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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

DECEMBER 1916

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Beginning A New Mystery Serial by ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE Author of "LOOT"

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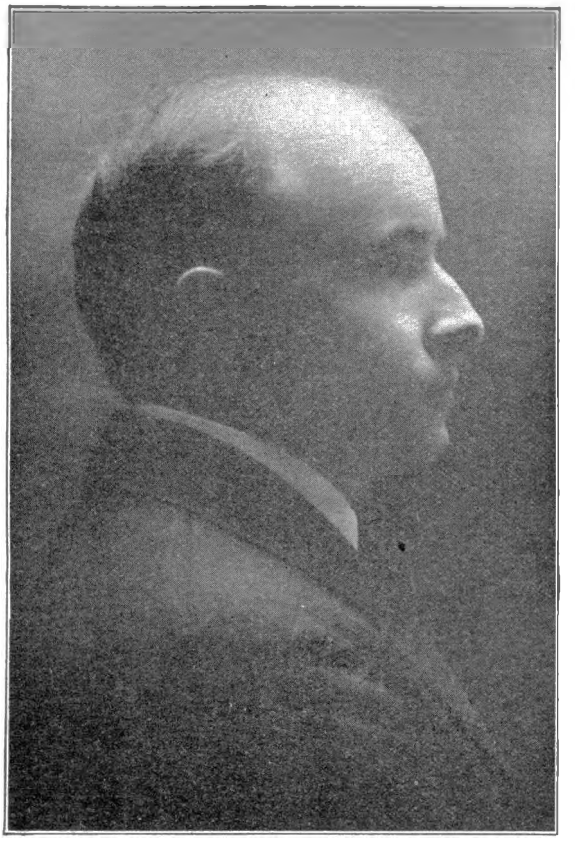
Arthur Somers Roche



Who Wrote "Loot" and "Ransom!"

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The January issue will be on sale at all news-stands December 1st.

December 1916

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

Vol. XXIV No. 2

RANSOM!

A New Mystery Novel by the Author of "Loot"

by Arthur Somers Roche

CHAPTER I

WARING was bored. The pretty dancer who had, without so much as a by-your-leave, dropped into the chair opposite him, yawned flagrantly in his face.

"M'sieur should have brought his breviary," she said.

"Eh?" Waring started; his eyes twinkled, and he smiled at the dancer. "Mademoiselle will honor me by drinking another glass of wine?"

The little dancer arose from her chair; she shook her scant skirt about her trim legs.

"Zut! M'sieur is as entertaining as a saint's confession!" She shrugged her bare shoulders; a man at the next table eyed her, and she smiled provocatively; Waring watched them glide off together, unresentful at the impertinent *moue* she made at him over her new-found partner's shoulder. Then he forgot all about her.

He sipped his wine, looking about him with vague eyes. It was the usual sort of thing in this sort of place. The same sort of thing that might be found in any

WHEN Arthur Somers Roche's "Loot" appeared, it caused a sensation. Readers were delighted with its ingenuity and its clever piling-up of mystery; and editors sensitive to their public's interest promptly besieged Mr. Roche with offers for his next novel. In this rivalry THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE was successful; and it is with some pride that we herewith offer you the pleasure of reading his latest novel, which is unquestionably the best mystery-novel published this year.

of a dozen Montmartre cafés at this hour — midnight. Officers home on leave, bright-eyed Parisiennes, a sprinkling of Russians, English and Americans. It was quieter than before the Great War, and there was less extravagance. The fact that the French were not spending their money on such entertainment as this might perhaps be one reason why Waring had attracted the attentions of the little dancer.

Waring wished that he had stayed at his hotel and got a good night's rest against to-morrow's railway journey to Cherbourg. For at least the dozenth time he cursed the breakdown of the Paris express—from the Riviera—that had made him miss connections for Liverpool and the White Star liner that sailed to-morrow morning. Even though it didn't matter that the liner sailing from Cherbourg to-morrow afternoon would land him in New York two days later than his planned sailing, even though by rare good fortune he had secured at the booking-office this afternoon excellent accommodations on the French liner, he was irritated.

He had wanted to sail on a White Star liner; he had wanted to land in New York seven days from now. It was a nuisance that one couldn't do exactly as one wanted. He had not intended to spend a night in Paris; he resented savagely the railway accident that interfered with his intentions.

THE little dancer who had so frankly forced her acquaintance upon him and as frankly left him, circled, with her more complaisant friend, close to Waring's table. She lifted one shoulder in affected fright at him. Waring knew that he had been scowling, and at the girl's mockery he grinned infectiously. The dancer felt sorry that she had so early decided that Waring was uninteresting; the grin justified her first opinion: that blue-eyed, red-haired men are by no means dull.

But Waring's grin disappeared quickly. It was a tiresome world, and Paris was not the least tiresome of the places in it. There had been a time, six or eight years ago, when Waring had loved Paris. Well, he loved the city now, but he didn't wish it forced upon him. Paris was like a rare and heady vintage: one must be exactly in the right mood to appreciate it, to desire it.

And Waring was not in the right mood. He wished that he were; Paris, when one felt right, was so gay. But to-night all the gayety seemed artificial, forced. This was the fourth cabaret he'd been in since leaving the hotel. . . . . He wondered if he were growing old. Thirty-one! Where did middle age begin, anyway? Had he lost his capacity for enjoyment? What meant all this late restlessness?

He caught his waitress' eye. *"L'addition,"* he said.

He paid his check, tipped the waitress and rose from his chair. He faced the entrance and stood, half-straddling his chair, for a moment. Then he sank back into it.

"Bring me coffee—with cognac," he told the waitress.

With a shrug of her shoulders—but incomprehensible, these Americans were!—the waitress departed to fulfill the order.

A moment ago Waring had wondered if he were growing old. Now he knew that he was not—at least not so old but that the sight of a pretty girl stirred his pulses. And she *was* pretty, this girl who had just entered the café. More, she was lovely! The long coat that half-veiled the outlines of her figure could not disguise the supple, delicious youth of her; and beneath the jaunty felt hat tendrils of brown hair, shot with gold, peeped tantalizingly out. Her eyes were dark, but Waring could not tell their exact color. Her face was oval, with a short, straight nose, perhaps the least bit tilted, with an adorable chin and a sweetly curving mouth. A lovely face, and despite its intense femininity a strong face. And mischievous, too! There was the promise of raillery in those dimples.

"RANSOM!" represents the high-water mark thus far reached by the very real genius that produced "Loot." To the adroit building-up of plot and situation displayed in the earlier story has been added a delightful humor, a really remarkable skill in character delineation and a charming grace in the handling of romantic passages. All in all, we believe "Ransom!" to be the most captivating story of the type we have ever printed—a story which will grow in attractiveness with each installment.

Waring was frankly entranced—and bewildered! So evidently a lady, what on earth was she doing, alone, in a Montmartre restaurant at midnight? It needed no second glance to tell him that she belonged to a class far remote from that of the pretty dancer who had so vainly tried to intrigue him. Waring had not knocked around the world thirty-one years without learning to tell, at a glance, the demi-mondaine. But this girl—

SHE sat down at a table near him; he heard her order: lithia water. He noted the color in her cheeks, and now that she was closer, the sparkle in her eyes. They were not so dark as he had thought; the long lashes had created that effect; they were hazel.

Waring found himself looking right into those eyes, with a queer impression similar to that which he had often experienced when staring over the side of a small boat into deep water—one pierces a shadow and thinks that the secrets of the deep are solved, when one discovers that it is another shadow one sees: mystery lurks beyond.

Then he noticed that her color had risen, and he himself flushed. He had been rude, though unintentionally. He half-lifted his hand to signal the waitress; then he dropped it to the table. Without the slightest flirtatious intention, he did not propose to leave the café just yet.

From the tables about him sounded hand-clapping. Waring looked toward the low stage at one end of the room. Upon it had just appeared a couple, shabbily attired. They began to dance. It was the usual Apache dance. The woman was slim, graceful, clever. But the man—degrading as Waring thought the dance to be, he yet was forced to involuntary admiration of the man.

A little above the average height,—he would scale within an inch of War-

ing's five-feet-eleven,—well-built, the man was not only a graceful dancer but was a wonderful actor. He threw himself into the spirit of the dance; he was pantherish, savage, ruthless, barbaric—Waring could not help himself; he found himself applauding.

He ceased clapping his hands as he looked at the girl at the near table. Had he been in any doubt as to her being in a place where she distinctly did not belong, that doubt would have dissolved now. For there was disgust on her face, her face that had been white and that suddenly became crimson. Waring was ashamed that he had applauded. He felt suddenly angry with the young girl. What right had she to come to such a place as this and witness this dance that glorified the baser, animal passions? She ought to be spanked! Serve her jolly well right to blush, to be mortified! If he were her brother, he'd give her a tongue-lashing that—

He ceased wondering just what his fraternal words would be. The dancers had left the stage. A man at a front table had smiled at the danseuse; she had sat down with him. The male dancer was swaggering among the tables, bowing to acquaintances who hailed him as "Raoul the Red."

His red hair, of course! That was the origin of the nickname. Waring conceived a violent dislike for the dancer. Red-haired men ought to be in better business than dancing. He felt that having red hair himself somehow de-classed him.

Then his violent dislike became cold anger. The dancer, bowing, nodding, had reached the table where sat the recently arrived girl. He smirked at her; he twirled the faint indications of a mustache. Waring saw the girl shrink in her chair. The dancer spoke to her and sat down beside her; the girl's eyes appealed to Waring. And Waring walked over to her table.

"Mademoiselle is annoyed?" he asked.

HE was conscious of a dead silence about him; the orchestra, which had been playing an American rag-time tune, grew still. The dancer leaped to his feet.

"M'sieur intrudes," he stated.

Waring eyed the man coldly. He turned to the girl again.

"Mademoiselle is annoyed?" he asked again.

To his surprise she replied in English.

"Please," she said, "take me out of here."

Waring placed a five-franc piece on the table. "For the waitress," he said.

The dancer picked up the coin—flipped it in the air, caught it, dropped it on the table.

"M'sieur purchases his pleasures cheaply," he said.

His strong white teeth gleamed as he leered. Waring aimed for the exact center of the smile; he had a large, capable fist and a boxer's eye. The dancer went down with a crash. It was Waring's left hand that had struck him. Waring's right reached for his coat and hat, on a chair by his own table. He got only the hat. A glance at the angry faces about told him that he had done more than strike a nauseous male flirt; he had struck a favorite of the cabaret, a favorite with many friends.

One's skin is more valuable than one's coat. Moreover, there was the girl. Waring seized her by one arm. Rapidly he propelled her to the door. The blow he had just struck "Raoul the Red" awed those in his path. They were content to curse him and afraid to molest him. But behind him—Waring glanced over his shoulder as they reached the door. The dancer was being assisted to his feet; his mouth streamed blood, oaths and threats. He reeled after Waring and the girl, urged on by the cries of his outraged admirers. Waring wondered whether to send the girl on by herself and stand and meet the rush, or continue with her. Which was better for her? Paris, at night, was—as had just been proved—no place for an unescorted young girl. He saw the little dancer who had tried to flirt with him climb upon a chair by the stage; the restaurant was suddenly dark. He did not know that "Raoul the Red" had repulsed the little dancer's affection and that she gloried in the blow that Waring had dealt him. He

only knew that there was confusion in the darkness behind him, and that a cabby who might have parleyed with an unescorted girl, delaying her to find out if there might be more in hindrance than in aid of her escape, whipped up his nag the moment they had climbed inside his carriage.

A nasty mess! Why on earth hadn't he controlled himself? A disgraceful café brawl that might have led to heaven knew what! But they were out of it, and now that they were safe, that no harm had come to the girl, Waring rejoiced in his skinned knuckles. He had taught one ruffian that a lady may not be insulted with impunity.

THE girl was huddled in one corner of the carriage. Waring could hear muffled sobs. The heat of the fight left him as suddenly as it had come; he remembered now how appealing and frightened had been her eyes, how lovely, even in her alarm, she had been. A queer chokiness that had possessed him when he first glimpsed her possessed him again.

"You mustn't cry about it," he said. "It's all over. Where do you wish me to take you?"

She named a hotel—a very fashionable and expensive hotel. Waring called the address to the cabby.

"I'd better ride along with you—if you don't mind," he said.

"Th-thank you," she replied. She said no more.

Sulkiness came to Waring. Of course, he didn't expect her to fall on his neck, but after all—he sat up very stiffly in the carriage, looking straight ahead.

More sounds came from the huddled figure beside him. He looked at her suspiciously. Of course, women often got hysteria after scenes like the one they had just passed through, but—this sounded like healthy giggling.

"I don't see anything funny," he said.

"You didn't see yourself—in the light we just passed," she answered. "You look so stern and—and—was that a left hook or a jab that you knocked that man down with?"

"You're American," charged Waring.

"Of course. And I read the sporting pages—when the sisters let me see a New York paper. You're American too."

"How'd you know?" demanded Waring.

"Would a Frenchman—or even an Englishman—have interfered and helped me? No indeed, Mr. Waring."

"Eh?" He was genuinely surprised. "How'd you know my name?"

"I read the society pages too, and look at the pictures—when the sisters let me."

"What sisters? Where are they tonight? How'd they let you out alone? What were you doing in that café? Don't you know any better? If I were your brother, I'd—"

"Yes, what would you do, Mr. Waring?"

WARING blushed. He remembered the punishment that he had thought suitable for her a little while ago.

"Well, I'd talk to you," he said feebly.

"How dreadful!" she exclaimed.

Ill-humor never held Waring very long. It was briefer than ever now. Though he could not distinguish her face in the gloom of the cab, he had not forgotten how lovely it was. He laughed; and his laugh was as likable as his grin. Yet he tried to be stern.

"What were your people up to, to let you out alone, anyway? And how'd you happen to go to that restaurant, and how—"

"Well," she said defiantly, "suppose you'd been in a French convent since you were five years old, and spent your vacations there too, except sometimes when girls invited you to their homes? Suppose you'd never been in Paris in your *life?* Suppose that your uncle, who was your guardian, had telegraphed the sisters to send you to Paris, and that when you got there your uncle was terribly busy and didn't have any time to take you anywhere, and spent all his evenings out? Suppose all that! Wouldn't *you* be bored and want to go out and see Paris, and finally wouldn't you go ahead and do it?"

"There's merit in your contentions,"

he said. "But—don't you know that it isn't safe?"

"I do now," she said, "but—I'm glad!"

"Well, so am I!" he laughed. "And perhaps your uncle wont mind my showing you the shops and the Bois and—"

"But we haven't been properly introduced," she said with a mocking primness.

"Oh," he said blankly. "But I can call on your uncle and explain, and—"

"Have him discover that I was out to-night? Indeed, no, Mr. Waring."

Waring pursed his lips. "Well, I have an acquaintance that's fairly wide in Paris. Suppose you tell me your uncle's name—and your own—and I'll see—"

"Do you really want to see me again?" she asked.

In any other woman, almost, Waring would have decided that the question was flirtatious. But somehow there was in this girl's tones a boyish frankness different from anything he had ever experienced. He answered her honestly.

"Indeed I do!"

"Then my uncle's name is Randall—Peter Randall."

"And your own?"

She laughed. "Oh, it'll be much more fun if you don't know my name, if when you come to call, we really *are* introduced and it isn't a make-believe."

"Oh, I say!" he protested.

But the carriage stopped before her hotel.

"I'll just get out; don't you," she said. "It would look—"

"Very well," said Waring.

He leaned across to open the door on her side. His hand brushed hers. She gripped his hand with firm fingers.

"You are just as nice and brave as you can be, Mr. Waring, and—I'm ever so much obliged."

THEN she was gone. Waring laughed tenderly to himself, as the cabby drove him to his hotel. "Ever so much obliged!" Like a boy! In his room, undressed, he bathed his bruised knuckles with witchhazel. What a delightful acquaintance! Well worth far more than bruised knuckles! He didn't blame her a bit. Her uncle must be a hard-hearted brute! Well, if he could secure an introduction,—and it would be mighty funny if he couldn't, with his wide circle of friends in Paris,—he would show the girl a good time. After all, he could easily cancel his booking on the French liner. There was no hurry about returning to America.

Poor little girl! All cooped up in a convent, and then denied the delights of Paris by a surly old curmudgeon of an uncle! What treats were in store for her! Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh was in town, he happened to know. And he and Mrs. Willy had been pals for ever so many years. Mrs. Willy would invite the girl to things, and would chaperon them, and—he chuckled at himself, as he dropped off to sleep. He wasn't so old, after all. Thirty-one marked the real youth of a man, not the beginning of middle age. . . . .

Only a very young and enthusiastic person whistles in the midst of shaving; yet Waring attempted—with very fair success—"Listen to the Mockingbird." A mouthful of lather cut short a roulade. He frowned at himself in the glass and then grinned delightedly. What a pretty girl she was!

He finished shaving, as quickly as possible. The passing of the night had not diminished his enthusiasm. He would cancel his booking, telephone the Embassy and find out what hotel was being accorded Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh's patronage, call on her, make her do some telephoning among her friends—*some one,* the friend of a friend of a friend, perhaps, *must* know Mr. Peter Randall.

He dressed with scrupulous care, yet with rapidity. Downstairs, in the hotel restaurant, he ordered fruit, omelette, coffee and rolls. Awaiting their arrival, he opened his *Paris Herald.* A headline struck him with almost the effect of a physical blow.

CAREY HAIG KILLS HIMSELF

Prominent New York Broker Discovered in Defalcation and Commits Suicide

Waring read the brief cable from New York that followed. Then he put the paper down and mechanically ate his breakfast. But he tasted nothing. Carey Haig had been his trustee; every cent of the Waring fortune had been in his control. The cable held out little hope that there would be any salvage at all from the wreck.

Waring must go to New York at once, after all. The inchoate plans of last night and the early morning must be abandoned. The girl—Philip Waring had no right to bother with girls just now—not while he was, so far as he knew, practically a pauper. And as he went upstairs to attend to his hasty packing, he thought little of the girl. Tragedy banished romance.

"Poor Carey," he said, over and over again.

CHAPTER II

THE *Montania* had docked. Waring had come down to meet Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh and her maid; he had helped the vivacious lady through the formalities of the customs, and now the maid and several suit-cases and handbags were in one taxi, while Waring and the pretty young matron were in another.

Mrs. Willy leaned back and sighed. "There, thank heaven, that's over. Philip Waring, you're a dear, and if I weren't just mad about my husband, I'd kiss you."

"These husbands," growled Waring. "They're always in the way."

"Not to-day," said Mrs. Willy. "The brute! Running off to Chicago the night before I land! I'll make him pay!"

"But it was very important business, Madge," expostulated Waring mildly.

Mrs. Willy laughed. "Just like a man! Defend another man against a woman!"

"And if I didn't defend him?" countered Waring.

"I'd stop this taxi and make you walk," declared Mrs. Willy viciously.

"William Patterson Sinsabaugh is the pink paragon of perfection," announced Waring.

"Exactly," said Mrs. Willy, dimpling. "You are a great reader of character, Phil—though in the Carey Haig affair you weren't, were you?"

"Oh, Carey was a good fellow," said Waring evasively.

"A good fellow! When he robbed you of—Philip Waring, how can you say such a thing?"

"Well, I don't think Carey was quite himself. He—there's a lot of mystery about that matter, Madge."

"Tell me," she commanded.

He smiled at her. "If I don't, I suppose Mr. Bill Husband will, eh?"

Mrs. Willy nodded. "Mr. Bill Husband tells Mrs. William Wife *everything*."

"Well, in that case—to tell you the truth, Madge, I'm puzzled about Carey. I've been over his books. Carey killed himself on the twenty-eighth of January. On January first all his investments, personal and trustee, were in the best of shape. He held something like four hundred thousand dollars for me; he'd been trustee during my minority, you know, and after I came of age I let him continue. It was less bother."

WARING continued:

"There was about eight hundred thousand that he held in trust for others—personal property, I mean. Well, on January seventeenth he began selling. By the twenty-fourth he had turned all his trustee investments into cash. And his own personal investments, amounting to a quarter of a million, he had sold also. He held one parcel of real estate for me—that is, collected the rent and all that sort of thing; he couldn't sell that. And there were three or four other bits of property that he didn't realize on—couldn't, I guess. Well, he killed himself on the twenty-eighth. He left a confession on his desk, stating that he had embezzled all the funds left in his care."

"But what had he done with all that cash?" demanded Mrs. Willy.

"That's the point that is so queer," said Waring. "On the twenty-sixth he drew from various banks every cent he had, both his own and the trustee money. It came to almost a million and a half. And that money has disappeared."

"Impossible," ejaculated Mrs. Willy.

"But true," said Waring.

"But can't you tell—find out? Isn't there any way—"

"Oh, I've got detectives looking into the matter," said Waring, "but—I don't look for much."

"But didn't he leave *any* clue at *all?*"

"W-e-ll, I don't know that you could call it a *clue,* exactly. It hasn't led to much."

"What was it?"

"Why, his stenographer—she rushed into his office at the sound of the shot that killed poor Carey—says that he lived for ten seconds or so, and that he repeated over and over the name 'Bergson.'

"And in his papers I found some notes made two days before he died—made on the twenty-sixth. Not much—simply a record of having paid one Simon Bergson $1,450,000."

"Why, almost a million and a half," breathed Mrs. Sinsabaugh. "And this Bergson—"

Waring forestalled her query. "Can't be located."

"But aren't there any other papers that would, maybe, tell—"

"Not a thing. Carey Haig kept fewer personal memoranda than any business man I ever heard of. But perhaps he burned them before he died. Anyway, there's nothing."

"And what are you doing?" demanded Mrs. Willy.

Waring shrugged his shoulders. "Me? Oh, I've got that piece of property that Carey couldn't sell. I'm acting as my own agent, rent-collector and that sort of thing. It brings me in about forty dollars a week."

Mrs. Willy gasped. Forty dollars sometimes paid for one of Mrs. Willy's hats.

"But you can't *live* on that, Phil! You aren't a slacker, Phil? You aren't lying down, are you? You aren't afraid to work?"

"Oh, no. Bill Husband offered me a job, but—"

"Why didn't you take it?"

Waring's voice grew bitter. "Well, Madge, what good am I? Your husband offered me a job, but—what experience have I had? I wouldn't be worth a fourth the money he offered me, and I'd feel like a beggar taking it."

"But what *are* you doing?" persisted Mrs. Willy.

"Well, woman, if I must tell you, I'm doing my darnedest to find this Simon Bergson."

"Had any success?"

"Not a bit."

"Expect to?"

"Hope dies hard in the Warings."

MRS. WILLY eyed him speculatively. "I don't know what sort of a business man you'd make, Phil. But I do know one thing about you."

"I entreat you, Mrs. William Wife of old Bill Husband—tell me what you know about me."

"You'd make a dandy husband, Phil."

"Eh?" He grinned his infectious grin. "You aren't thinking—Madge, it isn't possible that you're going to turn Bill Husband loose and—"

"Philip Waring, you're—you're *immoral!* I—maybe I wont introduce you to her, now."

Waring put his hands up over his head. "Help!" he groaned. "I thought that being a pauper would protect me from—"

"Well, it wont," declared Mrs. Willy decisively. "And your being poor—well, my Bill Husband lost every penny in the panic seven years ago, and look at the old dear now. And *he* didn't have any business experience or—or anything."

"No, not a thing in the world except a wife who came to him and offered him the hundred thousand that her father had left her."

Mrs. Willy colored. "Well, he didn't take it."

"And you expect me to take from some woman—"

"Oh, you go ahead too fast," said Mrs. Willy. "She—well, Bill Husband will find something else for you, and this girl—Phil, she's a beauty, and her uncle is immensely rich,—everyone says so, anyway,—and she's his only heir—or should I say heiress? Anyway, you're going to meet her—tomorrow night, if I can locate her so soon. She's stopping at the Plutonia, I believe, and—I'll bet you'll discover

this Bergson person and get your money back, and—I'm home at last! Oh, Phil, look at old John smile at me. I'm a bad wife and housekeeper, running off for three months at a time."

She waved at the grizzled butler standing on the steps. Then she was out of the taxi and at home. Waring, after conditionally promising to dine with the Sinsabaughs the following night—if Sinsabaugh should return from Chicago in the morning—and further assuring Mrs. Willy that he knew her judgment of feminine charms was perfect and that he felt certain that he would fall madly in love with Miss Sorel as soon as he saw her, dismissed the taxi and walked downtown toward his bachelor quarters in Twenty-eighth Street.

HE smiled as he walked. Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh was a dear. Just now she was reproaching herself for having been away from home for three months, but within another couple of weeks she'd be restless and off she'd go again. He remembered what he'd heard her husband say, to a group of chaffing intimates, at the club one day:

"It's all very well for you people to say that I'm no better than a bachelor, with my wife trotting off to Europe or California or some other place," Sinsabaugh had laughed. "*But*—the average man has one honeymoon in all his life. I've been married nine years, and I've had at least three honeymoons a year in the last seven. I *have* to stick on the job here, but that's no reason why she shouldn't have a good time."

It might not have worked well with some people; some men would have objected to the butterfly tendencies of Mrs. Willy, but Waring didn't know where a happier couple than the Sinsabaughs could have been found.

His smile broadened—then grew tenderly reminiscent as he thought of Mrs. Willy's undisguised matchmaking plans for himself. Dear lady! She never grew discouraged, never realized the hoplessness of her task. For if Waring ever married anyone, it would be that girl whom he had rescued from the attentions of the dancer in the Montmartre restaurant, and she—well, nobody that he knew, knew of Peter Randall, and so—well, he'd never see her again. And it was best. At thirty-one, untrained to business, the only chance a man without capital has is of being a salaried employee. *With* capital—but not a woman's! If he could recover the money embezzled by Carey Haig and—oh, well, what was the use! Spilled milk!

At the Waldorf, he stopped in for a cocktail. It was while drinking it slowly that he became conscious that he was being followed. He looked about him, with seeming carelessness but with eyes that took in everything. Yet he could see no one who seemed at all out of place here, no one whose manner was furtive or slinking.

Waring paid his check at the desk and walked out into Thirty-fourth Street. He tried to shake off the sensation that had made him scrutinize the faces about him at the bar, but it would not be shaken off.

Once, in Uganda, a panther had trailed Waring when he was separated from his native attendants. Something instinctive, surviving over the centuries from the days of ancestral barbarism, had warned Waring to be on his guard then. It had not been a matter of scent or hearing or seeing. It had been something beyond any of the five senses that had saved his life in the Uganda jungle. And that same supersense now told him plainly that he was being followed.

He turned toward the Avenue and walked south, continuing on his way to his apartment. Why should anyone follow him? If the mysterious Bergson, who had obtained Waring's fortune from the defaulting, self-slain Carey Haig, knew of Waring's feeble efforts to locate him, he would also know Waring's address. He would not bother to trace him there, when the telephone-book or ordinary directory would furnish the required information.

He was enmeshed in none of what the French euphemistically term *affaires*. Waring was no saint, but he was clean. No jealous husband, seeking divorce evidence. There was a nasty weekly in town that made a prac-

tice of printing innuendo, but even if the reporter of that unclean sheet had seen him escorting Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh home—ridiculous! The reporter would know Philip Waring by sight or he wouldn't hold his job overnight. This was not conceit; the Warings had been prominent socially in Manhattan since the days of old Jan Worringe, the founder of the family in New York.

Then, inasmuch as there was no reason for anyone's following, no one could be following. So Waring tried to believe as he turned the corner into Twenty-eighth Street. Nevertheless the feeling persisted, and as he entered his ground-floor apartment, he glanced rapidly over his shoulder. No one was in sight. Still, when he stepped across the threshold and closed the door behind him, he did not lock it. Instead, he stood close to it, his ear to the crack.

It was an old-fashioned apartment-house, only four stories tall, devoted, for the most part, to artists and writers. There was no elevator. And as it was a warm spring day, the door leading from the vestibule into the hall was swung wide. As he listened, Waring heard the sound of feet on the marble flagging of the vestibule.

THE steps ceased. Waring opened his door the least bit and glanced through. Some one was bending over, staring at the name-cards above the letter-boxes. There was something vaguely familiar about the man—also something strange: his apparel, which was French in cut. Waring now recollected what had not struck him as important when drinking his cocktail: that as he looked up, a man dressed somewhat oddly for New York had sauntered to the free-lunch table, his back to Waring.

Well, if the man *had* been following him, it was a simple matter to accost him and ask his reasons. Waring stepped through the door, very softly, and was in the vestibule before the man looked up. And Waring recognized him at once. It was the dancer, "Raoul the Red," whom he had thrashed last January in the café in Montmartre.

There was no time to ask questions. As Waring looked, the man sprang. There was a struggle of a moment; the knife that had flashed in the dancer's hand dropped to the floor as Waring's grip crushed his wrist. Agile, slippery, the man broke from Waring's grasp and burst through the open outside door into the street. Waring dashed after him. A touring-car was rolling rapidly down the street. Waring stopped; his anger evaporated in pity; he cried aloud, but it was too late. Heedless of everything save the man pursuing him, Raoul the Red had not seen the oncoming machine. Its front wheels knocked him down, hurled him against the curbstone.

The car stopped at once; the chauffeur—its only occupant—ran back to where Waring knelt over the dancer's body.

"It wasn't my fault, boss," stammered the man. "Y-you saw him; you—"

"I live right in this house here; name's Philip Waring. If there's any trouble about it, I'll clear you. Never mind about that, now. Take him to the nearest hospital."

"Is he dead, d'ye think?" asked the driver.

"God knows; he looks it. Hurry."

"D'ye know him, boss? It looked like he was running from you."

"I don't know him. He was in the hall, and I frightened him."

"Thief, eh? Help me in with him."

TOGETHER they deposited the limp form of Raoul the Red in the tonneau of the car. A few persons had been attracted by the accident, but so swiftly had the body been placed in the car that no policeman had as yet appeared on the scene. But one would come later, very soon, Waring reasoned. And if he told that the man had drawn a knife on him, had followed him here—well, Waring would have to tell the incident of some months ago, in the Paris restaurant.

And Waring had figured notoriously enough in the newspapers this winter. It had hurt a bit to read editorials, after Carey Haig's death, when it had been discovered that Waring's fortune had been lost, commenting on the difference between other Warings, who had *made* their fortunes, and himself, character-

ized as an idler who had not even taken ordinary precautions about his affairs but had let another man do the onerous work of collecting dividends and clipping coupons.

And now, if Waring told what had really happened— He wouldn't do it! Only last Sunday he had appeared in a newspaper-yarn that pretended to tell the habits and recreations of, and a lot of other nonsense about New York's "eligible society bachelors." God forbid that he should invite notoriety! He could tell the police what he had told the chauffeur. And a potential murderer was done no injustice when he was characterized as a sneak-thief.

He walked swiftly into the house to avoid the stares of the curious. Thank heaven, no one could possibly have seen the struggle, and Waring's clothing had not become more disarrayed than assisting the chauffeur lift the victim of the accident might easily have accounted for.

The gleam of steel on the vestibule floor made him pick up the knife, a nasty little dirk, that Raoul the Red had endeavored to use on him. And beside it lay a narrow envelope. Waring picked it up and took it with him into his apartment.

There, in his living-room, he stared at the envelope. It was without a name, but bore an address, *"Dix-sept Hancock Square, New York."* There was no doubt but that it had fallen, during the struggle, from the coat of Raoul the Red.

ONE does not, dealing with gentlemen, open envelopes belonging to them. But when one deals with a murderer, one dismisses scruples. Raoul the Red, in Paris, had been patently a superior sort of Apache, who lived a life not extremely different from that which he had portrayed in his excellent dancing. What friends he might have in New York were probably the same sort of people, though they might live in quaint, old-fashioned Hancock Square, in the heart of Greenwich Village. And those friends might very well be as vindictive as the dancer, might attempt to carry out to a conclusion what the dancer had so recently attempted. With the very knife that had so nearly penetrated his own body, he slit the envelope. Another envelope was enclosed; Waring drew it forth, to stare at it in wonderment. It was addressed to Simon Bergson, 17 Hancock Square.

Simon Bergson! The man to whom poor Carey Haig had paid almost fifteen hundred thousand dollars! Waring opened the second envelope without hesitation.

CHAPTER III

THE enclosure was written in French. Waring read it without scruple. The following is a translation:

My dear Bergson:

The bearer of this note is one Raoul Carvajal, recently a café dancer. At present he is most earnestly sought by the police, he having inadvertently knifed a cabman with whom he had some trifling dispute. I have used him once or twice in obtaining information concerning American habitués of the cafés where he danced, and have found him trustworthy. Considering that there is an extradition treaty between America and France, and that a word from either of us will mean his arrest and execution, we need have little fear as to his fidelity.

His difficulty with the police is providential, so far as we are concerned, for he is exactly the sort of man you have been wanting. I appreciate your difficulty in obtaining men of imagination who are also men of action, of violence. This Carvajal is of a mentality above his kind, and is as ruthless as a wolf. Further, though he has imagination, it is in subjection. I fear that I cannot recommend him as one truly interested in the Society, for he knows little about it, but promise of payment has made him an eager instrument. And if good be accomplished, it matters little that the tool be unclean. He is daring to the point of recklessness, and hates society as we do, though not, like us, because of society's injustice to the downtrodden. He hates it because he is a natural outlaw, not because he loves his fellow man. Incited by money, there is nothing at which he will stop, and such a man is necessary to you. Unfortunately, all those through whom we work cannot be inspired by the same lofty purpose that animates us. But in the matter of Burton Conybear and his associates, motives matter little; results are everything.

I am arranging to send him to New

York by the *Montania*, leaving to-morrow. There will be no difficulty about the matter, as I have learned that the police believe he has fled to Italy. They will not be looking for him at Cherbourg.

I might add, as a precautionary measure, that Carvajal has red hair, light eyes of grayish-blue, and is about five feet, ten inches tall. His teeth are even and his complexion fair. I trust that he will prove as valuable as I think he will—for, although he has never been in America, he has danced in England and speaks English with hardly a trace of accent.

I will not speak of matters connected with the Society in this letter, but shall do so in my regular weekly report. With all felicitations, I am

P. R.

WARING read the note again. Dated ten days ago, at Paris, there was no house address to identify the writer. And the writer had taken the precaution of signing only initials, which might very well be fictitious.

Nevertheless, although the sender was unknown, the man to whom it was addressed was the man whom Waring sought, and the police— He stopped, halfway across the room toward the telephone. He returned to his chair and for the third time read the note.

The "Society?" What did that mean? What did all the hints in the letter mean? And why should a Paris rough carry on his person a note in which was mentioned, with what seemed threatening meaning, the name of Burton Conybear, the richest man in America, if not the world? A slight fever of excitement throbbed in Waring's veins.

The police were stupid! Suppose he showed them this letter? He knew exactly what would happen. The police would first make inquiries; they would not dream of arresting Simon Bergson out of hand. Beyond a note stating that payments had been made to Bergson, found in Carey Haig's effects, and the fact that his stenographer had heard the dying man gasp the same name, there was nothing against this Bergson. This letter that Waring held in his hand? That was evidence against some person named "P. R.," who lived in Paris, who had committed no offense against United States laws and was therefore not amenable to police jurisdiction in New York. It was not evidence against Bergson. Bergson couldn't help it if his Paris friend sent him a murderer to be his assistant in—

Why, Bergson could say that the letter was a jest. And the letter would not be evidence against Bergson's word. No, the police would not make an immediate arrest. Instead, a heavy-footed, and probably fat-witted, plain-clothes man would call at the Hancock Square address. He would question Bergson, ask him why Carey Haig should have paid him money. The plain-clothes man would report to police headquarters the result of his inquiry, and then, if the police decided to arrest on general suspicion,—a very doubtful thing,—why, then Bergson would have had ample time to disappear. Anglo-Saxon law proceeds very slowly against one against whom no proof rests.

No! It was not a good idea to summon the police until one had actual, tangible evidence, sufficient to convince a jury. The facts that Raoul Carvajal bore a letter to Bergson, that Carvajal was wanted for murder in the French capital, that the dancer had even attempted to assault Waring, that Bergson had apparently received the benefit of the Carey Haig defalcations—all these things meant nothing to the police. There would have to be more than that; there would have to be proof that Bergson got money from Carey Haig.

The Greenhams? Well, that detective agency was looking into the matter for Waring now, but somehow he had felt all along that what interested the detectives was the advance payments he made them, not the prospect of success in getting back his fortune for him. Further, the Greenhams—he saw now that it was to allay his impatience—had told him that they were in possession of a clue that made them think that the mysterious Bergson had gone to the Pacific Coast. And all the time, unless this letter that Waring held in his hand was part of some silly farce, Bergson had been in Greenwich Village.

And the letter was not farcical. The man that it recommended had so plainly shown that he was willing and anxious to play a part in tragedy!

Waring considered this angle of the

affair. It was perfectly simple: Carvajal had been aboard the *Montania;* he had seen Waring with Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh and had recognized the man who had thrashed him last January. "Ruthless as a wolf" the letter said that Carvajal was. Well, the writer had written with knowledge. Undoubtedly Carvajal had forgotten all about his mission to America, his flight from the Paris police, in his savage exultation at seeing a man to whom he owed a vengeful debt. Undoubtedly Carvajal had followed Waring uptown with Mrs. Sinsabaugh; probably Carvajal had dismissed his taxicab when Waring dismissed his. Now that Waring looked back, he remembered that a taxi had been drawn up half a block from the Sinsabaugh home. And it was not so long after leaving Mrs. Willy that he had felt that he was being followed.

Most positively the letter was not farcical! The man whom it introduced to Bergson was all that the letter said he was! But why should Bergson—or anyone else, for that matter—need the services of a man like the dancer? What was this "society" that the writer mentioned? This capitalized Society? For the fourth time Waring read the letter. Written by a fanatic, yes—but by a cool-headed fanatic.

The same impulse that had stirred old Jan Worringe to leave his comfortable home in Holland, for the doubtful venture in a new world, stirred Jan Worringe's descendant to-day. Something new; something different! Something unknown, with a spice of danger! Add to this the fact that Waring believed Simon Bergson had somehow got hold of Waring's money, and his mood is understood.

Roughly, the description of Raoul Carvajal fitted himself. There was a difference of an inch in their heights, but that counted for nothing: a perfectly natural mistake, that would probably not be noticed at all. And the letter would introduce him to Bergson, give him a chance to secure that evidence needful if Waring were to recover his fortune — provided, of course, that this Bergson was the Bergson Carey Haig had mentioned with his dying breath.

But Waring refused to consider the possibility that there were two Simon Bergsons in the world, both crooked. For the Bergson who had got Carey Haig's stolen money was crooked; he *must* be. And this Bergson of the letter, whose correspondent hinted casually at murder—they must be the same.

A RING at his door-bell aroused Waring from his excited thinking. He answered it; a policeman, visibly armed with nothing more alarming than a notebook, entered the apartment.

Carvajal was dead. This Waring learned from the officer's first words. And the chauffeur had been taken from the hospital to the nearest police station, there to await the result of this policeman's investigations.

"The chauffeur was blameless," said Waring. "He was proceeding at a moderate rate of speed. It wasn't his fault. The man ran out in front of his car; he tried to stop."

"That's what the chauffeur says," agreed the officer. "But what made the man run? Was you chasing him?"

"I saw him in the hall, bending over the letter-boxes. At sight of me he began running. I naturally followed. I judge he was a thief."

"Probably was. You never seen him before, did you?"

This demanded the lie direct; Waring hesitated, but imperceptibly. It was a lie that would harm no one. It was not Waring's fault that Carvajal should have resented the just thrashing he had received last January, and so planned murder. It was the fault of the dancer. Then why should Waring suffer through Carvajal's fault?

"No, I never did," he answered.

"Well, guess it's an unmarked grave for his," said the officer. "Not a single paper on him, and not very much money. About two hundred dollars. Frenchman, he looked. French clothing, but no tailor's marks on it."

"Did he recover consciousness?" asked Waring.

The officer shook his head. "Guess he was dead when you picked him up, sir. Well, much obliged, sir. We'll turn the chauffeur loose at once."

THE officer left. Waring sat down in his chair again. Perhaps he had done wrong, but—he could see no particular harm in it. Of course, it was every citizen's duty to tell the truth, but—it didn't matter at all in Carvajal's case. Whereas, if Waring did tell the whole truth of the matter, not only would he figure in the newspapers—which he detested—with the story of his fight in Montmartre shouted broadcast, but he could not pose, to the mysterious Simon Bergson, as Raoul Carvajal. And as Raoul Carvajal he had intended to pose if the dancer were merely incapacitated—had intended to take advantage of the few hours or so that must elapse before Carvajal's friends could have been notified of his injury. But now—there was no need to telephone the hospitals, to find out if Carvajal were unconscious—no need to worry about moments. Carvajal was dead.

And Waring could not find it in his heart to be regretful at the man's death. He was a murderer—not merely a potential murderer, but an actual one, if this letter found on him told truth.

On showing the policeman out, Waring had found an afternoon paper outside his door. He opened it now. On an inside page he found the story of the *Montania's* arrival, and the list of passengers. There was a paragraph about Mrs. Willy Sinsabaugh, but Waring skipped this. He searched the list of first-class passengers.

For Carvajal must have been among these. There are difficulties about the landing in America of second-class or third-class passengers who are foreigners. It was natural that Carvajal's benefactor, "P. R.," of Paris, would see to it that Carvajal traveled in the fashion that would assure least inconvenience.

And Carvajal—or again, "P. R."—would have intelligence enough to know that a man dressed in French-cut clothing would have difficulty, no matter how well he spoke English, in passing for anything but a Frenchman. Hence the dancer had been booked as a Frenchman. Waring looked for French names among the passengers.

But the *Montania* was an English boat, starting from Southampton and touching at Cherbourg. There were only two French names among the first-class passengers, though there were plenty in the second-class list. Jacques Pelletier and Pierre Carnot were these two. Americanized Frenchmen, too, for they hailed, according to the list, from Dubuque, Iowa, and Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Well, maybe one of them really hailed from one of those places, but the other was undoubtedly Carvajal. Of course! Traveling "first" and speaking English extremely well, it would facilitate landing if Carvajal posed as a naturalized American—which was probably what he had done. In view of his birth, it would not seem unnatural for him to adhere to the methods of dress of his native land.

But which? Waring, smiling,—it didn't matter much, so far as he could see,—tossed a penny. It came down "heads." Well, then, not only in the next few hours would he pretend to be Raoul Carvajal, but he would profess to have been, during the *Montania's* voyage, Jacques Pelletier, of Dubuque, Iowa.

For if Bergson had been able to get almost a million and a half of dollars from Carey Haig, and had been able to vanish without a trace of his whereabouts until this providential accident had located him, and if Bergson were mixed up in some "society" that looked upon violence as a casual thing, it befitted Philip Waring to have a straight story. Waring only hoped that it *was* as Jacques Pelletier that Carvajal had posed. Still, it mattered little; with the letter of introduction whose description fitted himself, there was little danger of Bergson's suspecting an impersonation. And if he didn't suspect, he wouldn't make inquiries. Besides, four hundred thousand dollars was well worth risking something for! And Waring was suddenly convinced, through an emotional sort of reasoning, that he was going to recover his fortune.

Bergson had been the name of the man to whom Carey Haig had turned over the Waring fortune; Bergson had been the man whom Waring had tried, these past months, to locate; it was

surely nothing less than fate that had sent Raoul Carvajal upon Waring's trail, a trail that had led the dancer to death. And if fate had interposed in the Waring affairs so far, putting into the Waring hands a clue to the identity and whereabouts of the man who possessed the Waring fortune—well, fate simply couldn't let it go at that!

FOR half an hour Waring sat in the deepest thought. Fate had helped him, but fate sometimes seems to have a trick of helping those who help themselves. Perhaps, after all, fate is God.

He put himself in the place of Carvajal. Of course, the dancer himself would have explained his delay in reaching Hancock Square from the boat by saying that he had recognized an enemy and pursued him. Waring could not do this. But Waring could state that he had found his French clothing too conspicuous in this new country, and hence had bought new garments. That would account for the delay. Therefore Waring must buy new clothing.

Further, there were the two opened envelopes. It would be just as well to deliver the letter to Bergson in a sealed envelope. Waring, studying them, noticed that the handwriting on the outer one differed from that on the inner, which was exactly similar to the writing of the letter itself. Evidently Carvajal had not wished to carry, where by some accident it might be exposed to the curious, the name and address of the man whom he had intended visiting in New York. So Carvajal had enclosed the letter in a second envelope on which he had written, probably to refresh his memory, the address merely of Bergson.

Well, in that case, all that Waring had to do was direct another envelope in his own handwriting. There was hardly a chance that Bergson knew Carvajal's writing.

Waring could explain by saying that "P. R." had given him the letter without an envelope, and had given him Bergson's address by word of mouth, but that he, Carvajal, had feared to trust his memory. The falsity of all this might later be exposed, but it takes some time for letters to pass from New York to Paris and back again. Waring might accomplish a lot in that time.

Waring directed another envelope to "17 Hancock Square." Then he looked through his wardrobe. There were clothes there that had never been worn, but somehow they did not seem to be the sort of apparel that Carvajal would have bought. They were a bit too subdued in design for the taste of an Apache dancer of the Paris restaurants. Further, they were tailor-made, and Carvajal would not have had time to have clothing made.

Waring regretted the absence of "Mike," his servant. Mike was a Japanese who had been in Waring's employ as cook and general housekeeper for several years. But Mike, whose brain was extremely keen, and who would have died for Waring, was off for the day. And Waring could not postpone his visit to Hancock Square. Already several hours had elapsed since the *Montania* had docked.

Waring went to a desk. It was against the law for a free-born American to possess weapons in the city of New York. Nevertheless, having read of the experiences undergone by law-abiding citizens who had taken their weapons to the police to surrender them,—and had been promptly jailed,—Waring still possessed his automatic pistol, which had accompanied him to the Arctic and to Africa. He put the weapon, a flat, well-balanced affair, in the pocket of his overcoat. Then he left his apartment and started for a well-known men's outfitting shop. When he left there, he was dressed in new clothing from the skin out.

It was quite late in the afternoon when he turned in at the low iron gate that fended a pocket-handkerchief lawn, in front of number 17 Hancock Square, from the sidewalk. He was pleasurably excited as he walked along the red-brick path to the old-fashioned stoop, up the stoop and rang the bell. Only one thing really bothered him: what was "P. R.'s" name?

GILBERT PARKER'S short fiction appears only in THE BLUE BOOK this year. This is one of these six remarkable stories.

The NIGHT BEFORE

by Gilbert Parker

PATSY KERNAGHAN sat on the square block of timber in front of the Young Doctor's office, humming to himself, "The Night Before Larry Was Stretched."

He was thinking of to-morrow's tragedy at the county jail in Askatoon, where John Quintin was to be hanged for the murder of Milsom Bye, the cashier of the Grand Continental Railway. There had been a quarrel of great intensity between the two men, the origin of which no one knew. It did not come out at the trial, nor would the prisoner make statement on the point, though admitting the existence of the quarrel. It was known that Quintin had been ruined financially not long before, and had been "sold up" to pay his debts; that he was in urgent need of money; and that at the time he was killed, Milsom Bye was supposed to have in his possession ten thousand dollars belonging to the railway company. When the body was found in his office-car, the money was gone. There was no sign of a struggle, but Milsom Bye was lying dead with a knife-wound in his heart. There were clues, however. A tramp, the good-for-nothing brother of Rigby the druggist, had crawled into an empty railway-truck on a siding to sleep; but being wakeful, he had gone to the sliding door of the car and opened it a little. A moment afterward he had seen, in the moonlight, John Quintin come from Milsom Bye's car. Instead of going toward the railway station, Quintin had crossed the tracks near to the truck in which Ridley was hidden—so near that he was recognized.

The defense did not endeavor to prove an alibi, but admitted Quintin's visit to Milsom Bye. The prisoner would not, however, state the cause of his visit, nor present any defense, save that he did not commit the crime. He even admitted that he and Bye quarreled on the night of the murder, but he would not state the nature or cause of the quarrel. His rigid manner and

resentful attitude prejudiced the jury against him; and the facts that, while known to have been previously hard up and without money, three days after the crime he paid two hundred and sixty dollars for a pair of horses and a wagon, and that since the tragedy he had paid his hotel-bill of seventy-five dollars, seemed to establish conclusively that he was the murderer. Quintin's lawyer, Burlingame, had urged that he present the plea of manslaughter, on the ground of provocation, or of being first attacked; but Quintin persisted that he was not guilty of killing Bye, and declared that it was the duty of the court to prove him guilty—not his duty to prove himself innocent. He was, however, found guilty and condemned to death on this circumstantial evidence.

SILENTLY and stubbornly Quintin had lived his imprisonment and awaited his fate, agreeing to the appeal to the governor general for a pardon or a reprieve, but showing no unusual dejection when told that the appeal had failed. Meanwhile he kept declaring his innocence. At the trial, the Young Doctor—as he was affectionately called by all, having been given the name years before when the town was a mere settlement—had been impressed by the bearing of the prisoner, though his sullen demeanor was against him; and in his own mind the Young Doctor had grave doubts as to the man's guilt. Yet he could offer none save psychological reasons for his views. He had even written letters to the judge who presided, and also to the governor general, calling attention to the facts that the prisoner had not tried to hide any essential facts which would tell against him, had even assisted the prosecution, and had—evidently for some Quixotic reasons—hidden the cause of the original quarrel between himself and the dead man and refused to reveal the nature of their conversation.

The Young Doctor drew the attention of the governor general to the fact that small scraps of paper had been found on the steps of the car, bearing a woman's handwriting, on one of which were the letters *"cy"* and on the other *"crue;"* and that these scraps of paper had not been used in the case, while, it might well be, they were part of the history of facts which would not prove the prisoner's guilt but his innocence. He pointed out that it would have been easy for the prisoner to make up a series of falsehoods concerning the quarrel with the dead man, and this the man had not done.

The Young Doctor added that while the prisoner's action was unusual, it was not unprecedented, and that again and again prisoners guilty, and not guilty, had withheld facts which would have benefited them, as had been proved; and that innocent men had gone to the gallows hiding facts which would have saved them—to protect others from a sense of shame which seemed to their distorted imaginations as greater shame than being hanged. These phenomena were not unusual in the history of crime, and he urged that at least a reprieve was advisable. A reprieve need only delay the penalty from being carried out, but it would be a crime committed by the State for which it could never atone, if it hanged an innocent man. These efforts, however, had been of no avail.

AT length it chanced that, the regular jail physician being ill, a few days before the hanging the Young Doctor was summoned to attend the prisoner for an acute functional trouble.

"I suppose you think it's funny, me having you to doctor this pain under my belt when they've got me slated for hanging in three days," remarked John Quintin.

"Are you going to hang, then?" asked the Young Doctor, pouring some medicine into a glass. "If you are, this will help you to get right for it."

"No, I don't think I'm going to hang," answered Quintin, draining off the medicine, the pain in his face and body very acute. "I don't think I'm going to hang. That's why I wanted you."

There was silence for two or three minutes, in which the prisoner sought to get ease by clenching his arms

round his body and moving his head like an agonized animal.

"They don't believe it, but I never killed that scoundrel Bye—never!" said Quintin. "He wanted killing, and he was killed, but not by me. It wouldn't have been good for me to kill him, unless it was never known. There wasn't any profit for me out of it."

"There was ten thousand dollars," remarked the Young Doctor suggestively.

"Ten thousand dollars—hell!" replied Quintin. "Did anybody think I'd kill a man for ten thousand dollars? I had temptations to kill, but money wouldn't have tempted me. I aint guilty—by God, I aint guilty, and they haven't proved it. Somebody else put the knife into him—not me. He was a man who meant to live, and he's dead, and I don't hesitate to say that I'm glad he's dead; but that ten thousand dollars!" He snapped his fingers. "It wouldn't have had that much influence with me. I was in debt, but they couldn't hurt me because of that. Only a common, low-down thief of the road would kill a man for money, and I'm not a thief. I never stole anything in my life."

The Young Doctor realized that the man had a very unusual nature, with ideas fixed like iron, and that trouble had, to a rare degree, intensified his natural individuality, which was now, in an abnormal situation, eccentricity. John Quintin had, the Young Doctor knew, never essayed to make himself popular, and had, during the past few years, been taciturn, moody and very short with people; but when he first settled near Askatoon and began ranching and mixed farming he had been cheerful, and he was certainly kind and generous. All that, however, had been forgotten in his later reserve—not to say stark unsociability and gruffness.

The Young Doctor could not look into the deep gray eyes under the sternly overhanging forehead and study the untroubled low brow with the thick, shaggy brown hair, making a sort of cloud for the face, without his heart thumping in resistance to the verdict of murder against the man. He knew that psychology was nothing on which to base a man's reprieve or acquittal of a charge of murder; yet he had been such an acute student of human nature that he felt almost as much security in reading his evidence—the evidence of mind, nature, temperament, physiognomy and the physical tokens which, to the initiated, are more revealing than words—as the jury had found in the circumstantial evidence of fact on which they had sent the man to the gallows.

PRESENTLY the Young Doctor endeavored to induce Quintin to tell the whole truth, whatever it was, but was met by the reiterated reply:

"Let them *prove* me guilty. No one saw me kill him. There's no knife of mine been found. Why shouldn't that man Rigby have done it? He wanted money as bad as I did. The money I bought the horses with I got from a man who'd owed it to me eight years. He was going off into British Columbia when I spotted him on the train, and held him up. He was flush, and he paid me. Do you think I'd ha' been such a fool as to spend money like that after I'd stole it? It aint my fault he hasn't been found. I aint got to prove where I got them few hundred dollars, have I? Where's the proof they were the same bills as Milsom Bye had? . . . . . Bye deserved killing, but I didn't stop his breath for him. If I've got to hang, I wish I *had* stopped it. But I *aint* got to hang! Why should I, if I didn't do it? . . . . . No, I'm not goin' to tell anything more'n I have told. But I'm obliged to you. I can see you don't believe I done it. You got ways of gettin' at the truth differen' from the rest. If I'd had your brains, I'd have been a success in life. I only knew what I wanted, not how to git it. In everything it's been like that. But I aint dead yet. If there's a God, He'll see to that."

At length the Young Doctor left him, more than ever convinced that a crime was about to be committed by the law. In his pained interest he went over in his mind the whole case as it was told in court, and he tried to remember all he could concerning Quintin's life since his coming to Askatoon. He recalled

that for two years successively before the murder, Quintin had been away for a month. Having been called in to attend professionally to one of Quintin's farm-hands, he had been told that "the boss had gone over," which meant gone over the border between Canada and the United States.

Now, with "the dark procession of hateful death" approaching Askatoon jail, he wondered whether those visits over the border were connected in any way with Quintin's fate, as it now stood. So possessed was he with the mystery of the case and the horror of an innocent man being hanged, that he went to the railway station on the faint chance of being able to learn whether Quintin took train for anywhere south in the month of his absence from Askatoon.

FINALLY the Young Doctor found a clerk who could remember the essential facts he wanted to know. He was a slim, clean-shaven young fellow of about twenty-three, who had an unusual memory for people and names, and who was of some note in the local theatrical history of the place. His name was Patchin.

The Young Doctor said to him: "Do you know John Quintin?"

Patchin nodded. "Yes, I know him," he answered.

"Tell me, then," asked the Young Doctor, "do you remember his making trips last year, and the year before, in the summer-time, for a whole month?"

Patchin inclined his head. "Yes, I remember," he said.

"Did you sell him the tickets for the journey?" asked the Young Doctor.

"Yes, I did," replied Patchin. "I remember it well, because the name of the place he bought tickets for was unusual. It was French. That struck me at the time, and when I've seen the name since in the papers, I've remembered that John Quintin went there—went there both years in the summer-time, as you say."

"What was the name of the place?"

"Basse Boule—that was its name. It was settled by French Canadians. It's over the border in the United States."

"Basse Boule, eh! I don't think that place was mentioned at the trial, was it?" asked the Young Doctor.

"I guess not," Patchin answered. "I don't remember its being mentioned."

"Well, I have an idea that if we knew what took him to Basse Boule, we'd know more of the truth about the killing of Milsom Bye," said the Young Doctor.

"Why don't you ask him?"

"Yes, I might do that, or I might go down to Basse Boule."

"Wouldn't that be work for his lawyer, Burlingame?"

The Young Doctor nodded. "Yes, it would. I'll see Burlingame. No chance of being mistaken about it, eh?"

Patchin shook his head. "Not any," he said. "I've got a memory for things like that, which never goes wrong. If you want me, you know where to find me. If there's anything I can do, call on me."

AN hour later the Young Doctor visited the office of Burlingame, the lawyer.

"Burlingame," he said, "you're an expert in law and evidence, and I've got something that I think might be worth looking into. Did you ever hear of a place called Basse Boule?"

Burlingame inclined his head. "Certainly," he said; "it's over the border. It was settled by French Canadians from Saskatchewan."

"Well, did Quintin ever mention the place in your talks with him?"

"Quintin—no, never! What has he got to do with Basse Boule?"

"I don't know, but he went to Basse Boule two summers,—last year and the year before,—and I have an idea that something of the true story of the killing of Milsom Bye might be found at Basse Boule."

"You think he's innocent, do you?"

"Yes, as innocent as you or I. I don't believe he killed Milsom Bye."

"The evidence was all against him," said Burlingame. "It was not an easy case to defend. He had a quarrel, and he acknowledged it. There was no one else that could be suspected. Besides, Quintin paid his debts a few days afterwards."

"Did it never strike you that that is the one thing Quintin wouldn't have done if he were guilty?" asked the Young Doctor.

"You think his story was true, then, about the money?"

"Yes, just as true as anything else in the case. Just as true as that Milsom Bye was killed."

"Funny—it didn't strike me that way. I think Quintin is a blockhead. He appears to want to die, and the sheriff'll hang him sure as the sun shines."

"I suppose so. He's a queer fellow, the sheriff," remarked the Young Doctor sarcastically.

"Well, you see it's his first job of the kind, and he's dead set on doing the thing according to the rules."

"It's a foolish thing to make a sheriff of a wooden-head."

"I don't know about that. You don't want wooden-hearted lawyers or judges or even witnesses, but when it comes to carrying out the law, what's wanted is the hammer on the nail, or the round peg in the round hole."

"Well, the sheriff doesn't come into this at the present moment," remarked the Young Doctor, "but perhaps he will later. We'll see. Wont you go to Basse Boule and see what you can find out—or send a detective down? I'd go myself if I were you, however."

"I don't see how it comes in," declared Burlingame. "I think he's guilty, and he'll hang."

"But—but you'd think it good business to get him off, wouldn't you?" asked the Young Doctor. "Either by a verdict or reprieve or pardon?"

"Well, I don't know," replied Burlingame. "If a man wont save himself, when he can, I don't see why others should spend their time trying to save him. I put through the appeal to the governor general, and put it as strong as I could, but it wasn't any use, and if Basse Boule was any good in the case, I'll bet Quintin would have used it."

"Well, I'll bet he wouldn't," remarked the Young Doctor sharply. "I'll bet he wouldn't. I don't know why he's acting as he is, but if I ever met a straight man in my life, in my view it's John Quintin. Nothing will make me believe he killed Milsom Bye. Why didn't you make use of those scraps of paper that were found on the steps of the car? They were in a woman's handwriting. They're only pieces of words, but they might have led to something that would have put the whole truth before the court. We've never had the whole truth. We don't even know why Quintin quarreled with Bye, and no witness was able to give any light."

"I don't think there was anything in those pieces of paper," remarked the lawyer; "and if Quintin cares so little whether he lives or dies that he wont tell what would help him, I don't see where I come in. I don't even know what they quarreled about. If the quarrel was about something in which Quintin was right and Bye wrong, what a fool he is not to tell it! No, I've done my duty by the case. I've done all that a man can do, and I aint going to Basse Boule."

"But my case is that if John Quintin is hanged, you'll lose a lot of reputation—and self-respect," said the Young Doctor. "I don't believe he's guilty."

"Well, he himself says he isn't, and you've got that much support for your judgment," remarked Burlingame cynically.

"So you think most people here are as blind as yourself—as blind and opaque?"

"I'm not as opaque as you think, or as you say, because I don't believe you think it. What's the good of trying to defend a man who says it isn't his business to prove his innocence, and that it's the business of the State to prove his guilt?" asked the lawyer.

"Well, that's the kind of man I'd take a lot of trouble in trying to save," remarked the Young Doctor bitterly, turning away.

BUT the words "Basse Boule" kept ringing in his ears. When he got an idea into his head, he did not eject it because it made him uneasy. He kept asking himself always what it meant. That was why he was so successful as a doctor; it was why he had special mention from the chief medical papers of the world because of an ar-

ticle he had written on psychology in medical practice.

"Basse Boule—Basse Boule—Basse Boule!" It kept ringing in his brain, while Patsy Kernaghan—seated outside his office on the block of wood from which visitors mounted their horses—hummed in what seemed a cold-blooded fashion, "The Night Before Larry Was Stretched." When the Young Doctor came forth to pay a few visits to his patients,—none of them seriously ill,—he heard Patsy's apparently inhuman music.

"Go and sing your ugly serenade somewhere else, Patsy," he said. "Have you no feeling at all?"

Patsy's reply was that he was only trying to get used to the idea of John Quintin's being hanged, for "he wasn't the one to be murderin' anny man." Then Patsy entered on a sharp criticism of the excitement in Askatoon at a man being hanged, and how there would be crowds around the jail "in the marnin'—waitin' for the bell and the black flag as if it was a circus." He remarked that Askatoon wouldn't sleep a wink that night, so excited it would be—as if the Devil was coming with a diploma from Hell for every one of his children in the town, and that was more than the census set down.

At that moment a horseman came galloping up to the Young Doctor's door, and without dismounting, said: "A man and a woman took awful sick, and the man—" A quick, spasmodic gesture told of the man's state—and would the Young Doctor come at once? It was twelve miles away in the foothills, the messenger said. He was evidently a stranger in Askatoon, but he knew the Young Doctor by sight. He gave a name unfamiliar to the Young Doctor—Dick Jocelyn—and said that he had only been in the district a little while. If there was fear he wouldn't be paid, here was guarantee, and he pulled out a pile of bills and offered it to the Young Doctor, who waved it aside with a gesture of disgust. His horses were at this moment nearing the door. He questioned the man quickly and then entered the house and came out again in a moment with his surgical case.

An instant later he was on his way to the foothills, the man Jocelyn riding ahead, uneasy in his saddle, and turning around now and then as though to assure himself that the Young Doctor was really following. Once he came back to the Young Doctor's carriage. "She's deaf and dumb," he said, meaning the woman at the farm. The Young Doctor nodded, and the man rode on.

IN the living-room of the house where he was taken—Gorley's Place, it was called—the Young Doctor found a young and delicate woman unstrung and prostrated—and an old man who was dying. The man was in the last stage of an incurable disease. He could not live more than a few hours. The young woman, who was bordering on collapse, was yet rarely beautiful; but she had in her eyes the look of one hunted and terror-stricken. When the Young Doctor would have attended to her first, she motioned him to the couch of the old man. With strange intentness she watched his lips as he spoke; she wrote her reply on a piece of paper. And the Young Doctor suddenly recognized her writing as being the same as that on the scraps of paper found on the steps of Milsom Bye's car!

The Young Doctor asked the woman her name, speaking slowly, and again by the motion of the lips she understood him and wrote the name on a piece of paper.

It was Nancy Stone. He recalled the *"cy"* written on the scrap of paper on the steps of Bye's car. The *"cy"* and the *"crue"* were in the same hand; Nancy Stone had evidently written a letter to Milsom Bye in which she used the word *cruel*. The Young Doctor then spoke to her with his fingers, for he had learned the language of the deaf and dumb years before. At this her face brightened, and a steadier look came into her eyes. If there was one thing more than another, marking the character of the Young Doctor, it was his ability to win confidence and to soothe excitement. His Irish nature made him sympathetic, and his scientific and practical mind gave him coolness, and a sense and appearance of strength.

He quickly attended to the dying man on the couch, who appeared to be in more agony of mind than of body. The Young Doctor had seen hundreds of people die; yet he never had seen fear of death. He had, however, seen many minds in torture because of things that troubled them—things of which they wished to speak before they went. As their time of exit came, they had been more busy with the past than with the future. Many a time he had been father confessor to those who had never made confession in their lives.

In this case before him he recognized an agony which, far more than the death-agony on him, made the great beads of sweat stand out on Josiah Stone's forehead. He made up his mind at once that tragedy was in the lives of this old man and the deaf-and-dumb woman—really she was only a girl, though he knew by unerring observation that she had been married, for knowledge and suffering were in her eyes, and there were also the elusive yet sure physical signs of womanhood. As he attended to the old man, his mind kept repeating the words, like so many passwords to a lodge of mystery: "Basse Boule—John Quintin—Nancy Stone."

THE words repeated themselves like a call. He remembered his visit to John Quintin in the jail, and how fixed his conviction had become that Quintin was innocent. He determined to probe the thing, for there was the terrific fact that in another twenty-four hours John Quintin would hang. Presently the man Jocelyn,—a nephew of Josiah Stone,—who had brought him over from Askatoon, entered the room. With an abrupt gesture of friendliness to the Young Doctor, he walked up to the bed where the old man lay. Gazing at the wizened, haggard face, he said:

"Is it over? Have you told him?"

The old man shook his head.

"Well, you'd better do it now while there's time, or both you and Quintin'll be gone. You've got to go, and Quintin hasn't, if you speak. So pitch in: own up—tell the truth."

The old man tried to raise himself on his elbow, but fell back. The pallor on his face deepened. The eyes, however, took on a new burning light; the lips trembled. A whole lifetime of purpose seemed to gather in the stricken, dying face.

"Yes, I got to tell it, and I got to die," the old man said. "I killed Milsom Bye—it weren't John Quintin. It was like this: Years ago at Basse Boule I lived with my girl—Nancy there. She was deaf and dumb. Her mother had died when she was a baby, or little more. I took care of her; I loved her. She was everything to me. Two men came along—one was John Quintin, and the other was Milsom Bye. Milsom Bye was well off and good-looking, and I thought it was a good match for her, 'spite of her being deaf and dumb. So, like a damn' fool, I encouraged it. God, she was pretty—she was pretty, and she was good. Well, it was like this: John Quintin was in California; Milsom Bye snatched her up, and they was married."

THERE was a slight pause, in which the old man gasped for breath. Then he went on: "They was married, and for a while—a little while, maybe two years—they was happy, and a little child was born. Then—then—damn him, he got tired of her; he deserted her and got a divorce somewhere in the States—somewhere where they gave him a divorce just because my girl was deaf and dumb, and the damn' fool of a judge flung her out with her child—out of the marriage life.

"Then Milsom Bye disappeared—got away somewhere, and we never knew where he was till we come up here where I bought this farm, and I saw him working in his office on the railway. I took a letter from my girl—from Nancy—to him, asking him to be good to the child, and give the child money. She didn't think it fair that I should be supporting Milsom Bye's child, and she was right. So I took her letter and went to him, and he said to me: 'I suppose you've come on the same business that John Quintin come on a little while ago. Well, if you have, you can take yourself out and go to hell, for I aint going to have anything to do with you, or your daughter, or

your daughter's child.' He tossed the letter she had sent him on the floor.

"That drove me mad. I whipped out a knife, and I give it to him in the heart,—right in the heart,—and he dropped. As I stood looking at him dead, it 'most drove me mad again, he was such a scoundrel. As I looked at him I cursed—cursed him to hell forever. Then I took his money—ten thousand dollars it was—out of his cash-box and stuck it in my pocket. I dunno why I done that, except that I must ha' been mad; but I aint used a penny of it. It's there in that box."

He pointed to a hardwood box against the wall, heavily locked. The Young Doctor nodded.

"After I'd pocketed the cash, I stuck the knife away into its case, and I begun tearing up Nancy's letter to him. I tore it all up, and carried it away out of the car, leaving him there alone with his crime. I guess I was mad, sure. All I remember was that when I got back here, my pocket was full of the pieces of the letter Nancy wrote him. I put them in the fire, so there shouldn't be any traces. Nobody knew that she'd been his wife; and the letter, if it'd been found, or any pieces of it, would have given the thing away. So I tore it up."

"Yes," remarked the Young Doctor, "but you dropped some of it—two pieces of it,—on the steps of the car as you came out."

"Who found them—who found them?" gasped out the old man.

"One of the police, a constable, found them, but they didn't play any part in the trial," answered the Young Doctor.

Then the horror of the thing seized him. John Quintin was innocent. The man who committed the crime was lying on the bed in front of him, and with both feet in the grave. It was not enough to go to the sheriff with the story. The sheriff would be bound to carry out the hanging unless he received a reprieve from the governor general. Yet something must be done, and done at once.

A few moments afterwards, with some kind words to the deaf-and-dumb girl, which she read from his lips, he prepared to go. The governor was on a tour of inspection at the town of Paraman, about a hundred miles away. There was a train leaving in an hour and a half. He gave instructions to Dick Jocelyn to go to the sheriff, to tell him the truth and endeavor to prevent the hanging of John Quintin. Then he took the hands of the deaf-and-dumb girl in his own, pressing them hard, and said:

"The old man, your father, must go soon, but we'll try and save John Quintin. Good-by."

ARRIVED at Askatoon, the Young Doctor sent a telegram to the governor general at Paraman stating that he was coming, and begging him meanwhile to postpone the hanging, if possible, because the real murderer had been found.

When he reached Paraman, he found that the governor had gone to a ranch ten miles away. Riding hard, he reached the ranch, and laid the whole matter before the governor, who said:

"I'd telegraph the sheriff, but it wouldn't be any use. He can't delay the hanging without my written orders —so you must take them. Here they are."

Making out quickly the professional record of reprieve, he signed it, sealed it and handed it to the Young Doctor.

"I hope the train wont be late," the governor continued. "When is the hanging? At twelve o'clock—and it's more than a hundred miles, but you've fourteen hours, and it could be driven with horses, in that time. Wait—I'll write another reprieve, and give it to the best rider here. Between you, you should pull it off. Please God you do! Good-by—God's luck go with you."

The train was late. It was first reported two hours late—then four—then eight. It was eight o'clock in the morning before it arrived. All night long the Young Doctor had walked up and down the road beside the station, troubled, anxious, almost overcome. At last it appeared to him that the only hope was that the other messenger had got through with the reprieve, though if his train came even now, all would be well, as the journey could easily be

covered in three hours, which would leave an hour to the good at the other end—at Askatoon.

WHEN the train at last came, he boarded it and took his seat, counting the minutes until it should start again. Presently, as it did not move, he got out, went to the guard and to the engine-driver and told them what his mission was, praying them to put on all steam so as to reach Askatoon in time.

Never had the train made such good service as on this journey, but fifteen miles away from Askatoon it suddenly stopped. It remained still for nearly a quarter of an hour, in which the Young Doctor was almost mad with anxiety and apprehension. With the hard going, the bearings of the train had got overheated. When it started again, he prayed to Heaven that there should be no more stoppages till they reached Askatoon.

He arrived at Askatoon a half-hour before the hanging was to take place. Hundreds of people were at the railway-station. They told of the anxiety and apprehension of the sheriff, who declared that only the governor general's signed reprieve would save the State from hanging the innocent man. The other messenger the governor general sent had not reached Askatoon, but the sheriff had ordered police officers to go out to Josiah Stone's house. The old man was dead when they arrived, however, and they only took a verbal statement by Dick Jocelyn and a written statement by Nancy Stone—also the wooden box holding the stolen money. He was a pedantic sheriff; he was a sheriff of the law and the letter of the law—but he had determined to put the jail-clock back for an hour if necessary! It was in vain, however, for men to urge him to delay the execution!

"I know my job," he said, "and I got to do it according to the law. It's a bad case, but the prisoner wouldn't speak for himself, so he mustn't be surprised if things turn rough against him. He's been tried, found guilty and condemned to the rope. Only the governor general can stop it. I've got no rights; I've had my orders, and I've got to fulfill them—but I'll turn back the damn' clock if it's got to be done," he added to himself.

He did not turn back the clock, and John Quintin was not hanged, for, at twenty minutes to twelve, on the threshold of the jail, the Young Doctor handed him the reprieve.

TWO days later John Quintin emerged from the jail a free man, with the Young Doctor beside him.

"Where are you going?" asked the Young Doctor.

Quintin turned a piercing but friendly look upon him.

"I'm going to my old friend's funeral," he said, "and I'm going to have a talk with his daughter by and by." Then, after a pause, he added: "She's had a heap of trouble, but I'll try and put it right. I'm going to marry her, if she'll have me."

"Oh, she'll have you, all right!" remarked the Young Doctor.

When the Young Doctor saw them meet after the funeral, he knew that he had made a true prophecy. He saw the girl lose herself in the man's arms with a smothered cry of affection.

"At last, at last, my dearest!" John Quintin said.

"It couldn't be while Milsom Bye was alive. I'm a Catholic," she said on her fingers.

"I know," he answered. "I wish I'd killed him."

She shut her eyes in pain. "I'm glad you didn't," she said with her fingers. "My father had his rights, but they'd have hanged you, John. Then where would I have been?"

"They wouldn't have hung your father—everyone says he done right. I got my views, but there it is!"

"We must go far away from here, John," she gestured.

"We'll go right soon," he said, and kissed her on the lips.

She gave a poignant, discordant little cry as she dropped her head on his breast. It was the tuneless cry of joy of the deaf and dumb.

Strictly Business

by Kennett Harris

THERE are several safe and fairly certain ways of distinguishing the edible mushroom *(Agaricus campestris)* from the toxic fungi that so closely resemble it; nevertheless, speaking generally, our experimental human nature seems to prefer the hazardous but simple test of eating it. If you are not poisoned, it is a mushroom, sure enough. The same natural impulse makes a man apply a tentative forefinger to the apparently motionless buzz-saw, or satisfy himself by the sense of touch that the paint really *is* wet. It also makes a woman try, willfully and of design, to stir up the sharp-fanged, long-clawed, green-eyed monster that lurks dormant in the bosom of the loved one—or should lurk, if the loved one aforesaid really, truly and ardently loves her.

Little Mrs. Jimmie Burke ought to have been pretty tolerably certain that Jimmie loved her truly and deeply, if not so ardently as she could have wished. Perhaps she was pretty tolerably certain. The trouble with them is that they are never exactly satisfied unless the ardor is kept at white heat, and given that sort of incandescence for any extended period of time, they become bored to death. Ergo, they are never exactly satisfied—speaking generally, of course. In point of devotion, Jimmie Burke certainly came well up to the average of two-year-old husbands. According to his lights, he was highly considerate; according to his means, more than liberal—prodigal. Nothing was too good for Bess, if you asked him. She never had to ask him. He would go anywhere with her of an evening and be perfectly cheerful about it, and he remembered and observed anniversaries quite remarkably, for a man, as Mrs. Jimmie freely admitted. But—he was so cocksure of her, and so wrapped up in his business.

WE will, if you please, go back two years and some odd months. Scene: a suburban garden which a full-

orbed moon is flooding with soft, yellow, mellow light. Dramatis personæ: Miss Bessie Williams, the belle of Beverley Heights, *æt.* twenty, attired in some gauzy, white, clinging stuff—and Mr. James Burke (same Jimmie), a promising young coffee-broker. They are seated on a rustic bench, and more of the clinging stuff may be noted.

MISS WILLIAMS (*earnestly*): And are you sure, Jimmie—quite positively and absolutely sure and certain that you never loved any other girl—not in your whole life?

MR. BURKE (*emphatically*): I should say not!

MISS WILLIAMS: Didn't even take a particular fancy to anybody?

MR. BURKE: They all looked alike to me, until I met you, Bess, dear. Let's talk—

MISS WILLIAMS (*incredulously*): Do you mean to tell me that you never made love to any other girl but me?

MR. BURKE (*puzzled*): Sweetheart, why on earth would I want to make love when I wasn't in love? Not on your life! I was going to say—

MISS WILLIAMS: But they made love to you.

MR. BURKE: Not so that I noticed it.

MISS WILLIAMS (*with a charming little laugh*): Of course you wouldn't notice it, you big goose! You didn't even notice that I— Jimmie, it doesn't seem possible that you never loved *anyone.*

MR. BURKE (*smiling*): Did *you* ever love anybody before you saw me? I needn't ask if anybody ever made love to you. I know darn well they have—and I don't blame 'em, poor beggars! But how about you, Bess?

MISS WILLIAMS (*perceiving her advantage*): I—I don't have to tell, do I, Jimmie?

MR. BURKE (*cheerfully*): Why, no, darling. Of course you don't have to. I've got you now, anyway, haven't I?

MISS WILLIAMS (*sighing, retrospectively, as it were*): Poor Harry!

MR. BURKE (*lightly*): Poor Harry one of 'em? Well, what ice—what does it matter what happened before we knew each other? The big thing is now—and what's going to be. I was going to tell you about the business, sweetheart. I've been doing some pretty tall hustling at the office and outside since they were lucky enough to acquire me. I can say that without throwing myself any bouquets. Well, last week I laid down hard on Ferguson for a raise—and got it. I wouldn't have had the nerve to speak up to you tonight, only for that. Honest! But we'll have enough to get along with—now.

MISS WILLIAMS (*absently*): How perfectly grand! Isn't that just splendid! (*intensely*): Jimmie, suppose you hadn't met me at all. Do you think—

MR. BURKE: But you see, I did meet you. And that isn't all, Bess. The old man gave me to understand that in a year or two, if all goes well, a partnership wont be impossible. You see, dear, in our business it's like this—

YOU get the idea, don't you?

After the wedding and a short honeymoon trip, the Burkes established themselves in a modest little South Side flat and were blissfully happy. Perhaps Jimmie was more continuously so than Mrs. Jimmie, for much as he loved his wife and his home, and overjoyed as he was to get back to them after the toils of the day, those same toils were a pure delight to his superabundant and unflagging energies. Nothing could have been more tender than his morning farewells to the pretty little woman who brushed, twitched, patted and smoothed him down so solicitously when he was starting for the office, but having waved his last to her, as she stood watching him from the window, and the corner of the block being turned, his thoughts flew instantly and inevitably to Coffee. He went to work like Job's war-horse, sniffing Coffee from afar, champing his bit, so to speak, and chafing at every little delay of the car that carried him northward to the field of battle for business.

It is to be feared that Mr. Burke gave little thought to Mrs. Jimmie between the hours of eight-thirty A. M. and five-thirty P. M., except at noon, when he telephoned to her. There is no doubt that she was in his subconscious mind, the inspiration and stimulus of his exertions. It was all for

Bessie. The partnership that he was after was for her. It meant a nice apartment for her, for instance. Nothing wrong with the flat, of course—it was a little corner of paradise; but after all, at times it gave its occupants a sense of being cornered. The partnership would mean more pretty frocks for the girl—and knick-knacks—and more money for the occasional larks that they had together and which she enjoyed so much. But all this was subconscious.

As for Mrs. Jimmie, she was perfectly satisfied with the flat as it was, and her trousseau was pretty and complete enough, in her opinion, so that she had no present hankerings for more frocks. She reveled in her new household duties and fussed with and made much of them as happily as any young matron might; but with all that and with visits from friends, calls and shopping, she found odd moments to wonder if Jimmie really did care for her as much as ever. And she got a little tired of Coffee. She thought coffee was all very well as a beverage—in the cunning little aluminum percolator that adorned the breakfast-table; but as a topic of conversation and with a capital *C*, it became tiresome, especially when one wanted to talk about something else. Harry had never talked about Coffee. He had discoursed eloquently, in low, musical tones, of the Mysteries of Being, of Soul-sympathy, of the Starry Spaces and perfectly lovely things like those. He was too fascinatingly poetical for anything, Harry was. Poor Harry!

MRS. JIMMIE had several pangs of remorse concerning Harry. What a heartless girl she had been! how absolutely, fiendishly callous in her treatment of the poor fellow! How she had scoffed at his misery—trampled his poor, broken heart beneath her feet—and just because he had muffed everything in the finals at tennis that fatal day—spoiled her play and given the palm of victory—a most ravishingly gorgeous samovar—to that hateful Scrope girl and her silly partner! On what seeming trifles does destiny hang! Would she ever forget the tragic wretchedness of poor Harry's look when they parted—the haunting reproach of his large, liquid brown eyes!

She wondered what had become of him. Shortly after the rupture his people had moved to Milwaukee and he had accompanied them; and no sign or word from him had reached her since. He might even be dead. There was consumption in his family.

Poor Harry!

WELL, Jimmie Burke got his junior partnership at the end of the year, and he and Mrs. Jimmie moved into an apartment on Drexel Boulevard—not an ultra-fashionable one, but highly convenient in all its arrangements and affording room for a neat maid, who was by way of being a treasure. They began to entertain and be entertained a little more now, and flocked by themselves less on the occasions of their "larks." Not that they were in the least weary of each other's society, but it naturally seemed to happen that way. In the set to which they had gravitated, Mrs. Jimmie became even more of a belle than she had been in the old Beverley Heights days, and Jimmie was by no means hated, although he was perhaps more popular with the men than with the women. Women liked him, but the prettiest of them—especially the prettiest—found him rather uninteresting—by which they meant uninterested. He wouldn't even flirt for fun. Bessie would, and did; but flirt as she might, she couldn't worry Jimmie. It was most exasperating! It was worse than that; it argued insensibility—indifference. And yet, thought Bessie, if he doesn't love me he must be an angel from heaven, dear boy!

"Jimmie, do you love me?" she would ask.

"You're cold, rank poison to me, Budgie," says Jimmie, regarding her as fondly as you please.

There was another thing: that absurd pet-name "Budgie!" Of course, Jimmie only called her that when he wanted to tease her, knowing that it did tease her. Mrs. Jimmie inclined to plumpness. It was a very pleasing plumpness—nothing to worry about in the least, but quite the contrary; yet

the young woman did worry about it, and there was something about "Budgie"—a sort of rotundity, or orotundity, if you like—a suggestion of bulging and of bursting budgets. Harry would have called her *Niña* or *Carissima* or *Mignonne*. Poor Harry!

"But really, Jimmie—aren't you getting a little bit tired of me—just the teentiest, weentiest little bit?"

"How did you find it out? Here I've been thinking all along that I had concealed it beautifully. I'll play you a game of crib, Bess."

"No, I want you to talk to me."

"Well," said Jimmie quite seriously, "I've got some news for you, sure enough. There wont be any Surinam second crop. That Ecuador bug they had so much trouble with has got it sure, and our correspondent says that the planters wont believe it or do a thing to stop it, so it's going to do something sudden and unexpected to the market inside of a couple of months. You remember Brazil had a touch of it last year, but the planters there aren't any Brazil nuts. Progressive and up to date, they are. In July, Rio was quoted—"

"Excuse me a moment, Jimmie," said his wife. "You didn't see my tatting, did you? I must have left it in the dining-room."

It must have been hard to find, that tatting, for nearly half an hour elapsed before Mrs. Jimmie got back—with a streak of fresh powder on the tip of her nose. Jimmie was deep in *The Coffee Trade Weekly*, but he laid it down at once.

"Funny thing, Bess," he laughed. "There's an article on the prospective Surinam crop in the *Weekly*. If you read it, you'll get some idea of the situation. Surinam has a big berry—"

"I know. And the Jamaica has a little one. Jimmie, I do wish you wouldn't bring your business home with you so much."

"We'll play cribbage, then," Jimmie decided. "Get out the board, Sweetness."

THERE came another evening at home, after a week of gayety, when Mrs. Jimmie declined to play cribbage or even to lark—theater and the little French restaurant—at Jimmie's invitation. She had a letter to write, and when she had written it, she set about clearing up her desk, while Jimmie, reclining at a comfortable angle in his Morris chair, smoked his pipe and watched her lazily. Presently she took out a small package of letters, untied their confining blue ribbon and began to read them. Jimmie saw her lay the first one down and gaze absently at the bust of Apollo that surmounted the desk—then sigh and take up another.

Five minutes later Jimmie spoke: "Too bad, wasn't it! What seemed to be the trouble that time, Budgie? Who's your cheerful friend?"

Mrs. Jimmie gave him a quick, inscrutable glance and then handed him a photograph. "I don't think I ever showed you that before," she said.

It was the picture of a young man with large, dark eyes and long, wavy hair that bunched in the back and hung gracefully over his forehead to his left eyebrow. He wore a sort of a prediction of the sport-shirt, the collar of which was kept from unbosoming him entirely by a large bow-tie. His expression was between melancholy and severity. Jimmie grinned as he looked and then, turning the photograph over, read this inscription, in a big, scrawly handwriting:

From Me to You

"Oh you Me!" commented Jimmie, and added: "I'll bet he wrote poetry."

Mrs. Jimmie bit her red underlip. "Yes," she answered calmly and somewhat coldly, "he wrote poetry. Very unbusinesslike, wasn't it? Do you think it would amuse you to see some of it?"

"I wouldn't wonder if it did," replied Jimmie, innocently. Whereupon Mrs. Jimmie gave him this:

TO BETTINA—IN PRISON

I pine no longer to be free,
As other captives do.
My fetters are a joy to me,
For they were locked by you.

Encaged, still boundless is my view;
All that I wish I see—
No vision circumscribed for you
Are all the world to me.

"Good leather!" cried Jimmie generously. "Pretty smooth! Do you know, Bess, I couldn't write a line of poetry to save my blessed neck. Still, I can appreciate good poetry. Take Uncle Walt Mason or—or Tennyson. But there's one thing I *can* write, and that's an advertisement. You may not think it takes much of a headpiece to write a good ad, but—oh, excuse me."

Mrs. Jimmie had taken up another letter.

"Got any more of it?" Jimmie asked after a decent interval.

Mrs. Jimmie looked up. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes suspiciously bright—tear-bright, almost. "I don't think I shall show you any more," she said gently. "It doesn't seem fair to poor Harry."

"Oh, it's poor Harry, is it?" said Jimmie. "Gr-r-r-r-r-uh!"

It gave Mrs. Jimmie quite a little comfort, that long-drawn growl of her husband's. It was an exaggeration, of course—intended to convey the idea of jocularity; but that may have been just assumed to hide a genuine emotion of jealousy. There was no doubt that Jimmie had been unusually thoughtful and silent for the rest of the evening. Poor woman! she little knew that Jimmie, stirred by a spirit of emulation, was mentally conning rhymes ending with the sound of *oo* and *ee*. He had confessed that he was unable to write a line of poetry, but had he not been too modest in his estimate of his own capabilities? Come to think of it, he had never tried to write poetry.

"Blue," said Jimmie to himself, and *"coo—chew—drew—flue—glue—"* and so on for the length of the alphabet, after which he began with *"bee"* and went down the line again. The next morning *oos* and *ees* were running in his head like the blue trip slip for the eight-cent fare, and continued to run even in business hours. Eventually he produced the following—which, however, his wife did not see until a day or two later:

To Poor Harry—At Large
To Bessie I shall stick like glue;
Our firm is Us & We.
I'm mighty glad it's Me, not You,
And so, I think, is She.

There were to be doings at the Country Club that evening; so, shortly after lunch, Mrs. Jimmie visited a hairdresser who knew just exactly what to do with her lovely auburn tresses—and had it done. On her return she helped the Treasure Maid with some forehanded preparations for dinner, and she was in her room considering what dress she would wear to the doings when the door-bell rang.

"I'll go, Katie," she told the maid, and then hurried to the speaking-tube that connected with the vestibule. "Hello!" she called. "Hello, hello!"

There was no response. The caller had availed himself of the entrance of another tenant and was already mounting the stairs. That was why Mrs. Jimmie got such a shock when she opened the door to his rap.

"Why, Harry Dimpsey!" she cried.

IT was like seeing a ghost. Mr. Dimpsey too seemed quite overcome; at least he said nothing and did nothing, but just stood and stared. Mrs. Jimmie was the first to recover.

"Harry Dimpsey!" she cried again, but this time in a voice of welcome. "Harry, I'm *so* glad to see you! How did you find us? Here, let me take your hat. This way. Come to the light; I want to see if you've changed. Um, yes; you have, a little. Do you think I have? Of course you'll say I haven't, but I know better. Now you may sit down. No, not in that chair; this one is more comfy. My! you surprised me! Why didn't you write? But I suppose you were uncertain about the address. I know the last time I wrote to your sister, we were on Indiana Avenue, and she didn't answer my letter, the bad girl! Harry, I'm *so* glad! Yes, you *have* changed."

He had, judging by the picture. He was a trifle fuller in the lower part of his face; his hair was shorter, and he wore a quite ordinary collar and necktie; his expression was still melancholy, but it had no admixture of severity. Indeed, it would have been hard to look severe at Mrs. Jimmie just then. Her eyes were shining like—like anything you can think of—stars, say; and her cheeks had a pink glow that en-

hanced the brilliance of her eyes. Her hair was arranged for the party, and it was a mighty artistic arrangement. In a sweet little frock of robin's-egg blue, she was a dream, no less.

"I needn't say that I am glad to see you," said Mr. Dimpsey in the low, musical voice that Mrs. Jimmie remembered so well. He looked glad, and the lady felt quite thrilled, the more so as she sensed a sort of embarrassment in him—undeniably something odd in his manner.

"You must have wanted to see me, or you wouldn't have hunted me—us—up, would you?" said Mrs. Jimmie archly.

"Er—I suppose not," replied Mr. Dimpsey. "Do you know, Mrs. Burke—"

"I'm still 'Bessie' to my old friends, Harry," Mrs. Jimmie told him.

"It's awfully dear of you to say so, Bessie," he responded. "I was going to say that when I saw you at the door it took my breath away. I felt—I can't begin to tell you how I felt."

"Because I was so sadly changed?"

"You are changed, but not sadly. Wonderfully! The perfect fruition of the glorious promise of your early youth. Mr. Burke should be a very, very happy man. I hope to see him."

"Of course you will see him." Bessie was blushing with pleasure. "He'll be here very soon now, and you are to stay to dinner and tell me all about yourself and— Yes, you are; I insist on it. Now! Are you going to be good? Very well, then; that's settled. Tell me, how are your mother and Connie? Connie isn't married yet, is she? And you, Harry? Not even engaged? Oh *dear!*"

Mr. Dimpsey was shaking his head mournfully. "That's a cruel question for you to ask, Bessie," he said. "How could I be?"

"That's a silly question to ask," Mrs. Jimmie told him severely. But she was fluttered, nevertheless. "You could be, easily."

"Perhaps," Mr. Dimpsey agreed with a sigh. "But a man who has lost a golden treasure doesn't stoop to dull, base lead, however easy of attainment it might be."

AT this Mrs. Jimmie only laughed and told Mr. Dimpsey that he hadn't changed a bit. Just then there came the grating sound of Jimmie's latchkey, and she excused herself and ran into the hall to meet him. With a warning gesture she caught him by the sleeve and hustled him into their bedroom, closing the door after her.

"Jimmie," she cried, breathlessly, "Harry's here—Harry Dimpsey."

"Grr-rr-rr-uh!" growled Jimmie.

"Don't be silly. I've asked him to dinner, and we're not going out tonight, so you wont have to dress. Just pretty up a little so that I wont be ashamed of you. I'm going to tell Katie." She gave him a peck of a kiss and scurried to the kitchen, where she gave hasty but explicit directions to the presiding genius and then fluttered back to the library, where she found Mr. Dimpsey gazing sentimentally at one of her old photographs that stood on the mantel.

"Oh, that horrid old thing!" she exclaimed. "I wonder you can bear to look at it."

"*Do* you wonder?" asked Mr. Dimpsey, in tones that were almost sepulchral.

Wasn't it beyond words! Could any woman ask more of an old rejected lover? And there were lines in his face that had not been there when they had parted. His dress showed carelessness, if not recklessness. It was too sweetly, sadly delightful for anything. If only poor Jimmie—

She took her husband's photograph from its corner and showed it.

"And that is He!" Mr. Dimpsey said intensely.

"I must go and see what he is doing," said Mrs. Jimmie suddenly, and with that she tripped back to the bedroom and found Jimmie sitting on the bed, staring thoughtfully at a collar that he held in his hand.

"What is the matter with it?" she inquired.

Jimmie looked at her with a queer, absent expression. "Oh, nothing," he replied. "Nothing at all. Gee! you're looking swell, Budgie." He began to put on the collar.

"Do hurry, dear. And, Jimmie, I

want you to be nice to him. I think it was just lovely of him to come and see us the first thing. Oh—and Jimmie: please don't talk coffee. I mean—he isn't a business man, and—*you* know."

"All right," Jimmie assented. "We'll keep to politics and religion and the six worst smellers. Don't worry."

"I must get back to him," said Mrs. Jimmie. "Hurry along, dear."

JIMMIE thought she might have waited to part his hair for him and improve on the knot of his necktie. He was used to those little attentions, and although he generally protested against them, he felt that he was being slightly neglected. However, he hurried, according to directions, and in a minute or two made his appearance and greeted Mr. Dimpsey with hospitable warmth.

It was a nice little dinner. Katie did herself proud, both with the cooking and the service. Jimmie carefully refrained from talking shop, confining himself for the most part to such genial agreements as "Sure!" "Now you're whistling!" and "Great stuff!" Mr. Dimpsey obviously exerted himself to be entertaining, and did up Noyes, Masefield, Housman, Pound and Harriet Monroe as brown as you can imagine, quoting from them liberally, and with exquisite feeling. He also said some kind things about Shaw and, on the whole, approved of the art of Conrad. Mrs. Jimmie had not much more to say than her husband, but her appreciative interest was unbounded. She was simply enthralled. Here was intellect—penetration—the keen critical faculty tempered by magnanimity—profound insight! And she might have had this sort of table-talk every day instead of stupid prices-current, and tare-and-tret, shrinkage and such incomprehensible things. To be sure, she couldn't quite comprehend everything that Mr. Dimpsey said, but she knew, at least, that it wasn't sordid.

Poor Jimmie!

She couldn't help that small sigh as she got up and left the two men to their cigars. Mr. Dimpsey sighed too. Could it have been a sigh of relief? It sounded like it. As for Jimmie, he suppressed *his* suspiration, as it were, out of politeness, but he certainly dreaded unqualified companionship with Mr. Dimpsey. He was, he considered, fed up with the highbrow patter.

MR. DIMPSEY began, with a most insinuating smile: "Mr. Burke, I have yet to embrace my opportunity of congratulating you on your marriage. Will you allow me to do so now?—most heartily, sir, and sincerely, I assure you."

"Thanks," said Jimmie, rather uncomfortably. "Very kind of you."

"Not at all," Dimpsey disclaimed. "It is a pleasure to do so, and I want you to know how highly I esteem the privilege of witnessing in this intimate manner your—er—domestic felicity."

"That's all right," said Jimmie, knocking the ashes from his cigar. "Pleasure's ours. Glad to have you."

"You are very kind to say so," declared Mr. Dimpsey. "I reproach myself for not having called before, but since I came to Chicago a year ago business has been keeping me humping. Of course you are aware that I had the happiness of knowing Mrs. Burke in bygone years?"

"Why, sure," replied Jimmie, round-eyed.

"I may, therefore, perhaps, take the liberty of saying what is of course well known to you—that you have in her a —er—treasure inestimable, that grace and charm, combining in her with all womanly virtues, your sense of duty and responsibility to her must necessarily be strong."

"Say," said Jimmie, "aren't you coming it a bit strong yourself? Excuse me, but just what do you mean by my duty to Mrs. Burke?"

"Please don't take offense," said Mr. Dimpsey. "I speak of the duty of any man—of protecting and providing for his loved ones, not only during his life, but after he has departed to that bourne from which no traveler returns—a time when the sharp agony of grief may at least be mitigated by the assurance of an adequate provision against want. Death, Mr. Burke, is, as you know, the common lot of all—inevitable; and yet human nature is so constituted that

there is no contingency against which we are so reluctant and so unlikely to provide. I will venture to say that, clear-headed and far-seeing business man as you are, you have not considered the subject of life-insurance."

"Guess again," said Jimmie. "I've a policy in the Glacial, and I've been considering taking some more of it."

Mr. Dimpsey fairly beamed. "I beg your pardon," he said. "I might have known it. But before you go further with the Glacial,—and I don't deny that the Glacial is a good company,—I would like you to look into a plan that my company, the Prescient, has lately devised, a plan that I know will commend itself to your judgment as a practical man. Mr. Gibbons, of Palmer and Gibbons,—a friend of yours, I believe,—has just taken a five-thousand policy on that plan, and he mentioned you as a man who would be quick to perceive its advantages. He mentioned you particularly, and I should have called at your office this afternoon if I had not been detained. Please let me show you a few statistics bearing—"

He was pulling some papers out of his pocket when Jimmie stopped him.

"Excuse me once more," said Jimmie, struck with an idea. "Did you know who I was before Gibbons sicked you on to me?"

"That's the odd thing," explained Mr. Dimpsey, smiling broadly. "You see, I was so late that I figured you would have left the office, and so I telephoned Mr. Gibbons for your private address. No, I didn't know that you were Mrs. Burke's husband, and I was never more surprised than when she opened the door to me. Small world, isn't it? Not often I can combine business with pleasure this way, but as I was saying—"

"I'll tell you what," interrupted Jimmie. "We wont talk about it now. It would worry Bessie, anyway, if she had the idea that I was fixing for the Bourne; but if you'll call at my office to-morrow at eleven-thirty sharp, I'll give you half an hour and see what you've got. Have another cigar; you've let that go out."

There was a slight tinkle of the rings that held the portières at the door opening on the hall. Jimmie looked up quickly, and as he did so the curtains parted and Mrs. Jimmie entered, smiling charmingly.

"Let's go into the library," she suggested. "You can smoke just as well there as here."

"JIMMIE," said Mrs. Jimmie very casually, after the guest had departed, "what did you think of him?"

"Fine chap," Jimmie answered, perhaps a trifle too heartily. "Some breezy little conversationalist, isn't he?"

"You're a dear," Mrs. Jimmie told him. "What were you two talking about when I was out of the room?"

"Oh, sports," Jimmie replied easily. "He's quite a fan when you get to know him. I'll bet he can figure the odds on a big event better than a professional bookie."

"You're a darling," said Mrs. Jimmie. "You weren't the least little bit jealous, Jimmie—my old beau calling on me while you were away?"

"I don't know that I like it, altogether." Jimmie frowned, and his tone was sober. "I'll have to keep my eye on you, Budgie—and always be home to tea."

"You're an angel," declared Mrs. Jimmie with energy. She had been perched on the arm of his chair, tweaking his hair as she questioned him. Now she suddenly slipped into his lap, threw her arms tightly about his neck and pressed her cheek to his. It was a wet cheek, too.

"Oh, Jimmie, Jimmie-boy!" she cried, "I listened to you talking, you big, dear fraud! I heard that sneaky little *—thing!* Jimmie, I don't mind *your* business a bit. Tell me *everything* about it, dear. But oh, Jimmie, you do think more of *me* than it, don't you? Love me hard, *hard*, Jimmie-boy. It isn't business first, is it?"

Jimmie's hug was bearlike in its tension.

"To blue blazes with business," said he.

There will be another of Kennett Harris' delightful stories in the February BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE — on sale January 1st.

HERE'S WHY THERE IS NO "Free Lances in Diplomacy" IN THIS ISSUE:

CLARENCE HERBERT NEW, whose "Free Lances in Diplomacy" have been a notable feature of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE for nearly seven years,—have, indeed, been the most popular and long sustained series ever printed,—suffered a serious accident a few weeks ago, when he was severely mauled by a savage bear. By the curious irony of fate, Mr. New, who has traveled many times around the world and come unscathed through all sorts of adventures, suffered this mishap while feeding the caged beasts in a Brooklyn park. We quote from *The Brooklyn Eagle's* account of the affair:

> Clarence Herbert New, well known as an author, was so seriously injured by the Russian bear which he was feeding at the Prospect Park Zoo some days ago that it was necessary to amputate his left arm above the elbow. . . . .
>
> Mr. New was . . . . permitted to leave the hospital on Friday, after a speedy recovery from the shock and loss of blood, and is now able to sit up and operate his typewriter single-handed. Although his left arm is gone, Mr. New has an abundance of grit and courage, and he declared that in a month he would be as dexterous on the typewriter as he formerly was with his two hands.
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> "I had been in the habit of feeding the bears every morning for the last few months," said Mr. New, "and had always found them as gentle as kittens. On the morning of September 21 I went as usual before 7:30 to the bear dens in the park and soon had three of the animals up against the bars at the back of the pens where the rocks are high.
>
> "Two of them reached through the bars with their lips and took the sugar lumps that I had brought them; but the big Russian bear made a snap and caught my coat sleeve. I pulled . . . . but the cloth was too tough, and it held.
>
> "She pulled my arm in by the sleeve as far as she could; then quicker than a flash she shifted her grip to my arm above the elbow. . . . .
>
> "When I got loose, my arm was torn clear to the bone and tendons and was streaming blood. It was early and my shouts for help were not heard until I had walked nearly to the monkey house, trying all the time to get my handkerchief made into a tourniquet. Some of the keepers came out and I told them to get a cord to stop the flow of blood.
>
> "After I got into the monkey house where my arm could rest on a workbench, there was nothing to do but cover it up with a gunny-cloth to keep the flies away, and wait for the ambulance, which was thirty-five minutes coming."

Because of the quality of timeliness so essential to Mr. New's stories they have always been delivered to us as close as possible to the starting-time of our presses; and for this reason his accident leaves us without a "Free Lance" to offer you this month. We are happy to state, however, that Mr. New is recovering satisfactorily from his injury and has already begun work on a story which, unless he suffers a set-back, will appear in our next issue.

The NEW STORIES

The God of Tarzan

by

THESE fascinating "New Stories of Tarzan," twelve in number, will appear each month in THE BLUE BOOK. Tarzan's next adventure, which will be described in the January issue, is especially thrilling. Be sure to get your copy early.

AMONG the books of his dead father in the little cabin by the land-locked harbor, Tarzan of the Apes found many things to puzzle his young head. By much labor, and through the medium of infinite patience as well, he had without assistance discovered the purpose of the little bugs which ran riot upon the printed pages. He had learned that in the many combinations in which he found them they spoke in a silent language, spoke in a strange tongue, spoke of wonderful things which a little ape-boy could not by any chance fully understand—arousing his curiosity, stimulating his imagination and filling his soul with a mighty longing for further knowledge.

A dictionary had proven itself a wonderful storehouse of information, when, after several years of tireless endeavor, he had solved the mystery of its purpose and the manner of its use. He had learned to make a species of game out of it, following up the spoor of a new thought through the mazes of the many definitions which each new word required him to consult. It was like following a quarry through the jungle—it was hunting, and Tarzan of the Apes was an indefatigable hunter.

There were, of course, certain words which aroused his curiosity to a greater extent than others, words which, for one reason or another, excited his imagination. There was one, for example, the meaning of which was rather difficult to grasp. It was the word *God*. Tarzan had been first attracted to it by the fact that it was very short and that it commenced with a larger g-bug than those about it—a male g-bug it was to Tarzan, the lower-case letters being females. Another fact which attracted him to this word was the number of he-bugs which figured in its definition—Supreme Deity, Creator or Upholder of the Universe. This must be a very important word indeed; he would have to look into it, and he did, though it still baffled him after many months of thought and study.

However, Tarzan counted no time wasted which he devoted to these strange hunting expeditions into the game-preserves of knowledge, for each word and each definition led on and on into strange places, into new worlds where, with increasing frequency, he met old familiar faces. And always he added to his store of knowledge.

But of the meaning of *God* he was not quite sure. Once he thought he had grasped it—that God was a mighty chieftain, king of all the *mangani*. He was not quite sure, however, since that

would mean that God was mightier than Tarzan—a point which Tarzan of the Apes was loath to concede.

But in all the books he had there was no picture of God, though he found much to confirm his belief that God was a great, an all-powerful individual. He saw pictures of places where God was worshiped, but never any sign of God. Finally he began to wonder if God were not of a different form than he, and at last he determined to set out in search of him.

HE commenced by questioning Mumga, who was very old and had seen many strange things in her long life; but Mumga, being an ape, had a faculty for recalling the trivial. That time when Gunto mistook a sting-bug for an edible beetle had made more impression upon Mumga than all the innumerable manifestations of the greatness of God which she had witnessed, and which, of course, she had not understood.

Numgo, overhearing Tarzan's questions, managed to wrest his attention long enough from the diversion of flea-hunting to advance the theory that the power which made the lightning and the rain and the thunder came from Goro, the moon. He knew this, he said, because the Dum-Dum always was danced in the light of Goro.

This reasoning, though entirely satisfactory to Numgo and Mumga, failed fully to convince Tarzan. However, it gave him a basis for further investigation along a new line. He would investigate the moon. That night he clambered to the loftiest pinnacle of the tallest jungle-giant. The moon was full, a great, glorious equatorial moon. The ape-man, upright upon a slender, swaying limb, raised his bronzed face to the silver orb. Now that he had clambered to the highest point within his reach, he discovered to his surprise that Goro was as far away as when he viewed him from the ground. He thought that Goro was attempting to elude him.

"Come, Goro!" he cried. "Tarzan of the Apes will not harm you!" But still the moon held aloof.

"Tell me," he continued, "if you be the great king who sends Ara the lightning, who makes the great noise and the mighty winds and sends the waters down upon the jungle people when the days are dark and it is cold. Tell me, Goro, are you God?"

Of course he did not pronounce *God* as you or I would pronounce His name, for Tarzan knew naught of the spoken language of his English forbears, but he had a name of his own invention for each of the little bugs which constituted the alphabet. Unlike the apes, he was not satisfied merely to have a mental picture of the things he knew; he must have a word descriptive of each. In reading, he grasped a word in its entirety; but when he spoke the words he had learned from the books of his father, he pronounced each according to the names he had given the various little bugs which occurred in it, and giving the gender prefix for each.

Thus it was an imposing word which Tarzan made of *God*. The masculine prefix of the apes is *bu*, the feminine *mu; g* Tarzan had named *la; o* he pronounced *tu*, and *d* was *mo*. So the word *God* evolved itself into *bulamutumumo*, or, in English, he-*g*-she-*o*-she-*d*.

Similarly he had arrived at a strange and wonderful spelling of his own name. *Tarzan* is derived from the two ape-words *tar* and *zan*, meaning *white skin*. It was given him by his foster mother Kala, the great she-ape. When Tarzan first put it into the written language of his own people, he had not yet chanced upon either *white* or *skin* in the dictionary; but in a primer he had seen the picture of a little white boy, and so he wrote his name *bumudemutomuro*, or he-boy.

To follow Tarzan's strange system of spelling would be laborious as well as futile, and so we shall in the future as we have in the past adhere to the more familiar forms of our grammar-school copy-books. It would tire you to remember that *de* meant *b*, that *tu* signified *o*, and *ro* stood for *y*, and that to say *he-boy* you must prefix the ape masculine gender sound *bu* before the entire word and the feminine gender sound *mu* before each of the letters which go to make up *boy*.

TARZAN harangued the moon, and when Goro did not reply, Tarzan of the Apes waxed wroth. He swelled his giant chest and bared his fighting fangs and hurled into the teeth of the dead satellite the challenge of the bull ape.

"You are not *bulamutumumo*," he cried. "You are not king of the jungle folk. You are not so great as Tarzan, mighty fighter, mighty hunter. None there is so great as Tarzan. If there be a *bulamutumumo*, Tarzan can kill him. Come down, Goro, great coward, and fight with Tarzan. Tarzan will kill you. I am Tarzan the killer."

But the moon made no answer to the boasting of the ape-man, and when a cloud came and obscured her face, Tarzan thought that Goro was indeed afraid and was hiding from him; so he came down out of the trees and awoke Numgo and told him how great was Tarzan—how he had frightened Goro out of the sky and made him tremble. Tarzan spoke of the moon as *he*, for all things large or awe-inspiring are male to the ape-folk.

Numgo was not much impressed, but he was very sleepy, and so he told Tarzan to go away and leave his betters alone.

"But where shall I find God?" insisted Tarzan. "You are very old; if there is God, you must have seen him. What does he look like? Where does he live?"

"I am God," replied Numgo. "Now sleep and disturb me no more."

Tarzan looked at Numgo steadily for several minutes; his shapely head sank just a trifle between his great shoulders; his square chin shot forward and his short upper-lip drew back, exposing his white teeth. Then with a low growl he leaped upon the ape and buried his fangs in the other's hairy shoulder, clutching the great neck in his mighty fingers. Twice he shook the old ape; then he released his tooth-hold.

"Are you God?" he demanded.

"No," wailed Numgo. "I am only a poor old ape. Leave me alone. Go ask the *Gomangani* where God is. They are hairless like yourself, and very wise, too. They should know."

Tarzan released Numgo and turned

away. The suggestion that he consult the blacks appealed to him, and though his relations with the people of Mbonga the chief were the antithesis of friendly, he could at least spy upon his hated enemies and discover if they had intercourse with God.

SO it was that Tarzan set forth through the trees toward the village of the blacks, all excitement at the prospect of discovering the Supreme Being, the Creator of all things. As he traveled he reviewed, mentally, his armament—the condition of his hunting-knife, the number of his arrows, the newness of the gut which strung his bow; he hefted the war-spear which had once been the pride of some black warrior of Mbonga's tribe.

If he met God, Tarzan would be prepared. One could never tell whether a grass-rope, a war-spear or a poisoned arrow would be most efficacious against an unfamiliar foe. Tarzan of the Apes was quite content: if God wished to fight, the ape-man had no doubt as to the outcome of the struggle. There were many questions Tarzan wished to put to the Creator of the Universe, and so he hoped that God would not prove a belligerent god; but his experience of life and the ways of living things had taught him that any creature with the means for offense and defense was quite likely to provoke attack if in the proper mood.

It was dark when Tarzan came to the village of Mbonga. As silently as the silent shadows of the night he sought his accustomed place among the branches of the great tree which overhung the palisade. Below him, in the village street, he saw men and women. The men were hideously painted—more hideously than usual. Among them moved a weird and grotesque figure, a tall figure that went upon the two legs of a man and yet had the head of a buffalo. A tail dangled to his ankles behind him, and in one hand he carried a zebra's tail, while the other clutched a bunch of small arrows.

Tarzan was electrified. Could it be that chance had given him thus early an opportunity to look upon God? Surely this thing was neither man nor beast; so what could it be, then, other than the Creator of the Universe! The ape-man watched the every move of the strange creature. He saw the black men and women fall back at its approach as though they stood in terror of its powers.

Presently he discovered that the deity was speaking and that all listened in silence to his words. Tarzan was sure that none other than God could inspire such awe in the hearts of the Gomangani, or stop their mouths so effectually without recourse to arrows or spears. Tarzan had come to look with contempt upon the blacks, principally because of their garrulity. The small apes talked a great deal and ran away from an enemy. The big old bulls of Kerchak talked but little and fought upon the slightest provocation. Numa the lion was not given to loquacity; yet of all the jungle folk there were few who fought more often than he.

TARZAN witnessed strange things that night, none of which he understood; and perhaps because they were strange, he thought that they must have to do with the God he could not understand. He saw three youths receive their first war-spears in a weird ceremony which the grotesque witch-doctor strove successfully to render uncanny and awesome.

Hugely interested, Tarzan watched the slashing of the three brown arms and the exchange of blood with Mbonga the chief, in the rites of the ceremony of blood-brotherhood. He saw the zebra's tail dipped into a caldron of water above which the witch-doctor had made magical passes the while he danced and leaped about it, and he saw the breasts and foreheads of each of the three novitiates sprinkled with the charmed liquid. Could the ape-man have known the purpose of this act, that it was intended to render the recipient invulnerable to the attacks of his enemies and fearless in the face of any danger, he would doubtless have leaped into the village street and appropriated the zebra's tail and a portion of the contents of the caldron.

But he did not know, and so he only wondered, not alone at what he saw

but at the strange sensations which played up and down his naked spine, sensations induced, doubtless, by the same hypnotic influence which held the black spectators in tense awe upon the verge of an hysteric upheaval.

The longer Tarzan watched, the more convinced he became that his eyes were upon God, and with the conviction came determination to have word with the deity. With Tarzan of the Apes, to think was to act.

The people of Mbonga were keyed to the highest pitch of hysterical excitement. They needed little to release the accumulated pressure of static nerve-force which the terrorizing mummery of the witch-doctor had induced.

A lion roared, suddenly and loud, close without the palisade. The blacks started nervously, dropping into utter silence as they listened for a repetition of that all too familiar and always terrorizing voice. Even the witch-doctor paused in the midst of an intricate step, remaining momentarily rigid and statuesque as he plummed his cunning mind for a suggestion as how best he might take advantage of the condition of his audience and the timely interruption.

Already the evening had been vastly profitable for him. There would be three goats for the initiation of the three youths into full-fledged warriorship, and besides these he had received several gifts of grain and beads, together with a piece of copper wire, from admiring and terrified members of his audience.

NUMA'S roar still reverberated along taut nerves when a woman's laugh, shrill and piercing, shattered the silence of the village. It was this moment that Tarzan chose to drop lightly from his tree into the village street. Fearless among his blood enemies, he stood, taller by a full head than any of Mbonga's warriors, straight as their straightest arrow, muscled like Numa the lion.

For a moment Tarzan stood looking straight at the witch-doctor. Every eye was upon him; yet no one had moved—a paralysis of terror held them, to be broken a moment later as the ape-man, with a toss of head, stepped straight toward the hideous figure beneath the buffalo-head.

Then the nerves of the blacks would stand no more. For months the terror of the strange, white jungle-god had been upon them. Their arrows had been stolen from the very center of their village; their warriors had been silently slain upon the jungle trails and their dead bodies dropped mysteriously and by night into the village street as from the heavens above.

There were quite a number who had glimpsed the strange figure of the new demon, and it was from their oft-repeated descriptions that the entire village now recognized Tarzan as the author of many of their ills. Upon another occasion and by daylight, the warriors would doubtless have leaped now to attack him, but at night—and this night of all others, when they were wrought to such a pitch of nervous dread by the uncanny artistry of their witch-doctor—they were helpless with terror. As one man they turned and fled, scattering for their huts, as Tarzan advanced. For a moment one and one only held his ground. It was the witch-doctor. More than half self-hypnotized into a belief in his own powers, he faced this new demon who threatened to undermine his ancient and lucrative profession.

"Are you God?" asked Tarzan.

THE witch-doctor, having no idea of the meaning of the other's words, danced a few strange steps, leaped high in air, turning completely around and alighting in a stooping posture with feet far outspread and head thrust out toward the ape-man. Thus he remained for an instant before he uttered a loud "Boo!"—which was evidently intended to frighten Tarzan away, but in reality had no such effect.

Tarzan did not pause. He had set out to approach and examine God, and nothing upon earth might now stay his feet. Seeing that his antics had no potency with the visitor, the witch-doctor tried some new medicine. Spitting upon the zebra's tail, which he still clutched in one hand, he made circles above it with the arrows in the other

hand, meanwhile backing cautiously away from Tarzan and speaking confidentially to the bushy end of the tail.

This medicine must be short medicine, however, for the creature, god or demon, was steadily closing up the distance which had separated them. The circles therefore were few and rapid, and when they were completed, the witch-doctor struck an attitude which was intended to be awe-inspiring, and waving the zebra's tail before him, drew an imaginary line between himself and Tarzan.

"Beyond this line you cannot pass, for my medicine is strong medicine," he cried. "Stop, or you will fall dead as your foot touches this spot. My mother was a voodoo; my father was a snake; I live upon lions' hearts and the entrails of the panther; I eat young babies for breakfast, and the demons of the jungle are my slaves. I am the most powerful witch-doctor in the world; I fear nothing, for I cannot die. I—" But he got no further; instead, he turned and fled as Tarzan of the Apes crossed the magical dead-line and still lived.

As the witch-doctor ran, Tarzan almost lost his temper. This was no way for God to act, at least not in accordance with the conception Tarzan had come to have of God.

"Come back!" he cried. "Come back. God. I will not harm you." But the witch-doctor was in full retreat by this time, stepping high as he leaped over cooking-pots and the smoldering embers of small fires that had burned before the huts of villagers. Straight for his own hut ran the witch-doctor, terror-spurred to unwonted speed; but futile was his effort; the ape-man bore down upon him with the speed of Bara the deer.

JUST at the entrance to his hut was the witch-doctor overhauled. A heavy hand fell upon his shoulder to drag him back. It seized upon a portion of the buffalo-hide, dragging the disguise from him. It was a naked black man that Tarzan saw dodge into the darkness of the hut's interior.

So this was what he had thought was God! Tarzan's lip curled in an angry snarl as he leaped into the hut after the terror-stricken witch-doctor. In the blackness within he found the man huddled at the far side, and dragged him forth into the comparative lightness of the moonlit night.

The witch-doctor bit and scratched in an attempt to escape; but a few cuffs across the head brought him to a better realization of the futility of resistance. Beneath the moon Tarzan held the cringing figure upon its shaking feet.

"So you are God?" he cried. "If you be God, then Tarzan is greater than God." And so the ape-man thought. "I am Tarzan," he shouted into the ear of the black. "In all the jungle, or above it, or upon the running waters or the sleeping waters, or upon the big water or the little water, there is none so great as Tarzan. Tarzan is greater than the *mangani;* he is greater than the *gomangani.* With his own hands has he slain Numa the lion and Sheeta the panther; there is none so great as Tarzan. Tarzan is greater than God. See!" And with a sudden wrench he twisted the black's neck until the fellow shrieked in pain and then slumped to the earth in a swoon.

Placing his foot upon the neck of the fallen witch-doctor, the ape-man raised his face to the moon and uttered the long, shrill scream of the victorious bull-ape. Then he stooped and snatched the zebra's tail from the nerveless fingers of the unconscious man and without a backward glance retraced his footsteps across the village.

FROM several doorways frightened eyes watched him. Mbonga the chief was one of those who had seen what passed before the hut of the witch-doctor. Mbonga was greatly concerned. Wise old patriarch that he was, he had never more than half believed in witch-doctors—at least, not since greater wisdom had come with age; but as a chief he was well convinced of the power of the witch-doctor as an arm of government, and often it was that Mbonga used the superstitious fears of his people to his own ends through the medium of the medicine-man.

Mbonga and the witch-doctor had

worked together and divided the spoils, and now the "face" of the witch-doctor would be lost forever if any saw what Mbonga had seen; nor would this generation again have as much faith in any future witch-doctor.

Mbonga must do something to counteract the evil influence of the forest-demon's victory over the witch-doctor. He raised his heavy spear and crept silently from his hut in the wake of the retreating ape-man. Down the village street walked Tarzan, as unconcerned and as deliberate as though only the friendly apes of Kerchak surrounded him instead of a village full of armed enemies.

Seeming only was the indifference of Tarzan, for alert and watchful was every well-trained sense. Mbonga, wily stalker of keen-eared jungle creatures, moved now in utter silence. Not even Bara the deer with his great ears could have guessed from any sound that Mbonga was near; but the black was not stalking Bara; he was stalking man, and so he sought only to avoid noise.

Closer and closer to the slowly moving ape-man he came. Now he raised his war-spear, throwing his spear-hand far back above his right shoulder. Once and for all would Mbonga the chief rid himself and his people of the menace of this terrifying enemy. He would make no poor cast; he would take pains, and he would hurl his weapon with such great force as would finish the demon forever.

BUT Mbonga, sure as he thought himself, erred in his calculations. He might believe that he was stalking a man; he did not know, however, that it was a man with the delicate sense-perception of the lower orders. Tarzan, when he had turned his back upon his enemies, had noted what Mbonga would never have thought of considering in the hunting of man—the wind. It was blowing in the same direction that Tarzan was proceeding, carrying to his delicate nostrils the odors which arose behind him. Thus it was that Tarzan knew that he was being followed, for even among the many stenches of an African village the ape-man's uncanny faculty was equal to the task of differentiating one odor from another and locating with remarkable precision the position from whence it came.

He knew that a man was following him, and coming closer; and his judgment warned him of the purpose of the stalker. When Mbonga, therefore, came within spear-range of the ape-man, the latter wheeled suddenly upon him, so suddenly that the poised spear was shot a fraction of a second before Mbonga had intended. It was a trifle high, and Tarzan stooped to let it pass over his head; then he sprang toward the chief. But Mbonga did not wait to receive him; instead he turned and fled for the dark doorway of the nearest hut, calling as he went for his warriors to fall upon the stranger and slay him.

Well indeed might Mbonga scream for help, for Tarzan, young and fleet-footed, covered the distance between them in great leaps at the speed of a charging lion. He was growling, too, not at all unlike Numa himself. Mbonga heard, and his blood ran cold. He could feel the wool stiffen upon his pate and a prickly chill run up his spine, as though Death had come and run his cold finger along Mbonga's back.

Others heard too, and saw from the darkness of their huts—bold warriors, hideously painted, grasping heavy war-spears in nerveless fingers. Against Numa the lion they would have charged fearlessly. Against many times their own number of black warriors would they have raced to the protection of their chief; but this weird jungle-demon filled them with terror. There was nothing human in the bestial growls that rumbled up from his deep chest; there was nothing human in the bared fangs or the catlike leaps. Mbonga's warriors were terrified—too terrified to leave the seeming security of their huts while they watched the beast-man spring full upon the back of their old chieftain.

MBONGA went down with a scream of terror. He was too frightened even to attempt to defend himself. He just lay beneath his antagonist in a paralysis of fear, screaming at the top of his lungs. Tarzan half rose and

kneeled above the black. He turned Mbonga over and looked him in the face, exposing the man's throat; then he drew his long, keen knife, the knife that John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, had brought from England many years before. He raised it close above Mbonga's neck. The old black whimpered with terror. He pleaded for his life in a tongue which Tarzan could not understand.

For the first time the ape-man had a close view of the chief. He saw an old man, a very old man with scrawny neck and wrinkled face—a dried, parchment-like face which resembled some of the little monkeys Tarzan knew so well. He saw the terror in the man's eyes; never before had Tarzan seen such terror in the eyes of any animal or such a piteous appeal for mercy upon the face of any creature.

Something stayed the ape-man's hand for an instant. He wondered why it was that he hesitated to make the kill; never before had he thus delayed. The old man seemed to wither and shrink to a puny bag of bones beneath his eyes. So weak and helpless and terror-stricken he appeared that the ape-man was filled with a great contempt; but another sensation also claimed him—something new to Tarzan of the Apes in relation to an enemy. It was pity—pity for a poor, frightened old man.

Tarzan rose and turned away, leaving Mbonga the chief unharmed. With head held high, the ape-man walked through the village, swung himself into the branches of the tree which overhung the palisade and disappeared from the sight of the villagers.

ALL the way back to the stamping-ground of the apes Tarzan sought for an explanation of the strange power which had stayed his hand and prevented him from slaying Mbonga. It was as though some one greater than he had commanded him to spare the life of the old man. Tarzan could not understand, for he could concieve of nothing or no one with the authority to dictate to him what he should do, or what he should refrain from doing.

It was late when Tarzan sought a swaying couch among the trees beneath which slept the apes of Kerchak, and he was still absorbed in the solution of his strange problem when he fell asleep.

The sun was well up in the heavens when he awoke. The apes were astir in search of food. Tarzan watched them lazily from above as they scratched in the rotting loam for bugs and beetles and grub-worms, or sought among the branches of the trees for eggs and young birds or luscious caterpillars.

An orchid, dangling close behind his head, opened slowly, unfolding its delicate petals to the warmth and light of the sun which had but recently penetrated to its shady retreat. A thousand times had Tarzan of the Apes witnessed the beauteous miracle; but now it aroused a keener interest, for the ape-man was just commencing to ask himself questions about all the myriad wonders which heretofore he had but taken for granted.

What made the flower open? What made it grow from a tiny bud to a full-blown bloom? Why was it at all? Why was he? Where did Numa the lion come from? Who planted the first tree? How did Goro get 'way up into the darkness of the night sky to cast his welcome light upon the fearsome nocturnal jungle? And the Sun! Did the Sun merely happen there?

Why were all the peoples of the jungle not trees? Why were the trees not something else? Why was Tarzan different from Taug, and Taug different from Bara the deer, and Bara different from Sheeta the panther? And why was not Sheeta like Buto the rhinoceros? Where and how, anyway, did they all come from—the trees, the flowers, the insects, the countless creatures of the jungle?

Quite unexpectedly an idea popped into Tarzan's head. In following out the many ramifications of the dictionary definition of *God* he had come upon the word *create*—"to cause to come into existence; to form out of nothing."

TARZAN had almost arrived at something tangible when a distant wail startled him from his preoccupation into sensibility of the present and the real. The wail came from the jungle

at some little distance from Tarzan's swaying couch. It was the wail of a tiny *balu*. Tarzan recognized it at once as the voice Gazan, Teeka's baby. They had called it Gazan because its soft, baby hair had been unusually red, and *Gazan* is ape for *red-skin*.

The wail was immediately followed by a real scream of terror from the small lungs. Tarzan was electrified into instant action. Like an arrow from a bow he shot through the trees in the direction of the sound. Ahead of him he heard the savage snarling of an adult she-ape. It was Teeka to the rescue. The danger must be very real. Tarzan could tell that by the note of rage mingled with fear in the voice of the she.

Running along bending limbs, swinging from one tree to another, the ape-man raced through the middle terrace toward the sounds which had now risen in volume to deafening proportions. From all directions the apes of Kerchak were hurrying in response to the appeal in the tones of the *balu* and its mother, and as they came, their roars reverberated through the forest.

But Tarzan, swifter than his heavy fellows, distanced them all. It was he who was first upon the scene. What he saw sent a cold chill through his giant frame, for the enemy was the most hated and loathed of all the jungle creatures.

Twined in a great tree was Histah the snake—huge, ponderous, slimy; and in the folds of its deadly embrace was Teeka's little *balu* Gazan. Nothing in the jungle inspired within the breast of Tarzan so near a semblance to fear as did the hideous Histah. The apes, too, loathed the terrifying reptile and feared him even more than they did Sheeta the panther, or Numa the lion. Of all their enemies there was none they gave a wider berth than they gave Histah the snake.

Tarzan knew that Teeka was peculiarly fearful of this silent, repulsive foe, and as the scene broke upon his vision, it was the action of Teeka which filled him with the greatest wonder, for at the moment that he saw her the she-ape leaped upon the glistening body of the snake, and as the mighty folds encircled her as well as her offspring, she made no effort to escape; instead she grasped the writhing body in a futile effort to tear it from her screaming *balu*.

Tarzan knew all too well how deep-rooted was Teeka's terror of Histah. He could scarce believe the testimony of his own eyes, when they told him that she had voluntarily rushed into that deadly embrace. Nor was Teeka's innate dread of the monster much greater than Tarzan's own. Never, willingly, had he touched a snake—why, he could not say, for he would admit fear of nothing; nor was it fear, but rather an inherent repulsion bequeathed to him by many generations of civilized ancestors, and back of them, perhaps, by countless myriads of such as Teeka.

Yet Tarzan did not hesitate more than had Teeka, but leaped upon Histah with all the speed and impetuosity that he would have shown had he been springing upon Bara the deer, to make a kill for food. Thus beset, the snake writhed and twisted horribly; but not for an instant did it loose its hold upon any of its intended victims, for it had included the ape-man in its cold embrace the instant he had fallen upon it.

STILL clinging to the tree, the mighty reptile held the three as though they had been without weight, the while it sought to crush the life from them. Tarzan had drawn his knife, and this he now plunged rapidly into the body of the enemy; but the encircling folds promised to sap his life before he had inflicted a death-wound upon the enemy. Yet on he fought; nor once did he seek to escape the horrid death that confronted him; his sole aim was to slay Histah and thus free Teeka and her *balu*.

The great wide-gaping jaws of the snake turned and hovered above him. The elastic maw, which could accommodate a rabbit or a horned buck with equal facility, yawned for him; but Histah, in turning his attention upon the ape-man, brought his head within reach of Tarzan's blade. Instantly a brown hand leaped forth and seized the mottled neck, and another drove the

heavy hunting knife to the hilt into the little brain.

Convulsively Histah shuddered and relaxed, tensed and relaxed again, whipping and striking with his great body, but no longer sentient or sensible. Histah was dead, but in his death-throes he might easily dispatch a dozen apes.

Quickly Tarzan seized Teeka and dragged her from the loosened embrace, dropping her to the ground beneath; then he extricated the *balu* and tossed it to its mother. Still Histah whipped about, clinging to the ape-man; but after a dozen efforts Tarzan succeeded in wriggling free and leaping to the ground out of range of the mighty battering of the dying snake.

A circle of apes surrounded the scene of the battle; but the moment that Tarzan broke safely from the enemy they turned silently away to resume their interrupted feeding, and Teeka turned with them, apparently forgetful of all but her *balu* and the fact that when the interruption had occurred she had just discovered an ingeniously hidden nest containing three perfectly good eggs.

Tarzan, equally indifferent to a battle that was over, merely cast a parting glance at the still writhing body of Histah and wandered off toward the little pool which served to water the tribe at this point. Strangely, he did not give the victory cry over the vanquished Histah. Why he could not have told you, other than that to him Histah was not an animal. He differed in some peculiar way from the other denizens of the jungle. Tarzan only knew that he hated him.

AT the pool Tarzan drank his fill and lay stretched upon the soft grass beneath the shade of a tree. His mind reverted to the battle with Histah the snake. It seemed strange to him that Teeka should have placed herself within the folds of the horrid monster. Why had she done it? Why, indeed, had he? Teeka did not belong to him, nor did Teeka's *balu*. They were both Taug's. Why, then, had he done this thing? Histah was not food for him when he was dead. There seemed to Tarzan, now that he gave the matter thought, no reason in the world why he should have done the thing he did, and presently it occurred to him that he had acted almost involuntarily, just as he had acted when he had released the old *gomangani*.

What made him do such things? Somebody more powerful than he must force him to act at times. "All-powerful," thought Tarzan. "The little bugs say that God is all-powerful. It must be that God made me do these things, for I never did them by myself. It was God who made Teeka rush upon Histah. Teeka would never go near Histah of her own volition. It was God who held my knife from the throat of the old *gomangani*. God accomplishes strange things, for he is 'all-powerful.' I cannot see him; but I know that it must be God who does these things. No *mangani*, no *gomangani*, no *tarmangani* could do them."

And the flowers. Who makes them grow? Ah, now it was all explained—the flowers, the trees, the moon, the sun, himself, every living creature in the jungle was made by God out of nothing.

And what was God? What did God look like? Of that he had no conception; but he was sure that everything that was good came from God: his good act in refraining from slaying the poor and defenseless old *gomangani;* Teeka's love that had hurled her into the embrace of death; his own loyalty to Teeka, which had jeopardized his life that she might live. The flowers and the trees were good and beautiful. God had made them. He made the other creatures too, that each might have food upon which to live. He had made Sheeta the panther, with his beautiful coat, and Numa the lion, with his noble head and shaggy mane. He had made Bara the deer, lovely and graceful.

Yes, Tarzan had found God, and he spent the whole day in attributing to Him all of the good and beautiful things of nature; but there was one thing which troubled him:

Who made Histah the snake?

Love on the Stairs

by Royal Brown

SOME people will probably get the moral of this story all wrong. If they do, the fault is their own: for the moral is not what they think it is.

In the gray lexicon of Peter Tucker's youth there was no such word as *booze*. Peter was twenty-six, and he had known almost as long as he had known his letters that it's the first drink that leads to a steam-heated hereafter. He had been taught not only to spurn wine when it is red, but to shun it when it is yellow or any other color of the spectrum. According to Mrs. McQueen, he was a highly moral young man. Mrs. McQueen kept a lodging-house in the South End of Boston, and she was competent to judge.

In Peter's heart there nested twin ambitions. One was to earn twenty-five dollars a week. The other was to marry Alice Hersey, who occupied the first-floor-back at Mrs. McQueen's. Four years had passed since Peter had begun work as discount-clerk in a commission-house on Broad Street; it was three years since he had first passed Alice Hersey on the dimly lighted and musty-odored stairs at Mrs. McQueen's.

In four years Peter's salary had increased from sixteen dollars a week to twenty. In three years Peter's progress toward the fulfillment of his other ambition had been nil. He still flushed darkly as he drew his six feet of palpitating muscle and bone—Peter came from Maine—to one side so that Alice might pass him when they met on the stairs. She would give him a quick, abstracted smile and murmur her thanks, while Peter strove to swallow his epiglottis, which was crowding his vocal cords. Unless something unforeseen intervened, it would take at least two more incarnations to bring Peter to the point of proposal.

Nevertheless he had one solace. Though Alice was blonde, blue-eyed and extremely attractive; though the trim tailored blue suit she wore in season and out but served to emphasize her slim, rounded, youthful curves; though she was the target for the advances of certain other lodgers in Mrs.

McQueen's—in spite of all this, Alice had seemed invulnerable. Alice also came from Maine, of rock-ribbed New England ancestry. She knew that the young men who flitted in and out of Mrs. McQueen's meant her no good, and she fully intended they should do her no harm.

THIS was the situation on the day when Fate, Providence or Destiny—call it what you wish—took a hand in Peter's affairs. On that day Peter received a letter from his brother-in-law, H. Henry Horton, who lived in New York. The letter asked, as its predecessors had, for "temporary assistance." Expressed in terms of cash, this amounted to one hundred dollars. To which Henry added that Milly, Peter's sister, sent love and that if it wasn't for Milly he couldn't have brought himself to ask.

Peter ruminated the note and finally decided to send H. Henry the hundred. This would leave him exactly twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents in the bank.

Twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents is a small sum toward the proverbial rainy day, which requires umbrellas, raincoats and goloshes fashioned of yellow-backs. This troubled Peter. He remembered he had read a newspaper article that stated everybody ate too much. Peter, in whom a State of Maine appetite immediately came into conflict with a State of Maine conscience, decided that he probably *did* eat too much.

Then he put his bank-book in his pocket, took his straw hat, which was halfway through its second successful season, and started down the stairs. On the way he met Alice. He began to palpitate, and prepared to flatten himself against the wall and struggle with his epiglottis. In a moment his divinity would be abreast him. She would murmur "Thank you" in her sweet, low-pitched voice; her skirts would swish by him; he would get the faint, indefinable but incomparably sweet odor of her hair—and she would be gone.

EVEN at two o'clock of a Saturday afternoon in July, with the sunshine lying in patches on the asphalt outside, the stairs were in semi-gloom. Peter's impressions were dim and confused, but he realized her bright hair lay in damp curls on her flushed forehead, that her eyes were troubled and her half-parted, vividly scarlet lips were tremulous.

"I can't find Mrs. McQueen, and there's something terrible in my room," she said breathlessly.

There was a half-hysterical catch in her voice that aroused Peter. Swallowing his epiglottis by a superhuman effort, he stammered:

"Can I—perhaps—do you think—"

"Thank you," she exclaimed with fervor.

At the threshold of her room she whispered: "It's under the bed; do be careful."

Peter advanced to the bedside. There was a snarl, and Peter saw two gleaming eyes and two rows of glistening teeth.

"It's a cat," he announced.

The color flooded Alice's face. She looked at Peter as if she dared him to laugh.

"I know about a cat that went crazy and bit two people," she said, her eyes challenging his. "I'm sure that cat must be crazy; perhaps I'd better call a policeman."

The suggestion stung Peter to action. He reached for the cat, which retreated snarling and spitting and darting a vicious black paw at the advancing fingers. But Peter with a quick swoop grasped its neck and in spite of its struggles, hauled it out. It was large and muscular, with one torn ear and a disreputable tail—an old pirate of a cat.

Peter carried the beast to the window and dropped it to the roof of the woodshed.

"Scat," he said.

PETER turned.

"Thank you," began Alice. She looked up at Peter. Peter nodded; he could not speak. For at exactly this point, when the acquaintance should by all precepts have really begun to develop,—when they should have discovered that they both came from Maine and that they had many likes and dislikes in common,—at exactly this pregnant moment Peter remembered that he

had an epiglottis. He blushed to the roots of his crisp brown hair.

The wave of self-consciousness enveloped Alice. Her eyes wavered and fell on Peter's hat, lying negligently on the pillow of her bed. Its presence there accentuated the impropriety of what she had done.

One of Mrs. McQueen's most stringent rules was that none of her lady lodgers should receive their gentlemen friends—the phraseology is Mrs. McQueen's—in their rooms. Alice thoroughly approved of this rule.

"And she says to me," Mrs. McQueen had declared in Alice's hearing only the day before, "she says: 'Why, the idea! I simply asked Mr. Simpson in to move the bureau so that I could get my mother's picture, which had fallen down behind it.' And I said to her: 'The next time call me and I'll move the bureau for you. And it wont take me twenty minutes to do it, either.' That's the way they start. There was poor Mr. Simpson going his way, and she using her mother's picture to lure him on."

Alice blushed, a vivid scarlet that made her hair look lighter and her eyes bluer.

"Good-by," stammered Peter.

"Good-by," echoed Alice.

THE next day Peter met her on the stairs.

"Thank you," she murmured, without raising her eyes, as he made way for her to pass.

So much for one of Peter's ambitions! As for the other, Peter expected his raise the following Saturday. But when he opened his pay-envelope there were twenty dollars in it—and not a dollar more.

Peter knew he ought to go to Benson, the general manager, and speak about the extra dollar. But Peter also knew that Benson would pretend to be busy with his papers until Peter's courage wobbled, and then he would lift his cold gray eyes and say:

"Well, Tucker?"

Then, having put Peter at a disadvantage in the way any executive can, he would probably proceed to annihilate Peter. Still, it was possible Benson had overlooked the matter. Perhaps the next week—Peter clutched at the hope. He would wait. For if the truth must be told, Peter was not only a laggard in love but a dastard in business.

Peter had already cut his daily rations in half and was still getting twice as much to eat as the scientific chap who wrote for the newspaper said was necessary. This authority declared a normal man could live on thirty cents a day. Peter was spending fifty, which he decided was rank extravagance for a man in his precarious position.

After a few days he found that he had no appetite, anyway. The weather was infernally hot; columns of figures often swam before his eyes. Even when he passed Alice on the stairs, he no longer felt much emotion except weariness.

Though she brushed quickly by and never raised her eyes when they met, Alice noted the change in him. When he left her room on the memorable Saturday afternoon, she had been quite certain that Peter would presume and have to be put in his place. At this process Alice was adept. But the days passed, and Peter did not presume. This was contrary to all Alice's vicariously acquired information on the subject of men. She began to watch Peter with speculative eyes.

In three days of this watching she discovered more about him than she had in three years. Peter had brown, faithful, honest eyes, a generous mouth, a well-proportioned forehead and a chin that was much firmer than one would suspect from his actions. Alice decided that Peter was nice. Then occurred one of those inexplicable phenomena that are catalogued under the general head of feminine perversity. She ought to have been gratified that Peter conducted himself as he should. Instead, she was furious with him.

The worst possible explanation did not occur to her until the Saturday that Peter failed to get his raise. This was that Peter didn't think *she* was nice. Perhaps—perhaps he thought she was like the Miss Fish who had sought to lure poor Mr. Simpson from going his own way.

Alice had been sitting on the edge of

her bed when this thought occurred to her. She sprang up, her cheeks flaming.

"*Oh!*" she exclaimed, her small hands clenched.

Five minutes later, having marched downstairs, told Mrs. McQueen that she would give up her room the following Saturday and coldly refused a word of explanation to that amazed lady, Alice was back within the shelter of her room and had flung herself on the bed to cry as if—well, as if she really cared for Peter.

OF all this Peter knew nothing. His mind was focused on two problems: One was how to reach the magic minimum of nourishment which would sustain life at a cost of thirty cents a day. This had become an obsession with him. The other was what he should do if he didn't get his raise.

Poor light-headed Peter had a formula which he repeated to himself over and over again. It ran like this:

"Mr. Benson, I've been here four years. I've worked faithfully during that time. It seems to me—"

And so on, like clockwork. But—horrible thought—what would he do if Benson should turn those cold, granite-gray eyes of his toward him and say:

"Tucker, I can get a hundred men as faithful as you who will do your work for twenty dollars a week—or less."

What then?

Saturday came, the hottest day of a hot month. At one o'clock Peter washed up, took his hat and coat and went to the cashier's office for his envelope. He opened it with fumbling fingers and counted the contents—once, twice, three times.

There was a ten, a five, two twos and a one.

Peter stumbled out onto the busy street. He crossed the pavements, over which the heat lay in shimmering waves. He walked with lagging step into the restaurant where he took his lunches. It was as hot inside as it had been outside, and to the heat was added the odor of cooking food.

Peter slumped down in his usual place. The homely, wholesome waitress shook out a napkin and handed it to him. The perspiration stood in little beads on her heat-rouged cheeks. She looked at him sympathetically.

"You look as if you needed something good and hearty," she said. "Why don't you have a nice steak?"

Peter vaguely nodded assent. He wished the flies would stop buzzing about his forehead.

Across the table a red-faced man, with his napkin tucked in at the throat, ate industriously, with impartial use of both knife and fork. He eyed Peter curiously, between bites.

Peter's steak had come—and it persisted in floating about the table. He leaned back in his chair.

"I say," shouted Peter's outraged vis-à-vis, "wake up and pass that sugar."

Instead, Peter slumped down in his chair, his eyes closed, his mouth open.

"Good night!" said the red-faced man, with awe. "He's croaked."

ENSUED a bustle of which Peter was blissfully unconscious. During this the red-faced man took Peter's glass, turned the water in it into a coffee-cup and pouring out a generous four fingers from a hip-pocket flask, emptied it down the unconscious Peter's throat.

Peter had taken his first drink. As the fiery liquor burned his throat, his eyes wavered open and he smiled wanly.

"There," said the red-faced Samaritan. "You feel better, don't you?"

Peter did not know what had happened, but he knew he did feel better. Insisting that he was all right, he paid his lunch-check as the clock in the Custom House tower boomed twice.

Two o'clock! Peter gasped—he was due back at his desk.

He found the office deserted except for Benson.

"Well, Tucker," said Benson, "what's up?"

Then Peter remembered. It was Saturday, and Saturday was a half-holiday.

"Why—er," he began, conscious that Benson was eying him coldly and critically. Peter, usually slow to anger, felt the hot resentment flame within him.

"Mr. Benson," he said, in a totally different tone, "I've been here four years. I've worked faithfully during that time. It seems to me—"

"Tucker," interrupted Benson, "you are getting twenty dollars a week now. That's every cent you're worth. I could get fifty men who would do your work for less."

"Well," said Peter, "get one of them."

Benson looked up quickly. He had simply used the same old formula, the formula that seldom fails to work with the Peter Tuckers of this world, who know that there are always other men looking for their jobs. But this time something had gone wrong.

It was true Benson could get fifty men for Peter's job. But Benson knew something that the Peter Tuckers never suspect. And that was that a new man is always an unknown quantity. He may fit in as an office cog, or he may not. Even if he does fit, the fitting-in process slows up the office force and is apt to try the patience of his superiors, such as Benson.

"Tucker," he said, "I don't like your tone. But it has always been the aim of the firm to keep its employees and keep them satisfied. I'll see that you get your raise."

HE turned back to his papers, expecting that Peter would stammer his thanks and go. But Peter stood stock-still. For a moment he was too surprised to speak. He had defied the lightning—and had been presented with a pocket flashlight.

"How much?" he demanded.

Benson wheeled again, his eyes cold with displeasure.

"How much do you want," he demanded sarcastically.

"Five dollars," said Peter.

"What!" roared Benson. "Will you tell me why on earth we should raise you from twenty dollars to twenty-five?"

"I want to get married," said Peter.

Peter's eyes were desperate, his face flushed and drawn. Benson's exasperation waned.

"Tucker," he said in a kindlier tone, "I'm afraid that's not reason enough. If you want to stay on at twenty-one, I'll be glad to have you. Frankly, you're not worth twenty-five dollars a week, and I'm doubtful if you ever will be."

"Why?" demanded Peter.

"Sit down," said Benson, "and I'll tell you."

"In the first place," continued Benson, "you're a plodder. You lack imagination and initiative. You're not the kind of a man that executives are made of, and executives are the men that get the money. Do you think, for instance, you could fill Hayden's place?"

Hayden was the office-manager.

"Yes," said Peter.

Benson shook his head. "You couldn't."

"I could," reiterated Peter. "Give me a chance."

Benson studied Peter with curious eyes.

"By Jove, I've a mind to," he said at last. "Something seems to have gotten into you. Perhaps it's because you're in love." He twirled his thumbs thoughtfully; then he added: "The right woman can do a lot for a man, Tucker. I was discount-clerk here at eighteen dollars a week when I became engaged. I took my nerve in my hand, and look at me to-day."

Benson paused again.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Tucker," he said. "Hayden is going to leave. I've wished I had some man in the office with push and initiative enough to take his place. You're about the last man I dreamed of selecting. But I'm going to give you a chance. If you make good, you'll get twenty-five for six months and after that I'll see that you get thirty."

"Thank you," stammered Peter.

"One more thing, Tucker. I'll do all I can to help you. I know I've got a reputation as a hard man to deal with—I've worked hard to get that reputation. If the men in the outer office ever suspected I had a soft spot, they'd keep me on the jump."

Benson rose, gray eyes softer than their wont.

"Give my respects to the lady," he said.

FIFTY seconds later Peter was in the street. The effects of the red-faced man's elixir had begun to wane. What was it Benson had said? Oh yes—Hayden's job—my respects to the lady.

The hall at Mrs. McQueen's was as dim and as musty as ever.

"Hayden's job—my respects to the lady," Peter murmured to himself as he started up the stairs.

"Excuse me," said a timid voice.

Peter drew aside mechanically. A suit-case bumped his knee.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said the voice.

For a moment Peter's tired brain cleared.

"You are going away?" he asked.

"Yes—good-by, Mr. Tucker."

Peter did not realize that he was blocking her path.

"Please, Mr. Tucker," begged the voice.

He tried to move, but he seemed to have lost control of his feet. Then a voice which he dimly recognized as his own said:

"Hayden's job—my respects to the lady—Alice—will—you marry—"

Four hours later, he recovered consciousness. In the interim Mrs. McQueen and Alice had somehow dragged him to his room, a doctor had been summoned and had prescribed complete rest for several days. Of all this Peter knew nothing.

He dragged himself out of bed and managed to dress, though he was so weak that he had to sit down several times before he finished.

Two flights below, in the basement kitchen, Mrs. McQueen was delivering an ultimatum to Alice:

"If he's going to be sick, the hospital is the best place for him," she declared. "I'd say the same if he was my own son. I'd—"

"Listen; what's that noise?" broke in Alice.

"It's probably Mr. Simpson. As for your helping nurse Mr. Tucker—"

She stopped; Alice was gone.

PETER was wavering on the threshold of his room.

"Go back this instant," Alice commanded. "The doctor said you must."

Peter did not answer. Standing at the foot of the stairs, her face turned up toward him, she looked so slim, so fragile and so inexpressibly, deliciously feminine that Peter's heart thumped so loudly he could hear nothing else.

Indeed, Peter wondered that she didn't hear it. Perhaps she did, after she had come halfway up the stairs toward him, for she paused.

"Please go back," she said in a tone so charged with solicitude that instead of retreating, Peter advanced.

For a moment she looked as if she would flee in panic. But she held her ground, even when Peter towered above her, an unmistakable light in his eyes.

"Alice—will you?" he asked shyly.

She averted her face.

"What?" she asked, her voice so low he could hardly hear her.

"You know—what."

"Do you—really—want me?" she asked.

Some seconds later—they were still on the stairs—she drew her face back so she could look into his eyes.

"I thought you said it—because you were out of your head," she said. "Are you sure you aren't—now?"

At which Peter kissed her again.

This is the point where all love-stories end. But in real life there are other details to be arranged, such as flats and furniture and other things, which represent sums in addition done between kisses.

"I've only got twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents in the bank," confessed Peter in dismay.

Alice, being from Maine, couldn't help but be shocked until he explained to her.

"We can get married anyway," she said. "I've got two hundred and seventy-five dollars."

Peter rebelled at that. He maintained stubbornly that until he had saved as much as she had there would be no marriage.

"I'll starve if I have to," he announced.

"No, you wont," she said, her blue eyes indignant. "You tried that—and see what happened."

She paused and blushed rosily at the light in Peter's eyes, which proclaimed

the fact that he was satisfied with what had happened.

But she added, as she emerged flushed and slightly dishevcled from his grasp: "I can't help it, Peter; I would just love to give that Henry Horton a piece of my mind. He deserves it."

HENRY HORTON certainly deserved it. He had taken Peter's hundred dollars and put them in a sure thing known as Excelsior Torpedo Boat. H. Henry had a supreme faith in sure things, which never wavered, although over four hundred dollars of poor Peter's money had already been swallowed up in them.

H. Henry's holdings in Excelsior Torpedo Boat were quoted at seventy-two and a half when he came to grief. Millie from Maine—Peter's sister and H. Henry's wife—proved his undoing. Millie, for all her feminine prettiness and soft curve of body, was a rock-ribbed daughter of Maine.

She began to suspect something when Henry began to hint of automobiles. One night when he talked of Excelsior Torpedo Boat in his sleep, she listened on the line. Shortly afterward H. Henry was rudely awakened. While still half asleep he was put through a third degree that left him caught in a maze of a half-dozen conflicting stories.

Then, in pure desperation, he confessed.

The next day he sold Excelsior Torpedo Boat.

"If Millie hadn't gotten wise and butted in, I'd 'a' made a killing," he reflected bitterly as he signed a receipt for a check which was stamped:

NOT OVER $15,000

What he said to Millie when he got home that night, however, was:

"Well, old girl, we can still have a nice little nest-egg after paying Peter what I owe him."

His face was ingenuous; his smile was ingratiating. But Millie's brown eyes remained implacable.

"Make that check over to me," commanded she.

Now for the grand finale and final tableaux.

THE clock in the basement kitchen at Mrs. McQueen's had struck six. Alice, standing on the threshold of her room, knit her pretty brows impatiently. At that moment the front door opened, and Peter entered.

"Peter," she called, "there's a letter for you on the hat-rack."

Peter paused, one foot on the lower stair. He took the envelope and opening it, started slowly toward her. Something fluttered to the carpet; he stooped to pick it up and stood as one transfixed. This was more than flesh and blood, tinctured with lively feminine curiosity, could stand. Alice ran down the stairs and looked over his shoulder.

"Gracious sakes alive," she ejaculated.

They read the letter together, sitting on the stairs.

It was from Millie, who wrote that she had learned for the first time that H. Henry had been playing the stock-market with money borrowed from Peter. She wanted Peter to believe she couldn't say how sorry she was when she discovered this. She might have added, with truth, that it would be impossible to describe how sorry H. Henry was.

The money H. Henry had won was gambling-money, and as such was anathema, but she couldn't give it back to anybody in particular and so she had decided to put part of it in the bank and to turn the rest of it over to Peter. To which she added simply that she hoped it would be a lesson to H. Henry, who would have lost every cent of the money if he'd held the stock twenty-four hours longer.

Alice looked at the check once more. It was for eight thousand dollars and it was signed *Millie Horton*. There is no question but that H. Henry had learned his lesson.

"It can't be true," she said, looking up at him solemn-eyed. Then she added: "Peter, kiss me this minute, so that I can be sure that you're real, anyway."

As I said in the beginning, it is possible that some people will get the moral of this story quite wrong. And again I say that the fault is their own: the moral is not what they think it is.

In Outlaw Cañon

by Wilbur Hall

"SQUARE DEAL" PITT, Sheriff of Pico County, toiled afoot through the drifts in Outlaw Cañon, his tired horse following. For three days he had been making his slow way into the heart of this district, peopled by fugitives and renegades, and at every turn he had been delayed and harassed. It seemed almost as though the cold, which numbed him in spite of his exertion, the deep, soft snow and the rough and dangerous road were conspiring with the mountain men against him. The first knife-edged blasts of an approaching blizzard swept across his path, and the storm's black clouds obscured the sun and shortened the winter day.

Here and there lights were beginning to gleam in scattered cabins, but the Sheriff floundered on and on up the Cañon toward Rye Flats and Whit Thorndyke's store. Pleasant as they would have been, Pitt was not seeking warmth nor shelter. He was pressing forward to the end of a self-imposed mission, and the delays he had met had only served to strengthen his purpose. Occasionally he swung his arms sharply against his body, or beat together his gloved hands.

Inside the crude log-cabin store toward which he was pushing that January night there were two men. One sat under the single small, high window, silently watching his companion, who had just come in and who, with stiff fingers, was removing his spurs. As he hung them up, the flame of the pine-knot fire blazing beyond him lighted his evil, scarred face and contorted the grin on his lips into a menacing snarl.

"Yep," he said, as though answering a question, "I sure have kept him wastin' a sight of time. He aint more'n quarter-mile behind, but there's a reg'lar tail-twister blowin' up, so I guess he'll stay with us awhile."

"Don't reckon he knows who you are, do you?"

"No. I gave him a good look at me in Cedar, an' if he'd wanted me, he'd of started that play then. He's after the kid, I tell you. How long ago'd Trumbull pass here?"

"'Bout an hour. He'll get over the Pass before the blow hits us, and once he's in his cabin, there aint anybody goin' to find him till he's ready to be found. Where'd you get that roan you're ridin'?"

The man by the fire was tugging at a boot. "Borrered her from Bridges at

Cedar. She's powerful quick in the snow."

He got his boots off with difficulty, shaking the mud from them and placing them on the hearth. His companion rose and picked up a rifle from one corner, examined its magazine quickly and placed it on a shelf under the counter. As he straightened, a half-wild hound outside broke into vicious baying; then bridle-chains rattled and a footstep crunched in the snow. The bootless man slipped his cartridge-belt around, and the storekeeper took a step toward the door—but stopped as it was flung open suddenly.

"Howdy, boys," said Sheriff Pitt.

A BLAST of wind sucked through the room, but the officer stood on the threshold a moment, appraising the two men, before he entered. Stamping the snow from his feet, he threw back his leather-lined coat with a jerk that sent the damp and sleet flying and that revealed the butt of a gun in his shirt-bosom. Then he closed the door with his heel, leaned against it and unwound a muffler from his neck.

The two men settled back and mumbled greetings. The one near the fire drew on his wet boots and added another log to those in the fireplace. The Sheriff looked at him. "I don't seem to recollect you, neighbor," he said slowly.

The two men laughed, and the Sheriff thought there was a sinister note in their merriment. The storekeeper said: "Why, this is John Hardy, Pitt." He turned and added to his companion: "Mr. Pitt, here, is sheriff of this county, Jack."

The man called Hardy eyed the officer boldly. "Pleased to know you, Sheriff. You don't get up here often, I guess, 'cause I've been here six months. Took up a little land over in Stone's Throw Basin."

Pitt answered easily: "No, I don't have much call to come this way. Folks here'll tell you that I only make Outlaw Cañon and the Flats when I'm after a man wanted in this county. I've heard there's lots of settlers in these mountains that are wanted elsewhere, but I'm not herding other people's cattle."

Hardy shrugged his shoulders and turned half away. "Up on business this trip?" he asked insolently.

Thorndyke laughed again, but the Sheriff did not appear to catch the slur. "Yes," he answered. "Going to take a young fellow back with me when I return."

The storekeeper leaned against his shelves and started to speak, but thought better of it. The two mountain men exchanged significant glances. Pitt took from his pocket a plug of tobacco and cut himself a generous mouthful. Outside, the rising wind puffed against the cabin, whistling mournfully through the chinks; and the Sheriff felt gratefully the warmth and shelter of the room. The flaming logs on the hearth at the far end lighted it brightly, eclipsing the two smoke-blackened lanterns that hung on cords from the ceiling. On one side was a rude counter, flanked by shelves of groceries and tobacco; on the other a bunk, a homely bench and a pile of logs were crowded together to make room for a tier of post-office boxes and a delivery window in its rusty partition. From the rafters hung the lanterns, a few hams, a motley collection of cooking utensils, buckets and garden tools—and swinging dizzily upside down in one corner hung a child's cradle, wanting one rocker. Half hidden by the counter, near the front of the store, was a whisky barrel up-ended on a low platform. Dirt and litter were everywhere, and strange odors filled the close air.

A stronger gust of wind slapped against the cabin, and a load of snow was shaken loose from some high tree-branch and shot heavily to the roof. Thorndyke climbed on a box and took down one of the lanterns. "Blowin' itself up into a blizzard, Pitt," he said casually. "Better set down and get thawred out, and I'll go put up your horse."

Pitt shook his head. "Wait a minute, Whit. I don't know yet how long I'll stay."

"Lord, Sheriff," Thorndyke said, "you can't get away to-night. Hear that wind!"

They listened a moment; then the storekeeper started again for the door.

"Reckon that noise oughta stay you a spell," he said.

"Does seem to be blowing up a little," the Sheriff admitted. "But I've rid in the wind before. I haven't much time to waste. Came up here to get a young fellow that's been wanted down below for six months. Couldn't locate him till last Monday."

Thorndyke raised his lantern to turn down the flame. "Trumbull, eh?"

"Yes—Al Trumbull. He was in the Flats to-night."

THE man by the fire had been lacing his boots, and now he rose, stamped his feet and walked over to the counter. The Sheriff half-faced about quietly. For a breath the two stood looking into each other's eyes; then the mountaineer turned away and spoke to the storekeeper.

"These my things, Whit?"

"All there but your bacon. Aint ary a rind on the place. Goin'?"

It was the Sheriff who answered. "No, he aint going yet awhile."

Hardy paused as he was gathering up his packages, and the Sheriff continued evenly: "This makes the third time I've been up here for a man, but it's the first time I've been interfered with on the road. I've always had a rule to let the Flats and the Cañon folks alone as long as they kept the law in Pico County and didn't cross my trail. It begins to look like I've got to change that rule now—because somebody's been riding between me and Al Trumbull ever since I struck Cedar. To-night I'm going to catch up to the boy—and I wont need any help. You know what I mean?"

The sound of the growing storm outside filled the room for a moment. Thorndyke put down his lantern and moved back behind the counter a few steps. The man Hardy left his packages and walked slowly to the fire, picking up a heavy stick, dropping on the end of a bench and poking carelessly into the blaze. The Sheriff watched him closely. At length Hardy said shortly:

"I don't take you, Mr. Sheriff."

The Sheriff pushed back his big hat and shifted his position. "I don't guess you ever will, stranger; it don't look to me like you and I are going to get along very well. I thought that about the first time I saw you riding between me and Al Trumbull on that roan filly down at Cedar."

Hardy laughed shortly. "No hard feelin's, Sheriff. I don't believe I know this man Trumbull, do I, Whit?"

Thorndyke came lamely into the play. "Sure, he's the boy that has the cabin over in Stone's Throw near your piece."

The Sheriff interrupted. "And rode over that way this evening, didn't he?" he asked.

Thorndyke saw his blunder and reddened. "I don't know whether he still has that place over there or not," he hedged, and the Sheriff laughed.

"I'll know before morning," he said curtly. "Used to be so I could come up here and get square talk. Now things seem to be changed, and maybe some day soon I'll get time to find out who's changed 'em. Right to-night I've got my work cut out."

As he spoke, he was winding his muffler about his neck. Now he pulled down his hat again, stepped to the wall near the door and took down a padlock-key. The mountain men watched him, puzzling, but suddenly Hardy sprang up, dropping his pine stick on the fire and coming forward. The light from one of the lanterns struck his face squarely, and the Sheriff scrutinized it. "Well?" he drawled.

"Well," Hardy began truculently, "I reckon we've play-acted this long enough, Pitt. You're right—times has changed up here, and the mountain folks aint going to let the settlements down below run 'em any longer without havin' a little say theirselves. We don't aim you shall take young Trumbull out unless he wants to go—that's a fact."

THE SHERIFF took in the man deliberately. "I don't know what official you set yourself up to be in the Flats, friend," he replied. "I don't know as I care. This is the last time I need to say that I'm going to take Al Trumbull back. As far as you go, I don't like your looks, I don't like your line of talk and I haven't forgotten the

man that rode that roan filly up the Cañon ahead of me. There's one thing you can tell me if you want to—and that's why you had to come to Outlaw Cañon."

Hardy's fist clinched, and his mouth worked. "I come here because I wanted to; that's why. I've had all of this hyar party of yourn that I'm going to, and now I'm on my way. I mayn't be popular, or handsome, or carry a string of pet names, but I got rights same as the high an' mighties in the foothills, and if you don't let me out that door *now,* before this time to-morrow night you'll know who you've been foolin' with!" He took a step forward. "Now I'm going!"

Pitt's level gaze held him. "Oh, no, you aint going—not till I get ready. I don't need to be told that you're sort of running things in the Flats and the Cañon now, because I can see that. I'm sorry for you, because you'd ought to know that this county'll only stand just so much from these mountain districts. You started a row when you began interfering with me day before yesterday—now I'm going to interfere with you!"

With the word his long black gun was at his hip. He held the weapon poised easily, and it appeared to each of the two men to cover him alone. Sullenly they raised their hands. The Sheriff motioned to Thorndyke, and he came out from behind the counter and lined up beside his evil-faced companion. Pitt took Hardy's revolver from him, dropping it in a coat pocket; then he searched Thorndyke, found him unarmed and stepped back. He remembered something, however, and leaned forward, throwing the storekeeper's coat aside with a jerk.

"Heard you were wearing one of these," he said. "Guess you got it before my time." He tore a nickeled deputy's star from Thorndyke's shirt and put it away with the gun. "Your commission has been run out some time, Whit," he added.

Coolly he wheeled about and went behind the counter. He took up an empty sack, filled it with provisions from the shelves, and placed a silver dollar on the counter. Then he looked about him. "Where's an empty whisky bottle?" he asked briefly.

Thorndyke saw his eyes wandering toward the space below the counter, and he cried hastily: "Here, I'll get you one. There aint any—"

But the Sheriff laughed. "Oh, that's it, is it?" He reached down and picked up the rifle and with a nimble wrist ejected the cartridges; then without a word he pitched the weapon into the blazing fire, his eyes on Hardy. Thorndyke, thoroughly cowed, found a glass flask and handed it over; the Sheriff filled it at the barrel in the corner, put it in a hip pocket, dropped his revolver in its holster and went to the door. He opened it with difficulty, the wind drifting clouds of fine snow in about him and swinging against him heavily before he could close it after him. The two men inside heard the door-chain jerked around, heard the padlock snap and heard a step or two in the snow. Then all sound without was drowned in the furious gale.

The man called Hardy looked significantly at the small window in the west wall. His face was twisted with anger. "By God, he wont go back to the settlements, anyway," he said. "If this blizzard don't get him to-night, I'll get him to-morrow. He's making his last ride!"

SOME time after midnight, when the blizzard was at its height, a boy wakened with a start in a cabin a mile down the road from the Pass to Stone's Throw Basin. "Who's there?" he cried.

The noise of the storm beat his voice back, and he rose and stood listening, but heard nothing more save the howling wind. Cautiously then he opened the door. Lying almost against it on the waist-deep drift of snow the blizzard had heaped there was the big bulk of an unconscious man. The boy pulled the man inside, and with difficulty laid him on the bunk; then he threw an arm-load of pine-knots on the smoldering embers in the fireplace. Next he gathered some of the snow that lay plentifully about the floor and began vigorously rubbing the blue body.

As he turned the man over to remove

the stiff, wet clothing, he caught the flash of a badge on the vest and found a heavy revolver in its holster under the shoulder. He jerked back and stared for a moment; then he laughed grimly. "Well, you caught up with me at last, didn't you?" he muttered, and with an ugly look he took the revolver from its place and dropped it in a half-open table drawer.

The Sheriff stirred uneasily, and the boy crossed to a corner, took out a bottle of fiery liquor and forced a draught between the frozen man's teeth. Almost immediately the Sheriff's eyes opened and he drew a deep breath.

The boy stepped back, a little apprehensive. "Hello, Sheriff," he said. "How they comin'?"

Pitt shifted wearily and then moaned, as a movement of his left arm caused the bones to grind together. The boy examined the arm hastily, and swore. "Why, it's busted!" he cried. "You'll have to lie still, Pitt, till we fasten it up."

The injured man nodded. "Thanks, Trumbull," he said, and almost instantly fell asleep.

The boy watched him for a time, speculatively. Presently he threw more knots on the fire and sat down before it. His first feelings of pity for the Sheriff, who had been saved from death only by the chance of stumbling on this isolated cabin, were swept away now by resentment and anger. Pitt, who was called "Square Deal" by the people in the settlements, had driven Trumbull into hiding—and the boy was innocent. He had been a crony of Lew French and that crowd until he had accidentally learned that the others were stealing calves from the ranges. Then he had broken with them. He knew why Frank Rico was sent to pick a quarrel with him—it was because French's gang were afraid of what he might tell. But by sheer good fortune he had caught the Mexican's gun from him and turned it against him. It had been his life or Rico's, and Rico had been the one to be killed.

He remembered now the horror with which he had gazed on the fallen man, with the spreading stain on his shirt, and he shivered. But it was not his fault. He had felt perfect confidence in the Sheriff—in "Square Deal" Pitt—and had gone home and told his brother what had happened. The boy had gone to find Pitt, only to learn that he was in Antelope Basin. So Trumbull had hidden, waiting for the Sheriff to return. . . . . Then Mitch, the younger brother, had come flying with the news. The Sheriff had telephoned that Trumbull was to be arrested. When his deputies failed to find him, the Sheriff had authorized the offer of a reward, in his own name, and the settlements had turned busily to hunting for him. So he had fled.

Al looked across the room to his bunk, and his face burned. For a moment he considered a desperate course—rose and picked up the revolver in the table drawer—hastily sketched a plan for disposing of all evidence. . . . . But that wouldn't do. In the morning the Sheriff might make some attempt to arrest him, but without a revolver, and with a broken arm, he would be but a poor antagonist! Jack Hardy and Whit Thorndyke and the gang at the Flats would see that the officer didn't take him down to be hanged—Hardy had told him so at Cedar. Hardy wouldn't shoot a man in cold blood—that plan lacked color and daring.

Curiously, then, Al Trumbull's thoughts turned to his home, and he sat down again and stared into the fire. They would be plowing now on the big ranches, and picking oranges on the mesas in the southern part of the county. His mother's preserves and jellies, redolent of the blooming orchards of summer, would be on the table. Milk in the big blue-and-white pitcher that had been in the family ever since he could remember would froth creamily as it was poured into the heavy tumblers with the knobs on them. And at night, around the reddening base-burner in the front room—

HE sat up with a start to find the sun streaming into the cabin from the high windows on the east, the wind gone and the place cold. He began to stir about, rekindling the fire and heating coffee, and the Sheriff awoke, pulled himself up and drank greedily of the

steaming beverage. Then he looked into the boy's face.

"Well, Trumbull," he said slowly, for speech was difficult, "I got caught up with you at last. If you hadn't been warned at Cedar, I'd have saved breaking my arm last night and getting pretty cold; but I can't jest blame you. If you'll give me a hand now, I guess I can fix it enough so's we can get back."

The boy noted the "we" and looked up keenly, but said nothing. He tore strips from a blanket; and together, with the crude surgery of the hills, they set the broken bones—the Sheriff whistling a little as they worked.

"Guess I'll put my coat on before the arm gets any stiffer," he suggested. "Then we'll rig a sling for it."

Trumbull crossed to the fire where the coat was lying on the hearth to dry. The star the Sheriff had taken from Whit Thorndyke the night before had fallen from the pocket, and the boy picked it up and dropped it in his own, following the instant's impulse. Then he helped the Sheriff put on the leather-lined garment and made a wide sling for the broken arm. The Sheriff sat down on the edge of the bunk, his feet hanging, and pulled on his hat. "Now," he said, "I guess we had better talk a little."

Instantly Trumbull stiffened. He took a step or two to the table and leaned near the half-open drawer. "Well?" he questioned.

The Sheriff began quietly. "Al, I came up to take you back to the settlements. This gulch aint any fit place for you. I—I found out Monday where you were." He paused, feeling behind him for his tobacco, of which he took a piece in his mouth.

"An' I suppose you think I'm goin' back?" Trumbull said.

"Sure you are. That's what I came for."

"Well, you're goin' back alone."

"No, I'm not. I want to tell you now what I know about this business of yours—I've found out I didn't do you right. A month or so before you came up here I heard that Lew French's gang was stealing calves. I didn't have any evidence, but I rounded French up and tried to sweat something out of him. He threw me off the trail, all right, and I had to sort of take it back to him. Then he began to complain—said I hadn't given him a square deal."

When he hesitated, as though to find words, Trumbull interrupted: "What's that got to do with me? I never stole any calves."

"I'm getting to that," Sheriff Pitt said. "You see how I thought French had to be given a square deal in the proposition—because I thought I had maybe been wrong about the calves. When I was in Antelope Basin, French telephoned to me that you and Frank Rico had got into an argument about a heifer you had run off from the Rose ranch, and that—"

"That's a lie!" Trumbull cried hotly. "I turned Rico's gun on him when he came after me to get me. French an' that gang—"

"I know," the Sheriff broke in. "I know that—now. But I was anxious then to give French the benefit of the doubt, so if I had been mistaken about him, he wouldn't be able to say I was playing him low. I knew I'd be able to straighten the thing out when I got back to the settlements—so I sent word to hold you for shooting Rico. You would have been all right, either way. But you skipped out—and then I offered a reward. French insisted on that—said it looked like I was going to give him and his friends—and Frank Rico's folks—all the worst of it. He fooled me right through, you see—until Monday."

"What happened Monday?"

"Well, Monday, Lew French tried to get away from me when I caught him dead to rights with two calves from the I. X. L. ranch—and he got shot. Before he died, he told me where you were."

THE boy hitched one leg across the corner of the table and sat down. For a moment he meditated. The Sheriff's story fitted with what he knew of French. The cattle-thief's gang had been afraid of Trumbull, and had sent Rico to pick a quarrel with him. Then, after Rico was killed, French came and urged the boy to "light out" for the outlaw country—helped him through,

in fact. Thus they had gotten rid of him—shut his mouth. . . . . But this was mostly guesswork, and Jack Hardy and Whit Thorndyke, the mountain men, had warned Trumbull to look out for the Sheriff's smooth ways. "He's nothin' but a bloodhound, Al," Thorndyke had said. "If he rounds you up and takes you back, you'll swing, that's all."

"I s'pose you expect me to believe you," Trumbull asked impudently, now.

"Sure. Why shouldn't you?" the Sheriff replied.

"Why should I?"

"You never heard of me lying to a man to get him."

The boy's face set in a sneer. "Oh, you can't come up here an' pull off that 'Square Deal' Pitt stuff. This aint no foothills. You thought you'd get the drop on me, an' then you broke your arm. I've got your gun, an' you invite me to go peaceable—peaceable till you can get a pair of handcuffs on me, eh?"

Pitt had been shifting his position on the bed, dropping his right arm and sliding his body forward until he leaned rather than sat. As the boy uttered his innuendo the Sheriff leaped up suddenly, jerking the heavy blankets from the bed and whirling them between himself and Trumbull. The latter gave a cry and reached toward the table-drawer, but Pitt was on him with a bound. The mass of blankets enveloped the boy's head and arms, and the officer followed them with his own weight, which overturned Trumbull and the table in a heap. As they fell—Pitt on top—the officer was conscious of a sickening snap and the grind of the bones in his arm. It was broken again. With his teeth clenched and sweat on his forehead, he caught the boy in a grip between his knees and found his throat with a right hand of steel. Trumbull choked and ceased to struggle, and the Sheriff reached for the revolver that had fallen near.

Armed again, he rose, his gun ready; but Trumbull, wrathful and sullen, was beaten, and stood up on the heap of blankets with his hands raised: "All right," he cried. "This is your trick; but we aint in the hills yet by a hell of a sight!"

"No, we aint, Al; that's right. But we're going to start for there now."

THEY went out, the Sheriff last. The heavy snow had packed, and although the sun was warm, the going was good. The gaunt man with the limp arm and jaws set with pain followed his prisoner closely up to the summit, buried under many feet of snow—through the Pass and thence down Outlaw Cañon. They covered ground at a smart pace, the Sheriff drawing heavily on a reserve force that overcame pain and the hunger and weakness gnawing at him. Trumbull marveled at the strength and courage of his captor, and his resentment slowly died. What he felt instead he could scarcely have told. But there was some feeling.

"How's Ma—and the boys?" he asked suddenly.

Pitt was unprepared for the question. "Who?"

"My mother and the folks. I aint heard from them lately."

"Your ma's worrying some. I told her I was coming up for you."

"What did she say?"

"One thing and another. Said they'd be mighty glad to have you again living at home."

The boy turned quickly to search the Sheriff's face. Pitt looked at him quietly.

"Living at home," Trumbull repeated meditatively, and went on.

When they came to the first of the scattered cabins on the Flats, Pitt moved warily, his hand on the revolver-butt that protruded from his shirt. But they met no one and only saw, in the distance, a pair of gaunt hounds accompanying a mule which bore a slouching man down the Cañon.

"Reckon the gang is mostly snowed in or else at Whit Thorndyke's store," the boy volunteered.

With Trumbull still before him by a few steps, Sheriff Pitt turned aside when they reached the open space where—with smoking chimney—the little store stood, flanked by the white-mantled mountain-side.

"The dogs aint here," the Sheriff said in a moment. "Move up quiet and don't make any false breaks. Keep

ahead of me and mind your own business—savvy? I can't fool any, from this on."

The boy nodded, and the two came without noise, over the snow, to the door of the cabin. From within came the voice of the man Hardy.

"I told you he was makin' his last ride," he was saying. "What time did the horse come back?"

Whit Thorndyke, the storekeeper, answered: "He was a-standin' out by the sycamore when I got up. I was glad Pitt wasn't on him. That big walloper scared me last night!"

"You're easy scared, Whit, an' that's no lie. But he'll never scare you again, 'less you believe in ghosts."

There was a sinister laugh at this; then Thorndyke said: "Your gun was in the saddle-bag, but he'd emptied it. It's there above the fireplace."

"Ca'tridges is cheap," the other replied.

A fresh log was thrown on the fire, and there was silence for a moment; then the storekeeper said: "Lucky he didn't know you were Jim Yates. We'd of had him—"

The other interrupted sharply, with a violent oath. "Jest keep that name in your head, will you!" he cried angrily. "Jim Yates aint a fashionable handle in some parts. Don't get too damn' familiar!"

OUTSIDE, Trumbull glanced at Pitt, whose face wore a puzzled expression. Then the Sheriff's eyes lighted. "Jim Yates!" he whispered, and shifted his weight cautiously.

Thorndyke, inside, was apologizing "I wouldn't do you no harm, Jack," he said with a whine. "Have a little drink before you go." His steps sounded on the bare floor, coming toward the barrel at the counter-end.

On that the Sheriff moved suddenly. "Now!" he cried, and with his gun pushed Trumbull precipitately into the cabin. He stood on the threshold a moment, as he had done the night before; then he shut the door with his heel and leaned against it.

"Howdy, boys," he said.

Thorndyke, who was stooping over the spigot of the barrel, straightened up with a shrill, terrified cry, dropping the earthen pitcher and falling against the wall. The other man paled, but recovered instantly and exposed his teeth in a snarling grin. "Hello!" he said airily.

Sheriff Pitt unwound his muffler. "Get me a drink, Trumbull," he said.

The boy picked up the pitcher and drew half a pint of the fiery liquor, giving it to the Sheriff and then crossing to lean against the counter. Pitt drank, eying the men over the jug.

The mountaineers looked from him to Trumbull, and the latter shuffled his feet in embarrassment, hitched his shoulders and avoided their eyes. He was humiliated at having been captured, especially after their warnings and the aid of the man Hardy, or Yates. But more than that he was apprehensive. Awkwardly he thrust his hands into his coat pockets: in one, as he did so, he felt the deputy's star he had picked up in his own cabin and forgotten.

Pitt was speaking. "Well, I'm back. I've always give' you boys up here a square deal, but last night you tried to double-cross me. Did you guess I'd forget?"

There was no answer. Young Trumbull shifted his weight and half-sat on the counter, discovering then that a rifle lay within reach of his hand. The measuring gaze of the storekeeper was on that weapon now—he stood but a step or two away from it. Yates, if that was Hardy's name, leaned against the post-office wicket, near the fireplace, and on the wide stone shelf above his shoulder there were two revolvers. Trumbull felt what was coming—if these two desperate men could reach

their arms. He stuffed his hands in his pockets once more, cautiously brought out the star, and turned toward the Sheriff, his back to the mountain men.

Sheriff Pitt moved slightly, and his left hand, hanging limp from his broken wrist, struck against the door. He winced with the pain, and the boy Trumbull clenched his own teeth with a grimace of sympathy. But Pitt's voice was like cold steel when he spoke.

"Thorndyke, you've been wanted in Sonoma County for a long time—wanted bad. I've been giving you a chance, but you lost it last night. Now you're going back to face the music."

The storekeeper gasped, and his knees gave under him. "Hones' to God, Sheriff!" he cried. "That's a—"

"Wait a minute!" Pitt's voice was hard. He turned to the other man. "I got a circular a few months ago from Omaha, with a picture on it."

Yates snarled, but Pitt went on:

"There's a thousand dollars reward from the Bankers' Association on that circular, and the picture looks like you. Now you're going to the foothills with me to have another picture took—we'll see how they look side by side."

Yates laughed out at that. "Three of us—all at once, eh?" he taunted.

The Sheriff nodded coolly. "Three of you," he replied. "I'm called 'Square Deal' Pitt, as you may know. I came up to give this boy here a square deal. I'd made a mistake and played him the wrong cards. But you fellows butted into the game. Now I'm going to give myself a square deal. Do you see that!"

Trumbull was watching the Sheriff, amazed at his daring. Now a slight movement behind him caused him to turn his head. The man with the scar took another step backward. The revolvers above his head were within reach now. Thorndyke looked from Yates to the Sheriff. The latter stood calmly watching, the butt of his revolver peeping from his shirt.

Suddenly Yates sprang back and seized the nearest revolver, while Thorndyke leaped toward the rifle on the counter.

"Duck, Al!" he yelled.

But the boy snatched the weapon away, stood up and swung around, the rifle covering Yates. "Drop that gun!" he cried, and the mountain men caught breath angrily—for on his coat he had pinned the deputy sheriff's star!

Sheriff Pitt's revolver was on Yates now. Thorndyke, frantic with fear, threw himself on the rifle which the boy held, and it exploded. At the same instant Yates jumped behind the others, covered the Sheriff and pulled the trigger of his revolver. It snapped harmlessly. He pulled again, half crouching behind the reeling body of the storekeeper, but the hammer fell with a metallic click.

"Hands up!" Pitt cried sharply. "The game's played out!"

Yates glanced at the revolver in his hands and saw what he had done. The weapon was the empty one. Suddenly, with an oath, he hurled it to the floor and surrendered.

"You dirty spy!" he roared at Al Trumbull. "You dirty, sneakin' spy!"

The Sheriff came forward, and in another breath Yates stood handcuffed—leaning against the wall and panting. Trumbull, trembling with the tension, dropped his weapon and knelt beside the storekeeper. Pitt joined him, and they turned Thorndyke over. Then the Sheriff laughed.

"Get up, Whit," he said coldly. "You'll live to serve a term yet!"

The storekeeper raised himself slowly. His shirt was ripped open, and there was a broad red welt under his arm, from which a few drops of blood trickled. He sat down on a bench, glowering at Trumbull.

Sheriff Pitt looked quizzically at the boy. Then he said slowly: "I'm much obliged, Al. I missed that star on the way down, but I'm glad you picked it up. Better keep it till we get out of the Cañon, eh?"

Trumbull nodded. "Thanks, Sheriff," he said.

Pitt laughed a little. "I'm lucky about things this trip. So are you, Trumbull. There's a thousand dollars reward for this Jim Yates. It will help you get a start—down home!"

There will be another story by Wilbur Hall in an early issue.

Not Mentioned by the Experts

by Freeman Tilden

WHEN Colonel Sheldon died suddenly and left the Occidental Garden Tool Company to his son and daughter, the anvil-chorus gathered around and with their little hammers all attuned, beat out this cheerful dirge:

"They'll run it into the ground. They'll run it into the ground."

It surely did look as though, for once, calamity had logic on its side. Bob Sheldon was twenty-four, big in frame, intelligent in the eyes, and a fine fellow to have around when there was any fun in the making. But of the business he knew practically nothing. His father, with that strange perversity that has actuated so many other business men, had discouraged the son from familiarizing himself with the very details he was now called upon to face.

"You'll only get in the way," the Colonel had many times said with a grim smile of paternal superiority. "I'll put you through your course of sprouts next year. Run along now; I'm busy." And next year, for the Colonel, had never come.

Bob Sheldon had one long talk with his sister Kate, a handsome, clear-eyed young woman of twenty-one, on whose checks an outdoor life had lavished the advertisement of health, but in whose head there was just as little preparation for this event as there was in Bob's. They had in common, however, a certain firmness of mouth, a little touch of squareness of chin, by which, more even than in his acres of factory-space, Colonel Sheldon continued to live.

Kate Sheldon put her arm around her brother's neck and squeezed him. "You can't fail, Bobby," she said to him. "You don't know how to fail. It isn't in us, Bobby."

"You're a life-saver, Kate," the young fellow replied. "The best nerve-tonic in the world, little sister. But, do you know how I feel, Kate? You've seen the fire-horses rush out of their stalls when an alarm comes in? You've seen them stand right under the harness, and then—*bing!* down comes the harness on their backs; snap goes a single buckle and—they're at work. Well, the harness of business has been dropped on my back just like that."

"With the exception, Bobby," replied

Kate, "that the buckle hasn't been snapped yet. I mean, there's time for you to jump out of the harness yet. The horses have nothing to say about it; but *you*—"

Young Sheldon smacked his hands together with instant decision. "There!" he exclaimed, "I've done it myself, Kate. We're off!"

That night "Bob" Sheldon canceled every social engagement on his calendar, and when the office-force trooped in at eight o'clock next morning, the new president and general manager was at his desk.

IT is the beloved tradition among all of us whose papas failed to invest in Calumet & Hecla when shares were going begging at eight dollars per, that such pampered sons of wealthy men have something—er—coming to them. Bob Sheldon knew this tradition as well as anyone. His first walk through the office of the Occidental was a daymare—not that he wasn't greeted in a perfectly friendly manner: not that a single employee was otherwise than respectful. But there was a glint in the eyes of them all, down to the three-dollar office-boys, that spoke louder than a bawl. It said, with a certain comic tinge of triumph: "Well, Mr. Bob Sheldon, you've got it all your own way now. Make good if you can. But you can't. You'd better hire some one to do the work while you play tennis. Your absence will be necessary to any flourishing institution."

Almost apologetically young Mr. Sheldon approached one employee after another, asked a few cautious questions about the work in hand, and moved on, feeling that his ignorance was of Woolworth Tower proportions. A shrewd observer would have noted that Mr. Sheldon was not garrulous, and that he felt his way like a man crossing a trestle after dark; also, when he made a peculiarly bad break (as when he asked the head correspondent why the winter business showed such an increase over that of the summer), he covered his tracks with such hearty laughter at his own ignorance that the main point became obscured in the accessory entertainment.

ABOUT two weeks after taking executive charge of things, Bob Sheldon sauntered into that corner of the office which was the mailing-room, where the catalogues and other "business literature" were prepared for the post office. At a certain unobtrusive desk in this room, upon which each year of catalogue-wrapping had laid a new envelope of glue, the general manager on his rounds stopped a moment to talk.

"Good morning, Miss Reeves," he offered hesitatingly.

The girl at the desk looked up from her work. She met his eyes with frankness—frankness touched with nervous apprehension; a little of gentle appeal was added to these, and then the whole expression was made lovely with a becoming blush.

"Good morning, Mr. Sheldon," was the reply, and then the girl tried to return to her work. But her fingers trembled, and no trembling fingers can fit a bulky catalogue into an envelope designed on the plan of a hobble-skirt.

She was pretty, and she had character and—it may have had nothing to do with the character, but she also had fluffy bright hair which curled tantalizingly around her ears. Her lips, parted slightly, revealed the tips of two rows of small, perfect teeth. A small, neatly turned nose suggested a little bit of self-will. On her forearms were two bands of paper to protect her sleeves.

In spite of the fact that the forewoman of the mailing-room was almost at his heels, and the added fact that at his entrance all work had ceased automatically and the workers were regarding their new boss intently, Bob Sheldon leaned over the desk in the corner and asked: "How are you getting along with your work, Miss Reeves?"

There was a swift intake of breath behind Sheldon. It was the forewoman, who had heard the question; and somehow, on the instant, the new general manager felt that of all questions to ask he had somehow blundered into the worst. He was made certain of this when he saw the lips of the girl tremble and saw her put up her hand as though to screen her emotion from him. Sheldon had the good sense to throw out an inconsequent remark and

pass along. The forewoman followed him and plucked him by the sleeve.

"The fact is, Mr. Sheldon," she half-whispered to the young man in a tone as serious as though the fate of nations were involved, "she isn't getting along at all. I thought—you should know."

"Yes, yes, thank you," said Sheldon quickly, and started away. The woman detained him, propping herself against the corridor wall and making ready to detail the whole score of innings; but the young man discreetly backed off. "She's a little bit nervous, maybe," he replied, and hastened into another department.

BEFORE he returned to the private office, Bob Sheldon had made up his mind about two things. Concerning the first he began operations immediately by pressing a button for a boy and asking him to tell Miss Reeves please to come to his office.

A queer feeling of power, of autocratic power over other human beings, swept over Sheldon for the first time when the door opened and the sunny-haired girl came in. By instinct he rose; then, conscious of a peculiar impropriety in that, he sat down again and had just opened his mouth with a sentence when the young woman interrupted him. The color in her cheeks changed from crimson to white, and back to crimson, as she said: "Did you wish to speak with me, Mr. Sheldon?"

"Yes. Wont you sit down?"

"If you don't mind, I'd rather stand up," was the confused reply. And for the first time since taking hold of the job, Bob Sheldon felt that the situation had arisen which was going to tax his preconceived notions. For he had made up his mind that his dealings with the "help" were going to be of a friendly, helpful, confidential nature. His ideal, roughly conjectured, was that of a big family affair, in which he was by ownership the good-natured father, with everybody doing the right thing because the right thing was the friendly thing.

And now, as he looked over the top of his roll-top at the flustered girl, he felt that somehow, by virtue of their respective positions, there was a social chasm and that at the bottom of the chasm lay a slough of mistrust, if not suspicion. But he said, as briskly as possible: "Er—Miss—Reeves, I'd like to give you something better to do than your present work. I don't like to see—"

"Please leave me where I am," was the reply. "And please don't keep me *here* very long."

"Why, I don't understand! Why shouldn't I keep you here?"

"Mr. Sheldon," said the girl nervously, "*you* don't realize. Everybody in the office is watching everybody else. Everything you do and say is bound to be misinterpreted. They think—"

"What do they think? Tell me," breathed Sheldon.

"Nothing in particular, perhaps. But nobody knows what you're going to do, and they're all afraid, and they all gossip about the least thing, and each one is so anxious that you'll have a good opinion of him that they're beginning to talk about each other. May I go now? Or was it something about my work? I'd rather you didn't make any change with me."

"I see," said Sheldon. "At least I think I do. And so that's the reason why I don't seem to be able to get any definite information from anybody? I suppose it's natural enough. But perhaps I may see you some time out of office hours? There are some things I'd like to speak of—"

"I'd rather not, please," said the girl. "May I go now? Please? Thank you." And she hastened out with a relieved sigh.

"Great Scott!" muttered Bob Sheldon. "This is going to be an awful job. They're watching me the way a cat watches a platter of beef. I can't have any friends, or anything else. Even *she* is afraid to be seen coming into this room. I've got to make a break somehow. Here goes!"

He took the telephone and called a number. "Hello! That you, Kate? . . . . . Yes—Bob. Can you come right down? . . . . . Yes, right away. . . . . Good!"

Then he tipped back in his chair again and stared out the windows upon the big rocky mountain on the other

side of the river that ran along beside the "works" and considerately furnished the cheap power wherewith the Occidental garden-tools were made.

FINALLY an automobile rolled up in front of the office door. There was a light step on the stair, and Sheldon jumped up to meet his sister. "Something important, Bob?" she asked.

"Yes, it is, Kate. You know, this is an awful job Dad handed down to me. I find I don't know as much about the business as one of the young billing-clerks. Not only that, but I'm in a fair way never to learn anything. Everybody's afraid of me. They think I'm going to do something absurd, but they don't know what it is. Only the department heads have anything definite to say, and they're out to save their own bacon at anybody's expense."

"It isn't your fault, Bobby," the young woman replied, patting her brother's hand.

"No, I hope not. . . . . I've been working hard enough, heaven knows. But I've made up my mind; I'm going to send for that man who came up to see me last week. It may be ridiculous, but I feel the need of an outsider—some one who doesn't know a soul in the plant. He's an efficiency engineer. Do you know what an efficiency engineer is?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," was the smiling answer. "Tell me."

"I'm blessed if I know any too well, myself. But this man has been recommended to me as about the best in his line. He plans to go through the plant from cellar to garret and figure out production-costs and weed out the poor workers and systematize and suggest up-to-date devices and all that sort of thing. In other words, he's going to show us where we stand."

"It sounds fascinating, Bob. I wonder what he's like? Those mathematical sharps are queer creatures. Did I ever tell you about that old prof' we had at Elgar? You never saw a man who looked more like an owl—"

"There's no owl about this chap, Kate. He's frightfully young—but with the air of a man with big experience. What do you think?"

"I think you know what ought to be done, Bob. You wouldn't get him here unless there were good reasons. So go ahead."

"I'll wire him this afternoon," concluded Sheldon.

"POP" GRINNELL, the foreman of the wood-room, very neatly epitomized the factory opinion of Barnard after the first two months of efficiency engineering. In reply to Sheldon's query, "Well, Pop, does the new broom sweep clean?" the foreman snorted out, with the discontented air of an old workman whose precincts have been invaded:

"New broom? Say, Mr. Sheldon, that fellow's no broom. He's a vacuum-cleaner! He's raisin' Cain in this department, for certain. But I'll give the devil his due: he's a smart young man. I don't say but what we could have worried along without him buttin' in, but I'll admit he showed us a few tricks."

"For instance, Pop?"

"Well, here's one—funny nobody ever thought of it, too! It's as simple as the nose on your face: Every man has been going to the stock-room for his own unfinished handle-stuff. And the best of 'em will kill time, you know, because the stock is down one flight. This here fellow puts a five-dollar lad in the stock; he makes up bundles in fifty lots, shoots 'em around in a truck to each finisher, gets a receipt and—well, the result is we had to drop Joe Garrity off the pay-roll last week. And the rest of 'em more than make up for Joe's work."

"H'm! Anything else?"

"Well, there is a queer thing: You know, when those planers were put in, they were made too low. It gives a man an awful kink in his back to work on 'em any length of time. This here fellow Barnard just walks around with his hands behind his back, and all of a sudden he says: 'Those ought to be higher. What's the use breaking your back?' Next day up they went; and you'd be surprised to see the added work. . . . . He's a queer cuss!"

Indeed, without haste and without display, but with the sureness of one

who knows what he is about, the efficiency-man was beginning to shake things up in the old-fashioned Occidental works. Of course, he had no authority to make the changes himself; but Sheldon, after watching the developments carefully and discussing the proposals with the factory superintendent, instructed the latter to follow Barnard's advice to the letter.

"You think pretty well of him, then, Archer?" Sheldon had said abruptly to the factory superintendent.

"Yes, I do," was the ungrudging reply. "First I was against him, and I guess you knew it. You see, I thought he was coming in with some highfalutin ideas of cheapening the product so as to show a bigger profit. Well, I was wrong, Mr. Sheldon. He's as keen to uphold the quality as any of us. Then, first, I used to give him the laugh when I saw him snoopin' around holdin' the stop-watch on some of our old help. By jingo, I found I had something to learn myself about those workmen. It's funny how he happens to know about so many different things. He's up to all the latest tricks. He's introduced a bronze that costs about half what we were paying. I told him it would flake off the metal. I had tried some cheaper stuff once, and it was no good. But this is a new thing, and it sticks like glue. But that's nothing. He's just passed in a scheme that looks like a winner to me. It's in connection with the trouble we had with our tin-coated skimming sections on our separator. You know, the best we could do, the parts would wear and rust. Well, he's got the idea! What do you think? German silver! Hanged if I don't think it may be the making of our product—and the extra cost is a mere nothing. There's only one thing I don't like: I hate to fire the poor fellers that the increased production puts out of a job. But I know it's the right thing. As Mr. Barnard says, 'It's better for them as well as us.' "

"I wonder," thought Sheldon.

MEANWHILE the efficiency-man was becoming a rather frequent visitor at the Sheldon home. "You see, Kate," explained Bob Sheldon rather apologetically, "he isn't like one of the office help. He's doing a special job, and—well, hang it all, I suppose the real truth is I like to have him come up to dinner. You see, he's been around in the world, and it's like a breath of fresh air to talk with him."

"I'm sure I don't mind," replied the sister. "I agree that we can't treat him like an employee. And I like to hear him talk, too."

"Do you? That's fine. I'll ask him up to-night."

They couldn't very well avoid the subject of business, though Barnard showed that he could talk equally well of many other things. There was one feature of his conversation that was noticeable to his hosts, however: when he spoke of random matters, his manner was expansive, colorful and hearty. But when the subject turned to the business at the factory, he almost visibly hardened. He seemed to assume a different personality. He was no less interesting, but he became frigidly impersonal.

"And that's the one thing I don't exactly like about Barnard," said Sheldon to his sister one night after their guest had gone. "Oh, I *like* him well enough," he added hastily; "don't get a wrong impression. But there's one point that makes me feel distant to him. He seems to lack feeling—heart—whatever you may call it."

"Do you think so?" was the reply, and somehow a little touch of color came into Kate Sheldon's cheeks and her voice appeared unwarrantedly earnest.

"Well, I'll come down to cases, Kate. We'll allow that Barnard is doing wonders down at the plant. There's no doubt about it. Well, in the course of his work he makes suggestions. Sometimes it's merely to have the super' call a man in and talk him into speeding up. Other times it's a matter of firing a man—maybe one of the older ones."

"Well, but if they don't measure up to the work—" began Kate.

"That's all right. I'll acknowledge that firing one of the factory hands doesn't give me as much of a jolt as if it were one of the office help. Somehow the relationship—except for a few of the old-timers that grew up with Dad—doesn't seem so close. But that

isn't it. It's the chilly, northeast way that Barnard has of doing it.

"He says: 'What's the use of having two men on the trucks that go down to the cars?' 'One man can't unload,' says somebody. 'Keep a man down there, and let him be working on the scrapped-and-exchanged stuff between truck-loads,' says Barnard. We try it. *Bing!* go two heads. They were low-priced laborers, it's true—but that's his system, right through. He says: 'This man you don't need,' or 'This man can be dropped,' or 'This job can be abolished,' as if he were saying, 'Carry out this rubbish and drop it on the dump.' By George, Kate, it makes my blood run cold. I dare say I'm too sensitive. Is that it?"

"I like you to be sensitive, Bob," replied Kate. "Still, from the business point of view—"

"That's it! I suppose Barnard's absolutely right. Whenever I've suggested that maybe we'd better keep a man, for old times' sake, Barnard always comes back with that queer smile of his: 'Mr. Sheldon, business isn't run for old times' sake any more. I want to do this in *your* interest.'"

"And so you do it?"

"Hang it, yes. We're paying for the advice."

IT was when Barnard, two months later, shifted his attention from the factory to the business offices that Sheldon began to grow extremely nervous.

For nobody knew better than "Bob" Sheldon that the office management had always been conducted on a loose, fraternal scheme, in which there was a bewildering combination of loyalty and leaks. Colonel Sheldon had known it too, but his manner of correcting the abuses, though temporarily violent, was ineffective. The Colonel used to jump up from his desk about once a month, sally out into the corridor and heap imprecations upon a certain person or persons unknown—whereupon everybody became efficient and remained so for at least three hours.

Tucked away in the hills as the Occidental factory was, remote from any very large city,—and being, moreover, the only considerable manufacturing business of the town—it was natural that the office-force should resemble, in its attitude toward employers and employed, a large and fairly contented family. The office "help" was mostly recruited from the neighboring country. And it was a well-known fact that nobody, once in the employ of the Occidental company, had ever been discharged except for some glaring or really unforgivable fault.

So one afternoon when the efficiency-man opened the door of Bob Sheldon's office and said he was ready to present an important reorganization plan, the young executive felt suddenly afflicted with nervous depression. But he said: "Of course, Mr. Barnard; come right in."

"I find," began Barnard, coming to the facts with characteristic promptness, "that there are about seven persons who must be drawing their salaries for some other reason than the usual *quid pro quo*. I'm going to propose a plan by which you can cut the salary-roll by about four thousand dollars a year, Mr. Sheldon, and we're going to just about double the amount of work done by the rest."

"Is it so bad as that?" asked Sheldon, uneasily, but with a forced smile.

Barnard smiled in reply. "Really, I don't exaggerate when I say that there's been a sinful waste of money in the office. And I'm on the conservative side, remember. I don't believe in starting by paring to the quick. You know that, Mr. Sheldon."

Sheldon nodded. "Go on," he said.

"Now, the first man is—let me see—Walter Leavitt. He's looking out for the Pacific Coast States and Western Canada. The time may come when that's one man's job, but it isn't now. I propose to give his work to Lavelle, and let Dowling take Iowa and Kansas off Lavelle. That gives them each about a day's work. If necessary, we can split Iowa and let Weatherbee have the southern end. Leavitt we wont need, after this week."

"Not Leavitt!" exclaimed Sheldon. "You don't mean—"

"Why not? Any particular reason, Mr. Sheldon? Of course—"

"Why, no—that is—why, it probably sounds absurd to you, Barnard, but Leavitt, you know, is the son of one of my Dad's oldest friends."

Barnard looked at the other man curiously a moment. Then he said, dryly: "You know my feeling about those things."

"Yes, yes, I know," replied Sheldon, tapping his fingers nervously on the desk. "Who else?"

"Second man is Bullard. Bullard ought to work on a farm. He's honest and faithful enough, but he isn't cut out for office work. Where in the world did you ever get him?"

"Bullard? Oh, Bullard is the son of my Dad's old gardener. I know he isn't much good, but we don't pay him much, you see—"

Barnard shook his head. "I don't get that point. If he isn't efficient, he ought to go. As I see it, a dollar a week would be far too much for unfit workers. Surely—"

"I can't do it. What an idiot I must seem to you, Barnard! But really, I'd rather pay Bullard's wages out of my own pocket. Who's the next victim?"

"Well, there's a young woman named Thurston—"

"Gad, she's the daughter of our old Congregational minister."

"And another one named Reeves—"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Bob Sheldon impulsively. "Let's not sweep—too clean, Barnard. You see—that is—aw, say, old chap, we've got to have some feelings, you know—and—"

BARNARD could not suppress his impatience. "Mr. Sheldon," he said, "frankly, I don't get you. Even granting the Occidental is paying handsome dividends, why should it carry these people who aren't of the slightest use to it? If you'll permit me to say so, with no wish to be discourteous, it's stupid. Of course, I realize that firing an employee isn't a pleasant thing. But I'll take that job off your shoulders, if you desire. Put it up to me. I'll do it in a friendly way—I'll let them down easy; you can go away for a couple of weeks, if that would be convenient, and when you get back, why, the thing is done and over with!"

Sheldon shook his head stubbornly. "You can do that sort of thing in the big cities," he said. "The individuals don't count there. But see how it is, Barnard: this is a small town, after all. We know each other, and we've been brought up together; we're a kind of a big family. My dad must have known that these fellows weren't all 'live wires,' as you call 'em, and why didn't he let them go? It may be stupid, as you say. It may be rank sentimentality. Maybe it's sheer cowardice. But I'd rather sacrifice the money, so long as the plant is running smoothly—"

Barnard's voice grew so earnest that it sounded harsh: "Mr. Sheldon," he answered, "don't get the idea my pride is hurt because you don't accept my recommendations. I offer my best advice; if you don't accept it, I can do no more. But it does get on my nerves to see waste—waste, inefficiency, sloppy work. I like to see a business run as a business. If you insist on distributing your money for charity—"

Sheldon colored. "Not quite so bad as that, is it?" he interrupted.

"I sincerely beg pardon if I've become personal, Mr. Sheldon. Maybe I'm too conscientious. I haven't the slightest objection to your getting another efficiency-man. He might coincide more nearly with your ideas."

"Oh, I say, Barnard," said Sheldon quickly, "don't take it that way! I appreciate what you're trying to do for us here—my sister and I are delighted with what you've done. Let's not get all heated up about this. Can't we lay the matter by for a few days?"

Barnard was silent, but obviously dissatisfied.

Sheldon went on more eagerly. "I'll tell you," he said; "I'll meet you halfway—or part of the way. I don't want to be absurd about it. You bring me in the one person on your list that you think is least worth while to the office, and I'll—yes, I'll give him notice this afternoon. Then, afterwards, perhaps I can get worked up to this firing business. Will you do that?"

"I *will* do that," said Barnard with a dour grin. "It isn't much, but I'm bound to have some one of these star boarders fired—for the good of the plant. You

wait just a minute, and I'll bring in the sacrificial lamb."

"It seems melodramatic," gurgled Sheldon, halting him at the door.

"It *is* melodramatic, the way you insist on doing it. But let's get one head off, anyway. Then you'll get used to it. Just a minute."

SHELDON waited four brief minutes, wondering feverishly how he was going to carry out his part of the contract. Then the door opened and Barnard returned. With him was Miss Ruth Reeves.

"Miss Reeves," announced Barnard quickly.

Sheldon jumped up. His big, boyish face went as scarlet as the tie he was wearing. He stared at the pair distractedly for a second, opened his mouth to speak—and found no words. Before he could collect himself he heard Barnard saying, in a soft, calculated voice:

"I'm sorry to say, Mr. Sheldon, that I find this young lady quite unfitted for the work she's been doing. I can't discover that she has the slightest interest in it, or in any of the office work I've suggested to her. If I may say so, I think her mighty pretty and delightful—as a young woman, but not as an employee. I—"

"You may not say anything of the sort," retorted the young woman.

"I beg your pardon," returned Barnard blandly. —"I should like to say, Mr. Sheldon, regarding this young lady's capacity, that yesterday afternoon she was put at addressing form-letters. They were to go to farmers in different parts of Maryland. In every case she addressed these farmers as 'Doctor.'"

"The card index said so," insisted the girl, "and I followed it."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Reeves: it said nothing of the sort. It is true that on the corner of each card was the abbreviation *'Md.'*—for *Maryland—"*

"Well, *'M. D.'* stands for *Doctor* too, anyway," Miss Reeves replied, applying her handkerchief to her eyes in rapid dabs.

"You get that?" asked Barnard of Sheldon, with a grin.

Young Mr. Sheldon blinked rapidly and looked exceedingly foolish. Finally he said, weakly: "Well, of course, *'M. D.'* does stand for *Doctor,* you know, Mr. Barnard."

"To be sure it does," echoed Barnard with the sarcasm of exasperation. "It stands for *'more doughnuts'* or *'mud-digger'* or anything you please. But I ask you, Mr. Sheldon, whether an employee of this office shouldn't know, after a year or two, that we are not selling garden-tools to doctors of medicine, as a rule?"

Mr. Sheldon and Miss Reeves looked steadfastly out of the window—opposite windows—and there was a noisy silence.

"I leave her with you, Mr. Sheldon," said Barnard finally. Then he went over to the other man and plucked him a little aside. "Do your duty!" he whispered. "Or I'll do it for you, if you want me to. No sentiment, please, Mr. Sheldon."

Sheldon raised his hands as in feeble remonstrance.

"And if you don't raise any objection, I'm going up to see your sister on this matter of cleaning up the office situation. You told me once, you know, that you wanted me to get Miss Sheldon's advice on certain points. Well, here is a point where I think I—or you—need it. May I talk it over with her?"

"Yes, do," replied Sheldon with peculiar eagerness, pushing Barnard toward the door. "Put the case to her. Good idea, Barnard! Good luck to you. She'll be at home, I know." And he literally crammed the amazed efficiency-expert out the front door.

THEY stood silently for a long time—Sheldon and the sacrificial lamb. Sheldon walked over to the window, tugged at his collar, toyed with a technical journal on the window-ledge and then returned to the girl's side.

"Well, Ruth—Miss Reeves—" he began, with a confidence that rang quite false, "this man, Mr. Barnard—"

"I think it was downright mean of him," she said, without looking up.

"He wants to be still meaner," replied Sheldon. "And you can see how

mean he wants *me* to be. He says I'm to—fire you!"

"Robert—Mr. Sheldon!"

"Well, that's the usual way of putting it," added the man. "But you know I wouldn't do it, Ruth. Just as long as you insist on working nine hours a day out in that office, instead of—"

"Even supposing I ought to be—what you say—I think it was downright rude of him to drag me in here and make a spectacle of me—"

"Indeed it was," said Sheldon sympathetically. "I ought to mention that to Barnard. By George, I think I shall! And I'll tell him that as long as you want to honor us with your presence out there—"

"You needn't tell him anything of the kind," replied the girl with a pout. "I refuse to work for you any more. I—I resign. So there! You can't—fire me."

"Oh, no!" cried the man. "You can't—he can't—I can't—" The president of the Occidental floundered, dog-paddled and otherwise resembled a man going down for the third time.

"But he was right," went on the girl. "I know I'm not efficient. And he's right when he says I'm not interested—"

"Absolutely wrong," lied Sheldon manfully. "Absolutely wrong, Ruth. I don't know what in the world we should do without you."

"Now, don't be silly, Robert Sheldon," she said. "You don't need to say foolish things like that. I know I'm not efficient."

"The Occidental Company is more than satisfied with your work," insisted Sheldon. "I ought to know, hadn't I? You can't resign, Ruth. I wont permit it."

She looked at him out of the corners of her eyes. "Why in the world shouldn't you?" she asked. "When you know—"

"Because," he replied with an obviously desperate effort, but striding toward her and facing her (though she immediately dropped her eyelashes), "if you wont marry me, you've at least got to be where I can see you once or twice a day when I go out through the office!"

HE could see the tears glistening under the lashes. He reached for her hands and took them in his, and she did not attempt to withdraw them. But she looked up at him for a second and said, weakly: "Bob, this isn't fair."

"I don't mean to be unfair, little girl," the man replied swiftly. "I've tried all along to be as fair as I could. Heavens, dear, I've even bent backward, since Father died, and I came into this office! Many a time when I've been passing your desk I'd have liked to stop and talk with you, and I've gone by with just a cold 'Good morning'—and just because you frightened me half to death, that first morning I asked you to come into this office to talk with me!"

"I ought to have quit before; I knew *that's* what I should do," she murmured.

"And you didn't, because—"

"I thought you'd think I wasn't willing to work for *you*," she sobbed. "Honestly, Bob, I was doing good work before your father died—before you took charge. And then—you came into the office, and I've been so nervous ever since that I haven't known half what I was doing. Please let me just resign. I know I ought not be here."

"Ruth," he whispered, drawing her closer to him, "it was nearly two years ago I asked you to marry me. You told me then it was because you wanted your freedom. You wanted to work, like a lot of the other girls, and get into business, and that sort of thing. Was that the real reason?"

She looked into his eyes frankly and answered: "Yes, honestly."

"And you still feel the same way?"

"Please don't ask me anything more," she replied. "Please let me go now."

"I can't let you go till I know the

answer," he replied breathlessly. "Tell me, do you still feel that way?"

She turned her head from him and did not answer. He could feel the quick pulse-beats in her wrists. He had a thousand questions at his tongue's end, but it somehow didn't seem right to ask them. He waited.

The silence seemed tight and stifling to Sheldon. The big Seth Thomas on the wall talked loquaciously against time. Finally the man whispered: "I don't want to take advantage of this queer situation, Ruth—but I'm asking you again. Can we go back two years? Can we?"

Suddenly, with a little passionate cry, she withdrew her hands from the man's, put her arms up against his shoulders and rested her face against his breast. "I'm tired of all this—so tired," she said simply.

Sheldon put his arms gently around her and lowered his head and touched the warm, wet cheek with his lips.

Then, as suddenly she darted away and looked at him with a nervous, embarrassed smile, "My boss!" she said. "I *ought* to be fired."

"I feel more like an office-boy now," he replied, and reached for her again.

"I BEG your pardon!" said Barnard's voice at the door; and there was no questioning the honest amazement in which the words were uttered.

"Well!" said another surprised voice, almost at the same time. And the president of the Occidental, still with his arms about his late employee, saw over her shoulder his sister Kate and Arthur Barnard standing at the door.

"No, don't be afraid; come in!" boldly cried young Mr. Sheldon as the door started delicately shut. The late employee darted from her late employer's arms and running to the window began to show a keen interest in the surrounding country.

A delightfully idiotic grin displayed itself upon the countenance of the president. Barnard and Kate Sheldon looked at each other, and somehow the grin was so contagious that they both caught it instantly.

"Well, Barnard, I—I haven't fired her yet," stammered Sheldon.

"I see you haven't," was the reply.

"I—I don't think I shall—yet," went on the president of the Occidental. "I find her quite efficient—really."

"You know best about that," was the smiling reply.

"Yes—er—I know best. Yes—er—of course. I say, Barnard," went on Sheldon, "I've got to take issue with you. I absolutely refuse to fire anybody—at least to-day. I'm not feeling in the mood. In fact, Barnard," he grinned, "I'm afraid I'll have to disappoint your passion for firing. I don't know of a soul I want to let go. So there wont be any firing done—unless you decide to fire yourself!"

"Mr. Sheldon," replied the efficiency-man, in what was intended to be his most matter-of-fact and impersonal tone but which was strangely touched with emotion, "I've realized some things this afternoon, some things I didn't realize before. I see, for instance, that the individual counts for more here than in the big factories and offices in the city. You people are certainly a kind of big family.

"Now, as a simon-pure efficiency-man, I ought to insist that somebody here be fired. But I can't. I don't—feel like it. Well, then, failing in that, I ought logically to fire myself. My dear Sheldon, I can't even do that! I can't even fire myself—because—"

He turned and looked appealingly at Kate Sheldon.

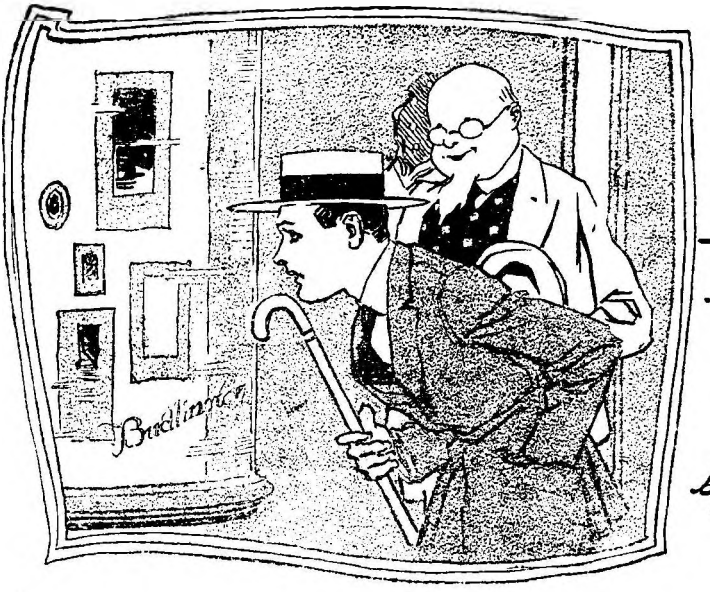
"Because I forbid him to, Bob," she came to the rescue. "Mr. Barnard and I—" She hesitated, and Sheldon saw her blindly search for Barnard's hand.

"We—" began Barnard hesitatingly, and now Sheldon saw, with astonished eyes, his sister find the hand she sought and cling to it.

"That is—" renewed Kate Sheldon.

"Hold on!" cried Bob Sheldon, rushing toward them with outstretched hands. "Don't say a word! I must have been blind. But I'm—I'm tickled to death, Kate. And Barnard, give me your fist! By George, old man, it does me good to know you've got a regular heart."

"There were—er—some things that were omitted from the efficiency text-book, I guess," gurgled Barnard.



Proxy

by Ellis Parker Butler

ONE morning in June when the air was beginning to become heavy with the peculiar New York combination of heat, gasoline-smoke, odor of street-sweepings and hot asphalt, Grandma Bunker spoke to her husband Jabez on a matter that was of no great importance.

"Jabez," she said as Mr. Bunker was drawing on his shoes, "if you aint got no special bunco-business on hand this morning, I wisht you would stop in to Mr. Budlington's photygraft place and fetch home my photygrafts."

"Why, 'course I will, Ma!" said Mr. Bunker immediately. "Bunco or no bunco, you know right well anything you want I should do is the most important thing in the world."

Mr. Bunker meant this. No more loving and honest couple ever lived than Mr. and Mrs. Bunker, and if Mr. Bunker had come to New York from Oroduna, Iowa, to take up the career of confidence-man and bunco-steerer, he never let his business interfere with his love for his wife. It had only been after Mrs. Bunker had assured herself that bunco-steering was a neat and honest business, and had given her full approval, that Mr. Bunker had taken it up.

"Well, Jabez," said Mrs. Bunker, "if you've got any bunco-work on hand, I don't wish you should neglect it for those photygrafts. I dare say Mr. Budlington will remember to fetch them home to-night. I just thought I'd like to send one to Cousin Sally Miggs, so it would get to her on her birthday."

It may be explained here that Mr. and Mrs. Bunker had for some time been living at Mrs. Wimmer's select boarding-house. During the year or more that she had known them, Mrs. Wimmer had grown to love the dear old couple—as, in fact, everyone loved them. On their side, Mr. and Mrs. Bunker loved everyone in the boarding-house, including Mr. Budlington and his bride. Mr. Budlington was a young man. He called himself an artist because he was able to point a camera at a person and take a picture that was sufficiently out of focus to look fuzzy. One of these photographs, done on paper that looked like the under side of a hat-box and mounted on a brown sheet with edges torn instead of cut, was a Budlington Art Photograph. One

of these cost twenty-five dollars. This was robbery, but it was also Art.

EVEN before his marriage, Mr. Budlington had lived at Mrs. Wimmer's boarding-house, and he brought his bride—now Mrs. Roxana Budlington—to the boarding-house. Mrs. Budlington may be described in one word—*peach!* Mr. Budlington, being an artist, looked like thirty cents alongside of his wife, and even when she was not present, he seldom looked like more than a plugged half-dollar. Much of this was due to his chin. It began somewhere near his upper lip and slanted sharply back under his collar. His chin had never been worth while, but when he became an artist and ceased making good photographs at five dollars a dozen in order to make fuzzy ones at twenty-five dollars each, he began growing a beard. This beard turned out to be a poor crop. It was sparse and kinky and the color of a newspaper that has been rained on and then dried in the sun. Above this was a mouth with a row of prominent upper teeth. Mr. Budlington was the sort of man of which you say: "If he only wouldn't be so good-natured!"

He wore a loose black bow tie and, in his studio, a brown velvet jacket.

Like many another, Mr. Budlington's studio was more awesome before entering than after entering. It was on Fifth Avenue, and the street entrance was also the entrance to seventy-six offices. These offices—or the concerns that occupied them—contented themselves with one line on a directory posted beside the elevator, but Mr. Budlington had an entire show-case. This show-case was extremely elegant and had cost Mr. Budlington nearly every cent he had in the world. It stood upright on a carved mahogany base, and the superb French plate glass was etched with the one word *"Budlington"* in Mr. Budlington's autographic style. Inside the show-case were the art portraits. The whole effect of the show-case was as if it said: "Here is a business as elegant and superb as Tiffany's!"

The moment you stepped inside the little entry the elegance slumped frightfully. It was a very old building, with a very old elevator. The elevator was worth seeing as a curiosity but not worth having as a gift. It was a small box that went upward slowly but jerkily. When you wanted to go to Mr. Budlington's studio, the elevator jerked and jerked and jerked for an interminable time, passing one floor after another, each floor showing glimpses of ancient plastered walls and much frazzled woodwork. When you reached the top floor, you found that Mr. Budlington occupied only a portion of it. The boards of the flooring were everywhere worn and splintered. Cheap rugs tried to cover the worst of this. The whole effect of the place was such as to make one say: "Poor devil! he's having a hard pull of it." And this was true. Mr. Budlington had had tough sledding before his marriage; now that he had to support Roxana, he was frightfully worried. It had been out of pure kindness of heart that Mr. Bunker had sent Grandma Bunker to have herself artfully photographed. The hundred dollars the six photographs were to cost (special rate to Mrs. Wimmer's boarders) was much needed by Mr. Budlington.

AS Mr. Bunker stepped from the elevator—so called in the lease—and entered Mr. Budlington's studio, he heard Mr. Budlington expressing himself in a tone of some vexation.

"No, I will not!" Mr. Budlington was saying. "I'll not sell a copy at any price. It's not for sale. A million dollars would not tempt me. I say no!"

Mr. Bunker pushed aside the curtain of the small waiting-room and entered. The voice of Mr. Budlington came from the camera-room, and Mr. Bunker had no desire to intrude.

"Oh! come now!" said the voice of another. "I just want it, that's all—just for myself. I wont show it to anyone. I wont let a soul know you let me have it."

"No, I tell you!" said Mr. Budlington.

"Fifty dollars," said the voice.

"Absolutely and positively no!"

"Well, I consider it unreasonable,"

said the voice. "I told you I only want the photograph because I admire it."

"I positively will not let you have it!" said Mr. Budlington.

"Well, then," said the voice, "tell me who she is. Just tell me her name. Just her name and nothing else. Will you do that?"

"No!"

"I'll give you fifty dollars."

"No!"

"One hundred dollars."

"Now, see here!" said Mr. Budlington. "I've been patient enough with you. You get out of here!"

"All right. I'm sorry. I'll go."

Mr. Bunker, peering through his gold-rimmed spectacles, saw the young man pass and enter the elevator. When Mr. Bunker entered the camera-room, Mr. Budlington was still angry.

"Howdy, Mr. Bunker," he said. "I suppose you heard me? Wonder what that fellow thinks I'm running—a picture-post-card store? Nice time I had getting rid of him."

"I reckon he wanted to buy somethin'," said Mr. Bunker.

"Yes, one of those art prints of my wife. This is the third time he has been up here. Infernal, cheeky rascal! He ought to know reputable photographers don't sell portraits of their sitters to Tom, Dick and Harry. And I wouldn't sell him my wife's picture, anyway. I can see what's the matter with him, all right! He's fallen in love with her through that art print I have down in the case on the walk."

"Well, 'taint uncomplimentary—" Mr. Bunker began.

"Oh! it is common enough," said Mr. Budlington. "Every photographer has the same thing happen. Always some one coming in to see if he or she can get a print of something seen in the show-case. But mostly they want the baby pictures. You put a pretty baby picture in the case, and you have the women coming up by dozens. But this fellow! He did make me mad!"

"I reckon he did," agreed Mr. Bunker. "You sort o' sounded that way. Well, I only stopped in to get one of Ma's pictures, if they're ready."

Mr. Budlington was most contrite. Mrs. Bunker's art prints should have been ready, but this fellow! Mr. Budlington would bring one, and perhaps two, of the prints home when he came to dinner. With this Mr. Bunker was of necessity satisfied, and he went down the elevator shaft, jiggling in the old, snail-paced car. With his errand done, he had time on his hands, and he stood for a moment in the entry. He had no bunco-business on hand. He thought, for a moment, he would walk up Fifth Avenue and find a bench in the Park and feed the squirrels, but as he started out of the entry he noticed the young man who had caused Mr. Budlington so much annoyance.

TO tell the truth, the young man did not impress Mr. Bunker unfavorably. He was perhaps twenty-two years of age, but of the type that is much mothered. In many respects young Mr. Wells Hardcome Heath was more a boy of seventeen than a man of twenty-two, for his mother—who was a widow—had kept him tied fast to her apron-strings. He was no giant of intellect to begin with, but as he stood looking into Mr. Budlington's show-case with a rapt gaze, he seemed a nice boy. As he stared at the twenty-five-dollar art print of Mrs. Budlington, he sighed.

Mr. Bunker stepped to Mr. Heath's side and looked into the case.

"Kind o' nice, hey?" he said.

"I beg your pardon?" said the young man, with just a tinge of haughtiness.

"I say she's a good-looker, aint she?" said Mr. Bunker. "I was just upstairs yonder and sort of overheard you talkin'. I reckon you'd like to own her, hey?"

"Do you mean—"

"Sh!" said Mr. Bunker. "Not so loud. I understood you to say you'd give fifty dollars? Want me to fix it up?"

"Can you?" asked the young man eagerly.

"Well, that's my business—I'm a fixer-up," chuckled Mr. Bunker. "I reckon I can. If I don't know that girl, nobody does. I guess I can fix it all right. What say your name is?"

The young man looked at the old man doubtfully. What he saw in the

plump, smiling face and the innocent, twinkling blue eyes was not calculated to increase his doubt.

"My name is Wells Hardcome Heath," said the young fellow.

Mr. Bunker rummaged in his pocket and found an envelope. On the back of this he wrote the name.

"Address?" he asked.

"I'd rather not give my address. Can't I see you here? Or somewhere?"

"I reckon it don't make no difference to me," said Mr. Bunker. "How'd it be if I was to meet you up at Central Park, along there by the entrance where that gold horse of General Sherman's is? To-morrow along about four?"

"That is fine!"

"And you'll fetch the hundred dollars?"

The young man hesitated. The slightest possible suspicion crossed his mind, but he looked into Mr. Bunker's blue eyes.

"Yes, a hundred," he said. "It is a great deal to pay, but—"

"But I guess you can afford it," said Mr. Bunker dryly.

THUS far, Mr. Bunker's mind had not held the least doubt that he could secure the photograph for Mr. Heath. It was quite right for Mr. Budlington to refuse to sell his wife's portrait to a stranger, particularly as the romance of his marriage was still new, but Mr. Bunker knew that many photographers do make prints for sale—with the subject's approval—and that not a few use their wives, sisters, mothers and children as models for such work. Mr. Bunker did not count on Mr. Budlington's ready consent, but he did count on Mrs. Budlington. For all her beauty, she was a sensible creature, and she knew how badly her husband needed money.

Mrs. Budlington settled the matter promptly.

"If Buddy doesn't want to sell my picture, I don't want him to sell it," she said.

"And I don't want your pretty face in the hands of every Tom, Dick and Harry," said Mr. Budlington. "Why, he might kiss it!"

That did settle it!

"Ma," said Mr. Bunker when they were in their room, "I dare say you and me was just as foolish as that once, but it don't seem like we could have been."

"Land sakes, Jabez," said Mrs. Bunker, "you're that foolish right now, and you know it. It's the nater of male and female so to be. I dare say there aint no foolisher fambly, when it comes to bein' fond, than what yours is. Look at how Ardelia Squoggs fell in love with that poor Rankin feller, and engaged herself to him when she might have married that rich Borkins boy any minute! And she was your own niece."

"I wonder if Ardelia ever got married to that Rankin?" said Mr. Bunker.

"I aint ever had word from your sister, as you know," said Mrs. Bunker. "Not since that Rankin feller joined the reg'lar army and was sent to Mexico. I heard from Sue Biggus that they was waitin' until the Rankin feller got promoted to be a general or lieutenant or something."

MR. BUNKER seated himself under the gas-jet and adjusted his spectacles. His feet were comfortable in his carpet-slippers, and he reached out his hand and took up that excellent little book, "The Complete Confessions of the King of Grafters." He turned the pages until he found one of his favorite chapters, and began to read, but hardly had he dipped into the page when a knock sounded on the door. Mrs. Bunker arose, holding her sewing in her lap with one hand, and went to the door. The visitor was Mrs. Wimmer.

"A telegram came for you, Mrs. Bunker, so I brought it right up," she said.

"Land sakes! I wonder who is dead!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunker.

"Now, Ma, keep ca'm," said her husband. "Just as likely somebody has been born as that somebody is dead. Rip it open and see, whyn't you?"

"I'm always so scared of telegraphs," said Mrs. Bunker.

"Well, hand it to me, then," said

Mr. Bunker. "I'll take the risk. I can't call to mind anybody I'd drop dead to hear they was dead."

Mrs. Bunker surrendered the telegram, and Mr. Bunker ran his finger under the flap and ripped the envelope open. Holding the moist sheet in both hands, he read:

> All delighted Ardelia married by proxy will not join husband until he is ready.

This was signed by his sister, Ardelia's mother. Mr. Bunker immediately removed his slippers and began lacing his shoes. Mrs. Bunker exclaimed, as women do, over the message that had come so many miles, and explained to Mrs. Wimmer the entire series of events leading up to Ardelia's proxy wedding. In this Mrs. Wimmer was really interested, for she was a woman of extraordinary width of interest. Mr. Bunker left them discussing Ardelia and her choice, while he went out to send a telegram of congratulation. They were still discussing Ardelia when he returned, and he did not interrupt them. He seated himself in his chair and smiled. Presently he chuckled.

"Pa," said Mrs. Bunker, "what you chucklin' about?"

"Just chucklin' because I've got some chuckle in me that wants to come out, I reckon," he said. "A man's got to chuckle, sometimes."

When Mrs. Wimmer had gone down to her own rooms and Mrs. Bunker was preparing herself for slumber, she reverted to the chuckle.

"Pa," she said, "was you chucklin' because you thought Ardelia had made a fool of herself, givin' up that rich Borkins boy?"

"No, Ma!"

"Was you chucklin' because she made a fool of Rankin by marryin' him?"

"No, Ma, I wa'n't! I was thinkin' about somebody me and Ardelia was goin' to make a fool of to-morrow."

"For the land's sake, Pa!" exclaimed Mrs. Bunker. "I hope you aint goin' out of your mind."

But Mr. Bunker was not going out of his mind. He chuckled again and let his hand slide under the pillow, where he had placed the telegram his wife had received from his sister.

THE next morning, as soon as he had had his breakfast, Mr. Bunker left the boarding-house and walked slowly down the street. He was in no great hurry, although he had one piece of business he wished to complete that morning. The day threatened to be one of those severely hot days that damage New York's reputation as a summer-resort.

When he reached the avenue, Mr. Bunker turned south and strolled onward at a comfortable pace until he reached the small, basement shop of a printer who had done work for him at sundry times. Into the shop Mr. Bunker descended.

"I wonder if you be too busy to get a job of printin' done for me by this afternoon?" Mr. Bunker queried.

"I'm so busy that if anybody brought in a real job I'd fall on his neck and kiss him," said the printer. "That's how busy I am. What you want?"

Mr. Bunker explained. He seated himself at the printer's desk and scribbled with a stubby pencil, writing and erasing and writing again until he had the "copy" to suit him. He then explained to the printer just how he wanted it set and printed, and there being no reason why he should go elsewhere, and the chair before the printer's desk being as cool as any spot near by, Mr. Bunker remained there. When noon arrived, he stretched and yawned and went back to the boarding-house. Having eaten a cold lunch, Mr. Bunker stretched himself on a couch in the boarding-house parlor and indulged in a pleasant siesta, Grandma Bunker sitting beside him and slowly waving a fan so that it cooled both her own face and the face of her husband.

As the day passed, the heat increased. At three o'clock Mr. Bunker roused himself.

"Well, Ma," he said, "business is business in the bunco-line, the same as in any other. A man has got to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow."

"Especially such hot days as this, Jabez," said Mrs. Bunker.

"Yep!" said Mr. Bunker. "I declare I'd ruther stay right here and be fanned than go out into all that heat."

"So you would!" said his wife sympathetically. "So you would, Jabez; but a human man has to do his duty in the world, heat or no heat, and I wunt be the one to keep you home when some poor soul is waitin' to be stang. So go along and do as you have been done by, keep on the shady side of the street and don't get sunstruck."

Mr. Bunker, thus sent on his way with a loving word, kissed the dear old lady and went forth. He stopped first at the printer's shop and secured the small quantity of folders and the business-cards the printer had prepared for him. These he slipped into his pockets, and at four o'clock he was at the Fifth Avenue entrance of Central Park.

IF you are acquainted with this entrance to the Park, you are aware that rows of park benches edge the walk, and that in any but the most inclement weather these benches are well filled. Mr. Bunker strolled slowly past these benches, keeping an eye on them, and it was not long before he saw young Mr. Wells Hardcome Heath. The young chap was seated on the extreme edge of a bench as if he were afraid his nearest neighbor might defile him by mere contact, and he was eagerly watching the passers-by. When he saw Mr. Bunker, his eye brightened.

"I say! here I am!" Mr. Heath cried, stepping forward and touching Mr. Bunker on the arm. "How did you make out, old chap?"

"If you knew me as well as folks out West knows me," said Mr. Bunker genially, "you wouldn't ask that. You'd know everything was fixed and settled and arranged. Out to Oroduna the sayin' is: 'You leave it to Jabez Bunker, and it's as good as done.' Yes, young feller, that's the reputation I've got out West. You got the hundred dollars with you?"

"Indeed I have," said Mr. Heath.

"Hand it over!" said Mr. Bunker.

They were standing where the full tide of those leaving and entering the Park eddied around them. As Mr. Bunker looked at Mr. Heath he saw, in the approaching groups of pedestrians, Mrs. Roxy Budlington. Mrs. Budlington saw Mr. Bunker. Already she was preparing to greet him as she passed, and her eyes held that friendly look with which we gaze on a friend. Mr. Heath, luckily, was looking in the opposite direction. He was looking at Mr. Bunker and thus into the Park. Without the least hesitation Mr. Bunker turned and, grasping Mr. Heath by the arm, pushed him hurriedly up the walk and deeper into the Park.

"Come! Hurry!" he urged.

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. Heath.

"Matter? Matter enough!" said Mr. Bunker. "Don't look back! Keep walking!"

Mr. Heath, sure now that Mr. Bunker must have stolen a photograph of the fair lady he had admired in Mr. Budlington's case, hurried. He was younger and thinner than Mr. Bunker, and he was soon dragging Mr. Bunker by the arm. Past the swan-boat lake he hurried Mr. Bunker, and through the menagerie and past the head of the Mall and up the Mall. Not until they were in a secluded nook near the middle of the Park did Mr. Heath release Mr. Bunker's arm.

"I think we are safe here," he said.

"Hope to gracious we are!" panted Mr. Bunker as he wiped his perspiring face. "What was you runnin' from?"

"Why, you said—"

"So I did! so I did!" agreed Mr. Bunker. "But there wasn't no use goin' clear to Harlem. It was just a man I didn't care to meet. He's sort of angry with me. We matrimonial agents make some mistakes, just like other folks, and sometimes a man has it in for us if the wife we get for him don't turn out just the way he thinks she ought to. In my business—"

"I say!" said Mr. Heath. "Are you a matrimonial agent?"

"That and other things," said Mr. Bunker. "Anything in the general bunco- and confidence-game line, as you might say."

"Well, that is none of my business, anyway," said Mr. Heath. "Where is the photograph? Here is the hundred dollars."

HE put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a nice roll of bills. From the top he took just one bill. It was worth one hundred gold dollars. Mr. Bunker took the bill in his hand and looked at Mr. Heath blankly.

"Hey?" he queried. "Photygraft? What about photygraft?"

"Oh! come now!" exclaimed Mr. Heath, flushing. "You know what I mean. What is this, a bunco-game? I said I'd give you one hundred dollars if you would get me a photograph—"

Mr. Bunker allowed his mouth to fall open and assumed a look of consternation. He stared at Mr. Heath like one stunned to stupidity.

"Photygraft! photygraft!" he repeated. "Why, nobody said nothing about no photygraft."

Mr. Heath's face flushed again, angrily.

"Look here, Mr. Who-ever-you-are," he cried, "don't you try that with me—"

"I aint tryin' nothin'," said Mr. Bunker soothingly. "You don't mean to say you meant you wanted to buy a photygraft of that girl for one hundred dollars?"

"Of course!"

"Gee whillikins!" exclaimed Mr. Bunker.

"Well, what?"

"Well, who ever heard of payin' one hundred dollars for a photygraft?" asked Mr. Bunker. "If you had said five dollars, or a dollar, or maybe six dollars at the outside! But one hundred dollars! Listen, friend—this aint my fault; I asked you right out if you'd like to own her. I asked you that yesterday, when we was standin' by that show-case. I says, 'I reckon you'd like to own her, wouldn't you?' and you says I can go ahead and fix it up and you'd give me a hundred dollars. That is what was said. Nobody said anything about a photygraft."

Young Mr. Heath now wiped his face.

"My heavens!" he exclaimed. "If you didn't get the photograph for me, what did you do?"

Without an unnecessary word, Mr. Bunker drew a telegram from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Heath. It was the telegram Mrs. Bunker had received the night before. As will be remembered, it read:

> All delighted Ardelia married by proxy will not join husband until he is ready.

This was signed by Ardelia's mother.

Mr. Heath stared at the telegram. His face went white and then red again. Mr. Bunker leaned his hand against a tree and slumped into an attitude of deep distress.

"But, I say," said Mr. Heath falteringly, "I didn't tell you—"

"I know!" said Mr. Bunker contritely. "I know! It is an awful mistake. You wanted her photygraft, and I've married you to her! It is awful! It is horrible!"

"But it is all nonsense," said Mr. Heath. "It can't be done, you know. You can't marry a man to a girl unless he knows it."

MR. BUNKER said nothing. He only groaned. He slid his hand into his pocket and drew forth some of his recently printed folders. He held them toward Mr. Heath, and the young man took one.

The folder was headed "J. Bunker Matrimonial Agency, Licensed by the Territory of Oklamaha." The second display-line read: "Why Not Marry a Western Girl?" The third line said: "We Attend to All Details." The first following page was devoted to the subject of Western girls in general and their admirable wifely qualities. The next page was headed: "We Arrange Proxy Marriages." This page Mr. Heath read from the first word to the last. He did not skip a line. When he had finished, his face was ghastly.

"This is going to kill Mother!" was what he said.

The page on proxy marriages was enough to worry any young man in Mr. Heath's position. It explained the law of proxy weddings as provided for in the constitution of the Territory of Oklamaha, with the ruling of the Supreme Court making telegraph proxy weddings legal, and the certificate granted to J. Bunker permitting him to perform proxy weddings by mail

or wire. It mentioned Mr. Bunker's fee as being one hundred dollars.

"There's one thing," said Mr. Bunker, after the two men had stood in silence for some minutes: "she is a nice-looking girl."

This did not seem to cheer Mr. Heath greatly.

"Nice-looking? What has that got to do with it?" he groaned. "The world is full of nice-looking girls, but that is no sign a man wants to marry them all. Why, look here!" he cried with exasperation. "I can't marry this girl—"

"She's your wife already," said Mr. Bunker.

"But—oh! it spoils everything!—it spoils my life. I wasn't going to be married for five years yet. I don't want a wife and family and all that. Mother will—Mother will disinherit me. And I'm engaged to marry Kate Vanderdonck five years from now."

"Maybe this wife will die before then," said Mr. Bunker hopefully.

"I'll bet this girl I'm married to isn't in my class at all! Is she?" asked Mr. Heath in deep depression.

"Her pa runs the milk-route out there," said Mr. Bunker.

"Ye gods!" cried Mr. Heath. "She's a milkmaid! Mother—Mother will commit suicide. Me married to a milkmaid I never saw, and Mother never told, and my engagement to Kate still standing! What does this—what does my wife's mother look like?"

"Last time I seen her," said Mr. Bunker, "she looked quite a considerable like me. Same build and gen'ral look. Only she didn't have no chin whiskers."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Mr. Heath.

Mr. Bunker felt heartily sorry for the poor young man. The tears were running down the poor fellow's face. As Mr. Wells Hardcome Heath sat huddled on the park bench upon which he had dropped, he seemed particularly young and immature, and Mr. Bunker, much as he felt he should give more time to building up the finale of his bunco-plan, had not the heart to cause Mr. Heath any more pain than necessary. Mr. Heath sat with his head buried in his hands, and Mr. Bunker watched him, much as an angler watches a hooked trout.

"Ardelia's last husband—" he said.

"Great Cæsar!" cried Mr. Heath. "Is she a widow?"

"Well, not exactly what you'd call a full widow," said Mr. Bunker. "She's a divorced widow. I got her a divorce from her last husband. I got her a proxy divorce."

He handed Mr. Heath one of the cards he had just had printed. It announced that Mr. Bunker secured, for a three-hundred-dollar fee, divorces by proxy anywhere in the Territory of Oklamaha. The effect on Mr. Heath was immediate and twofold. At first his countenance brightened; then a look of suspicion came upon it. He scowled at Mr. Bunker.

"I'm onto you!" he cried. "I know what this means; it means that this is a bunco-game, that's what it means! You get folks to marry by proxy, and they don't suit each other, and then you get them to divorce each other. You can't fool me! I'm a New Yorker and I can see into things! It's a bunco-scheme—that's why you charge three hundred dollars for a divorce and only one hundred for a marriage."

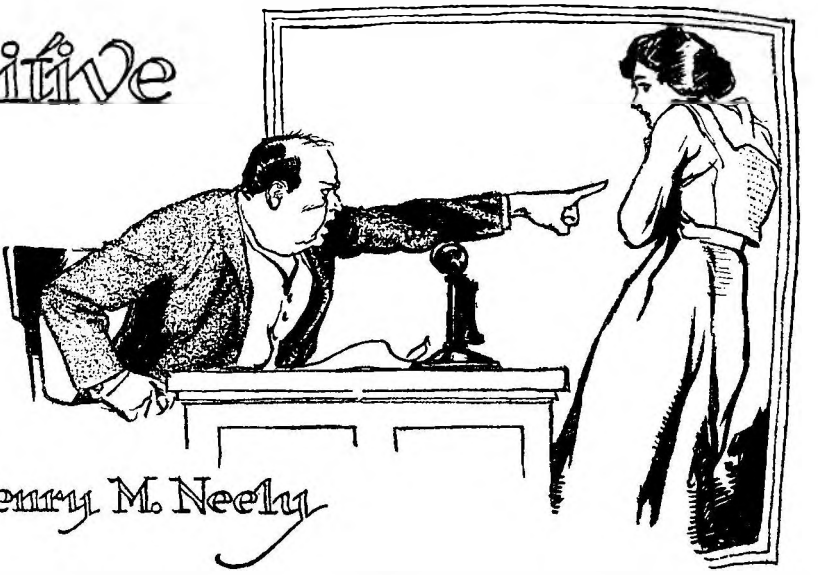
"Bunking is part of my regular line," admitted Mr. Bunker.

ABOUT two weeks later, when Mr. Bunker had the four hundred dollars Mr. Heath had paid for a proxy marriage and a proxy divorce safely in the very bank of which Mr. Heath was the largest single stockholder, Mr. Heath was walking down Fifth Avenue. As he neared Forty-second Street, he saw coming toward him a face he knew well. This was the face of Mrs. Roxana Budlington. Mr. Heath stiffened his back and walked straight ahead, and Mrs. Budlington, hurrying home, passed him without so much as a glance. Mr. Heath drew a deep breath of relief.

"That bunco-fellow was a crook, but he was a straight crook," he said to himself. "If he hadn't got that proxy divorce for me, that girl would have been after me long ago."

Another *Jabez Bunker* story next month.

Primitive



by Henry M. Neely

A HUSH of apprehension fell upon the half-dozen girls in the outer office. Those who had already put on hats and coats hastily closed their desks and hurried through the swinging gate to escape. Those who remained followed as quickly as possible.

Through the open door to an inner office there came the snarling, rasping voice of a man raised in anger.

"I tell you, it's got to stop," he cried. "Do you think the firm is paying you just to keep you in chewing-gum and clothes no decent woman would wear? No! It's paying you for results, and if I find any more slovenly work like this on the books, out you go, the whole useless, shiftless lot of you."

The last of the girls in the outer office made her escape without waiting to put on hat or coat. As she passed through the swinging gate, she cast a terrified glance at the good-looking young man who sat waiting there in the space railed off for callers. Her glance told him plainly that it was a scene all too familiar to her. He watched her hurry out to the hall and to the elevator, and he sneered with all the healthy disgust of a healthy man for a woman-driver, as he heard the voice still raised in quivering anger from the inner room.

"Now get out!" it cried. "Get out before I put you out! And one more mess like this,—one more, mind you,—and I'll fire you neck and crop. I'm sick of the whole crowd of you, anyway."

A girl with her cheeks flushed scarlet with shame hurried through the open door. It was evident that she had been the victim of the verbal lashing. Two other girls followed her, walking quickly, their faces white, their eyes cast down with fear.

As the young man saw the trio, he sprang suddenly to his feet and gripped the railings with fingers so tense that the tendons stood out bloodless and sharp on the back of his hands. His eyes blazed with a rage that threatened to pass restraint, and all the color fled from his cheeks with the wave of passion.

The first girl saw him. She hesitated in startled surprise—then walked up to him quickly and put a restraining hand on his.

"John!" she warned.

Very slowly he let his blazing eyes turn from the open door to look at her. He was about to speak when he saw that one of the other girls was standing by. Reluctantly he followed as they left the office.

Once outside in the hallway, she released his hand and turned to her companion.

"Louise," she said, "let me introduce my husband, Mr. Carney. John, this is Miss Stevens, one of our girls."

He bowed and mumbled a barely polite acknowledgment and then fell silent again. His eyes still burned with a rage almost ungovernable, and his hands were clenched into longing fists as he walked with them.

"He's a beast—that man Thayer," said Miss Stevens. "He had no call to talk to you that way, May. But what 're you going to do? You've simply got to take it or lose your job."

May Carney shrugged.

"He is paid to do it," she said resignedly. "You will find men like him in almost every office. It is part of the business."

CONVERSATION lagged painfully. John Carney's mood of truculent silence was so palpable that it stilled them into embarrassed commonplaces until Louise Stevens left them at her corner. Then his anger burst out.

"Do you mean to say," he demanded, white with rage, "that that contemptible beast was talking to you that way—to *you*—my wife?"

"Hush, John," she said. "People will hear you."

"Damn people! Answer me. Was he talking to you all that time?"

She drew herself up with stiff dignity.

"It isn't necessary to discuss it, either here or elsewhere," she answered. "You agreed before we were married that you would not interfere with my business. This is my business."

"No!" he cried. "I agreed that you could continue to work, because of your absurd ideas about broader spheres for women and all that sort of rot. But I did not agree to let any man talk to you that way."

"Mr. Thayer is head of our bookkeeping department," she said, still with her calm dignity. "It is his place to see that the work is done correctly. His methods are no concern of yours. You had no right to come to my office in the first place."

"I wanted to walk home with you," he said sullenly. "I left my office early, and I thought I would surprise you." He laughed, a short, bitter laugh. "I was the one who was surprised," he said.

He relapsed again into moody taciturnity from which she made no attempt to arouse him as they walked the rest of the distance home and up the stairs to their little flat. She appeared to be in anything but a talkative humor herself. The flush of her humiliation still burned in her cheeks as she bustled about her dinner preparations in the kitchenette, and the fire of her deep resentment smoldered in her eyes.

"You will have to excuse a frugal meal," she apologized slowly as they sat down to the table. "I intended to do some shopping on my way home, but Mr. Thayer kept us later than usual and—and, well, after that, my mind was occupied with other things, as you know. I forgot the shopping."

"Oh, that's all right," he said reassuringly. "There's plenty here. I'm not very hungry, anyway."

And then the moody silence again fell upon them.

FINALLY he pushed his chair back and sat looking at her for several moments before he said:

"May, I'm going to say a few things to you that you probably will not like. I wanted to say them on the street, but I'm glad I didn't, because I was too angry then to talk rationally. Listen! Do you hear that laughing downstairs?"

It was impossible not to hear it. A man and a woman were fairly shouting in hilarious glee over something in the flat below.

"It is the Hughes," she said.

"Yes—Billy and Dot."

"It sounds silly and not altogether dignified."

He shook his head with a rueful smile.

"It sounds to me like—heaven," he declared. "It forces home a contrast that it isn't altogether pleasant to contemplate. Do you realize that you and I have scarcely exchanged a word during dinner?"

She looked up quickly. Her eyes were instantly on the defensive.

"We are both tired," she said.

"And that we have scarcely touched the food that was on this table?" he continued.

"We were not hungry."

He lighted a cigarette and looked at her contemplatively.

"No," he said at length, "hunger and tiredness do not explain it. There is only one answer—Thayer."

She looked up sharply with a warning of anger in her eyes, but he met her gaze without flinching.

"What on earth are you driving at, John?" she asked with an attempt at a tone of patient martyrdom.

"I am driving at this: the time has come when you must release me from my promise not to interfere with your business. I am making enough for both of us. I am making just what Billy Hughes is, and you can hear how happy he and Dot are. Dot gave up her business. She had no ideas of a sphere broader than her home and her husband. I have shown you some of the minor proofs that a married woman has no right to continue in business unless it is financially necessary. You told me this evening that Thayer's methods are no concern of mine. I have just proved that they have totally ruined my home and happiness for one night, at least."

She drew herself up with forbidding dignity.

"We will not discuss it further," she said.

John Carney suddenly sat forward and thumped the table with his fist. It was the first time in their married life that he had ever done such a thing.

"Yes, but we *will* discuss it!" he cried, his eyes ablaze. "And I am going to tell you a few things."

But she interrupted him.

"You made the agreement yourself, before we were married," she reminded him in a tone of finality. "You knew then that I was unwilling to be dependent on anyone."

"But I did not agree to stand by mute as an oyster while another man bullyragged you."

"Mr. Thayer is my employer."

"And I am your husband. I am the man to whom nature gave the right—and the duty—to defend you from all insults. I am the man to fight to the death—"

She held up her hand in extreme weariness, to demand silence.

"Please don't be primitive," she begged. "This is the twentieth century. We are more than half civilized."

He laughed, a short, ugly laugh.

"Civilized!" he cried. "Do you think you can civilize a full-blooded human man into a piece of putty while another man abuses his woman?"

"John!" There was a ring of horror in her voice. "'His woman!' You are not discussing cattle."

"'His woman' is what I said." He rose and paced excitedly up and down. "Thayer's methods, which you defend, are bestial; and they deserve only the nomenclature of his kind. You insist on associating with him. Very well: I'll get down to that level too. I tell you, May, the skunk doesn't live who can insult my wife and tell me to keep my hands off because of business. Business! You say I am primitive. Thank God, I am! And I am just primitive enough to break every bone in Thayer's dirty body if I hear of him talking to you that way again."

SHE rose with an evident struggle to control her indignation.

"You will keep away from my office," she declared in a voice that trembled with suppressed anger. "You will attend to your own affairs."

"Yes; I will," he agreed meaningly. "And this becomes one of my most important affairs from to-night on. If I hear of another insult to you, you will either cease to be a business woman or you will cease to be—my wife."

She stood staring at him in astonishment for a full minute. From below came a little scream in a woman's voice and then again the hilarious, happy laughter of both man and woman. John Carney smiled bitterly.

"Listen to that," he said. "Billy Hughes is teasing Dot. Huh! I never tease you that way, do I? And I don't think I ever heard you scream."

Her lip curled in scorn.

"I never knew that you considered childishness essential to true affection," she said cuttingly.

"I'm not talking about my opinions," he retorted. "I'm talking about the play instinct of nature's great and immutable sex-scheme. You can't change that scheme, even if you are a good business woman. You can stand off and avoid it personally, if you want to, but you can't change it. And side by side with the play instinct is the male instinct of protection for his female. I'd like to see Billy Hughes stand aside and let any man hurt Dot's feelings. Huh! He'd murder the brute."

"Yes," she agreed scornfully. "The hurting of a woman's feelings seems to be a privilege that you reserve for her husband under your wonderful nature-scheme."

"At least," he blurted hotly, "it is a privilege that I don't propose to have any other man take with you."

She picked up some dishes from the table and left the room, her head held high, her eyes burning with resentment. John Carney looked after her. Then he shrugged and sat down to his evening paper.

THE subject of Thayer was dropped by tacit consent during the succeeding days, and the old, amicable relations reigned once more in the Carney flat. The first unpleasantness came after an evening spent with the Hugheses in their flat on the floor below.

"By Jove!" John exclaimed glowingly as they were preparing for bed. "Dot does keep a nice little home for Billy, doesn't she?"

Instantly May's eyes glinted defensively.

"Their things are not nearly as nice as ours," she parried.

"Oh, I know. Our stuff cost a lot more and it's more artistic and all that, but—Billy's place has an air about it—comfy, homey—there isn't any dictionary word to express it. Little touches, you know—"

"I'm sorry your home doesn't satisfy you," she interrupted, and her tone made him suddenly realize that he was treading on dangerous ground.

"Oh, now, May, I didn't say that," he protested. "I think this is one of the prettiest flats I ever saw. Of course you don't have time to do all of the little things that Dot does downstairs. It couldn't be expected of you. Keeping a place the way she does means that a woman has to make a slave of herself; she has no time for anything else, and I have no doubt it's very narrowing. Only—it does show in the atmosphere of the place."

"You have always said that I was a good housekeeper."

"So you are. None better. Huh! Should say not! Just look at the place we have here—spick and span, and about as pretty as they make 'em. You have shown splendid taste in everything, and you keep it tip-top. Billy's place can't compare with it—in outward appearance, that is. But I don't know just what the difference is. Everything down there seems sort of personal and intimate in a way I can't define. The pictures, for instance. Now, our Venus and our Mercury on the mantel in the front room—they're fine and artistic, but you never could say there was anything personal or intimate about them, could you? You never want to take them down and look closely at them and talk about them."

She turned to him with a level gaze that was both challenging and accusatory.

"Aren't you contented here?" she asked coldly.

Instantly he saw that he had gone too far, and a little flash of panic came into his eyes.

"Good Lord, yes! What ever gave you the idea I wasn't? Contented! Should say I am! You're just about the best little housekeeper I ever saw."

"But not a home-keeper. That is what I gather from what you have said."

"Aw, now, May! Don't be so touchy. I know you haven't time to do all the things Dot does. We wont say anything more about it."

THEREAFTER he carefully avoided the subject. His working day was longer than hers. He left the flat a half-hour earlier in the morning and re-

turned a half-hour later in the evening, so that, by the time he got home, she was able to compose herself and to smooth out the little lines of care and anxiety that the growing exactions of her taskmaster at the office were creasing in her forehead.

She said nothing of this to her husband. The one flash of temper that patient John Carney had permitted himself in their married life had warned her, and she realized with quick intuition that the topic of Thayer had better not be brought up between them.

But as the days passed and their two conversations recurred to her again and again,—particularly as they continued their habit of spending two or three evenings a week in the Hughes flat on the floor below,—the conviction began to force itself slowly upon her that there was truth in what John had said—that there was, in fact, a vast difference between her home and the less pretentious one that Dorothy Hughes kept for her boisterous husband.

There was a difference, too, she saw, in the way the two men fitted into their surroundings, in the way that they regarded them. She and John were always glad to spend an evening visiting or at the theater. Billy Hughes, in smoking jacket and easy slippers, could not be dragged from his cozy little flat unless Dorothy particularly wished him to take her somewhere. And Dorothy seldom wished that. She was as contented as was Billy in their little nest; both were becoming plump with the ease of life, and their faces fairly beamed with the joy of mere living.

May tried to reproach herself for the difference. She knew that she did wonderfully well with the limited time that she had to devote to her home. And she knew that she could do no more without sacrificing her long-cherished independence. That she would not consider.

THERE came another evening when John left his office early and stopped on his way to walk home with her. He did not go up in the elevator. He waited for her, instead, down in the great rotunda; and the moment she stepped from the lift, he saw that something had gone wrong.

She was with Louise Stevens again. They did not see him at first and stood talking in low tones of obvious anger, their cheeks burning with the hot blood of humiliation, their eyes flashing with the fire of their resentment.

John, wondering, stepped up to them. He saw May start and try to signal something to Louise, but Louise did not see it.

"Good evening, Mr. Carney," Louise said. "It's a good thing you weren't upstairs to-night like you were the other night. You'd have murdered that beast Thayer if you had 've been."

"Yes?" he asked. "Why?"

He saw May's glance of panic-stricken appeal to the other girl, but Louise was looking at him.

"Because," she said, "he called May a—"

"Louise! Please!"

May could keep silent no longer. The ominous calm with which her husband received the news was more eloquent to her than had been his previous outburst of temper. She knew now that patient John Carney would be patient no longer. She must be prepared for an unpleasant evening at home.

But John said nothing whatever until they reached Louise's corner. Then he turned quietly to May.

"Go on home," he said in a low tone. "I'll see Miss Stevens to her door. I want time to think calmly before I talk to you."

SHE looked up at him quickly, words of protest on her lips, but something in the unswerving level of his eyes and the new note of unquestionable authority in his voice left her faltering and then silent.

"You wont be long?" she asked.

"I'll be home before you have dinner on the table."

She left them and hurried as she had never hurried before. On the way she stopped in two stores for extra little tidbits of which John was particularly fond, and she ransacked her larder for the most appetizing meal that she could place before him. Somewhere,

some time in her life, she had heard a terse bit of marital philosophy about "feeding the brute."

She heard him on the stairs, climbing up calmly and methodically, as he always climbed. With a little pang there came to her the memory of the way Billy Hughes did this nightly—of his noisy rush two steps at a time, of his shrill whistle when he reached the floor below his, of Dot's running footsteps as she hurried to her door and threw it open to meet him, of the little happy scream as Billy picked her up bodily in his great, bearish embrace, and of the frank vulgarity—at least so May always considered it—of the kiss that could be heard even up to the Carney landing.

John came out to her in the kitchenette and stood leaning against the door. She waited, apprehensively, almost nervously.

"Gee!" he cried boyishly. "Things smell good, and I'm hungry."

She felt a little lump of relief in her throat. She had expected a fiery outburst against Thayer. But he appeared to be in quite the opposite humor. His eye fell upon the tidbits on the kitchen table.

"Oh, great!" he exclaimed. "We haven't had 'em in a month, have we?"

And then he came up to her, put his arm about her, raised her face to his and kissed her lips. There was a suspicious moisture in her eyes as she watched him go into the next room. And the lump in her throat bothered her again.

Throughout the meal he kept up a running fire of conversation, but he did not mention Thayer nor her office. It puzzled her. He appeared to be in a particularly cheerful frame of mind. With his coffee before him and the blue smoke of his after-dinner cigarette curling up toward the ceiling, he leaned forward to say something to her, and as the motion brought his head into the full glare of the light, she noticed for the first time a discolored lump, half concealed by his curling hair.

"John!" she cried. "What is that?"

He put his fingers up to it ruefully.

"Oh, that?" he said with a wry smile. "Yes; I meant to tell you about that later. It's where Thayer hit me when he threw the empty inkstand."

SHE half rose from her chair, but sat down again, stunned, amazed, inarticulate.

"You see," he explained blandly, "Miss Stevens told me Thayer was still in the office, and so I went back and made him apologize to me for what he called you to-day."

She swallowed hard. Twice she tried to speak but could not. And all the while he sat there watching her with a smile, his elbows on the table, his clasped hands holding the cigarette, from which a tendril of thin smoke curled up into the air.

"I feel better now," he said. "I've owed it to Thayer for some time for the way he's been treating you. I've been watching the drawn look of your face for a long while, and I knew what it meant. He was making you very unhappy. Well, you're square with him now. But of course"—he looked at her with a shade of anxiety—"you can't go back there. After Thayer gets sufficiently fixed up to appear in public again, he'd have the firm fire you, even supposing I'd let you work under him again. And that I wont."

"John!"

She tried to put into her exclamation all of her old-time dignity, all of her calm independence, but the effort was a miserable failure. She felt the tears very close to her eyes, and with a sudden realization that she had never let her husband see her cry, she rose quickly from the table and hurried from the room.

He did not follow, as she feared he might. When at last she had sufficiently conquered her feelings, she returned to the room, to find him seated in his Morris chair reading the paper.

As she went about her work of clearing away the dinner things, there rose to her lips a thousand angry words that clamored to be said to him, but each time she turned to say them, she noticed the firm lines of his jaw and the new glint in his eyes, and for the first time in her life she found herself hesitating and uncertain of her position.

She tried to convince herself that she hated him for what he had done, but she could not. The discolored bruise under his curling hair showed once or twice, and she tried to sneer in contempt at the primitive bestiality that had caused it, but the sneer died on her lips.

"Don't you think you had better bathe that bruise with witch-hazel?" she found herself asking him, and she could have bitten her tongue with mortification the minute the words were spoken.

He rose from his chair.

"Believe I will," he said.

As he passed her, he stopped and put his arm around her and tried to kiss her, but she pulled away angrily. And immediately she wished that she had not done it, that he would come back and take her forcibly in his arms and compel her to yield her lips.

IN the morning, at breakfast, he broached the subject again.

"I'm awfully sorry to have interfered, old girl," he said, "but I simply couldn't help it. Tell you what I wish you'd do. Just hang around and rest up a week or so before you connect with another office, wont you? You've been all used up, lately. I've been worried about you. Every night you've been so bodily tired and so mentally preoccupied that we've scarcely talked to each other at all. Outside of making the flat seem like an undertaker's shop, I've been afraid for your health. You'll rest up a bit, wont you?"

"I haven't decided yet what I shall do," she said, and she found herself fiendishly rejoicing at the quick look of apprehension that came into his eyes.

"Oh, May!" he begged. "Don't let this thing make any difference between us, please. I'm only a human man, and no human man could have stood it any longer."

She went about her housework, quite prepared to be thoroughly miserable with a whole day at home. But she marveled at the many things she found to do. She was too busy for misery.

Dorothy Hughes, hearing the unaccustomed noise overhead, ran up to see if anyone was sick, and when May, putting into the narration all of the indignation and resentment and injured pride that she could summon,. paused for sympathy, the little lady from the floor below clapped her hands rapturously and exclaimed: "Oh, goody! I wish he'd killed him. Billy would have."

And to her own vast astonishment she found herself countering: "John could have, too, if he wanted to. He's as good a fighter as Billy is."

In the afternoon she discovered herself standing in the center of their living-room, gazing all about her and wrinkling her brows over the puzzle of just what was wrong with it. It was furnished in perfect taste, but she had to admit that, as John had said, it was not "comfy, homey." She made mental notes of a number of things and then left the house, returning only in time to have dinner ready when her husband's methodical steps sounded on the stairs.

He glanced about him curiously as he sat down to the table.

"You've been doing something," he said, "but I can't place it."

"Oh, just cleaning up and rearranging," she said lightly.

"And how has the day gone?"

But she would not give him the satisfaction of knowing.

"I have been too busy to notice," she said.

ON the following day she delved into a closet that held the accumulation of several years—things that she had worn a short time and then put aside in favor of something new. She turned them over critically now to look for the flaws that had made her cast them off. But there were no flaws. It was simply that, having her own salary to spend upon herself, she had bought a lot of things that she did not need.

She sat down with paper and pencil and jotted down, as nearly as she could remember, the price of each gown and added the figures up. The total made her gasp. Her lips drew into more determined lines as she put the gowns aside. They should be sponged and pressed and perhaps done over here and there in compliance with the recent

changes of fashions. It had been criminal waste, and there should be no more of it. It was not good business.

As she delved once more into the closet, she emerged with a dress that made her pause and smile ruefully. It was a house-gown—a dainty, colorful, flimsy, fluffy affair that had been among her mother's wedding presents to her. She had worn it during the easy days of their honeymoon vacation and then, with the diurnal rush of returning from the office to hurry dinner, she had found no time to put it on and had thrust it aside.

She took it to the window now and turned it this way and that and inside out and upside down, with that inner-lining thoroughness of inspection that only a woman can give to an old dress when she is seeking excuses for not wearing it any more. But there were no excuses to be found. It needed pressing, undoubtedly, and perhaps a touch with thread and needle here and there.

She went out to the kitchenette to put the irons on the fire, but a glance at the clock made her hastily bundle all of the gowns back into the closet, finish setting the flat in order and go out to do her shopping. She had not realized how the time was flying.

All through dinner she was conscious of her husband's anxious eyes fixed upon her. She knew he was still uncertain of what reparation she would demand for the thing that he had done. He was worried; it was easy to see that. And she found herself inwardly rejoicing with a sort of fiendish glee that she could punish him so easily and without the unpleasantness of a wordy war.

HE lighted his after-dinner cigarette and sat back in his chair, letting his eyes stray about the room. She bit her lips nervously. It was she who was apprehensive. Would he see?

Suddenly he rose and took two frames from the mantel.

"Oh, I say, May!" he cried. "Where's Venus and Mercury? Where'd you get—well, by Jove!"

There was a world of warm delight in his final words. She could have cried out in vexation at the telltale flush of childish pleasure that she felt mounting to her cheeks, but John did not see it. He was sprawled over the table, the frames before him, his elbows spread wide.

"By golly!" he cried. "I remember them now. They're some of our old kodak pictures you've had enlarged. This one is you and me—on our honeymoon, eh? Up in the mountains. I remember we had a kid press the bulb when we posed there on that big rock with all those miles and miles of beautiful scenery for a background. Shows up great, doesn't it? Jove! It takes me right back. I can sniff the fresh air. And this one! Atlantic City, wasn't it? Yes, the next summer—on our vacation. Let's see: there's you and me and Billy and Dotty and Ned Warren and Ethel Sant—all draped picturesquely around that old wreck that was on the beach away down below Ventnor. Golly! That was a dandy vacation trip, wasn't it? Do you remember—"

And he launched into reminiscences of their happy two weeks and of their honeymoon; and before she knew it she was supplying missing names and details, correcting him, comparing it with other trips they had made and laughing with him heartily over the ludicrous incidents that they recalled together. Suddenly a clock struck and he pulled out his watch.

"Oh, May!" he cried. "It can't be possible! It's ten o'clock already."

She sprang to her feet in alarm.

"And I haven't cleared the table yet," she exclaimed.

"All right," he said, springing up. "I'll help. You wash; I'll wipe."

THE memory of this evening rose up before her almost hourly during the day that followed. That evening she listened anxiously for the sound of his footsteps on the stairs. With the first slam of the front door she ran into the bedroom for a final mirrored inspection of the once-discarded house-gown which she was wearing, smoothed the lace in its low-cut neck and hastened back to the kitchenette to assume a studied pose of preoccupied housewifery. But she knew that her face

bore a telltale flush, and she stamped her foot in anger at herself.

He came in and stood in the doorway, looking at her without a word. Then she felt a hand on each of her shoulders, and he swung her around to face him at arm's length.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed in a tone of boundless admiration. "By Jove!"

His glowing eyes fairly devoured her from head to foot. In spite of her pretended struggles, he drew her to him and held her tightly in a wordless embrace that was eloquent with meaning. And his eyes glowed with the old, almost forgotten light.

She hurried into the bedroom to escape him. Passing before the mirror, she caught sight of herself, her cheeks flaming scarlet with the flush that his tone and look had evoked.

"You fool!" she hissed at the altogether charming reflection. "You silly, sentimental fool!"

As the days followed, she found this vexing flush of hers called more and more frequently to her cheeks.

She found herself, too, getting the laugh habit. Intercourse with the Hugheses was no longer confined to visits to the flat downstairs; Billy and Dot began to come up to spend evenings with them, and May Carney discovered that she glowed with a sense of satisfying pride and proprietorship when she noticed that John's expanding smile was beginning to match Billy's and that his laugh was just as spontaneous and frequent and hearty.

There came an evening when she heard the door slam as only Billy Hughes had ever slammed it, and a rush and clatter on the stairs, two steps at a time, as only Billy had ever taken them, and a shrill whistle that had always been Billy's signal of homecoming.

She heard Dot, in the flat below, rush out to greet her husband, and she wondered if John would ever—

But Dot's little happy squeezed scream did not come up to her. Instead, she heard her cry "Oh!" and then John Carney's voice called, "Hello, Dot," and the noise clattered up to their own landing still two steps at a time.

She rushed out into the hallway in breathless amazement. It was John Carney leaping thus happily up the stairs.

He threw both arms around her and lifted her bodily in his bearish embrace, and she screamed a frightened little scream as she had heard Dot do so many times in the past. Then she struggled out of his arms, her cheeks flaming and her hair all disarranged, but not before he had pressed upon her lips a kiss whose sound could certainly have been heard on the Hughes landing below.

"What a perfectly silly way to treat a full-grown woman," she said reproachfully. Her eyes looked up guiltily into his glowing ones, and she nodded in flushed confession. "But—but I like it," she admitted.

He drew his pay-envelope from his pocket and handed it to her with some ostentation.

"Count it," he said.

She thumbed the bills over carefully—twice.

"Why, John!" she cried. "It is five dollars too much!"

"Nope," he corrected, "not five dollars too much—five dollars more. Boss gave me a raise without my asking for it. Said he had been very much pleased with my work lately. Lately! What do you think of that? And he hinted that there would probably be an opening up higher soon, and that it would pay me to keep on the way I'm going. 'Business gets along best when it's done with cheerfulness,' he said to me. 'And sometimes, recently,' he said, 'you've looked so full of it I was afraid you'd bust!' What do you think of that! That's what *you've* done, Maisie girl. Did you know it?"

ONE evening, as they were at dinner, there was a knock at their door and she opened it to admit Louise Stevens.

"Oh, May," the visitor cried, "I couldn't wait to tell you the good news, so I—why, what have you two people been doing to yourselves?"

She sat down and stared from one to the other in amazement.

"Why, you're getting fat, both of you," she accused. "May Carney, I declare you don't look a day older than twenty. And your husband must be nearly eighteen, isn't he?"

She smiled brightly across at John and then turned again to May.

"I'm leaving old Thayer," she said. "I've got a dandy job with Johnson & Stokes—you know, the firm you always said you'd like to work for?"

They congratulated her heartily.

"But that isn't the best of it," she continued. "I knew you'd be almost crazy by this time shut up at home so long with nothing to do, and you'd find it hard to get a job anywhere when they found out why you'd quit Thayer, so—what do you suppose I've managed to do?"

May Carney felt a sudden deadening chill at her heart.

"Wha—wha—what?" she faltered.

"I've managed to get a job for you at Johnson & Stokes' too! And it's five dollars a week more than you used to get with Thayer. Isn't that grand?"

May stared at her guest. Out of the corners of her eyes she saw John's cup pause in midair and then go down to his saucer again with a little tinkle that told of a hand not altogether steady. She knew that he was not looking at her. With a swift glance, she saw that he was staring down at his plate and toying dully with his fork. His face was almost white, and once more she detected those old lines of care and of stolid patience. Her heart went out to him in a great, motherly wave of love and protection. She had not seen those lines in a long time.

"Oh, I am sorry, Louise," she said. "It was awfully good of you, but unfortunately I have just taken a position that promises a much better future—much better. I cannot tell you yet what it is, but it is a job I have wanted a long time without knowing it. But I am awfully obliged, just the same."

John Carney said nothing after Louise had gone. For a long time he sat puffing his cigarette in moody silence. Finally he cleared his throat with an effort.

"I didn't know you had found a position, May," he said. "Didn't know you'd been looking for one. Of course, I'm glad for your sake—if you will be happier at work. Am I to know what the new job is?"

She looked at him across the table for a long minute, her eyes very soft and caressing. Then she rose and, walking around to him, put an arm over each shoulder, taking his hands in hers and smoothing her cheek against his hair.

"Yes," she said at length very low. "I'll tell you what the job is—but it will be the most difficult and exacting work I have ever done."

He released his hands and turned to her with a frown of protest.

"Now, May," he said, "I'm not going to have you working—what are you laughing at?"

She towsled his hair with her free hand.

"I'm laughing at the job," she said.

"The job? Well, what the devil is the job, anyway?"

She sank down upon his knee and her head came to rest lovingly upon his shoulder.

"Stupid!" she said softly. "The job is to stay here and keep you fatter and sillier and happier than Billy Hughes is."

A STORY of the tropics, by a man who can convey the glamour of the Far East more alluringly than any other writer except Kipling.

The Royal Blue Croesus

by James Francis Dwyer

CHAPTER V

LEFANE, walking up the road at the head of the little band, had been filled with all sorts of thrills at the thought that he would soon have in his possession a perfect specimen of the Royal Blue Crœsus. Now that his dreams had been shattered by the tolling of the Bell, he was as angry as a bobtailed viper.

"The infernal scoundrels!" he cried. "When I get hold of them, I'll flay them alive."

Hamerton was standing beside the girl. The young man felt that they were surrounded by an atmosphere of great mystery, suddenly flung about them by the strange sounds which came out of the hills. It was altogether unexplainable, and the few words which the girl had given as a reason for the flight of the carriers only whetted his thirst for further details.

"What do you think of it?" cried Lefane. "What do you think of the devils' running away and leaving their loads like that? Doesn't it beat anything you ever saw?"

The girl ran to the side of Peter Lefane and caught his arm. "Please do not blame them," she cried. "They are not to blame: they heard the Bell, and they were much afraid."

"But what have they got to do with the Bell?" asked the irate hunter of the Royal Blue. "Are they afraid that they will be drawn up to where this monk you speak about sits in judgment?"

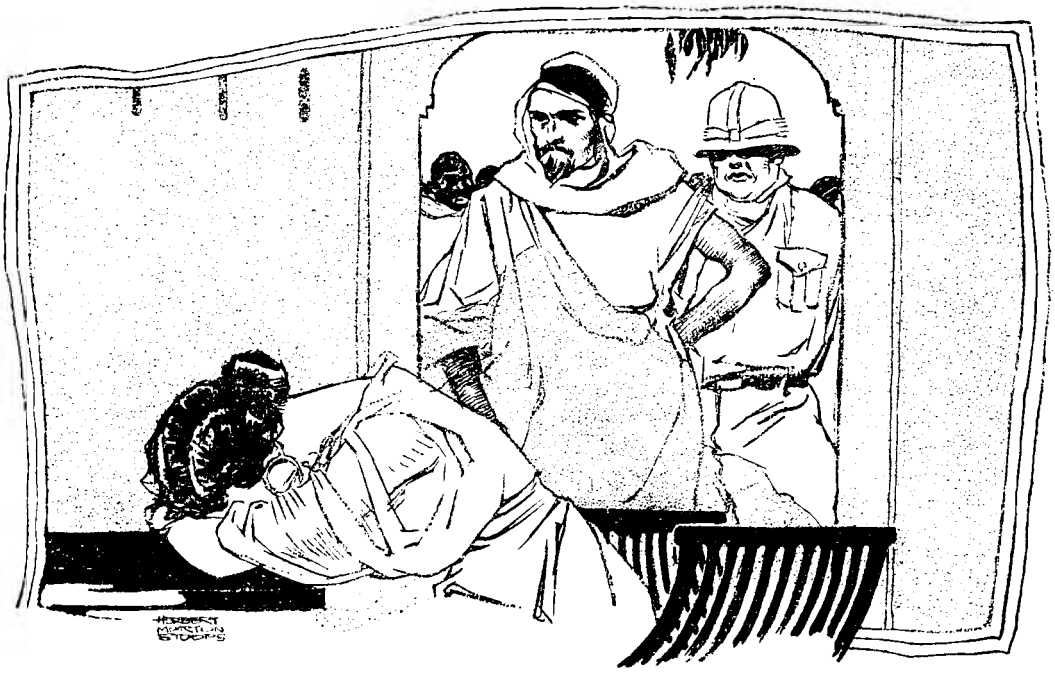
"No, no!" she cried. "No one likes to go over the mountains when the Bell is ringing. Some one will come toward it, some one who is listening because

WHAT HAPPENED IN

PETER LEFANE, an American railroad king, has a consuming hobby: the collection of butterflies. To complete his collection a specimen of that gorgeous species "the Royal Blue Crœsus" is needed; and as that rare creature is only to be found in the interior of tropic San Luondo, Peter resolves to indulge his hobby by journeying thither to capture his longed-for trophy. He takes with him a young scientist, Dr. Felix Hamerton.

After a long sea-journey Lefane and Hamerton arrive at San Luondo and find it a peaceful and beautiful spot, almost untouched by the commerce of the world. They are received by a hospitable old Arab and with him make arrangements for porters and the needful equipment for their journey into the interior in search of the Royal Blue.

The old Arab introduces them to his ward Laone, the orphaned daughter of a wandering Frenchman, who has been left in his charge. Hamerton is much taken with the



THE FIRST INSTALLMENT

beauty and simplicity of the girl, and while the expedition is preparing the two spend much time together.

FINALLY the party is ready and sets out into the hills. The Arab and Laone go with them a little way. Just as these latter are about to turn back, the sound of a bell is heard tolling over the desert wastes. The carriers drop their burdens and halt in terror. "What is it?" asks Hamerton of Laone. "The fear of the Bell," she breaths. "They,"—she points to the group of carriers,—"they will not cross the hills to-day."

"Why?" asks Hamerton.

"Because the Bell is ringing," she answers, "—because the Wailing Bell of San Luondo is calling and will continue to call till some one it wants goes up to it for punishment. It wails like that whenever it wants an evil-doer, and the evil-doers always come." And now the carriers turn and flee back to the village.

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he has done wrong, and—and no one likes to go over the hills while the Red Monk settles with the evil-doer."

"But I hired them!" cried Peter. "I hired them and paid them money to carry these bundles over the hills."

"But it is the fear," cried the girl. "They are stricken with a great dread when the Bell rings. Their fathers and their fathers' fathers listened to it, and they cannot help being afraid."

Lefane and Hamerton stood and looked at the girl. The fear which was upon the Arabs was also upon her. Her big eyes were filled with a strange dread as she stood and looked after the flying figures that were then close to the village.

Peter Jason Lefane walked toward the big rock and sat himself down upon it. He took off his hat and wiped his perspiring brow. "Now," he said, looking at the girl, "would you mind telling us the root of the whole trouble? Just tell us why all this nonsense goes on and who the dickens is the Red Monk that hands out punishment to those who do wrong?"

Laone was eager to tell. She wished to inform the two men why the carriers were not to blame in deserting their master. She desired to excuse them for what they had done, and hastily she told the story.

"FROM time immemorial," said Laone, "the Red Monk has dispensed justice at San Luondo. The Bell calls the evil-doer, wherever he may be. For hundreds of years it has tolled—for thousands of years. It is strange to you. You cannot understand how a bell can call an evil-doer, but I under-

stand. The belief in the power of the Bell is in their blood. They cannot resist its call. They hide when they commit a crime and wait with listening ears for the Bell, the Bell that is irresistible. They have been told that, no matter how long an evil-doer resists the call, he will come at last. Some day or other they know that he will answer the Wailing Bell and step forward, no matter how hard he tries to resist. Oh, you do not understand! You cannot understand! I have seen them, seen them one after the other go up, up into the hills when it called. Perhaps they resisted the call for weeks, months, years, but one day they could not resist. The good *marabout* has seen them. He prays when each one goes by to answer to the Red Monk."

"Who made the Red Monk the justice-dispenser?" asked Hamerton.

The girl shook her head. "There has always been a Red Monk," she murmured. "They come from a monastery 'way over beyond El-Ereem. When one dies, another comes to take his place, to wait at the Gates of Death when the Bell rings for the evil-doer."

"For what crimes does the Bell call them?" asked Lefane.

"For murder and many other crimes," she whispered. "Now it is calling for some one who murdered the good patriarch Beni Hadoun, three weeks ago. The village thinks it is some one who fled, but we do not know. But the Bell will bring him back, no matter how far he goes. You will see. Oh, you will see! He will come back to San Luondo, and he will go up this hill as scores of others have gone up, to the Red Monk who watches and waits for him."

TO Peter Jason Lefane came a desire to smile at the story; but although unimaginative, he, like Hamerton, was prevented from smiling. The girl believed, and her belief came out to him like a force that strangled the laugh that he wished to give. And she had put forward logic to back up her story. The people believed in the power of the Bell. The tale of the monk who sat in judgment and of the power of the Wailing Bell had been told for centuries. It was in their blood. They had set the Bell up as a supernatural thing which sought out the evil-doer and called him. Hamerton and Lefane pictured the wanted criminal waiting fearfully to hear the Bell, which would, no matter how long he resisted, finally drag him up and up the road that led into the hills.

"Do many come back?" asked Lefane. "Do many come back after their interview with the Red Monk?"

"None come back," she said softly. "They are all guilty. If they were not guilty, the Bell would not have the power of bringing them up the road. The Bell comes to them when they are guilty and draws them like a great hand sent out of the mountain to bring them up to suffer for their crimes."

The two Americans stood silent. The strange wailing noise was still going out toward the ocean.

"What can we do?" asked Hamerton.

"We can do nothing," said Peter Jason. "If we cannot get the carriers to take the supplies, we must return."

"Oh, you will go back!" cried the girl. "In a few days—in a few days they will recover from the fear that is upon them, and they will go with you."

HAMERTON and Lefane stood silent and listened. Out over the flower-covered slope between them and the sea went the strange noise. They pictured it going out like a foraging feeler searching for the man who had committed the murder.

And the girl's story had impressed them so much that they had at that moment a curious belief that the murderer would not be able to resist that noise. He had been told all his life that the sound of the Bell was irresistible. He had suckled the belief with his mother's milk. From a babe he had grown up with the firm conviction that a wrongdoer was sought out by this strange sound which came out of the hills, and that the wrongdoer, unable to resist the wail of the Bell, would take himself up to receive the penalty which the mysterious Red Monk awarded. San Luondo was a little world of its own, away and apart from

the great outside where civilization had swept away black superstition and created a new era.

Peter Jason found it hard to return. He looked from the stores to the blue hills and back again to the stores.

"Hamerton," he said, "I feel inclined to shoulder enough food to last us for a few days and go on up. What do you think?"

The girl had leaped to the side of the young man as Peter Jason's words came to her ears. "No, no!" she cried, clutching Hamerton's arms. "Do not go forward! Not to-day! Oh, not to-day!"

"But I am not an evil-doer," said the young Doctor. "I cannot be hurt by the Red Monk."

"But you might see," she murmured. "You might see something, something terrible!"

The eyes of the two men met, and Peter Jason shook his head as if puzzled over something. "Well," he said after a pause, "it might be just as well for us to go back and wait till those crazy beggars have got over their fear. I am afraid that we would not be able to carry enough to last us till we obtain a specimen of the Royal Blue."

"I do not think we could carry enough to take us over the hills," said Hamerton. "I think the journey is a little longer than we've thought it is."

"Well, it's the back-trail for us," muttered Peter.

"That's so," said Hamerton. "But don't be down-hearted. We'll tackle it again the moment these beggars get over the fear-chill that's on them now."

Hamerton and Lefane lifted the bundles of stores and specimen cases and stacked them up on one side of the road. Then, with Laone between them, they turned and walked toward the little village that nestled near the beach.

CHAPTER VI

THEY talked little on their way down to the village. They did not feel inclined for conversation. The two Americans were puzzled over the matter, while the girl walked as if in a day-dream. Now and then she looked at Dr. Felix Hamerton, and the young man was vain enough to think that each time she looked at him her eyes expressed the pleasure which was hers because he had not gone forward alone.

They crossed the cataract and walked down the golden road toward the little cream-tinted cottage of the *marabout*. And the *marabout* was standing out in front of the cottage to meet them. He knew of the flight of the carriers. His seamed face was turned toward them as they approached, while from the little cottage near, black-haired watchers peeped out.

"This is a nice state of affairs," said Peter Jason, addressing the old man. "Our carriers took flight because a bell started to toll, and they deserted us."

The old man lifted up his hands with a soothing gesture. "We must be patient," he said quietly. "We must be patient with them. They are afraid to go up into the hills while the Bell is ringing. Perhaps in a day or two the fear will have left them and they will be only too willing to obey your commands."

"But we wanted to go forward to-day," growled Peter Jason.

"I know," said the old man, "but we did not know that the Bell would start to ring. If we had known, I could have told you that they would not go up when they heard it. I know."

"We're up against it," said Hamerton. "It is no use urging. We have run against a belief that is as old as the hills, and no matter how we talk, we cannot alter it."

"It looks like it," said Lefane. "It's our bad luck. We must sit down and trust that the thing will blow over mighty soon."

THE two walked onto the veranda and sat down. Laone retired to her own quarters. A noonday hush was upon San Luondo, a hush into which the faint sounds of the Bell came curiously. The muffled notes did not seem to disturb the silence. They did not shatter it like an ordinary sound. The strange wailing note seemed to seep through it as if seeking.

"The crazy bunch!" growled Lefane. "This guy in the hills is a big grafter, I'll wager. He's the king-pin promoter of the fear-germ. Hully gee! Fancy his being able to stick up there in the hills and drag up a criminal by scaring him stiff."

"We are not in the United States," said Hamerton. "These people have been fed on that story for years and years. The girl says that it has been there for centuries and centuries,—the Bell, I mean,—and you cannot upset a belief that has been pumped into the brains of primitive people for centuries. This place is old, Lefane. It is a little backwater of the world, and it would take a lot more like you and me to alter their beliefs."

Peter Jason and the Doctor relapsed into silence. The noonday hush was heavy upon the town. The Bell continued to toll with occasional little intervals of silence in which the listeners felt that something would surely happen. They were little intervals of tense expectancy in which the heads that were thrust out of the little cottages watched the road as if certain that the evil-doer would answer the call and march up into the hills.

And in one of those little intervals, the expected happened. A cry of supreme fear came from the white beach, and Hamerton and Lefane sprang to their feet. The *marabout* dashed from an inner room. Laone came through the curtained doorway like a startled faun. Something had happened. From every cottage appeared heads that were turned toward the spot upon the beach from which the cry had come.

Hamerton and Lefane saw the person who had given the shrill cry. He was a tall, slim Arab, standing bareheaded in the white sunlight, and as their eyes fell upon him, he pointed with a long right arm out across the oily water that in the sunlight resembled a million wriggling snakes of every hue. Hamerton and Lefane looked in the direction in which he pointed. A tiny speck showed upon the oily water, a speck which as they watched it came slowly toward the shore.

"Who is it?" asked Hamerton. "Who is it that is coming?"

The girl looked at the *marabout,* but the old man did not answer the question.

Hamerton spoke again. "What do they see?" he asked.

"They think it is Djala returning," murmured Laone.

"And who is Djala?" asked Hamerton.

"They think it was Djala who killed Beni Hadoun," she breathed. "I—I told you this morning that the Bell was crying out for the murderer of the old man, and everyone thinks that it is Djala who murdered him."

"And where has Djala been?" questioned the Doctor.

"He ran away to the island of San Felipe," answered the girl. "He ran away two weeks ago, and now—and now—"

SHE stopped and looked at the two Americans, her right hand stretched toward the sea as if she would direct their eyes to the visible proof of the power of which she had spoken. In the unearthly silence that was upon the little village, the strange sobbing of the Wailing Bell came to them like the pulsing of something grim and terrible that was miles and miles away. Hamerton felt that his heart was beating in rhythm to the thing which was supposed to possess uncanny power.

"And now," said Peter Lefane, moistening his dry lips, "what will happen?"

"Why," said the girl, "Djala—Djala will walk up the road into the hills."

"And no one will stop him?"

"No one," she murmured, surprise showing for a moment in her eyes. "He must go to the Bell, because the Bell has called him."

The stillness became more and more intense. The very sound of the little waves upon the beach seemed to be muffled. The shrill cries of the insects in the undergrowth were choked by the all-enveloping cloak of silence which fell upon the place. Peter Jason Lefane and Dr. Felix Hamerton forgot the Royal Blue Crœsus. All thoughts of the aristocratic leader of the *genus papilio* were thrust from their minds. They could only think of the story which Laone had told to them, and as they thought over it, they watched the

black speck that was coming nearer and nearer to the white beach.

The minutes became wrenches that drew their nerves tighter and tighter. The tension was terrific. Hamerton had a desire to cry out to the solitary oarsman, asking him to hurry. Yet, curiously, he dreaded the moment when the man would land upon the beach. He dreaded it without being able to find the reason for the dread.

Nearer and nearer came the boat. No one spoke. Standing together in silence, the two Americans watched it. The *marabout* and the girl watched it. Every inhabitant of the little village watched. They were certain that it was Djala—Djala who was returning to receive the punishment for his crime.

CHAPTER VII

THE little boat containing the solitary Arab shot through the surf. The two Americans had no need to ask questions as to his identity. They knew that it was Djala. As he had come nearer and nearer to the shore, the attitude of expectancy had increased as the watchers recognized the features of the man who had fled after the murder had been committed. He had returned as they expected him to return.

Djala stepped from the boat and stood, a tall, slim, middle-aged Arab, upon the sand. For a full minute he stood surveying the little houses; then with curious, jerky steps he walked across the sand to the golden road that went into the hills, the road down which the carriers had raced an hour before.

San Luondo took a great breath and watched. Hamerton, glancing at the *marabout,* saw that the old man's lips were moving in prayer. The girl's eyes were distended; her little hands clasped the rail of the veranda as she watched. Djala was the center of attraction. He held all eyes as he reached the road and halted, his hands clenched, his face half-turned toward the sea from which he came.

The girl whispered something, and Hamerton strained his ears to listen.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Now the Bell will draw him up the road," she repeated. "Watch him! Watch!"

The wailing sound seemed to come louder and louder.

Djala took a step forward, another step; and the Bell wailed louder. Lefane had a belief that invisible hands were clutching the ankles of the Arab and jerking him forward as the waves of sound came down from the hills. It was an uncanny exhibition. The two white men leaned over the veranda and stared with bulging eyes.

And Djala was fighting, fighting the power which dragged him on. The Americans could see that he was struggling against it. His body was half-turned toward the water, while his feet went out with a slow, stiff, mechanical motion which reminded the Doctor of a toy figure that was wound up and set to walk a certain distance.

"Watch him," cried Hamerton. "Great God, watch him!"

Peter Jason Lefane made an inarticulate exclamation as he leaned far out over the balustrade of the veranda. The two Americans were stunned by the happening. They stared. They watched the manner in which his body writhed and twisted, the way in which he leaned back as if to tear himself away from invisible hands, while the groping, stiff-jointed legs moved onward, ever onward toward the fate he dreaded.

Hamerton thought that the noonday stillness was a monstrous thing. He felt that every sound had been blotted out by some power so as to allow the eerie wailing of the Bell to come to the ears of the fear-ridden man upon the road. It reminded him of the intense hush which falls upon a funeral procession when the bearers carry forth the corpse. The shrill note of the cicada had ceased; the little leaves that rustled against each other as the breezes wandered through the branches, hung limply; the noise of the surf died away to the faintest whisper that seemed to intensify the throbbing of the Bell.

"It's devilish!" muttered Hamerton, turning to Lefane. "It's uncanny!"

Peter Jason nodded his head: "It's the most awful thing I've ever seen.

Great Scott, some one should stop the poor devil."

THE two Americans looked at Laone. Her lithe body was tense as she leaned forward. The *marabout* had lifted his arms and now as the unfortunate Djala was passing by the cream-tinted cottage, he mumbled prayers, the sound of which added to the horror in the minds of the two Americans.

Step by step, Djala went forward. The wailing of the Bell did not cease for a single instant now that he was on the last lap of his journey. Slowly, ever so slowly, he went on and on, each foot put forward with the halting movement which made Lefane and Hamerton certain that his mind protested against every footstep, but protested unavailingly.

"It turns me sick," said Lefane, and his words sounded strange in the stillness. "I can't look at him."

Laone turned for a moment as if to silence the speaker, but Peter Jason Lefane refused to be silenced. "It's altogether wrong," he cried. "Why the devil don't they stop him? Who knows whether he did kill the man?"

"Hush!" cried the girl. "You mustn't speak!"

"But Lefane is right," said Hamerton. "Why let him be butchered by some fanatic in the hills? Why not stop him and try him properly for the crime?"

"It is the law," answered the girl, speaking in a whisper; "it is the law of San Luondo. Those whom the Bell calls go to the Bell."

The *marabout's* prayers rose louder. He chanted softly as Djala passed on toward the rope bridge which spanned the stream.

The little railroad magnate made a sudden rush to the steps. "I can't stand this," he cried. "We've got to stop him!"

Hamerton dashed after his employer, but the *marabout* had noted the movements of the two. His eyes were upon them as they turned, and he wheeled quickly so that he barred their way as they rushed to the steps leading to the little flower-splashed lawn that separated the house from the road.

"What would you do?" he asked quietly.

"Why, we'd stop the poor devil!" cried Hamerton. "He doesn't want to go up, but he hasn't got the will-power to resist."

"Leave him be," said the *marabout* solemnly. "Leave him be, my friend. A greater force than you can contend against is drawing him up the hills."

"But the poor devil doesn't want to go," protested Hamerton.

"He should go," said the *marabout* calmly. "He should go, my son."

Hamerton and Lefane stood stupidly and stared at the old man. They felt that they were up against a wall of superstitious belief that defied them. There was fanaticism in the eyes of the old man.

"He is a murderer," continued the ancient; "he is a murderer who escaped, but whose conscience is now bringing him back to pay the penalty of his crime."

"But this monk isn't the dispenser of justice," cried Hamerton hotly. "Why should he decree the punishment?"

"The Red Monks have dealt out justice in San Luondo for centuries and centuries," said the old man. "For twice five hundred years the Bell has tolled, and the guilty have come to it because their sins have dragged them forward to the punishment they have earned."

DJALA had reached the little rope bridge, and as the two Americans looked, they saw that his hands were clutching at the guide-ropes as if they would hold back the feet that were intent on taking him up to where retribution waited.

Hamerton gave an angry cry and pushed the *marabout* aside. "I can't stand it," he cried. "I'm going to hold the poor devil till he gets his wits."

He sprang down the steps onto the green lawn, and Peter Jason dashed after him. But their actions immediately attracted the attention of the watchers who had moved out of the cottages so that they could get a full view of the upward march of the culprit. And those solemn-faced watchers

were evidently of the same opinion as the *marabout* concerning the advisability of leaving Djala alone. As Hamerton and Lefane dashed across the green stretch, the crowd understood their intentions and acted quickly. With amazing swiftness they rushed to head off the two men, and before the Doctor and the little railroad magnate reached the road, they were surrounded by solemn-faced Arabs who scowled at them as they endeavored to push their way through.

The *marabout* called out something which soothed the temper of the mob, and the old man hurried across the stretch and spoke to the two Americans.

"You can't do anything," he said. "They will not allow you to do anything."

Hamerton looked as if he would fight his way through and run after Djala, but Lefane put a hand upon his shoulder and restrained him.

"It's no use," he said. "You will only start a riot if you go farther. This thing has soaked into their skins through countless centuries, and we can do nothing."

Laone had reached the group as Lefane spoke, and her little hands clutched the arm of Hamerton. "Come back," she cried. "Please, please come back."

Hamerton turned reluctantly and walked back to the little cottage.

Djala became a speck upon the golden road. Upward and ever upward he went. The blue hills seemed to gather him up like a tidbit which went into a monstrous mouth which at that moment seemed colored with a tinge that suggested blood. The speck disappeared, and a half-suppressed sob came from the watchers. They knew that they had seen the last of Djala; the sobs which came from the little groups told of relaxed nerves that had been kept upon a great tension as they watched.

The wailing of the Bell still came to them, but not in such volume. The mysterious watcher on the hill knew that his prey was close to him, and the sounds were muffled. Lower and lower they sank, till only the faintest murmur came to the ears of the quartet upon the veranda. At last the faint murmur died away, and the old *marabout* dragged his eyes from the hills and turned to the girl and the two men. "Now we must forget it," he said gently. "It's over."

CHAPTER VIII

ON the morning following the return of Djala, Peter Jason Lefane again started out to hunt up carriers and porters and endeavored to inspire them with sufficient confidence to go across the hills. But he found that the return of the Arab who had sought to evade punishment for his crimes had brought to the villagers a fear which was not easy to combat. His arguments were futile. The spectacle of Djala being drawn up the golden road was fresh within their minds, and they refused all bribes.

Peter Jason spoke to the *marabout,* and the old man shook his head.

"They will not go up for a week," he said. "Sit down and rest, my son, for you can do nothing."

And Peter reluctantly came to the conclusion that nothing could be done. The Arabs squatted in the sunshine, their eyes still turned upon the mysterious hills which had drawn Djala to their bosom. Although they did not expect him to return, there was a half-fear that a miracle might happen, and that down the road up which he had gone with halting steps would come the man they thought a murderer.

But the golden road was empty, empty as the blue dome of heaven that was stretched like a great wind-swept band above their heads. Its emptiness chilled them, and they shook their heads when Peter Jason attempted to kill their fears with mocking words.

Hamerton did not mind the delay. After the qualmy feeling caused by Djala's return had passed from his mind, he experienced a sense of satisfaction. The delay would give him seven days more with Laone before the cactus-covered wilderness beyond the hills would bar her from him for weeks and weeks.

He sought to make those days golden

ones, to which he could look back during the days in the desert. Morning, afternoon and night he was with the girl; and his persistent courtship annoyed Peter Jason. The old man's temper had been stirred by the refusal of the men to go forward, and as he saw that the delay did not have the same effect upon Hamerton, his irritation grew. On the fourth day after Djala had gone up the hill the two had an open quarrel. Hamerton had upset Peter Jason's peace of mind, and he spoke in no half-measured terms.

"What do you think you came for?" he cried.

"I came to help you collect specimens of the Royal Blue Crœsus," snapped Hamerton.

"And you are wasting all your time talking to the girl!" cried the railroad magnate, whose temper at that moment was not particularly amiable.

"That's my business," snapped Hamerton. "What is there to do until these fools get over their fright?"

Peter Jason Lefane walked close to the young man and fixed him with his little wise eyes.

"Listen, Hamerton," he said, "I'm going to tell you something: I am an old man, and I can tell you this to your face. If I were you, sonny, I'd cut the whole business out. You're getting into deep water. Besides—besides, my boy, you said good-by to some one in Philadelphia who would hardly care to hear about this business. You're not acting straight, do you hear? You're tying yourself in a knot that you'll have a devil of a job to undo."

Hamerton's face flushed. His eyes glinted as he looked at his employer. His temper was up, and the fact that Peter Jason told the truth only made him more angry.

"I'll do what I like!" he cried. "Do you understand? You hired me to do certain work, but when I accepted your offer, I did not give you the liberty of looking after my private affairs. Do you understand?"

"That's all right," said Peter. "That's all very fine and stagey; but you know well that I've touched you on a tender spot. You're not acting the part of a man, and you know it. Dr. Felix Hamerton, you're going back in a month or two, back to the country to which we belong, the good old United States of America, and—and—"

"That's enough!" cried Hamerton.

"It isn't enough," said Peter, his little head thrust forward as he spoke excitedly. "It's a long way from being enough. It would be better for you to get out of here at once than stay any longer and get yourself in such a tangle."

HAMERTON'S face was white with suppressed passion. He knew that the little railroad magnate had told the truth, and that knowledge left him at a loss for words. Each remark of the old man struck him like a blow. Lefane had torn aside the cloth and allowed him to see himself in the proper light. The old man had told the truth: he was not acting honestly, and Lefane was quite right in telling him that his indignation was of the stagey kind which told the accuser that he had no valid excuses to offer.

It was the first disagreement that had occurred since they left Philadelphia, and Felix Hamerton, thinking over the words of advice which the old man had given, knew that Peter Jason had told him nothing but the truth. He was in the wrong; he was doing something that was despicable, something that would bring him mental torture in the days to come.

The younger man lay awake for hours that night, thinking of Laone and of what Peter Jason had told him. Lefane had said that he would be leaving there in a few months, and Hamerton flung the groping antennæ of his mind out to that day when he would leave San Luondo forever. The picture was not a nice one. To that little paradise into which the old *marabout* had said the sting of sorrow did not come, he had brought pain and suffering, and he writhed as imagination pictured the parting. He was wrong, inexcusably wrong.

On the morning following the soul-examination which Hamerton had made, an incident occurred which prevented Peter Jason from further unbosoming himself upon the matter. At

the French cable-station sixty miles down the coast, Peter had left his name with instructions to forward to him any cables which might come from the United States, and on that morning a *dhow* came up the coast bearing to Peter a cablegram from Washington concerning the purchase of the P. S. & E. C., a railroad in which he was the biggest shareholder.

The arrival of the message made Peter forget Hamerton. Two words in the cable were mutilated, and the little railroad magnate cursed as he endeavored to make sense out of the remainder.

"I can't make head or tail of it," he cried, "and it means a lump of money unless I get it properly."

Hamerton made a suggestion. "Could I go down the coast to the cable-station?" he said.

Peter Jason looked at him for a moment as if he saw some motive behind the suggestion.

"Why should you go?" he asked.

"I simply suggested that I should go to save you the trouble," said the younger man.

Peter Jason looked at the Doctor for a few moments; then he smiled grimly. "You stay here," he said. "I'll go down, because I'll have to send an answer to this."

So Peter Jason Lefane set sail in the *dhow* for the cable-station at Kileena, leaving Dr. Felix Hamerton at San Luondo.

CHAPTER IX

IT was three days afterward when Peter Jason returned to San Luondo. The *dhow* had experienced head winds in bringing him up the coast, and he was tired and weary after the trip. He longed for the cool quarters of the *marabout* after the evil-smelling *dhow*, and he whistled cheerfully as he came through the surf to the white beach.

It was then that Peter Jason got a surprise. Hamerton was not there to meet him, and when the little railroad owner looked round for him, the old *marabout* walked forward, salaamed low and handed Lefane a note.

"From Dr. Felix," said the old man.

"From Dr. Felix?" repeated Lefane.

The *marabout* nodded, and Peter Jason, gripped with a strange little presentiment of evil, ripped open the note. There were only a few lines, but they staggered him as he read them. The message ran:

> I have taken your advice. I have cleared out. Call me what you like; I deserve it. I am going up to Cairo, and a letter addressed to Shepheard's will find me.

Peter Jason ran his hand over his round head and looked from the letter to the *marabout* and then back to the note. He was dazed.

"When did he go?" he cried. "When?"

"Yesterday," answered the *marabout*.

"How?"

"He had himself rowed out to a boat that was steaming northward. He did not make up his mind to go till he saw the smoke of the steamer on the horizon."

Once again Peter Jason read the note, frowned and looked seaward. He blamed himself for what had happened. He had rebuked Hamerton for his conduct with the girl. He had told him that it would be far better for him to clear out at once than tie himself up in a tangle; and Hamerton had followed his advice. Yet Peter Jason was not pleased with the discovery. He felt inexpressibly lonely as he stood and looked at the ocean upon which the lateen-rigged *dhow* rode over her own inverted reflection.

"And Laone?" he asked with a sudden snap of his jaws.

The old man made a gesture with his two hands which Peter Jason took to signify grief. "She is a wilted flower," he said quietly. "She has done nothing but cry since he left."

The hunter of the Royal Blue throttled the words which rose to his lips. The gesture which the *marabout* had made told him much. Laone was heartbroken over the departure of the man who had won her love during the few days he had dallied in the little beauty-spot by the sea.

"You must not blame him or Laone," said the *marabout*, noting Peter Jason's

desire to express himself forcibly regarding Hamerton. "It is fate, my son. Allah brought him here; Allah sent him away. Blessed be Allah!"

"It was his fault!" cried Peter savagely.

"It was my fault, if any," murmured the *marabout;* "but isn't it written that everything that happens is for the best? It was the will of Allah that they should love each other, and love is good."

"That's mighty nice to talk that way," said Peter Jason, "but what is to be done now? She will suffer."

The *marabout* made a gesture which took in the sea and the shore and the hills that looked down upon them in all the majesty of their purple raiment. "Allah knows," he breathed. "It is upon his knees, and he will do what he thinks fit."

PETER JASON knew that it was useless to discuss the matter further. With the *marabout* leading the way, he turned and walked up toward the house. The happening had upset Peter Jason. He pictured the girl with her startlingly beautiful face sobbing in her room, over the lover who had loved and fled. He, like Hamerton, felt inclined to curse the aristocrat of the *genus papilio* for the trouble which the pursuit had brought to the girl whose placid existence had been upset by their arrival.

Peter Jason did not see Laone during that day. And he did not see her on the day following. The girl hid herself in her own quarters, eating nothing and refusing to be comforted. Hamerton's departure had blotted out the sunshine from her life, and she hugged her sorrow in secret.

During those two days Peter Jason became active. His blood was up, and he pushed forward the preparations for the trip inland. He had never given way before obstacles, and he had no intention of relinquishing his quest now that Hamerton had deserted him. He told himself that he had come all the way from Philadelphia to obtain a perfect specimen of the Royal Blue Crœsus; and he set his jaw as he bullied the Arabs whom he collected to go with him into the desert beyond the hills. He flung himself fiercely into the work of marshaling the carriers, and as the fear which had gripped the swarthy men when the Bell had called for Djala had died away, he met with success.

It was on the morning that he set out for the desert that he saw Laone for the first time since his return from the Kileena cable-station. She came to him as he marshaled the line of porters upon the golden road, and the little millionaire was startled by the change in her appearance. To her face had come a spiritual look which made him wonder. Grief had added to her beauty by giving to it a soul-quality which had not been noticeable before. The eyes which had shown depths that thrilled Hamerton were even more wonderful now as they looked up pleadingly at Peter Jason's sun-tanned face.

"Where is he?" she asked. "You have his address."

Lefane, slow to give away information, studied her face for a few moments before speaking. "Why do you want his address?" he asked.

The girl thrust her little hand into her bosom and drew out half a dozen velvety leaves plucked from the silver trees which grew at the base of the purple hills, and she held them up to Lefane.

"I—I want to send him these," she murmured. "They are the good-luck leaves upon which the spirits of the hills leave their blessings."

The millionaire looked at the delicately tinted leaves which she held in her hand, and from them his glance went to the wonderful eyes which seemed to plead with him. His muscular fingers crooked as he thought of what he would like to do to Dr. Felix Hamerton at that moment.

"A letter addressed to Shepheard's Hotel, Cairo, will find him," he said slowly; then, afraid that tears might come to his own eyes if he stayed looking down at her, he turned and cried out an order to the head-man. He wished to forget everything at that moment, to forget the trouble which had come upon Laone; and he was anxious to dive across the blue hills into the desert beyond. He had been sidetracked, but now he was setting out to

wrest from the desert the treasure which had brought him ten thousand miles.

The twenty Arabs sprang to their feet, swung their loads upon their shoulders, and started up the road. Peter Jason walked at the head of the line, a thin, muscular figure, his jaw set in a manner which his opponents had long ago discovered meant a determination to do or die.

Over the rope bridge they marched, past the red pillar with its curious inscriptions, up past the big rock upon which Hamerton, Peter Jason and Laone had sat when the tolling of the Bell had stampeded the carriers. On and on up through the hazy mists they marched, toward the summit of the barrier which protected San Luondo from the desert winds.

CHAPTER X

FOR long, weary weeks, Peter Jason scoured the cactus-covered desert that stretched between the blue hills and the oasis of El-Drugha. It was a search that would have discouraged ninety-nine men out of a hundred, but Lefane happened to be the hundredth man sent by destiny to conquer, where ninety-nine would fail. He had the heart of a lion in a body that was tireless. He had a courage that imbued the twenty Arabs with an enthusiasm which made them search for the Royal Blue Crœsus with as much ardor as the man who employed them.

Climbing up the blue hills toward the desert, Peter Jason had made a vow. He determined that he would not go back to Philadelphia without a specimen of the Crœsus, and lest longing for home would come to him some night and drag him out of the sun-bitten wastes, he lost not a single minute in the pursuit of the treasure.

During the earlier weeks of the search, Peter Jason wondered if Hamerton had made a mistake concerning the habitat of the Royal Blue. A dozen times he struck camp, moving farther out onto the grim, wind-swept spaces where the djinns that Laone feared flung handfuls of sand into the hot blasts so that they looked like red specters careering across the wind-swept dunes. Yet he held on. Hamerton was an authority, and as Peter Jason always accepted the words of a man who was a specialist in his own particular line, he did not lose faith.

The little party groped forward, a foraging band that went on and on in search of the blue-winged beauty that had dragged Peter from the United States. Undeterred by heat and thirst, and supported by the enthusiasm which the indomitable little railroad king had put into them, the carriers went uncomplaining. By day they scoured the great gray stretches above which the heat waves danced in ghostly fashion; at night they sat in the stillness and listened while the little grains of sand spoke to each other with that curious whispering which stirs the imagination of the desert-born.

During those weeks, thoughts of Laone and Hamerton sprang occasionally into the mind of Peter Jason, but he resolutely thrust them from him. He tried to forget Hamerton and the girl, but again and again thoughts of them would break down the barrier of concentration and enter his mind. He pictured the face of the girl as he had seen her on the morning of his departure, and no kind thoughts of Hamerton came to his mind. The girl was suffering; and Peter Jason knew that all the fatalism which the *marabout* spoke of could not cure the heartaches which were hers.

ON the seventh week in the desert, success came to Lefane. The headman of the carriers captured a magnificent specimen of the Royal Blue Crœsus, and Peter Jason's whoop of

delight went echoing out over the wastes. He danced a two-step upon the hot sands. He was thrilled with the joy which the capture brought. He had achieved something which those others who had fought him in railroad deals and surpassed him in gifts to charities, could not do.

Peter Jason was possessed of a great satisfaction. He knew that on the morning when the New York papers recorded the fact that he had been successful in the search for a perfect specimen of the Royal Blue Crœsus, no millionaire could on the following morning show two specimens to make Peter Jason's performance look commonplace. They would have to send an expedition to scour the desert as he had done.

The first capture broke the spell of bad luck which was upon Lefane. Five days afterward another beautiful butterfly was put in the specimen boxes, and four days later a third was captured. Peter's joy was immense.

The stores were running low when the third capture was made, and Peter Jason, always a sure gambler, determined to turn back toward the hills which led down from the sandy plateau which they had assiduously searched. So the homeward journey was begun, and each day's march brought them nearer to the point from which they could look down and see far below them the little cluster of tinted dwellings that looked out upon the glittering ocean.

There came a day when they reached that point, and the twenty Arabs, with faces turned to the East, stood and chanted their thanks for their safe return. Peter Jason had a longing to join in that melodious chant.

They were but eighteen hours' journey now from the little village, and Lefane, possessed of a great desire to show his find to others, gave the word to push on. They would camp that night halfway down the hill and enter San Luondo before noon on the following day. The carriers were a happy lot as they went forward. They chanted songs as they moved at a speed that made Peter Jason put his best foot forward in an effort to keep up with them. The quest had been successful, and they could not restrain themselves. They sang loudly, wishing that all the dwellers in the little houses of cream and blue and rose-pink might know of the success which had come to them.

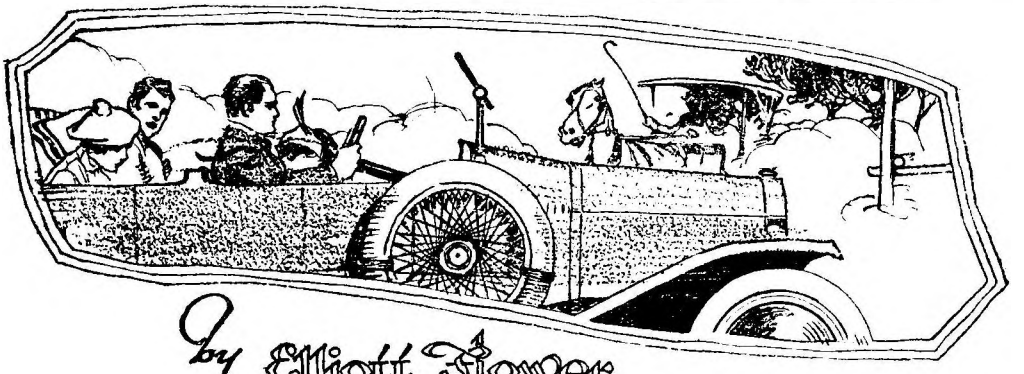
They camped when the night came down upon them like a black camel-cloth flung out of the north; but the thrill of expectancy was such that they could not sleep. They would have gone on if Lefane had desired, but Peter Jason, with the specimen case containing the three Royal Blues strapped to his neck, refused to take any chances. He was afraid that he might stumble in the darkness and injure one of the three beauties with which he would stir the world.

At daybreak the carriers were waiting for the word. The day of their return had come, and joy made their feet light as they waited for Peter Jason to give the order to advance. They chanted their songs that went out on the soft air of the morning, and their brown eyes glistened as they looked down to the little town that nestled in the flower-covered stretch between the foothills and the sea. Peter Jason, liberal in his early promises, had doubled their gratuities, and they danced with joy. When he gave the word to *trek,* they went forward at a lope, their joy-chant ringing out over the hillside.

Then upon the little squad fell the unexpected. Out upon the still air of the morning stole a muffled note that chilled them, a sound that was freighted with sorrow. It swept over them, a dolorous wailing noise that brought to their hearts the clammy clutch of dread. They halted as if they had been suddenly confronted by a terrifying enemy, and clustered in a group as they had huddled on the morning of the first expedition. The Bell of San Luondo was sending out its eerie note into the stillness of the glorious morning!

The conclusion of "*The Royal Blue Croesus*" will appear in the January BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE—on sale December 1st.

His Father's Verdict



by Elliott Flower

PERCIVAL PARKER — Percy for short—read his mother's letter, from beginning to end, tried to read it backward, and then held it at varying distances from his eyes, as if expecting to gain further enlightenment that way.

"Now, isn't that sad!" he grumbled whimsically.

"What?" asked Ben Tuttle.

"Mumsy writes that the Gov'nor is downright peevish," explained Percy. "She says he got a letter from Prexy that made him roar like a bull. Of course, she doesn't put it just that way, but I know well enough what a letter from Prexy would do to him."

"Any letter that Prexy would write about you," consoled Ben, "would be likely to make any father roar."

"And that isn't the worst of it," pursued Percy, too intent upon his trouble to make fitting retort. "Good little Mumsy has been holding up reports—there hasn't been one she dared show the Gov'nor—so he was unprepared. She meant well—but I'm not so sure of the wisdom of it—not now. Being unprepared, I fear this whacks him something fierce, and you can't tell what he'll do when he's whacked."

"Where do you get that 'Mumsy' stuff?" asked Ben. "You're no Mumsy-boy."

"Oh, yes, I am," confessed Percy. "I have to be. If it wasn't for Mumsy, I'd probably be driving a street-car right now. She gets between me and the Guv'nor, and he can only growl at her when he'd likely whale me. So I have to be Mumsy's boy; I've got no chance at all to be Popsy's. I don't know how. Why, he's so far given me up that he rarely says anything to me any more; and when he does, it's sarcastic. What do you think he threatened once?"

"Turn loose the tale," said Ben. "I'm no guesser."

"I blush to tell you," laughed Percy, "but I will. He said he was going to apprentice me to a milliner."

"Oh, well, that wouldn't be so bad," rejoined Ben, "if she was pretty."

"Oh, laugh—laugh your head off!" grumbled Percy. "It sounds funny, of course, but you wouldn't think it so funny if you had that sarcastic shot aimed at you."

"Fathers are unreasonable people, anyway," asserted Ben, "but they don't mean half they say."

"Perhaps they don't, some of them," conceded Percy, "but this one does. He means just exactly what he says, always."

"Well, he hasn't said anything yet, has he?" argued Ben.

ELLIOTT FLOWER has a peculiar knack in story-writing that gives his stories a really individual charm — a quality THE BLUE BOOK always takes care to offer its readers.

"Not out loud," replied Percy, "but it's coming. I've felt it coming; and a letter from Prexy—" An exaggerated shudder ended the sentence.

"Why don't you do something to ease him down?" asked Ben, as if that were quite the simplest thing in the world.

"I don't know how, I tell you," complained Percy. "It's all negative with me. I know pretty well what he wont like, which is 'most anything I want to do, but I've been too busy doing that to get a line on what he would like. He's never told me; he's never done anything but growl—and Mumsy's fine at heading off the growls. But some day he's going to bite, and a letter from Prexy—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Ben. "Barking dogs, you know—"

"Yes, I know all about barking dogs," said Percy; "but growling ones are different. The growling dog does bite. Still," he added, discarding his troubles with a shrug, "Mumsy's always managed to keep him pretty well muzzled, so let's hope for the best."

"That's the talk!" approved Ben. "Hope for the best!"

"Why borrow trouble," continued Percy, becoming more cheerful under the influence of his own philosophy, "when there's plenty to be had without?"

"Forget it!" advised Ben. "I've got something better to think about, anyway. What do you say to a joy-ride with a couple of Hampton peaches?"

"How about the Grampus?" asked Percy doubtfully.

"She'll never know."

"Risky," commented Percy.

"Sure," agreed Ben. "That's what makes it interesting, isn't it?"

Percy nodded, but he also frowned. "It listens good," he conceded, "but I'm awful close to the danger-line. One little break, and it's back home for me, with a blue tag attached."

"Pooh!" exclaimed Ben; "you can put it all over Prexy any time. I don't know how you do it, but you've got him hypnotized."

"Oh, I have!" scoffed Percy. "Then how does it happen that he's just been writing to the Gov'nor?"

"Because you weren't on the job," asserted Ben; "you didn't get to him first. If you had, your winning smile would have headed it off, as it always does. Anyhow, we've got to give those girls a ride—just simply got to do it."

"And me," reflected Percy, "only a point or two on the safe side of the 'con' line in each and every study on the list—the 'con' class in scholarship and the 'can' class in deportment; with the Gov'nor poring over a letter from Prexy. Too risky, Ben, too risky! I've got to draw the line somewhere, you know."

"Kitty Darwin comes from my home town," persisted Ben, ignoring the objection. "I know Kitty there—know her right well—but here I can't even smile at her. That's what makes it worth while."

"And Mumsy says the Gov'nor's all out of patience," mused Percy. "Of course, he didn't have to lose much to be out of it, his stock being low, but—"

"Kitty's somehow got on the blind side of the Grampus," argued Ben. "It's the chance of a lifetime. She has a friend in town that she's allowed to visit occasionally, and she and her chum, Myrtle Stone, are coming in Sunday afternoon. You met Myrtle the time I got a special dispensation to call at Hampton Seminary and took you along. Peach of a girl, you remember. Well, if we just happen along with a buzz-wagon at two-thirty, while they're on the way, we can get a nice little ride of about an hour, and they'll still have time to show up where they're expected before going back to the nunnery."

"Oh, I'll go," sighed Percy. "I knew I would all the time."

COLLINGWOOD ACADEMY, for boys, and Hampton Seminary, for girls, while distinct and unrelated institutions of learning, were separated by no more than an easily traveled mile.

Just why there must be what is colloquially known as a "fem sem" in the immediate vicinity of every boys' academy or college is a mystery that I cannot solve, but it is a fact that you seldom find one without the other. So we have Collingwood Academy and Hampton Seminary with the same post-office address and the same problem

of keeping the young people duly and properly separated.

For a Collingwood boy so much as to enter the grounds of Hampton Seminary without a formal invitation was ground for expulsion, and the Hampton girl who so much as smiled in the general direction of a Collingwood boy thereby put herself in jeopardy of being sent home in disgrace. For the severity of these rules the estimable principal of Hampton Seminary was held responsible, and because of this the boys of Collingwood Academy sought to show their displeasure by dubbing her "the Grampus," her charges being known as "Hampton peaches."

Percy well knew that it behooved one in his situation to avoid Hampton Seminary and all its inmates as he would a pestilence, for he had already sorely tried the patience of a long-suffering faculty, but discretion was not one of his virtues. Neither vicious nor stupid, he merely followed the line of least resistance, which too often leads away from duty and into trouble.

President Coulter of Collingwood Academy saw the nature of the trouble clearly. "The boy needs to be awakened to the seriousness of life," he reflected. "It's all a joke to him now. He lacks force, decision. He never has had to make a definite stand upon any subject, and so he just drifts." But a diagnosis is one thing, and a cure is quite another. President Coulter was unable to make any impression upon the boy, which so annoyed him that he finally wrote to Jonathan Parker with regard to the matter, referring briefly to his scholastic standing and more extensively to his infractions of discipline.

This was the letter of which Mrs. Parker wrote to Percy, and she had reason to be disquieted on his account. Jonathan did not say much,—he rarely said much,—but what he did say portended trouble. "Weak!" he growled. "Easily led! No backbone! It's time he had a jolt." Then, just as a preliminary to the jolt, the nature of which he had not determined, he forwarded President Coulter's letter to Percy with the following curt note:

Percival: I shall be glad to have an explanation of the inclosed.

And it was signed merely with his initials, like an office memorandum.

Even Percy's companions were of the opinion that he needed something to stir him up. He was too lackadaisical, too indifferent, having no purpose but the whim of the moment. They supported the athletic director when the latter, seeking new material, tried to get him interested in athletics. He was rather small and light for the football team, the director said, but he might do something in baseball or one of the other sports.

The idea did not appeal to Percy, but, following the line of least resistance, he escaped argument and importunity by reporting at the gymnasium daily for two days. Then, still seeking the easy way, he refused to go again except as a spectator. To the remonstrances of the director and others he replied reproachfully: "But that's work, you know. You didn't think I came here to work, did you? Why, the Gov'nor's a whale for digging up work, and I'd be loading trucks if he had his way. I didn't need to come here for work."

It will be seen, therefore, that the ties that held Percy to Collingwood Academy were of a nature to be easily broken, and he was fully justified in considering the situation critical. Indeed, so serious did it seem to him, when he was again alone, that he almost made up his mind to give up the proposed joy-ride—almost but not quite. It was easier to take the risk than it was to stand out against Ben's importunities.

AGAIN, when Percy received a summons from President Coulter, he was tempted to abandon the adventure. He did not know why the president wished to see him—there were so many possibilities that he dared not even hazard a guess—but it was a safe assumption that it was not to commend him.

Whatever of perturbation he may have felt, however, was carefully concealed when he met the president, and his air was that of respectful and wondering inquiry, as if he found the summons incomprehensible. But he always did seem very much surprised when he was haled before any member of the faculty.

"Mr. Parker," said the president impressively, "I am afraid you have not caught the spirit of our institution."

Percy pondered this thoughtfully for a moment. "Why, Doctor," he replied at last, "nobody backs our teams stronger than I do."

His disconcerting ingenuousness was illustrated in that. No other boy would have dared mention "backing" the academy athletic teams, for gambling was strictly prohibited. Yet every boy did "back" them to the limit of his means, and every member of the faculty knew it. So the Doctor hastily passed over this plea. "I do not mean," he explained, "that you are not loyal to the academy in your own way, but you do not seem to grasp its spirit and purpose."

"What have I been doing now?" asked Percy with the air of one earnestly seeking information.

"Nothing in particular and everything in general. There is nothing new, so far as I know,"—Percy was much relieved,—"but your whole record is unsatisfactory, and I have deemed it necessary to make a special report to your father. Perhaps you have heard from him?"

"Not yet," replied Percy, "but I shall. You need give yourself no uneasiness about that, Doctor. I'll hear from him."

"I hope so," said President Coulter. "Meanwhile, it seems to me wise to make one point clear to you, anyway: There must be a very great improvement, or, much as we may regret the necessity, we shall have to deprive you of the privileges of the school. This it seems better to say to you personally than to your father."

"Much better," agreed Percy.

"That is all, I think," concluded "Prexy."

PERCY sighed, bowed and retired to tell Ben Tuttle that he could not think of going on any joy-ride or of associating in any way with Hampton peaches at such a time. Aside from the inadvisability of breaking the rules, he could not now spare the time from his books. And still another argument for a dull and placid life came to hand when he stopped at his own room for a moment on his way to Ben's. He found his father's note, inclosing President Coulter's letter, there.

"Now don't that beat the waffles!" he moaned, after reading both communications. "Would anybody but the Gov'nor ever have thought of putting it up to me that way? Why, there isn't anything to explain except that Prexy's got only part of it."

But some reply had to be made, and so he sat down at his desk and pondered the problem deeply.

His first impulse was to write to his mother to intercede for him, but he abandoned that idea quickly. His father had taken this up with him directly, and the thing to do was to reply to it directly. He even found some satisfaction in the fact that his father was dealing with him directly instead of through his mother. It seemed to put him on a little different plane—an essentially masculine plane, as opposed to the feminine influence that had largely dominated his life so far.

But how was he to reply? He could make an extenuating plea, but that would be based on deception—not falsehood, necessarily, but deception nevertheless—a perversion of the facts. For there was nothing of importance in President Coulter's letter that was not true.

"Oh, what's the use?" he grumbled, reaching for his letter-paper. "I can be as curt as the Gov'nor, anyhow—so why not?"

He addressed and stamped an envelope, inserted President Coulter's letter and then added this scribbled note:

Dear Father: The inclosed explains itself.

PERCIVAL.

"And how he will roar when he gets that," he murmured as he mailed it.

Percy should have known better than to expect his father to roar, for he never roared. He growled usually, especially when speaking to or of his son, but on this occasion he did not even growl: he frowned, and the frown was one of perplexity rather than disapproval. He found the scribbled note decidedly puzzling. Nor was this surprising. Such a note from his son might

well have puzzled any father in similar circumstances, and there was the more excuse for bewilderment in Jonathan Parker's case because he did not know his son. So he pondered those few words frowningly, after the manner of a man who thinks it possible that he may have inadvertently stumbled upon the key to a problem.

The primary reason for Jonathan's surpassing ignorance of and indifference to his son lay in the fact that the boy's name was Percival and he was called Percy. Of course that in itself is no reason at all, but starting with that, all the rest happened quite naturally.

Percival is a perfectly good name—just as good as any other name—and Percy is no more effeminate than Bobby or Johnny or Tommy, but the name did not fall pleasurably upon Jonathan's ears.

"Percy!" he grumbled disgustedly. "Percy! What chance has a boy got with a name like that!"

Nevertheless the baby had been so named. Much depends upon who has the last word with the minister at a christening, and it is possible that Mrs. Parker, being unusually determined in this case, had taken some strategical advantage of her husband. Anyhow, the baby had been named Percival, and Jonathan had practically lost interest in him from that moment. He had no particular use for a Percy, he had said, but if they ever had a Hiram or a Peter or a John in the family, he would try to do something with him.

This lack of interest had been of small moment then, when the primary need of the baby was a mother's care, but it continued after the boy reached an age where a little masculine handling would have been good for him, with the result that Percy became his mother's boy, and the more of a mother's boy he became, the less use his father had for him.

Thus it happened that the comparatively unimportant matter of a name led to much, if not all, the trouble. Being his mother's boy, Percy had small chance to develop the hardy aggressiveness of the average young male. He was protected, so far as possible, from the knocks that are supposed to give a boy strength and independence, and he became somewhat effeminate in manner and foppish in dress, although at heart he was a real boy. His father, judging only by surface indications, became more and more disgusted. "I guess his mother knew what she was doing when she named him," he growled. "He's that kind of a boy."

Still, one stand with regard to the name he did make: he would not call the boy Percy, as all others did, but invariably spoke to and of him as Percival. There was not much choice, he declared, but Percival did not seem to him quite so insipid as Percy.

"If he'd only get hauled up for fighting or something like that," Jonathan grumbled, "I could overlook a lot of this other stuff."

But Percy did not fight, and he did not go in for athletics, and he did not do anything at all that Jonathan would have liked to have him do. So Jonathan, covertly watching in spite of himself, found less and less in his son that appealed to him.

Then came the curt reply to his own curt note, and he was puzzled—so puzzled that he postponed the "jolt" he purposed giving the boy.

Mrs. Parker, however, found nothing at all puzzling in it. She was shocked. "I am amazed," she exclaimed, "that Percy should be guilty of such impertinence! I'm afraid his school associations—"

"Impertinence, is it?" interrupted Jonathan.

"Of course."

"See anything else in it?" asked Jonathan.

"Why, no," replied Mrs. Parker, perplexed.

"Well," mused Jonathan, as he turned to his newspaper, "perhaps there isn't anything else there."

UNFORTUNATELY for Percy, the easy way was again the wrong way, and all because Ben spoke first. If Percy had had time to declare himself, after his interview with President Coulter and the receipt of his father's note, the result might have been different, but he was not given time to do that.

"All set!" Ben announced jubilantly the moment he saw Percy. "I've rounded up a buzz-wagon and got word to Kitty. She and Myrtle are crazy for a ride. You'll run the machine, of course."

The machine secured, the girls invited and the hour set! Clearly he could not back out then without showing himself in a very shabby light, and there was but a moment of hesitation before he surrendered. "A little matter like a joy-ride isn't going to cut much figure after that note of mine," he reasoned, "so why not?"

"Why not, indeed!" rejoined Ben.

"But it's the last time," asserted Percy. "Fact is, Ben," he went on explanatorily, "I've just had a nasty note from the Gov'nor that makes me feel more like somebody than anything else that ever happened. Funny, isn't it? But it somehow seems to give me class that I couldn't get through Mumsy."

"Forget it, anyhow," urged Ben, "and tell me which peach you prefer for your very own on this joyous occasion."

"One brief call under the espionage of the Grampus," returned Percy, "does not qualify me as a judge of peaches. You know them better than I, and my confidence in your judgment is such that I'll ask you to choose for me, and then I'll take the other."

"They're both really and truly peaches," declared Ben, "so there isn't much choice."

"There's always a choice," said Percy sagely, "but fortunately we don't all choose alike."

"If left to me," announced Ben, "I'll give you Myrtle."

"In that case," decided Percy, "I'll take Kitty."

"Suits me," laughed Ben. "I see enough of Kitty at home."

"Put one over on me, didn't you?" grumbled Percy.

"Oh, you'll find Kitty a right jolly girl when you get her away from the Grampus," Ben assured him.

And Ben was right. Percy did find Kitty a right jolly girl—quick and bright and self-reliant. Only for a moment did he regret the choice he had made. That was when he discovered what a timid, clinging, dependent girl Myrtle Stone was. Her reliance upon her masculine protector was very flattering. He could hear Ben, who was with her on the seat behind, reassuring her, and he would have been glad to do some reassuring himself. But Kitty, who was on the seat with him, did not need it. Kitty was vivacious, clever and daring, and he presently found this vivacity so delightful that he regretted nothing.

THE ride, therefore, was an enjoyable one for all. It would have been enjoyable in any circumstances, but it was the more enjoyable now because of the risk incurred. Elsewhere it would have been enjoyable but tame; here there was enjoyment with a thrill of apprehension added. There is something distinctly pleasurable in a mild thrill, but the pleasure departs when the thrills become numerous and acute.

Unfortunately, in this case it happened that President and Mrs. Coulter and Professor and Mrs. Delafield were out for a drive that afternoon in the ancient ark and behind the ancient horse that the Doctor kept for family use, and they provided some entirely unexpected thrills.

Percy, at the wheel, saw them first.

"Isn't that Prexy coming?" he asked suddenly.

It was, of course. They could not distinguish President Coulter at that distance, but there was no mistaking the rig. Moreover, it was coming directly toward them, and there was neither room nor time to turn and flee.

The girls went white. To be sent home in disgrace is a far more serious matter for a girl than for a boy, and they were in an agony of nervous fright. Even Kitty became panic-stricken and clutched Percy's arm, thereby almost sending the machine into the ditch, but she recovered her self-possession almost instantly. Myrtle did not. She clung to Ben, completely unstrung, and tearfully bewailed her folly in violating seminary rules.

"I wonder," murmured Kitty glumly, "what they'll do to us."

"We're disgraced!" sobbed Myrtle. "We'll be sent home! Oh, why did we come!"

Kitty was philosophical; Myrtle needed comforting.

Percy subconsciously noted this difference in the two girls, but his conscious mind was busy with the problem ahead of him.

There was just one chance of escape for the others, none for himself. Between the approaching vehicles there was an intersecting road, into which, if they could reach it first, they might turn without directly encountering Doctor Coulter and being held up by him. The driver of the car would be recognized, of course, but the others might fairly hope to escape recognition.

"Down!" ordered Percy, throwing on the power. "Duck! Get under cover! Perhaps we can make the turn ahead of them."

Kitty promptly slipped from her seat to the floor of the car and pulled the robe over her head. Myrtle, too perturbed for quick comprehension, made no move at all, but Ben drew their robe up and covered her also.

"How about you?" came in muffled tones from Kitty.

"Oh, I've got to take a chance," replied Percy. "Duck, Ben! One's enough."

"Nixy!" retorted Ben. "I go down with the ship."

"Well, here goes for a dash home to Papa!" laughed Percy.

Unfortunately, President Coulter noticed this sudden acceleration of speed, and it aroused his suspicions. He whipped up his ancient nag in an effort to reach the crossroad first. In this he failed, but he was near enough to wave his whip at Percy and order him to stop as the auto took the turn, skidding a little, balancing a moment on two wheels, but finally gripping the road again.

There was a scream of fright from the muffled figure on the back seat, a gasp from the huddled figure in front, and President Coulter felt that he knew all that he needed to know of the personnel of the automobile party. But in this he found he was mistaken: he did not know quite enough to get proof of what he did know.

Returning home, he telephoned Miss Cramer (the Grampus) that he had reason to believe that two of her charges were out riding with two of his boys. Miss Cramer thanked him, but intimated that she thought it quite improbable. This, however, was merely a matter of policy on her part; she did not wish him to think that her discipline was as lax as this implied. As a matter of fact, she recalled instantly that Kitty Darwin and Myrtle Stone were not then under the seminary roof. They had gone, by permission, to visit Mrs. Gaskell, a friend of Kitty's mother. Miss Cramer at once called up Mrs. Gaskell and asked for Kitty, but the ruse was profitless, for Kitty was then there and answered the telephone herself. Percy had broken all the speed laws getting her there. So Miss Cramer, rather glad of the opportunity, called up President Coulter and assured him that an investigation disclosed that he was entirely mistaken, so far as her girls were concerned—which so annoyed President Coulter that he gave some thought to the possibility of providing proof.

He had this idea in mind when Percy and Ben were haled before him after chapel the following morning.

OF course, the summons was not unexpected; they knew it was coming, and they had spent much time discussing the probable outcome of the interview.

"It's the big jump for me," sighed Percy. "You may get off with a bunch of black marks, because you're not already loaded up with them, but it's the big jump for me. And with this added to that fool note of mine, I hate to think what will happen to me when I get home."

But nothing of his perturbation did he show when they faced President Coulter.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken," said the Doctor solemnly, "I met you young gentlemen in an automobile yesterday afternoon."

Even at so critical a time the whimsical in Percy was dominant. "No," he replied, "you did not meet us. You tried to, but you didn't make it."

"That is mere quibbling, Mr. Parker," reproved the Doctor. "You were out on the Glencoe road in an automobile."

"We were," admitted Percy.

"You know, of course," pursued the Doctor, "that Sunday joy-riding, as I believe it is called, is forbidden?"

Percy reluctantly admitted his knowledge of this prohibition.

"Especially with young women," added the Doctor.

"Oh, of course," conceded Percy.

"And unless I am much mistaken," persisted the Doctor, "there were two young women with you."

Percy glanced at Ben, as if uncertain how to reply to this, and Ben came to his rescue. Percy was much relieved. The easy way was to let Ben assume the burden of this most unsatisfactory interview.

"As to that," said Ben, "we have nothing to say."

"Two young women," the Doctor went on relentlessly, "who were so anxious to escape recognition that they hid under the robes. Of course this makes the affair rather more serious for you. Sunday joy-riding alone would be bad enough, but joy-riding with two mysterious young women, afraid to show their faces, is worse—much worse. For the rest of the term, Tuttle, I think I shall have to put you under closer restraint, with the understanding that a single infraction of the rules, however slight, will deprive us of your society. As for you, Parker, you have had your warning, and I fear we shall have to lose you now."

Percy and Ben bowed to the judgment and turned to leave, but the Doctor was not through.

"There is, I think, one chance to save yourselves," he suggested in his smoothest tones.

They faced him again instantly, the light of hope in their eyes. Percy especially, having the more at stake, experienced a great sense of relief.

"That we may be better prepared to enforce proper discipline and guard against such regrettable occurrences in the future," the Doctor continued, "it is important that we should know all the circumstances. It is important to us, and I suspect it may be of equal importance to the faculty of Hampton Seminary. Now, if you will give us the names of these young ladies—"

"If you will excuse me, Doctor," interrupted Percy, "I believe I'll go and pack up."

THE news of Percy's banishment from Collingwood Academy came promptly to three people, and was received by them with varying emotions. Two of these—Kitty Darwin and Myrtle Stone—received the news at Hampton Seminary, and the third—the father of Percy—received it at his office in Chicago. The fate of Ben, being less dreadful, received only incidental attention.

Don't ask me how the information penetrated the sacred precincts of a well-ordered seminary and reached the two most interested in it, in spite of the fact that the Grampus was not altogether unsuspicious of them and was therefore watching them the more closely. I only know that it did, and that the girls got not only the main facts but many of the details.

"He sacrificed himself for us!" exclaimed Kitty.

"They both did," Myrtle reminded her.

"Yes, of course," agreed Kitty, "but Ben didn't have so much to sacrifice. He wasn't expelled."

"It was noble of them!" declared Myrtle.

"They must be saved," asserted Kitty; "at least Percy must. We can't let him be sent home."

"How can we help it?" asked Myrtle in surprise.

"I don't know," confessed Kitty, "but we must find a way—just simply *must* find a way. He has an awful father, I understand, and he's facing something terrible—for us!" Kitty had an excellent imagination, and it was not difficult for her to picture him as a knight in trouble and herself as a fair maid of romance. "He protected us; we must save him!" she insisted.

"I don't see what we can do," complained Myrtle timidly.

"Neither do I," replied Kitty, "but we must do it."

"Do what?"

"That's for us to decide," said Kitty, who was both perplexed and perplexing in her excitement. "We must think it over, Myrtle—think hard—let lessons

go, and think! Then we'll talk it over again in the next study hour."

The same information naturally set Jonathan Parker to thinking also, but not along the same line.

"Fired, eh?" he muttered. "Expelled! Faculty overlooked many of his escapades, but could not overlook the last! Weak! Irresolute! Too easy-going! No backbone! Well, that was pretty much all in the other letter. What's new? Ah, here it is. Joy-riding with a seminary girl! That's bad! Refused to tell who she was! Well, now, let's stop a bit and see about that."

He pondered it a few minutes; then he wrote a telegram, called a taxi, rode home and ordered his grip packed.

"Percival has been expelled," he informed his wife, "and I'm going to Collingwood to look into the matter."

"Expelled!" she cried. "How dreadful! What was the trouble?"

"Cumulative," he replied. "Lots of things. The culmination seems to have been a joy-ride with a seminary girl."

"Shameless!" exclaimed Mrs. Parker.

"Percy?" asked Jonathan.

"No, certainly not," she replied; "the girl."

"That's the way Adam figured it," remarked Jonathan, "but I shouldn't expect Eve to take the same view."

"Who is she?" inquired Mrs. Parker.

"If he had told that," replied Jonathan, "he wouldn't have been expelled."

"Really?" she exclaimed. "And he wouldn't tell? How very wrong of him! No wonder you're provoked. But if you'll let me talk to him—"

"Well, I wont," interrupted Jonathan brusquely. "This is the time I talk to him."

PERCY, his departure from Collingwood delayed by his father's telegram, was at the station to meet Jonathan when the latter arrived on the evening train. He was very much perturbed, was Percy, but he tried not to show it. And in spite of his perturbation, he was rather glad that it was his father and not his mother that he was to meet. His father would be more severe, no doubt, but there was a suggestion of manliness in dealing with him that he found unexpectedly and incomprehensibly gratifying.

"We'll go to your room and talk this over, Percival," announced Jonathan after a laconic greeting, "and then we'll see Doctor Coulter. I presume he can be reached to-night."

"At his house, yes," replied Percy.

"That's where I'd prefer to see him," returned Jonathan, and no more was said until they reached Percy's room. There Jonathan settled himself comfortably in a chair and lighted a cigar.

"All packed, you see," ventured Percy, forcing a smile, "ready for the sentence. What is it?"

"I haven't determined yet whether to take you in hand myself or let your mother go on spoiling you," replied Jonathan. "I'm not sure you're worth my time. What do you think?"

"Mumsy's awfully good to me, of course," began Percy, "but—"

"She wants to be, and thinks she is, but perhaps she isn't," was Jonathan's enigmatic comment. "You'll find it different in a man's world."

"Me for the man's world!" decided Percy impulsively.

"Perhaps," said Jonathan.

"Of course this has put me in bad," reflected Percy dismally.

"You were in bad before," rejoined Jonathan.

"I know," sighed Percy. "That note—"

"Yes," said Jonathan abstractedly, "I found the note encouraging."

Percy looked at his father in amazement, but the latter was half musing now and did not notice.

"You didn't lie," pursued Jonathan, "and you didn't try to dodge or duck,

or smooth me down, or ease the thing off through your mother. You stood up like a man, to take what was coming to you, and it surprised and pleased me."

Percy was a moment or two recovering his wits, but he finally managed to say that he was glad of it.

"The note itself," continued Jonathan, "was impertinent, but it was inspired by the right idea, and that's what counts."

It occurred to Percy that if he only knew when he was doing a big thing he might do them oftener, but he kept this thought to himself.

"Now," said Jonathan, coming out of his reverie, "let's see about this other business. As I understand it, you were joy-riding Sunday afternoon, which is forbidden, and you had a girl along, which is also forbidden."

"Two girls," corrected Percy. "Ben Tuttle was with me, and we each had a girl."

"President Coulter says they were seminary girls," suggested Jonathan.

"That's his guess," rejoined Percy guardedly.

"If they were," persisted Jonathan, "you were leading them into trouble also."

"I hadn't looked at it that way," evaded Percy.

"But you were!"

"Yes."

"I'm glad you see it," said Jonathan, "and admit your responsibility. It was for this you were dropped, I understand."

"No," replied Percy, displaying some bitterness now, "it was not, and that's what hurts. I'm canned for not sacrificing the girls, and Ben's in bad for the same reason. We could have got off by giving Prexy their names."

"And you wouldn't?"

"Of course not."

"Well, what are their names?"

The question was so unexpected and so sharp that it almost took Percy off his feet. "What are their names?" he repeated.

"That's what I asked."

"Well, I wont tell you," said Percy.

"Ashamed?" asked Jonathan.

"No!" blazed Percy indignantly; "but I'm not going to get them into trouble for anybody!" Then with more restraint: "I don't mind your knowing who they are and all about them, if you'll consider it confidential."

"Making conditions, are you?" growled Jonathan.

"In this matter, yes," replied Percy reluctantly.

JONATHAN listened to President Coulter's statement of the case, nodding his head from time to time.

"You seem to have put the boy to a pretty severe test," he remarked at the conclusion of the explanation.

"That is what I tried to do," said the Doctor, "and I am sorry the result was not more favorable. He had the chance to save himself and relieve you from this annoyance, but he refused it. Perhaps you can do better with him in the matter."

"No," returned Jonathan with unexpected cheerfulness, "I can't. He has told me no more than he has told you."

"Stubborn!" commented the Doctor.

"Surprising, anyhow, for a mamma's boy," rejoined Jonathan. "I had not expected it. But he has also surprised me in some other things."

"Weak!" pronounced the Doctor.

"No," said Jonathan, "I don't follow you there. He chose to face my displeasure rather than do a shabby thing, and possibly that means more than you think. I'm no white-winged, soft-spoken angel when I'm vexed."

"He should have thought of that," suggested the Doctor.

"He should," agreed Jonathan, "and possibly he did. I suspect that he did. That's what encourages me. Fact is, Doctor, the more you tell me of this affair, the better I like Percival, and I am almost ready to believe that he and I can get together on what I may term a working agreement. I am taking him home with that idea, anyhow."

Percy, who had listened in silence to the recital of his shortcomings, found this conclusion of the interview bewildering but gratifying—intensely gratifying. There was unexpected understanding between himself and his father: they had in some measure the same point of view, and he was suddenly and sur-

prisingly anxious to deserve more fully his father's good opinion.

"You and I, Doctor," added Jonathan, as he and Percy were leaving, "don't reach our verdicts by the same course of reasoning, which is perhaps a natural result of different environment, but you have done a good job in revealing something of the character of my son."

President Coulter was a little uncertain how to reply to this, and while he was considering what to say, he was suddenly startled out of all idea of replying to it at all.

THEY had reached the hall, and they found there two girls who had just been admitted—two very anxious and troubled girls, although one of them was trying hard not to show it. That was Kitty Darwin. She was seeking to live up to the rôle of a fair maid of romance intent upon the rescue of her hero, but she was finding it unexpectedly difficult. Myrtle, the timid, was plainly frightened to the verge of tears.

"Kitty!" cried Percy in amazement.

"Thank heaven," exclaimed Kitty, "we're not too late!"

"Too late for what?" asked President Coulter.

"To save the boys," replied Kitty bravely; "to keep Percy from being sent home to that dreadful father!"

Jonathan gave a little start of surprise, then regarded Kitty with a grim smile. Her eyes were upon President Coulter, however.

"We heard," said Kitty, "that you would let them off if you knew who was with them, and so—"

Jonathan, always quick to comprehend and equally quick in his judgments, interrupted. "Wait a minute!" he said. The girls turned startled glances upon him, and found something reassuring in the grim smile. "I wouldn't say any more," he advised. "I don't believe Doctor Coulter wants to know who was with them. Percival's dreadful father is satisfied, anyhow." He addressed himself then to President Coulter. "I think we ought to forget about this, Doctor," he said significantly. "I cannot escape the impression that if any word of it reached the seminary many people would get the idea that the atmosphere of Collingwood Academy has a tendency to smother manly impulses. I know I should, and I fear I should be unable to refrain from urging that view upon others. Yes, I feel strongly that we ought to forget all about the young ladies."

President Coulter, after a moment of hesitation, bowed his acquiescence, thus depriving himself of the satisfaction of proving to Miss Cramer that he had been right when he telephoned her.

"Good enough," approved Jonathan. "Percival and I will now see them safely home—"

"No, no!" objected Kitty in alarm. "We must slip back the way we came. But we're awfully grateful to you, Mr.—"

"Mr. Dreadful Father," prompted Jonathan.

Part of the way back to Percy's room was covered by father and son in silence. Then Percy spoke. What he said may have lacked dignity and filial reverence, but it was really an impulsive tribute. It was this:

"Say, Gov'nor, you're a pretty good old scout yourself, aint you?"

Jonathan smiled. Only a short time before he would have resented the apparent flippancy of this, but he knew his son better now—understood him better and knew better how to reach him.

"A pretty good old scout!" repeated Percy. "Do you know, Gov'nor, I'd do a whole lot for you!"

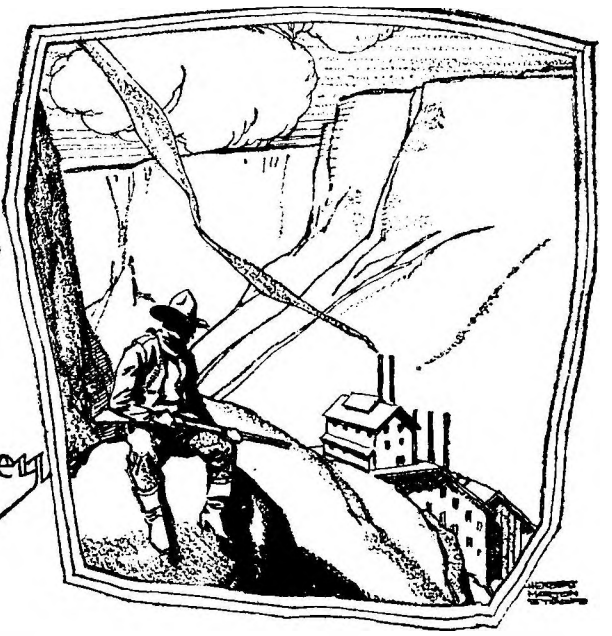
"Never mind me." Jonathan was growling again, and the smile was gone. "Never mind about me, but if you don't justify what those two girls did for you—show that you're worth it—look for one good walloping before you're shunted back to the nursery." He studied his son's face for a moment as they passed under a street-lamp and seemed to be satisfied. "But I believe you will," he concluded.

"You bet I will!" asserted Percy emphatically.

There'll be another attractive story by Elliott Flower next month.

The Goo-Goo Process

by Robert J. Casey



"STEW" BEADLES was not a great man; but he left a great mark. Though posterity never found enough of him to grace a grave, it was generally conceded in Cascade City that his departure from the world, both in the manner of his going and in its effects upon the destinies of two men, had been an event.

"Stew" Beadles, drunk as was his wont, stumbled into Big Jack's and clamored for the wherewithal to become more drunk—if such a thing were possible. He got it—a quart flask of varnish-remover that looked like water and had no taste after the first quaff. Then he started for his work in the dark reaches of the Jason Mine.

On his way he bumped his head against the fountain erected by the W. C. T. U. for the benefit of thirsty horses, and lost his bearings. Thus slight blame should be attaching to him for his failure to take the right trail as he stumbled onward, a good five miles up the cañon.

It was certainly not premeditated that, failing to reach the Jason workings, he should have brought up at the main hoist of the Tincat mine—that he should have careened into the open door of the dynamite-shed, open that day for the first time in years, and lighted a match.

Thereafter his movements were not a matter of great moment to anybody, save that among the ruins of the Tincat stamp-mill was found Beadles' identification-check, bearing the imprint of the Jason Mining and Milling Company.

Ray Cruice, the young owner of the Tincat, drew some logical conclusions, noted them in red ink in his ledger against the account of Weaver Jefferson, the controlling spirit of the Jason organization, and thereby laid foundations for a great conflict.

Previous to that time the young man and the aging president of the Jason had been friends. Thereafter they were not friends.

A MINING war more or less made no great difference in the daily life of the hills. It is the history of the camps that where there are lodes to be followed, claims to be staked and shafts to be sunk, some few will profit and some others will suffer. Battles ensue, as a matter of course. But the argument between the Jason and Tincat was a matter of considerably more impor-

tance. Both were low-grade mines paying large dividends—and therein is indicated a great deal. To handle low-grade ore profitably one must handle it in immense quantities; and this requires an enormous outlay of capital.

The Tincat and Jason represented the strongest financial interests in the hills.

The populace, which knew the history of the rivals by heart, waited in obvious suspense for the move that would hurl them upon one another in battle.

As a matter of fact, there were two moves. The first came shortly after the Tincat's new plant was hanging to the cliff walls and the red slime had begun to color the creek again. Ray Cruice paid a brief visit to the office of the Jason and confronted Weaver Jefferson.

"Your men dynamited my mill," he said, totally without animus, seemingly without great concern. "I give you fair warning that I'm going to dynamite yours."

"Well, I'll be—" gasped Jefferson. "I—"

"You don't deserve any warning," observed Cruice, "—you didn't give me any; but my soul will feel better for my having told you, when I get done with your plant."

Jefferson did not get a chance to reply. Before he could articulate any of the expletives that occurred to him, Cruice had walked out, flinging a laughing remark to one of the bookkeepers in transit.

The head of the Jason mine sat for a moment stunned. If this were a joke, he could not see where the laugh came in. If it were a declaration of war, it held even less humor, despite its odd delivery. He ordered guards posted—not that he thought they would be needed, but because of a Scotch streak in him that forbade his taking any chances.

Then the next night, between shifts, when fortunately there was not a man in the building, the stone mountain-side dropped out from under the Jason stamp-mill, and a considerable quantity of valuable machinery slid into the creek.

JEFFERSON thereupon visited Cruice.

"You dynamited my plant," he charged as he waved his cane threateningly in the younger man's face.

"What makes you think so?" demanded Cruice, unabashed.

"You said you'd do it—you threatened me. I have witnesses to that," he shouted.

"Oh, very well," assented Cruice good-naturedly. "Go ahead and prove it. I thought you were a sportsman. You started this thing out of court. Now, just as soon as a trick turns against you, you run to the law. What kind of fighting do you call that?"

The older man reddened, whether from shame or apoplexy it would have been difficult to determine.

"Who said I started it?" he roared. "Who said—"

"I did," interrupted Cruice. "I found one of your company's time-checks attached to some relics of the stranger who set off the blast in my stamp-mill."

"I know nothing about it," grunted Jefferson.

"Of course not," agreed Cruice. "I thought you wouldn't—and just to reciprocate, I don't know anything about the fireworks you've been having at your place. As I remember it, your buildings weren't very securely placed. On a bad ledge of rock, weren't they—timbers running down to the creek-bed to shore it up."

"That has nothing to do with it," snapped Jefferson.

"No, except that our explosion weakened your timbers—sort of poetic justice about it; we noticed it when our engineers were getting the débris out of the creek. We saw then that the edge of the mountain-side was sliding down."

"If it was an earthquake threw those buildings over the cliff," snorted Jefferson, "or a thunderbolt, if the mountain caved in, or if the Angel Gabriel blew his horn and they just naturally collapsed, nothing could convince me that you weren't to blame for it, anyway. And I'm going to collect."

"That suits me." Cruice assured him. "Now you're playing the game square, like the good old sport that you are. I enjoy a fight in the open."

"It'll be in the open, all right," shouted the president of the Jason. "But don't make the mistake you've persisted in so far—thinking you're dealing with a pack of idiots. Do you believe for a minute that if I intended to wreck your place I'd send a man over here with a brass label on him?"

"Can't say, I'm sure," replied the chief of the Tincat. "You were fool enough to let that timber go six months without attention, even after the explosion had thrown it out of gee. A man with intellect doesn't have to use dynamite. I didn't."

So Jefferson went back to his office and laid his plans.

CASCADE CITY did not need to be told that trouble was brewing. It was to be seen in the bustle of preparation at the Tincat and Jason works, in the carloads of disreputable-looking private detectives who swarmed into town by every train, in the growing hostility between the employees of the rival concerns.

And yet there was no open feud.

Cruice invariably bade Jefferson good day when they chanced to meet in Main Street, despite the lowering glances he received in exchange. Dorothy Jefferson, heiress to the Jason millions, carried out her part of the armed truce by beaming upon the owner of the Tincat as though her father's quarrels were the least of her troubles.

A *coup* as sudden as it had been carefully planned brought into the possession of the Jason mine an old sluiceway that for years had clung to the cliffs, a high-water mark of past prosperity. With it flashed into light a claim to an ancient water-right, and Cruice saw and understood.

Two days later the creek just above the Tincat was dry. Water was running through the sluiceway, dropping into the Jason mine and flowing out again a quarter of a mile farther down the cañon. And men with rifles over their shoulders patroled the flume.

The bed of the creek, thick with the red slime deposited by years of cyaniding, was drying under the hot sun when Cruice arrived at the plant. The huge mills stood silent, save for the few units treating the ore-pulp in the final stages of the separation.

Cruice called in his chief engineer immediately.

The look on the man's face bespoke the helplessness of the situation.

"Well, Barnes," said the chief, "can't we do something about this?"

The engineer shoved a pair of heavy spectacles back on his nose and stared reflectively.

"No," he said decisively, "there's nothing you can do."

"Is there any artesian water in this district?"

"Just a drop. We're digging a well now. . . . . Unless you can win out in the courts, this looks to me like the finish."

CRUICE stepped to the window and looked down into the color-splashed cañon. On the opposite wall the sluiceway trembled beneath the weight of the stream it carried from the Jason. Below it, the creek-bed gleamed unnaturally. The mud-cakes, splitting up into rectangles, gave it the appearance of a red-tiled road.

The silent buildings of the Tincat, a full half-mile of them, presented a spectacle such as he had never before seen. He was almost ready to agree with Barnes that this was the end. He had been too sure of himself in his management of the heritage he had received from his father. That father would not have overlooked so important a factor as the sluiceway. That father would have held the whip instead of feeling the lash.

"I think I owe the old diggings something more than a surrender," he said at last. "Draw up specifications for a dry-washing plant at once."

A gleam of admiration flashed in Barnes' face. Then his eyes became dull again and his mouth serious.

"I'll do it, Ray, if you say so," he answered. "I suppose your father would have done it. He never knew when he was licked, either. But don't cherish any illusions about this dry-washing proposition. It never has worked out well with the kind of ore we're handling here. I doubt if you

could make it pay in a mine so doggone low-grade as this."

"Argument is a waste of time," said Cruice. "Order the pneumatic jigs from somebody who'll be able to get 'em here by express in a week."

Then he picked up the telephone and called Weaver Jefferson.

"Want to sell out so soon?" chuckled the president of the Jason.

"Nope, just wanted to notify you that you're going to pay the wages of my men for every day they have to stay away from work. That's only a fair proposition. If you don't want to do that, I'll buy you out."

"Tommyrot," returned Jefferson.

"I thought you'd say something like that," commented Cruice. "But I have one proposition left. Don't say I haven't been decent in telling you about these things. In spite of her handicap in the way of a paternal parent, I love your daughter and I think I shall marry her."

"You go to the devil," advised Jefferson with fervor. "If I catch you hanging around my house, I'll shoot you."

"Oh, very well," sighed Cruice. "Have it your way. But if anything happens, don't say you weren't warned."

Then he hung up the receiver in the midst of a burst of lingual pyrotechnics and sat down to think.

Whatever might have been the relations between the Tincat and the Jason previously, there was no denying that this was war and that the ancient pirate who had fired the first shot stood to win.

Thus far the feud was very little different from other feuds. Cruice's suspicion that his mill had been deliberately dynamited was based on precedent. Dynamite is a force quickly mobilized in a mining war, and highly effective on the firing-line. The resort to a grab of water-rights was to have been expected also. It was in the book of mining tactics when the Phœnicians went to Cornwall after tin.

But the story took a new turn shortly after the final diplomatic conference, with the arrival of Jeremiah Sullivan and the famous "goo-goo process."

JEREMIAH was red-headed and evidently experienced in mining. At any rate, he knew all the preliminary tricks. He dropped off the Omaha train with a heavy suit-case.

"Watch out for that, boy," he called to the porter who struggled to load it into the Custer Hotel push-cart. "Ore-samples."

Thus quite simply he was established as a "sourdough."

He looked about the platform, spied the policeman who was almost certain to be present at the arrival of all trains and sauntered toward him. Just as he was abreast the guardian of the law, he turned about.

"Keep my trunks right side up, boy," he called to the porter. "Chemicals. Don't want 'em spilled. Five-spot for you."

And thereby, just as efficiently, he was established as a chemist. Only a man familiar with the workings of small towns would have understood that the police force is a sure-fire disseminator of news.

Before nightfall all Cascade knew that a new metallurgist was in town. His presence was immediately linked up with the Tincat-Jason conflict, and as such was cause for imaginative effort. Theories as to the reason for his advent became "inside information" within an hour after their first telling, and the patronage of Big Jack's was stirred to enthusiasm.

As Joe Johnson, one of the Tincat foremen, observed energetically, albeit somewhat incoherently: "It's action. Thashwotwewant. Action! Somethin' doin' now. No more waitin'."

The workers were tired of waiting. And the Cascade citizens to whom the Tincat pay-roll was a matter of no small moment were also tired of it. If Mr. Sullivan's presence foreshadowed a definite step one way or the other in the warfare, his welcome was assured.

Cascade City did not have long to debate over Mr. Sullivan's course of action. He seemed to realize that his opportunities were as he made them; so the morning after his arrival he hired an automobile and visited Mr. Jefferson in the offices of the Jason Mining and Milling Company.

"My time is very limited, Mr. Sullivan," said the man who guided the Jason's quest for the golden fleece. "Please be as brief as possible."

"My time's as valuable as yours," replied Mr. Sullivan calmly. "And I don't intend to waste any of it. I'm a chemist—you've probably heard of me. I have been in the mining business ever since I was big enough to shovel muck.

"I've invented a process that's five times as cheap as cyanide. It'll take the color out of rock where a fire-assay wouldn't show any. It works with talcose ore or sulphide. Nothing will stop it, and it makes the principal expense of low-grade mining the cost of shoveling the muck into the ore-cars."

Jefferson shot a keen glance over the rims of his glasses and grunted.

"They all do," he said. "Never heard of a secret process yet that couldn't take the gold out of your teeth if you ventured into the same room with it. But I notice that cyanide is still on the job. It has no competitor."

"There's oil flotation," contradicted Sullivan. "Any good process goes begging. It's the sorry history of mining that the industry has been controlled by men who can't see farther than a pick and pan. I can prove my process. That's what I'm here for."

"All right," agreed Jefferson, "prove it. If it does what you say it will, I'll give you ten thousand dollars for it."

Sullivan laughed.

"In the first place, Mr. Jefferson," he said, "ten thousand dollars wouldn't pay me for the laboratory work I've put in. In the second place, you can't buy it. The process isn't for sale. It's to be worked on a royalty basis. Neither you nor your chemists will know anything about it except its results. The formulæ for the solutions used in dressing the ore and the precipitant I shall keep to myself."

"That's all I care to hear," snapped Jefferson. "Not only does the introduction sound like every one on a similar subject I've heard in years, but your proposition is identical with that surrounding every other wonderful chemical fake in mining history. The woods are full of mysterious chemists and 'goo-goo processes.' I'm too old a fish to bite at that bait. Good day."

"Good day," replied Sullivan with a grin. "I'm sorry I can't interest you. But I hope to verify one of your statements. The woods hereabouts will be very full of 'goo-goo processes' before I get through."

The red-haired chemist dropped in to see Cruice. What encouragement he got there was not discussed for publication—but he stayed in Cascade.

The waters of Cascade Creek continued to pour through the rejuvenated sluice, and the floor of the cañon below the Tincat works grew dry and dusty. Cobwebs spread across the bolted doors of the plant, and windows fell out after that unaccountable fashion of windows in deserted buildings.

Rust gathered on the machinery, and like a great ship run aground with all sails set, the immense workings of the famous Tincat began to show the ravages of dissolution. The impression gained ground in Cascade that Cruice was headed toward bankruptcy and that a few weeks more would see the mine in the courts, whither so many other Black Hills mines had preceded it.

Cruice was not without his following in Cascade. There were those ancients of the people who had known his father before him. And there were newcomers aplenty who favored him merely because he seemed to be on the defensive. But sympathy could not alter the fact that the Jason held the advantage.

Even the coming of the pneumatic jigs and the alteration of the Tincat plant to accommodate them failed to change the trend of opinion.

Presently strange new buildings began to shoot up overnight on Tincat hill. Load after load of heavy machinery was transferred to the narrow gauge and hauled up into the cañon. The men who had been idle found work as carpenters at the mill. And it became obvious, even to the uninitiated, that another great drive was bringing the war close to climax.

DURING the installation of the machinery, Ray Cruice met Dorothy Jefferson in full view of Cascade's in-

quisitive Main Street. He smiled and held out his hand, and she returned the greeting. Cascade City breathed a simultaneous gasp.

"Why don't you ever come over to see me any more?" demanded the girl in a voice loud enough to be heard by no less than a dozen interested persons in the doorway of the post office.

"Your father told me he would shoot me," was the candid response. Dorothy stamped a pretty foot.

"It's preposterous," she declared vehemently. "You're like two children. Why should your old mining squabbles affect me?"

"No reason at all," agreed Cruice readily. "I tried to tell your father the same thing, but he threatened to break me in two, and I don't want him to do it. . . . . So, you see, there's hardly any course left for me but to hand him the wallop he's trying to hand me. Do I make myself clear?"

"Oh, I understand. Your excuses probably seem logical to you—but they don't to me. Neither of you will accomplish anything. You'll spend fortunes, and five years from to-day you'll be just as you are now—deadlocked."

"Don't fret about that part of it, Dot," advised Cruice. "I'm squaring my mill around, and when we open up again it will be to lift your fond parent's scalp—"

The audience in the post office door gasped at the threat. Then by some unaccountable process it got abroad. Because of Cruice's obvious sincerity popular opinion veered somewhat. Cascade foresaw sensational developments.

CHARLES KING of London, seated in the Johannesburg office of the Empire Mining Company, looked up from his mining paper with an ejaculation that brought Herman Vandergaalt, the manager, from an inner room.

"The Tincat mine has abandoned cyanide," announced King. "There must be some mistake in the report."

"If it hadn't been for cyanide, there would have been no Tincat mine," commented the manager. "Of course it's a mistake."

And so wherever gold was mined, the word went around. Something had happened to change the working policy of the world's most efficient low-grade mine. The mining world slowed down a bit, awaiting the next announcement from the Hills. It was obvious that the process which could lead the Tincat to desert cyanide must be the greatest advancement in gold-recovery in a quarter-century.

In Cascade City, Weaver Jefferson read the signs and summoned every mining engineer within two days' call. Then he ordered a conference at the Jason plant.

From his office he watched the strange performance at the Tincat through a pair of binoculars.

"Lots o' new sheds near the slime-plant," he observed to Henry Gordon, a Colorado metallurgist hired for an elastic conscience rather than expert knowledge. "Know what they are?"

"Funny place for a concentrating outfit," decided the engineer after a glance through the glasses. "He seems to have steam up, but there doesn't appear to be much doing around his hoists. Nothing turning in any of the upper works. Heard he was putting in a dry-washing outfit—can't see how he's going to work it that way—looks to me as if he's shoveling away his tailings-dump to make room for something else."

Jefferson scrutinized the cliffs.

Suddenly he brought the glasses down, and when he turned toward Gordon, his face was apoplectic.

"Shovelin' tailings!" he repeated. "I should say he was shovelin' tailings. Bein' a mining-expert, you could see that, could you? Well, look again. He's haulin' those tailings back into the slime-plant. He's re-treating 'em, man—re-treating tailings that have been through cyanide. I'm tellin' you, Gordon, either the man's gone crazy or he's found out somethin' about mining that you and I'd better be learnin'."

"It's impossible that he should be able to treat the tailings of a good cyanide plant with any degree of profit," Gordon replied airily.

"Yes, I know all about that," retorted Jefferson. "But why's he doin'

it? Huh? Tell me that. The boy's been playin' second best so far, but don't get it into your head that he hasn't any brains. If he's reworkin' his tailings, there's a reason for it."

"Of course it's barely possible that he may have hit upon some new process that would give him more complete recovery, but—"

The Jason chief was no longer listening.

He swept the glasses across the scarred red rock and the dusty cañon floor, baking under the noon sun, to the gray mountain of tailings.

A small army of men was at work, shoveling into the great pile like ants about a hill. Ore-trains zigzagged up the cliff wall toward the new sheds. Black smoke was rolling from the tall stacks of the power-plant.

"You said it," remarked the magnate. "It is a new process. The fellow who invented it was in here trying to sell it to me, and I wouldn't pay any attention to him."

"It may be something else," suggested the engineer.

"It isn't," snapped Jefferson. "They are treating the stuff. I can see 'em through some of the windows from here. And take it from me, young Cruice knows what he's doing."

And so the next morning the mining world got a new surprise.

THERE was no questioning the success of the process. There was the radiant Mr. Sullivan, who answered all queries from the Jefferson faction with a crafty smile; there were the fast-swelling mining-crews who spread strange tales of a bonanza found in a waste-heap; there were the weekly pay-checks, issued with unfailing regularity—surest sign of opulence; and there were closely guarded shipments in the Tincat company's strong-boxes. All these things attested to the efficiency of the reclamation and pointed strongly toward Cruice's ultimate success in the war with the Jason.

It was in the air, however, that the Tincat would not be allowed a placid use of its latest process. Jefferson had come into the Hills with the argonauts who braved the hostilities of the Sioux nation and Crook's army. That he lived to tell of it was argument enough in support of his prowess. Behind him lay a thrilling history. He had never been beaten.

Rifles seemed to be a part of the "goo-goo process"—at least they were more in evidence than any other implement at the Tincat works. Men, prepared against emergencies, sat at the foot of the claim where once the creek had flowed. Blue barrels peeped from slots in the newly erected buildings.

One day an employee of the Jason was gathered to his fathers in the cañon near the Tincat. There was a bullet-hole in his back, and it was officially announced that he had met his death in a fight with another worker. The populace of Cascade, however, thought differently.

Cruice's determined stand against the inevitable held the controversy in a deadlock for perhaps a month, during all of which time the refining of the tailings-dump went on unceasingly. Then Jeremiah Sullivan received a call to the offices of Jefferson Weaver. He was closeted with the chief of the Jason works perhaps an hour, emerging just in time to make an automobile connection with the down train from Deadwood. Thereafter Cascade City saw no more of him, but his memory lingered. Obviously he had made some arrangements for the use of his process. Quite as obviously this process was to be used against the Tincat. It was merely a logical deduction that the crisis in the affairs of the Jason and Tincat had been reached.

A week afterward Ray Cruice took charge of the night-shift in person, as he had done since Sullivan's precipitate departure. Rifle in hand, he threaded his way among the weathered buildings and stood watching the workmen pass through the timekeeper's office.

Already the little ore-trains were in operation between the tailings-dump and the old slime-plant. High on the mountain-side the tracks of the old ore-road lost themselves in the dusk. The shaft-house stood empty, silent and unmarked save for a searchlight that now and then swept its beam over the works.

In their new function the ore-cars seemed oddly out of place. Though the reversed process had been started more than a month, Cruice could not get used to it. The trains should have been crawling over the shaky trestle to the stamp-mill. The roar of heavy machinery should have been in the air. The glint of many lights should have been mirrored in the swiftly moving waters of the creek. But there were no lights and no creek.

The installation of the "goo-goo process" had not changed the routine of the mill to any great extent. Cruice passed among a series of settling-tanks, looked at the filters and pulp-presses conserving the scant water-supply and went on out into a new shed where the dry-washing apparatus imported at the beginning of the war stood ready for action. Not a jig was in operation.

There was a hum in the air—a whirring of pulleys and vibrating-tables, reminiscent of a chant in a vast church. A storm-cloud had crossed the moon, and the cañon below the slime-plant was impenetrable.

CRUICE stood at the door of the long shed for a moment, staring down the hillside. A light flashed in the assay-office—then was suddenly snuffed out. A dull report followed. The chief of the Tincat stood at instant attention. He had been the last to leave the office, and he remembered distinctly that he had locked the door.

He moved forward cautiously, keeping well into the shadow. A gleam from a suddenly opened door in the boiler-room shot across the path below the assay-office. Into it and out again a figure darted. Cruice made a mental note that it looked like some one he had seen with Jefferson Weaver. He raised his rifle, fired and dropped to the ground. Instantly a bullet snapped above his head.

What followed was kaleidoscopic. The steam siren of the Tincat blared a call to arms that echoed between the rock walls of the cañon like the crack o' doom. The searchlight swung into belated activity and wasted precious minutes seeking out the cause of the trouble at the spot whence Ray Cruice was pumping lead at the fleeting shadow, rather than on the cañon floor whither the shadow had flown. Cruice heard, above the din, the exhaust of an automobile motor leaping away into the night, and the whistle, far away, of the train from Deadwood.

The two sounds in themselves told much. The raid, whatever its object, had been timed well to permit an escape. Some five miles below the Tincat the narrow-gauge crossed the Northwestern—there the Omaha train would make a brief stop. To-morrow an automobile, supposedly stolen from a Cascade garage, would be found abandoned near the junction. So far, Cruice was able to visualize the working of the plot.

But he was not given much of a chance for further thought on the subject. Action was paramount. Armed men were pouring out of the sheds in semi-panic. For the most part they were shooting as they ran—much to their own imminent danger. The shouts of the chief guards failed to rally them.

A watchman on the sluiceway across the cañon dropped neck deep in the cold water that filled the trough and, on general principles, joined in the fray. The Jason siren, too, began to shriek a warning, and torches blazed up, lighting every path by which an attack might be made on the Jefferson works.

But there was no attack. However much the disorganized protectors of the Tincat might have welcomed such a war, circumstance intervened. Almost before the exhaust of the motor-car had been smothered in the bedlam of other noises, a spot of light began to grow in the gloom at the foot of the Tincat slime-plant.

It became steadily brighter, flickering with every change of the cañon wind. Cruice stood up for a moment, scarcely comprehending. Then a thin line of red crept up a corner of the assay-office, and a burst of radiance crowned the ridge-pole. He dropped his rifle and ran about the long building to the shed where the scant fire-apparatus was kept.

He realized dully that the fate of the Tincat was a matter of a few moments:

the wind was in the wrong direction, and there was no water.

As he hauled the hose-cart from its shelter and onto the path, he saw that he was too late. The roof of the assay-office was in flames, and a comet of fire was leaping out toward the adjacent buildings.

THERE was no need for the search-light or the Jason's torches now.

In the light of the doomed buildings Cruice could make out the face of every man on the hillside. He noted with satisfaction that the siren stopped instantly, and the pumps, installed for just such a crisis, began a futile effort to raise water from the dry creek-bed. The engineer in his excitement had acted as habit dictated. Doubtless he would stick to his post until the thin walls caved in on top of him, never remembering the cause behind the strange behavior of his machinery.

The buildings of the Jason stood out in ruddy brilliance from the grotesque shadows of the mountain-side. Men were running about there also. One squad was carrying rifles out onto the flumeway. The others for the most part were hurrying about like great marionettes, laying fire-lines and spraying the dry board walls and roofs in the path of the sparks from the Tincat.

The comet of fire mounted higher with each succeeding puff of wind toward the pines that danced in the shadow above. It seemed only a matter of a few moments when a spark would drop there and a forest fire would seal the fate of both plants at once.

Then a mighty explosion shook the hills. The feeble walls of the assay-office dropped inward, carrying the roof with them. The lowest building of the slime-plant, now afire, rocked uncertainly, and the panic-stricken workers were thrown upon their faces. A roar like a distant surf arose above the crackling of the fire, and the hillside trembled again.

The flaming light from the Tincat seemed to spread downward. It flared like molten slag on the floor of the cañon. The racing pumps halted their futile drive with a coughing sound, and presently resumed again with strong rhythmic strokes. The limp fire-hose stiffened and squirmed, and a wild cry went up from the Tincat forces.

The creek had come back again.

The workers did not question how or why. The water had come, plenty of it. Before they were really aware of what had happened, a dozen streams were halting the ravages of the flame-tinged wind.

IT was deathly quiet in the cañon as the men filed back to work—the distant organ-tone of the wind in the pines and the lapping of the creek waters alone disturbed the silence.

As Cruice watched the mill settle back to its routine, he caught the sound of a motor-car. Reviving, as it did, unpleasant memories of the events immediately preceding the fire, it arrested his attention. To his surprise it seemed to be drawing closer. Then came the echo of a second motor, farther away and also approaching.

He picked up his rifle and walked cautiously down the hill, passing the hot embers of the assay-office. The huge vaults stood out of the wreckage barely scathed by the fire but ruined none the less. The massive doors had fallen outward—dynamited.

He did not stop to give a second look. He had suspected something of the sort. Since the tiny flame that followed closely upon the echoes of the first explosion, he had known that the fire had been purposely kindled. It was obvious that the man in the shadow intended to keep the employees of the Tincat busy beyond power of pursuit. The ruse had succeeded admirably.

The first motor stopped in the shadow, where the road crossed the creek. There was a startled exclamation. Then the car started again and splashed into the ford. Cruice smiled. It was plain that the car held only one occupant and that that one had been surprised to find the creek in its accustomed place.

As the machine climbed the bank, he raised his gun.

"Stop," he shouted. Whatever else he might have said died on his tongue as a girl's frightened voice answered.

"Oh, Ray, is it you?" she queried. "Please tell me nothing has happened to you."

"Never better, Dot," he answered, hurrying to her side. "We've had a little excitement to-night, but I don't believe anyone was seriously hurt. What are you doing here?"

"I heard of it. The whole town has heard of it. Every man who can climb into an automobile will be out here in a few minutes. They heard the explosion and saw the fire in the sky. I—I—told Father I was coming to you. I told him I would not be a party to his tactics any longer—and before he could do anything about it, I came. Now I'm here."

The second motor had reached the creek.

This time a curse told of the driver's amazement at finding the water.

"The irate parent, I judge," commented Cruice.

The girl nodded.

"I told him to stay home, but he wouldn't. . . . . It's his way."

THE car dived into the creek, and Cruice sent a rifle-shot into the air as a warning.

"You can't come any farther," he called.

"This is Jefferson," announced an angry voice from the tonneau. "I want to talk with you."

"I don't care to talk with you," objected Cruice. "So there's no use of your coming any farther."

There was a moment of silence.

"Listen, Ray," came a placating tone that signalized a notable change in tactics. "I'm willing to settle things with you. I'm willing to make terms."

Cruice wavered, but he was suspicious.

"Bless your old heart," he said, "I don't want any terms. Don't let me interfere with your program. Go right on with the fireworks."

"I'm offering you a way out, Cruice," Jefferson repeated acidly. "This is no joking matter for you."

"Your car is getting the creek all dirty," commented Cruice. "Please get out of here with it."

The reply nettled the old man.

"How did this water get here?" he demanded. "You can't fool with me, young man. I'll have you in court to-morrow for violating my water-rights. I'll show you, and I'll show my addle-pated daughter."

"Quiet!" cautioned Cruice. "I'm pointing a rifle at you. It might go off, and you're on my property, and no one would worry very much."

A curse from the driver and a grunt from Jefferson were the only answers.

"I'll be in court to-morrow, all right," the proprietor of the Tincat went on. "But it wont be to tell how this creek got here. I'm going to call on you to explain why you sent one of your staff to rob my vaults and set fire to my mill."

For the first time Dorothy Jefferson betrayed her presence.

"Oh, Father," she screamed in horror. "Were you the cause of this?"

"You get home out of here," was the angry reply.

"I'll not do it. I hate you. I wish I had died before you had a chance to label me as the daughter of a thief." She broke off, sobbing. Her father swore fluently.

"All this is to no point," said Cruice. "The lady's here. She wishes to stay, and I choose to let her. You came to start something, and the sooner you start down the gulch again the better for your own safety. No one could blame me for dropping you in your tracks."

"I didn't have anything to do with this," came a hard, dignified voice from the automobile. "I told the men I would warn you if they attempted any such lawlessness. However, if you choose to fight, I'll fight. And I'll get my daughter if I have to send the militia after her."

"Go as far as you like," agreed Cruice. "But don't linger. I'm getting a cramp in my trigger-finger."

"I can't back out of here," protested the chauffeur, "and there's no chance of turnin' around in the creek. Can't you let a fellow get up on the bank a minute?"

"Come ahead," invited Cruice, and the big car laboriously lifted itself out of the slime to a point within a few

feet from where the Tincat chief and Dorothy Jefferson stood waiting.

At the sight of them the old man smiled wistfully in spite of himself.

"Dammit, boy," he said, "I don't want to be hard on you. I didn't crack your safe or set fire to your mill. Henry Gordon, a crooked mining engineer we hired, suggested the job to me and I fired him—told him to get out of town. I suppose he did it, but it was his own undertaking—not mine. I didn't know he was around. I've played the game pretty close, but arson aint in my line."

"That's right," agreed Cruice genially. "You do prefer dynamite, don't you?"

Jefferson abandoned the argument in his own defense with a snort and a sigh.

"Oh hang it—if you only had sense enough to know when you're licked," he choked.

The chauffeur judiciously delayed starting the car.

"I'm not licked," denied Cruice.

"You just admitted that your vaults were looted, and it's easily seen you've had something of a fire."

"Ah, yes! But the man who cracked the safe will be worrying more about it in a few hours than I am. He escaped with a few bars of tungsten, which while valuable is not vitally necessary in the working of a gold-mine. Mr. Gordon is due for a sad awakening."

"Tungsten?" gasped the old man. "Tungsten?"

"Surely—tungsten. What did you suppose we were reworking our tailings for?"

A long series of hitherto incomprehensible pictures was arranging itself into logical groups in Jefferson's brain.

"Then it wasn't a new process?"

Cruice laughed.

"I hate to tell you," he answered, "but it wasn't. You bought Sullivan's process for the old Gold Inlay claim up the creek a couple of miles, didn't you?"

The question was innocent enough save for the fact that the transaction had been secret—and Jefferson scented trouble.

"You see," Cruice went on seriously, "we didn't need the process to take out tungsten, and we didn't have any water to wash gold with. . . . . And it wasn't much of a process, anyway. I invented it myself several years ago. So I hired Sullivan to put over the deal for the claim. Then we ran a tunnel through the hill and took the water away from your flume. The explosion you heard was the blast which opened the shaft—the creek comes back to its old course just below your works."

"You—" Jefferson began as soon as he could find voice. "You—"

"There's a lady present," advised Cruice.

Jefferson turned abruptly toward his daughter.

"I guess you're right," he said disgustedly. "I'm getting feeble-minded. It's been proved to me to-night. I suppose the only way to save the Jason now is to give it to you as a wedding present."

"No," disagreed Cruice, as the car crept into the creek again. "I have a lot of dry-washing apparatus I'll sell you cheap." The roar of the motor-exhaust smothered Jefferson's reply, which probably was not fit for publication, anyway.

Up on the mountain-side, lights had begun to gleam in the Tincat stamp-mill, and presently came the throb of the batteries.

"It was worth a good fight to save that," said Cruice. "I can sympathize with him in the loss of the Jason. I know how I would have felt had he won. . . . .

"I think," he went on after a moment, with a broadening smile, "I think we can drive a bargain with the irate parent, you and I. We'll trade him back his mine for his promise not to call out the militia to prevent our marriage."

Then he lifted Dorothy Jefferson into her car, took a place beside her and drove slowly down the cañon toward town.

Another of Robert J. Casey's virile stories next month.

The Lights of Falvey's

by John Barton Oxford

IN the shabby vestibule—the exact counterpart of scores of other such vestibules up and down the narrow street—Matt Meeghan scraped the caked snow from the soles of his shoes while he fished with stiffened fingers in his overcoat pocket for his latchkey. Rows of tarnished letter-boxes, many of them with their glass fronts either cracked or gone completely, yawned at him like so many toothless, grinning mouths. The single lighted bulb of the four on the vestibule's ceiling gave out grudgingly a feeble yellow glow which made the cold place seem all the colder and grimmer. Occasional sharp assaults of the dry, wind-driven snow rattled against the glass panels of the outer door behind him.

Finding the recreant key, Matt bent to slip it into the lock. A spirited young avalanche came tumbling off the turned-down brim of his hat, caromed off the top of his tin dinner-pail and made a little shimmering mound on the imitation-marble floor. Matt gave a quick turn of the key, and with it an impatient kick at the bottom of the door. It swung inward, letting out a rush of warmer air which was laden with the mingled odors of unprotected steam-pipes and a score or so of kitchens, most of them at that moment quite apparently in the full blast of their appointed office.

The first flight of stairs, like the dingy floor of the vestibule, was of imitation marble—badly worn and hollowed on the treads by the passing of many feet. Above the first flight pretenses ceased, and hard pine, long since shorn clean of its original varnish, sufficed.

Matt clicked up the first flight and clattered up the second. The third flight he took more cautiously. If there is such a thing as whispering with one's feet, Matt's feet whispered their way up that third flight of stairs. He went a-tiptoe, those heavy shoes of his making the barest audible sound on the worn treads.

On the top stair he stood for a moment listening. The streaky grime of the molding-room at the foundry, which never consents to complete obliteration, rimmed his eyes darkly and accentuated his cheekbones like some sort of badly executed make-up. He was a big, rawboned young man, a trifle worried, and, too, a trifle wistful, as he stood there in the yellow glow of another single bulb on the wall. A steady-

going sort, you would have said at a first glimpse of him.

Noiselessly he turned the knob of the door in front of him. It gave into a tiny hallway—a very clean little hallway. In a room beyond, a faint light glowed. Matt put down his dinner-pail, shook the last of the melting snowflakes from his overcoat and tiptoed toward the light.

It burned in a little room, rather bare, but like the hall, scrupulously clean. There was a bed, and on it some one propped up with pillows; a table with bottles and glasses and medicine-droppers; an old rocker upholstered with faded green brocade close to the bed, and slumped sidewise in the rocker a girl somewhat younger than Matt.

THE girl had been reading, for the gas-bracket was stretched out over the green brocaded chair, and there was a book, face-down, on the girl's blue gingham apron. She started slightly as she caught sight of Matt's big bulk filling the doorway; then she blinked, rubbed her eyes, and pointing to the bed, laid a warning finger on her lips. Matt bobbed his head in comprehension and retreated, with that same whispering of his feet that had carried him up the final flight of stairs. The girl slid noiselessly out of the chair and followed him quite as silently. They crossed the hallway into a small kitchen. A shining nickel kettle steamed a plaintive, low-toned drone on the stove-front. A table against the wall was spread, its dishes covered with a napkin.

"No change to-day?" Matt asked, pulling off his coat.

"Just the same," said the girl.

"Doc been?"

She nodded.

"What'd he say?"

"Nothing more'n he's said already. He wants her to have this new medicine, beginning to-morrow."

The slim fingers of her right hand groped in the pocket of the gingham apron and pulled out a prescription slip. Matt perfunctorily took it and wrinkled his brows over the unintelligible scrawl upon it. He started to put it in an inner pocket, but the girl stretched out her hand for it.

"I'll get it to-night when I go out," she said.

Matt hesitated. Then reluctantly he handed the paper back to her.

"You aint goin' out to-night, Ellie, are you?" he asked with a frown that made his grime-blackened brows yet more forbidding.

"You'll be here, wont you?" she said with a little frown of her own.

"Yes. Sure, I'll be here. You know I'll be here," he said slowly. "But it's snowin' somethin' fierce."

She turned away from him. She busied herself with something on the shelf of the stove. Then she turned to whisk the napkin from the dishes on the table.

"Here's your supper all ready for you. I've got to get ready."

She did not look at him as she spoke. He knew well enough from previous experiences that she wouldn't look at him.

"There's more ham in the pan, if you want it, and two more potatoes in the oven," she went on.

Matt made no move toward the table. He stood there fumbling at his coat, twisting a big finger into the loop at the neck and out of it again.

"It's snowin' fierce," he repeated; but this time he said it sharply, with a certain added meaning in the way he spoke. "It's a rotten night. You'd better stay in."

The girl made no reply. She moved toward the door. But whereas before there had been about her movements a certain weariness, a certain limpness and lassitude, now there was a tautness to her whole slim figure, a hint of finality more than a hint of combat.

Matt took a step forward, stopped, hunched his big shoulders and spoke between set teeth.

"You're goin' to be sorry for all this some time, Ellie," he said with venom. "'Taint right. Darned if it is! You know what the doc's told us. It may be an hour, or it may be six months. It's comin', anyway, and just as likely to-night as six months from to-night. Yet you go traipsin' out every night, and stay out till half-past 'leven, or twelve or—or you know what time it was you got in Monday night, don't you? It

would be bad enough any time, but now—well, now it's worse than ever. If it—it does happen—if Mom dies some time while you're night-gaddin' like this, you'll have somethin' to think of the rest of your life, and I wont never forgive you, neither, Ellie! You'd better think it over a little!"

The girl had stepped into the little hallway. She paused there in the shadows just beyond the door. He saw her shoulders droop and the fingers of one hand plucking nervously at the blue gingham apron. Then she threw back her head. She half turned, but even there in the shadows her face was averted.

"It's easy enough for you to talk, Matt Meeghan," she said querulously. "You're away from here all day. I—*aint*. I've got to go somewheres; I've got to have some little change, aint I? How'm I ever goin' to stand it and take care of her days like I oughter if I don't have no change? Snow or hail or rain—or—or—*anything,* Matt Meeghan, I'm goin' out when I get the chance. I'm goin' out, nor you nor nobody aint goin' to stop me!"

HE heard her go into her own room. He heard her moving about—the swish of clothing as she changed, the crackle of silk, the click of hairpins. He sat down at the table against the wall, but the ham grew cold and the potatoes were untouched.

He tiptoed into his mother's room. She was still asleep, propped on her pillows. He was stealing cautiously out again when the door of Ellie's room opened and she all but bumped into him.

The brown hair that had been smooth and sedately straight when he first saw her that night in the green brocade chair was now fetchingly wavy underneath the coyly tilted black hat. There was something fluffy and feathery at her throat. Her cheeks, of late of a dead whiteness, showed a suspicious pinky flush. Also her lips were too red and her eyebrows too straightly and smoothly black. But she was strikingly pretty; even he had to admit that.

Softly he reached behind him to shut the door of his mother's room. After that he reached up and lighted the gas-jet in the hallway. He said nothing, made no comment. He merely stood there looking at her, but his eyes left no need whatever of words.

"I'll—I'll get that prescription filled and bring it back with me," she said with such uneasy haste that the words all ran together. "I'll—you aint got no right to look at me like that. Didn't I give up a good job to stay home and take care of Mom? Didn't I? You think of that instead of lookin' at me that way! I've got a right to some little change."

For answer he ran one big, pudgy finger quickly across that pinky flush on her cheek and held it out to her in silent accusation. She cried out sharply, whether with anger or chagrin he could not tell. She jerked open the door and ran lightly down the stairs. Matt caught the shimmer of her silk stockings. He saw she wore a pair of wholly inadequate pumps. And overhead the snow was swirling even harder on the skylight above the hall. He shut the hall door and stalked back to the kitchen, his head bent, his cheeks burning hotly, and one great fist clenched at his side.

THE faded green shades at the back windows were drawn down. Matt snapped one of them up to its full height. Through the twisting swirls of snow the lights in the alley below and the lights in the back windows of the houses beyond it shone but faintly—little half-hearted circles of gold in the storm. But across the neighboring roofs his eyes caught a shifting, changing flare, now white, now green, now red. There was nothing feeble nor half-hearted about it. Up there in the stormy darkness it made brilliant mock of the night and the shrouding snow. Plainly he could read the letters of that sign with each flashing shift of color. "FALVEY'S" they spelled, in ten-foot smudges of brilliance.

Matt's fist clenched more tightly, and he ground his teeth. That was where Ellie had gone—over to Falvey's, on the Avenue—Falvey's, with its glitter and tinsel, its smooth, shining floor, its twenty-two-piece orchestra, its little tables beneath overgrown palms, its

crowds of shuffling, swaying, close-clasped couples. He knew. Those silk stockings and flimsy pumps of Ellie's, her too pink cheeks, her too red lips, her too straight and too black eyebrows meant Falvey's as sure as fate. More than one night when his mother had been sleeping quietly he had followed Ellie surreptitiously—followed her until the rococo entrance of Falvey's had swallowed her like some insatiable maw.

The golden smudge above the chimney-pots changed to red. Matt shook his doubled fist at it. Falvey's got 'em—in droves and flocks. It was a giant candle drawing to it all the silly, foolish moths like Ellie. Nor weariness nor sickness nor impending death itself could stop 'em. The lilting plaints of that twenty-two-piece orchestra, the shuffle of all those dancing feet, the little tables beneath the palms, the glitter and the tinsel, the flare of lights—it all got into the blood and stayed there against all odds, against all protests.

Under that disturbing flare of lights, Ellie, one of the best dancers of them all, was even now twisting and turning and swaying in somebody's arm—Ellie, slight, willowy, far too pretty for a place like that.

A LITTLE noise came from the next room. Matt turned from the window. His mother was awake at last. Her dull eyes were watching the doorway as he entered her little room.

"Oh, it's you, Matt," she said. "It must be evenin', then."

"It's a little after eight," said he, settling himself in the chair of green brocade. "You've had a pretty decent day of it to-day, aint you, Mom?" he asked.

"A good day, Matty," said Mary Meeghan. "I've slept a lot—and rested. I feel stronger, Matty. Honest, I *do* begin to feel stronger."

"That's the stuff, Mom."

"Where's Ellie? She gettin' some sleep?"

Matt fixed his eyes on a patch of shadow on the ceiling.

"Uh-huh! Ellie's turned in," he mumbled.

"I guess she needs sleep," said his mother. "Ellie's gettin' pretty tired. It's awful hard on her. I see her dozin' a lot here in the chair daytimes. That aint like Ellie. She's quick and eager, naturally."

Matt said nothing.

"She's gettin' dreadful white and thin," his mother went on. "It worries me to see her so scrawny and drawn. She stays here too close. Ellie don't get no change at all. I wisht she'd feel she could go out once in a while, evenin's."

Matt seemed to find something inordinately interesting in that shadow he was watching.

"A change of some sort would help Ellie an awful lot," Mary Meeghan persisted, with all an invalid's tenacity to an idea. "Dancin', now; Ellie likes that. She's a pretty dancer. She used to love to go over to that place on the Avenue—the one we can see the lights from the kitchen windows—what's the name of it? Oh, yes, Falvey's. I wisht we could get her to go there once in a while. It would do her heaps of good. Ellie loves to dance so, and she's got a good head. She'd take care of herself anywheres. Don't you s'pose you could get her to go over there to Falvey's and dance some evenin', Matty? 'Twould be a change for her. I'd like to see her eyes shine once again."

Matt swallowed hard.

"I'll try, Mom," he said, his eyes turned away.

"Right off?" his mother questioned. "To-night? We used to make such a fuss about her goin' there too much. Maybe it would please her if you told her I said I'd like to have her go."

"It's snowin' to-night, Mom," Matt demurred. "Hear it, rattlin' on the windows? Yep, that's snow. A reg'lar old whale of a storm. It's a fierce night."

"To-morrer night, then?" she questioned eagerly.

"To-morrer night," he promised.

"And you, Matty," Mary Meeghan went on with her plans, "you'd oughter go somewheres evenin's yourself. Now, the night after to-morrer, Ellie'll stay here with me, and you—"

"I'm all right," Matt interrupted her. "Aint I gettin' a change with bein' at work every day? Sure I am. Evenin's

I don't ask nothin' better than just to stay here with you, Mom. Honest, I wanter stay here with you. Honest, Mom. That's straight!"

She smiled at him from her pillows—smiled and sighed and put out one hand timidly toward him—and, even as she did it, fell asleep again.

THE snow flailed the windows; the gas-jet purred and simmered and flickered; Mary Meeghan slept fitfully, with now and then a deep, labored fight for breath. Presently Matt too must have dozed in his chair, for in some hazy mental process, half-dream, half-conscious thought, he was dragging Ellie from the floor of Falvey's, dragging her roughly by the wrist, while she screamed and fought like a little tiger and the dancers muttered threats at him and seemed about to rush him and rescue her from his clutches. Ellie's breath was hot against his neck as he held her hard against him; it came in choking, rattling gasps as she fought to free herself from his clutch. . . . .

Then Matt Meeghan sat up in the green-brocade chair, wide awake. Some one *was* fighting hard for breath. It was his mother, there on the bed. He jumped up, thoroughly alarmed.

"Mom!" he cried. "Oh, Mom! Oh, Mom!"

He sank down on the edge of the bed. He slipped one arm beneath her, lifting her gently. Her wide, staring eyes were full upon him.

"John," she mumbled. "John, dear, John, dear—"

That was the name of Matt's father, dead these twenty years and more.

Matt began to shiver. Now he was stifling hot; now he was freezing cold.

"Mom, it's me—Matt; don't you know? It's me—Matt," he said brokenly.

"John, dear, so long—so long—" she choked between rattling breaths. Then momentarily the eyes cleared.

"Matt? Yes—yes—of course. For a minute—I—thought—" She was whispering the words now. They were all but inaudible. Matt was bending close to her to catch them. "Where's Ellie? I think—pretty—near— Get Ellie, Matt! Call Ellie!"

"Yes, Mom. In just a second, Mom. Let me make you more comfortable first!"

He was shaking so he could scarcely hold her in his arms.

"Ellie—quick, Matt!"

"Yes, Mom. Let me fix the pillows!"

He was fighting blindly for time.

"Ellie—"

There was a sharp struggle; the rattling breath ceased—began again—died away. She crumpled in his arms.

The dry snow beat the windows. The gas-jet purred and flickered and hummed. At last Matt laid the burden in his stiff arms very gently back on the pillows.

Blindly he staggered into the little hallway. The door into the kitchen was open; the shade at the right-hand window was still high up as he had left it. The lights of Falvey's sign, a great smudge of red against the sky at that moment, flared across the shadowy outlines of roofs and chimneys.

"Oh, my God, it's happened," he groaned, "with Ellie over there!"

He tottered to the table, and sank into a chair. There was a great rattle and clatter of dishes as he buried his big head in his outstretched arms.

AT last he caught the sound of cautious footfalls on the hall stairs. Whether it was minutes or hours he had huddled there in the chair at the table was all one to him. The ascending footsteps ceased; the guarded murmur of voices sounded just outside the hall door. Matt lifted his head, listening. He got out of the chair. Every muscle in his body was stiffly taut. Through the kitchen window he could see the clouds of shifting snow; but the glaring light above the roof-tops had gone out.

Outside in the hall a voice—a man's voice—said: "This door?"

The knob creaked as it was turned. Matt fairly leaped into the little hallway. With a quick pull he threw the door wide open. He placed his big frame in the open doorway, his arms outspread, blocking it effectually.

At the top of the stairs was Ellie. Her jauntily tilted hat was wet and

bedraggled with melting snow. The wavy brown hair beneath it was dishevelled; the pinky flush on her cheekbones stood out in almost ghastly fashion against the dead pallor of her skin. Her eyes were wide, frightened, panicky. There was a thick-set man with her, muffled in a heavy frieze coat with the collar upturned about his throat. One of his hands held Ellie's elbow. Matt caught the flash of an overlarge diamond ring on one of the thick fingers.

He stood there in the doorway, glaring savagely at the pair before him; yet he did not see them, for a sudden mist had shut them out from his eyes.

"You can't come in," said Matt, and the evenness of the tones surprised him. "Not here—not now!"

The girl made a little cry—a tired, broken cry.

"Oh, *Matt!*"

"Steady!" he heard the man with her saying. "Steady, now!"

"You're too late," Matt went on. "I warned you to-night before you went."

Something in the tone made her cry out sharply again.

"Not that," she begged, "not *that!* Oh, Matt! Not that!"

"Didn't I tell you before you went it might happen any time?" he said bitterly. "Didn't I? She died calling for you, begging me to bring you to her; and me stallin'—stallin' about you until she died, you painted—"

"Hold on!" said the man beside Ellie so sharply that Matt stopped in his bitter tirade.

"Well, who are *you?*" Matt growled at him.

"That doesn't matter just now," was the quiet response. "Only—"

THE mist suddenly cleared from Matt's reddened eyes. Ellie was trying to push past him. She was pounding him with all the strength of her small doubled fists. She was sobbing wildly:

"Let me go to her, Matt! Matt, you let me go to her!"

He caught her roughly by the shoulder and flung her back against the bannisters.

"You?" he sneered. *"You?"*

He shook his two clenched fists at her threateningly.

"You? Go back to Falvey's or to—to the streets, where you belong," he said.

The man in the frieze coat took a step forward.

"Let her in!" he said in tones ominously quiet.

"Where do *you* fit here, just now?" Matt sneered.

"Nowhere," said the other. "Nowhere at all."

His right hand shot out suddenly, caught the lapel of Matt's coat and jerked Matt well out into the hall.

"Go in," said he to the limp girl against the bannisters. "Go now—and quick!"

The girl sped through the doorway. The man leaped quickly forward, shut the door after her and set his back against it, facing Matt, who had turned and was coming at him with hunched shoulders.

"Wait," said the stranger, "wait a minute before you start anything you'll be sorry for. Listen to me first! You're Matt Meeghan, aint you?"

SOMETHING in the cold, restrained tones had stopped Matt in his tracks. He stood there rather dazed and scowling darkly.

"Yes," he admitted.

"Her brother?" the man questioned with a backward bob of his head.

Matt gave another thick, monosyllabic answer:

"Yes."

The man at the door took a deep breath. His cold eyes took in Matt from head to foot.

"If there's one thing more than another I'd like to do just now, Meeghan, it's to kick you," he said. "I'd give ten good years off my life right now for the sake of kicking you as thoroughly as I'd like to."

"Maybe you'd better try it," Matt suggested.

"I would, if circumstances were different and it would do any good," said the other. "But it wouldn't. Instead of kicking you, I'm going to talk to you and you're going to listen to me. I'm O'Neil, Falvey's manager."

He paused.

"I heard you," said Matt, himself now dangerously calm. "Go on!"

"I used to see your sister dancing there often," O'Neill continued. "She was a good dancer, too—about the best that ever came there. There aint many dance like her, take it from me.

"So awhile back, when she came and hit me up for a job, I was ready to listen."

"A—a job?" said Matt blankly.

"Teachin' the green ones that don't know how or don't know the new dances," O'Neil enlightened him. "She asked me what we paid. I told her we had three women teachers on salary. The rest got what business they could and split with the house fifty-fifty. I offered her one of those jobs, and she took it. She didn't get much at first: she was too meek, too gray-lookin' in the glare of the lights—dressed too plain, too. I suggested to her she make herself a little more on the fluff, and I showed her how to make up for the glare of the lights. She made good after that, all right. She had 'em comin' in droves. She was good business for the house—and for herself."

"Say," Matt gasped, a sudden light beginning to dawn upon him, but the other held up his hand.

"It was good business to keep an eye on an asset like her, so to-night, when I saw she was tired and worried about somethin', and was cryin' quiet-like to herself, whenever she got a minute to herself, I watched her sharp. I didn't want nothin' as good as she to go givin' out on me. She got a whole bunch of fresh ones to teach to-night, too, as luck would have it. Keepin' the fresh ones in their place takes it out of a girl like her. So when it's time to close up, I wants to send her home in a taxi, but she vetoes that quick. She says no, thanks, she can walk—that it aint but a step home. And then I offers to see her home or to send one of the doormen with her. But it's no, thanks, again; she can make it very well alone. And she's sorter shakin' all over and tryin' hard to keep the tears back, even as she says it.

"So I follows her, quietly, at a respectable distance, to see that she makes it all right, and before she's gone two blocks she stops, leans up against a buildin' and goes down in a heap.

"She comes to in the drug-store at the corner, where I took her. And she looks sorter dazed at first, like the drug-store's brought somethin' to her mind that she can't quite remember. And then she digs up a piece of paper and says how lucky she's had to be lugged into the drug-store, because not feelin' well, maybe she'd have forgot this prescription she oughter get filled.

"It all come out there in the drug-store while we was waitin' for the prescription to be put up—about her mother bein' so sick and she givin' up her job to take care of her, and how hard it was comin' on her brother Matt to have to stand the expenses of the best doctors they could get, and Matt hadn't oughter be spendin' all his money, because he had a nice girl he was goin' to marry. So she was tryin' to help out, teachin' there at Falvey's, only Matt mustn't know anything about it, or he'd never let her do it. Matt was that kind. Good as gold, Matt was. We come the rest of the way in a taxi, spite of all her independence. Now, maybe, you *want* me to kick you."

"Kick me?" said Matt dully. "You'd oughter kill me. I almost wish to God you would."

"You got about the right idea," said the other gently, "only now that you feel that way, you'd better go in and be tellin' it to *her* instead of to me. Good night!"

ELLIE was kneeling beside the bed when Matt came in. She struggled wearily to her feet.

"I wa'n't here, Matt," she reproached herself wildly. "She called for me, and I wa'n't here. Oh, Matt, what'll I do? She asked for me, and I wa'n't here!"

Matt leaned over the still, white face on the pillows.

"Mom," he said softly, "Mom, here's Ellie. She—she couldn't get here before."

He turned to the girl, who had crumpled down by the bedside again.

"She understands, Ellie," he said huskily. "Don't never have the least doubt about that. Mom understands."

The BLOOD-RED BANNER

by Michael White

TWO men stood confronting each other in the official room of the Civil Commissioner of an India district. Though they were far from being strangers, neither had offered a hand or friendly word at meeting. Both maintained an attitude of distant formality; and yet in the tenseness with which the atmosphere was charged, each seemed to feel that an impending crisis surmounted whatever barrier otherwise separated them. The older of the two was Carden, the Commissioner; the younger, straight-standing and with sun-tanned, clean-cut features, was Victor Baylay, an American and Chief Engineer of the adjacent native state of Patar.

"I came in, sir," proceeded Baylay, "to give you information of the situation in Patar."

The Commissioner bowed a dignified acknowledgment.

"I am afraid the hasty withdrawal of the British regiment here for active service in Europe has not improved matters."

The Commissioner's serious expression became a shade graver. His hand, apparently for support, sought a table littered with official correspondence.

"I am hoping for a detachment of troops from some center as soon as it can be spared."

"But in the meantime," put in Baylay, "you have merely a handful of men to protect the women and children left behind by the regiment, in case of a native uprising in Patar."

The Commissioner's face cleared a little, as if he had found the urgently needed support.

"I have a letter from the Maharaja, in which he professes his unswerving loyalty. I see no reason to doubt its sincerity."

"Neither do I," agreed Baylay. "I believe absolutely in His Highness' good faith. But I had a private audience with him this morning. He confided to me that he felt his own position was as precarious as that of your cantonment. In fact, he asked me if it would not be possible for you to send him help."

"Is this conceivable!" exclaimed Carden, the more hopeful attitude vanishing out of his manner.

"Unfortunately, all the news I can gather from other sources goes to confirm it. There are two principal revolutionary agents in Patar. The Brahmin, Ram Panth, has gained considerable in-

fluence over the palace, and is making inflammatory headway with the populace. It seems that recently a Turkish officer, Kamil Bey, has found his way overland through Persia and is secretly in Patar. It is reported he has won over Nihil Singh, the commander of the Maharaja's bodyguard. The Maharaja is practically a prisoner, and has been warned if he attempts to thwart the conspirators, short work will be made of him."

"This is bad—unquestionably bad," reflected the Commissioner, shaking his head. Then, after a thoughtful pause: "Do you know for certain if this Turkish officer is succeeding with the Maharaja's bodyguard? At the moment, their defection would portend a disaster."

"That is the chief point in doubt," answered Baylay. "I am on friendly terms with Nihil Singh, but whenever I have touched on the subject, he keeps silent."

"Do you think you could discover his real feeling toward us?"

"I can try. I will also watch closely and inform you of any development."

"Thank you—thank you, Mr. Baylay. I dare say your position as an American places you to some advantage with these people. It is quite likely to exclude you from personal designs."

"As an American, sir," stated Baylay, holding his head decisively, "where the lives and security of white women and children are concerned, I claim the right to be included in their danger—absolutely and without any reservation."

The Commissioner glanced at his caller with a shade of enforced appreciation.

"I—I recognize the spirit prompting your offer, and responsively accept it. I —er—am truly sorry—"

"Mr. Carden," interposed Baylay, "I hold that the serious difference between us is distinct from an outside peril of this kind. I promise you not to charge any act of mine from one account to the other."

The Commissioner bowed his sense of Baylay's chivalrous conduct.

"You return to Patar, then?"

"At once."

"And I shall hear from you?"

"As soon as I have anything definite to report. If the revolt comes to a head, I shall be with you to take my part."

The Commissioner lifted a hand as if conflictingly moved to extend it to Baylay, but the engineer had turned and strode from the room without apparently noticing the action.

BAYLAY mounted his horse, and was quickening its pace out through the compound, when a girl in soft light dress stepped from some shrubbery to the drive a little in advance. Baylay drew bridle to permit her to pass. Instead, she halted at the drive edge. He lifted his sun-helmet. She acknowledged it with an inclination of her head —then looked up from under her parasol into his face. They met for the first time since a few days previous to the onsweep of world-war, and the abrupt severance of relations promising a fortunate marriage. It was she who broke a rather embarrassing silence.

"I suppose you called to see Father, Mr. Baylay. Did you find him very worried?"

"Naturally anxious, but not needlessly alarmed," he replied evasively. "I came to offer him my services, and am glad to say he accepted them."

"Oh!" Her lips parted in a delighted exclamation, while her features lighted up with corresponding emotion. "Then —then—everything has been explained. You know, I never doubted your word —a mite even—about that other person. I—I could dance, or cry, or laugh outrageously for the very joy of it. Why are you not staying to lunch, Victor?"

Partly to conceal his downcast look, Baylay dropped from the saddle and stood beside her.

"Hilda,—Miss Carden, I suppose I must still call you,—you can't imagine how sorry I am to remain on the character blacklist. I feel my position every bit as keenly as I appreciate your trust. But as I told your father before, until the other person chooses to act squarely, I can make no further explanation than my word of honor in denial of the charge against me. I called on your father solely with relation to the situation in Patar."

"Is—is that all?" she cried, and the tone of her voice emphasized infinitely more than disappointment.

"All—yes, all I can say or do at present." Baylay hung his head so that the horse's mane brushed his cheek. "In the end it may suffice—a little."

She turned without another word, to retrace her way amid the shrubbery. He watched her, to notice that as she passed from view a handkerchief was lifted to her face. His features were drawn and set, as he remounted and put his horse into a gallop.

"This comes," he muttered to himself, "for the saving of a friend's wife from folly and earning her everlasting hatred. The curse of the thing is I couldn't disclose what did happen on the night of the regiment's last ball without ruining the woman, and subsequently shattering Grantham's pious thoughts of her in some miserable shell-blasted trench. He went away convinced that I was by no means a friend. It was hardly the time to undeceive him. Until it is cleared up by Mrs. Grantham, I lose Hilda. So the matter stands. Now it looks as if our fight to a finish draws mighty near."

He swept along the road to pass presently a spacious though isolated bungalow. In front of it a stylish *memsahib* (white woman of rank) was directing a native gardener. She paused to watch Baylay curiously, but he omitted recognition of her in any way. Mrs. Grantham was a handsome brunette, and her smile considered extremely fascinating, but the expression on her face as her eyes followed Baylay was of no pleasing quality.

Baylay rode into Patar, to mark by those subtle signs familiar to residents in the Orient that sinister events were impending. Instead of the stir and excitement of Occidental gatherings at a similar crisis, Baylay could feel the tenseness of an unnatural calm—that oppressive weight in the still atmosphere presaging a tropic hurricane. It needed but the awaited word to explode blind unreasoning fury upon the object of stirred-up hatred. He first sought Nihil Singh, the commander of the Maharaja's bodyguard, and found him on the parade-ground in front of the palace, putting his troops of fluttering penons through their evolutions. He waited for the opportune period of a halt to address the stalwart, bronze-visaged, black-bearded commander, sitting his horse like a statue.

"Salaam, Nihil Singh Bahadur," greeted Baylay.

"Upon thy house be the peace and blessing of God," came the grave rejoinder.

"True, peace!" Baylay grasped the cue. "I heartily agree with you in that petition, Nihil Singh."

The turbaned head moved not the fraction of an inch to the right or left, but kept eyes fixed steadily in front.

"I repeat," he said slowly, "with the blessing of God. Otherwise there be a peace which is no peace in this land. Accursed is a peace maintained by the unjust. I say no more."

Baylay felt that Nihil Singh's words were at best ambiguous, seeming to hint strongly at the overthrow of the British *Raj*. He made an effort to elucidate them, but Nihil Singh preferred to talk of the fine art of swordsmanship in cutting a wild pig in half at one supreme masterful stroke. And presently the maneuvers were resumed.

A DAY or two afterward Baylay was looking over some maps of the province, in order to be prepared in case a retreat became their last chance, when a caller, Mr. Ram Panth, was announced.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Show Mr. Ram Panth in."

A moment later a rice-fed, arrogant, sensuous-lipped person entered. He wore the usual native costume, with the trident of his high caste stamped in red paint upon his forehead. Patent-leather shoes and gold-rimmed spectacles marked slight material condescension toward Occidental civilization. Baylay received Ram Panth with a mask of cordiality, omitting, of course, defilement of the holy one by an offer of his hand.

"Come right in, Mr. Ram Panth. Mighty honored by your visit. Sit down—sit down, Your Godship."

Baylay shifted a screen to place a chair for Ram Panth where the light would fall upon his features. As Ram

Panth hesitated to begin, roving the room with dull, fish-like eyes, Baylay gave him a tentative lead.

"Well, Mr. Ram Panth, I hope none of my Mohammedan people have been committing any sacrilege, bothering one of your sacred cows or something."

A fat hand, flashing a large yellow diamond, gestured Baylay's venture aside.

"We are all one people now," he asserted.

"That's better," Baylay nodded.

Ram Panth took this as a favorable attitude, and with inborn guile, proceeded to draw Baylay into preliminary indisputable admissions.

"You are an American, Mr. Baylay."

"Unquestionably."

"Therefore you are for the freedom of all peoples. You are a hater of oppression."

"Right again, as a general principle," assented Baylay, with his eyes fixed keenly on the Brahmin's unctuous face.

Ram Panth, having got thus far satisfactorily, sucked in his breath with growing confidence.

"We agree; I am glad. In you, how your blood—your noble impulses—must boil—must revolt before the face of intolerant contempt and injustice."

"My blood and noble impulses might do so, Mr. Ram Panth, in such a situation as you outline," Baylay fenced warily, "but as yet I fail to note any personal application of it."

"That springs from the generous nature of the American. You do not wish to see evil. In your love for your fellow-humans, you would rather suffer torture than harm the oppressor."

"I would, eh!" Baylay could not repress a grin.

"Yes, you would rather meekly submit."

Baylay felt he was obtaining information about himself which his past record hardly qualified.

"But you have passions, like other peoples." The Brahmin's dull eyes lighted up with a wicked gleam. "The British *Raj* crumbles now everywhere. It is the time for us to cast off the oppressor. We know of your injustice, and feel a deep distress for you. You too have suffered from his scorn and contempt. Be with us, and you shall bathe your hands in the blood of him who drove you from his door. Into your embrace you shall take the woman who spurned your God-sent desire. She—"

Ram Panth broke off, for the mild American's face had become unaccountably overspread with the glare of a tiger. Baylay grasped tightly the seat of his chair, lest he spring upon the Brahmin and choke forever in his fat throat needful information.

"Go on—go on," he hoarsely urged. "But cut out my personal affairs—if—if you expect me to listen."

"For the freedom, then, of our people we desire your skill," Ram Panth went on, heeding the warning. "If money and jewels you would have, of such there will be an abundance. If you so wish, even some of the English lives shall be spared."

Baylay nodded, relaxing a little.

"I prefer that kind of talk, Mr. Ram Panth, but before coming to any decision I must have more information. I shall want to know just who are in the scheme. You can understand I don't care to take a leap into the dark. I'm told the Maharaja is not favorable to your idea."

"He is a fool," sneered the Brahmin. "For him is prepared the choice of a poison-goblet or a string round his neck."

"A cheerful prospect for him," mused Baylay. "How about Nihil Singh?"

"He is with us. So are many of the palace officers. Come to the Temple of Shiva at three hours after sundown. Kamil Bey has prevailed on Nihil Singh to be there. What you demand shall be granted. Exerything will be settled."

"All right," agreed Baylay. "I'm always open to conviction on any project, though naturally I want the right side to win."

"The freedom of oppressed peoples?"

"Certainly—if they are so."

Ram Panth bowed with great satisfaction and departed.

THE Temple of Shiva rose from a river-bank—a pile of rambling, grotesquely decorated buildings. Its main approach was from a court. Beyond

this the low-caste populace were not permitted to pass. Open doors, however, glimpsed for them a lamp-lit interior, for the most part a huge image of the Destroyer, garlanded with flowers and blazing jewels. Its face and mien left nothing wanting by way of a nightmare terror. On entering the court, Baylay was effusively welcomed by Ram Panth.

"Behold,"—he swept a hand toward a considerable gathering,—"there are few of the important ones absent."

Baylay glanced from face to face to note several of the palace officers and, standing apart, the commander of the Maharaja's bodyguard. His spirits sank to find Nihil Singh definitely among the conspirators.

"Come," said Ram Panth, "and speak with Kamil Bey. To him we owe encouragement that a big Turkish army is already at the Afghan gate of India."

Baylay kept to himself the thankful conviction that a big Turkish army anywhere near India was a seductive myth. Kamil Bey was not at first communicative, but after a little yielded to Baylay's inviting manner. He presently drew Baylay apart so that their discussion might not be overheard.

"I have been an attaché in Paris," he confided, "so you can imagine what I think of these ridiculous Hindu idol-worshipers. But they promise to serve our end, and as you can see, there will be plenty of loot for us when we take the upper hand."

"I thought you were out for freedom of peoples too," remarked Baylay.

"Freedom for these dogs of Hindus? To *Gehenna* with them. Wait till we spend the proceeds of that idol's jewels in your New York. Do I suppose you have any other reason for joining these fellows? Nonsense! But we must play a part with them until the time comes. We had better not speak of it any more here. I see Nihil Singh is looking this way. I have argued my tongue black in winning over that old savage."

With this enlightenment, Baylay detached himself from Kamil Bey, to pick up further information. He wandered from group to group, piecing scraps of talk until he had gathered the general plan of revolt. Two bodies were to move simultaneously, one upon the palace to seize the Maharaja, the other to march to the British cantonment. The hour appeared to be set for some time the following night. The cutting of telegraph lines and blowing up of railway bridges were other details decided upon.

Discussion was halted by the beating of a gong. Within the temple a sacrifice was being offered to propitiate the god. Ram Panth, naked to the waist and displaying the sacred thread over his shoulder, poured a libation of blood over the idol. Baylay turned from the spectacle to notice that Nihil Singh had departed. He thought it was an opportune moment for him to slip out and make for the British cantonment, but he reckoned on too little guile in the Brahmin. He found the outer gate barred and bolted, with armed men posted before it.

When he demanded to be allowed to pass, he was told he could not do so until Ram Panth granted permission. It flashed upon Baylay that, having been enticed to the place, he was to be held forcibly for a treacherous use of his name and professional assistance. Since to fight his way out was impossible, he must plan a counter-stroke quickly. To that end he presently rejoined Kamil Bey, who looked scornfully bored with the tedious Brahmin rites.

"Don't you find this kind of thing a bit tiresome?" questioned Baylay in a whisper.

"I would give my head to smoke a cigarette somewhere else," Kamil Bey responded.

"I'm with you. Isn't there a passage back to the river-front? We could smoke there in cooler air."

KAMIL BEY readily fell in with the suggestion. He led Baylay along the wall of the court to a door giving entrance to the temple precincts. A Brahmin moved to intercept them, and yielded passage on a few words from Kamil Bey. He also gave directions to reach a platform on the river-front. They explored a winding corridor, then crossed a lofty chamber to gain the platform with bathing-steps leading into the placid water.

"Thanks be to Allah," piously ejaculated Kamil Bey. "Here one is not compelled to inhale a nuisance with every breath."

He proceeded to light the longed-for cigarette.

"That's so," coincided Baylay, measuring with his eye the breadth of the river. Barring a chance *mugger* (alligator), he reckoned he could easily make the other side.

"I've got a rotten headache from the heat and smell of marigold-flowers in there," he remarked, moving toward the steps. "A splash or two of water may relieve it."

Without remonstrance from Kamil Bey, Baylay descended the steps. He halted on the lowest one, threw up his arms—and then neatly dived into the water. When he came up, he was several feet from the steps. Bestowing a glance over his shoulder, he saw a most astonished Turkish officer. Then he set out with a strong overhead stroke across the river. He heard a shout to stop, and that was all before climbing the opposite bank. While wringing his soaked garments, he looked back upon the temple. By this time the platform held an excited crowd. Torches lighted up the scene, in which Ram Panth and Kamil Bey could be distinguished in hot dispute. Presently a gunshot cracked from the platform.

"It's about time I was going," reflected Baylay. "They'll be coming after me in a boat."

He gave a kick or two to his waterlogged shoes, then made off across country for the British cantonment.

TOWARD daybreak Baylay turned up on the Carden veranda. The news he brought left the situation no longer in doubt. Excepting the Maharaja and a few adherents, Patar was on the brink of revolt. Carden had been wiring desperately for assistance, but the last message which came through before the line was cut held out faint promise of immediate relief. The suggestion of retreating to the railway, several miles distant, was opposed by Baylay.

"We are, all told," he calculated, "a dozen of us, with twice as many dependable servants. Counting the women, children and sick left by the regiment, we have nigh upon eighty to protect. If cut off by Nihil Singh's cavalry, there would be little else for us to do but surrender at mercy. I'd hate to think of the kind of mercy handed out by Ram Panth. Besides, by this time they have probably destroyed the bridges. Here, with a trick or two, we can put up a pretty good and maybe a long-enough fight."

It was decided, therefore, to hold out Carden's house to the end. Baylay was given charge of the engineering part of the defenses, and went to work with characteristic energy. He mined the approaches, connected an electric system, contrived wire entanglements and constructed a barricade for rifle-fire. He discovered a damaged quick-firer left behind by the regiment, repaired it and brought it in to sweep the Patar road.

At sunset the women and children were reported in safety, and posts assigned for the defense. Baylay had encountered Hilda once or twice during the day when hustling from one job to another; now she sought him, rifle in hand, and asked for a position at the barricade.

"I have had to give Father the slip," she explained, "though I don't see why I should not take part with the men. You know I kept my nerve pretty well on that tiger-hunt."

"I do; you held it mighty well when the brute charged our elephant."

"Then please show me where I can be of real use."

He was about to place her under his immediate care, when some one called to him that Mrs. Grantham was still absent.

"Mrs. Grantham," cried Baylay. "Why was she not brought in?"

"They say she refused to come."

"Refused to come! Great heavens, she must be out of her mind! Her house will be the first attacked, now, any moment!"

Impulsively he darted for an automobile held for any sudden emergency, and was off down the road to the Grantham bungalow.

Hilda turned back to the house with pride and resentment quickened.

"And he vowed that woman was nothing to him. Yet he races to bring her here. Why could he not have sent some one else? I suppose, before all, he wishes her to be with him."

BAYLAY reached the Granthan bungalow to find its mistress calmly reading a novel. She rose coldly on his abrupt entrance.

"May I ask why I am indebted to you for this call, Mr. Baylay?"

"To beg you to leave here for safety instantly."

"Thank you, but I prefer to rely on the fidelity of my servants."

"In the circumstances I can't believe you are serious."

"No?" She laughed with a taunting note. "Pray, how am I to know this is not another amiable trick to protect my innocence?"

"Mrs. Grantham, you must be mad to argue like this at an hour of extreme danger to us all."

"Sane enough to hate you very sincerely, Mr. Baylay."

"I grant you that privilege, considering I was imprudent enough to save you once from yourself; but this—"

"Appears to be of the same uncalled-for vintage. You promised to take me in your car to the railway station on the night of the regiment's last dance. Instead, you rambled all over the country, pretended to have lost your way, and I caught an atrocious cold."

"Also with the result," rejoined Baylay, "that your husband, and my former friend, continues to believe in you, if he is still alive on some battlefield. When you asked me to take you to the station, I understood it was merely to exchange a few words with a friend passing through by the up-country mail. It was not until we were halfway there I discovered you were to be the friend's fellow-passenger to Delhi. A remark you let drop about the return-trip gave it away.

"Then I did lose the track—purposely, maybe—and God knows how much else. An explanation of our roaming the country at night had, of course, to be made. I thought when you came to your senses you would find a means to exonerate me, knowing I could not and would not crush Captain Grantham at such a time with the truth of it. But instead, to shield yourself in the easiest way, and, I presume, in revenge for disappointment, you struck at me, branding me as having attempted a bit of forcible deviltry. I think I have stated my case clearly."

"Leave — leave the house," she flashed.

"I will—when you accompany me."

"Never!"

"On the contrary, now, though God knows why I am fated to be your rescuer for the second time."

She stamped her foot, lifting her voice in a call for the servants.

HE closed upon her, picked her up struggling in his arms, and bore her out to the automobile. He drew her, still resisting, in beside the driver's seat, held her firmly and started up fast speed.

"How romantic!" She cast herself back, scoffing at him. "Is it to be a real elopement this time, with the Cardens' as our destination? Is not that rather an odd place to choose, Mr. Baylay?"

Baylay stared grimly into the flood of light cast forward by the automobile-lamps. In contrast, another outlook was black enough in all conscience, shaded darker, if possible, by his well-meaning entanglement with Mrs. Granthan. It occurred to him now how even this action would likely be taken as confirming her version of that other ride. But perhaps in a few hours it would hardly matter. In hopefully cheering up others, he had not deceived himself: their plight was desperate. They had swept on some distance, when a bright flame leaped upon the sky in their rear. Baylay glanced over his shoulder.

"There goes the thatch of your house," he said.

Mrs. Grantham had withdrawn into silence.

Thence they covered the better part of a mile. Suddenly a tumult broke on their ears.

"Hello!" cried Baylay. "The main body of the rebels must have come out by the longer Chenab road. Wonder if we can make a dash through them?"

He slackened speed, cut off his lights and proceeded cautiously. Presently he swung around a bend in the road. Baylay caught sight of groups of figures ahead. He stopped to reconnoiter.

"Jove! we're in a fix, by the look of it," he murmured.

As if in response, a scattering shower of bullets whistled over their heads. One or two spattered on the car. A cry, more of surprise than pain, sped from Mrs. Grantham. Baylay glanced at her to notice she had shrunk in her seat.

"My God! Are you hit?" he anxiously questioned.

"Yes,—I think so,—but it does not seem very serious."

BAYLAY promptly backed the car out of range around the curve, and stopped to examine his companion's injury. He had barely begun to question her when a galloping clatter of many horses came in hot race from their rear. Baylay stood to catch visually the flutter of pennons and glint of saber-scabbards betokening the Maharaja's bodyguard. He reckoned that a leading horseman was Nihil Singh. They now appeared to be caught between two bodies of the enemy. Into Baylay's mind flitted the thought that it was passing strange he should meet his end striving to protect the one woman on earth he had every reason to despise, while elsewhere might fall another for whom his soul craved, and for whose safety he would willingly shed his last drop of blood. His suspense was but momentary, with no time granted to attempt escape. The leader of the troopers came up and called a halt at sight of the automobile.

"Who art thou?" fell the terse challenge.

"Vincent Baylay. And thou?"

"By favor of the Maharaja Sahib, commander of His Highness' bodyguard. *Hai,* Brother, we be of the same *raj* this night of nights."

"Then you are on our side," cried Baylay, with quick revulsion of feeling from dejection to intense relief.

"On thy side, Brother? Was it ever otherwise? Did I not tell thee as much, if thou could but understand. Dost think we would have the heel of the Brahmin again set upon our necks, or the peace of the Mogul oppressor return to the land? But we said nothing, even went a little the other way to throw dust in the eyes of these rebel swine, so that we might catch every one of them when the proper time came. We have seen to it the Maharaja sits secure upon his throne, and now hasten to settle this other matter. See,"—he tapped a white bundle tied to his saddle,—"that is the top part of one called Kamil Bey. It is to be laid at the feet of Carden Sahib."

For very joy Baylay could have flung himself into the arms of the grim Sikh soldier.

"And what dost thou here?" questioned Nihil Singh.

Baylay briefly explained their plight, with the fear that Mrs. Grantham might be seriously wounded. She appeared to have sunk into unconsciousness.

"Come, then," cried Nihil Singh. "We will soon cut a path for her to the *hakim"* (doctor) "sahib."

HE ordered the bodyguard to envelop the automobile and then gave the word to advance on the rebels. In this way Baylay ran the machine until, in a little, he was the center of a furious combat. While guiding the steering-wheel, he caught glimpses of the terrible thrusts of the lancers leaping upon and spitting dark figures. The air vibrated a frightful din.

At last they drew near to the Carden compound. But here another danger threatened. The defenders were blazing away still unaware of the bodyguard's loyalty. Baylay's system of defense had proved its worth in hurling back the first onslaught, but he had not bargained to be blown up with one of his own mines at the touch of a button. He, therefore, threw on his lights full power, pumped his horn for all the power there was in it, and cautiously pushed toward the gate. Hilda, on the other side, heard and saw. A cry went up at the gate to cease fire. The wire entanglements were hastily drawn aside to permit the machine to enter.

"It's all right," he shouted, steering inward. "The Maharaja's bodyguard is with us. They are charging the fight out of the rebels. Don't shoot them by mistake."

He drove on up to the house to shout urgently for the doctor. When he had handed over Mrs. Grantham, he ran back to take part in the victory. On his way through the compound, a small elephant came tearing along in a panic. Perched atop its back thumped and bumped a fat, screaming figure. As the elephant swung around to dodge a tree, Baylay sprang forward and grabbed a wabbly leg that hung from the beast's flank. He tore the figure to the ground, recognizing the features of Ram Panth. He grasped the Brahmin's holy top-knot by which he hoped eventually to reach Nirvana, and yanked him to his feet.

"Justice, Sahib, justice!" pleaded the whining, terror-stricken Ram Panth. "Did I not say the lives of the Sahibs could be spared?"

"Yes, but a lot more for which you are going to get quick justice."

It was with an effort he restrained himself from shooting down the treacherous Brahmin where he stood. Instead, he dragged him with scant ceremony to the house. He had consigned him to a guard, to start again on similar business, when a servant requested his presence with Carden Sahib.

THE servant led the way to a room where he found the Carden family, together with the doctor, grouped about a bed. Upon the bed lay Mrs. Grantham, stimulated to consciousness. The doctor addressed Baylay upon his entrance.

"Mrs. Grantham wishes to make a public statement in your presence before submitting to an operation. We hope for good results, but—"

"But," Mrs. Grantham took up his trend, with an effort displaying will power over loss of physical strength, "but he has considerately advised me to set my affairs in order beforehand. Mr. Baylay,"—her eyes sought his face,—"I have liked you none too well, and I am not moved now by any sentimental change, but I regard it as unfair to carry the account over beyond your ability to combat me."

Baylay bowed slightly.

"I admit, therefore, I have wronged you. I withdraw the charge I made against you that you ever acted toward me dishonorably. On the contrary, I recognize what you did was in all respects the part of a true friend of my husband."

She paused to arrange her sequence of thought, and presently resumed.

"I will disclose it all, so that there may no longer rest even a faint shadow upon Mr. Baylay's honor. On the night of the ball, I—"

"Mrs. Grantham," Baylay interposed, "please say no more. You have entirely satisfied all I claim—I hope Mr. Carden and the others present also understand. It is my wish the rest remain forever unknown beyond our two selves, particularly to the man far away upon a field of his country's service."

He turned to Mr. Carden.

"I don't doubt you will coincide with me in this, sir."

"Certainly, Baylay, certainly. So far as I am concerned, Mrs. Grantham has amply cleared you. I regret extremely I ever believed otherwise."

Baylay bent over the bed, extending his hand.

"Mrs. Grantham, cannot we part—now—as friends?"

She looked upward at him. Presently a light stole into her face. Her fingers sought and rested in his hand.

"Thank you. You are very kind—very generous to me," she murmured faintly.

The doctor intimated he wished those not selected for assistance would retire.

WHEN Baylay passed from the room, Hilda was at his side. They sought the veranda in silence—then a spot where they stood alone.

"Vic,"—she called him by his pet name,—"you know I never doubted you. It was you who said you would not permit me to keep my promise while that cloud remained. I—I am sorry—"

She broke off, lifting her face to his and crying softly.

"Sorry! What could you have ever done to be sorry for?" He caught her in his arms, pressing his lips upon hers in a soul-flaming kiss. "There, sweetheart, that seals the past. What real joy—real happiness—ever came except through a night of stress, pain and discouragement!"

DIMPLES

by

A. C. Allenson

IT took Caleb Ransome forty toilsome years to gather his pile; his son Bulstrode took as many weeks to scatter most of it. Those who saw both operations said that if the old Massachusetts worsted-spinner could know that his money was buying vanities for mine-sharks, he would turn in his grave. This may be doubted for other than the obvious reason. Caleb was a Presbyterian of the rigid predestinarian school. He believed all a man's steps are ordered by the Lord, as the actor's part is written before the curtain goes up; and that philosophy breeds a practical kind of stoic.

THE first of a fine group of stories by an unusually gifted writer. Dimples is a character well worth creating and well worth knowing: you'll find this exploit of his most interesting.

Bulstrode was at once his father's glory and cross, his pride and the negation of life's most cherished hopes. Thus was it written, and to ask "What doest Thou?" of the Foreordainer would have appeared to Caleb presumptuous impiety.

When the old man died, the mill was sold. Caleb had hoped the boy would one day take the reins from his failing hands, but that wish too he buried in the hushed graveyard of his heart. Two hundred thousand dollars was the son's portion when all was over.

MYCROFT wished the man would sit down. He himself was a reposeful person, plump, neat, pinkily fresh, with gray whiskers and mustache. Mustache alone, and he would have seemed sleek; the whiskers saved the situation. They were the kind bank presidents and butlers wear. There was the suggestion of puncture in Mycroft's buoyancy; his eyes were nervously shifty, the cheeks pinker than usual. Who could talk hair-trigger business with a man who regarded one as a python a pigeon? Hitherto there had been an immaturity about Ransome ill fitting the wide-shouldered bigness. He moved with the powerful grace of a sluggish tiger. The unwinking black eyes looked through and past Mycroft. Despite the year's acquaintance, the latter never felt sure how far the cubbish, overgrown boy could be played with, made to dance. There was now un-

certainty in his mind whether the other would grip his throat or ask him out for a drink.

The hour was four, the month March; outside, snow was falling heavily. Broadway below seemed strangely far away and quiet. The office was darkening fast. Ransome now stopped pacing and stood surveying the gloomy office. A few blueprints and photographs were tacked to the walls. On a table were several pieces of rock, some pink-veined and carrying flaky bits of yellow stuff, believed by simpler clients to be gold. Near these were two old tomato-cans filled with dirty sand. Mycroft had the artistic realist's eye for dramatic touches. The suggestion of the wilderness had value, and so there they squatted in seductive simplicity, a fat, red-ripe tomato on each dirty label. The sand smelt unpleasantly, but Standard stock was not put where it is on boudoir perfumes. The cans had been sunk in the ground to let oil ooze in. Truly a land of milk and honey—or their marketable equivalents.

Ransome picked up a can and surveyed it like the grave-digger regarding the skull of *Yorick*. Then a smile, neither mirthful nor bitter, crossed his face.

"I'll take these as souvenirs of my money," he said. "So long, Mycroft. I'm going to the North."

When he had gone, Mycroft drew a relieved breath. He was glad Ransome was going far away. The tiger looked like waking.

"Dead game sport," he conceded when Pye and Skinner appeared. "Never turned a hair or let out one yelp, and he's off to the North for good to-morrow."

It had been an excellent little project. Pye owned a large stage capital acreage, bought for a song, in a Western territory. Skinner was the expert who wrote reports, figured romantically and had the gift of prophecy. He examined the Pye lands, and with the aid of the tomato-cans, demonstrated the presence of oil. The optimistic Mycroft engineered the flotation in his doubt-annihilating fashion. Oil was to be tapped below. Myriads of sheep were to range the grassy surface in woolly fatness. What a prospect! Oil, wool and mutton for the million, at one glorious swoop. At the psychological moment Bulstrode Ransome arrived and exchanged much of Caleb's hoard for some natty bits of excellent paper.

Really it was a miserably humdrum affair. There was not one patch of vivid coloring, no single brilliant ray of gay prodigality in the drab dreariness of it all. A midnight sandbagging in a muddy country lane would have had more high-light romance about it. Still, it was not quite a complete job. Ransome waked in time to save the last fifty thousand. The other had gone irrevocably, since the law knows no way by which butter can be extracted from a dog's throat. Perhaps some hidden legacy of paternal philosophy aided Bulstrode, though halfway to the elevator, predestinarianism petered out. He almost decided to go back, grip the fat throat and hammer the pink face much pinker. Then he felt that to strike a soft-fleshed thing like that would be the same as hitting a woman.

He walked home through the snowy streets. The wind was rising; probably the wind-up storm of the winter was here. He thought of the great white Northland. Soon the birds would be coming back, crane, bittern, duck, great phalanxes of honking wild geese, and the smaller folk of the air. Sap rising in the maples, ice-husk bursting from lake and river, arbutus flowering in the vales. There came the roar and rush of long-prisoned waters, the cold, clean sweetness of Nature's resurrection morn. The hotel room smelt stale. He flung wide the window, and the white flakes whirled in. He looked down on the hurrying throng, speeding vehicles, crowded cars, and longed for the blazing pile in the open, the dripping steak with savor of smoke and fire on it, the very reek of the sputtering bacon on the shack stove. There came to the fettered man the hunger for play for the great, driving forces within him; and a fierce, incoherent desire to square accounts with the three who, under the veil of friendship, had trapped, haltered and robbed him.

"I've got to see Dimples," he said, and went out into the storm again.

THE wind was now high. It rattled the windows of the room on the top floor of the shabby lodging-house, finding its way through cracks and laying thin white drifts on the floor. The room was small, the furniture mean. A biliously yellow gas-jet on the wall flickered in the gusts.

On the table stood a green-shaded reading-lamp. In a low chair beneath the lamp's rays sat "Dimples" Holt, reading a small, thick, vellum-bound copy of "The Iliad," printed anciently in Amsterdam. The fury of the gale was unheard by him, the cold scarce felt, the ills of life forgotten.

Seven o'clock this March night, he was on the sunlit, windy plains of Troy, with wise Ulysses, mighty Agamemnon king of men, Hector of the glancing helm and swift-footed Achilles. Presently he laid the book on the table. The cold had reached him. He got up and leaned against the scarce warm radiator.

A well-built man, though under middle height, with blue eyes, a mop of rebelliously crisp sandy hair, a clean-shaven, boyishly dimpled face that had capacity and character stamped in every feature. He had been a rolling stone. Professor of Greek in a small Western college, newspaper man, prospector, disappearing occasionally for a year or two and then bobbing up again, bronzed wire-hard from some far trip. Men capable of judging said that Dimples was able to do anything, the trouble being that in things men ordinarily count worth while he was unambitious. Now and again a brilliant bit of work made men curse what they called his indolence. His pen bit like an etching tool or rivaled the brush of a wizard in form and color. Chronically impecunious, unfailingly cheerful, he had a comfortable view of life. He worked solely for his living. When he got ahead he stopped working till the obeseness of his pocketbook was sloughed away.

On the heels of realization that he was cold, Dimples felt hungry. He remembered he had not lunched, his inner man's protest was just. A careful search of his pockets produced seven cents, all pennies. He laid them with dimpled gravity on the table in a row. He knew a place where he could get a steaming plate of beef-stew, with potatoes in it, coffee, and a noble hunk of bread, for that sum. It was served by the neatest of red-cheeked Irish girls, who, he suspected, fished out the biggest pieces of meat and potato for him. Sometimes when he finished his coffee, he would find another cup at his elbow, and when he insisted he had drunk his money's worth, she always said:

"Sure, an' it's a great dr'amer ye are."

Yes, it should be the Irish stew and girl; the combination to-night was irresistible. He was preparing to go out, when Ransome appeared.

"Hello, Dimples," said the big fellow, shaking off the snow.

"Come in, Bull, if you can get in." Holt threw down his hat. "You are several sizes too large an animal for a bijou apartment. Mind the chair; it's only got three legs."

"Let's have some dinner; then we'll talk," said Ransome. "Don't leave all that bullion on the table, though. Been raiding the Subtreasury?"

The Irish maid did not see Dimples that evening. They went to a fashionable restaurant and dined sybaritically. Ransome ate little, smoked many cigarettes and was talkative about trivial matters. Few could read his mind from the outer aspect of the man. Dimples did not consider this stolid inscrutability at all admirable; it was bovine, not human. He ascribed it to the poverty of Ransome's life in woman's friendship, and pitied the curiously isolated man who had never bowed before the dominance of fine womanhood. Some day, he hoped, a woman would send sunshine into the bleak life, soften its hard philosophy, and tenderly humanize the man.

They had lived together in the Northland, prospecting one season and wintering there, hunting. Dimples had come to understand Ransome, his driving, indomitable force, coupled with a childlike simplicity regarding men. He

had made it his business to find out what manner of men the Mycroft gang were, and had watched the weaving of the toils. Bull would be fleeced; none could save the honest, obstinate fellow. Perhaps it was a necessary part of his education. Money, as Dimples viewed it, meant little to a really big man, and the common whimpering over its loss always appeared to him one of the most childish of humanity's littlenesses. Nevertheless he hated robbery, especially when the victim was a friend. It was midnight when they got back to Dimples' room.

"That's all finished, for a time, at any rate," said Ransome, flinging himself on the iron bed—which creaked ominously. The listener knew that the Land Development Company had not developed, and that the victim realized it. He tinkered with a hatpin and his pipestem, the dimples deeper than usual.

"I'm going out of this, going North. A year, maybe two, perhaps five. Care to come along, Dimples?" asked Ransome, springing up.

"The hand of the Lord is in it," replied Holt. "I was thinking of a snow-shoveling job for the morning. When's the trek?"

Not for months did Dimples learn the details of the oil, wool and mutton scheme. Then he laughed uproariously, swore learnedly and picturesquely by many strange gods, in divers tongues, while Bull looked into vacancy as if to find Mycroft, Pye and Skinner there. Thereafter Dimples spent many idle hours on his back with the Iliad, reading and meditating luxuriously.

IN the fall of the second year, Dimples reappeared in his former haunts. He had money, lived well, was the same cheery good fellow, with perhaps a little added gravity. There was the same bulge to his pocket that gave him a lop-sided appearance, and he still breakfasted with Homer propped against the sugar-basin, as of yore. It was learned he had been prospecting with that queer chum of his, Bull Ransome. That they had kept together for nearly two years was regarded as no small tribute to the qualities of Dimples. Presently it leaked out, more from inferences at first than direct statement, that some dispute had arisen, making separation desirable. It was not surprising to those who knew both men. Holt, while good-natured and accommodating, could be inflexible.

The wilderness tests friendships. Monotony, enforced idleness during the long winter, reveal and magnify the less agreeable aspects of character. The harsh severity of nature reaches to man, bringing out narrowness, selfishness and intolerance that civilization, in part, hides. The variedness of a broad social life provides balancing influences.

The fraternity of newspaper men gave Dimples enthusiastic welcome. They respected his ability, loved his *camaraderie,* admired his independence of men and things. He could stand with the biggest, his pocket was open to the unluckiest; he had the gift of seeing the best in men, thus revealing the best in himself. Such men are the aristocracy of the most democratic republic.

It was in the dining-room of his hotel that Mycroft ran across him. A neat personal paragraph in the *Meteor* entitled "Achilles in the Arctic" had been the official press welcome to the junior member of the Ransome and Holt expedition. Mycroft saw it, and being curious about Ransome, looked the wanderer up.

"You are a hero, Holt," he said gayly. "I hear you spent two years, shack and canvas, with Ransome alone."

"Guess you've got it twisted," said Dimples, frowning. "The fact we separated means nothing unpleasant. We were like those old Bible prospectors Abraham and Lot, the land too small for us; so we split. Let me tell you, Mycroft, a better man than Ransome in that land you wont find, and it's a land that calls for a broad-gauge, full-powered man."

"And how are things? Where did you say it was?" asked the other.

"North," replied Dimples, jerking his thumb Arcticwards.

"Ah, just so," said Mycroft. "Nothing special?"

"Making a living," smiled Dimples in a satisfied way. "Enough to let me

jog along the Avenue and Broadway every so long to see the girls' new styles. Can't say I like 'em—the styles, I mean. What do you think of this swaddling clothes, Loie-Fuller, twist-'em-around-you, ball-of-twine kind of woman's dress? Guess you've got used to them, but I've a fancy for the kind Mother used to wear, don't you know."

"I'm afraid my opinion isn't worth much," laughed Mycroft. "A married man has to trail with the crowd. Can't say I approve of the extravagances, but—" He lifted his hands in indulgent good-nature.

"You're dead right," nodded Dimples earnestly. "It is the girl inside that counts. Let her have what she likes, make 'em the way she likes, put 'em on as she likes, so long as there's the same fine little New York girl inside 'em; that's what goes. I'd like to take half a dozen back with me. Sounds Salt Lakeish, don't it? but my meaning's all right. There's no better pal than a girl pal. If it's knockout for yours she's there with a lap for your battered head, and if you're in clover, she'll take care there's no moldy money in your clothes to start a germ nursery. I'm taking one to Coney to-morrow; she works in a downtown eating place. Used to fish the meaty bits out of a five-cent stew for me when I was broke, and now the glass is rising we're going to celebrate."

"Glad to hear things are panning out so well," said Mycroft. "If you run across anything, remember we are always ready for a flyer."

"Right oh! Well, so long." And the two separated.

IN the early summer of the third year the whisper came out of the North. From camp to city, across the continent, over seas, round the world, the whisper rising to a hum, a shout, a shriek: "Gold!"

It was coming down from an unheard-of place in the wilderness. Dimples Holt had struck it, and overnight became world-famous. A score of graphic pens spread broadcast the fame of the scholarly adventurer who read the Iliad as others linger over love-letters. Biographical paragraphs, anecdotal side-lights, set forth an attractively intimate portrait. To a world accustomed to the Death Valley type, Dimples was a new species, a picturesque figure in an ordinarily rather sordid field. All summer the rush swept in, headlong, irresistible as a tidal-wave, and as senseless. The only person apparently unaffected by the magic madness was the central figure in it; and most amazing of all, he refused to launch on the favoring tide.

The boom crowd, after vainly assailing him with persuasions and offers, stood back to survey and marvel. A real mine, with real gold in it, a mob with teeming pockets, crazy to invest money, and a grinning little runt of a man telling all and sundry in the pleasantest way to go to thunder with their money; but not to come trampling round spoiling his cabbages. There was something new under the sun, after all.

To fervent beseechers he replied that he had nothing to justify him in taking the public's money. Naturally, the last thing men believe being the truth, nobody believed Dimples. Some thought him a rather original kind of idiot, but an idiot certainly, since no man can be sane and despise money. In a world of the jaundiced, health would be regarded as a disease. Others suspected deep design, though what its object could be none could imagine. There is nothing in this world so utterly baffling as plain truth.

Claims were taken up, worked and abandoned inside the year. Men do not hang over costly mine failures as they once did. Mycroft and his two associates came with the first flight and bought land, Skinner remaining, avowed to work it, but much more anxious to solve the mystery of the Holt discovery. He knew Dimples' reputation as a brilliant, bookish ne'er-do-well, an intellectual eccentric in whose trail a shrewd man might find worthy pickings. He found access to Holt's workings astonishingly easy, and while he did not see all he believed was there, he learned much.

He further ascertained that unsuspected friction existed between Holt and Ransome, that the former's prop-

erty had been Ransome's, sold by the latter at the time of their separation. The Oxbow Camp, Bull's place, lay several miles off the track of the rush; and it was rumored that it had been an unlucky venture. Fortune seemed to have been with the man who had the smaller stake in the game. Many a better man than the big miner has been soured by the realization that he has given away the kernel and retained only the husk.

During his stay in the locality, Skinner had never met Ransome, but one afternoon, waiting for Holt on the dividing-line between their properties, he saw the Oxbow man coming on horseback up the trail. At first he was sure the rider had seen him as he darted back for the shelter of the bush, but after a moment's watching he doubted this. As he gazed, from his hiding-place he saw that four years had turned the green giant into a seasoned, iron-visaged man. There was a masterful, reckless insolence of bearing, that made Skinner glad their paths lay apart. The Oxbow Camp was isolated from the world, hedged in by tree-clad hills. The gang working there were foreigners over whom, report said, Bull ruled with a despotic, ruthless hand. A bitter, lawless, driving bully of a man—so repute named Bulstrode Ransome.

Holt, walking to meet Skinner, came face to face with the rider at a sharp turn of the path.

"I was coming to see you," said Ransome curtly, as they met. "No, I don't want to go to the house; what I have to say can be said here and quickly. You've been long enough in this country to know what's thought of a man who entices away his neighbor's workmen. I hear you have taken one of my foremen, Black Dominic."

"If you mean I have the man working for me, that is so," replied Holt. "If you think I enticed him, you are mistaken."

"I don't care to spin words," said Bull. "The man was mine and you've got him now."

"But be reasonable, Ransome," answered Dimples quietly. "He came of his own will. I'm short-handed, and he told me he had left you."

"If it was known you barred deserters from other mines, there would be no trouble of this kind," retorted Bull. "You've got a bad reputation for fussing up workmen, playing the sympathy stunt and coddling them for your own profit."

"Why don't you try a stave of the same music? Perhaps the men wouldn't quit you so readily," said Holt.

"I didn't come for advice," snapped Ransome. "I came to remind you of one or two things you seem to be forgetting. I brought you here, staked you when you had nothing, gave you the land you are working on your own terms. All you have you owe to me."

"I know it. You gave me better than a square deal, Bull," replied Dimples readily.

"Yet you turn round and steal my man," sneered Ransome. "Look here, Holt: you send that Black Dominic back to me, or I'll fix you so that you wont have any mine to put poached workers in."

Dimples' face flushed, and the blue eyes shot fire.

"If you'd asked decently, Ransome, I believe I'd have tried to get the man back to you," he said. "But if you think you can handle me as if I were one of your Oxbow dagoes, you've guessed wrong."

Skinner admired the little man's grit. He gave back not one inch, and outmatched the frowning bulk of the other.

A month later the Mycroft syndicate met in the Broadway office. Skinner had an excellent report to present. There was big trouble between Ransome and Holt. The former had a lien for forty thousand dollars on the Holt lands and had brought suit. Latterly Holt had been trying to raise money, but the ebb of the rush had spoiled him. A gold promotion may mean millions or nothing; there is rarely middle ground. Dimples had missed his moment and damned his own prospects by foolish candor.

"Handled it as if it were a case of smallpox," grinned Skinner. "Scared lest the dear public should lose. Morals up to the gunwales, and then some.

Between ignorance, fear and crankism, he has muddled a fine thing into the ground."

So it happened that when Dimples arrived in New York on his forlorn trip, with Ransome's judgment hanging over his head, Mycroft's offer of assistance meant not only the elimination of Ransome, but of Holt also. When the offer was made of aid at the cost of four-fifths of his holdings, Dimples cut loose and cursed Mycroft and his friends horribly. They forgave him, since his nerves were so palpably frayed. High and low, New York, Boston, Montreal, and half a dozen other cities, Dimples searched in his belated frenzy, but, as Skinner graphically put it, he might as well have tried to sell a dead skunk. There is nothing more malodorous than a mine project in a boom rebound, and certainly nothing deader. Here and there a speculator might have been induced to take a flyer at a fancy price, but Dimples wanted too much to tempt a straight gamble.

A NEW SERIAL

"VAGABONDS OF CHANCE" is the title of a new serial by George Washington Ogden which will begin in our next issue and which will be completed in four generous installments. It's an exciting story of boom days in Oklahoma, and you're sure to like it.

THE sale took place in the little frame courthouse on the edge of the wilderness. Never had the return swing of the pendulum of fortune been more dramatically swift than in the case of Dimples Holt. A year ago, the sale of a fragment of his holding would have made him rich for life. He had missed his tide, and lay stranded, a no less pitiable figure because of his quiet cheerfulness. He sat in a corner, alone, his bent head and broad hat hiding his face. Across the floor stood Ransome, big, domineering, intolerant. The sheriff was stumbling through the customary legal preamble when Mycroft, Pye and Skinner entered, and sat down at the back. Ransome's face was like a thundercloud.

The bidding shot up to fifty thousand dollars in the opening minutes. Skinner nudged Mycroft: the bidders were local men, who knew. Then Ransome spoke for the first time, and in crisp five-thousand jumps one hundred thousand dollars was reached. It was rumored round the room in the sudden excitement that the two well-dressed strangers who seemed greatly interested in the proceedings were millionaire Porcupine boomers getting busy on the new prospect. They challenged Ransome, and a merry duel lifted the figure to one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The syndicate at the back then held a hurried consultation, Mycroft casting an appraising glance at Ransome, with whom the bid rested.

"Five more," he said in his softly persuasive voice.

"Sixty!" came back Ransome like a shot.

"And five!" responded Mycroft, with mild persistency.

"The bid's against you, Mr. Ransome," said the sheriff.

Bull shook his head, and pushed his way through the mob. Outside he stopped for a moment to listen to the finish.

"Going! Going! Gone!" He could almost see the whirl of the hammer, as the bang resounded through the place.

THERE is but one hotel in the little settlement, and Skinner had turned in to order dinner, and await the coming of his friends, who were still in the sheriff's office. He was in excellent spirits, as a man has the right to be whose plans have worked out perfectly. The door opened, he looked up, expecting to see his associates, but in came Dimples Holt and Bull Ransome, arm in arm, and behind them the two reputed Porcupiners, who were New York newspaper men, of Dimples' inner circle of friends.

The unholy alliance was disconcerting, and shook the apprehensive Skinner to the toes. It might mean nothing but he didn't like it. He went out and hunted up his confederates. There was a hurried consultation, and the three hurried over to the hotel. For a man lately rifled of his possessions,

Dimples seemed wonderfully cheerful, but of course he had come out well, and when Ransome was paid off he would have enough to enable him to promenade Broadway modestly for quite a time, and read Homer, free from mercenary attractions. In the middle of the table at which the four sat was a brown-paper parcel.

"Here come the conquering heroes," shouted Dimples, waving his hand amiably. Really he was quite irresistible. Mycroft rose and approached the table, a smile on his face, his associates following.

"No hard feelings, I trust, gentlemen," he said cheerily.

"Lord! no," replied Dimples. "Smile, Bull, you animated gargoyle!"

"Not in mine," grinned Ransome. The bogus Porcupiners roared lustily.

"We may have an offer to make you, Mr. Holt, as we proceed with the development of our purchase," said Mycroft pleasantly.

"Develop what?" asked Dimples. "Oh, the hole in the ground? Well, there are all kinds of funny notions about fun. Guess you've lots of money, so it don't matter much."

"No, so long as it comes back with some growth on it," remarked Pye.

"You don't mean to say you still think you've got a real, cross-my-heart gold mine?" asked Dimples wonderingly, and a little hurt. "After all I told you! Gosh! what a liar you three must think me. I swore at anybody who said I had one, and when they came around with their oodles of money I sicked the pup on 'em."

"Where did the gold come from that was sent down?" demanded Pye.

"Ask Bull," said Dimples. "There's the villain with the tons of yellow stuff. Bull! make a noise like *Gaspard* in 'The Chimes of Normandy.' He's got a place, Skinner, over on the Oxbow that'd make Crœsus look like the end-man on the bread-line. Bull's not like me: I've got to blab all I know, but he sits and looks like the sound of a locked safe door."

"Salted!" spat Mycroft, stung by the banter.

"Lord, no," grinned Dimples. "Except as Nature salted it. She's the tricky dame. Sometimes it's oil—then wool and iced mutton."

"If there's anything crooked about this, you'll pay," threatened Skinner, shaking his fist.

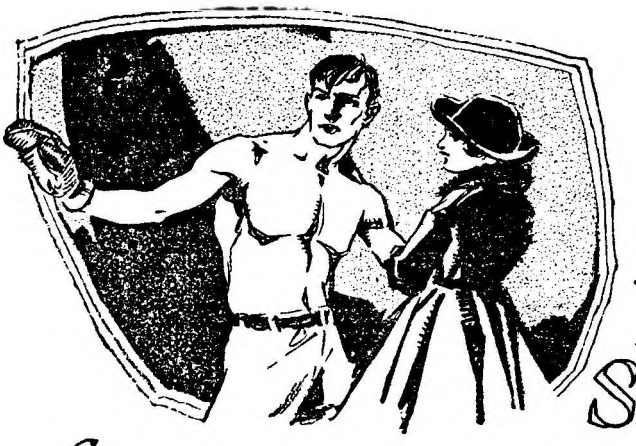
"Crooked!" said Dimples scornfully. "It's the straightest you'll ever see. When I stage-manage a show it goes through on schedule time. It came a bit high—fifteen thousand bucks for land and fixings, and piffling round picking gold out of millions of tons of rock. I guess for every ten dollars you spend you may rake in ten cents' worth of pay-stuff. It isn't as bad as it might be; I came out all right: fifteen from one hundred and sixty-five leaves one hundred and fifty thousand, rich, deep velvet, and I certainly did need the money."

"Wont everybody sit down?" asked Ransome plaintively. "I'm hungry and mine's mutton. Do you know, Mycroft, I haven't touched a shred of mutton since our little flyer that cost me just what Dimples has scooped. Uncover the bride cake, Dimples, and let's get to work."

HOLT opened the parcel and two dirty tomato-cans stood revealed.

"Chuck 'em out, Tom," said Bull to the grinning waiter. "Everything's square. Dimples and I signed partnership articles half an hour past. He brings in a hundred and fifty thousand—just what you separated me from, Mycroft; and if you want to know something about a gold-strike, look out for papers the day after to-morrow. You'll hear about the Oxbow and the Iliad mine that Ransome and Holt are going to gouge out. You're not leaving us? Well, if you must. Mine's mutton, Dimples—chops first, then loin, and we'll fill in with leg. I feel that I could look a whole sheep in the face now and not blush, for the first time in four years."

There will be another story by A. C. Allenson in an early issue of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.



Jim Kettig's Soft Spot

by Octavus Roy Cohen

CERTAINLY no one of Jim Kettig's acquaintances would have suspected him of so human a sentiment as love, which merely proves the old rule that even a man's intimates know very little about him.

His friends, who numbered legion, knew the exterior Jim Kettig very well: they knew him for a square-jawed, broad-shouldered, utterly ruthless man, expert in the ways of the prize-ring and the race-track, a great bargain-driver, a man avowedly striving for the betterment (financial, not spiritual) of Jim Kettig — frankly brutal, frankly gruff, frankly untroubled by conscience of any sort.

As regards women, he had little to say; but that little was short, to the point and very profane—until he set eyes on Mary McManus.

His meeting with Mary McManus was directly attributable to his weakness for biscuit-colored gloves. Also the long arm of coincidence played a part in it. It was by the merest coincidence that Jim happened to be passing the department-store in which Mary clerked at the glove-counter, at the very moment he noticed the frayed forefinger of one of his gloves. A matter of such moment called for immediate action, and so Jim entered the store, sought the glove-counter and requested a pair of biscuit-colored gloves. He paid no heed to the girl behind the counter who eyed his headlight diamond and asked:

"Something for about three-fifty?"

Just at that moment Dan Cupid scored a bull's-eye. Jim Kettig's eyes flashed upward very suddenly into the hazel orbs of the girl. He took her in all at once: perfect complexion, dark brown hair, small, trim figure, slender hands. And Jim Kettig flushed, for the first time in his life, and without apparent rhyme or reason. And because he was Jim Kettig and proud of his reputation as a woman-hater and bad man in general, he swore to himself and made his voice three notes gruffer than nature intended.

"Lemme see the best you got," he ordered. The girl turned her back on him and commenced her search for the desired articles.

It so happened that the very first pair of gloves she proffered were quite the best looking biscuit-colored gloves Jim had ever seen, and they fitted him to perfection. But he didn't take them, stride from the store—oh no, indeed. He looked at other gloves, fingering them over, trying them on, growing gruffer and more enthralled with each

passing second. Nothing in biscuit-color seemed to suit. He inspected black gloves and tan ones and gray suède. A wide-eyed floorwalker, devotee of ringsides, recognized the great Jim Kettig and bustled forward.

"Good morning, Mr. Kettig," he said. "Can't you get what you want?"

The other man whirled. He was distinctly displeased by the interruption.

"Yes, I can git what I want—and without no help; understand?"

Plainly the floorwalker did not understand.

"If you would prefer that *I* wait on you—"

"I'd prefer nothin' of the kind." Kettig picked up the pair of gloves which she had first shown him, and flung a fifty-dollar bill on the counter. "I'll take these," he said gruffly. For the barest fraction of an instant the girl's eyes met his, and he fancied that he detected the ghost of an amused twinkle in their limpid depths—at which he flushed once again.

CHANGE was brought; Jim donned his purchase and tossed his frayed ones languidly on the counter with a command to "Give 'em to one of the elevator-boys." Then he turned away with not another glance at the girl behind the counter, and started for the door. Halfway there he turned: the floorwalker had known him, and it was plain that the floorwalker had seemed anxious to curry favor. Kettig, a good politician, planted a smile on his big, clean-shaven face, and turned to seek the dapper little fellow.

He found him in the center aisle. The young man stepped forward eagerly.

"Mr. Kettig?"

"Yeh. That's me. Say—I like these gloves. S'pose you send half a dozen pair to my rooms. Er—ah—how'd you know who I was?"

"Oh!" with a deprecating shrug. "Anyone who knows anything about fighting knows you." The inflection was overtly flattering.

"Aw, gwan! You attend fights much?"

"As often as possible."

"Great scrap on at the American tonight. Tommy Hopkins and Knockout Brennan. Going?"

The floorwalker trembled.

"I'm afraid not. Brennan's made a sensation, and the cheap seats were sold out when I dropped by the box-office yesterday morning. And I can't afford ringside for that class of bout. They wanted five dollars for them."

"Rot!" Kettig slipped memorandum-book and gold pen from an inside pocket and scribbled rapidly. "Here's a pass for you and friend, ringside, tonight. If you have any trouble about it—which you wont—call for Jim Kettig. I'll fix it up."

Manna from Heaven! A gold-nugget! The floorwalker gasped, stared and then burst forth into voluble thanks.

"Aw! can that! Can that! I want you to set eyes on that Knockout Brennan. He's the best lad I got in my stable. Comin' champ', he is. And when a guy likes the game as much as you do—why, I hate to see him barred out from a good scrap because he aint got the price. No thanks comin'—besides, you're gettin' them gloves for me. By the way,"—with crafty indifference,—"that was a competent little saleswoman who served me. What's her monniker?"

Eager to prolong the thrilling interview with the great man, the floorwalker fairly spilled words.

"Mary McManus. She lives—I think—at eighty-two West Ninety-seventh. She's pretty green, at that. But I don't reckon she'll be here very long."

Kettig's face clouded.

"Aint gonna be fired, is she?"

"Naw!" The floorwalker grinned. "Them pretty ones don't wait that long. We think she's gonna be hitched."

"Married?"

"Uh-huh. And say—it's to a fighter."

"Oh! Who?"

"I don't reckon you've ever heard of him. He's a youngster, been fighting prelim's over in Brooklyn. Then he knocked out Battling Riley when they slung him in on a semifinal, and now they've got him fighting semi's at the clubs in Manhattan. He—"

"You mean Kid Conover?"

"Yeh! Say, you know 'em all, don't you?"

"I'm in the business. But how you know she's engaged to the Kid?"

"If she aint, she will be. He hangs around the store 'most every night to take her home, and they been keepin' compn'y regular for about six months. And she reads the sport-pages about him, an' all that sort of thing. She—"

"Aw! chee—you rattle on an' on about her. I was just curious, that's all. What I'm *int'rested* in is them gloves. You'll deliver 'em to-day—huh?"

"Yes, yes. To-day, sure. Drop in again some time. And thanks awfully for that pass. It was mighty good of you."

KETTIG strode from the store, his thoughts chaotic.

Being a man of the type strong on self-analysis, he faced issues squarely. And three facts confronted him—facts and problems in one. Marshaled, they loomed up about as follows:

First: he was in love, or perilously close to being in love, with Mary McManus, however ridiculous the idea seemed.

Second: she was, according to the floorwalker, on the verge of the matrimonial plunge with Kid Conover.

Third: if she was to listen to the suit of him,—Jim Kettig,—Kid Conover must first be relegated to the limbo of impossibilities.

In order that his mind might work more clearly, Jim Kettig walked toward his rooms, some twelve blocks away, and as he walked, he gave himself over to concentrated thought. Plainly, in order to win the girl he must first eliminate Kid Conover as a rival. Jim didn't care to enter the race for her hand until he felt that competition was not very keen, for Jim underrated his powers as a woman-winner. He knew too little about the sex.

By the time he reached his rooms, his plan had been given birth, nourished and was mature. The next day, in glancing over the sport-pages, he saw that Kid Conover had won an easy victory on points in the ten-round semi-windup at the Rink. Thereupon he sent word to the Kid that he wished to talk with him.

Four hours later Kid Conover, slender, wiry, square of jaw and level of eye, and with the clear, clean flush of well-trained youth upon him, presented himself. Kettig came right to the point.

"Conover, I have seen you scrap," he lied abruptly. "And there aint a doubt that you got championship stuff." The young fighter flushed with pleased embarrassment at the compliment from the prize-ring czar. "I'll take you under my wing, train and manage you, if you'll put yourself in my hands entirely. It'll be on the basis of a fifty-fifty split, and we'll sign a five-year contract—so if you win the title I'll get back the money I'm risking on it. What say?"

Conover's face was answer enough. He was alternately red—then ghastly white. Certainly there was no doubt of his delight at the chance.

"Well?" The big man was impatient.

"Of course! Sure."

"Well, here—" Kettig shoved a typewritten document across the table. "Give that the once-over. I thought you'd accept, and I had my lawyer draw up the contract. If you like it, sign it."

IT took Kid Conover less than three minutes to read the clearly expressed conventional fighter-and-manager contract. In three and a quarter minutes, his signature was attached and one of the bell-hops was summoned to witness the ceremony. That done, the bell-hop was dismissed and Kettig proceeded to outline his plans.

"The trouble with you is that you aint had a chancet," he remarked. "First off, I'm gonna keep you under cover. I aint gonna let it be generally known that I have took you under my wing. I'm gonna fix up special trainin'-quarters, get you a coupla high-class sparrin'-partners and put you in trim to do your best. Then I'm gonna get you on with Knockout Brennan, who finished Tommy Hopkins at the American last night."

"Brennan!"

Kettig's eyes narrowed.

"You aint scared of him, are you?"

"No-o! I aint scared of anyone. But I'm green yet, and he's a vet. Why, after whipping Hopkins, it looks like Nolan will hafter give him a crack at the title."

"Right-o. And if you whip Brennan, where'll you be? Answer: on Easy Street. Nolan'll take you on—he'd rather, because he's afraid of Brennan, anyway, and he wouldn't be afraid of you. Then you'd be champ and takin' in something like twenty thousand a year soft kale. You got everything to win—and the stuff to win it with—and nothing to lose."

"But—"

"Say, Kid, listen to me: d'yuh suppose I'd be sinking this coin if I thought you was gonna lose? Not on your life I wouldn't. Jim Kettig aint that kind. I'm backing you to the limit to put acrost the greatest surprise-party they had in this little old town in a long, long time. You're a little bit of all right as a scrapper—fast and clever and with a good punch. You need a little training against good sparrin' partners to season you—and that's the reason I don't want it known you're under my wing—because then the managers 'd be a little wary about puttin' you on with Brennan, as I got him too. Why, if you keep your nerve, he'll be pie for you. He wont plant a fist on you twice in the ten rounds. And think what it'll mean—"

"Oh, I'm willing enough, Mr. Kettig. I only thought I was so young at the game."

"So much the better. That'll make it a bigger surprise than ever. 'Unknown fighter whips Knockout Brennan. Sensation sprung at American Sporting Club. Nolan will have to fight new phenom'.' Say, can't you *see* them headlines in all the papers? It'll mean a fortune for you, a plumb fortune. Sure, it's something of a gamble, but if I didn't think you'd win, I wouldn't be doin' it, would I? It's a go?"

Fame! Fortune! It meant one thing to the youthful and ambitious mind of Kid Conover—Mary McManus! And Mary meant home and comforts and happiness and—oh, everything worth having! It *was* a go, and Kid Conover said so in no uncertain terms. Frankly, he had never believed he was a stellar fighter until Jim Kettig had announced it: but Jim knew fighters, and he had developed several champions from apparently poor timber; and it was as he had said: what object could he have if not to win? Kettig was a long, long way from being philanthropically inclined.

Kid Conover might have felt qualms had he seen the metamorphosis in Jim Kettig as he closed the door and departed. The big man's face grew purplish, and his hamlike fists clenched.

"The little runt!" he choked. "Her lovin' *him!* Why—why—well, when Knockout Brennan finishes with him, there wont be enough of him to love. He'll be plumb mincemeat!"

AS Jim Kettig entered the room, Kid Conover flushed and quickly shoved something under his pillow. His training was finished; the day of his fight with Brennan had come after six weeks of rigid training, and to-day he rested on a lounge, blankets covering him as protection from the cold. Kettig caught the gesture as he entered, and his face flamed.

"What's that, Kid?" he asked sharply. "What you do that for?"

Conover's face was beet-red.

"Nothin'. I—"

"What you got there?"

"Nothin'."

"Say, listen here: I been backing you hard. I don't want no tricks pulled. Lemme see what you got there."

His insinuation was plain. He fancied that the Kid was hiding liquor or a cigar or some other forbidden thing. And in self-defense, the Kid produced that which he had hidden. It was a picture. Kettig snatched it from him, and the laughing eyes of Mary McManus stared into his. Kettig was conscious of a contraction about the heart.

"Well, whadaya know about that? Picture of a Jane. Who is she?"

"She—she—" stammered the young fighter very boyishly. "We're going to be married—if I win. We'll have money enough then."

"I see. I didn't understand nothin' like that when we signed up."

"You didn't ask."

"No-o. That's true. Well, you got my blessin'. Tell me about her."

DAN CUPID is a perverse little runt. He takes keen delight in forcing those into whose hearts he has sent his darts, to do things which torture them. For instance, if there was one thing in the world which Jim Kettig did not want, it was to hear Kid Conover discuss Mary McManus.

In the first place, Jim knew almost as much about the girl as did the Kid. Not that he had been introduced formally: such a crude procedure as that would have spoiled his little game. No hand must be seen behind the Kid's crushing by Knockout Brennan; no sinister motive must be attributable to him. Jim Kettig knew enough about women to know that all his careful planning would go for naught should Mary McManus ever discover that it was with the desire of winning her he had disguised himself as a good Samaritan and brought the Kid's ring career to an untimely end.

Say what you will of Kettig's morals or lack of them, his scruples or his absence of all scruple—one thing must be said of him: he was a careful workman. Furthermore, he knew the ins and outs of the little game he was playing. He knew, for one thing, that a single crushing defeat at a time when a young fighter is forging to the front will forever end that fighter's chances as a titular possibility. It's a matter of ring psychology and ring history. And the rule has even worked with champions and near-champions. Terry McGovern was never the same after Young Corbett whipped him, nor Sharkey after his grueling mill with Jim Jeffries at Coney Island, nor Corbett after going to dreamland from the end of Bob Fitzsimmons' arm. And in the case of Kid Conover, young, ambitious and with his heart bolstered by his successes,—which were successes, however minor,—the blow of a bad defeat would prove crushing. And Knockout Brennan had instructions not to finish the battle with a blow, but to hammer the fighting soul out of Conover's body.

Jim Kettig had passed away the six weeks of Kid Conover's rigid training season in the calfish delights of watching Mary McManus from afar and allowing himself to fall more and more deeply in love with her. To tell the truth, Jim Kettig was surprised, and not a little ashamed of himself. Not that there was anything to be ashamed of in falling in love—but under Jim's code it was silly and weak and not the thing for a strong man to do. Also, Jim would have cut off his right hand before he would have broken the news to any single one of his friends. And the very fact of repression served to kindle further the fires of his passion, although his nature was naturally icy, and not at all impatient; and so he did not make a false move in his little game.

IN response to his request, Kid Conover talked. It was not the easy-flowing conversation which was his by right, but his speech was halting and embarrassed and very, very awkward.

"Well, ye see, it was thisaway: me 'n' this girl—Mary McManus, her name is, and she works in the glove-department at Stacey's—me and her has been keeping company for the longest kind of time, and wanting to get married, and somehow I couldn't quite see my way clear to do it. Not that I didn't want to—oh, chee, man! if you'd ever seen her, you'd know it wasn't that; but I couldn't get enough coin together. There I was, managin' myself, and payin' my gym' expenses, and trainin' without sparrin' partners, and fighting almost for nothin', because the managers knew I wasn't in no position to ask for more kale than they offered; and she was a-waitin' an' a-waitin' and never askin' no questions, an' sayin' that she was just as anxious to get married as me, an'—I guess this makes you sick, don't it?"

Kettig's face was white, and his big fists were clenched.

"No." His voice seemed very harsh. "Go ahead!"

"Well, me 'n' her was terrible silly. Come time when she'd have an afternoon off, like Thursday,—Stacey's closes Thursday afternoons in summer, y'know,—Mary an' me'd go down to some big furniture-store, an' we'd allow

that we was thinkin' of furnishin' up a little apartment, an' we'd take pencil an' paper along an' take notes on prices an' things, an'—well, we got worked out about six ways of furnishin' the home, an' payin' for it on the installment-plan.

"What we thought we'd do was to furnish a dinin'-an'-livin' room in fumed oak, an' the bedroom in bird's-eye maple—with a real kitchen-cabinet an' a gas-range in the kitchen, so she wouldn't have too hard work; but even then we didn't see how we could do that on what I was earnin'; an' neither of us wanted to board, y'know. An' then, along come you—makin' me this offer an' givin' me a chancet: an' golly! if I win, we're gonna take a real apartment, with steam heat an' all, and furnish in Circassian walnut an' solid mahogany, with a phonograph an' a piano, an' we're gonna have a woman to do the heavy work an' the washin': Mary says she wont do no such of a thing, but I aint gonna scrimp the dollars if I can afford to spend 'em, an' it'll save her work."

The Kid's eyes were shining, and he reached out an impulsive hand and laid it on the manager's knee.

"It's you done all this, Mr. Kettig, every last bit of it. Mary, she says she wants to meet you, an' I was plannin', maybe, if you would, after I lick Brennan—"

"You sure you gonna lick him?"

"Sure?" The Kid laughed. "With all that waitin' for me, how could I *help* it? An,' as I was sayin', after I lick him, I want you to have dinner with us some evenin', so Mary can meet you. She—she—says she just *loves* you a'ready. An'—an'—" He flushed painfully. "Of course, I aint said nothin' like this to her, but—but—if we ever have a youngster—he—he's gonna be named Jim Kettig Conover. An' that's a fact. Sa-ay—"

The Kid's face went suddenly blank. For Jim Kettig rose abruptly and made for the door.

"What's the matter, Mr. Kettig? What—"

Kettig whirled. His expression was very, very queer.

"Oh! you go to blazes!" he half-snarled. The door slammed behind him.

THE arena was choked with rancid cigar-smoke. From the thousands of tensed spectators arose an excited buzz of comment and conjectures. One and all they agreed that this was the greatest fight the club had ever staged.

For full seven rounds, now, this unknown fighter—this semifinal man who called himself Kid Conover—had been fighting the redoubtable Knockout Brennan to a standstill. And it had been a fight—a terrific battle of give and take.

The first round had proved very tame. Kid Conover had tap-tapped about the ring and contented himself with jabbing. Nervous, that was it, and feeling himself out. Then in the second round Brennan had connected with a vicious right hook to the jaw. It was a blow the like of which the Kid had never felt in all his brief professional ring-career. His feet had been lifted from the ground. His head had struck the canvas crackingly, opening an ugly wound from which the scarlet flowed freely. And with that cut had come a ferocious insanity to the Kid. He arose from the canvas fairly Berserk. Was this man to rob him of the happiness in store for him? For the Kid must win; he knew that. If he lost, he would never be able to marry. It would be a financial impossibility. And the Kid was little good at any other trade.

Thereafter he had electrified even the blasé gallery-gods. He had stood toe to toe and swapped punches—actually swapped blows with the marvelous Brennan. True, he had been worsted, but he had left his brand on Brennan, and the blood was flowing freely from both men.

THE gong rang for the commencement of the eighth round. Kid Conover leaped across the ring, eager for the fray. His youth spurred him to superman efforts. His courage was unquestioned. Even were he defeated, the defeat would be a glorious one. Knockout Brennan's face wore a peculiar expression as he put up his guard to meet the wild rush.

As the Kid catapulted close, Brennan's arm uncorked and drove to the point of the jaw viciously. The Kid saw stars as he rocked back on his heels

—then instinctively covered against the powerful, slamming drive of the elder ringmaster. They fought now body to body, Brennan having the offensive. And then the Kid drove his right to the midriff. It wasn't a very hard blow, but it sunk into the solar plexus. Brennan grunted with anguish and broke ground. The cold perspiration broke out on him, and his knees were momentarily wobbly.

The crowd sensed a climax, and rose to its feet howling encouragement to the Kid. The crowd always howls to the under dog, and they had come to see the Kid massacred. Now they were with him to a man. Conover rushed, both arms flailing. Brennan, crouched, met his rush with his shoulder, and they clinched and wrestled about the ring. Seconds were precious to Brennan—and finally he stepped back, smiling gamely. He felt safe at last, and when the Kid rushed again, Brennan met him vicious blow for vicious blow.

They mixed furiously near a neutral corner—lawyer and laborer, magnate and miner, slapping one another on the shoulder as they howled delirious approval of the bout. And then—

Brennan dropped to the mat, slid down Kid Conover's legs, his eyes glazing. He lay on the canvas, his muscular body twitching in seeming agony while the crowd gasped. The referee's arm rose and fell mechanically.

No one had seen the blow land—the specific blow which had brought about this cataclysmic reversal. One man swore it had been a repeater to the solar plexus, another that it had landed on the jaw, still another that it had been a wicked heart-punch.

"Eight—"

Brennan squirmed and tried to rise.

"Nine—"

He fell back on the mat.

"Ten!"

Delirious fanatics swarmed into the ring and lifted the encarnadined Kid Conover to their shoulders. The king was dead! Long live the king!

And now that the wild excitement was past and victory perched on his standard, Kid Conover felt a mite sick. He wiggled down from the shoulders of his admirers and shoved his way to his dressing-room. And there Mary McManus awaited him. At sight of her he curtly ordered all the men out of his dressing-room. Then he shot the bolt on the door. And he took her in his arms, and both of them cried.

IN the select private room to the rear of Mahlon's saloon, Jim Kettig and Knockout Brennan faced one another across the table. Brennan drank beer, Kettig lemonade. Jim Kettig seemed to have aged ten years.

He drew forth a stuffed wallet, selected therefrom a sizable roll of bills of large denominations and shoved them into Brennan's hand.

"I hated t make you do it, Brennan, but I guess that'll square it."

"Yeh, that'll square it,"—as he counted over the money and placed it carefully in an inside pocket. "But put me wise, wont you, Kettig: what the devil made ye change y'r mind all of a suddint and pay me to lay down to him? It's the first time I was ever paid to quit."

"That," answered Jim Kettig slowly and distinctly, "is something that is none of your business. Furthermore, Brennan, it wont be healthy for you to remember it, either. Understand?"

"Yeh—I understand. An' ye needn't get nasty about it. I aint no squealer. But I just—"

"Get out! One peep to anyone about the frame-up—an'—you understand!"

Brennan "got out." Once in the street, he turned a corner, furtively drew forth the wad of money handed him by Jim Kettig and counted it over. His eyes shone, and then he chuckled.

"Soft coin!" he soliloquized. "Well, I should snicker. An' wouldn't Kettig throw a fit if he knew that the knockout wasn't faked at all! That Kid is the best scrapper I ever faced. Gosh! he paralyzed me!"

ONE year later Jim Kettig became godfather to Jim Kettig Conover, weight seven pounds, four ounces. The room in which he was born was in a steam-heated apartment, and was furnished in Circassian walnut.

Good Eggs and a Millionaire

by William H. Hamby

"WHAT!" Bart Emberson's voice exploded into the telephone - receiver as though he had been hit in the stomach by a baseball. "Not four hundred dozen to-day!"

He hung up the receiver and reached to his hip pocket for his handkerchief. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and sweating violently.

Bart was president, manager, owner and financier of the Emberson Wholesale Fresh Egg Company of Springfield. He had five buying-stations in neighboring small towns, and had just received the report from Oak Grove, the last of these stations.

For five minutes he figured with a stub of a pencil, perspiration oozing from every pore.

"Ottley,"—he turned a distressfully flushed face upon his assistant,—"I've just discovered why so many people fail in business."

"Is that so?" Ottley was not enthusiastic in his desire for information: he knew painfully well why one man had failed in business.

"Yes," said Bart, "and it is so simple I don't see why somebody has not made a national motto out of it. A man fails in business because he does more buying than selling."

"In other words," said the sallow-faced Ottley, "he pays out more than he takes in."

"Exactly," nodded Bart. "Now for over a year—ever since the grand bust-up—I've been fighting that Burton gang for the fresh-egg business. Now I've got it, and hanged if I know what to do with it." He ran his fingers over his wet hair and shook his head. "We took in two thousand dozen eggs to-day—and paid four cents a dozen above St. Louis prices. We have orders for only fourteen hundred dozen at a fair profit. We'll lose five cents a dozen on the rest, counting out expenses. I figure we are in the hole on to-day's business about seven dollars."

"Then why don't you buy less?" said Ottley.

Bart shook his head positively. "That is not it. The question is why don't I sell more. No man wants to pull twenty teeth merely because he has only food enough to keep twelve busy. Ottley, you find the best market you can for that extra six hundred dozen. I'm going to knock around a little, and wont be back after supper."

IT was scarcely sundown when Bart went by for Hildred Murray. Eleven years ago he and Hildred read poetry and Emerson together in high school and dreamed of hitching their wagon to a star.

Then he lost her, or rather himself, and the star, for ten years. He worked hard with his hands, but drifted from job to job, sometimes at a dollar and a half a day—or sometimes two a day.

One morning, two years ago, broke and hunting work, he saw Hildred alight from a train, poised, well dressed, handsomer than ever. She was a demonstrator for the Golden Wheat Biscuit Company, at fifty dollars a week. It gave him a jolt that woke him up. He put his head to work and started a local fresh-egg buying-station, and made it go. Then he went to Springfield and organized a wholesale fresh-egg company.

He never missed a chance to advise with Hildred. Her business ideas were fine—and he liked to be with her.

She was on the porch waiting. His head was not too full of his problems to note the light, summery dress, and the soft hair at her temples and the girlish curve of her lips. She looked like—she used to under the apple-tree, only finer and happier; more like—say a summer evening.

"Bart,"—they were sitting on the grass above the lake in the park,—"if you are getting more eggs than you can sell, why don't you buy less?"

"Hang it all," said Emberson vexedly, "that is what Ottley said. And for heaven's sake, Hildred, don't repeat Ottley's question. I sometimes wish I had let that man stay in jail. Not but what he is a most faithful helper, but he is always suggesting the easiest thing to do. The worst enemy a man has is the friend who is always showing him a safe, easy way to fall back.

"You see, Hildred, there is a 'well-enough' streak in every man. That is all there is in some men. It had me for ten years—until your fifty-a-week jolted me. Since then I have had that 'plus something,' that 'you-got-to-get-on' feeling. And for the love of the stars, Hildred,—the stars we used to hitch our wagon to,—don't let me stop."

The girl laughed, a laugh any clean-minded man would love to hear.

"No, Bart,"—she touched his arm ever so lightly,—"you'll never go back. You are going to do big things. I'm sure you will find some way to increase your markets."

"I've got to." Bart dug his right heel into the ground. "I must. You see, up until a few months ago I was clearing a hundred dollars a week. That looked big to me. It would be awfully easy just to rest on that. But Hildred, I've gone far enough in business to see a man does not rest. If I sought no new markets, I'd be sure to lose some that I have—and my business would dwindle and dwindle. I'd be satisfied with eighty a week, and then sixty, and then I'd put up with forty. You see how it would be? I've got to go forward. Besides, I want to. It is this that makes business worth following."

He relapsed and shook his head, gloomily.

"But where I am to find them, hanged if I know. It seems to me I have scoured St. Louis and Kansas City for every possible purchaser of strictly fresh eggs—I mean those who are willing to pay eight to ten cents a dozen above the market for guaranteed eggs, handled right and not more than forty-eight hours old. There are a lot of people, no doubt, who would be customers if I could reach them—rich men's clubs, millionaires' establishments and the like. But there's always a steward or a committee or a lot of red tape in the way, and I can't get to them. Anyway, I'm awfully bashful about tackling those big fellows—I was raised in the hills, you know."

"Have you tried Chicago?" asked Hildred.

"Only once, and not very much then. They think it is too far. But I could manage it. My stations are now getting the eggs direct from the farmers every day, and I have so educated the farmers in the care of the eggs that they are delivered clean and fresh and unshaken. I ship by express direct from the stations that same evening. So I could get eggs to the users in Chicago within forty-eight hours of the time they are laid. But so far, I've had no chance to prove it."

THEY talked on for an hour, about other things: about Hildred's work, and people—and the summer evening.

Bart, looking down at the girl by his side, felt powerfully, for the first time in his life, that she stood out in

his thoughts separate from all other women. There was no other girl in the world he would have preferred sitting there in her place.

He put out his hand a little awkwardly,—for Bart was not experienced,—and took hers. She let it remain passively in his a moment, and then gently released it. He did not try to recapture the hand, and she suggested in a matter-of-fact tone:

"I believe, Bart, you'd better try Chicago for a new market."

"I believe I will," he said.

FOR two weeks the egg receipts piled up four hundred, five hundred, eight hundred—and at last a thousand dozen a day more than Emberson had markets for. Something had to be done. Bart took a night train for Chicago.

Hunting for business in Chicago when the mercury stands at ninety-eight in the very teeth of an electric fan, will take the starch out of a man if anything can—especially if he is not finding it. And Bart Emberson was not. He had been hunting for business since Thursday morning. It was now two o'clock Saturday, and he had not found enough to keep one candler busy.

He had tried hotels and cafés. They were willing to buy fresh eggs, but not at his prices—one cent a dozen, or perhaps two, above Chicago prices; express added, that meant nothing.

If he could only get hold of the millionaires— But the millionaires were not at home. Even if they were, they did not see men selling fresh eggs for their kitchen use.

In a last desperate effort Bart went into the Silver Moon Café. He leaned on the cashier's desk and waited for the proprietor. The cashier had sent for the proprietor to come to the front, because, in spite of the temperature, Bart was good to look at.

The proprietor, short and fat and in his shirt-sleeves, waddled down the aisle between the now almost empty tables, shedding moisture like a porpoise coming up from a dive.

Bart handed him his card and started to explain his business.

The perspiring proprietor was not listening to the explanation; he was looking at the card and abusing himself for having come forward.

THE EMBERSON WHOLESALE FRESH EGG CO.
Springfield, Missouri

"Eggs!" The little fat man's lips curled in supreme disgust and scorn. "You couldn't *gif* me eggs. I vouldn't unload dem if you ship dem for nuttings."

Plainly Schloss was in a bad humor. Perhaps no one in the world has more justification for being in a bad humor than the proprietor of a restaurant—unless it be his customers.

Bart started to explain that he handled only guaranteed, strictly fresh eggs, right from the nests, but Schloss lifted up his lips in a snarl.

"I tell you I don't vant eggs. To hell mit your eggs. They are all rottin." Whereupon he turned his fat, offended back upon the fresh-eggs man, and waddled back down the aisle between tables.

Bart turned to the door and went out, followed by the admiring and regretful eyes of the cashier. He was also followed by a tall, solemn young man with a toothpick in his mouth, who had been getting his change from the cashier during the brief interview with Schloss.

"Eggs on the bum?" he remarked, catching up with Bart.

"Good eggs are," replied Emberson. "I judge from what I've seen and heard,—and tasted for three days,—that Chicago has been robbing a few million setting hens the last two months. They don't seem to have any faith in fresh eggs. I suppose they have lived so long on storage and seconds and forty-seconds that a real egg would give them indigestion."

The tall young man gave a brief chuckle. He did not look as if he had ever laughed before. His face was so thin that his cheek-bones stood out as prominently as a riot-heading on a jaundiced afternoon paper. His lower lip not only met the other halfway but could lap over a half-inch.

"Going to be in town over Sunday?" The tall young man paused at the corner where he was to catch a car.

"I don't know," answered Bart. "I have no reason to stay here. But I hate to quit before I have begun."

"Chicago is a beastly place when it is hot," said the solemn one. "If you want to stay over, why don't you run up to the Wisconsin lakes for Sunday and cool off? Lake Delavan is a nice place, and it's handy. I'm going up there myself Sunday."

His street-car clanged its way to a stop. "So long," he called as he swung on.

BART went on down the crowded, sweating, noisy street, calling himself a triple-plated, double-barreled fool. Why did he want to stay over? Why was he here, anyway? There was no possible chance to get business in Chicago. Eggs were a drug on the market. The heat was ruining them by the millions. Carload after carload came to Chicago only to be dumped—not enough good eggs in the whole car to pay the freight. Those who did buy usually found themselves badly cheated. So the storage men were having an inning, and strictly fresh eggs were bracketed with other stale jokes.

And at the bottom of his disappointment was a lonesome homesickness for Hildred Murray. All the time he had been in Chicago he had been thinking of her. Nobody he saw looked like her—nearly like her. Three times he had gone to the Golden Wheat Biscuit Company's offices, to be told she would be in the latter part of the week. Saturday morning he had gone back, eagerly hopeful. She had come in the evening before, but had gone out early that morning—on a vacation.

SUNDAY morning Bart sat in the shade on the sloping lawn between the hotel and the lake, worrying over his large oversupply of good eggs and bad luck. It seemed a sinful waste to pay six dollars a day to be as miserable as he was at this big summer hotel.

On the veranda back of him, scattered about the lawns, promenading the lake-front, sailing, fishing, everywhere were people in groups of from two to forty, enjoying themselves and looking important. Bart did not know a soul among them, and he certainly did not feel important. Not one of the guests but looked as though the entire egg business would furnish rather meager pin-money for a week.

He was lonesome. Every group seemed too important to pay any attention to the rest—except there was one small company that everybody looked at with bated eyes. There were six of them, and they had created a sensation when they appeared at breakfast. Bart gathered, from the looks and awesome whispers in the dining-room, that they must be some people of national importance, and their coming to this hotel a surprise. The two outstanding figures in the company were a big, heavy man with a world-driving look in his face, and a lithe, slender girl with a world-drawing look in hers.

As Bart sat on the bench and pondered futilely the ways of life and the rocky road of business, a man unobtrusively slipped down on the other end of the bench and said, "Hello."

Bart jumped. He had almost concluded it was a capital offense to say "Hello" in this climate.

"Why, hello." He broke into a warming grin. It was the tall, solemn young man with the long underlip.

"You got here, I see." The young fellow rubbed his right hand over his lean cheek as though massaging his high cheek-bone.

"Yes, and I'm not getting much for my money."

The young man smiled. There is nothing more winning than a friendly smile on a serious face.

"One never does. Money is a piffling medium of exchange when it comes to fun. It takes so much of it to buy a little—and then you don't get what you want."

THEY talked a short time. The big auto-'bus honked—and directly a batch of new arrivals from the station began to filter through the grounds.

Bart turned with a jerk and lost the thread of the conversation. That was Hildred Murray, sure as the stars—and she was laughing into the face of another man.

"Darn!" Bart thought it was under his breath.

"What did you say?" asked the man beside him.

"Oh, nothing." Bart turned back, looked sheepish—and sick.

The other looked at him from the corner of sophisticated but twinklingly sympathetic eyes.

"It is a tough old world sometimes, isn't it?"

"Yes."

Bart was looking fixedly out over the lake. The bathers dived; the oarsmen shot their boats here and there; the canoes slipped in and out. Bart scarcely saw it; cared not at all. He was drinking the dregs of despondency.

Hildred had a right, of course, to spend a holiday with another man. Bart commended her for her sense, seeing that he himself was a miserable failure who in a little while would be back to his old dollar-and-a-half-a-day odd jobs. But the thought of losing Hildred just took all the life out of him.

"Did I mention the all-important fact that my name is Ramsey—Eli Ramsey?" said the tall and solemn young man on the bench.

"No," answered Bart.

"Your name, I believe, is Emberson," suggested Ramsey. "I think that was the name our fat friend Schloss hissed in the restaurant yesterday. Or do you sell eggs under an assumed name?"

"That's my name," nodded Bart. "I never have to dodge customers who buy my eggs."

Neither spoke for ten minutes.

Ramsey looked around directly, his eyes expressive of deep sadness.

"I'm lonesome," he said.

"So am I," responded Bart.

"I don't know a girl here, do you?" continued Ramsey.

"Not one," said Bart, and then blushingly added, "Not but one."

Ramsey was in too deep dejection to notice the correction.

"Say,"—he turned on the bench with the light of a suggestion in his face,—"let's play whiffletree."

"WHAT is the game of whiffletree?" Bart Emberson showed instant curiosity.

"It is like this," Ramsey explained as solemnly as a cat watching a mouse-hole: "You look around and pick out some man, and say, 'Does he or doesn't he?'—meaning, does he know what a whiffletree is, or does he not? I bring all my psychological penetration to focus on him, and take the affirmative—'He does.' And to settle it, I go ask him. If he does, I win. If he does not, you win. Then I pick out a man. You have your choice of does or doesn't and then go ask. The one who gets ten points first, wins. The loser has to ask some woman he does not know, about whiffletrees, and run the risk of being put in jail for a masher or the asylum for a lunatic.

"It is very interesting," concluded Ramsey. "I know, for I never played it. Just now thought of it. It will also be helpful to you in your egg business. Teach you to know the hand-picked from the factory-enameled variety. Will you play?"

"Sure," grinned Bart. "Anything to break the monotony and get the worth of my six dollars."

"You may pick first," offered Ramsey generously.

"All right. What do you say to that pink young man in the white suit leaning against the tree talking to the green parasol?"

"I say he doesn't," instantly decided Ramsey. He arose and walked across the lawn, tapped him on the shoulder and solemnly propounded his question. The young man stared blankly, mopped his face, and shook his head.

Ramsey sauntered back grinning.

"One for me!" And he made a tally on an old envelope.

"Now, let me see. I'll pick an easy one for you. What do you say about the fat man in the sun, fishing off the end of the pier?"

"I say he does," decided Bart, and started off to learn.

He stood by the fat man a moment getting a lead on his question. "By the

way," he said after a few remarks about fishing, "a friend and I have up a dispute, and decided to leave it to you. What is a whiffletree?"

One can almost invariably depend upon a fisherman to be accommodating. The fat man scratched his knee, and looked painstakingly into the lake trying to remember.

"Let me see. I think it is a do-dink on a sawmill-engine to keep it from running too fast."

Bart returned crestfallen, but grinning. "I lose."

Then he looked around for a hard one for Ramsey.

A sailboat had just come in, and even at a hundred yards Bart knew the occupants. No doubt he would have known Hildred Murray at three hundred yards. The couple started toward a refreshment-booth.

"Yonder," said Bart quickly, "—that man with black eyebrows."

"Why, I can't see his eyebrows from here," said Ramsey, surprised.

"Go after him and you will. What do you say?"

"I say he does," said Ramsey, and loped off after him like an eager player chasing a golf-ball. He caught up with them as they entered the ice-cream booth.

He limped back as doleful as a tired dog that has lost its rabbit in a hollow tree.

"No good." He shook his head. "I sure struck a frost there. He conveyed to me in one good stare that his feet have never been off velvet until to-day —and only now because of the bunting on his left."

RAMSEY sat down on the bench and thumped the back with his fingers while his eyes searched the grounds for something difficult.

Directly a grin parted his lips and dented his thin cheeks. Bart, who had followed his gaze, felt icicles slipping down his back. A party on the way from the hotel to the pier had stopped and was holding some debate—trying to decide whether it was warmer to go boating or stay at the hotel. In the center of the group, looking frightfully bored and cross and sweaty, was a large, awesome man with the world-driving look in his heavy face.

Ramsey's grin broadened until it reached his ears.

"There is your man," he nodded. "What do you say?"

If Bart had not had a long string of youthful fights to his credit over the other fellow's wanting to quit a game before it was done, he would have dropped the whiffletree then and there. But instead he swallowed twice, felt weak in the resolution, and decided: "I say he does."

Truth to tell, Bart was never so scared in his life. The whole ridiculous game looked asinine to him, and he would have given a week's egg business if he could have ducked and run. But the same thing that can't let a man throw up a big job, holds him to the finish of a small one.

As Bart approached the group, he gathered that the young woman wanted them all to take a launch and go across the lake; and the old man was violently damning the lake and all its shores. Bart braced his knees and headed straight for his quarry. The only way, he knew, was to go at it so fast that he would not have time to get shaky. He approached the big man so directly that there was a moment's uneasy movement in the party—as though they feared an anarchist's bomb.

"Say,"—Bart touched the old gentleman's shoulder and looked into his keen gray eyes,—"do you know what a whiffletree is?"

FOR the fraction of a minute the old man looked into Bart Emberson's eyes with a keen, reckoning speculation. Then the irritation eased up on the lines of his face, a twinkle gathered in his eyes, the lines of his mouth relaxed. He broke into a laugh.

"You bet your socks I do, young man," he said, "—and a king-pin and a hamestring and a trace-chain. . . . . Pleased to meet you." He held out his hand.

"My name's Bart Emberson."

"And mine is Garnett," said the old man.

"Garnett?" replied Bart. "Seems like I have heard it before."

The old man laughed. "It has been heard of before. But what about the whiffletree—why did you ask? Are you selling whiffletrees?"

Bart shook his head and grinned.

"No; a friend of mine and I were playing the game of whiffletree—and I bet you knew."

"The game of whiffletree?" The daughter turned with softer but almost as shrewd eyes, much interested. "What is the game of whiffletree?"

Bart explained.

The old man roared. "That is the best one yet. Bless me, if you youngsters haven't some ideas, after all. Were you raised on a farm?"

"Where I grew up," replied Bart, "the farms were so thick there was not room for cross-fences between them, and towns so scarce a real-estate man could not locate one in a day's journey."

"So was I." Willard P. Garnett beamed. "And did you ever have a stone-bruise? And can you make a whistle, and plat a whip of hickory-bark?"

Bart nodded.

The old man turned to his daughter, who had been an interested listener.

"Say, Nell, meet a friend of mine, Mr.—"

"Bart Emberson," supplied the young man, and took the offered hand of the lithe, handsome girl.

"Say, Emberson," proposed Garnett, "we are going for a trip on the lake. Come along."

"I'd love to," hesitated Bart, "but—I can't quit my friend. The game is not finished."

"Bring him," ordered Garnett, "and finish on board."

BART went back to Ramsey, whose astonishment had been growing for five minutes. Even his solemn countenance could not hide the expectant wonder with which he awaited Bart's explanation.

"Come on," said Emberson; "we are going launching with them."

"Say, what are you talking about?" Ramsey's long lower lip sagged in utter incredulity. "Do you know who that was you were talking to?"

"Said his name was Garnett," replied Bart.

"Exactly," nodded Ramsey, as a squelcher.

"Come on," said Bart impatiently. "They are waiting—don't you see? We are going boating with them."

Ramsey got up and followed in stark, dumb astonishment.

"Mr. Garnett," said Bart, "meet my friend Mr. Ramsey."

Ramsey shook hands bashfully. "I believe I met you, Mr. Garnett, at White Springs last summer."

"Oh!" The old man's face clouded a moment. "Were you in that bunch?"

Ramsey nodded.

"Were you the one—" The frown deepened threateningly.

Ramsey shook his head emphatically. "No, I was not."

"I guess not." The old man's face cleared. "I guess it was that red-headed one from Cleveland."

The party started down to the pier, where a white-and-gold launch waited. Miss Garnett caught step beside Bart. Plainly the whiffletree man interested her.

"Mr. Emberson,"— she looked up and smiled out of the corners of her eyes,—"I wish you would explain those things you and Father named, so I can play the game of whiffletree too."

Bart smiled back. It was sort of thrilling to be smiled at by a girl of that sort. As he detailed the meaning of a king-pin, a hamestring and a hickory whip, his eyes wandered from Miss Garnett for a moment—and fell for a fleeting second on two of the most astonished people he ever saw—Hildred Murray and the black-eyebrowed Kelland.

They were standing near the end of the pier. Kelland's mouth was open, his face contracted with incredulous amazement. But Hildred Murray's astonishment was of a different sort.

Bart lifted his hat and gave a fleeting nod, and went on with his whiffletree talk.

ON deck of the launch old man Garnett captured Bart and made him sit beside him on a leather cushion at the stern of the boat.

"Is it a trot-line or a trout-line?" There was a grin on the world-driving countenance of the big man.

"Hanged if I know," replied Bart. "I always called it a trot-line."

"And what is the best bait for cat-fish?"

"Chicken-liver for a trot-line—just worms for a hook."

The old man nodded. "And did you use' to slip off about dark after the day's work was done and go down to the creek when the water was muddy and fish for cat?"

"Lots of times," assented Bart.

"And you went barefoot and had stone-bruises, you say?"

"Why," declared Bart, "I had stone-bruises so often that I traveled most of the summer on one foot. I can hop from here to town right now and never touch but one foot to the ground."

The old man laughed. He told a story of the time he hid out sixteen eggs for Easter and a crow found them and sucked all of them.

Naturally Bart told of his own youth, and growing more and more absorbed, and unconscious of talking to a stranger, he told about his ten years of day labor after leaving high school, and of his fight to establish a business.

Garnett was much interested, and asked him all about his fresh-egg business—where he got his idea, how he worked it out, and about his difficulties.

Bart told him frankly all about it, and discussed perplexedly his difficulty of finding increased markets.

"I could cut down my business," said Bart, "—not buy so many. But hanged if I retrench!—even if I break. I've got to go ahead."

The old man laughed. There was a little reminiscent regret, perhaps, in it. He clapped his hand on the young man's knee.

"I've felt that way myself. I guess a lot of us feel we have to go forward, even if we go overboard."

He asked Bart a few more questions, casually made a note or two in a little red book and then remarked with a smile:

"Nell's been signaling me for a half-hour to turn you loose. I guess you better go. She wants to learn more of the whiffletree game."

Miss Garnett was still learning about the whiffletree game when the launch returned to the pier at five o'clock.

She took his arm as they left the boat, and she was looking at him, smiling eagerly, as they went up the bank.

In a shade not far up the bank sat Hildred Murray and the other man, but she did not see him, and he did not appear to see her.

BART left next morning on an early train for Chicago.

All that day and the next he fiercely tackled the job of inducing somebody to buy strictly fresh eggs at ten cents a dozen above the market. It was two days of the grimmest, most determined work he ever did—and two days of the most complete failure. He had secured one trivial order for twenty dozen—simply nothing.

When he went back to his hotel, hot and fagged and grimy,—and utterly discouraged,—he found a letter.

It was from Porter Ottley, and he dreaded to open it. It was mailed Monday. The substance of it was that he had better come home at once. Things were going to smash with a whiz. They had over fourteen hundred dozen eggs left over from Saturday, and had lost one of their best St. Louis customers, and—

Bart jammed it into his pocket. Why read all the details of bad luck? Didn't he know them by heart? Didn't he know that when the old hen Bad Luck got into your garden a whole flock of her devastating little chickens followed scratching after her?

AT five o'clock the next afternoon Bart walked into the office of the Emberson Wholesale Fresh Egg Company at Springfield.

Porter Ottley scrambled to his feet with a speed that belied all his past movements. He grabbed Bart's hand and began to crank it.

Bart looked at his assistant astonished. There was something the matter with Ottley's face. Why, even his sallow skin seemed transformed!

"That was sure a great day's work

you did Monday!" Ottley said in admiring awe. "How in the world did you land it?"

"Land what?" Emberson was very much in the dark. "What has happened?"

"Why lookee there!" Ottley motioned to the desk, on which were a score or more letters and telegrams. "Orders there for sixteen hundred dozen—permanent orders, too."

Bart snatched at the letters like a starving man raking roasting potatoes from the fire. He went through all of them, tabulating the orders in each, before he turned on Ottley.

"I can't make it out to save me," he said, running a hand over his forehead. "I did not see one of these people. I'm —plumb flabbergasted."

"I don't know a thing about them," said Ottley, now mystified. "I supposed you had got them. Don't suppose it's a joke—or a trick by those Burton people?"

Bart shook his head. "No, they are genuine. You filled them, didn't you?"

"Yes," nodded Ottley, and gave in detail how he had called each of the buying-stations and made up the orders to be expressed direct.

"Good." Bart was weak from relief. This not only saved him, but made him. But how on earth did it happen?

"There was nothing else?"

"Nothing but a paper. It was addressed to you personally, and I did not open it. There it is on the desk."

BART ripped off the cover. It was a Chicago paper, a big morning paper. He hastily turned the pages. The third was marked.

He looked, and swallowed. His hand shook. He swallowed again. At the top of the page were big headlines:

CHICAGO MILLIONAIRE PLAYS WHIFFLETREE

In one corner was a two-column picture of "Willard P. Garnett, Millionaire," and across the page a picture of himself—"Bart Emberson, the country Fresh Egg King."

Bart's heart beat like something shut up pounding on a door as he read. He had never seen himself in print before.

The article, written in a semihumorous vein, told the story of the whiffletree game, giving Bart credit for inventing it. Willard P. Garnett was spoken of as "the man who owns something less than a third of America, and who it is reported fires three secretaries a week because they use a superfluous word, or mention railroads to him when he is thinking copper mines." And then Bart was described as a boy from the country, who did not know a millionaire from a breakfast-food clerk, but who had a lot of fun in him, and a big idea.

Here his fresh-egg scheme was touched upon lightly but clearly. He was the one man in the United States who had perfected a system of getting good eggs immediately to the tables of those who could afford to pay. "He only sells to exclusive people who can afford fancy prices."

Bart grinned. Whoever wrote that article was a psychologist.

He laid the paper down. He saw now. Part of those orders came from Garnett's various clubs, part from his friends; the rest came from this article. And more would come.

He turned back to the paper. There was a column on another page headed, "Daily Jag Jolts." It was a column of light humor, "By Eli Ramsey."

The whole thing was clear. Ramsey was a press humorist. Bart warmed to the generous fellow. He had done this out of the kindness of his heart, and had made fun out of it.

TWILIGHT had dimmed the office until he could scarcely see the figures, before Bart laid down his pencil. He had been alone an hour. He had gone over the books, got everything in shape, and outlined the future enlargement of his business.

Even now, if he cleared only two cents a dozen,—and he usually did better than that,—the business would make him more than twelve hundred a month.

Why, it was unbelievable fortune!

And yet somehow, somewhere there was that in him that failed to respond like it ought. Why was he not kicking the roof off the house and shouting at

the top of his lungs? Why was not his brain dizzy with the glory of such an achievement?

Because—he discovered and confessed it—there was a sore spot in his heart. What did it—

Then something happened. It was not a coincidence. Lots of things that seem like a coincidence are merely the well-regulated plans of some feminine mind.

There was a step in the door. A voice that sounded very far from an efficient business tone, a voice soft and scared, said:

"Why, are you back, Bart? I'm so glad to see you."

Bart arose and shook hands, and the sore spot in his heart made his handshake limp. He drew a chair for her—a good four feet from his.

"Are things so awfully bad, Bart? I'm sorry you are blue."

"Never were better. I'm just planning to enlarge my business. Have more orders than I can fill. The business is running about twelve to fifteen hundred net a month."

"You don't mean it, Bart? How splendid!"

There was no mistaking the joy in her tone. It was genuine, as had been the sympathy a moment before.

"Why, that is incredibly good. It seems marvelous. How smart you are, Bart."

Bart made a deprecatory movement of his hand, but did not fully deny it.

A moment's silence. Bart was thinking about Lake Delavan—and the other man. He knew now he had no show; how could he with a girl like her? But—he was jealous of the other man, anyway.

"You had a good time at the Lake?" He knew it was an awkward move. It was a chilly tone, too.

"Why, yes. Why, why, were you there, Bart?"

He nodded.

Hildred laughed a little low, amused laugh. That was not a wise thing to do, and she knew it, but she could not help it.

"Why, Bart, you were not jealous?"

"No,"—stiffly, indignantly,—"no, of course not. I just—"

ANOTHER silence. The twilight had deepened. Hildred's hand went out casually, accidentally, and rested on the edge of the desk, near his. With a wise, tender smile hid under the fading light, a smile that understood both his heart and hers, and had for ever so long, she said:

"Bart,—Bart,—I was jealous too—oh, horribly jealous of that millionaire girl."

He laughed, a delightful, wholehearted laugh. The sore spot was gone.

"How silly girls are," he said. And he found the hand.

"Isn't it a wonderful night?" he said as they left the office. "Hildred, let's go to the park. There's something—something awfully important I want to tell you."

"Let's do, Bart," she said in gentle acquiescence.

In a very shadowy, secluded spot, her face half buried on his shoulder, she said:

"Bart, honey, that man I was with was Mr. Garnett's secretary. I was hoping to interest the millionaire through him in your fresh eggs. But you went higher up and beat me."

The next morning the manager of the Golden Wheat Biscuit Company at Chicago puzzled a half-hour over a telegram, and then gave it up.

Golden Wheat Biscuit Company,
Chicago, Illinois

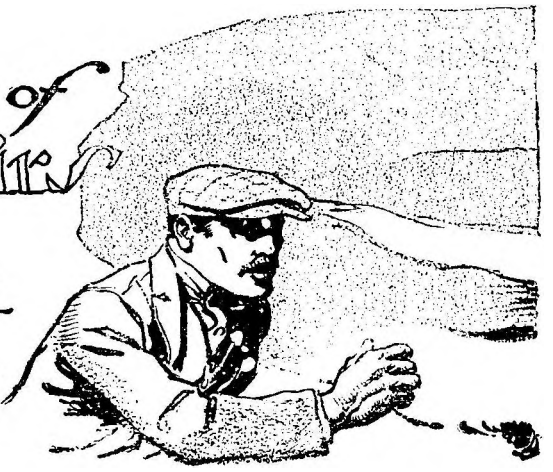
Resign as demonstrator for your ready-made biscuits. Have accepted position as demonstrator of hand-made biscuits for wholesale fresh-egg company here.

HILDRED MURRAY.

The Story of Kitty Carstairs

A Book Length Novel

by J. J. Bell



CHAPTER I

THE LONDON MAIL

THROUGH the still summer dusk the night mail for London roared down the long declivity, clashed into a cutting and forth again, screamed, flashed past the deserted little station of Dunford and thundered triumphantly along the level toward Kitty Carstairs.

Leaning on the fence bounding the track, the girl watched the tremendous approach with a fascination which custom had failed to dull. As the monster seemed to leap upon her, her attitude lost its easy laxness; she stood erect, her white-clad arms leaving the fence, her slim brown fingers clutching it. A sensation of oily, steamy warmth, a glimpse of two dark human figures in a fiery glow—and the great engine was past. A whirl of brilliantly lighted corridors with their puppet-like occupants, a couple of darkened sleeping-cars, more carriages, a postal car, a guard's car—and the train was gone. A rush of air cooled her delicately tanned face and disturbed her unprotected, dusky hair. Her brown eyes gazed after the train and saw the big net swing out from the postal car and snatch the little leather-covered bundle from the iron arm which Sam the postman had moved into position a minute earlier.

With a sigh Kitty took her hands from the fence. The thrill was over; the reaction had come. For a moment she hesitated. Should she wait for Sam the postman, as she sometimes did, and get his honest, cheerful company home? No, she couldn't be bothered with Sam to-night; she would sooner run the risk of meeting some one whom she would rather not meet.

She turned to cross the broad field that stretched between her and the main road, and found herself face to face with a young man in light tweeds, well cut but getting shabby. He was fairly tall, gray-eyed and inclined to fairness, his shaven countenance very attractive.

"Good evening," he said with a grave smile, as though not quite sure of his welcome.

She was startled, but recovered herself as quickly as the flush left her cheek. "Good evening, Mr. Hayward," she returned in a tone of politeness softened by kindness. "I didn't know you were in Dunford."

"I came home this afternoon. May I

walk a bit of the way with you—that is, if you aren't—" He stopped short.

Following his gaze, she saw the figure of a man crossing the field in their direction. She frowned slightly, saying: "You know your people wont like it, Mr. Hayward." Then hurriedly: "I don't want to have to speak to Alec Symington—if that's he coming."

"Then I'll stay with you, Kitty, for it's certainly Symington. Ah, he's turning back. One would almost think he had heard you."

"He couldn't possibly hear me at this distance, unless in his mind," she said. "And you had better not call me 'Kitty,' Mr. Hayward," she added. It was more an appeal than a command.

HE made no reply, and they walked a little way in silence. He was first to speak.

"So you still go down to watch the London mail run through."

"Yes. I don't miss many evenings, but then, you know, it's the one sensation of this place—to me, at any rate."

"The first time I ever saw you was at the fence there—five years ago, it must have been. Your hair was in a pigtail and—"

"I was sixteen then, and now I'm—about sixty." She laughed rather drearily.

"And the last time I saw you, three months ago, you were there—"

"And no doubt if you come back in a hundred years, Mr. Hayward, you'll find me there again!"

"I was glad to see you there to-night, Kitty—please don't forbid me to be friendly. I'm feeling particularly friendless at present. Indeed, I think you might be kinder than call me 'Mr. Hayward.' What's wrong with 'Colin?'"

She ignored the question but said kindly enough: "If you are in trouble, I'm sorry, and I hope it's not serious."

"I've failed in my final—for the second time."

"Oh, Colin!" she exclaimed, sympathy putting an end to formality.

"Thanks, Kitty. That's the most comforting thing I've heard since I came home."

"Surely they weren't hard on you." Kitty's social position was several steps down from that of Colin's people, but behind her words lurked the suspicion, not based entirely on fancy, that the Haywards might have been very hard indeed on the youngest son and brother.

"Oh, I dare say I deserved the dressing-down I got," he returned. "You see, my parents, brothers and sisters take my failure as a sort of public affront. My brothers have been brilliant, and because two of them became a minister and a lawyer without any apparent trouble, my father can't see why I have not become a doctor with equal ease and speed."

"But you never wanted to be a doctor."

"That is not the point, Kitty. I was expected to become one. Well, I've struggled through four professionals, but Providence—I've no doubt about it's being Providence—says I've gone far enough for humanity's sake."

"Do you mean that you are not going to try again?" she asked presently.

"Exactly! And that has added to the trouble at home. I'm twenty-five, and I told them I couldn't go on wasting more years at a thing I was plainly not adapted for. They insisted that I should go on, and I respectfully but firmly refused." He paused.

"Well, Colin?"—anxiously.

"I don't want you to imagine," he said slowly, "that I'm thinking any evil of my people. I understand their feelings, their pride and so on, well enough; but they don't understand me one little bit. Well, I'm going to look for something to do that doesn't require a university brain. To begin with, I'm going to London—"

"London—oh!"

"Still hankering, Kitty?" he gently inquired.

"Never mind me. Please tell me more—if you want to."

"There isn't any more. If you are watching the train to-morrow night, you may see the last of me. I'll be on the lookout, anyway."

THEY had come to the gate leading to the main road, and by tacit agreement they halted.

"But you haven't quarreled with your people, Colin?"

He smiled queerly. "We don't quarrel in our family—more's the pity. We bottle it up, and of course that preserves the resentment. No; as far as I can see, we shall part politely, but I'm perfectly well aware that I needn't trouble to come home again until I can prove that my way was the right one." His tone changed suddenly. "But that's enough—too much—about my affairs. Tell me something about yourself, Kitty."

She shook her head. "I must go; it's almost ten, and—"

"Let me come as far as the end of the little wood."

She hesitated and gave in. It was for the last time. "We must walk quickly, then," she said.

But their steps lagged in the darkness of the pines.

"Do you still want to get away from Dunford?" he asked her. "Does the London train still call you?"

"Oh, don't speak about it! And please try to forget that I ever spoke about it. I'm a silly girl no longer."

"I never thought your ideas and ambitions silly, Kitty."

"You tried to discourage them."

"That was my selfishness. I didn't want you to go away from Dunford. It may not be a very lively place, but it's safe. Quite a number of people seem to find moderate happiness in the neighborhood."

"The happiness of turnips!" she said fiercely—then laughed sadly. "Oh, that wasn't fair of me," she went on. "But, you know, before I came to live with my aunt and uncle here, I always looked forward to seeing the world and doing something in it, and my father encouraged me—but there's no use in going over that again. Some day, perhaps, I'll resign myself to selling postage-stamps and sending telegrams and—"

"Are your uncle and aunt still set against your going elsewhere? Now that you're of age they could hardly prevent—"

"Please say no more, Colin. When you come back rich or famous, or both, you will find me here."

He could not check the words that rushed from his heart. "Kitty, if I could only hope that I might find you here—waiting."

SHE did not affect to misunderstand him. "You don't really mean that," she said quietly. "We are too good

friends for that sort of thing. Yes, I believe we are good friends, although our friendship has not all been open and straightforward. But I'm glad we've had it, Colin, and I don't want to be sorry afterwards."

"I never supposed you could love me," he said softly, "but since you allow the friendship, will you let me write to you? You're the only friend I feel I want to write to while I'm trying to prove that my way is the right one."

She considered before she said: "I'd like to hear from you, but you must not write. It would only make trouble. And now I must say good-by and—good luck." She put out her hand.

He held it, striving with himself. Then he said a little unsteadily: "I think you must know that I have cared for you all along, and because I may never see you again, will you—will you let me kiss you—once?"

"But, Colin, you understand that I—I don't love you?"

"Too well!"

She could just see that his face was white. She made an almost imperceptible movement, and it was not of refusal.

A moment later he was gone.

When the sound of his footsteps had ceased, Kitty stirred.

"Am I crying?" she said to herself, and wiped her eyes. "Poor Colin, poor boy! I wonder if he will write, after all." She started for home. "And I thought I had sort of got over the London longing," she sighed.

CHAPTER II

KITTY'S ANSWER

BY taking the path through the wood she had cut off a wide curve of the main road, but she now realized that she had not saved time. She was nearly home. Already the few remaining lights of the village bade her welcome back to dullness.

"Five years!" she said to herself, "and I may live in it for fifty more."

Kitty Carstairs scarcely remembered her mother. She had been brought up—or allowed to bring herself up—by her father, a Glasgow journalist of brilliant parts and erratic methods, a wretched manager of his worldly affairs, a delightful guest, an entertaining host and altogether a very lovable fellow. Kitty adored him and ignored his weaknesses and eccentricities. When he died after a long illness, she wished she might follow him quickly. He left a little money,—and just enough debts to eat it up,—five novels in manuscript, two collections of travel sketches and a play,—all in a more or less unfinished state,—and a letter to Kitty's only relatives, the brother and sister of his dead wife.

Kitty never saw the contents of that letter; all she knew was that it seemed to procure her a home with John Corrie and his sister in the village of Dunford.

For many years John Corrie had been postmaster as well as proprietor of a flourishing general store, the only shop of importance in the place. A canny man and a farsighted was John Corrie, grasping but not exactly mean. If the villagers did not love him, they respected his success. He had "got on" marvelously. Apart from the store, he owned a small mill, bought for an old song from the trustee of a bankrupt, and a coal-yard taken over from an unlucky merchant and mortgagee. Also he had invested his savings in land and houses. He was a tall, gaunt man with small, pale blue eyes, a long, melancholy nose, a tight mouth and high, prominent cheekbones over scanty grizzling whiskers, which ran into a short, untidy beard. His head was quite bald. He was an abstainer and a regular attender at public worship, though not an office-bearer of the church.

His sister Rachel assisted him capably in the store. She may have been a good-looking maiden; now she was a scraggy, drear-visaged creature with a curiously suspicious manner and a craze for doing everything precisely as her mother had done it. She seemed to object to youth's discovering or making use of a new method. She was mean in some ways, but for lack of courage not so grasping as her brother, for whom she had a wonderful love.

Kitty attended to the post office, which served a district sparsely populated but of considerable extent. She had never received a penny for this. On the other

hand her relations did not grudge her in board, lodging and clothing; and twice a year they gave her a pound to spend as she liked. She divided the money on "pretty things" and books. Books, by the way, had initiated the friendship between her and Colin Hayward. He had lent her many, but only one at a time, for the thing had to be done secretly; but he, at least, preferred "one at a time," since it meant frequent meetings during his holidays.

AS Kitty neared the cottage, which was ancient-looking without but fairly modern within, and which was connected with the store and post office, she was suddenly informed by her eyes that the room on the right of the door was illuminated. Unless on a Sunday night it was a rare thing to see a light in the parlor. The Corries received no social visitors, with the exception of Alec Symington, the owner of White Farm, and a familiar guest like him was expected to be at home in the kitchen.

The girl felt uncertain what to do. She rejected the temptation to steal upstairs to bed; she was not going to let them think she was afraid of them at this time of day! Well, there was nothing for it but to go into the kitchen and wait. Noiselessly she entered and seated herself in a basket chair.

A moment later the silence in the opposite room was broken, and by her aunt's voice, raised to an unusual pitch.

"The more I think on it, John Corrie, the more I see what a fool ye've been. To take fifty pound for a thing that's come worth twenty thousand—that'll maybe yet be worth thirty, forty, aye, fifty thousand—"

"Hold your tongue, woman!" Kitty scarcely recognized her uncle's voice. "How could I, or anybody, ha' foreseen that the shares would go up? Five year ago the broker in Glasgow told us they were rubbish. Six months ago ye agreed I had done well to get fifty pound for them from Symington—"

"Oh, he knew what he was doing—he knew, though you didn't!"

"I don't believe he did. He's been daft about gold mines for years. He'd ha' been ruined by now if his father hadna died and left him White Farm. I tell ye, Rachel, he bought the five thousand shares off me with his eyes shut, just for a speculation. Don't talk! Ye know well ye were as sick-tired as I was o' seeing those fancy certificates lying in the safe, wi' never a ha'penny o' interest to—"

"No, no, John, we've been cheated—I don't care what ye say—and it's maybe a judgment on us—"

"That's enough! Ye mun make the best o' a bad job. And it'll maybe no be so bad in the end." Corrie let out a laugh. "Ye'll no complain if we get half o' whatever he gets for the shares, when he sells them."

"Oh, dinna begin on that again. He'll never pay up."

"Aye, he'll pay up. I've got his bond in my pocket!"

"Ye didna tell me! How did ye manage it?"

CORRIE replied, but he had lowered his voice and only a murmur reached Kitty's ears. She was not interested in her uncle's affairs generally, but it was something new to hear of his having been "done," for "done" was the word that came into her mind the moment she understood Symington's part in the business. Eavesdropping, however, was not one of her weaknesses, and she rose with the intention of making known her presence in the house.

Just then her aunt's voice rose in a sort of screech of incredulity—

"But she'll never consent!"

"We'll see about that. Leave it to me."

Once more the voices became indistinct. In the kitchen doorway Kitty stopped short. Whom were they talking about now? Herself? When had her consent ever been asked for anything? For a few moments she hesitated, tempted to lay her ear against the parlor door. Then, throwing up her head, she stepped softly along the passage and shut the front door with a bang.

As she turned from it, the parlor door was snatched open and her uncle's face peered out. His brow was glistening, and his eyes held gleams of excitement; but his voice was curiously mild.

"Come in here for a minute, Kitty," he said.

She followed him into the room, wondering. This was not the customary reception on her return from seeing the London mail go by, and she was later to-night than ever she had been. Her aunt, sitting with folded hands on one side of the fern-filled hearth, gave her an instant's glance, which conveyed nothing, and resumed staring at the folded, toil-worn hands in her lap. Her uncle took his chair on the other side, saying:

"Sit down. Ye're late, but maybe ye've a good reason for that." It may have been a smile that distorted, for a moment, his thin lips.

KITTY drew a chair from the table, seated herself and waited. She had learned, long ago, never to open a conversation with these two.

Mr. Corrie rubbed his hairy jaw between finger and thumb, cleared his throat and said, almost pleasantly: "Well, did he meet ye?"

It was an unexpected question, and she could not answer immediately.

He helped her by adding: "Ye needna be shy. Mr. Symington left here half an hour back to look for ye."

"No," she answered, "he didn't meet me." Strange that her uncle should speak of the man as "Mr."

"Eh?"

"No," she repeated, "he didn't meet me."

"That's queer." Uncle and aunt exchanged glances, and the latter asked:

"Where were ye to-night?"

"At the railway."

"And ye didn't see Mr. Symington?"

"Yes, I saw him—at a distance."

There was a pause before Mr. Corrie spoke, less smoothly than before.

"Did ye keep away from him?"

"Not more than usual."

"I want a plain answer."

"No."

"Then—who was wi' ye at the time?"

Kitty flushed and went pale. "Mr. Colin Hayward."

"What? That useless waster! Were ye no forbidden to ha' any acquaintance—"

"And he's failed again in his examinations!" cried Miss Corrie. "It's the talk o' the place."

"What ha' ye to say for yourself?" roared her brother.

"Nothing," came the quiet answer, "nothing that would satisfy you or Aunt Rachel. I had no intention of meeting Mr. Hayward to-night, but when I did meet him I was not going to pretend I did not know him because he had failed in an examination. And before long I was very glad I had met him, for his presence kept away Mr. Symington. Now, if you don't mind, I'll go to bed."

A WARNING glance from his sister caused Mr. Corrie to strive for self-control.

"Sit still," he said shortly. "Ye know perfectly well it's no the thing for you to be walking wi' one o' the Haywards. Mrs. Hayward, as ye're maybe no aware, complained about it last year—"

"That'll do, John," interposed Miss Corrie, observing the girl's burning cheeks. "We're as good as the Haywards any day, but we'd best forget that affair. Now that Kitty's heard about it, she'll know what to do in future."

Kitty mastered the quiver of her pretty mouth, and with a quick movement brushed the tears from her dark eyes, and looked straight at her uncle.

"Please tell me at once," she said, "what Mr. Symington wanted with me."

The directness of the question had a disconcerting effect on Mr. Corrie.

"Maybe you could guess," he mumbled at last.

Kitty ignored the invitation.

"Ye'd best tell her, Rachel," said Mr. Corrie.

"Mr. Symington is anxious to marry ye," the woman said in little more than a whisper.

Without haste Kitty got up and moved to the door. Turning there, she faced them both. Her voice was clear, and steady—

"I would not marry Mr. Symington for—for twenty thousand pounds."

The man sprang to his feet, but she was gone, the door closed behind her.

"Almighty!" he gasped, sinking back into his chair.

"What's wrong wi' ye?" cried his sister. "I warned ye she would never consent."

"She'll consent yet!" he said, with a suppressed oath. "But—but what made her name twenty thousand pounds?"

IT was nearly an hour later when Colin reached his father's house. Hayward, senior, was not precisely a heartless man, but he was totally without imagination.

Seated—one dares to say "posed"—at an extremely orderly writing-table in his fine old library, he received his youngest son with a stern look and motioned him to be seated. He was in evening dress, and you would never have taken him for anything but a gentleman—in the narrow sense of the word.

"You are late," he said presently. "Where have you been?"

"Walking about. It's a lovely night."

Mr. Hayward smiled bitterly. "Were you alone?"

"Most of the time." Colin looked at his father. "I met Miss Carstairs, and we talked for a little while."

"Who on earth is Miss Carstairs?" Mr. Hayward did not wait for an answer to his ironic question. "You mean the young woman in the local post office, I presume—the young woman, in fact, with whom your wretched philanderings—"

"That's enough, Father!" The young man rose quickly. "Let us leave Miss Carstairs out of—"

"Well, I trust you have informed her as to your income and prospects."

"Why should I do that?"

"Usual thing in the circumstances—is it not?"

"I don't understand you. What circumstances?"

"Tut!" exclaimed Mr. Hayward. "Don't you intend to marry the grocer's daughter—I beg her pardon—niece?"

Colin barely restrained the fury that paled his face. "You may take my word for it," he said, "that Miss Carstairs certainly does not intend to marry me."

"Really! She must be a generous young person to give her kisses for nothing."

THERE was an ugly silence. The son took a step forward, his hands clenched at his sides.

"Since when," he asked at length, "have you been employing a private detective?"

A dull flash overran the older man's countenance. "Be careful! The information was not sought by me."

"Who gave it?"

"You are welcome to guess." He flicked a folded note across the table. It was addressed in pencil to "T. H. Hayward, Esq.," marked "Urgent," had evidently been torn from a notebook and had been sealed with a scrap of stamp paper. "A servant found it under the hall-door, about an hour ago. That's all I can tell you."

Colin opened it, and his face burned as he read:

A friend warns you that your youngest son and the post-office girl were kissing in the wood to-night.

"Well," said Mr. Hayward, "do you know the writing?"

His son made a gesture of negation. "May I keep this?" he managed to say presently.

"No," said the other, holding out his hand for the paper. "I will keep it—and God help the person who wrote it, when I find him or her!" Next moment he resumed his cold manner and incisive tone. "All that, however, does not exonerate you, though I am not going to dwell on the unsavory subject of your disgrace—"

"There is no disgrace!" hotly cried Colin.

His father smiled wearily. "Apparently we shall not agree on the meaning of the word. Now may I ask what are you going to do?"

"As I told you, I am going to London," replied Colin, holding himself in.

"And then?"

"I don't know yet."

"Very well." Mr. Hayward opened a drawer and took out a small bundle of notes. He threw them onto the table, saying: "A hundred pounds. Do as you like, but don't ask for more—for your own sake."

"Father," cried Colin, his anger lost in bitter humiliation, "I swear I did my best at college, only I wasn't fitted for—"

"We have already discussed that. By the way, I would suggest that you make

it convenient to leave here early in the morning instead of at night, and so spare, in some measure, the feelings of your mother and sisters—"

"You are heartless! I will leave the house now!"

"Please, no, unless you desire to start a scandal among the servants, and another in the village."

"Oh, you are worse than heartless; you are unjust. . . . . But I will wait till the morning. Good-by." Colin turned and moved toward the door.

"Wait — you've forgotten your money."

Without looking back Colin went out.

When Mr. Hayward went to bed, half an hour later, he left—deliberately—the notes lying on his writing-table.

AT six-thirty next morning, Colin entered a closed carriage and with his modest baggage was driven to the station. There had been no farewells, and on the whole he did not regret their absence, for he knew they would have been highly seasoned with reproaches and unwelcome advice. He took a ticket for Glasgow.

Having heard the carriage drive away, Mr. Hayward in his dressing-gown came down to the library. Where the notes had been he found a scrap of paper:

I. O. U.
One hundred pounds.
C. H. HAYWARD.

He smiled sardonically, muttering: "I thought he would climb down." He put the I. O. U. beside the anonymous note of last night, in his safe.

CHAPTER III

NOT FOR SALE

THE morning mail for Dunford was usually in the post office by a quarter to seven, conveyed from the railway station by Sam the postman, a little stout person with a gray military mustache, whose age, according to his own statement, was "forty-nine and a bit." It had been that for a good many years. With Sam's assistance, Kitty was wont to sort the letters, and the two had become stanch friends, though no very serious confidences had been exchanged.

In the midst of the sorting this morning Sam suddenly remarked that Mr. Colin Hayward had not made a long stay with his people.

"I seen him at the station," he continued. "I couldna say where he was bound for, but he had a pickle luggage, and he wasna looking extra cheery. 'Been getting lectured for no passing his examination, I suppose. Poor lad, I'm vexed for him. He never got on with his folk, and he's the only real gentleman in the family. They're a cauld-hearted, stuck-up lot. Him and me used often to gang fishing,—that was afore your time, Miss,—and a kinder, blither chap I never hope to meet. Well, well, if he's the black sheep, the others ha' used a queer lot o' whitewash."

Kitty felt that she was expected to say something, but just then Sam came on an address that required deciphering, and the subject dropped, not a little to her relief.

When the sorting was finished, Sam set out on his round, and she made her way to the cottage for breakfast. Her uncle was already at table, looking more than usually morose; her aunt was muttering to something on the stove—a habit of hers when annoyed. Kitty perceived that she was still in disgrace, and her heart sank. After all, these two people constituted her whole kin, and she would have pleased them had it been possible, if only for the sake of peace and cheerfulness. More, she would have loved them had they given her the slightest encouragement.

Mr. Corrie completely ignored the girl as she took her accustomed seat. To his sister, he growled over his shoulder:

"The paper's late again! I've a good mind to start selling the dailies as well as the weeklies myself. That Lorrance woman seems to think she can play wi' her customers just because she's a widow."

"I'll speak to her," said Miss Corrie, coming over with a dish of bacon.

"Tell her she had best bring the paper here—or send it—within five minutes o' the train's arrival, or she'll lose more customers than me. D'ye hear?"

"Aye, I hear ye, John. Take yer

breakfast now, and ha' patience for the paper."

THE meal was almost over when Mr. Corrie spoke again—this time to his niece.

"Well, ha' ye been thinking o' what I said to ye last night?" he abruptly demanded.

Kitty was not unprepared for the question, and she answered calmly enough that she had not further considered the matter—which was not, perhaps, quite accurate, because she had assumed that it was closed.

"Then ye'd better think it over now, for Mr. Symington's pretty sure to come again to-night."

"If he comes, I can only tell him what I told you—of course, I'll do it politely. . . . . Uncle John, why are you so anxious for me to marry that man? Tell me straight—do you and Aunt Rachel want to get rid of me?"

Corrie hesitated. He dared not say, as he was tempted to say, that he could not afford to give her a home any longer, because, for one thing, the girl was as well aware as himself that he kept the allowance made by the post office for her services as assistant—an assistant, by the way, who did practically all the work.

"Not so long ago you thought very little of Mr. Symington," she pursued, "and I've often heard Aunt Rachel call him anything but a nice man. Besides, he must be nearly forty."

"That's enough," said Corrie sharply. "Your aunt and me know him better than we used to. We want you to marry him because we see 'twould be a good thing for you. Same time, he's come into a heap o' money."

"Aye," said Miss Corrie, "he has that! He's talking o' giving up the farm and setting up house in the city—Glasgow, maybe. That would suit ye fine, Kitty."

"I'm sorry I can't do what you want," the girl said slowly. "I'd rather be dead than married to him. He—"

"Don't talk trash!" exclaimed Corrie, lowering upon her. "Ye'll give him 'Aye' to-night, or it'll be the worse for ye. Don't you try to cross me, ye daughter o' a beggar!"

"John!" squealed his sister.

Kitty was on her feet, her beautiful eyes blazing from her white face. "How dare you!" she cried, shaking with furious indignation. "How dare you speak so of my father, a man with a great, noble mind? You, you miserable thing, with not an idea in your head, not a thought in your heart, but money, money, money! My father owes you nothing—nothing, do you hear? His daughter has earned every penny she has cost you."

John Corrie, unused to contradiction, much less to retaliation, rose, gray of countenance, shuddering with passion. Probably he was not aware that he had the bread-knife in his hand, but his sister grabbed his wrist.

"Listen to me," he began in a thick voice.

"I wont! You are not sane," said Kitty, "or you would never have spoken such words about my father, your own sister's husband—not that I'll ever forgive them or you. But you are mad—mad with greed! I tell you, once and for all, I'm not for sale to Mr. Symington!"

He sat down with a crash, his mouth gaping.

"Go, go!" whispered Miss Corrie, motioning frantically with her free hand. "It's eight o'clock—time the office was open."

KITTY turned and went. She was glad to go, for her courage was already burned out.

Miss Corrie shook her brother. "Ye fool, ye forsaken fool!" she moaned. "That temper o' yours has ruined everything. Ye'll never get her to marry him now."

He turned on her savagely. "What ha' ye told her?"

"Me? Never a word."

"Then what did she mean by saying she wasna for sale? She must ha' heard—"

"Guess, maybe. Why did ye tell her the man had come into a heap o' money? I warned ye to go canny."

He flung her from him and got up. "Let her guess what she likes, think what she likes, do what she likes—but she's no going to beat me! I'll find a way! I'll manage her yet! Ten thou-

sand—twenty—maybe twenty-five thousand pound—no, by heavens, I'm no to be done out o' that by a stubborn lass."

"Let be, John. Ye ha' siller enough. Ye dinna spend a trifle o' your income. Ye'll rue the day that ye cheated your sister's daughter, for that's what it comes to."

"Hold your silly tongue, woman. I've cheated nobody but myself."

She shook her head. "I would like to read Hugh Carstairs' letter again."

"Ye're welcome — another time. There's the paper at last." He almost ran to the front door.

He returned, opening the paper at the financial page. Seating himself, he cleared a space on the table and laid it thereon. Then his thick forefinger began to move down one of the columns as though it were feeling for something. At last it stopped, and he gazed awhile. His breath went in with a hiss. "Zeniths!" he muttered.

His sister was staring over his shoulder, but her sight was indifferent. "What is it?" she gasped. "What about the Zeniths?"

In a hushed voice he replied: "They rose seven-and-sixpence yesterday..... They're now worth ninety shillings a share. That means £22,500 for the five thousand. That would be £11,250 for me—us. . . . . I wonder if Symington shouldna sell now. Wait till I see if it says anything about them here." He turned to some paragraphs headed "Mining Notes." "Aye, here it is! Oh, listen, Rachel! It says they'll likely go to eight pound! Almighty! We munna let him sell!"

She sighed and said: "It's time the shop was open."

"Aye, so it is—but wait a minute."

She began to clear the table.

He rose suddenly. "There's the keys," he said, throwing them on the table. "Ye can open the shop. I'm going up to White Farm."

CHAPTER IV

THE MISSING FIVE-POUND NOTE

AT the risk of offending a stray customer Kitty delayed opening the post office until her outraged spirit had become a little calmer—only a little, for the mingled passions so brutally aroused would subside only through sheer exhaustion. She had no one to confide in, no one to count on for sympathy and comfort. She had thought she had grown used to being alone in the world, but she had never experienced loneliness like this. Her bosom heaved, but her eyes remained dry.

Sounds of people moving in the shop next door roused her from a sort of stupor. Taking the big key, she proceeded to open the office for the day's business. There was some bookkeeping to be done, also a schedule or two to fill up, but her hand shook so that she could scarcely write. And suddenly she realized that she was afraid, desperately afraid. She was so wholly dependent on that man next door; her very existence was in his hands; she was, to all intents and purposes, his prisoner.

A few pounds would have made all the difference now. She possessed less than two shillings. There was no escape.

She unlocked the safe and transferred parts of its contents, money, stamps and so forth, to their proper drawers. The money gave her a sickish feeling—so much of it the price of her salvation over and over again, her freedom in a fraction of it. Violently she shut the drawer and turned to the desk behind the glass screen.

A CHILD came in with a letter and a penny, and a little later a woman appeared with a parcel. Then there was a longish blank till an elderly man entered. He made a brief remark on the weather and proceeded to fill up a money-order request-form. Presently he pushed it across the counter along with the money, twenty-seven pounds, in three five-pound and twelve one-pound notes, also eightpence to cover the charge. Laying the money on the desk, she collected her wits and carefully wrote out the order. Her sleeve brushed the notes separate without her noticing it.

The man wanted to know when a letter would be delivered in a certain outlying place in Ireland, and she took the "Post-office Guide" to the counter and found him the information contained

therein. He went out, leaving the door open. The brisk current of morning air was welcome. Before she could turn from the counter, a girl came in with a few shillings for her savings-account.

When the girl had gone, Kitty put her hands to her head, which was now throbbing painfully. Some little time elapsed before she returned to the desk. Observing the notes, she gathered them up and placed them in the proper drawer for money-order and postal-order transactions. She locked the drawer with a key on the bunch hanging from her belt. Often this drawer contained fairly large sums. Once more she attacked her clerical work.

Somehow the morning passed. At noon she was relieved, for half an hour, by her uncle. He peered about but made no remark, and without even glancing at him, she passed through the short passage leading to the shop and thence to the cottage. Her dinner was waiting on the table. Miss Corrie, who had put it there, had gone back to the shop; she dined with her brother later.

Kitty could not eat. After a while she went up to her room and lay down for ten minutes. The pity was that she had not spent the whole of her half-hour upstairs.

THE first thing that Corrie did on being left to himself, was to snatch from the floor, under the shadow of the desk, a five-pound note. Holding it stretched between his hands, he stood transfixed, while the clock ticked nearly a hundred seconds. Then his hands began to shake, and sweat appeared on his face. Two minutes later he left the office to take care of itself, going out by the public way. Keeping close to the wall, he passed round behind the office and shop and into the yard at the back of the house. The place was not overlooked by neighbors, but he glanced keenly about him before he turned his gaze upward. Above the ivy an attic window was wide open.

He tiptoed to an outhouse; he tiptoed back with a ladder. He placed the ladder in position and climbed a few bars, halted and made a show of doing something to the ivy. Ascending further, he repeated the performance. At last he was at the window. For a few seconds he remained with his body bent and stretched into the room; then he withdrew, descended the ladder, replaced it in the outhouse and returned to the office.

At twelve-thirty his niece appeared. He moved toward the shop, seemed to change his mind and came back. He cleared his throat, and said:

"I'll check the cash."

Hitherto the formality had always taken place after business hours, but the girl, too sick at heart to be surprised at anything, without hesitation or remark handed him her keys.

Before long Miss Corrie called him to dinner.

"It'll ha' to wait," he returned, apparently immersed in his task.

At the end of twenty minutes he spoke.

"Here!"

She came over. "Anything wrong?" she asked wearily.

He pointed to the open drawer. "Ye're short!"

"Nonsense! Twenty-seven pounds—that's been the only money-order business to-day."

"Well, there's only twenty-two."

"You've made a mistake," she said, with reviving alertness. "Three fives and twelve singles."

"Was that how Torrance gave ye the money? Be very sure, now! Three fives and twelve singles? Eh?"

"I'm perfectly sure," she returned impatiently. "The notes must have stuck. How much do you make me short?"

"Count for yourself."

She took them out and laid them on the counter. There was a short silence, broken only by the rustle of the paper and the ticking of the clock.

SUDDENLY she raised her head and looked him straight in the eyes, without a word.

He stood her gaze for a brief space, then turned it to the notes. His fist banged the counter.

"Five pound short—a five-pound note—where is it?"

Still she stared at him, silent.

"Can ye no answer?" he snarled at last.

She answered with a strange, slow little smile. It maddened him. He strode across to the passage and shouted for his sister.

Miss Corrie came at once. "What's the matter, John? Mind, the lad's in the shop."

"Send him to his dinner."

Kitty spoke. "No. I want a witness."

"A witness!" screeched the woman. "What for?"

Corrie pushed her aside and bawled: "Peter, ye can go for your dinner now." He waited until he heard the door open and close; then he wheeled and said to his sister: "She's five pound short."

Miss Corrie threw up her hands.

"Yes," said Kitty quietly, "I'm five pounds short."

The woman was about to speak, but her brother motioned her to hold her tongue.

"I want to know where that five-pound note is. Do ye hear me, girl?"

She paid not the slightest attention.

"See here, Rachel," he said somewhat wildly, "she admits she got twenty-seven pound from Torrance this morning. She had the key o' the drawer all the time I was here my lone. And you and the boy can swear I never passed to the house. When I checked the cash in her presence, I found her five pound short. And she wont say what's become o' it."

"Tell him," cried Miss Corrie. "Speak!"

"What's the use?" said the girl, and there was a pause.

"Were ye up the stair at your dinner-time?" he demanded.

No answer.

"Aye, I heard her," said the aunt.

"Then it's my duty to—to make a search," he said in a thick voice.

"Get the police," said Kitty. "They're honest."

He all but lost control then. "Up to your room!" he roared. "Rachel, ye maun come likewise."

KITTY turned and led the way. She felt that this was only the beginning of the ghastly farce. Nothing could possibly be found in her room unless her uncle contrived to put it there while he was pretending to search, and she would see to it that he was not allowed to manage that!

"If it's no in there," said Corrie, as they reached the small landing, "your aunt'll ha' to search your person. Go inside, the two o' ye. I'll bide here. Rachel, you make search."

Kitty began to feel puzzled in a dull, dreary fashion. Her uncle could play no tricks from where he stood. Why should he make such a long business of the matter? He had failed to terrify her, and—

"Where'll I search?" wailed Miss Corrie.

"Every place. It's got to be found," replied her brother. "It's Government money."

"It'll take a long, long time. Would ye no give her another chance to—to speak?"

"She's had her chance. Hurry up!"

It was perfectly natural that Miss Corrie should start with the chest of drawers that served also for a dressing-table, placed at an angle with the window and near it. She drew out the right-hand top drawer.

"Turn it out on the floor," he ordered.

Kitty sat down on the bed, and apathetically watched the scattering of her poor little fineries, gloves, ribbons, fancy buttons and so on.

"It's no there, anyway," remarked Rachel, rising at last.

She opened the neighbor drawer, and Kitty winced, for it held her father's manuscripts.

"Oh!" gasped Rachel, and stood petrified.

"Hurry up!" called her brother, and she started.

"It—it's here," she whispered, and held it up.

Corrie strode in, snatched it and held it close to his niece's face.

Kitty was white as death now. What dumb innocence, what loud defense, could stand against this?

Her aunt slunk from the room.

"Well," said Corrie at last in a lowered voice, "I'll let ye go free now; I'll let ye go free till this time to-morrow—no, till ten o'clock to-morrow night. But if ye want to go free after that, ye know the way—the only way.

Now ye can think over it. I'll mind the office myself."

With that he went out.

Had Kitty held a weapon of any sort then, she would certainly have tried to kill him.

IN the evening her aunt brought her some tea, set it down and retired without a word. But no restraint was put on her movements. Restraint was unnecessary. Where could she go, penniless? Later, when she heard Symington's voice in the kitchen, she stole downstairs and out of doors.

In the dusk, an hour afterward, she stood at her old place, waiting the roaring approach, the thundering dash past, of the London mail. Colin Hayward would not be on board, she told herself, and wondered vaguely why, after all, he had left early in the morning. And now he would be in London, and things there would already be making him forget her. She did not love him as she judged a maid should love a man—but oh! how gladly she would have yielded now to his tender arms and his kind voice.

The train was coming—it was nearly on her. Something white fluttered from a window. The signal could not be for her—and yet with her heart in her eyes she gazed. And just for a tick of time she had a glimpse of Colin's face.

It was all over.

She laid her arms on the fence and bowed her face on them and wept as never she had wept in all her one-and-twenty years—such tears of bitterness, such tears of loneliness.

Perhaps Sam, quitting his post on the railway, may have wondered at the bowed figure, but he went discreetly homeward by his own way, a hundred yards farther down the field.

In the starry darkness Kitty came to herself and slowly made her way to the only home she had. Emotion had weakened her physically, but her spirit yet struggled strongly in the toils. She had still nearly twenty-four hours of freedom, such as it was. To-night it was too late for any persecution from Alec Symington, who surely must have left the cottage some time ago, and gone home.

But on the road, at the gate of the field, he was waiting.

CHAPTER V

THE REGISTERED LETTER

"AREN'T you going to shake hands?" asked Alec Symington. He was leaning on the gate smoking a cigarette.

It was not so dark that the girl, who had halted a couple of yards away, could fail to see the smile accompanying the words. Symington's was by no means an ill-looking countenance, though forty years, half of them strenuous, after a fashion, had blurred the fineness of the well-shaped features; it would have been attractive, admirable even, but for something in the eyes, something about the mouth, under the nicely trained tawny mustache, that is not to be fully described by the word covetous. His was a face that no wise man would regard without doubts.

Symington was tall and broad-shouldered, but in the light of day he had a softish look, and one imagined him as a "fat man" in the years to come. He was no hard-working farmer. White Farm had come to him for lack of a worthier and fitter heir, his two brothers having died not long before his father, and there were honest people in the neighborhood who would tell you that the good old property was already on the road to ruin. Symington's record was that of a man who had seen a good deal of life in different parts of the world, and learned little worth knowing, who had frequently touched the skirts of Fortune but never captured her, and who had gambled away more hours than he had toiled. And now, at forty, he was probably nearer to Fortune than he had ever been, and certainly nearer to love, as he understood it. For in Kitty Carstairs he had nothing to gain but youthful sweetness and fresh beauty; indeed, in a material sense, the possession of her was going to cost him dear—if he kept his bond with John Corrie.

"Aren't you going to shake hands?" he asked again.

"Please open the gate," said Kitty, "or I must go home another way."

"It's a lovely night, and your aunt knows I'm looking after you. I want to have a talk with you, Kitty."

She sighed. "I'm very tired—too tired to listen to anyone. Please let me go."

"I wont keep you long, and we can find a nice dry seat in the wood, since you're so tired. Come, you needn't be shy with me, Kitty—"

"Are you going to open the gate?" she coldly asked.

"Immediately, if you'll promise—"

HE turned sharply. Some one had come out of the little wood, and was crossing the road.

"Is that you, Miss?"

"Oh, Sam!" cried the girl in a gasp of relief.

"Can't you get the gate open?" the postman inquired, as though no Symington had been there. He came forward and laid a hand on the bolt.

"What the blazes do you want?" blurted Symington, suddenly erect.

"I'm thinking Miss Carstairs is due home by now," Sam said coolly. "What do you say, Miss?"

"Miss Carstairs is in my charge, you interfering fool!"

"No, no, Sam; I'm not!—and I want to get home at once."

"Kindly stand aside, Mr. Symington," said the postman.

"Stand aside—for you!" exclaimed Symington in a fury. With an ugly laugh and a curse he drove his fist at the little man's face, sending him down in a heap. "That's to go on with," he said, and strolled off.

"Oh, you coward!" cried Kitty, wrenching open the gate. "Are you badly hurt, Sam?"

Sam was already rising, holding his aching jaw. Inwardly he was raging, but all he said then was: "All right, Miss. My turn'll maybe come. And now I'll be seeing ye home."

She caught his arm, for he seemed in need of support.

"Ye're trembling, Miss," he remarked, "and no wonder. Never mind; it's all over now. But I'd just like to hear ye say ye didna think me too interfering-like."

"Oh," she said earnestly, "I don't know what I'd have done if you hadn't come. I'll be grateful to you as long—"

"There, there! It's my reward to know that ye didna want his company, for he's a rotten bad one."

THEY walked a little way in silence, and then a sob escaped the girl. She was at the end of her wits and her courage. Few of us can stand and struggle alone all the time, and she knew that Sam had saved her only for a matter of so many hours.

"Come, cheer up, Miss," he said kindly. "Ye wasn't in the office to-night, and your aunt told me ye wasn't so well, so it's no wonder ye're upset. Still—"

"Sam," she interrupted, "I'm going to tell you everything—nearly everything. You're the only soul I can trust." And in whispered, spasmodic sentences she poured forth her tale.

Sam was more than shocked; he was overwhelmed.

"To think of it, to think of it!" he repeated feebly a dozen times before wrath and pity took command of his honest soul. Then he was for taking John Corrie by the throat and shaking all but the last breath out of his body, for telling Miss Corrie exactly what he thought of her and for presenting Kitty with his savings—yea, and his own little abode, to enable her to stand independent of her unnatural relatives.

She was half laughing, half crying, by the time he paused for breath.

"Oh, Sam, you know I'd never allow you to do any of those things for my sake, but I'll never forget your goodness. You mustn't do anything, or I'll wish I hadn't told you. But I do want you to advise me what to do."

"I never liked John Corrie," he cried, "nor did any soul in Dunford; but I never doubted he was a straight man. But dinna ye be afraid for the five-pun'-note business—dinna ye be afraid for that!"

"But that's what I am afraid of! I might escape from Mr. Symington by simply going away, but not from—"

"Your uncle would never dare to—"

"Dare? After what he's done, what would he not dare? And he's clever in his way. How did he get that five-pound note into my drawer?"

Sam's hand went to his mouth. A sound not unlike a chuckle became the beginning of a fit of coughing. When it had passed he said:

"We'll maybe find that out yet, so dinna let it bother ye too much, Miss. But if he tries to frighten ye, let me know, and I'll deal wi' him—by gravy, I'll deal wi' him!"

"Sam, you must be careful. What if he got you into trouble, and you lost your—"

"I can take care o' myself," said Sam, "except, maybe, at the boxing—and I didna get fair play from that scoundrel." He laughed ruefully.

"The beast!"

"Well, well, as I said, my turn'll maybe come—any yours'll come to a certainty, Miss. Keep up your heart. Are ye feeling a bit better now?"

"Oh, yes," she answered warmly. "It's not so awful when one isn't all alone."

"Poor, pretty thing!" he said gently, "ye'll win through yet. . . . . And now we're nearly there, and I'd best no be seen wi' ye. We'll get a talk at sorting-time in the morning."

"Unless I'm forbidden the office."

"Ah, well, if your scamp o' an uncle does that, we'll just ha' to find another way."

With a hurried pat on her shoulder, he turned and went.

THE cottage door was not locked. Having entered, Kitty stood still for a moment, listening. Silence. She turned into the kitchen, to find it, as she had scarcely dared to hope, unoccupied. Her aunt and uncle had evidently retired for the night.

A candle burned on the table. A jug of milk, bread and butter were there also. Somehow the sight of food stirred her sense of humor. She had read of a murderer's being treated to an egg with his breakfast on the morning of his execution, and it had struck her as pathetically absurd. Never before had such an attention been paid her. She drank a little milk, because she was thirsty, and went upstairs.

On the chest of drawers in her room she found a piece of yellow wrapping-paper bearing her aunt's writing:

Do your work in the office to-morrow morning as usual.

So her uncle intended literally to keep his promise that she should "go free" until the following night. But after that, what?

If Kitty had disliked Symington in the past, she hated him, nay, detested him now. His assault on Sam was the last blow to her respect for him. To give Symington his due, he had regretted the blow almost at once. It had been a stupid blunder to make in Kitty's presence. Her indignant, contemptuous words had told him that.

He had gone home angry with himself, cursing the postman, feeling that it would be inadvisable, if not fatal, to approach the girl again until the thing had cooled in her mind. Then he could apologize, blaming the outburst on his overpowering desire for her. Yes, he had better give her a week, during which old Corrie would, of course, continue to exert his influence. Meantime, he would make a trip to London. Whether he liked it or not, he must convert a few Zeniths into cash.

Kitty endured a bad two hours before sleep came, but nature won at last, and she passed the remainder of the night in blessed unconsciousness.

WITH the morning's mail Sam arrived in a heated condition, puffing and blowing.

"I was in such a hurry to see how ye was, Miss," he explained. "Keeping up your heart?"

She gave him a nod and a brave smile. Poor old Sam—he was good and kind and willing, but how could he really help her from her hideous plight?

They fell to work on the contents of the sacks, and the minutes ticked past.

"Registered letter, Miss," said Sam, throwing it to her end of the counter, as he usually did with such a packet.

She was about to lay it aside for attention later when the address caught her eye. A cry escaped her.

Sam turned to see her, white as a ghost, tearing at the envelope.

"Oh, what can it be?" she whispered. Then, as if courage failed her: "Sam, come and take it. Tell me what it's all about. I—I daren't look."

Sam's fingers were none too steady as he received the envelope. "Registered at Glasgow," he muttered, and proceeded to extract the contents.

These were a fairly plump bundle of bank-notes, and a half-sheet of paper bearing the words:

From an old friend of your father.

Sam read them aloud while she stood rigid, with her face in her hands.

"Am I to count them?" he asked.

"Yes," she murmured.

"Five-pun' notes," he said, and there followed a rustling pause. "Twenty o' them—a hundred pound. . . . . See!" He took one of her hands from her face, and pressed the bundle into it. "Feel them—they're real, ye poor pretty thing!"

CHAPTER VI

KITTY LEAVES DUNFORD

SAM was doomed to be late in starting on his round that morning. The moment Kitty's mind grasped the significance of the windfall, her tongue was loosed. She talked excitedly, even wildly. The sender of the notes—she wished he had given his name—must be some one whom her father had helped in the old days. Her father was always lending money that never came back. That was why there was none when he died. She hoped she might some day discover the sender; otherwise he would never realize how much more than kind, how truly wonderful, was the thing he had done. For he had given a desperate, persecuted girl her freedom!

"But what are ye going to do, Miss?" Sam ventured at last.

"I'm going to trust you," she said, with a broken laugh.

"Aye, surely ye can do that. But I hope ye're no for being reckless. Your eyes are shining something terrible."

She laughed again, and said: "I'm going to London!"

"London!"

"To-night."

It took Sam some moments to recover. "But what's taking ye a' the road to London?"

"I've always wanted to go. I've always said I would go if I had the money—and now I've got it!"

"Ha' ye no friends in London?"

"I've no enemies."

"Oh, but this'll never do!" he cried. "What'll happen to ye?"

"Perhaps I'll have some adventures—I hope so—and—"

"Adventures—guid God!"

"—and I may make my fortune."

He threw up his hands, muttering: "Oh, dear! the money has turned her head!"

She laid her hand on his arm. "I want you to help me," she said softly, "—that is, if you can do it without getting yourself into trouble. The express stops at Kenny Junction at twenty minutes past nine, but that's six miles away, and I must take some luggage—"

"Mercy on us!" he exclaimed, "how can ye think it out so quick?"

"I've thought it out, and dreamed of it, and cried about it, Sam, oh, a hundred times! Now, can you get some one with a cart, or anything on wheels, to meet me, secretly, outside of the village, at eight o'clock?"

HE gave her a long look. "Will ye no think over it, Miss!" he asked at last.

"I'm going to-night. Can't you imagine what life here, with those people, must be?"

"Aye," he said slowly. "No to be endured, I dare say. But"—he became timid—"I mun ask ye a question, Miss, whether it offends ye or no. It—it's about young Mr. Hayward. Ye're no running away wi' him, are ye?"

Once more she laughed. "I had forgotten all about him," she said truthfully. "What a question to ask!" Then she flushed a little.

He looked abashed as he murmured: "Young folks do stupid things in haste, and it was for both your sakes I asked the question. Well, well," he went on, "if your mind's made up, I suppose I canna change it."

"And you'll see about a cart, Sam?" she said eagerly.

"I'll no do that!"

"What? Why?"

"Because when ye leave your uncle's house, when ye leave Dunford, ye mun

leave wi' your head high and your name fair. Think, Miss! What'll it mean if ye creep away as if—as if ye was guilty? Why, it would mean that your uncle would be free to make a scandal, aye, and maybe do something worse—"

"But he can prove me guilty as it is! And do you think for a moment he would let me go?"

"Will ye trust me, Miss?"

"Of course, Sam."

"Ye promise?"

"Yes; if you wont keep me from going?"

"Then ye've promised! Now listen, for we'll maybe no get another chance to arrange it. At eight o'clock to-night ye'll ha' your bag and things ready, and ye'll come down the stair, wi' neither fear nor trembling, and ye'll open the door, and ye'll find me waiting wi' a cart—"

"But, Sam, Sam—"

"And if your uncle or your aunt asks where ye're going, answer the truth. But if they try to stop ye, leave them to me. That's all. If ye canna trust me—"

"Oh, but I will—I do!" she cried, "though I don't understand—"

"Then it's settled, and I just hope I'm no doing a bad thing for ye in helping ye. And now the folk'll be wondering what's come over their letters."

KITTY was not sorry to discover that she had only five minutes left for breakfast. She was all apprehension lest her nerves or her looks should betray her. The slightest appearance of cheerfulness, she felt, would alone be fatal. Fortunately, her uncle had left the table, and was immersed in the morning paper at the fireside. Zeniths had fallen half a crown, and it seemed to him the beginning of the end. His niece's engagement to Symington twelve hours hence would not take place a moment too soon. He never doubted that the girl would give in.

Miss Corrie, silent, her face a melancholy mask, was beginning to tidy up things.

Not a word was spoken during the girl's brief stay at the table, but when she rose to go to open the office, her uncle spoke from behind the paper.

"Ye'll mind what I told ye?"

Without response she made for the door. And just then her mind was suddenly confronted with a new difficulty. She was expected to be on duty in the post office until eight P. M., and yet she must have her things packed and be ready for Sam at that hour.

At the door she turned, knowing it was now or never.

"I don't think I can stop in the office till eight to-night. I'm too tired."

There was a silence full of acute suspense, until he returned grudgingly:

"Very well. Your aunt can take charge after tea."

She hurried away, her heart thumping with relief. She would have nearly an hour and a half to herself before the hour of departure. Heaven help her to keep her self-control till then. She told herself she did not doubt Sam, and yet—

"John," said Miss Corrie, "do ye think she'll give in?"

"She darena face the other thing."

After a pause: "John, what do ye think she wanted the five-pun' note for?"

"Ye can ask her."

"She might ha' got a safer place to hide it than she did—"

"Will ye hold your silly tongue, woman! Zeniths went back two-and-six yesterday. I'm going up to White Farm."

TWELVE hours later Kitty stood in her room ready to go. It was exactly eight, but she was allowing a minute or two to pass in order to make sure of Sam's being there. Her courage was at ebb, and she was very pale. Yet she hoped she might escape from the house without being noticed. The best of her worldly goods were contained in a bag and hold-all, part of her luggage of five years ago.

At last she felt she must go or faint. She opened the door softly and picked up her burdens. The bag was heavy. She was taking her father's manuscripts. Stealthily she stepped across the small landing and began to descend. But it was impossible to move, laden as she was, on that narrow, wooden stair without making considerable noise. And

as she reached the bottom she was confronted by her uncle, who had just shut the shop for the night.

"What's this?" he demanded with an awful frown, as he blocked the way to the front door.

Kitty's heart all but failed her. She cleared her throat, wet her lips and managed to utter the words:

"I'm going to London."

For a moment the man was stupefied. Then his shout went down the passage leading to shop and post office—

"Rachel!—here, quick!"

In desperation Kitty sought to push past. He seized her arm. He was breathing hard; his face was the color of putty.

Miss Corrie appeared.

"What is it? Oh!" she exclaimed, perceiving the luggage.

"She's mad," said her brother thickly. "Says she's going to London. Liker to jail!"

"How can she go to London or any place?" cried the woman. "Unless—did ye check the cash to-day, John?"

"Aunt Rachel!" exclaimed the girl.

"Take her luggage up the stair, Rachel," Corrie ordered. "We'll ha' to do something—"

The door was opened from the outside. Sam stood on the step. Beyond him, at the gate of the little garden, was a pony cart he had borrowed or hired.

"Are ye ready, Miss?" said Sam cheerfully.

CORRIE strode to the door, his face working with passion.

"What do ye mean?" he demanded threateningly.

"Miss Carstairs," said Sam, without flinching, "is for London, and it's my pleasure to drive her to the junction."

"He's mad too," screamed Miss Corrie. "Shut the door in his face."

Swiftly Sam stepped inside, and closed the door.

"Mr. Corrie," he said quietly, "I would advise ye no to interfere." To Kitty: "I'll take your luggage, Miss."

Corrie, beside himself, raised his fist.

"Wait," said the other, still calmly. "The folk in Dunford are maybe dull, but I could tell them a thing, Mr. Corrie, that would make them spit at ye in the street, and maybe pull your house and shop about your ears. . . . . Come, Miss."

"Move a step, and I send for the policeman," roared Corrie.

"In which case," retorted the postman, "I'll just ha' to give ye in charge. For what, I ask ye, was ye doin' up the ladder yesterday, about twelve-thirty?"

"By God, postman, I'll—"

"I'm askin' ye a straight question. I was comin' down the hill at the time, but I've guid sight still, and what's more, I had a witness. Ye can say ye was paying attention to your ivy—an' truth it needs it!—but in that case, I would ask ye if the ivy was growing inside o' this young lady's bedroom. . . . . Come, Miss. He'll no touch ye." And opening the door, and then gently pushing Corrie out of the way, he took possession of the bag and hold-all.

And he and the girl passed out without hindrance.

WHEN they had gone the woman turned a ghastly face on her brother.

"John, ye mun tell me what he meant about the ladder."

As if he had not heard, Corrie staggered out of the house and took the road to White Farm.

Sam put his charge into the express with many injunctions and a package of sweets. Kitty had scarcely spoken during the drive, and now speech failed her altogether. She could only cling to his rough hand and nod her promises to send her address, when she found one, and let him know if ever she required help. He was a lonely man, and she had given him a new and great interest in life.

They were too much engrossed at the last minute to notice a high-wheeled gig dash up to the station gate and deposit a passenger, who entered the train lower down just as it was starting.

There were three other passengers in the compartment, all more or less inclined to doze. Though deadly tired, Kitty had no inclination for sleep. Nor could she give a thought to the future. Not so soon could her mind and nerve recover from the strain and shock of the last two days.

After Carlisle, however, she found herself alone, and the solitude began to have a soothing effect. She lay back in her corner and closed her eyes. The great train—the dear, kind monster she had so often watched and longed to travel on—thundered out its miles southward, and at two in the morning slumber was not far from the exhausted girl.

Kitty gave a little sigh of content—and opened her eyes.

The door of the compartment slid back. Alec Symington entered.

CHAPTER VII

A FRIEND IN NEED

FOR a moment or two Kitty was terror-stricken. Then common-sense came to her aid. She was free; she was independent; the man might annoy her with his attentions, but he could not harm her. She sat up and met his smile with a grave look of inquiry.

"This is a pleasant surprise, Kitty," he said, seating himself directly opposite. "Rather a crowd in my part of the train, and I was hunting for a compartment with room to spare when fortune led me here," he lied. "Not often I'm so lucky."

Kitty made no response.

"You might have let me know you were going to make a journey," he said pleasantly, "but perhaps you decided on it since I saw you." He glanced at her things on the rack. "I see you are going all the way. Well, so much the better for me—eh? Come, Kitty, be friendly and say something."

"I have nothing to say, Mr. Symington."

"You're thinking of last night—or, to be exact, the night before last. Well, I'm glad of this chance of apologizing. I'm sorry I struck the postman, but I was mad with the man for interfering, you know. I had something to tell you, Kitty, something I've wanted to tell you for a long time. . . . Well, are you going to forgive me?"

"You had better ask Sam that. You didn't hurt me—you only disgusted me. I think you should try to find a seat in another compartment." She was quite cool now. Indeed, she was not sorry to have the opportunity of humiliating him for Sam's sake.

At her words his face took on a dusky shade, but he asked quietly enough: "Is that quite fair, Kitty?"

"You have no right to my name." She turned to the window, let up the blind and sought to ignore him by peering out into the darkness; but if she thought thus to get rid of his company, or even silence him, she was mistaken.

"You are a very foolish little girl," he said presently. "Here you are, running away to London, where you haven't a friend—"

"Who told you that?" she demanded.

"Well, have you?"

"Yes!" It was true. She had suddenly remembered that Colin was there, not that she expected ever to meet him. But the inspiration served her purpose: Symington was taken aback.

"Then it is some one your uncle does not know of," he said sharply, and wished he had not spoken, for she was quick to retort:

"So my uncle told you I was in the train, though you pretended to be surprised to see me! I may be foolish, Mr. Symington, but I'm not utterly stupid."

"You are—delightfully stupid," he returned, restraining his temper, "if you think I'm going to let you disappear into London before I have seen what your friend is like. London is a dangerous place, as you would know if you had ever shown your pretty face in it before. Now, don't get excited. Be reasonable—patient, if you like to call it that. I don't wonder at your running away from your awful relations and that dead-alive village, but what are you going to do in London?"

KITTY, now both angry and uneasy, did not reply.

"I don't mean to be impertinent," he went on, "but I can't help being aware that you have no money—or, at least, very little. Now, in London—"

"You needn't concern yourself whether I have money or not," she interrupted hotly. "You will force me to leave this—"

"Please—just a moment. I can't help concerning myself—no man could—in the circumstances. And as I happen to be a man who is in love with you—oh, you know it very well—"

She rose to take her things from the rack. It was certainly not a wise move. With a strange laugh he sprang up and caught her, prisoning her arms.

"Silly little girl," he whispered passionately, "to think you can be quit of me so easily! No, no! I've got you, and I mean to keep you. Don't struggle—it's no use. There!" He had her fast. They swayed together with the movement of the train. "Now listen, Kitty," he continued: "You'll like me better when you know me better. I'm not a bad sort, and I can give you things you've never dreamed of. Let's be friends for the present. I wont hurry you about the other thing." His voice sounded a little breathless. "In a few hours we'll be in London. If your friend is there, good and well; but if not, you must let me look after you—show you where to stay, and so on. Leave everything to me. We'll have a jolly good time while you're getting to know me—"

Wrenching one of her hands free, she struck him in the face.

"You beast!"

Doubtless the word stung more than the blow. A madness grew in his eyes.

"I'll kiss you for that!" he cried—and let her go with a stifled curse. The girl sank into her corner, ruddy. The man sat down, ghastly.

THE corridor-door was drawn back by a young woman in rather fashionable attire. In her left hand she carried a "sevenpenny," a finger marking the place. Without a glance at either occupant she stepped in and, leaving the door open, seated herself beside it and began to read.

Kitty had again turned her face to the window, and soon the shameful glow faded, leaving her pale. The natural reaction came, and she wanted to cry. Symington's color, on the other hand, had risen. Once more he sat opposite, looking hot and sulky. After a little while he produced his cigarette-case, but he put it back unopened. He would have given something for a newspaper, though it had been a week old. He was furious with the intruder, and now and then took a stealthy glance at her which might possibly have alarmed her had she observed it. Now and then, also, he took such a glance at Kitty, and at last discovered that she was on the verge of tears. Confound it! she must not be allowed to make a scene. He transferred himself to her side.

"Look here, Kitty, it's all right," he whispered, and surreptitiously put his hand on her elbow.

She started as if from pollution. "Can't you leave me alone?" she said under her breath. "I never want to see you again, but I'll hate you a little less, perhaps, if you go back to the compartment you came from—anywhere out of this."

Nettled, he replied: "You may as well make up your mind that I'm going to see you start safe in London."

She drew away from him as far as possible and resumed her study of the darkness.

Symington, trying to look as if he had not been rebuffed, lay back, folded his arms and stared openly, rather rudely, at the intruder, who was now making a pencil jotting on the fly-leaf of her book. When she had finished writing she went back to the printed page, read for a few moments, and stopped as if an idea had struck her. She put up her hand and pressed the button labeled *Attendant*. Then she returned to the story.

It was beginning to dawn on Symington that she was not a bad-looking girl, though she must be a pure idiot, when a steward from the sleeping-car appeared in the doorway. The man saluted the girl respectfully, and as though he was pleased to see her.

"Didn't know you were traveling with us to-night, Miss," he remarked.

She smiled upon him, and tearing out the fly-leaf, folded and handed it to him with a look which apparently he understood. He bowed and retired.

SYMINGTON had got the length of admitting to himself that in other circumstances she might have made a pleasant enough traveling companion, when the official again appeared. Not a

little to Symington's surprise it was himself whom the man now addressed.

"Excuse me, sir," came the polite English speech, "but I can find you a comfortable seat in another part of the train."

After a slight pause, "Thanks," said Symington, shortly, "but I'm pretty well where I am."

"Sorry, sir, but this compartment is reserved for ladies only," said the other, politely as before, and proceeded to affix to the window a label bearing out his statement.

Symington hesitated, but he had the wit to realize that there was nothing for it but to go. With what dignity he could command, he said to Kitty, "I'll see you when we arrive," favored the intruder with a scowl which ought to have slain her but which nearly made her smile, and followed the official.

Then the intruder shut the door, settled herself comfortably and went on with the story.

And Kitty began to sob helplessly, her face in her handkerchief.

At the end of, perhaps, a couple of minutes, she felt a light touch on her shoulder and was aware that the intruder was sitting down beside her.

"If you cry any longer," said a calm, low-pitched voice, "I'll be thinking I did the wrong thing in interfering. Besides, the attendant will be here immediately with some tea for us, and he might think he had done the wrong thing, too. Also, you have nothing to cry about now—have you?"

"Oh," said Kitty, wiping her eyes with one hand and groping for the stranger with the other, "the relief was too much for me. How can I ever thank you for being so kind and clever?"

"You can postpone that till another day, Miss Carstairs—don't be alarmed: I saw it on your luggage," the other said, with a reassuring hand-clasp. "Mine's Hilda Risk, though I'm quite a cautious person, as a rule. To-night I made an exception," she went on, giving Kitty time to recover herself, "and interfered in a way that must have seemed rather extraordinary to you. But I simply couldn't help it. I noticed you before you got into the train, and I saw you were troubled and nervous. I noticed the—oh, well, the gentleman arrive at the last moment and get on board after glaring about him. And as I happened to be just next door to you, and in a seat next the corridor, I observed him prowling along, ever so often, and taking stock of your compartment. And every time he appeared, I admired him less—I hardly know why. And the last time he came I saw him grin. And when he entered your compartment I couldn't rest, and after a little while I took the chance of putting my foot in it dreadfully—and you know the rest. Feeling better now?"

"Oh, yes, thank you," Kitty answered, turning her attentions from her eyes to her pretty hair. "But you were so cool!"

"I suppose I was. Once I've made up my mind to do a thing, I get that way. Besides, I'm never afraid of a man!"

"Never afraid of a man!" cried Kitty in tones of such amazement that her new friend laughed.

"No; because, you see, a man, in his soul, is always afraid of a woman. It's a useful thing to remember."

"But—but do you—hate men?"

"On the contrary! Most of my friends are men. Here comes the tea; now we'll be happy!"

THE attendant placed the tray on the seat, beamed on Miss Risk, and withdrew.

Kitty looked like crying again.

"I believe you're hungry," said Hilda. "Fall to on the bread and butter, and I'll pour out. It requires a little practice, you know." She proceeded to talk about herself, explaining, much to Kitty's interest, that she was a journalist. "Most of my work consists of 'specials' for *The Lady's Mirror,* rather

a swagger weekly, though quite young. I 'do' all sorts of big functions, swell weddings and so forth. I've a knack for making dreary things look bright in print, also a knack for making the dull remarks of prominent persons seem brilliant. These are the chief reasons, I fancy, why the editor sends me all the way from London instead of employing some one on the spot. I have just come from Aberdeen, and if you read my article in next week's *Mirror,* you will imagine that I was in fairyland instead of in the worst of weather, at a damaged garden party, among a few hundred ordinary humans who wished themselves at home! But I enjoyed myself—I generally do."

She looked as if she did, thought Kitty, venturing for the first time to take note of her new friend's appearance. Hilda inclined to fairness. Her hair was a light brown without tinge of red, and her fine skin was almost pale, though the lips were warmly colored. Her nose was short and straight; her chin, while nicely rounded, hinted at a certain boldness—not aggressiveness—of character. She was probably six or seven years older than Kitty.

She chatted on about herself and her work till she saw that Kitty had made a fair meal.

"Feeling pretty fit now, aren't you?" she said encouragingly, and rang the bell.

"Oh, quite different. I don't know what to say to you, Miss Risk," Kitty said gratefully. "You've been so good to me and—and you don't know a thing about me."

"May I ask, two questions?"

"Ask anything—please!"

"Just two for the present. Have you friends meeting you at Euston?"

"No."

"And where do you want to go on your arrival in London?"

"I—I don't know."

Hilda nodded gravely. "I see you have a story," she said, "but even if you wish to tell it, I want you to keep it back—for the present, at any rate. You and I must have a nap, or we shall be mere wrecks at the end of the journey—and I've pages to cover before lunch-time. Ah, here he comes!"

The attendant appeared carrying pillows and rugs. "I don't think you'll be disturbed, Miss," he said before he retired with the tray and the silver Hilda had laid on it.

Two minutes later she had Kitty tucked up on one of the seats.

"Now go to sleep without wasting a moment in worrying over what's going to happen a few hours hence. We'll manage nicely. Leave it to me."

And Kitty left it. She was not used to being taken care of, but even the novelty of that experience did not long withstand slumber. In a few minutes she had forgotten it along with her weariness and woes.

AS the porter took their things, Hilda whispered to Kitty:

"Don't look about you; and if you happen to see him, don't show it."

Presently they were driving westward in an open taxicab. It was a lovely morning, and the air was delicious after the long train-journey.

"What a nice country color you have," Hilda remarked, "but you're not a country-bred girl, are you?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because you take all this as a matter of course."

"You mean that I don't seem excited? But, you see, I—I'm wondering."

"Where we are going?" said Hilda, taking a quick glance behind.

"Am I rude?"

"Not at all. A most natural thing to wonder about. Well, at the present, we are going to call—just for a moment—on my rich and only brother, who does not approve of my way of life, though he's as good as any brother could be. After I have given him a message, you are coming home with me for breakfast—and that's enough to go on with, I hope."

"But you don't know anything about me!" cried Kitty.

Hilda's smile was very kind. "I certainly don't know your pedigree, nor the name and address of your dentist; but I believe I could guess almost as much as you could tell me concerning your recent troubles. However, you can tell me what you will, later on. Meantime, take it easy and get up an appetite."

The cab turned to the left, negotiating a maze of streets of varied aspect, and at last drew up at the imposing doorway of Aberdare Mansions.

"We shall take our things with us," said Hilda, "and find another cab when we need it."

In the hall, waiting for the elevator, she said:

"Now, don't be alarmed. Our friend of last night followed us in another taxi, and has doubtless noted the address. I fancied he would do something like that, and accordingly we have stopped here."

"To put him on a wrong scent!" Kitty exclaimed almost gleefully. "How clever you are!"

"Now let's go up and give my brother the message. Our things can lie here till we come down again. In you go!"

THEY soared to the fourth floor, where the conductress rang at the door on the right. A discreet-looking manservant opened, and permitted himself to smile a welcome.

"Good morning, Sharp," said Hilda. "We're not coming in. I want to see Mr. Risk for twenty seconds. As it's so early, he may come in his dressing-gown. Tell him it's most urgent."

Possibly Sharp was used to Miss Risk's ways, for he went without hesitation, and before long his master, garbed as Hilda had suggested, came forward. He was tall, thin, clean-shaven, and you would have known him as Hilda's brother by his eyes.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed at the sight of Kitty. "I beg your pardon!" he added quickly. "What is it, Hilda?"

"Just this, John: If a gentleman, more or less, should call here with inquiries about a Miss Kitty Carstairs, you will oblige by treating him as you would treat an undesirable person inquiring for your own sister. And please instruct Sharp accordingly."

"Very well," said Mr. Risk without the slightest emotion of any kind. "I'll remember, and so shall Sharp. But may I know the gentleman's name, more or less?"

Hilda turned to Kitty. "Would you mind?"

"Mr. Symington," murmured Kitty, with a lovely, shameful color.

"Thank you. . . . . But, my dear sister, where are your manners?"

It was Hilda's turn to blush. "Oh, Miss Carstairs, do forgive me! That wretched man put everything out of my head. Let me introduce my brother, Mr. Risk—Miss Carstairs."

Mr. Risk held out his hand—apparently he had forgotten his costume—and the embarrassed girl took it.

"I never wonder at my sister's making friends," he said pleasantly, "but I do marvel that she keeps any. Well, Hilda, wont you and Miss Carstairs stay and take breakfast with me?"

"Impossible—thanks, all the same. Good-by, John, and don't forget the name."

"I will," he retorted teasingly, "and treat all inquiring gentlemen as you requested."

Hilda went laughingly into the lift, and Kitty, feeling the friendly clasp of her arm, smiled almost happily.

CHAPTER VIII

MISS CORRIE MAKES A DISCOVERY

AT the same hour, some four hundred miles away, Kitty's absence was being felt. It was time to open the post office, and John Corrie was realizing that he would have more than enough to do until he secured a new assistant—whom he would have to pay!

Corrie had just opened the shop. Outside, the boy was cleaning the windows; inside, Miss Corrie was setting things straight on the provision-counter. He himself was bending at the open safe, taking out the usual supplies of silver and copper for the tills. These were contained in ancient battered pewter mugs, and now he laid the mugs on the floor preparatory to closing and locking up the safe.

An impatient knocking came from the post office, and he cursed under his breath. But it was already five minutes past eight, and it would never do to have talk about the office not being opened punctually. Rising, he called to his sister to look after the money, and hastened away to admit the knocker.

Miss Corrie moved listlessly toward

the safe. Her face had a drawn look. She had not slept. She had spoken scarce a word to her brother since Kitty's departure, and neither she nor Sam, whom she had helped with the sorting this morning, had referred to the previous evening's affair. Sam and Corrie had not yet met.

But, a yard from the safe, the woman's listlessness vanished, her face flamed and then went more pallid than ever. Never before had her brother done such a thing—gone out of the shop, leaving his keys in the safe. Her opportunity at last!

She ran softly to the door that opened on the post office and put her ear to it. Several persons were demanding the postmaster's attention. There was time as well as opportunity! She darted back to the safe, opened it, then the drawer on the left, searched—and found what she sought: the letter written to her brother by Kitty's father when he was dying. She hid it in her bosom, to read when she might safely do so. She left the safe as she had found it, took up the mugs of money and proceeded to supply the tills with change. The letter seemed to scorch her breast. She could not wait.

Summoning the boy, she bade him keep an eye on the shop for a few minutes, and passed into the cottage. In the kitchen, she seated herself at the hearth and, quaking, took out the letter. Five minutes passed.

MISS CORRIE swayed as though she would fall. "So that's why he would never let me read it properly!" she muttered. "Oh, John Corrie, what ha' ye done!"

After a little while she obtained control over her body. "What made him keep a thing like that? It should ha' been burned—burned and forgot!" She reached forward, held the letter over the fire—and drew it back. "But what if he misses it from the safe?"

In miserable uncertainty she began to reread the document. In the midst of it she went rigid. Her brother was coming through the shop, calling her. Her fingers fumbled at her bodice. Too late! In her panic her eye was caught by a certain popular weekly paper lying on a stool at her side. She snatched it up, pushed the letter between the leaves and made pretense of reading.

"What's wrong wi' ye?" said Corrie, entering. "This is no time for reading."

"I was just looking at—at something," she stammered.

"Away and attend to the post office," he returned. "I mun be in the shop this forenoon. . . . . D'ye hear me?"

"Aye." To take the paper with her would simply anger him, she reflected quickly. She would come back for it at the first opportunity. Letting it fall where she had found it, she got up and left the kitchen.

He followed her, growling.

At half-past eleven, the morning delivery finished, Sam, as was his custom, came into the shop to purchase his favorite weekly.

"There's no one left," said the boy.

From the opposite counter, where he was serving a customer, Corrie called to the boy:

"Ye'll get one in the house." It was not the first time he had sold his sister's paper to a customer.

So presently the boy came back with the paper, and Sam, folding it up, put it in his pocket and went home.

FORTUNATELY for his stomach's sake, at any rate, it was the weekly half-holiday, so that Mr. Corrie, having closed the shop at one, was free to relieve his sister in the post office and dispatch her to prepare, with all speed, something in the way of dinner. He was a little astonished at the eagerness with which she departed to do his bidding.

A minute later she was back, looking as though she had seen a ghost.

"John, where's the paper?"

"What paper?"

"The *Western Weekly*. Quick—what ha' ye done wi' it?"

He turned from the counter with a grunt of impatience. "Get my dinner ready and never heed about that trash! If ye want to ken, Zeniths rose sixteen-and-threepence yesterday—no that it matters to us now. Away wi' ye, and hurry up."

"John, for the love o' God, tell me where the paper is!"

That startled him. "What the mis-

chief's wrong wi' ye, woman?" he demanded, regarding her frowningly. "Sam, the postman, got the paper. There wasna another in the shop—"

For a moment's space she gazed at him as though he had said something too awful for belief. Then, with a wail, she threw up her hands.

"It's the beginning o' the judgment!"

"What d'ye mean? Are ye daft?"

He roughly seized her arm. "Speak!"

"The letter was inside the paper," she moaned.

"The letter! What letter?"

"Hugh Carstairs' letter about the shares. . . . . I took it from the safe to read it. . . . . When I heard ye coming to the kitchen, I was feared, and I hid it in the paper. . . . . I—I didna mean to betray ye, John, but—oh, dinna look at me like that!"

"Ye've ruined me," he stormed, "damned me!" For an instant it seemed as though he would strike her, but he flung away, saying: "Get out o' my sight! Ye've done for your brother!"

Yet, for all his passion, his mind was working quickly. He recalled her as she tottered through the shop.

"There's just a chance he hasna opened it yet. Haste ye to his house and tell him ye want a sight o' it for ten minutes. Make any excuse ye like, but gang quick."

Willingly she went, poor soul, for with all her being she loved this brother of hers, contemptible thief though he was.

JOHN CORRIE lived a hideous age in the ten minutes that followed. Then Rachel returned with the paper in her hand, but everything else about her told him she had failed.

"John," she said, "I'll offer him every penny I possess"—she had laid by nearly two thousand pounds—"for the letter."

As though he had not heard her he passed into the empty, shuttered shop and, sick with dread, sank on a chair.

She followed and repeated her declaration. "Away!" he cried; "I mun think."

Reluctantly she left him, and in the kitchen recovered herself sufficiently to set about preparing some strong tea.

An hour passed before he joined her; he started to pace the floor.

"Ye read the letter?" he asked at last, abruptly, in a repressed voice.

She nodded, her mouth quivering.

"Ye ken what it means in the hands o' an enemy—a friend o' Hugh Carstairs' daughter? Jail!"

"Oh, John! But he'll maybe sell it to me."

"Ye fool!"

Presently she said: "Sit down, dearie, and try a cup o' tea. I've made it fresh for ye."

He went on pacing. "And what about Symington?"

"If ye were to tell him the truth, maybe—"

"Ye fool!"

"But I was thinking," she said meekly, "he might help ye for his own sake."

"The only way he can help me is to marry your niece within the three month, getting her promise at once, of course. But—"

"Something maybe happened in the train last night," she ventured. "Ye'll be hearing from him in the morning."

"I wonder," he said, slowly, "where she got the money to gang to London wi'."

The woman's hand went to her flat breast. "John, did she no take it from the post office, as ye said?"

"No," was the sullen answer.

"Oh, John, John! But ye've enough to bear now without me reproaching ye." After a pause she continued: "She'll ha' to send Sam her address afore he can do anything wi' the letter."

"Aye; but they're no such fools as to communicate wi' each other through this office."

She sighed helplessly.

"There's somebody in the office," he said suddenly. "I'll—"

"Let me," she interposed; "ye're no fit. Take your tea till I come back."

SHE was absent several minutes, and on her return she was cheered by seeing him at the table and the cup empty.

"Who was it, and what were ye doing in the shop?" he asked, more from habit than interest.

"It was Mr. Hayward—"

"Him! What was he wanting?"

"A notebook, and he was terrible particular about the size. He had a piece o' paper with the measurements wrote on it."

"Ye wouldna find anything fine enough to suit him."

"But I did. There was one left o' the half-dozen that ye got once for Mr. Symington. He said it was the very thing. . . . . Could ye no eat something?"

He was brooding again, and minutes passed ere he roused himself.

"That postman's got me," he muttered bitterly, "got me as never a man was got before. I'm cornered. He'll hear from the girl to-morrow,—they'll ha' planned about writing, ye can be sure,—and then he'll get to work wi' the letter. I feel like making a bolt for it—but where can a man hide in these days o' wireless telegrams and the like?" All at once he turned on her, snarling: "What for did ye interfere wi' my private affairs?"

She winced and shuddered. "The Lord kens I'm sorry," she whimpered. "And He kens I would do anything to help ye now. John, is there anything I can do?"

"Aye," he replied with a dreadful, ironic laugh, "ye can burn the cursed letter!"

Gaping, she gazed at him. What did he mean?

"Only, ye would likewise need to burn the postman's house over his head, and that within the next twelve hours." The laugh came again and died into silence.

The woman's face lost its foolish laxness; she seemed to stiffen all over. And suddenly she screamed:

"I'll do it. . . . . John, I'll do it for your sake!"

"What?" he shouted, and started to his feet.

She staggered, recovered and rushed from the kitchen. When he followed, he found that she had locked herself in her own room.

He passed into the dim shop and sat down.

"Did she mean it?" he asked of the shadows. And later: "Better her than me, for who would ever suspect her?"

It was evening when she came out. She went about her accustomed duties, but her countenance was gray and stony, and she was as one stricken dumb. And he, being afraid to ask a certain question and incapable of thinking of aught else, was dumb also. They retired at the usual hour of ten.

CHAPTER IX

COLIN IN LONDON

COLIN'S change of mind with respect to the hundred pounds had taken place within the hour following his proud refusal. The thought of Kitty's position in the event of a scandal was too much for him. Dependent on the Corries, practically a prisoner in Dunford, the sensitive girl would be bound to suffer terribly—and all on account of himself. And so he had gone downstairs, miserable enough, but prepared to tell his father that he would take the money, after all—prepared also for humiliation. But as we know, he was spared the latter. It should be added that he did not for an instant doubt that the notes had been deliberately left on the writing-table. His father was not the man to be careless where money was concerned.

Well, he would send the notes to Kitty in such a way that she could not suspect him. A hundred pounds would give her a certain independence and power whatever happened; they would open a way of escape if the need for that became urgent. Colin did not ignore the possibility of her going to London, but he honestly strove to extinguish the hope of meeting her there. Had she not told him frankly that she did not love him? And what was his wordly state that he should dare to dream of any girl as his own? As an honorable man he must go his own way and endeavor to forget those sweet stolen hours in the woods around Dunford.

It is not to be assumed that Colin arrived in London penniless. To be precise, he possessed the sum of £15, 7s., 4d., but whether such a considerable sum gives a young man a better start than the proverbial half-crown may be left open to question. With only thirty pence in his pocket, a man dare not

pause to pick and choose, and perhaps that is the real secret of the success of the half-crown adventurers—if they ever really existed.

Colin had plenty of acquaintances, not to mention sundry relations, in London, but he had no desire to meet them in his present circumstances; nor did he imagine they would be rejoiced to see him. Most of us can be quite kind to the failure, but few of us can sincerely sympathize with him, especially when we conceive him to be a fool as well.

LONDON held but one man whom Colin desired to meet. This was Anthony West, a friend of his earlier student days. West, who was several years the senior, had been a failure too; that is to say, he had stuck in the midst of his science course, wriggled for a while between paternal wishes and personal inclination, and had been captured finally by the latter. A writer of clever prose trifles and dainty verse, he had plunged into journalism. The friends had not met since then, and their correspondence had gradually ceased. West's last letter had been written two years ago.

To the address on it Colin went on the morning of his arrival. Mr. West, the landlady informed him, had left a long time ago; she had no other information to give. Colin, after recourse to the directory, journeyed to a court off Fleet Street, made some inquiries, entered a doorway of grimy and forbidding appearance, ascended three flights of steep and narrow stairs, and tapped at a door that had seen better days. A shout bade him enter, and he advanced into the London office—or part of it—of a provincial evening paper, and the presence of his friend—who, bowed and scribbling at a decrepit desk, took no notice of him. A more dismal and dusty little room Colin had never been in. Poor old West had evidently failed again. Colin's heart was sinking fast when the scribbler turned, stared and recognized him.

"Well, this is good!" cried West. "Sit down!" From a broken easy-chair he swept a pile of newspapers and a dozen or so books for review. "Here, take a cigarette, and give me ten minutes to finish this." The scribbling was resumed, with the remark—Greek to Colin: "It's those dashed Zeniths—started booming again this morning."

At the end of seven minutes he sat up, rang the bell, and swung round toward his visitor.

"Talk!" he said, wiping his brow with one hand and tapping a cigarette on the desk with the other.

A boy dashed in, grabbed the press telegraph-forms and fled.

"Do you still write verses?" asked Colin involuntarily.

West exploded with amusement. "So that's how it strikes you! Yes, I do—not here—but never mind me—what are you doing in London?"

"Nothing," was the truthful enough answer.

West's gaze was kindly.

"Go on! Something tells me you are in a hole, and if I can do anything to help—"

"Thanks, Anthony. I see you haven't changed," said Colin gratefully. "I'll tell you all about it, for I need advice badly." And with commendable brevity he gave his friend an outline of his affairs.

AFTER he had ended, the other remained silent, a brooding look on his tired, rugged, honest face, for nearly a minute. He spoke abruptly, but gently.

"What do you want to do?"

"Anything."

"H'm! What can you do?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, it can't be so bad as all that, Colin! Do anything in the way of writing nowadays?"

Colin flushed.

"Haven't touched it for a year. You see, I did make an attempt to please the governor."

"And before that?"

"Had a few small things accepted here and there—locally, you know."

Anthony sighed. "I broke forcibly away from the uncongenial myself," he said; "so my sympathy is genuine. But it didn't mean falling into clover. I'm here from seven to twelve, six days a week, doing things I hate, and earning some money. For the rest of the day I'm free—and sometimes my brains are

free too—to do things I like, which, however, seldom earn anything. My income is about four pounds a week, and it might stop any week. I'm telling you these things, Colin, not to discourage you, but simply to prepare you—"

"But four pounds a week is rather good," said Colin.

"So I thought when I was a student, living at the cost of my father. Why, now, I could easily spend it all on books alone."

"Are—are you married?" Colin ventured.

"No. . . . . I'm not complaining, you know. Four quid is doubtless as much as I deserve, but I'd like to be able to look forward to something bigger—only I daren't hope. If I were you, Colin, I'd leave writing—journalism or the other thing—for a last resort. Take a look round and see what you can see. I assume you have some stuff to go on with."

"About fifteen pounds."

Anthony frowned. "That doesn't give you much rope. Of course, I'll be delighted—"

"Please!" interrupted Colin.

"All right. But I'll take it unkindly if you get stuck without letting me know. In spite of my groans I've always a bit to spare—at least, nearly always." He looked at his watch. "Five minutes yet." For a little while he was gloomily silent; then his face lightened. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a note to a man who is interested, financially and otherwise, in many things. He might find you an opening somewhere. I once was able to do him a small service, and he has a long memory. . . . . Let me see! This is Friday, and he doesn't come to the City. Still, I believe he'll see you at his house—say, about four o'clock."

Anthony shook his pen and scribbled a few lines, folded the sheet, and put it in an envelope, which he addressed to

John Risk, Esq.,
83, Aberdare Mansions, W.

Handing over the letter, he said: "You may find him cool at first; he is seldom anything else. Coolness seems to run in his family. But whatever you are, be frank with him. Come and see me to-night and report. There's my address. I'll have a chop for you at seven—and a bed if you'll stay. And now"—he held out his hand—"good luck!"

Colin went out with a full heart. What a wonderful thing was friendship!

AT four to the minute he presented himself at 83, Aberdare Mansions. He was evidently expected,—it was like Anthony to have 'phoned,—for the servant on hearing his name conducted him at once to a beautifully appointed study.

The servant placed a chair and retired. The tall man who had risen from the writing-table took West's note, saying courteously: "Be seated, Mr. Hayward." He sat down himself and read the note, then said quietly:

"Mr. West has the right to ask what he will of me, and it appears that you are his worthy friend. Will you be good enough to tell me what you care to tell about yourself, Mr. Hayward?"

It was a less easy matter in the face of this calm, urbane stranger than it had been with Anthony for listener, to render a succinct account of himself, but Colin omitted nothing, however unflattering to himself.

Mr. Risk offered no comment, but he asked one or two questions, which seemed to Colin rather idle, and then fell silent and reflective.

Suddenly he said: "Do you trust me?"

With some hesitation but without the least dubiety Colin answered: "Certainly, Mr. Risk."

"Then I will trust you," said Risk in his matter-of-fact voice. "I am going to give you a trial," he went on, "and in the circumstances it is, I admit, a rather curious one. You have, of course, the option of refusing, but if you accept, kindly let it be done on the understanding that you will obey my instructions implicitly. Please understand, also, that the fact of your coming from a place called Dunford, while it forms an odd coincidence, and may be a help, has nothing to do with my choosing you for this particular piece of work. I would have asked you to perform it just the same had you come from the Isle of

Man. Well, now,"—he paused for a moment,—"I have a letter here which I wish to be delivered first thing in the morning to Mr. Alexander Symington, White Farm, Dunford—"

Colin checked words at his very lips.

"A train leaves King's Cross at five-forty-five, and though it does not usually stop at Dunford, I have arranged that it shall do so for you shortly after one A. M. I hope you may be able to find some sort of shelter until six, when you will deliver the letter. You will bring back an answer by the first train possible and report to me here. By the way, you are, perhaps, acquainted with Mr. Symington?"

"Very slightly."

"Like him?"

Colin smiled faintly. "Can't say I do."

"He is quite unknown to me," the other proceeded. "I am curious to know, however, just how he looks when he reads this letter, and you must try to manage that for me. Here is the letter. There is no need for me to make a mystery of it—a simple business question."

The letter was typed on a large sheet bearing the heading "The Zenith Gold Mining Company, Limited," and ran as follows:

> Dear Sir:
> We have your letter of yesterday's date covering the Certificate (Bearer) for 500 shares, Nos. 23501 to 24000, which you desire to have converted into 5 certificates for 100 shares each. This is having our attention. Meantime, will you kindly inform us at what date, as nearly as possible, you purchased the shares numbered as above?

It was signed by the secretary of the company.

Colin handed it back, remarking: "It seems a simple enough matter, Mr. Risk."

"I hope so. Now, are you prepared to go through with it?"

"Certainly."

"Good! You are not likely to encounter your friends at so early an hour."

"It doesn't matter if I do. I'm not under a very black cloud, you know."

"Still, you are not keen on the job."

"I'm keen on carrying it through."

Risk nodded, as much as to say, "That's the right spirit," and laid a couple of banknotes on the table.

"For your expenses," he said, and added a few instructions. "Mr. West shall be advised that you are leaving town, so you don't need to trouble about your engagement with him. I'll look for you to-morrow evening."

Realizing that the interview was at an end, Colin rose.

"I'll do my best, Mr. Risk."

"I expect that of you, Mr. Hayward," said the other, ringing the bell.

At the gate of the lift Colin stood aside to allow a lady to emerge. Their eyes met for an instant, and he noticed that hers were unusually luminous and wide-set. Then his mind went back to the business on hand.

"HULLO!" said Mr. Risk as his sister came in. "Hope I didn't interrupt your muse in its description of some poor wretch's wedding-garments—"

"You did! The only amends you can make is to ring for tea and tell me why you wired for me."

"To give you tea, perhaps," he said, pressing a button.

"Come, John! What do you want with me?"

"Who is Miss Carstairs?"

Hilda sat up. "She's a friend of mine—"

"New?"

"Well, she is—but why do you ask?"

"Tell me what you know about her," he said seriously.

"I'm afraid I can't, John," she replied, after a moment. "I'm under promise not to repeat what she has told me."

"That's a pity. Where did you meet her? Glasgow?"

"No—on the train, last night."

"Can't you tell me where she came from?"

"I think I may tell you that much. Dunford is the name of the village."

"Dear me! Dunford seems to be emigrating to London!"

"What do you mean, John?"

"Nothing for you, Hilda. Did she mention her father?"

"She told me he was dead. He was a journalist. They used to live in Glasgow. I had better not say more."

"Thanks; you've told me all I want to know about Miss Carstairs—for the present. Now what can you tell me about the mysterious Mr. Symington, whose head you instructed me to punch on his calling here?"

"Oh, has he been?" she exclaimed hopefully.

"Patience! I may be wrong, but I fancy he is still in Dunford. In fact, I've just dispatched a messenger—"

"Nonsense! The man's in London—or was this morning!"

"Indeed! Why didn't you say so this morning?" Risk asked without irritation.

"I thought that you would understand that he was—was after us."

"My dear girl, I don't wish to belittle your attractions, or Miss Carstairs', but I wish you had been more explicit at the time. I merely thought that in the course of one of your escapades you had favored an objectionable person with your brother's address instead of your own,—an admirable expedient, I admit,—but I had not thought of the person's being on your very heels, as it were."

"But what do you know of him?" she asked, looking puzzled.

"The Zenith secretary sent me a letter this morning which had come from a Mr. Symington, of Dunford, and now you have strengthened my suspicion induced by the letter that he is also the objectionable person. Of course, there may be another Mr. Symington in Dunford, so I'll let my messenger go ahead. It will be good training for him, anyway—test his discretion and so on. What does Miss Carstairs say about Symington?"

"I can't tell you."

"Has she mentioned a Mr. Hayward—Colin Hayward?"

"No."

Just then the servant brought tea. When he had retired, Hilda said:

"John, do tell me what it all means."

He looked at her gravely. "I don't know yet. It may all mean nothing of any consequence. On the other hand, it may mean something of considerable importance."

"To you?"

"To your new friend. Now hold your tongue, and pour out."

CHAPTER X

COLIN INTERVENES

IN the darkness of the hour preceding dawn, John Corrie, fully dressed, lay on his bed, listening. The sound he had been dreading yet yearning for had come at last. His sister was moving in the room above. The atmosphere was sultry; yet the man shivered. Was Rachel about to attempt the deed that might save him, or was she only restlessly repenting of her wild promise? If the former, should he stop her, or let her take her self-appointed course? One question led to another, but none got an answer.

At last he was aware that she was cautiously opening her door. He did not move. He heard her come stealthily down the stair, pausing after every creak. Presently he caught a glimpse of light under his door. It vanished—yet not so suddenly as though a candle had been blown out. She must have turned into the passage leading to the shop. What could she be wanting there at such an hour? He pretended to himself that he could not guess.

After a little while the light returned with her footsteps. It remained in his vision during the short silence that ensued. The silence ended in a heavy sigh. John Corrie lay very still.

The light went out. He heard her groping her way to the front door. He heard it open—close—softly. She was gone on her dark errand, and he had deliberately let her go. Nothing he could ever do or suffer in this world would redeem his soul from that loathsome disgrace. But John Corrie was not thinking of his soul then.

He sprang up, lighted a candle and ran upstairs; thence he peeped from a window. He was in time to see a cloaked figure fade into the misty murk. The cloak bulged at one side. What was she carrying in it concealed? Again he pretended he could not guess. Returning downstairs, he pretended, also, not to feel the strong, rank odor of kerosene, nor to notice the drips on the passage from the shop.

He returned to his bed, but now he kept the candle burning, for he was afraid of the darkness. And ere three

minutes had passed, he rose, shaken with a new terror. What if the holder of the letter should, in spite of all, escape with it? . . . . For a moment he wavered on the verge of collapse; then the very terror itself stiffened his nerves, cleared his mind and drove him to action.

IN an amazingly short time he was following the path taken by his sister. He wore no cloak, but both his side pockets bulged, and he carried a clublike staff. He sped swiftly through the slumbering village. He was sweating and shivering, and once his whole being leaped as if jerked, at the whistle of a distant train. He did not intend to overtake Rachel; she must do her work deeming herself unobserved; yet he did not wish to be far behind her. Clear of the village, he began to trot on the grass at the side of the road.

Years ago a sanguine and enterprising individual had caused to be erected by the roadside, midway between station and village, a superior sort of timber shanty, and had labeled it "Cyclists' Rest — Temperance Refreshments." There were plenty of cyclists in the summer, and numerous pedestrians also, but somehow few of them seemed to be tired or thirsty; and at the end of the second season the sanguine and enterprising individual departed, unseen by human eye, leaving a small selection of aërated waters in the refreshment-room and sundry little debts for lodging and so forth in the village. Eventually the building fell to the only bidder, Sam the postman, who converted it into two apartments and a fairly snug home of which he was inclined to be proud.

A mere strip of garden separated the house from the road, but Sam kept it bright with flowers for eight months of the year. The front of the house was painted a pale stone-color; the porch, the door and the two quartets of tall, extremely narrow windows were colored white. Altogether it provided a gay relief from the sober moorland behind it. Across the road, and separated from it by a deep ditch usually dry in summer, lay a strip of moor gently sloping upwards to the wood, through which a path supplied a short-cut from the station to the village. There was no other dwelling within five minutes' walk.

When John Corrie's eyes began dimly to discern the house, he slowed his pace till he was stealing forward with every appearance of caution and alertness. Suddenly he stopped short, dropped on hands and knees, and let himself down into the ditch, where he crouched, holding his breath.

A vague figure was coming hurriedly from behind the house. On reaching the road, it broke into a shambling run, its dark garment flapping like the wings of some huge night-bird. As it passed the lurking watcher it panted and sobbed. Presently it disappeared round a bend, and the watcher heaved a sigh of angry relief. That was the worst of women: they could do nothing without making a fuss!

HE drew himself from the ditch, and now his head and most of his face were covered with a heavy black muffler. Keeping to the grass, he darted toward the house. Opposite it, he halted for a moment, almost overcome by the thudding of his heart. Just then he perceived a thin smoke rising from the rear of the house—from the attached shed, he guessed, that contained the postman's store of coal and wood. That nerved him again. It was now or never.

Dropping his bludgeon, he brought from his pocket a hank of thin, strong rope, shook it out and tiptoed across the road. He was about to fasten one end to the door-handle with the view to securing it to a pillar of the porch, when he bethought himself of another, though barely possible, way. With fearful care he turned the handle—and lo, the door gave! Chance had favored him! Sam had forgotten to lock it—not for the first time.

Sweating, John Corrie opened the door about a foot, put round his hand and removed the key from the lock. Then with infinite gentleness he drew the door shut, inserted the key, turned it and withdrew it. Almost fainting, he recrossed the road, took up his staff, and fell rather than descended into the ditch.

A faint breeze was stirring at last. Smoke blown over the tarred roof of the shanty drifted to his nostrils. For a while, fingering the key, he seemed to hesitate; then, turning, he tossed it from him among the heather. The rope he coiled up and let fall at his feet. He crouched low in the ditch, staring intently at the house.

And presently a spark floated up, hovered and died. But others followed, thicker and thicker, and a glow appeared under them. Crackling sounds broke the silence, softly, timidly at first, but soon with noisy boldness. The breeze gained in strength. A fiery tongue waved above the roof, subsided, rose again and licked the tarry surface; ere long it was joined by others. A low roaring mingled with the crackling. The narrow windows were still dark, but smoke began to stream from the ventilator over the door. Woe to the sleeper if he did not waken now!

Cold with terror, fascinated by horror, Corrie knelt in his lair and gazed and gazed. Suddenly a light sprang into being in the room on the left. The sleeper had wakened and struck a match. Corrie wondered if he would wait to light a candle, but in the next moment the windows went dark. Sounds followed: a cry, the noise of a chair overturned, hurried footfalls on a bare plank floor. Then Corrie put his hands under the muffler and thrust his fingers in his ears. For the inmate was trying to open the door.

The flames were now rising high above the roof; smoke was pouring from the ventilator, trickling from under the door and through crevices about the windows and walls. A reddish glow behind the windows on the left caused the watcher to shut his eyes. But he could no longer close his ears to agony, for the prisoner was raining blows with some heavy implement on the door and lock. Once more Corrie was roused to action. What if the holder of the letter should escape with it, after all? He readjusted the black muffler about his head till little more than his eyes remained uncovered, took a fresh grip on his staff and held himself in readiness. The blows became frantic.

UP yonder in the wood, Colin Hayward, fagged with the long railway journey and much thinking, had thrown himself down to await the morning. He was almost asleep when the sound of knocking made him raise his head from his arms. As he did so, he became conscious of a strong smell of burning timber. The sound coupled with the odor struck him as odd at that hour.

He got up and crossed the few yards which lay between him and the verge of the wood. From there he looked down on fire and smoke, and quickly realized that the burning thing was the abode of his old friend Sam the postman. He descended the slope as swiftly as the darkness, the treacherous ground and the slippery heather permitted.

AT last the lock was shattered, the door torn inwards. The hatchet fell from Sam's hand as, spent and coughing most grievously, he staggered forth to reel across the road, barefooted, in a long gray nightshirt. At the grass he stumbled and fell helplessly, in a heaving torment of smoke-charged lungs.

He was beginning to revive, when behind him, rising from hands and knees, John Corrie clubbed him over the head—once—twice—and would have struck again, but that there was no need. Sam lay on his face, one hand clutching grass, the other under him, clenched against his breast. With a sob of terror, Corrie threw his cudgel into the ditch and turned his victim over.

And now the back of the house was well ablaze, and in the yellow light even small things became plain. The clenched hand, for instance, held a crushed piece of paper—the little, terrible thing the recovery of which meant salvation to Corrie. He went down on his knees to pry open the grasping fingers, but they fell apart of their own accord. He took the letter. He gloated over it. The latter proceeding was folly; his moment of exultation was to cost him dear. Hearing, dulled by excitement and the thick muffler, did not warn him until too late. He scrambled to his feet only to be seized viciously from behind by the collar and shaken like a rat. Then a cruel grip on his wrist caused him to

drop the precious letter, and a savage kick sent him five yards beyond it on his face.

"You beastly coward!" cried a voice he knew, and all panic-stricken he picked himself up and fled.

Colin had started to pursue, when a groan from the stricken one recalled him. The letter caught his eye. He picked it up almost mechanically, stuffed it into his pocket, and proceeded to do what he could for Sam. Perhaps, after all, his student days had not been wholly wasted. But Sam was sore hurt. His home was a fiery furnace, and he neither knew nor cared.

CHAPTER XI

TWO TELEGRAMS

ON the following afternoon Kitty and her new friend were lounging in the latter's sitting-room, one of the four apartments of a little old-fashioned top flat in Long Acre. The situation of Miss Risk's home had its drawbacks, but it was a most convenient one for her business, and she had given the house itself a charm and comfort not to be despised.

"But I can't go on being your guest indefinitely," Kitty was saying from her seat at the open window.

Hilda, stretched on the couch, smiled and then yawned. She had had a hard morning's work, and the heat was oppressive.

"You have been here for about thirty hours," she returned in a lazy voice. "Don't say it seems like years."

"Oh, you know what I mean, Miss Risk—"

"I think you might call me by my pretty name."

"I'd like to," said Kitty diffidently, "but—"

"I believe you're afraid of me, Kitty!"

"I'm not really, but—"

"If you say 'but' again, I'll go to sleep! Now listen, Kitty! You have told me a good many things about yourself, so you can no longer argue that I know nothing about you. I know far more about you than you know about me. Isn't that so?"

"Perhaps it is, Miss—Hilda."

"Well, then, if you keep talking about leaving me, the only conclusion I can draw is that you don't like staying with me—"

"Oh, no, no!"

"—or that you are absurdly proud."

Kitty hung her head.

Hilda gave a little nod of understanding. "Kitty," she said kindly, "wont you trust me and let me protect you? I've never had anyone to protect except myself. . . . . Come and sit beside me."

The younger girl came slowly over to the couch, faltered, and fell on her knees, crying:

"And no one has ever protected me, or wanted to do it, before."

Hilda took her in her arms—strong, shapely arms they were.

"Poor little soul!" she whispered, "can't you see not only that I want you to stay here, but that for your own safety's sake you must stay here until, at least, you know something of London, and have found employment and made friends? When all that has happened, you shall be free to choose as you think best, but till then you're my prisoner, whether you like it or not!"

AFTER a little while Kitty said tremulously: "Don't be offended, Hilda, but—but if only you would allow me to—to pay my share."

"Well," answered Miss Risk in a most businesslike tone, assumed mainly to satisfy the other, "we may come to terms later on—if you promise now to be my guest for a month."

"I never knew there was a girl like you in the world!"

"No more there is!" said Hilda cheerfully.

"I never dreamed I was such a coward till that night—"

"You mislaid your courage—that was all—but you'll find it again presently. And look here, Kitty! Until my brother finds something for you to do—"

"Oh, is he going to try?"

"John never tries—at least he never seems to; he just does. But never mind about that now. I was going to say that you can help me a bit, if you feel so disposed."

"How? Tell me quick!"

"You used to type for your father, didn't you?"

"Yes, yes! I must show you the work I did for him. I believe I was fairly smart. But after five years—"

"You'll knock off the rust in no time. You can work away on my old machine most mornings, and when you feel it coming easy, I'll give you plenty of manuscript, my own and other people's too, if you want it. How's that?"

"All the difference in the world, for it means I sha'n't be entirely useless. Oh, you have made me so happy!"

"Go on!" laughed Hilda, "I like being cuddled!" But there were tears in her eyes. "Goodness!" she exclaimed next moment, "there's somebody coming up Jacob's Ladder!"—as she designated the steep and narrow wooden staircase leading to the flat. "A man, I should say, from the tread. Shall we flee and tidy ourselves, or simply draw down the sun-blind?" She rose and went to the window. "It must be the blind, I'm afraid. Matilda is unusually alert in answering the door to-day. Don't be alarmed, Kitty. I've no friends who aren't nice, and I want you to meet them all sooner or later. Now let's arrange ourselves at our ease, and hope it may be a particularly nice one to begin with."

KITTY was smiling despite her nervousness when the elderly servant, whom Hilda's brother insisted on her retaining, announced "Mr. West."

It was at once evident to Kitty that he and Hilda were the best of friends. Next moment he was introduced to her, and there was something in his handshake as well as in his eyes that took away half her shyness.

"Miss Carstairs has come from Scotland to spend a little time with me," Hilda said presently, "so you must give her as good an impression of the journalistic life as you can."

"You are not in the trade, I hope, Miss Carstairs?" he said, with a faint smile; then, suddenly: "But pardon me, perhaps you are a friend of Hugh Carstairs, of Glasgow, who wrote so brilliantly some years ago. I met him once in a friend's house just before I came to London."

"He was my father," Kitty said softly, with a flush of pleasure.

"Then you and I shall have at least one big subject in common," he said warmly.

"This is splendid!" said Hilda, smiling.

"Mr. Carstairs was my ideal journalist," Anthony went on. "I've often wondered why he never wrote books. Perhaps he hadn't the time—"

"Miss Carstairs has just been telling me," said the hostess, "that she has in her possession several unfinished works of her father's—"

"Not here? Not in London?" he cried eagerly.

"Yes," said Kitty timidly, "I have them with me. There are several—one a play."

"Would it be too much—" Anthony began, and halted.

"Mr. West means that he would like to read them," Hilda remarked. "I think you might trust him," she added, with a glint of amusement. "Really, Anthony, I never saw you so enthusiastic before!"

"Wait, Hilda, until I give you some cuttings of Hugh Carstairs' articles to read. And you, Miss Carstairs, perhaps, when you know me better, you will allow me to look at the unfinished works."

AT this point Matilda brought in tea, and the conversation became less personal. Kitty was well content to listen. She was more than interested. The five years of barren drudgery in Dunford were forgotten. She was living in a new world, the world of her girlish dreams during the last year of her father's life, the world he had promised he would show her—some day—when his ship came home. . . . . And Hilda Risk, guessing what it meant to the girl, kept West talking of people and things in his profession till with a start he noticed the hour and rose to go.

Hilda went with him to the door. She had a question to ask.

"Anthony," she said, "it's not like you to gush. Did you really admire her father's work so much?"

"Honestly, Hilda. Why, the man was

a genius, though I'm afraid he didn't make the most of himself. Possibly your brother has not mentioned that he knew Carstairs well."

"John! He never told me!" she exclaimed.

"As a matter of fact," he added, "John requested me to call on you this afternoon."

"Oh!"

"You're not annoyed, Hilda?" he asked rather anxiously.

"Of course not!" she smiled. "And I ought not to be surprised at this time of day at anything John does. I suppose he wanted your impression of Kitty?"

"I think he wanted to be made absolutely certain that she is the daughter of Hugh Carstairs. I was not to make any other inquiries of her. But as you know, there isn't much profit in asking John his reasons."

"I do know—and we'll leave it at that. And I'll not ask you what you think of Kitty—yet. Come soon again and make her better acquaintance. She is very sweet, and she will be bright, too, once she gets a chance. . . . . Working as hard as ever, I suppose?" she said, as he took her hand for a moment.

He smiled a little sadly. "Will you allow me to take you and Miss Carstairs to the theater some night soon?" he said.

"Thank you; that will be a treat for us both, Anthony."

"I'd like to introduce a friend of mine who has just turned up in London—Colin Hayward. Your brother—"

"Why, John mentioned him yesterday!"

"Then may I bring him?"

"Surely."

"Till then, good-by."

HILDA returned to the sitting-room to find a new Kitty, all delight and eagerness.

"Please tell me what he writes," she asked, almost sure that Mr. West was her friend's lover.

"He writes beautiful things that don't sell," Hilda replied a trifle bitterly, "and he makes a poor but decent living from a wretched provincial paper. And," she continued with a change of tone, "there isn't a better man on this earth—nor a prouder. I'm telling you this, Kitty, because you are likely to meet him pretty often. He has refused a post worth fifteen hundred pounds a year offered him by my brother."

"Oh, why?"

"Because at Cromer, four years ago, he saved me from drowning, and he refuses to be paid for that. There's pride for you!"

"Isn't it more than pride?" Kitty softly ventured.

Miss Risk passed to the window and drew up the blind, remarking: "He is going to take us to the theater some night soon."

Kitty clasped her hands in rapture. "I seem to have come into heaven!"

The other laughed. "By the way, he has a great friend who hails from your part of the world, Kitty. Mr. Colin Hayward—"

"Oh!" cried Kitty.

"You know him?"

"Yes."

"Not another villain, I hope?"

"Oh, no."

"You would not mind if Mr. West brought him here?"

"Indeed, no," said Kitty, angry with herself for blushing. It was so silly, especially as she was not in love with Colin.

Hilda did not pursue the subject. Their friendship, she felt, was still far too new for the taking of liberties, however friendly. After a pause:

"Have you decided," she inquired, "about letting your aunt know your address? I wish I could advise you, but I simply don't know what to say about it."

Kitty sighed. "I think I'll wait for another day. If I could only let her know without my uncle learning it!"

"He can't hurt you now."

"I wonder," murmured Kitty, with another sigh.

"Oh, this wont do! Mustn't get into the dumps again! Leave it till tomorrow, as you say. How do you feel about a walk before dinner?"

"I'd love it! And please, Hilda?"

"Go on, Kitty."

"Will you—will you help me to buy some decent clothes?"

"Hooray!" cried Miss Risk, "that's the proper spirit!"

MATILDA came in with a telegram for her mistress.

"Reply paid, Miss," she said, retiring; "boy's waiting."

Hilda read the following:

> Has your guest any recollection of hearing her father use the word zenith not in an astronomical sense? JOHN.

"My brother asks an extraordinary question," said Hilda, and handed the message to Kitty.

Kitty gazed at it, frowned and shook her head. Then: "Oh, wait! The answer to the question is 'No,' but once, quite recently, I heard my uncle speak of zeniths—not zenith. But why should Mr. Risk—"

"Don't ask me! I'll just reply, 'Not father but uncle,'" said Hilda, going to the writing-table.

And just then Matilda came in with another telegram.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Hilda, and with her pencil slit it open. Her gay expression faded out. She paled slightly, muttering, "Another matter," and tore it into little pieces. Then she went on with writing the reply.

The torn telegram, which had been "handed in" at the same hour as its precursor, was also from her brother. It said:

> Take very good care of your guest. No going out alone. But don't alarm her.

CHAPTER XII

DREADFUL POSSIBILITIES

JOHN CORRIE was now fairly in the net. He reached his cottage in a condition verging on collapse, physical and mental, and slinking round to the back, gained admittance by the window of his own room from which he had emerged an age, as it seemed, ago. He stood listening. . . . . Not a sound. What was his sister doing? He must see her at once--not to tell her anything, but to discover whether she had learned of his having been out of doors.

But first he must remove traces of the outing. Having lighted the candle, he got off his boots and the black muffler. They must be got rid of. In stocking feet he stole to the shop, and there made a parcel which he laid on a high shelf behind a row of tomato-cans. In another part of the shop he hid his jacket in similar fashion. And then a most sickening thought struck him and almost wrecked his fear-tossed mind. The staff! Almighty! what on earth had made him fling it in the ditch? Sooner or later a search would be made—might even be going on now! Presently, his mouth craving water, he went unsteadily, spilling candle-grease by the way, to the kitchen.

And there he found his sister, in a heap on the floor. She was inert but fully conscious. Somehow he managed to drag her up and place her in the armchair by the cold hearth. Then he got water and gave her some, took a draught himself and sat down by the table. On a sudden inspiration he blew out the candle. A wakeful, curious person might wonder to see a light at such an hour. Besides—

For perhaps twenty minutes the two wretched beings sat huddled in their chairs, motionless, speechless, while a feeble grayness began to filter slowly through the darkness. Then the woman spoke, neither to the man nor herself, but as to a third person, invisible, somewhere in the shadows.

"I hope he died quick. . . . . I hope he didna feel the fire. . . . . I did it for my brother's sake. I promised Mother I would look after John."

Corrie rose and sat down again. He was not going to tell her outright that Sam had escaped the flames.

There was another silence, and through it came the sound of a person running on the dry road. Presently the sound gave place to that of knocking; then cries—shouts—more knocking—then running again—several persons—cries and shouts once more.

THROUGH the grayness the man and woman peered at each other's pallid countenances. And she was thinking of a little brother she had tended long, long ago; and he was thinking of a club-like staff lying in a ditch. The scattered

noises from the village grew to a commotion. Corrie dropped forward, his elbows on his knees, his face between his hands.

Suddenly the woman got up and came over to him and laid her hand on his shoulder, and said with a strange tenderness:

"Dinna be feared, John. Ye're safe. The letter's bound to be ashes by now."

Then she shrieked, for the room was lighted by a blinding flash; she fell to her knees. Almost immediately the house shook under an appalling crash. The long-threatened storm had burst.

There was a pause as though to allow earth to take one deep breath before the storm and deluge—which were to prove memorable in Dunford and district.

Not many minutes had passed when something like hope came to John Corrie. Unless the staff were already discovered, he was safe so far as it was concerned, for now the ditch would be rushing a foot deep. His wits began to work again. Even if young Hayward had picked up the letter—

He drew Rachel to her feet, saying shortly but not harshly: "Get to your bed, woman. I'm for out."

"Out!" she echoed faintly. "Would ye face the wrath o' God?"

"I would face the folk, in case they wonder. Besides, ye canna be sure that —that he's burnt wi' the house."

"Oh, God!" she whispered; and a moment later: "John, bring me word he's alive, and I'll take oath it was me that stole the Zeniths!" She moved gropingly from the room.

SO Corrie, having put on his Sunday boots and oilskins, went out into the storm to face his fellows. He did not encounter his poor victim, who was already on the way, in a summer visitor's motor-car, to the nearest hospital, twenty miles distant; but he heard talk of concussion of the brain and a villainous-looking tramp seen in the village the previous night; also he beheld the ruins of the shanty and the brimming ditch. But for something white on the sodden grass he looked in vain; and young Hayward, it seemed, had disappeared after doing what he could for the postman.

It was nearing four when Corrie returned home. The storm had ceased, though a fine rain still fell on torn-up roads, ruined crops and flooded meadows. He told Rachel exactly what he had heard, and added a little more.

"He was found by young Hayward. Supposing he had the letter in his hand when he was struck, where is it now?"

She was too exhausted by the revulsion, too thankful, to think it out.

"If you're in danger, John, I'll take the blame," she faltered. "We'll hope the letter was burned."

"But if it's no burned, what about Symington?"

"He mun give back the shares."

"Ye talk foolishness, Rachel!"

"I'm wearied. I canna grasp aught except that I didna commit black murder. Let me be till the morning."

Afraid to say more lest he should betray himself, he let her go.

AT eight o'clock, the moment the wire was open, he sent a telegram to Symington:

Come at once.

About eleven, Symington's housekeeper, purchasing provisions, mentioned in the course of her chatter on last night's affair—the sole topic of conversation in Dunford—that young Mr. Hayward had called to see her employer at six o'clock that morning.

"What was he wanting at such an hour?" Corrie managed to say.

"He didna name his business, but he took a note o' the address in London."

This added to Corrie's uneasiness, though he could conceive of no connection between the early call and the letter.

About an hour later a customer casually referred to his having observed young Hayward enter the morning train for the south, at Kenny Junction. At that Corrie well-nigh gave up. All morning he had hoped against hope that Hayward would return the letter to its owner—himself. Now he was forced to face two dreadful possibilities: first, that Hayward had recognized him last night; secondly, that Hayward knew Kitty's address in London. And before long he perceived a third: namely, that Symington, elated by the enormous rise

in Zeniths, might have been talking openly about his shares.

Corrie felt like making a bolt for it. Vain to imagine mercy from Kitty after all that had passed! Only the idea that Hayward's recognition would be a difficult thing to substantiate and the thought of his sister's promise restrained and sustained him.

He called Rachel into the post office at a moment when no business was doing. They had scarcely spoken since three o'clock.

"Do ye stand by what ye said about the—the shares?" he asked her, not without shame.

"Aye, I've promised," she said dully.

"They'd be easier on a woman than a man," he observed, looking away.

"It doesna matter." She turned to go back to the shop.

"Symington'll be here to-night," he pursued. "There ought to ha' been a letter from him this morning, so I wired him. Maybe we'll manage to put everything right yet. I wish we had your niece's address."

She faced him. "If I had it, I wouldna tell ye," she said quietly. "It'll be enough if I ha' to sacrifice myself. Speak no more to me about this business, John Corrie, for I ha' nothing more to say—only terrible thoughts." And with that she left him.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LETTER

COLIN HAYWARD began the journey south with much to wonder about. He had obtained no light whatever on the extraordinary affair in front of the burning house, for Sam had not recovered consciousness. It was, indeed, doubtful whether he would ever do so. Colin had not the slightest suspicion as to the identity of the muffled coward whom he had seen fell the half-suffocated postman; he had not, owing to position, observed the former take anything from the latter's helpless hand; neither had he in his rage noticed the crushed letter fall. It was in his path as he turned to the victim's succor, and he had picked it up almost automatically, with some vague notion that it might be of consequence to somebody or other.

Then he had forgotten about it.

Now—an hour after leaving the junction—having exhausted the contents of his cigarette-case, he put his hand into a pocket for a reserve packet, and encountered the document. He merely glanced at its heading, intending to place it in his letter-case for attention later. He had no intention of reading it—enough to learn to whom it belonged.

But the words "My dear Corrie" arrested both hand and eye. Presently he told himself that there was nothing so very strange in this; the letter might easily have been dropped and left lying there hours before the ghastly affair took place. He noticed the date was of more than five years back. But in the same moment he was caught by the words "Kitty" and "Zeniths"—and "5,000 shares."

"I'm afraid," he said to himself, "I've got to read this whether I like it or not."

It was a longish letter, written in a clear, small hand on both sides of a large square sheet. The portion with which we are concerned was as follows:

> You may perhaps find nothing in the enclosed share-certificates (which, please note, are "bearer") but a fresh evidence of my folly in worldly matters. Still, the Zenith Gold Mine is the only thing of the kind I ever put hard-earned money into. There are five thousand £1 shares, and I paid 2s 6d apiece for them, and at the moment they are unsalable.
>
> I acted on the advice of a friend who had seen the property, and who had knowledge of such things. He was convinced that the mine would come right in time—meaning years—and pay big dividends. Well, he may have been all wrong, and I the silliest of poor fools; but now, John, I put the shares in your keeping as a "possibility" for Kitty, when she comes of age. I have never mentioned them to her—certainly not with any reference to herself—for I don't want her to be more disappointed in me than I can help. Give them to her when she is twenty-one, and show her this letter, and if by any chance they are worth money then, or later, she will at least repay you what she may have cost you—though, of course, I am hoping she will earn enough to do that as she goes along.
>
> N. B. Should you hear of the shares rising before then, you will just use your discretion, and do the best you can for my girl.

COLIN'S delight at the thought of Kitty's having a fortune of her own was soon swamped by a flood of doubts and suspicions. The remainder of the journey was a sort of nightmare. Of only one thing could he assure himself as he neared London: Kitty's fortune, were it in danger from persons in Dunford or London, was not going to be made an easier prey by any act of his.

At first he had thought of showing the letter to Mr. Risk and asking his advice, but now he determined that his only course was to return to Dunford at the earliest possible moment, and put it into the hands of Kitty herself. He might be losing the chance of his life by such an action, and Mr. Risk might be the best and straightest of men, but Colin was so truly in love with the girl that the hopelessness of it made no difference. Consequently nothing but her happiness mattered.

It was about five o'clock when he reached Aberdare Mansions. He was admitted without delay to his employer's study. Before he could speak, Mr. Risk, with a smile, said:

"Sorry I gave you that vain journey, Hayward. This morning a note from Symington came to the office requesting that the new certificates be delivered to him at the Kingsway Grand Hotel."

"Yes; that's the address his housekeeper gave me, Mr. Risk," said Colin. "Do you wish me to take the letter there now?" he inquired, producing it.

Risk took it and laid it on the writing-table, saying: "About noon I sent the secretary to the hotel with a similar letter, and he found that Mr. Symington had left for Scotland about two hours previously—presumably in response to a wire which the secretary was able to learn he had received."

"Gone back to Dunford?"

"We must not assume that. Take a cigar, Hayward, and, if you will, tell me in a few words what you know of Mr. Symington."

"Very little, Mr. Risk, and any information I have is indirect. His father and his two brothers all died within a year, and about eighteen months ago he became the owner of what we call the White Farm—a very decent little place until he got possession. He's not interested in farming, you know. I've heard he has done all sorts of things—some pretty queer—in his time. He has the reputation of being a gambler and a speculator, but please remember that I'm repeating gossip. I"—Colin hesitated—"really know nothing against the man."

Risk, offering a lighted match, said quietly: "Well, what do you know in his favor?"

Colin smiled. "One is more likely to hear of a man's faults than his virtues. Besides, as I told you, I've been more away from Dunford than in it during the last five years or so."

"You are not familiar with the natives?"

"Not generally speaking. Still, I hope I have a friend or two among them."

"Would Mr. Symington have been welcome in your home?"

"His father would have been courteously received."

RISK nodded thoughtfully. "Please pardon so many questions, Hayward. I feel that I may now tell you why I am taking so much trouble, and giving you so much, over this Mr. Symington. About seven years ago, I advised a friend who had come into a little money to put it into Zeniths for what is sometimes termed a 'long shot.' I did so not only because I positively knew the mines had a great future, though possibly a distant one, but also because I knew my friend would otherwise fritter away the money which he honestly believed he could save for his daughter, then a young girl. . . . . Yes, Hayward? Have you something to say?"

"Please go on," said Colin, restraining himself.

"Very well. Zeniths at that period," the other proceeded, "were decidedly out of favor. One could buy at two or three shillings. My friend bought five thousand at half a crown a share. At his request I did the business for him and eventually handed him ten 'bearer' certificates for five hundred shares each. I am a methodical person in some respects, and in an old diary I have a record of the transaction and the numbers of the shares.

"Now,—one moment, please!—I had my friend's promise that he would not part with the shares until I gave him the word. If he needed money badly, he was to let me know. Time passed, and circumstances prevented our meeting; I was much abroad. I did not hear of his death until a year afterward, and I failed to trace his daughter. But I have always been on the watch for shares bearing the numbers recorded in the old diary, and I have not grown less keen since the shares began to move up in earnest. And now, when the shares have risen to over four pounds apiece,—when my friend, had he lived, would have seen himself worth at least twenty thousand pounds,—along comes a letter from a Mr. Symington covering five hundred of those same shares—"

"Mr. Risk, I have something to say—"

"One moment more! Within a few hours of its receipt, I discover, by the merest chance, the daughter of my old friend—"

"Her—his name was Carstairs—Hugh Carstairs?" exploded Colin.

"It was."

"And no doubt you mean as well by the daughter as you meant by the father? Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Risk!"

FOR an instant Risk frowned; then he smiled pleasantly. "The daughter barely knows me, but she has no better friend, for her father's sake. Yet I must try to satisfy you that I am not interested in those five thousand shares with an eye to personal profit."

He got up, and leaving Colin hot and uncomfortable, went to a safe built into the wall behind the paneling, a door in which stood open. He came back with a thin bundle of parchment-like papers which he put into the young man's hand.

"Kindly look at these, Hayward, and tell me what they represent."

Reluctantly but perforce Colin examined the documents, and after a little while he replied a trifle huskily:

"Eighty thousand shares in the Zenith Company—and you are the owner!"

"Well, does that satisfy you that I can afford to be honest? Please don't think I was showing off!"

Colin hung his head as he handed back the certificates—and murmured an apology. He was not so much impressed by the man's great wealth as by his cool, straightforward answer to suspicion.

"You are evidently Miss Carstairs' good friend," Risk said kindly, throwing the bundle on the table, "and so your doubts do you credit. You are aware that she is in London?"

Colin jumped. . . . . Well, she had not been long in making use of the hundred pounds! "I didn't know," he managed to say fairly steadily, and could have asked many questions.

"She is staying with my sister," continued Risk. "My sister was here a few minutes ago. Sorry you did not meet. If you like, we shall call upon her after dinner. But now as to Symington. I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to make another night journey—only you need not start till eleven-thirty, when you will find a sleeping berth on the train. Am I working you too hard?"

"Rather not!" cried Colin. "But, Mr. Risk, I must not delay another moment to show you this." He produced the crumpled letter. "When you have read it, I will answer any questions I can."

Risk took the letter and started slightly. "Hugh's writing!" he murmured. He read carefully and without apparent emotion. Having come to the end, he sighed and said softly: "Just tell me all you can, Hayward."

COLIN made a brief and simple relation of his experience beside the burning house. He also told what he knew of the Corries. His host heard him out in silence—and thereafter remained in thought for a space.

Then he said: "You have raised a lot of questions, Hayward, but I must try to put them in order before I ask them. Certainly we shall have enough to talk about this evening, and I'm afraid we must postpone the call upon my sister. In any case, I don't think we ought to bring Miss Carstairs into the business before we can avoid doing so. I have learned that she has no knowledge of the purchase of Zeniths by her father. It would be a pity to excite or alarm her unnecessarily. At the same time, this letter of Corrie's in

itself proves nothing against the man. I am not in Miss Carstairs' confidence, and my sister has not felt at liberty so far to tell me what the girl has confided to her, but I can't help suspecting, after what you have told me, that Miss Carstairs was not particularly happy in Dunford, and that she may possibly have run away."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Colin, almost inaudibly.

"Only," continued the other, "I am loath to believe that she had so little common-sense as to attempt London with nothing in her purse and no friends in view—for you have given me to understand that such was her position. Isn't that so?" he asked, with a keen glance at his guest.

Colin felt himself reddening.

"Look here," Risk said pleasantly, "wont you help me by being open with me? I'm the older man, and I've been pretty frank with you. The fuller the confidence between us, the better we shall work together. Now, I do not doubt for a moment that you were honestly surprised to hear of Miss Carstairs being in London—"

"So soon," added Colin, before he could prevent himself.

"You mean?"

"Mr. Risk," cried the young man, half angry, half amused, "you would get the truth out of anyone! Well, I'll trust you; but she must never know." And he confessed to sending Kitty the hundred pounds.

"And how much had you for your own needs when you arrived in London?" Risk presently asked him.

"Fifteen-odd. But you know I couldn't have taken that money for myself."

THE host's smile was kindly. "I doubt whether you are going to be a great worldly success, Hayward," he said, "but I'm sure you are on the right road to happiness."

Colin gave his head a rueful shake. "Please understand," he said shyly, "that there's nothing between Miss Carstairs and me except a little ordinary friendship."

"Thank you for telling me about the money," said Risk, in a more business-like tone. "Now, as to this letter: what is your suggestion?"

"That you keep it—in your safe—for the present, Mr. Risk."

A slight frown contracted the older man's brow. "It is a horrible thing," he remarked, "to be retaining another man's private letter, and yet I think the circumstances might excuse the action. You see, if Mr. Corrie is innocent, we are doing him a great wrong; if he is guilty—well, we are depriving him of a rope to hang himself with. On the whole, I think you ought to call on him to-morrow morning and hand him back the letter—which I shall keep until it is time for you to start."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Colin, aghast.

"And you need not trouble about Mr. Symington for the present. Let us assume them both innocent until we can prove them guilty."

"But Kit—Miss Carstairs' fortune!"

"Say the word, and I will hand over to you five thousand of my own shares to hold until you are satisfied that I am dealing fairly with her interests."

Colin said nothing.

"I had hoped you were going to trust me," the other murmured.

"Mr. Risk," cried the young man distractedly, "put yourself in my place! What would you do?"

"I'd at least think over it," Risk replied cheerfully. "I'll give you half an hour. I have an engagement now—with a photographer, of all people—and I'm sure you would like a bath and a change of linen after those journeyings. My man will look after you." He pressed a bell-button on the table.

"And while you are thinking over it," Risk added, "please keep remembering this: that there is only one right way of doing a thing—which is my way!" He laughed and extended his hand. Then he became grave. "Hugh Carstairs once rendered a great service to my mother when she was abroad and alone. He is dead, but I remember always."

The servant opened the door and stood at attention. Colin passed out.

AT the same hour Hilda Risk was ascending to her flat in Long Acre. On the second landing she came to an

abrupt stop. She had walked from her brother's home, intending to make a purchase on the way—and had forgotten all about it. "Trying to think of too many things at once," she reprimanded herself, and retraced her steps.

As she emerged upon the street she almost collided with a man apparently about to enter. He drew back with a muttered apology, and she passed on her way with a vague feeling of having seen him before. He had a sharp, rather pinched countenance, small dark mustache, and his bowler hat was decidedly shabby. So much she noticed. Then she dismissed the matter, proceeded on her errand, returned home to find Kitty happy at the typewriter, but happier still to see her, and settled down to some journalistic work which was to keep her busy most of the evening. As for the man, he made for Covent Garden telegraph office.

In the middle of the night, being wakeful, she had an odd recollection of the pinched face under the shabby bowler. And now she remembered where she had seen the man before. Why, only half an hour had elapsed between the first and second encounter! For she had noticed him on the opposite pavement as she was leaving Aberdare Mansions.

"The beast followed me!" she thought suddenly.

CHAPTER XIV

COLIN RETURNS THE LETTER

"YOU bungler!"

Mr. Symington's countenance was sickly; his voice was full of cold and bitter disgust.

The wretched Corrie had come to the end of his sorry confession, not without interruptions, mainly of an angry, abusive nature. And now the verdict: "You bungler!" Somehow it stung most of all.

"It's easy to call names," he rejoined resentfully. "I'm no the only bungler. If ever a man let a girl slip through his fingers, it was you. Ye should ha' had her easy that night—while she was terrified—after she had taken the post-office money—"

"I don't believe she took any money."

"Then how could she pay her fare to London?"

"Probably the postman lent—gave—her it."

The postmaster forced a grin. "Well, ye can believe that, if ye like. And then," he went on quickly, "ye had your chance in the train—and lost it!"

"I've told you why."

"Well, if ye had got the girl, the letter wouldna ha' mattered so much, for ye would ha' got the Zeniths wi' her. So ye can blame yourself as well as me."

There was a silence. Corrie sat glowering at the floor and plucking at his lower lip. Symington scowled openly at him. They were in the privacy of the parlor. It was about seven o'clock and growing dark.

Suddenly Symington emitted a short, ugly laugh. "So this is what you brought me back from London for! Well, I don't wonder at your being afraid. Between embezzlement and attempted murder—"

"Whisht, man, for God's sake!"

"It may be murder itself yet—"

"Be quiet, damn ye!"

"Look here, Corrie: what'll you do if Sam recovers?"

"He canna recover—I heard it an hour before ye arrived. But supposing he does recover, what can he do without the letter?"

"You're perfectly sure he didn't spot you?"

"Aye; I'm sure—and I'm almost sure young Hayward didna recognize me."

"Otherwise you wouldn't be sitting here now—eh?"

"Let that pass," said Corrie, restraining his temper. "The point is—the letter."

"But I don't happen to be interested in the letter."

"Ye've got to be interested in it! If I canna get back the letter, I'll need to get back the shares."

"I'm afraid you wont get back the shares."

Corrie exploded: "Would ye ruin me—send me to the jail?"

SYMINGTON ignored the outburst. "I bought the shares from you," he said calmly, "and paid for them. I have

your acknowledgment. I may say that I intended to hold them till September, when a first dividend will be declared, which, I am informed, will send them to ten pounds—"

"Ten pound! Fifty thousand for the lot!" gasped Corrie.

"Just so. But rather than risk being involved in your dirty affairs, I'll sell the lot to-morrow for what I can get and—er—emigrate."

"Ye swine! But ye'll ha' the police after ye!"

"Why?"

Corrie rose, sat down again, and writhed in his impotence.

"I might have the lawyers after me," Symington admitted easily, "but the lawyers always take a long time to get to work, and I generally travel quickly. However, I think you're making too much of your own danger. Kitty is not likely to attempt to prosecute you, since you can prove that she tampered with the post-office money." He peered through the dusk at the other's face. "Isn't that so?"

"Aye, that's so," Corrie managed to reply.

After a little while Symington said: "Why don't you make Kitty come back here?"

Corrie stared—then dropped his gaze. "How can I do that, when I dinna ken where she is?"

Symington took out the telegram he had found on his arrival.

"Is that her address?" cried Corrie.

"It may be. It is certainly the address of the lady who took charge of her on the train, and now that I've got it, I'll soon find where Kitty is."

"How did ye get it?"

"Never mind. But it might be worth your while to send a wire, first thing in the morning, to Kitty, at this address. Just say: 'Serious for you if not home within twenty-four hours.' . . . . How's that?"

CORRIE groaned. "She wouldna come. Maybe she's seen the letter by this time."

"Maybe she hasn't. It's a chance, anyway—your only chance, perhaps. Will you wire—put it stronger if you like—in the morning?"

"I—I tell ye, she wouldna come."

Symington got to his feet. "I believe," he said slowly, "it was a filthy lie about the post-office money."

Corrie shrank in his chair. He was at the end of his endurance. "I did it," he stammered, "to help you."

"Did what?"

"P-put the five-pun' note in her drawer."

"Damn you!" cried Symington, raising his fist. "You did it to help yourself to half the—" He stopped short with a stifled curse.

Miss Corrie came in with a lighted lamp, which she set on the table.

"Are ye quarreling?" she quavered. She seemed to have grown ten years older during the past forty-eight hours.

Symington strode by her, but halted in the doorway.

"I'm going back to London to-morrow," he said harshly, "and I don't want any more wires from you." Thereupon he went out.

Rachel turned to her brother.

"John, John," she cried piteously, "will he no help ye?"

The unhappy man threw out his arms, let them fall on the edge of the table and bowed his face on them. Helplessly his sister regarded him—then turned and left him to himself. She went to her room and fell on her knees. Had Kitty appeared in that hour, one may presume that she would have been offered the miserable confession of a miserable sinner. But there is an old saying concerning the devil when he was sick.

SHORTLY after eight the following morning Colin, carrying a light overcoat and a small suit-case, entered the post office. The dingy place was flooded with sunlight; even the passage to the shop was filled with it. The counter was unattended. Upon it Colin laid the suit-case and coat. Raising the lid, he disclosed, among sundry articles pertaining to a lengthy night journey, a little box-camera. For a moment or two he fingered it somewhat nervously. Then, at the back—i. e., under the hinges—of the case he drew aside a strip of leather, uncovering a small round hole against which he fitted the

eye of the camera. He let down the lid so far: it was kept from closing by his left hand, which remained inside. Presently, drawing a long breath, he rapped smartly on the counter.

Almost immediately Miss Corrie appeared in the short passage. At the sight of him she seemed to stumble, and as she recovered herself he said:

"Can I see Mr. Corrie for a moment?"

Without answering, she turned and went back. It seemed many minutes before Corrie himself appeared. Colin thought he had never seen a more ghastly-looking creature. The countenance was unreadable, but the man's soul was torn between terror and hope.

As he stepped into the office, there was a scarcely audible click from the suit-case.

"Morning," he said huskily, and ran his tongue over his lips.

"Morning, Mr. Corrie," replied Colin, fairly cheerfully. He brought forth a sealed envelope without superscription and handed it over the counter, saying: "You might look and see if the paper enclosed belongs to you."

Corrie took it with shaking fingers and moved back from the counter. He cleared his throat.

"Ye mean me to open it, Mr. Hayward?"

"Certainly." Colin could have pitied the man, as he turned a second film silently into position.

THE envelope was very firmly gummed, and Corrie's fingers fumbled in a fashion painful to witness. But at last it was torn open—the precious letter was in his hand. He looked as if he were going to cry. Now the click might have been ten times louder without his hearing it. He was dazed with relief.

Colin closed the case, feeling almost guilty.

"Is it yours, Mr. Corrie?"

Corrie seemed to pull himself together. "Aye, it's mine, sure enough, and—and I'm obliged to ye, Mr. Hayward." The old cunning came to his aid. "I lost it more'n a week ago. Might I ask where ye found it?"

"On the grass across the road from the postman's house, while it was burning," answered Colin as naturally as he could.

"Well, well! That's mysterious, for it's more'n a month since I was that road, except the morning after the fire. Somebody mun ha' found it and lost it again. Well, once more, I'm obliged to ye, though the paper's no o' any great consequence. It was written by my poor brother-in-law when he wasna quite right in his head. Still, I'm glad to have it, Mr. Hayward, thank ye."

"I should explain," said Colin, concealing with an effort his disgust, "that after I picked it up I forgot about it until I was in the train for London. Good morning, Mr. Corrie." He caught up case and coat, and hurried out before Corrie could frame another sentence.

"Rachel—here, quick!"

She came in haste, almost weeping.

"Oh, John, John, ha' ye got it back?"

"Aye," he answered shortly, with something of his old truculence of tone.

"God be thanked!" she murmured.

"Ye'll ha' to manage by yourself for an hour," he said rapidly. "I mun hurry to White Farm."

"But now, John, ye'll tell Kitty the truth," she cried excitedly. "I got her address this morning. I can trust ye wi' it now, for ye're a changed man as I'm a changed woman—"

"What's the address?"

"Three Hundred and Sixty-six, Long Acre, London—care o' Miss Risk."

"I'll mind it. Well, I mun run, or I'll miss Symington. I'll master him yet—aye, I will that."

"But ye—ye'll tell Kitty the truth, John—ye'll write to her this very day—will ye no?" She caught his arm.

"Pah!" He shook her off. "Let me gang, woman! Well, well, I'll see, I'll see."

SYMINGTON was at breakfast when Corrie broke in upon him.

"What the devil do you want?" was the spurious farmer's greeting.

"I've got back the letter!"

"Sit down and don't make a scene," said Symington, after a moment. "Tell me about it quietly. And look here, Corrie: I was a bit rough on you last night—"

"Ye were that! But now it's my turn—"

"One moment. I had good cause for my annoyance—you must admit that much. But after I left you, I thought it over in cold blood, and came to the only conclusion possible. You and I must continue to work together; we must stick to the original bargain."

"Ye mean that ye'll try to marry her yet and pay me half the profits?"

"Exactly! Now tell me about the letter."

Under this coolness Corrie's violence collapsed. He seated himself, saying: "But can I trust ye to keep a' I said last night secret?"

"We have got to trust each other, Corrie. Let us forget about last night. Now go ahead."

By the end of the postmaster's brief recital Symington's brows were contracted.

"It's a puzzler," he remarked. "I should say that Hayward returned the letter for one of two reasons: either he hadn't read it through, or else he wants to stand well with you on account of Kitty. What do you think?"

Corrie shook his head. "I don't know what to think, but 'twill do neither of us good if he comes across her in London."

"How do you know he's going back there?"

"I canna say for certain, but I've heard o' talk among the servants that there was trouble with his father the other night."

"Possibly." Symington grinned—then became grave. "Then what's he doing back here?"

"Ye beat me there. But if ye want advice, it's just this: get a hold o' the girl without delay. That's the only way now to make absolute sure o' the Zeniths. I can give ye her address for certain."

"Well, I'm hanged!"

"My sister got it this morning. Write it down, will ye?"

"It's just as I thought," said Symington, a moment later, "but I'm obliged to you, Corrie. And, as you say, it's the only way to make sure of the Zeniths without risking trouble. I'll go south to-night."

"How are ye going to get a hold o' her? Ye've got to mind she's wi' friends—at least, I suppose so."

"You can leave that to me. Kitty wont escape me a third time! I wonder if she's much in love with that fellow Hayward. Well, if she is, I'll make use of the fact."

"I'd give something to ha' him out o' the road," said Corrie, with sudden viciousness. "I've been thinkin' he maybe kens more'n he's shown. If Sam was to get better, after a'—"

"Don't start brooding on that!" said Symington sharply. "By the way, have you destroyed the letter?"

"No; I'm going to keep it—safely this time."

"Why on earth—"

CORRIE glared at his fellow-conspirator. "I intend to trust ye, Symington," he said slowly. "Same time, I warn ye, if ye try to get the better o' me, I'll take the risk o' handing the letter to Kitty Carstairs and telling her the whole cursed story."

For an instant Symington's gaze was murderous. Then he laughed. "Canny man, canny man!" he sneered. "If Kitty would forgive you—well, let that pass. Meantime, I want the loan of twenty pounds. There ought to have been a registered letter for me this morning. If it comes to-morrow, you must redirect it to London. Now I'll walk down to the shop with you and get the cash."

"All right," said Corrie reluctantly, after a pause. "But ye mun be careful what ye say before Rachel. I doubt if she's on our side now. Let her think ye're considering about giving me back the Zeniths for the girl. D'ye see?"

"Very well. Now that she's got Kitty's address, she might easily make trouble."

"I wish," said Corrie, as they went down the road, "I wish ye would tell me how ye're going to get a hold o' her. Ha' ye got a plan?"

"Perhaps I have." Symington smiled darkly, and changed the subject.

(Meanwhile Colin was seated in an exceedingly slow train on his way to the hospital where Sam the postman lay. Afterward he would go on to

Glasgow, and thence back to London by a line that did not pass near Dunford. In this he was simply obeying the instructions of Mr. Risk.)

CHAPTER XV

THE DINNER-PARTY

THAT nearly a fortnight should have passed without any effort on Symington's part to "get a hold" of Kitty may seem to the reader to require some explanation. Possibly sufficient will be found in a conversation between Risk and Colin, which took place on the twelfth day after the latter's call on the postmaster of Dunford. Colin had returned from Scotland, only to be dispatched, within a few hours, to an address in Amsterdam with a belt full of finely broken bottle-glass next his skin, which he believed to be a fortune in uncut precious stones. Back from Holland, he found written instructions to proceed to Madrid to fetch a little box purporting to contain three thousand sovereigns, and actually concealing about half a hundredweight of lead.

And now, a trifle fagged, he was sitting in Risk's study, hoping to hear that he had done well. Risk did not keep him long in suspense. After a few questions respecting the last journey he said, rather abruptly:

"Well, Hayward, you've been serving me, so far, pretty much with your eyes shut: I wonder if you care to continue with your eyes open. I warn you that some of the work may be dull and most of it will be hard. I have got plenty of young men who work well in their own particular grooves, but I want one who is prepared to take on any job I put before him, just as I, with so many different interests, have had to do in the past for myself. I don't expect you to learn everything at once, but I should expect you to be interested in everything that interests me. And I offer you five hundred pounds for the first year."

Colin almost leaped from his seat. "Five hundred pounds, Mr. Risk! Why, I'll never be worth that!"

"You'll think differently six months hence. Meantime, do you accept?"

"Oh, rather! And I thank you a—"

"Then let us talk of something else. For instance, I have word that your friend the postman has a chance of recovery, and I have to tell you about our friend Symington."

"I've been wondering," said Colin, "whether he accepted your invitation to call at the office."

"He did—the morning after you left for Amsterdam. Incidentally, I got rather a good snapshot of him. He seemed a trifle nervous until he received the new certificates, and then he coolly informed the secretary that he had purchased the old one six years ago—an unmitigated lie, as we know. It remains to be seen, of course, whether he is acting for himself or for Corrie, and if the former, how many of the five thousand shares have come into his possession."

"You can't prevent his selling the shares?"

"I could do that by circularizing all the exchanges and brokers, but sooner or later that would mean publicity. Besides, I want to give Mr. Symington rope just as I've given it to Mr. Corrie."

"It may prove awfully expensive rope, Mr. Risk," ventured Colin.

"I'm ready to pay for my amusement," the other pleasantly returned, "and you don't want me to tell you again that I will replace every share it may cost Miss Carstairs."

"I didn't mean that," said Colin. "Only—well, you have been so good to me that I'd hate to see you lose—"

"Money! Yes, but think of the game, Hayward! And we're going to win that. Why, it's going to be the most tremendously interesting business I ever tackled. You don't mind danger, do you?"

COLIN laughed. "I'm afraid I've had no experience, but I'm at your service, Mr. Risk. I suppose," he went on, "Symington has already converted some of the five hundred shares into cash."

"We may assume that much. To put it mildly, he has been on the spree since the day he got the new certificates."

"You have had him watched?"

Risk nodded. "And I have gone into his past to some extent. He is not a desirable person, I fear. But we shall leave him for the present. My sister and Miss Carstairs, also your friend West, are dining with me to-night, and I hope you are free to join us."

Colin flushed with pleasure.

"I should like you," continued Risk, "to make your quarters here for the present. Sharp has a room ready for you. And now I'm going to ask you an impertinent question. Have you any debts?"

"No—well, I owe my father that hundred pounds," the young man replied ruefully.

"Then pay it; and if you think you have any grudge against him, forget it. For this year I will pay your salary quarterly, in advance. Don't thank me. I simply want you to be able to serve me with as free a mind, and as light a heart, as possible. Frankly, you're an experiment." With a kindly laugh Risk proceeded to write a check.

It was no shame to Colin then if his eyes were moist. Surely his father would think kindlier of him now.

AN hour later, he and Kitty were face to face. Ages long it seemed since their parting in the little wood, less than three weeks ago! How much had happened since then! Perhaps Kitty was more at her ease than he. She had slipped into the new, pleasant life as though she belonged to it. She was still a little shy, but not awkwardly so. She had never been "countrified;" yet Colin had always thought of her as a country maid—and had loved her none the less for that. In sunlight and moonlight he had deemed her the prettiest creature alive. But now, under the shaded electric lamps of a London drawing-room, in a white muslin frock that gave glimpses of her neck and arms, he beheld her, and his faithful heart ached at her fresh loveliness.

"Isn't this wonderful?" she whispered, smiling, as they shook hands.

Poor Colin! He managed to smile in return, but not a word could he find, for in that moment he realized that he loved her more than ever, and that if his love had been well-nigh hopeless before, it was utterly hopeless now. For with all his resolutions to put her out of his life on coming to London, he had indulged a dream of fighting for success in order that he might one day rescue her from dreariness or hardship, and somehow win her for his own. Alas, now he comprehended only too fully what the Zeniths meant to himself. Kitty would be a very rich young woman. He could serve her in nothing at all. What an irony that the man who had given him his first step upwards—and a great step, too!—should be the man to set his dearest desire beyond his reach! Well, there was nothing for it but to cleave to duty and have done with dreams.

Nevertheless it was a cheerful little dinner-party, and during it the lovelorn young man and Hilda Risk laid the foundations of a lasting friendship. Toward the close of the repast Kitty was telling the host of her father's unfinished comedy, which Mr. West had just completed.

"He did it in six days, Mr. Risk," she said warmly, "and I could not have told that it was not my father's own work. It was wonderful!"

"Not at all," said West, in his matter-of-fact voice. "There was next to nothing for me to do, for the last act was foreshadowed. It's a great play, Risk. Craven, of *The Planet*, whom I got to read it right away, admitted as much this very day, though he wouldn't accept it."

"Why?" asked Risk.

"Too much unlike recent successes, I suppose," said West dryly. "And I believe it would draw all London."

"Miss Carstairs," said Risk kindly, "wouldn't you like to see your father's play performed?"

The girl's shining eyes answered for her.

"I think I can persuade Craven," remarked Risk, turning to West. "Can you arrange a meeting between us for the day after to-morrow?"

"By Jove!" said West softly. "The thing's done! Miss Carstairs, take my word for it, that play will bring you a little fortune. Risk, God bless you!"

Kitty looked from one to the other. "Is it—is it really and truly going to be?" she asked, tremulously.

"Leave it to Mr. Risk," cried West in high delight.

"I think you may, Miss Carstairs," Risk said, with that amused look of his. "But don't count on the fortune just yet. Still, I'll make the best terms I can for you."

"And Mr. West," she put in quickly. "Please don't think me ungrateful and horrid, Mr. Risk, but I don't wish you to—to trouble about the play at all unless Mr. West promises—on paper, too—to take half the profits—if any."

"Never!" shouted West, indignant.

"Goodness me," said Hilda, interrupting her talk with Colin, "what on earth is the matter, Anthony?"

"Nothing, my dear," replied her brother. "Merely Anthony's little way of receiving a decent business proposition." He turned to Kitty. "Never mind, Miss Carstairs; we three shall have a talk together later, and—"

SHARP came into the room with a note on a salver.

"Messenger-boy brought it, sir; said it was immediate," he murmured to his master, as he presented the salver to Kitty. "No answer, madam," he said aloud, and retired.

Kitty had taken the note mechanically, but now as she sat staring at it, the color ebbed from her face. The plain envelope was directed to her,—in rather shaky writing,—"Care of Miss Risk, 366, Long Acre;" apparently Hilda's servant had sent the messenger on to Aberdare Mansions.

Anthony West alone made any effort to sustain the conversation, but then he was the only person present to whom the incident appeared ordinary, and he too soon fell silent at the sight of the girl's pallor.

At last the host said gently: "Hadn't you better open it, Miss Carstairs? It may be nothing so very serious, after all."

Kitty seemed to nerve herself; she even smiled faintly as she tore away the flap. She took out a piece of ruled paper folded once,—a page torn from a notebook,—opened it and forced herself to read the two lines scrawled upon it in pencil.

Then the paper fell from her fingers, and with a little cry of pain she put up her hands and hid her face.

CHAPTER XVI

CHASTISEMENT

HILDA was the first to make a movement. She rose and passed quickly round the table to the apparently stricken girl.

"Kitty," she said quietly, "remember you are among friends here—friends who will not permit any person or thing to harm you." She laid a reassuring hand on the girl's shoulder.

The host also rose, signing to Colin and West to follow him from the room. But just then Kitty let her hands fall from her face. No longer was it pale, for the shock of fear was past; her cheeks glowed with insulted pride, and her eyes shone with honest indignation.

"Mr. Risk, please don't go away," she said a little unsteadily. "I don't wish anyone to go away. I'm so sorry to upset everything like this."

"Don't worry about that," Risk said gently. "As my sister has just remarked, we are your friends, and we are all ready and anxious to serve you. You really want us to remain?"

"Please." She turned to Hilda. "I want you to read it aloud," she said, pointing to the note.

Hilda picked up the paper, and she too flushed as her eyes took in the penciled words.

"The beast!" she muttered under her breath. She took West's seat, which he had vacated for her.

"This note," she announced, "has neither address nor signature. It has evidently been penciled by a person under the influence of rage, illness or—alcohol. It asks: 'Do your new friends know where you got the money that brought you to London?' That is all."

Colin went ruddy, half rose and subsided with mingled feelings—anger at the affront to Kitty, dread lest for her sake he should be forced to confess to sending her the hundred pounds, and a sudden recognition that not so long ago he had held a similar piece of paper bearing an anonymous message in pencil.

"And now," said Kitty in a steadier voice, though she was pale again, "will you, please, tell them all you know about me, Hilda—all I have told you about myself?"

THE host poured a little wine into a glass and set it before her, saying: "My dear Miss Carstairs, I want to know only one thing. Who is the unspeakable cad who wrote that?"

Kitty took a sip and smiled faintly. "If you can be bothered listening to my rather unpleasant little story, which I want Hilda to tell," she said slowly, "I think you may guess the writer's name. At least, I can think of only one person who would do such a thing—"

"Symington!" burst from Colin's lips.

"The gentleman who, unfortunately, has never called here," said Risk quietly.

"Of course, it can be no other," cried Hilda, in unwonted excitement.

Colin was on his feet. "Mr. Risk, will you excuse—" he was beginning, when Sharp entered.

"Mr. Symington," the servant intimated, "wishes to speak with Miss Carstairs on the 'phone."

There were blank looks until Hilda, with recovered coolness, said:

"Sharp, you will tell Mr. Symington that Miss Carstairs is afraid of contamination, even over the wire."

"Very good, Hilda," her brother remarked. "Have you got it clearly, Sharp?"

"Yes sir," the servant answered, and calmly repeated the words. Then he went out.

Risk turned to Colin, who was still standing, and gave a nod, murmuring: "All right, Hayward; we'll excuse you. Good luck!"

Colin bowed to the ladies, and with a curious set look on his face left the room.

HILDA glanced at her brother, but said nothing. Kitty was feeling a little hurt and, perhaps, a little relieved also. Why should Colin have wanted to escape hearing her story? On the other hand, it would, no doubt, be less trying to hear it told without his presence.

"Let's have coffee in the study, John," said Hilda suddenly, "and I'll try to do what Kitty asks. I do think you and Anthony ought to know how abominably she has been treated, especially as one of her wretched persecutors seems to be losing his head and getting to work again."

"Personally," said Risk, "I confess to acute curiosity. In two minutes we shall do as you suggest, Hilda. Meanwhile, Miss Carstairs, let us try to come to some agreement with West about the play."

It was a tactful suggestion, for Kitty was requiring a change of thought rather badly just then.

Later, as they were passing to the study, Sharp got a word with his master in the hall.

"Mr. Hayward asked me to tell you, sir, that he was making a call at the Kingsway Grand Hotel, but that he did not expect to be long in returning."

"Very well. . . . . Did he ask for anything before he left the house?"

"A flexible cane, sir, which I chanced to be able to provide."

Risk nodded, and looking serious, was about to follow his guests, when a thought seemed to strike him.

"Sharp, did Mr. Symington make any response to the message?"

"He did, sir."

"What did he say?"

Sharp hesitated. "Well, sir," he replied at last, solemnly, "I should say he contaminated the wire, sir!"

IN common justice it should be stated here that Alexander Symington was not a faithful slave to alcohol. As a rule he kept the upper hand. A full record of his adult life, however, would show that at long intervals, and at times of extreme excitement, he lost his grip, fell and simply wallowed. His collapse on this occasion was probably the result of his converting a hundred Zeniths into nearly five hundred pounds sterling. With pockets full of notes and gold, and with the sure prospect of being able to refill them as soon as emptied,—refill them over and over again,—it is small wonder that he became reckless in an

abnormal degree. At all events, the money was not in his pockets for an hour when, with the assistance of a couple of fellows no finer-souled than himself, he entered upon a bout of dissipation as wild as it was varied. Even Kitty was forgotten.

And now he was in process of "coming to himself"—and a very unpleasing process it was. Physically, though weakened, he was less disorganized than might have been expected; mentally, however, his state was that of extreme annoyance with himself and savage resentment against the world in general, and two persons in particular. He could not remember all the idiotic acts he had committed in the course of those crazy days and nights, but he was clearly and disagreeably aware that besides squandering four hundred and seventy pounds, he had presented his two boon companions with a hundred Zeniths apiece for no reason or purpose that he could soberly name.

He was further tormented by the bitter reflection that he had wasted ten valuable days. For all he knew, Kitty, in that period, might have put herself beyond his reach for good and all. Also, he had lately received from Corrie a somewhat peremptory note requesting him to report progress, and breathing a novel and unpleasant spirit of independence.

It was in this harassed condition, and with a still clouded intelligence, that he had obeyed the two impulses in the direction of Kitty, of which we have seen the results—so far. And now, not so many minutes after the telephone episode, he was already cursing himself for a silly fool, and asking what madness was upon him that he should have as good as warned the girl against himself.

HE had determined to spend this evening in the sitting-room of his suite reserved in the Kingsway Grand Hotel, a hostelry largely patronized by unattached gentlemen with money to burn. An hour ago he had dined very lightly and temperately, but the reaction from the previous overindulgence had soon afterwards demanded fresh stimulant, and a pint bottle of champagne stood on a small table convenient to his easy-chair. He was expecting his two friends, but hoping that something—a motor accident, fatal, for choice—might yet prevent them from turning up. It would be many a day before he forgave those two, for although he had gayly presented them the Zeniths, he now regarded them about as kindly as if they had robbed him.

He lighted a cigarette with an unsteady hand, took a mouthful of wine and lay back in his chair, sluggish of body, sullen of soul. When, a moment later, he heard the door open, he swore under his breath, but did not so much as turn his head. He anticipated a greeting as the door was shut—a bluff greeting of the "What ho!" order; wherefore the words that came after a brief pause were something of a shock.

"You swine!"

He started up to see "young Hayward" standing over him, with a look in his eyes that boded anything but good will.

Colin was full of fury, but it was the frigid sort.

"What the deuce do you want?" said Symington at last, and his hand stole behind him. His recent pleasure-hunt had included visits to one or two rather queer corners of London town, down by the docks.

"What you want is a thrashing," answered Colin, "and I'm here to give it you."

SYMINGTON'S complexion went from scarlet to gray.

"What the devil do you mean by intruding here? If you don't clear out—" His hand went up with a glitter. "Out of this, you young fool, or by—"

Swish! Like a flash the whangee cane smote his knuckles. With a cry he let drop the weapon. Colin kicked it across the room.

Hissing with wrath and pain, Symington sprang up and made a dash for the bell. No use. He was seized by the collar, shaken vigorously—then dragged to the table in the center of the room, from which the dessert had not been removed. Mercilessly he was thrown across it, his face in a dish of raisins, and in that undignified position,

vainly struggling, he received a most painful chastisement.

Often afterwards Colin, whose weight and muscle were nothing exceptional, would wonder how on earth he had managed to handle successfully a heavy man like Symington; but love and hate combined with honest rage gave him, for the time being, the strength of three, and his victim, moreover, was flabby after a long debauch.

The noise of the caning, coupled with the involuntary exclamations of the sufferer, were, however, not long in attracting attention, and a knock on the door warned Colin that it was time to desist. Putting his whole heart into a final cut, which brought forth a yelp of anguish, he loosed his grip, saying rather breathlessly:

"That is the reply to your anonymous notes, Mr. Symington, and if you want to call the police now, pray do so."

A waiter, mouth open, was staring from the doorway.

Symington stood up, his expression devilish. He had a fruit-knife in his hand—a frail, pretty thing, yet pointed. He lunged at his enemy's face. Again the cane swished, and the knife fell to the floor.

"Gentlemen!" gasped the waiter.

"Well?" inquired Colin. "Is it to be the police?"

"Damn you! Get out of this! I'll make you sorrier than any police judge could do."

"Very well," said Colin, turning to the door. "In the meantime," he added, over his shoulder, "if I were you, I'd get the waiter to remove the raisins from your chin and left eyebrow." With that, perhaps the unkindest cut of all, he went out, leaving Symington almost beside himself with passion.

As for the waiter, the unfortunate creature was so tactless as to smile at the raisins, and two days later he was dismissed from the hotel service.

AS soon as he reached the street, Colin realized that he was shaking all over. "What a rage I must have been in!" he said to himself, half gladly, half ruefully. "Well, I guess he wont trouble Kitty again, and I don't see how he's going to get at me."

But Colin did not know Symington, or he would have, at least, qualified his confidence. As a matter of fact, by thrashing the man he had simply turned a cad into a blackguard. But he drove back to Aberdare Mansions feeling that he had been able to do something for his beloved, after all, though she must never know of it, and he arrived there happier than he had been for months.

Risk met him in the hall with a quizzical smile.

"Found him out, I suppose, Hayward?"

"That's for you to do, Mr. Risk," was the blithe reply. "I found him in, and I fancy he'll not move far to-night, at all events."

"Don't tell me," said Risk, his eyes on the cane, "you whacked the beggar!"

"To the best of my ability."

Colin found his hand being shaken.

"It was splendid, Hayward," Risk said gravely, "and we must hope it was also wise. Now we'll forget about it for the present. Come along and have your coffee. We have heard Miss Carstairs' story, and West and I are her willing servants till she comes to her own. But, of course, she must not know we are working for her, and she must, if possible, be induced to forget those ugly little incidents of to-night—or, at any rate, be prevented from dwelling on them."

TWO hours later, the night being exquisite, Colin walked home with Kitty, West escorting Hilda.

"Mr. Risk is giving you plenty to do, isn't he?" Kitty remarked, making an effort to shake off the feeling of restraint that had come upon her on finding herself alone with Colin.

"Yes," said Colin, who was hampered by a similar sensation. "But he's worth working for. He has given me a chance that I might have sought in vain all my life. But never mind about me, Kitty," he went on. "I wish very much to know what you—or rather Miss Risk—told the others while I was absent to-night."

"I think I'd rather not talk about it," she said, after a short pause. "Mr. West, or Mr. Risk, will tell you, if you really want to know."

"Kitty, why do you say that, and in such a tone?"

"Why did you go away almost as soon as I asked Hilda to tell my story?"

"Why? Well, because,"—he hesitated,—"because it suddenly occurred to me that—that there was a thing I must attend to," he concluded lamely. "Good heavens, Kitty, you surely didn't imagine that I was anything but keen to hear your story! Ever since I learned you were in London I've been wondering how the great change came about."

His earnestness overcame her doubts. "I'm a horrid thing, Colin," she declared self-reproachfully, "but I wanted to make sure that you did not despise me—"

"Despise you!"

"—for running away from Dunford, and for accepting the kindness of strangers as I have done."

"What an absurd idea, Kitty! I wont tell you how glad I was to hear you were in London, and in the care of such friends. Show that you trust me a little better by telling me how it all came about. By the way, have you heard from Dunford since you left?"

She shook her head. "I sent my aunt my address, and told her I was all right, but she has not answered. Well, I'm not so surprised at that as at not hearing from Sam. It was he who helped me to get away."

"Wont you begin at the beginning?"

"Very well—only you must promise not to discuss it afterward. It's not a pretty story, Colin, and only in self-protection did I ask Hilda to tell it to-night. Well, here it is."

SHE told it simply and in few words, and he heard her to the end without a single interruption. Now and then, indeed, when her voice wavered, he would have given all his future to have taken her, for one moment, into his arms. The incident of the one hundred pounds brought a flush to his face, while he blessed the thought that had caused him to send her the means for escape; but the tale of her uncle's hideous treachery turned him ghastly with wrath and pity.

"And so," she finished, "the journey that started so miserably ended most wonderfully, and here I am with all my dreams come true,"—she gave a small rueful laugh,—"except one. For I used to dream of being brave and independent and even adventurous; and now—"

"Oh, Kitty, thank God you didn't arrive in London alone!" he exclaimed.

"I do," she returned softly. "I was a little fool to imagine I could ever have stood alone and made my own way. I'm self-supporting now with my typing, but that's all thanks to Hilda. Colin, did you ever hear of anything so wonderful as the way things have turned out for me? Do you know, once or twice I've thought it might all have been planned out by Mr. Risk—that he, for my father's sake, might have been secretly watching over me. . . . . Some day, when I know him better, I'll ask him straight about the one hundred pounds. Don't you think I might do that?"

"Certainly," said Colin cheerfully. "And so now you are perfectly happy, Kitty?"

"Yes, I am!" she answered, with just a trace of defiance. She was not going to admit that there was something lacking, and perhaps she was not quite sure what the something was. And of course it was nothing to her that Colin, earlier in the evening, had appeared to be greatly taken with Hilda—and Hilda's lovely eyes!

Later, he mentioned that West and he desired to take her and Hilda to a theater on the coming Friday. Kitty had already been to several theaters; yet somehow the prospect thrilled her more than it had done prior to previous visits, though her acceptance of the invitation, given subject to Hilda's approval, was little more than polite.

They were nearly home when Colin said rather diffidently:

"I've promised not to discuss Dunford or the people there, but Kitty, I'd just like to hear that you are no longer afraid of that wretched worm Symington."

After a moment she replied: "No, Colin. For that moment, at dinner, I was afraid, horribly afraid, I admit. But I've got over it. For what can the man do?"

CHAPTER XVII

A GRIM PURPOSE

SINCE last we saw them, John and Rachel Corrie, apart from the conversation necessitated by business, had scarcely spoken to each other. The man kept a sullen silence, lest in speech he might betray his real intentions; the woman, having come to mistrust in all his ways the being whom she loved more than herself, held her peace lest she should lead him into self-betrayal.

Rachel knew by this time why she had heard no more from Kitty. Her three letters to the girl had never passed beyond the post office,—she had actually and secretly witnessed her brother destroy the last,—and she reasonably assumed that if Kitty had written again, her letter had met a similar fate.

Although the new assistant and postman were conversant with their duties, Corrie never failed to postmark with his own hand both outward and inward mails. His manner had become disagreeably furtive; always he seemed to be watching, waiting for something to happen. Rachel's poor heart bled for him; she blamed the sin more than the sinner; and she would have given her soul to save his. Night after night she lay long awake, brooding, scheming to the end that he might be rescued—in a worldly sense, to begin with. She fondly believed that if he were drawn back from his present sinning, his life for the future would be sinless. She believed, also, that it was Symington whom she would have to overcome in the first place. To Rachel Corrie, Symington, in the night watches, appeared as Satan himself.

And at last, at a sultry midnight, such a midnight as had witnessed her dreadful deed for her brother's sake, a vague idea drifted, from heaven knows where, into her distracted, weary mind, and lodged there. Ere she slept, it had developed to a grim purpose, which even the searching light of morning could not weaken.

She would render Symington powerless, helpless, by depriving him of the Zenith certificates! But how? It cost her many more sleepless hours and much aching thought before she could answer the question. But eventually the way was found, and while it appalled her, she would not turn back. However, she would have to bide her time. For one thing, the mill was at present too busy—the mill which, you will remember, was one of John Corrie's properties apart from the general store—and the mill was involved in her scheme. For another, a word with Symington might have helpful results.

IT was on the third evening following that of his castigation that Symington reappeared in Dunford. He came in response to a curt note from the postmaster: "It is time you and me had a talk. Look sharp." A telegram preceded him. For the first time since his last visit Corrie mentioned the man's name to Rachel.

"Symington'll be here 'tween eight and nine."

"I'll be out," she returned calmly.

For a moment he was taken aback. Then, "as ye please," he said, and after a slight pause added: "I expect your niece'll get the shares before long."

He did not look at her; nor did she at him as she replied:

"Very well, John. I'll be glad when it's a' settled."

She left the house at the hour the train was due, and took the road which led to White Farm and also to the mill, a couple of miles further on.

Symington arrived at the cottage in a bad humor.

"What the devil do you keep on bothering me for?" he demanded the moment he was in the parlor. "I'm going ahead as quickly as I can. Do you want me to ruin the whole thing by rushing it?"

"No use losing your temper," said Corrie coldly. "It's a fortnight past since ye started to get a hold o' the girl. I want to ken what ye've been doing in London, besides enjoying yourself."

"Don't talk about enjoyment! I tell you I've been busy the whole time."

"Well, what ha' ye done?"

SYMINGTON took out a cigar. "Look here—what are you trying to drive me for? What's at the back of this cry for haste?"

"There's a chance o' the postman's getting better."

"Well, curse him for a nuisance, and you for a bungler!"

"Mind, I've got that letter!" snarled Corrie.

"You'd never use it! . . . . However, I may tell you that I've completed my arrangements for the capture of Miss Kitty."

"And what may they be?"

"I think I'd better not tell you. You're so tender-hearted!"

A gray shadow came over Corrie's face. "Is—is it going to hurt her?" he whispered. "I canna consent to her being hurt—seriously."

Symington laughed shortly. "You think I'd hurt Kitty, do you? Sometimes I fancy you're a bit cracked, Corrie! Well, I must admit it's going to be a little unpleasant, inconvenient, for her—but nothing worse. She's going to disappear for a time—"

"Where?"

"You're better not to know, in case you're asked—see?"

The postmaster plucked at his lower lip. "Maybe," he mumbled, "maybe."

"And young Hayward's going to disappear likewise."

"God! Are ye no afraid? But how am I to believe ye?"

"Give me four days—a week, at most. Now don't ask any more questions, for I'm not going to answer them. As I said, you're better not to know anything."

"Just one. How long'll it take, think ye, to—to make her give in?"

Symington had drunk a good deal of wine on the train, or he might not have answered as he did.

"How long does it take to starve a healthy man?" he inquired.

IN the dusk Symington was nearing the farm when, from a gate in the hedge, Rachel Corrie stepped into his path.

"I want a word wi' ye, Mr. Symington," she said bluntly.

"Well?"

"And first I'll tell ye that John doesna ken o' this."

"Go on." He was annoyed at the interruption, for he had much to think of before he slept that night, and he was returning to London by the early morning train. He was tormented, too, by a craving for drink.

"'Tis about the Zeniths," she proceeded.

"None of your business, I should say, Miss Corrie."

"I say different. But I only want ye to satisfy me that ye are dealing fair with my brother."

"How dare you insinuate—"

"No need for temper," she went on steadily. "John maybe wouldna like to ask ye himself, but I'm going to put a straight question, for it's been on my mind for a while now—"

"Kindly come to the point."

"I will! Have ye or have ye not parted wi' any o' the shares?"

His indignation was well assumed. "If you were a man—" he began.

"But I'm only a woman, though not one o' the blind, trusting sort, Mr. Symington. Still, I'm as curious as any."

Suddenly he gave an ironic laugh. "Very well, Miss Corrie; I don't want you to lose any more of your beauty sleep, so I give you my word that—"

"And ye'll let me see the certificates, Mr. Symington," she interrupted firmly.

For an instant he hesitated. He might tell her that they were in his banker's safe. But no: better exhibit them and have done with the matter.

"If I were not aware of your affection for your brother," he said, "I'd consider your request an insult, and refuse it point blank. However, you can come along to the house and be satisfied."

He prepared for other questions, but she asked none, and presently he was showing her into the farmhouse parlor, saying: "I'll fetch them at once."

SHE waited in the twilight, listening with all her nerves, as it were. She heard him go upstairs; she counted his movements in the room directly overhead.

Symington knew he was taking no small risk. Originally the certificates, folded separately, had made a tapetied bundle of ten, each certificate representing five hundred shares. Now there were only nine. But Symington

took from his pocket a certificate for one hundred shares, and inserted it in the bundle. He could not tell how familiar she might be with the documents, but he trusted that she would be satisfied with finding the number of them correct, and reckoned that if she did insist on examining them separately, the dusk would prevent her detecting the discrepancy. So he came downstairs whistling.

"Thank ye," she said at once, without even touching the bundle; "I'll be getting home now."

For she had discovered what she wanted to know—not with her eyes, but with her ears.

"Silly old fool!" Symington remarked to himself, much relieved, as he went upstairs again. "I needn't go on worrying about her, anyway."

He entered his bedroom, returned the one-hundred-share certificate to his pocket and deposited the bundle in an immensely heavy oak chest, steel-bound and fastened to the floor near the window. It had been the Symington "strong-box" for generations. Only lately had the idea of superseding it with a modern safe occurred to the present owner.

"I'll write to Glasgow for a price-list to-night," he thought, withdrawing the queer, stumpy key and replacing the chintz cover, which gave the chest something of the appearance of an ottoman. "Yes; I'll write to-night." Just then his importunate thirst assailed him once more and drove him downstairs to a cupboard in the parlor.

CHAPTER XVIII

AN INTERVIEW WITH SAM

ONE morning, about a week later, John Risk, on his arrival in the City, found his sister waiting in his private office.

"I'm ordered to Newcastle to-morrow, for a couple of days," she informed him. "What am I to do about Kitty? Naturally, she'd imagine all sorts of things if I told her she must not leave the flat during my absence, and I can hardly afford to tell the editor I don't—"

"You can take her with you, Hilda. Why not make a little holiday of it, and when you've finished the job at Newcastle, take a week by the sea somewhere? You've had no break this summer. You're looking a bit fagged. Of course, I'll stand the racket."

"Dear old thing, I don't believe I can refuse!" she cried.

"Good! I'll post you a check before midday. But now I must ask you to run away. This is my busy morning. By the way, you can tell Miss Kitty that the play is going on almost immediately. West caved in last night, and agreed to take his share, and, as luck would have it, Grant's recent venture has turned out a frost, and the theater is available—"

"John! How many thousands is this going to cost you?"

"None, I think. I believe in the play. However, that's none of your business. You don't think any the less of West for taking his share?"

"No, indeed! Besides, Kitty forced him by declaring she would not have the play go on at all, if he refused. —Well, I'm off," added Hilda, rather hurriedly and with some color in her cheeks.

"One moment. You haven't been followed again by that man, have you?" he inquired.

"No. Why do you ask? I'd have told you."

"So you would, my dear. Symington is in town at present, and I happen to know he has been selling more shares."

"Oh! But John, isn't it time to act?"

"Very nearly, I hope. That's all, Hilda. Good luck to your holiday."

She kissed him and went out. A slight frown crossed his forehead for a moment. Then he pressed one of several buttons on his desk.

COLIN entered. He had a letter in his hand.

"May I speak first, Mr. Risk? I've been waiting to show you this." He handed over the letter; it was from the superintendent of the hospital where Sam the postman lay.

"Ah!" exclaimed Risk, "this is what was wanted! 'The operation on the

skull has been successful,' he read, 'and the patient is now well enough to give you a short interview.' Hayward, you must go north by the first train, learn all you can and instruct him to hold his tongue for the present."

"I can catch the eleven-thirty train," said Colin, who was already acquiring the decisive ways of his friend and employer, "and may be there in time to see him to-night. You wish me to return at once?"

"I want you to take in Dunford on your way back and get me one or two photo's. I'll give you a note of what I require, along with the camera. But that needn't take you more than a couple of hours. Don't you want to look up your people?"

"They're all from home this month —thank you for thinking of it. I ought to tell you that my father and I have made it up—by mail."

"That's right! Now, before you go, will you do me a rough sketch of the postman's house before it was burned —that is, a drawing of the front, showing doors, windows, et cetera, as correctly proportioned as you can make them. Jot the colorings at the side. . . . . One thing more: you might break your return journey at Newcastle, for an hour or so. My sister and Miss Carstairs will be there to-morrow. I'll wire you where to find them to the hospital this afternoon."

Colin felt grateful, but merely returned a "Very well, Mr. Risk," and hastened to his own office to get through the work on hand. The request for a sketch of Sam's old house puzzled him, as did the photographic business, but he possessed the valuable wit for knowing when to suppress questions.

Risk immediately plunged into a small ocean of correspondence. He had an extraordinary number of financial interests, and they really interested him apart from their profits.

A secretary entered.

"Mr. Boon, of the Westminster Film Company, is here, sir. He has an appointment with you."

Risk glanced at the clock. "In two minutes," he said, returning to the correspondence, "show him in."

The secretary knew by this time that two minutes to Mr. Risk meant exactly 120 seconds; and on the 121st Mr. Boon was admitted. His visit lasted about fifteen minutes.

Before he left he was introduced to Colin, with whom he had a few minutes' conversation, which was probably more enlightening to himself than to the young man; and he took away with him the rude sketch of the Dunford postman's abode.

RATHER late in the evening Colin, by special permission, was sitting at Sam's bedside. The postman was still weak, and the nurse had warned the visitor against anything in the way of excitement, but his memory was clear enough, and there was not, after all, a great deal to be remembered. Colin was soon in possession of the few facts worth having; they formed, at least, a valuable little appendix to Kitty's story. As to his assailant on the night of the fire, Sam frankly admitted that he had nothing better than suspicions to offer; yet he was convinced that the house had been deliberately set on fire, and that he had been assaulted in his weakness either by Corrie or Symington or both.

But Sam was not greatly interested in his own affairs. Time enough to think of punishment and revenge when he was on his feet again, he declared. He wanted to hear about Kitty.

Colin did his best to oblige him, leaving out, of course, all reference to Symington's last outbreak, and explaining that Kitty was not yet aware of her old friend's misfortune and illness.

"Quite right, quite right," said Sam. "So long as she's in good health and wi' kind friends, I'm content. And before long I'll be getting the letter ye say she wrote me just after she got to London. Ye see, we couldna trust Corrie, and she would send it to Peter Hart, the shepherd, in the next postal district."

"I'm going to tell her simply that you've had an accident," said Colin; "so you may expect a new letter from her immediately. Now, I see the nurse looking at me, and I suppose my time is up. But I must tell you, from Mr. Risk, that your house will be rebuilt, and ready for you by the time you are ready for it. Not a word, Sam! It's

no use arguing with Mr. Risk. I know! Well, I must go. Keep everything a secret for the present."

Sam clung to the young man's hand. "Tell her," he whispered, "to look out for Symington. Tell her the news o' her has done me a power o' good. Good luck to ye, Mr. Colin—good luck to ye both."

COLIN hurried to the inn, wrote a letter, and just managed to catch the late night mail for the south. The letter would reach Risk by the second morning delivery. Then he reread the telegram he had found waiting for him at the hospital. It seemed to give him pleasant thoughts, for he smiled. It was from Hilda, and invited him to take tea the following afternoon in the Station Hotel, Newcastle.

Next morning he stepped from the early train at Dunford. In order to turn aside any local curiosity, he went straight to his father's house and got the caretaker to give him breakfast, explaining that he had called on his way to London to collect one or two small articles from his old room. Thereafter he strolled around with his hand-camera and secured some "souvenir snapshots," as he put it to an interested villager. In the course of his stroll he recorded—surreptitiously, it should be remarked—a view of the back of Corrie's cottage, and another of the scene immediately in front of Sam's ruined dwelling.

Passing the post office on the way to the station, he obtained a glimpse of Corrie talking to a farmer in the doorway. Though he detested the man with all his soul, he was tempted to make room for a little pity, so haggard and wretched was the postmaster's appearance. Corrie, after a slight start, gave a perfunctory wave of salutation, which Colin, feeling a hypocrite, returned.

By noon he was in the train again, counting the miles to Newcastle. Within half an hour of the train's leaving Dunford, Corrie dispatched a telegram to Symington—"Left at 11:50."

About the same hour in London, a message was flashed north to greet our traveler with a great disappointment. He had to change at Carlisle; and as he was boarding the Newcastle train there, his heart full of Kitty, hope struggling once more against resignation, an official carrying an orange envelope came along inquiring for "a Mr. Colin Hayward." And presently Colin was reading Risk's message:

Urgent. Return straight to London.

There was just time to rush back to the express train he had so recently left. Afterwards there was more than enough time for wonder and worry.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BURNING OF THE MILL

ON the afternoon of the same day, which happened to be the weekly half-holiday, Rachel Corrie returned from a longish walk undertaken, as she had announced to her brother at dinner, in the hope of relieving a severe headache. In those days it was for her a rare occurrence to leave the house at all and a common one to have a headache, but Corrie had been too self-engrossed to be moved by surprise or sympathy.

Entering the cottage, Rachel certainly did not look much the better for the outing; she seemed, in fact, to be suffering from a faintness, for at first she leaned awhile against the closed door, and then she crept slowly and unsteadily up the passage, keeping her hand on the wall for support. Presently she was peering into the darkened shop—listening, also.

Ere long her brother's voice came indistinctly from the post office beyond; she gathered that he was checking figures with the assistant. Rachel appeared to nerve herself—then stepped stealthily into the shop. On a nail in the wall, just behind the door, she hung a ponderous key—the spare key of the mill, which had been idle that day for the first time in several weeks. For fully a minute she stood motionless save for her breathing, her hand pressed hard to her heart; then, with a heavy sigh, she stole out and laboriously ascended to her room. She was wholly spent as she fell upon her bed; yet at the end of an hour she was down in the

kitchen preparing the evening meal, to which her brother would come when he had finished with the inward evening mail.

Of late John Corrie's appetite had been indifferent; to-night it seemed to have failed him altogether. He sat there speechless, now and then taking a sip of tea, and never once allowing his gaze to fall on his sister—not that she, poor soul, could have met it for an instant. Nevertheless at last she forced herself to speak.

"Can ye no eat, John?"

He shook his head impatiently. "Let me be. I'm no hungry."

With her eyes on the cloth she said in a strange gentleness of tone: "John, dinna trouble overmuch. Maybe everything'll come right yet. Dinna be vexed wi' me, but I believe—John, I believe that if ye took pen now and wrote to Kitty, telling her the truth—" She stopped short, so dreadful was his expression.

"Let that be," he growled, "or ye'll drive me stark mad. Peace—no another word!" He got up and strode from the room.

IN his pocket was a letter, the postmark on which would have told that it had been mailed in London about midnight—a letter which he had been expecting for days, consisting of one penciled word, *"Arrested,"* with neither address nor signature. And by that solitary word Corrie's soul was racked, as between a man's last hope and his final terror.

Alone, Rachel put her hands to her face.

"Oh, God," she murmured, "if only it had been possible! But now the candle mun be left to burn—burn to the end. Maybe—oh, surely—I'll save him yet."

In her methodical way she cleared the table, washed the dishes and set the kitchen in order. Afterward she sat by the fire and tried to read the morning's paper. She noticed that on the previous day Zeniths had risen to six pounds, but the sensational advance moved her not at all. Long after she had ceased to read she kept staring at the printed page. At seven o'clock, feeling her strength ebbing, and knowing how vital it was that she should conserve every spark of energy in her, she went up to her room and lay down. There was still another hour, possibly more, to wait and endure.

At last—at last the sound of running and excited shouts—a thundering on the door below—the opening of the door—

"Mr. Corrie, the mill's on fire!"

A pause that seemed an age; then her brother's voice, harsh, yet almost calm:

"Rachel, the mill's on fire!"

"I'm coming," she tried to call, producing naught but a croak.

She got to the window in time to see him hastening away in the failing light. She made no attempt to follow just then. She lingered, crouching there behind the curtain, until the heavy silence informed her that practically the whole population of Dunford had bolted to the scene of destruction. Then, body and wits under control once more, she took the implements she had prepared, cloaked herself and set out on the road to the mill. Not a soul was in sight.

HER destination was the White Farm. At the door she knocked, ready to plead faintness should the unexpected happen. But no one came. She had gauged pretty accurately the duty-sense of housekeeper and servants in the master's absence. One and all had incontinently deserted the place and their occupations to see the fire she had raised. A chained dog barked wildly; she did not appear to hear it.

The door was not locked. She entered and without hesitation climbed the stair. She had been welcome in the house in the old and happier days of Symington's parents. She had often seen the strong-box in its original place in the sitting-room. Doubtless it was now upstairs. She was counting on that. If he had lately got a safe, she had burned the mill to no purpose. . . . . But God would not let her be cheated so, for was it not all done for her brother's salvation?

And now she was in the apartment above the sitting-room. The light was very dim, but she soon found what she sought. In a moment the chintz cover

was off and laid aside. Then in a sort of splendid fury, with heavy, powerful tools, she attacked the lock, wrenching, twisting, thrusting, driving, heedless of the attendant noise.

And at last the mauled and shattered thing gave. With a fierce blow of the hammer she drove it inward. The heavy lid yielded. The bundle of Zenith certificates was there for her to take. She hid them in her dress.

She swept up the smallest trace of her work, closed the lid, and neatly replaced the chintz cover. There would be no discovery till Symington himself made it. As she left the house she glimpsed, away to the left, a smoky glow, over the hollow that hid the mill. Without a second glance she set out for home along the still deserted road.

Having bolted the cottage door and returned the tools to their place, she sat down to examine her prize.

"The scoundrel has parted wi' five hundred shares!" she muttered after a careful recount of the certificates. "Poor John, it was an evil day when ye let Alec Symington into this house. But Kitty'll forgive ye a tenth part o' her fortune—if she doesna, I'll offer her every penny I possess. Oh, John, I think I've saved ye; and some day I'll confess to ye about the mill. I'll never regret it. . . . . But what's this?"

She had become conscious of a folded paper, unlike in texture the certificates lying on her lap. She must have inadvertently picked it from the strong-box along with the bundle. It was endorsed "Lease of House at 73, Lester Road, Richmond, Surrey." She opened it and read.

"So he's got a house at that place," she reflected. "Well, it's none o' my business. I wonder if John kens. Likely no. . . . . I'll ha' to try to put it back in the box—no! I'll risk nothing for that scoundrel's sake! He can want his lease!" She made to toss it into the fire—then drew back. "I'll keep it in the meantime, along wi' the shares, till the time comes for telling John. The sooner they're hid the better." She rose and stood wavering. "Oh, God, but I'm weak," she whispered. "Help me to win through."

IT was late when her brother came in, begrimed and drenched. She had a meal all but ready for him.

"Tell me about it, John," she said as he came to the fire in dry garments. "I couldna gang—couldna bear to see it."

"Ye would ha' seen a grand blaze," he returned bitterly. "There's nothing left—new machinery and all!"

"Well, well," she said soothingly, "it's a fine thing an insurance policy—"

"Very fine—when ye've paid the premium."

Stopping short in her hospitable task, she stared at him. "But ye paid it a month back!"

"Did I? The days o' grace were up three weeks back, but—but I had—over many other things to think about." A groan burst from him; he put his hands to his head. "Three thousand pound gone up in three hours!"

Rachel's mouth opened, but she was dumb. As if frozen, she stood there by the table, a plate of cut bread in her hand.

"Aye," he went on heavily, "and I'll take my oath it was no accident, for the place where the fire started—"

With a strangled cry the woman tottered and fell crashing across the table.

Ghastly, Corrie sprang to her assistance. Stumblingly he carried her to his chair by the hearth. She was not unconscious; her collapse had been mainly physical. Blood was dropping from a gash in her wrist made by a broken dish.

"Dinna heed me," she murmured; "I'll be all right in a minute, John."

He fetched water and cloths, knelt, washed the wound and bandaged it awkwardly yet with some tenderness. Slow tears ran down her cheeks.

"Am I hurting ye, Rachel?" he asked.

She shook her head.

He spoke again. "I shouldna ha' told ye so quick about the insurance. Dinna keep thinking on it." Then with obviously a great effort: "Ye've been a good sister to me, Rachel. I—I wish I had been a better brother."

His words left her speechless. What had come to him?

He answered the unspoken question. "Money's no everything, after all," he said hoarsely, shamefacedly. "When I

saw ye fall, I thought ye were killed—thought I had killed ye—wi' ma tongue. And—and just for an instant I saw myself without ye—alone—in this house—in this place—in the whole world. I had never thought o' it that way before." He sighed and got to his feet. "We'll say no more about it, Rachel, but I'll try to treat ye better from now." He cleared his throat, and averting his gaze said: "I wish I had never set eyes on Symington."

RACHEL restrained herself then, not for her own sake but for his. For his own safety he must not know her secret a moment before the time was ripe. Moreover, though his kind words had moved hér deeply, they had not healed her wounded trust in him.

All she could say was: "Ye'll aye find me ready and willing to help ye, John; and it's never too late—"

"I doubt it." He sighed again heavily. "But things mun take their course now. Ye'd better gang to your bed, or ye'll be useless in the morning, and I've got to be early at the mill. I'll get my supper myself."

She went without a word.

Corrie sank into his chair.

"Almighty!" he moaned to himself, "what devil started me speculating on the Stock Exchange? Gone, the savings o' a lifetime! And now the mill that would ha' sold for enough to save me and maybe my savings likewise—in ashes—just ashes! It's ruin, black ruin, unless Symington does all he's promised. And the postman's getting better! I'd write to Kitty this night, if it wasna too late—but now I'm damned in her eyes forever and ever!"

Small wonder if it were indeed so!

In the study at Albermarle Mansions Colin, very pale, sat staring at a sheet of typewritten paper which Risk had put into his hand, saying:

"My sister, as I've already explained, found this on her return to the flat. Steady, now!"

On the sheet was written:

Dear Hilda:

A detective has come to arrest me. He says it's the post office. I'm not a bit afraid, only sorry to trouble you so. Sam will see me through. Good-by for a little while. KITTY.

CHAPTER XX

AN ADVENTURE

KITTY was not a little excited at the prospect of her trip with Hilda, though at first her pride had raised a difficulty, and she had begged to be allowed to pay her own expenses.

"Very well," Hilda had promptly rejoined, "if you wish to hurt my brother's feelings, not to mention mine, I can't prevent you. Besides, you will spoil my holiday—"

"But Hilda, I can't be always taking—"

"You can have your revenge when the play is making your fortune."

"I wonder if it will. . . . . Anyway, I'm glad Mr. West is going to be reasonable. Aren't you?"

"Let's go out and buy things for our holiday," Hilda had said rather hurriedly. "We have no time to waste to-day. It's a nuisance, but I'm afraid I shall have to go to the office for an hour to-night, so that I may leave things in shape."

"And I must finish that typing before I go to bed. Oh, Hilda, sometimes I can't help feeling that it's all a dream!"

"What—the typing?"

"All the wonderful things that have happened to me lately. Why, it's not a month since that horrible time in Dunford. I only wish for one thing—to hear from Sam. I can't understand his not writing."

"Possibly Mr. Hayward, who has gone to Scotland, my brother's note tells me, will have news. I am wiring him to take tea with us at Newcastle to-morrow afternoon."

"Oh!"

"And, naturally, I want to look my best! So come along to the shops at once! By the way, we have dinner early to-night—Matilda's evening at the moving pictures."

IT was now shortly after eight. Hilda had not been long gone to the office, after promising to return by ten and wishing, secretly, that she had asked Matilda to postpone her outing. But her casual suggestion in that direction had been scoffed at by Kitty; and to

have carried it further would only have made the girl nervous.

Kitty was too absorbed to feel lonely. Under the shaded electric light she was making an effort to finish her typing before Hilda's return. She was in the best of spirits that youth and health can supply, and she was looking forward eagerly to the morrow—and perhaps the morrow's afternoon.

Nevertheless she did start when a bell in the distance purred suddenly. "Silly!" she called herself the next moment. It was just the hour for the postman, and probably he had a packet that would not go into the letter-box. She went at once to the door.

A thick-set man of middle age, heavily mustached but not unpleasantly featured, wearing dark tweeds and bowler hat, said:

"You are Miss Kitty Carstairs."

Before she could answer, he was standing beside her and the door was closed.

"I have something to say to you, Miss Carstairs," he proceeded in a quiet voice. "I think you ought to sit down to hear it."

For some seconds the girl was incapable of speech and action. But her mind was working, and it perceived that she gained no advantage by remaining in the confined space of the little passage. In silence she led the way to the sitting-room.

"Who are you, and what do you want with me?" she managed to say, taking her stand with the table between them. She began to suspect that he was a messenger from Symington, but there was something "decent" about his face that reassured her.

His reply was certainly unexpected.

"I am a detective, and I hold a warrant for your arrest. I have to warn you that anything you may say now may be used against you later."

Kitty went white, but it was with anger. "Who," she demanded at last, "has dared to do such a thing? Who desires my arrest?"

"The warrant is issued at the instance of the Postmaster General—"

"Ah! I see! I suppose—"

"Miss Carstairs, I warn you again that—"

"Does all this mean that I have got to go with you—now—to the police office?" To herself she was saying: "Don't be a coward! You've nothing to be afraid of."

"It is my duty to take you there," the man answered, "and I hope you will not make it harder for me than you can help."

His respectful tone stayed the sinking at her heart.

"Can't I send a message to a friend?" she asked.

"You might leave a short note. I—I think," he said, almost nervously, "I can allow you five minutes—not more—to write it and put a few things together." He wiped his forehead, though the window was open and the room cool. "Of course," he went on quickly, noticing her look of dismay, "you may not be detained long. No doubt your friends will arrange for bail. But now—please—I must ask you to make haste."

"Will you tell me—" she began.

"I can answer no more questions."

APPARENTLY there was nothing for it but to submit. She sat down, scribbled the brief note that we have seen, and rose.

"I am going to my room."

He followed her as far as the outer door, where he mounted guard, as it were.

Within five minutes she rejoined him, dressed for out of doors, a small traveling-bag in her hand.

"Let me get it over," she said.

"You are a brave young lady," he remarked. "Allow me." He relieved her of the bag. "A very brave young lady!"

"I've done nothing to make me afraid."

With his fingers on the door handle, he said:

"Will you give me your word to—to come with me quietly?"

Her head went up. "Of course!"

He opened the door and stood aside for her to pass out. Now there was no doubt about his nervousness; he was paler than she.

She went steadily before him down the narrow wooden stairway. On the

landing he overtook her, and they continued their descent on the broader stone steps, passing business offices closed for the night.

At the entrance a plain-looking motor brougham was waiting.

"I hope you will remember, Miss Carstairs," he whispered, "that I used no harshness."

"I will—thank you. Have we far to go?"

"It's a longish drive."

As they crossed the pavement Kitty thought it strange that no one stared; then she almost laughed at the stupidity of the notion. Why should anyone stare? Truly, the man was behaving very nicely.

He opened the door, followed her into the brougham and closed it with a bang. The brougham immediately rolled away. He took the narrow seat opposite, and she heard him draw a long breath.

She tried to balk the returning fears. Anger at her uncle assisted her to some extent. He must have gone quite mad! And then a dreadful thought struck and almost stunned her spirit. Suppose something had happened to Sam! Suppose he were—dead!

TIME passed ere she recovered her wits and courage. Her aunt knew the truth, and Kitty could not believe that Rachel Corrie, even for her brother's sake, would fall to perjury. And there was Mr. Risk and Hilda and Mr. West and—Colin! Oh, with such friends, why should she be afraid? No doubt she was in for a most disagreeable ordeal; but it was bound to end in her complete triumph. . . . . Well, she was having an adventure, and no mistake! Adventures—how lightly she had uttered the word in the past to Colin! How gently he had treated her foolish talk! Her mind went back to that night in the little wood at Dunford, when she had let him kiss her. Then his prospects and hers had been simply blank. Now—but what had made her allow him to kiss her?

She came out of a long reflection. Indeed, the destination was evidently a far one! She had not noticed the course taken by the brougham—not that she could have recognized any streets other than one or two of the main West End thoroughfares. It seemed to her now that they must be somewhere in the suburbs.

"Are we nearly there?" she asked her guardian.

He cleared his throat. "Still a bit to go," he said, and gave a long, vague explanation, which she could not follow, as to police districts and other matters. "My work ends," he concluded, "when I have handed you over to the —the chief inspector."

She thought of asking him what the chief inspector was like, and whether she would have to go to Scotland, but suddenly she felt too tired for talk. The reaction had come, and she lay back exhaustedly, with the tears not far away. She was no longer impatient to reach the destination.

THE man drew down the blinds. Soon the speed of the brougham was increased; it seemed to be traveling over a different sort of road. There were occasional ruts that suggested the country.

At the end of what seemed a very long, yet too short period, the man said:

"We are practically there now." And under his breath he added: "Thank God!"

The brougham lurched round a corner; presently its pace slackened.

The man drew up the blind on the left, and the moment the motion ceased, threw open the door and jumped out, laying her bag on the ground.

"Will you get out, please?" he said. His voice had become husky and fearful.

She obeyed and looked about her.

"But surely this is not—"

Speech failed as the man, with a whispered "Forgive!" sprang into the brougham, which immediately started.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned the man, "to think I've lived to do a job like this for the sake of twenty pounds!"

Kitty found herself standing on the earthen foot-walk of a badly lighted road, in front of an iron gate, open, with a shrub-bordered path leading to a large, dark house. That was all she had grasped, when some one sprang

upon her, a heavy shawl was thrown over her head and face, and—her senses failed.

SHE came to herself, lying on a couch in a large room with a low ceiling which, like the walls, had been whitewashed but lately, for there were dampish patches here and there. The floor was of stone flags, but its bareness was partly covered by Turkish rugs. There were no windows, unless one cared to give the name to a couple of oblong openings protected by gratings close to the roof. Two electric bulbs, which, with their wires, had evidently been hurriedly installed, depended from the ceiling; an electric heater glowed in a niche in one of the walls. Across one of the corners a curtain had been hung on a wire, and being only partly drawn, permitted a glimpse of a small white bed, a white dressing-table and a white washstand.

Near the center of the room was a round table covered with a new cloth and decorated with two pairs of silver flower-vases containing carnations. A middle-aged woman was engaged in putting the finishing touches to a meal consisting of a cold chicken, sliced ham, salad, bread and butter and so forth—also a small bottle of champagne and a siphon of lemonade.

Kitty sat up, but she was still too dazed to notice the incongruities. She saw only a woman's back and the white walls.

"Have they put me in prison?" she asked faintly.

The woman turned a red, expressionless face, and answered:

"Maybe, Miss. But your supper's ready. Kindly ring if you want anything."

"I want to see the—the inspector," said the girl, still groping in a mist.

"Yes, Miss. To-morrow, maybe. Your bed's ready when you want it."

She went out. A bolt was shot.

Kitty pressed her palms to her temples, and with eyes closed remained motionless for several minutes. Then, with a sigh, she took courage to look about her.

It was well that she had a healthy heart, for at the realization of her surroundings a weakly one must surely have stopped.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BARRED WINDOW

IN the study Colin rose to his feet, a prey to distress and wrath. Kitty's message fluttered in his hand.

"I had better take the midnight train," he said, striving for control.

"To what end?" Risk gently asked, while Hilda, who looked worn-out, took a step forward as if to speak.

"To compel that blackguard Corrie—"

"Please sit down again, Hayward," Risk said, enforcing his words with a mild pressure. "As far as we can see it at the moment, Corrie had no direct hand in the outrage—"

"He has got the Post Office authorities to act—"

"The Post Office people had nothing to do with it. Pull yourself together, man! I'm going to give you a shock. . . . . You tell him, Hilda."

"Mr. Hayward," she said pityingly, "the person who took Kitty away was merely masquerading as a detective. He had nothing to do with the Post Office. My brother learned that much within a few minutes after my giving him the alarm. . . . . But don't let this crush you. We want your help, you know." Hilda had a way of striking the right note.

Colin got a grip on himself. "Symington, of course," he said, steadying his voice.

"Oh, of course!" she assented bitterly. "And I went out and left her alone!"

"At the same time," said Risk, "Symington did not move from his hotel after eight o'clock last night, and he went north by the mail-train at five this morning. That does not prove his innocence; on the other hand, it does not help to prove the other thing."

"You have set the police to work?" said Colin sharply. At that moment he hated Risk. Why on earth had not the man held up Symington the moment he doubted the latter's right to the Zeniths? Why had he insisted on

making a "game" of it all? But the feeling passed. He knew too well that Risk had been as sincerely anxious to shield Kitty from anything sordid and ugly as he had been eager to serve her material interests.

"No," said Risk mildly. "I have no supercilious feelings about the methods of our police, but for Miss Carstairs' own sake we want publicity less than ever now. I have eight men at work, who will do all that Scotland Yard could do—and I am not resting much myself."

COLIN thought for a moment. "Knowing what we do," he said, "we don't need to look far for a motive on Symington's part. The Zeniths alone—"

"Kitty will never give in," cried Hilda. "He'll never force her to marry him—"

"Good God!" groaned Colin, "to think of her being in that scoundrel's power!"

Risk laid a hand on his shoulder. "Blame me, if you must, Hayward," he said quietly, "but don't give way to despair." After a slight pause he added: "Give me four days."

"You have a clue?"

"Not quite—only the means, I hope, of obtaining one. But don't ask me questions. My plan may be unnecessary, after all. We may perhaps find the way without it."

"But Mr. Risk, can't you put your plan into operation at once?"

"It requires some developing. For heaven's sake, Hayward," exclaimed Risk, with unwonted warmth, "try to believe that I'd give all I have if I could get the poor girl out of that cad's clutches without an hour's delay!"

"You will trust my brother, wont you?" said Hilda softly, and next moment Colin was silently wringing Risk's hand. Somehow he could not doubt this man.

"And what can I do?" he asked presently.

"Though it may seem out of place, I want you now to tell me the results of your journey. Also let me have the films you exposed. By the way," Risk went on, "West has got a week's leave, and is going to spend a few days in the neighborhood of Dunford. He's unknown there, and another flying visit from you might seem more than odd to some people. Besides, I want you here. Only, I'd like you to see West before he starts by the midnight train—you may be able to give him some hints about the district, and so on. Therefore we'll get on with our talk, and you can be over at Euston soon after eleven-thirty. He expects you. He would have come here, but he had an appointment with the manager of the Planet Theater—"

"You see," put in Hilda, "we are so sure of having Kitty with us again, almost immediately, that the play is going forward as if nothing had happened."

IT is to be feared that Colin did not find much comfort in the remark, but at least it reminded him once more that a cool head was then of greater value to Kitty's cause than all the warm hearts in the world.

Though he could not have stated why, he was feeling a little less cheerless when he left Aberdare Mansions for the meeting with West. He was noting in his mind certain suggestions which he thought might be of use to his friend, and absent-mindedly looking out for a taxicab, when one appeared and came to the pavement in response to his signal.

"Euston," he said, and got in.

But as he was about to draw to the door, a hand was laid on it and a voice requested the driver to "hold on."

"Excuse me," continued the voice, which belonged to a shabby-genteel, sharp-featured young man, "but I think you are Mr. Colin Hayward." An uncleanly hand presented an envelope.

"What's this?" muttered Colin—then seized it with a start. It was the covering of a note he had sent Kitty a week ago. "Where did you get this?" he demanded.

"Through a barred window," was the answer. "The lady told me what you were like, and where I'd be likely to find you,—this isn't the first place I've tried,—and she gave me a sovereign, and she said you would be sure to give me another, sir." An unclean palm slid forward hopefully.

"But look here," cried Colin, his heart thumping, "there's no message written here! Have you lost—"

"The lady said she had nothing to write with, but she said you would surely understand and come quick."

Colin drew a long breath. "Where is —the barred window?"

"Gimme the sovereign, please, and I'll show you. It's not far."

"I'll give you five sovereigns when you've shown me!" said Colin. "Tell the man where to go and get inside."

He had not forgotten about West, and Risk was still in his mind; but they had simply ceased to matter.

"How far?" he inquired, as the cab started.

"About ten minutes from here."

"What sort of place is it?"

"Respectable—oh, quite respectable, but not the sort of place a gentleman like you would fancy to live in, sir. First time I was ever there, too. Just taking a stroll, wondering where I was going to get my next meal, when I heard a female cry from an area, and looking down I saw a hand moving at a window, a few inches open, behind bars that were—"

"That'll do. Look here, I may require your help."

"Welcome, sir—when I've touched that fiver."

"Take it now." A bank-note rustled.

"You're a real gentleman! Thank ye, sir!"

BEFORE long the cab left familiar thoroughfares and began a journey through a succession of more or less mean streets. In reply to Colin's questions his companion named some of them, without, however, making Colin much the wiser. But what mattered it whither he was going, so long as it was to Kitty? His heart was wild with anticipation; his hand trembled on the crushed envelope that she had so lately touched.

Colin had no fear of not being able to rescue Kitty. If necessary, he would request police assistance, but he did not expect to have to go that length. People who abducted girls, or who took temporary charge of them, were not the sort to wait for the police. Colin, too, had a fairly heavy stick which Sharp had put into his hand as he left the flat. Certainly he was not afraid. He looked at his watch. Why, he might not only rescue Kitty but manage to catch West at Euston also! As for Symington and Corrie. . . . . The shabby-genteel young man began to talk earnestly.

The cab stopped at a corner. The guide got out and walked slowly down a narrow pavement, in front of houses that still wore an air of respectability, dingy indeed, and decaying, but not to be wholly suppressed. The long street was indifferently lighted and void of traffic.

Colin paid the driver and followed. By arrangement he did not overtake his guide, but watched him for a signal.

They were halfway down the street when the leader threw out his left arm. Colin marked the position; and on reaching it found a gateless space in the railing leading to a steep and narrow flight of steps. He paused for a moment, noted the second low window on his right, which showed a very faint glimmer behind its bars and blind, looked again to make sure that his guide had halted within call, as agreed, and with a wave of his hand, and grasping his stick, began cautiously to descend into the darkness. A moment later he was tapping discreetly on the window. And then—

He was seized from behind, thrown backward and downward into, as it seemed, an atmosphere of chloroform. The last distinct sound he heard was the *chug-chug* of a motor, and a strange voice saying: "Hurry up; there's the car."

AT five minutes before midnight Anthony West rushed from the train to a telephone-box and rang up Risk.

"Colin hasn't turned up," he said without preamble.

Almost for the first time Miss Risk heard her brother swear. But he did it without losing his calmness.

"Then you must go on, Anthony, and carry out the program as well as you can," he replied. "You must use your own discretion a little more, that's all. Don't lose your train. Accidents will happen. Good luck to you."

He hung up the receiver and turned to his sister, grave concern in his face.

"Hayward has not arrived at Euston. Of course, he may have met with an accident on the way,—if so, the police will soon tell us,—but now I could almost bet that Symington did not really go north this morning—or rather, he turned back before he had gone far. I ought to have given the beggar credit for more cunning."

Hilda considered before she asked: "But why in the world should Symington want to harm him?"

"There may be several reasons. Perhaps I ought to tell you where Hayward disappeared that night you and Miss Carstairs were dining here. He went to Symington's hotel and gave the rascal a sound thrashing—"

"Oh, splendid!"

"Yes, but indiscreet." He sighed. "I don't like it. Cad as he is, I could almost trust Symington not to maltreat the girl, but—" He returned to the telephone and rang up a police-station on the route to Euston.

"But he would never dare," began Hilda, and stopped short, remembering Symington's face as she had seen it that night in the train. Cruel—that was the word—the face of a man who would inflict torture to gain his end.

Risk had hit on the truth. Symington had not gone far north that morning. As a matter of fact, he had left the train at Rugby, entered a powerful motor-car and come south again—not to the Kingsway Grand Hotel, but to a rather dilapidated mansion situated in Lester Road, Richmond.

AT Dunford, on the following evening, John Corrie found among the letters from the south one for himself. For the second time he gazed at a single penciled word, *"Arrested"*—and shuddered between terror and hope. The man's nerves seemed to be in rags, for he paled, started violently and dropped the letter when the door of the post office opened.

But it was only a tourist who entered. Corrie's whole being bounded up in relief—only to drop sickeningly at the stranger's first words:

"I wish to see Miss Kitty Carstairs."

CHAPTER XXII

THE SECOND PRISONER

THE woman with the red, expressionless face put her head into Kitty's prison and said:

"I've to tell ye that he'll be coming to see you in five minutes from now." She closed the door and shot the bolt.

Kitty was seated on the couch with a book in her hand. She had actually managed to read a little, though it is highly probable that she could not have told very clearly what the pages had been about. Yet the fact that she had been able to fix her attention on a mere story for the space of a couple of hours proved that she had regained a fair command over her wits and recovered at least something of her courage. At all events, of the panic of twenty-four hours ago little trace remained. She was pale, but it was the pallor of anxiety, not terror; and now, at the woman's announcement, the apprehension in her fine eyes was counterbalanced by a determined firming of her pretty, sensitive mouth.

"He can do nothing, after all," she assured herself, "and it wont be very long till they find out where I am. I must show him I'm not afraid of him."

It was past midnight, but she felt no weariness, for she had slept through the afternoon. She was, in fact, feeling as well as ever she had felt. Just after the first horrid realization of her situation, she had made up her mind to starve rather than accept of his hospitality; but soon she had perceived the absurdity of such a course.

"For goodness' sake, be as sensible as you can," she commanded herself. "You've got to keep fit and healthy, for you don't know what you may have to do with your strength. And the food is of the best, perfectly cooked and beautifully served. So don't try to pose as a persecuted heroine on the stage. You've been fearfully lucky, and this is only going to be a nasty little episode, which you'll laugh at before long!"

All the same, she had a breakdown or two in spite of her brave words, and the time had passed very, very slowly. Now, as she heard a step at the door, she nerved herself to play a part.

SYMINGTON entered, closing the door behind him. He was in evening dress and cut a handsome figure, in his way. His countenance was somewhat flushed; his eyes glistened rather unpleasantly. For various reasons he had delayed visiting his prisoner until now.

"I am sorry I could not come to see you sooner, Kitty," he said, halting by the flower-decorated table and resting his hand on the back of a chair. "This room," he went on, "is not what I would have chosen for your reception, but it was the best I could do in the time. I have a fine house upstairs being prepared for—us. Still, I hope you have been fairly comfortable. You have only to ask for anything you want." He paused, watching her.

Her eyes had never left the book; she appeared oblivious of his presence.

"Kitty," he said, "will you kindly tell me if there is anything I can do."

"You can go away," she answered quietly, without moving.

"There is something you must hear before I go," he said. "And Kitty, don't trouble to try to make me lose my temper, because I'm not going to oblige you in that way. In any other way, you have only to ask."

"Then if you must talk, please leave my name out."

After a slight pause he said: "Would you mind putting down your book for a few minutes?"

She lowered it, her finger at the place, and faced him.

"Well?"

"Have you no questions to ask me?"

"None."

"You are great!" he exclaimed. "But I have a question to ask."

She lifted her hand to her mouth and gave a little yawn. His color deepened, but he spoke calmly enough.

"How soon will you marry me, Kitty?"

There was cruelty in her voice. "Mr. Symington, how far do you intend to go with this idiotic business?" She threw a significant glance around the room. "It must have cost you a good deal of money, so far—and all for nothing!"

He winced but kept himself in hand.

"How soon will you marry me?"

"You know I will never marry you." She made as if to resume her book.

"I know that you shall!" He moved quickly and stood over her. "Don't you see that you are in my power?"

"I'm under lock and key, if that's what you mean."

"Don't force me to tell you what I mean. I'd far rather have your promise without that. . . . . Kitty, listen! You can't deny that you know I'm desperately fond of you." His words came swiftly now. "And I can't deny that I'm aware you don't even like me. But just as you could make what you please of me, I believe, in time, I could—"

"Stop!"

"You must hear me! I'm a rich man, though hardly anybody knows it. I can offer you a splendid life—give you things you've never dreamed of, take you abroad, make you a home wherever you desire. . . . . Kitty, I confess I've done lots to be ashamed of in my time, but I swear I'll make you a good husband—"

"Oh, do stop!" she said, her calm broken. "How can you—how dare you—talk so after all you have done—the abominable things you have done to me? Rich? What should I care if you had all the money in the world? Why, I shouldn't care enough to ask how you had got it—"

HIS hand fell on her shoulder. "Be careful," he said in tense tones. "For as surely as I am touching you now you are going to marry me!"

She shook off his hand. "If you touch me again—" She stopped short.

"Well?" It was almost a sneer. Next moment he said: "Don't be afraid, Kitty. I'm not that sort. You—you're sacred. But you do not leave this place until we go out of it together to be married. Don't think you can escape, and don't imagine it will be so very long till you give in. Your friends may find their way here some day, but they wont be in time. Afterwards—what will your friends matter? You'll be my wife, and no one shall dare come between us!"

"You are mad!" she exclaimed, cling-

ing to her courage. "For your own sake give up this crazy notion. Otherwise you'll be dreadfully punished!"

With a short laugh he moved away a few paces; then he faced her again.

"You deliberately wont understand my love for you, Kitty, and you don't understand my power—as yet. For your own sake, and another's, I beg you once more to give in without forcing me to use—"

"Oh, what is the good of all this talk? You can make things uncomfortable for me, for a few days, perhaps, but you can never compel me to do the most hateful thing I can imagine—in other words, marry you. And that is my last word, Mr. Symington." She took up her book and opened it, but her fingers trembled on the page.

With difficulty he restrained his passion. "Very well," he said a little thickly. "I'm sorry, but you force me on the course I would have avoided if possible." Softly he cleared his throat. "Now I'll explain: A little while ago I received a telephone message to the effect that— Ah!" he broke off. An electric bell had sounded in the distance. "Let us wait." He smiled as he took out his cigarette-case, but the fingers that presently held the match were not much steadier than hers. "Listen, listen!" he muttered.

IN spite of herself Kitty listened. At first her ears could detect nothing; then they heard the closing of a distant, heavy door. A brief period of silence was followed by the sound, faint to begin with, of slow, heavy footfalls. Soon she realized that they were descending a stone stair. Nearer they came, and at last seemed to reach the level. Nearer still—they were coming along the passage outside her door. They rang dully and erratically on the stone flags. Kitty thought of two men bearing a weighty burden. As they passed the door she heard voices, gruff and impatient.

Suddenly Symington gave an odd, triumphant laugh, saying:

"My second prisoner has arrived!"

Involuntarily the girl lifted her eyes.

"For the last time, Kitty, will you promise to marry me as soon as I—"

She sprang to her feet. "You miserable fool," she cried, "I'd rather be dead!"

He grinned. "The more you hurt me, the more I love you! It's no use fighting me, Kitty. I'm going to win," he declared, "for you're bound to give in. Why? Because my second prisoner shall not get so much as a crust until you give me your word! Remember, you forced me to it." He swung round to the door.

"You coward!" she gasped. "Who is your second prisoner?"

Without answering he went out. It was as though her wall of defense had suddenly crumbled into ruins.

CHAPTER XXIII

A LETTER FROM WEST

ON the third evening following that of Kitty's disappearance, Risk was reading a letter which the last post had just brought him. The letter was from Anthony West, and the important parts of it ran as follows:

I have now completed the arrangements according to your instructions. This town is only twenty miles from Dunford, and the road between is excellent. Besides, the moon will oblige on the night appointed. I am no judge of cars, but think I have engaged the sort you require.

I saw the postman yesterday. He is fairly on the mend now, but worrying at not hearing from Miss Kitty. Herewith three snapshots of him, taken while sitting on the hospital veranda. By the way, I gathered that he would not seek to lift a finger against Corrie without Kitty's permission.

Corrie is a hard nut. He takes me for a friend of Kitty's late father, and I have allowed him to think that my first inquiry was prompted more by a belated sense of duty than by any real interest in the girl. I dropped into the post office about closing time last night, and found him less disinclined to talk. He said nothing directly against his niece, merely remarking that in the face of his advice she had gone to London, where she had friends, and that while she had not yet written, he hoped he might be able to hand me her address before long. To extract truth from such a person will take a bit of doing.

The sister, I learn from the gossips, has been ill, though not seriously so, for the last few days. I should add that Cor-

rie goes about saying that the burning of his mill was a piece of foul play. A man told me to-day that it was not insured.

No word of Symington. He has not been seen in Dunford for more than a week. As far as I can gather, no one would regret his permanent absence.

I see Zeniths have jumped to eight pounds. Do you still say they are worth twelve pounds? I almost wish I had taken your advice, and pawned my shirt!

Well, I am looking forward to our meeting here on Thursday with pleasure, not to say curiosity. What's the game, I wonder? But perhaps you will have found Kitty and Colin before then—God make it so.

Risk laid the letter on the table, placed the snapshots in an envelope, directed it and rang for his man.

"Sharp, take a taxi and deliver this to Mr. Boon. Say I'm sorry it comes a little late, but that he must get his men to work harder. Tell him to spare neither man nor money. There must be no failure to-night. I am going out presently. If I'm late, don't wait up. Pack my bag for one night; include both my revolvers. Call me at eight; breakfast at nine; and a taxi for nine-thirty."

AN hour later Risk was at the flat in Long Acre.

"This wont do, Hilda," he said kindly. "You're not going to help matters by breaking down. Have you been out to-day?"

"No. I feel now that I daren't leave the flat in case she should come back—perhaps with that beast after her—poor little soul! Oh, John, I sometimes think it was all my fault. I should not have left her alone that night—"

"Nonsense! If it comes to that, I am to blame, for I might have foreseen. But you'll soon have her with you again, Hilda!"

"Have you news?"—eagerly.

He gave her West's letter, saying: "You can look at it afterwards. No; I can't say I have news, but in a few hours I shall be ready to act. That wretched Corrie shall tell me where his niece and Hayward are."

"Are you sure?" All at once she put her hands on his shoulders and looked searchingly into his face. "Oh, John," she whispered, "you can't hide it—you're afraid of something!"

"Yes," he said at last with sudden weariness, "I'm afraid." Next moment he drew himself up. "But that's because, like you, I'm tired out. A few hours' sleep will make all the difference to both of us. Wont you come back with me and stay the night? I hate leaving you here."

She shook her head. "Imagine if she came in the middle of the night—"

"Try not to imagine things, my dear. And I'll just spend the night here. This couch will do. Ask your maid to call me at seven. And go straight off to bed yourself. How's that?"

"Oh, you good brother!" she cried softly. "I was wondering how I was going to get through another night alone!"

Soon she retired, a little more hopeful, and ere long was in a sleep of sheer exhaustion.

But for Risk, wearied as he was, there was scarcely any rest. He was desperately anxious. He could not conceive of Symington's daring actually to injure the girl; but what if the man struck at her through his other victim? Risk groaned at the thought. He went to the window, and threw it wide to the still, mild night. Ah, it was no longer a game he was engaged in, but a business most terribly serious, vital to the future peace of his soul. For he loved—no need to deny it to the stars—he loved Kitty Carstairs; and a lover's insight had informed him that, sooner or later, her heart would turn to Colin Hayward, who had put faith and trust in him, who regarded him as benefactor, aye, and true friend. So he had his honor as well as his love to serve in smashing the enemy. Yet had Colin not come to London, what might not have happened?

At last he tore himself from the night and his sorry dreams, and lay down, not to sleep, but grimly to rehearse, in minutest detail, all that he had planned for the morrow. And every now and then he was interrupted by a dread.

ANOTHER was rehearsing a plan, that still, mild night. In a small room, furnished with odds and ends, sat Symington. The atmosphere was unpleasant with cigar-reek and whisky-

fumes. Since his tremendous bout of dissipation the man had somehow failed to regain the mastery with respect to alcohol. Yet he was far from being intoxicated. Apart from the plan itself, two things were especially clear to his intelligence. First: Zeniths had boomed to eight and a fourth; second: he had less than twenty pounds on hand. It would be necessary to convert another certificate into cash at the earliest moment possible. He was tempted to convert them all into cash at the present magnificent price; only greed to obtain yet more restrained him.

"Nothing for it," he thought, "but to travel to-morrow night, after—Unless—why, the thing might be done to-night! No, no! Steady! Don't be a fool and spoil everything by rushing it! If her mind is not sufficiently prepared, and if he doesn't look sufficiently—" Breaking off, he rang the bell at the side of the fireplace.

The woman with the red, expressionless face answered the summons.

"How is the lady now?" he asked.

"Sleeping at last, but she's restless. I doubt she wont sleep long." Her pale eyes avoided his. "Though I don't know what you may be after, Mr. Granton," the hard mouth said slowly, "I take the liberty of warning you not to carry it too far—"

"Mind your own business, and clear out. Send your man to me."

"No offense intended, but I doubt she hasn't eaten a bite to-day," said the woman, and went out. Her humanity was not equal to the grand wages she was getting.

SYMINGTON sighed, took a drink and muttered: "Poor Kitty! Perhaps we may get it over to-night, after all."

A huge lout of a man, with a red beard and a bald head, shuffled in.

"Well, how is he now?"

"Not much change. Looking peaked a bit. But he made a joke when he said good-night. Expect he'll feel a goodish deal worse by to-morrow."

Symington considered. "When you go downstairs," he said at last, "you will take away the water and give him none to-morrow."

"What? No water, Mr. Granton?"

"That's what I said."

"Oh, but surely that's a bit—"

"Are you going to obey or not?"

The man lifted his shoulders. "All right, Mr. Granton; it's no affair of mine. Only—"

"Get out!"

The man shuffled away. He had an ugly past known to his employer.

Symington cursed under his breath. "No good for to-night. Poor Kitty! It's a pity, but I can't help it. Well, to-morrow night ought to settle it, and if not, I can wait. But I might have gone north to-night, lifted the stuff and got back here under twenty-four hours. Why the blazes didn't I think of that?" His eyes roved as if in search of an answer, and lighted on the decanter. He glowered at it, and a flush, almost purple, overran his countenance. "Damn you," he suddenly shouted, "it was you that kept me!" And snatching it from the table, he hurled it across the room so that it burst into fragments against the wall. There was a breathless pause till he asked in a frightened whisper: "What the devil made me do that—made me do that?"

He went to bed without finishing the drink in the tumbler.

CHAPTER XXIV

AFTER THREE DAYS

KITTY was undoubtedly nearing the limit of human endurance. Threats and offers of bribes had alike failed to move the red-faced woman; not one out of a hundred questions had she answered save by the formulæ, "I'm sure I couldn't say, Miss," or "You'll have to ask himself about that."

It was the fourth night of her incarceration, the third since Symington's visit. At first she had demanded his presence; later she had implored. The reply was always the same: "Maybe soon; but you must have patience, Miss." Less than an hour ago she had heard it, and now the quaint little clock on the wall, which she had sometimes loved for its "company," and sometimes

wanted to smash for its heartlessness, tinkled nine. Was another day going to pass without relief, another night of awful uncertainty approaching? She had given up trying to persuade herself that her captor was not vile enough to carry out his menace against Colin—for Colin, she could not doubt, was the second prisoner.

And yet Kitty Carstairs was not at the very end of her wits. One thing she had in her power to do. She could starve herself! Yesterday she had scarcely touched food; to-day she had not broken her fast. There on the table, with its mocking carnations, was a silver tray bearing sundry delicacies, exquisitely served, which the woman had left on her last visit for the night. They taxed the girl's powers of resistance, but her spirit conquered the flesh.

"God, hear me," she whispered; "let me not eat till I am convinced that Colin has had food." She was feeling weak and somewhat faint, but the sickly headache had abated, and her mind was very clear.

"I will try once more," she told herself. "I will pretend to be ill, and that may bring him. Then I will show him I am determined to starve. I shouldn't be much good to him dead!"

HER finger was on the bell when she heard a sound in the passage. The bolt was drawn back, and Symington's voice said: "Get to your bed. I don't want to see you again to-night." A rough voice answered: "Right you are, sir. Good night."

Then Symington entered. Without preface he exclaimed in hurt tones: "Kitty, what's wrong with the food?"

"Is your other prisoner getting the same?" she asked quietly, approaching the table.

His laugh was lost in a crash.

Kitty had lifted the tray and flung it at his feet.

"There's your rubbish!" she panted, catching hold of a chair-back. "You can't beat me!"

"By God!" he exclaimed, furious; then he restrained himself. "You can't keep it up, Kitty, my dear. One day of real hunger is nothing to brag about. Wait till you see my other prisoner. I'm going to take you there now. He has had three days of it—and no water since yesterday. He'll advise you not to be foolish."

"You beast!"

He winced, but he merely said: "Come!"

She did not hesitate even when he took hold of her arm.

"You are a great fool," she said. "Can't you understand that any decent man would advise me to commit suicide rather than marry you?"

"Be silent!" His fingers crushed her flesh.

He led her along a passage lighted by electricity. A couple of windows, she noticed, were boarded over with metal-lined wood. They passed a couple of doors similarly strengthened, and with stout bolts apparently new. They turned a corner and stopped. The topmost third of the door in front of them had been cut away, and the opening fitted with steel bars.

"Look in," said Symington.

Kitty saw a chamber which might have served as a storeroom in the past. The shelving had been removed; the walls were torn and filthy. A table, a chair and an ancient sofa constituted the furnishings. A single light hung from the ceiling.

ON the sofa lay a young man, the state of whose raiment suggested a very long journey without a dressing-case. His face was gray and pinched.

"Oh, Colin!" she cried.

His eyes opened, peeringly; he struggled into a sitting posture and pressed a hand to his brow.

"Why, it's Kitty!" he said with a laugh that died abruptly. "I'd forgotten," he muttered. A short pause;

then: "So we're both prisoners. But he wont starve you, Kitty. Well, I hope our jailer is enjoying himself while it lasts. Oh, you're there, Symington! Kitty, has he told you about the thrashing I gave him the other night?"

Symington turned away with a badly suppressed snarl.

"Oh, did you, Colin? Thank you, thank you! But, Colin, what am I to do? He's starving you, and says he'll give you nothing till I promise to marry him."

"Really! What a gentleman he is! Of course you'll marry him!"

"Come!" said Symington roughly.

Kitty held on to the bars. "Colin, I'm starving myself—"

"No, no! For God's sake, Kitty—" Colin rose, but staggered. "I'll pull through. And don't you be afraid. It's only for a little longer," he said, and got to the door. "Let me touch your hand, Kitty, and I'll pull through."

"Let go!" Symington said savagely, "or—"

"Forgive me! I've kissed your hand, Kitty dear," said Colin in a weak, husky voice.

"And I wish it had been my lips!" she cried with a sob.

Beside himself, Symington tore her from the door, inside which Colin had fallen. As he left her in her own room, he said:

"You'll feel and think differently to-morrow. I sha'n't see you till then. Going now to Dunford. But before I leave I'll supply our friend with plenty of water—well salted."

CHAPTER XXV

THE GREAT EFFORT

THE passage of a motor-car through Dunford in the night-time was too common a happening to disturb sleepers or excite the curiosity of a wakeful person. To-night John Corrie was wakeful, as he so often was till long after midnight, and it is probable that he was not aware of the big car's approach till it stopped at his own door. Being a dealer in gasoline, he at once perceived a reason for the stoppage. More than once in the last few years he had been called in similar wise to the receipt of custom, though never quite so late as this. On the last occasion he had, without opening the door, curtly refused supplies. Nowadays, however, he could not afford to turn money away at any hour of the twenty-four. So in shirt, trousers and slippers he was into the shop almost as soon as the expected knock fell. Still, it was better to make certain before opening.

"What do ye want?" he called, hand on key.

"Petrol."

He opened—and next moment his arms were behind him while steel clicked on his wrists.

"A single sound by way of alarm, John Corrie," said a quiet, cold voice, "and you're a ruined man. We are not after your money, but we're going to have the whole precious truth out of you."

The speaker, as the half-fainting Corrie perceived in the light of a portable lamp which some one had placed on the counter, was accompanied by three men, two of them in the garb of mechanics. The third he recognized as the man recently inquiring about Kitty.

"What do ye want wi' me?" he whimpered.

"Where is your sister?" asked Risk.

"In her bed. She's ill."

"Then we shall do nothing to disturb her, and you had better follow our example. West, find a chair, and put him on it—over at the door." He indicated the exit to the dwelling-house.

Near the opposite end of the shop, which was fairly spacious, the mechanics were already busy. On rubber-shod feet they made scarce a sound. Within the space of a few minutes they had rigged up a framework about nine feet square and stretched a white screen upon it. Risk unpacked the contents of a box of polished wood, while West kept guard on the prisoner.

AT last, with a show of courage, Corrie demanded: "What daft-like performance is this? A magic lantern—"

Risk came quickly behind him. "We're going to show you a few pictures, Mr. Corrie," he said pleasantly, "and afterwards we shall be glad to hear how they strike you. Meanwhile I'm going to gag you—keep still, it wont hurt."

At the end of ten minutes one of the men murmured, "All ready, sir," to which Risk replied, "Wait till I give the word," and stationed himself where he could watch every movement on Corrie's part. The lamp was put out, but through the blinded windows the moonlight filtered, giving a ghostly touch to the man in the chair.

"Number one," said Risk softly.

The screen was illuminated. Upon it appeared a face, that of the late Hugh Carstairs. A glimpse, and it was gone. Corrie gave a jerk.

"Two," muttered Risk, and Kitty Carstairs smiled and disappeared.

"Three." A man's visage with an uncertain grin—Symington.

Then, for an instant, the screen held a certificate for five hundred shares in the Zenith Gold Mines. Corrie sat as if frozen, but at the next he quivered, for he beheld a portion of a letter which he knew was in his safe.

"Six." Behold! Sam the postman holding a copy of *The Western Weekly* in one hand and staring at a letter in the other. Again Corrie gave a jerk.

"Seven." A five-pound note of the National Bank of Scotland. "Eight." A rear view of Corrie's cottage, a ladder against the ivy and a man of Corrie's build reaching into an open window. And then there was a pause.

"Now," said Risk, "we are going to have a little cinema entertainment, a scene from a drama of real life which, I believe, would interest the public, not to mention the police."

As he spoke, the door from the dwelling-house was opened, a few inches, silently, unobserved.

"Go ahead," said Risk.

WHAT followed was, as the perpetrator would have been first to admit, a piece of bare-faced fake. Yet its one glaring divergence from fact and its several minor discrepancies could not neutralize the main dire truth of the story. As a film it had been a costly and difficult piece of work; as a spectacle it would have impressed any audience. The only question Risk asked himself now was, would it attain the single object to which it had been devoted.

The screen was again illuminated, but not brightly. Corrie, sweating with apprehension, gazed in a sort of fascination at the outside of his own home. Soon he saw a muffled figure which he could scarce have denied as his own, so familiar it was, even to the slight limp of the left leg, emerge and steal down the dim, deserted road, with fugitive glances here and there. It peared a shanty that might have been vanished, and immediately there ap- the postman's. Toward it came the muffled figure. It passed behind the shanty. A strangled sound came from Corrie's throat as he tried to scream, "I didna!"

The familiar figure came back, went to the door and—Corrie shut his eyes. But he could not keep them so. When he looked again, the shanty was blazing at the rear. Suddenly the door was torn inward, and Sam the postman, or his double, dropped a hatchet and staggered forth in agony. He reeled across the road, fell on the grass and lay heaving. Then into the picture crept the muffled figure, raised a bludgeon and smote once, twice—knelt, lingered and rose with a letter in its hand. Then all movement ceased for perhaps ten seconds. And then, as by an invisible hand, the black muffler was snatched away and there was the face of John Corrie and no other, a mask of guilty terror.

The prisoner, breaking from West's detaining hold, pitched forward to the floor, and groveled.

"What are ye doing to my brother?" The harsh voice of a woman startled them all.

GAUNT, ghostly, Rachel Corrie strode forward and halted beside the miserable creature whom she loved.

"Pack o' lies!" she cried. "It was me that set fire to the house; it was me that stole the Zeniths and sold them to

Symington; but I've got them back, all but the one certificate. Ye cowards! what mean ye by treating an old man—" She broke off, fell on her knees and whispered: "John, it's all right. Ye're safe, dearie, quite safe."

Risk, who had sent the wondering mechanics outside, turned the key and came over to the group. He stooped and unlocked the handcuffs, unfastened the gag.

"Miss Corrie," he said gently, "I'm sorry you have suffered this, but it was vital that we should get at the truth." He signed to West, and between them they lifted Corrie to the chair. He was not unconscious, but stupefied.

The woman got to her feet and began to chafe her brother's hands.

"Listen," she said in a low voice. "Promise—swear—that he'll never be troubled again, and I'll put in your hands the nine certificates—"

"I'm afraid we want even more than that, Miss Corrie," said Risk.

"What do ye want? Money for the tenth? Well—"

"A full account of your brother's bargains with Symington."

"I can give ye that too—if ye promise."

"And we must know at once where your niece is—where Symington has hidden her."

"God!" Rachel's jaw dropped. "Hidden her?" she gasped after a moment. Suddenly she shook her brother, not harshly. "John, what's this they're saying? Kitty hid away by Symington! Speak, man! Oh, but surely, surely ye ken nothing about such a black business! Yet speak, John! Where's Kitty?"

"To save yourself from penal servitude, Corrie," said Risk solemnly, "tell me where she is."

Corrie groaned and hopelessly answered: "Before God, I dinna ken."

Risk and West looked at each other. For once, at least, the man had told the truth. They could not doubt it. And so the great effort had ended in failure.

THERE was a grievous silence. At last West spoke:

"I suppose, Miss Corrie, you never heard of Symington having another address than White Farm—of late, I mean?"

Rachel started. "Wait!" she exclaimed. "Can I trust ye no to hurt him?"

They assured her, and she ran unsteadily into the dwelling-house. During her absence Corrie made one remark. It was characteristic. He spoke slowly, meditatively.

"The mill wasna insured. I'm completely ruined."

Rachel returned. "See!" She handed him the folded paper she had inadvertently taken from Symington's strong-box. "And take the Zeniths," she added. "Oh, the curse they've brought to this house!"

At the lamp Risk examined the document. Drawing a quick breath, he said: "Miss Corrie, this is our last hope; we must act on it without delay. As for the shares, you will kindly keep them till I send you a certificate to take the place of the missing one, and then you and your brother can deliver the lot, in whatever way you choose, to Miss Carstairs."

"Ye would trust me!" gasped the woman.

Risk just glanced at the abject Corrie. "I believe it is what Miss Carstairs would do herself," he said, and added with a faint smile: "I've got a good sister too. Well, you sha'n't be further disturbed. Those things"—he indicated the screen and apparatus—"can be put aside, and I'll have them taken away later on. Come, West. There's not a moment to lose."

They entered the car, and twenty minutes later the special train waiting for them at Kenny Junction. And as they were whirled south, somewhere in Yorkshire, a great train roared past bearing the sleeping Symington to the rudest awakening of his life. He had laid himself down in his berth still savage with chagrin at his blunder in bringing his two prisoners face to face before they were sufficiently subdued, yet confident as ever of ultimate victory. Poor little Kitty! Plucky though she was, she was bound to give in once hunger and distress got the upper hand.

SYMINGTON, however, had made a second blunder, though he remained ignorant of it. He had left Kitty with a new horror to brood on and had thereby rendered her so much more despairing and helpless; but he had left her also a straw, so to speak, on the flood of her despair. Her intelligence did not perceive it at once; hours had passed and her spirit was well-nigh exhausted when it drifted into her ken. She clutched it because there was nothing else to lay hold on. Would it serve at all? Was the situation altered by the fact that her persecutor was going away—nay, he must have gone three hours ago!—for the night?

Suddenly she sprang from the couch. Danger? What danger would she not dare in order to help—to save—Colin? Her mind was still very clear. She thought quickly—then acted.

She switched off the lights, groped her way behind the curtain to the bed and lay down. On the wall, convenient to her hand, was a bell-button. She gave it a long pressure, then waited—in vain. Again she rang—again and yet again. At the end of ten minutes she began to fear for her scheme, but just then she heard shuffling steps in the passage. The bolt was drawn; the door opened and a voice demanded crossly to know what she wanted at two in the morning.

Kitty groaned and cried: "Oh, I can't bear it any longer. Please bring some food—bread, water—anything. I'm too weak to get up."

"All right," was the sulky reply, "but you might have taken it when it was there for you."

At the rebolting of the door, Kitty got up. Presently she was leaning against the wall just behind the door. She trembled all over; her heart thumped; she feared she was going to faint. Would the woman never return?

At last she came, threw open the door and, still drowsy and grumbling, proceeded with an untidy tray in the direction of the bed. She was at the curtain when Kitty darted from her corner and out into the passage. *Bang!* went the door; home went the trusty bolt!

A SINGLE light glowed in the passage. Without pause Kitty ran next door and shot the bolt; then she ran to the next, and treated it likewise. From within, a man's voice called sleepily: "What's up?" Then she had to take the support of the wall, her hand to her heart—but not for long. The trapped woman began a furious protest. Kitty went back and said as firmly as she could:

"If you make another sound, I swear you'll get no mercy later. The man's bolted in too."

"You can't get out of the basement," bawled the prisoner. "The stair-door's locked, and he took the key with him."

"Very well! Our friends will be here in the morning," Kitty retorted brazenly, "and I don't think you'll ever see your master again, unless in the police court."

The woman began to whine.

"Hold your tongue," said Kitty, and left her.

She ran to the place where she had seen Colin. Through the bars she beheld him huddled on the sofa. A large earthenware jug lay smashed in a pool on the floor.

With her heart overflowing, her eyes half-blind with tears, she tore back the bolt. He did not move at her entrance, not even when she fell on her knees beside him.

"Oh, Colin, Colin!"

His hands fell from his white, pinched face and tired eyes. He regarded her in a vague fashion.

"Kitty," he said dreamily, "by any beautiful chance, did you mean what you said about your lips?"

And then it seemed the most natural thing in the world that they should be in each other's arms.

"THERE must be a kitchen and pantry somewhere. Are you able to come and look, Colin?"

They were both pretty shaky, but they went exploring along that stone passage like lovers in a sequestered country lane.

They discovered a comfortable kitchen, with two basket easy-chairs and a well-stocked larder.

"We must eat awfully little to begin

with," said the wise Kitty. "And you must sit in that nice chair till I prepare it."

They partook cautiously of some very light dainties, and sipped a little wine and water; and then Colin felt equal to a wash-up; and then they made love; and then Colin went along to give the man, who was inclined to be boisterous, a word of warning; and then they made more love, and talked a little sense as well; but the sense made them very sleepy, and for a space they forgot even each other; and when Colin woke up, he beheld Kitty preparing something for breakfast; and it was such a delicious sight to behold her with her sleeves rolled up that he was almost angry when Risk and West, having forced a silent entrance to the house, smashed their way down to the basement.

LATER, safely at Hilda's flat, Kitty would have thanked Risk, but he stopped her almost at the first word.

"No, Miss Carstairs," he said, with a rueful smile, "I have found out that I'm not clever. I thought I was till I met your aunt. I have to thank her for saving me from a bitter failure. I believe she will yet save her unhappy brother. "And"—he paused for a moment—"I think we may leave Mr. Symington to receive his punishment from her—unless you would prefer—"

"Oh, let him go," she cried, with a shudder. "I hope I may never see him, or Dunford, again. I want to ask you a question, Mr. Risk. Do I—do I owe you a hundred pounds?"

"Alas, no," he answered meaningly; "I'm not the lucky man."

"Ah!" said Hilda. "I was sure of it all the time!"

"Colin!" exclaimed Kitty before she could prevent it, and blushed adorably.

Colin turned inquiringly from his talk with West. "Yes, dearest," he said quite naturally, and then blushed also.

There was an interesting silence till the young man stammered: "By the way, hasn't Kitty told you we were engaged?"

"Well," remarked Hilda, when the congratulations were over, "I must say I never thought of Mr. Symington as a match-maker!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF SYMINGTON

IT would seem that Rachel Corrie had forgotten her own weakness in her brother's collapse. He had risen as usual, but it was evident that he was totally unfit for the business of the day. Crouched in his chair by the kitchen fire, he presented a sad spectacle of human misery and shame. It was after nine, and Rachel was endeavoring to persuade him to eat some breakfast.

With scarcely any warning Symington, coming from the shop, was upon them. His face was like chalk, his eyes were congested.

"Corrie," he cried hoarsely, "I give you three minutes to produce my Zenith certificates!"

Corrie seemed to shrink—that was all.

Rachel placed herself in front of him.

"Mr. Symington," she said steadily, "I took them, and ye can just make up your mind never to see them again."

Just for an instant he seemed balked. Then he said viciously: "Hand them over, or see your brother go to jail!"

"For what?"

"Attempted murder."

"'Twas me that fired the postman's house, but that's all settled. Anything else?"

He glared at her, uncertain how to proceed.

She did not wait for him. "Mr. Symington, two gentlemen were here last night, and I sent them to a house at Richmond, Surrey—"

"What? You devil, you've ruined me!" He fairly staggered. He did not ask how she had learned about the house.

"They'll be there by now, I should say," she went on unemotionally. "A dirty business, Mr. Symington. If I were you, I'd make haste to quit this country. You're a done man hereabouts."

"Corrie," he shouted, "you're responsible! You sold me the shares. Find me the certificates at once, or by—"

"Dinna tell all the neighbors about it," Rachel said quietly. "I'm responsible. Do what ye like wi' me. But mind, ye broke your part o' the bargain by selling some o' the shares secretly—"

"You fool, that was no legal bargain! But the law will recognize your brother's receipt for—"

"Gang to the law! Man, I can fancy ye sweating at the mere sight o' a policeman!"

He looked death at her then, yet felt he must use guile rather than force. Suddenly he spoke.

"Look here! I'll make terms with you. I'll give you a—a fourth."

"I'll keep what I've got—for Kitty. So that's the end, and ye can just get out o' this and leave me to give John his breakfast."

With a snarl he sprang, thrust her aside, and reached the side of Corrie's armchair. Corrie leaped, sank back and became rigid, the muzzle of a revolver against his temple.

"Get me the Zeniths!"

RACHEL'S countenance was gray. At last she wet her lips, and said almost inaudibly: "I'll fetch them." She turned to go.

"No," whispered the voice of John Corrie. "Let him shoot. Ye'll keep your honor, and he'll be a murderer. I'm no caring."

In the silence steps were heard approaching. The voice of a girl called: "Is Mr. Symington there? A wire has come for him."

Symington went to the door and took the orange envelope. Then, closing the door and putting his back to it,—the revolver still in his hand,—he opened the message. As he read he seemed to forget the presence of others. His face took on a bleak, sickly aspect.

This was the message:

> At Anchor Line Office, Glasgow, fifty pounds and ticket await Mr. Granton. One hour after dispatch of this, instructions will be sent local police. Bearer Zeniths are now subject to scrutiny at Company's London office before they can be negotiated. John Risk, Director.

He read it thrice, and during the third reading he slipped, as if unconsciously, the revolver into his pocket. For a brief space he stood motionless, bowed in thought.

All at once he turned, opened the door, threw up his head, squared his shoulders, and went out.

Dunford saw him no more.

John Corrie still carries on business there. His sister's money, which turned out to be twice as much as he had thought, saved the situation. The only noticeable change in the man is his open respect for her. She writes to Kitty a stiff letter twice a year.

Sam the postman refused a new house, but accepted from Risk a "soft job" in London.

ON a night six months after Symington's disappearance, our five friends occupied a box at the Planet. The occasion was the 150th performance of the play, which was going as strong as ever. Anthony West had ceased to grumble at having to accept a fat check every Wednesday. Kitty did not know what to do with all her money, but, as Risk assured her, she had still time to think about it. Her marriage day was fixed for a month thence.

The curtain fell on the last act.

"Don't wait for me," said Risk. "I'm going down in a minute to have a word with Craven. I may look you up later, Hilda," he added with a more than usually affectionate glance at his sister.

That afternoon West had called upon him and made a confession concerning Hilda.

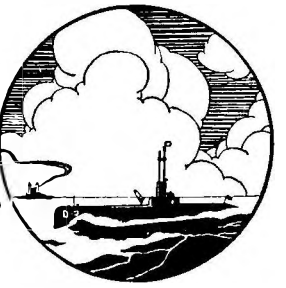
With leisurely haste the four lovers left the box. None of them had protested at the idea of not waiting for Risk.

He gazed after them, smiling whimsically, possibly a little sadly.

"And so," he murmured, "the poor dog got none."

THE END

From Frigate to Submarine



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- ☐ Motor Cycle
- ☐ Burglary
- ☐ Employer's Liability
- ☐ Workmen's Compensation
- ☐ Bonding
- ☐ Elevator
- ☐ Plate Glass
- ☐ Race Horse
- ☐ Tornado
- ☐ Hail
- ☐ Golfer's Policy
- ☐ Parcel Post
- ☐ Rent
- ☐ Merchandise in Transit
- ☐ Live Stock Transit
- ☐ Live Stock
- ☐ Live Stock Mortality
- ☐ Sprinkler Leakage
- ☐ Marine
- ☐ Breeders and Exhibitors
- ☐ Tractor
- ☐ Salesmen's Samples
- ☐ Registered Mail
- ☐ Use and Occupancy
- ☐ Explosion

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912,

Of THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1st, 1916.

State of Illinois, } ss.
County of Cook. }

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Charles M. Richter, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of The Blue Book Magazine and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form; to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher, The Story-Press Corporation.....
.....1912, North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Editor, Ray Long.....North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Managing Editor, None.
Business Manager, Charles M. Richter..... Chicago, Ill.

2. That the owners are: (Give names and addresses of individual owners, or, if a corporation, give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.)

Louis Eckstein.....North American Bldg.., Chicago, Ill.
Louis M. Stumer.....North American Bldg.., Chicago, Ill.
Benjamin J. Rosenthal..North American Bldg., Chicago, Ill.
Stephen Hexter.....North American Bldg.., Chicago, Ill.
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3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. CHARLES M. RICHTER, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 18th day of September, 1916. [Seal.] LOUIS H. KERBER, JR.

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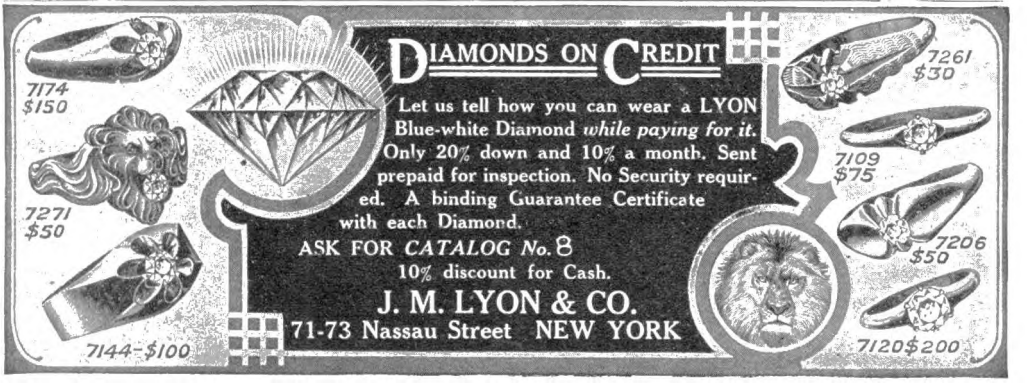

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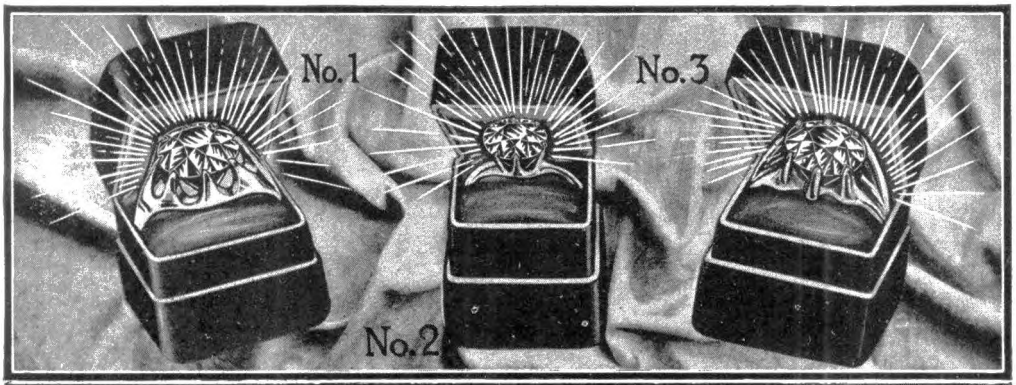

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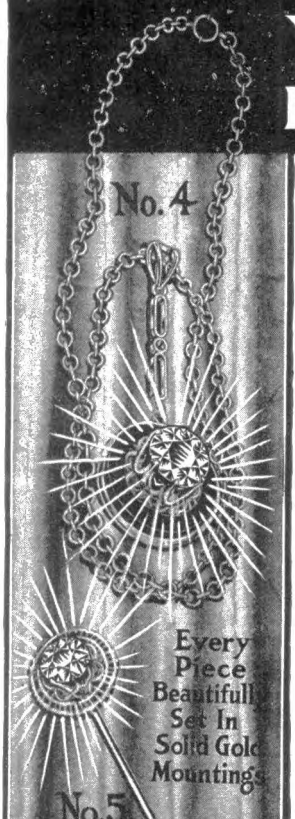

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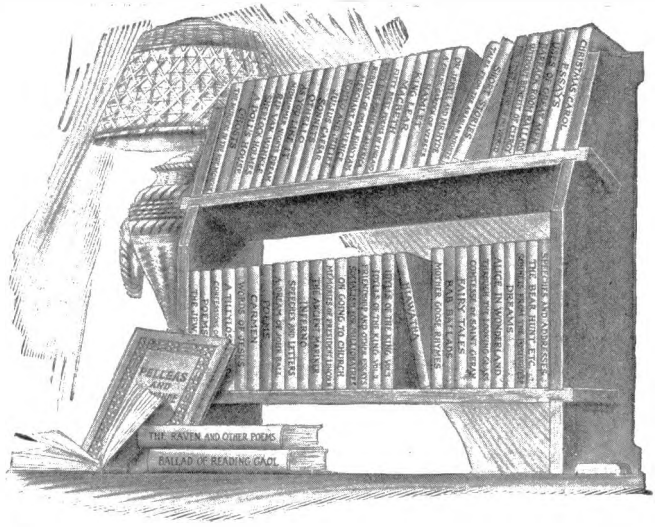

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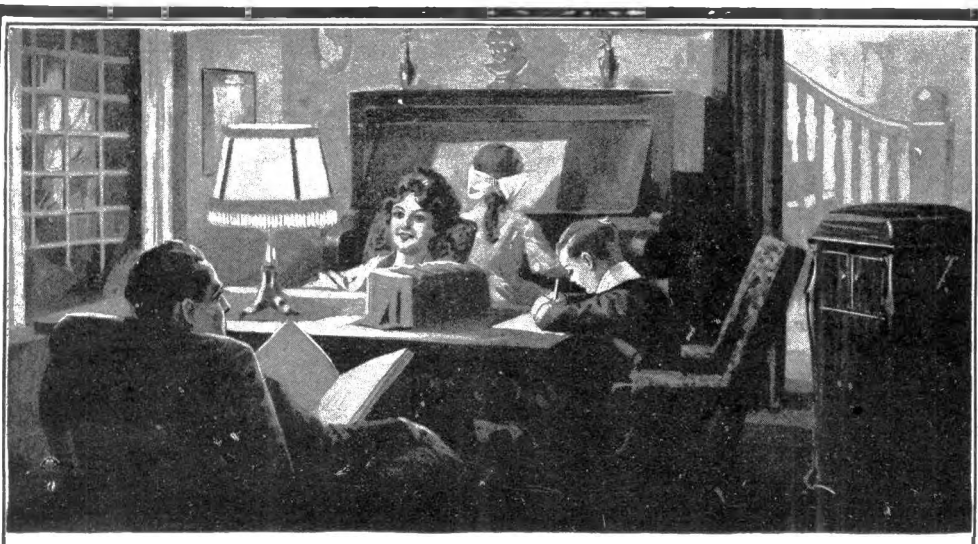

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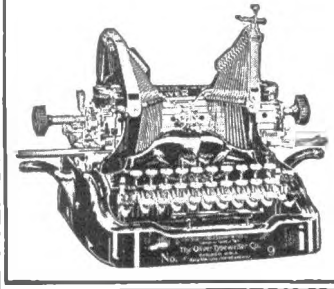

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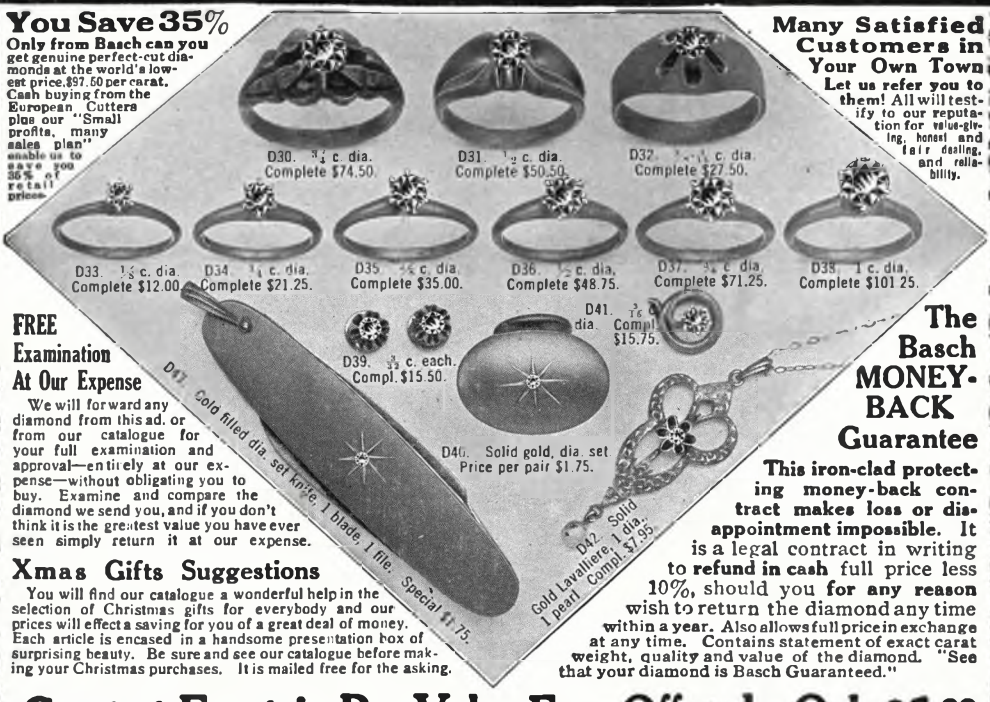

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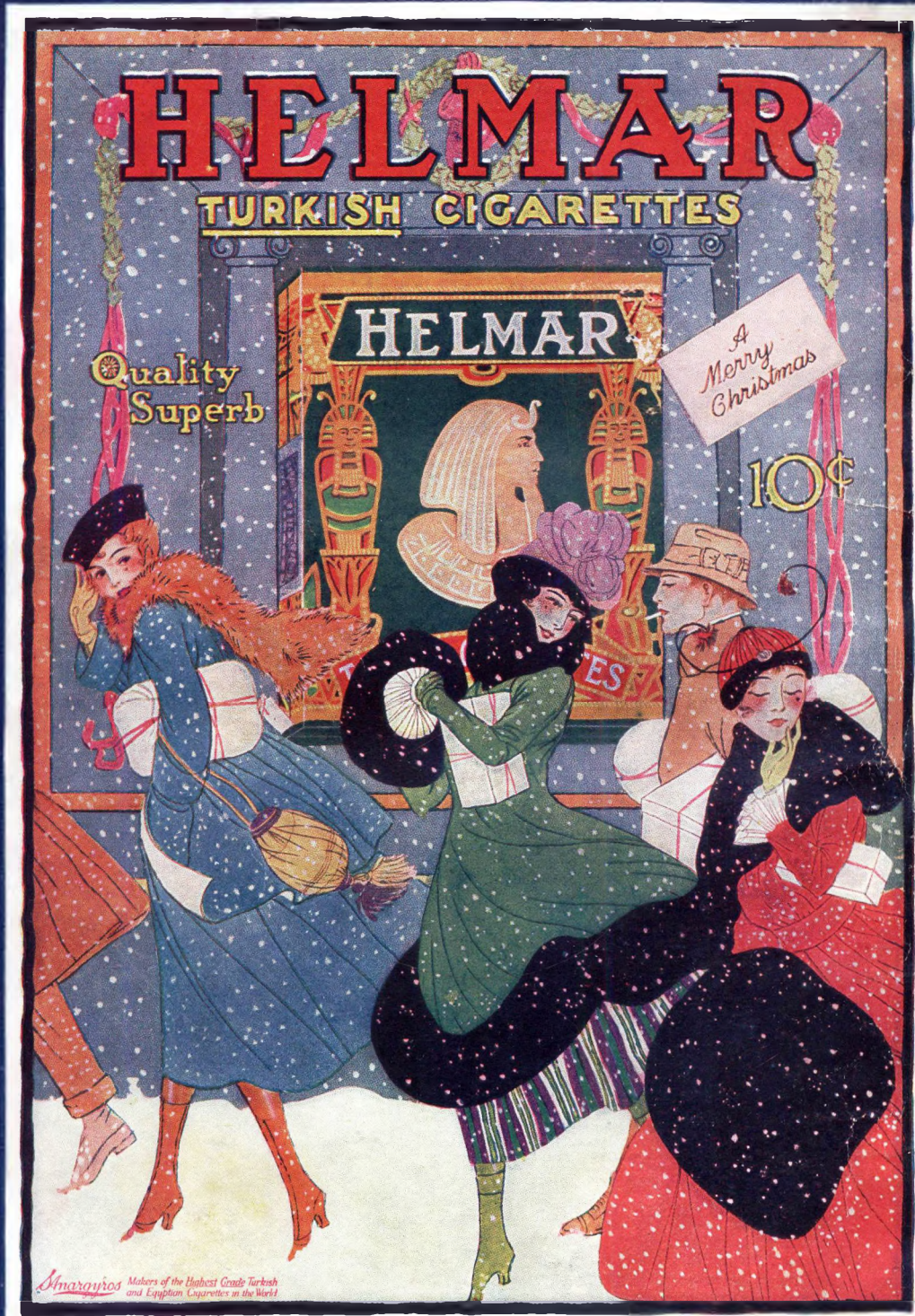
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