. Austin's pistol. He always kept it in the table-drawer."

"And you had it ready?"

Again a slight pause.

"Yes."

"It was found beside the body. You placed it there?"

"Yes."

"You realized that the wound was in the left side of the head and put it under the left hand so that it might have been supposed to be suicide?"

"Yes."

"And afterward you swore that he could have shot himself with his left hand. It was perjury, Mrs. Austin."

She moved her hand slightly and let it fall again.

"What did it matter?" she said dully.

Clancy thought a moment.

"If you were so little disturbed by what you had done," he said coldly, "why didn't you get the letters then?"

Her glance wavered.

"I didn't realize. I didn't think."

"I see," said Clancy. "You couldn't think of everything at once. Natural." His voice died away. After a moment he added in a different tone:

"Mrs. Austin, did you hear any voice, here in the library, besides your husband's and Wainwright's? Think carefully. Could either of the voices you heard at the very last, when you came back to the door, have belonged to any one else?"

Her startled eyes shifted quickly to his face. Gropingly she turned the chair on which she leaned and sank into it.

"Why do you ask?" she questioned just above her breath.

"Because there was another man here."

She gasped and her white hand caught at her throat.

"Another man?" she whispered. "Another man? How do you know?"

"I know," Clancy spoke slowly. "*I* know—because he told me so himself."

"Who—who was it?"

"George Hull."

"George Hull," she repeated, dazed, incredulous. "What was he doing here?"

"He hated Mr. Raymond Austin bitterly for some reason. He came here to kill him."

She drew in a deep, gasping breath.

"And he says that he did kill him. He has confessed."

A few moments later, Jane Norman was awakened by a light, insistent tapping on her door. She threw on a dressing-gown and crossed the room.

"Who is it?" she said softly with her hand on the knob.

"It's Peter Clancy, Mrs. Norman. Sorry to disturb you, but Mrs. Austin—"

The door opened quickly.

"Betty! Is she ill?"

The light in Peter's hand fell on the tall, dark figure and anxious face.

"She fainted," he replied briefly. "I think she's all right now. I carried her into her room and brought her to. But somebody ought to be with her. Somebody that can be trusted. Make her talk, Mrs. Norman. Make her tell you everything. Help her to get it off her chest. No," as suspicion flashed in her eyes, "I won't ask you a question. Not one. I promise. Go to her, quick. She needs a woman like you. And don't leave her. Take this." He thrust his light into her hands and added

with a sigh of weariness and relief: "I will not need it any more to-night."

CHAPTER XXV.

TRAPPED.

PETER CLANCY was late to breakfast the next morning, though he had risen early. Mrs. Austin kept her room, but the rest were all down before him. He could hear their voices around the table as he listened in the upper hall.

Dr. Pryor had not yet returned. Peter had told Mrs. Norman of the doctor's request that food should be sent over to George Hull's and Bill Stubbs had been despatched in the doctor's car, laden with thermos bottles of hot coffee and other breakfast necessaries, before the heavy dew was off the grass.

The sun that morning shone fitfully through heavy clouds which were driven across the sky by a rising wind from the southeast. The broad waters of Potonquet Bay, so quiet and safe in the summer season, were already lashed to white-capped waves and the little boat, moored out beyond the boathouse at the foot of the lawn, rose and fell, dizzily, its slender mast describing a wide arc against the tumbling water.

Clancy's face was as bright and cheerful as if he had no care in the world. True to his promise, he asked no questions of Jane Norman except as to Mrs. Austin's state of health. Her report was favorable. They had talked for a long time, she said, and at last Mrs. Austin had fallen asleep, was sleeping still, thank God. She looked at Peter, curiously, but in her turn, asked no questions. On leaving the breakfast-table Peter had joined her and, together, they ascended the stairs. At the top they parted, she to go back to Mrs. Austin and he to return once more to the library.

He had been there but a few moments when a light, apologetic tap sounded at the door. Peter called out:

"Come in," and the door opened.

"William Stubbs, Dr. Pryor's chauffeur, said you wished to see me here right after breakfast, sir."

It was Samuel Budge who spoke. He stood on the threshold, very stiff and erect, a perfectly correct and conventional "gentleman's gentleman."

"Yes," said Peter gravely. "Come in and shut the door."

The man did as requested. He was tall and thin and moved softly, like a cat.

"Now come here," said Peter. He had seated himself at a small, low table which stood in the middle of that half of the room which joined the main house. The fitful morning sunlight, shining through the easterly windows fell clear of the table and lay in a pale rectangle on the floor beyond.

"Stand there," said Peter coolly. "I want to have a good look at you."

The man started at the words and at the tone in which they were uttered. He drew himself up stiffly and his long, narrow face, pale by nature, grew more colorless still. But he had been long trained to obedience, so he stepped at once into the pool of sunlight and faced Clancy.

The manner of this strange man of business of whom he had never heard in all his years of service with Mr. Raymond Austin, troubled the valet. He wished that the man would speak and not sit there staring at him. It made him quite nervous. After all—

The valet's jaw dropped.

With a lightninglike movement of his left hand, Clancy had taken from his pocket and flung out on the table a collection of small objects. In his right hand he held an automatic pistol which pointed, most uncompromisingly, at the left side of the valet's striped waistcoat.

"Now speak up, Samuel, and talk fast. What have you got to say for yourself?"

The valet gazed at the scarf-pins, cuff-links, and other small and valuable articles of gentleman's attire which lay in a glittering heap on the table.

"I—I don't know anything about those, sir." He spoke through ashen lips.

"Come, come, Samuel. This won't do. It's too thin. You must know at least that they belonged to Mr. Raymond Austin. You must have handled 'em often enough."

"Yes, sir," said the servant. He rubbed his hands together and shrugged his thin

shoulders up to his ears as if he were very cold. His whole body seemed to have shrunken inside his glossy broadcloth.

"Well, I'll tell you where we found 'em this morning, Samuel. They were at the bottom of your trunk, rolled up in several different pairs of socks. Not a bad place to hide 'em at that. Took us almost ten minutes to find 'em. It might have been better, possibly, I only make the suggestion, if you'd kept them on your person. But there—it's a cinch you thought of that and decided they'd make an ugly bulge on your beautiful figure. You were pretty smart, Samuel. It was clever of you not to take everything, I've got to hand that to you. Somebody was sure to get wise if you had. 'But who's to notice if I take only part of 'em,' says you. 'Not the mistress. She doesn't half know what he's got. And most of the servants are new. His brother's only been back a short time,' you said to yourself. You were an old and trusted servant. It looked almost too easy."

The man was cowering now, but he plucked up courage to say with lips that shook so that he could scarcely articulate:

"I didn't do it, sir. I never took 'em, so help me God! Somebody else must have put 'em in me box."

"Shut up!" said Clancy, scornfully. "You make me sick. You had no hesitation about robbing a dead man, you cold fish. But the next time you do it, remember not to stand in front of a mirror when you stow the swag in your pocket and be more careful to make sure that no one is going to open the door unexpectedly."

The man's eyes darted about the floor. He looked like a hunted rat. The thoughts tumbled over each other in his confused brain. This pleasant red-headed man had seen then. Had known for certain what he, Samuel Budge, had been doing at his late master's chiffonier yesterday afternoon, and had spoken pleasantly and made no sign. Who was he? And how much more did he know? The valet's knees shook so that he could no longer stand and he fell to the floor and groveled for mercy.

"Overwhelming temptation," he gasped brokenly. "Never done such a thing before. Oh, Lord; oh, Lord! I'd worked so long for him. And he was a bitter, hard master, sir, bitter hard. They'll all tell you so. He was hard on me—hard on that pretty young lady he married—hard, hard as stone to everybody."

A sudden noise of shuffling feet on the stone stair of the private entrance checked him. He started up in terror.

"Not the police," he whispered. "Oh, my God! Not the—"

Clancy's hand on his collar choked the last word.

"Come in here, you—you"—and the valet was summarily dragged across the floor and thrown incontinently into his late master's bedroom. The thing was done swiftly and almost noiselessly, for a man just inside the door received the reeling form in his arms and clapped a capacious hand over the valet's mouth.

"Keep him quiet, Stacy," whispered Clancy, closing the library door softly.

He turned back and beckoned to a man at the entrance to the dressing-room.

"Don't forget what I told you, Calkins. You're not to show yourselves till I give the signal. Keep these doors locked," he pointed to the one which communicated with Mrs. Austin's rooms and to the one which led into the hall, "until you hear from me. Then you know what to do. And keep that man quiet, Stacy. I don't want my little surprise party upset."

The men nodded silently, and Peter went swiftly back to the library.

(To Be Concluded NEXT WEEK.)

Hyacinth Hounds

by Genevieve Wimsatt

"MOHAMMED once said that if he had two loaves of bread he would sell one, and with the money buy hyacinths," murmured young Mrs. Morley, touching the frosted pink bells of the Madame Hodgsons nodding on the breakfast-table between her and a rustling expanse of morning newspaper. "I wish we Americans had more of that appreciation of the esthetic. This is a sordid, materialistic age."

The printed expanse halved, then quartered itself, and a round, kindly young face accented by two shrewd gray eyes showed above the folded sheet.

"If you suppose that philosophy of letting the loaf go, and plunging in hyacinths, is confined to Oriental peoples and ancient times, you've taken the wrong tip, Grace," remarked Mr. Morley, flashing a grin across the table at his ornamental partner. "But if I had two hyacinths I'd sell one, and buy a thrift stamp."

"That's just like a business man!"

"It's just like a rising business man," agreed Mr. Morley with some complacency, "but it isn't representative of the average citizen. Among the masses a taste for flowers is a much more universal characteristic than a yearning for thrift stamps."

"Why, Roger, every one knows this is a money-grubbing age, and that we are a Philistine people! With us business always comes before beauty!" protested Mrs. Morley.

"Well, it should," dared the business man stoutly. "Business is a garden plot that produces the flowers of beauty. There's a big difference between growing hyacinths, and merely hunting hyacinths; and most people want the flowers without working the plot. Instead of scratching until they have a hyacinth bed of their own, they sell their bread—or their Liberty bonds, or their lots, or mortgage their houses—to buy perishable cut-flowers—or, to put it into modern terms, automobiles, or diamonds, or Pekingese pups. By jingo, Grace, this country is overrun with hyacinth hounds!"

Mrs. Morley's limpid blue eyes rounded in incredulity and dissent. "Do you mean to assert, Roger, that you actually believe there are still persons in this utilitarian day and land who would forego a material gain for an esthetic enjoyment? Who are stirred by the same lovely sentiments that Mohammed, the Oriental mystic, voiced so beautifully?"

"Plenty of 'em! Plenty of 'em! They are the big majority! Their feeling for the esthetic may not drag them to the florist's; but nine out of ten of the people you meet every day will forego any practical advantage for a momentary pleasure; they will, invariably, put the imponderables—as you express it—before the practical, the ideal before the material."

Before Mrs. Morley could do more than raise her eloquent dissenting eyebrows at

this statement, the tinkle of a bell called her, reluctantly, from her chair.

"It's Johnson, I'm sure," she explained, laying down her napkin. "He said he would come around this morning to show me how well he could walk with that new artificial leg. Two hundred dollars was a lot of money to collect from your family, and mine, Roger; but it meant so much to poor Johnson. Now that he can lay aside his crutch he can get that job at the mill, with light work and good pay."

Five minutes later, with a dazed look in her dewy eyes, Mrs. Morley came slowly back to the breakfast table, sank into her seat, and poured herself a cup of black coffee.

"What's the matter, Gracie? You look sort o' dashed—"

"Worse than that, I'm crushed! Think of it, Roger! After we had all scrimped, and saved to get together the money for old Johnson's leg, and sent him the check, what do you think he's done with the money?"

"Bought a phonograph, perhaps," hazarded Mr. Morley.

Mrs. Morley's dimpled chin dropped. "How did you ever guess it?" she exclaimed, almost in awe. "I wouldn't have thought of it in a thousand years, but that's just what he's done!"

"Musical hyacinths for Johnson," muttered Mr. Morley, bending his head over his coffee cup. "You can look at that old peg-legged scarecrow and see that he has a soul above practicality."

"A phonograph, the cabinet kind at that, with assorted records," repeated the outraged benefactress bitterly. "Why, he lives in a horrible little hovel, and has no proper clothes, and no money for decent food! If he had got the leg, and taken that job that Mr. Lewis offered him, he could have lived comfortably, and, in time, saved enough money to buy himself a phonograph if he had to have one! Did you ever know of anything like that?"

The tinkling of the telephone bell in the hall drowned the muffled reply.

"I'll answer it," said Mrs. Morley as her husband started to rise. "It's for me, I know."

The man who has made a study of the psychology of customers, and mastered the principles of facial expressions, does not ask, "What's wrong now?" when his wife sinks into her chair with an exhalation of breath that closely resembles a snort, and taps her foot against the table leg. Mr. Morley made no such mistake; instead he marked time, stirring the spoon reflectively in his empty cup. At the end of a minute patience was rewarded, and his wife burst forth with:

"This is too ridiculous! What do you suppose now, Roger? Mrs. Finnigan, who's been doing my laundry all winter, has bought—what do you think?"

"You told me she was going to buy an electric washing-machine," ventured Mr. Morley mildly.

"And so she was! She's been talking about it all winter. And I've encouraged her, and given her lots of little pieces to do up that I usually launder myself—and she's terribly hard on embroideries, and has almost ruined my monogrammed tea-set that I was so proud of. But I felt that she needed the money, and that if she could get the washing-machine her work would be easier."

"Well, isn't it?"

"She didn't get it!" Mrs. Morley almost wept. "She called up to say she couldn't send my laundry back this week, and when I asked her if the new machine wasn't satisfactory, she stammered and stuttered, and finally admitted that at the last minute she had bought a life-sized painting of Brian Boru, with the castle of Kincora in the background. She said the king's red velvet robes, and the fine gilt frame, made her parlor look so grand and cheerful!"

"Hibernian hyacinths."

"I think you are horrid, Roger." Mrs. Morley looked up suddenly as a shadow fell across her plate. "Why, Helen Stevenson, is that you, or your ghost? You came in so quietly I didn't hear you!"

"I saw your door open as I went by, Cousin Grace, and slipped in for a second to surprise you," answered the pretty young girl who stood framed in the white doorway against a background of morning sunlight.

"Your coming was providential, Helen,"

laughed Mr. Morley, placing a chair for the guest. "Grace and I were about to puff a little difference of opinion into a full-sized disagreement."

"No!" A flattering incredulity rang in the newcomer's exclamation. "I didn't suppose you two ever did that! But it wasn't a premonition of your danger that sent me in here, but my own vanity—I wanted to show off my new hat. It's a Willett."

"A Willett! Oh, he always has the loveliest hats in town!" cried Mrs. Morley, and lifted respectful eyes to the spreading Leghorn smothered with pale blue hyacinths so skilfully copied from nature that they radiated an illusion of dew and fragrance. "It's simply a marvel, Helen. But—but—I thought you told me you were not going to buy a thread for your wardrobe this season, but were going to clothe you mind with a secretarial course to raise your efficiency at the office?"

The visitor blushed, but answered lightly:

"Oh, well, who could resist a hat like this for twenty-five dollars? It was a bargain in these days when everything is so expensive. I've decided to wait until winter to take that course. I don't know that I need it, anyhow—and they do charge so much at those business colleges—thirty dollars."

For a few minutes after their guest had dashed away, Mr. and Mrs. Morley sat in silence. There was no sound in the sunny room except the rustle of an unfolding newspaper and the faint tinkle of silver under a restless hand. Then Mrs. Morley arose, deliberately lifted the pot of rosy blooms from the table, and disappeared kitchenward. When she returned she was flushed, but empty handed.

"I don't believe I'm as fond of hyacinths as I thought I was," she admitted thoughtfuly. "They are so commonplace."

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THE FOREST CHRISTMAS TREE

WE were three firs slender and tall,
A forest sisterhood,
Who, many a winter, spring, and fall,
One family, had stood
From tiny seedlings, frail and small—
No higher than the crumbling wall—
Till now—we towered over all
Our kin in Gervain Wood.

Christmas drew near, the holiest day
The world has ever known,
Since sage and magi knelt to pray
Before a manger-throne—
Came men to cut for hirelings' pay
Trees for the Yule-tide trade, and they
Took both my sisters dear away,
And I was left alone!

That Eve, as though to comfort me
Who had no candles bright,
The Star the Wise Men joyed to see
Judea's desert light,
Blazing with gracious sympathy,
Turned my bare boughs to radiancy,
Till happy, I, too, came to be
A Christmas tree that Night!

Mazie V. Carruthers

While Dorion Lives

by Victor Rousseau

Author of "The Eye of Balamok," "Draft of Eternity," "The Diamond Demons," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CONTRACT.

ALEXANDRE and Eudore raised Will's inanimate body and carried it down the slope of the cliff to a little, disused quay, where the schooner was moored, followed by Duncan. On board was Angus.

"Pitch the damned spy overboard!" growled Eudore.

"Put him in the fo'c's'le. We'll throw him over in the middle channel, where he'll travel a long way before he floats ashore," grinned Duncan.

"We'll run him ashore on Cold Island and leave him there," said Angus. "My creature made me swear by the Virgin not to have him killed. He gave her a hundred dollars for taking care of him. Sheer off before this storm gets worse, and run up the jibs and mainsail."

The dogs, freed from control, had started in a mad race toward Bonne Chance, dragging the overturned sleigh behind them.

Acting upon his policy of taking the bull by the horns, La Rue called at Jeremiah's house on the morning following upon his seizure. He found Jeremiah lying like a log in bed. Yet there seemed to be intelligence in the eyes: they were not the glassy orbs of an unconscious man. He had already learned that Jeanne had returned to her uncle's house, and the news had given him immense satisfaction. Only Jeremiah could thwart his plans now, he believed, and he wondered, as he stood at the bedside and looked at the almost inanimate hulk before him, whether the secret of their quarrel and of the blow were hidden forever in that broken brain. How long, if not forever, would the dumb mouth remain his ally?

The spectacle threw him into a torture of apprehension. He knew that, unless death supervened, complete paralysis seldom lasted more than two or three weeks at most. Once Jeremiah gained the faculty of speech, his hopes were ended.

Mme. Angus and Jeanne had been at the bedside when the notary entered, but the girl, with a slight movement of her head in recognition, had left the room almost immediately. La Rue knew that the old woman did not understand a word of English. He resolved to ascertain whether any consciousness lurked behind the staring eyes.

He bent forward. "Listen, Jeremiah," he said. "You remember what we were talking about when you had your seizure, eh? Don't ever get it into your head that our friend's alive, just on the strength of that photograph you spoke about. That was a part of your delirium. I'm going to marry Jeanne. You understand me?"

He could have sworn that the flicker of a light which gleamed in Jeremiah's eyes was that of understanding and apprehension. It warned him to make haste with

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whatever he meant to do. La Rue withdrew from the house, bowing respectfully to Jeanne as he passed the parlor, where she was standing.

He called each day to inquire after the sick man, always respectful and unobtrusive. On the third day he ran up against Angus.

The acting chief of the clan was hanging round the house, conscious of his complete inadequacy to fill the job. Jeremiah had been the head and brains of the confederacy. He had promised that Jeanne's marriage to La Rue would restore the fortunes of the McGraemes, and he had obeyed his instructions implicitly, only to see Will Maitland calmly walk away with the girl, and depart for Quebec, apparently betrothed to her.

When Angus saw La Rue he came forward deferentially.

"Ah, *monsieur*, this is a great blow to us all!" he said, shaking his head. "Do you think my cousin will recover, M. Philippe?"

"Impossible to say!" returned the notary sharply. "If he does live, he will probably always be a cripple, perhaps an imbecile."

"Ah, *mon Dieu*, what shall we do? We are poor men. Perhaps one might obtain the bone-setter—"

"The bone-setter is not necessary, Angus." La Rue surveyed him thoughtfully, then tapped him on the shoulder. "You have a good head, Angus."

"Ah, *monsieur*, of what use is this when one can neither read nor write?"

"You must rely on those who can. You are now the head of the McGraemes. You must live up to your responsibilities."

Flattered, although he did not understand the latter part of the sentence, Angus waited deferentially for La Rue's next words.

"I shall be willing to advise you until your cousin recovers, if he does recover at all. Mme. Dorion is to become my wife before M. Maitland returns."

Angus's lips parted in his sour grin, displaying his projecting fangs.

"We can take care of the spy, *monsieur*," he answered. "All Bonne Chance has sworn that there shall be no betrayal of our sealing fleet this year, few though our schooners be. But, *monsieur*, it is another thing to force an unwilling girl to the marriage altar.

"Besides, she is our kinswoman, and, though she has not acted rightly by us, still we cannot permit violence. And again, *monsieur*, the curé at St. Boniface would not marry her against her will."

La Rue heard Angus's little harangue with angry impatience.

"Fool," he blustered, "who spoke of violence? There will be neither marriage altar nor curé at St. Boniface. Is not our curé, M. LeGrand, in Europe, and does not the church, where there is no parish priest, accept a contract made before witnesses?"

"Ah, *oui*, *monsieur*. Thus many are married in the further parishes every winter. But in the spring they go to the nearest curé to have the record made."

"We'll leave that to Mme. Dorion," answered La Rue.

"She has consented, then?" asked Angus incredulously.

"She will consent, Angus, and you, if you know your duty toward your people, will assist me."

"Ah, M. La Rue, how often have I not spoken to her, telling her what her duty is! But she is stubborn as a little ass, *monsieur*."

"And when the ass will not go, Angus, in spite of beatings, do we not tie the bundle of hay before his nose?"

Angus broke into his surly grin, which broadened as the notary described his plans to him.

La Rue clapped him on the back again when he had finished. "Everything shall come out right, and there will be more money than you have ever seen, Angus," he said.

On the next day, however, La Rue experienced an unexpected shock. Calling to inquire for Jeremiah, he found that the old man was able to move both arms. He was also undoubtedly aware of what was taking place about him.

La Rue only remained with him long enough to make sure that he was still incapable of any form of self-expression.

It had become a desperate race now between the return of Jeremiah's speech and Jeanne's coming of age. La Rue sought the girl in the parlor.

At his entrance she drew back from him in agitation.

"Mme. Dorion, I have to congratulate you on your uncle's improvement," said La Rue respectfully. "And I'm sorry for all that has been happening of late. I wanted to speak of it before, but I felt I'd been too much to blame. You and I used to be good friends. I should like you to feel that, if you can never look on me as a friend, you won't consider me an enemy."

She moved restlessly under his gaze. She did not know what to say, and she distrusted him profoundly.

"I wanted you, Jeanne, and I felt jealous and hurt when Mr. Maitland came on the scene. I wouldn't let him cut in and beat me. I'd known you all my life. Well, he beat me. And when it came to the point of separating uncle and niece I realized that I had gone too far. You don't say anything. I want to deal straight with you."

"You—you have my uncle in your power," she answered slowly. "You have a mortgage on this house as well as on the lands. You can turn us out when it falls due. You have your rights to protect."

"I want to protect them. I admit I played on the old man's fears, because I wanted you. I can't do it any more. And I stand to lose everything. The mortgage falls due in May. You come of age this month, don't you?"

"On the fifteenth."

"Well, you know that the mortgage doesn't amount to the paper it's written on, because your uncle had no right to mortgage your lands. I'm willing to turn it over to you, to destroy it, the day you come of age, if you'll sign a contract undertaking to pay me twenty thousand dollars in the event of the courts deciding that you own the Dorion lands.

"It's my only chance of getting anything back. You don't have to do it. I'm relying on your sense of fairness. After all, he's had the money, and it's a dead loss to me."

Jeanne looked steadily into his face, and the gaze that he returned was unwavering. She could read nothing in his eyes, but she distrusted him none the less.

"You understand, Philippe La Rue, that I shall never marry you?" she asked slowly.

"I understand. And you still have no faith in me?"

"How can I trust you, when you have persecuted me and betrayed my uncle, to get him into your power?"

"Perhaps I have done things out of love of you which I shouldn't have done."

"'Love!'" she repeated contemptuously. "I do not want to hear that word from you, M. La Rue."

"You needn't. But I have my own interests to look after. I want my money back. You don't have to pay it. Of course I never intended to prosecute your uncle. That was a bluff. It has failed. But I want my money. It rests with you. A simple act of justice, *madame*—and you can raise thousands on the Dorion lands. We hadn't sense enough to know their value. The Banque Industrielle will offer you a quarter of a million for those lumber rights."

Jeanne considered a while. "If I sign a note for twenty thousand dollars, it means that I am returning you your money and that you forego all claims upon my uncle."

"My money, with reasonable interest—yes, *madame*."

"You overlook the fact that M. Maitland is the owner of those rights."

"Mme. Dorion, he cannot hold them. The deed has been found, the original deed which shows that you are the owner. It cannot be contested."

He smiled inwardly at her look of distress and continued: "I did not tell you this. But your uncle knew. I am so sure of what I say that the contract will make the payment conditional upon the verdict of the court being in your favor."

She put her hands over her eyes. "Wait a minute! Let me think!" she said.

She felt her loneliness bitterly. To traffic in Will's lands seemed abominable,

though she felt sure that in this case he would approve. If only he were present to advise her!

"*Madame,* it is a simple act of justice to me!" pleaded La Rue.

"Very well! I'll sign your contract on the day I come of age,,' answered the girl.

The days that followed were fraught with intense anxiety for Philippe La Rue. Jeremiah was recovering, without doubt. More than that, both sides of his body showed equal improvement. On the day before Jeanne came of age he could sit up in bed; but he was still unable to speak, and his rugged face betrayed neither recognition nor emotion when La Rue approached him.

So the race was won. Late on a cheerless afternoon the notary came in, bag in hand, and strewed his papers over the parlor table. Angus and his wife were called in as witnesses. He handed Jeanne the mortgage.

"If you will destroy this, Mme. Dorion," he said, "the debt will become one of honor and nothing more, until the new contract is signed."

Jeanne glanced over the mortgage in the waning light and slowly tore it into pieces, dropping them into the wood fire. La Rue began to read the new contract aloud. When he had finished, he handed it to her, and she looked through it. Then, at his direction, she affixed her signature, and the notary his. Angus and his wife placed their crosses as witnesses.

La Rue pushed the document aside.

"Here again, *madame,*" he said, indicating a copy beneath. "One for you, one for me. And this triplicate for the county records."

He handed Jeanne one of the copies, put a second in his pocket, and left the third on the table.

"I congratulate you," he said. "M. Maitland has lost his case. We have just heard. The decision was handed down more than a week ago."

Jeanne looked at him in dismay.

At that moment the grinning face of Jean Desmoulins appeared within the room.

"Ai, ai, M. Angus, you are wanted by Duncan and Alexandre!" cried the half-wit.

Angus started and looked at the notary, who turned to Jeanne. "*Au revoir* for the present, *madame,*" he said.

Angus's wife had already left the house for the night. The girl, standing beside the table, watched the two men go out. The significance of the news that La Rue had given her had hardly come home to her. It seemed to make no difference, but there had been something furtive about his concealment.

Vague distrust, never wholly extinguished under his plausible approaches, suddenly became merged in a presentiment of greater evil. She picked up the paper.

The contract was drawn as La Rue had proposed and read. She owed him twenty thousand dollars in six months' time on the security of the lands. Then her eyes fell on the copy.

But this was no copy. Drawn to the same length, so that the difference could not readily be recognizable in the gathering gloom, it was a marriage contract between La Rue and herself, signed by both, and witnessed!

Jeanne read it without uttering a sound. She let it drop from her fingers. A deathly chill crept up her limbs and seemed to constrict her heart like an icy band. He had the copy, of course. But this fraud meant nothing! She snatched up the paper, tore it fiercely into a score of pieces, and let them flutter upon the hearth like a shower of snow.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RETURN.

IT was not La Rue, but Alphonse Belley, the storekeeper, who had first received the news that Will had lost his case. The mail-carrier, leaving St. Boniface a few hours ahead of Will, had picked it up from one of the McGraemes, who had pulled ashore from the schooner to exchange brandy for flour.

Belley was retailing the news late in the afternoon to a number of cronies and customers who had gathered in his store.

"So it appears that M. Maitland's days are finished in Bonne Chance," he said. "Well, he could not stand up for long against Philippe La Rue. Philippe La Rue is a devil, as we all know, but he is a *Canaven* like us, and the *Canaven* devil is better than the English devil."

Hearty approval greeted this dictum, especially on the part of Will's employees.

"He won't come back," continued Belley, encouraged by the demonstration. "He's got too much sense for that."

"If he comes back before our schooners get out of harbor, he won't live to carry any more tales to the Blanche!" shouted one of the audience. "Eh, Duncan is on the watch!"

"For my part, I'm glad to see the last of that M. Maitland, either way," said Poulin, the mill-hand. "Now we'll have a good master of our own race over us, instead of a foreigner."

"Yes, M. Maitland has done a lot of mischief here, not to speak of cutting down wages and growing rich while our families starved, and now we shall have a good *Canaven* master," said another hand.

"But the mischief's done," said Belley. "It won't be long now before you see the sealing company here. Just as soon as the ice goes out their steamers will be in port."

"And to think that Mme. Dorion should have fallen in love with the scoundrel!"

"That was where he played false. If he hadn't tried to take her from Philippe La Rue he wouldn't have got into so much trouble. Now M. Philippe has the lands and everything. Jeremiah has lost all."

"Eh, the great rascal of a Scotchman!" grunted Belley. "So Philippe La Rue will be the new *seigneur*, and Jeremiah comes down into the dirt! They say he had his stroke when M. Philippe's mortgage fell due and he couldn't meet it."

"Well, I must be going," said Poulin. "So long as M. Maitland pays out good money, I can't afford to lose it." He looked out. "*Bateche*, another storm!"

He stamped out, and the rest straggled out behind him. Belley went to the door, closed it, and, taking a broom, began to sweep the dust from the floor toward the trap-door of the cellar in one corner. When he had collected it, he opened the trap and brushed it down. Then he began to dust the counter.

He enumerated the bananas still remaining on hand, counted some rolls of cloth, and finally began to add up his sales for the day. He was in the middle of this when the door opened and Jean Desmoulins appeared, white with snow. A gust of wind blew a cloud into the store.

"Shut the door, imbecile!" shouted the storekeeper.

Jean obeyed, and went shivering toward the wood-fire burning in Belley's stove. Stretching out his hands, he warmed them at the blaze.

"Well what news hast thou?" demanded Bailey.

"Ai, M. Alphonse, M. Maitland has just arrived, and M. Angus and Duncan have gone to kill him."

"What's that you say?" demanded Belley. "Who told you this?"

"Ai, M. Alphonse, Duncan sent me for M. Angus at M. Jeremiah's house. M. Philippe was there, and Mme. Jean."

"Who told thee that they will murder M. Maitland?" asked Belley, striding softly toward him.

"Ai, M. Alphonse, I have heard it said. I never forget. And now there will be five hundred dollars for me, eh, M. Alphonse?"

Belley, whose face had suddenly gone purple, seized Jean by the shoulders and began shaking him to and fro with a pounding movement, causing the half-wit's head to vibrate from side to side like a marionette's.

"Imbecile! What is this about five hundred dollars?" he shouted.

Jean whimpered. "Ai, ai, I am a poor imbecile, M. Alphonse!"

Belley went on shaking him, and he was apparently so deeply engrossed in this pastime that he did not hear the door open until he was aware of the roar of wind and snow that burst into the store. Then he turned, to see a stranger standing before the counter.

"Shut that door!" shouted the storekeeper.

The stranger kicked it to with his foot.

Belley regarded him out of narrowed eyes. This blond giant was a stranger along that coast. He presented a singular appearance, for his skin, blackened, as if by exposure to intense heat and sunlight, had peeled in places, exposing a milk-white integument beneath, while in others it had acquired patches of protective pigmentation. That in itself was singular, but when the storekeeper caught the look in the stranger's eyes he leaped backward in terror.

"What can I do for you, *monsieur?*" he stammered.

The stranger laughed uproariously, and yet there was something in the sound of it that sent a chill through Belley's heart.

"*Eh bien,* it's my old shipmate Alphonse!" cried the stranger heartily. "And Jean, there, as I live! Thou wast a foolish boy in the old days, Jean! How hast thou fared since then?"

"Ai, ai!" screamed Jean Desmoulins. "It is M. Dorion! It is our *seigneur!*"

"Right!" cried Dorion boisterously. "Set out the bottle and glasses, Alphonse, and lock your store. We three will have a drink together, in memory of old times. It is not long I can stay, for I have business in Bonne Chance to-night—though indeed it may be here," he added seriously.

Alphonse Belley, trembling so that he hardly hold it, produced a bottle of brandy from beneath the counter, and three thick tumblers. He began tremulously to pour a drink for Dorion, but the man, grasping his hand, held it until the glass was full.

Then he raised the tumblerful of raw spirits to his lips.

"Here's luck to my devil!" he cried, and drained it at a draught. He set it down with a smack of satisfaction.

"Eh, Alphonse, why dost thou tremble and not drink with me?" he cried, clapping the storekeeper on the shoulder. "Drink, man, and Jean with thee!"

Belley poured out a tot for himself and another for the half-wit.

"Well, old comrades," cried Dorion, "there were the five of us in the old days, were there not? Thou, Jean, and I, and Jeremiah McGraeme, sailing together in the one boat, and thou, Alphonse, and Philippe La Rue in the other, and off to the sealing grounds. Changes! Great changes, Alphonse! I have learned of them along the coast.

"Jeremiah McGraeme has become a great man since my wife held the Dorion lands. And Philippe La Rue, he is a great man, too, *hein?* Those were great days, shipmates! And when we all landed on Miquelon, drunk, and the gendarme would have arrested me, and I killed him—that was a great deed, eh? And what saidst thou of that in Bonne Chance, Alphonse, *hein?*"

"We said that you had been drowned at sea, Emile," said Belley huskily. "We did not wish your wife to know what had happened to you. We all agreed on that story, and none of us has ever betrayed the truth—not even Jean here!"

"Thoughtful and kind, Alphonse!" shouted Dorion, slamming his hand down on the storekeeper's shoulder again. "But what if my little Jeanne believed me dead, and married again, *hein,* Alphonse?"

"She—she has not married," faltered the storekeeper.

"So much I know," grinned Dorion. "But when we fled from Miquelon, Jeremiah and I and Jean, who was it told our fellows in the next boat of what happened, *hein,* Jean?"

"I am a poor imbecile!" stuttered Jean Desmoulins, with flopping knees.

"So much we all know, Jean; and thou hast not changed, Jean Desmoulins. And therefore I bet my hat"—he slammed it on the counter, upsetting the glasses—"that thou hast not received thy share of that thousand dollars reward that the authorities of Miquelon offered for my betrayal, *hein,* Jean?"

"Ai, ai, he has not given me my five hundred dollars!" screamed the imbecile, pointing a long finger furiously at the storekeeper.

But Dorion already had Alphonse Belley by the throat, and the storekeeper was black in the face, and his tongue was protruding, and gurgling sounds came rattling from his larynx.

"So it was thou, old Alphonse, *hein?*" he roared, and suddenly released him and flung him back, laughing more loudly than before.

"Dost thou know, Alphonse, why I did not choke the soul out of thee?" he asked. He struck his breast. "It is because my devil here tells me that thou art not the man whom I am looking for. Who was it whispered to thee to sell me to the authorities at St. Pierre, *hein*, Alphonse? Jeremiah, my father-in-law, because he coveted the lands which would fall to his niece, my little Jeanne? Or my old friend Philippe La Rue, who was casting sheep's eyes at her? No, do not tell me, Alphonse, for thou art a great liar, and my devil here will tell me which of them it was when the time comes."

But for the present Alphonse Belley was beyond telling anything as he sprawled, gurgling, over a bolt of cloth.

"Ai, M. Emile," cried Jean, "have you been dead, then, that you have seen the devil? M. Alphonse and I saw you break from the gendarmes when they came to take you, and they shot you dead."

Dorion turned upon Jean and seized him in his powerful arms.

"I have been dead and in hell!" he cried boisterously. "Thou hast a good memory for a half-wit, *hein?*"

"*Ai, monsieur,* I forget nothing. It is only when M. Alphonse tells me to forget that I forget, because I am a poor imbecile. *Ai, monsieur,* pay me my five hundred dollars for betraying you!"

Dorion uttered a roar, and, unbuttoning his coat, dripping with melted snow, pulled out a huge, weather-stained wallet and counted out from it five hundred-dollar bills, which was all it contained. He flung them at Jean, who leaped at them and gathered them into his hands.

"Now," shouted Dorion, "I go to find the man who betrayed me, and also my little Jeanne, and my good devil shall tell me what to do!" He swaggered to the door. "*Bonsoir, b'hommes!*" he shouted. "We'll drink to my devil in hell together when I return!"

He was gone like the devil in the rush of wind that set the oil-lamp flickering. The whirl of snow that entered seemed in the half darkness like a wraith rushing into the store.

"Eh, shut the door, Jean!" coughed Belley. "Dost thou want that madman to come back and murder us? Put the bolt on! We sleep to-night together!"

Jean obeyed, chuckling. When he came back Belley had opened the candy-case and piled all its contents in a heap on the floor —nearly a score of boxes. With his hook he lifted down the remnants of the bananas and put this on top of them.

"These are the value of that five hundred dollars of thine, Jean," he said, taking the bills from between the half-wit's fingers.

Jean let them flutter into the storekeeper's palm, and, with exclamations of delight, sat down upon the floor.

"Listen, now, Jean!" coughed Belley. "We have seen nobody to-night—thou understandest? Poor imbecile that thou art, henceforward thou rememberest nothing of that time when we sailed with Emile Dorion for the sealing grounds!"

"Ah, *oui, monsieur,*" mumbled the half-wit, cramming his mouth with candies.

The storm was at its zenith as Dorion strode from the store and took the road along the cliff toward the neck. The fierce gusts swirled his cloak around him and threatened to blow him from his feet. He strode on through the gale until he reached the drop of the cliff that gives upon the meadows and the narrows of Presqu' Ile.

It was a strange night for any one to be abroad except by necessity, but a little group of men was gathered here, looking out uneasily toward the sea and muttering. At Dorion's approach they scattered as timorously as sheep, and then, as if ashamed, came crowding back upon him, half aggressively, too, and eager to scan his face.

Strange passions had been stirred in Bonne Chance that night, and the minds of these men matched aptly with Dorion's. At the apparition of the blond giant all idea of aggression died. He had lost his hat, and his hair fell like tow about his shoulders. The madness in his eyes made

him the embodiment of terror to the little group, and yet his voice was as smooth as honey when he addressed them.

"*Bonsoir, b'hommes!*" he shouted. "A fine night for devil's work, eh, *messieurs?*"

"What dost thou know, a stranger?" growled one of those whom he addressed. But another started forward and stared into the madman's face.

"Ah, *bon Dieu,* it is our *seigneur* Emile Dorion, come back from the dead!" he screamed.

There was an instant of intense scrutiny, and then the group had dispersed and was running along the road toward Bonne Chance as fast as its legs would carry it.

But Dorion had seized the speaker by the shoulders, holding him fast.

He studied the face of the terrified man attentively. "So it is thou, little Ulysse Savard!" he exclaimed. "And thou hast remembered me. *Ben!* Tell me, now, where is my little Jeanne?"

The man raised a trembling hand and pointed toward Presqu' Ile.

"So she still grieves for me, and has not married again?"

"No, *mon seigneur*—no, M. Emile," stammered the man.

"*Ben!*" shouted Dorion. "*Au revoir,* little Ulysse Savard! My devil—"

That was all Ulysse heard as he fled at top speed through the gale, to tell his comrades that the devil had come to preside over the obsequies of the English spy.

CHAPTER XXV.

WRECKED.

A LOW tapping at the door startled Jeanne from her tense absorption. The thought that it was La Rue, returned, roused her to a desperation of anger. She went quickly into the hall and opened it. But the figure that entered in the whirl of snow was that of Mme. Angus.

She came forward hurriedly in the dark and clasped the girl's hands in hers. "He is in danger," she sobbed. "I learned of it only a few minutes ago. I overheard Angus and Duncan talking. I had to come to you. I made Angus promise that he should not be harmed, but I cannot trust him. He was good to me, as you know—"

Jeanne caught at her arm. "Who, Rose?" she cried. "Not Will?"

"M. Maitland. I made Angus promise me—"

"Where is he?"

"He is coming into Bonne Chance by the dog-sleigh. They have planned to waylay him outside the village and take him aboard the schooner, so that he shall not betray the sailing of the fleet to the Blanche. Duncan said they would kill him, but I made Angus promise me he should not be harmed."

"Stay here with my uncle!" cried Jeanne. "I'm going—"

"Ah, *mon Dieu,* you cannot go in this storm!" cried Rose McGraeme. "They will stop at nothing—Angus and Duncan and the boys. They have followed him from Quebec. Half of Bonne Chance knows. They will kill you, too!" she wailed.

Jeanne had flung on her coat and crammed down the fur cap on her head. "Where is it? Where is the schooner?"

"Off the old wharf. What are you going to do? They will kill you, too, and then me, and every one who may try to help him. They are desperate. They have sworn he shall never betray the schooners again."

Jeanne shook her off, caught up her snow-shoes, and buckled the straps across her insteps. Unheeding the wails of the woman at her side, she flung the door open and plunged into the storm, taking the road toward the neck as fast as her snow-shoes would permit her. La Rue's trick was completely forgotten in the fear that gripped her.

Reaching the neck, she made her way across the dunes and frozen arms of water in the direction of the little, disused quay. The minutes seemed eternities; she prayed as she stumbled on that she might not be too late, and all the while she could see nothing but the track immediately ahead of her, and all the while the wind howled wildly and blew the snow into her face.

At length the outline of the little wharf loomed up before her. All about it the ice floes, loosened by the storm, ground upon one another, battering at the sides, and at the sides of the schooner, which Jeanne could dimly make out at the pier's end. She groaned and strained at the ropes that held her, and the wind howled through her standing rigging.

The girl kicked off her snow-shoes, climbed the side of the pier over the piled-up floes, and began to run along it through the deep snow that covered the warped, broken boards. Now she could see figures upon the schooner's deck, and one upon the end of the pier, casting off the stern rope. The bow rope had already been cast off, and the vessel was turning under the force of the tide.

As the other rope went free Jeanne leaped the widening interval, the man scrambled aboard and turned toward her. She found herself face to face with Angus. At the helm was Eudore; Duncan was hauling on the mainsail; Alexandre was running up the forejib.

Duncan, turning his head at the same moment, saw her. He leaped back with an oath, and the great sail came clattering down.

Angus, staring dumfounded, could only stammer:

"What are you doing here, Jeanne?"

"Where is M. Maitland?" cried the girl fiercely.

"He is not here? How the devil should he be aboard?" shouted Duncan, with a vicious scowl.

"How long do you think you have been permitted to use that language to me, Duncan?" cried Jeanne. "I asked where M. Maitland is."

"I don't know. In Quebec, I suppose," Duncan muttered.

"You are lying to me. He is on board this ship, and I am going to find him."

"Eh, Jeanne, have you lost your senses?" shouted Angus, who, as acting chief, could venture with more authority. "You are mad, girl! Put back!" he shouted to Eudore.

The tiller veered in Eudore's hands, and, as the ship careened, a great wave struck her amidships, deluging them all with icy water. Alexandre, who had run up the jib, came up, defiant and waiting upon his father's order.

The schooner, carried by the swirling tide beyond the pier, was drifting dangerously near the pack shore ice.

"Put back!" yelled Angus as the schooner righted.

"No, no!" shouted Duncan. "Put her head to sea! We'll be crushed against the pier! We'll take her with us, Angus. Put her in the poop cabin!"

Unconsciously he had given the girl her clue. Jeanne darted past him, eluding his attempt to seize her, leaped into the waist, and ran toward the fo'c's'le. Alexandre sprang to intercept her, stumbled as the ship rolled, and went sprawling. As the girl ran, she saw an ax lying beside a half-cord of wood that had been stacked amidships. She snatched it up and beat in the flimsy door of the fo'c's'le with half a dozen furious strokes.

Will was reeling dizzily in the middle of the tiny cabin.

Jeanne ran to him and thrust the ax into his hands. He stared at her, called her name.

She clung to him a moment. "Are you hurt?" she cried in his ear.

He pushed back his hair, matted with blood. She pointed into the ship's waist, where Angus, Duncan, and Alexandre were running forward.

Will began to understand. He stepped forward. Jeanne thrust herself in front of him. At the sight of the two the ruffians came to a perplexed halt. Jeanne's cries to them were drowned in the roar of the wind.

The schooner, driving with great speed under a single jib, had, more by luck than Eudore's steersmanship, negotiated the packed floes, and was heading for the open Gulf, pitching like a cork in the surging waves.

Each movement sent them staggering. Jeanne clung to Will, steadying him, and the short delay gave him a breathing space. The chill air of the Gulf revived him. At last he remembered.

Angus came forward.

"Eh, Jeanne, why do you interfere with us?" he cried furiously. "You always stood by your own till this damned spy came to Bonne Chance. He's taken all we had, and he's come back to betray our sealing schooners. Stand out of the way, and let us get at him."

"That's untrue, Angus!" shouted the girl. "You're the oldest man here. You've got the most sense. M. Maitland has never harmed any of us. And you know what it will mean to all of you if he is harmed."

"*Bateche!* You are mad, Jeanne!" yelled Angus furiously. "My home—my brandy—our schooners gone—all gone! You're a traitress. Get out of the way at once!"

Duncan and Alexandre were creeping forward.

"Get back!" cried the girl. "You've fought M. Maitland before this, when he had nothing but his fists. You'd better take care!"

They stopped, drew back, and stood whispering together.

Will slipped his arm around Jeanne. "I'm all right now," he said. "Go into the fo'c's'le."

But she persistently kept her place at his side.

"Put back into the bay, and this folly shall be forgotten!" she cried. "You know I'm one of you, Angus. I shall say nothing, nor will M. Maitland."

There was no response. Jeanne saw Duncan climb to the mainmast and haul on the sail again. It came up, fluttering, straining on the halyards, and at once the schooner bounded wildly forward, darting like a greyhound for the open Gulf. Presently Jeanne saw the three in conference upon the poop.

They meant to carry out their plans, but the respite had almost given Will back his strength.

He spoke in Jeanne's ear: "I was struck down in the fog and stunned. I remembered nothing after that, till I heard the door being battered in. I'm going aft to have it out with them."

"I'll come with you."

"Go into the fo'c's'le, Jeanne!"

She stood her ground obstinately. Just then they saw Angus coming forward. He stopped a few paces away and shouted:

"Eh, listen, then, Jeanne! We'll put you both ashore in the bay if you'll swear to say nothing about to-night. We'll be round Bout de l'Ile in a few minutes. What do you say? You swear it? And M. Maitland?"

A shadow leaped from the bow, hurling itself straight at Will, and knocking him down. It was Duncan, who had crept forward, unobserved in the darkness. In an instant Angus and Alexandre were at Will's throat as he tried to rise.

Jeanne flung herself among them, beating at them with her fists. Will rose upon one knee. Duncan's knife thrust at him, and pierced the fold of his mackinaw. Before the ruffian could withdraw it Will had brought the ax-blade down on his skull.

Duncan yelped once, and dropped. As he fell Will seized the writhing body, and, whirling it in his arms, drove Angus and Alexandre before him, along the waist of the ship.

Upon the poop they turned at bay. Will, dropping Duncan's body, hurled himself up the steps. Eudore screamed and ran from the tiller. Instantly the schooner leaped broadside to the waves. A huge sea broke aboard, and she careened until she lay with her starboard gunwale submerged.

Will was flung back, half stunned, into the waist.

Shuddering through all her timbers, the ship righted. Groping in three feet of water, Will found Jeanne clinging to the mainmast. He caught her by the hand and dragged her aft toward the poop cabin. Another sea burst over them, washing them to the poop steps.

Will dashed open the door of the poop cabin and pushed Jeanne inside. He ran up to the tiller and grasped it as it swung. The half-logged schooner came slowly about. He glanced around him. Eudore, half drowned, was clinging to the stern rail.

There was no sign of either Angus or Alexandre.

"Where are they?" Will shouted.

Eudore motioned despairingly over the waves.

"Take the tiller! Hold her while I bring down the mainsail!"

Will loosened the halyards and the sail came to the deck. The wild speed of the schooner lessened at once, though even her single jib was carrying her at a fast clip into the Gulf. To starboard was the bulk of Bout de l'Ile, with the great limestone arch.

Although headed apparently for the middle channel, it was clear that the ship was being sucked by the tide and driven by the wind toward the submerged fangs off the point, and only by a miracle could she clear them.

Will ran back to Eudore. "Steer the channel into the bay!" he shouted.

Eudore made some gesture. Will saw Jeanne at his side.

"There's a chance of clearing Bout de l'Ile and making the bay!" he cried into the girl's ear.

She slipped her arm through his, and they stood there, waiting. The deck was a mass of ice, their clothing stiffening into boards. Minutes passed. The snow-bound shore rushed by them. The storm was blowing over, but the wind blew steadily toward the shore.

They were directly off the point now, and the cross-currents appeared to hold the schooner motionless for a few minutes, though foot by foot she was drifting toward the lee shore. Now the little balcony before the limestone cave came into view, the long flight of steps, and the distant lights of Bonne Chance.

Eudore, at the tiller, worked frantically to win the channel between the lines of reefs, where the seas burst in hammer-strokes of spume. For a few minutes it seemed as if the danger were past, though the shore rushed by hardly a score of yards distant.

Now the reefs were all about them, the seas boiled, and the long combers lifted the schooner toward the rocks—or the calm waters of the bay.

Suddenly there came a jar, a scraping, rending sound, the vessel heeled, recovered, rode the tremendous surges, and, ripped from her port bow amidships, drifted, a sinking log, beyond the reefs toward the rocky base of Bout de l'Ile.

She was already half under. Will sprang for the jib and hauled it down. The tiller spun through Eudore's hands as the schooner grounded, and then, lifting herself, battered her broken bow against the granite base beneath the arch, and again, like some insensate suicide, beat out her timbers on the rocks. Then struggling more weakly as the level of the waves rose to her decks, she wedged herself beneath the arch and yielded her body to the surges.

Will caught Jeanne in his arm and stepped into the waves. As he emerged from the first contact with the icy waters he saw the wooden steps before him. He caught at them with his free hand, and clung there, and thus, buffeted, he gained his footing and drew Jeanne ashore.

Her eyes were closed, her head had fallen back on his shoulder. Her face was cold as death. Not stopping to revive her, Will lifted her in his arms and carried her, step by step, up the icy stairs.

At the beginning of the little rock-passage toward the cave he stopped, exhausted. Eudore rushed past him. He tried to call to him to bring aid, but his voice failed him. Gathering to him the last remnants of his strength, he carried the girl into the shelter of the stone chapel and laid her down.

He saw that she still breathed. He rubbed her frozen face and hands with snow. Their dripping clothes were again crackling with ice. To delay was fatal; at all cost he must bring help; but the lighthouse was not in operation, and the keeper did not occupy his cottage during the winter months.

He must leave Jeanne there, then, while he essayed the passage of the ravine. He would rest only a moment—he took the girl in his arms and drew her to him, so that she might not freeze to death while he waited for his strength to come back to him.

Then his eyes closed, and he lay at Jeanne's side upon the chapel floor.

Jeanne, roused from her faint by the sting of the snow upon her face, opened her eyes. She stared about her, saw Will at her side, and remembered all.

She staggered to her feet, and, wide awake, called to him and chafed his hands, and tried to awaken him in turn, and at last rose unsteadily upon her feet and stumbled to the chapel entrance.

She heard a footfall on the crackling snow, and came face to face with La Rue.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TWO SOULS PASS.

AFTER his conference with Angus, which lasted from the time they left Jeremiah's house together until they parted at the neck, where Duncan was impatiently awaiting his cousin's arrival, La Rue went to his house. At this crisis in his affairs he was conscious of a singular coolness and clarity of spirit; everything had been staked, and the issue was not in doubt.

Nevertheless, it would be as well to give Jeanne time to recover from the surprise and shock of the trick that he had played her.

He would go to her on the next day. If he knew how to handle women, he could count that the bold stroke would win him admiration in her eyes, and that she would make the best of her position. If she would not—well, she was his wife indubitably, by church and law, according to the contract reposing in his coat-pocket. And there was only old Jeremiah in the house with her. She would see reason.

He laughed over it as he ate his supper; but when his old housekeeper was gone the hounds of his passion leaped, baying, at their chains. Why should he wait even until to-morrow?

Jeanne would think no more of him—might even despise him; and at the worst there was only an old, crippled man and a girl.

Torn between desire and instinct, which bade him remain, he walked the floor of his study for a whole hour. He thought of the bitter blasts sweeping Presqu' Ile neck, and of the warmth within the cottage.

At last he put on his cap and coat, pulled on his high boots, and took the road toward the neck. Upon the opposite side of the street a little group of men stood huddled in sheepskins, and pointing out toward the invisible sea.

La Rue slunk quickly past them, unnoticed. He did not want to think of what their discussion was. Though he knew, he was not the moving spirit in the plot against Will.

As he stamped through the deep snow that covered the road, the warning instinct died in the face of his rising passion. He had waited too long, gone through too much to be balked now. When at length the McGraeme house came into sight he was striding with the easy assurance of one who has already conquered.

He opened the unbolted door. The parlor was unlit. Jeanne must be up-stairs in her uncle's room, where the lamplight showed through the drawn blinds. He made no particular ceremony about walking softly. Let her hear him; let her come down; it was his way of notifying her.

Nevertheless, he lit the parlor lamp and tossed off a drink of Jeremiah's brandy before going up-stairs. Jeremiah's door was half-open, but the old man was alone, for Mme. Angus had gone down to the shore in her anxiety and terror. La Rue walked in.

Jeremiah was lying propped up in bed, the great arms extended over the counterpane.

As La Rue entered he perceived the old man turn his head slightly toward him. The arms moved, but the face was expressionless, and no sound came from between the lips.

"Where's Jeanne?" La Rue demanded.

Jeremiah said nothing, but a somber light flickered in his eyes.

"Heard me, and lying low, eh, Jeremiah? Well, I've got her at last. I suppose she told you. She's signed a marriage contract with me in the presence of Angus and his wife. They witnessed it. A little bit of sharp practise, Jeremiah, but she

won't think any the less of me for that. And don't you worry your head about Dorion turning up. Dorion's a dream. Forget him!"

Jeremiah's eyes were a blaze of impotent fury. A sudden rage seized La Rue as he felt this unspoken anger burning upon him. He thrust his face forward into Jeremiah's.

"You've played a long, tricky game for those lands, old friend," he said. "I've beaten you. Better get used to the idea. Now, where's Jeanne? In her room, eh? I'm going to her."

Jeremiah's lips opened and closed. For the first time, spurred by intense emotion, his will forced itself into the channels of the dead nerves of the larynx, and a grunting sound came from his mouth. The big fists began to go up and down upon the bed like flails. The body heaved like that of a bound Titan.

There were three rooms up-stairs. La Rue turned into the one adjoining Jeremiah's; the lamp from the old man's table illuminated it, and a single glance showed that it was empty. La Rue crossed the hall and knocked at the opposite door. When no answer came he struck a match, turned the handle, and looked in. This room was empty, too.

He went back, furious. "Where is she?" he demanded.

The flail-like fists were still thrashing on the counterpane. Jeremiah's helpless wrath beat down the notary's rage. La Rue went out quickly.

Where had she gone? To Cawmill's house, perhaps, as he had learned she had gone on the night when she meditated flight with Will. He cursed himself for not having thought of that possibility. Still, there was the chance that she had taken refuge somewhere near by when she heard him enter. La Rue considered.

There was nowhere at the top of the house that could serve her as a hiding-place, but there were the kitchen and the stables. He went down, took up the parlor lamp, and carried it into the kitchen adjoining.

The girl was not there. He set it down and went out to the back. The stable was a little distance to one side of the house; immediately behind the kitchen was a weed-grown space, and behind this a mass of towering rocks, sprawling against the edge of the humped plateau behind, and riddled with caves.

The storm was dwindling. The moon appeared suddenly among the clouds, lighting up the scene. La Rue, standing irresolute, started violently as he saw a figure emerge, apparently from the rocks, and stagger toward him. Next instant he recognized Eudore, dripping with seawater.

The man ran up to him, extending two palsied arms. "Eh, the fire, the fire!" he gasped.

La Rue caught him from the shoulders.

"Where do you come from? Where's M. Maitland?" he snarled.

"Eh, they're all dead but me, and he's in there with Jeanne," answered Eudore.

Despite the sudden blinding rage that took possession of him at the words, La Rue understood whence Eudore had come. There was a legend in Bonne Chance that the stone chapel at Bout de l'Ile, inaccessible from the Presqu' Ile road on account of the great masses of rock that ran out into the bay, was connected with the McGraemes' haunts by a natural tunnel. But the McGraemes had always known how to keep their secrets.

La Rue swung Eudore round violently in the direction from which he had come, and pointed. Under the compulsion of his grasp Eudore led the way, plunging into the darkness of one of the crevices in the hillside. Presently, as they progressed, they heard the thunder of the breakers, accentuated within the hollow of the rock chamber. In a minute more there came a glimpse of moonlight, and La Rue found himself within the chapel.

Eudore, released, darted back, moaning and shivering. La Rue went forward. Beside the entrance he saw Will lying unconscious on the ground. Jeanne knelt by him, and, at La Rue's appearance, the girl cried out and rose to her feet stiffly, pointing to Will. Then, recognizing La Rue, she started violently and drew back.

La Rue looked from one to the other. He bent over Will. He laid his hand upon his cheek. It was icy cold, but there was warmth in the hollow of the throat beneath the ear, and Will stirred under his touch and mumbled.

La Rue turned to the girl.

"Well, Jeanne?" he asked.

"Will you bring help, while I stay with him?" asked the girl simply. "I'm too weak." She leaned against the wall of the cave. "I'm afraid he's dying."

"I'll do anything in the world for you, Jeanne," answered the notary, with a sudden burst of passion. "It's all right now, isn't it? You'll come to me as my wife?"

"Never!" she returned. "If you're a man you'll go for help. His life will be on your conscience."

"I'll go; but I'll take you with me, Jeanne. Come!"

He caught her by the arm, but she dragged herself away.

"I'll never go with you!" Jeanne answered.

Deep in La Rue's heart a bitter hate was burning, kindling into him a fierce resolve to conquer this girl who defied him. It urged him to beat down her opposition with blows of his fists upon the frail and weakened body which housed her defiant spirit.

Madness of hate and madness of passion struggled in him, and blended into a single instinct of possession.

"*Maudit,* you're mine, Jeanne!" he shouted. "All's fair in love and war. You signed that paper, and you're married to me!"

Her voice was very weak, and her answer simple.

"Philippe La Rue, M. Maitland is perhaps dying. Will you not bring aid, or let me pass you?"

"Let him die! I'll save no English spies that come here to betray us, unless you swear to come to me as my wife. There's nothing can come between us now; we're man and wife; you signed that paper—"

He caught her shrinking body to him. She screamed and tried to elude him; she turned and beat his face with her fists. He swore, and, as she half broke from him and ran toward the chapel's entrance, caught her again and held her more tightly. She felt herself swooning.

Standing at the door of Jeremiah's kitchen, La Rue knew nothing of the man watching him from the rocks beside the Presqu' Ile road, nor that his entrance into the tunnel with Eudore was observed by one who had been born into the secret of the sea-path to the hills, carven by nature before she had made man to traverse it, and known to the Indians from immemorial time.

Dorion, crouching among the rocks, with eyes that saw everything, marked La Rue's journey.

Presently he descended into the road and went up to Jeremiah's house. The lamp, burning upon the kitchen table, illuminated the parlor faintly, but Dorion did not go into the parlor. The instinct which now dominated and controlled him told him that Jeremiah was up-stairs as surely as if he had been a tracking beast of prey. Noiselessly he went up and, without hesitating, entered Jeremiah's room.

Jeremiah, exhausted by his futile struggle against the bonds that chained his limbs, had fallen back upon the pillows. Despair was in his eyes, but the carven face remained immobile and expressionless.

Dorion stepped to the bedside and looked at him in silence. Steadily and unwinking the dumb man and the man with the dumb devil continued to watch each other.

Whatever messages were flashed from soul to soul, not a sound escaped either of the two men as they read each other's hearts. Dorion saw himself reflected in each of Jeremiah's eyes, beside the lamp. It was his devil that he was now nodding and smiling at, staring back at him from either pupil, and not Jeremiah.

He knew that this was not the man he was looking for. Chuckling softly, Dorion stepped out of the room and down the stairs. Then he went through the kitchen and took the road that La Rue had taken.

As Jeanne's resistance suddenly relaxed,

La Rue became aware of a figure in the stone chapel behind him. At first he thought that it was Will, arisen from unconsciousness. Then he knew.

There was a grin on the lips of the blond giant, and he was crouched like a panther in the gloom of the cave, his twitching fingers like talons ready for burying in his victim's throat.

La Rue's blood froze. A scream broke from his lips. He dropped his unconscious burden and staggered back, staring in incredulous horror at the apparition of the man whom he had believed dead long since.

He glanced shiftily to left and right, and then, turning quickly, he ran out to the balcony, with the intention of scaling the wooden steps and gaining the summit of Bout de l'Ile. But at the same instant Dorion leaped, not at La Rue, but so as to interpose his body between him and the rocky ledge that ran from the balcony toward the stairs.

La Rue leaped back, crouching in mad panic at the edge of the ledge.

"Let me pass! What do you want?" he shouted.

Dorion did not answer a word, but crouched too, watching him, with a fearful tension in the poised muscles.

"I know what you want," cried La Rue. "You think it was I who betrayed you to the gendarmes. It was Belley and Jean Desmoulins, and old Jeremiah, who egged them on, in order to get you out of the way and have Jeanne's lands."

He raved in his fear, but Dorion neither spoke nor stirred.

"I did my best to save you. I'll talk it all over with you to-morrow, and we'll settle who was responsible. I have proofs. We'll cross-examine everybody, if you'll come to my house. I swear I had no hand in it. Let me pass! Holy Name, he's a devil, he isn't a man!"

He stepped a little nearer, his eyes scanning the interval between Dorion and the mouth of the cave, Dorion and the low ledge of the balcony.

"If you're angry because you heard what I was saying to Jeanne, I—we thought that you were dead. How was I to know you were still alive when you'd been shot down in St. Pierre? And if you hadn't died we were sure you'd been hanged for that murder. Of course, now you've come back, Jeanne's yours—"

"Not a word answered him. La Rue's heart was hammering in his throat. No he knew what Dorion's look portended. This was death that stood in his way. He could count its approach by seconds, could see the monster staring out of Dorion's eyes, preparing for its leap at him.

He ran to meet it. He hurled himself at Dorion with a loud, strangled cry. And Dorion's answering cry rang like shrill laughter above the whistle of the wind and the crash of breakers below.

They grappled in the mid-balcony. All the hate fanned by the years of his imprisonment had gone into the muscles of Dorion's arms. La Rue was no weakling, and terror had armed his own muscles as if with sheaths of steel; but he was like a babe in the hold of his enemy. Dorion's hands clutched his throat and bent his head backward, and back until it seemed as if the vertebrae would snap like brittle pipes.

As his head went back La Rue saw with inverted gaze that the summit of Bout de l'Ile was crowded with spectators. They came running down the wooden steps, shouting. La Rue saw all this as in a clear picture, and something within him, rising above his fear, calculated that they would arrive too late.

He saw it all, although his face was turning purple, his heels were drumming on the edge of the ledge, and his strangling screams, cut off by the wind, sounded no louder than the twittering of birds.

The spray of the waves leaped over them. The men who came running along the ledge, unable to intervene, saw for one moment the two men poised on the very extremity, where the balcony began. La Rue was bent backward in Dorion's arms and he had his arms about him. If the *seigneur* had meant to free himself at the last, it was too late.

They were gone in the whip of a huge wave that lashed the parapet, locked fast together.

Nothing was visible below but the seething and treacherous sea.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TOGETHER.

AS from a torture chamber Will emerged to consciousness of the sunlit room and the bed in which he was lying. He groaned as his slight movements sent that racking pain once more through his bandaged limbs. He opened his eyes and recognized Paul Cawmill seated at his side.

"Jeanne!" he muttered.

"Eh, she is better, M. Maitland. She will be permitted to leave her bed tomorrow, and you shall see her. You must lie still, *monsieur*."

"Where am I? I thought—"

"In the house of M. Jeremiah McGraeme. You have been ill, after the shipwreck. You were badly frostbitten, *monsieur*."

Will was too weak to question further. But he puzzled a long while over this. Only bit by bit was he able to reconstruct in sequence the events of the wild cruise. And his recollections ended with the sinking of the schooner.

He questioned Paul again that afternoon, when he felt stronger.

"Who took me off the ship?" he asked. "I remember jumping into the water—that's all."

"Holy Name!" exclaimed Paul. "Did you not carry Mme. Dorion up the stairs in your arms and place her in the chapel, *monsieur?*"

"You're dreaming, Paul."

"*Eh bien,* I dream. But still, it is necessary to lie still and not to talk, *monsieur,* till you are better."

Will was brought to acquiescence only by the positive assurances that he should see Jeanne on the morrow. All the day he had believed her dead, he had thought that Paul was trying to hide the news from him. He remembered nothing that had occurred after that leap with Jeanne. He never remembered, and it was not until he was well that he learned of Dorion's return and the death-fight between Dorion and La Rue.

He was all of a fever the next day until Jeanne came in. Her hands were wrapped in bandages, but she had not been so badly frostbitten as Will. She knelt down at the bedside, and he drew her face down to his breast, and for a long time she was content to lie there before raising her face to smile at him.

What he had to say was to make her miserable for two days thereafter.

"Jeanne, you know I've lost the lawsuit. You've won. You own the Dorion lands."

"Yes, Will," she answered mechanically.

Rose McGraeme had told her of the tragedy, but it was not necessary then for her to let Will know that Dorion's return had introduced a new complex into the situation, and as swiftly withdrawn it. The information had thrown her into a violent agitation. She had been spared the shock of seeing the last fight, and even La Rue's attack upon her in the chapel had left only a cloudy impression on her brain.

She had controlled herself after hearing the news from the old woman with a great effort, for Will's sake, and had shut her mind alike against the horror of it and the sin of rejoicing at her deliverance.

"I can't ask you to marry me now, Jeanne," whispered Will weakly.

She put her face against his.

"But you have asked me, Will," she whispered back.

"I've got to make a fresh start, Jeanne. I'm a pauper, just as your uncle foretold. How is he?"

"Better, Will," she said with a sigh.

Just then Paul entered, and she started up guiltily. Paul looked at the ceiling with an expression of so much discretion that the superiority of his attitude drove the girl from the room in confusion.

Paul came to Will's bedside.

"Ah, *monsieur,* he said, "if only you had permitted me to accompany you on board, this accident would never have occurred. Undoubtedly we should have succeeded in giving warning of the sealing fleet. Now they are gone, and the Blanche

I hope that the government will take a lenient view."

"Go ahead with what you have to say, Paul," said Will in a weak voice.

"Why, *monsieur*, I merely said that, had you permitted me to accompany you on board I could have saved the vessel. It was bitter news that Angus brought me, that I was to await you in Bonne Chance, and not to go to the rendezvous."

"So Angus told you that, eh? What else did he tell you?"

"He told me, *monsieur*, how he and Duncan had joined you in the service of the government, and that, to throw the people off the track, it would be pretended that they were to kidnap you aboard the schooner. Thus the Blanche would be warned before the sealing fleet had started, and a search would reveal the sealing implements aboard."

"So you still think I am a government spy, eh, Paul?"

Paul winked at him. "Ah, *monsieur!*" he said knowingly. "See now, *monsieur*, is it not true that, by mistrusting me, you have brought misfortunes upon yourself? There was the time when you came alone to Presqu' Ile to catch the smugglers, and were nearly killed by them. There is this time, when you should have permitted me to go aboard and save the vessel by my seamanship, instead of distrusting me. And now I am afraid that the government will be angry with you, *monsieur*, and"—to Will's surprise he burst out sobbing—"they will take you from Presqu' Ile."

"Paul," said Will, "you're worth your weight in gold as a man with a genius for coming to the most impossibly wrong conclusions. It is true that I am leaving Presqu' Ile."

"*Ah, monsieur*, so the government requires you here no longer?"

"I am not here for the government. How many times must I tell you that I am here to cut airplane timber on my own account?" asked Will in exasperation.

Paul tried to wink at him. "*Bien, monsieur!* And this airplane timber—why may it not still be cut?" he inquired. "Perhaps you do not know that Georges Savard has concealed many kegs of brandy—"

"That will do, Paul," said Will.

Paul hesitated, looked at his master mournfully, and then went out. Will did not see Jeanne again that day. On the next morning she was sitting up in his chair, awaiting her impatiently, when there sounded the shuffling of feet in the passage without.

A tap came at the door. To Will's astonishment there entered a deputation of six men, headed by Gingras and Poulin.

Gingras explained. "*Monsieur,*" he said, "we have heard that you are going to leave Bonne Chance."

"Yes, Gingras. The government has decided that the Dorion lands are the property of Mme. Dorion. There is, then, no further work for me."

"That is what we have come to see you about, *monsieur*. We do not want you to go. Consider, *monsieur*, the advantages that you remove from us of Bonne Chance! No work—no wages—hunger! And then, *monsieur*, before you came, Bonne Chance had a reputation—very bad—for smuggling.

"Now you have driven these men away, and established work for us all. So we have talked it over, and we are agreed that, if you will remain, we will work for you for a dollar and eighty-five cents a day, until the times improve."

Will was touched by the naive proposal. He tried to explain the situation to the men. But it was clear that the idea that he was a government agent had now taken firm root in Bonne Chance again, and this time, as a supposedly successful one, he had the solid backing of the village.

The McGraemes were dead, the smuggling was at an end, the fleet he learned had cleared for the sealing grounds unmolested, and the next year's earnings were secure. Bonne Chance was now looking toward the steady job on Presqu' Ile, in place of the uncertain chance of jobs in distant lumber camps.

"If you will write to the government, *monsieur*, that we work for a dollar eighty-five," suggested Gingras hopefully, "perhaps they will permit the work to continue."

Will was almost compelled to order them

from the room. Yet, after they had gone, he fell to thinking. If only he could stay, perhaps as Jeanne's manager! But that would create an impossible situation.

She was strangely distant when she came in that afternoon. Paul, too, had been acting strangely all day. Will's nerves were stretched to breaking-point by his perplexities, and the pain of his injuries.

"You seem unhappy, Jeanne," he said. "Has anything gone wrong?"

She shook her head.

"Your uncle?"

"No, it is not my uncle," she answered petulantly. "Will you have some eggs for your supper?"

"I'm not thinking about my supper," answered Will, taking her hand. "What is the matter, Jeanne?"

She tried to draw her hand away. Her tears fell on it.

"Jeanne, there is something the matter. What is it? Why didn't you come back yesterday, or to-day until just now? It isn't what I was saying yesterday that hurt you?"

He drew her toward the arm of his chair.

"I was going to ask if you would wait for me, Jeanne. But I hadn't screwed up my courage to the point. It isn't as if I were a young man—I didn't want to bind you—"

"Will, let's be honest with each other," she returned. "I knew it was all impossible from the beginning. It was natural that you should think you cared for me, I suppose, when we were thrown together here so much, first by our enmity, and—then in the way we were. But I always knew that I was inexperienced, uneducated, not at all fit for you—"

"Jeanne, what are you driving at?"

"That was why I felt it was all hopeless. I am so willing to release you, Will. Did you suppose it would be necessary to persuade me, or to make excuses? Do I want to be the wife of a man who would be ashamed of me, and sorry all his life?"

Will caught her in his arms.

She did not struggle, but drew herself to the limit of his grasp and remained obstinately looking away.

"Now, Jeanne, dear, you'll have to explain," he said. "I'll never let you go until you do."

"I know," she said in a low voice, "all about that girl you were engaged to in Quebec."

Will got out of his chair. "You do, eh?" he asked in a quiet voice. He shouted in a voice of thunder, "Paul!"

Jeanne started, tried to break from him. "What is the matter, Will?" she cried. "You are not going to—to do anything to Paul?"

"Only wring his ass's head from his shoulders, that's all, Jeanne. Paul, come here immediately!"

"Will!" She turned toward him. "You mean to say that—it was all Paul's imagination?"

"Not his imagination, Jeanne. Just his malignant, asinine discretion. Paul, you might as well come when you're called, or else I'm coming after you!"

Paul's voice was shouting below. Jeanne clung to Will.

"Not a word—not a word of truth?" she gasped. "Don't hurt him! You are so strong! He didn't mean—"

"Will you marry me, Jeanne? You know I love you with all my heart; I meant to ask you to wait for me, but I can't do it or take chances with arch-asses like Paul around. Will you marry me? Quick? You scoundrel! I've been calling you—I'll kill him unless you say 'yes,' Jeanne."

"Yes! Yes!" she breathed quickly, as Paul came into the room.

"I thought you called me, *monsieur*," said Paul innocently, casting one of his discreet looks upward.

Will strode forward.

"I did, you—you—" He grasped Paul's hand in his. "I wanted to tell you what a good foreman I've got, Paul," he said huskily. "And tell the men their jobs will last as long as they want them. I'm going to keep right on the job, and there'll be work for everybody in Bonne Chance who wants it."

(The end.)

Suggestion

by

Burton Harcourt

THE slashing of rain against my window made me nervous. I tried to read and could not. I puffed furiously on my cigar, chewed the end of it, then gave it up and tossed it into the grate. While I was searching for my pipe the door-bell rang.

The boy I found outside was dripping with rain.

"Are you Mr. Watermount?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered. "Come in."

"I can't," he said. "There's a man at the Planters' Hotel wants to see you."

"What's his name? I'll drop around to-morrow," I told him.

"You've got to come now," he boy declared. "He says he's got to see you to-night—right away."

"Not in rain like this, son," I objected. "I'll see him to-morrow."

"But he's got the d. t's., and he says he's dyin'," the boy insisted, "and he says he's *got* to see you. He says he's Charlie Summers."

"Charlie Summers?" I repeated. Then I remembered Charlie. "Just a minute."

I got my raincoat and my pipe and tobacco, and we started out. As we went through the pouring rain the four squares to the Planters' Hotel I tried to formulate in my mind some sort of a possible history for Charlie Summers. But I could not. He had disappeared ten years before. What he might have been doing meanwhile I could not guess.

I found him in a room on the fourth floor of the hotel. A rather excited chambermaid outside the door had warned me of possible violence, but there was no need of the warning.

Charlie Summers was sitting up in bed awaiting me—and such a Charlie Summers as I had never expected to see. His face was swollen, his eyes bloodshot, terrified and wide. He was a piteous and shrunken picture of the handsome fellow I knew in my college days.

I could hardly persuade myself that it was he. But he stuck out his hand, shaking with nervous tremors, and motioned me to a chair.

"Jimmie," he said, "don't be surprised. Don't be afraid. I've thrown a few things about to-day, when they worried me, but I'm all right now. I hope you haven't forgot me."

"No, indeed," I told him. "I'll never forget Charlie Summers. How are you?" It was a brutal question.

"You can see how I am," he answered. "I'm near dead. That's why I called for you."

"But where have you been for the last ten years?" I asked.

"Everywhere," he said. "But I'm through traveling now, Jim. Never mind where I've been."

"The last I heard of you, you were in Baltimore," I interpolated.

"That's the last anybody I cared about

ever heard of me, too," he said. "I've traveled a lot, and drunk a lot."

He paused and began to cough. After a moment he began again:

"I disappeared ten years ago—after the drowning of John Purvey. You know that. I've wandered around, and I've been pretty hard on this body of mine with drink, Jim, and I'm not going to last out the week.

"You can see that. And I've been carrying a beastly secret that won't let me die easy. It's the secret that made me drink. It's the secret that made me disappear. It's a secret that I've got to tell to somebody before I die, and you are the only man I know in this town, Jim Watermount, and it's you that have got to hear it."

"All right, Charlie," I said. "Fire away! It won't be bad, I know—not half so bad as you think, perhaps."

He stared at me with bloodshot eyes. He held up his quivering finger and pointed it at me.

"What would you say if it was *murder?*" he demanded.

I gave a start.

"You don't mean to say that you killed John Purvey?"

He nodded. Then he added hastily:

"It's nothing they could hang me for, Jim. Don't get excited. It's a thing between me and God and John Purvey. That's all. It's a thing that means hell, though it couldn't mean the electric chair. I killed John Purvey.

"He was the best friend I had in the world. He was my partner. I killed him. Men go to hell for such as that, Jim, and I'm no better than any. But I haven't told a living soul, and I can't die in peace until I tell it.

"It's hounded me all over the world. I've got to tell it, Jim. It won't save me from hell, but maybe it will help me die easy."

I was too much surprised at the disclosure to say anything. I merely sat and waited for him to resume.

"There wasn't a better boy in the world than John Purvey," Charlie went on. "We set up in practise together two years after I left college—in Baltimore. You know that. But you didn't know John Purvey. He was just a boy, Jim—but brilliant as a young Webster.

"He had all the brains in the firm. It was all his doing—our sudden success. We didn't lose a case—not one. He was a wonder. I'd hate to try to give you figures on how much money we made in three years. My mind is hazy. But it ran into the thousands with three figures.

"Nobody could make a better plea than John Purvey. Nobody could arrange evidence as he could. I wasn't jealous. I did a lot of work myself. He couldn't have done what he did without me. Although our phenomenal success was due to him, I was no slouch in the law.

"And I was absolutely necessary to him because of his failing for liquor. He had a hopeless craving for whisky. I never touched a drop in those days, Jim. Whisky or wine meant no more to me than water—in fact, I preferred water.

"But John Purvey was crazy for alcohol. It didn't get him 'down' often—once in three months, maybe, or once in six. But when he went on a drinking bout it lasted for at least six or seven days. He disappeared.

"Everything was dropped. He hid himself away in some dark corner of town and remained diabolically drunk for a week or two. He didn't come near the office. But when it was over, he was the same brilliant and lovable John Purvey as ever.

"Well, we kept things going nicely enough. Few people ever suspected that John was weak on liquor. I always lied for him when he was drunk. I said either that he was out of town or that he was sick.

"People believed me. We got along handsomely, making a tremendous reputation and a world of money. It ran that way for three years.

"Then the girl came into the accounting—not my girl, John's girl. A multimillionaire of Baltimore gave us a case that involved over half a million dollars. It was a difficult case, but there was no reason in the world why we should not win it. As usual, John did most of the assembling of

the evidence and busied himself with preparing the defense.

"It was a case that demanded the best that we had. And the best that we had was John's.

"The old fellow was a blue-blood, all right, Jim. He came to the office frequently—a fine old fellow with white side-whiskers—to talk things over. His daughter almost always came with him.

"She was a beautiful girl, about twenty-three, I guess—a blond with big blue eyes. I was pretty much interested in her myself, but John got her. Before the case had been in our hands for three weeks they were as good as sweethearts.

"In another week they were engaged. But they had not told her father. They thought they would put that off till the case was won.

"It made a big difference in John, this love affair with a pure and beautiful girl. He seemed to have forgotten his old craving for liquor entirely. I had hoped that he would never remember it. But I will confess I was worried.

"And, exactly as I had feared, about a month before that case was to come up, John Purvey disappeared. At first I tried to make myself believe that he had not gone on a drinking spree, but it was soon plain to me that he had. Mr. Thwaite and Virginia—those were their names—called at the office twice, and I had to tell them that John was out. The third time I had to tell them that he was ill. Mr. Thwaite was worried about his case. Virginia was worried about John. I told them he would be back soon.

"On a Thursday morning three days later they came again. I had hoped that John would be over his holiday by this time, but he was not. I don't need to tell you that I was as mad as a wasp at John for this. I had been furious ever since he disappeared in the previous week.

"'Mr. Purvey is still ill,' I reported. 'I'm sorry.'

"'What in the name of common sense is the matter with him?' demanded Mr. Thwaite.

"'Pneumonia,' I said, after a moment's brain-racking hesitation.

"'Then it must be serious!' cried Virginia.

"'No,' I put in hastily. 'He's practically well now. I think he'll be out nearly any day now.'

"As I said this, the door opened and John Purvey appeared. It was terrible. He was drunk as a sow.

"'G' mornin',' he cried, nodding at Mr. Thwaite and Virginia.

"They rose together, and Virginia screamed.

"'What's the meaning of this?' cried Mr. Thwaite, almost roaring.

"'G' mornin,' repeated John, holding out his hand and overbalancing himself in the act.

"'Come!' Mr. Thwaite said to Virginia, 'we must get out of this—at once. Mr. Summers, our relations are at an end. Please understand that. You may send my papers to Swartsell & White.'

"He thrust John out of the way with his arm. John struck the door-jamb sharply, grasped his forehead with his hand, and seemed suddenly terrified.

"'Vir-ginia,' he mumbled stupidly.

"'I never want to see you again!' she screamed, stamping her foot.

"They went out.

"John fell into a heap on the lounge by the door. After a moment he sat up and held his head in his hands. He began to cry like a child.

"All this time I had been standing in one position. I was furious, Jim. God forgive me, I could have whipped him with a knout. I saw red. I was almost choking.

"He looked up. His face was piteous. It was plain that he realized perfectly now what he had done. But he was still maudlin drunk.

"'Charlie,' he groaned, 'Charlie—what—what can I do—about this?'

"'*Do?*' I blurted. If *I'd* turned a trick like this, John Purvey, I'd throw myself in the river.'

"I took my hat and left in a rage.

"You know what he did," Charlie Summers concluded, staring at me with wide, bloodshot eyes, clouded with terror. 'He *did* throw himself in the river that night.'"

Classified Advertising continued from page 4, front section.

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