THE CAVALIER

JULY

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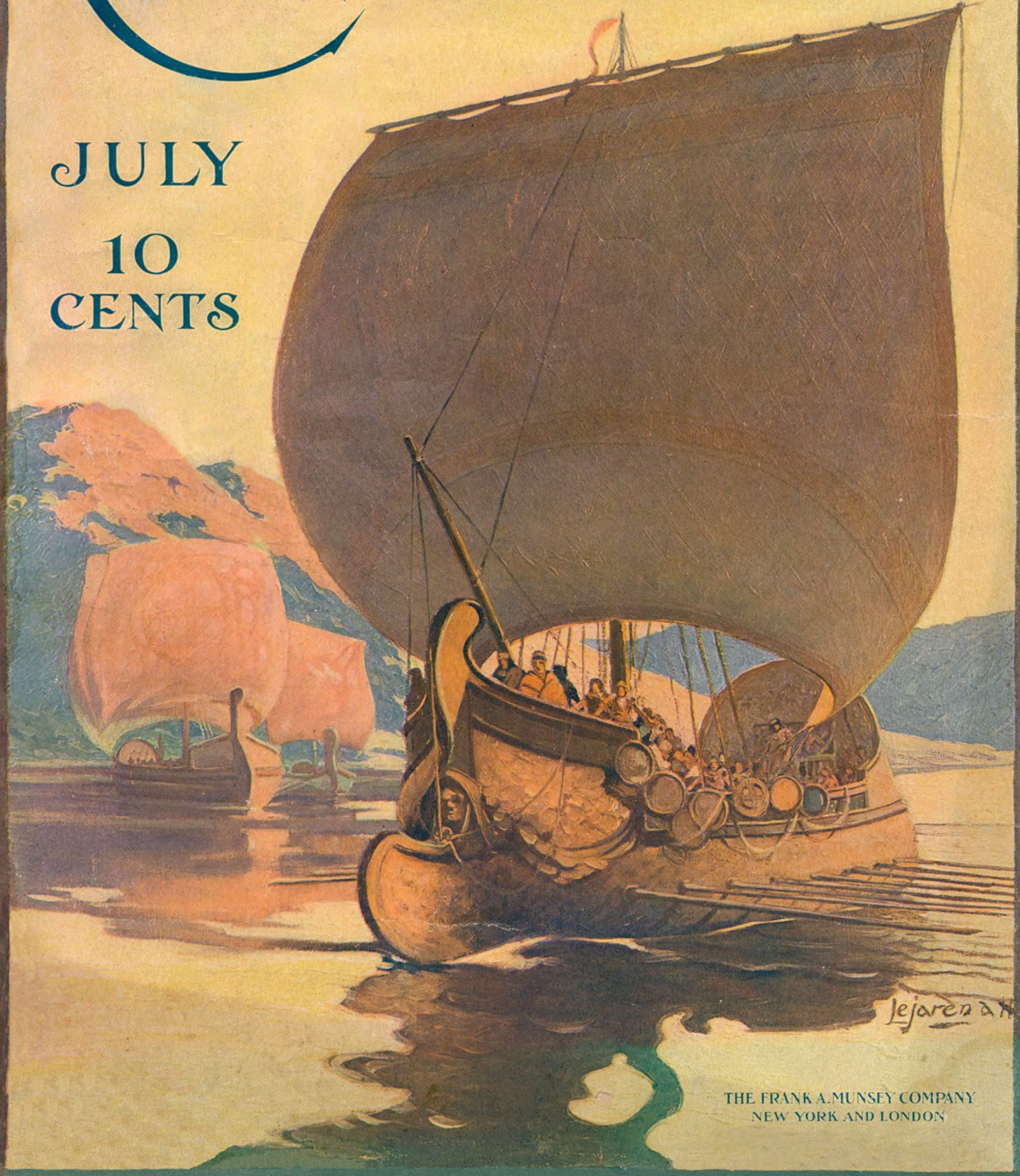

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THE CAVALIER

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A Desperate Bridegroom.

BY ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE,

Author of "For Henry of Navarre," "The Spy of Valley Forge," "The World Upside Down," etc.

What Fate Did to a Young Man Compared to Whom Jonah Was the Original Lucky Jim.

(Complete in This Number.)

CHAPTER I.

A LAGGARD.

"YOU'VE heard about the ship that went down in sight of port?" observed Clyde Maxwell. "Well, for sheer bad luck, I've got that ship looking like a golden argosy of joy. And this I am sure I can show you."

"Is it a matter of life and death?" asked the purser.

"Life and death? Worse!"

"I wish I could help you out," said the purser, watching the tall, ulster-clad man with a new interest. "Is it—is it anything you'd care to tell me about? Not that I've got any authority to help you out," he added as a cautious afterthought. "I've explained that to you already."

"You certainly have. So has the captain. So has the health officer. So has everybody in sight. You're an exception to the rest, in one way—you're the only soul on the ship who has shown the faintest interest in my possible reasons for wanting to get ashore. The rest all—"

"You say it's 'worse than a matter of life and death,'" explained the purser; "so I suppose it's something with a story to it. That's why I asked. That and because you and I have been good friends since the old business college days. But if you'd rather not tell—"

"It's a relief to jabber it to some one. Here goes. I told you I was engaged. Well, I'm on my way home to my wedding. The date set for it is March 1st—day after to-morrow. I had to make this European trip for the firm. The ship was scheduled to dock at New York on February 25th—two days ago. I figured out that I'd have fully three days' leeway. Then came the broken shaft that delayed us two days, and, now that we've struck quarantine, comes this diphtheria scare. And we're all held up, by law, for two days longer, till they find out whether there'll be any more cases to—"

"I get the idea. You're liable to be late for your wedding. Hard luck! But you can send the girl word by wireless, can't you? She'll surely understand. In two days you'll be able to land. Let's see. This is February 27th. Twenty-eight days in February, aren't there? Two days after this will—will bring it up to March 2d. The wedding need be put off only one day. And—"

"You don't understand," cried Maxwell. "That has nothing to do with it. Here's the idea. Miss Sylvia Tennant — the girl I'm going to marry—is my third cousin. I've known her since she was a child. We've always been in love with each other. Our families always favored the match—especially her grandfather. He died last year, leaving six hundred and twenty thousand dollars. According to his will, the money was to be divided equally between Sylvia and myself—"

"Good old grandpa!" put in the purser.

"On condition," resumed Clyde, "that we marry each other *on or before her twenty-first birthday.* A fool sort of a will, wasn't it? But his heart was set on the match. And he didn't believe in long engagements."

"Nobody would believe in them," chuckled the purser, "if there was six hundred and twenty thousand dollars waiting at their end. You're a lucky chap, Maxwell. For a struggling young lawyer to come into three hundred and ten thousand dollars, and to marry a girl with the same amount of wealth, seems almost too good to be true."

"It is too good to be true," groaned Clyde. "That's the trouble. I might have known it could never happen. I'm the original Jonah from Jonahopolis."

"Hasn't thrown you over, has she?"

"No, but—"

"She won't be silly enough to break the engagement, just because you're held up a couple days on a quarantined boat?"

"No, no! But her twenty-first birthday falls on the 1st of March. That's all. *Now,* do you see?"

The purser whistled long and reflectively.

"I understand!" he exclaimed. "You are in bad, for a fact. The wedding scheduled for March 1st, a fortune depending on it, and *you* booked to get to town one day late. Say! I've got an idea. Why not send for Miss Tennant to come down here and marry you on shipboard? That would—"

"That would be fine!" scoffed Maxwell. "Only, you seem to forget no one but health officers are allowed to board the ship or to leave it. I believe the law even forbids any private boats to come within a hundred feet of us. So there we are."

"But, can't the will be set aside, or—"

"No. We all agreed to it, and it has been probated. Unless Sylvia and I are married day after to-morrow, the six hundred and twenty thousand dollars reverts to the Something-or-Other Charitable Gild. The old chap wasn't really so much of a crank, though, as you might think.

"He knew Sylvia and I were in love with each other. He knew I was too hard up to marry. He knew I would be too proud, as a poor man, to marry an heiress. So he divided the money between us, and made that little proviso against a long engagement. It all seemed for the best.

"And it would have been, if I hadn't got delayed on this confounded old floating hospital of a broken-down liner."

"Easy—easy, old man!" laughed the purser. "Remember, I'm supposed to have a certain amount of loyalty for the ship, and I don't enjoy hearing her roasted like that. It's your own fault you're in such a hole. Why did you wait so long? If I'd been in your shoes, I'd have been married on the very day the will was read. I wouldn't have waited till the eleventh hour and taken chances on some accident like this."

"We planned to marry two months ago—just before I sailed for England. She was coming with me for a wedding trip. But her mother fell ill, and we had to postpone the wedding for her sake. Don't rub it in. I'm so sore I wish I had a third foot to kick myself with. Here I'm robbing the girl I love. I don't mind my own loss. I can always earn some sort of a living. But to think I'm making her lose a fortune! I'm not going to do it, either!" he went on fiercely.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Do about it? I've nearly forty-eight hours left. We are at anchor off Staten Island, not a quarter of a mile from shore. Ferries are running between Staten Island and New York every few minutes. In one hour from now I could be at Sylvia Tennant's door. I could be with the girl I love, and I could save six hundred and twenty thousand dollars—all in one hour. Do you think I'll lose that chance for the sake of all the quarantine that ever happened? Not I."

"And perhaps carry diphtheria germs to her by way of a wedding present?"

"Nonsense! The health officer himself says it's probably only tonsilitis; and even if it's something worse, all the half-dozen cases are in the steerage or the second cabin. I haven't been brought into contact with any of them. It's worth the risk. And I'm going to try it."

"How?" queried the purser, with incredulous amusement.

"If you ask as an officer of the ship, it's none of your business. If you ask as a friend, I don't know. Hallo! I thought no private craft were allowed alongside."

The two men were leaning over the vessel's

port-rail, their gaze fixed on the hilly shores of Staten Island. From the Rosebank wharf a natty white launch had chugged out into the gray, ice-strewn water. It was now nearing the vessel, and "rounded to" at the foot of the hanging companion-ladder.

Several men, members of the crew, were lugging one or two trunks to the companionway. Just behind them, escorted by the obsequious captain, walked a portly, middle-aged man.

"Isn't that the chap you pointed out to me yesterday as old McCue, president of the Bird Seed Trust?" asked Clyde.

"That's the man," assented the purser. "Don't you envy him? He's to be an exception to the rule that holds the rest of us here. By special permission. You see, he's one of the directors of the line, and— Where are you going?"

Maxwell had left his friend, and was racing across the twilight deck. He halted in front of the captain and McCue as they reached the head of the companionway.

"Pardon me, Mr. McCue," he began. "I am to be married March 1st. A fortune depends on it. May I go ashore with you? I will pay for my—"

"Step back!" thundered the captain, aghast that an ordinary passenger should dare accost the great Bird Seed Trust president. "Stand free of that gangway!"

"Mr. McCue," implored Maxwell, "I beg you will take me along. It is necessary— much depends on—"

He got no further. A shove from the captain pushed him away from the gangway. And Mr. McCue, balanced by two sailors, had begun his descent of the ladder. Before Clyde could recover his lost ground, the bird-seed magnate had entered his launch, and the little craft was puffing shoreward.

"What d'ye mean by interfering like that?" snarled the captain, glowering at Maxwell.

"What do *you* mean by letting one man break quarantine, and not another?" snapped Clyde. "McCue can carry infection to the land as well as I can. Besides, if he can go, why can't I?"

"I don't wish to argue with you, young man," said the captain loftily as he moved away.

"You won't get the chance," retorted Maxwell; "for I'm going to leave this ship, by fair means or foul."

"If I hear any more threats of that sort from you," howled the captain, "I'll put you in irons! You'd have me fined or suspended, would you, for letting you go ashore in defiance of the health officer's orders, and maybe spread disease germs all over New York? I'll have you ironed if you make one attempt to—"

"Very good!" shouted Clyde, reckless with impotent fury as he shook aside the heavy ulster. "Try it, if you can! I'm off!"

With one hand on the rail, Maxwell vaulted over the side, kicked his heel against the projecting ledge, reversed, and plunged head downward into the water far below.

It was a pretty dive. And it was executed not only with the skill of a trained swimmer, but with a suddenness that left the captain gaping, open-mouthed, with dumb amaze.

CHAPTER II.

A LEAP IN THE DARK.

NOW, the distance from a liner's second deck to the water below does not look very great. A diver will speedily find it far longer than it appears.

Also, a man who, under ordinary circumstances, can readily swim a mile or more in moderately cool salt water, will find it quite another thing to swim twenty strokes in a February sea that is thick with floating ice fragments. The more so, if he be weighted by shoes and clothing.

As Clyde Maxwell, expert swimmer, struck water, the chill of it bit his very bone. He sank like a plummet, the cold numbing his every faculty. Dimly he realized he must swim as never before, if he would counteract this.

He was coming to the surface. With arms and legs he struck out madly.

At first his numbed limbs almost refused to obey him. His heart seemed hammering in his throat, choking him.

As he came up, he was aware of the liner's side, rising, miles upon miles, like a topless precipice, above his head. To the right, far away, through the gathering twilight, glowed the lights of Rosebank and of the Quarantine Station. In that direction he began to swim.

His clothes held him back. Once his head came in contact with a bit of floating ice, with a force that almost stunned him. He could hear, as though from a vast distance, the captain's booming voice, howling orders.

Clyde Maxwell knew that a boat would be lowered at once and sent in search of him. He knew, too, that no swimmer can hope to keep headway against a rowboat.

But the night was fast settling down. By

that dim light, and amid so many fragments of flotsam and dirty ice, he might possibly hope to avoid observation.

Shore was less than a quarter mile away. If he could gain its shelter unseen, he might readily get to New York within an hour or so. It was worth the chance.

Ordinarily, Clyde would have thought little enough of such a swim, even fully dressed as he was. But now, every stroke was anguish.

Yet it comforted him to note that as he continued swimming, the first numbness began to wear off; to be succeeded, in fact, by a certain glow of physical reaction. He was young, barely twenty-five, and in fine physical condition. Where many a man would have sunk, through shock and exhaustion, he battled on.

He swam for what seemed hours. The yellow shore lights through the gray murk appeared to draw little nearer. The tide was almost at ebb. So he must swim upstream at an angle of forty-five degrees, to make any straight course.

A strong man, a young man, a trained swimmer, Clyde Maxwell found himself confronted with the hardest task of his life. It was an athletic contest where the prize was a safe landing; where loss meant a decidedly unpleasant form of death.

The numbness was all gone now. His body seemed to burn, as the blood stung to the surface in defiance to the surrounding cold. But his clothes weighed a ton, and his first burst of physical prowess was failing. He longed unspeakably for a minute's rest, that he might get second-wind and call upon his wearied muscles for a newer, stronger effort.

But he dared not float, lest some cross-current sweep him out to sea. Turning, he swam on his back, to shift the strain.

At the second stroke, some gigantic invisible hand apparently gripped his right leg in an agonizing clasp that doubled the limb tight under him.

"Cramp!" he muttered, to himself. "This won't do. It'll spread to the other leg or to my body; and then I'm a goner."

His shoulder struck against some rough surface. Instinctively, he threw out his arm to seize or push away the obstruction. He had come alongside a great splinter of mast, some twelve feet in length and as thick as his own body.

At the same instant his other leg doubled under him with an excruciating wrench of pain. The swimmer threw an arm over the broken spar and hung there exhausted, helpless, trying to force his knotted leg-muscles to straighten out from their chill-induced cramp.

For the moment, he was safe. This bit of wreckage had been whirled hither and yon, for weeks perhaps in the thousand tides, currents and eddies of the sea. It might even be a vestige of some wreck on the Labrador or the Florida coast. It and himself—two atoms of hopeless jetsam—had been brought into accidental touch in his hour of dire need.

There he clung, panting, exhausted, in agony. And, with the cessation of his own motion,, he could hear the steady *slap-slap-slap* of water against the prow of a fast-moving boat, and the steady churn of rowers' blades.

The boat was coming. The boat sent from the liner to find his body or to bring him back to legal captivity.

At the thought, his blood ran warm again and his slack jaw set firmly. He had risked life in that mad effort to reach shore, to reach the girl he loved, to save her from poverty.

Was he to be hauled forth ignominiously from the water, lugged back to the ship and be perhaps clapped into irons? A pretty wind-up, was it not, to so wildly daring a venture? The thought roused his cooling rage to fever point.

The boat was drawing very near. It was perhaps midway between the liner and the shore. Lying there alongside of his spar, Clyde could see the craft silhouetted against the paler eastern sky-line. Four men were rowing. In the bow, stood a petty officer, bending forward and scanning the waters. A white-capped coxswain was at the tiller.

"He can't have come much farther in this time," the standing man was saying. "Either we're close to him, or else he's sunk. Most likely he's gone down. It's ten to one against any one keeping afloat in zero water like that."

He spoke indifferently, as if commenting on some impersonal fact. Clyde Maxwell, barely fifty feet away, heard him and illogically resented the fellow's calm.

"Hold hard!" called the steersman suddenly, rising in his seat and pointing toward Maxwell. "There he is!"

"Where? Oh, over there? You idiot, that thing's twelve feet long. It's a broken spar."

"I thought I saw it move. It—"

"Move? Every wave makes it bob up

and down. Give way there!"—to the rowers—"Keep her a point more upstream, Saunders. He'd make for shore at the nearest point—not so far down as this."

The boat swept by, not forty feet from the spar. Clyde clenched his teeth over his tongue to keep from crying for help as the rowers faded away into the gloom. But the picture of his own humiliation and the prospect of losing his one chance held him silent.

He was in no instant danger of drowning. He could hang onto this spar for hours before numbness would shake off his clutch from the slimy wood.

If he floated out toward sea, there was always a chance of some incoming craft hearing his hail and picking him up. And no rescuer need know he had come from a quarantined ship.

It was a chance and he resolved to take it. He shut his eyes and held on.

The chill was creeping all over him now, and his teeth were chattering. He was seized by a ridiculous desire to sleep. He tried once to climb atop the spar. But before his numbed muscles could accomplish the task, the fragment of mast rolled over.

He was knocked off under water. Only by a mighty effort could he catch a fresh hold on his treacherous support.

Thus, it seemed, centuries of time crawled by.

Suddenly, as the drowsiness was growing too powerful to be longer combated, something grated underneath the spar. The wood shook, floated a second longer, then came to a standstill with a slight shock.

Light as was the impact it served to loosen Clyde's stiffened hold. He sank—into three feet of water!

The feeling of hard, rough sand under his feet jerked the man back to life. He looked up. Above him, not twenty feet away rose the bank. The spar, caught in an eddy, had drifted ashore, a half mile or so south of Quarantine Station.

Clyde Maxwell was still too numb to stand. On all fours, groaning and panting, he scrambled weakly to land. There, forcing himself to kick to twist quickly about, he at last restored some semblance of life to his deadened body.

Staggering up the bank, more than once falling from sheer fatigue, the drenched, exhausted man found himself a mile or so away from a lighted village. Beyond the far houses he saw a train moving northward, toward the New York ferry.

The sight put new life into him. He reeled onward a few yards. But the longing for sleep had come back upon him with redoubled force. He lurched sideways and fell.

As he struck the frozen ground, some hard, bulky object in his hip pocket was pushed painfully against his thigh. Dully, he wondered what it was. Then he remembered.

His pocket flask!

With stiff, sensationless fingers he hauled the thing from his pocket, knocked off the neck against a stone (his fingers were far too numb to manage the cork) and set the flask to his lips.

A deep draft of the fierce, biting liquid. Then another. And warmth began to replace the deadly chill of his body.

He got to his feet. Every movement was pain. But he could move. And he no longer yearned for sleep.

He stumbled onward toward the town.

In the middle of a vacant lot stood a little one-story wooden building, rough-hewn, unpainted. It was apparently a tool-house. From between the gaping boards streaks of warm red light streamed out. A tin chimney poured forth smoke.

Maxwell climbed a low fence and crossed the field toward the tiny shack. The prospect of warmth was too strong for the chattering man to resist. In another minute he had groped his way through the dark, to the side of the building.

There he paused. How was he to account for his soaked clothes, his tremendous fatigue? Yet, so tempting was the mental vision of a warm room that he did not hesitate.

He was feeling his way around the shanty in search of the door, when a truly terrifying voice from within broke upon the silence of the winter night.

"Hist!" growled the voice, with an odd mixture of gruffness and natural soprano quality. "We must dissemble! Should the minions of the law track us to our lair in these mountain fastnesses, all would be lost. As we depart hence, let each man make his own way homeward. We must not be seen together, lest some shrewd sleuth suspect that the Dauntless Pirates of Staten Island are—"

"Say, Tim!" interrupted another treble voice, "ma says I can't be a Dauntless Pirate after next Saturday. She say's it's nonsense to—"

"Peace!" thundered the first speaker. "What have we here? Rank mutiny, varlet, I—"

"Tim," put in a third pirate, "if old Masterson ever gets onto our using his tool shed for a pirate lair, he'll—"

"Cheese it!" suddenly whispered the chief of the Dauntless Pirates of Staten Island. "Someone's outside! I heard—"

"It's Masterson!" squealed another. "He'll—"

Terror smote the Dauntless ones. Blind, unreasoning terror. There was a scuffle. A rickety door, not three feet from where Maxwell stood, burst open. Half a dozen small boys dashed forth at top speed.

At a safe distance they turned and shrilled a wild defiance to their unseen grown-up foe. Then, evidently fearing pursuit, they vanished homeward. Maxwell lurched into the deserted "lair."

The warmth and comfort of the place stretched forth and enveloped him. He entered, shut the creaking door behind him and looked about.

The room was about twelve feet by twelve in area. The walls were of unplaned shoring, the tarred flat roof low. The place was hot to suffocation. In one corner was a pile of farming implements. In the center of the apartment stood a cheap, air-tight stove, red hot. On the floor beneath it a heap of driftwood.

A table held two candles, and was further burdened by a feast of rough sandwiches, new roasted potatoes and similar viands. A skull and crossbones in charcoal covered half the door. Old coats and other farm-clothes hung from pegs on the wall. Such was the Dauntless Pirates' lair.

Clyde Maxwell paid scant heed at first to his surroundings.

Scarce had he spread his blue fingers in front of the stove when he began to divest himself of his clothing. Each wringing wet garment he hung up near the red-hot center of warmth. Then, with a cast-off jumper that he found lying among the tools, he set to work vigorously to rub himself down.

Soon, he was not only in a glow, but in perspiration as well. The menace of pneumonia was past. There had been nine chances in ten that such exposure as he had undergone would bring on congestion of the lungs.

The hut had providentially afforded the tenth chance. Warmed, in a glow, rested from his exertions, Maxwell all at once realized that he was hungry.

"I'm afraid," he murmured, "I'll have to be an unbidden guest at the Dauntless Pirates' board."

His meal over, and his clothing dry, he redressed, and prepared to go. He laughed softly to himself at the tame ending of his rash adventure.

He had sprung melodramatically from the rail of an ocean liner, had plunged into ice-laden waters, had battled like mad with grim death, had eluded pursuit and had saved his well-nigh extinct life. He had come ashore, found warmth, food and a place to dry his clothes.

All that remained was to walk a mile to the nearest station, board a train for the ferry, then take a boat to New York, and arrive at Sylvia Tennant's home almost in time for dinner.

The adventure promised to end tamely enough. Now that it was all over, he half-wished there had been one or two more details of excitement in it. It would make better telling.

He was fully dressed again, even to the tweed sea-cap which, jammed down to his ears, had somehow stayed on his head throughout the icy swim. Nothing about him would suggest to the casual eye a man who had illegally escaped from a quarantined ship.

It had been a big risk. He saw that, now. But it was over. And Sylvia and the six hundred and twenty thousand dollars were well worth the superhuman task he had accomplished.

Clyde stepped to the door and opened it. A blast of chill air made him shiver. To go as he was, from that hot room out into the windy February night would be suicidal.

He wished yearningly for the heavy ulster he had shed when he jumped overboard. Then his eye fell on the row of old clothes on the wall.

"I'll have to borrow something more," he told himself. "I can send it back by express or bring it back myself when the honeymoon's over. And I'll slip the owner a dollar or two by way of rent."

He was glancing over the motley assortment of garments, as he spoke. All were evidently such clothing as a man might keep in barn or shed to wear while working in the fields.

From under a line of battered overalls, jumpers, jackets and torn sweaters, Clyde fished out at last an overcoat.

Its sleeves were frayed. It was shiny at elbow. Several buttons were gone. There was dried mud here and there on its worn plaid surface. But the coat was warm and big. Maxwell brushed away the mud,

dusted the mangy plush collar and slipped into the garment.

Then, fastening it as best he could, he put on his cap again and set forth, turning his back upon the hospitable lair of the Dauntless Pirates.

Somehow, as he started briskly toward the railroad track, his buoyant spirit seemed to fail.

Now that all peril was apparently over, he felt an odd sense of impending trouble.

CHAPTER III.

A NEW TURN IN THE ROAD.

A CHURCH clock somewhere was striking eight, as Clyde Maxwell boarded the last car of a train bound for the New York ferry.

There were few passengers, and such as chanced to be in the same car seemed to find nothing unusual in the spectacle of a tall, gloveless young man in a shabby, ill-fitting plaid overcoat and a brown tweed sea-cap.

When he came to pay his fare, Clyde mechanically thrust his fingers into the change pocket of the overcoat. One coin was there; a nickel. It was only after he had handed this over that he realized he had unconsciously robbed the coat's real owner of the money.

"I'll make it good when I send back the coat," he thought. "It was probably a nickel he stuck here to buy a cigar or a glass of beer next time he happened to be wearing that old coat to the village."

Then the refugee's mind turned with a joyous rush to the welcome that lay before him. Each revolution of the train's wheels was carrying him nearer and nearer to the girl he adored. In another hour he would feel her dear arms about his neck, her lips pressed to his.

How she would thrill at the story of what he had dared and done in order to come to her and to save her fortune!

Surely no knight errant of old had hazarded more, in so brief a space, for his lady-love. Now that he was safe he knew he had run a fearful risk. But it was past. And it was worth it all.

But for his daring, he must even now have been back on that horrible ship, herded with the rest of the human sheep, awaiting the quarantine's end, for another two days.

If, according to the health officer, no new cases were reported by the morning of the third day, the passengers would be allowed to land.

The third day! This was the night of February 27. The morning of the third day would be the morning of March 2.

A whole day too late! A day whose loss would mean over half a million dollars. And the difference between wealth and grinding, toil-ridden semipoverty. If—

The train drew into the terminal. With a handful of other passengers, Clyde Maxwell rushed toward the ferry. He could see a boat in the slip.

A uniformed guard was motioning a group of people aboard. That meant the boat was about to start. He would be just in time.

Maxwell thrust his fingers again, by custom, into the overcoat's change pocket, drew them out with a laugh at his own absent-mindedness, thrust his hand into his trousers pocket, and fished forth a fistful of small change.

Hastily glancing at the coins as he ran, he selected a quarter, slipped the rest back into his pocket, reached the ticket window; and, with one eye on the boat, pushed the piece of silver across to the ticket-seller.

"Hurry, please!" he said, as the seller hesitated, "I want to catch that boat."

"Whatcher given me?" growled the ticket man.

"I say I want to catch that boat. Give me my ticket."

"An' *I* say," retorted the ticket-seller, with ponderous sarcasm, "whatcher given me? What's *this?*"

He thrust back the coin.

"It's a quarter," cried the exasperated Maxwell. "What's the matter with it. Hurry or—"

"It ain't a quarter," snapped the ticket-seller. "I don't know what it is. But it don't go here. Nothin' but good United States money is taken on the—"

"What a fool I am!"

Clyde had glanced down at the coin and had seen it was an English shilling.

"Wait a second!" he added, pulling out his pocketful of change and pawing it over, "I'll give—"

"Get a move on, there!" shouted the next man in line behind him. "You'll make us all miss our boat."

Reluctantly, Clyde left his place at the head of the little line and stood aside under an electric light, looking down with ever-increasing despair at his handful of change.

There were several shillings, a two-shilling piece, a couple of sixpences, a copper or so, and a gold sovereign.

English coins, every one of them. Of excel-

lent monetary value in London, but, for Clyde's present needs, of far less value than one battered five-cent piece would have been.

He had gotten rid of most of his English money before coming on shipboard, and had calculated on using up the rest in tips before going ashore.

Hence, in the clothes he had been wearing when he left the vessel, he had not one cent of American money. Safe in his cabin below was all his United States currency.

And now, the lack of a nickel was liable to halt him in sight of his destination. He could have sworn aloud in his vexation.

He had risked life, health, freedom. And he had won. Only to be balked now for the lack of a five-cent disk of metal.

He resolved on an appeal to the ticket-seller. Turning, he took his place at the end of the dwindling line before the window.

And, as he fell into place, the coveted ferry-boat started lumberingly away from her slip.

Far away, the lights of New York flashed him a mocking invitation. There, in the city behind that clifflike rampart of tall water-front office buildings, was Sylvia Tennant. And for want of five cents, he could not reach her side.

The rest of the line before the window had melted away. Clyde approached the ticket-seller. Holding out his palm, with its little burden of copper, silver, and gold, he said:

"I've only English money with me. I didn't land till a little while ago. I want to get to New York. Here is a two-shilling piece. It is silver. You can prove that by ringing it. Will you give me a ferry-ticket in exchange? You'll make forty-five cents on the deal."

He paused, half expecting a gruff refusal, and preparing to offer the gold piece next. But the ticket-seller did not answer at once. Instead, he backed away, in his booth, to get a better look at Maxwell.

Then, eying Clyde doubtfully, he said:

"We ain't supposed to do that sort of thing. But wait there just a minute, and I'll see if I can't fix it for you."

Surprised and pleased at the erstwhile gruff attendant's gentler manner, Clyde leaned against the ticket-window and waited.

Again his gaze strayed to New York. This time he returned the lights' gaze defiantly, and their twinkle seemed to take on a friendlier aspect.

There would be another boat in a few minutes. The attendant would give him a ticket for it. A short sail and he would be at Battery Park. Then—having no American money—he would probably have to walk all the way to Sylvia's home in West Eightieth Street. But what did that matter? He would easily—

The ticket-seller's voice was in his ear once more. But it was not to him the fellow was speaking.

"I guess that's your man, orf'cer!" said the seller.

Clyde whirled about. In front of him stood the attendant, and at his side three other men. Two policemen and a thick-set young fellow whom he remembered as one of the health officer's assistants on board the liner that day.

"That's him!" went on the ticket-seller. "Answers the description to a T. I suspicioned it the second I clapped eyes onto that English money of his an' heard him say he'd just landed. So I hustled off to fetch you. I hope I ain't caught any disease for being so near him."

The Health Department doctor stepped up to Clyde.

"Yes," said he, "you're the man. I remember seeing you on board to-day. I was sent here an hour ago to watch for you. There's a watcher at every ferry. I hope you'll come quietly."

"Quietly?" sputtered Clyde. "Where?"

"Back to the ship. I have a launch waiting down at the dock, and—"

"I am not going back. I—"

"You prefer to go to the Ellis Island inspection hospital? Or to the inspection hospital at Ward's Island? If you insist, I can have you sent to either of those institutions, and you can wait there a fortnight until quarantine is lifted. Or you can go back to the ship and stay there two days. Take your choice."

"You have no right to—"

"I am acting within the department's rights and by its orders. These policemen will back my authority. Will you—?"

Clyde dodged suddenly to one side of the thick-set doctor. Ducking under the out-thrown arm of one of the policemen, he made a rush for the street outside.

His plan of action was by no means clear. But he was resolved to escape. Once out in the darkness, he might be able to formulate some scheme whereby to cross the Kill von Kull to New Jersey, and so back to New York.

So sudden was his ruse and so quickly did he execute it, that he was a good ten feet in the lead before the policemen could make after him in pursuit.

Through a knot of arriving Staten Island-

ers he flew, darted to the street entrance, slipped on a bit of ice, and fell with a crash to the ground.

His head struck against the flagstones with a thud. A thousand stars seemed to burst before his eyes. Then things went black, and he lay very still.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER CHANCE.

"IT was a nasty crack on the head," some one was saying; "but it is nothing serious. He's coming to, all right."

Then came a throbbing that shook Maxwell and made his head ache abominably.

Vaguely he knew he was aboard a gasoline-launch. He opened his eyes.

By the light of a boat lantern, he could see the young health doctor bending over him. There were two other men in the launch.

Raising his head, Clyde noted the boat was skirting the northeast shore of Staten Island.

"All right now?" asked the doctor. "You might have got concussion from a fall like that. The thick sea-cap saved you from anything worse than a five-minute knockout.

"You'll have a bruised place on your scalp for a day or so. But otherwise you're as good as new.

"What did you try to bolt for? It was no use. Every ferry was watched. Every police station, roadhouse, and depot in Staten Island was notified. You'd have been caught again before morning. That's why I asked you to come with us quietly."

"If I hadn't slipped," answered Maxwell shakily, "I'd have gotten away somehow. Even if the ferries were watched, I'd have found a way out. Just as I would have done half an hour ago, if I'd had a nickel with me."

"Yes," agreed the young doctor, "you'd have got clear that time, I grant you. You see, we were watching the ferries for a man with no overcoat and with clothes that were wringing wet. When you came along in dry clothes and an overcoat, you'd have passed scot free but for the English money. It would not have worked a second time, though; for we'd have sent out a better description. Why did you risk your life just to reach New York three days earlier?"

"If I'm not married two days from now, I forfeit more than half a million dollars. You won't believe that, of course; and I don't care whether you do or not. But it's true. So I took chances."

"Say, Mr. Maxwell," observed the official, dropping his voice and speaking with a reluctant admiration, "you interest me. I like your pluck. The man who had the nerve to dive over a ship's side on a February evening, and the strength to swim a quarter of a mile in such water, is worth helping. That's why I'm helping you."

"Helping me?" sneered Clyde. "By nabbing me and lugging me back to the ship? Thanks, vastly; but I'd have preferred to go unhelped."

"Don't get hot under the collar. I caught you; and I'm taking you to the ship. That's true. I had to. I'm a sworn employee of the Health Department, and I can't go back on my duty. But I've helped you, none the less."

"How? By trying Russian police methods, and—"

"By interesting the health officer in your case, and getting him to persuade the captain not to put you in irons or bringing criminal proceedings against you, as that worthy commander had threatened to. By arranging that you should be brought privately back to the ship, if you were caught, and treated there as if nothing had happened. Maybe you think it was easy to do all that? The captain was as mad as a wet hen. Steer clear of him."

"Thanks."

"Also," went on the official, "I arranged that you be brought to the ship instead of going into worse and longer confinement. And I kept those two policemen at the ferry from fanning you with their clubs and then dragging you off to jail for resisting an officer."

"I'm much obliged," muttered Clyde. "If I'm not more grateful, just remember what I've been up against."

"You speak of getting married," hazarded the other. "If you'd care to scratch off a note to—to the young lady, I'll dip it in carbolic solution, and then see it's mailed to her."

Clyde started up in delight. Headache and shakiness were forgotten. The official handed him a pocket-pad and a pencil.

"Don't make it too confidential," he advised; "for, while I'm dipping it and putting it in an envelope I might happen to see some of the writing."

Clyde was scribbling away furiously. On one sheet he wrote Sylvia's full name and address. This he handed the official, who promised to copy it on an envelope. Then, on a second sheet, he wrote:

SYLVIA:

I am quarantined off Staten Island. The quarantine will end two days from to-morrow morning.

Then I will come at once to you. But it will be a day late.

I won't try to tell you how I suffer at the thought of all that my delay must mean to you. We have lost a fortune. But we still have each other. And that is the *real* happiness. I've risked all to reach you on time. And I have failed.

Forgive me—I write stiffly, in case this note should be read by other eyes before it reaches you. In two days—from to-morrow morning, I shall be with you. A whole day too late. CLYDE.

It was a miserably stilted, unsatisfactory note. Yet, he could say no more; and it gave him a vague sense of comfort that she would know he had not failed through negligence.

He handed the paper to the official, who took and pocketed it, just as the launch ran under the companionway of the liner.

"If I haven't already overburdened you," said Clyde, slipping off the borrowed overcoat, "would you mind having this coat sent to one 'Masterson,' a farmer near Rosebank? And send him this sovereign as payment for the forced loan. I'd like to send something to the Dauntless Pirates, too," he muttered under his breath, "if I knew their names. They saved me an attack of pneumonia."

None of the passengers was about as Maxwell ran up the companionway to the deck. A petty officer eyed him askance. The captain, as Clyde passed on toward his own stateroom, met him, glowered, made as though to speak, then grunted and turned aside.

Arrived in his cabin, Maxwell's first act was to plunge both hands in his steamer-trunk and scatter its contents right and left until he came upon a roll of American money. Then, changing into other, less wrinkled, clothes, he stuck the bills into his pocket, along with several pieces of silver.

"It's like locking the stable door after the horse is stolen," he grumbled; "but it does me good to feel a bunch of honest Uncle Sam currency in my suit. If I'd had one nickel of this with me an hour ago—"

His stateroom door silently flew open. A man slipped in softly and swiftly, closed and locked the door behind him, and stood facing the amazed Clyde.

The newcomer was a dapper little keen-eyed man of about fifty. Maxwell remembered chatting with him once or twice in the smoking-room. His name was Deane.

"I don't know what part of the country you come from, Mr. Deane," observed Clyde, recovering, with a tinge of anger, from his surprise, "but you won't be offended, I hope, if I tell you that in civilized communities there is a quaint, old-fashioned custom which demands that people knock at a door before bursting in. It is a custom I believe in encouraging. I merely mention it, in case you—"

"No offense! No offense!" broke in Deane in a low, hurried voice. "My apologies. I had to come in quickly. The captain was crossing the passage below. I was afraid he'd see me."

"Well?" queried Maxwell. "What if he had? There's no law against people coming here to see me. I'm not under arrest. Or—"

"No offense!" repeated Deane soothingly, adding: "No, you're not under arrest; though it's a miracle that you aren't. The captain raged like a bull of Basham after you went overboard. Swore he'd do all sorts of things to you. After a while the health officer calmed him down, and—"

"I still don't see why you popped in upon me like a confounded jack-in-the-box," said Clyde irritably. "You'll pardon me if I say I'm in no humor to receive callers."

"I think you'll be in humor to receive me," returned Deane, quite unruffled. "Will you be patient while I explain my errand? I'll be as brief as I can. Then, if you say so, I'll get out. Believe me, Mr. Maxwell, it's to your advantage to listen."

"Go ahead, then," gruffly vouchsafed Clyde, somewhat impressed by the other's air of earnest mystery. "But I can't see how it's to my interest to—"

"Perhaps you will," Deane assured him. "To come to the point, first of all, I understand you want to escape from this ship."

"That's my affair. I did escape. I'm back again. It isn't a subject I want to discuss."

"Don't be cranky. You wanted to escape. You still want to escape. I think I can help you do it."

"You?" exclaimed Clyde, incredulous, yet with a tiny thrill of foolish hope pounding away at his heart. "I don't understand."

"Let me explain. I happened — by the merest chance, of course—to be smoking a before-dinner cigar, just behind the corner of one of the deck-cabins this afternoon, when you were telling your tale of wo to our honest friend, the purser."

"You listened?"

"Quite by chance, as I said. At first, because so improbable a story amused me; then with an idea of helping you. But before I could broach my plan to you, you had gone over the side. So I am hunting you up, at this late hour, to offer my services. Now, do you understand why I didn't want the captain or anybody else to see me come in here?"

"Go ahead," answered Clyde, perplexed by a mingled hope of escape and instinctive dislike to the glib, smooth-spoken fellow.

"After you escaped," resumed Deane, "I took the liberty of sending one or two wireless messages in cipher to certain friends of mine in New York. One was to a firm of inquiry agents. I asked for details about you."

"About me? Why?"

"In reply," went on Deane, "I have just received a couple of wireless telegrams. From them I learn that, though you are not particularly well off, you have a name for rigid honesty that is almost a byword among your friends—that you are honest, often to your own disadvantage, and that you are strictly a man of your word."

"That is highly flattering," scoffed Clyde. "But may I ask why you took the trouble to set detectives to scraping up my record? What business was it of yours? I call it a piece of abominable impertinence."

"Go easy," smiled Deane. "Wait till you have heard me out. I wanted to see if you were O.K., and those details came to me along with the rest. I also verified your story about having to lose six hundred and twenty thousand dollars unless you are married by March 1st."

"My private affairs are no concern of—"

"Oh, yes, they are. That's why I'm going to help you. Now do you want to hear my plan?"

"I've been waiting to, for five minutes."

"You saw old McCue, the Bird Seed Trust man, go ashore this afternoon? Well, he only took a small part of his luggage along. He has arranged that the rest of it shall go up at five o'clock in the morning, so as to be at the dock when the custom-house people start in."

"Well, how does that concern me?"

"Want to go along?"

"Do I? Do I? But, pshaw, it's impossible. If—"

"It isn't at all impossible. That's why I'm here. A tug is coming for the luggage at five. It's pitch dark at that hour. The tug belongs to a company I've had dealings with. I sent a cipher telegram to them, too. Then I found out what sailors would be on watch at 5 A.M., and I slipped a ten-spot to one of them. He'll be on duty at the companionway when the tug comes alongside. Two men from the tug will carry the trunks down, one at a time. You will take the place of one of those men on the second trip. No one will know, in the dark, except the tug people and the sailor on watch at the gangway. It's absurdly simple."

"Yes—if it weren't impossible."

"How is it impossible?" challenged Deane. "You'll be waiting in the dark, behind the pile of trunks. As the two tug men come for their second load, one of them will stand aside, and you'll take his place. I don't think it was really necessary to tip that sailor. In the dim light the change would not be noticed. But I wanted to make sure. Of course, you can't carry your luggage ashore. But you can readily wait for that until the ship docks."

"Look here!" said Maxwell, more moved than he cared to show. "It's a crazy trait of humanity always to seek something in exchange for nothing. That trait fills the poorhouses and potters' fields and the Wall Street men's pockets. But I am still a little sane. You come here almost a total stranger, offering to help me out. You say you have paid out money, and sent cipher telegrams, and spent time and trouble on the scheme. Why? There must be an answer. No one does that sort of thing to help a stranger evade the law. That's why I say 'Impossible.'"

"Quite right," assented Deane, with a careless shrug of the shoulders. "If you care to look at it that way. But there are other points of view. If you were a sentimentalist I might say I'm interested in seeing two loving souls united, and in saving them a fortune that they would lose unless I—"

"I am not a sentimentalist," interrupted Clyde. "Try another."

"If, on the contrary," argued Deane, "I knew a shrewd young man who had to get to New York at a certain time or lose six hundred and twenty thousand dollars, and if I knew that the young man were so eager to get to New York that he had already risked his life to do so—if I knew all that, I say, mightn't it occur to me that the young man would pay me a pretty penny for engineering a scheme that would put him safely ashore in Battery Park?"

"*Now* we're getting down to facts," agreed Clyde. "You will get me safely out of this, as a purely business proposition. Is that the idea?"

"If you choose to put it that way—yes."

"And your terms?"

"For a man who stands to win six hundred and twenty thousand dollars, do you think one thousand dollars is too big a bonus?"

"H'm!" muttered Clyde. "Let me think. No, it isn't too much. Of course, in a sense, it is extortion pure and simple; just as it would be if you charged one thousand dollars to lift a drowning man out of the water.

But it would be worth it to the drowning man. And it's worth it to me."

"Good! Shake on it."

"Thanks. But, if you don't mind, I'd rather not. This is a business deal. I accept because I have to. But you can't expect me to feel much personal liking for a man who does me a good turn at a price like that."

"As you choose. Be on deck, in the corner beyond the gangway, a little before five. Remember, when the men come for the trunk—"

"Hold on!" broke in Clyde. "I haven't one thousand dollars with me. I've barely ninety dollars in American money."

"That's all right. You'll pay me when I come ashore two days from to-morrow morning. I'll hunt you up."

"But what guarantee have you that I—"

"That's why I made those inquiries about your honesty. You are a man of your word. You've agreed to pay me. You'll pay."

"You're taking chances. Shall I give you a note for the debt?"

"It isn't necessary. I read faces pretty well. It's part of my trade. I've never been mistaken in one yet. And if you say you'll pay, you'll do it."

Clyde felt his heart warm unaccountably toward the man.

"That's very decent of you," said he. "I'm sorry if I spoke roughly; but, you see, it was an odd proposition. I was a bit staggered at first. By the way, you spoke just now of your 'trade.' What is that trade?"

"A little bit of everything, if you like," laughed Deane. "Just at present my trade is to enable a rather excitable young man to evade the quarantine laws and win a fortune. And speaking of trades reminds me of my mission to Europe. I went to get some decidedly important papers—mortgages, notes, and that sort of thing. It was needful that some of those papers reach New York not later than to-morrow. There's a lot of money involved. As they can't, I am a pretty heavy loser. So you see you aren't the only unfortunate on board."

"Hard luck! Can't you smuggle them ashore the same way you're smuggling me?"

"Turn them over to a tugboat captain to lose or forget? Not much. That would mean a bigger loss than their not getting there to-morrow. And, in my case, there is no kind stranger to butt in—for a consideration—and help me. There are mortgages and—"

"If you're hinting that you'd like to have me take them—"

"You?" cried Deane, in slow wonder. Then: "Why not? I was a fool not to think of it. The very thing!"

"Wait! I haven't said I would. I'll have enough business of my own to transact, without—"

"Don't say that!" pleaded Deane. "Now that you've given me the idea, don't refuse. Listen. I'll make a new bargain with you. Like yourself, I'm up against it, and extortion is permissible. If you'll take that little satchel of papers with you and deliver them to my partner, whom I'll telegraph in cipher to meet you in Battery Park at 6 A.M.—so you won't be delayed in having to go to my office—if you'll do this for me, we'll cancel the one thousand dollars payment, and call it square."

"But—"

"There's a lot more than one thousand dollars involved in that packet of documents," said Deane. "Is it a deal?"

"Why, yes—if you insist. But I get all the best of it."

"Good! I'll telegraph Coan, my partner, to meet you in Battery Park—or say at the foot of the South Ferry 'L' stairway—as near 6 A.M. as he can. All you have to do is to give him the bag. I'll slip it to you on deck just before you start. You can button it inside your coat. Coan is a big chap, with a brown beard. I'll tell him to call you by name, and that'll be all the 'countersign' needed. Give him the bag, and your debt to me is wiped out. How about it?"

"It's a go," said Maxwell. "But I still feel I ought to pay you cash for all you're doing to—"

"If that little bag gets safe to Coan to-morrow morning," answered Deane, "it'll be worth more cash to me than any payment you could make."

He smiled oddly and quitted the cabin.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN WITH THE BAG.

CLYDE MAXWELL did not dare go to bed. He did not even take the risk of dozing in his chair lest, after the exhaustion and hard exercise of the day, he should oversleep.

He must be on deck, alert, waiting, before five in the morning. He was weary. He ached in every limb. His eyelids seemed lead-weighted. He had slept badly the previous night, and had waked at dawn.

He had that afternoon undergone more violent physical effort than falls to most athletes in a week. All his system cried out for

a long, refreshing sleep, to knit the raveled nerves, to replenish the worn-out tissues.

Yet, everything depended on his keeping awake. And by sheer will-power he sought to beat back the lures of slumber. He walked back and forth in his narrow stateroom, planning the future.

If all went well, the tug should bring him to New York before six in the morning. It would doubtless land him somewhere off Battery Park, before going on with its load of trunks to the steamer's dock. He would cross the "L" stairway, wait there for Coan —if the latter was not already there awaiting him—give up the satchel, and then make a bee-line for West Eightieth Street.

He smiled as he thought of Sylvia's amaze when she should find him camping on the front door-step of her home before seven o'clock—a whole day before the wedding's time limit should expire.

Somehow, he could not think as coolly and as calmly as was his wont. Nature can stand only a certain amount of strain. The man who has plowed all day cannot run fast foot-races at sunset. The system that has been overexhausted balks when concentrated mental or physical effort is called for.

Clyde made such few arrangements as were needful. He replaced and locked his steamer-trunk, thrusting it under his berth. He saw to it that all his money was safe in his pocket. He put on his thickest overcoat, and changed his sea-cap for a derby.

He dared not risk the suspicion of any of the ship's officers by carrying even the lightest hand-luggage with him. He would be lucky, he knew, if he could thrust Deane's small handbag, unobserved, under his overcoat.

He looked at his watch when all preparations were complete. Just eleven o'clock. Six more hours to wait.

To fight off drowsiness, he went on deck. A fine, misty rain was falling, and the footing was slippery. He paced back and forth along the almost deserted decks, smoking and trying to bring his jaded faculties up to concert pitch.

Back and forth the tired man walked, while the drizzle fell cold on his face and dampened his thick coat. Eight bells struck. Twelve o'clock. Five more hours of waiting.

To the north a broad, pale glow painted the lowering skies. That was New York. Sylvia was there. To the right an arc of tiny, twinkling lights spanned a black abyss. That was Brooklyn Bridge.

If he were on the bridge he could walk to Sylvia's house in an hour and a half. He could ride there by Subway in twenty minutes—maybe less.

If he could find a hotel on the way, with a thousand white beds in it, he would tumble into the first one and sleep the clock round. If—

He roused himself with a start. Leaning against a stanchion, while he viewed the distant city, he had fallen asleep on his feet. Only the forward lurch of his unbalanced body had waked him. He fell to walking once more, this time more briskly.

The captain, on his way to bed, passed Clyde on deck, and favored him with another glower. Maxwell thought he read suspicion in his surly glare. If the captain should suspect him of planning to escape a second time a secret watch would undoubtedly be set upon him.

Perhaps such a watch was already set. It might be wiser to go below. And down into the warm, stuffy interior of the vessel the weary man went.

In his stateroom he forced himself to move rapidly about, to go through a series of "setting up" exercises that still further tired him, to reading aloud as he walked up and down.

And so, in the course of what seemed an eternity, the endless night dragged itself away.

Red-eyed and half-drunk from sheer sleepiness, Clyde Maxwell looked at his watch for the fiftieth time. Quarter before five. Time to go on deck.

He had not dared go earlier lest some officer, noting his presence, should suspect him of an intention to dive overboard a second time.

Cautiously, yet smoking a cigarette to allay any idea of secrecy, Clyde made his way to the deck and strolled along toward the gangway. His senses were alert enough now. He glanced furtively from side to side, on the lookout for any officer who might question his presence there at such an hour.

At last he saw a little pile of trunks near the gangway, with a sailor on watch beside it. Below, a tug was working its way alongside. Maxwell shrank back into the shadows behind the trunk-pile and waited.

An officer came to the gangway, exchanging a low-voiced hail with the tug's captain. Then he gave an order to the sailor, and moved along in the darkness.

A moment later Clyde, crouching moveless and tense in the shadows, felt a light touch on his arm.

He almost cried out with nervous shock.

Whirling round, he found himself confronting a faintly discerned figure that had crept up to him unheard.

CHAPTER VI.

VICTORY IN SIGHT.

THE dim-seen man laughed softly at Maxwell's start of surprise.

"Your nerves are bad, my friend!" he commented.

"I—I didn't know it was you, Deane," faltered Clyde. "I was afraid it might be—"

"And well it might," replied Deane in the same low-pitched voice. "That sailor chap I bribed just told me that word has been passed along to keep an eye on you. The captain's afraid you'll make another bolt for freedom. I shall relish hearing his comments when he finds you're gone. Here's the bag. Take all sorts of care of it. Some of these papers are worth their weight in gold to my partner and me."

He pressed a small brown leather satchel into Clyde's hand.

"It's very heavy," observed Clyde, thrusting it into the breast of his overcoat.

"Paper is about the heaviest thing, in bulk, that you can find," said Deane. "For Heaven's sake, don't let that bag slip out or drop. I've telegraphed ahead to my partner. You'll remember the directions?"

"Yes. I'm to meet a big brown man named Coan at the foot of the South Ferry 'L' stairs about six o'clock. He's to call me by name, and I'm to give him the bag. By the way, suppose he doesn't show up?"

"He will. Don't worry about that. He's as anxious to get the bag as I am to send it. It— Look sharp! Here come the two roustabouts from the tug for McCue's luggage."

A couple of men stamped up the companionway-stairs, picked up a trunk from the pile pointed out to them by the sailor on guard, and started down with it to the tug. A minute later they were back.

"Take the rear end of the trunk," whispered Deane to Maxwell, "and hold it high, so your face will be hidden. I hope that fresh officer won't happen to pass just as you— Go ahead."

The two tug-men had returned. At a sign from Deane, they stooped over a trunk at the darkest corner of the pole. Deane gave Clyde a shove forward.

At once, the nearest of the two men from the tug stepped backward noiselessly into the shadow cast by the single near-by light. Clyde as quickly and silently darted forward and caught up the far end of the trunk which the second man was lifting.

No one had observed the maneuver. The nearest outsider was the sailor on guard, who stood with his back to them.

Across the few feet of dark deck moved Clyde and the roustabout, their burden between them. Then the tug-man started down the companionway, Clyde at his heels.

"That's the gawkiest way I ever saw a grown man handle a trunk," observed the returning officer to a companion. "The hindmost man. He holds his end of it up against his face like a mask. And he can hardly keep his feet. If that's the way they are going to shift the luggage, they'll be at it for another hour."

"Queer," remarked his companion, "what worthless men those tugboat captains pick up. That's some amateur who struck him for a job. Did you notice he wore an overcoat and derby? Imagine a regular trunk-mover wearing such togs. Big chest development, though. His chest stuck out like a pouter pigeon's."

They passed on. Clyde, who had caught every word of comment, never knew how he completed the rest of the journey down the steep, slippery stairs. It was not until he felt the tug's little deck beneath his feet that he dared to breathe.

Creeping along the narrow footway, he came to an open door, and found himself looking into the empty galley. He crawled in, and shut the door behind him.

There for another eternity he waited, straining his ears for every sound from the liner. After a veritable eon of time the tug cast off. He heard her screw churning the water. She turned, puffed as she got under weigh, then settled down into steady onward motion.

Clyde drew a deep breath of relief. It was as though the burden of the universe had just been lifted from his tired shoulders. He was safe—free!

He opened the galley-door and ventured out on deck, or, rather, onto the three-foot runway that serves that purpose on a tug.

A full quarter-mile behind him rose the bulk of the anchored liner. Ahead, momentarily drawing nearer, was New York. In the east, above the dim Long Island shoreline, the night was paling into the faint approach of dawn.

Clyde found the steep little stair that ran up to the pilot-house. Up he went, opened the door of the little room, and entered.

row of benches ran around the wall. In the middle was a stove, with a lantern above it. At the end farthest from the door was the wheel. At this stood a sweatered, red-whiskered man.

"You're the mizzable stowaway, ain't you?" asked the man at the wheel. "I was waiting for you to show up. You sure handle a trunk awkward. I watched you come aboard. There'll be fine doings on that old hulk when they find you gone. If I hadn't been paid blamed well, I wouldn't 'a' took the risk."

"Can I sit down here?" asked Clyde, pointing to the long, leather-covered benches.

"Sure. Make yourself to home. You look played out. Lay down there an' get a mite of sleep. We won't be to New York for half an hour yet. I'll wake you in plenty of time. I've got orders to run alongside Schaefer's pier at Battery wall an' put you off there."

Clyde scarce heard the last words. He had tumbled, exhausted, upon the bench, and was dead asleep before he had time to answer. Heavily he slept—the slumber of utter exhaustion, oblivious of everything about him. Ten hours of such sleep refresh both mind and body. A half-hour of it is barely enough to relax the system, and leave it in worse case, apparently, than before.

Maxwell seemed scarce to have closed his eyes when he was dragged back to painful consciousness by the pilot's grip on his shoulder. Shaking the dazed sleeper to and fro roughly, the man was shouting:

"Hey, you! Wake up there! Are you doped? We're off Battery wall. Get a move on! We can't wait all day!"

Blinking, gasping, Clyde Maxwell stumbled to his feet. Slowly he realized where he was. At first, he made as though he would fall back again on the bench. But the pilot's shouts and shakes gradually brought him to his senses.

Down the steep little stairway he blundered. The tug was slackening speed, and warping into an open pier. Gray dawn filled Battery Park, just beyond.

The sight of his long-coveted goal spurred Clyde to momentary activity. As the tug grated along the pier's edge he jumped to the string-piece, hurried down the dock and onto solid land.

He was in New York at last. A full day ahead of the date he had risked so much to keep. He was in the same city with Sylvia. Within a half-hour of her home.

He looked at his watch. Three minutes before six. Broad daylight. Then, somewhat conscience-stricken at memory of how he had neglected the satchel of papers, he clapped his hand to the breast of his coat. The bag was still there—undisturbed.

"Now to pay my debt to Deane by handing this thing over to a big, brown-whiskered person named Coan, at the foot of the 'L' stairs!" he reflected. "And then—for the nearest Subway that will take me to—Sylvia."

He crossed the empty park, and came to the nearest of the two "L" stairways. Except for one or two early Brooklynites, who had just emerged from the ferry-house and were climbing the steps, the stairs were deserted. No big, brown-whiskered man.

Maxwell moved across to the other stairway of the "L." This was totally empty. Taking up a position where he could watch both sides of stairs, Clyde muttered impatiently:

"I wish my brown-whiskered friend would show up. It's cold waiting here."

Five minutes passed, then ten. No sign of Coan. Maxwell had taken out the bag, and was holding it in his hand. But the chill early morning air bit his fingers. So he returned the bag to its place in the bosom of his overcoat, and rammed both hands into his pockets.

Quarter past six. No Coan. The deserted section was beginning to wake up. But Clyde was beginning to grow sleepy again.

The excitement of reaching his goal had for the moment pushed aside the pall of slumbrous exhaustion that had encompassed him. Now, gradually, steadily, it was settling down again.

The half-hour's sleep had served only to make him ravenous for more. The cold air that had at first revivified him now added to his drowsiness.

Maxwell looked about him. Coan had not appeared. But from one of the benches at the northeastern end of the little park, Clyde was sure he could watch both stairways as well as by standing in the center of a sidewalk.

So he moved over to the nearest bench, sat down, glanced against the foot of each stair, and—promptly fell asleep.

The sun was shining in his face. Some one was shaking him and calling in his ear.

The pilot! No, he had left the tug.

At last he thought he remembered.

Clyde Maxwell opened his eyes stupidly. A man in blue was leaning over him; a man in blue with brass buttons; a big man.

"Are—are you Coan?" Clyde murmured drowsily.

"No," retorted the bluecoat. "I'm an orf'cer of the law. What are you doin' sleepin' off a jag in the freezin' cold? Get up!"

But Maxwell had once more sank peacefully back into slumberland.

Glancing about to see no one was observing his treatment of a well-dressed and apparently respectable civilian, Officer Mahan applied the one unfailing police cure for undue slumber.

Pulling out his night-stick, he smote the upturned soles of Clyde's shoes a resounding blow. Maxwell, with a growl of pain, sprang to his feet, wide-awake.

"What's—what's up?" he demanded.

"You are!" retorted the policeman. "An' it's high time. This is no place to sleep off a load. Get home with you, before I run you in!"

Clyde, shamefaced, moved a few steps away. The officer continued on his beat.

Maxwell looked across at each stairway, now swarming with people. But in the hurrying crowds he could see no loitering brown-whiskered giant. A glance at a nearby clock told him the hour was eight-thirty.

Had Coan come and gone while he slept? And, if so, to whom was he to deliver the bag? He had promised Deane to deliver it. And, unconsciously, he had broken his word. For the first time in his life. A hot lash of shame stung him.

What was to be done? He did not know the address of Deane's partner, nor how to get the bag to him. To think matters out, he sat down again on the bench. He was keenly awake now, and his mind had resumed its old activity.

Deane had said the bag contained papers whose arrival in New York on that particular day meant much financially to both partners. And he had promised—

An odd thought flashed into Maxwell's brain. Deane, by money and cipher telegrams, had had no trouble in getting him off of the liner. Why had he not gotten himself off in the same way? It would surely have been as easy to smuggle two men aboard the tug as one.

If it had been worth so much money to Deane to get those papers to New York by February 28, why had he not brought them himself, and thus have won one thousand dollars for which he had bargained with Maxwell?

It did not seem logical. Clyde could not understand. Why, too, had he arranged so odd a meeting-place for Maxwell and Coan? Any hotel lobby, or Coan's own office, would surely—

"Now, then," roared the exasperated officer, "didn't I tell you to beat it home? Git!"

He yanked Clyde sharply to his feet. The pull burst the two upper buttons on Maxwell's overcoat.

Out flew the bulging brown satchel. Through the air it hurled, struck the iron corner of the bench with a force that burst the locked clasp, and fell to the ground wide open.

Out upon the grimy pavement between Clyde and the policeman cascaded a mass of fire-bright diamonds.

A full quart of precious stones, in necklaces, bracelets, rings, and unset.

All piled in a blazing, sprawling heap upon the sidewalk.

CHAPTER VII.

A DOCK FOR—NOWHERE.

FOR an instant both men gazed spellbound, agape, at the flashing, dazzling mass of wealth at their feet.

It was Clyde Maxwell whose trained mentality was first to awaken. While the officer was still staring, hypnotized, down at the jewel-strewn sidewalk, Clyde's brain set to work with a lightning swiftness.

Deane was undoubtedly a diamond thief. A wholesale smuggler, at the very least. He was known to the police. The haul he had brought across seas would not be brought ashore by himself.

Some wireless tip from confederates on land had undoubtedly apprised him that the police were on the lookout for his arrival. And he had chosen this means of getting the loot safe into his accomplice's hands.

The whole talk of one thousand dollars' payment for engineering Clyde's escape—the whole scene—had evidently led up from the very point to that one proposition—that Maxwell bring the bag to New York.

Deane had chosen an unconscious agent whom he knew to be honest, desperate, resourceful. It had failed only because Clyde had fallen asleep at the moment when he should have been on the lookout for Coan.

All this, in a fraction of time, flashed wordlessly through Maxwell's mind. He was finely caught. How could he explain to an already suspicious policeman his possession

of thousands of dollars' worth of precious stones? Would the honest owner of such treasures be sleeping in a public park with the jewels stuck carelessly in the front of his overcoat?

He could not tell his story. If he did, he would be haled back to the ship or to one of the quarantine islands. If, on the contrary, he did not tell the truth he would be taken at once into custody.

In either case his hope of marrying Sylvia Tennant by the first of March would be at an end.

He had been used as a catspaw by a smuggler or a thief. He felt he no longer owed Deane anything. He must escape now, as best he could. A blind, irresistible impulse of flight seized him.

Something else seized him at the same instant. Officer Mahan, shaking off his daze of wonder, had sprung forward and caught him by the shoulders.

"A flash yeggman, eh!" roared the officer, his dull face alight with visions of promotion. "Worked all night to get the stuff and came down here to sleep it off, did you? Well—"

He got no further. With a sudden tremendous wrench, Clyde tore himself free, leaving his overcoat in the policeman's grasp. The wrench also gripped under his coat and yanked away his linen collar.

He whirled to run, missed his footing on the curb, and rolled in the snowy mud of the gutter. Mahan hurled himself upon the fallen man. Clyde, with the skill of old football days, wriggled from under his clumsy assailant, gained his feet and set off at top speed.

People had begun running up from all directions. As Mahan gained his feet, no less than four street boys had launched themselves with howls of delight upon the diamonds. The bulk of the little crowd, divided in desire between fun of a man-hunt and the incredible spectacle of a fortune in jewels starring the sidewalk, chose the latter attraction.

This gave Clyde a start. So did the fact that Mahan, torn between two duties, rushed at the juvenile diamond-grabbers instead of directly giving chase to the runner.

Across Battery Park sped Maxwell. In his ears rang the shouts, whistles and stick rappings wherewith the policeman, mounting guard over the hoard, strove to summon aid for his pursuit.

Hatless, his overcoat gone, his other coat ripped and dirt-stained, his collar lost, his tie awry, his hair disheveled, Clyde knew his running figure would be a mark for the first policeman who might answer Mahan's frantic summons.

So he dropped into a brisk walk. Even yet, he realized that the first policeman who, hearing the whistles and raps, should catch sight of him would arrest him on suspicion. He cast about for a hiding-place.

Now Battery Park is a delightfully picturesque spot. "Guides to New York" devote much space to its beauties and historic memories. But it is about as devoid of effective hiding-places as was the shaven crown of Pharaoh's head.

Clyde, glancing back, could see several bluecoats running from all directions toward the crowd whose center was Mahan, the jewel-guardian. In another moment they would know, and the chase would begin. Hemmed in at one pointed end of Manhattan Island, he must be caught like a rat in a blind drain.

Some forty feet ahead of him stood a motley, jostling crowd. They were swarming against a wicket that led to a boat landing. Between them and a little steamboat that lay at anchor stood a determined old man with a white goatee, thrusting back the foremost of the throng and holding the passageway to the boat against them while he scanned certain passes and tickets.

Maxwell, with a primal instinct of a hunted thing that seeks to lose itself and hide its trail by plunging into a crowd, wriggled his way through the rearmost rank of the waiting men and women.

He understood well enough now where he was. This was the dock of the government boat that plies between Battery Park and Ellis Island. Here come foreigners of all grades on their way to Ellis Island to greet immigrant friends. Here, too, are brought such "undesirables" as have eluded governmental vigilance at Ellis Island, reached New York, and been captured and ordered back for deportation.

From the incoming steamers big barges carry steerage passengers to Ellis Island. There, the newcomers are sorted out, examined for disease, poverty or other official crimes and eventually—if they are in luck—allowed to set foot in the glorious Land of the Free.

As each ship discharges its barge-loads there, a horde of friends and agents cross in the government boat to meet the late arrivals. In the outskirts of such crowd did Clyde Maxwell now find himself. For

a few minutes—if no one had observed his stealthy advent—he was safe.

His soiled, tattered attire caused less notice in this nondescript gathering than it would have done elsewhere in the park. Nevertheless it could not long pass muster.

Every minute or so, the crowd would roll confusedly forward of its own weight, toward the barrier. Then before the onslaught of the white-goateed man, it would recoil in even more dire confusion. At each such maneuver, Clyde managed to work his way deeper in the mass.

In a few minutes at most the boat would be ready for its passengers. Then the crowd would go aboard. His shelter gone, he would once more stand exposed to the eye of the first searching officer. Something must be done, and quickly.

At his shoulder, as the people once more recoiled, he found a tall, slender man, of much his own general appearance. The stranger wore a rather dilapidated but still fairly presentable slouch hat, and a long greenish ulster.

He looked hard up. Maxwell had an idea.

"Friend," he whispered, not seeming to speak directly to the man, "I will give you forty dollars for your hat and ulster. If you accept, next time the crowd gets into a mixup, slip off the hat and coat and pass them to me. And I will hand you the money."

The other paid no heed. Covertly nudging him, Clyde began his whispered speech again, this time closer to his ear. The stranger turned ever so slightly; and copying Maxwell's furtive manner whispered:

"Qu'est ce que c'est que vous dites? Je no comprends pas l'Anglais."

In French Clyde repeated his request.

"Show me the money!" muttered the stranger, doubtfully, in the same tongue.

Drawing four ten-dollar bills from his roll of currency, Clyde displayed them in the hollow of his hand. The stranger nodded, almost imperceptibly, and began carelessly to unbutton his long coat.

"When we are pushed back," he murmured in French, "I will stumble as if I were knocked off my feet. You do the same. That will jostle the rest. In the confusion we can change."

Clyde vaguely wondered at the fellow's quick agreement and ready resource. But he did not grudge paying forty dollars for coat and hat that were not worth ten. Thus garbed he could easily walk unnoticed past policemen who were scouring the square for a hatless, coatless man, and could reach Sylvia.

Again the mass of people rolled forward. Once more the man with the white goatee drove them back. The recoil was more violent than usual, whirling the human atoms this way and that into a veritable whirlpool of confused, tangled groups.

Several persons were shoved bodily off their feet. There were some laughs and profanity and renewed turmoil as these sought to scramble to a standing posture once more.

Two tall men, especially, were a long time regaining their balance and in rising again to the surface of the human whirlpool.

But when they did emerge, the Frenchman's tousled head was bare. His ulster was gone, disclosing a decidedly ragged coat beneath. In his fist he clenched four ten-dollar bills. Clyde's own torn coat, on the other hand, was covered by a long, faded green ulster. His recently bare head was crowned with a black slouch hat.

It had been very simple, very unexciting, wholly unobserved; this quick exchange. Clyde turned, as if weary of waiting for the boat to take on passengers, and began to thread the crowd toward the open park.

But the Frenchman was ahead of him. Working his way with the unerring, wriggling swiftness of a snake, he went just in front of Clyde and at a far more rapid unopposed pace.

Gaining the street, the Frenchman set off at a run, toward the elevated stairway. He had not gone a hundred feet before Clyde, still elbowing through the crowd, saw two policemen bear down upon him, seize him and bring him to earth. They had been looking for a hatless, overcoatless man in disheveled clothes. And, in the luckless Frenchman, they had found one.

Clyde drew a long breath. He was safe. The Frenchman would come to no ultimate harm. Mahan at a glance would see he was the wrong man.

But, for the time, the pursuit of Maxwell himself was at an end. The way before him lay clear. He had reached the outskirts of the boat crowd. The Subway was not five minutes away. Sylvia—

"Get back there!"

An official with a rattan cane, (insignia of office in immigrant circles) bellowed the order, just as Maxwell passed the verge of the crowd. He bore down upon Clyde, a second portly man following by way of reenforcement.

"He doesn't understand you," suggested this second man.

"He'll understand this, then," retorted the first, putting out a ham-like hand, placing its flattened palm against Maxwell's breast and thrust him backward into the throng. Clyde was dumfounded. The police were after him. He had sought refuge in this throng. Now that he was preparing to leave it two beefy giants were bent on driving him once more into the herd. Not to arrest him, but to keep him with a hundred or more excited people.

"What does this mean?" he demanded wrathfully. "Keep your hands off me, or—"

"Well, I'll be blessed!" exclaimed the man with the rattan cane. "What do you know about that? Here, Frenchy couldn't speak one word of English this morning and they had to get an interpreter to tell him he was to be deported as an anarchist. And now he hands out a line of English as good as you or me. The cuteness of these furreners!"

"I am not a foreigner!" cried Maxwell. "I am an American citizen."

"You're slick enough to be one," agreed the second man. "But the game won't work here. You were turned over to us with orders to put you in Ellis Island pen. And there's where you'll go."

"It's a mistake," declared Maxwell, "I'm not the man—"

"No?" queried the first official with elephantine irony. "You look a bit cleaner than you did when they turned you over to us here a half hour ago. I didn't take much notice of your face. But I'd swear to that coat anywhere. I let you stand free in the crowd, knowing you couldn't make a getaway, and not caring to be jostled by that bunch. But I've never taken eyes off that coat since I put you there. Now, cut out the smooth talk and chase back where you belong, unless you want us to put bracelets on you."

"Hold on!" said the second man. "Boat's ready at last. One on each side now, so he won't give us the slip again!"

There was a forward surge of the crowd. The two big officials each linked an arm in Maxwell's and hurried him through the press aboard the boat.

"This is an outrage!" shouted Clyde, struggling vainly in the double grip. "You've got the wrong man, I tell you! You'll smart for this."

"Wrong man, eh?" chuckled the official. "Too bad about that! The wrong man can generally prove pretty easy that he's the wrong man. And you'll get a chance to—over on the island—I don't think."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN "UNDESIRABLE."

THE boat cast off, for her short trip to Ellis Island. Once more Clyde Maxwell had the annoyance of seeing the New York shoreline recede before him just when he most eagerly yearned to approach it.

Herded amid a deckful of chattering, jolly foreigners and lynx-eyed agents, he stood miserable, hopeless. His first impulse was to declare his identity to the two men who had hustled him aboard, and to prove it by the letters in his pocket.

But these men were port officials. By this time they would undoubtedly have heard of his escape from the liner. In which case he must at once be rushed unceremoniously back to the ship or transported to one of the quarantine islands. No, he could do nothing—could say nothing.

Twenty-four hours ago he had been a blameless, honored member of society. Today, he was "wanted" on the liner for breaking quarantine; he was "wanted" in New York for the supposed theft of many thousand dollars' worth of diamonds.

He was, meanwhile, being carried to Ellis Island, for deportation as an undesirable immigrant.

Truly, one day had played sorry tricks with a respectable young New York lawyer.

There seemed absolutely no way of escape. Or, if there were, his jaded brain could not grasp it. He had struggled long and gamely. But destiny had proved too much for him. Now, he was fain to drift, inert, with the resistless fate-stream.

The port laws of our government for the prevention of epidemics and the barring out of undesirable immigrants are stringent. They are excellent. But this particular stray fish that had been caught by mistake in the relentless net could have cursed their splendid efficiency.

A policeman on board was chatting with one of Clyde's captors a bare ten feet from where he stood. Maxwell, turning from his own wretched thoughts, caught a word or two of their talk.

"Yes," the policeman was saying, "'twas a queer enough sight. There stood old Mahan, waving his club and keeping guard over the

prettiest heap of real jewelry you'd care to see. And a dozen street-kids trying to pinch bits of it, under his very eyes.

"We hunted high and low for the fellow who dropped the loot. Pretty soon a couple of South Ferry cops came up with a man that looked like the right one. He was jabbering French and fighting like a wildcat."

"Could Mahan identify him?"

"No. That's the funny part. Swore it wasn't the same. But they've locked Frenchy up, just the same, on suspicion. Just before I had to catch the boat, a Central Office man hustles up. He gets one look at the diamonds and recognizes them from cabled descriptions that was pulled off in London last month.

"It seems, the Scotland Yard people got an idea it was the work of a Yankee crook, and they heard he'd sailed for New York. They cabled a description of him to our people here, and—"

"And the crook landed safe with the jewels and then went to sleep in Battery Park. He sure deserved to be caught."

"But it wasn't the crook. The man they were looking out for was a dapper, short cuss, about fifty years old. He's known as 'Atlantic' Donnelly, because he plays both sides of the ocean, and has a gang of accomplices in New York, and London, too. But Mahan swears the fellow who had the jewels is tall and under thirty. Must be a confederate. But how he could be so stupid as to—"

The boat drew in to the Ellis Island wharf, and Clyde heard no more. Nor did he need to. Deane—or 'Atlantic' Donnelly—had made a pretty catspaw of him. As an all-round dupe, he felt he had no living equal.

But he felt, none the less, a grim consolation in knowing the jewels were forever lost to the thieves. He had smiled as he thought of Coan's feverish vigil at the foot of the "L" stairs while the innocent go-between was peacefully snoring on a Battery Park bench not a hundred yards away.

He could picture Coan's long wait—of perhaps an hour or more—his conclusion at last that the game must be up, and his departure before Maxwell had awakened.

How furious and how utterly puzzled both Deane and Coan would be when they read of the discovery of the stolen diamonds, strewn on the sidewalk.

His guardians put an end to Clyde's reflections by seizing his arms once more and walking him ashore and into the nearest of the top-heavy buildings, whose weight seems forever to be crushing the tiny island down under the water-line.

Dully, he noted the joyous, noisy greetings between new-landed immigrants and their friends. Dully, he saw his captors go through formulas, and accompanied them through the babel of many sounds, to the main building's second floor, past the "main pen"—jammed with vociferous or sadly silent immigrants—past the inspectors and doctors to the "detention pen" at the far rear.

There, into a sort of cubby-hole his guardians pushed him, and he was left alone to his reflections. Here, with other undesirables, he was locked for safe keeping, lest his presence contaminate the Land of the Free.

Clyde Maxwell awoke with a sense of being buried alive. From afar came the sound of swishing waves. But this was half-drowned by the nearer clamor that is never wholly stilled—the noise of herded, unhappy humanity.

Clyde lay on his hard, narrow cot, watching gray, early daylight filter into the stuffy alcove where he had slept the sleep of utter fatigue. Little by little he pieced together the events of the long, dreary day of detention, the futile plans he had formed, only to dismiss the dreary inactivity, the abject hopelessness. And now it was the morning again.

"The morning of March first," he muttered aloud. "My wedding day."

"Shut up there!" bawled a voice in the next apartment. "Can't you let a man sleep."

Clyde lay still, looking miserably upward. His wedding day! The day whereon he must marry or else forfeit six hundred and twenty thousand dollars. And here, in the guise of a French anarchist, he was about to be deported from his native land. When or how or where he would be able to clear up the wretched mystery and regain his freedom, he could not guess.

He had made two useless attempts, the previous afternoon, to get the attention of keepers, and to tell his story. But they had refused to listen to him. Long experience with undesirables had taught them to take such tales at their face value. Which was usually—nothing.

At breakfast-time he set aside his coarse food untasted. The long day wore on. At dusk he was led downstairs and put aboard a tug, along with four others from the "detention pen." He did not know where they were being taken. Nor did he go through the useless formality of asking.

In fact, it was not until the tug rounded the Staten Island shore that he took note of

his surroundings. There, in the distance, straight in line with their course, he could see, off Quarantine Station, the liner he had left two nights before.

He wondered if they would pass near to her. Near enough, perhaps, for him to recognize familiar faces on deck. Of one thing he was certain. He would not be able to see Deane.

News of the jewel fiasco would have reached the thief before now, and his fertile brain would have devised a way of escape from the ship. He was not the sort of man to stay aboard and face the Central Office men at the dock.

Nearer and nearer to the liner they came. And, as they were approaching, it seemed to him the tug slowed down. A guard came across to where Clyde and the four other undesirables were huddled in one corner.

"You're going to be put aboard that ship!" he said gruffly. "And you'll go quiet, so as not to put the passengers wise. See? The first man that raises a rumpus will get the club end of this stick over his head."

The next moment they were alongside. So many tugs came back and forth daily, that the advent caused no interest on the promenade deck. A ladder was run out, from the steerage gangway, and the five were ordered to climb it.

"What—what does it all mean?" murmured Clyde, in blank amaze, while these proceedings were under way.

"I know," answered a squat, dwarfish-looking undesirable, who spoke with a strong Scotch accent. "The pen was overcrowded. They had to thin it out. So they took the first batch of us away. I heard one of the guards talkin'. The orders was to put us aboard the first outgoing ship that carries the likes of us. An' this is the one. She's stuck in quarantine till to-morrer.

"But she sails again as soon as she can dump her cargo an' passengers. We're brought here at dusk, so the passengers won't get riled at bein' aboard the same ship with us. I know. It's happened to me once before. But next time I'll land all right. An' when I do—"

"Silence, back there!" growled the guard.

Up the ladder, one after another, crawled the five—Maxwell last of all. They were rushed along dark passageways, and at last were all pushed into a small, dimly lighted cabin, with rows of bunks along one side of its wall, and a single smoky lantern hung from the low ceiling. One little port-hole, locked "half open," served for ventilation.

"Tell the ship-doctor I want him," whined the Scotchman, just as the guard was about to close the door behind them. "My head aches turrible an' I've got a sore throat."

The guard made no reply, but slammed and locked the door.

"Are you very sick?" asked Clyde of the Scotchman. "If you are, I've a bit of cash with me and I'll be glad to buy you some sort of better fare than they're likely to give us."

"Sick?" grinned the Scot. "Not me. I never was sick in my life. I just wanted to bother 'em a bit."

"They probably won't give him the message," said Clyde in disgust.

"Oh, won't they, just? You'll see. They run us out of their country. But they won't risk our gettin' any contagion into their ships. That doctor'll be told. An' he'll come, on the hop. But I guess he'll hop back faster'n he came. Say, what was it you told me about havin' a little cash? Hand it over."

He moved threateningly toward Clyde. So, at the magic mention of money, did the three others.

Clyde sprang backward, to the little blank space beside the port-hole.

It was bad enough to be cabined with these four specimens of the *genus* Undesirable—these lowest of Old World blackguards—without being robbed by them as well.

He resolved to fight to the last breath. Fate had already robbed him of a fortune—perhaps of a wife as well. These guttersnipe into whose company fate had forced him, should not rob him of the few valuables he had left.

A Berserk rage stirred within him. He had been misfortune's lifeless puppet long enough. Here was a chance, at last, for violent action.

No one man, outside of a dime novel, could hold his own against four. But ere he should go down under the heap of battling foes, he would give a good account of himself.

Flinging off the green overcoat, he stood on guard, awaiting the onslaught.

"Rush him, boys!" sang the Scotchman.

Silently, fiercely, the four closed in upon their lone victim.

CHAPTER IX.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

IN the fraction of a second, as Clyde Maxwell stood tense, alert, on guard, facing the impending attack—even as the four undesirables moved to within arm's reach—

the door of the cabin was unlocked and thrown open.

It was an odd anticlimax from the deadly crisis. At sound of the turning key, the quartet of assailants started back as if by magic, and fell at once into attitudes of unconcern.

None of them thirsted for irons or for solitary confinement. This stranger and his money could be parted at leisure, later on.

A young man stepped briskly into the room and glanced about. Except for the guard in the passage outside, he was alone.

"Now, then!" he said, in pleasant, businesslike fashion. "Which of you five was asking for a doctor? Speak up. Which one was it? And what's the matter?"

"You ain't the ship's doctor," challenged the Scotchman. "You ain't got no uniform."

"The ship's doctor is busy just now. I belong to the Health Department force at Quarantine Station. I happened to be on board when word was brought that one of you—"

His voice trailed away. His eyes, moving rapidly from one to the other, had fallen upon Clyde Maxwell. The rays of the single light were full upon Clyde's haggard face.

The recognition was mutual. At the newcomer's first word, Clyde had known him for the young official who had brought him back to the ship two nights before, and whose intervention had saved him from trouble with the captain.

The Health Department doctor's face showed a momentary spasm of surprise. Then it settled into a mask of indifference. Walking up to Maxwell, as the Scotchman was about to speak, he said sharply:

"You're the sick one, my man! Step outside with me. You're in bad condition and likely to carry infection to the others. I must have you isolated."

"No, doctor," pleaded the Scotchman. "I'm the sick one. This feller's all well. Leave him with us."

He got no further. The young doctor had linked his arm in Clyde's and was propelling him from the room, past the astonished guard, and down the passageway.

Reaching a bench beside a port-hole, he sat down and stared in unfeigned amazement at the dilapidated figure before him.

"What on earth does this mean?" he demanded. "Two nights ago I brought you back here. Yesterday morning you were gone. To-night, I find you here looking like a hobo and locked up with a gang of criminals who are to be deported."

In as few words as he could, Maxwell told his story, the doctor listening open-mouthed. At the close of the recital the official's only comment was:

"My friend, compared to you, Jonah was the original Lucky Jim."

Clyde made no reply to this palpable, if unpalatable, truth. The doctor knit his brows in thought. For a space, neither spoke.

"You were mistaken in your story," said he. "Let me set you right. What really happened to you is this. The night I brought you back to the ship, you couldn't sleep. You wandered about till you got down here and happened into the calaboose. The spring door shut behind you and you couldn't get it open. So you've had to stay there ever since. Till I happened to find you just now. In your mad efforts to get out, you tore your clothes and lost your collar."

"But," protested Clyde, bewildered, "I—"

"Never mind all that. It's the account I'm going to give the captain. If I told him your version of the story, he'd have you in irons. If I tell him mine, he'll be so glad that you didn't get away that he'll let you go back to your old stateroom and land with the rest tomorrow morning. If it isn't the truth, it's as much of it as the surly old brute is entitled to. By the way, he's worse than usual to-day. Another passenger somehow decamped last night. Strangely enough, it was your friend Deane. Come along, and let's get the ordeal over with."

An hour later, in his own stateroom, Clyde Maxwell looked keenly at himself in the mirror. A bath, a complete change of clothes, and a shave had wrought miracles in his looks. The young doctor, who was dining aboard, sat on the berth edge.

"Feel better now," he asked.

"Physically, I'm all right again," answered Maxwell, "but I wasn't staring into the mirror for that. I was practising the very difficult art of looking myself in the face. I find it harder than I thought."

"Are you so homely as all that?" laughed the doctor.

"No. I'm worse. I'm a fool. Two days ago I learned I couldn't get to New York in time to be married to-day. What did I do? Instead of planning things out and trying to pull political wires, I jumped overboard. You brought me ignominiously back. I became a thief's catspaw and got away again. Safe to New York that time. Only to be chased as a burglar, and to land at last in the coop at Ellis Island.

"Then I was condemned to be deported as an undesirable, came near being murdered, and—at last, find myself just where I was two days ago. All that danger and adventure gone for nothing. Do you wonder I find it hard to look at such an idiot's image in the glass?"

"It's the worst hard-luck story of the year," sympathized the doctor. "But, after all, you might be worse off. For instance, you might be in the Tombs, charged with jewel robbery. You might still be at Ellis Island.

"Or you might be below, fighting for life against those four foreign crooks. You're like one of those bobbing mandarin toys. Fate has knocked you over, often enough. But, each time, you've managed to bob up serenely."

"I haven't bobbed up at all from the biggest blow of all. You forget, I won't get to town till to-morrow morning. A whole day late for the wedding. To-day was the last day of grace. I expected by this time to be the husband of the loveliest girl on earth, and to be part owner with her of a fortune of six hundred and twenty thousand dollars. As it is, I lose the fortune. I make her lose it. And I'm still too poor to marry. There's no prospect now of my being able to afford committing matrimony for another two years."

"Cheer up, old chap! You'll soon make a name for yourself. There's lots of money in the law."

"There ought to be," growled Maxwell. "I, for one, have taken little enough out of it. Shall we go to dinner now? Unless dining with the original hoodoo will bring you bad digestion."

In spite of his effort at cheerfulness, Maxwell carried a heavy heart to bed with him that night. And dawn of the next morning found him awake and miserable.

The wedding day had come and gone. Through his detention on shipboard he had lost a fortune. He had lost the immediate hope of marriage. He had made Sylvia lose wealth that would have brought her all the little luxuries that women love.

If ever they could marry, she must struggle along as a poor lawyer's wife.

The thought was wormwood to him. He half feared to face her at the dock. Perhaps, chagrined at his failure, she would not even come to meet him.

As the liner moved slowly through the upper bay, Maxwell could scarce bring himself to talk coherently with the doctor, who had decided to run up to town with him.

Together they stood at the rail, watching the city's line of piers and busy life beyond. Clyde could scarce repress a reminiscent shiver as they passed the Battery.

Into her dock the steamship was hauled by her frantic little tugs. A mass of faces from the pier below gazed up at the returning wanderers. Waving handkerchiefs fluttered everywhere. Long-range hails were exchanged between rail and stringpiece.

Suddenly the doctor noticed Clyde start. Following the latter's gaze, he noticed a tall, slender girl, in the foremost rank of the waiting crowd. Her decidedly pretty face lifted toward Maxwell's was alight with joy and with eager welcome.

"Miss Tennant, I suppose?" hazarded the doctor.

"Yes," nodded Clyde. "And the sight of her brings a lump into my throat the size of a goose-egg. Just look! She is as glad to see me as if my delay and my rank stupidity hadn't robbed her of a fortune. There's something divine about women. Something before which we men must stand awed, with bare head."

"That's right," acquiesced the doctor. "Now, if it was she whose hard luck had made you lose six hundred and twenty thousand dollars, I suppose you'd be glowering at her like a cross between *Richard III* and *Macbeth*."

"I'm afraid so," confessed Maxwell, "but the sight of her face with no reproach or sadness in it, hits me harder than if she had begun shouting maledictions at me when we were a mile offshore.

"It isn't only the money. It's the fact that we must wait ages and ages now before I can afford to marry. The junior partner of a struggling young law firm is not a Crœsus. Come on and help me get the first agony over. The gangway is ready at last, I see."

Down the railed inclined plane they moved, side by side. In front hurried passengers with loads of hand luggage, hastening to be swallowed up in the eager, welcoming throng below. Behind them pushed and pressed onward many others.

Maxwell's eye had never once left Sylvia's glowing face. She had not been able to force her way close to the gangplank, but stood some yards back, waiting with laughing impatience for Clyde to come and greet her.

The pier was reached at last. The doctor by his side, Maxwell prepared to thrust a path to the girl he loved. Amid the clamor of welcome rose the shrill squeals of news-

boys hawking early extras of afternoon papers.

One youthful vender, finding most of the people too busy greeting each other to be interested in the news of the day, held one of his papers on high, in hope that sight of the glaring headlines might tempt passengers to buy.

As Clyde began to shoulder his short journey through the press, toward Sylvia, he found the front page of the paper stuck almost into his face.

He raised an impatient hand to push aside the sheet. Then, his hand in mid air, his eyes fairly bulging, he stared agape at the black-lettered front page.

"What's up?" asked the doctor, wondering at the sudden halt, and the look of crass amazement on Clyde's face, "have you seen a ghost?"

Instead of replying, Maxwell snatched the paper from the boy and stood with his eyes glued to the top of the page.

"Hey, you! Gimme me money!" shrilled the newsboy.

Clyde did not hear. The doctor tossed the vociferous boy a nickel. The youngster at once ducked in the crowd and disappeared.

Maxwell still stood, forgetful of Sylvia, forgetful of the turmoil about him, glaring wildly at the news sheet. He was muttering something under his breath; apparently the same sentence over and over again.

"What is it?" demanded his friend more imperatively. "Wake up, man! You're blocking the whole crowd. And there's your *fiancée* trying to get to you. Have you gone crazy, that you'd rather read a 'yellow newspaper' than speak to the girl you're engaged to?"

Clyde Maxwell stirred, as from a trance.

"It's—It's a mistake, of course!" he muttered weakly. "The newspaper's made a mistake. But please look at that date, doctor."

With shaky forefinger he pointed at the date line running across the top of the printed page.

The doctor, thoroughly mystified, followed the trembling track of Maxwell's forefinger and read aloud:

"*Tuesday, March 1, 1904.*"

Then he glanced at Clyde.

"Well?" he queried, "what is there so odd about that?"

"It's—it's a mistake," reiterated Maxwell, "but—"

"The date? There's no mistake. This is Tuesday, March 1. What of it?"

"No!" shouted Clyde. "Yesterday was Monday, March 1. We were stuck at Quarantine on February 27. We were stuck there till this morning. That's three days. February 28, March 1, March 2. To-day is March 2. March 1 was to have been my wedding day. Sylvia's birthday. The last day of grace named in the will. The day we were to marry or to forfeit the—"

"You told me, on the evening I met you—the evening of the 27th," interrupted the doctor, "that you must marry two days later or else forfeit—"

"That's what I said. And two days later was March 1. And—"

"Two days later," cried the doctor, with sudden understanding, "was *February 29*. Nineteen hundred and four is a leap year and February has twenty-nine days. Do you mean to say you didn't stop to think of that? Why, if you'd told me you were due to marry on March 1, instead of saying in two days, I could have set you right in a minute. This is March 1. You're in plenty of time to—"

But Clyde had left him. With a shout of utter, boyish delight, he clove the indignant intervening crowd and seized Sylvia by both hands.

"I'm back on time, sweetheart! I'm back on time!" he cried in wild exhilaration. "I'm—"

"Why, of course you are!" laughed Sylvia. "We have planned for a noon-wedding. Mother scolded me for coming down to meet the ship instead of staying at home and dressing. But I wanted—"

"And you weren't worried for fear I'd be too late?" he gasped, marveling at her coolness.

"Why, no," she returned. "Not after I got that carbolic-smelling note from you, saying you'd be here this morning. But what did you mean in the note by saying this would be 'a day too late'?"

"Fate stole a day from me," he answered, dizzily happy. "Or else I lost it overboard. By the way, dear, I want you to meet the best friend I've got. And"—laying a hand on the doctor's shoulder—"I want him to be my best man at the wedding.

"Miss Tennant," he went on in mock formality, "may I present Dr.—Dr.— Say, old chap, you've saved my life once and saved me from irons twice, and—I don't even know your name!"

(The end.)

Going to See Billy Clark.

BY F. RONEY WEIR.

A Story Which Proves That It Is Sad to Be Unique, and Much Nicer Not to Be the Only One of Your Kind.

"TELL mother good-by again for me, Mr. Crofts, and don't let her worry. I shall be all right."

Christine Mason shook hands with the neighbor who had brought her to town to catch the eight o'clock Overland train for the coast.

"I guess there's something besides the job in the restaurant that's takin' you to Seattle," grinned Crofts, with the easy familiarity of a man who had dandled Christine on his knee as a baby, and had lived next door to her parents for twenty years.

"I'm thinkin' there's a sweetheart by the name of William Clark that lives round in that city somewheres. Seems to me I've carried letters to the post-office addressed to somebody by that name, and then brought back answers addressed to Miss Christine Mason, Cedarville, Washington."

Christine felt herself blushing furiously, not as a girl who is pleased at hearing her own name coupled with her lover's, but as one who found the subject painful.

"It wasn't just nice of you, Mr. Crofts, to read the addresses on the letters given you to post; but I won't deny writing to Mr. Clark. I did write to him—for a while. I knew his sister, Annette. But that was some time ago. We don't correspond any more."

"I guess he lives in Seattle, though," persisted Mr. Crofts.

"Yes, I think he does." Mr. Crofts winked an eye knowingly. "But I hope you will believe me when I tell you that I do not expect to see him, or—why, Mr. Crofts, you horrid old thing!—I know if ever I correspond with anybody again I shall not ask you to mail my letters. Here comes the train! Don't forget to tell mother what I said. Good-by."

Christine grasped her suit-case firmly and climbed up the high steps into the car. She took possession of a seat immediately behind a sullen-looking little boy, who eyed her suspiciously as she arranged her wrap and bag and lunch-box for the day.

She noticed casually that the child's cheeks showed river courses of salt-wash running through the soil of travel. He had been crying, and Christine, who was herself not far from tears, felt a sudden pity for the little chap.

Then she noticed that his clothing was of the best, his little coat of a late cut, and his entire appearance that of a little man whose mother took good care of him; and she decided not to waste her pity on a sullen child who had, most likely, been disciplined for his own good, but to keep it for herself. She, who had been deserted and forgotten by the man whom she had expected to marry.

Billy Clark had come to their little rural community wearing the halo in which a young man from the city usually moves in a neighborhood where the skating-rink and revival meetings are the regular social pleasures and the Knights of Pythias dance the event of the year.

He had singled her out from the first; had flattered and followed her with such persistency that she, poor girl, never having had a lover, believed herself the most fortunate woman in the world, and wondered why she had been chosen instead of Katie Haywood, who was such a fine musician, or Flora Hodge, the acknowledged beauty of the village.

Then, suddenly, her dream of happiness began to fade. Clark had asked her to write to him after he returned to the city—she had never dreamed of not writing; was he not her own—the man who was to be her husband?

But after a time his letters lost something of their original fervor, and in spite of her despairing outreach—her loving call to him across the miles, grew more infrequent and icy until this last—the one she had brought loose in her handbag that she might glance it through now and then in order to destroy any teasing wish to see him that might attack her—this last cruel, cruel letter which had almost broken her heart.

He thought perhaps they had made a mistake—of course, if she insisted upon his keeping their engagement he should do so; but for her own good—and so on, and so on, all down the bitter page.

She had not told her mother, and she had not told a single girl friend. Her sister Emmeline might have guessed something of her trouble; but Emmeline, the dear girl, was not one to probe into other people's hearts and insist on talking things over.

Christine was going to Seattle to work, but she did not intend Mr. Clark should know of her presence in the city.

It was very warm. The engine was taking water, and it seemed as if the train would never start. When in motion the heat would not be so oppressive.

An old woman four seats ahead fanned herself vigorously with the cover of her lunch-box; the tear-stained little boy hummed a wiry, monotonous tune, which rasped one's nerves like the song of an unhappy mosquito.

Suddenly, through the car-window, close to Christine's ear, a head appeared, and Mr. Crofts whispered: "Mrs. Billy Clark won't sound so bad. I guess it's something besides a job that's takin' you to Seattle. When you git to be Mrs. Billy Clark don't forgit your friends up here in the country. Good-by. I'll take your message to your mother."

"Mr. Crofts, I don't like it—to be talked to this way—" But Christine was scolding at a row of thrashing-machines loaded upon trucks, and the facetious, though mistaken, Mr. Crofts had already slipped into the past. The train was moving toward Seattle.

When Christine drew in her head her eyes met those of the grimy little boy surprisingly close to her own. He was hanging over the back of his seat facing her, all the languor and sullenness gone, and in their place an ill-concealed excitement.

"Are you going to marry Billy Clark?" he asked unhesitatingly.

"No, I am not!" snapped Christine, the sting of Neighbor Crofts's insinuations strong in her mind.

"Don't you like him?" queried the child.

"No."

"I do! I love him!"

"Then you are the one to marry him," said Christine, still indignant at Mr. Crofts for carrying his clumsy pleasantries so far as to humiliate her in the eyes of her fellow passengers.

If this child had heard so plainly, everybody in the car had heard. Those men over across, busy with their game of cards, might know Billy Clark and joke him about his country girl who was coming to the city to find him; or that old woman, fanning herself so furiously, might be his aunt, or the cousin of his mother; you can never tell in a train.

"Why don't you marry Billy Clark?" persisted the dirty little boy; and Christine, red with anger and confusion, whispered: "Little boys shouldn't talk to people they don't know, and ask impudent questions. Where is your mother?"

The boy immediately became sullen and silent.

"Where are you going?" questioned Christine.

"To see Billy Clark," responded the boy.

"Very well; I am not."

"You are! You are going to marry him!" declared the boy. "That whisker-man that poked his head in at the car-window before we started said so."

"I wish you wouldn't—why—remember things that don't concern you. Who are you, anyway? What is your name?"

Down went the little chin, and the stubborn expression again froze every feature of the soiled face.

"Where did you get on the train?"

No response, except a perceptible tightening of the mouth. Christine's vexation became lost in amusement.

"You won't tell me your name, nor where you live, nor who your mother is; but you will tell me where you are going and who you are going to see?"

"I'm going to Seattle to see Billy Clark."

"All right; thank you. I hope you will have a good time."

The boy sighed, and settled into his own seat in a disappointed attitude.

The conductor came through for the tickets, and stopped at the seat in front of Christine. "Now, see here, young man," he began, "you've got to tell me who you are, and how you came on this train, and who you belong to, or I'm going to take you by the heels and heave you right out into the

sage-brush! Understand? There are lions and bears and walloppogeehoes out there—"

The boy was white with terror, and suddenly avalanched himself over the back of the seat into Christine's arms.

"Oh, don't let him! Oh, don't let him! Billy Clark will never marry you, if you let him throw me out to the wallahoe—them things!"

"Do you know anything about this boy, ma'am?" The conductor turned on Christine as if she were to blame for the whole dilemma.

"No, I do not; I just came aboard the train back at Centerville. Aren't his people with him?"

"He don't belong to anybody. Nobody knows anything about him! First thing anybody knows, there he sets—all by himself. He's a bad boy; that's what he is! He won't tell where he got on, nor who put him on, nor what his name is.

"He just says he's goin' to Seattle to see Billy Clark, and that's all we can git out of him. He hasn't any money to pay his fare, and I don't know what to do with him. I was in hopes he was your boy."

Christine could feel the pressure of the dirty little cheek against her tan traveling coat; she could feel the thump of the lonely little heart. She put her arms about him tightly.

"He shall be my little boy. I will pay his fare. I know a gentleman in Seattle by the name of Billy Clark. It may be the Billy Clark this little boy is going to see. I dare say it is."

"Well, all right," assented the suspicious conductor. "I'm glad to have him taken off my hands. In all my days on the road, I've never run across such a sulky little rascal.

"You see, if I could find out where he got on, and what his name is, I could cook his goose in a hurry—just wire back and relieve his parents' anxiety. Why, somebody is just crazy about this young one! Some town along the line is all out draggin' the river and probing the wells! It's a fright! I ask him if he knows where this friend of his'n lives, and he says 'Yes, in Seattle;' and that's all he does know!"

"Poor little mannie!" soothed Christine. "Probably this Mr. Clark that he is going to see will know who—" she finished in pantomime above the nestling head.

"Acquainted in Seattle, ma'am?" questioned the conductor.

"Not at all; I don't know anybody there. I am going there to work."

"Oh, I see; well, you won't want to be bothered with this kid; I'll hand him over to the humane officer when we pull in."

"You won't let him do that, will you?" demanded the child of Christine.

"No, dear; not until we have found—Mr. Clark."

"You say you know a Billy Clark in Seattle?" questioned the conductor.

"Yes," said Christine calmly; her own humiliation in the Billy Clark episode fading into insignificance beside her wish to bring this lost little boy to his own again. Personal pride should not stand in the way of such a consummation.

"This is the address of the William Clark that I know," she said, handing the conductor a slip of paper with a penciled number upon it. "And I believe very likely he is the one the boy is looking for."

"Has he got a l-e-e-tle, t-e-e-n-ty, locomotive in his watch-charm?" asked the boy, aroused to sudden animation.

"He may have," said Christine. "I remember he was a railway employee at one time."

"That's the one, all right," decided the conductor. "I remember there is a Clark, a mail clerk, on this road. I'll just send a wire to this Clark. Will you kindly give me your name, miss? He'll be more apt to show up, if I sign the name of some one he knows."

"Do you like this Billy Clark so much that you left your poor papa and mama to think you are drowned while you run away on the train to see him?" asked Christine.

"Yep," answered the boy. "Billy Clark is the best man in the world!"

And then he let his thin, dirty little hand wander over the shoe-box in which Christine's mother had packed a toothsome lunch.

"Have you got bread and butter in there?" he inquired wistfully.

"Bless your little heart, yes. Are you hungry?"

"I'm awful hungry," he owned, the corners of his mouth curling pitifully.

After this Christine would have stopped at nothing to protect and comfort the child. She even looked forward with eagerness to the meeting with Clark—a meeting she would have shrunk from earlier in the day.

Before the train pulled into Seattle she had managed to elicit from her quondam friend the facts that his mother had promised him that he would make Billy Clark a long visit after Billy Clark was married; that he had once asked Billy Clark when he intended to marry, and Billy Clark had answered, when

he ran across a girl with a dimple in her cheek, who was good to dogs and little boys.

Christine tried to imagine these sentiments in the mouth of the Billy Clark whom she knew, and realized that they were a misfit.

Long before the train blew its final whistle, and rang its bell for Seattle, the shoe-box was empty, and it was Christine who was hungry.

At the station Billy Clark awaited them, with a supercilious pardoning smile for the little country girl, who couldn't take a slight, but must needs make a flimsy excuse for telegraphing him.

The kid? Why, certainly not; he had never seen nor heard of him before! What was to be done?

Why, that was easy; turn him over to the humane officer. Was she so verdant as to suppose she must mother every lost brat she happened to run across? She would get over that after she had been in the city a while. He expressed his pleasure in the fact that she intended to stay in Seattle.

He should be delighted to show her the city. Where did she intend to stop (he said "Stop") and when might he call?

He could not understand Christine's attitude toward the boy; he wasn't any relation to her, was he? Well, then! Why, he would be all right with the humane officer; and his folks would advertise him, and then he could be shipped back to where he belonged.

Meanwhile the boy turned an agonized face to his friend.

"You won't do that—what he tells you to, will you?" he asked.

"No, dearie, I shall not!" promised Christine decidedly, and he glanced triumphantly at the vanquished exponent of the humane-officer solution. He was rather a handsome baby, now that Christine had washed his face and hands, and brushed his hair.

"See here, Christine," said Clark, "if you are coming to Seattle expecting me to—well—look after you a little, you must learn to abide by my judgment in matters like this."

"Oh, I don't intend to do anything of the sort," Christine hastened to assure him. "I hope I made it plain to you why I let the conductor send the telegram—"

"Awh, come off, Christine! Be honest, now; that telegram was a bluff—you really wanted me. Own up, little girl."

The shame and consternation in the girl's face was apparent to the child.

"You bad, nasty old Billy Clark, you get away from here, or I'll buy a little red gun and shoot you dead!" he exclaimed, and all the bitter vindictiveness of which a child is capable sharpened in the pin-point pupils of his little light-blue eyes.

"Gee, but you're a game bird!" chortled Clark. "We'll put the mitts on yeh, and get you into the ring!" Then he stopped, startled by the change in the child's face.

A sudden rosy glow overspread it; the frosty hate melted out beneath a chinook wind of love. With a cry, he thrust himself forward and sprang into the arms of a young man who had that moment entered the door of the waiting-room.

"My Billy!—my own Billy Clark!" he cried. And, "Merrill! Merrill, my dear boy, where did you come from?" demanded the newcomer, holding the child close, and caressing him as a woman might have done.

Christine stifled an excited sob in her handkerchief.

"Oh, I am so glad we've found you!" she trembled, pressing forward, entirely oblivious of the presence of Billy Clark the First.

"Answer me, Merrill. Where did you come from, and where are father and mother?"

"Why, they're in Spokane, of course. I ran away to see you, Billy—all alone—and I didn't tell anybody my name, nor where my father and mother were; because if I had they would have shipped me back before I ever found you, Billy."

"That was very naughty, Merrill! Father and mother will be half crazy. I must send them a wire, and then I'll take you right back in the morning. It's lucky I happened to drop in here just now. If I hadn't, whatever would have become of you?"

"She said she'd stick right by me," said Merrill, indicating Christine with one slim finger.

The child was tractable enough now.

"Mother said I might make you a long visit after you were married. Aren't you married yet, Billy?"

"Not yet, Merrill."

"Can't you find a girl with a dimple in her cheek who likes dogs and little boys?"

"No, Merrill."

"Billy," once more the finger was brought into requisition, "she's got a dimple, and she says she likes dogs, and—I know she's awful good to little boys."

The surprised eyes of the man met the startled eyes of the girl, and they both laughed; but in that sudden glance something passed between them—a prescience of the future so tangible that it was visible even to the thickened perceptibilities of Billy Clark the First.

The new Billy Clark took the girl's hand in his.

"I have great faith in Merrill's judgment," he said. "I shall take him home to-morrow. He will probably tell me all about it, and—when I come back, may I come and see you and explain everything to you?"

"I shall be very glad if you will," she answered, and then turned hesitatingly to the boy. "You wouldn't care to kiss me good-by, would you, Merrill?"

The child put his arms about her neck and gave her a hearty smack, while he cried gleefully:

"You see, there is more than one kind of a Billy Clark."

"Thank Heaven!" murmured the girl to herself.

A Slippery Battle in Oil.

BY GEORGE C. JENKS.

The Story of an Inheritance, and of Riches and Hatreds That Were Hidden.

CHAPTER I.

WHY THE BELL RANG.

EVERYBODY in Dunn City was on the dead run. That is, everybody with a serviceable pair of legs who was able to be out of doors.

There were a few invalids, babies, and storekeepers who did not join in the general rush down Main Street, and Marshall Gray, the mayor, looking over municipal ordinances in his office in City Hall, did not permit himself to be disturbed.

But these were the exceptions.

Pretty nearly every one else in town was pelting away in one direction—toward Rowton's oil refinery, down by the creek.

For the big bell in the tower at Rowton's, which had not sounded for more than a year, was giving tongue in a clamor that, as it echoed and reechoed from the high mountain walls which surrounded Dunn City, fairly electrified its inhabitants.

The refinery consisted of a series of buildings of galvanized iron along Dunn Creek, with a high fence round the spacious yard. In all the iron sheds were immense tanks for oil, arranged so that the pipes which led from the distant oil "farms" could pour the crude petroleum into them without let or hindrance in a steady stream—when there was any. Until to-day the pipes and tanks had been rusting from disuse.

"Hey, Donovan! Donovan! Where are you?"

A well-built young man of thirty-two or thereabouts, whose wiry frame, ruddy cheeks, and alert blue eyes could belong only to an out-door man, roared this as he ran into the yard. He was George Rowton, owner of the refinery since the death of his father, six months before.

At a window appeared the round red face of Mike Donovan, the watchman. He was industriously pulling at the bell-rope.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

"Here I am, Misther George!"

Clang! Clang! Clang!

"Well, stop that infernal bell!" was George Rowton's angry command. "What's got into you? What's the matter?"

The clanging ceased, and Mr. Donovan, grinning cheerfully, came out and replied:

"Shure there's nothin' th' matther."

"Then what are you ringing the bell for? Every one thought it was a fire."

"Indade then, av it was a foire, I'd hov to put it out meself, widout bringin' all this smather av people to see me do it. No, bedad, it's somethin' else, and I'm t'inkin' it'll be good news for th' town, so it will. Av yer father was aloive, rest his sowl, he'd know."

"Get down to facts, will you?" was the impatient interruption.

"Faith, I will thot. Come wid me," answered the watchman. Then as he saw that

several hundred of those who had raced down to the refinery in response to the bell were crowding into the yard, he asked, with a curious twinkle in his eyes: "Shall I let thim folks see what I hov t' show ye?"

"Certainly. Why shouldn't you?"

"No rayson in loife, Misther George."

Mike Donovan led the way till he came to a tank where, from a large tube bent over the edge, was pouring a stream of what looked like dirty water, but whose strong odor proclaimed it to be crude petroleum.

"Good Lord! Is it possible?"

George Rowton gazed at the rushing stream for a few moments in blank astonishment. Then, as the full import of it took possession of him, he ran up the ladder resting against the tank and looked inside.

"We'll have to get some men to work, Mike," he said quietly.

"Shure ye will. I'm t'inkin' this here tank is purty nigh full."

"It is. Somebody has to watch the valves."

The young man was cool-headed enough. It was the first time there had been any activity in the refinery since it had come into his possession. But he knew something about the oil business, notwithstanding years of absence from Dunn City.

"Come here."

He beckoned to a group of hungry-eyed men in front of the crowd thronging into the great iron shed, and they ran forward eagerly.

"Get to work here!" he ordered briefly. "You know what to do. There's a gusher somewhere, and it's coming straight to us."

Well did the men understand the meaning of the torrent of oil pouring from the pipe. It signified that somebody, somewhere—perhaps twenty miles away—had struck oil and had turned it into one of the several pipe-lines communicating with the Rowton refinery in Dunn City.

Until all the wells in the Dunn Creek region had given out more than a year ago, these men had been steadily employed. Since then they had scraped along as best they could. What wonder that they went to work now with a will?

What it had meant to Dunn City when well after well ceased to flow, and the whole Dunn Creek oil-field became a region of "dusters" and "dry holes," can be realized fully only by those who have witnessed the collapse of an oil boom, with its paralyzing effects upon a community of which petroleum had been its very life-blood.

Since Rowton's refinery, after dropping men from its pay-roll by degrees for months, at last closed up altogether, because there was no oil to refine, the city had been dying of dry rot.

Not only had the families of the three or four hundred idle men from the refinery suffered, but the income of every business man in town had slowly dwindled into nothingness. Nobody bought anything in the stores, because no one had any money.

It was not strange, therefore, that the news of the sudden coming in of oil with a rush drove the whole city wild with excitement and hope.

As George Rowton got down from the ladder, where he had been watching the oil gushing from the pipe, half a dozen eager men climbed up tumultuously to look into the tank, and thus assure themselves, by actual vision, that the oil which meant so much to them, really was there.

"There are too many people coming in, Mike," called out Rowton to the watchman. "Turn them out and close the gates, but let in every man who wants to work. We'll divide up what there is. If the oil keeps on coming in like this, there'll be plenty of work for everybody."

"All roight, sorr."

A thick-set man, with a square jaw, sharp black eyes, and an iron-gray mustache which only partly concealed the forbidding outlines of his hard mouth, pushed his way to the front, elbowing the laborers aside as if they were of no account.

He was Calton Sarner, owner of the Keystone Hotel, and reputed to be the wealthiest man in Dunn City.

"Hello, Rowton! I hear there is oil coming in. Where's the well?" he asked patronizingly.

George Rowton gave his questioner a quick glance of dislike, as he replied shortly:

"I don't know."

"H'm! That's queer. You know where your pipe-lines connect up in the country, don't you?"

"They branch off in a hundred different directions. I haven't had time to trace this one yet."

As he said this, Rowton turned his back on the hotel-keeper, who looked after him with a sneering grin under his iron-gray mustache.

"Iv'rybody git out av, th' yar-rd what ain't worrukin'," shouted Mike Donovan, herding the people out of the gate.

In his bustling anxiety to obey the orders of his employer, Mike was not overdiscriminating, and he gave Calton Sarner a brisk shove toward the gate with the rest.

With an oath, Sarner turned on the watchman, the heavy cane he carried upraised for a blow. Then a hand caught the cane behind, as George Rowton said, calmly, but firmly:

"No, Cal! That won't do. Mike didn't recognize you."

"Yes, he did," shouted Sarner. "He knows me well enough. He wanted to show his authority. The insolent loafer! I'll crack his thick skull, if you will let go of this cane for a minute."

"Don't ye do it, Misther George," put in Mike Donovan, but without betraying any particular fear. "Ye jist hould on t' th' shtick till I git out av his r'ach. Shure I hov no toime for a schrap now." Then, to a crowd of boys who were trying to sneak past him, to keep in the yard, he yelled: "Go on, ye omadhauns! Out av th' gate wid yez befure I hilps yez wid me fut!"

The indifference of Mike to his wrath made Calton Sarner boil over, and he struggled desperately to get the cane away from George Rowton, who retained his hold without difficulty, as he motioned to the watchman to keep quiet.

Just then there was a sudden diversion that put an end to the squabble over Mike Donovan. One of the men who had climbed up to a hitherto empty tank shouted excitedly:

"Mr. Rowton! Here's another pipe working!"

"And here's another!" from a second man.

Similar announcements came from two others.

George Rowton wanted to go and look, but hesitated to take his hand from Calton Sarner's cane until the hotel-keeper said quietly:

"That's all right, George. Let go. I won't bother any more with Donovan. I was mad for a moment, but I'm over it now. I only came down here to see whether the report that oil had begun to come in again was true."

"Well, you see it is coming in, don't you?" smiled George Rowton, as he released the cane. "Five pipes are working now. If it keeps up like this, we shall get five hundred barrels a day."

"Just about, I should say. And you don't know where the well is?"

"Haven't any idea. But I am going to see very soon."

"Yes, naturally. Well, look here, George. Let me tell you something."

"Go ahead."

"If you can't find the well that is sending you the oil—"

"But—"

"Yes, I know. You think there is no doubt about your finding it when you go looking over the fields. But suppose, for the sake of argument, that you do not find it, why—"

Calton Sarner stopped, and his black eyes half-closed in a cunning leer, as, with his cane, he bored holes in the petroleum-soaked soil at his feet.

"Well, what?" demanded Rowton.

"Why, in that case, come up to the hotel. I may be able to help you."

Without another word, Sarner turned toward the gate and marched out, giving Mike Donovan a forgiving smile as he passed.

CHAPTER II.

SHADOWED.

"BLUFF!" muttered George Rowton, as he went back to his work. "What can Sarner know about it? Anyhow, I reckon it won't be hard to find the wells when I look them up."

He busied himself about the refinery for the remainder of the day, and when, at nine o'clock that night, he left the place in charge of his right-hand man, Howard Gray, it was with the comfortable knowledge that everything was working smoothly, with oil pouring into the tanks as abundantly as ever.

His way lay up Main Street, where all was dark save in front of the Keystone Hotel. There a crowd of excited men was still discussing the mysterious flow of oil at Rowton's, while through the brightly lighted windows of the office could be seen others inside, all talking earnestly on the same subject.

"Hallo, George! I've just heard the good news. Is the oil still flowing?"

It was Mayor Gray, father of Howard, who had been standing in the doorway, and now came forward to give George Rowton's hand a hearty shake.

"Yes, mayor. It's running about five hundred barrels. Howard is down at the refinery. He'll stay there another hour or two, and then leave things to the regular night force. Didn't he tell you about the oil this afternoon?"

"I haven't seen Howard since breakfast, and I've been so busy in my office that I didn't know anything about the excitement

till half an hour ago. Your father used to say he was sure there would be another oil boom here at some time or other, and it looks as if he knew."

"I wish he were here to see it," said the young man sadly, as he nodded a good night and went on toward the rambling old house, in a grove of poplars, where he lived with his only sister, Eleanor.

"Calton Sarner was here this afternoon," was the information with which Eleanor greeted him, as he entered the comfortable dining-room.

"He was? What did he want?" asked George Rowton with a frown.

"He came to tell me about the oil coming into the refinery. He said it was a splendid thing, and would bring back all the old-time prosperity to Dunn City."

"I hope it will."

"And he told me a secret."

George Rowton jumped up angrily from the chair in which he had just sat down to the table.

"Why should he tell you his secrets?"

"I don't know, George, I'm sure. I don't want to hear them. I don't like Mr. Sarner."

"I should hope not."

"But—I—I—am afraid he likes me. I wish you could contrive to keep him away from here."

"I'll keep him away, if I have to knock his head off," growled her brother. "Now, what's the secret?"

"He says the oil that is coming into the refinery is his."

"What?" roared George. "How is that?"

"Well, you know he owns a lot of property adjoining ours over by Penton's farm, and some of his wells are piped to the refinery, and—"

"Did he tell you where the well is that is sending in this oil?"

"No. He only said the oil was his, and he could shut it off at any time."

"Humbug!"

"I don't know, George. He told me he was going to see you about it in a day or two. He wants certain things, and unless he gets them, he will stop the oil."

"He wants pay for his oil, of course. That's all right. He'll get the regular market price. I am not going to cheat him."

"I don't think that's what he means," faltered Eleanor. "In fact, he said it wasn't money he was after."

For nearly half a minute George Rowton looked into the face of his pretty sister. Then he said steadily:

"I guess I understand, Eleanor. Well, he won't get what he is after."

"I'm sure he won't when you say it like that," she returned, no less steadily.

"All right. Now give me some supper as quickly as you can," he said, in a brisk tone. "I'm going out."

"Down-town?" she inquired, with elaborate carelessness.

"No. I'm going to ride over to Penton's. I mean to find that well before I sleep." Then, half starting from his chair: "What was that?"

"What was what?" asked his sister, without looking up from the table, where she was arranging, with some little clatter, a plate and knife and fork she had just taken from the hands of the maid who had come in to serve George Rowton's supper.

The young man bounded to a window which, it being a warm night, he had thrown open on entering the room, and which overlooked the wide porch.

"There is no one here now. But I could swear I heard a chuckle, and I fancy I see something moving among the trees over there," he murmured.

"What did you say, George?" asked Eleanor.

"Nothing. I felt a draught from the window. I guess I'd better close it."

He did so, carefully locking the sash. He also closed the inside shutters and bolted them, afterward pulling down the window-shade. Then he went to the two other windows and repeated the whole process with them.

"We'll leave the door open and get a breeze through the hall from the back," he remarked, as he attacked the good meal his sister had been careful to have ready for him.

"I'll lock up the house while you are away, George."

"Certainly. And keep the dogs in your room. Perhaps you'd better have one of the maids sleep with you, in case I am away all night."

"Oh, no. That would never do," she laughed. "If I had one, the other would want to come, too. She'd be afraid to sleep by herself up there in the attic."

"That's so. Well, so long as the house is all secured, and the dogs are with you, there is nothing much to fear."

"Nothing at all," she said confidently.

He ran up to his bedroom on the third floor after supper, and put a revolver in one pocket and a blackjack in the other. He had a lonely trip before him, and tramps who

will go as far as murder are not unknown in the oil country.

"Sim, is my horse ready?" he called out from the back door, a minute later.

"Here he is, Mister George."

An awkward-looking man, square-shouldered, big-handed and swarthy, in blue-jean overalls and a hickory shirt, with a ragged panama hat on the back of his shock of black hair, led a handsome roan, saddled and bridled, into the circle of light from the open doorway, where stood Eleanor and the two maids. He was Simmons, the outside man of all work.

George Rowton vaulted into the saddle, after patting the neck of the horse lovingly, and Simmons, without a word, shambled away to his quarters over the stable.

"I'll wait while you fasten the back door," said George to his sister.

He sat there after the door was closed till he heard the locks turn, the bolts slide into place, and the iron bar fall into its socket. Then he rode away through the narrow valley between the mountains which encompassed Dunn City until he reached the long road leading toward the distant woods, with their naked-limbed trees and ghastly stumps, amid which were scattered the derricks, engine-sheds, tanks, bull-wheels, and other queer paraphernalia of the oil fields.

As the roan clattered along at an easy trot, his rider deep in thought, a shadowy figure—the figure of a man on foot—followed him at a safe distance, keeping up with the horse apparently without effort.

Mile after mile the roan trotted along, and still the shadowy figure followed until the woods were reached. As the horse stopped to a walk, picking his way among the trees and avoiding the derricks which loomed up frequently above wells that either had never yielded oil or had dried up after giving a few barrels, the man dogging his footsteps suddenly shot off at a tangent and disappeared.

"By Jove! There they are!" exclaimed George Rowton, addressing his horse, for want of a human confidant. "There is where I am getting my oil."

In a clearing, a few hundred yards ahead, he had made out the outlines of half a dozen immense tanks, some twenty feet high and about the same in diameter. Over the edge of each tank was hung the crooked end of an iron pipe, and from every pipe was gushing crude petroleum.

"I'm in luck!" muttered the young man. "I've struck the right tanks at the very beginning. I guess they are Sarner's, all right. But now, where is the well that is pumping the oil into the tanks?"

His ear had detected the steady thumping and gasping of a pumping engine, although he could not see it.

He rode away in the direction of the sound, however, and soon came to a place where he could make out the dull red glare of a fire in a wooden shed, shining on a high derrick. It came from a furnace under a boiler, by the side of which an engine, puffing away industriously, was agitating what seemed to be miles of horizontal rods, zigzagging through the woods to furnish power to any wells that might need it. These are called by oil men "shackle-rods."

"Hallo, engineer!" hailed Rowton, as he leaped from his horse.

"Hallo!" came the response from somebody inside.

Then, from the shed, his hands carelessly in his pockets and his hat on the back of his head—sauntered Calton Sarner!

CHAPTER III.

TWO PROPOSITIONS.

"GOOD evening, George."

The salutation was offered in a matter-of-fact tone, as if it were quite the usual thing for the manager of a city hotel to be found in charge of an engine in the woods at midnight; but there was no mistaking the underlying sneer.

"What are you doing here?" asked George Rowton shortly.

"Looking after this engine at present. It is pumping my oil, and I am interested in the way it is done," was the cool reply. "The regular man has gone to his house for another coat, and I am filling his place temporarily."

"The regular man? You mean Silas Penton, don't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"I thought you were at home."

"I am at home," grinned Sarner. "This is my engine-house."

"I meant in Dunn City, where your business is."

Calton Sarner's bantering manner suddenly changed to one of menacing sternness, as he said:

"My business to-night is out here, near those tanks, Rowton. I'm glad you've looked in on me. I want to talk to you. Hitch your horse to that fence and come in."

"He'll stand without hitching. What have you to say to me?"

George Rowton's tone was as uncompromising as the hotelkeeper's, and as he walked into the shed there was an angry gleam in his eye, which did not soften as Sarner shot the rusty bolt after closing the door.

"Sit down. I bolted the door, because our conversation must be confidential."

Sarner pointed to a wooden chair with a cushion on it, evidently the regular engineer's favorite seat; and when Rowton had taken possession of it, the hotel man dropped upon a stool and comfortably crossed one leg over the other.

"I saw your sister this afternoon," he began.

"So I heard."

"I told her that oil coming into your refinery was mine, and that I could keep up the flow right along, and put Dunn City on its feet again."

"Yes?"

"But I said I would do it only on certain conditions, and that it all remained with you."

"She told me something to that effect."

George Rowton's manner was that of a man who was not only not particularly interested, but rather bored, and it puzzled Calton Sarner.

"I am ready to make a bargain with you," went on the hotelkeeper.

"There is no bargaining required," interrupted Rowton. "The price of crude oil is fixed by the Standard, and I shall pay you—"

"I'm not talking about the price of crude oil. That's a mere matter of routine. I want something else that you can help me to get."

"I—" began Rowton, firing up.

"I dare say I could get it without you," continued Sarner coolly. "But your help would be useful. I have felt that all along, but I didn't know exactly how I was to command it. Now that I've struck this oil, I am in a position to offer inducements."

"No inducements would be strong enough to make me consent to what you want," declared Rowton, clenching his fists involuntarily.

"Listen to what they are, first. I am pumping from my well five hundred barrels a day, and the well is going to last. I could keep the refinery going for a year on this strike alone. Then I have other wells which are certain to be gushers, by all the signs. I am going to run my oil to your refinery for five days. At the end of that period, unless you agree to my terms, I shall cap my well, and the oil will stop."

"Throwing some hundreds of men out of work and starving their families. That would be a splendid thing to do, wouldn't it?"

"For which you would get all the blame."

"I?" shouted Rowton. "What have I to do with it?"

"Oh, I'd attend to that. The men would learn that you had quarreled with me on some personal matter, and had refused to handle any more of my oil. That's how the affair would go before the public."

"The men would not believe it. You forget that I have a tongue in my head, and could tell them the truth."

"I think I can use my tongue as skilfully as you," replied Sarner, with an evil grin. "They would believe me because you are practically a stranger in Dunn City, and they don't know anything about you, except that there have been hard times ever since you came home from California. What's more, they didn't like your father.

"He was a man of violent temper, and he always ground wages down to hard-pan. The name of Rowton has always been unpopular among the laborers of Dunn City. You mark my words, George. If that flow of oil stops, and there is more of the poverty and distress which began some time before your father died, it will mean a hot time for you and—Eleanor—"

On the instant, George Rowton was on top of the grinning Sarner, sending him over with a crash, stool and all, on the greasy floor, and holding him there with a savage grip on his shirt-front and necktie.

"You dirty scallawag! You dare to threaten my sister!" hissed Rowton, with blazing eyes.

"What's the matter with you?" gurgled the half-throttled Sarner. "I didn't threaten her. Let go of me, will you?"

"I will when I've finished what I have to say."

"Hurry up, then."

"It's just this. I'd rather see my sister dead than the wife of such a man as you. If the running of the oil depends on that—"

"I never said it did!" yelled Sarner.

"But that's what you meant, isn't it?" asked George Rowton, involuntarily loosening his grip.

"No. It's something else, entirely different. Let me get up."

There seemed to be the ring of truth in the denial; and, rather ashamed of his impetu-

ous violence, Rowton held out his hand to help Sarner to rise. The latter ignored the hand, however, and, having got to his feet, sullenly straightened his necktie and brushed his soiled clothing without looking up.

"Now, Sarner, come to the point," ordered Rowton, after a pause.

Calton Sarner suddenly sprung back and pointed a revolver at George Rowton's head.

"There are two points," he shouted, "or, rather, three. This gun is one."

"Leave that out," was Rowton's careless rejoinder. "The gun doesn't count. You are not going to murder me, are you?"

"I'm going to defend myself, if you attack me again," snarled the other.

"Get on with your other propositions."

"You're a cool guy," said Sarner in involuntary admiration. "Well, one of my propositions is this: I want to be mayor of Dunn City."

"No chance for you," replied Rowton coolly. "Marshall Gray will be nominated to succeed himself by the Republican convention, next week. That's all settled. He is the best mayor Dunn City ever had, and no one else would have the ghost of a chance against him."

"The man who is nominated will be elected. You know that, don't you?"

"I know that has always been the case for many years."

"Well, I want that nomination."

"But—"

"There is no 'but,'" interrupted Sarner. "I want it, and you must fix it. If I don't get it I shut off the oil, and the public will get my story of the reason."

George Rowton laughed derisively.

"Why, Cal Sarner, you must be losing your mind. Even if the people did believe you, they'd insist on knowing where the well is, so that they could handle the oil themselves and make me refine it. If you refused to tell them, they'd just storm that hotel of yours, and ride you all over the Dunn Creek oil region on a rail till you led them to the well. Get out of my way! I'm going out."

"Wait a minute. I haven't finished. You don't suppose I'm such a fool as not to have provided for meeting your obstinacy, eh?" sneered Sarner, still with the pistol in his hand. "It happens that the mayoralty is not the only thing I want."

George Rowton's brows came a little closer together.

"Name the other thing."

"I will—at the same time requesting you to notice that I have the drop on you."

Rowton nodded acquiescently, but his right hand fell casually against his coat-pocket, in which he could feel the outlines of his revolver.

"Go ahead."

"Then, here it is. If you will consent to my paying my addresses to your sister, Eleanor, I will agree to keep the oil flowing, whether I win the mayoralty or not. Wait a moment. Let me go on," he added as Rowton seemed about to speak. "I don't ask you to insist on Miss Rowton accepting me for her husband—"

"Very gracious of you, I am sure," interjected Rowton with a contemptuous smile.

"All I want is to be allowed to visit your house and do my own courting."

"And you think my sister would consent to such an arrangement?"

"If you say so, yes."

"And if I refuse both your propositions, what then?"

Calton Sarner shrugged his shoulders.

"You can draw your own conclusions. But I don't ask you to make up your mind right now. You have five days to think it over. Only, remember that the oil will stop at the end of the fifth day," he said as, waving the pistol gently up and down, his hard mouth grinned, while the fierce black eyes shot malevolence.

For a few moments there was silence, save for the thumping of the engine, during which Calton Sarner kept his pistol leveled; while George Rowton, his hand against the coat-pocket containing his revolver, gazed thoughtfully about the shed.

"Sarner!"

"Yes?"

"You give me five days to make up my mind?"

"Well, I shouldn't think you would require so long. But, if you do, I am willing to wait until the fifth day for your answer."

"All right. Will you unbolt that door?"

Sarner, without speaking, unbolted the door and threw it open. George Rowton walked out of the shed and deliberately mounted his horse, standing just where he had been left, near the rough fence.

With his pistol in his hand, Calton Sarner watched George Rowton go out, and he smiled smugly at the thought that the young man was quite at his mercy. Perhaps, if Mr. Sarner had happened to see that same young man, one night about a year before, in a certain rough mining-camp in Nevada, draw his "gun" like lightning and put six bullets into the open top of a tomato-can a

hundred yards away before one could count "four," he might not have felt himself so much master of the present situation.

Calton Sarner watched Rowton ride away until he was out of sight in the dark woods. Then, going inside the shed, he closed the door, and growled:

"Come out!"

A dark-visaged, shock-headed, shambling man, in blue overalls and a hickory shirt, edged himself from behind the boiler and stood humbly before the hotelkeeper.

"Keep after him! Don't let him out of your sight until he is in his house for the night. Get that?"

"Yes, Mr. Sarner."

"All right. Mind you don't make any mistake," was the surly admonition of Calton Sarner, as he opened the door.

The dark-visaged man in the blue overalls and hickory shirt—who had listened to the whole conversation between Sarner and Rowton in the engine shed—shuffled away without replying. He had his orders, and evidently was determined to carry them out to the letter.

He was Simmons, the hired man at the Rowton home among the poplars on the outskirts of Dunn City.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NIGHT ENGINEER.

GEORGE ROWTON did not go directly home after leaving the engine-shed. His night's work was not completed. He rode straight away in the direction of town until assured that he was out of sight of Calton Sarner. Then, as he reached a particularly dark spot, under the trees, he reined up his horse, so that he might reflect on the situation without disturbing his thoughts in picking his way.

The limbs of trees, as well as the shackle-rods which wound about overhead seemingly without sane purpose, made it difficult for a horseman to move through the oil-fields in the darkness, and it was only by exercising great vigilance that Rowton was able to avoid repeated collisions.

For the benefit of those not familiar with the oil country, it may be explained that shackle-rods are rods of iron, some ten or twelve feet in length, jointed together, and suspended by wire-ropes from tree-limbs, posts, derricks, oversheds and houses, and elsewhere, by convenient supports, through the woods. One set of these rods will extend, zigzag fashion, sometimes for a mile or more, often with other lines crossing them here and there.

These shackle-rods bring power from a distant engine to as many as a dozen wells sometimes, or even more. The method is simple, although it seems strange to the unaccustomed eye. Connected with the line of rods, wherever it may be needed, is an iron upright, which controls, by a series of eccentric motions, the plunger in an oil-well. The engine moves the line of shackle-rods backward and forward, and the uprights sway in unison, working the pump and bringing up the oil.

In some cases there are individual engines to pump a well, but the "community of interest" arrangement of shackle-rods generally prevails where there are many oil-wells comparatively close together.

Rowton looked up at the zigzagging jointed rods which he could dimly make out over his head, and he smiled to himself at there being any difficulty in finding the Sarner well.

It would be only necessary to follow the pipe which was pouring the oil into the tanks to their source, and there, of course, must be the well. It was absurdly easy.

So thought Rowton, as he shook his bridle. Then, as the horse went on in response to the hint, he muttered: "Yes, I can find the well, I am sure. But first I'll see what Silas knows about it."

Silas Penton, whom Sarner had mentioned as his night engineer, was George Rowton's general superintendent in the oil-fields that were his own property, although every well he had was dry, and had been for some time.

Ten minutes' careful riding brought Rowton to a large fenced-in piece of ground, comprising several acres, in the middle of which was a rambling wooden house of peculiar shape.

Evidently the house had been put up piecemeal, for in the center it was four stories in height, while the portions round the outside were only two. It was like some of the old castles that cling to rocks along the Rhine, and seem to have been thrown together accidentally. The main difference was that this house was of wood, instead of stone, like the German castles.

The whole place looked old, although, as could be seen by the feeble light of the moon which now showed itself strugglingly among the flying clouds, the doors and windows were all solid and well secured.

A derrick, towering sixty feet in the air, some fifty yards from the house, but inside the fence, told that oil had been struck there at some time, probably in large quantities. But the well was idle now, and, like everything else in the neighborhood, seemed to be under the influence of a blight of some kind.

No light could be seen at any of the shuttered windows, and the deep barking of two large dogs made George Rowton hesitate about entering the yard.

"Those dogs might remember me, and they might not," he reflected. "I don't think they have seen me more than two or three times, and they have fangs rather longer than I want to feel in my flesh."

So he sat silently on his horse in the shadow of a clump of trees near the gate, rather in a quandary, when suddenly a shaft of light leaped across the dark yard, as a side door in the house opened and a man came forth.

"Hallo, Penton!" cried George Rowton.

"Who's that?" was the response, in a timid tone. "Hey, Terry! Bruce!"

"Don't call the dogs, Penton. This is Rowton."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Rowton," came the apology, almost abject in its humility. "You know, I did not expect to see you here at this time. It is nearly two in the morning."

"The dogs seemed to be suspicious of me, too."

"Oh, the dogs are chained. But a stranger would not know that, so I called them just to scare whoever it might be," laughed Penton, as he came through the gateway.

"How is it you are out at this hour?" asked Rowton.

"I'm going over to the engine-shed. Mr. Sarner came to me two or three days ago and asked me if I would take charge of the engine at night. He said one of his wells had come in big, and he was going to send the oil down to the refinery in Dunn City as soon as he had fixed his pipes.

"Who fixed the pipes and did all the other work about the well? There was the boring, casing, and so on to be attended to. A well doesn't begin to spout of itself. It has to have some help."

"That's true. But I don't know who did it."

"Didn't you ask?"

"Yes, but Mr. Sarner said that was none of my business. He wasn't telling anything about it to anybody, he said. All he wanted me to do was to watch the engine at night, and see about getting a man for the daytime."

"And did you get a day man for him?"

"Yes. Only," added Penton, with a sly, chuckling laugh, "it isn't a man."

"Oh, I see. A boy, eh?"

"No, a woman!"

"A woman—for an engineer?"

"Yes; it's my sister, Amanda. She knows as much about the oil business as I do, and she can run an engine as well as any one along Dunn Creek."

"You're a wonder, Penton."

"Oh, I don't know about that, Mr. Rowton, but I think I know something about business," was the chuckling response.

There was silence for a few moments, and Simmons, the dark-visaged spy, who had been following the man who was supposed to be his only employer, in obedience to the orders of Calton Sarner, plastered himself bolt upright behind one of the tall poplars, a few yards away, as he wondered what was coming next.

"Can we go indoors for a minute or two?" asked Rowton, at last. "I have something to ask you, and you can't tell who may be listening out here."

This random shot made Simmons shiver, for he well knew that George Rowton would not handle him any too gently, if he should chance to discover his wandering man of all work.

"Of course we can go in, Mr. George," replied Silas. "I'll lead your horse."

Almost before the spy realized that he had been obliged to lose sight of his man, after all, George Rowton and Silas were in the house, with the door closed.

The fair-sized sitting-room into which Rowton was ushered was in one of the smaller parts of the house, round the four-story edifice in the center.

"This seems like home, Silas," observed Rowton, as he threw himself into an old-fashioned armchair, redolent of another age, with its walnut frame and horsehair cushions. "This room was my father's den in the old days, you know."

"Yes, Mr. George, I remember. When the oil business was booming I used often to come in here to get my orders. I didn't think then he'd ever move out of this house."

"I wish he hadn't. I never feel the same in that other house in Dunn City as I did here. I believe this will always seem like my real home, though I never expect to live here again. What's that thumping? It seems to shake the whole building."

"It's the shackle-rods that pass over the roof. Your father had them put there on poles fixed to the roof when the big well in the yard was giving its two hundred barrels a day, and they've never been taken down. Since Mr. Sarner has had his engine going with his new well they jar the house a great deal. But they don't do any harm; and as for the noise, why, I am used to it, and don't mind it a bit."

On the table, in the center of the room, was a large coal-oil lamp, whose light fell full upon Silas Penton's face. It showed a pale, rather thin countenance, with a long nose, wide mouth, thin lips, and eyes which shifted so rapidly when looking at any one that they seemed to be veiled, and no man had ever been able to say what their color really was.

"Well, now, Penton," said Rowton in a businesslike tone, "I have no objection to your taking care of Mr. Sarner's engine at night, but I suppose you don't forget you are in my employ."

Silas Penton raised his two hands deprecatingly, and the veil lifted from his eyes for an instant, but covered them again immediately.

"How could I forget it, Mr. George? Am I not here in your house and looking after your new wells—"

"All dry holes up to the present," put in Rowton, with a shrug.

"Yes, but we shall strike oil in some of them some day. Of course, I was going to tell you that I had taken this night engineer's job. I didn't think you'd mind, because I get along with very little sleep, and I'm round all day—"

"That's all right," interrupted Rowton. "What I want to know is, where is the well that is sending all this oil to my refinery? Can you find out?"

"I'll try, Mr. George."

"Then you'd better go to your work at the engine-shed now. I saw Mr. Sarner about half an hour ago, and he expected you back in ten minutes. I'll come to see you again this afternoon."

The young man got up suddenly and strode to a door, which, without noticing particularly, he supposed was that by which he had entered the room. But Silas Penton got there before him, and smilingly pointed to one opposite.

"That's the way out, Mr. George," he purred.

"Oh, yes; I see. But the other door would take me out, too, by the front entrance, past the big staircase," laughed Rowton. "I haven't forgotten my way about the old house yet, Silas."

"No, of course you haven't. But we hardly ever use the front door now. We find it more convenient to go in and out at the side," said Penton, as he led the way to the yard. "It's a fine night—or rather morning—isn't it?"

"Very."

"I suppose you're going home now?"

"Yes."

"Is there much excitement over this rush of oil?"

"A great deal."

"It'll put most of the old hands in the refinery at work again, won't it?"

"All of them, if I can manage it."

"I'm glad to hear that. There has been an ugly feeling among the men since the wells shut down. They blamed your father for it, although it was not his fault; and I've been sorry to notice that a lot of them seemed to be down on you, just because you are his son. Most unreasonable, isn't it?" went on Penton, in his softest tone, while his veiled eyes turned quickly to the young man's face and away again.

"Most unreasonable," assented Rowton, who was in the saddle by this time.

"I suppose you were anxious to see where the oil came from, and that was the reason you came out here at this late hour?" was Silas Penton's next remark, with another of his swift, furtive glances at the other one's face.

"That was the reason. I thought you might be able to give me some information about this mysterious well."

"I'll try to get it out of Mr. Sarner. While the engine is pumping the oil I'll try to pump him. He! he! That's pretty good, eh?"

Silas Penton chuckled at his own brilliant flash of humor all the way to the gate as he walked by the side of the horse. Then he said:

"You are not going toward the engine-shed, I know, if you're going home, Mr. George. Good night! I mean—good morning! I'll look for you in the afternoon, Mr. Rowton."

"Good morning," returned Rowton.

With a parting nod, Penton moved away, while Rowton, after waiting till he could no longer see the engineer in the moonlight or hear him pushing his way through the bushes, set his horse going, but—not toward Dunn City.

His shock-headed, dark-visaged "shadow" shambled cautiously after him.

CHAPTER V.

WHERE THE PIPE LED.

"I'LL have to go to the tanks first of all," thought George Rowton. "Then I can work from them along the pipe line to the well."

It all sounded so simple that he could not help wondering how so keen a man as Calton Sarner could have supposed this would not have occurred to him.

"Perhaps he thinks it doesn't make any particular difference whether I find it or not, so long as it is his," he reflected, as he rode along, dodging the moving shackle-rods which were still busily pumping oil to his refinery, miles away, in Dunn City.

"That may be, but I want to make sure the well *is* his. Our properties adjoin. The well might be—accidentally—on my side of the line, and I'm afraid my good friend, Sarner, might stoop to take advantage of such an 'accident.' He has done dirty tricks like that before, unless everybody libels him."

For ten minutes George Rowton pursued these musings, the horse stumbling along over the broken ground, while his rider kept on ducking to avoid the shackle-rods, and the "shadow" followed at a safe distance, until the increasing odor of petroleum, always more or less penetrating in an oil district, told Rowton he was again near the six great tanks into which he had seen the oil pouring before his interview with Calton Sarner in the engine-shed.

With the swift perception of an expert, the young man made out the main conduit, from which branched smaller pipes to the different tanks, each of these pipes governed by a valve that could be opened to let the oil pass into the tank, closing automatically when it was full.

As the oil was rushing away into the big pipe leading to the Rowton refinery as fast as it poured into the tanks, the valves were all open.

It was in the pipe leading from the well, by which the oil was coming to the tanks, that George Rowton was immediately interested, however, and it pleased him to note that, on account of the undulations of the ground, he would be able to follow it without difficulty, even by the uncertain moonlight. In some places the pipe was entirely above the surface, and always he could trace its direction.

With the bridle of his horse over his arm, Rowton moved along the course of the pipe for about a mile. Then the pipe climbed a hill, lying on top of the ground, and, descending the other side, it took him into a valley, where stood an immense tank of the same general pattern as the six near the engine shed, but much larger than any of them.

This tank was elevated about eighteen inches from the ground on ponderous wooden posts, and, as Rowton looked underneath, with a lighted match, he saw that the pipe he had been following tapped the tank through the bottom, and he knew that the engine he had seen in the shed, with the crooked lines of shackle-rods that passed over his head even here, were forcing the oil up into it in a mighty torrent.

He did not spend much time looking at the pipe under the tank. What he wanted to find out was where the oil—which merely passed through this great reservoir, to supply the six tanks a mile away—came from originally.

He had been aware of the existence of this huge tank, of course, because he had traveled all over the Dunn Creek oil-fields again and again since his return home from California, six months before, but he had not expected that the pipe would ostensibly end here. It only strengthened his conviction that, for reasons of his own, Calton Sarner was resolved, if possible, to keep the situation of the new well a profound secret.

Climbing the perpendicular iron ladder attached to the tank, he looked in. As he had anticipated, the receptacle was not much more than half full, although the rhythmical bubbling on the surface of the oil showed that it was not only pouring out through the pipe line to the distant six tanks, but was also coming in through the agency of powerful pumping machinery somewhere.

"Here's the pipe from the well," said Rowton to himself a moment or two later, as, having descended from the ladder, he went to the other side of the tank and examined the bottom, with the aid of another lighted match.

The pipe which obviously was conducting the oil to the big tank was of the same size as the other which took it to the other six tanks, but, instead of extending along the top of the ground, or near the top, it plunged straight downward, as if the well might be immediately beneath, although probably a long distance into the earth.

This, however, could not be, as George

Rowton well knew, so he went carefully all over the small valley, his eyes fixed upon the ground, seeking some trace of the pipe wherever he thought it might possibly show itself before stretching away to the still undiscovered gusher.

Not a sign of it could he find, and at last, after half an hour of patient examination of the broken surface of the ground, in the course of which he turned over many a heavy boulder beneath which he thought the pipe might be concealed, he gave it up for the time being.

But if Rowton did not come across the pipe he sought, he only narrowly missed discovering something that would have surprised him considerably.

This something was nothing more or less than the dark-visaged, shock-headed Mr. Simmons, who had been set by Calton Sarner to watch his movements and report on them.

More than once the spy saved himself from being found by the man who supposed himself to be the man's sole employer only by quick and skilful dodging.

It was an unnecessary risk that Simmons took, too. He could have kept an eye on Rowton from a safe hiding-place on the hill above, but it seemed as if he were too curious on his own personal account to see what the young man was about, to follow merely the letter of his instructions from Calton Sarner.

He wanted to satisfy himself, as well as the hotelkeeper, and in his overeagerness he nearly got directly into George Rowton's way half a dozen times.

Rowton walked slowly to his horse and settled himself in the saddle. He was thinking deeply, whistling unconsciously below his breath, like a man who was not entirely dissatisfied with the state of his affairs. The fact was, that, notwithstanding he was a little disappointed because he had not found the well which was spouting five hundred barrels a day, he did not feel that his night's work had been for nothing.

He argued that, before he could get to the well, he must have traced the pipe to the big tank, and now that job was done. When he began his next hunt for the well he could start from this point directly, without loss of time.

As for the threat of Calton Sarner to stop the flow of petroleum at the end of five days, that was something he would have to consider at his leisure. He could not decide on his course with regard to Sarner's propositions all at once, although he was quite sure that, so far as his sister was concerned, there was nothing to debate over. That Eleanor ever could become the wife of this saturnine, unscrupulous man, from whom honest, decent people naturally recoiled, was unthinkable.

There were streaks of light gray and dusky orange in the eastern sky, and, as George Rowton realized that it would be broad daylight when he reached home, hurry as he might, he turned his horse's head in the direction of Dunn City, and with a wary eye upon the shackle-rods that squirmed about over his head, rode away at a gallop.

Simmons waited till he had gone a little distance, and then followed. Satisfied very soon that Rowton was going straight toward his home, the spy struck off to the right through the woods until he came near the creek. Then, making a number of short cuts with which he seemed to be familiar, he managed to be in his room over the stable, with an air of having been there all night, when the young man rode under the poplars surrounding his home and shouted for his man of all work to come and take his horse.

Simmons was a model of respectful, if sleepy, activity, as he went to the horse's head, to lead him away to the stable.

"Did you find what you were looking for, Mr. Rowton?" he asked, in a casual way.

George Rowton looked at the man sharply and suspiciously.

"What do you suppose I was looking for?" was his rejoinder. "How do you know I was looking for anything?"

"I didn't know, of course, but I saw you went along the road to Penton's, and I thought perhaps you were looking for that well that everybody is talking about," answered Simmons humbly.

"H'm! Well, I didn't find it," said George Rowton, as he marched over to the side-door of the house, and ringing the bell, called out to reassure his sister.

"No, I know durned well you didn't find it, yer bumptious dub!" growled Simmons vindictively, on his way to the stable with the horse. "And you haven't found out yet what it means to have Abe Simmons hate you and your whole stuck-up family, either. I had no use for your father, but I believe I could stand him better than I can you."

The evil eyes under the overhanging brows glared at the door which had just closed on George Rowton, and Simmons shook one of his great fists at it, as he muttered some inaudible threats, which, judging by the expression of the swarthy face, might have conveyed murder itself.

(To be continued.)

Say, Where's Your Card?

BY ARTHUR W. SULLIVAN.

Wherein Indiscretion Proves To Be the Better Part of a Young Reporter.

ACK BURNS was a red-hot reporter. He could make more news from less facts than any other man on the morning *Courier*. This meant he was a good man to send out on a "story," because he always turned in interesting copy whether school kept or not. He had had one or two real "beats," and was looked upon by Warner, the city editor, as the best young reporter on the staff. For this reason he was often sent out to cover important news, when some of the more experienced men took a night off to investigate the proposition of why the earth sometimes has two moons instead of only one, as she ought to have.

Burns had completed a large and healthy Wednesday night's work when he unlocked the front door of the house on One Hundred and Tenth Street at two in the morning and decided to turn in.

Reaching his room, he found Camp, his roommate, asleep as usual, and with his buzz-saw working full blast—also as usual. Burns snapped on the light.

"Here, you, Camp," he said, "roll over. How do you expect a man to get his beauty-sleep with that rumpus going on?"

Camp turned off the buzz-saw, and turned on a muffled complaint in English that Webster doesn't recognize.

"Say, by the way, old boy," continued Burns, ignoring the remarks, "to-morrow night is my night off. What'll we do?"

"I don't care. Say, shut up and go to bed. I'll talk to you to-morrow morning."

"Have you been to the six-day race at the Garden?" continued the reporter mercilessly.

"No," sourly.

"Well, let's go."

His roommate got up on one elbow, blinking sleepily.

"All right, Jack. By the way, can't you get some graft tickets for that race?"

"I don't know. Perhaps I can."

"I tell you how we'll fix it," said Camp. "Give me your reporter's card, and I'll drop in at the Garden and get a couple of tickets to-morrow at lunch-time. You won't need your card, since it's your day off, and I can save you a trip down-town. Also, it will be no trouble for me."

"I'm a little afraid of that, Camp. I oughtn't to transfer my card, you know."

"I realize that; but there's scarcely any risk in it; and I don't feel like planking down a cold buck to go up to that heaven-kissing second balcony and watch those ants circle below me."

Burns hesitated for a moment, and then said:

"Well, go ahead and get the tickets. Here's the card." He drew it from his wallet and placed it in the inside pocket of his roommate's coat.

"But, be as careful of that card as you would of your best girl's mother, and try to get up here with it as early after work as you can."

"Yes, I will. Good night."

Camp turned over the other way, let out a link in his sleeping apparatus, and headed for dreamland as if he had been sent for. Burns slipped out of his day clothes into his night clothes in a jiffy. Then he snapped out the light.

Ten minutes later Camp's solo had become a duet that rattled the teeth of the combs on the dresser and set the hair of the hair-brushes on end.

When Jack Burns awoke at twelve o'clock the next morning Camp had departed this life for the one down-town. He enjoyed a leisurely combination lunch and breakfast, and then stretched out in his favorite chair to read.

At four o'clock the telephone-bell rang down-stairs.

"Somebody for you, Mr. Burns," called the landlady.

Girding himself for the encounter with his bath-robe, Jack descended to the telephone.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo, Burns. This is Warner, of the *Courier*."

"Yes." Jack could foresee an assignment coming his way.

"I'm sorry, old man, but I'll have to ask you to jump out on a big story. I know it's your night off, and I hate to do it, but Clayton and Needham are both out on other leads, Groucher is on his periodical, and I won't trust this to any of the cubs."

"Is there no one else?" growled Burns.

"No one else I would give it to."

"Well, what's your story?"

"Old man Creston, the multimillionaire, you know, is in some mix-up. I don't know just what it is. Neither does any one else. But one of the boys got a tip that he has just employed a detective agency to help him.

"You know, and I know, that old Creston wouldn't call on detectives or anybody else unless he was up against something pretty serious. I want you to go out to his country place, Beechmont, and cover the whole situation.

"If it's big enough, we'll give it a four-column, first-page spread. Get all the pictures you can, and if it's about any one in the family try to get a heart-interest story. Also, remember to handle old Creston with care."

"Yes, sir; I'll go right out. It listens like a pretty interesting proposition to me."

"By the way, Burns, you better call me up every hour up to ten o'clock, and every half-hour after that till we go to press, unless, of course, you get a full story early enough to get back to the office with it."

"I understand. Good-by."

Jack hung up the receiver. For a moment disgust was the predominating emotion that swayed him—disgust at having to give up his one night of rest in the week to the merciless newspaper game.

Then he began to think over what Warner had said.

Old man Creston!

Why, he alone was good for a column any day in the year. The mere fact that he had come down to his office looking glum would set the stock-market to palpitating. The moral is, if you're a great financier, don't court indigestion.

There really can be a large amount of responsibility laid on an innocent Welsh rarebit or an after-theater lobster that didn't know any better.

The crowning love of Creston's life was his hatred for all reporters, the press in general, and the public in particular. His country place was better guarded from representatives of the papers than it was from burglars. In fact, State Senators and other public officials were frequently called in conference by the great man. But a reporter was called everything else under the sun, and his stay on the magnificent Beechmont grounds was measured by the speed at which two husky attendants could impel his person to the public highway.

Burns knew he was up against a stiff proposition. But the very difficulties stirred his reporter's blood and fired his enthusiasm. In a moment the disgust at work was forgotten, and he was bounding up the stairs and into his clothes as fast as his two hands would permit. As he dressed he began planning his campaign.

"If I'm the only newspaper man out there, I can touch my old friend, Captain Sloan of the detectives, for some details. That will make it easy. If there are any other papers on the job, I'll have to pass up that scheme.

"Then it will be up to me to hustle alone and beat the bunch. Let's see. I know one of old Creston's chauffeurs; maybe I can get hold of him. It will probably take some real money to open his lips; but the paper pays for that, so I'll try to open them as wide as I can. If he fails me, I'll do something else. One thing is sure—I'll get this yarn, or know the reason why.

"There's a four-forty train out to Beechmont." Jack pulled out his watch. "I've just time to catch it on the fly, if I hustle."

He slipped into his coat, banged on his hat, took the stairs two at a time, and went for the Subway kiosk so fast that a flock of urchins could have matched pennies on his coat-tails as he passed.

By good luck he caught a Subway train at once. Arriving at the Grand Central, he rushed up the stairs, bought a ticket, and sprinted down the long alleyways to the train. He reached the gate just as the attendant was shutting it, but squirmed through and swung onto the back platform of the last car, puffing and disheveled, but happy.

"Everybody will think I'm a commuter, if I go in looking so mussed up," said Jack to himself, so he readjusted his garments at a few important points and then went in and sat down.

The conductor came presently for his ticket, and Jack opened his wallet.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "Great Scott!" and then stared dumbly at the open wallet in his hand.

"All right, but let's have your ticket," said the conductor. Jack produced it without raising his eyes, and handed it over. Suddenly as he sat there he realized the awful predicament he was in.

He had no reporter's card!

What this meant to Jack only a reporter can understand. Without it he was no more privileged than any other citizen. He could obtain no interviews, enter the Beechmont grounds, or hope for any consideration at the hands of Creston or his employees.

With sinking heart Jack remembered that his card was in Camp's coat-pocket.

Up to this time, in his excitement over the story, he had forgotten its existence. Now he was caught absolutely off his guard. Here he was on a train going away from Camp as fast as electricity would take him.

Yet, even could he have returned to the city, he had absolutely no idea where Camp might be found. Being an outside man Camp wasn't to be depended on at the office, or anywhere else for that matter.

Camp being out of the question, Jack's position seemed hopeless.

He wouldn't dare call up Warner and tell him that he had loaned his card to some one else, even under the most excusable circumstances.

No matter how innocent they might be, Jack knew that Warner would be unforgiving in his condemnation, and might, indeed, make serious trouble for him.

The reporter felt there was no hope to be looked for in that direction, yet the outlook before him was no brighter. He was going out to a town he didn't know on a story he didn't know, to try and see a man he didn't want to know any better than he had to.

He felt Creston's restrictions on the press would be more than usually severe, and he knew that under any circumstances every reporter would be called upon to show his identification card. Without his card he might just as well quit the story before he began it, a paradox that didn't appeal at that moment to his usually sunny sense of humor.

Still, he had gone too far to give up. He had accepted the assignment. Any going back now would be looked upon as quitting by Warner and the office in general.

"There's only one way out of this mess," Jack decided after long thought, "and that is not to get out of it at all." This time he appreciated the paradox a little bit.

"I'll stick to this story now until I get it, or until I'm beaten by every fourth-rate sheet in the city. But it's certainly up to me to make the fur fly when I get up to Beechmont."

Having thus settled his own mind, he hunted up the conductor of the train and asked how to reach Creston's place from the Beechmont station.

"Just follow the road west, it's only a short walk. Yours is the next station."

Presently the train began slowing down, and Jack was soon deposited on the platform of a small wooden station.

Quite a gathering of local celebrities was clustered round the ticket-office window. Every one seemed to be discussing some topic of absorbing interest.

Jack stepped up in time to hear a voice say:

"I tell you she didn't elope. She's not that kind. She's too much like the old gentleman—too proud and high-bred."

Jack turned carelessly to one of the listeners.

"So Creston's daughter has eloped, eh?"

"Yeah. That's the tale that's going round. They say she went out with one of her servants in the auto yesterday, and ain't been heard from since. I can't see no excuse to think of anything but an elopement. She's had this fellow in her employ for over a year, and you can get powerful well acquainted in that time. Looks to me like it was a little game the two of 'em had fixed up together."

"What's old Creston doing about it?" queried Jack.

"He's got a lot of detectives on the job. There's some of them up to the house now. The old man ain't left the house since it happened, and I understand he's near crazy."

"Thanks," and Jack hurried away.

What a story! Oh, what a story! Its magnitude thrilled him. Its possibilities awoke every reportorial instinct in him.

Old Creston's only daughter! And eloped with a common servant, too! Wouldn't the public gobble that tid-bit?

He turned it over and over in his mind. Already he was formulating the opening paragraph.

"Full page spread if I find it's true," he thought as he hurried up the road.

Then he suddenly remembered that he didn't have his card, and the sickening realization brought him up stock still.

But he couldn't quit now, he simply couldn't. There must be some way to get the facts. He would have to find that way or make one. With this determination he again started rapidly up the road.

"Beechmont," the home of Clarendon Creston, was situated far back in magnificent grounds which were surrounded by a very ornamental but very practical ten-foot iron fence. As Jack approached the beautifully wrought front entrance he noticed two men at the gate, and a third, a rather familiar figure, passing through.

He hastened his steps. The familiar figure looked like his old rival, Gannon, from the *Bugle*.

Jack started to push through the gate, but found his way blocked by the two men, one of whom was a policeman.

"Hold on. Where ye goin'? Do you own this joint or are you just makin' a visit?" asked the bluecoat roughly.

"I'm a reporter from the New York *Courier*, and I'm out on the Creston story," said Jack. Again he started forward, this time in earnest. He had recognized the man who had passed in ahead of him. It was Gannon of the *Bugle*.

"Let's see your card," said the officer.

Jack produced a personal card.

The officer threw it away.

"Don't try to kid me, young feller," he remarked, twirling his club. "Show me your reporter's card or back you go."

Jack hesitated. Then he decided to brave the thing out.

"I lost it," he said candidly. "I only wish I did have it."

"Ha-ha," roared both guardians of the gate at great length and with much gusto.

When they had finally recovered, the officer concluded, wiping his eyes with his coat sleeve:

"You're a smart one, all right, but you can't fool us. Now move along. There's nothin' doing here."

There was just one thing to do. Jack hated to do it because he would have to humble himself to Gannon, his bitter professional rival. But he swallowed his pride.

"Hallo, Gannon," he called.

Gannon was by this time well up the carefully trimmed avenue, but he turned at the sound of his name.

"Come here and help me out," bellowed Jack.

Gannon came back smiling. It wasn't often Burns of the *Courier* asked a favor.

"This—this—this—" Jack indicated the policeman but paused for lack of a sufficiently vicious yet tactful noun—"has refused to let me pass. I've lost my card and I want you to identify me."

"Why, sure thing," said Gannon, turning to the officer. "This is Burns of the *Courier*. I'll be responsible for him."

"We had strict orders—"

"Orders be hanged! I tell you this man is a reporter. I also tell you that you'll get into a whole lot worse trouble keeping him out of here than you will by letting him in. He's a representative of the American press, and has a thorough right to investigate this matter. Another thing, my friend, is this: You may have heard of a politician named Mr. Condors."

The policeman started.

"Well, he owns the *Courier*, and if you like your easy job, you'd better be easy with *Courier* representatives. Get the point?"

The officer shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, weighing Creston's presenf largess against Condor's power.

"Well, go ahead," he said finally. "But I'll keep my eye on you, young feller."

Jack breathed freely again as the two reporters walked up the path together.

"Much obliged, old chap," he said. "Hope I can do the same for you some day."

Frankly, Jack was more relieved than he would have cared to admit. He was safe inside the grounds now, and felt that the story was within his grasp. Had not Gannon happened along as he did, Jack knew that utter defeat would have stared him in the face.

"By the way," remarked Gannon, "have you seen any other newspaper men up here?"

"Not a one. Have you?"

"No."

"Well, it looks as if the *Bugle* and the *Courier* had the story dead to rights, Burns. How shall we cover it—together or alone?"

Jack reflected a moment. He knew he was in no danger of being "beaten" by Gannon, and he felt that he would no longer need such assistance as he had just demanded.

"I tell you, Gannon. I'm indebted to you for getting me through the gate, and I don't want to bother you any further by asking such favors. Now that I'm inside I think it's my cue to rustle for my own story. I say let's work separately."

"Suits me to a T," replied his companion.

Reaching the marble steps leading to the mahogany door of the house, Jack halted.

"I think I'll take a look round the place for a few moments. It's getting dark, and I may not have a chance later."

"All right. I'm going inside to see what I can see, as the consecrated cross-eyed bear once remarked. So long. I'll see you again."

The two men parted.

Jack at once went to a lodge near another entrance to the estate, and, getting the use of the telephone with the aid of a greenback, called up Warner.

"Just got here," said Jack, when the city editor answered. "I'm inside the grounds, all right. The facts so far are, that Creston's daughter has eloped with a servant. No trace of either one of them as yet."

"Great stuff, Burns! Great stuff! I'll save you big front-page space for that, but get it to me as soon as you can."

"By the-way," interrupted Jack, "Gannon, of the *Bugle,* is the only man out here. We're working separately, and I'll try to put one across on him."

"Go to it, Burns," said his chief enthusiastically, "it's up to you. This will be the biggest story ever pulled off on old Creston, and you can make it a great beat. Go to it hard."

Jack hung up and left the lodge.

"Now I'll go up to the house and look around a little myself."

By this time it was half-past six and almost dark. It was also time to eat, but Jack gave that feature no thought. He was too much of a newspaper man to care for eating or sleeping or any weakness of the flesh when there was good copy to be rooted out.

He bounded up the white marble steps two at a time, and rang the bell.

A liveried servant opened the door.

"Your business, sir?" he inquired.

"I'm a newspaper man, and I've come to get the facts about the disappearance of Miss Creston."

"One moment, sir." The door shut in Jack's face.

It was opened again a moment later by a heavy-faced, dull-looking person, who was evidently the majordomo of the establishment.

"What is it you want?"

"As I've said before," Jack began, "I'm a newspaper man."

"What paper?"

"The *Courier.*"

"Let's see your card."

A chill seized Jack at the heart and slowly congealed the blood in his veins. But he answered confidently:

"Is that necessary? They just let me in at the gate. I didn't show my card there."

"Let's see your card." The majordomo's face was impassive.

"Now, see here, old man," said Jack in his most persuasive manner, "I haven't come out here for fun. I must get this story, and just as soon as I can. I won't take long—" And he started forward.

The majordomo extended one arm and held Jack where he was.

"Got to see your card," he said, and stood like a graven image.

"This will make it all right, won't it?" and Jack handed him a crisp bill. The man stuffed it in his pocket and resumed his former stolidity.

"Can't let you in without a card," he said.

"What are you—a parrot?" asked Jack, exasperated. "I've got to get in here and get this story. If you want proof of who I am, Mr. Gannon, of the *Bugle*—"

He stopped suddenly. Now he was in another mess. He couldn't call Gannon out to help him. Gannon had given him the choice of working separately or together on the story, and he had chosen the former method. What a fool he had been! His only hope now was to move the heavy mind of the individual before him.

Jack began again at the beginning, and tried every known expedient except a blackjack on the solid dome of the majordomo. He pleaded, threatened, almost wept, tried to bribe, and lost another dollar at it. All to no purpose.

Finally, desperate, he started forward in earnest. Two great hands flattened on his chest, and he found himself tottering on the top marble step. The door slammed to behind him, he heard the lock click, and saw the hall light go out. Then silence.

He stood as absolutely alone as if he had been in the Sahara Desert. He was as far from his story as white is from black. He looked around him hopelessly. Nothing met his eyes but the black night and the blacker house.

He tried to think—to find some solution of the situation.

Perhaps Gannon— No, certainly he must have got his story and gone.

A thousand questions flooded his mind.

What should he telephone Warner? How should he explain the situation after his first optimistic message? Where should he turn next to pursue the story?

Suddenly Jack Burns, red-hot reporter, found himself in the grip of despair.

He sat down on the step absolutely overcome at his impotence at this crucial moment. It seemed as if his months of good work had all gone to the dogs in the twinkling of an eye.

How could he hold up his head before the rest of the newspaper men or the office? The office! What would they think down there. Jack knew what they would do, but he didn't mind being fired so much as the present disgrace.

And it was all on account of that fiendish card that he had given to Camp.

Jack's head sank into his hands.

One or two hot tears of shame trickled through his fingers in spite of himself.

He jumped up more ashamed than ever and started down the path.

"Well, I'm licked on this," he admitted finally. "I'm licked good. Now I'm going back to the office and face it out."

A few minutes' walk brought him to the gate through which he had so jubilantly passed a short time before. The police officer was still on duty. He held a lantern up, and, recognizing Jack, remarked:

"I wondered where you was, young feller. Your reporter friend went out about half an hour ago. He was askin' after you."

"What did he say?"

"He said he had a typewritten statement from old Creston that gave him the whole story."

Jack saw a gleam of hope.

"What was the story?"

"I dunno. I tried to find out, but he just laughed and hurried along. Said he just had time to catch a train. Told me to buy a *Bugle* to-morrow and read the whole thing."

The gleam of hope went out like a candle under a bucket of soot.

"What did you get?" inquired the officer.

"I got left," said Jack grimly, and went on into the night. Leaving the gate, he turned to his right and followed the road that gleamed dimly before him.

A ten-minute walk brought him to the little wooden station with its one oil-lamp glaring out from a battered tin reflector.

Suddenly a thought struck him.

"I'd better telephone Warner or he'll be wild," he said to himself. "I hate to do it, but he certainly ought to get some word from me.

"Got a telephone here?" he asked the station agent.

"Nope, but there's one over in that grocery on the other side of the track."

"Thanks. By-the-by, when is the next train for the city?"

"In ten minutes. She's due just after number two pulls in from the other direction."

Just then the scream of an engine-whistle pierced the still night, and the huge yellow eye of a locomotive appeared far down the track, growing larger and larger as it bore down upon the station.

"Here's number two now," said the agent. "Your train will be here in a very few minutes."

Jack realized there was no time to telephone, so he stood on the platform and watched the train come to a stop, all the wheels spitting fire from the hard-set brake-shoes.

Indifferently he watched the passengers alight. There were but a few, mostly men late from business. His eye was caught, however, by a young lady who appeared to be alone, and who glanced down nervously into the dark on the platform trying to make out the faces before her.

Finally she descended the car-steps. As she was about to alight her heel caught on the lower step, and she fell heavily, just as the conductor, who was looking the other way, gave the signal for the train to start.

In an instant Jack was at her side. He quickly drew her away from the now moving wheels, and raised her to her feet.

The fall had half-stunned her, and she clung to the reporter as she swayed uncertainly. The old tin reflector threw the light squarely into her pallid face.

Jack uttered a sudden exclamation.

Lifting her in his arms he carried her to the rattly old carriage that had anchored off the station platform as the train pulled in.

"Drive to Creston's," Jack ordered.

Then he turned his attention to the comfort of his companion. He lowered one of the carriage windows so there would be fresh air, and, taking out his handkerchief, placed it behind her head to protect her from the dusty, moth-eaten cushions.

"Thank you very much," said a sweet voice in the darkness beside him. "You are very good to me."

"Oh, no—really," replied Jack, embarrassed. "Certainly I wish I could do more. Did you hurt yourself badly?"

"No, I think not. The suddenness of it rather shook me up, that's all. I'll be quite over it presently."

There was silence for a time. Through the carriage-window came the sounds of night in the country. The jehu was humming a tune about forty-seven bottles hanging on the wall, and the quadrangular nag in front was plugging along half asleep, probably dreaming of a full measure of oats he remembered back somewhere in the dim distance of his youth.

Suddenly Jack's companion sighed.

"What is it?" he asked. "Are you in pain?"

"No," she replied, "quite the contrary. I am perfectly recovered now, and the sigh was one of contentment."

Jack was still pondering this, when she continued:

"It may seem strange that I am riding home with you this way. It may seem still more strange that I am traveling alone and with no baggage. But if you could realize the absolute comfort, as I do, in being with some one you feel you can trust perfectly, you would soon change your opinions.

"The last two days have been terrible, simply terrible. I have been the victim of most distressing circumstances, and yet I suppose my friends think I am guilty of eloping.

"Oh, it's horrible!"

Her self-control wavered, and then gave way to tears.

"Tell me about it," urged Jack, and, even as he said it, he knew that he had arrived at one of the crucial moments of his life.

"We may as well become acquainted at once," he continued after a moment's thought. "My name is Burns—Jack Burns. You are Miss Creston, are you not?"

"Yes."

She had not entirely recovered her composure, so Jack went on:

"You have my deepest sympathy in what you have endured. It must have been a harrowing experience."

"Oh, it was!" she burst out. "What I had done to win the affection of that cur, I don't know."

"To whom are you referring?"

"Jenks, the footman, who tried to abduct me. He and my chauffeur played a fiendish trick. The chauffeur pretended to be ill, and Jenks volunteered to take me for my usual afternoon spin.

"I said to him: 'Jenks, you don't know how to run a car.'

"'Oh, yes, I do, miss,' he answered. 'I've learned it for just such a time as Parker got sick.' So I, fool that I was, let him have his way and went out with him."

"Where did he take you?"

"We drove round all the boulevards first, and he planned it so that at six o'clock we were quite a distance from home and on a strange road.

"'Turn round and go back now,' I told him. "'Yes, miss,' he said, 'very presently. But the car is out of gasoline, and I know a road-house not far from here where I can get some. It's only a few minutes' run.' So I told him to go ahead, but hurry.

"We reached the road-house; but, instead of stopping in front of it, he turned into the yard. I began to be alarmed.

"This became real fear when Parker, the supposedly sick chauffeur, came out of the house. He and Jenks talked a few moments together, and then came over to me.

"To make a long story short, they were going to hold me in order to bleed father for money. I agreed to all they said and seemed to fall in with their plans, while all the time I was looking for some means whereby I could communicate with home.

"But they were too clever for me. After giving me something to eat, they made the run to the city and forced me to stay in a horrible hotel that night and all the next day.

"Once Jenks tried to kiss me—"

"But how did you finally escape them?" interrupted the reporter.

"That was very simple. They were foolish enough to both be away from the hotel at once, each thinking the other was there. I made such a disturbance in the room that I attracted the attention of the proprietor, and was very soon free and on my way home, having given an assumed name."

"Now answer me a few questions," said Jack, and with the utmost tact and skill he gathered the details until he had built a newspaper story so perfect in situation, development, and climax that he fairly trembled with delight at the thought of it.

He had forged every link in the chain, and every word of it was from the lips of the heroine herself.

His was a story that would paralyze newspaperdom inside of eight hours!

When he had finished and was silent, the girl beside him in the dark said, quite unconscious of the blow she struck:

"Of course, Mr. Burns, I consider all this that I have told you as strictly confidential. I had to tell some one, I was so wrought up over the whole thing. You have proven your-

self a gentleman in every way, and I know you will grant this wish."

Then began the biggest struggle in Jack Burns's life.

Should he give his word and hold as confidential this great story, this intimate narrative of one of the best-known women in the world, or should he treat it ruthlessly as news—news of the kind that calls for the whole top of the front page and three-inch type?

By winning name and fame should he lose his own self-respect and that of all his friends, or, on the other hand, should he pass the opportunity for self-aggrandisement, and remain a comparatively unknown reporter, but an absolutely square one?

The girl turned toward him, as if expecting the long-delayed answer to her question.

"Until permission is granted me by yourself or your father," said Jack steadily, "not a word of what you have told me shall ever pass my lips."

"Thank you," said Miss Creston simply.

"Miss Creston," said Jack, after a moment's silence, "will you do me the favor of introducing me to your father?"

"Why, of course, Mr. Burns. I certainly want him to meet you. He will be more than eager to know you, not only because you have treated me so courteously, but because you probably saved me from serious injury by your prompt action at the railroad station."

A moment later the carriage drew up before the broad marble steps—the steps that Jack had so hated an hour before.

The reporter opened the door, helped Miss Creston to alight, paid the cabman, and then accompanied her to the front door.

In answer to the pressure a bell rang deep in the bowels of the house.

There was no response, and after waiting several moments Jack put his finger to the bell and kept it there.

Finally a light glimmered inside. Then the hall burst into radiance, and a disheveled lackey threw open the door. When he recognized the young lady before him he started perceptibly, but stiffened at once.

"James, tell my father I want to see him," commanded Miss Creston.

"Yes, miss. It's very good to see you again, miss."

He disappeared up the stairs. Miss Creston led the way into a magnificent drawing-room and snapped on the light.

"We will wait here," she said.

There was absolute silence between them. Jack had a difficult task to perform, and only hoped that Mr. Creston would hurry so he could get it over with.

The ticking of a great-grandfather's clock measured the seconds one by one, and each little space of time seemed ages long to the agitated reporter.

Finally there came a hasty shuffling of slippered feet on the floor above, and then a descending tread on the stairs. Miss Creston rushed out to the hall.

"Father," she cried, and the next moment was close in the arms of a white-haired, austere-looking old gentleman.

"Oh, Clara!" he said in a trembling voice. "Where have you been? Tell me the truth about it all. I will forgive you anything now that I have you with me once more."

Briefly his daughter recited the events since she had left home in the automobile the day before. When she had finished the old man was livid with rage.

"The dogs!" he thundered. "The dogs! I'll hunt them until I land them both behind the bars."

He turned away for a moment.

"James!"

"Yes, sir?" The man came running.

"Call up Hobbs at once at the detective agency and tell him to come out here personally as fast as he can. We have the information we need to trace those rascals."

"Yes, sir; I'll phone at once, sir."

Mr. Creston turned again to his daughter. As he did so he raised his eyes and saw the reporter in the next room.

"Who is that?" he demanded.

His daughter took him by one hand and led him into the drawing-room.

"This," she said, "is Mr. Burns, who has been very kind to me. I fell while getting off the train at the Beechmont station tonight, and he not only pulled me from under the train, but he brought me home in a cab."

Mr. Creston advanced with a smile and held out his hand.

"I want to thank you, sir, with all my heart for your courtesy to my daughter," he said warmly. "I am glad to have the opportunity of meeting you."

"Thank you, sir," said Jack, rising and shaking hands. "I assure you that what little service I could be was a great pleasure. I should not have come into the house, only I feel that I must speak to you about a matter that concerns me very deeply.

"But I am afraid that by doing so I shall incur your disfavor, as heartily as I have so

far won your approval. I—I—" He halted, at a loss how to proceed.

Mr. Creston looked at him keenly.

"Sit down," he said. "Now go ahead. Don't be afraid to speak out."

Jack studied the pattern of the carpet attentively for a moment, thinking. Then he looked his new acquaintance squarely in the eye.

"I shall be frank with you, Mr. Creston. On the way up from the station I learned the whole story of your daughter's misfortune from her own lips, even down to the smallest detail—"

"Well, well—what of that?" queried the old gentleman a trifle testily.

"Just this. I am a newspaper man, a reporter on the *Courier*. I was sent out here to-day to get this story. I didn't get it. I was going back to the office, beaten and in disgrace, when I accidentally saw your daughter fall from the train, and came to her assistance."

"Then you brought her home, and pumped the story out of her on the way," growled Mr. Creston. "That's why you were so courteous, eh?"

"Father," interrupted the girl, "you are altogether unjust. I volunteered the information, to begin with. It was only after I had done this that Mr. Burns asked me any questions."

"Well, I won't have this appear in the papers, young man, do you understand?" roared Creston, rising and pacing the floor. "I won't have it!"

"I think you entirely mistake my motives," interrupted Jack sharply. "Let me ask you a straight question. Had I really wanted to, I could have driven off in the carriage and had the whole story on the press by now, couldn't I?"

Creston stopped pacing and looked at his questioner from beneath knitted brows.

"What are you driving at, young man?" he demanded.

"Just this. After telling me her story, Miss Creston asked me to consider it purely confidential. To be fair to her and to myself, I promised that nothing should come out until I was given direct permission either by herself or you. *I am now here for that permission, and from you.* I want word from you that will allow me to print the true facts in the case."

Mr. Creston again looked Jack through and through, and there was admiration in his glance. Then he turned on his heel and paced the room again.

"Never, sir!" he said.

"See here, Mr. Creston," Jack continued, indignant. "I'm going to tell you a few facts that perhaps you haven't considered.

"You gave Gannon, of the *Bugle,* some kind of a statement to the press this afternoon. That will appear in the *Bugle* tomorrow morning—"

"Yes, but what did I give him?" interrupted Creston again. "Only the barest facts just as we knew them—and they are all wrong."

"That's just the point, Mr. Creston! The *Bugle* will publish a story of an elopement that is not only untrue, but that will be almost libelous.

"But that isn't all. Every other paper in town will take that story and distort it in every possible manner, until, by the time the final evening papers are out, your daughter will not have a shred of reputation left to her name.

"Furthermore, all the papers will publish pictures that are not authentic, and Miss Creston will get the worst sort of yellow-journal notoriety.

"I know these things will happen, because I am a reporter, and have seen them happen before."

Mr. Creston strode up and down, a heavy frown clouding his face.

"Mr. Burns," he said finally, "you know what you're talking about. Everything you've said is true, and I grant you I hadn't looked at it that way.

"It's terrible to think of what will appear about my family to-morrow, but what can you do to prevent it?"

"I can't prevent the appearance in the morning papers of your typewritten statement, but I can prevent the dreams of imagination the afternoon papers will print. And I can do it, if you will give me your authority to write the story that I—and I alone—know.

"I want you to tell me just what I may or may not print. I will adhere to your restrictions rigidly, I give you my word of honor. And I want you to give me pictures that are genuine.

"I will give the world the one true account of this abduction, and I will, so far as one man can, make the publicity connected with this case as inoffensive as possible.

"The world is bound to hear something —why, then, not let it hear the correct thing?"

Mr. Creston stood a full five minutes in deep thought.

"Let's talk it over," he said suddenly, and pulled up a chair next to Jack.

One hour later the reporter stood at the telephone.

"Hallo, Warner, this is Burns."

"Well, what's the matter with you? Where have you—"

"I'll tell all that later, but just now take this Creston story. I have the whole thing. Got it from both the girl and old Creston himself. Also have four pictures and every detail.

"More than that, I have the old gentleman's permission to tell the story from beginning to end; and, last of all, I have the only story that is within a mile of being true."

"Fine, Burns! Fine!" roared Warner. "It's the best thing you've done, and the best this office has seen in years."

"Let me dictate," called Jack.

"Yes, you'll have to. We're just going to press, but I'll hold the front page till you get this in. Here, Roberts," bawled the city editor to some one in the office, "take Burns's dictation."

Jack could hear over the wires the confusion of the office—the click of the typewriters, the copy-readers yelling for boys, and the voice of Warner ordering his assistant to kill the first-page story to make room for his.

The whole atmosphere of the newspaper crept into his blood, and tuned him for the feat he was about to perform.

"Hallo!" said Roberts. "Go ahead. Make it good, and send it fast. It's going out hot to the compositors."

Then Jack told to the greedy world the newspaper story that made him famous.

So sleepy he could scarcely see, so tired he could barely walk, Jack Burns reached home at four in the morning.

The first and last thing he remembered before he dropped on the bed was to reach into Camp's coat as it hung on the chair, find his reporter's card, and mutter, as he put it in his wallet:

"If I ever separate from that card again as long as I am in the newspaper game, my pet enemy may wallop me all he wants over the coco with a baseball bat, and I won't say a word."

Durant's Defense.

BY ANTHONY WRIGHT.

Dealing with a Marriage of Convenience That Ended in a Love Match, and with a Tragedy That Was Happy.

(Complete in This Number.)

CHAPTER I.

AN UNREASONING OUTBURST.

HILDEGARDE HARRINGTON called the *maisonette* her home. It was custom, rather than choice, for home had come to mean very little to Hildegarde. She sat alone in the living-room of the little West Kensington house, looking out over a cool window-box of daisies into the tiny ivy court.

A tawny cat scratched itself on the crumbling brick wall on a level with Hildegarde's eyes. She watched the animal in a dreamy manner as it lay purring in the sun, a picture of utter content.

It reminded her of the peaceful existence she had led before the death of her father.

Her day-dream was suddenly shattered by the opening of a door. Hildegarde glanced up at the girl who entered, and moved over on the lounge to make room for her.

"Been walking, Dorothy?" she asked pleasantly.

"Yes; I just came in," said the other as she switched off a light-brown pongee cloak and threw it over the space vacated for her

on the lounge. An edge of the bright cloth fell across Hildegarde's skirt and stood out like shimmering gold on the dull-gray background of the dress.

"You look like *Juliet* pining for her lover," remarked Dorothy, dropping into a low, Dutch rocker beside the lounge, and giving Hildegarde a penetrating look. "Have you been reading one of those silly romances of yours?"

A slight blush passed over the face of the girl in gray.

"No; I haven't been reading at all. Somehow I don't feel as industrious as that today. I've just been sitting here, thinking how peaceful everything was," replied Hildegarde.

"Was?" Dorothy caught up the word with some irritation in her tone. "You mean before I came in?"

"Oh, no," the other assured her quickly, with a conscious start as she realized how little spirit there was in her denial. "I was thinking of the peaceful times when father was alive. Don't you miss him?"

"Why, certainly." Dorothy's voice took on a surprised note. "But we still have mother."

"You mean you have. My poor mother," her voice softened at the thought. "How I wish I could have seen her! How I wish I had a mother now!"

"What a surprising thing to say, Hildegarde!" said the other somewhat angrily. "Just because mama is your stepmother is no reason why you should talk like that. She has surely always treated you as well as your own mother would have."

"But that was before father died," Hildegarde answered thoughtlessly, and could not check herself when she realized how it must sound to her half-sister.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," Dorothy reproved her hotly. "I'm sure you're very ungrateful."

"Doesn't it stand to reason that she would love you more than she does me?" answered Hildegarde, trying to recover from her mistake. "I am no blood relation to her. Just because my father happened to marry your mother after mine died, you could hardly expect that she would love me as much as she does you, who are her own flesh and blood."

"But she does love you just the same, Hildegarde," was the quick retort. "Hasn't she proved it a thousand times?"

"Oh, I suppose so," answered the other wearily. "Come, let's not talk about it. I did not mean to bring the matter up."

"I must really tell mama how you appreciate her efforts to get you out among people and have you enjoy yourself. It will surely interest her," said Dorothy in a cutting tone.

"I wish you wouldn't trouble your mother about me any more," Hildegarde said in the same tired voice.

She found it hard to bear the keen sarcasm and criticism that was always present in the younger girl's manner.

"It's no trouble, I assure you," answered Dorothy.

She was impertinent and complaining always. The contrast between two girls with the same father could not have been greater.

Dorothy Harrington was not more than twenty; her half-sister was twenty-three. And yet an average person would have construed their ages quite differently. For Dorothy's face was like her mother's—hard, cold, with very worldly eyes. She had inherited none of the noble characteristics of the girls' common father.

Hildegarde's features were neat and clear-cut; they could have been called cold but for the refined softness of expression. The girl's heart spoke through her eloquent eyes.

A strained silence had ensued after Dorothy's impertinent reply. She sat studying the face of her half-sister in a calm, critical scrutiny that missed nothing.

"I saw Harold in Piccadilly this afternoon," began Dorothy, resuming the conversation abruptly after she had cut it off.

"Did you?" replied Hildegarde, brightening perceptibly, but trying to keep the show of enthusiasm from her frank face.

"I suppose you are dying to hear what he said?" the younger girl went on archly.

"What do you mean by that?" Hildegarde flashed back.

"Oh, you seem to be so interested in him, that's all," the other replied, with a slight exultation in her manner. "Sure you're not interested in him in the least?"

"I wish you wouldn't tease me, or try to tease me, with Harold all the time, Dorothy." There was a little flash of spirit in Hildegarde's manner. "What can he ever be to me but a good friend, now that—that—" A deep sigh gave way to a dry choke, and she could not finish.

As Hildegarde's glistening eyes turned toward the window, so that the other should not see what made them glisten, Dorothy's lids narrowed shrewdly, and she drew her tight little mouth into a sneering smile.

"Oh, now that you are to marry Mr. Bardsley, I suppose you are trying to forget Harold," she said.

"I'm not trying to forget Harold Durant." Hildegarde had risen from the lounge, and her arms shot down stiff at her sides in an effort at self-control.

Dorothy looked as though she regretted having mentioned the name of Bardsley. It always had such a strange effect on her half-sister.

"There was never anything between us. Good Heavens, do you think if there had been—do you think if any man in this world loved me—that I would submit to the thought of Mr. Bardsley for an instant?" Hildegarde went on hotly.

"I know it is your mother's wish for me to marry him. I refused him last week because I couldn't bear the thought of him, not because there is anything between Harold Durant and me."

"Do be sane, Hildegarde," said Dorothy in a bored voice. "You always become so hysterical over Mr. Bardsley. I'm sure mother wouldn't force you to marry him. Surely you can say nothing against him—except possibly his age. He is such a dear, such a fine, splendid-looking man. I am quite envious of his attentions to you."

"Then why don't you marry him?" cried Hildegarde.

A conscious flush spread over the younger girl's face, and her eyes dropped as she murmured quickly:

"How absurdly you talk, Hildegarde. He doesn't love me. Hasn't he told mother and you how he fell in love the first time he saw you? How he liked your quietness, praised your beauty, and everything. He would never like me. I—I am quite different from you."

Hildegarde's fingers clenched tighter, a flush mounted to the roots of her hair. She could feel the wave of anger surging up and through her body.

Concentrating her energy, trying to hold her trembling lips in check, her pent-up feelings finally burst over the dike of self-control, and carried her on in an unreasoning flood of words.

"Yes, that's the reason you give," she cried. "What does it matter to me, if he does love me? Is that any reason why I should submit to be fondled by his cold fingers? Would you like to sit beside him and stroke his thin white hair and call it living? You would call him a man who has outlived his usefulness; you know that's what you think.

"He is nothing but a collection of cold refinements. Mr. Bardsley is three times my age. He wants a *nurse,* not a wife. Ugh! I could—"

Her energy had carried her too far; she did not know what she was saying. Hurrying from the side of her half-sister, she rushed to her own room and sobbed it all out on her pillow.

Half an hour later Mrs. Harrington slipped into Hildegarde's room and put her soft palm on the girl's throbbing forehead.

"You mustn't excite yourself so, dear," she said. She expressed her affection by a mechanical relaxation of the strained muscles about her mouth and eyes, hardened by hypocritical social usage.

Hildegarde was a clinging girl. She accepted even forced expressions of tenderness for the genuine article. She needed love; leaping forward at the slightest expression of affection and returning it trustingly.

It was this childlike virtue in the girl which Mrs. Harrington understood fully and took advantage of whenever occasion demanded.

CHAPTER II.

A PASSIONATE PLEA.

SOFTENING Hildegarde with affectionate questions, Mrs. Harrington wormed an account of the trouble from her. Hildegarde's anger was spent, and she clung to her stepmother as though she were the only hope left.

"You won't make me marry Mr. Bardsley, will you?" the girl pleaded, in a voice that was almost childish.

"Why, of course not, dear," smiled Mrs. Harrington, peering into the bright eyes of the girl. "I think it would be for the best, because he loves you and can take care of you handsomely; but you shall decide for yourself."

"But he's so old—" began Hildegarde.

"Oh, I don't know as that should make any difference," Mrs. Harrington put in quickly. "I'm sure some of the happiest marriages I've seen have been between young girls and what you choose to call 'old men,' if Mr. Bardsley is a sample of that kind."

"Why, he's three times my age," the girl cried, wondering why Mrs. Harrington could not see it.

For Hildegarde could never resist her stepmother when she showed sympathy with her. However she might doubt her in the abstract, Mrs. Harrington had such a finished manner that the clinging girl, wholly unex-

perienced in the ways of the world, never doubted her interest when she chose to adopt a motherly attitude.

"Come, dear, we can talk this over later," Mrs. Harrington broke in on her thoughts. "You must dry your eyes and make yourself presentable. Mr. Bardsley is coming to dinner."

"Oh, can't I stay in my room?" the girl queried anxiously. "His compliments are so annoying."

"But he is in earnest. Besides, Mr. Durant has just telephoned to say that he is calling this evening," replied Mrs. Harrington.

The girl's manner changed suddenly. Harold Durant was always interesting to her, and the stepmother played her cards well.

"I guess I might as well dress now," decided Hildegarde.

"Then you are more anxious to see Mr. Durant than Mr. Bardsley," replied Mrs. Harrington with what was meant to be a gently chiding smile. "How strange you are, Hildegarde; Mr. Bardsley is so much more worthy than Mr. Durant. You hear so many peculiar things about young Durant, I have sometimes thought he was hardly a fit person for you and Dorothy."

"I'm sure I know nothing against him," the girl retorted quickly.

"Except that he was very wild at Cambridge, and spends most of his time in Piccadilly," Mrs. Harrington answered, giving the girl a keen look. "But I suppose you think that makes him a dangerous man, and girls nowadays seem to favor the risky sort; there is a glamour about them which seems irresistible. I suppose you have the sacrificial idea, Hildegarde, that a woman's mission in life is to marry a man in order to reform him."

"I'm not going to marry Mr. Durant," the girl answered wistfully. "He hasn't asked me."

"Then you may consider yourself fortunate, my dear, for he has asked nearly everyone else he knows. No one seems to have enough sporting instinct to take the chance."

Mrs. Harrington turned toward her stepdaughter with a fascinating, tender smile, and left the room at once.

When she was gone Hildegarde thought over her remarks about Durant. She could not deny them. There were stories on all sides about the young fellow.

Doubtless her stepmother was correct. It would be dangerous for her to love Durant, and yet she felt that she did, in spite of the fact that her relations with the man had never been on any other basis than friendship.

When Hildegarde went down to dinner she found Ernest Bardsley alone in the drawing-room. He rose and greeted her impressively. He was always the same, perfect in every social attribute and charmingly agreeable.

Yet there was a strange air about him. To Hildegarde he seemed a most mysterious person. There were so many incongruities in his make-up. There was an intangible something that the girl did not like. She could not place her finger on it; but a mystery floated somewhere in his manner which repelled her as much as his age.

Possibly it was that Mr. Bardsley was a Canadian, who professed to be ignorant of London life, and yet he had all the manners of a club-man. He was reputed wealthy; no one knew him, but his manners were sufficient introduction, and his appearance was rather striking.

To look at him one would say that he was a Canadian. He wore American-made *pince-nez* without rims, his face was smooth, and his hair a bluish white, with a tinge at the roots which sometimes seemed light green, as though his hair had previously been dyed.

While perfectly polished in every respect, there was that element of mystery about him which fascinated some people and repelled others.

As Hildegarde looked at him that night, she wondered that her stepmother could urge her to marry this man. He had sought an introduction to Hildegarde six weeks before and paid assiduous court ever since. The girl could not understand why Mrs. Harrington would take up a man unknown in London, who had no family.

But Hildegarde did not know that money was the object of the wished-for marriage. Bardsley had that in abundance, according to his story of it, and stocks and bonds which he offered as a settlement for his marriage.

It was this lure which had attracted Mrs. Harrington and showed her how she might get rid of Hildegarde and provide a fortune for her own daughter at the same time. For her real mother-love was with Dorothy, and since her husband's death she looked upon his daughter as an encumbrance.

Had Hildegarde known this ulterior motive she would not have been so anxious to please her stepmother and try to like Mr. Bardsley.

She had avoided all chances of seeing him alone, and was therefore greatly startled when she went down to dinner to find that neither Mrs. Harrington nor Dorothy was in the drawing-room with him.

After greeting him she started to stammer an excuse and leave the room, but he caught her gaze, and his eyes pleaded that she would stay while he went on hurriedly:

"Please don't go, Miss Harrington. I have wanted to see you alone for so long. Don't snatch away the wished-for opportunity."

"What is it you want, Mr. Bardsley?" she asked tremulously, trying to remain collected.

"When I made you my offer of marriage last week I was too cold and businesslike. I had no chance to see you alone," he went on, his voice breaking a little with feeling. "I want to tell you that I made the offer merely because I love you. I could not live without you. I am more assured of that every day."

"Please, please don't, Mr. Bardsley. You make it so hard for me," the girl urged.

"But I must tell you," he went on quickly. "This is my first chance. I have the heart of a boy in my breast. My white hairs argue nothing. I can love you better because I have experience. I have gained in respect.

"It would be the business of my life to serve you. I would be your slave. Think, only think, Miss Harrington, a young man cannot love. He flits from one flower to another, gathering honey. An experienced man is steadier, he knows true respect, true love."

"Oh, you mustn't talk to me like this, Mr. Bardsley. It is not fair. I must go," cried Hildegarde, her whole tender being stirred by his earnest appeal.

It was not in her to be cruel and hard. She was so responsive to the expression of love, and yet knew that she could never return his.

She started from the room. Mr. Bardsley put out a restraining hand and the dog-like affection in his weak eyes made her stop.

"I must tell you. I burn with passion for you," he went on madly. "Oh, I know it sounds strange for a man of my years to talk this way. But it is the truth. I did not begin to live until I saw you.

"I cancel all my years and say that I am now a youth, Miss Harrington. I am going to begin with a clean sheet. You have wiped away the crowding years. I am young again for just looking into your eyes."

"Stop!" the exclamation burst from her for sheer self-protection.

His entreaty, while it chilled her one moment, set her on fire the next. Love was what she wanted. She had never before refused it. It was harder for her than anything she could have imagined. To have a surfeit of love poured at her feet and be unable to accept it.

He drew himself up proudly at her exclamation and ceased speaking. She respected him for it and could not help but think how different his love-making was from what could be expected in a youth. It was so respectful, so thoughtful.

"You mustn't talk to me like this," her cheeks were burning. "I don't love you. It is unfair to both of us."

His shoulders slumped, he became an old man again in an instant.

"I'm sorry," he said slowly, in a voice that cracked. His spirit was spent. His age had returned with double strength, and appeared as a barrier again. "I'm so sorry."

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

ALL through dinner Hildegarde avoided Mr. Bardsley's eyes. He had recovered his composure, but the girl strove in vain to act as though she had forgotten the interview.

Several times during dinner, things were said which put rash youth at a discount and glorified experienced age. These were not lost on Hildegarde. Her sensitive mind recorded them, and they continued to argue themselves out of their own volition.

Harold Durant called at nine and joined the little family group in the drawing-room, where Dorothy was amusing herself at the piano and Hildegarde was sitting beside Mrs. Harrington and Bardsley, who were discussing the youth of the age and talking about the shocking things young men were allowed to do with little or no censure from their elders.

Durant's entrance was an anticlimax. He personified the type they were discussing.

His care-free face, the slight cigarette stain on his fore-fingers, the extremely modish cut to his waistcoat, all went to make up the modern youth who affects a certain nonchalant pose and would have it seem that he is through with the cares of the

world and has devoted himself to whisky-and-soda and the theater.

But beneath the studied carelessness of his exterior there was a flash of something which showed the man. He talked in the exaggerated manner of youth and said little that did not have froth on it. Yet his eyes belied his training and said plainly that a man lived beneath the artificial shell and that he was a purposeful, resourceful sort.

The conversation became general, Dorothy left the piano and entered into the talk, so that not so much was demanded of Hildegarde, and she leaned back in her chair, looking first at Bardsley and then at Durant.

Hildegarde knew she loved the younger man instinctively; but, not satisfied with that truest of feelings, she sought a reason for it. From appearances, reason was all on the side of Bardsley. He seemed more the man than this flippant young fellow who talked of horses and the stage.

Often Hildegarde remembered what her stepmother had said. Durant was a risky sort of person to deal with. The love of youth could never be dependable, as that of age. As to passion, hadn't Bardsley shown more than she had ever seen before?

True, she revolted from the thought when his age was taken into consideration. But she continually thought of Mrs. Harrington's experienced attitude, and she had said that it was far better to be "an old man's darling than a young man's snarling."

Within herself the girl realized that the adage was false; but there was reason in it, and with the two men before her, Hildegarde played with the thought.

It was possible that Durant did not love her, but something in his manner said that he did, and she responded far more readily to the hope of that something than she did to Bardsley's passionate avowal.

Just before they broke up for the evening, Durant had the opportunity of a few words alone with Hildegarde. He had seemed anxious for the time all evening, and began at once:

"Miss Harrington—it's so foolish to call you that, but custom demands it—may I see you alone some time? I have something very particular to say to you."

As he spoke he glanced in the direction of Bardsley, as though fearful that he would hear. All evening the young fellow had been watching the old man, and occasionally asking him direct questions which had but little bearing on the conversation.

"We are alone now. What is it you would like to tell me?" replied Hildegarde, her heart giving a little leap.

"It would take too long. May I see you to-morrow? Will you meet me in town?"

"That wouldn't be right. I'm sure you can come to the house," she answered coolly, surprised by his peculiar manner.

"But we would be interrupted here. Will you walk in the park at three to-morrow? I can meet you accidentally there."

"But what is the need of it?" she queried, hating anything which seemed underhanded.

"I can't explain. I haven't time. Will you be there?" he asked, his whole bearing becoming active, and changing abruptly from the languid air he maintained so easily.

"I can't answer now. What can you have to say to me that you can't say here?" Her protest was becoming feeble.

Bardsley was already saying good night. There was little time left. Durant fixed his eyes on hers, and said with emphasis:

"I shall expect to see you there. Don't make any decision until you see me. I have wanted to tell you something for so long. It will make all the difference in the world in your life and mine. You must!"

At that moment Bardsley interrupted to say good night, and Harold Durant left shortly, having dropped back into his easy, artificial manner.

Hildegarde had but little sleep that night. She felt that Durant loved her. She was certain that she loved him.

While deceit was a thing Hildegarde abhorred, she knew how hard it would be to see him alone in the house for any length of time; Dorothy or Mrs. Harrington would be sure to come in and interrupt.

So the next afternoon at three she took the motor-bus to Knightsbridge, and walked slowly up and down the principal parade, looking for Harold.

He did not appear. She wondered if he meant some other part of the park. But that could not be; this was the only place where they would be apt to meet.

For two hours she walked up and down; then, fearing to be late for tea, and having to undergo scrutinizing questions, she gave up waiting and returned home. Her disappointment was great. She had hoped so much from that interview. Now she began to doubt Durant again, and remembered her mother's remarks concerning him and his reputation.

Mrs. Harrington was out when the girl reached home, and Dorothy was taking tea alone.

"Have you heard the news?" queried Dorothy, as Hildegarde entered.

There was something ominous in her manner which made Hildegarde ask, breathlessly:

"No; what is it?"

"Harold Durant has mysteriously disappeared," said Dorothy, watching the effect on her half-sister between narrowed eyelids.

The news came as a relief to Hildegarde at first. It was balm to her vanity, in explaining his failure to appear in the park.

"Disappeared? What do you mean?" she cried a breath later.

"I mean he's run away, and his family is looking for him. Stella just ran in to tell me about it. He quarreled with his father last night. There's some scandal about it."

"Scandal?" Hildegarde's tone was tense, and she stood stiff and straight, her eyes boring into those of her half-sister. "For mercy's sake, tell me!"

"I don't know much about it." Dorothy strove to maintain a careless air. "It was about some woman, I believe."

"A woman!" cried Hildegarde, remembering Mrs. Harrington's implied suggestions every time she spoke of Durant.

"Yes; that is what they say. Of course, I don't believe it. Stella is such a little scandalmonger, you know; they say the woman—"

"It really doesn't interest me," said Hildegarde, passing a quivering hand over her forehead. "Please don't tell me any more."

She took a deep breath and started to go to her room, when Mrs. Harrington came through the door and asked what the trouble was, for she noticed the anxiety in the girl's face.

Hildegarde, in order to carry it off, stayed in the room and took tea with Mrs. Harrington, while Dorothy sketched to her mother the news concerning Durant. Mrs. Harrington had heard about it, and only remarked that it bore out her feeling toward the young fellow.

Dorothy left the room, and Hildegarde was alone with her stepmother. They talked of trivial things for some time, carefully avoiding the thought which was uppermost in their minds.

At length Mrs. Harrington drew a deep sigh and moved over beside Hildegarde on the lounge. Taking her hand, she said softly:

"My dear child, you must make up your mind. Mr. Bardsley was very much hurt by your manner last night. Why do you continue to think of this worthless Durant? He is one of these idle young Englishmen; they are not like our American college boys—they are so much more sophisticated. On the other hand, Mr. Bardsley is so different. He has your interests at heart, and I am sure he can make you happy. Do listen to reason."

The word "reason" had a great appeal. Hildegarde realized that reason was all on the side of Mr. Bardsley, but she could not bear to think of actually marrying the man.

"Please let's not talk about it any more," she requested of her stepmother.

CHAPTER IV.

A SHADOW ON THE WALL.

A WEEK passed. Hildegarde heard nothing from Durant. She still clung to the hope that he would appear and deny all the stories concerning him, which Mrs. Harrington insisted on retailing to her in order to point out to the girl her moral duty in regard to Mr. Bardsley.

At length, in sheer desperation, her mind poisoned against Durant by the ever-present stories, Hildegarde gave in and agreed to marry Bardsley.

Mrs. Harrington was delighted beyond measure; and the night that Hildegarde told Mr. Bardsley she would marry him, that she had passed through an evolution and at last become a woman, was a memorable one in the little West Kensington home.

She went to dinner on Mr. Bardsley's arm. The change that had been wrought in her gave the man new life.

"Your happiness shall be my life-work," he said enthusiastically, as they went in to dinner.

Hildegarde noted two glowing spots of color in his cheeks. They sickened her, reminding her of the last flickers in a dying grate, stirred into action by the thrust of a poker, before dissolving into ashes.

She drew her scarf more closely about the shoulder which was next to him. The hand resting on his arm seemed chilled, while her free hand burned.

"The Dead March" in "Saul" dirged through her ears; she thought of how many times in the future this empty thing would be repeated. Then a picture of Harold Durant floated before her eyes. Her lips straightened into a thin line, and she turned to Mr. Bardsley with a pathetic smile.

"What a child I was to refuse you!" she said. "Thank Heaven I have passed the chrysalis stage and am now a woman!"

From the very evening that she sealed her fate and kissed good-by to happiness with her own lips, Hildegarde was a changed person.

She sought society, afraid to be alone. As there was no wish for delay from any one, the marriage date was set early, and Hildegarde tried to forget Harold Durant in busying herself with the clothes Mrs. Harrington provided for her.

Nothing had been heard of young Durant. Hildegarde was often informed of some rumor concerning his strange disappearance by Mrs. Harrington, who continued the poisoning process in order to help Hildegarde keep her courage and go through with the ceremony.

Ten days from the time Hildegarde had given her consent the wedding took place.

The girl's mind referred mockingly to the word "marriage" until the time actually arrived. She knew the full penalty for the step she was about to take, but felt that she was doing right and might better be married to an honorable man than be single to dream of one who her stepmother had convinced her was wholly unworthy. Besides, she must provide for her future.

So Hildegarde went through with the marriage form bravely. It was a very simple wedding, and a honeymoon on the Continent had been planned. The word honeymoon was further mockery, but decency demanded the usual title.

Immediately after the ceremony Mr. Bardsley and his trembling little wife were whirled off in a taxicab to a private hotel in the Mayfair district, where they were to spend the night in order to start for Calais on an early morning train.

It was the first time since Bardsley's passionate outburst that they had been absolutely alone. Now they were man and wife, and Hildegarde's sense of honor was strong enough to make her feel that she must live up to the relation with the best that was in her.

Mr. Bardsley seemed to realize her agitation of mind, and continued his formal bearing, regulating his expression of love to cloying compliments.

The girl was dressed in a neat little gray traveling suit, and her cheeks bore a becoming flush, due to her anxiety of mind.

Several people turned to look at the pair when they walked up the steps to the quiet hotel. It did not take a very keen observer to recognize the situation at once, and even the man in livery who opened the door for them looked after the strangely-mated pair with a great sympathy for the bride in his usually passionless eyes.

Mr. Bardsley had reserved a charming little suite of three rooms on the second floor. They centered in one pleasant drawing-room, which opened on to a delightful balcony overlooking a courtyard at the rear of the hotel.

It was a cool room, quite French in appearance, with its long windows leading to the balcony, and its cool Louis XIV furniture. The room was full of flowers, and Hildegarde found a quantity of cut ones in her bedroom.

The little apartment was a regular bower, an ideal place in which to begin a honeymoon. The woodwork was enameled white, the rugs were picked out in light colors, everything blended to look cool and fresh and young.

As Hildegarde dropped on a spreading lounge before the balcony and watched the lights of the city, the well-toned room sang a sweet song of content to her. She listened to it, dreaming, forgetting.

She fell into the spell cast by the surroundings, and not until her drifting eyes encountered the pallid face of her husband did the chords of the sweet song jangle.

He was so out of place in such a room. Oh, if she were only there alone to enjoy it! There was only one other person in the world that might have fitted into the fresh background. How she should like to be alone in the room with him!

But she stopped her thoughts abruptly, Harold Durant must be forgotten, he was gone. Her husband's voice suddenly broke the silence and rang into her dream with a jangling discord.

"Hadn't you better refresh yourself a little, dear?" he suggested. "We shall have a little supper soon, and then enjoy the balcony together. The lights are fine from here."

"Yes, yes," she murmured, getting to her feet and stepping into her beautiful bedroom to bathe her perspiring hands and flushed face.

The room had a strangely young appearance. It was done in pink. Everything there was in beautiful accord; pink-flowered chintz curtains danced at the little diamond-paned windows.

It was a wonderful room, a little more cozy than the large drawing-room, a little deeper in tone, richer in feeling; it seemed a step further in expression of happiness; it spoke warmth and comfort to her.

She dallied before the glass, matching the pink in her cheeks with deep shades glowing over the tiny mantles which enclosed the lights above her dressing-table.

For an instant she wondered what the third room in the suite was like; whether it was as fitting to her husband as this to her.

She blushed at the ungenerous thought, and passed a powder-puff over her face before going out to join Bardsley.

Her hand faltered. She stood in a listening attitude, staring straight into the mirror before her and seeing nothing.

She had heard an exclamation in the next room. There were two voices. A slight scuffle was borne to her ears. A low, tense cry followed, and then the sudden fall of a body.

There were hurried footsteps; it seemed that they were crossing the balcony.

Hildegarde threw the powder-puff from her and dashed into the room where she had left her husband alone.

There he lay, motionless, on the floor. In a moment she realized all. The skin on his face had collapsed, the look was hideous. He was dead. A bloody wound showed on his forehead.

At that moment the movement of a shadow on the wall attracted Hildegarde. She watched for a moment, and then sprang through one of the French windows with the agility of a cat, and seized a skulking form which was about to slip over the balustrade.

It was a man; she tugged at his coat, and he moved with her toward the room, without resisting.

The moment the light fell on his face Hildegarde shrank back in horror.

"*You!* Great Heavens! What are you doing here?" she cried in a dry, tense voice as she recognized Harold Durant, his face distorted with passion.

The man's eyes dropped, and Hildegarde's gaze followed them until they rested on a steel bar in his hand.

He fumbled it awkwardly.

The end of it was covered with fresh blood.

CHAPTER V.

A HORRIBLE CHARGE.

HILDEGARDE threw up her hands involuntarily at the sight of the club; her eyes hung on those of Harold Durant, and she swayed back and forth, unsteady, unfixed in purpose.

"You—you—" she found her voice again and the accusation in her tone scorched the man. But her attempt at charging him with the crime dwindled to a gasp.

"Just a minute!" cried Durant, darting from her side and rushing over to the dead body. "Before you accuse me you must know who this man is. I'll show you that."

His fingers searched the pockets of the dead man deftly, and Hildegarde drew close with breathless wonder.

"What are you doing? Don't touch him!" cried the girl, torn between emotions.

At that moment the pair gave a guilty start and their eyes rested on each other's. They had both heard footsteps at the door, and there was a sudden heavy knock.

Durant dropped his eyes quickly from those of Hildegarde and made one last attempt to find on the dead body the proof which he wanted to offer her.

"It is not here!" he cried.

"What is not there?" Hildegarde asked, as Durant jumped to his feet.

"The proof you must see before you accuse me," the young fellow flashed. He was standing beside her, strong and straight. She leaned the slightest bit toward him and one could not but remark the slightness of her build and wonder how she could be so full of purpose.

The raps at the door became poundings and hammerings. Durant's eyes slid rapidly back and forth in their sockets. His agitation was great and he glanced apprehensively from the door which was being assaulted to the body on the floor; then his eyes turned to the girl's and from thence in a faltering glance toward the window opening to the balcony.

"Yes, you had better go now!" cried the girl, turning to him suddenly.

Durant took one step toward the French window, paused, and turned to her.

"It'll be hard for you if I go," he said simply. "I think I'll stay."

The girl flashed him a look full of spirit. Her tongue was dry, she moistened it as best she could and managed to cry:

"Heavens! No! It will be twice as hard if you stay. Go out through the window."

"But I won't leave you. I'll give myself up!" he cried.

"Don't! Don't!" Hildegarde entreated, taking him by the arms and pushing him through the window. He went reluctantly.

As she heard a key turning in the main door to the suite Hildegarde gave him a final shove to the balcony and turned to

be ready for the hotel people who had been trying to gain an entrance and were at last succeeding with a "master key."

Harold Durant caught at her shoulders as she turned to rush back. She tore away from the touch of his fingers and stood off several feet, her head thrown back, nostrils flaring, eyes flaming. She looked for all the world like a well-bred horse, proud of having just won a race, yet a little unsteady in consequence.

"I'll bring back the proofs. You sha'n't think so badly of me!" cried Durant.

"Oh, I don't know what to think! I don't know what to—"

She cut off abruptly as the front door was opened.

"Go! Jump into the garden!" she cried, pushing him toward the rail in feverish haste.

The man's face burned. She had proved herself so superior to him; yet Hildegarde, wholly in the dark, felt that she had acted like a coward.

His form had no more than dropped softly to the garden below and he had looked up to whisper a final assurance that he would come back with the proofs he had mentioned in such a mysterious manner, when two men burst through the room adjoining the balcony and Hildegarde heard a cry of surprise from the foremost.

Taking a deep breath, she hurried back to the room and found the men examining her dead husband.

"When did this happen?" queried one of the men, jumping up at her entrance. "We heard a body fall and a scuffle not more than five minutes ago."

"That was when I first heard it," answered the girl. "But are you connected with the hotel?"

"Yes," replied the man who seemed to be in charge, "I am the house detective. Sommers is my name."

Hildegarde acknowledged the remark with an incline of her head and stood breathing sharply between parted lips.

"Of course you know who I am," she answered. "I suppose that is part of your business."

"Oh, yes. You are Mrs. Ernest Bardsley. But we must waste no time on what I know," the man went on. His little ferret eyes glanced round the room in a restless way that made Hildegarde's skin crawl each time they rested on her.

"I know nothing of your ways of working, Mr. Sommers, but if there are any questions you would like answered I shall be anxious to assist you by telling you all I can," Hildegarde volunteered to fill in one of the awkward gaps when the rat-eyed little man was looking, as it seemed to her, into her very soul.

"If you wouldn't mind, I have a few questions," he said, turning toward the man on his knees beside Bardsley's form.

"There is no doubt but that he is dead?" Mr. Sommers asked.

"Yes, death was instantaneous," was the reply from the thin little man in black, who had quite the bearing of a doctor.

"I thought so myself," said Sommers, turning to Hildegarde. "Come, I will hear your story on the balcony."

"Oh, not there!" cried Hildegarde, put off her guard by the sudden suggestion.

"But you came from the balcony when we entered the room," he caught her up quickly. "You haven't any reason why you don't want to go out there again?"

The suggestion in his voice chilled her. She was losing control of herself.

"None at all, only it's cold. Won't it be just as well to talk here or in my room?"

The detective made no answer, he dropped to his knees and inspected the carpet closely; then, like a hound on the scent, he half crawled to the French window through which Durant and Hildegarde had passed. The girl stood rigid, awaiting his return.

Meanwhile the little man in black, who proved to be a doctor, had gone below to make his report of the death.

When Sommers returned to the room his face was very calm and he looked up at Hildegarde with a wide-eyed expression which put her off the track.

"It's too bad," he said. "I thought I had a clue."

She made no answer, but dropped her eyes and gave a sudden start as she saw that Sommers was holding a bloody handkerchief half behind him. She had not noticed it before and evidently he had drawn it from concealment for a purpose.

He watched keenly as she tried to recover from the start.

"Why, I thought you found no clue!" cried Hildegarde.

"Oh, well, I'm just wondering if this is," he answered guilelessly.

"Where did you find it?"

"On the balcony. I noticed some bloodstains leading through the window, and this was at the end of my search," replied the detective casually.

"It's a man's handkerchief. Are there any initials or marks on it?" asked the girl, trying to assume a matter-of-fact tone.

"No, there is nothing on it to show who might have dropped it."

"How unfortunate," murmured Hildegarde, not knowing what she was saying, but feeling a great relief in the knowledge that Durant had left no positive trace behind him.

"Now, if you'll just tell me the details—all you saw and heard—I'll be greatly obliged to you," said Sommers, dropping the handkerchief idea abruptly.

"I was looking in my mirror, when I heard a slight scuffle and a sharp cry, followed by the fall of a body," began Hildegarde slowly. She paused then and bit her lip.

"Yes, go on," urged the man.

"Then I rushed into the next room and found my husband lying dead, as you see him now. That's all."

She breathed in gasps that were hard for her to control.

"You're sure that was quite all?" he asked sharply.

"Oh, no! But the thing was so awful I couldn't bear to be in the room. I rushed to the balcony for air. That's the reason I did not let you people in when you pounded on the door. I was quite overcome."

"And what did you see on the balcony?" asked Sommers.

"Nothing — absolutely nothing," replied the girl resolutely, her decision made.

"You didn't see a man there?"

"No."

"You talked to no one?"

"No one." The answer came in a flash; she realized that his eyes had again become piercing.

"That's strange," mused Sommers, dropping his gaze discreetly. "I thought I heard two voices as I entered. But it's no matter. My ears probably deceived me."

CHAPTER VI.

A TRYING TIME.

ALONE in her room, ten minutes later, Hildegarde sat on the edge of her bed and stared at the wan, frightened face which peered back at her from the depths of the mirror. Why she had lied to protect Durant she did not know. Why she would not let him give himself up was unaccountable to her.

Certain as she was that he had murdered her husband, she seemed to feel that he had provocation. His words about the proof that he would find for her had a great effect. All that he had said argued in his favor. Yet, there was no excuse for murder. She quivered from head to foot as a result of her trying experience. Continually Hildegarde thought of her talk with the detective. He had let her go immediately after she had denied the fact that she had been talking.

Hildegarde feared to see the man again. She hoped that he would believe her, and account for her strangeness by the stress of circumstances.

But what worried her most was the fact that she could not explain to herself why she had acted as she had in regard to Durant. Surely there had never been anything between them which would call forth the least particle of sacrifice on her part; and yet she wanted to shield him—she wanted to save him in spite of everything.

Taking a cold, critical view of the whole thing, she felt that he was unworthy of her effort, and yet instinct had made her protect the man of whom she had heard nothing good.

Suddenly pulling herself together, she forced her overwrought mind to a consideration of her present state. What was she to do? She had no money of her own. Doubtless she would receive some from her husband's death; but the present moment was the question with her. It would be hard to return to Mrs. Harrington; but Hildegarde saw no other way out of it.

Putting back into her suit-case what few articles she had already removed before the tragedy, she fastened up the bag, and ordered a cab through the telephone in her room.

She left the little Mayfair hotel at once, and went back to the old house in West Kensington; she knew of no other place to go.

Mrs. Harrington received her with open arms when she recounted the tragedy, leaving out any mention of young Durant.

"We must see about Mr. Bardsley's will at once," said the practical stepmother. "I do hope he has made good provision for you."

"Oh, I couldn't take any of his money," cried Hildegarde. "I wouldn't touch it. I have no right to it."

"We'll see about that later," Mrs. Harrington smiled warmly. "Come, you must get to bed now; I'm afraid you'll break down. Your eyes have an unnatural glow."

Dorothy and her mother helped Hildegarde to bed, and Mrs. Harrington's fear proved correct; for in the morning the girl was unable to rise. She had spent a horrible night,

in which Bardsley and Durant had rioted together in her dreams. In the morning she had a fever, and her condition seemed somewhat critical.

It took two days to get Hildegarde on her feet again. During her illness they had told her nothing concerning Bardsley or Durant, fearing that it might have a bad effect upon her. But when she was up again she insisted that she be told all that had transpired. Mrs. Harrington gave her the papers she had saved, each giving an account of the horrible tragedy. But Hildegarde was strong enough to bear the stories by then.

When she had finished reading them, and had laid them aside listlessly to gaze out the window and wonder concerning Durant, her stepmother, who had been watching her with interest, queried:

"Well, Hildegarde, what do you think of the rumors about Mr. Bardsley having been a lord in disguise?"

"It can make no difference to me what he was," answered the girl absently.

"But you are his wife. How unnatural!" cried the good woman.

"I was his wife," Hildegarde corrected.

"And yet you profess no more interest than you would have if the grocer had died."

"But Mr. Bardsley was nothing to me," the girl insisted.

"I know; but society demands more than your attitude from a widow."

"Please don't talk to me about it," cried Hildegarde. "I want to forget the whole affair."

"But—"

"Don't. It's all so hideous to me. Everything happened so quickly. It seems like a nightmare."

Mrs. Harrington refrained from speaking with a very great effort, for the rumor that Mr. Bardsley was a lord who had married Hildegarde under an assumed name had been generally discussed everywhere, and the ambitious American instinct for lords, which Mrs. Harrington possessed to a pronounced degree, made her anxious to discuss every phase of the affair with her stepdaughter, in the hope that she would be able to throw some new light on the subject.

But Hildegarde was very uncommunicative.

"Did you know that they can find no will left by Mr. Bardsley?" queried the elder woman suddenly.

"Yes; I noticed that in the paper. But it cannot interest me in the slightest."

"But you are his widow, and entitled to anything he leaves if he died intestate."

"What difference could that make to me? I wouldn't accept anything from Mr. Bardsley," Hildegarde answered, with a vague glance out of the window. Her thoughts had been on poor Durant ever since the tragedy.

"What an unnatural child! What an unnatural woman!" cried Mrs. Harrington, provoked that she could not get the girl to discuss matters with her.

Hildegarde made no answer; she sat looking blankly through the window. As she sat, mechanically taking in each passer-by, the girl gave a start, and would have jumped from her chair, only that Mrs. Harrington noticed her abrupt movement and seemed curious for the cause.

So Hildegarde controlled herself, and settled back into her chair, with a hand over her eyes, which were fixed on an object she had suddenly seen through the window.

"Don't you want to get me a glass of water? I'm a little faint," Hildegarde asked her stepmother.

Mrs. Harrington, hoping to have a confidential chat with the girl, hurried to do her bidding, and while she was gone Hildegarde lost not a moment's time.

Raising the window, she called to the man on the sidewalk who had attracted her attention and almost made her jump from the chair.

"Great Heavens!" she cried. "What are you doing here?"

The man had stepped across the grass, and was beneath the window.

"I want to see you," answered the man. "Mrs. Harrington said you were not at home to anybody; so I've been walking by occasionally, waiting for this chance."

"You must go. What if somebody sees you?" cried the girl, turning apprehensively, for fear Mrs. Harrington should return at any minute.

"I must see you—alone—at once," he cried eagerly.

"But it's impossible. I can't leave the house. They wouldn't let me. I'm just convalescing."

"But you must!" His voice was tense.

Urged by the entreaty in his tone, and fearing every moment that her stepmother would return, Hildegarde wavered. She could not understand the strange appeal which Harold Durant made to her—for this was the man who had caused such agitation in her breast as she had seen him passing by.

Rightfully, she should not even stand there talking with him. She felt that he had murdered Mr. Bardsley; and yet, some prompting

from Nature said distinctly that she must shield him—that she must protect him, being the only witness against the man.

At least, she could hear what he had to say in his own defense that had been interrupted at the hotel by the arrival of the detective and doctor.

Hearing the rustle of Mrs. Harrington's skirt, as she was returning with the glass of water, Hildegarde leaned far over the sill and whispered eagerly:

"For Heaven's sake, go now. Somebody will see you. Meet me at seven to-night, Knightsbridge entrance of Hyde Park. But don't let anybody see you."

The girl had become a woman. All this trouble had aged her. She felt more capable, more sure of herself, and her chief worry was that she should still have faith in Harold Durant, when she felt almost positive that he had killed Bardsley in a fit of jealousy.

Controlling herself admirably, she swung round from the open window just as her stepmother entered.

"You mustn't stand in that draft, Hildegarde," cried the elder woman, rushing to close the window.

But the girl backed up against it, and completely filled the frame, so that Mrs. Harrington should not see and recognize Durant as he beat a hasty retreat.

"I was faint, and I had to have a breath of air," answered Hildegarde, with a blush. "I'll close it now."

As she spoke, she slowly slid the window down, still standing in front of it.

Like a scared rabbit, she moved about the house and ticked off the minutes until seven o'clock.

She hardly knew how she would be able to get out alone and see Durant.

She felt that she was taking a big risk, in any event. But Hildegarde was determined to keep the tryst.

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNEXPECTED THIRD.

AT a little before seven Hildegarde complained of a headache, and said she must take a little walk.

"But dinner is almost ready," her stepmother protested. "Wait till after dinner, and I will walk with you myself." She was still anxious for the *tête-à-tête* that Hildegarde denied her.

"No, I can't bear the thought of anything to eat. I must go now," replied the girl.

"Then wait a moment and I'll go with you," Mrs. Harrington offered, rushing off for her coat.

Hildegarde could not get away alone, so she started out from the house with her stepmother, her busy little head trying to plan some strategy that would enable her to keep the appointment with Durant at Knightsbridge.

The two ladies walked over to High Street, Kensington, where the bus lines run to the city.

Hildegarde turned suddenly and faced Mrs. Harrington.

"I'm going to take a little bus ride. Just down to Piccadilly and back. I must have some fresh air. I don't feel able to walk farther," she said.

"But you'll be late for dinner," protested the other.

"No; I don't care for anything to eat. Please let me do as I wish."

By this time they were standing on the street corner, and a bus was stopping near by for passengers. With one leap Hildegarde made the motor-bus just as it was starting. Mrs. Harrington gave a little cry of surprise, but Hildegarde was already running up the little stairway to the top. She paused for a moment, and waved a reassuring hand to her stepmother.

Poor Mrs. Harrington shook her head and sighed as she turned back to the little West Kensington *maisonette*.

"I can't understand what possesses that girl. She seems so different since Mr. Bardsley's death. A taste of liberty has spoiled her. I do wish she'd confide to me what is on her mind."

Hildegarde, glowing with the spirit which had caused her virtually to run away from Mrs. Harrington, sat in a front seat on top of the bus and jolted back and forth with the vibration of the huge machine. She herself could hardly understand the spirit of daring which possessed her. Her lips parted unconsciously as she thought of meeting Durant at Knightsbridge. She seemed hopeful for the first time since the tragedy.

It had been hard for her to think of ever seeing Durant again. She had schooled herself in those few days to think little of the man, and yet he was in her thoughts unconsciously nearly all the time.

She wanted to hear the explanation he would offer concerning his presence in the Mayfair hotel rooms. While she felt morally certain that he had killed Mr. Bardsley, she thought he might in some way have a

worthy excuse; although it was hard to imagine a defense for deliberate murder.

As the bus stopped at Knightsbridge, Hildegarde's heart throbbed with convulsive flutterings. She was about to learn the solution to all the mystery which had sprung up so suddenly and upset her well-ordered life.

Her cheeks flushed with the unwonted rush of blood; she hurried down and crossed quickly to the park entrance. Ten feet farther, a man silently joined her. She did not have to look at his face. The very presence of the man was all she needed to feel that it was Durant.

"Let us walk over here," said the young fellow. "There is a bench by that clump of hydrangeas."

She went with him trustingly. It was strange to her that she could place such absolute faith in a man whom she believed to be a murderer.

"Do tell me quickly," she breathed. "I've thought so much about it since that night. My brain is in a maze. You said something toward the last, before the detectives broke in, about my not judging you until you told me who Mr. Bardsley really was. Who was he?"

"I must begin at the beginning," said Durant slowly, as they seated themselves on the park bench and he glanced quickly around to make quite sure that they were alone.

"Hurry. I'm so afraid something will happen so that I shall not hear your defense. I must know it," the girl cried anxiously.

"Well, I'll start at the beginning," the young fellow began in his characteristic English drawl, which had always fascinated the girl.

"You know," he went on, after a reflective pause, "I'd tried to see you several times while this fellow Bardsley was paying attention to you. I wanted to get a good look at the man. I wanted to study him. He is the type of man that interests me. No doubt you noticed several incongruities about him?"

He paused for an answer.

"Please go on. I'm so afraid you won't be able to finish your story. Can't you skip this part?" cried the girl.

"No. We have all the time in the world. I must tell the thing chronologically, or I'll get mixed, and you won't understand everything. Do you remember that there were many conflicting statements in Mr. Bardsley's personal appearance?"

"Why, yes," she faltered. "I'm not very keen at noticing such things, and I do not understand you Englishmen as well as your own people do; but I remember wondering why Mr. Bardsley was such a strange mixture of Englishman and Canadian."

"That's it precisely. Good! As an observer, you are a success," the young fellow remarked whimsically.

"Do go on," she urged. "I'm so impatient to hear the story."

"Well," said Durant, "I was very glad of the opportunity I had that last night I called on you of studying the man closely. I noticed with particular interest that there was a greenish tinge about his hair, as though it had been dyed at some time or other."

"Yes," answered the girl. "They spoke of that in the papers in connection with the rumors that he was a Lord Somebody-or-other."

"Exactly. Well, I didn't like the look of the man. I must tell you frankly that I was greatly interested in you, and for my own personal satisfaction I wanted to find out more about this Mr. Bardsley."

"Is that why you made the engagement with me in the park for the next day and broke it, because you were personally interested in me?" she asked. A woman can never forget the slightest slight.

"I've wanted so often to explain that. But on account of the gravity of ensuing matters, I have had no chance. It was like this. I walked home with Mr. Bardsley from your house that night, and on the way I questioned him, and learned enough from his answers to feel that he was trying to hide something.

"I left him at his door and started for home, when a man came suddenly out of a shadow and presented himself before me by pulling off his cap. I looked at the fellow curiously, and asked him what he wanted, thinking he was a beggar.

"'Pardon me, sir,' said the shabby man, 'but would you mind telling me if that was Lord Carrington you just passed with a moment ago?'

"'Lord Carrington!' I cried. 'Why, no. Everybody knows he disappeared mysteriously over a year ago.'

"'It had the look of him, sir,' replied the fellow, and something in his tone told me that the man knew more of Mr. Bardsley than I did.

"Being interested, I took him to a public-house, and soon got his story. He assured me that Mr. Bardsley was Lord Carrington, who had mysteriously disappeared over a year ago. You must have read of it. It was

over some gambling debts, but the thing never got into the papers that way.

"He was a pretty bad old scamp, as I happened to know. But the public respected his old shell, and there was a great outcry when he disappeared."

"Wait a minute. You've got me all muddled up," cried Hildegarde. "This man that stopped you said that he had recognized in Mr. Bardsley a Lord Carrington who had mysteriously disappeared?"

"That's the substance of it," went on young Durant. "I gave him more to drink than he could manage, and the fellow admitted that he'd been set to watch Mr. Bardsley, and offered to prove to me that he was Lord Carrington."

"But why should you care?" asked Hildegarde.

"On your account," he answered quickly. "I didn't want to see you people taken in by an old scoundrel. Americans are very gullible when it comes to an English gentleman, and I know Mrs. Harrington was lured by the idea that Bardsley was from an old English family and had money."

"I see. Hurry, please."

"Well, the upshot was that I went down to Liverpool with this fellow that very night to follow up the story. I tried to communicate with you by telephone, but being unsuccessful, I went without putting you on your guard. That was why I wanted to see you in the park; I was suspicious of Bardsley from the first."

"And you failed to appear the next day because you were in Liverpool?" asked Hildegarde.

"Yes. I got so engrossed in looking up this fellow's evidence about Bardsley that we stayed away a week, and Dame Gossip got busy in the meantime with the story that I had quarreled with my father over some woman. On that account I did not show up as soon as I returned to London, but went round with this fellow Turner, working on the Lord Carrington case."

"Then Mr. Bardsley really was Lord Carrington?" asked Hildegarde.

"Yes, and you are Lady Carrington right now. It's a name to conjure with. It's a—"

The young fellow stopped abruptly and jumped to his feet. At the same instant both had noticed a man standing in front of them. He had come up silently and stood listening.

As Durant jumped up, the newcomer held out a hand to Hildegarde and said:

"Allow me to congratulate you, Lady Carrington, on the news I have just heard."

Hildegarde's pulse almost stopped beating.

The thin voice was that of Sommers, the Mayfair hotel detective.

Peering through the darkness, she recognized his attenuated features.

He turned sharply to Durant.

"I want to see you alone." His tone was like steel.

"We will send the lady home in a cab, and then have a little conversation that I've been wanting with you ever since the night you stood over the dead body of Lord Carrington with this club in your hand."

Sommers drew a thick steel bludgeon from his pocket and held it before Durant's eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. SOMMERS'S STRATEGY.

TEN minutes later Hildegarde Harrington found herself in a taxicab, being whirled off to the West Kensington house. Her mind revolved faster than the auto's wheels, and thoughts jolted about in her mind more incessantly than she jolted back and forth in the broad seat.

Womanlike, she blamed the detective's advent on her intuition. She had felt that Durant's story would be interrupted.

Her mind suddenly flew back to a happy childhood in New Jersey, where she had read in books about lords and ladies, and suddenly to be confronted with the idea that she was really Lady Carrington took her breath away. Titles are empty things at best, and Hildegarde knew it, yet a strange thrill shot through her as she repeated to herself: "Lady Carrington—Lady Carrington."

It had a rich sound. It spiced of intrigue and romance. She smiled to herself as the thought insisted on repeating itself.

Then her mind would jolt back to the thought of poor Durant in the hands of the police.

He should have gone into hiding on the Continent. They both should have known that she would be watched, and that anybody seen with her would be suspected.

She marveled at Sommers's strategy. How had he figured it all out and come to the conclusion that Durant was the guilty person?

His trial of Durant by the bloody bludgeon had been very skilful, and the man had winced. She knew no reason why she should defend Durant, but remembered with a thrill of pride that she had made a defense of the young fellow to Sommers immediately after

ne had appeared before them in such a spectacular manner.

Again her mind, grown eccentric by the excitement, switched back to the thought of now, as a child, she had dreamed of lords and ladies. She gave a little gasp as the realization of her present state was borne in upon her.

She was living one of those stories she had read as a little girl far back in America; but the reading of them had been far more pleasant than the realization.

At that moment the machine stopped at the curb, and Hildegarde alighted, rushed up to the door, and fell into Mrs. Harrington's arms.

The older woman noted her excitement, and insisted upon some explanation. But Hildegarde did not wish to discuss anything with her stepmother, so she merely explained that the auto ride had thrilled her and caused her cheeks to burn.

"But you didn't have any money with you. You had only a shilling in your glove," said Mrs. Harrington suspiciously. "How could you pay for the taxicab?"

Hildegarde blushed.

"Oh, oh, yes, I had some more money with me," she faltered, unable to think of any other explanation, and wondering, as she spoke, how she could so easily bring herself to a deliberate lie.

Pleading a headache, she went to bed, and, in spite of the many harassing thoughts, soon fell to sleep, her bodily fatigue asserting itself.

Early in the morning her senses were dashed into consciousness by the abrupt opening of her chamber door.

Looking up, with heavy, sleepy eyes, she saw Mrs. Harrington rushing toward her with a strained expression on her face and a newspaper clutched tightly in her hand.

Instinctively the girl felt that the news had been published that Durant had been arrested for the murder of Mr. Bardsley.

She sat up in bed and seized the paper.

A deep sigh of relief escaped her as she took in the following head-lines:

LADY CARRINGTON VICTIM IN MAYFAIR TRAGEDY.

Body Identified as that of Lord Carrington, Who Mysteriously Disappeared Last Year.

Further Developments Expected.

The last line made Hildegarde draw in her breath sharply again.

"Further developments expected" could mean but one thing. The news would shortly be announced that Durant was the guilty man. She dropped back limply on her pillow. The news of Bardsley being Lord Carrington was old to her and made no impression.

Her whole thought was for Durant. She could never determine exactly her feeling for the man, but intuitively she always wanted to protect him. She felt a savage instinct to deny that he had any part in or knowledge of the crime. It seemed strange to her that she should take this attitude, but the man had an unusual appeal which she could not resist in any way.

"Think, child. Don't you understand what this news means to you?" cried Mrs. Harrington, breaking in harshly on Hildegarde's thoughts.

The girl made no answer.

"Don't you realize that you are Lady Carrington? A name to conjure with," went on the excited woman.

"Oh, what difference does all that make?" Hildegarde replied, with a little sob.

"Why, girl, there are thousands of women who would sell their very souls for that name," went on her stepmother, in an overflow of excitement.

"I've sold my soul in a different cause," answered Hildegarde simply, thinking of Durant.

"It means power, social power; everything, anything that you want, in London or at home," went on the excited woman, plainly showing her hand.

"But what difference can that make to me?" the girl asked blankly.

"Hildegarde," her stepmother looked at the girl with eyes full of wonder. "You are the most peculiar girl I have ever seen. It is hard, hard to think of your attitude. If your sister Dorothy were Lady Carrington, she would turn it to advantage. If I had that name—"

"Don't!" cried the girl. "You shouldn't talk in such a mercenary way. I had no feeling about Bardsley all the way through. If he proves to be a lord now that he is dead what possible difference can it make to me? I certainly would not make capital out of a loveless experience. I will take back my maiden name. I am not a married woman."

"But the law allows you to use his name. You are out of your senses, Hildegarde."

As she spoke, Mrs. Harrington realized that she was going too far. She had thrown

tact to the winds in her excitement over the news.

Suddenly coming to her senses, she reached out her arms and gathered Hildegarde into them in a soothing manner. The girl relaxed, always unable to resist the expression of love, no matter how insincere.

"I'm sorry I talked so foolishly, Hildegarde," the older woman said softly. "I was so wrought up over this news and what it might mean that my imagination got the better of me."

Although the trials through which Hildegarde had passed had aged her somewhat she was not yet able to see through Mrs. Harrington. She accepted her explanation and lay content in the soothing embrace while her stepmother assured her that even if she did not come into a fortune through the death of Lord Carrington, she should always be sure of a home with her.

Dorothy entered and joined the little party. She, too, was greatly roused by the news that Hildegarde was really Lady Carrington. She could not keep the annoyed tone out of her voice as she addressed her sister, affecting a sweetness of manner which seldom set well on her.

"And how is Lady Carrington this morning?" she asked pleasantly, as she entered.

The title burned in Hildegarde's ears.

"Please don't call me that," she said.

"You mustn't do that, Dorothy," Mrs. Harrington admonished lightly. "Can't you realize that it is painful to your sister after all she has been through?"

"I can't see that she's been through so much, mama. She never loved Lord Carrington anyway," was the sharp rejoinder.

"I think it would do you good, if you would learn to express your thoughts in a little more graceful manner," Mrs. Harrington answered.

"Now, if she had married Durant—" the girl began. But a quick look from her mother cut her off.

Hildegarde flashed a glance at Dorothy when she mentioned the name of Durant. She wondered if the news were out yet. It was so hard for her not to confide all she knew in some one. Yet she must say nothing. She still guarded Durant instinctively.

"I understand that Durant's name is being connected with this case," said Dorothy suddenly, disregarding her mother's look.

"Then it's out at last!" cried Hildegarde, hardly realizing what she said.

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Harrington caught up the words on the instant.

"Oh, oh, nothing," answered the dazed girl vaguely. "Please go away and let me alone."

She was afraid to be alone with anybody. She feared every second that she would let out the truth. Her mind was so surcharged with the thought of Durant's part in the tragedy that she was fearful every moment lest she should let some suggestion drop that would incriminate him.

CHAPTER IX.

A HARD HOUR FOR HILDEGARDE.

"WHAT did you mean by asking if the story was out? What story?" queried Mrs. Harrington anxiously.

"Oh, there's no story. I didn't know what I was saying," cried Hildegarde, anxious to redeem her mistake, so that no suspicion should rest on Durant.

At that moment there came a ring at the front-door bell.

"I'll go," said Mrs. Harrington, rising. "The maid is out to-night."

"It may be some one calling on me," remarked Dorothy, rising also and going to her room.

Hildegarde, left alone, sank back in her chair and closed her eyes. She twitched nervously; the poor girl had been through so much in such a short time that she was hardly herself.

Continually before her vision floated the indelible picture of Lord Carrington, as she knew him then to be, lying dead on the floor and Harold Durant fumbling through his pockets in search of proof of some kind; proof which he said she must see before she judged him.

What could that proof be? She must hear his entire story? The first of it had opened her eyes considerably. Evidently Lord Carrington's reputation had not been savory, and it was certain that Harold had taken up with Turner, the man who had been set to watch Lord Carrington, in order to protect her best interests.

She had reached this point in her thought when the door opened and Mrs. Harrington entered with a strange look on her face.

"Hildegarde," she said, "there is a most unusual person here to see you."

"What is his name?" asked the girl wonderingly, rising from her chair.

"He calls himself Mr. Sommers, I believe," answered her stepmother, having reference to a thin visiting-card in her hand.

A quiver shot through Hildegarde.

"Did he say what he wanted to see me about?" she asked tremulously.

"No. He said you'd understand why he wanted to see you and would not refuse him an interview. A very unusual man. Looks like a grocer's clerk or a solicitor; I'm surprised at your acquaintance with him. Surely you won't see the man," went on Mrs. Harrington.

"I don't want to," replied Hildegarde slowly. "But— Oh!" She thought of Durant and wondered why the hotel detective had called. "I suppose I'll have to."

"What hold can this man have on you?" queried Mrs. Harrington, giving her stepdaughter a sharp glance. She seemed unable to understand the girl since she had been married.

"None whatever," answered the girl. "Only I suppose I must see him."

She started toward the door.

"I will go with you," offered Mrs. Harrington, starting forward.

"No, I must see him alone," replied Hildegarde resolutely, passing through the door and closing it abruptly behind her.

She found Sommers waiting in the hall, hat in hand. Indeed he did look like a solicitor.

"What is it?" breathed Hildegarde.

"I'm so sorry to bother you," began the detective in a slow voice, "but I must see you alone for a few minutes. Where can we go where we will not be disturbed?"

Hildegarde looked round. The place was so small she could not think of a safe spot.

"Probably we had better go outside."

"As you wish," replied the detective.

"Wait a moment and I'll get my things."

She started into the next room and found Mrs. Harrington listening at the door.

"I forbid you to go out with that common person," cried Mrs. Harrington. "I can't understand what's come over you, Hildegarde. You must be out of your senses to suggest taking a walk with such a person."

There was only one way out of it. Hildegarde realized she must tell her stepmother who the man was.

"Mr. Sommers is a detective," she said simply; "he wants to talk with me about Lord Carrington's death."

"A detective! Good Heavens! Has it come to that? My daughter being interviewed by a common man from Scotland Yard?" cried Mrs. Harrington hysterically.

Dorothy entered the room at that moment and added to the confusion.

"He is a private detective from the hotel we went to, where everything happened," answered the girl, mechanically reaching for her hat and coat.

Mrs. Harrington took the things from her forcibly.

"If you have anything to say to a detective, it must be before me. You must be chaperoned. It's outrageous!" cried the excited woman, her curiosity as strong as her sense of social propriety.

"But it isn't possible," answered Hildegarde.

"Then bring him in here, and Dorothy and I will go elsewhere," was the abrupt decision.

"I don't want to put you out," answered Hildegarde solicitously.

"This is a poor time for you to begin thinking of that," was the ungracious reply.

Hildegarde feared lest Mrs. Harrington would eavesdrop; but she did not want a further scene, so she agreed to ask Mr. Sommers into that room.

The man came up, still fumbling his hat in his hand awkwardly.

Hildegarde made him a sign to speak in a low voice and drew her chair near him.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"I have been talking with Mr. Durant since we left you," he began.

"And where is he now?" asked Hildegarde impatiently, for she feared the detective and his power.

The man's ratlike eyes narrowed.

"He is safe in my rooms at Clement's Inn," he replied.

"Then you haven't turned him over to the police?" queried the girl with a great sense of relief.

"The police? No. What have they to do with Mr. Durant?" asked Sommers, sharply looking at her.

Hildegarde realized that again she had said too much. It was hard to retract, but she answered haltingly:

"Oh, I don't know. Only you detectives, you have such strange ways of working, and I thought you might have arrested him on suspicion."

"Suspicion of murder?" smiled Mr. Sommers. "Well, not yet. You see, I must have a few more details. All I know now is that Mr. Durant was in the room with Lord Carrington's body and you."

"Then he has confessed?"

"No," said the detective, looking at her with a glowing smile. "He said nothing about it. I just put two and two together

and imagined it. I'm glad that you have voluntarily substantiated my theory."

Hildegarde could have bitten her tongue out. She was so determined to protect Durant that her very thought in that direction had made her stumble into a series of blunders. It was impossible to extricate herself from this one.

Durant evidently had outwitted the detective, and the latter had come to her, knowing that she would be easy to get information from. She hated herself for her lack of sagacity and the fact that he had surprised this information from her.

"You would make a poor witness in court for the defense, Lady Carrington," he smiled. "You are too eager to tell all you know."

The girl was confused. She vowed not to open her mouth again during the interview. But the detective was wily, and in a few minutes had her talking volubly on things which she felt had no direct bearing on the case.

Then he thrust in the following question with the quickness and deftness of an operating surgeon using his knife:

"Why did you help Durant escape?"

This time Hildegarde was shrewd enough to catch the import of the question in time to delay her reply.

"Just what do you mean by that, Mr. Sommers?" she asked slowly.

"Well, you have admitted that he was in the room with you and Lord Carrington's body. I wondered if you had forgotten that we were pounding on the outside door at that moment and wanted to know whether Durant just left as we entered, or whether you helped him get away?"

"I refuse to answer any such question," answered the girl firmly.

"Would you rather answer it in court?" The man used his weapons well.

"Goodness, no!" cried Hildegarde.

"Then it's better to talk the thing over quietly now. But I'll leave that question, as it seems to be painful. Tell me, have you ever heard of a man in London named Turner?"

That was another direct thrust which Hildegarde was unprepared to parry.

"Yes, there's a stationer by that name in this block." Her ready wit helped her over the point.

"Don't trifle, Miss Harrington," Sommers caught her up sharply. "I mean did you ever hear of a man named Turner who was in any way connected with this case?"

It was hard for Hildegarde to answer, but she felt that she might do Durant more harm if she lied. She tried to remain silent; but her efforts were ineffectual, for Sommers continued to put the question in different forms until she finally blurted out:

"Yes."

This reply seemed to be all that the detective wanted. He rose abruptly, took his hat, smilingly thanked her for the interview and withdrew quietly.

After Hildegarde had let him out she threw herself on a sofa and held her hot head between her cool palms. It had been a horrible hour for her. The man had managed to get all the information he had wanted, and she felt that she had been untrue to her determination of helping Durant in the face of everything. Sommers had won; she had given more information than she had intended. It had been impossible for her to remain silent under his quick questions.

While she lay dumbly accusing herself of incriminating Durant, the door opened softly, and Mrs. Harrington and Dorothy stole into the room.

Both of their faces were flushed, as though they had been guilty of listening to the interview.

CHAPTER X.

A SUDDEN RESOLVE.

AWARE of their presence in the room, Hildegarde looked up and faced her stepmother and Dorothy.

"You heard?" she asked, reading the flush in their faces and quickly construing it.

"Great Heavens! Yes!" cried Mrs. Harrington. "To think that my daughter should be mixed up in such a scandal as this!"

"Scandal? I don't understand," said Hildegarde, raising her eyebrows.

"What else would it be called? Your name mixed up with that of Durant and Lord Carrington in a murder mystery. Oh, it's too horrible!" cried the good lady.

"Mr. Durant had nothing to do with this affair," Hildegarde asserted stoutly.

"If he didn't, it seems very strange that he is arrested for his part in the crime."

"He is not arrested," Hildegarde denied. "I am surprised that you were not above listening at the door."

"We could not help but hear," put in Dorothy. "It is for the honor of the family that we should know such things, anyway."

"The honor of the family," smiled Hildegarde. "It seems to me that suffered

enough when I made a loveless marriage with an old man so that Dorothy's chances would be better."

"It's not true," cried Mrs. Harrington.

"Oh, I don't care to discuss it," replied Hildegarde in a tired voice, rising from the sofa and starting for the door.

"Wait!" cried her stepmother, barring the way.

The girl stood still and looked up at her stepmother with an insolent spirit which was new to her. She had passed through her girlish stage and come out a thinking woman, wholly master of herself.

"What do you want?" she asked quietly.

"This man Turner. What connection had he with the mystery?" demanded the other.

"I don't care to discuss anything further with you," answered Lady Carrington. "All I said to Mr. Sommers was in confidence, and I do not care to talk it over."

Mrs. Harrington was greatly surprised by the change in Hildegarde, but she felt she could learn nothing further, so stood aside and allowed Hildegarde to go to bed.

Next morning at breakfast Hildegarde found Mrs. Harrington's lawyer in the study with her stepmother. She was greatly surprised that the solicitor had called at such an early hour.

He left before the girl had finished eating, and Mrs. Harrington hurried into the breakfast-room with a deep wrinkle between her eyes. Hildegarde had noticed this wrinkle before; it was always accentuated when the woman was angry.

"A nice person, this Lord Carrington," she burst out hotly, crisping Hildegarde with a fiery glance.

The girl said nothing.

"My solicitor informs me that the securities he turned over to me for your hand are absolutely worthless," the woman went on in a burst of fury.

"Then he did make a settlement for my hand. Then you sold me to him," Hildegarde remarked calmly.

"Listen to that," cried Mrs. Harrington, the furrow between her eyes deepening, as she turned to Dorothy, who was entering the room. "She says I sold her to Lord Carrington. Such ungratefulness! I married you to a lord. Others have paid millions for such a husband, and you—"

"But you just said he was worthless," Hildegarde reminded her calmly.

The contrast between Hildegarde and the two other women was marked plainly. She was calm and collected, while they both had difficulty to keep from screaming when they addressed her.

She saw through it all in a flash. Mrs. Harrington had surely married her off to the old man, not knowing he was a lord, in order to provide money with which to buy a title for Dorothy.

She was rather pleased that the securities had proved worthless. The irony of it all amused her. The tables had been turned. She had secured the title of "lady," which amounted to nothing with her, and Dorothy had lost the fortune which was to secure a title for her.

"And you will inherit nothing, too," screamed Mrs. Harrington, glaring at the girl who had dared to cross her. "My solicitor says Lord Carrington, the old beast, died in debt, and had absolutely no money. So you needn't hold your head so high, my fine Lady Carrington."

The sarcasm was keen, but it had little effect on Hildegarde. She was learning things rapidly. She was beginning to see through her stepmother more clearly than she had been able to before.

"I'm sorry I deprived Dorothy of a title," said Hildegarde. "She can have mine just as well as not. I shall never have any use for it."

"Yes, that's characteristic of you," answered Mrs. Harrington, softening her tone slightly, as her inherent discretion came to her aid. "Here I do my best for you and secure a title for you that has a positive social value in England, and you refuse to make use of it. That's gratitude for you."

"I am very grateful," answered the girl. "But you must remember that you married me to plain Mr. Bardsley, and I can't very well hold you responsible for anything which happened after that."

"But you have the title now, and can surely make use of it to advantage."

"I don't care to discuss that part of it at all," replied the girl firmly. "I shall resume my maiden name, and that is all there is to it."

Hildegarde rose from the table directly and left her breakfast unfinished. She had tossed in bed nearly the whole night thinking of Durant, and wondering how she could help him after the blunders she had made to Sommers. She felt that she must do something to help Durant.

Suddenly the thought of the man Turner came to her as she sat alone in her room thinking of every possibility. She might

find him and get some information from the fellow which would help Durant. She knew not how, but something told her that it was a chance, and she jumped to her feet, feeling she would be happier if she had something to occupy her time.

Making a sudden resolve, the girl put on her street clothes and started out.

Mrs. Harrington stopped her at the door and demanded to know where she was going. Dorothy joined them, and Hildegarde only averted a scene by saying she was going to take a walk and wanted to be alone.

Once away from the house, the girl felt as though she had been liberated from a cage. Her spirits rose, and she began to hope that she might yet be of assistance to Durant. It was strange that she could not yet place her feeling in regard to the man, and still was willing to work in his behalf.

She had no idea how to go about hunting for this man Turner. In the quiet of her own room it seemed quite possible that she might be able to find him, but once on the street she felt a strange incompetence, and knew not which way to begin the search for the one man who knew about Lord Carrington.

One thing was certain, she could do nothing in that part of town, so she went over and took a bus to the Strand. On the way downtown she thought hard in the hopes that she would hit upon some scheme to get on the trail of Turner. But the more she thought the more impossible the idea became.

So, by the time she had reached the Strand she had given up the idea entirely, but was glad she was out of the West Kensington house. She felt more as though she was doing something to aid Durant.

Sauntering slowly down the Strand, her mind active and open to any suggestion, she came at last to Clement's Inn. In a moment it flashed over her mind that Sommers had said he had chambers there, and that Durant had been left there the night before when the detective came to call upon her.

She walked past the building, and then turned quickly to pass it again. There was a strange fascination about the place which might hold Durant.

It was peculiar that she had gone there without knowing or caring where she went. Some magnetic force must have drawn her, she figured at length.

Again she turned and walked by Clement's Inn. She wanted to go in and see if Durant were still there. She had watched the papers carefully, and had been greatly relieved to find that no mention of Durant's name had been made in connection with the case.

Just as she turned the last time, resolved to go home, she almost bumped into a man hurrying through the large gate to Clement's Inn.

He glanced up at her and then stopped abruptly.

"Miss Harrington!" cried the man. "What brings you here? You are just the person I want to see."

"I was just walking past, Mr. Sommers," answered the girl, recognizing the detective.

"Won't you come up to my rooms?" he urged. "I have something of great importance to tell you. You may be of assistance."

She hesitated a moment, then, thinking that she might be of service to Durant, the girl complied with his request, and accompanied him to his office.

There she saw a figure bent over some papers at a desk in the corner. She recognized the man by his broad back. It was Durant.

Hurrying over to him, she held out her little gloved hand, and he jumped to his feet to welcome her.

"Thank Heaven, you are still free," she said feelingly.

"Yes, Mr. Sommers has been very decent to me since I have been his guest," replied Durant.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GUILT IS PLACED.

"DID you get the man?" queried Durant, turning abruptly to the detective.

"He is in the next room with two of my men," answered Sommers.

"Good. Let's get to business at once," said the young fellow. "Won't you sit down, Miss Harrington; you look very tired."

Hildegarde thanked him with her eyes for his offer and his delicacy in having called her "Miss Harrington."

She studied Durant's face while they waited for Sommers to bring in the man in question. Surely he did not look like a murderer.

In a few moments Sommers threw open a side door, and walked in beside a swarthy-faced individual with bloodshot eyes and a cruel mouth.

Hildegarde involuntarily moved nearer to Durant as the fellow entered and took up his position before Sommers's broad desk.

He had not noticed Durant until the young

fellow jumped to his feet and greeted him with extended hand.

"Hallo, Turner," he said.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. Durant?" answered the other, with a quaint shuffle of his feet, which showed his cockney origin.

Hildegarde's interest increased. Then this was the man Turner whom both Sommers and Durant had spoken of. The man she had hoped to find. The girl smiled as the thought came to her.

Sommers took a chair, and Turner remained standing in front of him.

"Now, Mr. Turner," began the detective, "we have been at some trouble getting a hold of you. Mr. Durant would not tell me that you were mixed up in this thing, but I felt rather sure that you were, and Miss Harrington was good enough to let me know that she had heard your name mentioned in connection with this case. I don't know what I would have done without her help."

He turned and smiled at Hildegarde, who blushed as she realized how easily she had fallen into the detective's trap the night before.

"I have not been able to get much from Mr. Durant except the fact that he was in the room with Miss Harrington after the tragedy occurred. I forced that confession from him.

"Now, I am convinced, Turner, that you know all about the killing of Lord Carrington, and if you will make a clean confession of all you know, I'll do what I can for you. Your reputation is not good, and if you refuse to talk, I'll have you sent up, understand?"

A shiver shot through the man Turner. Evidently he knew the iron hand of justice and did not relish the thought of it.

"If I tell the story straight, will you protect me?" asked the ragged fellow.

"As far as possible."

"That's all I want. You're a gentleman. So here goes."

Without further parley, Turner began his story from the first. He repeated what Durant had told Hildegarde.

Turner had been hired by a ring of gamblers to ferret out Lord Carrington in his disguise and keep watch of him. Turner had followed various clues until he reached Canada, and there learned of a man named Bardsley, who had just come from England and answered the description of Lord Carrington.

He traced the man back to Liverpool, and from thence to London, and had only made practically sure of his man the night before he had met Durant returning home with Lord Carrington.

Finding Durant interested, and thinking he would prove a valuable alibi, Turner had taken him to Liverpool and showed him ship's records and witnesses who convinced Durant that Mr. Bardsley was really the lord who had disappeared on account of gambling losses.

Turner then made a long pause.

"Go on," said Sommers. "The whole truth, please."

"You'll promise nothin'll happen to me! I'll tell you the story straight if you'll let me out of it."

"Yes," answered Sommers. "Your skin will be safe."

"Well, you've caught me fair, and I believe you'll treat me fair. It happened like this," went on the ragged fellow. "I reported to the gamblers that Lord Carrington had fleeced that I'd tracked him to his lair, and found he was going to be married and spend the night at the little hotel in Mayfair.

"I also told them," here his eyes shifted toward the window, so he would not see Durant, "that I saw a pretty good way for them to save their skins. I told them about Durant, and said we could fix it up so's it would look as though he killed Lord Carrington."

"So that was it?" said Durant, half rising from his chair.

"Yes, I done you dirt," answered Turner. "You didn't mean nothin' to me, and the others was paying me good money."

"Then, that explains why you kept your appointment with me the night of the tragedy, and told me you thought there was a plot against Lord Carrington," cried Durant, beginning to see light. "That's why you told me we'd better go and see that nothing happened on account of Miss Harrington? That's why you left me behind the house, and I crawled over the veranda alone just in time to see the murderer escape, but not in time to catch him?"

"That's it," was the matter-of-fact reply. "I knew you was dippy over the girl and would do anything for her. The gamblers hired a fellow to kill Lord Carrington, and I had it fixed with him to make his getaway over the railing while you was climbing up. You saw him. I knew you'd be sure to miss him, and then run to see if the girl was all right."

There was a long silence. Hildegarde's eyes met Durant's squarely and rested there.

She was beginning to understand and classify things.

"Who was the man that was hired to commit the murder?" demanded Sommers eagerly.

"I ain't squealin' on no pals," replied Turner firmly. "He was just a poor devil what was hired to do it. He needed the money."

"What a peculiar plea," said Sommers. "But we'll let that rest. I guess we can find him. Give us the name of the gamblers that had it in for Lord Carrington."

"I don't mention no names," the other retorted tartly.

"Well," smiled Sommers, "I guess we won't have much trouble there. When Lord Carrington mysteriously disappeared there was a rumor afloat that he had assumed some disguise in order to get away from a certain coterie of gamblers to whom he owed money. I've got their names."

"Then I guess they're done for," remarked Turner. "Is that all you want of me, boss?"

"No, I'll have to keep you here until the trial of the gamblers is over; you'll be a valuable witness," replied Sommers. Then he turned to Durant: "But I won't want you any more, except at the trial," he said, "and I'll try to keep you out of that if I possibly can."

He grasped Durant's hand and congratulated him warmly.

Then Durant and Hildegarde left the office. Silence remained unbroken until they were half-way up the Strand. Then Durant looked down at the girl, who was biting her trembling lip to keep back the welling emotion.

"I'm sorry I couldn't tell you about all this before," he said. "But that man's trick unarmed me. You see, Turner told me somebody was going to kill Lord Carrington, and he deserted me when I hurriedly went to the rescue.

"I picked up the bloody club with which Lord Carrington had been killed, and you naturally thought that I had had a hand in it. I merely wanted you to know who the man was before you said anything, so I searched his clothes for a seal Turner said he was carrying, which would identify him. But the seal was not there.

"I didn't dare tell you anything at the time, and was rather glad that you forced me to escape. It would have gone hard with me had I been caught as you saw me."

"Oh, Harold," the girl said softly, taking his arm. "I'm so sorry. But I couldn't bring myself to really believe that you were guilty. I couldn't figure the thing out at all. My mind was so dazed."

"It's all right now, little girl. The truth has come out," he said softly.

"But why didn't you tell me before?"

"How could I? I had no chance. Besides, how could I expect that you would believe my bare word when circumstances were directly against me?"

"You might have known I would believe you against all the people and all the circumstantial evidence in the whole world," she said.

"Do you mean that?"

"I certainly do." She looked up at him with eyes eloquent with love.

"I want to tell you something as soon as you recover from the nervous wrack of all this excitement. I think you know what it is. But I can't trust myself to say it here on the street."

"I think I understand," she replied, holding his arm a little tighter and looking into his eyes with a trusting gaze.

The gamblers were tracked down and punished for the murder of Lord Carrington. Sommers managed to keep Durant's name out of the affair, although Hildegarde had to appear as a witness, much to Mrs. Harrington's horror.

A month after the trial Hildegarde and Durant were married. She converted her husband to the idea of making their home in America, and they left London, with all its intrigue and romance, to Mrs. Harrington and Dorothy.

Mrs. Harrington continued her search for a title for her younger daughter, and on every possible occasion when it can count for anything, referred to her other daughter, "formerly Lady Carrington; but she eloped with a commoner after his grace's death, and we have heard nothing of her since."

Turner ended his days in an almshouse, and the poor tool who was hired to murder Lord Carrington confessed all when he was caught red-handed in another crime, some years later. He was eventually hanged for his pains.

Mr. and Mrs. Durant are living happily in the Middle West of America, and whenever Mr. Durant wants to bother his wife he addresses her as "the former Lady Carrington."

(The end.)

The Curing of Kemilia.

BY WADE WARREN THAYER.

A Bit of Cloth Works Wonders in a Case That Had Medical Science Up in the Air.

DOWN in the rocky bed of Kalihi Stream, Kemilia was washing the clothes. She stood knee-deep in the running water, her loose white gown kilted about her hips. Her sleeves were rolled up to her elbows, and from the vigor of her toil, a button at her neck had flown off, leaving her smooth brown shoulders and the full, rounded throat, exposed to the cool breath of the trade wind.

She sang blithely as she worked, and now and then she looked up to toss back from her shoulders the two heavy plaits of dark hair, which hung to her waist. A leaning poinciana, flaming with scarlet blossoms, cast cool shadows on the water, and now and then a bright petal fell, to float away to the sea, on the soapy tide from Kemilia's laundry.

Along the narrow path through the *lantana* bushes came a young man, whistling a familiar *hula* dance.

"Eh, Keoki!" called Kemilia, without glancing up. "You are back early; I am almost through. We'll have time for a swim in the pool below the fall. Then you can help me home with the clothes."

The whistling ceased as the newcomer, a tall and not unhandsome Hawaiian youth, paused at the edge of the bank and looked down at the girl.

"Let's have the swim first, Kemilia," he said. "You can finish your work afterward."

At the sound of his voice Kemilia looked up in startled surprise.

"Oh, it's you, Pehu!" she cried, dropping the garment she was rinsing and clutching at her throat to close her gown. "I thought it was Keoki. What are you doing here? Aren't you working?"

"I made five dollars in a *che-fa* game this morning, so I quit," said Pehu. "It's easier than working—*che-fa*. I'm going to make a lot more to-morrow."

He came down the bank and seating himself on a stone, leisurely rolled a cigarette, while he talked at length on the scheme he had evolved for beating the Chinese *che-fa* lottery. Kemilia listened for a moment in contemptuous silence and then, turning her back on him, resumed her labor.

"And I'll be a rich man and ride in a hack all the time," he concluded triumphantly, blowing a great cloud of smoke into the air and watching her, to see the effect of his words.

"You better go along home," Kemilia flung over her shoulder to him, scrubbing away industriously.

"It's too nice and cool down here," he objected, "and besides—you said we'd go swimming. Come, let the washing go! It will be fine in the big pool."

"But I won't go swimming with you," the girl replied scornfully. "Go on about your business and let me finish my work."

"All right if you won't," the young fellow said philosophically. "But say! You're pretty when you're angry, Kemilia," he added, leering at her. Quite evidently he had been drinking, and it made him bold. "You mustn't send me away like that," he coaxed. "I never have a chance to see you since you got married. Come over here and sit down and let's talk a while."

Kemilia's wrath blazed at his insolence. Gathering up the garments she had washed, she stepped to the shore. Pehu rose at her approach and barred her way to the path.

"Get out of the way," she commanded curtly. "I'm going home."

"Trying to run away from me, eh?" he sneered. "Give me a kiss then, and I'll let you go."

Her reply was a sound box on the ear

and a quick shove. With a shout of dismay he toppled full length into a shallow pool among the rocks. Without a glance at him as he rose spluttering and cursing, rubbing a whacked head and a damaged elbow, Kemilia snatched the last of her washing from a *lantana* bush and climbed the steep bank.

The bedraggled and discomfited swain made his stumbling way back to the shore. Over her shoulder as she sped homeward down the path she caught his parting maledictions.

II.

SAFE at home, she debated whether she should tell her husband of the incident; but Keoki was quick of temper, so when he finally rode up to the door, in all the bravery of his mounted policeman's uniform, she had concluded that it was best to say nothing.

Furthermore, she felt dull. She had an uncomfortable headache—perhaps from the hot sun of the early afternoon.

On the doorsteps in the early evening, while Keoki smoked his cigarette and related the day's doings, she was silent and sat with her head leaning against the doorpost, looking off to the west. There the sun was sinking to rest behind the Waianae hills, painting the cloud curtains of his evening couch in gorgeous hues of crimson and gold.

"Why are you so quiet, Kemilia?" Keoki asked at last, as he concluded a funny tale of a runaway milk-wagon, at which she did not even smile. "I don't believe you've heard a word I've said. Aren't you feeling well?"

"I think I am only tired," Kemilia replied, "but my head aches a bit. I believe I'll go to bed."

Keoki sat alone while the tropic night dropped fast, and his cigarette glowed in the gathering gloom. The evening breeze rustled the leaves of the banana trees beside the steps, and across the way a Portuguese woman was loudly berating her husband who had come home drunk from his work down at the wharves. By and by a sigh, that was almost a groan, came from within, and roused Keoki from his drowsy reverie. He went indoors.

"Are you sick, Kemilia?" he asked, pausing at the door to light a match and hold it over his head.

Kemilia had thrown herself on the bed fully clothed, and there was a feverish look in her eyes.

"I don't know. I feel rather ill. I'll be all right in the morning," she replied, turning her head away from the sudden light.

But in the morning she was no better. Keoki prepared his simple breakfast and ate it alone.

At the police-station he telephoned to Dr. Hood, and then started out on his all-day tour, riding slowly up and down the long length of King Street or standing at attention at the turn into the Waikiki road, where the automobiles raced out the broad avenue to the beach. When his relief came in the late afternoon he galloped homeward to Kalihi, very much worried.

It was not like Kemilia to be ill. In all her healthy young life she had never had a serious sickness and he was anxious. The doctor's motor-car was at the gate as he reined up his horse. He came to the door as Keoki entered.

"How is Kemilia, sir?" he asked.

"I think she is all right. She has rather a high fever and she talks a bit queer, but she will be all right to-morrow."

The doctor seemed worried, however, and he did not look Keoki in the eye.

"Didn't you come this morning, sir, when I telephoned you?" Keoki demanded accusingly.

"Of course," Dr. Hood answered. "She seemed feverish then, though, so I thought best to come again. Give her the medicine I have left. I think she will be better to-morrow. I shall return in the morning."

The doctor climbed into his car and glided away down the hill. Indoors, Keoki found Kemilia still in bed, and she did not notice him at first when he spoke to her. Then she looked up from her pillow and said harshly:

"Go away; I will not go swimming with you," and she turned away and threw her arm over her eyes.

Rebuffed, and puzzled at her strange words, Keoki stood a moment in troubled silence, looking down at the sick woman. Then he divested himself of his khaki uniform, and, in shirt and trousers, went to the tiny stable in the rear to care for his horse.

The intelligent animal seemed to understand her master's distress of mind, for she permitted herself to be rubbed down with none of her accustomed high-spirited pranks, and she nuzzled his shoulder gently as he combed her heavy mane and forelock.

Despondently Keoki returned to the house. Kemilia lay as he had left her, and when he spoke her name softly she looked up at him with unseeing eyes and gabbled something

unintelligible. Keoki turned away with a sigh, and sadly prepared his evening meal.

He was trying to induce the sick woman to eat something, when he heard the chugging of a motor-car just outside. Presently there was a tap upon the door, and Dr. Hood appeared. He was accompanied by two other gentlemen, whom Keoki recognized as among the best-known physicians in Honolulu.

With a nod to Keoki, Dr. Hood went straightway to the bed and, leaning over the sick woman, spoke to her gently. She only turned away fretfully, muttering something in her delirium. The other doctors approached, and the three held a low-voiced consultation.

Poor Keoki stood aloof, awaiting their verdict. He could understand very little of their conversation, for it was in English, and was full of medical terms—words whose very ponderous length made Keoki's heart sink.

Kemilia must be very, very ill, indeed, if she had all the terrible things they were discussing.

After what seemed an age to Keoki, the conference ended. Dr. Hood came to him, and spoke encouragingly of Kemilia. Briefly he showed Keoki the medicines to be given, and told him when each should be administered. Then they all went away.

III.

Day after day the sick woman gradually sank. Dr. Hood called twice daily at first, then three times; and nearly always he was accompanied by some other physician. They shook their heads over the case.

Kemilia took all their remedies with docility, but each day she grew weaker. Her form lost its rounded plumpness; her great brown eyes burned deep in their sockets. Occasionally she had lucid intervals in which she spoke to her husband, and even discussed her illness with mild interest.

Then would come a long period, when she knew no one, and would lie for hours in comatose silence or wake to senseless babbling.

Poor Keoki was distracted.

He had secured leave of absence after that first day, and spent his time in and out of the sick-room. Hours he would sit and watch the sick girl, ready to jump at her lightest request. When the delirium came, and she did not know him, he was helpless. Then he would fly to the stables and confide his misery to faithful Kaipo, his mare.

More than a week passed thus, and Kemilia steadily sank. She was seldom unconscious now, and lay most of the time inert and motionless, her eyes fixed staringly upon the ceiling.

Then one day, after his morning visit, Dr. Hood called Keoki out of doors and gently told him that he feared the worst. Keoki received the news in silence. It almost seemed as though he did not care. The doctor, as he climbed into his auto and sped away, shook his head over his apparent callousness.

Had he been able to look into the recesses of Keoki's mind, perhaps he might have thought better of him. For hours he sat upon the doorsteps as the doctor had left him, smoking cigarette after cigarette, and thinking, thinking.

The light faded from the hills, and all was dark, save for the winking of the electric lamp down at the corner as it swung to the evening breeze.

Keoki was of the later generation of Hawaiians. Born in the days of the sway of the missionaries, and educated at the Kamehameha schools, he was brought up to absolute faith in the powers of latter-day science. Unquestioningly he had called in the white doctor when Kemilia fell ill, and he had blindly obeyed his commands.

But now the white man's science had failed.

Kemilia was dying; Kemilia, his bride of a year. What should he do without her? How could he bear to lose her? Could nothing be done to bring her back to him again, well and strong as she had been a week ago?

It was such a little, little illness; only a fever, and yet the doctors had been baffled by it. He almost believed he could cure her himself.

When he was a little boy, he remembered, his sister was ill, and as they lived in the country, and no doctor was near, they called in a *kahuna*—a Hawaiian witch doctor—and he had cured her almost in a day. But the missionary, when he came along next week, had upbraided his father, and told him it was wrong to have a *kahuna* pray over a sick person, and they had promised not to do it again.

What had the *kahuna* done? He was so small, then, that he could not remember the details, only there was something about a white chicken and a red pig. The other native boys had jeered at him about the matter, for it had been reported in the church by the missionary, and he had fought one boy over it, vindicating the family honor so completely that they let him alone afterward.

In later years they had taught him at school that belief in the powers of a *kahuna* could not really cure a sick person. Yet his sister had lived! That fact came back to him persistently. And the foreign doctor had not been able to save Kemilia, with all his medicine.

Why not call in the *kahuna?* Why not, indeed? Confronted by its first real test, the faith of Keoki in the infallibility of his teachings began to waver. For centuries his forebears had been ministered to by the dread *kahunas,* with their weird spells and incantations.

Education told him their ways were vain and foolish; instinct made him turn to them in his trouble as his fathers had before him.

It was just at this point in his brooding that the sound of footsteps aroused him. A lantern came bobbing along the lane, and stopped opposite the gateway. By its flickering light, Keoki made out a queer figure—a little weazened old man with a shock of snow-white hair and a wisp of white beard under his chin and chops.

Keoki knew him well as one of the leading members of the Kauluwela church, a fervent Christian there, a Sunday-school teacher, and a leader in prayer at the Wednesday evening meetings. Other things, too, he had heard—darker, more sinister—and the man's coming chimed uncannily with his thoughts.

"Eh, Keoki," said the newcomer, holding his lantern over his head and peering over the gate, "how is Kemilia? I hear she is very sick. No better, eh? Too bad."

"She's not very well," Keoki admitted.

"Still sick?" the old man persisted. "What's the matter with her? She was all right a week ago, for I saw her down at the fish-market. What does the foreign doctor say? Why does he not make her well?"

There was a scarcely veiled sneer as he spoke of the white physician.

Keoki stirred uneasily. His half-formed resolve weakened as he looked down at the newcomer. He was a different figure tonight, in his thin cotton undershirt and dungaree trousers, bare-footed, bare-headed, bare-armed, from Elder Solomon Kamaka, whom he saw in church every Sunday, clad in frock-coat, immaculate linen, and patent-leather boots.

Nor did he inspire confidence as he looked up at Keoki from under the lifted lantern, a sharp and inquisitive look on his face. The young man dropped his eyes nervously, and answered in monosyllables the questions with which the old native plied him.

"I'm coming in to take a look at her," said Kamaka, opening the gate and entering the house.

Almost as if hypnotized, Keoki watched him enter. Then with an effort he roused himself and followed.

IV.

THE little low-ceiled bedroom was lighted by a single lamp, turned low. This Kamaka lifted, and, approaching the bed, looked long and silently down upon the sick woman. She was dozing, and for a moment did not move. Then, under his scrutiny, she wakened, and, stirring restlessly, turned over and gazed into his eyes. It was one of her lucid intervals, and she smiled wanly as she recognized the native elder.

Briefly he questioned her about her illness, but elicited nothing. Then for a space he stood pondering, while the lamp in his hand flared in the breeze that blew in at the window, and Keoki, in the background, shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. Suddenly he wheeled on Keoki, and shot a sharp question at him.

"Who has she been quarreling with? Who is it? Tell me quick."

"I—I don't know," Keoki stuttered in surprise.

"Yes, you do. Yes, you do. I want to know who it is, right now."

"But I don't know," Keoki protested. "Kemilia has no enemies. I never heard of her ever having any trouble with any one."

The old man turned again to the bed. "You've been quarreling with some one," he asserted. "You tell me all about it."

Kemilia looked up with mild surprise. "What do you mean? I have had no trouble with any one," she replied in a feeble voice, puzzled at the old man's excitement. Then, in a moment, she added slowly, with an evident effort to remember: "Oh, yes. I think I did have a little trouble with Pehu, a Kauai boy I used to know. It was the other day, down in the stream where I was washing the clothes, the day I was taken sick. Pehu was drunk and he insulted me."

"Ha, I thought so," the old man exclaimed with satisfaction. "Tell me all about it."

Kemilia described the incident, and under the spur of awakened interest, her voice regained some of its strength, and she even smiled weakly as she told of the discomfiture of the intruder. Keoki's fists doubled in his pocket as he listened, and he uttered an imprecation, but Kamaka waved him to silence.

"When he fell into the water and you ran home, did you bring all of the clothing with you?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so. I am sure," Kemilia said. "I hung it all out to dry before Keoki came home."

The old man turned to Keoki. "Where are the clothes she washed that day?" he asked.

Shamefacedly, the young man pointed to a chair in the corner, where—with masculine disregard of such domestic matters—he had heaped the clean clothing, leaving it there through all the days of his wife's illness.

Kamaka examined the garments, looking each over carefully, while Keoki stood over him with the lamp. The sick girl watched him with curious eyes.

Finally, with a grunt of satisfaction, he pounced upon a white *holoku,* or woman's gown, at the hem of which was a triangular tear, a small piece of the cotton being missing..

"When did this happen?" he inquired, carrying it to the bed.

"I don't know. I never saw it before. It is a new *holoku,* too."

"Looks as though it had been torn by a thorn. Can't you tell me when you did it?"

"Perhaps I tore it when I snatched it from the *lantana* bushes," Kemilia said. "I was frightened at Pehu. I wanted to get away quickly."

"Who is this Pehu? What does he do? Where does he live? Where can I find him?" The old man's questions came quick and fast.

"I know him," growled Keoki. "Leave him to me. I'll fix him."

"You be still," snapped Kamaka. "This is my affair now. Tell me where I can find him."

Unwillingly enough Keoki told him. There was that in the old man's manner that compelled obedience.

Possessed of the desired information, Kamaka pondered a moment. Then, with sudden resolution, he went to the door and picked up his lantern. From the porch he turned again upon poor Keoki and pointed a menacing finger at him.

"Don't you dare to move from that spot until I return," he said.

Swiftly he left the house, and they heard the slam of the gate and the soft patter of his bare feet on the road. Keoki squatted in the corner, too overcome with mingled fear and superstition to move. The little old *kahuna's* methods had been so mysterious, and his last command had been accompanied by so baleful a glance, that Keoki's nerve had gone completely.

On what sinister errand he was bent, Keoki could not guess. He scarcely dared think. He remembered terrible tales of the *kahunas* in the old days; how they prayed men to death, who had incurred their displeasure.

He would have liked to settle matters with Pehu with his own fists; but not for his life would he have called down upon himself the terrible anger of the *kahuna.*

An hour passed and then another. On the bed Kemilia had sighed and tossed for a moment or two, and then sunk into a deep lethargy. All sounds ceased in the dwellings round about, and only the chirp of a cricket, or the restless stamping of Kaipo in her stable, broke the silence of the night. The wind blew cool from the hills, and the lamp upon the table flared dangerously once or twice; but Keoki did not move.

V.

At last there came the patter of bare feet on the road, and in a moment Kamaka entered. He was puffing from his exertions. The white hair on his forehead was damp with sweat; but there was a triumphant gleam in his eye.

In his fingers he had a soiled bit of white cloth.

Without a word, he went to the chair where he had flung the *holoku,* and fitted the shred of cotton in its place. It was the missing piece.

"A needle and thread," he commanded curtly.

Trembling with superstitious awe, so that he could scarcely stand, Keoki rose from his corner and produced them, after much fumbling among drawers and shelves.

Neatly Kamaka stitched the recovered bit into the torn gown—he had been a sailor once—while Keoki looked on, too frightened to offer a word or ask a question.

"*Anaana,* devil's work," vouchsafed the old man, as, his task completed, he held the restored garment up for inspection. "He was praying her to death. He had got the little piece of her *holoku,* and was praying her to death. But I fixed him; I fixed him."

From his mouth he drew a pearl button and showed it to Keoki. "I got this from his coat; and then I told him he had to give me that piece of cloth he had stolen, or I would pray *him* to death. He laughed at first, but when I began on him—"

The old man suddenly seized Keoki's hand

and began in a low voice a weird minor chant. His eyes gazed into Keoki's and through and through them, and far, far away beyond. Keoki tried to draw away, to fend off that awful look with his hand; but the chant grew louder and still louder, and words fell from the old man's lips unintelligible and obscure; and still his eyes held the terrified youth spellbound.

Keoki's head began to whirl, the room spun round, strange visions came before his eyes, and in another moment he would have fallen senseless. Then, as suddenly as he had begun, Kamaka ceased his ululation, and dropped Keoki's hand.

"See how easy it was?" he said with a harsh laugh. "That fellow knew in a little moment that I was his master, and the rest was easy. I don't think he will ever try *anaana* again. But, don't you so much as whisper a word of this to any one," he added fiercely, and his little eyes seemed to dart fire. "If you ever dare to tell a soul, I'll—I'll—"

He left the threat unfinished, and slipped from the room. Keoki, sunk in a dazed, half-unconscious heap on the floor, heard the click of the gate and the sharp patter of his departing feet.

Through it all Kemilia had not stirred. She seemed to be sleeping peacefully.

When Dr. Hood called early next day on his morning round, Keoki had gone back on duty, and Kemilia was up and about. She was a bit weak, and she showed the effects of her illness in the languor of her movements and her hollow cheeks. When the physician, horror-stricken at seeing her attending to her usual duties, commanded her to go to bed, she only laughed.

"I am well again, doctor," she said. "Why should I go back to bed, when there is so much to do?" and she pointed to the disorder of the house and the heap of unironed laundry in the chair.

"But you will have a relapse and will be sick again," the physician protested.

"Oh, no, I shall not," she replied cheerfully. "I am perfectly well now, only I am not so strong. I shall not work very hard for a day or two, and then I'll be all right."

The doctor climbed into his motor-car again and puffed away, completely puzzled. Down-town he met a brother physician, and gave him the news.

"It is marvelous, simply marvelous," he said. "Last night I would have sworn that that girl would not live two days. She was even then sinking, and I feared when I went up there this morning, that I might not find her alive. And she was washing the dishes! What do you think of that?"

Later in the day he came across Keoki, slowly pacing his horse along King Street. By this time the doctor had somewhat recovered from the shock of Kemilia's sudden raising from her death-bed, and he greeted her husband with congratulations as he drew alongside. They chatted a moment, while Kaipo danced and flirted her ears at the chugging motor.

"She is a wonderful woman, your wife," the doctor said, as he started away. "She was very low last night, and I did not expect to see her up so soon. But I never despaired. We pulled her through all right, didn't we?"

But Keoki thought otherwise.

ON THE ICE.

In letters on the silvery ice
We cut our names, sweet Maud and I;
When, with a blush, she said: "How nice
To cut a heart around them. Try!"

I cut the heart, and then a ring,
And then the sentence: "I propose."
She answered: "I accept—next spring
The time. What fun! And no one knows."

But all the world a lover loves.
A schoolboy read our secret there,
And straightway called us turtle-doves.
Now Maud blames me—but do I care?

Winthrop Church.

The Man Who Mixed In.

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS,

Author of "Trouble in Bunches," "By Bullet Persuasion," "The Hoodoo Ranch," etc.

Wherein a Young Man Learns that the Golden Rule May Seem to Belie Itself and the Reward of Virtue Appear Doubtful.

CHAPTER I.

A RESCUE.

THE annual cruise of the Whereaway Yacht Club was close at hand, and I had gone over to Pegman Point, on the Sound, to spend a few hours getting my forty-foot yawl in shape. Few other members of the club were round, as I had reached the clubhouse earlier than was the custom of the majority.

All round were boats of every sort and size. Some of the larger, with crews, were anchored out in deep water. A few small catboats or motor-boats were near the pier, but there was no one aboard any of these.

I had about finished my task and sat in the cockpit smoking, when, merely by chance, I glanced toward the club pier.

The Cynthia, my yawl—named after my younger sister—was moored about seventy yards from the end of the pier.

The pier had been deserted during the time I had been working. Nobody had been at the clubhouse but the steward.

But now I was startled at the sight of a small boy, scarcely more than a baby, running down the pier toward deep water.

He did not seem to be running for pleasure. He ran as a boy would run to escape something or somebody.

My heart gave a leap. The end of the float at the end of the pier had no guard. And the little fellow did not slacken his pace.

"Go back!" I shouted. "Stop! You will fall in the water!"

Either he did not hear me, or was too excited to obey, for he kept right on.

Right to the edge he went. Then, when he saw the swirling water, he tried to stop. He thrust his hands behind him, as children do when suddenly confronted with danger; but he was too late.

He wavered a moment, then tried to turn; but, throwing up his hands and giving a little cry, he toppled over into the water.

I reached the water as soon as he did, and swam with all my speed toward the spot where he had gone down.

By the time I had reached the spot, he had risen to the surface and gone down again. I made a successful dive, and clutched him about five feet under water.

I brought him to the surface. I was nearer the pier than I was to the Cynthia, and the clubhouse had better facilities for restoring the boy to consciousness than I had on the yawl. Moreover, Jennings, the steward, knew more about such things than I did.

With the boy in my left arm, I clambered onto the float. I was soon on the solid pier, and then went hurriedly into the clubhouse.

"Jennings!" I called, as I also touched the bell. "Jennings!"

"Here, Captain Bob," he said. "I'm here. What — what's that? A drowned boy?"

"I don't think he's drowned, Jennings. I saw him fall in, and dived at once after him. Let's get to work."

"Certainly, Mr. Reade. Certainly. Poor little chap!"

We soon had him stripped and in the steward's own bed. Mrs. Jennings, who also lived at the clubhouse, was called into action, and we soon had the gratification of seeing the little fellow open his eyes and look round in a bewildered way.

"Who is he, do you know?" I asked.

Jennings shook his head.

"I'm sure I've never seen him before.

There's only one family living on the Point proper, and they have no little children. And they are wealthy. This boy evidently comes from poor people."

"Very poor, I should say," added Mrs. Jennings.

"What makes you so sure of that?"

"Why, it's as plain as the nose on your face. In the first place, his clothing is patched, and patched until the original is almost gone. In the second place, just look at his pinched, half-starved little face and emaciated body. Some widow's child, I suppose. The patching is neatly done, by somebody accustomed to poverty and the needle."

Jennings and I went outside, and I had a smoke while Mrs. Jennings gave the little fellow her motherly care.

I strolled down the pier, and sat on the string-piece to ruminate. Somehow, there rested on me a peculiar sense of responsibility. I reasoned with myself that it was foolish. Almost anybody else would have simply taken the boy to the police and never given him a second thought.

But that had never been my way of doing things. My elder sister, Arabella, who had aristocratic ideas, was somewhat haughty and at times disagreeably sarcastic, had dubbed me "Bob, the Fool Knight."

When my younger sister had remonstrated, my father had said:

"But you know, Cynthia, Bob is always getting mixed up in somebody else's business."

"But only to do good," Cynthia had retorted.

"I'll grant you that, when he doesn't do harm."

That will, in part, explain my status in my family. My father was rich, my mother in poor health. Arabella, as I say, was aristocratic, and engaged to marry Gerald Braithe, a man of wealth. Cynthia was more like myself, and we were chums.

Of work—real work—I knew nothing. I had never done any work, except that which is allied to sport.

I had dragged a baby boy—he seemed a baby to me—from the water. Certainly he must belong somewhere in that vicinity, for he was too small to have traveled far on his little thin legs.

Pegman Point was an isolated place, on the north shore of Long Island, reached only by private conveyance.

While I sat there various expedients entered my head. I thought of telephoning from the clubhouse to the police, asking what to do. But the reply would be either to bring the child to them, or try to find his home.

I felt a reluctance I could not explain against handing the boy over to the police. It took him entirely out of my control. Just why I, twenty-two years old, should want to keep control of a poor boy like that I don't know, and shall not try to explain. It was my nature.

"Well," I said to myself, "there is no crime in trying to find his home and parents, if he has any. And then, if I fail, it will be up to the police."

I walked toward the clubhouse slowly, still pondering. I had come in a hired automobile, and the chauffeur was somewhere round, sunning himself.

I had hired the car from a garage near our house in Madison Avenue, and did not even know the chauffeur's name.

He was respectful enough, and safe, so far as drink was concerned.

I found Jennings and his wife in conversation.

"Well," I said, "how is the boy?"

"He is sleeping quietly just now," replied Mrs. Jennings. "Poor little fellow, he was quite worn out. In his sleep he sobbed and moaned. And there are marks on his body that seem to indicate that he has been struck."

"Who would strike a mere baby like that?"

"It is often done."

"Did he say anything?"

"He tried to. I asked what his name was, and the clearest part of his answer was Eddie. There is no question about that. His first name is Eddie. About his last name there is some doubt. It is either Tempo, which I believe is 'time,' or Dingo, which I think is the name of an animal, or something like that.

"And he has a sister. I can't make out her name. He calls it 'Ethlee.' It probably is not the name. It might be Elsie. I presume that is it, because he said yes when I asked him. I also asked him where he lived. He said 'Empty-empt,' and the nearest I can come to that is seventy-seven. But seventy-seven what? I don't know."

"Then," I said, "all we know is that his name is Eddie, sister's name presumably Elsie, last name something like Dingo, and he lives at number seventy-seven—something or other."

"Yes, and you can't get any more out of him."

"Well, I'm going to find his people."

"I knew you would, sir," said Jennings. "I remember a few of your good deeds. Always doing somebody some good."

"Or harm."

"No—no, sir. A man may make a mistake trying to do good, but I think he deserves credit for his intentions just the same."

"My opinion, too, Jennings; but the world does not coincide with our opinion. Blunder on the right thing, and you'll get credit for great shrewdness. Use all your shrewdness and let accident mar your plans and you are a fool."

"Just so, sir."

"I'm going to let the kid sleep. When he wakes I'll see what I can do. Meantime, I'll have a bite to eat."

CHAPTER II.

IN MUDDLE STREET.

"HE is awake and dressed," said Jennings, coming to me on the porch. I had finished my lunch and was smoking. The chauffeur was now eating.

Mrs. Jennings was bringing the boy out to me.

He looked at me with wondering eyes. Big blue eyes that had a timid shrinking in them that bore out the opinion of Mrs. Jennings that he was afraid, and was running away from somebody.

"Why, I thought you said his clothes were all patched," I said. "There isn't a patch in them."

"These are not his clothes," said the kindhearted woman. "We lost a little boy about his age. I couldn't put on those old things, knowing that I had a lot of nice clothes that would fit him. He looks decent now."

"There is certainly no sign of poverty about him."

I called the boy to me and plied him with questions. I got the same answers Mrs. Jennings had got. No amount of twisting and turning could bring any improvement. Suddenly I plumped a new question at him.

"Are papa and mama good to you, Eddie?"

He shrank from me, and his lips trembled. Yet I received no word in reply.

"That's answer enough," said Jennings.

"Do you want to go back to Elsie?"

He looked at me as though he did not understand.

"He's too little to know," said Mrs. Jennings. "Yet, if he has a home he must go there. If you take him away, it must be done by legal processes."

"I have no intention of taking him away, because I wouldn't know what to do with him. Still, if I found conditions so deplorable as to make it necessary, I suppose something must be done."

"Be careful, that's all, sir. Pardon my speaking so free-like. But I know how you are apt to rush in where there is danger of getting into trouble."

"Oh, I don't think there will be any trouble. Tell that chauffeur to get out the car, will you?"

The auto was soon at the door. The driver looked curiously at the boy.

"Home, sir?" he asked.

"No. This boy fell in the water and I fished him out. I want to find his home if I can. Go first to the police-station at Corona."

"Very well, sir."

Arriving at that destination I asked to see the captain. I was taken at once to his private room. I stated the circumstances just as they were.

"I don't know anybody who could answer that description," he said. "If there was anybody in Corona at seventy-seven any street, I would probably know of a lost child. Why don't you try Flushing?"

"Go on to Flushing," I said to the chauffeur.

The boy seemed to be enjoying the ride, but he said nothing. His blue eyes roved about as though everything was new to him, and pleasing.

I spoke to him several times, but his answers did not encourage conversation.

I went to the captain of police at Flushing and told him the same story I had told at Corona.

"I've been to Corona," I said. "The captain there could not help me out at all. He told me to come to you."

"I don't know that I am in any better position to help you than he was. But there is a familiar sound in the last name. I can't recall it now, but it seems to me we had a man here once for drunkenness, or something of that kind. But so far as Flushing itself is concerned I'm sure the parties do not live here. I don't know what to tell you—wait. I have a faint idea you have passed your quarry on the way.

"About half a mile from here there is a settlement called Cubbletown. It is a miserable, squalid collection of shanties, erect-

ed by the railroad company for temporary use only.

"The company is making some large improvements along this way, and these little houses are for the temporary shelter of the laborers, iron-workers, masons, and others, whose homes are too far away for them to return each day. It is not a nice place, but a perfectly safe one. A mounted officer gets through there on his beat, and reports things quiet as a rule. The place really looks worse than it is, because being only temporary, no money is spent on improvements."

"Thank you. Cubbletown looks promising."

"Shall I send an officer with you?"

"Oh, no. I'll get along. I've been in worse places than Cubbletown, I fancy. If it is a settlement of people who work, I'm safe enough."

He gave me minute directions as to how to find Cubbletown, which directions I transmitted to the chauffeur.

"I'll do my best, sir," he said.

In a short time the machine was slowly threading its way along a miserable road, on neither side of which was there a sidewalk, and battalions of dirty children stood in rows gaping at the unusual sight of an automobile.

"Go easy," I said. "Dirty as they are, we don't want to run any of them down."

"Hullee gee!" I heard a shrill voice cry. "Luk at Eddie Denko ridin' in er autermobill."

"Stop!" I said to the chauffeur.

I looked to see who had done the shouting. I chose the boy with the widest grin.

"Do you know where Eddie lives?" I asked.

"Sure."

"Will you tell me?"

"Sure. His fadder ain't no good. Licks him all de time. Say! You a detective? Old Denko's been arrested before. He ain't no good."

"Hasn't Eddie got a mother?"

"Naw."

"Who is Elsie?"

"His big sister. She's all right, she is. The old man hits her, sometimes. Say, he ain't no good."

"But where does he live?"

"See that telegraft pole? That corner. You turn down Muddle Street. Seventy-seven. S'long. I'd go wid you but when old Denko comes back he'd kill me."

We went slowly round the corner into Muddle Street.

"I've seen many streets with incongruous names," I said to the chauffeur. "But for downright appropriateness, give me Muddle Street every time."

Ashes were carelessly dumped in the road. Fences had been made of lath and barrel staves round little gardens where a few women, who might have developed into something useful under proper conditions, had done their little best to make the place habitable.

One man had tried to paint the hut he lived in. He had painted it. But he had gathered up his colors wherever he could get them along the works, and the house was of several colors.

Yet, mean as were all the houses we saw, number seventy-seven was the worst.

It had never seen any paint. A pane in a front window was broken. Yet, at the same time, in that same window hung a curtain of some kind of cheap white stuff, showing that the woman in this case was not at fault.

We stopped. I got to the ground, telling Eddie to stay where he was. He seemed willing enough. I knocked at the door. There was no response. I knocked again with the same result.

I tried the door. It was not locked.

I pushed it open and walked in. I stopped—shocked—bewildered.

On the floor, face downward, lay a girl. She was motionless.

Round her head was a broad bandage.

I thought she was dead.

CHAPTER III.

MR. DENKO.

FOR a moment I stood apparently without sense or brains. Then something pulled me together. I stepped to the door.

"Fix that car so that by no possibility can it run away," I said, "and come in here. There is something wrong here."

"She's safe enough," the chauffeur answered, meaning the automobile. He stepped down and joined me inside the house.

"Great Moses!" he exclaimed. "What's this? Murder?"

"Looks like it," I said.

I looked around the miserable room. At one side there was an old dilapidated couch. I tenderly picked up the prostrate figure, and laid her down on the couch, face upward.

"Why, she can't be more than seventeen—eighteen at most!" exclaimed the chauffeur.

"She is less than eighteen," I said. "It's the hunger and misery of her life that makes her look older."

I raised the bandage a little. There was a discolored ring around the left eye.

"She has been hit savagely—brutally," I said. "It's a wonder she's alive. But she is alive. Of course, there is no doctor in this hog-wallow. But I'll bet there's a saloon."

"We passed two."

"Go and get me some port wine. Get a bottle, you know, one that is sealed. I would not risk anything they'd opened here."

The chauffeur was quick. He hurried out, and I hunted for water. I found some in a pail. It was none too fresh, but it had to do. I applied it to the girl's wrists and temples. While doing this I had a chance to study her.

Her face had the same pallor, and the same look of want the boy's had had. Her features were beautifully molded, the nose fine and aquiline, the chin prettily rounded, and the ears small and like translucent shells.

Her neck was thin, showing the lack of proper nourishment, but giving promise of great beauty when fed out to a full roundness.

The hands were small and white, but showed the marks of toil and evidence of a pitiful effort to keep them well cared for.

The dress she wore was clean and well-darned, as the boy's clothing had been.

When the chauffeur returned with the wine I managed to get a little of it in her mouth without choking her. In a few minutes I was rewarded by seeing her open her eyes.

"Don't—papa—don't strike me again," she murmured.

The tone was pleading, the voice soft. I smothered a curse.

"Don't be afraid," I said. "Nobody's going to hurt you."

She looked at me in a startled way.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"My name is Robert Reade. I know yours. It is Elsie Denko."

"Yes—how did you know? What do you want here?"

"I brought your little brother Eddie home."

She closed her eyes. Her lips murmured, "I'm sorry."

"Now, tell me all about it," I said. "There is evidently something very wrong here. I saved Eddie from drowning. He is all right now, outside in an automobile. He seemed to be running away from somebody."

"He was. I was afraid he would be killed, and I told him to run. Then I got it instead of him."

"What was it all about?"

"I sent Eddie for some bread at the store, and gave him a ten cent piece. He lost it. My father was drunk. When Eddie came back and told us he had lost the money my father went for him like a crazy man. I shouted for Eddie to run. My father tried to run after him, but he was so drunk he fell.

"Then he turned on me and struck me in the eye and knocked me down. He kicked me in the side after I fell. It pains me so—right here."

I had already noticed that breathing and speaking seemed painful to her. I felt her side where she had placed her hand.

"I believe he has broken a rib," I said. I also said something under my breath that need not be recorded here.

"Now," I said, "I don't know just what to do. I can't leave you alone like this, and there's nobody in this hole able to take care of you. And I doubt if anybody who is able would come here. As for Eddie, wouldn't you like him to have a good home and a good education and grow up to be a good man?"

"Yes, oh, yes. But it would be so hard—so hard never to see little Eddie."

"Oh, I'd manage for you to see him, but not your father."

"He might kill you."

"I'll look out for that. If he tries that game we'll fix *him*. I don't like to talk like this to you about your father, my poor girl, but he's—he must be—a brute."

"He—when he drinks too much."

"Well, is he ever sober?"

"Not much—not since Eddie's mother died."

"Eddie's mother? Wasn't she your mother?"

"No, not that one. My mother died long ago. My father had two wives."

"What did Eddie's mother die of? Was she sick long?"

The girl turned her face to the wall and began to cry. I knew the answer better than if it had been given in words.

"Wot's hall this 'ere?" came a thick, loud voice from the doorway. "Wot the devil! Who's makin' of my girl cry? Who comes 'ere in ha hautomobile?"

The man, a strongly built, tattered, bleary individual, lurched heavily and unsteadily into the room.

"Mr. Denko, I believe," I said.

"Mr.! Mr.! I'll smash you!"

And rocking on his unsteady feet he glared at me as though he meant it. I wondered that

he did not speak of Eddie being in the auto. Then it flashed over me that his drunken condition and the change of Eddie's clothing had probably prevented recognition. I thanked the Lord for that.

"Sit down," I said sternly. "If you don't like to be called mister, I'll call you simply Denko. But sit down. I want to talk with you."

With a curse he fell heavily into a chair.

"Wot you want?" he asked.

"You are a pretty specimen of a man," I said, "throwing all the scorn I could into my voice. "Yes, a fine specimen of a—no, not man. You're no man."

"Wot you want?" he demanded again. It was evident that he was not greatly concerned with my opinion of him.

"This morning you were about to kill your little boy just because he lost the price of a loaf of bread."

"The price—the price of a loaf of bread! It was ten cents he lost. The price of a pint of beer."

"Even so. Think of a strong man like you hitting and kicking a nice little boy like that. Don't you feel ashamed of yourself?"

"'Shamed? Say, are you one o' them preacher fellows? Wot's yer game, anyhow? Wot brought you 'ere?"

"I came on purpose to see the biggest brute in the United States. You've won the ribbon, all right. If I was the presenting judge I'd see it was made of hemp. Good strong, manila hemp. Hang you! Quicker than I would a ten thousand dollar picture. I've seen your boy. If it hadn't been for me you would have been a murderer."

He looked at me savagely from his dull, slobbery eyes.

"She sent him for bread," he growled. "I didn't want no bread. An' he lost the money."

"You didn't want bread. Didn't you want your children to have bread?"

"Aw, they could get bread from the neighbors. 'Twere all the money in the house. I gave the kid a blow. She told him to run. 'E ain't never come back."

"And never will, if I can help it. I told you if it hadn't been for me you would have been a murderer. He ran right into Long Island Sound. Small as he is, he would rather drown than live with you."

Of course, this was not literally true. Eddie had tried to save himself when it was too late.

"Where is 'e now?"

"I won't tell you."

"Who's got 'im?"

"I won't tell you."

"What's your name?"

"My name is Robert Reade."

"You've got 'im. I'll get 'im. You can't take a boy away from 'is father that way. Who's going to work for me when I'm old, hey? I'd like that, my boy bein' brought up not to know 'is father. Ho! W'y don't you take the gal, too?"

That was the very thought that was running in my mind at that moment.

CHAPTER IV.

ST. ANNE'S HOSPITAL.

WHY didn't I take the girl away? There were weighty reasons, I knew, why such a course would be criticised. *I* could stand the criticism. The girl was—a girl. The boy was a baby, and the case was different.

But my blood ran fast and hot as I glanced from the stricken girl on the couch, shielding her face with her hands, to the sodden brute who swung to and fro in his chair.

Another blow or kick from him would kill the girl.

"Do you work, Denko?" I asked.

"Work! 'Course I work. Who'd keep me, I'd like to know, if I didn't work?"

"You don't work steady, do you?"

"Nobody does here. It's off an' on. When there's work we work. When there ain't no work we—"

"Drink?"

"Well?"

"You don't make enough to support three."

"Wot's that got to do with you?"

"Now be reasonable. Wouldn't it please you to have your boy brought up in a good home, in a respectable manner, get an education, and wear good clothes?"

"He wouldn't look at me then when I want 'im to work for me. I'm gettin' old. W'en a man has a boy an' feels 'imself gettin' old, 'e wants the boy to work an' hearn money."

"But he's only a baby. And with the treatment he gets here he may die. He can't earn much money dead."

"I ain't goin' to kill 'im, Mr. Reade. I like the little feller."

"You show it. I don't exhibit my love for people by beating them."

He commenced a drunken snivel.

"You see, Mr. Reade," he said, it's all

along o' my wife dyin'. She was a good woman. She'd work, she would. But she tuk sick an' died. Wot could a poor man do? Left like I was with a baby like that? Sometimes I thought I was goin' crazy. I did the best I could. Nobody can do more than that."

"Almost any man could do better than you have, if he kept sober. What was the matter with your wife? What did she die of?"

"She had—she had small-pox."

"You're a liar. You killed her with your brutality."

He glared at me like a savage beast.

"Let that go," I said. "She's dead. And do you know that perhaps you have killed this girl here? Do you know that you have broken a rib?"

"Broke a rib? 'Er rib?"

"Certainly—her rib. I wouldn't display any interest in the matter if it was your rib, or even your worthless neck. You kicked her in the side after you knocked her down."

He made an attempt to get up, but thinking better of it just then, sat down again.

"She's got to have attention," I continued. "She's got to have a doctor. Otherwise the consequences will be bad."

"Did the miser'ble fool tell yuh I knocked 'er down an' kicked 'er?"

"She didn't need to tell me. I came in here and found her lying on the floor unconscious where you had left her after your brutal attack. How else, but from a kick by you, would a rib be broken. She has done her best for you. She has kept house for you better than you have deserved.

"See the things that can be kept clean. They are clean. Eddie's clothes were clean and well-mended. But what sort of a pigsty is this to keep such a girl in? I'm going to have steps taken to take her out of this. Somewhere where she can have a little care and kindness."

"You! *You!*"

Denko now rose from his chair and advanced toward me in an ugly and threatening manner. The chauffeur had gone out to his machine.

"You'll take my gal away, will you? I'll kill you for that!"

His bloodshot eyes now, instead of being dull and bleary, fairly blazed with wrath.

As he lurched toward me I grabbed him. I flung him with all my strength across the room. He went whirling, and stumbling, and then fell in a heap.

I stood a moment and watched him. He did not move. I stepped to him and examined him. He was not injured. The drunken stupor had overcome the excitement.

I went to the couch. The girl had fainted. I picked her up in my arms and carried her out to the automobile.

"Now," I said, "let the consequences be what they may."

The chauffeur looked at me in a peculiar manner.

"None of that," he said. "I don't take part in girl abductions."

"Nobody asked you to," I answered. "You are an employee of the company of which I hired this auto. You will obey my orders. Drive to St. Anne's Hospital in Manhattan."

It is needless to say I did a great amount of thinking on the way. The more I thought, the more it appeared necessary to keep Elsie's identity a secret. Then, in order to do that, I'd have to keep my own name a secret.

Moreover, it is not usual for a young man to take a young woman not a relative to a hospital as strict as was St. Anne's.

At last I had it all figured out, and was ready to tell a few soft fibs for the sake of humanity. It was all that was in my mind—the girl and the immediate need of assistance.

We reached the hospital. There was a porte-cochère at the side and we drove to the entrance for patients.

An official of the hospital came out.

"I have a patient for you," I said. "A surgical case. Broken rib, I think."

He looked at the girl, and then at me.

"How did it happen?"

"From a fall."

"Who is she?"

"My sister. Morton is our name. Her name is Annie, and mine David."

Again he scrutinized us. The vast difference between her shabby clothes and my new yachting suit must have struck him as being incongruous. Yet I suppose there was an air of respectability about me that caused him to proceed with getting her inside.

She was taken away to a room, and I had to go to the office.

After making what arrangements there were I asked if I might see my sister as soon as she had recovered consciousness. I remembered that the girl must be warned. She did not know I had given a fictitious name.

This was granted. Fortunately I was the

first, outside the nursing sister, who spoke to her. I spoke in whispers.

"You must remember you are in a hospital," I said. "And I don't want your father to find you until you are well. And to avoid all trouble, I have given you the name of Annie Morton, and I am your brother Dave.

"I have made all arrangements. Don't worry. And as your brother I have the right to provide for you. I will see you tomorrow. Remember your name. You are Annie Morton, and you live at this number on West Thirty-First Street."

In lower whispers I gave a number. Then I left her.

The number on Thirty-First Street was the address of my closest and dearest friend, Center Solitor. Solitor was a clerk, earning twenty dollars a week. He was in love with my sister Cynthia, and she with him.

This fact had raised, and kept raised, a tremendous storm in the Reade household. But more of this will come out later.

The next question was, what to do with Eddie. I knew perfectly well that if I took him home, the storm that Cynthia had raised over her love for Solitor would be sunshine compared to what would follow my entrance with a waif like Eddie. Arabella would have fits. My mother would faint.

A happy thought struck me. I had given Solitor's address for the girl. Why not take the boy there? He would have good care.

The reason I knew this was that Solitor boarded with his old nurse, a Mrs. Cullom. She was now a grandmotherly old woman, strong, and sturdy, but no longer fit to go out nursing, and too old to be desired as a nurse in a rich family.

Solitor and one other young fellow paid her enough to keep all three, and they enjoyed better accommodations than they would have had in a boarding-house.

The care of Eddie would be nothing to the old lady, and out of my allowance I could pay enough to give her more comforts than she had. It was a happy thought.

I drove to Solitor's.

CHAPTER V.

THE READES.

HAVING made satisfactory arrangements with Mrs. Cullom, whom I knew very well, and who agreed readily to the porposals I made, I rode to my home.

I confess I was in rather a mixed-up condition. I knew I had done that which would bring down on my head, if it became known, the wrath of at least a portion of my family, and that was the portion that ruled the house.

As I entered the hall, letting myself in without ringing, I heard what seemed to be an angry argument in the library. But this was so usual a thing now, I did not consider it worth noticing. I walked in.

My two sisters were there.

"What's the bally row?" I asked.

"Oh, the same old thing," said my sister Cynthia. "Happy in her own engagement, she can't let other people alone."

"I had the sense to become engaged to a man with something," said Arabella.

"I've nothing to say against Gerald Braithe," I said, "but I don't see why you should always pick on Cynth and Center. He's a good chap."

"Granted. But what is he going to support her on?"

"Well, he's no idler."

"You know, Bob Reade, that Center Solitor hasn't a cent in the world."

"Neither have I, for that matter, only what father gives me."

"That's another thing. Center Solitor hasn't a wealthy father like you."

"How do you know he hasn't? Center doesn't know himself. He hasn't heard from his father in two years."

"Well, he wasn't rich then, and a man doesn't get rich in two years."

"That's all you know about it. Some men get rich in two days."

Arabella made a gesture of impatience.

"That," she said, "is beside the question. We were discussing the utter impossibility of Cynthia marrying Center."

"You were discussing the impossibility, I wasn't," said Cynthia tartly. "I see no impossibility. Neither papa nor mama says no."

"That's what makes me so angry. If mama had a little backbone! Of course, I know that with papa money makes little difference. Mama knows what it is for two young people to struggle. Papa says he was poor and got rich. He thinks a lot of Center. Well, as a young man, I have nothing against him. But he is not the man for a Reade to marry."

"Oh, I love my Center, but oh, you Reades," said Cynthia rather slangily. She had none of Arabella's spirit of pride.

"Now, look here," I said, speaking with that authority that goes with being the only

son and twenty-two. "Quit the jaw. You make me sick—honest, you do. Here is a fellow, one of the best in the world, and because his father left him a barrel of money, you think he is superior to the entire human race.

"Thank goodness, Braithe is not that kind himself. You never hear him speak of his wealth. And I know of many a kindness he's done that you never heard of. Why the deuce can't you enjoy your own good luck and let Cynth alone?"

"I don't want her to marry so as to disgrace us."

"Rot! Center Solitor wouldn't disgrace us, if he earned only half what he does."

"Well, you've no business to say Cynthia ought to marry him."

"I never said any such thing. I said there was no reason why she shouldn't marry him, if she wanted to."

"Wanted to marry? Wanted—what's all this now?"

"Oh, it's the same old row," I said, as my father brought his portly form through the doorway. "The same old quarrel."

"Well," said my father, sinking into his library chair, "I have had about enough of it."

"But, papa, you know that Center Solitor—"

"That will do! I know that Center Solitor is a man and a gentleman. I'll have no more wrangling in this house on the subject."

Arabella looked surprised. I was a little surprised myself. My father was usually the most easy-going of men. But a look at his face showed that he meant what he said.

"Then—" began Arabella.

"Enough, I say. I have had a long talk with Solitor this very day. In the most manly way he came to me and asked if he might propose for Cynthia's hand. He told me the whole story of his life. I have always admired the fellow. Now I admire him more than ever. There is sadness in his family—what is left of it.

"Has he ever told you how he lost his mother, Cynthia?"

Cynthia was all interest now. She sat down on the arm of the chair I was sitting in, and folded her hands in her lap.

"Why—only that she was lost at sea."

"It was most pathetic. It seems—"

Just then my mother came in. Father, always kind and polite to her, rose and kissed her, and handed her into a chair, and then resumed his own.

"You were having a discussion," said my mother.

"The discussion is over," said father firmly. "I am telling how Center Solitor lost his mother. There was another child, a baby girl about four years or five years younger than Center. When this girl was two years old Mrs. Solitor became ill. Nobody knew just what the trouble was, and doctor after doctor was tried, to no effect.

"Finally, one who seemed to understand the case advised a certain spring in Austria. It had, he said, certain healing powers for this particular malady.

"Mr. Solitor was not a rich man, but he had some money. He did not feel like permitting his wife to go to Austria alone, and made such business arrangements as would enable him to accompany her.

"But there was Center. About seven, he needed care. It was more than his mother could do to take care of the little girl and him, too, and to take a nurse along was more than Mr. Solitor could do.

"Therefore, he was left with Mrs. Cullom, his old nurse, with whom he now lives.

"Somewhere in midocean the ship was wrecked. Solitor did all he could to save his wife and baby. The sea was so rough that boats were swamped as soon as lowered.

"The ship sank and many were drowned. Mr. Solitor leaped into the sea with the little girl clasped in his arm, and grasping his wife.

"After sinking and rising again, he found himself near one of the swamped boats. Two men were clinging to it. It was so badly crushed that nobody could get into it, but by hanging to the gunwale they could keep afloat.

"Mr. Solitor grasped the boat, but Mrs. Solitor was unconscious. He hurled the baby inside the boat in order to hold his wife.

"A huge wave struck the boat, and swept his wife from his grasp.

"Solitor lost consciousness, he thinks, but must have kept swimming. Anyway, he was picked up alive, and found himself in a hospital in Bremen, when he recovered consciousness.

"When he got so that he could get about he found that his wife's body had been found, but nothing was known of the baby girl.

"He returned home, and found that his partner had robbed him of everything, and fled.

"Disheartened, but not discouraged, he set out to find another fortune. The last Center heard from him he was going up into

Alaska to invest what he had made in some mining properties he thought was good.

"That is the story, and a sad one. And with it, Center has been steady, industrious, and saving. Many another young fellow, left alone like that, would have gone to the deuce."

"You must have had a long talk with him," said my mother. "What brought you and so young a man into such intimate relations?"

"He came to ask me if he and Cynthia could marry."

"Oh! And did you tell him it was impossible?"

"No!" replied my father in a louder and more severe tone than I had heard in a long time. "I told him Cynthia should consult her own heart and pleasure in the matter. That closes the incident. Let us have dinner."

CHAPTER VI.

SOLITOR "IN THE SOUP."

THIS is not a yachting story, or I could fill page after page with descriptions of the many incidents of the cruise of the Whereaway Yacht Club.

My arrangements were all made, and all I had to do was to throw what little extra luggage I needed into a car; and then, true to my promise, I ordered the chauffeur to drive to St. Anne's Hospital.

It had not occurred to my addlehead that hospitals had regular visiting days, and I was confronted at the very door with the information that this was not a visiting day; and it was against the rules of the hospital to permit patients to be seen.

"Cannot the rules be suspended just this time?" I asked. "I leave on a yachting trip to-day, and don't know how long I may be gone. I should very much like to see my sister before I go."

"That, of course, does make a difference," said the doorman. "Step into the office there and state the case."

I did, and was courteously received. The result was that I obtained permission to see my sister.

I found Elsie in a clean, sweet room, with everything as convenient as a sick-room could have it. It was not the room she had been hurriedly put in the day before.

"Well, sister Annie," I said, sitting down in the chair at her bedside, "how do you feel to-day?"

"I feel much better," she said, looking up at me with a peculiar light in her eyes. A sister passed the door every few minutes—not taking note of us, but in the regular routine of her work. Still, but little could be said between us concerning our new relationship, and by a tacit understanding we proceeded along the lines of brother and sister.

"Did the surgeon examine your side, Annie?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. "He found two ribs broken."

"Two!"

"Yes, and he said I must have rest—complete rest for a long time. There are other injuries I don't understand."

She looked pale, and, even with her hair tightly braided in hospital fashion, she was very pretty. The bandage was gone from her head, and the discoloration round her eyes had been almost obliterated.

"Is there anything you would like?" I asked. "Being a surgical patient, I suppose you can eat fruit and candy."

A smile, half sad, half wistful, showed in the play of her pale lips.

"I ain't ever had much of that."

"You shall have. I brought you some oranges and a box of bonbons. I'll ask the sister if you can't have some every day."

I could almost feel her glance following me as I stepped to the door. The reply I received from the sister was entirely satisfactory, and I went back to Elsie.

"It's all right," I said. "Now, you won't see me for about a week. I am going on a yachting cruise."

"I hope you'll have a fine time," she said.

"I'll arrange so you won't miss me. You will get your candy and fruit just the same."

"All the same, I'll miss you."

I laughed, and took her hand to bid her adieu. I was shocked at the thinness of it. It was like taking hold of a piece of paper. It was swallowed up in mine.

"You don't grow much to hand," I said.

"There's not much to me," she said.

I knew the reason. But I did not wish to hurt her by speaking of her starved life.

From the hospital I went direct to Pegman Point, and found Center Solitor waiting for me on board the Cynthia. The anchorage was a lively place. Every yacht was alive. Signals were being exchanged. Shouts of command rang out over the water.

We were soon under way, and it was just one week from that day when the Cynthia swung to her moorings at Pegman Point and Solitor and I went ashore.

I had not said a word to Solitor about Elsie Denko. And Eddie said so little, and that little was so difficult to understand I had no fear that my secret would be discovered.

Solitor went to Mrs. Cullom's. I went home, feeling that to be my first duty, resolving to see Elsie next, and then the boy.

Naturally, my mother was glad to see me, as mothers are. Cynthia wanted to know all about the cruise. Arabella was out driving with Gerald Braithe.

While I sat telling Cynthia about all the sport we had, I kept watching my mother. There was a thinness, a drawn look to her face, and a nervousness of manner I had never seen before.

She left the room, and I broke off from my narrative.

"Cynth, what's the matter with the little mother?"

Cynthia sighed.

"I don't exactly know, but things are not going right. I've got brains and eyes enough to see that. It's papa."

"Dad? Why — hasn't commenced to drink, has he?"

"No, it isn't anything like that. He's the same dear old dad. But there's something—it's new—it's come up since you went away. He stays at the office later and gets home all worn out. He and mama have quiet conversations together, which they stop as soon as Bella or I come near. Whether he is ill, or has business troubles, I don't know. I wish you were twenty-four."

Cynthia's remark can be explained. It was an understood thing in the family that I was to have a liberal allowance, my entire liberty, all my time to myself, until I was twenty-four. Then I was to throw aside idleness and buckle down to business with my father, relieving him, when I had mastered the details, of the burden he had carried so long.

"Well—I can't hasten my age," I said. "But if dad is in need of me, I can cut in now just as well."

"Don't say anything till you observe for yourself."

After a short visit at home I made some sort of excuse, having many things to do after an absence of a week, and went to the hospital to see Elsie.

She was sitting up in a large comfortable chair. When she saw me the color rushed to her cheeks, making her really beautiful. Her eyes grew moist when I took her hand.

"You look splendid—fine," I said. "Do you feel as much better as you look?"

"Oh, I am in heaven. If heaven is like this, I wish he had killed me. But I s'pose I've got to get well and go back and take more."

"Don't think of that now. We'll cross that bridge when we come to it."

"You are so kind," she said. "I got your candy and fruit and books. Some of the books I didn't understand—you know I never went to school much. But I liked the pictures."

"You poor abused, neglected child," I said. "You'll go to school when you are well. I'll manage somehow."

From the hospital I went to Mrs. Cullom's to see Eddie.

I found the boy clad in a new suit Mrs. Cullom had purchased with money I had left for that purpose, and he ran to me with outstretched arms. When he was almost clasped in my own, he stopped and backed away. A look of fright came into his face.

"Do' tate bat to papa!"

"No, you bet I won't take you back to papa. You'll stay right here, little man. Mrs. Cullom is good, isn't she?"

"Nice damma."

"Yes, she's a nice grandma."

I had a short talk with Mrs. Cullom, and made further arrangements concerning Eddie's expenses.

I still had a portion of the afternoon before me, and nothing really to do. I visited the club, half expecting to find Solitor there. But he had left Mrs. Cullom's to go to his firm's offices, to make arrangements about returning to work the following day.

I dawdled through the afternoon, and started home at about the right time to get there for dinner.

Within a hundred feet of the house I met Solitor, who had just left it.

He walked with his head down, and didn't see me. His hands were clasped behind his back. He was the picture of desolate despair.

"Great heavens, man!" I said, "what the deuce is all this? Is this the gay and light-hearted Solitor who was shouting 'Nancy Lee' at the top of his voice from the deck of the Cynthia only yesterday, and 'A Life on the Ocean Wave'?"

"It's all over," he said hoarsely.

"What's all over?"

"Everything. Firm's busted, job gone, everything in the soup."

(To be continued.)

Wimple's Fog-Piercer.

BY BURKE JENKINS.

Our Old Friend Tadbury Meets Gentleman Ginger and Learns What a Truly Inventive Mind Is.

TO be exact, it was just thirteen days after my return from Patagonia with Tadbury Wimple that I got hungry.

I don't mean ordinary, little every-day hungry; I mean *hungry*. Accordingly, from the vantage point of a park bench, I viewed the situation, and rumination fast pointed me to demand justice from the benighted, visionary, but lovable little cuss who had lost my job for me on *The Planet*.

I walked over to the old shop.

Surprise, disappointment, and disgust met me; for a dust-free rectangle over the grimy door showed where his sign had been, and a futile rattling of knob betrayed that the bird had flown—moved—hiked.

I gave vent to relieving profanity and was answered in kind by a grinning street gamin who had edged near.

"Be ye's lookin' fer the dippy guy?" came the word from under the tattered cap.

"How?"

"Ain't yer trailin' the old geezer, as is crippled under the lid?"

"I'm calling on Mr. Tadbury Wimple," I replied with dignity.

"Well, there ain't no use gettin' frost-bit about it; 'cause I'm just the candy when it comes to knowin' where he's at now."

"You know where he moved?" said I in quickened interest.

"Sure," accented the urchin.

I waited the information. None forthcoming, I fingered my final nickel into view.

"Six - Ninety - Five West Sixty - Ninth Struut!" yelled the kid, snapping the coin from me and beating, hot-foot, to a pie-shop.

It was a long and disagreeable walk; for the morning's threaten had finally decided on a steady, fine drizzle; and this was coupled to an even more disgusting mist which was thickening by the minute.

The house I was in search of proved hard by the North River and I arrived there pretty well soaked and uncomfortable; but a certain cheer came to me as I viewed the old sign of "Tadbury Wimple, Inventor" which graced the entrance of the new quarters. Said quarters proved of different situation as to altitude from the former hang-out; for underneath the bell was the guide: "Five flights, west."

I trudged the five and thumped imperiously.

"Well, well, Dick boy," greeted the little old fellow, folding his arms and surveying me delightedly. "Balm to sore eyes you are."

Then his face lit up with that wild enthusiasm I was coming to know so well.

"And just in time, too. You couldn't have picked a better day."

"For myself," said I in some feeling, "I never saw a much worse day. Tad, I'm broke. Haven't landed even a whisper of a job; and what's more, I'm hungry to the last hole in my belt."

"So?" answered Tad in that peculiar upward inflection of his, and within thirty seconds he had whisked things before me from a cupboard to a drawn-up table—some deviled ham, half a loaf, two oranges, a bit of cheese, and a passably cool bottle of stout.

I fell to and felt better.

"Why the move?" I asked him finally. "And to such an out-of-the-way neighborhood?"

"Dick," replied Tadbury seriously, "I am not the man who will consult his own personal comfort. I live simply that my

work may live and live longer, at that, than I."

"I see," said I quietly.

"I came way over here," he continued, "in order to be near the river."

He swept his arms toward the two westward windows whose panes were beaded with the mist.

"Why the river?" I queried. "I thought that you would have already perfected the new magazine for the automat—"

"Dick," he cried in the nearest I ever saw him to anger. "I'm no longer interested in destruction. My guide is Grant—'Let us have peace.'"

"Oh!" said I mildly.

"Dick," demanded Tad impressively after sufficient interval for effect, "what is the greatest menace to man? In other words, what one thing has man, so far, been least unable to battle against?"

"Woman!" I cried.

"Woman!" snapped Tadbury in disgust at me. "No, not woman, but fog. *F-o-g.*"

"Fog? Well, they're both equally impossible to see through."

"To see through!" yelled Tad, fanatically delighted. "Aha, there you've got it, Dick. Think of the menace to shipping. Ask any old sailor what he most fears at sea. He'll tell you; and tell you without a moment's hesitation—fog!

"We've armed the reefs with lighthouses, guarded the channels with buoys, equipped the coasts with guards, but what has up to now been done to defy that which puts all these to naught in a second of its conquering mantle? What instrument copes with fog?"

"None," I admitted calmly, for I was smoking one of Tad's cheroots by now.

"None, eh?" he chortled in boyish glee. "You mean none that you've yet seen. But, look you here, Dick, boy!"

He trotted to one of the windows, on the sill of which rested a tubelike arrangement that fairly bristled with wires.

"What's that?" I queried, knowing my part.

"That!" he cried in rising tone. "That—is Wimple's Fog-Piercer! That has downed Nature's last stand against man."

"Do you mean to tell me, Tad," said I, rising and going toward the window, "that you can see through a fog with that thing?"

"Didn't I tell you you had picked exactly the right day to find me? Out there, Dick, is fog;" he indexed toward the river, "and here," he patted the tube, "is its conqueror."

"How do you handle the thing?"

Tad threw in a switch that was fixed to the side of the tube, and passed me the whole rather bulky cylinder.

"Here's the eye-piece," he explained. "Use it, to all intents and purposes, like a telescope."

I took the thing from him and leveled it, while Tad threw open the window, letting the bank of mist roll to us; for it was very thick by now.

More to humor him than anything else, I squinted a doubting eye into the lens he indicated.

I confess I was startled.

Immediately there leaped before me a soap factory's chimney on the Hoboken shore.

I swept the tube northward. Out of the gloom, and in an ample field of vision, there appeared the freight-yards of the West Shore, the dye-works, a ferry-boat leaving its slip.

Then I pointed the thing toward the midstream; then nearer our own shore.

But one second I gazed on a sight that made me leap.

"Come on, Tad!" I yelled, dropping the fog-piercer and clattering down the rickety stairs to the street.

II.

"WHAT in the name of Nick?" panted Tad wheezingly, as he ran up to me on the near-by wharf.

"No time now. I'll explain afterward," said I quickly, as I motioned him to help me put a volunteer service dory overside. I had seen the boat from the window.

Into it we popped, and I caught up the oars. Then I turned for my direction. Fool that I was, I hadn't thought of this contingency.

Tad chuckled gleefully as he produced what had been making a large bump under his coat. He had had sense enough to snatch the fog-piercer from where I had dropped it.

Once more I sighted the tube, caught my direction, then dug oars fast. Two minutes thereafter we could hear cries for help, and within another five I had succeeded in bringing up alongside a man struggling with diminishing strength.

We hauled him aboard.

But it was not till we had hauled him up those five fiendish flights, rolled him medicinally over a keg, and trickled some brandy into him that a blinking eye gave sign of life.

After this first sign, however, his recovery was rapid; and within a half-hour after I had first seen the tug ram the launch he had

been in and sink it, he was looking about him inquiringly.

He appeared to be a man, though, that it would be hard to disconcert; for, after a hasty glance around, he inquired:

"How were you able to see me out there in the fog?"

He addressed his question to me, but I thought it only fair that all explanation and credit should go to Tadbury, the inventor; so I kept silent, and let Tad make the most of his triumph.

A flitting wave of secrecy first stole over his chubby countenance, but this was quickly mastered by chest-heaving pride. He passed the invention toward the man.

"Wimple's fog-piercer," he explained with wonderful dignity.

"And you?" asked the man, as he took the proffered tube.

"I am Tadbury Wimple," admitted Tad modestly.

And then, just as I had done, the man sighted the piercer out across the river. His amazement seemed to be the final thing to free him from all hint of his recent ducking. He became intense in his questioning.

"How long have you been manufacturing these instruments, Mr. Wimple?"

"That," said Tad, "that is the first, the embryonic output. In fact, I have not yet begun to manufacture."

This seemed to delight the man hugely.

"Splendid. And you are open to propositions, Mr. Wimple?"

"Meaning?" asked Tad guardedly.

"Meaning monetary. Come — I might as well be perfectly frank with you," went on the man after a minute of brow-puckered self-communion. "My name is Smith, and I'm forever indebted to you, of course, for having rescued me. But maybe we can help each other. And here's how:

"As I say, I'm Smith—Walker Smith; and I'm an Englishman, a Londoner, in fact. Now, Professor Wimple, what are your terms for the entire English land rights for your fog-piercer?"

"Land rights?" queried Tad in surprise. "I have so far only considered the benefits at sea of my discovery."

"And in that you have failed to remember a wonderful field for the invention," explained the man. "Fact is, I'll come out with the entire thing. I, Walker Smith, am president of the Lavender Taxicab Service of London."

"Oh!" cried Tad and I in unison.

"You have doubtless either experienced or heard of that curse to London traffic, the London fog?"

"Of course!"

"Well, my proposition is for the manufacture in London of one thousand of the wonderful fog telescopes as a starter. I wish to equip every car of mine with the invention. Think of the stroke I'll make over all rivals!"

"Well, I'll be—" I started; but Tad inquired softly:

"Your proposition again, Mr. Smith?"

"Briefly and directly stated thus. You and your assistant (pointing to me, and thus giving me a job) are to sail with me on Saturday for London. There I will equip you with a workshop and tools for the making of the instruments. As fast as they are manufactured, I'll put them into active use on my cars. But my rights must be exclusive."

"And?" queried Tad meaningly.

"And for this," went on Smith, "I hereby agree to make you a direct payment of one hundred thousand pounds upon the completion of the thousand instruments."

By combined support, Tad and I managed to keep standing.

"Furthermore," continued the Londoner, "I, of course, incur all expense of the voyage, and so forth—everything, in fact. Now, Professor Wimple, what say you?"

How Tad ever did it, I give up. He actually managed to wrinkle his forehead into almost thought.

"English land rights only?" said he.

"English land rights only!" emphasized Smith.

"Then," said Tad slowly, "I'll do it."

We agreed to meet him on the deck of the Saturday steamer; he shook hands; worded again his profuse thanks for his rescue, which he really seemed almost to have forgotten; then he left.

I took the fog-piercer from the table where it lay and kissed it reverently.

Tad seemed rather pleased over the way the thing had developed.

III.

TAD and myself were prompt in arriving at the steamer on Saturday. Tad guarded a small carpet-bag coddlingly, for in it reposed the original and only fog-piercer, the prototype of those we were to make in London. I carried simply a small paper-grip containing a razor and my other shirt.

Two minutes before starting time Tad inquired casually:

"Have you seen Mr. Smith, Dick?"

"No, I haven't," I gritted harshly, for doubt had begun to dawn in me. I never was trustful, anyway. But I was wrong; for, just as the final line was cast loose, there leaped forward in the interval the person of the Englishman, Smith.

He passed close to us as we stood on the deck, and even as he did so he said hastily:

"Follow me immediately, gentlemen."

And, keeping to his rapid pace, he led down the saloon stairs, and made immediately for our staterooms which he had secured adjoining. Tad and I were to occupy one, Smith the other.

Just before quitting the deck, however, somehow I noticed particularly a keen-eyed man who was scanning every arrival. But I further noted that he took no notice of Tad and myself.

"Gentlemen," offered Smith, after we had seated ourselves in the stateroom allotted to us, "I shall have to acquaint you with a certain secrecy I shall have to observe on this voyage."

"Yes?"

"Yes. Perhaps you observed a man up there on deck? Eh?"

"Several," said Tad, with a grin.

"I know, but any particular one?"

"Yes, a particular one," said I.

"Aha, I see you are observing, Mr. Hardy. Now, that man is named Gates, Wilbur Gates. And he's head and control of my greatest rival, the Crimson Car Association, so called. So far, I must admit, not one advance have I made in taxicab service, but what he has done me out of my triumph by copying my ideas.

"It follows, therefore, that the greatest secrecy must be observed. I'll beat him to this greatest of all inventions yet. You understand me?"

Tad and I lost no time in thought.

"Perfectly!" we agreed unanimously; and then Smith opened a bottle.

The voyage proved absolutely uneventful. Land was raised in record time and we prepared to debark. I bent on my other shirt, and Tad caught up his grip. But, opening the door between our stateroom and Smith's, we saw no sign of said gentleman. Instead, propped up for view, was a slip of paper.

Shall meet you, gentlemen, at eleven to-morrow night at the corner of Tickman Street and Tilbury Lane. Observe secrecy. Until then, yours,

WALKER SMITH.

Tad and I spent the next day picking up dropped h's around London; then managed to find Tickman Street and Tilbury Lane. From the shadow of the corner house came a familiar voice:

"Come on in, gentlemen."

We entered a dark hall, turned to his guidance, and stepped across a raised threshold into a dimly-lit room of some size.

"This," said Smith, "will be the workshop. Pretty nicely located, eh, professor?"

From the introspective eye of Tadbury I could see that he was already noting the place for his lathe—here he would have the brazing furnace—there the lens polisher. Oh, I knew Tad.

"Great!" he chortled finally.

"I'm delighted it suits you," glowed Smith. "Now, here's the wherewith to purchase your equipment." He passed Tadbury a goodly handful of notes. "And now, professor, when can I expect the first hundred?

"You see, I'm all impatience. Fact is, I have decided to make my first coup by equipping just a hundred cars. As I have the entire rights, I needn't fear. I'm in somewhat of a hurry, because I'm a little doubtful as to what the scoundrel Gates has up his sleeve."

"Say the hundred in a fortnight," said Tad thoughtfully.

"Splendid!" cried Smith, and without another word he turned and left us.

Forthwith, on the morrow we got to work on the making of those fog-piercers. I could help Tad quite a bit; for I'm somewhat handy at tools; and each succeeding one was easier to put together than the preceding.

From time to time Smith would drop in on us of an evening, chat a while, and leave. He always took with him as many as we had completed up to the time of his visit.

Finally came the all-eventful day when the first hundred had been made.

"Great!" ejaculated Smith, with glowing approval. "And it looks almost as though the fates were with us in everything!"

"How?" I inquired.

"Why, naturally, being a native Londoner, I'm distinctly up on our fogs. I've been watching the weather for the past two days; and if we don't have the rip-snortingest dense fog commencing to-morrow, I'll eat my hat, as you Yankees say."

"Think so?" asked Tad, intensely interested, now that his invention was so near its final test.

"I know it!" cried Smith firmly, as he bundled up the last dozen piercers, prepara-

tory to leaving us. "And now that our first hundred is completed; furthermore, my hundred cars equipped therewith; with my hundred chauffeurs thoroughly coached in the use of this greatest of instruments; well—look you, gentlemen, for the papers of day after to-morrow! I miss my guess if you don't find interest therein."

Whereupon Mr. Smith tucked the bundle under his left arm, shook hands with his free fist, and left us.

IV.

SMITH was right. The next day was terrible as to fog. A thick blanket of greasy smoke hid everything in that indefinable color so peculiar to London.

I had the greatest difficulty in managing Tadbury. Almost for the first time I could remember, he was awfully nervous. Up and down that workshop he'd pace.

Finally I grew desperate. I decided to waive aside my own comfort. I suggested a game of pinochle. Tad tumbled.

Nothing ever got it over pinochle to Tad.

And so I thumbed those greasy cards, even up into the next day; for I knew that sleep would be impossible.

And just as the first rays of a slightly clearing dawn stole in on us at our table came the first rumble of the hubbub.

Usually they don't cry an extra in London. They're content with a blazoned placard. But this thing was too much for them. Even as in the old U. S. the newsies began to run up and down, yelling their news with purposeful unintelligibility.

"Dick," cried Tad to me, "run out and buy one."

I left the shop on the jump, caught a paper from a yeller, paid him too much, and sprang back into the shop alongside Tad.

Together we read:

STUPENDOUS!

The most daring and stupendous day of crime has passed over London.

Yesterday, during the thick fog that held us, houses were most unaccountably entered; carriages and cabs were held up at the pistol point; diamonds even snatched from ladies therein. How the criminals were enabled to see through the smoke that proved so baffling to the police is still a mystery.

Detective Grey, of Scotland Yard, has the most plausible theory, however. He attributes the entire hundred robberies to the leadership of Gentleman Ginger whom he has been trailing for nearly a year.

Detective Grey says that he almost had him in custody on a steamer that arrived from America about a fortnight ago; but that the noted criminal managed to give him the slip just as the steamer touched.

But Detective Grey promises more revelations today. He says that he saw the scoundrel Ginger in several conversations with two men who appeared to be Americans. One was a small, bald individual of near-sighted vision; the other, taller and of somewhat military bearing.

Grey even goes so far as to connect them in some way with the means of the robberies; for he says that he is confident they assisted said Gentleman Ginger to escape from an overturned launch in the Hudson River, New York City, at the very moment when he, Grey, was about to get his man.

Singularly enough, they managed to rescue him in just such a fog as dimmed things for us yesterday.

Now, it is hoped—

But that's as far as Tad and I got.

First, there came an imperious knock from the street door. But little time was given for an answer, for immediately thereafter the door gave way before massive shoulders.

One peek I got at the helmets of a full score of London "bobbies," and this through the keyhole of the inner door.

I flung open a rear window that gave upon a narrow alley. Catching up the bewildered Tadbury, I dropped him bodily to the flags below; then I followed.

"Come on, Tad!" I cried as I led it hot-foot down the alley to a back street at its end.

And Tad came—at a pace, moreover, that kept me digging to equal. Talk about Love lending wings! Commend me to old man Scare!

But, take it from me, it wasn't one whit too swift; wasn't swift enough, in fact. Doggone those athletic Englishmen anyway, say I.

Whistles sounded behind us. Answering whistles took up the cry ahead. And just then I spied a park and whirled toward its entrance path. You see, I was in hopes of sheltering bushes.

But bushes wouldn't have availed long had it not been for what Wimple had told me was man's one unconquered curse of nature.

I mean fog. And did I bless it, as it once more settled its dimming mantle thick about us? Answer is, I did!

Nor could I see a thing myself. But I was satisfied anyway, even though it caused me to lose Tadbury in the mix-up.

Fact is, I didn't see Tadbury Wimple again in London.

Indeed, I never once laid eyes on him until I recognized him alongside me pouring branmashes into a feeding trough on the cattle steamer coming home.

The Mystery of Fra Diavolo.

BY FREDERICK F. SCHRADER.

A Road-Agent Mystery That Thickens Till it is Almost as Impenetrable as the Mountains in Which it Originated.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

KATHERINE BIRDSONG has been left heir to the great Birdsong mine in Colorado. Dick Fanshaw, superintendent of the mine, and much enamored of Catherine, is her guardian. She, though friendly, does not appear as yet to love him, but dares him, if he loves her, to capture —alive—the famous road-agent, Fra Diavolo, a robber no one has really seen, yet who has been responsible for many recent hold-ups. Fanshaw, Catherine, Lieutenant Baxter, U. S. A., and Mr. De Chatras, representing a large French cattle-raising association, and Senator and Mrs. Terbush, drive in the stage-coach to the nearest railroad. They are bound for Washington, District of Columbia, where Catherine is to visit the Terbushes. After nightfall the stage-coach is held up—all think by Fra Diavolo—and Fanshaw, evidently remembering Catherine's dare, jumps out into the road. There is a sound of shooting. The robber disappears, so does Fanshaw. It is pitch dark and storming badly, so, after making a hasty search, they have to drive on, leaving Fanshaw to an unknown fate.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST RELAY.

"GEE up, thar!" cried Bill, and the horses bounded away. He disdained the use of the whip. There was no exuberance in the fat driver's soul that could be expressed in whip-cracks, as was his wont.

The entire party was dispirited and downcast; and Kate, though she refrained from telling the reason, secretly charging herself with Dick's misfortune, was more depressed than any one else. De Chatras had taken the miner's seat in the coach, and attempted to cheer her up in his lively way, but only succeeded in eliciting polite attention from the grieved girl.

For a while the party discussed the hold-up to the exclusion of every other topic, and then gradually subsided into silence.

Each was engaged with his own thoughts. Who was the mysterious road-agent?

What had become of the gallant superintendent? Had he been killed? Was he lying, wounded and helpless, perhaps unconscious, in some gulch, anon to awaken and call in vain for assistance? Perhaps he and the highwayman had grappled and fallen together over some precipice in the darkness!

Ere long an ominous grumbling and rumbling was heard among the mountain-tops, and pretty soon the storm which Bill had predicted burst in all its fury. The rain was coming down in torrents, but the horses did not slacken their pace.

Bill knew every foot of the trail, and the dim light reflected from the sky in the water which gathered in the hard road showed him there was no danger.

A series of sodden whip-cracks at last startled the passengers out of their reverie, and made the women tremble as if a new danger was about to burst upon them.

But it was only Bill signaling his approach to the relay station; and when Kate thrust her head out of the coach-window and looked ahead, she presently descried the light of a lantern, which was swung from side to side by an invisible hand to apprise the driver that his coming had been expected.

"What's been a keepin' yer, Bill?" asked a voice as the coach came to a stop. "Ain't met the road-agent, hev ye?"

"That same," growled Bill, getting down from his box. "Never had sich dog-gone luck in the six years I've been a shootin' the

* This story began in The Cavalier for June.

stage over this here line. Broke down at Parker, and held up afore I'd gone sixteen miles!"

"Hallo, thar!" shouted the first voice. "Bert! Bert! Bill's been held up ag'in!"

This remark, evidently addressed to the man who was leading out the six relay horses, provoked a hearty outburst of profanity from somewhere in the thick of the gloom.

"And, what's worse," added Bill, "one of our men's got lost."

"Shot dead?"

"No. Thar was nobody hurt, and this time the gent with the mask didn't git nothin' except mebbe a bullet-hole through his chest. But I had Dick Fanshaw aboard—Fanshaw, of Dexter—know him?

"Wall, he jumps on the road-agent kinder rough and unexpected-like, and when we looks both has disappeared. I rather guess he's broke his neck, or is sleepin' with a ounce o' lead under his ribs. I couldn't stop, and you'll jist hev to git out a posse and look for him round Red Point. That's whar it happened."

The passengers listened to the conversation without stirring. The rain was still coming down in sheets; the darkness was denser than ever, and the pale oil-lamp inside the coach lit up a group of ghostly faces.

"We ain't got a man to spare here, Bill," resumed the voice without, while the passengers heard the horses unhitched and the relay team put in their places.

Kate started at this information, for she dreaded that no effort would be made to find the wounded hero until it was too late to aid him, provided that her worst fears were realized and Dick was disabled and helpless.

"Bert's wife is here; she's been cookin' and washin' for us, and mebbe we could send her over to the town and get out a posse by daylight!" suddenly exclaimed the first speaker.

"She'll go; the old woman will go," Bert answered from somewhere about the heads of the fresh team. "She ain't much skeered in the dark, and knows the way. Mebbe I wouldn't like to go and have a chance at Fra Diavolo!"

And the worthy attaché of the relay station muttered fiercely in an undertone, the purport of which was lost in the storm.

Bill briefly detailed the particulars of the adventure which had befallen the coach, and the owner of the voice, as well as Bert, declared that the road-agent must be exterminated and Mr. Fanshaw's fate be cleared up, even if Mrs. Bert had to get up and trudge to the near-by camp to wake up the marshal.

In a few hours the next stage would be along, almost overtaking Bill's coach, which had lost the better part of a day by reason of the accident near Parker, and the two stablemen had to remain on duty.

Kate heaved a sigh of relief when she heard the determined tone of the men as they promised Bill to see that the country was roused and that every effort would be made to solve the mystery of Dick's disappearance, and she smiled wanly at De Chatras when she heard the fat driver say to one of the men:

"I never was good at resignin'; but this trail ain't wide enough for Fra Diavolo and me; and unless that gent gits out o' the way, Bill Barker will be lookin' for a new job by'm-by."

"It do git on a man's nerves, I reckon," said the voice.

"It do," emphasized Bill. "It knocks ten years of natcheral growth out o' yer every time yer told to throw up yer hands!"

"Shall we ever get on our way?" moaned poor Mrs. Terbush.

Yet the man had not been idle a moment. As rapidly as hands could work—and work in the dark and in the wet—the horses were hitched to the stage and the lines passed up to Bill, who had meanwhile stuffed his corncob pipe again, and, stepping under the shed for a moment, had applied the lighted match to his favorite weed, drawn a few hearty puffs, and without regard to his discomforts from a soaked skin, had remounted his seat and was ready to start forward on his last relay.

"All aboard!" he shouted from sheer force of habit, and, flinging a hasty farewell at the two men as the animals started off, he fixed his eyes on the trail ahead and the big Concord resumed her journey.

It was half an hour after train-time when Bill pulled up in front of the wooden railway station at the town of Belmont. He had trusted to luck rather than to his timepiece that something might have delayed the train. And he was happily right. The train was late, and had not yet been reported.

By this time the rain had ceased, the sky had cleared, and the moon was shining.

The disappointment of the passengers changed to joy when they stepped out and the cheering information greeted them that there had been a delay in the arrival of the train, and that they had ample time to check their baggage and say farewell to the good-natured

driver. Every one shook his hand, and all declared they never would forget him after what they had gone through under his command.

Kate took him aside and said:

"Mr. Barker, you'll see that nothing is left undone to get information about Mr. Fanshaw; and as soon as you hear, you'll advise me by telegraph, won't you—care of Senator Terbush, Washington, D. C.? And you'll do what you can to rouse the country and rid it of Fra Diavolo?

"He must be captured, dead or alive, for what he has done to-night. But at present I am more anxious about Mr. Fanshaw than anything else, and I'll always keep you in grateful remembrance if you'll do what you can to assist in finding him."

Bill promised with a solemnity that only needed one of his characteristic oaths to make it perfectly binding; but, seeing he was in the presence of a lady—and a lady of such delicate beauty and charm as Miss Birdsong—he refrained and contented himself with making the politest bow, accompanied by a peculiarly graceful flourish of the foot, that he had ever executed.

She shook his hand warmly, and when he looked at his palm in the light of his oil-lamp a little later he was not annoyed to find that she had crossed it with a twenty-dollar gold-piece.

Kate addressed the same request to the Senator, who told her that she need have no alarm about Dick; that if he had not met his death, he would be found, for he intended to urge the Governor to redouble his efforts to rid the State of the road-agent, and everything would be done to clear up the mystery of Mr. Fanshaw's strange disappearance.

This conversation took place in the dingy waiting-room of the station. They heard the stage drive away, and Kate listened to the rattle of the wheels with a strange feeling, as she reflected that to-morrow it would be traveling back to the familiar scenes of her childhood, passing the spots where she had often stood and waved it a greeting and watched it keeling and tumbling like a craft on the billows till it vanished from view among the hills and the rocks.

And she? She was going out into a new life, a new civilization, to scenes so different from those to which she was accustomed. Would her life henceforth be as happy as it had been?

"A penny for your thoughts," said a pleasant, manly voice at her elbow, and as she turned she beheld De Chatras regarding her with an admiring look.

"I was thinking of—" she began.

"Of Mr. Fanshaw?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, and of my childhood days up there in the mountains," she said, with a touch of sadness.

"I'm afraid Mr. Fanshaw is the only one who distinguished himself in your eyes, and the only one who deserves your thoughts," said De Chatras.

"He is my guardian, you know," she said with a faint smile.

CHAPTER VII.

WHILE WAITING FOR THE TRAIN.

DE CHATRAS saw that Kate was not disposed to take him into her confidence regarding her state of feeling toward Dick. When she ascribed her interest in him to the fact that he was her guardian it was the same as if she had politely informed her interrogator that he was treading on delicate ground.

But De Chatras was obviously not the sort of man to be easily put out of countenance. He smiled and nodded his head.

"I think but for the driver," he said, "I should have sought an opportunity to distinguish myself, and perhaps by receiving a bullet wound have earned for myself the happiness of gaining your sympathy, Miss Birdsong."

"Really?" she asked, laughing. "How?"

"I wanted to shoot the road-agent's head off as he commanded us to stop," replied De Chatras with a laugh, "but Bill persuaded me not to try it. You know there are times when one is wonderfully impressed by the advice of others."

"And this was one, I suppose?" she said with a slight taunt.

"Yes, this was one. The confounded fellow made me change my mind in a trice. But for that I might be mourned for and regretted—even," he added significantly, "if I am not your guardian."

"And one other thing," said Kate.

"What?"

"The superintendent of the Birdsong Mine."

"Ah, yes, I forgot. He is more to you than a mere guardian—happy man."

"Much more," continued Kate playfully, for the Senator's assurance and Bill's promise to leave no stone unturned to discover news of Dick had restored some of her old

spirits. "Much more. Mr. Fanshaw and I were playmates."

"You and he? He is much older. You must have been a very small girl."

"I was a very mischievous and pestiferous little freckle-faced thing in red flannel petticoats," she returned. "But there is another thing that weighs with me in regard to Mr. Fanshaw. I feel in a way responsible for his disappearance. I insisted that he should capture Fra Diavolo, but not dead—no, not dead, but alive!"

Her voice faltered strangely.

"And you think that in attempting to perform this chivalrous feat he was drawn into a serious complication? I see. That explains why he did not shoot the road-agent dead when he leveled his revolver at him. Of course! I wondered why he did not shoot. But, pray, Miss Birdsong, may I ask what prompted you to impose such a serious task upon your guardian?"

"I shall never forgive myself for doing so unless Mr. Fanshaw turns up alive and well," she said, "and I would give all I have in the world to know that he is not hurt. I hardly know why I asked him to do such a rash thing.

"Of course I was not really serious, yet to tell the truth I had an inordinate curiosity to discover the identity of the man who is called Fra Diavolo. I can't account for it in terms of cold logic.

"There is perhaps no ground for my assuming that he is no ordinary creature and that if he were unmasked he would turn out to be something so different from what he is generally believed to be. I have been fearfully disillusioned to-night by what little I was able to determine about the road-agent when he held us up.

"He was not at all the romantic person I had fancied him to be. He spoke like all the other people in the mountains, in an uncouth dialect, and though he was fairly polite, he was far from being a gentleman in disguise."

The smile on De Chatras's face expanded as though Kate's romantic outpourings about the road-agent amused him.

"How do you know that *our* road-agent was Fra Diavolo?" he asked.

"I don't know," she replied. "I simply assumed so."

"I feel certain that this man was an impostor," De Chatras said with a satirical smile. "And if I am right in my theory, you may still see Fra Diavolo brought in by your—guardian."

He was about to say "hero," but he said, "guardian," and with a peculiar emphasis.

"By Jove!" he added, "if I could hope for the reward of a simple smile from you, I would almost be tempted to remain here and undertake to ferret out the whereabouts of this romantic highwayman and bring him to you alive."

"You forget that there is a reward of ten thousand dollars offered for his arrest," she said. "My smile would hardly compensate a man for the risk of undertaking the capture of this desperado who is too much for them all, even the secret agents of the government.

"Until we were all placed so ignominiously at the mercy of this ordinary highwayman, I actually had a suspicion that you might be the secret agent of the government who had been assigned to the work of capturing Fra Diavolo. But, of course, I have changed my mind now."

"By Jove, that is cruel, Miss Birdsong!" said De Chatras. "You mean that if I had been the secret agent, I should have asserted my authority. I should have shown my officer's badge beneath my coat by the light of Bill's lantern and said to the highwayman:

"'Hold, sir! I am a secret agent of the government and I arrest you in the name of the law. If you do not submit I shall get down from this box and try to prove to you that I have a perfect right to arrest you!'"

De Chatras laughed at his own humor and Kate said:

"And I should have experienced another disillusioning process, for I pictured such a man as of entirely different material from ordinary mortals, I mean as a man who by some power beyond others can do what no other man can do. But to see him show a star and order the other to submit to arrest—pah, how ordinary!"

"How I regret that I am no heaven-born genius to win your favor, Miss Birdsong," De Chatras said, without losing his easy poise and good manners at Kate's delicately veiled satire. "If I were on the same footing as Mr. Fanshaw, I believe I should accept your challenge of capturing the road-agent, even if you asked me to do it single-handed and alone."

Kate looked into De Chatras's face with a calm, steady eye. After a little pause she said:

"Do you know, Mr. de Chatras, you puzzle me? I almost fancy you have a purpose in bringing this whole subject up for

discussion. I believe you don't like Mr. Fanshaw and are trying to belittle his brave conduct of this evening. I wonder if you are what you represent yourself to be?"

"I have made no representations to you, Miss Birdsong, if I remember distinctly," replied De Chatras good-naturedly. "Hence I could have made no misrepresentations. May I ask what I am suspected of, or do you still adhere to the notion that I may be a government detective?"

"I will not say what my suspicions are —admitting, for the sake of argument, that I have suspicions. The Senator informed us that you are the agent or manager of a large cattle ranch in Wyoming," Kate said.

"Allow me to give you my business card. You will observe that it is something more than a cattle ranch—that it is a cattle syndicate, a French cattle syndicate, called the Bordeaux Improvement Company."

"You speak French?" she asked, after glancing at the card he had taken out of his wallet and handed to her.

"Fluently."

Kate spoke to him in French, and De Chatras answered her in that language with the utmost felicity.

"I am delighted that you speak French," she said, "and I hope you will forgive my impertinence. It wasn't meant seriously. I like to know people who speak that language. When we are settled in Washington I shall ask Mrs. Terbush to invite you to call on us, provided you say you'll come."

"It would be the greatest happiness of my life to have that privilege," De Chatras said with a show of enthusiastic appreciation. "Evidently you have changed your mind about my vocation, and are now convinced that I am not a secret agent nor—Fra Diavolo."

"How did you know that I thought that?" Kate exclaimed, before she had taken time to reflect on her words. "Oh," she quickly added, "I beg your pardon."

"I grant your pardon unconditionally," he said with a laugh. "You ask me how I knew that you suspected me of being one of two extremes, either the road-agent or the thief-taker. I have a remarkable power of intuition and observation.

"For example, I knew that you gave Bill, the driver, money to stimulate his energy in getting tidings of Mr. Fanshaw. I knew that you suspected me of being a secret-service man or the road-agent, and I know that the telegraph operator in yonder," he pointed to a window to an adjoining room, "is receiving a message at this moment that the train has left the last station and will be here in fifteen minutes."

Kate looked into his face with an expression of amazement.

Lieutenant Baxter just then entered by the door that divided the waiting-room from the telegraph office. He and the Senator and Mrs. Terbush had for some time been sitting in another part of the room chatting.

The young officer had seen Kate in close conversation with De Chatras, and after waiting vainly for them to break off so that he could engage Kate in conversation for a while himself, had strolled into the next room.

"The train is due here in fifteen minutes," he said. "The operator has just received the message."

"There, you see?" laughed De Chatras. "And yet it was very simple. I know the Morse code and heard the ticker announce the fact which Baxter has just stated."

Kate felt convinced that De Chatras was no ordinary man.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER MESSAGE FROM 93100.

THEY joined the two elder people, and after a few moments' conversation the Senator excused himself and entered the operators' room to file two telegrams, one of which was addressed to the Governor and the other to his private secretary at Denver.

Lieutenant Baxter hoped for an opportunity to have Kate to himself for a few minutes. He envied De Chatras, who had succeeded where he had failed, and who always found a way, it seemed, of thwarting his desire to be alone with her.

Mrs. Terbush had recovered from the excitement of the night, and confessed that she longed only for a comfortable berth that she might go to sleep and forget stage-coaches and highwaymen.

The Senator rejoined the party, and in a short time they heard the whistle of the engine of the approaching train. A few minutes later it pulled up before the station platform, and the little party got aboard. The signal was given, and without further ado it sped forward on its way to Denver.

The Senator was met at the depot early the next morning by his private secretary, who placed a number of letters and telegrams in his hands.

Owing to the events of the preceding day

the Senator had decided to stop over in Denver for twelve hours for a conference with the Governor. De Chatras and Lieutenant Baxter agreed to do likewise, not wishing, for reasons of their own, to forego the agreeable companionship of their friends.

As the Senator's house was closed for the season, they were all driven to a hotel, where the two young men passed the day with the ladies, while Senator Terbush went about his business.

As soon as he had an opportunity, he examined his mail.

A telegram, dated Belmont the day before, arrested his attention.

It read:

Reason to believe that Fra Diavolo was passenger aboard stage held up. This for your private information. Tell no one. 93100.

"I'll be hanged!" was all the Senator could say. But after a moment's reflection he muttered to himself: "Our secret-service man is either a wizard or an infernal fool. I don't believe it."

His first impulse was to confide the contents of his mysterious message to the Governor, but on second thought he concluded to be ruled by his correspondent's advice, and omit this from his discussion of the situation.

He urged the Governor to redouble his efforts to capture the outlaw, and when he told that official what the experience of his party had been on the previous day, the State executive promised to take immediate steps toward organizing a scouring party to ascertain the fate of the superintendent of the Birdsong Mine and apprehend the road-agent.

"The Washington officials promised to put the best secret-service man in their force to work on this case," the Senator said to the executive. "This man has performed wonders in several cases that baffled them for months and even years, and they assured me that he would run his man to earth without help from any one.

"Knowing the interest I took in trying to preserve the reputation of the State by putting an end to lawlessness of every kind, he was instructed to keep me advised of his movements as far as practicable, and I have the best evidence that he is hot on the trail of this Fra Diavolo. But this bandit is the most perplexing criminal I ever heard of, and in every way a match for the detective."

"Rest assured," said the Governor, "we will get Fra Diavolo without the assistance of Washington. These men are all right on cases of mail-robbery on trains and defalcations by more or less inexperienced criminals. But when it comes to rough work in the mountains among desperate men who kill on sight, they are no match for our sheriffs and town marshals."

"Still, I have a good deal of faith in this particular man," said the Senator. "He captured a gang of counterfeiters in North Carolina a year ago by a bit of clever strategy where all other efforts had failed."

"What's his name?" asked the Governor.

"That is a secret."

"You said he reported to you occasionally."

"He always signs a cipher."

"What part of the State is he working in?"

"I should not be surprised that he was aboard the stage with us when it was held up. I had a message from him at Parker, and another dated at Belmont last night. He showed that he was advised of every movement we were making, and how he could have got from Parker to Belmont without being one of our party is something for you to solve."

"Who were your fellow passengers, Senator?" asked the Governor.

"A Mr. de Chatras, representing a big French cattle syndicate of Wyoming, and Lieutenant Baxter of the army, on his way to Washington. De Chatras was introduced to me in the East to talk over a bill in which he was interested, and which was then pending before Congress, and Baxter is going to Washington to report to the War Department."

"One of these is your man, of course," argued the executive. "That's plain from all you say. De Chatras's cattle interests may be all a mask; that would be comparatively easy to arrange. Baxter's connection with the army may likewise be a mere pretense.

"Come to think of it, a detective parading as an army officer would enjoy unusual facilities and a certain degree of immunity from danger. A road-agent would think twice before attacking a man wearing the uniform of his country and vested with all the authority that goes with its epaulets."

"That is all very plausible," said the Senator, "but what would you say, if I told you of a suggestion made to me that Fra Diavolo himself was a member of our party?"

"Do you believe it?"

"I am not prepared to say now. On the surface of things I should say no, but stranger

things than that have happened, and, somehow, the belief is taking root in my mind."

"Then the road-agent who stopped your stage could not have been Fra Diavolo."

"Naturally not, if he was one of our party," and the Senator chuckled. "I tell you, Governor, this is developing into an interesting case."

"By Jove, I have it!" suddenly exclaimed the other, bringing his fist down on his desk with some force, and looking at the Senator with a significant expression: "One or the other of your traveling companions is the detective, and he is shadowing the other, who is Fra Diavolo!"

Senator Terbush gazed at the Governor intently for a moment without speaking. At last he said:

"Now, that is a theory worthy of M. Lupin, or any other great detective creation of Poe or Gaboriau. I am not ready to accept that theory, but I shall certainly bear it in mind."

"They are both leaving the State, and your secret-service man wouldn't do that unless he had a strong reason. Now, if Fra Diavolo had determined to leave the State and your detective knew his movements as well as you lead me to believe, of course it would be natural that he should attach himself to his party, and your ladies being the chief attraction to two young men, what more natural than that you should indirectly be entertaining both Fra Diavolo and his pursuer?"

The Governor concluded with a ring of triumph in his words, that showed how implicitly he believed in his fine-spun theory.

"I shall accept your explanation until I have something to convince me of the contrary," said the Senator as he rose to go. "In the meantime I shall keep a sharp lookout. I must say I like these young men, and I should hate to discover that you were right."

When the Senator returned to the hotel the first question put to him came from Kate, who anxiously inquired if any news had been received regarding Mr. Fanshaw.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT HAPPENED TO DICK.

IN the course of a week Senator Terbush and his little party arrived in Washington, and Kate beheld a new world opening before her eyes, the great world for which she had always longed and of which she had so often dreamed.

Here her father, the old savant of the Smithsonian, had lived; here her mother had passed her honeymoon, and here she had been born. But only a vague memory lingered in her mind of her earliest years.

At a very tender age her father and mother had gone to Colorado to live, as has already been narrated, and her childhood recollections were lost in visions of rocks and mountains, and life in a cabin, until her mother had died, and in much talk about different kinds of quartz and specimens, and "the great discovery" that made them rich, but brought a violent death to her father, soon after she had been sent to the convent.

Senator Terbush had a handsome summer home in an outlying residence park in one of the most picturesque spots about the capital.

From the window of her room Kate could gaze out upon a dense forest scene, through which rippled a silvery brook among high banks covered with trees and rocks, wild yet alluring, and so different from the savage scenery of Colorado. In another direction her eye rested upon the Potomac and, in the farther distance, a spur of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The first to greet them at the station was Lotty Terbush, and after kissing her father and mother, the handsome brunette cast herself affectionately into the arms of her schoolmate.

The Senator introduced his daughter to De Chatras and Baxter, and the two men plainly showed their admiration for the young lady and promptly asked for permission to call.

Senator Terbush had sounded his companions by all the strategy, direct and devious, that his subtle, highly-trained legal mind could suggest, but nothing in the course of the journey had developed to remove his first impression that they were gentlemen of culture and refinement.

He determined, therefore, to treat them with every consideration until he had evidence on which to form a conclusive opinion regarding their standing and character.

He would like to have interposed his objection to their visit until he had completely assured himself on this vexing point, but not having taken his wife into his confidence regarding the suspicions which the Governor had expressed, Mrs. Terbush had given a ready assent to the proposed visit, in which the two girls had, of course, heartily concurred.

The Senator resolved, however, to satisfy himself the very next day respecting his two

interesting companions by a personal visit to the War Department and sharp inquiry into the antecedents of De Chatras.

Among the letters and telegrams awaiting the Senator on his arrival were several messages from Colorado, and among the latter one which briefly stated that the mystery regarding Dick had been cleared up, and that, though somewhat injured, the superintendent had returned to Dexter. There was also a personal message from Dick announcing himself alive and well after an exciting adventure.

No trace had been found of the road-agent.

A few days later the Senator, who had contracted a heavy cold from exposure during the night of the storm, and had been advised by a physician to keep within doors for a few days, handed Kate a letter which had been brought to the house by the private secretary.

It was in large sprawling letters and signed "Yours trooley, Bill Barker," detailing in such graphic terms that the two girls laughed heartily as Kate read the missive to Lotty, how Mr. Fanshaw had escaped with his life and was well as ever.

As the Senator was unable to leave the house and he was desirous of satisfying himself regarding his visitors without delay, he wrote a letter to the War Department, in which he veiled as well as he could the inquiry to which he desired an answer. Several days elapsed before the eagerly expected reply was put into his hands.

It said:

Lieutenant Reginald Baxter has been for some time past detailed for inspection duty in the West, the nature of which is confidential.

"That removes all objections to Baxter," said the Senator to himself.

There are a thousand ways of tracing a man's character through special channels in Washington without resorting to the police, and though Senator Terbush was an adept at making most of these channels serviceable to himself, he was unable to learn anything that reflected upon De Chatras, or contradicted his claim to be the representative of the Bordeaux Improvement Company of Wyoming; so that at the end of his investigation he had learned little more than he knew at the outset.

De Chatras was well known to a number of persons in Washington who resolutely vouched for him as a gentleman.

In the meantime Mr. Richard Fanshaw was nursing a broken arm and a disfigured face in his rooms at the Clarendon Hotel, Dexter. Here the hotel's most sumptuous apartments had been set apart for the superintendent of the Birdsong, and here he had made his home for several years.

Mrs. Bert had dutifully, and with the self-sacrifice of a pioneer woman, trudged over to the camp near the relay station in the storm that night of the hold-up, and had sounded the alarm. At the first blush of morn a determined posse of fifteen men had taken the trail to the red rock where the hold-up had occurred. The rain had effaced the marks and the men had to start on a blind trail.

The conformation of the ground gave them a pretty accurate notion, however, what direction the road-agent must have taken, and dividing their force into three parties of five each, they scattered over the adjacent territory.

It was not long ere the sharp report of a revolver apprised ten of the men that the third squad had news of the missing man, for it had been agreed that this should be the signal.

They answered with a discharge of firearms, and soon rejoined their companions, just as they were carrying the miner out of a deep gulch into which he had plunged in the darkness.

"I thought it was all up with me, boys," said Dick, as the men laid him down on the ground, and fetched water for him to drink.

"The down stage was held up last night," he began; but the leader cut him short.

"Yer needn't be tellin' us that," he said. "We heerd it last night, and that's what started us after ye."

"What—what became of the coach and—and—the passengers?" he asked weakly.

"The passengers is all right and on their way to Denver. They waited for ye to return, but as they could find out nothin' about ye they went on."

"They're gone?" he asked. "I wonder how long I've been here? A day or two, I reckon."

"It all happened last night," was the answer.

"Then it was last night? I thought so. I don't know what happened. I took after the road-agent—in the dark, you understand. Have you found him? I must have put a bullet through him."

"Maybe yer did. We're goin' to look for his body, but first we want to see you taken care of."

"Thank you, boys. It's mighty kind of you," said Dick. "I'll be all right now, but I reckon I crippled my wing."

"Yes, and ye spoiled yer beauty, Fanshaw, leastways for some time to come. Yer must have lit on yer face."

"I guess that's where he hit me with his gun, right in the face. I couldn't see him after that, and must have tumbled into this hole. When it began to rain I came to, but was unable to help myself. If you hadn't found me I reckon I would have been a candidate for the undertaker all right."

A part of the posse stayed to make Dick comfortable, and carry him the short distance to the side of the trail, where the up-coach would soon be passing, while the rest of the party scattered to take the trail of the highwayman.

Dick's keenest anxiety was regarding Kate. He wondered whether his fate had inspired her with the least interest or concern, and he was exceedingly anxious to have an interview with big Bill Barker, who would be the only person able to give him the desired information.

But Bill would not pass that way until the following morning, and so, tortured with bitter anxiety, he had himself lifted into the stage when it came along and carried back to Parker, where there was a doctor who could dress his injuries.

CHAPTER X.

A DEAD ROAD-AGENT.

THE doctor put Dick's broken arm in splints, ordered him to rest a few days, and after applying some plaster to the ugly cuts in the miner's face, left him with the cheering information that he would soon be over it.

Dick waited only to be told that the body of the road-agent had not been discovered, when he got one of the men at the station to drive him over to Dexter in a buggy, and having been assisted to his rooms, he fell into a reverie in which Kate and his late traveling companions played a conspicuous part.

With his uninjured hand he wrote to the Senator, briefly apprising him of his escape and asking him to give him whatever information he could regarding Baxter and De Chatras.

"I don't know what got over me that night," he wrote, "but that road-agent never would have got away but for one thing. Kate can tell what I mean."

Then he wrote a telegram, which he ordered sent from Belmont by the earliest stage, and which was among the messages found by the Senator among his mail on his arrival in Washington.

The day after he was delighted to receive a call from Bill Barker. The genial knight of the reins had been furloughed by the company, and Bill was taking his first holiday after months of faithful service.

"Laid off for good behavior, *me!*" he exclaimed as he entered Dick's room and held out a powerful paw by way of greeting, which the miner seized with hearty cordiality, while Bill let out one of his big guffaws that made the rafters shake.

"Durn it all," he added, "if the company didn't try to shoulder the whole business on me. Said but for me the stage would have been robbed sure. Give yer my word, Fanshaw, I sot that still on my box when Mr. Road-Agent says 'hands up,' yer could have fed me lollypops on a stick, as in my innercent childhood days."

And with that Bill sat down, while the chair in which he deposited his huge frame creaked ominously.

"Havin' a holiday forced upon me, I thought I would come over to Dexter, look the town over and see how yer was a gettin' along," he continued. "I know one female as will be mighty glad to hear ye've got a few blue chips left to play for yer life with."

"I wonder!" exclaimed Dick. "A female?"

"Yer hearn me, didn't yer?"

"Who now?" asked Dick, affecting not to understand.

"Tell me yer don't know the party!" replied Bill, dubious of Dick's ignorance. "Why, who do yer reckon but that handsome little Birdsong proposition?"

"Kate? Kate Birdsong? You got me guessin', Bill."

"Well, you oughter to have seen her! She didn't want me to pull out. She'd a stayed thar on the trail all night waitin' for ye, I reckon. But with orders to make that midnight train, if I had to git thar on three wheels, what was thar to do but gee-up?

"I did powerfully hate to leave yer to an unknown fate, as the sayin' goes, but it had to be did, and I done it. Got to Belmont half hour behind time, but the train was late and no damage done."

"So Miss Kate asked about me and was interested?" pursued Dick.

"I reckon some," replied Bill. "Didn't she give me a twenty-dollar gold-piece to send her news about yer and didn't she look

into my face with a look that went slidin' down my spinal column like greased lightnin' down a lightnin'-rod? Shall I forget it? Well, no, not so easy, I reckon. An old Forty-Niner like me!

"You don't know what it means to have a purty thing like that take yer by the hand and smile into yer face with a tear in her eyes and mebbe a tear in her voice, too. I ain't ben quite right since, and I'm tickled to death that the company gave me a lay-off just so I might get away from myself and feel happy alone."

Dick enjoyed the old driver's ecstatic sensations, so graphically described, but what particularly elated and pleased him was the information that Kate had thought of him and had expressed her anxiety regarding his fate.

He felt less worry now that either De Chatras or Baxter would supplant him in her esteem, for truth to tell he had conceived grave suspicions that the polished strangers had designs upon her, and he felt himself at a great disadvantage so far away from Kate's surroundings.

"I promised to write her a letter and let her know yer was all right, and I done it. It took me all day, 'cause I ain't just what yer might call in practise, and I ain't wrote a letter since I left home," continued Bill.

"What did you write, Bill?" asked Dick with an amused smile.

"I ain't much on spellin', I admit," said Bill; "but I've got the *ex*pression, and I sez to her: 'Miss Kate Birdsong, dear Miss,' sez I, 'hopin' this will find yer well and in good health, I take my pen in hand to unform yer that Mister Fanshore ain't hurt none, only a arm and face broke, as I am reliably unformed by witnessers who wouldn't lie except on special occasions and for money, he drawin' out of the game with a good stack of chips and a rosy future, which same I reckon will please yer mighty as it do yours trooley, Bill Barker.'

"I remember every word," added Bill gravely. "I allus do. That's a pecooliarity o' mine. I remember the last letter I wrote before this'n, bein' to a certain dishwasher lady o' my acquaintance I was particular sweet on at the Busy Bee Hive bo'din'-house in Punkville, Tennessee, twenty years ago. I'll betcher I kin tell yer word for word what I said to her—"

"I believe you, Bill," said Dick, interrupting the garrulous knight of the ribbons. "I'd rather hear what your dishwasher friend said in reply."

"Oh, she was a heartless croquette, Fanshaw," wailed Bill reminiscently. "Don't ever fall into the hands of a croquette. She said she was never goin' to have no fat man to come buzzin' round her, and for me to go about my business, and a lot of other things of a pussonal and ver' insultin' character.

"I ain't no coward, but when she said she'd shown my letter to Jeff Bridges, and he was so provoked that he was lookin' for me with an old army gun loaded to the muzzle, I felt so darned pizen mad that I jest left the town for good.

"I never likes to be in the same latitude with a man who is always usin' a gun in an argument, 'cause I allus feel tempted to kill 'im. It's my disposition."

Dick ordered some refreshments for Bill, who had meanwhile stuffed his old corn-cob, and was puffing away in a most contented state of mind when the sheriff of the county was announced.

Sheriff Tucker was a man of fifty-two, of medium height and strong physique. He came to talk to Dick about the latest developments in the hold-up.

"Fanshaw," he said, as soon as he was seated, having shaken hands with both men, "there's been a dead man found about five miles from the place where the stage was held up. It may be the stage robber. Could you identify him?"

"Identify him? Identify a man with a mask on his face? I couldn't see for the dark!" exclaimed the superintendent. "Ask Bill, here."

"Couldn't be did," grunted Bill.

"What's always puzzled me about this here case," said the sheriff, "is that you didn't plug him when you had the drop on the road-agent."

"I did have the drop on him, and I could easily explain why I didn't put it to him, but that's a private reason, sheriff. The fact is, I tried to capture him alive."

"He fired at you, didn't he?"

"Yes, and luckily I ducked my head just as he blazed away, and that's why I'm alive to-day," explained Dick. "I made a leap for him, throwin' up his gun before he could fire again.

"He must have struck me in the face with the butt. All I remember is my holdin' on to him somehow. He started to git away—me after him. Just what happened in the darkness I can't just tell.

"I know I fired at him when he had broken away from me, and I thought I heard

him give a yell. I must have hit him. The next minute I went head first down a ditch, and there I lay till the rain began to fall on my face and brought me round again. But I couldn't move."

"What's the style and general appearance of the pilgrim yer ben pickin' up, sheriff?" asked Bill.

"Oh, he's a good riddance, I reckon," replied Tucker. "Ain't much to look at. 'Bout as ugly a critter as you'd meet. None too good to hold up a stage. Just got word this mornin'. What's the caliber of your gun, Fanshaw?" he suddenly asked.

"Mine? A forty-four," said Dick.

"I'm dead sure from certain facts that he's the man that held up the stage," resumed Tucker. "He wore a black mask, and one of his guns—he carried two—was empty. He died from a bullet-hole in his neck."

"Hooray!" shouted Bill, rising from his seat. "It's that French devil that's been skeerin' ten years' growth out o' me."

"Whoever he is," said the sheriff, "it's sure not Fra Diavolo. He don't answer the description. Did anybody else in your party fire at him?"

"No," said Dick, who instinctively felt that the sheriff had a reason for asking these indirect questions.

"Did you see anybody else fire, Bill?" asked Tucker.

"Not me. I don't know what them two gents, Baxter and the other, was a doin', but it wasn't me. No, siree; I was busy holdin' my hosses."

"Why do you ask?" inquired Dick.

"Because the bullet in the dead man's neck is a thirty-eight," replied the sheriff.

CHAPTER XI.

SECRET ORDERS FROM F. D.

THE body of the unknown had been brought to Dexter, where an informal inquest was held, and every witness directly or remotely connected with the hold-up was examined.

O'Leary and his French wife were summoned; but they shook their heads, and swore they had never seen the stranger.

Neither Dick nor Bill could definitely identify him as the man who made the attack on the stage.

Asked by the coroner if he had ever seen the man, the superintendent of the mine said, after making a close inspection of the features, that he thought the fellow was a miner who had applied to him for work some weeks before and had been referred to the foreman. The foreman said he had given the man work, but he had soon after asked for his pay-check, collected his money, and disappeared.

The leader of the searching party testified that they had found the body among some rocks, where it lay hidden from view until the surroundings were closely examined. He thought the man had crawled there and bled to death.

"Did you find anything about his person that was suspicious?" asked the coroner.

"A black mask," was the answer, "and two revolvers, one of which was empty; but there were two cartridges in the other."

"Was there anything else that justified you to conclude that this man had anything to do with the hold-up?" was asked.

"He couldn't have been dead but long enough to have been shot about the time the stage was held up. His clothes were soaked with water, showing that he lay there when the storm broke," testified the witness.

"Anything else?" asked the investigating official.

The witness looked at the sheriff, and Tucker rose from where he sat in the front row of seats occupied by witnesses and others who crowded the rude undertaking-shop where the inquest was held.

"The men found a paper on his body which shows that he was workin' with others, and that this hold-up was planned in advance," said Tucker, taking a small sheet of dirty paper out of his wallet and handing it to the coroner.

On it was scribbled in pencil:

W. Red rock 16 fr P 4 fr B to-night. F aboard. Mind orders. F. D.

The coroner read it, and turned to Tucker.

"Do you make it out?" he asked.

"No, I don't," said the sheriff. "But the hold-up took place at what is known as Red Rock, and 'F. D.' must be Fra Diavolo."

"I found it in the band of his hat," said the leader of the searching squad.

"Anyway, it's an important piece of evidence," remarked Tucker. "It's somebody's handwritin', and I take it to be Fra Diavolo's."

"It is important—very important," mused the coroner, still trying to study out the cabalistic writing. "I shall refer it to the grand jury."

There was some further inquiry into the case, and it was then adjourned.

When the Governor's men arrived the county officials had brought out all the facts that could be ascertained in relation to the case. Fanshaw had been found, the dead road-agent had been the subject of an official inquiry, and valuable evidence had been lodged in the hands of the coroner.

"What gits me," commented Bill, as he left the inquest with Fanshaw and the sheriff, "is what 'F aboard' stands for."

"What'll you bet it stands for my name?" asked Dick suddenly. "He knew I was aboard."

"And then again it might stand for Fra," said the sheriff.

"Look a here," exclaimed the driver, "don't you be tellin' me I've ben a drivin' that gent in my coach, Mr. Tucker. It makes me nervous all over, it do."

"Be that as it may," said Tucker, "Fanshaw or Fra, we've got a valyible piece of evidence to work on, and I'm tellin' yer, boys, we are going to land him sure."

The three men parted company, Dick going to his room, Tucker continuing up the road, while Bill entered the bar to discuss the events of the day with a number of mining men and merchants of the town assembled there, and also to indulge in his favorite vice of draw-poker.

In spite of the "valyible" evidence referred to by the sheriff which the inquest had developed, the case soon came to a state of suspense; and the mystery, on which both the State and the county authorities were indefatigably working, was as far from a satisfactory solution as ever.

The hope of finding the writer of the missive that had been discovered on the body of the dead road-agent did not materialize, though every effort was secretly made to that end.

O'Leary underwent a racking cross-examination by the authorities, as his resort in the outskirts of the town was known to have harbored questionable characters of all kinds. But the Irishman declared that the mysterious highwayman had been at his house but one night, always wearing a mask; and, though on that occasion he drank and sang and was boisterous generally, he took good care not to reveal his features.

He gave the officers a general description of the individual, which tallied with that of half a dozen persons of standing in town and fitted no one in particular.

Thus the case dragged on, and no arrests followed.

Dick's interest in Kate did not abate as time wore on. He received letters from the East, which enabled him to gather that his ward was enjoying her new experience to her heart's content, and that she was the object of much social attention. She wrote him occasionally, and referred in what the superintendent regarded as a rather coquettish spirit to her conquests.

Now and then she mentioned Lieutenant Baxter and De Chatras as frequent visitors to the handsome suburban residence of Senator Terbush. She told him how happy she was, and how her new life was supplanting her interest in everything connected with her old mountain home, except her few friends who, she hoped, would always remain loyal to her.

Dick's jealousy of De Chatras and Baxter was increasing with each letter, and he would have liked to start for Washington at once to enter the field against his rivals. But for some time he found it impossible to leave his post.

One day he received an anonymous letter, however, which changed all his plans. It warned him that his ward was exposed to the danger of falling a victim to the plot of unscrupulous fortune-hunters who were attracted by Kate's beauty and great fortune, and the writer advised him to drop everything and come East to look after her interests.

The next day Mr. Fanshaw announced to his friends that he would go to Washington, and would remain absent for an indefinite period.

Dick took the down-stage to Belmont, where Bill shook hands with him and begged him timidly to remember him to Miss Birdsong, after which he disappeared in a saloon to brace his drooping spirits with an amber-colored nerve tonic.

Dick stayed two days in Denver to equip himself properly for the social career upon which he was about to enter, and when he boarded a Chicago-bound train one evening to continue his journey his trunk was packed with a supply of clothes and haberdashery that would have fitted out a raja.

CHAPTER XII.

DICK THREATENS DE CHATRAS.

DICK'S arrival in Washington created a small sensation. He had not announced his intention of coming, and his friends were greatly surprised, but none the less pleased.

Kate received him with a warm display of cordiality, put both her little hands in his, and looked at him with her roguish eyes in a way that thrilled him through and through.

Lotty Terbush, too, was delighted to meet him, and the Senator and Mrs. Terbush insisted that he must make his home with them.

Nothing could please Mr. Fanshaw better or work more consistently in harmony with his plans, for this would give him a direct advantage over every rival who might appear to dispute his interest in Kate.

He had been at the house but a few days before he convinced himself that De Chatras must be the man referred to in the anonymous missive which he had received. Although there was a mild rivalry between him and the young officer, De Chatras apparently enjoyed Kate's favor over any one else, and Dick convinced himself that if she was not already in love with him she was certainly in danger of being drawn into a violent affair with De Chatras.

The Coloradoan began to conceive a violent hatred for his rival, and tortured by intense jealousy he resolved to leave nothing undone to drive him off the field.

At the first opportunity to be alone with Lotty he began to sound that young lady regarding Kate and De Chatras, knowing that the two girls were intimate friends and that the other had confided her most secret thoughts to her keeping, as two girl chums will.

They were sitting alone in a shady nook of the extensive grounds that surrounded the house when Dick began his investigation.

"I don't know what to make of Mr. de Chatras," said Lotty thoughtfully. "From the moment I met him he affected me in a peculiar manner. He has the most singular hypnotic power of any man I ever saw, and I know that he is exercising a strong influence over Kate."

"Has Kate ever expressed her opinion of him to you?" he asked.

"He affected her the same way. She once told me that she believed him at first to be either the bandit Fra Diavolo or the secret-service man who was supposed to be on his trail."

Dick gave a violent start at this information, but he quickly controlled himself, while Lotty recounted the conversation which Kate and De Chatras had on the station platform at Belmont the night of the hold-up, of which Kate, in a burst of confidence, had informed her word for word.

"I think you have a right to know this," said Miss Terbush, "and it can injure no one. I know Kate is deeply interested in him and he in her. I feel certain that under the name of De Chatras he is covering up another identity, yet I am not disposed to believe that there is anything wicked in the man. He is too much of a gentleman to be a criminal.

"He impresses me like a college man of cultured family connections, and if he did not speak English so fluently, I should say that he was a Frenchman of noble birth, who for certain reasons did not wish to be known by his title. He has splendid standing, and every one who comes in contact with him is charmed and delighted with his manners."

Dick decided not to disclose the fact that he had received a letter of warning which evidently referred to De Chatras, and in the course of the conversation which he had with Miss Terbush he learned enough to convince him that she, too, felt a profound interest in the polished stranger, which debarred him from taking her too far into his confidence.

He resolved to find out what Kate's real feelings were, and if she avowed an active interest in his rival, he prepared to make open war upon him—war to the knife.

Evidently Kate suspected his design, and evaded every effort to entangle her in a discussion of De Chatras, and some time elapsed before he could force her to listen to him.

When he broached the subject he was surprised to find with what obstinacy she opposed him.

"I've been here long enough to learn that this man De Chatras is wild over you," he said. "And I've come to ask you whether you are going to be taken in by a man like that."

For reply Kate curled her lips and flushed angrily.

"My dear Dick," she said after a little pause, controlling herself, and laughing at him, "I admit that father appointed you to be my guardian. As superintendent of the Birdsong Mine and its general manager you control my fortune, and I am satisfied. I know you are faithful and have managed the property so well that I am rated a very rich girl.

"I appreciate all that. But you have no right to demand that I shall not speak to this man or any one else. My heart is my own, and I can like or love whom and what I please without having to ask your consent."

"Then you admit that you're in love with him, and maybe you'll marry him?" he demanded angrily.

"I admit nothing of the kind," she exclaimed. "Mr. de Chatras is a very fascin-

ating man. I am fond of his society. He is agreeable. But I know nothing about him. There is mystery over his life which I have not been able to penetrate, and before I marry any man I must know that he is worthy of the love of a good woman."

"You admit then that you don't trust him?" he said.

"I admit nothing. You don't understand."

"It's you that don't understand, Kate," he retorted. "Why do you suppose this man is making love to you? Why, to get your money. He knows that you are an heiress, and that by drawing you into his clutches he will get your millions.

"Who is he? What is he? Do you know? Does any one know? He's what they call in story-books a common adventurer, and perhaps you were right when you thought he was the highwayman Fra Diavolo. By Heaven, if I thought you would listen to him I'd—I'd—"

"Dick!"

The girl looked at him with blazing eyes of anger in a manner that effectively checked him. She had never seen him so furious. His face turned pale, and she heard him grind his teeth in suppressed rage.

"What would you do?" she asked calmly after a little pause.

"It's this man against me," he muttered, "and we're going to fight to a finish. I told you that day when we sat on the rock near Parker and talked things that I would never give you up. I reckoned you'd be taken in with the show and fuss of society in the East, and you'd forget your bringing up and your old friends; but De Chatras ain't going to get you away from me, and that's final."

Kate was on the point of losing her temper, as he had done, but again she controlled herself, and when she spoke it was in a quiet, subdued tone, but with a certain touch of pride that showed how deeply affected she had been by his words.

"I deny that I am carried away by what you call fuss and show, that I have forgotten who and what I am, or have turned my back on my friends of former times.

"Who are the friends you speak of? Where are they? Have I not been delighted to see you? Have I been guilty of betraying anybody? Have I ever refused an appeal for help from any one I ever knew out there?

"You are overstepping your rights in speaking to me as you do," she continued. "I will tell you this, I do not love De Chatras, and no one here can claim that I ever held out promises of that kind to any man. I forbid you to do anything against De Chatras. You have no right to be his enemy, unless you can prove that he is not a fit person for me to associate with."

She paused, and he held out his hand to her.

"I reckon I lost my head," he said, "and I apologize. But I'm going to show De Chatras up, and if I prove to you that he's not the right man for you, will you then think better of me?"

She gave him her hand and said:

"I cannot think better of you than I always have, Dick. I forgive you, of course, for getting so angry without cause. But I warn you not to go to extremes with a man who has never given me cause to suspect him of anything unworthy of a gentleman."

"I'm going to clear up the mystery that hangs over De Chatras before I leave Washington," was all he said.

(To be continued.)

SECRETS.

My flowers she wears at the dance to-night—
A cluster of roses red.
They nestle so close to her bosom white
That my heart is filled with a strange delight,
A mixture of hope and dread.

I cannot help wishing that I might be
A rose on her bosom white,
To feel her heart throbbing, and know that she
Would whisper her secrets, fair rose, to me
Instead of to you, to-night.

Sam S. Stinson.

My Foolish Trip To Boston.

BY GERALD N. COE.

And How I Asked for a Pickle and Was Given a Prize Package of Surprises.

A PRACTICAL plumber makes more than an average playwright.

It's no harder for the playwright to produce his goods than for the farmer, but it's a whole lot more difficult to sell them.

This isn't idle discourse. I know.

I've been a playwright. Hard as it is to make the confession, I'm putting it here in cold type, and I'll stand by it. I've been a playwright for fifteen years; during that time I have also been a clerk, bookkeeper, salesman, and street-car conductor.

But all the while I was a playwright just the same. Nothing could cure me, though I never had the slightest encouragement.

It's a horrible business, this unsolicited playwriting. It isn't play, by a long shot. It's a great deal like doing business for nothing all the time, and it's quite essential that you have a job on the side.

That's why, when I found myself out of work two months ago, I decided to run over to Boston and take a chance at securing a position as traveling salesman for a pickle firm. There were many applicants, but I had inside information and thought if I went to Boston and presented myself personally I would stand a pretty good chance of getting the job.

I didn't hear about it until noon on Monday. The situation would be filled by six o'clock that night, I was given to understand by one who knew. He advised me to go to Boston and try to nail the place.

It looked good to me; but I was in New York and had only twelve dollars in my pocket. If I went it would have to be in a hurry, as the office where I hoped to land the job would be closed at six, and it is some little trip to Boston.

I looked at my dollar watch and found it was ten minutes past twelve when I received the inside information. Then before my eyes flashed a little sign that used to hang over a former boss's desk. It read:

> HE WHO HESITATES IS LOST.

Not wishing to be lost in a big city like New York, I rushed at once to a telephone-booth and called up "Friend" wife.

"Hallo, is that you, Mabel?" I asked when I got the connection.

"Yes," came the answer; I recognized it as my wife's voice, but it sounded full of hairpins.

"What's the matter, are you going out?" I asked.

"Yes, I'm going out to do the shopping," she said. "I was just doing up my hair when the janitor's wife called me to the phone."

"Oh; that explains the dents in your voice then," I replied. "Well, I just called up to tell you I'm going to Boston."

"To Boston!" she cried in a vibrating tone that riddled my ear-drum. She seemed as surprised as though I were going to Etah.

"Yes, ever been there?" I asked facetiously.

"But what are you going to that dreadful old cow-path town for?" she cried in curiosity. "To sell a play?"

The sarcasm was fine. Mabel hardly sympathized with my efforts at play-writing. She always said it ate up the price of Easter bonnets and things.

Be that as it may, as they say on the stage, I explained to her about the inside information concerning the job, and added that while a job in Hoboken would be worth two in

Boston, it was either that or stand up with the rest in the old bread-line.

"Ferdinand," she said in a tone that Isabella often used with her more famous husband, "it's an idiotic idea. What if you don't get the job? I've only got seventy-eight cents in the house, and I was just going to ask you for some money. If you eat up all our capital in that one chance, we'll be destitute."

"But I can't lose," I told her feverishly. "I've got inside information that will land the job for me. I've had experience in the pickle line, and I'm going to make a try at it."

"You'll be sorry for it," she said. "But what will I do for money?"

"I'll mail you two dollars before I go," I answered ruefully. "The train leaves at one sharp. I've got to take the Paul Revere Limited in order to reach the pickle office before six o'clock. The job's open till then. It'll be a close squeak. I don't even know where the office is."

"What?" she cried. "You don't even know where the office is?"

"No," I answered calmly. "But I have their post-office address. It's Roxbury Crossing Station. I can find out from there. I've got the name of the company. It's the Proul Pickle Company, and their correspondence is sent to the subpostal station at Roxbury Crossing."

"Nice people to deal with."

"But the fellow who gave me the tip used to be a partner of old Proul, and he's given me a letter to him. It's got to be, I must land the job."

"Well," she sighed, "I suppose you're determined, and your failure will no doubt work up well for a new play."

That was the keenest satire of all. Every time I did anything foolish, she said she supposed I just did it to get material for a new play. But she appreciated my work, even if she did laugh at it. She blamed the theatrical managers who allowed me to remain undiscovered. It was always her theory that managers were all sheep, and that when one jumped the fence and bought a play from a new man the rest followed in sheepish fashion and made the playwright successful.

But be that as it may, as the villain always says; I slammed up the receiver and raced for the station. I was just in time to catch the train. It was a limited express, and I had to cough up excess fare, which entitled me to a chair in the smoking-car, as everything else was full.

The ticket cost me six dollars, I had mailed the two dollars to my wife, so I had just four left; but I remembered that if I lost out on the job I could return by boat, the fare being only three dollars by that route.

So I wasn't up against it, although my mind was in a maze as I took my seat. It was some time before I began to take note of the other passengers. To my great surprise they all seemed to be of one class. They were a Broadway-looking bunch.

The fellow next to me had a series of three diamond rings on his little finger and a watch-chain which started in the upper left-hand pocket of his vest and disappeared into the upper right-hand one, or else it ran the other way. I tried to puzzle the thing out for two or three minutes, but, anyway, the chain extended across his otherwise manly chest and made the diamond-shaped bits of purple in his waistcoat stand out vividly.

He had a smooth face and a comedian's mouth. A comedian's mouth is like the ordinary trouble-maker, only it is always furnished with a draw-string and dips down at the corners in a most surprising manner.

Before he said: "Rotten train, don't you think?" I knew he was either an affected Englishman or an actor. Then I knew he was an actor.

Having a sort of fellow feeling, I suggested:

"Yes, it's hardly worth the excess fare. But, I suppose you travel so much you find all trains below grade."

"Exactly," he replied. "But it will do. Yes, it will do quite well. You're not in the profession?"

"Not yet," I replied, choking down that old longing.

"Going to Boston?" he asked after a long impressive pause. It seemed that he wanted to talk to pass the tedium of the trip, and I was more than willing to converse with a real live actor.

"Yes, Boston," I answered, wondering if he thought I could get to Chicago on the Paul Revere Express, which doesn't even stop at Mount Vernon.

"I've been there the past week. Beastly hole," he remarked. "Lucky to escape to New York over Sunday."

"Yes, it's nice to escape from New York," I replied, a bit flustered by the impressive presence of the gentleman.

He twiddled his thin cane in his plush-fingers and looked annoyed.

"You are playing there?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, sweeping his arm toward

the other passengers. "So are most of the others. All down to New York for Sunday. It's a deadly hole, that Boston."

I trembled a bit with the thought that I was anxious enough to go there to look for a job as a pickle salesman. Then I pressed my right elbow cautiously against my breast-pocket, where reposed my pet play, "An Angel and a Backer."

A sudden idea flopped into my mind and flirted about like a radiant gold-fish in a parlor aquarium. Its tail swished through the troubled waters of my mind and made them leap and flash with beautiful iridescent lights.

Here was my chance: A tiresome railroad journey, a bored actor, an ingenious playwright. I would flash the play on him and he, to escape being bored, would begin reading it idly enough.

He would be struck by the possibilities of it at once, become interested, absorbed, enchanted, and finally buy the thing. Oh, it was too good to be true. I began making alterations and additions in several of my old castles in Spain.

"Yes, Boston is a dreary hole," he continued at that moment. "Full of playwrights."

I jumped and winced.

"Hope I haven't hurt your feelings," he said, with a slow smile. "I didn't stop to think that most everybody is a playwright nowadays."

Then I confessed, and tremblingly produced my pet and pride, "An Angel and a Backer."

"Won't you read it? Or would you rather have me read it to you?" I asked hesitatingly.

"Both— I — I — mean — *neither!*" he cried, bouncing from his seat with the bomb fear of a Black Hand victim in his eyes.

I caught hold of his arm and began reading with impassioned fervor. I forced him to listen, because I knew it would be worth his while.

A clever touch of pathos in the first act affected him so that he excused himself and went into the buffet-car to bathe his eyes and throat.

I didn't see any more of him until the end of the journey, though I kept a very sharp lookout. Evidently he had been so affected by the play that he feared to trust himself to hear the rest of it.

I was greatly disappointed, but he reappeared just as the porter was brushing me off; for I learned that I must get off at Back Bay Station to reach Roxbury Crossing, and I called to him.

"Sorry you didn't hear the rest of that play. It's got a good summer resort scene in it and some funny situations," I said.

"Oh, yes," he replied, dodging past me.

Then I forgot the wretched pipe-dream and concentrated my mind on business. Mabel was right. I wasted more time on plays and trying to sell them than I put in at other work. I must force the play out of my mind and get down to the pickle business. I must be pretty wide-awake to land the job.

As I jumped off at Back Bay, I was completely disillusioned about that play. The actor hadn't been interested in it from the start, I was sure. Why hadn't I spent my time figuring out a line of talk on pickles, instead of wasting it in futile efforts to interest an actor in my play?

I was pretty sore at myself as I jumped down into a howling winter gale and ran across to a corner drug-store to call up the Roxbury Crossing postal station and ask for the address of the Proul pickle concern. I shouldn't have wasted my time. This playwriting business would be the commercial death of me yet.

I got the subpostal station, but they wouldn't give me Proul's address without my going to their office, I don't know how many miles away. It was already twenty minutes to six, and I hadn't a second to lose.

I was up against it. But suddenly an illuminating thought came to my mind. I hurriedly looked through the "P's" in the telephone directory. There were four or five "Proul's" in the directory, and I was at a loss to know which was my man. But I found one which gave "Roxbury Crossing" as the telephone exchange.

I jotted down the address, and rushed out into the street. A policeman told me which car to take, and I arrived at Proul's at just two minutes to six.

Breathless and excited, I dashed in and found that luck was with me, and I had reached the right address.

Several men were waiting, and I handed my friend's letter to a clerk, asking that it be taken in to Mr. Proul at once.

He came out in a minute or two, and motioned me to go in. I walked on air. There wasn't the slightest doubt in my mind but that I would get the job.

I found a wiry little man sitting at his desk, and he looked me over carefully. I'm sure he was impressed with my looks, and it seemed to me that all that was left to do was

to discuss the amount of salary for which I would deign to assist him in disposing of his pickles.

"I'm glad to see you," he said, sticking out his hand.

"Yes. When shall I begin work?" I asked breathlessly.

He looked up at me in a very puzzled manner. Twice he started to speak, but thought better of it.

"I can start any time," I relieved his mind anxiously. "The sooner the better."

"I'm very sorry," he began slowly.

I didn't wait for him to finish, but cut in to reassure him.

"Oh, well, then, I can wait. My time is yours now, Mr. Proul."

"But," he said quickly, "I can't hire you. I've already filled the vacancy. I am very sorry that I can't accommodate the old partner of mine who gave you this letter. Under ordinary circumstances, I could have done so, but a most unusual salesman came in this morning, and I was so impressed with his ability that I gave him the position at once."

"You don't mean it!" I gasped.

The breath was knocked out of me completely. I had been so sure of this job that I had already considered asking him for a week's salary in advance.

"Yes, I'm sorry," he said.

I sat round wondering if he'd gone out of his mind or what. I had been morally certain of the position, and to have my footing snatched from under me in such a hasty manner was mighty depressing.

When I recovered sufficiently, I got up and said good-by. He was very polite, and saw me to the office-door. But that didn't help my injured feelings the least bit.

I thought of my wife, and her advice to stay home. It certainly had been a fool's errand.

To say that I was disappointed is putting it mildly. I thumbed over the four dollars remaining in my pocket and cursed my luck. It was only a little after six o'clock, but I would have no chance to get home that night. The river boats leave early in the afternoon, and I didn't have railroad fare back to New York.

So I had to make the best of it. I couldn't spare a cent of my cash, and I began to wonder mightily how I was going to sleep that night. It was too cold to sleep on the ground, and I didn't relish the idea of spending the night in a ten-cent lodging-house; but that was all my means afforded.

So I walked the streets for hours, trying to recall every horrible happening of my life. I succeeded rather well. As near as I could make out, I'd had a rather rotten deal in this game they call Life.

When I traced down my troubles to their origin, it always came to the same thing. My troubles had invariably come directly or indirectly through my abnormal appetite for play-writing.

I stood in the cold streets, and took a shivering oath that I would never write a play again as long as I lived. I vowed it with a full heart, but that didn't relieve me any.

Of course, I couldn't exactly blame my losing out on this job onto my play-writing proclivities; but I remembered that I hadn't kept my mind on business on the train, that I had tried to interest the actor in my play, and forgotten the bread-and-butter side of life. It was this attitude which had always been my undoing.

I passed the glaring entrance to a theater, and instinctively paused and read the advertisements.

Bah! I shivered. There was the place that had been responsible for my failure in life. The theater. I could have written a sermon against it at that moment.

I stood looking down dejectedly as the throngs passed into the place. I didn't look up once, my mind was too full of trouble.

Suddenly something underfoot arrested my attention. It looked a great deal like the familiar thin theater-ticket envelope. I had wasted many dollars on tickets, and instinctively reached down and picked this up.

My eyes bulged out suddenly as I saw that it contained a little red slip. Good gracious! As I pulled it out, I found that it was a really truly theater-ticket, and, on looking at the date, I learned it was good for that night.

Then the old passion surged over me, and I fell by the wayside. I went in to see the play on the ticket I had found, arguing to myself that it would be criminal neglect not to use it.

Of course, I might have tried to sell it and added the price of a night's lodging to my slender amount of money. But that would be foolish. I couldn't bear to see a ticket go for less than its face value.

So I went in, being but a frail human. The show began, and I liked the first half of the opening act rather well. Then I had a big jolt. The leading man came on, and I recognized him beyond a doubt as the fellow who had sat beside me in the train coming down, and had shied away from my play.

He acted well, but his vehicle was rotten. I patted "An Angel and a Backer" in my breast-pocket and smiled. There was no comparison between the two plays. Mine *was* what the other *tried* to be.

Comparisons are odious, as a rule; but this was the exception which showed proof. I smiled cynically to myself as I thought of the actor running away from my perfectly good play and picking up with this pitiful show.

Before the end of the first act people began to leave. It was a good house, but it was a first-night performance, and I learned from remarks made around me that the thing had never been tried out before.

It went flat. Before the middle of it I was half inclined to leave myself. I remembered then that I had heard of the leading man before; he was a small star who had possibilities, and I was sorry for him that the play proved a failure. I even thought of substituting mine. But what a chance!

Well, I went out after the show with a very bad taste in my mouth. I am surprised I stayed that long, but the fascination of even a rotten play was great, and I couldn't resist.

I stood on the street-corner wondering which way to go. I couldn't spare more than ten cents for a bed, if I intended to ever get home, and I couldn't make up my mind to encounter a lodging-house even in my pauperish condition.

While I was standing there, a man passed by, looked sidewise at me, and then turned abruptly and gazed straight in my face. To my great astonishment, it was the actor. My hand instinctively went to my breast pocket. I almost pulled out "An Angel and a Backer" without thinking of the consequences, when he reached out and shook my hand.

His face was wreathed in smiles.

"Hallo," he said. "Glad to see you."

I remembered his lack of joy the last time he had seen me, and marveled at the change.

"What are you doing here?" he asked abruptly, as I stood speechless on the curb.

"Nothing," I answered.

"Suppose you come over and have a little lunch with me," he suggested, resuming his former worried air.

Lunch! I gasped. I was hollow inside, having sacrificed everything for the price of my trip home. It sounded like heaven to me, and I accepted in a very precipitant manner, I fear.

I wondered mightily at the change in him and how he could take a man to lunch just after the failure of his play. He was a most remarkable person.

"Well," he said, after we had ordered, "was your trip to Boston successful."

"Not very," I replied casually.

"You didn't dispose of your play, then?" he asked, with more than ordinary interest.

"My play!" I cried, my fingers eagerly clutching it and dragging it forth.

"Yes, didn't you say something about your play having a summer resort setting and some good situations?"

"Yes," I answered, swallowing the frog in my throat.

"Well, I'm interested," he went on abruptly. "I'm afraid I was a bit brusk on the train. You see, I was thinking of my new play to-night. But now it's a flat failure and I'm open for something new.

"I'm tired of the regular plays the managers hand to me; I'm going to get a play of my own, and see what I can do with it. I want something with a summer-resort setting. Will you read me your play after lunch?"

You could have knocked me over with a mosquito's leg. Would I read the play? Say! It was like offering a man a drink after he's been lost in a desert for fifteen years.

I choked down the food, and read the play afterward. The most startling thing of all was that he liked it.

He took me around to his manager that very night, and the next day all papers were signed, and I received two hundred and fifty dollars advance royalties.

I telegraphed my wife to come to Boston and meet me, and when I saw her at the train I made her take back all she had to say about my foolish trip to Boston.

It was just as she said. Theatrical managers are sheep. One jumped the fence in my case, and now I'm besieged with orders for plays. I've sold six old ones that I had pickled, and am writing a new one.

If you're in New York next week, come round and see me at the Waldorf. I'll give you a pass to my opening night next Monday. Advance press notices on it have been great. I'm made.

I wouldn't look a pickle in the face now. I'm above that sort of thing. I've thanked Heaven a thousand times that Providence intervened and kept me from getting that twenty-dollar-a-week job.

While the average playwright doesn't make as much as a plumber, when one really arrives he gets the coin handed to him in bunches.

Excuse me, I've got to receipt for a check for one thousand, advance royalties, for that new show I was telling you about.

His Risen Past.

BY GEORGE M. A. CAIN,

Author of "Ways to Wealth," "Over the Partition," "His Stolen Fortune," etc.

The Shadow That Fell Athwart a Man's Career as It Was About to Reach Its Zenith on Election-Night.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

THE evening that Wilbur Johnson is elected mayor of the growing oil city of Beckwith, Jim Totten, one of the poorer class of citizens, comes to him and demands his vote in favor of a traction franchise, the company wanting the franchise having agreed to pay him for all the aldermen's votes procurable. Upon Johnson's irate refusal, Totten shows him a telegram, which he says he will send to the police of New York, tipping the latter off to the fact that Johnson, and a certain Wilbur Daworth, who disappeared eight years before with forty thousand dollars of the Howardson National Bank, are the same. Johnson offers Totten six hundred dollars to let him off, which Totten accepts, and signs a paper pledging to maintain silence concerning Johnson's alleged connection with the bank robbery, and receives two hundred dollars on account. He then gets the traction company to increase their offer, but when he returns to Johnson, to bleed him for more, he finds himself helpless, because of the agreement he has signed. Yet somehow police from out of town have hit upon the real identity of the mayor-elect, and he is forced to flee from town; though by so doing he deserts his sweetheart, his fortune, and leaves his name besmirched. Arranging matters so that it will appear that he has committed suicide, he goes to St. Louis, and thence to Winfield, Kansas. There remorse that some innocent man and his family may be suffering for his weakness and crime, makes him telephone to the Pittsburgh police department and tell them to release a certain suspect they have arrested, and that he is coming to give himself up. Yet the thought of prison and the sound of the telephone-operator's voice, detailing to the local Winfield police what he has just telephoned, drive him again toward freedom. He rushes out to the train-shed, and, barely escaping from the station-guards and the police, catches a train that has already started. He learns that he is being carried toward Wellington, Kansas, and there, he concludes, he will have to give himself up to the law. In order not to be arrested at the next station, Wellington, he jumps from the train and hides in a shack by a cornfield. At nightfall he comes to a crossroads village and goes into the store to buy food. The men inside look at him suspiciously, and he learns that a notorious highway robber has been raiding the locality. Relieved that they do not suspect him, he goes away with his purchases, but has gone a very short distance when he is halted. The man stopping him, covers him with a revolver and bids him extend his arms so that handcuffs may be adjusted. Again the terror of prison inflames Johnson. He strikes out madly. His opponent's gun is discharged, and the man himself falls over the side of the bridge and is killed by striking an iron stanchion. The villagers, roused by the shot, come out and praise Johnson for killing the man, who turns out to have been the robber. Next day they insist upon his going to the county-seat to go through whatever formalities are necessary before the court. He is complimented by the judge on having rid the county of such a pest, and presented with fifteen thousand dollars—the reward offered for the capture—dead or alive—of the robber. As he is leaving the court-room, the Winfield telephone-girl who overheard him talking with the Pittsburgh police department, comes in with a police officer. But just as Johnson is being questioned by the latter, the girl says this is not the man she meant. Johnson learns later that she told this lie to save him, because her brother has been murdered by the very robber he had killed the night before. The girl, however, bids him hurry away.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FRESH START.

TEN days later a man with neatly trimmed beard and mustache registered in a moderate-priced hotel in Denver. He registered upon the big book as Norman J. Brucher, and then left immediately after seeing that his suit-case was stored in his room.

In his hand was a list of quiet boarding-houses clipped from a morning newspaper.

At lunch-time he returned to the hotel, ate a square meal, then paid his bill, took the suit-case and left again. Boarding a trolley-car, he rode to the corner of a very respectable side street. Half a block brought him to the door of a somewhat solemn-look-

* **This story began in The Cavalier for April.**

ing brick house. On the door-frame a neat enamel sign bore the words:

Furnished Rooms with Board.

He opened the door with a thin key, walked up two flights of stairs and turned to the front of the house, where he entered a fair-sized room with two windows overlooking the street. Laying his suit-case down upon a chair, he stepped back to close the door.

"Is everything all right, Mr. Brucher?" a feminine voice asked as its owner, a matronly widow of forty-five, approached.

"Quite satisfactory, Mrs. Gordon. It is very kind of you to get things arranged so quickly," the man said. "I shall feel very much at home here, I am sure."

"I only hope the air cures your throat trouble," the widow spoke with a more than professional sympathy.

"It is only a slight tendency, I think, anyhow," Brucher replied. "I hope I shall be able to find something to do that will enable me to stay in Denver. I don't think I shall ever have any serious trouble here. The air is doing me good already."

"I'm glad you like the room," the woman said, and walked away.

She shook her head a little sadly as she started down-stairs. Her son, she had told the new boarder, had died of tuberculosis.

Had she seen the face of the newcomer as he dropped into a chair and gazed out over the silent street and the solemn-looking houses opposite, she would have regarded his case even more hopelessly than she did.

It was pale beneath the superficial tan of exposure. There were wrinkles at the corners and rings beneath the vacantly staring blue eyes. The cheeks were hollow and ended in deep grooves running downward from the sides of his drawn mouth. The lips seemed to arrange themselves automatically into a mirthless smile.

It was thus that Wilbur Johnson settled himself to begin his new life.

He had carried out his rôle of hypochondriac pedestrian only as far as the first railroad station after leaving the friends he had acquired in the village on the banks of the Arkansas. With fifteen hundred dollars in his pocket, he could plan a much better sort of flight than he had originally intended.

His first purpose had been to attempt something in the mining districts of Colorado, getting as far from civilization as possible, yet giving himself a chance to earn, in some way, the means of livelihood.

Somehow the receipt of the reward for the killing of Red Mahew had convinced him that he would never lack for mere money. What poor consolation the possession of dollars could afford him for the loss of everything else would be his.

It had been comparatively safe for him to travel while the New York police were accepting the theory of suicide on his part. But he had expected that the failure to find his body in the lake at Beckwith would start them to renewed efforts.

Instead of this they seemed content to let the matter drop. Doubtless they had other things to attend to besides the searching for the perpetrator of an eight-year-old crime, and were rather glad to accept the theory of the criminal's self-destruction as saving them further trouble in the matter.

At all events, the news of Beckwith's disappearing mayor-elect ceased, in a few days, to be of sufficient consequence to appear in the papers.

Even the ruse he had used upon the Indianapolis police to secure Horace Turner's release had been accounted for as the work of some overzealous friend of the prisoner. Turner had been freed before Johnson had telephoned, anyhow.

It is quite likely that Johnson would have been safe, even though the police had still kept up their search. He had lost flesh, especially from his face. This fact, together with the growth of his beard, had provided a disguise through which only a former acquaintance could have recognized him.

He had reached Denver by a somewhat circuitous route, intended at first to throw pursuers off his trail. He now concluded that he need hardly go into the wilderness.

His experience in the country had only trained him for the easier varieties of farm life. On the other hand, he possessed some money and fair knowledge of city business methods, which would serve him in good stead in town.

His latest alias he had selected with considerable care. It was precisely the sort of name that would be least suspected—German, neither elaborate nor too common. It went well with his appearance since he had grown the beard.

It had been the last thing required to bury him from the past and prepare him to commence entirely anew. He felt that he was quite as safe as he had been the morning

he dropped from a freight-car in the valley where Beckwith, Ohio, now stood.

He rose from his seat and took the suit-case from the other chair. Placing it upon the bed, he opened it, and started to put the few articles it contained into the empty drawers of the chiffonier. Then he picked up the newspaper he had dropped upon the top of the piece of furniture.

Leaving the rest of the unpacking for another hour, he sat down again and commenced a careful scrutiny of the back inside pages of the paper, where were the columns of "Help Wanted" advertisements.

There were but three or four of these which could possibly have interested him. And, when he had finished each of these little notices, he slowly shook his head. They were such as would require references concerning his past. It may be possible to escape a past. It is quite another matter to create a new past.

"Quite another matter," he slowly repeated the thought half aloud, as the paper dropped unheeded upon his knee. "Quite another matter indeed."

"Yes," he added after a few moments' further reflection, "and, in the deeper things, in what pertains to oneself, you can't escape from the past."

Once he had nearly done it for a time. But there had been only a little past then. At eighteen there had not been much to leave. The one dark thing in that past had, however, risen to undo him at last, after shadowing his thought for years.

But now those years, eight and a quarter of them filled with the beginnings of a real life, were added to that past. No matter whether the world ever discovered him again or not, there was too much of it for himself to get away from.

He could not escape the memory of an honorable prosperity which had been snatched from him. He could not escape from the fact that his heart had been filled with the love of a splendid woman until there was no room for thought of another love. He was not sure that he would wish to escape from these things if he could.

But the past two weeks had brought other things from which he would gladly have escaped at the cost of becoming a day-laborer for the rest of his life. There were the things that had taught him to dread the future, to distrust himself, to shrink from his own very shadow.

A hundred times he had thought he would give all the pleasures he had known, all that he might know, could he return to Beckwith and take up what he had left there—if by doing so he might blot out the record of that fortnight of weakness.

Sometimes it seemed to him that he could be happy in the face of all the other losses, could he forget just a few scattered hours and minutes and seconds of those fourteen days.

Those were the hours when he had stood ready to sell out his city to the East Ohio Traction Company before he conceived the trick that had made the sale needless; the minutes when he had faltered in his purpose to give himself up and save Horace Turner; the seconds when he had struck Red Mahew in his insane rage and terror, and sent the bandit's body into lifeless pulp beneath the bridge.

For in each of these cases it had been no fault of his that he had escaped the moral obliquity involved. He would have gone on and voted for the traction franchise had he not thought of another way to stop Jim Totten's mouth.

Again it had been the invention of a ruse which had saved him from allowing another man to endure imprisonment in his stead. He felt that he would never have given himself up, that he would always have turned back at the last moment, though Horace Turner had been sentenced to years of confinement at hard labor.

In the last, worst case of all, it had been only chance which had saved him from the gallows. When he had struck that fatal blow he had supposed he was striking an officer of the law bent upon the performance of duty.

True, he had not intended or thought of killing the man. But he knew well enough that any jury would have convicted him for murder if Red Mahew had been what he had thought he was striking. By this time he had become sufficiently convinced of his own weakness to believe that, should like circumstances again arise, he would be quite capable of any crime to secure his freedom.

These weeks had cost him his fortune; he might set about gaining another. They had cost him his heart's love; men have grown the stronger for such loss. They had cost him his faith in himself. He knew no way to restore that.

Now he knew that there was an irremediable flaw in his character, a dark thing that he could not resist, which could drive him to what depths of moral obloquy it would.

Vaguely he wondered whether all men

were like him; whether, hidden in the breast of each of the hundreds of millions of mankind, there were the consciousness of some mastering evil.

One after another he called up the things he knew of various acquaintances. Some were bad men, who made no apparent effort to conquer their vicious tendencies. Perhaps he had unjustly condemned them for that they could not help. But there were others —a few others—who seemed too firmly entrenched in goodness to be overwhelmed by any temptation or fear. But—had they ever been brought face to face with the thing that might have wrecked them?

At last his mind fastened upon the memory of a certain carpenter who had been in his employ for five years. He had picked the man out of the gutter.

Again and again during the first year he had been on the point of discharging the drunken Irishman for his uncontrollable weakness. Then, quite suddenly, Mike had announced his intention of " making a mission " in the little church which most of the laboring people of Beckwith attended.

And Mike had shamefacedly acknowledged that he had taken the pledge under the powerful stimulus of a terrible sermon on intemperance.

But he had kept sober for five years. Each day of his life he passed the doors of half a dozen saloons. The beer-pails of his fellow workmen were around him at lunch-time six noons out of every seven.

" Yes," he admitted slowly, " Mike Murphy has beaten his enemy. But—"

He paused, spent a moment idly thinking of a form for a pledge he might take wherewith to meet the foe he could not resist. The thought, which occurred to his mind, of turning himself over to the police—he did not even seriously consider. To get away from it he picked up the paper again and let his eye wander over the financial quotations.

The first line struck him as somehow familiar. He seemed to have seen it several times lately:

	High	*Low*
Ackerson Copper	43½	43¼

He could not tell where he had seen it. Of course, it must have been in the papers. He could not remember ever having seriously read the column of " Outside Securities " before.

Yet that particular line seemed to him as well known as a verse from some poem he had once recited in school.

He must have seen it somewhere. He could not get away from the feeling that he had seen it often and quite recently. Then he wondered why he should interest himself in whether he had seen it or not.

He glanced on down the column. He noted how things were still tumbling lower and lower as a result of the panic which had already begun to affect business in Beckwith before he left.

It had not affected him particularly, save to make it necessary to slow down his operations somewhat. But it had badly frightened some of his friends whose work had to depend largely upon borrowed capital.

His eye wandered back to the first line. Figures and all, it seemed more familiar than ever.

Suddenly it acquired a meaning. If he had seen that line before just the same as it stood now, Ackerson Copper must be one line of stock that was holding its value when almost everything else was falling lower and lower.

And what could that have to do with him?

Nothing at all if Ackerson Copper was so thoroughly solid that it could withstand the stress of these times. But his quick business instinct told him that there might be a good deal in it if Ackerson Copper happened to be one of the things that was merely waiting rather longer than other things for its plunge into the general downfall.

He must do something to earn money. He had not enough to invest in any business of any consequence. He could not furnish the necessary references to obtain employment.

Playing the market would at least furnish diversion. If it did take away all his money, he could find work on a farm, which was about as good as anything else which was open for him just now.

He went to the office of the nearest newspaper and bought a whole month's back numbers. These he took to his room. From them he quickly discovered a reason for his familiarity with that line.

The name of the mine stood at the head of all the lists, owing to its beginning with the first letters of the alphabet. And in searching for news pertaining to himself he had lately been compelled to look over back pages where the line must have fallen under his eye.

But he learned many other things from his study of the papers. He added to this by another trip, to a broker's office, where he secured a copy of the mine's prospectus. He remained in the office to peruse this little volume.

It was after closing time when he had

finished, and the manager of the office was growing manifestly impatient for his departure. There were other things that he would have liked to look up, but he decided to accept the South Dakota incorporation of the company for evidence of its standing.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," he said quietly to the man with the engaging smile restored to his face. "But would you be willing to take my selling order for as much Ackerson Copper as you can on a thousand dollars margin? I'd like it shoved through the first thing in the morning."

"Ackerson Copper?" the manager repeated in surprise. "How much do you want?"

"I'd like to cover just two points, if you'll take it at that."

"We'll take it. We'd take it at one."

"All right, a thousand shares then—at forty-three and a half if you can get it. But down to forty-three, if necessary. I'll be here to tell you when I want to cover."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A PLAY FOR FORTUNE'S SMILE.

HE knew that the place was a bucket-shop. He had not been sure when he entered. The fact made no difference to him.

Had he been in a position to make a really large selling deal, he might have given the push that would send down the stocks as he expected them to go.

Not being in such a position, he must wait till some one else did that for him. Under these circumstances a bucket-shop was just as good a place as any for his purposes. In fact, it was better, for it did not charge him interest on the whole amount of the stock.

"I suppose I am making a fool of myself," he said slowly, as he climbed the stairs to his room once more. "If that were only the worst thing I had ever been!"

He sat down and resumed his heedless staring out of the window and his gloomy thinking of the past. Lower and lower he sank into the depths of despair. The tinkling of a bell below startled him to realization that it had long been dark.

He glanced at his watch, holding it so that the light of the arc-lamp across the street fell upon it. It was six o'clock, the hour at which Mrs. Gordon had said dinner was served.

He turned on his electric light and made a hasty toilet before descending to the basement. Then he stood in the dining-room for a moment waiting for the maid to show him his place among the twenty-odd guests of the place.

He was given no introduction to the others. The maid had spoken in a voice loud enough for all to hear, "Mr. Brucher, you will please sit here," and that had been introduction enough.

Those nearest him said "Good evening" as he took his seat.

Then they left him alone, save to offer him assistance by passing him anything he could not reach.

There was little conversation during the early part of the meal. The attention of all seemed taken up with the matter of satisfying good appetites. The new guest had nearly finished his roast, when a young man entered the room as though in a great hurry.

"Good evening, all," he said breezily, as he sat down in the one vacant chair at the table.

Instantly the room seemed to take on animation. Everybody returned the last comer's greeting.

"Late as usual," one of the ladies said, pursing her lips in mock severity.

"Really, I couldn't help it to-night," the young man said with a tone quite lacking the apologetic quality of his words.

"I suppose the cars were blocked by a fire, and you started to walk home and saw a poor woman up on the top floor that needed rescuing, and got yourself so badly mussed up leading her through the roaring furnace that you had to go to a tailor's and wait for him to make you a new suit."

This speech came from another female member of the company.

The tardy youth laughed with the others.

"Now, look here," he grumbled, "I never said I rescued that woman. I merely told how I had stopped to watch a fireman do it. Any one would have done that. But it wasn't a fire to-night, nor a block of the cars."

"Don't tell us you've got a new excuse," two or three cried in derision.

"I stopped for some business."

"Bet you your dessert I can give a general line on the business," another young man now entered the bantering.

"I won't take you," the last arrival replied.

"I'll bet you got a tip that some stock was going to jump about forty points the first thing to-morrow. Then you took time to go and see Michaelson at your pet bucket-shop, and he told you the tip was all to the good.

"You've got down all your last week's wages but your board-bill. And to-morrow will see Mr. Michaelson taking his little sponge to wipe you off his slate when the stock makes the mistake of dropping out of sight."

The breezy young man flushed a little, but he kept his good-natured smile.

"But this tip is a good one," he defended himself.

"You can let us have it. It won't hurt us. We don't play the game, anyhow."

"Well—it's this. The Luckheimer Brothers are going to secure control of Ackerson Copper to-morrow. They're satisfied it's good stuff."

"And, what's the answer?"

"The answer is that the stock jumps as though it were sitting on pins. I suppose it's no use to advise you all to get in."

It wasn't. But there was one listener who might have been readily persuaded to get out.

Still, he smiled with that cold, made-up smile which was the only smile he could produce in these days. He was smiling to think how little difference it made whether his money went from him or grew big in his hands.

No, he did not care. As he reached his room and sat down once more to that everlasting thinking which had been growing into a habit, which threatened to plunge him into melancholia, he spent but a moment trying to decide whether to reverse his order to the bucket-broker.

"Let it go," he said calmly, and turned to his usual dismal introspections.

"Let it go," he spoke bitterly as he saw the figures put up on the board next morning, and noted that Ackerson Copper had gone up a quarter of a point.

"Let it go," he repeated to himself as he watched the column under the abbreviation "Ack. Cop.," and waited for another change of the figures.

Soon it came. Underneath the first quotations the busy young man with a long black dust-sleeve on each arm wrote "45."

Wilbur smiled grimly still. In his thoughts of himself last night he had taken into account the queer fact that he seemed to smile all the time nowadays. That make-believe grin with which he sought to disguise his inner misery, which never reached up to his eyes, seemed fixed upon his mouth.

The smile stayed during the long interval before another change was made in the figures. Then it disappeared. Enough excitement was being brought into the game to make it seem interesting a little bit at least. The quotation was 45¼.

Three-quarters of his money was gone. He could now order a fictitious buying to cover his fictitious sales, saving just two hundred and fifty of the thousand he had given the manager yesterday afternoon. But his interest was still only that of a gambler playing for stakes he can easily afford to lose.

No, he decided indifferently; he would not pull out yet. He would wait and see the other fraction written down, the one which would reduce him to the necessity of seeking immediate employment.

He stepped up to the manager and asked to pay his commissions outside the margin he had put up. It nearly stripped him, but it left him in the game until his point of margin should have gone.

He sat down again and listened to the almost unceasing click of the telegraph. He watched the young man hurrying from column to column, writing busily the reports of prices falling—all but Ackerson Copper. The old smile had come again to his lips.

"Ackerson is still rising," the marker spoke cheerfully as he danced across the board to the first column of the "Unlisted." He glanced past Wilbur toward some one farther to the rear.

Johnson turned about to see who it might be who was profiting while he lost. His gaze met the eyes of the breezy young man who had come to the boarding-house late for dinner last night.

"Hallo!" that individual spoke cheerily. "You in the game, too?"

Johnson still smiled.

"I guess I'm just out of it," he said. "I sold Ackerson short."

"I guess you're done for, then," the callow youth grinned. "I'm sorry for you; but it's going to help me. It will go to forty-eight yet, if I'm not off in my guess."

"It looks so," Wilbur yet smiled.

"I don't like this eighth-point advancement, though. I wish it would keep up the quarters. Looks as though it was getting shaky."

Johnson had not looked at the last quotation. He had taken for granted that it was forty-five and a half. He turned and glanced at the board. The figures were "45⅜."

"I guess I'll wait for the end," he said, dropping back into his chair.

"Where do you get off?" his new acquaintance asked.

"At the half," Johnson replied, when he thought he caught the meaning of the query.

"That's just where I'm going to climb up higher. I'll be able to double my margin when it touches the half.

"Why didn't you play that Luckheimer tip?" the youth asked a moment later.

"I don't know," Johnson smiled. "I never heard much good about tips."

"Well, you're right about most of them. But I got this from a friend who's in the game big. And he had it straight enough so that he's put in a couple of thousand. Here we go. I can catch 'a' on the sounder."

The smile fell again from Wilbur's lips. He felt enough interest in the finish of his money to look natural as the marker reached for the column that told the destiny of his wealth.

CHAPTER XIX.

FORTUNE OBLIGES.

WILBUR JOHNSON was not the only spectator who stared hard at the figures that the marker left at the bottom of the column.

The manager of the bucket-shop stared. One or two others stared.

Most of all the young man from Johnson's boarding-house stared.

Then the hands of the breezy youth went forward upon the seat in front of him. His plump, rosy features lost their color as he buried them in his hands. A groan escaped from the bloodless lips that had talked so confidently a moment before.

Wilbur glanced for only an instant at the collapsed, huddled figure. The thought flashed into his mind that in hundreds of other rooms like this one, perhaps, hundreds of other young men had flung out their hands in gestures of hopelessness and cried forth their misery at sight of those two figures.

Perhaps some of them had enough margin up to hope for a rally. But they were being wiped out one after another; for the marker stayed beside the Ackerson Copper column and wrote single figures to denote the fall, point by point, of the stock.

He halted when he had written down forty. Johnson turned again to the huddled heap. Then he considered that the young man might wait. Whatever he himself might do to help there, he had a chance now to greatly increase his profits.

"I'll cover now," he said briskly to the manager. "Put the profits on more margin. Sell sixty-five hundred shares."

To his momentary astonishment the manager gave the order to the telegraph operator: "Buy a thousand Ackerson."

There was a rapid clicking of the instrument for ten seconds.

"Sell sixty-five hundred," he said quickly.

Wilbur eyed him carefully. There was more delay about this last transaction. And the man who had supposed he was giving fictitious orders caught a gleam of satisfaction in the eye of the one who had made them real.

Then he understood. The bucket-shop manager was giving real orders with a definite purpose. He hoped to stop Wilbur's gains by proving that there was no chance to sell Ackerson stock any more.

But the gleam of satisfaction died quickly. The manager once more assumed his business smile, that engaging, open, winning smile which was his real stock in trade. The operator had said the single word, "Sold."

The men who had been trying frantically to keep Ackerson up for the past three weeks were making a desperate stand now, and taking as much as they could of the inpouring avalanche of stocks.

The young marker had stepped to other columns on his huge wall of little black squares. Now he came back to that first "Unlisted" column again.

"Do you want to cover now?" the manager asked him when the quotations had dropped to thirty.

Johnson spent a moment in thought. While he thought he studied the manager's face.

"Not yet," he answered laconically. Then he turned his attention to the collapsed figure upon the chair behind him.

"Brace up, old man," he said.

The young man shivered, and a sob was his only audible answer.

"How much did you lose?" Johnson asked again. He had walked around to the other's side and laid a hand upon the bent shoulder.

Still there was no reply. The shoulder shook a little as though the sympathetic hand were distasteful. Wilbur took it away, and stood, trying to think of some new words with which to approach the grieving youth.

Suddenly the bent figure straightened. The breezy, cheerful youngster of last night stood up. For an instant he looked at Johnson, and Johnson looked at him. Then he started for the door.

Wilbur did not think he had ever seen a face quite like that before. He had seen men in deep distress, and there was deep distress upon the young man's face. He had seen great fear, and he knew this man was desperately afraid.

But there was something else written in the countenance before him—something which he had never seen. Yet he knew instinctively what it meant as well as if he had seen the youth place the muzzle of a pistol to his head.

Quickly he seized the limp arm that dangled nervously through a sleeve almost frayed at the bottom. With a swift movement he hurled the desperate fellow back into a chair.

"You stay here till I'm ready to go," he spoke sternly. "It will be closing time in half an hour. Then I want to talk to you."

A momentary look of resentment flashed into the dull eyes. The trembling limbs made a feeble attempt to lift the weight of the stooping body. Johnson gave another thrust with his arm, and the young man sat meekly back and stayed there.

Wilbur did not sit down again. He stood guard between the would-be suicide and the door for twenty-five minutes.

"You may cover my sales now," he said quietly to the manager of the office.

"Buy sixty-five hundred Ackerson Copper," the manager bade the operator.

"Bought—at sixteen and a half," came back in the fraction of a minute.

"Stay where you are for a moment," Johnson spoke harshly to the young man as he walked to the desk to settle his account.

He watched the rapid figuring of the commissions and noted the manner in which they were taken without making any comment. He merely glanced at the clock as he folded a check for one hundred and seven thousand, five hundred and ninety-five dollars and put it into his pocket. Even the manager stared at the indifference with which he took his phenomenal gains.

"We'll be glad to handle your business for you in the future," the manager smiled as Johnson started away. He wanted to get all that money back, and Johnson understood.

"I shall not trade in stocks again," Wilbur said firmly. "I've had enough."

He glanced again at the clock.

"Is there any one you could send with me to verify my signature so that I can deposit this money?" he asked of the manager.

"I'll be glad to accommodate you," that gentleman replied. "I have to go to the bank myself, anyhow. Wait just a few moments."

Wilbur had hardly expected this accommodation. Evidently the manager still had hopes for future business in which the stock gambler's almost inevitable losses would more than restore what he had so suddenly won.

"You can ride up in my machine with me," the manager offered when he had settled up the accounts of the few customers who remained.

"Come now," Wilbur spoke to the huddled figure that humbly waited his command.

The manager frowned a little at this. But he made no complaint, and the three got into the big touring-car.

Half an hour later Wilbur Johnson walked out of the bank with a large check-book under his arm, and a smaller book in his pocket. On the outside of this book was written the name "Norman J. Brucher." On the inside was a debit against the bank of one hundred and seven thousand, five hundred and ninety-five dollars.

"We'll have some lunch now," he said to the young man, who leaned limply upon one of the little desks along the corridor for the use of the customers of the bank. He had just thanked the manager for his trouble and for an invitation to take a spin about the city.

"Where's a first class place?" he demanded. "I guess I can afford a good meal this afternoon."

The youth directed him and followed at his side.

"I haven't heard your name, I believe," Wilbur spoke again while they waited for the oysters.

"Ralph Meade," the young man replied. "And yours?"

"Brucher," Wilbur said laconically. He did not heed the hand which Meade held out toward him.

For some reason he did not seem to like the young man. He had made up his mind to get him out of trouble. But he did not care to have any effusion over the matter.

"Now, we'll go home," were the next words he uttered.

The meal had been eaten in absolute silence—dejected silence it was on the part of both of them.

"Come up to my room," Wilbur commanded as he paid the chauffeur of the taxi-cab which had brought him to the door of the boarding-house. Meade obeyed him.

He motioned the youth into a chair and took another facing him.

"How much did you lose on Ackerson Copper to-day?" he inquired directly.

At last some flicker of pride and will asserted itself in Ralph Meade's broken spirit.

"Why do you ask? What is it to you, anyhow? What are you trying to get at?" he growled.

Yet his voice lost the ring of indignation and quivered weakly at the end.

"Was it your own money?"

The words, spoken in an undertone, were yet as forcefully uttered as though they had been thunderbolts striking the weak boy in the heart. For an instant there was a flash of fire in the dark eyes. But Johnson's were riveted upon them unwaveringly, and they quickly fell.

Then, once more, Meade's hands covered his face as he leaned forward in that hopeless heap he had made of himself through the last hours at the broker's office. Sobs shook the youthful frame. Tears trickled through between the carefully manicured fingers.

Wilbur Johnson overcame a feeling of contempt for such a demonstration of misery over the loss of a few dollars. He overcame it by jabbing his own conscience as to the manner in which he was weak. When, at last, he spoke, it was in a voice of sympathy almost feminine.

"Tell me all about it."

Ralph Meade looked up for an instant. Then he sobbed out the truth.

A sordid little story it was. The young man was employed as both buyer and salesman by a small concern. To him had been entrusted the disbursement of certain payments that morning.

It was the company's thousand dollars that had gone—the company's time he had wasted in losing its money. Wilbur listened in silence until it was all told.

"Have you ever used your employer's money that way before?" he demanded.

"No—yes, once. I won that time."

Quietly Johnson undid the paper round his new check-book. He drew his fountain pen from his pocket and wrote upon the first of the blank checks. Tearing it loose from the page, he handed it to Meade.

"Take that to the bank to-morrow morning, and cash it or have it certified. Then pay your bills with it," he said.

Meade shook his head.

"I couldn't pay you back in three years," he spoke mournfully.

"You'll pay me back right now," Johnson answered, "by listening to a little sermon from one who knows what he is talking about. When I've got through, I'll let you pay the rest in another way.

"Meade, every man in this world has some special inherent weakness—a besetting sin, I think, the regular preachers call it. And, no matter what other things a man overcomes, no matter how many good deeds he performs—he is not all of a man until he conquers that particular weakness.

"Yours, I see, is gambling; mine—well, never mind what mine is. That's the end of the sermon.

"Now, we'll call that payment of about twenty-five cents. For the rest. Do you happen to have a Bible in your room?"

"Y—yes," Meade replied, looking as though he wondered how soon Johnson's mental malady might become violent.

"Bring it here," Wilbur ordered.

"To pay the rest of that thousand dollars," he said when Meade came back with a volume from which he had not brushed quite all the dust, "you will place your hand on that book and solemnly swear that, for the rest of your life, you will never wager a cent upon any gambling device or game, or pay a dollar of margin on a stock, so help your God."

Ralph Meade quivered a little, then uttered a feeble protest. Johnson was inexorable.

"It's that or prison for yours," he snapped. "I'll stop payment on that check before the bank opens if you don't."

Raising a trembling right hand, Ralph repeated after him the words that Wilbur pronounced.

There was a pause of some minutes before the young man rose with a sigh and started to leave the room.

"By the way, Meade," Johnson asked, as if they had never had any dealing before in their lives, "have you lived in Denver long?"

"All my life," Ralph answered.

"Know anything about suburban real-estate here?"

"Why—a little. My firm deals with builders."

"How much are you worth as a salesman?"

"Well—er—my salary is twelve hundred."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-one."

"Meade, I don't think you deserve to keep your job. If you'll resign after you've paid those bills to-morrow, I'd like to talk over a contract for your services with me in some suburban real-estate business I intend to undertake."

Impulsively the young man reached out his hand. This time Wilbur took it and grasped it warmly.

"I'll be here at noon, if convenient to you," Meade promised.

When he was gone Johnson sat silently gazing at the figure opposite the empty space at the top of the first page of his new check-book.

"A fair fortune—won in a day," he commented.

His face had assumed that fixed smile about the mouth—the smile which never reached his eyes.

"Thank Heaven, the first of it went to save somebody. But—oh—all of it can't save me."

Then he sat smiling solemnly as he gazed out of the window until the supper-bell rang.

CHAPTER XX.

FORTUNE LAUGHS ALOUD.

EARLY the next afternoon Wilbur, with Ralph Meade, started in an electric cab and visited several outlying districts. Of three or four of these, whose limits were touched by the ends of car-lines, Johnson made special note, marking them on a map of the city which he had secured during the morning.

With this map, he went to a real-estate brokerage the second morning.

"Find out for me just how I can get a hundred acres at one of these spots, and how much it will take to acquire options on nine hundred more," he said.

It was quite in accord with the manner in which Dame Fortune always rained gold upon Johnson while denying him every joy of wealth that a thousand acres in one of the places he had selected was in the hands of a man so badly tangled up financially that he was glad to sell the whole for a little less than fifty dollars an acre.

"It's the least desirable of the three," Johnson complained. "But I'll take it. I'm afraid I'll have to do my own brokering from now on."

Taking a tiny office in an out-of-the-way part of town, Wilbur began working night and day. He spent a month in almost constant planning with contractors for paving, lighting, grading, laying of sewers, planting of trees. Meade, whose work thus far had been practically that of an errand-boy, watched his new employer with eager interest.

"That idea of giving the city the heart of your land for a public park is one of the cleverest things I ever saw," he stated admiringly, as he gazed upon the finished map of the prospective suburban section.

"It isn't original," Wilbur assured him. "It's been done before a good many times. It is a good plan."

"Well, I should say it is. Why, you can pay for that park ten times over in the increased value of the lots round it."

"I know that. It's good speculating. But that isn't the thing I like best about it."

There was something of the old ring of enthusiasm in Johnson's voice of late. It sounded more clearly than ever in response to Ralph's: "What then?"

"What I like about it is that it's giving people something for their money. And, Ralph, that's the only kind of speculating that pays. You once saw me turn a thousand dollars into a hundred thousand in a single day—a few hours. That was mere luck—sordid gambling. It gave nothing in return for what it took.

"That was the first and last time I ever did such a thing. Now, I'm doing what I believe in. It will turn that hundred thousand into half a million. And nobody will have lost anything because I win. The three or four hundred men who will own homes round and near that park will all be glad of what they've got, glad to have paid for it.

"There was a moment when I was tempted to put my money into buying up that Ackerson copper stock. I believe I could have caught enough shorts to have cornered a little thing like that. I might have made my half-million in half a day.

"And I would have had the satisfaction of knowing that I had taken it out of others' pockets without giving them any more for it than if I had stolen their purses. Half a million isn't worth that. I would hate that hundred thousand, if I didn't know it had come from a bucket-shop which would never have used it as well as I can, from men whose living comes by gaming with stacked cards."

"Mr. Brucher," Ralph Meade spoke earnestly, "I half believe I'm glad I did what I did that day. It—it—you're making a man of me."

His voice broke, and he hurried out of the office upon some errand.

When he was gone, the old lip-smile, with which Wilbur Johnson had learned to mask his feelings from others until he wore the mask when alone—came back to the lower half of his face. His eyes, tired, unhappy, gazed unseeing at the blue-print fresh hung on the wall.

Yes, he was making a man of Ralph Meade. He was helping the young fellow to meet his great enemy, to overcome his particular weakness. But, what was he doing for himself?

Was he gaining strength wherewith he might, if occasion again demanded, be able to sacrifice his freedom for others' rights? This was the test he constantly put before

himself. Would he go to prison now—was he any nearer the point where he would go to prison—if some one else were arrested for the crime for which they wanted him in New York?

After all, it was a morbid test. So long as he was not compelled to meet it actually, there was no reason why he should meet it in imagination. But circumstances had made him morbid. And the more normal atmosphere of active life had not yet had time to cure him.

No, he thought, he would never feel that he was all the man he should be, never feel that he was quite worthy of self-respect, never regard the darkness of those two weeks of flight as expiated, until he had given himself up to the law to deal with as it would.

The opening of his office-door roused him from his goalless line of thought. He turned about, expecting to see Ralph Meade or one of the contractors. The young man he saw was none of these. His face seemed familiar, but Wilbur could not recall where he had seen it.

"I am Mr. Hotchkiss, of the *Blade,* Mr. Brucher," the young man introduced himself.

The name seemed as elusively familiar as the face. Johnson's first impulse was to demand sharply what a reporter wanted of him. Then it occurred to his mind that it might not be a bad time to begin some little advertising, and he bade his visitor sit down.

"We thought it would be of interest to our readers to give some detailed account of the improvements you are making in your new section. You know the kind of ad I mean. We'd be glad to let you have half a page, Sunday, at rather reduced rates."

Johnson pondered for a moment. The *Blade,* he had already learned, was a rather sensational sheet. He would personally much prefer one of the soberer papers as a publicity medium.

Still, it was quite probable that the yellow paper went more than any other journal into homes of the class he expected to provide with better homes.

He decided to make a bid for the space offered. The two soon had agreed as to price.

"And now for the write-up," Hotchkiss began, taking out pencil and paper for notes.

Rapidly Johnson pointed out the details of his plans, dwelling particularly upon the park feature.

"That's the real thing," the *Blade* man exclaimed enthusiastically. "Why not run that alone now and leave the rest till later. I can quote you better rates on two spaces. You can do straight advertising of your houses around 'Beautiful Mountainside Park.' Don't you think so?"

"I believe you're right. We'll do it that way, anyhow. Go ahead, and I'll up with the park. Get a photo of the thing as it is, and I'll have a drawing made of it, 'after taking,'" Johnson added to the suggestion.

"And we'll hand out about a column and a half of blow as to the public benefactor, Norman J. Brucher. Give us some facts about your life."

Instantly Johnson paled. "I'd rather not do that—I think it would hardly be good taste—I—"

The newspaper man glanced up in surprise. Then his eye caught the nervous look on Wilbur's face. A moment he studied it intently.

"Great Cæsar!" burst involuntarily from his lips.

Thrusting his pencil and paper into his pocket, he turned and darted out of the door before Johnson could move.

Suddenly it dawned upon Wilbur where and how Hotchkiss's face and name had been familiar. Three months ago this man had so distorted an interview with himself for the Beckwith *Gazette* as to make him demand Hotchkiss's discharge from its staff.

Wilbur Johnson's chance for expiation had come. For just forty seconds he considered the fact, smiling up at the blue-print on the wall. Then he glanced quickly at the clock which had ticked off the forty seconds.

Seizing his check-book, he wrote out a desk check for twelve thousand dollars.

In the first electric cab he could get he had himself hurried to the bank.

Thence, with the money in his pocket, he urged the chauffeur to break the speed laws in reaching the nearest railroad station.

CHAPTER XXI.

TWO MILES FROM GULCH CITY.

"ABOUT two miles from here, it must be. I guess I'll stop."

Furtively the lone speaker glanced backward over the rocky road up which he had climbed. Above him, on the right, rose the steep sides of a mountain.

Beneath him, on the left, rolled the black waters of a turgid river, some twenty feet below the road. A hundred yards away the dull gray of the road-bed was lost to view as it twisted behind a jutting wall of rock.

There was only the trace of a smile upon

the haggard face now. There were the lines of weariness, the pinched wrinkles of hunger. Most of all, there was the expression of deadly fear.

For almost a fortnight Wilbur Johnson had been in constant flight.

From the towns he had taken to the villages. From these he had fled to the mountain fastnesses.

Only at the most remote mining-camps did he dare to stop now as he made his way westward.

For the sensation-loving *Blade* had made the most of its reporter's recognition of the one-time mayor-elect of Beckwith, Ohio.

Its gibes at police incompetence, taken up by other papers all over the country, had set every detective force in the land upon edge to take the fugitive.

He had escaped from the last mining-camp's store just as he had seen a sheriff enter it to inquire about him. The officer of the law had ridden by with three deputies, while Johnson hid in a bush by the road half a mile out.

Gulch City ahead would be waiting for him. He must leave the stage road and circuit the camp through the mountains.

But he would wait till to-morrow for that. He needed daylight, more of it than remained of to-day. He needed rest and the coarse food he had procured back at the store.

He clambered over the rough rocks till he found a sheltered ledge some eight feet above the road. Two pine-trees clung to the sides of the cliff on either end of this projection, and hid it from both directions.

Slowly he undid the handkerchief in which his food was wrapped. He would have liked to wash his hands in the river below; but he was not sure how soon the stage-coach would pass that way.

A cold breeze swept along the gorge, and he shivered slightly.

"Lucky I got started south," he muttered listlessly. He was acquiring the habit of talking aloud to himself through having no other to talk with. "I'd have frozen to death in the upper Nevadas. The San Bernardinos aren't so cold. And what if I had?"

His lean shoulders rose in a shrug. He fell to eating the dry food before him.

"Guess I'd better stop at that," he spoke when he had eaten about a quarter of what he wanted. "It's a long way to the Mexican border yet."

Deliberately he folded the handkerchief again and knotted its ends about the remnants of food. Then he sat, leaning back against the rocks as comfortably as he could. He closed his eyes in a vain attempt to fall asleep.

Soon they were wide open once more, staring down into the dark stream below. Round his lips played the ghost of that miserable smile. He was thinking again—thinking, thinking—as he seemed always to think now when he ought to sleep.

Just now he was thinking of the little dog that had saved his life at the road-bridge over the Arkansas. Last night he had lain awake and wondered how much longer his mind was going to endure the strain, and whether he would know it if he were locked up in an insane asylum.

The little dog—had he got back safe to his real owner?

Johnson had left him at the friendly village where the fickle beast had attached himself to the tall, lanky man at the inn. He had known he dared not try to take a dog along on his precarious voyages.

Would the pup know him if he should ever get back there? Would it run out and leap up, wagging its tail, barking joyously, trying to lick his face? Would anything or anybody ever be his friend again? Did he deserve ever to have a friend again?

There was no answer to the questions. There was no answer to most of Johnson's questions nowadays, no answer to anything.

The future, the past, the present — the whole universe in general and his own life in particular—it was all a huge unanswered, unanswerable enigma.

Suddenly he became alert. Every nerve leaped to cautious attention. He held one hand hollowed over the edge of his ear.

Hoof-beats! Ah, the stage! No, there was no rattle of wheels.

The click of a loose shoe sounded particularly clear in the stillness. It came nearer and nearer, without becoming visible. Then it stopped. Johnson could hear the thuds of two pairs of feet as the riders dismounted.

Then followed the rustle of brush, as though the horses were being led into the bushes at the side of the road. He remembered that there had been a little opening just below the turn.

The lone man drew back a little closer and peered forth again at the spot where the road came into sight from behind the wall of rock. Soon the two riders appeared.

As he noted their pistol holsters and the magazine rifles slung over their shoulders, he huddled still nearer the cliff behind him.

They walked slowly forward. He could still see their faces as they approached the spot beneath his hiding-place.

Hard faces they were, sullen and ugly. One of them appeared somewhat younger than the other in years, though hardly less villainous in mien. The older one was especially disfigured by a long scar over the left eye.

"Nice-looking officers of the law they have about these parts," Wilbur commented as his eyes returned again and again to that sinister-looking scar.

He shifted his gaze to the cliff above him, and made a little more certain that he could not get away from the spot he had chosen save by descending to the road.

"Wonder how they knew I was here?" he thought.

Then, as the men crouched down behind a bush almost directly beneath the rock on which he stood, he concluded that they did not know. Evidently they were waiting for him to pass.

Well, perhaps he was going to get away again, after all. Perhaps he could gain a few more hours of liberty. They might wait a long time for him there before he would drop down into their hands.

He had just reached this conclusion when he heard the distant rumble of the stage-coach. He wondered whether the sheriffs would warn the passengers that a dangerous criminal was ahead.

The idea brought a real smile to his lips. His fear that he might again injure an innocent person in his mad dread of being caught had kept him from carrying any sort of weapon.

The stage-coach came rapidly round the bend. It reached the spot where he could see it most plainly from his shelter, about twenty yards away.

A sudden sharp word was spoken by the men below him. The leading team rose on their haunches and were nearly thrown by the pair behind.

The driver, sitting with a rifle across his knees, held up his hands, still clinging to the reins. The three passengers on the top of the coach held theirs up empty.

Then Johnson realized that he had once more taken highwaymen for officers of the law.

The discovery that the men below were not looking for him put him off his guard sufficiently for curiosity to make him crawl a little closer to the edge of the ledge where he could get a better view of the proceedings.

"Go on, Bill. Get the boxes," the older man was saying to his partner. "I'll keep 'em covered. The first man that drops a finger will drop the rest of him."

The younger of the bandits shoved his left-hand pistol into his belt as he walked toward the stage. Reaching it, he swung quickly up over the whiffletrees onto the box. Still holding his weapon trained upon the driver, he shoved at a small case with one foot and sent it tumbling to the ground.

He was just reaching the same foot for a second similar chest, when—

It dawned upon Johnson that he could take an interesting part in the game.

The older man, who was really the most apt to do shooting of dangerous sort, was standing directly beneath the ledge. His rifle was at his shoulder.

His eye was upon the top of the stage.

Quick as the idea had flashed into Wilbur's mind, he acted. He raised himself to his feet and leaped with only one motion.

The noise of his leap caused the man to glance upward as Johnson's heels struck fairly upon his face.

The rifle exploded loudly, but harmlessly, as the bandit went crashing down under Wilbur's weight. It was not his gun that Johnson had feared.

It was the pistol in the hand of the younger of the robbers.

There was only the fraction of a second between the bang of the rifle and the sharper crack of the pistol on the stage-coach.

A million lights suddenly burst forth in Johnson's head.

(To be continued.)

SPECULATIONS.

Love is a god of fancies; a glance, a whisper low
May wake to life that idol which we hold
And I have thought sometimes, in certain hearts I know,
That Love was wakened by a chink of gold.

Flavel Scott Mines.

The Barber-Shop Riddle.

BY R. K. THOMPSON.

A Mysterious Situation, Fraught with Dire Possibilities for Any Man Who Doesn't Shave Himself.

THEY say I'm cured. They ought to know, the State Lunacy Commission and the house doctors at Brangle-cliff Asylum, who signed my discharge last week.

But—somehow, I doubt it, myself!

When you have been cutting out paper dolls for six months in the company of a set of cripple-minded people who think they're Napoleon Bonapartes, Julius Cæsars, Andrew Carnegies, and the like—when you've been cooped up in a mad-house for a half-year—some kind of a demonstration is needed to prove to you that you've finally got back all your buttons.

That's why I'm going to write this story. It's going to be a sort of a test, the setting down of the awful circumstance that drove me to the seclusion of the booby-hatch.

If I can survive the strain of calling back to memory the details of the affair that cost me my reason, then I'll know that I'm sane again.

To begin:

At eleven minutes past ten, on the sunshiny morning of April 15, last, a tall man, in a stylish suit of clothes, with an alligator-skin satchel in one hand and a suit-case in the other, stepped out of the Grand Central Station in New York City.

That was me.

Just back from a six-thousand-mile trip through the West, with a line of notions that I'd shown to every jay drygoods merchant between the two coasts, the big town certainly looked good to me!

I swung off in the direction of Broadway. And, as I walked, I kept my eye peeled for a barber-shop. There was a two-day stubble on my chin that needed mowing, right away.

Pretty soon I came to a likely looking place. Not anything pretentious, but all right as far as I could tell from the outside. So I turned in at the door.

One barber was lounging against the cigar showcase, reading a midnight extra of an evening paper spread out between his elbows on the glass. Two more were sitting together over by the rear wall. They bounded up, as if on springs, and leaped to their chairs.

"Here's luck," I thought. "No customers in the place, and I won't have to wait!"

I walked over to the row of coat-hooks at the side, took off my coat and hat, hung them up, set my bags down safe, and began to untie my necktie.

"I beg your pardon!" said somebody behind me.

I turned round. There stood the barber who'd been reading by the door.

"Do you want anything?" he asked.

I winked at him.

"No, indeed! I'm the most absent-minded fellow you ever saw in your life, and I've just dropped in here out of sheer forgetfulness!"

He didn't smile.

"You'll have to go some place else, mister!" he announced.

With my hands up at my collar, I stood there staring at him. What was all this?

"I want a shave!" I said shortly.

"Sorry, but you can't get waited on here!"

My face turned red. I looked round at the three empty chairs and the two barbers standing idle beside them.

"You aren't too busy," I began.

"Yes," he lied, "yes, that's it. We're very busy in here. These—these chairs are all reserved ahead of time. I'm expecting some regular customers at any minute. So—"

I was struck dumb. The truth had dawned on me—I was being turned out of that shop!

Well! In all the years that I'd been traveling round the country, dropping into barber-shops for a shave every day, and a haircut twice a month, nothing like this had ever happened to me before—ever!

Which was probably why I took it as I did. For, I was so stunned, I tightened my cravat, put on my hat and coat, picked up my baggage again, and walked out of that place without a single word.

Outside, I kept on walking. I was three blocks away before I came out of my trance—the stupor that the shock of the thing had thrown me into.

Then I began to grope around in my dazed mind for the reason. Why had I been turned away? What was the matter with me? Wasn't I fit for a barber to handle?

Shucks, why hadn't I thought of it before? There wasn't anything the matter with *me*. The trouble was in that shop—the barbers were on strike. That was it!

But, if that was the case, why had two of them dashed to their chairs, fit to break their necks, when I came in at first?

The strike-theory was exploded. Then what other reason had the proprietor of that shop for insulting me by refusing to let me be shaved in his establishment?

Maybe he didn't like my looks?

I am red-haired, and perhaps that barber didn't like red-headed men. Disliked them, hated them—wouldn't have any of them around.

That explained the whole business.

I'd heard of such things before. A barber out in St. Louis told me once that a friend of his wouldn't let a cross-eyed man sit in a chair in his shop. Just out of prejudice.

So, that was settled. I felt mighty relieved, I'll tell you. It had thrown a load on my mind, for a fact, to be treated the way I had been. I always got along well with anybody I brushed up against. And it had jarred me to be rebuffed that way without a minute's warning.

But now I put the thing out of my mind. That wasn't the only barber-shop in the city, not by several hundred. And it wasn't every proprietor, either, who had a prejudice against red-headed men. So I'd find another place—

Here was one, now. I was right in front of another—and a better-looking shop.

I opened the door and went in. This outfit boasted four chairs—and every one of them was full. Well, I'd have to wait my turn, I made up my mind.

I walked across the shop, put down my grips, hung my hat on a hook, and sat down in one of the row of cane-bottomed seats.

Then, looking carelessly up, I discovered that every barber in the place had stopped work.

Just then the boss, so I gathered, stepped toward me.

"Excuse, please!" he faltered.

"Well?" I snapped.

"You—you want something here?"

I frowned.

"No," I answered bitterly, "I don't want anything here. I only came in to watch you keeping busy. I love to see people work. What do you suppose," I barked, "that I came in for? To get a suit of fireman's clothes?"

"So sorry, *signor!*" he said, shaking his head. "But you will have to go somewhere else!"

I sat there, looking at the little Italian with my mouth open like a fish out of water. Could I believe my ears?

"You—you won't wait on me here?" I gasped.

He shook his head so fast his ears flapped like castanets on the shaved sides of his skull.

"No, *signor!*" he said.

I rose, like a man in a dream. I fumbled my hat on my head. Stooping, I hoisted my bags again into my hands.

Then I started for the door.

"Good morning, *signor!*"

I brushed by him, without a word, stumbled out of the shop, and strolled off up the street.

Was I drunk? Crazy? Dreaming? What was the matter with me?

For the second time in five minutes I had been refused a shave in a barber-shop!

Why?

There were only two reasons that I could think of which would entitle any barber, working as a sort of servant of the public, according to the law, to turn a man away from his establishment.

First, if a customer was drunk he might be refused a seat in a tonsorial chair. Was I under the influence? I was not—and nobody could possibly think so, to see me.

Second, a barber would have good grounds to refuse to work on a man who had some plainly evident contagious disease. I was sound as a nut—nothing the matter with me at all. As a blind man could see at a glance.

Twice I had been turned away. Now I wanted a third try.

If I could get waited on in the next bar-

ber shop I came to, then I would understand why I had been refused in these last two.

I would go back to the strike-idea in the first shop. If I was shaved without any trouble in the next place I entered, I would be satisfied that there was nothing the matter with *me;* that the difficulty was all in the two shops where I had been rebuffed.

A strike in the first establishment, that had been empty when I entered it, *would* account for my turn-down there. (The two barbers might have jumped to their chairs, I reasoned, to prevent me from entering them, instead of to welcome me in.)

And the second place—well, I could fit the prejudice against red-headed men there. That Italian proprietor may have disliked me on sight because my hair was carroty. May have refused to shave me for that reason.

Everything would be explained in that way, if I had no difficulty in the next place I stopped.

But—if I was refused admittance to a barber shop for the third time in succession? What then?

Why—oh, but I wouldn't be, that was all!

I was foolishly alarmed over the two surprises that I had already received. It was impossible—silly to suppose—that there was a ban against me in the city's barboriums.

Breathlessly I ground to a stop before the striped pole in front of a swell-looking shop. Dashing the perspiration out of my eyes, and firmly clutching the heavy bags in my hands, I walked into the place.

And immediately I stopped stock still.

There were a half-dozen barbers in this place, some working, some taking it easy, when I stepped over the threshold.

As barbers will, they had all looked round at me as I pushed open the door. And then—

With one accord, the whole parcel of them bunched together and dashed to the rear of the shop in a shouting stampede. A moment I watched them, with the eyes staring out of my head, milling round a narrow door at the back of the establishment.

And the next minute *they were all gone!*

I stood there for a minute, turned to stone. And then I commenced to tremble—the uncanniness of the thing stopped the beating of my heart.

Three men, with lather dabbed on their faces—one with one side of his mustache off and the other side on—sat up in their chairs and looked foolishly in the direction that their barbers had fled.

Then they looked at each other, struck speechless with surprise. And finally their eyes turned around to me, standing within the doorway.

"Here!" one of them called out to me. "What's the meaning of all this?"

I took a step forward. Weakly I shook my head.

"I d-don't know!" I stuttered in a ghastly whisper.

"What did you do to make those men duck out of this shop?" demanded another. "Huh—speak up?"

I swallowed hard and looked at them all piteously.

"Upon my soul, gentlemen," I faltered, "I didn't do a thing. Just stepped in through the door, and they took one look at me—"

"You didn't have a gun or a Black Hand bomb in your hands," began the man with half a mustache.

Silently I held up the two grips that I carried.

"Friends!" I whined. "What's the matter with me? Tell me—in Heaven's pity, *tell me!*"

I had them staring at me in real earnest now, their own troubles forgotten in the sight of my terrible distress.

"This is the third time this has happened," I quavered on. "The third time, understand. Twice I have been refused a shave—a simple shave—in a barber-shop. And now—you see what has happened, the minute I set my foot inside this shop!

"Am I drunk—crazy—broken out with small-pox, scarlet fever, in the first stages of cholera or suffering with housemaid's knee? I'm a white man, a Christian, entitled to patronize any barber-shop in the land, I believe. Yet—I've been turned down twice, and now six barbers run before me as though I had the plague!

"At first," I added, "it was a blow to my pride, as it would be to any man's to be insulted by a turn-down from a barber. But I've forgotten that now. What's worrying me—losing my goat—is the riddle of what ails me, why I am refused wherever I go, what threw the fright into the force of this place?"

I took a step forward and threw out my arms.

"Can any of you tell?" I cried. "Look at me!" I turned slowly all the way around,

like a clothing model on display. "What's the matter with me? Why would any barber refuse to shave me?"

All shook their heads in silence. Evidently they saw nothing of whatever it was that made every barber I had encountered rule me out of consideration as a customer—turn tail and run from me—on first sight.

"I don't see anything the matter with you, sir!" said the man with the half-shaved upper lip.

"You look all right to me!" commented another.

"If I was a barber myself," added the third, "I'd shave you, all right!"

I looked searchingly at all three of them. They were serious. They saw nothing the matter with me—any more than I had when I looked in that barroom mirror.

"All right, friends!" I said tremulously. "Much obliged to you!"

And I turned on my heel and walked out.

Slowly I moved up the street. Three blocks away I entered another barber shop. Politely but firmly I was put out.

Turning to the north, I walked up an avenue and tried again. For the fifth time I was refused.

Dumb, paralyzed, I tried the sixth shop I passed. The seventh, the eighth—at length an even dozen.

I couldn't get into a chair in a single one! Why?

I did not know.

Can you imagine my feelings? To drop into the city of my birth, after a commercial trip through the West, and find, on arriving, that I couldn't get into a single, solitary barber-shop?

And not to know the reason why?

The thing was unheard of. Absolutely impossible. Worse than a dream.

And yet—it was actually happening to me.

I felt reason tottering on its throne. Either I was mad—mad as a March hare—or I had walked into twelve barber-shops run by a set of trained lunatics.

But how could that be? In pretty nearly every place I stopped, customers were being shaved, massaged, singed, shingled, and bay-rummed in the ordinary way.

It was a mystery — why I could not be waited on.

Evidently I was the only sober Caucasian in the city that couldn't. I was not like other men.

Strangest of all, too, only the barbers saw that!

Here I was, walking along the public highway, without a mob round me, creating no more attention than anybody else who was abroad on their own business—just an ordinary red-headed, six-foot man, carrying two heavy bags in his hands, and with a hardly noticeable two-days' growth of beard on my face—

Which no barber I had seen would shave!

Horses didn't shy at me, men passed me by without a second look, women didn't pale as they caught sight of me, and little children gazed at me without running away.

To the eye of my ordinary fellow man, I was apparently no different than anybody. Yet—to a barber I was either a freak or an undesirable citizen in the extreme.

Absent-mindedly, I turned in at the thirteenth barber-shop I had encountered in my weary walk. Only one white-jacketed man was in the place, and he sprang to his chair as I opened the door.

Without a glance at him, I walked to the rear and laid down my grips. Methodically I took off my hat and coat, and started loosening my tie.

Before I got far, I thought, the barber would be telling me to get out. In just a minute he would be doing that.

But—he didn't!

With my collar off, and in my shirt-sleeves, I walked over and sat down in the chair. Was it possible? At last had I found a place where there was no objection to me?

"Shave, sir?"

The fellow breathed the question into my ear as pleasantly as you please, while he flapped a towel out before me and began to tuck it around my neck.

"Yes!" I blurted. "Once over, and be careful of the tender skin around the scar on my left cheek."

He picked up his brush and mug.

"Very good, sir!" he answered.

I laid my head back on the plush rest with a sigh of content. At last—at last! My troubles were over—

There was a commotion in the rear of the shop. Twisting my neck around, I saw another barber come in, probably from the living-room beyond.

He darted forward, and pulled the man who was mixing the lather away from my chair. He whispered something in his ear.

And then—there was a crash behind me.

I sat up and looked around. The barber, the minute before so ready to remove the stubble from my chin, had dropped the shaving-cup from his hands and stood staring at me with a chalky face.

And as I looked at him his eyes closed, and he tottered.

Evidently overcome by the words his partner had whispered in his ear—

He fell in a faint on the tiles of the floor!

I got out of the chair. Supported by one hand on its arm, I stared at the other barber. Over the limp body of the unconscious tonsorialist we looked at each other for a space of seconds.

"What's the matter?" I asked finally, with the quiet of a nervous crisis.

"Sorry, sir!" answered the second barber. "But you'll have to leave here—go some place else!"

"This man—" I looked down at the body.

"Knocked out," put in the other, "completely. He couldn't shave you, as you see."

"And you?"

The man paled.

"I—I'll have to close up shop," he stammered, evading my eyes. "This poor fellow will have to be taken care of! You'll have—have to leave here, sir, at once!"

Again! It was no use trying to avoid my fate—I must go from this place as I had from the others. I was ostracized; finally, I made up my mind, forbidden the patronage of every barber-shop in the city!

I walked across the room, put on my collar, hat, and coat again, once more lifted my baggage, and walked out of the door—

And straight into the arms of a policeman!

"Got you!" he exploded, as I bumped into his embrace. "You're my prisoner!"

Over his shoulder I saw a barber standing out in front of the shop up the avenue that had turned me away before I entered this one.

Evidently the officer had been sent for to take me to jail by this establishment in which I had been repulsed.

"What's—what's the charge against me?" I panted. "You are arresting me; I'll go with you quietly—only tell me, tell me what is the matter with me? Put me out of my suspense!"

"Come along!" the bluecoat answered, jerking me by the arm. "You'll find out soon enough at the station-house!"

A sudden calm, following the storm of my feelings in the past hour and a half, descended on me. I walked along, unprotesting, beside my captor.

I was being taken to prison—but at least I would find out the solution to the puzzle that had softened my brain when I got there. That was all that mattered—all that I cared for.

To find out, once for all, why I had been turned out of every barber-shop I stepped into.

"Here y'are!" announced the officer, leading me up the steps of the precinct station-house. "Come in here and have a little talk with the sergeant, me boy!"

I was dragged up to the rail.

"So you got him all right, did you, Clancy?" said a stern voice from the desk. "Prisoner, answer truly—name?"

"John Arthur Barnes!" I whispered.

The sergeant put down his pen between the leaves of the "blotter" and looked down at me with a scowl.

"Give me your real name, young feller!" he snapped, in a tone of warning.

"That is my name, sir," I began.

The telephone-bell ringing beside my inquisitor just then interrupted the proceedings.

"Lo!" answered the sergeant.

"What's that?" he fairly shouted at the words that floated into his ear over the wire. "Say that again?"

His face, as he listened, turned from angry red to smiling, natural pink again.

"All right," he said. "I see. Good-by!"

He looked down at Clancy, the copper who held me prisoner.

"You've made a mistake, officer!" he said, with a deepening of his smile. "They've caught the real culprit over at the Sixty-Eighth Street house!"

The patrolman started.

"The divil, ye say!" he cried. "But this fellow"—he turned to stare at me—"this guy answers the description, all right. There it is: Red hair, tall, carrying one satchel and a suit-case, scar on the left cheek, appearance of not having shaved for several days—"

"I know!" interrupted the sergeant. "But the real criminal has confessed. So this man goes free!"

"Well—I'll—be—darned!"

Clancy released my arm. And I fell limply against the rail.

"You're discharged, sir!" the sergeant called. "Sorry, if we've put you to any bother. But—come, come!"—sharply. "You can't stay here. You'll have to go some place else, sir."

At these familiar words I pulled myself together with an effort.

"Tell me," I begged, "what does all this mean? I've suffered a great deal—my mind appears to be leaving me. Will you kindly explain to me why I've just been turned out of twelve — thirteen — barber - shops in this town—"

"Why," interrupted the officer at the desk, "do you mean to tell me— Clancy!" he broke off, "the poor fellow doesn't understand what this is all about! Would you believe it?"

The patrolman looked at me kindly.

"Is it true, sir?" he questioned. "Do you mean to tell us that you haven't read the papers to-day?"

I shook my head.

"I just came into town this morning," I said. "I haven't seen a newspaper yet. What —what is the matter?"

"Well," laughed the officer, "I'll bet there ain't a barber in this city that hasn't read one item in to-days news, anyway. They're all great readers of comic weeklies, magazines, and newspapers, ordinarily. But this time—well, here, look at this for yourself!"

He pressed a folded newspaper on me, one finger pointing to a half column of type bearing a heavy head-line.

I took the sheet, braced myself against the railing round the desk, and read:

WARNING—NEW YORK BARBERS LOOK OUT!

Man in Town To-Day Had Better Be Watched For Carefully By All Tonsorial Experts!

GENEVA, N. Y., April 15.—The police of this city warn the barbers in New York to be on the lookout for this man in the next few days:

A tall, well-built, youngish fellow, red-headed, and with a scar on one side of his face—the left cheek. Man is likely to be carrying two grips, a satchel and a suit-case, as he was seen to leave this town with these early last night.

William McClintock (the man's name) is a dangerous maniac. He has already murdered three barbers, and has gone to the metropolis, it is supposed, on the hunt for more. All of his victims have been slain while shaving him—the madman overpowering the barber, taking the razor away from him, and cutting his throat.

It is believed that the madness to kill any and all barbers he can get his hands on was brought upon the lunatic in this way:

He has a tender skin and a wiry beard. For a number of years, no barber has been able to shave him without causing him inconvenience, pain, and suffering. McClintock tried for long to get different tonsorialists to shave him properly. And the inability to do so in the end has driven him insane.

So, barbers of New York, as you value your lives, don't let the man herein described enter your chairs. If you do—you risk your own necks.

The paper dropped from my nerveless fingers. I saw it all!

"Now, sir, you understand!" said the policeman by my side. "Is there anything else I can do for you?" he added.

I turned a pair of glassy eyes on him.

"Oh, yes, little playmate!" I babbled. "You can sing me to sleep, if thou likest!"

I closed my eyes, and sank to the floor.

"Good Lord!" I heard the bluecoat gasp. "The thing he's gone through, and most likely the shock of the explanation of what was a mystery to him—all of it has drove the poor gent crazy as a loon!"

Such was indeed the case!

An Unwritten Sequel.

BY MIRIAM CRUIKSHANK

Train Acquaintances Find a Clue in a Story That Leads to a Climax Unplanned by the Author.

MARY STEDMAN sprang into existence on the top floor of the Elinora Flats, as suddenly and as fully equipped for her life-work as Minerva herself. Her creators knew no more of her ultimate mission than they might of the confines of the outermost ripple made by a pebble cast into a stream.

To the casual observer the top floor of the Elinora had its disadvantages. Five flights of steps and no elevator separated it from the outside world. Its proportions were modest. Its walls were not thick enough to bar the smell of burning potatoes in the flat adjoining, nor the rasping sound of the phonograph on the floor below. Yet to Carolyn Emerson, sprawling her graceful length over the

divan of divers duties in the living-room, it seemed to-day a haven of rest.

That she, the daughter of a man distinguished in his country's service, should have elected to earn her living when a crash came, was a source of bewilderment, even to herself at times. Relatives and friends had been prolific in their offers of assistance and advice. Men who had loved her in the old days renewed their avowal of devotion. Nevertheless, she had chosen the Elinora with Joan Meredith as a companion, and the position of secretary and social guide to the Hartley Joneses as a solution to her financial problem.

Of course, the Hartley Joneses were absurdly impossible—now. Their millions still reeked of the fatty compounds which, transformed into soap, made the solid structure upon which they were founded. Their aristocracy was as new as the gilt - and - satin chairs in their Louis - Seize drawing - room; but there were compensating advantages. Their checks appeared with clocklike regularity; their admiring awe of herself kept her sense of humor from flagging, and, until to-day, she had considered herself well content.

Possibly that surprising glimpse of Addison Craig across the room, listening with his old-time air of courtly attention to Blanche Jones's platitudes, had stirred visions of a past that she had supposed buried forever.

Addison was in Egypt when her father died. His letter of sympathy, after a year's wandering and many forwardings, reached her at the Elinora, and—she had not answered it. He was very short-sighted, she remembered, and there was nothing remarkable in the fact that when his eyes rested for an instant on the tea-table over which the secretary demurely presided, he had made no sign of recognition.

Certainly he had no reason to expect to find her within the ornate splendor of the Hartley Joneses' four walls. If he saw at all, he probably thought himself deluded by a chance resemblance.

Perhaps he had forgotten—

"Joan," he said aloud, "if I had your skill with a stub pen, and my knowledge of people and—and life, I could write a novel that would make me famous."

"Most of us are inoculated with that microbe," answered Miss Meredith bluntly. She sat at a desk littered with papers, her sleeve rolled above her rounded elbows, a line of perplexity creasing her brow.

For a certain monthly stipend Joan Meredith conducted the "Girls' Corner" of a fairly well-known magazine. Her reference library included such volumes as "Advice to Young Mothers," "Guides for Young Housekeepers," manuals of deportment and fancy work, and "What to Do Till the Doctor Comes." Her answers to the queries propounded by perturbed youthful minds proved her versatility.

Just now she was tactfully pointing out the evils of vanity to one anxious correspondent, while her whole soul yearned for the vanity of a new silk petticoat. Such a dream as had been displayed in a shop-window that morning, ruffled, befrilled, alluring—and pay-day three weeks off. Her pen skurried briskly across the page until the homily was finished to her satisfaction. Then—

"I think if I owned our combined forces, I might do something myself; but neither of us is a genius, Carolyn."

"No," said Carolyn serenely, "I know."

Her hands were clasped above her shapely head, her delicate nostrils wrinkled in unconscious rebellion at the commingled cookery odors that assailed them, but her eyes were alight. She watched a gleam of yellow sunlight dance into the window and across the brow of a soft-eyed Madonna that hung on the eastern wall, and the glow deepened.

"Joan," she questioned, "what does that big, flourishy *S* in your name stand for?"

"Stedman—my grandmother's name. But why?"

"Because, though neither you nor I is a genius, Mary Stedman may be. Stedman sounds literary, poetic—a few more things—doesn't it? Mary was the mother—Mary is bitterness—Mary means a star of the sea. Mary is the sweetest, simplest name in the world." And, meeting the bewilderment in Joan's eyes, she burst into a rippling laugh. "Drop work a moment and listen to me," she said. "I want to plan 'Mary Stedman's' career."

II.

When the north-bound express swung out of Washington at one o'clock on the 23d of December, snow was falling. When the train reached Baltimore a glistening sheet covered the ground, a wind had risen, storm-signals were being flashed along the Middle Atlantic coast, and traffic was impeded by frequent jerks and halts by slippery rails and obstructed tracks, till somewhere within Pennsylvania's borders it came suddenly to a standstill. Addison Craig, staring moodily through a frost-bedimmed pane into the snow - flecked darkness, reviled the fate that had led him to

spend Christmas in New York. His modest stock of reading matter was exhausted, and the newsboy had left the train at Baltimore. The expected five hours on the train seemed likely to grow into eight or ten, and he was bored.

He cast speculative eyes about him, listing the possibilities of fellow passengers, for he was not minded to be alone with his own thoughts. A suspiciously blond lady in broadcloth and chinchilla had ensconced herself behind a thick paper-back novel, apparently oblivious to the frank stares of the bald, pink-cheeked, elderly fop across the aisle. A faded little woman up front napped fitfully, sitting up between times to question querulously her stolid Swedish companion as to the probability of reaching New York at midnight. He turned back to the window, half irritated, half amused. Then the man in the chair back of him leaned over and touched Craig lightly on the arm.

"Beg pardon—but here's a story worth while; and since we seem doomed to several hours of this—"

The voice, for all its combinations of Western and Southern inflections, was pleasant. Craig faced a pair of wide-awake gray eyes set in a rugged, bronzed face, and noted subconsciously a breadth of shoulder that owed nothing to the tailor's skill, and an aggressiveness of jaw that suggested breakers ahead for the unwary trifler. The speaker blandly continued:

"Magazine fiction isn't much in my line, and I'm usually patriotic enough to want all I take to be home product, with no parleyvoo trimming. But this woman—Mary Stedman, she calls herself—seems to know a thing or two; and if you're interested—"

He flapped back a page with strong, brown fingers, and the title, "In the Shadow of the Winged Lion," came within Craig's range of vision.

"Tremendously," said Craig promptly. "Venice—" He hesitated. Fond as he was of chance acquaintances, he was not given to confidences. "I have been there a great deal," he concluded a bit lamely. "It is connected with—with some of the pleasantest episodes of my life," and the magazine was transferred to his grasp.

Twenty minutes later he once more faced his fellow traveler.

"Pretty good stuff, eh?" that individual queried genially. "But something — something I don't quite get at—what is it?"

"I don't know," Craig spoke soberly, "but except for certain tricks of phrase, which are totally unfamiliar, I would say that I knew the writer—had known her very well, but not as Mary Stedman."

"And I," the other man retorted promptly, "would give my chances for pulling off a certain deal that I'm after, to meet the writer *with* all those little tricks of phrase—they get to me somehow—I've always had a notion I could love a woman who wrote and talked like that." The amused gleam in Craig's eyes faded under the ring of sincerity in his tone, but returned at the question, "Would it do to write?"

"Write? I don't understand."

"To Mary Stedman," with a touch of impatience. "Down my way—Texas—when we want a thing we go after it. I don't know how else to meet this girl, so I thought I'd try a note, in care of the magazine, with a please forward in the corner — it might work."

"It might," Craig said thoughtfully; "but the girl I believe to be Mary Stedman would be apt to toss such a note into the fire."

"And the girl I believe to be Mary Stedman—the girl with that knack for slinging English—would be game and answer it. I'll wager you a thousand bales of cotton against anything you say that I hear something."

His finger was on the electric button at his side, and he turned briskly to the porter:

"A table and writing materials, please."

He smiled across at Craig, extracting at the same moment a card from a long Morocco case. "George Hartley Hanniman, of El Paso, is my name, and you can get me at the Esplanade any day. Is the bet on? I am going to write that letter, and if you're interested in the lady you might try your luck, too. In Texas, when we want a thing we go after it, and even if we are licked, we die fighting. Make a try, anyhow—it may pay."

"It may," admitted Craig hesitatingly.

There was a wailing shriek from the locomotive, and once more, with many a creak and groan, the train was on its way. When it arrived in Jersey City, several hours later, the letter was written and had passed under Craig's scrutiny. Shortly afterward it was dropped into an ice-rimmed letter-box, and at the corner the two men parted with a cordial handshake and an agreement to dine together a week from that night.

"By which time I'll have my answer," said the optimistic Texan.

Craig smiled.

On the night planned, before the appear-

ance of the dinner, Mr. Hanniman drew out his long morocco case and extracted a letter. It was typewritten, very brief, and read:

MY DEAR MR. HANNIMAN:

Thank you so much for your interest in my work. My busy life leaves me little opportunity for the cultivation of new friendships or interests, but I cannot forbear this line of appreciation.

Cordially yours,
MARY STEDMAN.

"Not very much," said the young man, restoring the missive to the case, "but, in the language of the street, 'it helps some.'"

III.

ON the evening of the 31st of December, Carolyn was dressing for a dinner at the Hartley Joneses. The divan of divers duties was piled high with chiffons that had long been laid away. An iron was heating in the kitchenette, and the owner of the finery put a touch here and there, and discoursed to Joan, who corrected proof-sheets the while.

"I am only asked, of course, to make out a number—to go in with an impossible cousin, who is rich and must be cajoled, but who eats with his knife or drinks out of his finger-bowl, or wears his war-paint to the table, I've forgotten which. Mrs. Jones asked if I had a gown, and hinted at Blanche's old black lace. I froze her with a glance. This is three years old, but it was made in Paris; and I have a figure. Do you think I'll look a frump?"

"You'll look a dear—you always do. I suppose she thought if you wore the black lace, she could squeeze in a word about Blanche being kind to you, in case you got too much attention. It's hateful to be poor," and Joan sighed lustily. "Wouldn't it be nice if Mary Stedman's lover turned out to be a billionaire?"

"What an idiot you are, Joan! There are worse things in life than poverty."

"I am as the Lord made me; and if anything is worse than poverty, it hasn't come my way. I am tired of writing two columns of fool advice every month, and answering every letter that Sally at the Crossroads chooses to write, so long as she sends self-addressed and stamped envelopes. I am tired of ready-made skirts, reduced hats, and bargain-counter gloves. I am tired of darning my stockings. I want rustly silk linings and real lace on my underclothes. I want to be rich—sordidly, soaringly, vulgarly rich. If I were Mary Stedman—" She stopped with a tragic swing of her pink kimono-clad figure, for Carolyn was laughing.

Her face was sober enough when, a little while afterward, she left the cheery fifth floor and descended the narrow flights of stairs to the lower hall. She hated old clothes as much as Joan did; the women who gathered about the Hartley Joneses' board were possessed of keen and appraising eyes, and she was glad none of them had figured in her past life. She had arranged the list of guests herself, always excepting the unknown cousin; so she knew.

In the chilly vestibule she paused and looked into the letter-box labeled "Emerson—Meredith." The flickering gaslight played on something white, and her investigating fingers drew forth an envelope. It was thin and foreign-looking, despite the domestic stamp and New York postmark. It was addressed to Miss Mary Stedman, and had been forwarded from a magazine office, and—the handwriting was Addison Craig's.

For a moment she hesitated; then, clutching the missive tightly, she stepped into the cab that was waiting for her. As the vehicle threaded its way through crowded streets she pressed close to the door to catch every gleam of light, deliberately broke the seal, and began to read.

There was no salutation.

By the merest chance my attention was called to your story, "In the Shadow of the Winged Lion." Much of the phrasing—the choice of words—is as little yours as the name that signs it. Yet the story is all yours—yours and mine. Venice and you are in my mind forever associated. The splash of the gondolier's oars is the accompaniment to your laugh. The blue of the skies is the background best fitted to the portrait of you I hold in my heart. That Mary Stedman, whose mask of name and personality you wear, may have convinced herself that the main episode in her story is mere material. You—the real you—know better. I am convinced that the message which flashed to me from those printed pages could never have come, if I had been utterly forgotten. I know that I shall find you wherever you are hidden. I feel that I shall win out yet—

She leaned back against the cushions with closed eyes. The city's roar became, for an instant, the ripple of a canal, the lights that danced through her lowered lids were the stars in the sky of Venice. Once again she heard the tinkle of a mandolin, a voice humming an old-time Venetian love-song. She had heard that song played by a street-band on the day of Mary Stedman's dawning. Once before she had heard it—on a night when she almost cared—a night when a little more daring on his part, a little more assurance, might have—

The cab swerved into the curb and stopped. Fifteen minutes later she had entered the Hartley Joneses' dining-room with a man whom her hostess had hastily presented as: "Mr. Hanniman—the one I told you of, you know."

Obviously, he was not of New York; yet he wore his evening clothes as though he were used to them. He was clean-shaven and square-jawed, and looked thoroughly alive—wholesome and American. Carolyn let her gaze wander from the accuracy of his tie to the centerpiece of water-lilies nestling upon their mirror background; then—

"Mr. George Hartley Hanniman, of El Paso, Texas?" she questioned demurely.

The man turned. His gray eyes were disturbingly honest, his jaw more aggressive than noticed from a profile view; but humor lurked about his mouth.

Carolyn waited.

"How did you know that?" he demanded.

"In my busy life there is little time for the cultivation of new interests and friendships," she told him softly; "still, I am not unappreciative—" The iron jaw twitched; the eyes widened.

"Well, I'll be—" he said slowly; "so, you are she?"

"I am sorry you are disappointed. I had hoped—"

"Disappointed is not the word," interrupted Mr. Hanniman bluntly. "You are too pretty to disappoint any one; but you are not my idea of Mary Stedman. I never dreamed of finding her here."

"You thought I had no time for—er—society?"

Carolyn was struggling with a wild desire to laugh. All her life men had made love to her. Since she was seventeen there had not been a time when she had not felt herself desired and desirable in masculine eyes. Yet, here was a man honest enough to say she was not his ideal. The experience was so novel as to be diverting.

"Oh—that," he shrugged his shoulders. "If you like this sort of thing, I've nothing to say. Aunt Helen and Blanche get nothing out of it but a snubbing from the women who eat their food, yet they seem to enjoy it. That is all unimportant, however. When may I see you somewhere else?"

"To prolong the disappointment?"

"Rather to adjust my ideas. You are Mary Stedman; but you are not, according to my preconceived notions. I didn't catch your name when Aunt Helen introduced us, and was totally unprepared. I don't see why she didn't tell me I was to bring in an authoress."

"Hostesses are not supposed to furnish a diagram with each dinner-partner. Blanche is looking well, isn't she?"

"She would make beautiful copy for the designer of a fashion sheet—if that is what you mean. Where do you live, and when—"

"A man with your persistence deserves his reward. I live in the Elinora Flats, which, being in the hundreds, are without the civilized pale. Mary Stedman is at home on Sundays after four; but you need not feel obliged—"

"Thank you," said Mr. Hanniman promptly. He was on his feet, drawing back her chair. His gray eyes, several inches above her level, met hers squarely. "I'll be there at two minutes after."

Therefore, it would seem that Miss Emerson were lacking either in hospitality or courage; for at three o'clock the following Sunday she appeared in the living-room of the flat, dressed for the street. Joan, lounging on the divan of divers duties, looked up from the novel she was reading, in surprise.

"You are not going out?"

"I must. Nerves are in the ascendant, and I need a walk. I suppose you don't care to come?"

"Not on that sort of invitation, certainly. Besides, this book looks interesting; and if it palls, I am going to wash my hair."

"Then, I trust it won't pall until two minutes after four," Carolyn murmured as she closed the door. "It is only in fiction that the heroine looks like a vision with well-soaped tresses, and Mr. George Hartley Hanniman is of an alarmingly frank nature."

In the lower hall she paused to bestow certain instructions upon the janitor, whom she chanced to meet; then, a smile curving her lips, she stepped into the street.

It was dusk when she got back to the Elinora. Joan, bustling about the kitchenette, heard the click of her key in the latch and came forward to meet her. Joan's cheeks were an unwonted pink, her eyes were half twinkling, half defiant. For a moment they faced each other silently.

"Joan?"

"Carolyn! How could you?"

"He wanted to know Mary Stedman; but, even after a whole dinner together, I seemed unsatisfactory. There was nothing else to do. What did he say?"

"That he had never been beaten in a deal yet; but he didn't consider it fair for two women to combine in bamboozling one man."

"The shape of his chin bars him from sympathy. Go on."

"He came on the last stroke of four—the janitor sent him right up, it seems, when he asked for Miss Stedman—and remained until ten minutes ago. He told me about last night, and I understood. He says he is coming again to-morrow, and the next day, and the next"—Joan's gesture was eloquent—"until he finds out which one of us is *Mary!*"

The teakettle bubbled joyously in the kitchenette, and she hurried toward it.

"Everything is ready, and I am starving. Let's have supper," she said.

IV.

THAT night Addison Craig in his Washington hotel received this telegram:

Dined with Miss Stedman Friday. Teaed with another Miss Stedman to-day. Possibly Mary is twins. G. H. HANNIMAN.

Which telegram brought Craig to New York, where he sought the Texan in his quarters at the Esplanade, and demanded of him: "Her name is really Mary Stedman, after all?"

"Why, I suppose so." The steady gray eyes met Craig's rather blankly for a moment. "She hasn't said anything to the contrary, and the red-headed custodian at the door let me up without parley when I asked for her. What made you think the name was assumed?"

"Because—oh, hang it all, Hanniman! There was something — something in that story that only one woman on earth could know, and her name wasn't Stedman."

"*Wasn't* and *isn't* are widely divergent. I assumed that the lady was single, and she didn't contradict me. Neither did the other one—the one I saw at the Elinora Flats. Jolly little girl, she was, too, if she wouldn't give up the family secrets. We could ask the Hartley Joneses, but they're out of town for a few days, and I don't know how to reach them. It was at their house, at dinner, that I first met Mrs. or Miss Stedman. They're relatives of mine"—apologetically.

"The Hartley Joneses, why—" Craig paused.

Into his consciousness crept the remembrance of his first call at that house, made two months back. His attention had been caught by the back of the shapely head of the goddess of the teacups. Fearful of his own sight, he had questioned Blanche Jones, adding simply:

"She reminds me of an old friend—but I can't be sure at this distance," and Blanche had said:

"You must be mistaken. That is mama's secretary, who comes in to help at such times —she is rather a superior young woman."

"Rather—superior—"

He got to his feet, and walked to the telephone.

"I am going to call a cab," he said aloud. "Where in thunder are the Elinora Flats?"

"Subway's quicker," said Mr. Hanniman, and his grin was broadly sympathetic, "only I trust that your Mary isn't mine. I'd hate to call you out for her."

Craig did not deign to reply. Already he was half-way down the stairs, making rapid mental calculations of the time-distance between the nearest Subway station and that part of the plebeian hundreds where the Elinora was situated.

His habitual calm of manner had returned, however, by the time he reached the big, dingy apartment-house; and he found himself questioning the janitor concerning Miss Stedman's whereabouts, with no outward trace of trepidation.

"Top floor—left," that individual grunted surlily, and Craig climbed the many flights of stairs. He pushed the bell on the door at the left, and a girl opened it. She wore a hat and jacket, as though she were just going out, and she was pretty—exceedingly pretty, but—

"Miss Stedman?" he asked, and the girl nodded.

"I came—that is, Mr. Hanniman gave me your address and—"

He stopped, irresolute. It must sound rather ridiculous to a perfectly strange woman to hear that a man had got her address because he believed that she was some one else, and yet—

"I was tremendously interested in your story, 'In the Shadow of the Winged Lion,'" he concluded.

"Thank you," said Miss Meredith pleasantly. "Will you come in?"

"But you were just going out." Craig found himself smiling at the dimple in the corner of her mouth. He suddenly bethought himself of the closing phrase in the Texan's telegram: "Possibly Mary Stedman is twins."

Possibly she knew Carolyn. Possibly she was not the author. Possibly—

"I have an appointment at four," said the girl, and the dimple deepened "but I need not leave for fifteen minutes."

She made a hospitable gesture toward an armchair and Craig stepped over the threshold.

"You see," he explained, "there is no place on earth that means as much to me as Venice; and I felt that you could never have written of it as you did, if you had not known and loved it, too. Have you spent much time there?"

"I've never been there at all," she answered, "though"—hastily, seeing the bewilderment in his face—"I've always wanted to so much, and I think I must have a—er—subconscious understanding of its charm."

"You must," said Craig dryly, "or perhaps your sister—or is it your sister-in-law?"

His hostess got up suddenly and moved across the room. From where he sat, Craig could see her left cheek and the tip of a small ear just visible under waves of brown hair. Both were a violent crimson and he was wondering what solecism he had committed, when she spoke again, as quietly as ever.

"She is not my sister-in-law," she said, "and—er—*she* has been abroad, with a relative. They took in Venice, I believe."

She glanced inadvertently at the clock, and Craig picked up his hat.

"It was very kind of you to bother with me—and that Venetian end of the story—it's simply—well, wonderful, you know."

"I am so glad—and it has been a pleasure. We—I appreciate very much your telling me my local color is good. Good-by," and she held out a friendly little hand. An instant later the door had clicked shut.

V.

FROM the nearest pay-station Craig called up the Esplanade and asked for Mr. Hanniman. His visit to the Elinora had been pleasant enough, but had brought no results. The pretty girl he had talked to had said that her companion was not her sister-in-law. That eliminated Mr. Hanniman's theory that Carolyn had married somebody named Stedman. But, if she wasn't married, why call herself Stedman? Or, if she didn't call herself that, who was the mysterious woman who knew enough of her affairs—of his affairs—to be able to write that story?

Here his confused meditations were interrupted by the answer coming over the wire:

"Mr. Hanniman had gone out—would not return till late."

Craig hung up the receiver and glanced at his watch, overtaken by a totally new idea. Hanniman had said that the Hartley Joneses were out of town, but *he* was not supposed to be informed of their whereabouts; and within half an hour he had presented himself at their door.

The man who answered his ring told him that neither Mrs. nor Miss Jones was at home. He was new to his situation, and knew nothing of their plans. However, the young lady who attended to the letters was there—perhaps she would see him.

Craig allowed himself to be conducted into the big drawing-room, with its gilt and brocade hangings on the left.

He heard the man's soft tread on the thick rugs, the subdued sound of voices, the faint swish of skirts, and the curtains into an adjoining room parted. Craig got to his feet and put out one hand, as though to aid his groping sight.

"Carolyn," he said, "Carolyn! So it is you, after all?"

VI.

"THEN who is Mary Stedman?"

They were still in the Louis-Seize drawing-room, and the white and gilt clock, supported by dimpling Cupids, was chiming out half-past five. Carolyn, with a belated remembrance of Joan waiting for her in the Elinora, had slipped away for a moment to put on her wraps, and was now ready for the street. The footman who had brought in the tea-things, with an appreciation of the situation that it did not need long service to teach him, had retired.

Craig repeated his questions, dropping an alarming number of sugary crystals into his tea the while, and Miss Emerson laughed.

"You have heard of Mrs. Harris?" She moved restlessly across the room, then came back to his side. "Well, Mary Stedman must be—shall I say her second cousin?"

"Oh!" said Craig, and there was a world of dawning comprehension in the monosyllable. Carolyn went on:

"Neither Joan nor I could write a story by ourselves, but she is awfully clever with her pen, though hampered by—by lack of experiences, I might say, and I—well, literary collaborations are neither new nor unusual. We started Mary Stedman's career, and because I had seen you that day, and thought you had forgotten—or because I couldn't forget myself, I don't know exactly—I told Joan the story, never letting her dream it was mine, of course, and she wrote

it. The first magazine we tried accepted it, and we thought we were going to do all sorts of wonderful things. The second story came back for the fifth time this morning, however, and I am afraid Mary Stedman is a little discouraged—afraid—"

"Do you mind so very much?" queried Craig tenderly. "Won't you be as well satisfied to help with my career?"

They went out into the wintry street together, and Carolyn's eyes were shining. As their taxicab whirred over cobbles and car-tracks she seemed well content. Only when they swung around the final corner, and stopped in front of the Elinora, did a shadow creep about her mouth, and Craig, noticing it, wondered.

They climbed the five flights of stairs, and in the tiny top hall she turned to him with a catch in her voice.

"Joan—Addison," she said. "What will I do about Joan? I can't bear to tell her, and she will never think she can manage Mary Stedman without me."

The corner apartment was deserted, however. No Joan came forward with a gay greeting; no lamp blazed on the table in the living-room; no kettle bubbled in the kitchenette. Carolyn's fingers sought the switch, and the electric light flashed on Joan's typewriter-desk and on a note propped up in a conspicuous place. She picked it up and read it over; then she read it again before handing it to Craig:

Have gone to dinner and to see "What Every Woman Knows," with Mr. Hanniman. Hope you won't be lonely. J.

P. S.—He has found out about Mary Stedman.

"I think," said Addison Craig dryly, "we need not worry about Joan."

Mrs. Scales Dabbles in Real Estate.

BY C. LANGTON CLARKE.

While Mr. Scales Groans and Swears, and Mr. Butterworth Trembles and Sighs.

MRS. SCALES, entering her husband's study, found him seated at his desk and running over a small bundle of papers with every manifestation of satisfaction. As he laid the last one aside, and smiled complacently, she addressed him.

"What's pleasing you so much, George?" she inquired. "Has somebody left you a fortune?"

"No," replied Mr. Scales. "People are not leaving me fortunes to any great extent. What money I get I earn, and work pretty hard for, let me tell you. These papers—" and he picked up the documents and ruffled them like a pack of cards—"represent as much hard work and diplomacy and finesse, as many men exercise in a year.

"I flatter myself"—he spread himself a little in his chair—"that there is not another real-estate agent in this town who could have carried a delicate bit of business to practically a conclusion in such a thorough and satisfactory manner."

"You don't need to pray at night for a good conceit of yourself, George," returned Mrs. Scales. "I don't suppose it amounts to so much after all. What's it all about?"

"I don't suppose you would understand if I told you," replied Mr. Scales loftily.

"I suppose you could explain it, couldn't you?" said Mrs. Scales sharply. "I'm not so hopelessly deficient in intelligence as you seem to think, and what's the good of being the wife of such a brilliant man of business, if one hasn't a chance to appreciate it for oneself? If I say to any one: 'My husband's such a clever man,' and they ask: 'How do you know?' I would have to say: 'He says so himself.' Now, if I knew all about this thing, I could tell them about it."

Mr. Scales laughed disagreeably.

"That's just what I'm afraid of," he

said. "You tell any one about this piece of business, and there's an end of it. All my work would be wasted. There's one link to forge yet. When the chain is completed, I will give you the whole story."

Mrs. Scales's curiosity was roused.

"You don't seem to have much confidence in my ability to keep a secret," she said in offended tones. "You must think I'm a regular tattle-tale. I don't see why you can't give me some idea of the business, anyway."

Mr. Scales threw the papers into the top drawer of his desk.

"Well," he said, "I don't mind telling you this much. There is a certain piece of property, on a corner of two business streets in this city, which is a very desirable site for a bank. Unfortunately, it is not in one block, but is owned by six different persons and is occupied by small buildings. I have been engaged for some months in buying out these people without letting any one of them know that I was in treaty with the rest."

"But why do you need to be so sneaky and underhand about it?" demanded Mrs. Scales. "What does it matter if they do know? It's none of their business."

Mr. Scales laughed indulgently.

"Because," he said, "I don't want to be held up. If any one of them knew that I had made a deal with the others, he would immediately jump his price to a practically prohibitive figure, and I would have to pay it or let the whole thing go by the board, and be out the money already spent. Now do you understand?"

Mrs. Scales nodded thoughtfully.

"I see," she said. "But I don't quite see how you can manage it. Neighbors, even in stores, are gossipy, and would tell each other."

"That," replied Mr. Scales, somewhat vaingloriously, "is where the skill and tact come in. I have not appeared in the transaction at all. The deals have been made through others. Those papers I was looking at are options on five of the properties, made out to different people, who, when the last is secured, will turn them over to me."

"Options?" queried Mrs. Scales. "What's that?"

"An agreement to sell at a stated price, within a certain period, in consideration of a sum paid down at the time the option is signed. If, at the expiration of that period, I wish to repudiate the bargain I am at liberty to do so, but in that case I forfeit the money paid."

"And how much do you have to pay?" queried Mrs. Scales.

"Just as little as the other fellow will take," replied Mr. Scales. "In these cases it has cost me from three hundred to four hundred dollars apiece for six months' options. I expect that the one I have yet to get, and which is the keystone of the whole property, will cost me about three hundred. Now, are you satisfied?"

"No," said Mrs. Scales, "I'm not. I want to know more. When are you to buy this last one, and put in the 'keystone' as you call it?"

"To-morrow," replied her husband cheerfully. "I don't anticipate the slightest trouble. The owner has just returned from California or I would have closed with him before. I happen to know from a few discreet inquiries that he is dead anxious to move out to the coast, and would be willing to take any reasonable offer for his place. Butterworth is going to see him to-morrow afternoon and make the deal."

"Just one question more, George," said Mrs. Scales. "How much are you going to make on the whole thing?"

"At a conservative estimate," replied Mr. Scales, "about five thousand dollars."

Mrs. Scales clasped her hands in ecstasy.

"Oh, George!" she cried, "I am so pleased. You really are a clever fellow, and now I don't mind asking you something which I have wanted to ever so long, but I didn't quite like to."

The gratified look which had overspread Mr. Scales's countenance at his wife's tribute to his astuteness, vanished with her closing words and was replaced by one of mistrust.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"About a month ago," said Mrs. Scales, folding her hands and settling herself more comfortably in her chair, "I was poking about in Berners' looking for a little silver handbell, when I saw the most perfectly lovely diamond ring."

She paused a moment for some expression of encouragement, but Mr. Scales merely emitted a disgusted grunt.

"One of the loveliest rings I ever saw," continued Mrs. Scales. "Three flawless stones in the cunningest setting. The man said it was the greatest bargain they had."

Again she waited to be questioned, but Mr. Scales maintained a discreet silence.

"The price," Mrs. Scales went on, "was only three hundred and fifty dollars, but the clerk went away and spoke to Berners him-

self, and he said they would let me have it for three hundred and twenty-five—a clear saving of twenty-five dollars."

"That's the sort of saving that makes millionaires," commented Mr. Scales sarcastically.

"And now that you are going to make at least five thousand dollars on one little deal," said Mrs. Scales, ignoring his unresponsiveness, "I don't mind asking you. I want you to buy me that ring."

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" shouted Mr. Scales. "Do you think I'm crazy? Three hundred and twenty-five dollars for a ring? I never heard of such a thing. You must think I'm made of money. Now, don't let me hear any more of such nonsense."

"I'm sure, George," returned Mrs. Scales, half weeping, "that if I had made a lot of money on a deal, and you asked me for something, I wouldn't refuse you."

"Well, go and make it," replied Mr. Scales with brutal directness, and bounding out of his chair, "and then we'll see how far you carry your theories into practice. I haven't time to talk nonsense. I have to run down to the club for half an hour. If Butterworth comes in, ask him to wait."

Without giving his wife time to renew her arguments, or make any further appeals to his generosity, Mr. Scales flung out of the room, and in a few minutes the banging of the hall door announced his departure.

For several minutes after her husband's abrupt exit Mrs. Scales sat staring in front of her with a woful countenance, occasionally dabbing her eyes with the corner of her handkerchief. Presently her glance fell on the top drawer of the desk, which Mr. Scales, in his agitation, had forgotten to close.

Without any particular purpose she seated herself in the desk chair, and, taking out the bundle of options, began to examine them. It did not take her long to satisfy her curiosity as to the location of the property for which her husband was in treaty. In fact, she knew the corner well.

It was situated just outside the main retail district, and she had spent some hours at various times in one of the stores, a narrow building, whose proprietor made a specialty of Dutch china.

As she skimmed the documents she found that this particular store was not included in the agreements, although they embraced those on either side of it, and came to the conclusion that this was the property which was yet to be purchased to complete the block.

She tied up the papers again, threw them back into the drawer, and sat for a while idly drumming her fingers on the desk.

"George is really getting too mean for anything," she said. "It would serve him right if I were to go and tell the man who owns the store all about it, and let him hold George up."

Her meditations were interrupted by a ring at the door-bell, and in a few minutes Mr. Butterworth, an old friend of the family, rotund, debonair, and immaculately attired, was ushered in.

Mrs. Scales, explaining Mr. Scales's temporary absence, welcomed him with effusion, seated him in the most comfortable armchair, produced her husband's cigars, and having made him thoroughly comfortable, seated herself opposite to him.

"I hope," she said, after a few desultory remarks, "that you will be successful tomorrow."

"Eh?" said Mr. Butterworth, with a look of surprise. "In what?"

"In getting old Sinclair to sell you that store," replied Mrs. Scales easily.

Mr. Butterworth assumed an air of polite bewilderment, and Mrs. Scales laughed.

"Oh, you needn't pretend to look so puzzled, Mr. Butterworth," she said. "George has told me all about it. I know that he has got options on five places on the corner of Wellman and Green Streets, and that he only wants to buy Sinclair's property to complete his purchase, and sell to the bank."

Mr. Butterworth smiled amiably.

"Oh, of course, if you know," he said. "It's all right, but you must pardon my caution. These sort of things are usually kept pretty close."

"Surely," said Mrs. Scales reproachfully, "you wouldn't have a man keep things from his wife. I'm sure you tell yours everything."

"Yes—oh, yes, to be sure," Mr. Butterworth replied, with one or two mental reservations. "I'm sure I don't know why he shouldn't, but you know Scales is inclined to be secretive about business matters."

"Well—I know all about this, you see," returned Mrs. Scales, "but it might be as well not to let George know I told you. You won't, will you? He might be annoyed with me."

Mr. Butterworth promised the strictest secrecy, and Mrs. Scales went on.

"There's one thing he forgot to mention; he was in such a hurry to get away to his club. How much are you to pay for this

place of Sinclair's? You don't know how interested I am in everything that concerns my husband's business."

"Well," replied Mr. Butterworth, expanding amiably under the influence of his hostess's smiles, "if he told you so much, I don't suppose there is any harm in telling you that. We are prepared to go as high as eleven thousand at a pinch, but my first offer will be nine thousand. I expect to get the property for about nine thousand five hundred. It would be worth that, apart from the other properties, as an investment."

"I have often thought," said Mrs. Scales dreamily, "that I would like to own a little real estate. You know I have a few thousand dollars of my own that my Aunt Jane left me. It is still in the First National, drawing wretched interest. George is so frightfully optimistic about real estate—I suppose he is so used to talking that way to his clients—that I almost mistrust his judgment. What do you think?"

"My dear lady," replied Mr. Butterworth, "if you are looking for an investment, I don't believe you can do better than put your money in real estate in this city. You will be surprised how quickly you can get returns."

"Thank you, Mr. Butterworth," said Mrs. Scales, after a pause of deep thought. "I think I will take your advice. By the way, when are you to see Mr. Sinclair?"

"About three o'clock," replied Mr. Butterworth, smiling knowingly. "It is one of my maxims that if you want to do business with a man, the best time to tackle him is after he has had a good luncheon. He is much more amenable to reason."

"How clever you are!" said Mrs. Scales enthusiastically. "Do you know, I should never have thought of that. And now—here is George back. Not a word about what we have been talking of. You promise?"

Mr. Butterworth again assured his hostess that he would preserve the strictest secrecy, and had hardly concluded when Mr. Scales entered the room.

"So here you are," said the latter hospitably. "Sorry I had to run away for a while. Hope Mrs. Scales made you comfortable."

He lighted a cigar, and dropped into a comfortable chair.

"And what subject," he asked amiably, "have you two been discussing? The baby?"

"We have been talking," said Mrs. Scales, before Mr. Butterworth could reply, "about real estate. I have been telling Mr. Butterworth how much I should like to put a little of my money into property. He says I couldn't do better."

Mr. Scales looked sharply at his friend.

"You haven't been blabbing any secrets, have you?" he asked suspiciously.

"Secrets?" echoed Mr. Butterworth, somewhat taken aback.

"Oh, you know what I mean well enough," said Mr. Scales peremptorily.

"I don't think," interrupted Mrs. Scales, coming to the rescue, "that Mr. Butterworth is in the habit of talking secrets. Surely, George, I can ask Mr. Butterworth's opinion of investments without your getting disagreeable. I suppose you think I ought to take no one's advice but yours."

"Oh, it's all right," said Mr. Scales, reassured. "But you know, Butterworth—or you will know when you have been married a little longer—that you can't be too careful about confiding business matters to a woman. Once, when I was a good deal younger and more foolish than I am now, I told Mrs. Scales about a big purchase I was putting through. Two days afterward I saw in the society column that Mr. Scales, the well-known real-estate agent, was negotiating on behalf of Mr. James Abernethy for the palatial residence of Mr. Everard Wilson.

"Abernethy raised the very deuce over it. It appears that Mrs. Scales confided in a friend, who told another friend, who mentioned it to the society editor."

"Mrs. Forrester had no business to mention it at all," said Mrs. Scales indignantly. "I don't see how you could blame me. I told her in the strictest confidence."

"And I told you in the strictest confidence," retorted Mr. Scales. "So there wasn't much to choose between you. Since that time," he added, "I have made it a point, in mentioning any prospective deal to my wife, to avoid specific details. I thought"—and he laughed good-naturedly—"that perhaps she had been trying to pump you."

Mr. Butterworth darted a reproachful glance at Mrs. Scales, who replied with a slight smile and a warning shake of the head as though to remind him of his promise.

"So you think," said Mr. Scales, "of going into real estate, do you? Well, you couldn't do better. I'll look round for a nice little investment for you."

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Scales scornfully, "but I think I'll look round for myself. I suppose you and Mr. Butterworth want to talk business which I mustn't hear, so I'll say good-night."

"You'll pardon my suspicions, Butterworth," said Mr. Scales, when the two were alone, "but one can't be too careful. I mentioned the deal to my wife in a general sort of way, without specifying the locality, and I was afraid that the natural curiosity of women had led her to try and get some of the details out of you. However, I might have known you better."

Mr. Butterworth, oppressed with a sense of guilt, and a feeling of strong resentment against the unscrupulous and deceitful ways of womankind, made an inarticulate reply, which passed for assent, and the two men fell to discussing the deal to be transacted on the morrow, Mr. Scales issuing elaborate instructions and Mr. Butterworth listening submissively.

Mr. Scales had hardly left the house next morning before Mrs. Scales was at the telephone. She called up a certain address, and a long and animated dialogue followed. Occasionally little quirks of laughter interfered with her remarks, and seemed to occasion some surprise in the person at the other end of the line, as she hastened to explain her levity by declaring that she felt in unusually good spirits that morning.

"Now, don't make any mistake," she said in conclusion. "At ten o'clock sharp in the First National. Don't fail me."

Then she hung up the receiver and went to put on her hat and jacket.

It was almost the luncheon-hour before Mrs. Scales returned to the house, and she had hardly divested herself of her street attire before Mr. Scales came bustling in. He appeared to be in tip-top spirits, and whistled a little air very much out of tune, as he hung up his hat.

"You seem to be as merry as a grig, George," commented Mrs. Scales. "What's happened to put you in such a good humor?"

"Pretty good news," replied her husband, smiling beamingly across the table. "You know that deal I was speaking to you about?"

"Oh," interrupted Mrs. Scales brightly. "So you've put the keystone in."

"No," replied Mr. Scales carelessly, "that comes off this afternoon. But that wasn't worrying me.

"But I met Travis, manager of the Metropolitan, this morning, and sounded him about the willingness of the bank to buy that property. I was pretty guarded, and so was he, but I learned enough to be sure that they will take it. I guess it's good enough for six thousand profit at least."

"Oh, George, how lovely for you," replied his wife ecstatically. "But suppose the man who owns that piece of property you were telling me about won't sell?"

"Not much fear of that," rejoined Mr. Scales cheerfully. "It's just a matter of price. If I have to go a few hundred above the real value, I guess I can afford it. Butterworth has full instructions. He is to see the man at three o'clock."

It was on the tip of Mrs. Scales's tongue to say "Yes, I know," but she checked herself in time.

"Well, I'm sure I hope it will be all right," she said. "But you know you can never be sure of things in this world."

Mr. Scales laughed indulgently, and having consumed his meal with less deliberation than usual, rushed back to his office.

"Poor George!" said Mrs. Scales, half smiling, as the door banged behind him.

It was half-past six, a good half-hour later than usual, when Mr. Scales returned to his home.

His brow was gloomy and his manner oppressed, and he fidgeted about his study, picking things up and throwing them down again with an air of impatience and abstraction which his wife found rather trying to her nerves.

"What on earth's the matter now, George?" she said at last. "Your good spirits seem to have evaporated. Anything wrong?"

"Most extraordinary thing," replied Mr. Scales, throwing himself into a chair. "Butterworth's been to see that man three times this afternoon, and hasn't been able to catch him in. The woman in the store said he had been out all the afternoon."

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Scales cheerfully, "I suppose he's got business to attend to as well as you. People sometimes go to your office and find you out. I suppose Mr. Butterworth can see him in the morning, can't he?"

"It's all very well to talk," returned Mr. Scales, scowling darkly, "but since I saw Travis this morning I want to get this thing settled beyond all chance. Butterworth's gone to see him now. He is expected back for tea."

The ringing of the dinner bell temporarily diverted his thoughts, but his enjoyment of the meal was considerably impaired by constant listening for sounds heralding the return of his emissary.

The city hall clock was booming out the hour of eight, and Mr. Scales's impatience had reached a point almost unendurable, both to himself and his wife, when the door-bell rang, and Mr. Butterworth's footfalls were heard ascending the stairs.

"Poor Mr. Butterworth sounds tired," said Mrs. Scales sympathetically, for there was nothing of the usual buoyancy and elasticity in his step.

"Tired!" snorted Mr. Scales. "I bet he's not half as tired as I am waiting for him. Well?"—as Butterworth entered the room and stood hesitating with his hand on the door-knob—"did you see him?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Butterworth.

"Well, look a little more cheerful, then," adjured Mr. Scales. "You made the deal, I suppose?"

"No," replied Mr. Butterworth, who did not seem anxious to commit himself beyond monosyllables.

"No?" shouted Mr. Scales, rising hurriedly from his chair. "No? And why not? Didn't you make him the offer I told you?"

"No," said Mr. Butterworth again.

"You didn't!" roared Mr. Scales, clutching at his hair and staring wildly at his friend. "You didn't? What's the matter with you? Are you crazy?"

"It wasn't any use," replied Mr. Butterworth in a choking voice. "He had sold the place already."

"Sold?" cried Mr. Scales, in a state of agitation terrible to behold. He crushed the evening paper he was holding into a hard round ball and hurled it to the other side of the room. "Sold? And when?"

"This morning," responded Mr. Butterworth, wearily seating himself. "He told me he had had a good offer and had closed with it at once."

"This," cried Mr. Scales, shaking his clenched fists wildly in the air, "this is what comes of your theories about always seeing a man after dinner. You think you're such a wonderful judge of human nature. If you had gone to see him this morning, this wouldn't have happened."

"But you agreed with me," protested Mr. Butterworth, too depressed at the failure of his mission to resent his friend's manner. "You know you did."

"I did it out of politeness," snapped Mr. Scales. "But I thought it a fool idea, all the same. Well, I suppose we'll have to buy from this other party at an increased price. Whom did he sell to?"

"I don't know," replied Mr. Butterworth.

Once more Mr. Scales was in danger of falling into an apopleptic fit.

"Well, of all the bunglers!" he was beginning when Mr. Butterworth cut him short.

"I tried to find out," he said. "But Sinclair wouldn't tell. He said it was one of the conditions of the sale that he was to keep his mouth shut.

"It looks to me," he added thoughtfully, "as if you had been a little too communicative in your conversation with Travis this morning. I shouldn't be surprised if the bank were at the bottom of it. If they hold that property, they can get the others pretty much at their own price from you. I thought you had been a little hasty."

Mr. Scales, speechless at the notion, stared horror-stricken at his friend.

"It's not Mr. Sinclair who keeps that little Dutch china-shop you are talking about, is it, George?" queried Mrs. Scales with an artless air.

Mr. Scales and Mr. Butterworth wheeled simultaneously, and regarded her with surprise.

"Yes, it is," said the former at last. "What do you know about it?"

"Why, I know everything about it," replied Mrs. Scales. "Far more than you seem to."

She smiled placidly with the superior air of one who possesses a choice piece of knowledge, hidden from the rest of mankind.

"Oh, you do, do you?" said Mr. Scales incredulously. "Perhaps, then, you can kindly tell us who bought it."

"Why, of course I can," replied the wife. "If you want very much to know."

She smiled pleasantly at her raging husband, and when her eyes rested on the startled countenance of Mr. Butterworth her smile became wider.

"I bought it," she said at last.

A dynamite bomb exploded in the room could hardly have created greater consternation than did these simple words. Mr. Butterworth uttered a loud exclamation, and Mr. Scales, dropping limply back into his chair, stared at his wife, as if she had suddenly taken leave of her senses.

"You?" he gasped at last. "Have you gone mad?"

"Not at all," replied Mrs. Scales cheerfully. "You see, it was this way. Last night Mr. Butterworth and I were talking about real estate as an investment. I told you, you remember, and I happened to mention old Sinclair's place.

"I often deal there, and I always thought

Mr. Sinclair such a dear old man. Well, Mr. Butterworth said that the place would be a capital investment, didn't you, Mr. Butterworth?"

Mr. Butterworth uttered a slight groan. He glanced at Mr. Scales, but the devastating glare in that gentleman's eye was too much for him, and he looked hastily away again.

"So," continued Mrs. Scales, evidently enjoying herself, "remembering what you said, that I couldn't do better than invest my money in real estate, and that if I wanted to buy jewelry I ought to make some money for myself, or something to that effect, I made up my mind to buy Sinclair's shop, if I could get it reasonably cheap."

"And what," demanded Mr. Scales, in a voice which he hardly recognized as his own, "do you call reasonably cheap?"

"Well," replied Mrs. Scales deliberately, "Mr. Butterworth said he thought somewhere round nine thousand five hundred dollars would be a fair figure. Didn't you, Mr. Butterworth?"

Utterly crushed by this unexpected disclosure, Mr. Butterworth could only shake his head feebly. Mr. Scales looked at him, as if he could have joyfully stretched him dead on the carpet.

"So this morning," Mrs. Scales went on, "after you had left for the office, I called up Alfred Satterlee, the lawyer. He's an awfully nice, obliging young fellow, and I made an appointment with him at the First National, and we got my check for a thousand dollars marked. Then we went to Mr. Sinclair, and I told him I thought of buying his place.

"He said he was quite willing to sell if he could make a deal right away. After a good deal of bargaining, he said he would sell for ninety-four hundred, three thousand in cash, and the rest on a mortgage at five per cent, with the right to pay off the mortgage any time by giving three months' notice.

"Mr. Satterlee made him put that in. As Mr. Butterworth said ninety-five hundred would be a fair price, I said I would buy the store. Mr. Satterlee drew up the deed, or whatever you call those things, and I went back to the bank and got the other two thousand. The whole business was over by half-past twelve. Now don't you think I'm pretty clever?"

Mr. Scales, his eyes still riveted on the unhappy Mr. Butterworth, ground his teeth.

"Mr. Sinclair," continued Mrs. Scales, "was really very kind. He says he knows of a man who would, he is sure, be willing to rent the store on a five-year lease, at a rental which would give me seven per cent clear. I think I shall go and see him to-morrow."

Then at last Mr. Scales found his voice.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," he shouted. "You will make over the property to me. And how did you know?" he added in a milder tone, as he began to realize that the fears regarding the bank, conjured up by Mr. Butterworth, were groundless, "how did you know that there was not some flaw in the title?"

"I don't know what you mean exactly," returned Mrs. Scales unguardedly, "but I knew that if you were satisfied, it would be all right."

Next moment she realized her blunder, but it was too late.

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Scales witheringly. "So you did know this was the place I was after. I thought that was a nice cock-and-bull story about investments. So Butterworth put you up to this, did he?"

"I did nothing of the kind," interrupted Mr. Butterworth hurriedly, and scowling as fiercely as his amiable countenance would permit on Mrs. Scales. "I didn't know any more about it than you did. Do you suppose I would have spent the afternoon wearing myself out on your beastly business, if I had?"

"But you must have told her something about it," insisted Mr. Scales angrily.

Mr. Butterworth was about to exculpate himself, but, faithful to his promise, refrained.

"I can't say anything about it," he said.

Mrs. Scales burst into a ringing laugh.

"Oh, George," she cried, "it's all too funny. I'll tell you all about it. You were so fearfully secretive that you aroused my curiosity, and after you went out last night I looked at those papers in your drawer. I knew at once where the property was, and although I don't set up to be very clever, I knew that Sinclair's place was the store you had still to buy. Then, when Mr. Butterworth came in, I pretended to know all about it, and naturally he thought you had told me. He wasn't to blame. He didn't tell you, because I made him promise not to."

"And why have you kept me in this anxiety all this time?" demanded Mr. Scales severely.

"To punish you for not confiding in your wife," replied Mrs. Scales, "and to make the disclosure a little more exciting. That's why I made old Sinclair keep his mouth shut."

"Humph!" said Mr. Scales. "Well, any-

way, I have got the property, which is the main thing."

"Eh?" queried Mrs. Scales, arching her eyebrows in affected surprise.

"I said," explained Mr. Scales, speaking with great distinctness, "that everything is well that ends well. And that the main thing is that I have got the property."

"But you haven't it, George," said Mrs. Scales. "I have it, which isn't the same thing at all."

Mr. Scales stared at his wife.

"But you are going to turn it over to me," he said sternly.

"Certainly I am, George," replied Mrs. Scales brightly. "On one condition."

"On one condition?" echoed Mr. Scales blankly.

Mrs. Scales did not reply, but, going to the desk, opened a drawer, and took out Mr. Scales's check-book, which she spread open. Then she beckoned her husband to join her.

"Write," she said, "a check for three hundred and twenty-five dollars, and make it out to William Berners & Sons."

Mr. Scales looked at his wife, then he looked at Mr. Butterworth, who was grinning broadly in appreciation of the situation, and with a muttered exclamation, sat down, and obeyed his wife's command.

Mrs. Scales folded the check and smiled beamingly on her husband.

"Sinclair's store is yours," she said. "And to-morrow, George, I will show you one of the prettiest diamond rings you ever saw in your life."

The Hand of Fate.

BY HELEN A. HOLDEN.

And How It Seemed To Be Intimately Connected With the Finger of Derision.

THE sun was hot, the road dusty, and the girl self-absorbed. The horse, very fat and very lazy, took advantage of these facts.

At the crossroads the girl roused from her reverie. She spoke reproachfully to the horse.

"No, you don't, Old Faithful. That way would eventually take us to the farm again. I am sure Uncle Kenyon told us to take the turn to the left."

The girl persuaded the horse much against his will. Then she gave herself up again to her thoughts.

She was on her way to meet Shirley Kenyon. That was the most important fact in the world. The next in importance was the event that was to take place the following day.

When a girl is engaged to a man, it is not only a pleasure but a dire necessity to make much of such an occasion. Cecily had lain awake whole nights puzzling over the situation.

"If Shirley were only a girl," thought Cecily, "I could so easily have made him something. But I suppose men would look foolish embroidered. How unreasonable of any one to have a birthday in July, anyway—the hottest, most inconvenient month of all the year."

Aunt Harriet had been appealed to, on Cecily's return from a vain hunt through the hopeless country store. She had suggested a cake with a motto and dates in chocolate icing on a white background. Cecily shuddered as she thought how much it reminded her of a tombstone.

Aunt Harriet was really no relation to Cecily. She was an aunt of Shirley's, with whom Cecily was spending the summer. Cecily sighed as she thought how easily Aunt Harriet could save the situation—if only she would!

The old-fashioned farmhouse was full of old mahogany. With apparent artlessness, but with much tact, Cecily had broached the subject. Any one of the old pieces, a chair,

a foot-stool, a table, would make an ideal birthday present for Shirley.

Cecily would have paid any price, and been willing to take anything, from the garret to the cellar. But Aunt Harriet could not be made to understand.

Shirley was welcome to anything the house contained. It would all be his some day, anyway. But to take money for it from Cecily, was preposterous.

Cecily could not make her understand that she must gain possession first, before she could give it as her present. Argument had been hopeless.

"Old Faithful," Cecily suddenly drew up on the reins, "what's the matter with that nice, shady spot for luncheon? It's already past the time, as you doubtless are aware. The people in the house, back there, can't possibly object; but, just to be polite, I'll go and ask."

The farmer's wife did not mind, but would not hear of Cecily's eating down by the dusty road. She invited her to remain under the cool arbor at the back of the house.

"Is there some one who could take care of Old Faithful?" asked Cecily. "I can't think which comes first, his feed or the watering. Mr. Kenyon told me, but I can't seem to remember."

"You stayin' at the Kenyon farm?" asked the woman, when she returned from sending her husband to attend to the horse.

"Yes," replied Cecily with a winning smile. "The warm weather and the city were too much for me. I seemed to get tired so easily. They packed me off up here in a great hurry. I don't look as though there were anything the matter with me, do I? Indeed, there's nothing like your good mountain air and the good things you all have to eat."

There was method in Cecily's volubility. She meant to please.

The back door was wide open. While the woman was gone, she had glanced into the kitchen beyond.

There on the mantel shelf was a clock—a big, old-fashioned mahogany clock.

"It is the hand of Fate," thought Cecily. "It has been decreed that I should buy that clock and give it to Shirley as a birthday present."

So Cecily sat through the noon hour and talked and gossiped. She answered the innumerable questions asked by the woman, Mrs. Corning she called herself. She willingly laid bare what she knew of the Kenyon household. She regretted that she, herself, was not a Kenyon, so she might the more readily satisfy the curiosity of her hostess.

But Cecily's efforts were not in vain. She had her reward.

"Twenty dollars seems a good deal to ask," Mrs. Corning had expected to compromise on half that sum, "seeing as how the clock don't run. But it means more to you than it would to most."

"Indeed it does," replied Cecily. "You say it really was once in the Kenyon family? Shirley's own grandfather's clock? It seems too good to be true. Shirley will enjoy that part more than he does the clock, I think."

"His grandaddy owed my pa a debt that he couldn't pay," explained Mrs. Corning. "It had been a bad year. So pa took the clock in part payment. Be sure an' tell Miss Kenyon. I 'low she'll take a heap o' interest in hearin' 'bout it."

"I really must be starting," Cecily had suddenly become conscious of the time. "You see, I expect Shirley this afternoon. I have still quite a drive to get to the junction before the three-thirty train."

"You don't mean you think you are on the way to the junction?" asked Mrs. Corning.

"Why, yes. Surely I'm over half-way?" asked Cecily anxiously.

"You're 'bout half-way the wrong side o' the way to the junction," replied Mrs. Corning.

"Oh, dear!" Cecily became incoherent in her distress. "Is there any way around, any short cut through—any way of making that three-thirty train from here?"

"No shorter way than to go back to the crossroads," replied Mrs. Corning. "That's 'most back to the Kenyon farm. There ain't no possible way you can make it now."

As Cecily turned the willing horse toward home, she did not feel entirely forlorn. Mingled with her disappointment at missing the train was a feeling of elation over the treasure she had found.

"If it hadn't been for the crossroads," she patted the wad of newspapers affectionately, "I should have missed drawing this prize. I even believe you are worth missing the ride up from the junction with Shirley. He will think so, too, when he hears it is his own, own grandfather's clock."

Before Cecily had reached the house Aunt Harriet rushed out, crying breathlessly:

"Where is Shirley? What has happened?"

Cecily explained, adding:

"What will Shirley do, Aunt Harriet?

Will the poor boy have to tramp it all the way up from the junction?"

"Now, don't you worry about him," replied Aunt Harriet. "As soon as he makes sure we haven't sent for him, he'll just hire some one to drive him over. He ought to be here before long now. What in the world, Cecily, is that package you got there?"

"That"—pride and excitement struggled in Cecily's voice—"is a birthday present I picked up on the way for Shirley."

"Land sakes!" exclaimed Aunt Harriet as the clock came in view from its several wrappings of newspapers. "I should think the person who got rid of that would be mighty pleased with theirselves."

"You won't say that when you hear all," said Cecily, with dignity.

"But if it only keeps good time, you needn't mind the looks so much," Aunt Harriet continued consolingly. "It is lucky Shirley don't take after his grandpa in everything."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Cecily.

"Grandpa Kenyon wouldn't have a clock in the house. Said he didn't want to be reminded o' the passin' o' time."

"How did he know when to get up, and when to go to bed, and when to do anything?" asked Cecily.

"He could tell near enough by the sun," replied Aunt Harriet.

"Please pay strict attention, and answer very, very carefully." Cecily felt the seriousness of the situation. "Are you sure—quite sure—about that? I mean about Grandpa Kenyon never having had a clock?"

"Why, of course." There was no hesitation in Aunt Harriet's answer. "Any one who remembers grandpa will tell you about his queer notion on the subject. But, tell me, Cecily, where did you find the clock?"

"Aunt Harriet," replied Cecily solemnly, "at the time I called it 'the hand of Fate guiding me.'"

"Then you didn't get it from the Corning farm," said Aunt Harriet. "Fate would 'a' taken you to any farm but that."

"Why not there?" Cecily knew something unpleasant was coming.

"No one round here has anything to do with the Cornings." Aunt Harriet's voice was withering in its contempt. "They're a mean, low-down set. The truth's not in them," she added sententiously.

"Aren't you sort of hard on them?" Cecily fought hard against the conviction that her late hostess was not all she had thought her.

"Not a mite," replied Aunt Harriet stoutly. "Why, if you, now, had happened on her with that clock, she'd have made you believe anything. She'd have made up some big lie—there ain't no other name for it—till you'd have been sure you'd have had to get it, no matter what price she asked. Where did you get it, Cecily, and how much did it cost?"

"Such a spiteful old Sapphira!" groaned Cecily.

"What did you say?" asked Aunt Harriet.

"Oh, nothing. What would you call a fair price, Aunt Harriet?" Cecily felt as though nothing could hurt now.

"I think fifty cents would be a big price," ventured Aunt Harriet. "I hope you didn't pay any more—"

"I think that must be Shirley," broke in Cecily hurriedly. "I'll just run down to the road and meet him."

MY COMRADE.

I HAVE a comrade, bright and sweet;
  She interests me more
Than other girls I chance to meet,
  Who think me oft a bore.
Next to my heart she occupies
  A place that is unique;
She looks at me with laughing eyes,
  No matter how I speak.
And when I crack a joke and wink,
  As great men sometimes do,
To see her smile, you'd really think
  She thought that joke was new!
She's mine! Yet sadly do I trace
  These lines. I cannot laugh,
For deep within my new watch-case
  She's but a photograph.

Sixty Tables For Two.

BY JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE.

The Goose With the Golden Eggs Visits the Red Rooster With Results That Have Nothing To Do With the High Price of Living.

IT was the dinner time of day at the Café Chantecler Rouge. Under its cerulean ceiling and within its tapestried and rose-garlanded walls, glass and silver g l e a m e d and sparkled bravely upon the most spotless of linen. Roses and carnations nodded from glass vases upon the tables, with all the irresponsible nonchalance of flowers.

About the room some thirty waiters stood with drooping shoulders, displaying all the objective symptoms of chronic melancholia, while near the door a Napoleonic *maître d'hôtel* sat limply upon a chair, a rotund *Hamlet* in modern evening dress.

In a little bower, opposite the door, a string orchestra of seven pieces gloomily discoursed appropriate music. (At the moment they were playing Schumann's "Träumerei," and tears dripped from the violin bows as the instruments sobbed.)

There were at three of the gay little tables just as many solitary diners; but, be it whispered, they were actually attachés of the house, eating with all the appreciative gusto displayed by a *claque* at a theatrical first night.

It may be gathered from the name that the Café Chantecler Rouge was a French restaurant. The proprietor, Mr. Peter Riley, was not a Frenchman, but the *maître d'hôtel* was; and so were the waiters, and the names on the menu, and the musicians, and the personnel of the cuisine, and all the decorations and furnishings. Even the candelabra seemed almost to shrug their shoulders and the candle flames to swagger and sputter with Latin abandon. So what mattered the name or face of the proprietor?

It may also be gathered that the Café Chantecler Rouge was a pathetic failure, commercially and artistically. It stood near the "board walk" of a famous beach resort, and hundreds of gay people with appetites and money passed its open doors, but through some hapless twist of fate the people gravitated to the Café Cordon Bleu, which stood not more than two hundred feet away.

There the table reservations were made hours in advance, the waiters dashed madly about, with the marks of overwork writ upon their faces, and the proprietor—a Frenchman—paced sedately among the tables with an occasional glance of calm commiseration out the windows at the bravely lighted windows of his unfortunate neighbor.

Such situations are inexplicable. Psychologists can arrive at no logical solution.

The sphinx would never tackle the riddle of the public. It was simply that the public did not go to the Chantecler Rouge. Perhaps it did not face the sea at the psychological angle. Perhaps it mattered that one had to go up two steps to get in, whereas the entrance to the Cordon Bleu was flush with the sidewalk.

Perhaps the name of Riley was just a fraction of a degree too incompatible with the French scheme of things, though the name was studiously concealed like a crime. Whatever the reason, the fact remained that the café was a failure.

At six-thirty of that evening one Amos Manning, a portly gentleman in ample tweeds, came ambling along the board walk and stopped at the Cordon Bleu. A lordly "captain" (of waiters) met him and looked with vague disfavor at the tweeds.

"*M'sieu'* has reserved a table, yes?" he inquired with every expression of doubt.

"No," said *m'sieu'*, with no doubt at all in his tone. "But I'm Amos Manning."

The personage shrugged its shoulders very slightly and allowed its eyes to wander again over the tweeds. "Evening dress is not insisted on, *m'sieu';* but is it not that *m'sieu'* might be—er—oh, just the least bit more comfortable in the men's grill-room in the basement?"

Mr. Manning tarried not for argument. He merely uttered a simple monosyllable, which blanched the face of the personage, turned on his heel and strode away. He strode on until he stood in the lonely halls of Mr. Riley's Chantecler Rouge.

Thirty waiters sprang to greet him. He selected a table by a window, and three waiters struggled to seat him, while three more wrestled with the *maître d'hôtel* and an omnibus for the honor of taking his hat and stick. The orchestra broke into a positively spirited rendering of the "Marseillaise."

Mr. Manning bore an enviable reputation with himself as an epicure. He had gastronomic theories. One was the idea of simplicity in ordering. He held that a cut of roast beef and the serving of it was a more rigorous test of a cuisine than the most comcomplicated concoction of blended viands and sauces.

He ordered a simple, clear soup, and as he sipped it smiled about him in a way that made the corners of the waiters' mouths almost cease to droop for a fraction of an instant. He ate filet of sole, braised sweetbreads, a slice of joint, an artichoke, and a bit of cabinet pudding with a beaming placidity which was infectious; and he smacked his lips over the steaming mocha as if it were a vintage.

His tip was not extravagant, but it was satisfactory and respect-compelling to the only really happy waiter in the room. As he moved with the even smoothness of a ship toward the door, he complimented the bowing *maître d'hôtel.* Stopping near the door, he said with sudden resolution:

"I shall be here for supper after the theater. You may reserve a table for two."

A satellite of the chief hastened to mark down the reservation with scrupulous care. "We have extra music at supper, *m'sieu',*" he said proudly. "We have the great tenor, M'sieu' Lalatte, formerly of the Opéra-Comique."

Mr. Manning smiled pleasantly, to show he had no serious objection to graduates of the Opéra-Comique, and walked away.

At eleven o'clock there were four people supping at the Chantecler Rouge. Two of them were bona-fide customers; the other two were attachés supping incognito.

Amos Manning arrived with an enchanting female companion, who made the orchestra bloom into an inspired rhapsody. The emptiness of the room and the idle waiters seemed to impress the man more than at dinner. He called the woman's attention to the deserted air of the place, and they both cast glances of sympathy at the melancholy staff of attachés.

Mr. Manning ordered a supper that was a poem — a culinary symphony. The dishes were elaborate confections, jewels, enamels, and cameos. The café had stood the test of simplicity; now the gourmet subjected it to the test of the very jugglery of the art, and it was not wanting.

The heralded M. Lalatte, sometime star of the Opéra-Comique, stood up before the apparently adoring orchestra and sang, as was to be expected, "La donna è mobile," "Ridi Pagliaccio," and "Salve dimora."

Mr. Manning and the lady patted their hands together graciously.

At eleven-thirty the first two bona-fide customers departed. Soon after, the two attachés incognito departed, looking vastly uncomfortable, having made a wonderful show of eating for some six hours. Mr. Manning and his charming companion were the only remaining customers.

Still the thirty faithful retainers stood at limp attention, napkins on arms. Still the orchestra played on. M. Lalatte came forth again and sang "The Last Rose of Summer" heartbreakingly.

Manning applauded with noisy appreciation. His companion clapped her small hands and chirped "Bravo!" The great tenor bowed to the floor, hand on heart.

"My dear," said Mr. Manning, "this affair amounts to a private entertainment, does it not? Here we are practically alone in the place, and we have a great corps of servants at our beck and call; we have a capital orchestra working hard to please us, and a singer quite above the average café type."

"It looks rather pathetic, I think," said the woman.

"It is," said the man. "Humorously pathetic, my dear. I half fear we are being entertained by a ruined house, bravely treating us to its last gasp."

He called for his score. It amounted to ten dollars and eighty-five cents. He paid it and added an electrifying tip. Then he called for the proprietor, and Mr. Riley came forth furtively from some inner refuge.

"This is — er — M'sieu'—" murmured Manning inquiringly.

"I'm Peter Riley!" said the proprietor.

"Ah, glad to know you, Mr. Riley," said Manning. "Your place always as busy as this?"

"Humph! It's no joke!" said the Irishman.

"I've had a vast deal of good service and entertainment this evening," said Manning. "I have paid for it a comparatively paltry sum. If you'll pardon me, I'm interested to know what it may have cost you. We needn't go into servants' wages, rental, lights, and all that; but what, for instance, do you pay the singer?"

Mr. Riley was honest. He hesitated a minute, and then said bluntly: "Lalatte's supposed to get a hundred a night. To be straight with you, I pay him fifteen. The musicians get five apiece."

"See!" said Manning, with interest. "My check doesn't even pay for the singer. You are apparently in wrong with the public, Mr. Riley, through no direct fault of your own. We must popularize this place. It is too satisfactory to lose. Now, Mr. Riley, I would like to give a little dinner here next week—about twelve covers. I want it a bit unusual."

Riley looked genuinely pained.

"I'm glad you like the place," he said; "but I'm afraid we can't accommodate you, sir. We're down and out. Money is all gone, and we can't open at all to-morrow. The boys'll have to get their pay off an auction sale or something."

"Look here!" said Manning, with authority. "I want to give a dinner here, and I usually succeed in doing pretty near what I set out to do. You keep this place open for me, and I'll back it. I'm Amos Manning."

"Tell that to your creditors. You're not on to the advertising game. You need a press-agent. Keep on running this joint just the way you are, and I'll do the rest. Amos Manning doesn't back losing games. In a couple of months we'll have that blue-ribbon place across the street looking like a band o' crape!"

And that's the history of the famous Café Chantecler d'Or.

Amos Manning didn't like the figure of the red rooster on the sign, and he had it gilded.

The Goat in the Bender Family.

BY FRITZ KROG.

The "Missis" Impulsively Entrusts Sam with a Mission, Which He as Impulsively Performs.

THE morning after Mrs. Bender had sold Hec, the Benders' big gray mule, she got up rather stiffly, and Sam watched her limp about her work out of the corner of his eye. A fine drizzle of rain was falling and Sam groped about in his mind for some excuse to leave the farm.

Mrs. Bender in a bad humor on a rainy day was not altogether the most companionable creature. But Sam could think of nothing.

"Git outn my way," snapped Mrs. Bender, giving Sam a shove that doubled him up. "What you standin' round here fer, a gaffin' at me?"

"Shucks, maw," said Sam, "there ain't no use actin' that way. I ain't doin' nothin'."

"Shore you ain't," exclaimed Mrs. Bender. "You're darned tootin', you ain't doin' nuthin'. You ain't never doin' nuthin'."

"You're all time a bellerin' about doin' sumpin'." Sam growled. "You never gimme a chanst to git started. Now I was jest a thinkin' about doin' sumpin'. If you lemme alone I'll git a idear by and by."

"You git a idear!" snorted Mrs. Bender. "Don't try to come nuthin' like that on me. Ain't I knowed you ever sence you was knee high to a duck? You ain't never had sense enough to come outn the rain when it's wet, Sam Bender, and you stand there tryin' to gimme talk about idears!"

"I wisht you'd tell me what to do, if you're so danged smart," said Sam.

"I ain't carin' what you do," Mrs. Bender replied, "'s long's you keep outn my way. Git out and ketch rain frawgs, if you want to."

"If I had two horses—" Sam began.

"Tryin' to throw it up to me for sellin' that fool Hec?" demanded Mrs. Bender. "Say? Ain't we got the money to buy two new mules if we want 'em?"

"That's it!" Sam exclaimed. "I'll hitch Moll to the spring wagon and drive over to Zeke Cole's and make a dicker fer his mule!"

"Go ahead," Mrs. Bender replied, "but I ain't goin' to give you more'n fifty dollars. That's all that Cole critter is wuth and if you ain't got more to give, you'll buy him at that."

With fifty dollars in his wallet and a blanket over his head to keep him dry, Sam drove out of the barn-yard.

"You git back betimes," was Mrs. Bender's last caution, "and don't lemme hear that you went to town. If you go one step further than the Cole place, and I hear about it, I'll give you sech a lickin' as 'll lay you up till Christmas, Sam Bender."

As Sam opened the barn-yard gate Mrs. Bender put her head out of a window and yelled more advice.

"Git him fer forty, Sam, and make Zeke throw in the halter and the harness, if you can git it! And if you lose the money—"

Sam did not hear the rest, but long experience taught him to make a pretty fair guess of what Mrs. Bender had in mind. He brightened up as he went along and so did the weather. Before he reached the macadamized country road the sun was shining brightly.

Arrived at Zeke Cole's house he was met by the usual chorus of barking dogs, followed by Mrs. Cole, who put the clamor at rest with a couple of well-delivered kicks and a club.

"Howdy, Maria?" said Sam.

"Howdy, Sam?" Mrs. Cole replied. "How's Hanner?"

"Jest tolleble," Sam explained. "Our Hec shook her up some yeste'day. Where's Zeke?"

"He's over to Bill Amick's sale," said Mrs. Cole. "Zeke 'lowed he'd go over 'cause it was rainin' and nuthin' else to do."

"Bill sellin' out?" exclaimed Sam. "I reckon I'll stop there on my way to town."

Sam was delighted at the prospect of visiting the auction. There would be much good company there and he might bargain there for Zeke's mule.

There was an unusually large attendance at the Amick sale. The younger men were pitching horseshoes, while their girls looked on. The older men stood round the auctioneer or wandered round looking over the goods on sale.

"Howdy, Tom?" said Sam to Tom Waters, one of his neighbors. "Seen Zeke Cole anywhere 'round here?"

"How, Sam?" exclaimed Tom. "Yep, Zeke was here, but he took a notion to go to town when it cleared up."

"I reckon I'll see him there," Sam replied. "I was just goin' there, myself."

"Here we are!" shouted the auctioneer. "A double set o' harness—good as new. How much am I offered?"

Sam pricked up his ears. A double set of harness! Just what he would need, when he would have that new mule!

"Two dollars!" somebody called.

"Two dollars and six bits," Sam shouted.

"Four dollars!"

"Five!" Sam called.

Before Sam could think again he found himself in possession of the harness and minus fifteen dollars.

The next article for sale was a double barreled shotgun. Sam's eyes glittered, but he did not bid until he found that the gun would be sold for ten dollars.

"Ten dollars!" sang the auctioneer. "Ten dollars! Is that all I hear? Ten dollars. This fine gun at ten dollars! Well, one! Ten dollars. Two! Do you want to let it go at that? Is that your last word, boys?"

"Eleven dollars!" Sam shouted. "By gee whiskers, I ain't goin' to let no chanst like that git by me!"

Sam finally got the gun at sixteen dollars. Before he had time to add fifteen and sixteen and subtract from fifty, the auctioneer was selling a goat. To Sam's eyes, his roll, mostly in small bills, looked almost as big as ever.

"Wal," said Sam to himself. "I reckon I might as well buy that goat. It's good luck fer horses to keep a goat in the stable."

Sam got all rights to the goat for four dollars. Then he made a reckoning and was astounded to find that only fifteen dollars remained. At the same time he thought of Mrs. Bender and the cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

"I know what I'll do," he suddenly de-

cided, "I'll go to town and buy her the goods fer that black silk dress she's been a achin' fer fer more'n ten years. We got fifty dollars more to home, anyways, and we can buy a mule with that."

When Sam arrived at the store he first bought a nickel's worth of cheese and crackers to appease his hunger and then he began to take soundings in regard to the purchase of the silk. Sam knew as much about dresses and dress goods as the proverbial hog does about Sunday.

"Jeremiah," he said to the storekeeper, "does a body buy silk by the pound?"

"No," Jeremiah replied, "by the yard."

"How many yards do you reckon go to make a dress?" was Sam's next question.

"That all depends on the heft of the lady," Jeremiah replied. "Some ladies is skinny and some has got lots o' beef. Them as there ain't much to, I reckon could git a dress outn ten yards, and there is them what forty yards would barely cover."

"Lemme look at some black silk," said Sam.

Jeremiah pulled a big bolt from the shelf and, after knocking the dust off it, he unrolled some for Sam.

"What's it wuth?" asked Sam.

"Twenty-five cents a yard," said Jeremiah.

"Gimme fifteen dollars' wuth," Sam went on.

Jeremiah was surprised, but it was not his business to ask questions, so he cut off sixty yards and Sam carried it proudly to his wagon.

Sam drove homeward rather slowly, partly out of consideration for the goat tied to the wagon, but mostly because he was not overanxious to get back to the wife of his bosom. At times he thought the silk goods would make everything pass off smoothly, and at times he had his doubts.

He stopped to see the finish of Bill Amick's auction, and his friends complimented him on his luck in the purchase of the gun, the harness, and the goat. But Sam showed a strange aversion for any discussion of his investments.

He had a hazy notion late in the afternoon to buy Zeke Cole's mule on a long-time payment, but he was afraid that that would only lay him open to more blame, and so he did not try it.

It was dark when he drove into his own barn-yard, and a light was shining in the kitchen window. First of all, he turned the goat loose because in the last mile of the trip it had been doing its best to choke itself. Then, with the silk under one arm and the gun over the other, he made for the house.

At the door it occurred to him that it might be better to leave his purchases in the wagon and talk the matter over with Mrs. Bender. She had a nasty habit of jumping at conclusions, Sam remembered.

When Sam finally put in an appearance, empty-handed, in the kitchen, Mrs. Bender, surrounded by the children, detected her spouse's nervousness at once.

"Did you git him?" she asked.

"Git what?" said Sam.

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Bender. "What! You stand there like a rooster with the pip and ast me, 'What?' What! I'll tell you *what!* I'll bet you ain't got no mule at all!"

Sam sidled toward the door and opened it a little.

"Gimme them fifty dollars!" said Mrs. Bender.

"Now, Hanner," Sam began hastily, "don't you start nuthin' till I had a chanst to tell you. Gimme a little show, will you?"

Mrs. Bender reached over quick as a flash, seized Sam by the scruff of the neck, and slung him against the kitchen table. At the same time she shut the door with a marvelously agile back kick.

"I'll give you all you're lookin' fer!" she shouted, advancing on Sam, "unless you can show me them fifty dollars or a mule—some kind of a mule, anyhow."

Sam backed away and began to talk very fast. At each step he trod on one or more little Benders, and set them bawling. And as she waded through her brood, Mrs. Bender stepped on them, too. So by and by all of them began to take a lively interest in what was going on.

"I ain't got no fifty dollars, nor no mule," Sam yelled above the racket; "but I got a new set o' harness, *and* a gun and silk, Hanner—silk fer the dress you been after—now *don't*, Hanner! Ain't I tellin' you? You got *silk*—"

Mrs. Bender, past all words, flew into Sam like an angry cat. She literally shook all argument out of him, and then suddenly pushed him away and rushed out of the door into the barn-yard.

"I'll see what the fool did buy!" she gasped.

Seeing the wagon with Moll still standing there, she ran over to them, and began rummaging under the seat. But she had reckoned without the goat.

Just as she had gotten her body into a

most convenient angle for his attack, the goat pitched in. When Mrs. Bender's head shot under the seat and brought up against an iron spring, she thought Sam was taking revenge on her. When she had gotten herself out of the wagon she beheld her real enemy, and almost exploded with wrath.

There was no explosion, but the goat executed a double-quick flank movement and charged again. This time Mrs. Bender went under the wagon, and stayed there. Whenever she began to crawl out, the goat was ever ready to drive her back.

All this commotion at her back frightened Moll, and she began to run. When the mare first started, Mrs. Bender tried to crawl along under the wagon as fast as it was rolling away from her. But humans make but slow time on all fours, and she presently found herself out in the mud with no protection whatever. Sam found her trying to roll away from the goat.

Naturally the little Benders arrived on the scene of action with their father when they heard Mrs. Bender calling for help.

Alexander Bender stopped Moll before she jumped the fence, and Tom and Annie fell on the goat, hand and foot. Meanwhile, Mrs. Bender returned Sam's good deed of raising her to her feet by attacking him with a stick.

By and by the goat, the children, and Sam and his loving wife got things mixed up, not being able to see well in the dark, and not particular, anyway, where the blows fell, and so everybody hit everybody else at least once.

It was Zeke Cole's appearance in the barnyard that put an end to the fight.

"The holy gee whiz!" he exclaimed. "What's a goin' on here?"

"That you, Zeke?" Sam gasped.

"Me and myself," Zeke replied. "It looks like you all was havin' a family picnic. I just rode over to see what you wanted. My ole woman told me as how you was lookin' fer me."

"That fool man o' mine," said Mrs. Bender, "started out to buy your mule, but—"

"I wisht he'd a bought the critter," Zeke answered. "He died a hour ago of the colic."

A long silence followed this announcement, while Sam let the fact and all it meant soak into his understanding.

"If that's all," Zeke went on, "I'll be goin'. Good night."

Around the stove in the kitchen the Benders nursed their injuries. On the table lay the black silk, and in the corner stood the new shot-gun.

"Hanner," said Sam solemnly, "the Lord shore led me on to-day, when he saved me from buyin' a mule what would 'a' kicked the bucket with the colic before I could 'a' had him in the stall."

"Yep," Mrs. Bender replied, "but it must 'a' been the goat that led you on to buy the silk. There's enough there to make a dress fer a forty-dollar cow. And that's the last o' that goat, too. I'm goin' to kill the critter before breakfast."

But she did nothing of the kind.

Jim Wiley—Magnate.

BY NEVIL G. HENSHAW.

Our Friend, the Well-Known Con-Man, Learns the Comparative Value of Golden Silence and Oily Words.

"WHEN the mother-song man wrote 'One Little Word Would Have Changed Our Future Life,' he came mighty near hitting my case," remarked my friend Jim Wiley, the eminent grafter.

"What was it? Love?" I asked, scenting a story.

Wiley shook his head.

"No," he replied. "'Twas loaf. If the boss had said 'Go,' I'd have seen the deciding game that year, and I'd probably be still holding down my disreputable job at the corner grocery. As it was, he said 'You're fired,' and I went like an obedient employee.

"That's how I came to be a magnet attracting the iron dollars from the little suck-

ers all over this beautiful land. Some day, if I make good, I may attract the metal from the big ones. Then I'll adopt the new spelling and call myself a magnate."

"But, Jim," I interrupted in surprise, "haven't I heard you say that you would never descend to an occupation so dishonest?"

"You have," he agreed promptly, "but such remarks must be taken *hic jacket,* as they say in Latin. Despite its degradation, this magnate graft has its compensations. For a brief period I was one myself, so I ought to know. It come about something like this.

"Me and Push Evans had become interested one summer in a filibustering scheme we'd unearthed in New Orleans. To float it we required something like one thousand dollars capital, all of which we had at the time except about nine hundred and ninety-eight dollars and seventy-five cents. Accordingly we started out to gather in the remainder. We chose Texas as the scene of our operations, and nailed our hopes to a discovery we'd named The Magic Wonder Soap.

"It was a simple graft, yet a profitable one. We got into a buggy with a one-dollar bar of soap cut small, and I gave a talk on quick washing.

"Then Push took a wheel off the buggy, wiped the axle clean with a white handkerchief, and guaranteed that I'd remove the stains in less than a minute, using nothing but a basin of cold, hard water and a piece of the Wonder the size of a pea.

"Why, when I took that handkerchief all black with axle-grease, and brought it out as clean as the day it was made, them Texans would tear each other's clothes to buy the little blocks that Push handed out at fifty cents apiece.

"How'd we do it? Easy enough. Just wiped the grease off beforehand and put on tar soap. I haven't seen a handkerchief since without wanting to cry in it.

"But, as usual, just about the time things was going as merry as a divorced belle, and we was something like three hundred dollars ahead, the fates got tired of playing 'heavy, heavy hangs over your head.'

"One morning, at a place called Echo, Push got careless and took off the wrong wheel. There must have been some one in the crowd from our last stand, too, 'cause the joker who helped him forgot to screw the nut on the wheel again. This interfered some with our getaway.

"When the wheel come off, we remembered that old French saying about *horse de combat,* and took to the nag, but it wasn't any use. A crowd of cowboys rounded us up before we'd got a hundred yards. On the way back they gave me a first, second, and third hand explanation of something that had always puzzled me before—the same being why they was called punchers.

"After the crowd had divided the money and other personal belongings in our grip, they come to the less important matter of deciding our fates. At first they was for giving us the old-fashioned tar-and-feather treatment with a mono-rail finish, till they discovered that the only tar in town was mixed up with several other ingredients in a bottle of cough medicine at the city drug-store. After this they discussed a few Indian specialties that would have made the Spanish Inquisition look like a meeting of the Humane Society.

"I'd just about got prepared for death when a man pushed out of the crowd and begun to speak. He was big and fat, and his voice sounded like the lower G on a steam piano. The crowd begun to laugh before he opened his mouth, and I got scared, sure enough, 'cause I seen he was the town joker. When one of them boys get started, you might as well shake hands with your finish and call it a day's work.

"'Gents,' says he, 'you're on the wrong track. Lynching and burning alive are too common occurrences to waste on such a golden opportunity as this. Let us reserve our colored population for such ordinary pastimes, and do something original with these strangers who have so generously offered their services for our amusement.

"As your district attorney, I have long been anxious to give our city a thorough cleaning, and who could do better for such a purpose than these knights of the Magic Soap? Go now and collect all of your soiled clothing, and if there is anything in that old saying about cleanliness being next to godliness, these gentlemen will furnish the material for a new mythology."

"The crowd yelled 'Hear! Hear!' when he was through, which was more or less unnecessary. If he'd said his prayers in any civilized place, they'd have arrested him for disturbing the peace.

"'Friend,' says I, 'as a lawyer, your quality of mercy is, of course, sprained, but don't tell me that it has also suffered from a compound fracture. I am not afraid to die, but I do draw the line at being disgraced. Do

you mean to tell me that you're thinking of turning me and my companion into a humanized steam laundry?'

"'We're not thinking about it,' says he. 'We're going to do it. We'll commence operations on the square.'

"'If you do, you'll be a disgrace to your profession,' says I, and I started to beat it, with Push following close behind me.

"But we hadn't counted on that law in Texas that makes it contributory negligence to go without a gun. Before we'd got started good the bullets begun diggin' round my feet, and I hove to so sudden that Push come near diving right through me.

"'It's no use,' says I. 'It'll be bad enough to turn laundryman without having the added disgrace of being shot in the heel like Mr. A. Chilles, of the old-time Troy aggregation.'

"We went back meek as lambs, and they escorted us to the court-house square, where some one had set out a couple of tubs and other washing paraphernalia. The population of Echo was about one thousand, and they all turned out to see us, except one man who had died the night before.

"Likewise, every one brought something to wash, until we had an assortment that would have made the stock of the average department-store look like a lady burlesquer's costume.

"It was about ninety degrees in the shade, and I was dressed in a complete professor's make-up—silk hat, frock coat, spats, and all. You may imagine how I looked, but not how I felt.

"Them Texans was overjoyed. They all agreed it was the funniest thing they'd ever seen, not even excepting a triple lynching they'd had the year before. When they wasn't laughing at us they took pot-shots at my hat, till it looked like one of them open-work gas-heaters.

"'Long about three in the afternoon the interest began to flag, and they finally let us go. How much washing we accomplished, I have never been able to say.

"I broke ground on the northeast corner of a red table-cloth as a starter, and at the finish I'd only succeeded in making it look like it had bled to death in spots. Push was mighty near dead, and I'd passed away and come to so many times that I'd have made one of them hoodoo incarcerations look like the life of a butterfly. We was both of us wet to the waist, and we'd wore enough skin off our hands to cover a saddle.

"When we got to the depot and discovered that it was the passing point of the east and west bound trains, I made Push dig up his change, and found we had a total of three dollars and sixty cents between us. After I'd handed him his one dollar and eighty-five cents, I cut loose with what was on my mind. I was sore, and I didn't take the trouble to hide it.

"'Push,' says I, 'we had best part, if we wish to continue with the friendly relations that have always characterized our partnership. When you hung a lottery number upside down last year and lost us a capital prize of three thousand dollars, I didn't say a word, and I wouldn't speak of it now, if it wasn't necessary to show what I mean. That was a monetary loss, and was all in the day's work.

"'This time, however, you have gone too far. My dignity has been ruffled, rinsed, dry-scorched, and ironed, and it will take me some time to get over it. Let us go our different ways before we quarrel—you on the east-bound to Beaumont, where I'll join you after I've cooled down.'

"'Jim,' says Push, 'I can hardly blame you. I reckon I have been mighty absent-minded at times; but, as the brains of the concern, I've felt that I ought to hitch my wagon to a star.'

"'Wherefore, you've picked out a State where there ain't but one, and that of the shooting variety,' says I. 'Hereafter you'd better use a bullet-proof wagon.'

"'All right,' says Push. 'When you meet me in Beaumont, I'll be riding in a mental subway. Shall we shake hands?'

"'Let's rather shake each other,' says I, and, the trains coming in just then, I jumped a local and went my way.

"I'd hardly got settled, though, before I began to feel sorry. It was the first misunderstanding we'd ever had, and I'd done it all. After reviewing matters in the cold light of reason, I come to the conclusion that I'd acted about as calm and deliberate as a blond woman who's found a strand from the horsehair sofa on her husband's coat. I likewise decided that I'd get off at the first stop and work my way back to Beaumont.

"The car was crowded, so I'd took a seat with another passenger. He was a little, hatchet-faced man in a high-cut gray coat, and he had one of them black felt hats such as are used by swell Chinamen. No one would 'a' wore a hat like that unless he'd been a preacher or a grafter; so I come at him as 'Brother,' knowing I'd strike him either way.

"'Brother,' says I, by way of a starter, 'do you know the name of the next stop?'

"'I do,' says he, and he pulled a paper and a pair of nose-glasses and begun to read.

"I waited fifteen minutes, and then give it up. He had about as much more to say as a moving picture.

"After a while the brakeman stuck his head in the door and yelled 'Topaz,' and I picked up my hat, which was the only baggage I was carrying.

"'Everything comes to him who waits,' says I to my seat-mate. 'The brakeman's gone and give away your secret. I hope you'll excuse my lack of appreciation just now, but I didn't know you was making a speech.'

"The man put up his newspaper and dug a hand-bag from under the seat.

"'My friend,' says he, 'when you've lived as long as I have, you'll find that silence is golden.'

"'Meaning in a polite way to compliment me on my brass,' says I. 'You're getting on. Some day you'll play out a complete string of words and sentence yourself to death.'

"I think he meant to come back at me, but just then the train stopped with a jerk, and we done an embrace that was like closing a pair of scissors. Topaz must have been only a hesitation-point, 'cause we'd hardly caught up with our breath before we was under way again. By the time we got untangled the train was hitting it up lively, and I done a marathon down the aisle with the other half of the Nelson a close second.

"I swung off the platform and let go; and then my running-mate threw his grip at me and jumped the wrong way. He corkscrewed up in the air like one of them Fry Diavilo spools, and when he come down I was the string that caught him. After that I seen a display of stars that would have kept Push hitching for life.

"Some one pulled me to my feet, and I looked up and seen a strange sight. It was a human man about six foot three, in boots and corduroy pants.

"Up-stairs he had on a frock coat and red tie, with an opera-hat stuck on one side of his head. It was half-opened, and looked like one of them Chinese lanterns—all except the candle. Likewise, this party wore a red ribbon the size of a 'For Rent' sign, with 'Reception Committee' wrote across it.

"'Friend,' says I, 'are you John Drew, or Buffalo Bill, or both?'

"'I'm the mayor,' says he. 'I reckon you think you've had a deuce of a reception in Topaz.'

"'You're a mind-reader,' says I. 'Suppose you look after the other fellow. He's beginning to come to.'

"'I was just thinking of shooting him up a little for falling on you,' says the mayor. 'Do you know who he is, or where he comes from?'

"'Judging from the way he landed on me, he must be from Mars,' says I.

"'Excuse me,' says the mayor. 'If I'd knowed he was one of your mother's folks I wouldn't have said what I did.'

"After we got him to his feet, we walked to the station, where the rest of the reception committee was waiting for us. There was six of 'em, all rigged out with ribbons, and they looked like something between a crazy-quilt and a conversation at sea — with flags. I shook hands all round, and they asked me why I hadn't come in my car.

"Not knowing whether they meant a private one or an automobile, I told 'em it was out of commission, which answered both ways. I didn't know who they took me for, but I meant to be him for the time being.

"After a while the committee scattered for their horses, and the mayor and sheriff led me and my silent partner to a decoletty hack, which they said had been imported specially for the occasion. Then we set out for the opera-house.

"Topaz was a disappointment.

"In the language of jewels, it was a doublet. It had a main street half under water, and some wooden buildings that had been built on the style of architecture adopted in stacking lumber-yards. There wasn't a tree or a blade of grass, and the general effect was something like the pictures of the big cut on the Panama Canal—only less cheerful.

"When we got to the opera-house, though, things brightened up a little. There was something like fifty school children standing out in front, with the rest of the population backed in behind 'em. Likewise, there was a small disturbance that done business under the name of the Topaz Silver Cornet Orchestra.

"As we rolled up, they give us 'America,' with the children joining in, and a couple of buzzards that was looking on just give one squawk and lit out for Galveston at sixty miles an hour. It was the only time I ever wished I was a buzzard.

"The mayor was as tickled as if he'd been deaf and dumb, and while the people was crowding into the hall on the second floor he got us out and led the way to the stage en-

trance. Half-way back he stopped and opened a door on the ground floor. He was like a kid who's fixed up a surprise and then give it away 'cause he couldn't hold it in any longer.

"'Take a peep, and say nothing,' says he. 'This is coming later on.'

"We looked in, and seen a table about half a mile long, with a cold lunch on it that would have scared a glass-eater. There was meat and chicken in chunks, and pies and buttermilk, and enough canned stuff to stock a small store. Likewise, green corn.

"My seat-mate gave one look, and dug in his grip for a bottle of soda-mints. After he'd took a couple he said something about atmospheric indigestion, and just naturally faded away. I explained that he was subject to such attacks, and we went back to a dressing-room, where the committee was waiting for us with a five-gallon jug of whisky. Then the mayor suggested an eye-opener before we begun speaking, and after that things are kind of hazy.

"I have a dim recollection of stumbling over some scenery, and then I heard a lot of clapping, and some one shove me into a chair by a table with a pitcher of water on it, and I seen I was on the stage. The committee lined up in a half circle, and they done pretty well, considering—except one fellow on the end, who got too close to the edge and fell into the orchestra.

"Likewise, his partner on the other side set himself on fire with the footlights; but we put him out so quick with the pitcher that it ain't worth mentioning. I've often wondered if the audience thought we was intoxicated.

"After a while the mayor got braced up against the table, to introduce me, and he hadn't said a dozen words before I found out who they took me for.

"I was supposed to be Carcow, the great Texas magnate, and my professor's make-up had done the trick, including my hat, which they thought had been smashed when I jumped from the train. I'd read a lot about Carcow in the papers, but somehow I couldn't remember much except that he was one of them millionaires who'd started out a cabin-boy on the ship of state and had polished his brass so successfully that he had most of the other statesmen riding in the steerage.

"The mayor enlightened me, though, by giving it out that Carcow had promised Topaz a Y. M. C. A.

"Every one thought it was a United Merchants Commission Agency; and, as the mayor run the biggest general store in town, he was naturally enthusiastic. He said he supposed that as his illustrious countryman controlled everything in the State, Topaz's commissions would amount to a fortune.

"Then he went on to explain that the present exercises was just a small effort at appreciation that the people had got up the day before, when they heard that Carcow was coming to decide on the site for his building. He added that when they laid the corner-stone Topaz would pull off something that would make any similar affairs that had gone before look about as fancy and hilarious as the death-scene in 'East Lynne.'

"In about ten minutes the mayor run down and retired in my favor. It was an awful moment, with the band playing and the people clapping like a colony of Jerseyites killing mosquitoes.

"I started in to bluff a speech, and then give it up and come at them with a lecture on 'Ancient Egyptian Ruins' that I'd once handled in connection with some slides of the San Francisco earthquake. When I got through they mighty near pulled the house down. It was a pile-driver hit, and the mayor in closing the exercises said that he'd never heard anything to equal it.

"'There's speakers and speakers, ladies and gents,' says he, 'but this party is what you call a orator. Excusing my language, I bet there ain't a one of you who's understood a darn thing he's said.'

"When the meeting broke up the people got in line to meet me, and I spent about an hour shaking hands. After they was through I felt like I had on a catcher's mitt, and my fingers was about the size and shape of a bunch of bananas. I ain't had the heart to use a pump since.

"Just as we was leaving the stage a man come running in and called the mayor and the sheriff aside. They talked for a while mighty excited, and then the mayor sat down at the table and wrote out a check. After he'd given it to the man and sent him off, he took my arm and led the way down the aisle, with the committee following close behind us. Somehow I begun to feel uneasy.

"The mayor wasn't quite as polite as he'd been before, and he held on to my arm like he was afraid he might lose me. Likewise I could hear the sheriff whispering something to the rest of the crowd.

"When we got to the lobby we went by the banqueting-room and crossed over to a real-estate office on the other side.

"'Just a moment, Mr. Carcow,' says the mayor. 'There's a little matter that we'd

like to straighten out while we have the time.'

"'Certainly,' says I. 'My motto is always business before pleasure.'

"I tried to speak as careless as I could, but my voice was about as steady as a merry-go-round. After the committee had crowded in, the mayor took a gun out of his belt and laid it on some papers on the table.

"'Just to keep 'em from blowing away,' says he.

"As there wasn't a breath of air stirring, this wasn't very encouraging, especially as the rest of 'em got out their guns and laid 'em on their laps where they'd be handy. Then the mayor pointed to a map of Topaz that was hanging on the wall.

"'Mr. Carcow,' says he, 'I've just heard something that I hope will surprise you. When you come here a month ago and offered us a Y. M. C. A., you said you'd build it on condition that we'd sell you the lot for one thousand dollars. Ain't this so?'

"I didn't know if it was or not, but I took the chance.

"'It is,' says I.

"'Next,' says he, 'being undecided on what lot you wanted, you asked for an option on several at that price, the option to last thirty days. You said you wanted to find an artesian well for the building, though what you wanted with one in such a place and with the river only half a mile away we didn't understand then, and we don't understand now. However, we give you the options on seven lots belonging to myself and these gentlemen, and you built seven little houses on 'em, and sent seven outfits to bore for water. Am I right?'

"'You are,' says I.

"'Well,' says he, 'one of our citizens, who's a well-borer, lost some tools last night, and, thinking one of your outfits might have stole 'em, he went out to-day at noon, when the men was at dinner, and broke in them houses to look for 'em. He didn't find the tools, but he found something else. Do you know what it is?'

"I didn't, and I said so.

"'Then I'll tell you,' says the mayor, reaching for his gun. 'He found oil. Yes, sir, crude oil in six of them wells. The other had struck water.'

"I seen it all in a flash, but I couldn't say a word to save my life. The committee got their guns unlimbered and began to examine 'em in a thoughtful sort of way, and I was just figuring how hard I'd have to hit to dive through the plate glass of the front window, when the mayor begun to speak again.

"'I see you're su'prised, Mr. Carcow,' says he, 'and it does you credit. Now, I don't want to make no suggestions; but I tell you what I'd do if I was you—if I was you, mind. I'd draw up a little paper releasing them six options on the oil lands and instruct the owners of 'em to go to the lawyers to-morrow and get the deeds for 'em that have been left there subject to your offer of one thousand dollars.

"'As you was boring for water, you can't have no use for the oil; and just to make the matter businesslike, and for a consideration, these gents and myself are willing to pay you one thousand dollars cash for that release, so that you'll get the odd lot for nothing. Take your time in deciding, 'cause we're willing to argue the matter with you till to-morrow, when them options runs out.'

"It didn't take me a minute to decide.

"'Gents,' says I, 'to say that I'm su'prised don't begin to express my feelings. I can only tell you how pleased I am at your good fortune, and hope that you understand my innocence in the matter.'

"'Perhaps we'll understand it better when we get that release,' says the sheriff, practising a few fancy drops with his forty-five.

"I reached over and got a pen and paper, and wrote out the release at the mayor's dictation. After the committee'd read it, I signed 'James H. Carcow' at the bottom, which I knew from the papers was the magnate's signature. I wasn't worried about doing it, either. I wrote it in my own handwriting, and it was no more than addressing a letter.

"Just as I finished the man come in with the one thousand dollars in hundred-dollar bills. The mayor give it to me, and I stuck it in my pocket and made a little speech, saying that I was going to use it in putting a window in my building to commemorate the discovery of the oil. I disremember whether I said it was going to be cut glass or stain. Then I shook hands all round, and we went in to the banquet.

"It was a stag affair, so no one ate anything except in the first round, which was some kind of soup. After that we attempted what Push calls holding a saloon, and I can only remember the rest in spots.

"The mayor made a speech about my generosity, and I come back at him with something about a trifle, and the people went crazy, and fired a salute, and shot three of the waiters. Shortly after dark a couple of

uninvited guests tried to ride in on horseback, and, in the fight that followed, I have a faint recollection of going through a window, and beating it up the street with a blind round my neck and a handful of slats stuck through my coat like a buttonhole bokay.

"I made the station a few minutes before the expres. pulled in, and wired Push to join me in Beaumont, so we could keep straight through to New Orleans. Of course, I took a Pullman and went in the smoker; and there was my seat-mate on the local that morning. He was leaning out the window talking to some one, and as we started I heard him say:

"'And mind you have 'em recorded the first thing to-morrow. The sheriff'll have to back you up, whether he wants to or not.'

"When he pulled his head in, I slid up to him and begun to talk. I was all swelled up with what I'd done, and how smart I'd been, and I had to get rid of it or die.

"'Friend,' says I, 'on the one occasion when you spoke to me, you told me that silence was golden. I'm now going to show you where you're wrong, and what you missed by not speaking out when we landed at Topaz this morning.'

"I reckon I exaggerated my adventures some on account of the banquet, and I reckon I must have rubbed it in pretty strong, 'cause before I was through I was sorry for him. He looked so skimpy and seedy, when I finished, that I offered him one of the bills.

"'Suppose you take it and buy a phonograph,' says I. 'Anyhow, we started out together, and you ought to have your share.'

"He shoved the bill away, and pulled his paper and nose glasses. But this time he loosened up for a few words, and I went sneaking out like a man leaving a photograph gallery.

"'Thanks,' says he, 'but I've got it. I'm Carcow.'"

Her Chance.

BY LILLIAN BENNET-THOMPSON.

A Story of Fair Play, and How a Victorious Football Team Made a Successful Actress.

"PAYSON, where's Miss West? Send her here at once."

The manager of the "Confidence" company slammed the telephone-receiver on its hook, and turned from the instrument with an angry scowl on his face.

"Anything wrong, Mr. Braddock?" asked the young man, when he had returned with the report that Miss West would come at once.

"Wrong? I should say there is something wrong. Here's Rivers telephoning to say she won't go on to-night. Pretended she was ill—violent sick headache. She isn't any more sick than I am. She's got cold feet; that's all that ails her. I'll have to play West—and she'll make a fizzle of it, as sure as guns."

A slow grin overspread Payson's face.

"Aha!" he said. "Miss Rivers has played college towns before, evidently. So the home team won, eh?"

"Yes, confound it! And I suppose the town isn't big enough to hold 'em and their heads. But if they'd lost, they'd have been singing 'The Dead March' in 'Saul' all through the show. The crowd has practically the entire gallery, and the rest of the house is clean sold out."

There was an aggrieved note in the manager's voice.

"Just my luck to strike this burg the day of the biggest game of the season. But what the deuce am I to do? Rivers won't play—simply hung up the receiver; and if I don't put West in, I'll have to refund the box-office receipts. That'll queer the show for the rest of the week. We'll have to make the best of it, but—come in," he snapped, as a knock sounded on the door.

The girl who entered was tall and slender,

with a lot of fluffy brown hair with golden gleams in it, and a pair of big brown eyes. She came forward a few steps, looking at Braddock half inquiringly, half timidly.

"You sent for me, Mr. Braddock?" she asked.

"Yes." The manager wheeled round in his chair. "Miss Rivers is sick—unable to appear. You'll have to go on. It'll be easy; you know it perfectly. Do your best. Remember, I depend on you. That's all."

He waved her out, and turned again to Payson.

"The deuce take Rivers!" he continued savagely. "What does she suppose I engaged her for—to lie down just at a critical moment? If I'd wanted West for the part, I'd have given it to her when Miss Barclay left. I passed her up because she couldn't do the thing right to save her life. How do you suppose she'd look in that third act, eh?

"Good heavens! It needs a woman of resource and dramatic power, a woman with an appealing personality, to play that part convincingly; and while West is a pretty girl, she can't get it over. I'll rush her right off after every act, so that she won't be frightened and lose her nerve. The only thing is to make her get through the show some way—anyway. Of course, she can't do anything but fall down, but— Oh, she'll have to be made to believe she's all right.

"And then Rivers goes and plays this dirty trick the first night she's scheduled to appear! By Josh! I'll fix her for it; see if I don't! Wouldn't you think she was a Broadway star, and had been with the company years, instead of being a second-rater, engaged last week at a pinch? The nerve of her!"

Braddock fairly snorted with rage.

"Are you going to announce the change in the cast?" asked Payson.

"I am not! Miss West can go on as Annette Rivers, and any knocks that get handed out to her will do for my lady. It won't help her to get another job; for you can bet a hat she won't have this one any longer than it takes me to find another woman to play the part. Now, beat it, Payson; I've got work to do, if you haven't."

Once in the little bare dressing-room that had been allotted to her, Muriel West—that was the way her name appeared on the program in very small type—stood with clasped hands and shining eyes.

"Oh, isn't it just lovely!" she cried ecstatically. "My chance — my chance at last! Now I can show Mr. Braddock—show them all. He says I don't 'get things over'—haven't any personality. I'll show him he doesn't know! I'll make a hit!"

She pirouetted joyfully before the cracked mirror; and then, realizing that the time was short, set about making up for the part she had understudied, and which, for a year, she had despaired of getting a chance to portray. Miss Barclay's health had been exasperatingly good; and when she had left to play the lead in a better company, Miss Rivers had been at once engaged to take her place.

This was to have been her first appearance. It was a sore disappointment to Muriel that Braddock passed her by and selected another actress; and it was difficult for the girl to realize that she was to have the much-desired part at last, and to play it before a packed house. She was sure she could act; all she wanted, all she asked, was an opportunity to demonstrate her ability.

As she daubed grease-paint on her cheeks and brightened the carmine of her lips, roseate visions floated through her pretty head. A "job" for next season was assured should she "make good" to-night.

There would be no further need of making the wearying round of agents' and managers' offices; no more waiting in a stuffy room, packed with other jobless actresses, to hear only the discouraging tidings that Mr. So-and-so could not be seen that day. No more playing stupid *ingénue* rôles, or dusting the furniture in the first scene, while babbling of the family skeleton to the underfootman.

Long before her cue, she was waiting in the wings, her eyes, eager with anticipation, fixed on the stage. The "heavy" was going through his scene with the *ingénue*—the latter, she realized with a thrill of delight, was not getting nearly so much out of the part as she herself did.

The house was very still; beyond the gleaming circle cast by the footlights she could see a close-packed mass of humanity—every seat occupied.

Ah—there was the hero's cue. In a moment now she would go on to her rendezvous with him in the garden-scene. He strolled on in all the glory of a light gray summer suit and pink striped shirt. His tan shoes were resplendent and his straw hat was tilted at a most becoming angle. He waited for a barely perceptible instant before beginning his lines—waited for the "hand" that usually greeted the entrance of the leading man.

"*Take off that hat! Take—take off—*

take off that—take off that hat! Hat! Hat! Hat!"

Apparently the entire gallery had spoken as one voice; the little theater was filled with a volume of sound that completely drowned the hero's voice as he essayed to speak. He paused, disconcerted, astonished, outraged, and glared at the offenders. Silence.

Then he resumed his jaunty stroll across the stage, glancing to right and left. He began his speech: "I wonder if she will come?" which was Muriel's cue to enter.

But he got no further than the first two words, when the balcony again, and more loudly, admonished him to remove his headgear.

There really seemed nothing else to do. What use to appeal to the ushers? Three men, however able-bodied and willing, could neither remove nor silence three hundred exuberant college boys, jubilant over the victory of the football team. The hero wisely took off his hat, and again attempted to speak.

"Put it on! Put it on! Put it on! We don't like your hair!" vociferated the gallery.

The hero reluctantly obeyed; and this time he was permitted to finish his lines.

Shaking in every limb, Muriel West entered. She had never played a college town before, and the part the gallery had elected to take was entirely unexpected and somewhat terrifying.

But she summoned all her will, and stepped lightly on the stage. The leading man turned and came toward her, both hands extended.

"Lucy, dearest—" he began.

"Take your hat off!"

"Hat! Hat!"

"Where are your manners?"

"Remove your lid when you speak to a lady!"

"*Take your hat off!*"

Fuming in impotent rage, the badgered man removed his hat for the second time, and tried to go on. But his voice was swallowed up in the general commotion.

The college spirit seemed to have been brought along by the keg, so much of it was present.

Singly, by couples, and in bunches, the crowd volunteered remarks, made suggestions, commented upon and criticized the appearance of the performers. The play proceeded by fits and starts—when it proceeded at all.

Out in the wings Braddock danced up and down, alternately swearing at the young hoodlums who were bent on breaking up the show, and cursing his own inability to put an end to the racket and eject the entire crowd.

Payson looked helplessly on.

He had seen instances of the sort before, and knew that the management was powerless, so long as the crowd elected to follow its present course of action. One usher who attempted to interfere was picked up bodily and removed; the others wisely did nothing—which was all they could do.

"Better order the curtain down, Mr. Braddock," Payson ventured.

"I should say not! The show goes through, if I have to lick every one of those cubs myself."

"Why doesn't the heroine speak up?" some one in the gallery wanted to know.

"She can't talk. She's tongue-tied," he was assured, as Muriel made an abortive attempt to go on with her lines.

"Kiss the pretty lady, you man!" came the next command; and at the suggestion, the entire body of students rose up and insisted that she *was* a pretty lady, and should be saluted forthwith.

With tears in her eyes, Muriel listened. Her chance had come—and gone. It had been taken from her by a lot of rowdy college boys who did not, or would not, understand.

Oh, if they only knew what they were doing—knew what it meant to her—she was sure that they would be quiet, would let her at least try. A sob rose to her lips, but she choked it back. She would be brave; she would not cry. She had waited so long—and when at last her chance had come, they would not let her have it. It was hard—so very hard.

With a sudden impulse she turned and ran down to the footlights.

"Hist! Listen!"

"Let the pretty lady talk!"

"*Place aux dames!*"

"Shut up, fellows!" called out the captain of the football team—a big, husky fellow who sat directly in the center of the front row. "Let's hear what she wants."

The noise redoubled; then it gradually subsided to a hissing murmur; and high and sweet rose Muriel West's voice.

"Please, please give me a chance," she begged. "Play fair. It means a whole lot to me. I've never had a chance until tonight, and I'll never have another. It isn't just for this evening — it's for the rest of my life. I'm just asking you to let me try

to 'make good'—just asking you for fair play."

Her voice shook, and threatened to break; but she swallowed the lump that rose in her throat and went quickly on:

"You're all college men; you play the game. You wouldn't take an unfair advantage in baseball, or football, or any other sport. Why should you when a girl is playing the game in deadly earnest? Please, oh, please, play fair!"

She paused, and turned away to hide the tears that welled up in her eyes. There was a moment of absolute silence, and then the football captain spoke.

"Give her a show, fellows," he called out. "Let's keep still and give her a chance. She's earned it. Now, then, three cheers for that gamey little girl—and then keep your mouths shut."

The response that followed shook the rafters. And then a respectful silence settled over the gallery.

When the curtain fell, at the end of the first act, Braddock seized Muriel's arm and hurried her away to her dressing-room. She made her change and played the second act, and again the manager hustled her from the stage. She wondered why he did it. Then the truth dawned on her.

They were ridiculing her, jeering her, and Braddock did not want her to know it. She had heard of an instance where the same thing had been done in the case of a Broadway star; and the subterfuge had succeeded. The actress had mistaken the booing and hissing of the audience for applause, and had triumphantly played her part through. Muriel knew she was doing her best; but if Braddock had to take all these precautions to keep her from hearing what was going on in the auditorium, her best was evidently not good enough.

The girl made her entrance in the third act with a sinking heart. No one could have been expected to put up a first-class performance under the circumstances, but she felt that hers was not even second or third class; it was absolutely bad.

They were very kind to her, those boys. They had done as she had asked them; they had given her a chance to show what she could do. And what was she making of it—what was she doing? She summoned all her art, all her love of her profession, to her aid; but she was miserably conscious that she was making a dreadful failure of it all.

The final curtain fell; and then pandemonium broke loose. Or, if it were not pandemonium, it was at least a very creditable imitation. Sobbing unrestrainedly now, Muriel ran from the stage.

From the auditorium she could hear yells and shouts of derision. She felt that she could bear no more. Her hopes had been so high—she had been so sure of success—and now her shining air-castles had come tumbling in ruins about her ears.

She flung herself full length on the rickety couch in her dressing-room and buried her face in her hands. What would Braddock say to her now? He would never give her another chance. Perhaps he would not even let her stay with the company; he could easily get another *ingénue.*

The thought made her sob afresh. What should she do? How could she get another engagement? How was she going to live?

Footsteps sounded outside; there was a knock on the door.

"What is it?" she asked in a smothered voice.

"Mr. Braddock wants you at once, Miss West. Please hurry."

The steps retreated.

It had come! He had sent for her, to tell her that he did not want her any longer. She sat up and pushed back her rumpled hair from her forehead.

Well, she must face it.

What was it the football captain had called her? "Gamey"—that was it—"gamey." Well, she would be that. She would show that she had grit, anyway. With head erect and firm tread she passed from the dressing-room. Half way down the passage she met Braddock.

"Quick!" he said excitedly. "They're calling for you." He seized her hand and hurried her along.

"They? Who?"

But he did not answer, only pulled her along faster. Scarcely knowing what she did, the girl stumbled along after him, through the wings and out upon the brilliantly lighted stage. As she appeared, there was a roar of applause, mingled with cries of "Rivers! Rivers!" a tempest of ringing cheers, that swelled in volume and went on and on, as if it would never cease.

There—the tumult was subsiding now. Hark! That was Braddock's voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he was saying, "you have been good enough to call for Miss Rivers. I want to make an announcement to you. Just before eight this evening, Miss Rivers refused to go on, fearing some such demonstration as that which took place in the first act.

"This young lady is Miss Muriel West, who was Miss Rivers's understudy. I say 'was' advisedly, because she is so no longer. From now on, Miss West will continue in the part which she handled this evening with so much credit to herself and to the company. I thank you for your attention."

Dazed, bewildered, swept completely off her feet, unable to credit the evidence of her senses, Muriel could only stare blankly at Braddock as he finished. She—to play the star part—oh, it was impossible, too good to be true!

Some one was coming down the aisle, some one almost hidden beneath a huge armful of roses. It was the football captain.

"Miss West," he began with an awkward bow, "the fellows have asked me to hand you this — these — this small token of — of their esteem and respect, and to tell you that what this gentleman has just said—why, it just simply tickles us all to death. For we think you're the pluckiest, gamiest little girl that we ever saw."

He stopped, blushing and stammering, but no one minded him. Braddock stepped forward and took the flowers from him, piling them in Muriel's arms. The girl looked over the great mass of crimson and white blossoms at the cheering, stamping throng.

They had liked her, then; she had not been a failure; she had succeeded, and in the face of a situation before which many a more experienced actress would have quailed.

And she was to have her beloved part for the rest of the run of the piece—oh, it was so good!

She could think of no words to thank them, these big-hearted, good-natured, jolly college chaps, who loved fair play, and who had given her her chance.

She took an impulsive step forward, her cheeks flushed, her eyes like stars.

"Oh, you dears, you dears!" she cried.

The Tale of a Ticket.

BY MARVIN DANA.

Showing That It May Cost Considerably More Than Nine, Thirty-Two to Travel to Throgsdale.

WILTON observed, with a slight sensation of annoyance, that the line at the ticket-seller's window was long, and he, therefore, hastened his steps a little to secure place at the end of it, for he saw a dozen others approaching the same point.

The limited was a popular train, and it appeared that the office was about to be besieged by travelers.

Indeed, Wilton's first feeling of annoyance was soon changed to one of self-gratulation over the fact that he had secured his position so early, for the score ahead of him would soon be out of the way, while the waiting line behind him momently increased its length.

Finally, it came his turn at the window.

"Single to Throgsdale," he directed, and laid down a ten-dollar bill.

"Nine, thirty-two," the ticket-seller mumbled mechanically, as he pushed the printed slip beneath the grille.

In another moment, Wilton had gathered up the sixty-eight cents change, and had passed on from the window. There remained still some ten minutes before the train's starting time, and he went forward without hurrying toward the door that opened into the train-shed. While he was yet a rod away from it, a young man stepped swiftly to his side, and spoke eagerly:

"I beg your pardon, sir, but you bought a ticket to Throgsdale?" he exclaimed interrogatively.

At the unexpected address, Wilton halted instinctively. He observed that the stranger was a handsome, well-dressed man of perhaps twenty-five years. His manner of speech was that of a gentleman, and his tone was distinctly apologetic, as that of one who

reluctantly presumes on another's good nature.

The whole impression created was of a character so favorable that, after a moment of hesitation, Wilton, although much astonished, answered graciously:

"Why, yes," he said slowly, "I did. But—" He paused, inquiringly.

The stranger smiled and the smile was a very pleasant one.

"Of course, you think it strange, my asking you in this way," he replied quietly. "And, first, let me tell you that I do not wish to strike you for help of a financial sort, as you might easily be inclined to suspect. But I do want to know the price of your ticket to Throgsdale.

"I was close by the window when you were there, and so I heard you ask for one, but I didn't hear the amount mentioned, and, as there's such a crowd at the window, I thought I'd just ask you. I knew it would be quicker than running across to 'information.' I hope you will excuse my venturing to trouble you in this way, sir."

"Oh, it's no trouble at all," Wilton answered with much affability, now quite won over by the young man's agreeable bearing. "The price of the ticket is nine, thirty-two."

He was still holding the pasteboard in his hand; his eyes dropped carelessly to it as he spoke.

The stranger whipped out a pencil from his waistcoat-pocket.

"Rochester is beyond Throgsdale," he murmured meditatively.

"Yes," Wilton agreed. "Some twenty-seven or twenty-eight miles, I believe."

"And there's no stop-over on these tickets," the young man mused. He put out his hand. "Let me see, please."

Then, as Wilton surrendered the ticket to him, he scanned the fine print rapidly, and afterward shook his head.

"Nine, thirty-two," he repeated softly.

For a moment, he tapped the ticket absent-mindedly with the pencil point, jotting down the figures of its cost, then he returned the slip to its owner.

"Thank you very much," he said earnestly. "You have given me all the help I wished, and I am grateful to you, very grateful, indeed."

He bowed and turned away, while Wilton went forward again, feeling rather better disposed toward all the world by reason of the charming manners displayed by this young stranger in a chance encounter.

On the train, Wilton took a chair in the drawing-room, and passed the hours of traveling very comfortably in eating, reading, smoking, and dozing by turns. It was as the train neared its destination, while he was sitting in the smoking-room, enjoying a cigar, that the conductor of the limited entered.

The official lighted a cigar, and puffed energetically for a few moments in silence. There was a deep scowl on the man's brow, and, for want of something better to do, Wilton watched his *vis-à-vis* curiously, wondering idly if this were the official's ordinary expression, or if he were just now seriously disturbed over some recent catastrophe. He was not long left in doubt.

The conductor took a final energetic pull from the cigar, blew the cloud of smoke forth with extreme viciousness of manner, and finally lifted his eyes to the passenger opposite.

"I've been done!" he ejaculated wrathfully, without preamble. "I know it as well as I know my own name, but to save me I can't tell the how of it. That's what gets me. It riles my dander. I haven't the least ghost of an idea as to the how of the thing. Only, I've been done, and I know it!"

Wilton smiled encouragingly, sympathetically in fact, for on occasion he had "been done" himself, as is the lot of our common humanity.

"Tell me about it," he suggested.

"But that's just what I can't do—hang it!" the conductor rasped. "You see, I don't know how it happened, myself."

"Anyhow, tell me what happened, without the how of it," Wilton urged.

To this rather incoherent request, the conductor forthwith assented by plunging into his narrative of trouble.

"It's this way," he explained. "Some one has done me out of a fare, I'm sure. I know the man, too, but what I don't know is how he did it. I noticed this chap brush by me while I was taking up tickets in one of the forward cars. He went on toward the back of the train from which I had come in collecting the tickets. So, in a little while, when I was through with the first round of the train, I went back, looking for him—I had naturally taken stock of his appearance enough for recognition. Well, I found him, all right, in the last car. And what do you think?"

"Well?" Wilton questioned obligingly, as the conductor paused expectantly. "What happened?"

"He certainly had his nerve right along with him, and in good working order," the

official declared, with intense disgust. "Why, sir, he had the face to say to me that he had already given up his ticket to me. What do you think of that?"

"And he hadn't?"

"Not much!" the conductor retorted emphatically. "You see, my memory is peculiar, but it's all there every time. I can go through half a dozen cars, and remember every face perfectly. The years of training on this job have made it a cinch for me. I forget them before the next trainload comes along. They're coming in and going out of my head all the time.

"It's easy to me, as it ought to be, for it's my business. Well, I knew that the first time I had seen this fellow was when he rushed past me in the forward car. Then, I went back there, looking for just him and not for anybody else, and—he had the nerve to tell me he had given me his ticket already."

"What did you do then?" Wilton inquired. He was not greatly interested, but the obvious sincerity of the conductor made appeal to his sympathy.

"I told him that I knew better," was the spirited answer. "And then, of course, we had it back and forth. I'm used to that sort of thing from dead-beats. Only, there was one thing that jarred me more than usual with this chap.

"That was, he didn't lose his temper one single mite, but just kept on insisting as polite as you please that I was mistaken in the matter, that my memory must have played me a trick, that I had collected his ticket earlier in the game. He must have known that I knew he was lying, but he had the gall to put up the bluff just the same without turning a hair.

"And the harder I stormed, why, the gentlemanlier he was, until, to tell you the truth, he got me worked up to a point where I was almost frantic, and I must own that I talked to him in such a way that the passengers listening began to sympathize with him, and to think that he was suffering unjustly under the stupidity of an ignorant brute—myself.

"I pulled up then, and told him short that he must either pay or get off the train, and that I'd give him ten minutes in which to decide. Then, I went away to calm down properly, in order to retain the dignity of my position, as it were, and, incidentally, to retain a fair standing in the opinion of those rubbering spectators.

"Well, it took me most of that ten minutes' interval to get thoroughly placid again. For, in fact, I used up the full time I had set, and my nerves even then were a bit frazzly when I returned to the end car to learn what the deadhead had decided to do, whether to pay up or to be put off, for I surely would have stopped even the limited for the sake of putting the shyster off the train. Confound him!"

The conductor relapsed into a sullen silence, brooding over his woes.

"Well, which had he chosen?" Wilton demanded.

His indifference had vanished before the vehemence with which the angry conductor had told the incident, and he was now grown curious as to the result of the controversy.

"Why, as to that," came the dispirited reply, "it seems that the miserable scamp hadn't chosen either alternative. When I came back down the aisle of the car toward where he was sitting chatting with another passenger, he jumped to his feet, with a pleased-as-Punch slit in his chops, and looked as if he wanted to hug me right then and there before the carfull.

"'It's all right,' he sings out, as chipper as if we were old cronies together, and always had been that same, and always would be. 'Of course,' he goes on, 'I understand that your memory unhappily chanced to play you some trick on this occasion, but—'

"I interrupted him long enough to point out firmly that my memory was still attending strictly to business at the old stand, and was likely to continue so to do, irrespective of his attitude in the matter.

"But, the second I paused for breath, he went right on, all the time so pleasant you wouldn't suppose butter would melt in his mouth, and quite regardless of my justifiable grouchiness toward him.

"'I can identify my ticket, and by that means refresh your memory in the premises,' he remarks, and beams all over me while he says it. Then, he went on to explain with his nice manner of winning frankness that pleased all the passengers a whole lot, although it failed to cut any ice with me.

"'I remembered,' he says, 'after you went that, when I bought my ticket to Throgsdale, I absentmindedly jotted down on the back of it a memorandum of the price, nine dollars and thirty-two cents. So,' he went on, grinning harder than ever, 'if you'll just run over your bunch of tickets until you find mine with that memorandum—nine, thirty-two—on it, that will settle the whole matter. I assure you that I cherish no hard feelings on account of your little mental slip.'

"I supposed, of course, that the wily scoundrel was bluffing somehow; but the other passengers straightway lifted up their fool voices in chorus, telling me that, as a simple matter of ordinary justice, I must immediately look through my tickets of the run."

"Why, I—" Wilton began.

But the conductor waved a prohibitive hand, and continued his plaint:

"So, just to satisfy the butters-in, I did run over my tickets. The first Throgsdale ticket I came to, when I turned it over, did have nine, thirty-two written on the back in pencil. Yes, sir, it was there, plain as could be, just as that fellow had said.

"And figures don't lie they say— Oh, no! Huh! I got away as soon as I could, without making any apologies so that you would notice 'em, and he's riding peaceably back there now. I know I've been done—a man has his instincts that way, sometimes.

"But I can't fathom the how of it. It seems as if those figures clinched the facts in that chap's favor. But I know there was some game. Drat him, anyhow!"

When at last the conductor paused from his impetuous remarks, Wilton hastened to voice his delayed explanation.

"It so happens that I can tell you the how of this thing," he announced triumphantly. "While we were in the station, before the limited started, that fellow of yours back there took a look at my ticket in a friendly way, so to speak, and he jotted down on it then those identical marks. I saw him do it myself."

"What! He's a friend of yours?" the conductor exclaimed, with new indignation. "Then, you—you—"

But Wilton hurriedly made known all the facts. As the brief narrative drew to a close the official leaped to his feet joyously.

"I understand now!" he cried. "I've got the how of it at last, and I'll have that chap where he ought to be in a jiffy. It surely was great luck my running into you in this way, and happening to tell you the story. Thanks, thanks!"

With this hasty utterance the conductor rushed forth from the smoking-room. Wilton followed closely; for he was minded to witness the discomfiture of the ingenious swindler who had not scrupled to make use of him as a part in the mechanism of this chicanery.

But, as he hastened along at the conductor's heels through the first day-coach behind the Pullman, he was halted for a moment by the greeting of an acquaintance who was returning to his home in Throgsdale. Wilton explained the fact of his haste to witness the event about to occur in the rear car. He told enough of the story to provoke his friend's curiosity, with the result that, when he again proceeded on his way in the trail of the vanishing conductor, the friend bore him company.

As he entered the last car of the train, Wilton perceived the conductor half-way down the aisle, bearing down on the hapless victim. As he had anticipated, he at once recognized in this passenger, sitting with his face to the approaching official, the young man who had accosted him in the station before the departure of the limited.

The conductor had moderated his speed a little as he saw his prey waiting before him helplessly, and Wilton came up close behind just as the interview began.

"The jig's up!" the conductor exclaimed with evident triumph. "You'll pay me my fare, right here and now, my fine young fellow, or you'll be handed over to the police at the next stop. I'm on to your little game, I'd have you to know."

"Why, I thought I—you—" the young man began stammeringly; but he broke off in confusion. The evidences of a guilty conscience were instantly and plainly visible.

"Oh, yes; you thought you had squared everything by means of that clever little hocus-pocus about the pencil-marks," the conductor sneered. "Well, I'll have to admit that you came pretty near to pulling off the stunt. But I've got the facts against you now, you rascal!

"The marks were there all right, and you put them there all right; but it so happens that those same pencil-marks that you lay such stress on were on another man's ticket all the time. You pay, or you go to jail—that's all. Perhaps you recognize this gentleman?"

The conductor turned, and with a nod of his head indicated Wilton, who had been standing behind him.

The young man glanced quickly in the direction pointed out, and instantly perceived that he was trapped beyond all hope of escape. Thereat the color surged red in his cheeks.

"Oh, Lud, I'm in for it now," he muttered to himself, with a groan.

But the conductor caught the words.

"You can just bet your life on that proposition," he agreed grimly. "My only word of advice to you is that you pay up, although it's more than I ought to do to let you off

that easy. Jail is the place for one of your great talents."

"I'd pay fast enough, if I could," the young man declared miserably. "The deuce of it all is I can't. I haven't the money."

"So I guessed," was the official's unsympathetic reply. "Well, there's one thing you can do as soon as the train comes to a standstill."

"And that is?" the other asked with a sudden accession of hopefulness in his voice.

"You can go to jail," the conductor affirmed brutally; and he chuckled malevolently over his own savage attempt at humor.

It was just then that Wilton's inquisitive friend spoke for the first time.

"What's all the row about, anyhow?" he questioned. "I don't understand the mix-up exactly."

But when the conductor and Wilton had set forth the facts briefly, this gentleman shook his head in vigorous protest.

"You have another guess coming," he declared positively.

Then, in answer to their astonished interrogations, he made a concise statement of what he knew bearing on the affair in hand, and his contribution was of vital significance.

"I don't know anything about the matter more than this," he said. "I was next in line behind this gentleman at the station. I noticed him particularly because he seemed so unusually pleased with himself and with the world in general, judging by the expression on his face and the way his smile hung on.

"I observed him closely, because I hadn't anything better to do while waiting for my turn; and so you can depend on it that I know what I am talking about when I say that he bought a ticket to Throgsdale, and that he paid for it with a ten-dollar bill."

At this astonishing announcement the conductor stared first toward the speaker, then toward Wilton, and, last of all, toward the young man who had deceitfully claimed the pencil-marked ticket for his own. Wilton, too, was wholly bewildered by this new turn of affairs.

Even the young gentleman himself, who was thus exonerated from a serious charge of fraud in one direction, yet seemed hesitant to take advantage of the interposition in his behalf.

At last, however, as the eyes of the group regarded him intently and wonderingly, he spoke with downcast eyes, his air one of profound embarrassment:

"I must make a clean breast of it, I suppose. I don't see any way out of it, short of free confession. As a matter of fact, I was, quite unexpectedly, short of money at the last moment. I learned from this gentleman, however"—a gesture of the head indicated Wilton—"what the price of a ticket to Throgsdale was, and (to my great satisfaction, it was cheaper than I had thought it would be, so that I had just enough to pay my fare afterward from there on to Rochester, where I have funds a plenty.

"So, you see, the only point of the matter is that, having paid for my ticket to Throgsdale once, I didn't have enough to pay the fare a second time, just because the conductor forgot that he had already collected my ticket once."

There came an ominous growl from the bewildered conductor at this remark. But Wilton interrupted the threatened outburst of indignation on the official's part.

"How about those pencil-marks?" he demanded.

"Oh, as to them," the young man answered, in some confusion, "it really is the truth that I merely jotted them down on your ticket in a moment of absent-mindedness, and that was all there was to the matter—at the time. I happened to think about it afterward—that it wasn't exactly the proper thing to do with a polite stranger's ticket, but the trouble is that I have an awful habit of marking things up with lead like that.

"I did it in this instance absolutely without intention of any sort. But, later on, here, the memory seemed to come to me as an inspiration. It was after he left me with a stipulation of ten minutes' grace that the idea occurred to me, and I fancied I saw a way out of the difficulty by referring him to those marks as a means for the identification of my ticket. I didn't consider my employing this expedient anything essentially dishonest, although, of course, it was deceitful in a way.

"I had made the marks there myself, and I had bought a ticket to Throgsdale, and I wasn't doing any injury to any one else—only saving myself from serious annoyance in consequence of another person's blunder. For my ticket was taken up, you know," the speaker concluded defiantly.

"If I'd taken up your ticket, young man," the conductor retorted angrily, "you'd have had a slip for it in your hatband."

A dazed look crept over the young man's face.

"I wonder!" he exclaimed.

Forthwith, then, he stood up, and from the

rack above his head he reached down a derby hat. As he turned it around in his hand, all saw stuck in the band a conductor's slip of pasteboard.

It was the conductor who broke the tense silence. His face was still gloomy.

"I don't understand it yet at all," he grumbled. "It must be that my memory's failing me, this early in life, and me a careful liver, too! I would have sworn I never took the ticket from him!"

But now the young man laughed.

"I think I see more light on this dark mystery," he said pleasantly. "When I got on the train, I wore an overcoat with the collar turned up, and I had this derby hat of mine on. For a while after we started, I kept the coat and hat on, for I felt a little chilly.

"It was during this time that you began the collection of tickets, and you took mine one of the first. Then, after you had gone on, I took off the overcoat, and also the hat, both of which I put away, up in the rack. I never thought about your slip in the hatband. For the matter of that, I don't think I was aware of your putting it in there at the time.

"By and by, I got this soft hat out of my valise, and put it on, as I always do when traveling. Afterward, I went forward through the day coaches of the train, to see if there was any one I knew on board.

"I noticed that you looked at me sharply as I came back, but I paid no attention to the fact, for I had nothing on my conscience —then. So, you see—"

"I see," the conductor admitted.

The Note She Found.

BY ORLANDO MOORE.

If Seeing Is Believing, You Must Be Sure That There Is Nothing the Matter With Your Eyes.

"MR. MAXFIELD was here, Miss Mabel," announced the white-capped maid, as she opened the door in response to her mistress's ring. "He left a moment ago."

Mabel West frowned a little, as she stood pulling off her gloves in the hall.

"Did he leave any message, Jane?" she inquired.

"No, miss. He said nothing, except that he had an engagement. He waited quite a while in the library for you, miss."

"Very well, Jane. Hang up my coat, please."

Mabel passed her outdoor garments to the maid, and went into the sunny front room.

She was disappointed at missing Gerald Maxfield, though for the past three months, ever since she had become engaged to him, she had seen him every day.

"He might have waited for luncheon," she said to herself, picking up the book he had evidently been reading, and putting it back in its place on the shelf.

"He knew I would not stay out very long. I wonder why he hurried away? He spoke of no engagement last night. Why didn't he tell Jane where he was going, or whether he intended coming back?"

She stood for a moment idly drumming her fingers upon the desk.

"Oh, perhaps he left a note!" she exclaimed, turning over the papers in search of a message. But there was no word for her, and she started to leave the room, when her eye fell upon a folded sheet of letter-paper on the rug close to the table. He had written her a line, then, and the wind had blown it from the desk to the floor.

Picking it up, she sat down in a chair, unfolded the paper and began to read.

"Dearest Boy—"

Her hands fell to her lap. This was not for her.

The writing, small, irregular, and distinctly feminine, was totally unlike Gerald's bold, dashing chirography. It must be something which he had dropped, evidently written to him, and by a woman.

But what woman would address him in such fashion? He had no sisters, and Mabel was familiar with his mother's handwriting. But perhaps she had made a mistake; perhaps it was not "Dearest Boy" after all. The writing was not so very easy to decipher.

She looked again. No; she had not been mistaken. The note began plainly "Dearest Boy."

Annoyed and perplexed, Mabel turned the page and looked at the signature—"Your own loving Little Girl."

A quick spasm of jealousy seized her. Who was his "Own loving Little Girl?" What woman had the right so to sign herself to Gerald Maxfield? And how dared he receive such a letter? He had told her countless times that he cared nothing for other women—that she was all in all to him. With whom, then, would he be on terms of such familiar intimacy?

She wondered angrily what was in the letter—wondered what this other woman could have to say to an engaged man. Doubtless something his *fiancée* should not know, or she would not call him her "dearest boy" and herself his "loving little girl."

Mabel felt herself very hardly used. Gerald had no near relatives, had said he had no near or dear women friends. Who was this woman? And what had she to say? Would it be right to read the letter?

She felt it an unworthy thing to pry into Gerald's private affairs, to read his correspondence without his permission; but she told herself fiercely that this time she was justified. If he were playing fast and loose with her, she should know it. It might save her misery and pain.

With quick determination, she began to read the note again.

DEAREST BOY:

If you can get away from that tiresome Mabel to-morrow morning, meet me at the Grand Central on the arrival of the twelve-thirty train. If you are very good, you may take me to luncheon at Cherry's.

I haven't seen very much of you of late, and it's always the same old excuse—that girl. Really, if I didn't know how much you love me, I believe I should be jealous of her!

A thousand thanks for the lovely flowers, and the still more lovely bracelet. And you remembered that my birthstone is the sapphire. I shall have to think up some fitting reward for such devotion.

Until to-morrow, then, and don't fail me. But I know you will not.

Your own loving
LITTLE GIRL.

For a moment it seemed to Mabel as if the room swam before her eyes. She felt stunned, dazed by the suddenness of the blow that had fallen.

With infinite care she perused the note again, to be sure she had read aright. "That tiresome Mabel."

He had discussed her, then, with this person, to whom he sent flowers and sapphire bracelets—this woman who would be jealous if she were not so sure of his love! It was unspeakable, unbelievable.

Mechanically, Mabel folded the note and locked it in the desk.

How she had loved him, had trusted him! And this was her reward. This deception, falseness, this cowardly correspondence with some other woman. What could she say? What could she do?

He had gone to meet this person—perhaps was even now laughing with her over the fact that he had been able to rid himself of "that tiresome Mabel." Was she so tiresome, then? If so, why did he seek her society? Why had he asked her to marry him?

Was it only to break her heart and make her miserable? Or did he hope to blind her indefinitely to his other love-affairs?

Oh, it could not be true—there must be some mistake. He had always been so good, so tender, so kind. He could not be so base, so unworthy of her love.

She glanced at the clock; it still lacked ten minutes of the half-hour.

Then she sprang to her feet and ran into the hall. She seized her hat and coat, putting them on with trembling fingers. A moment later she was in the street.

She would see for herself, if Gerald met this woman. Perhaps the note had not been his—some one else might have been in the library and dropped it. But the phrase, "That tiresome Mabel," had stamped itself upon her mind, and would not be denied. And Gerald had told Jane he had an engagement.

No; she would not think; she would not dwell on it. She would wait and see for herself.

At the Subway station she just caught an express, and five minutes later she was asking at the information bureau of the Central what train was due at 12.30, and on what track it came in.

There was only a moment to spare. She hurried through the waiting-room and out upon the platform, glancing to right and left in search of Gerald. The train was in, and a stream of people poured past her.

Several men and women seemed to be waiting for some one from the train, but Gerald

was not among them. He had not come, then; she had wronged him.

Then her heart gave a great leap—and seemed to stop beating. For there he came, a suit-case in one hand, swinging easily along by the side of a tall, slim girl, who was chatting animatedly. Mabel shrank back behind one of the pillars, as the pair passed so close that she could have reached out her hand and touched them.

"It was awfully good of you to come," the girl was saying. "I was afraid—" and then the rest of the sentence was inaudible.

With white cheeks and quivering lips, Mabel stood looking after the retreating figures. Then she slowly followed them, through the waiting-room to the street.

A taxicab stood at the curb, and as Mabel went down the steps she saw Gerald in the act of entering it, and heard him call over his shoulder to the chauffeur:

"Cherry's, please."

The machine shot away, and the girl on the steps stood watching it until it turned a corner and disappeared. Then she forced herself to go on down to the Subway.

The trip up-town seemed like a dream; she could not remember very clearly what she did, until she found herself standing in the hall of her own home, with Jane excitedly wanting to know if she were ill, and whether a doctor should be summoned.

"No, Jane; I'm all right, except that I'm tired and have a headache," she said.

Her voice seemed to her to belong to some one else who was a long distance away.

"But I don't want any luncheon; and if any one calls—any one at all, Jane—I am not at home."

She mounted the stairs to her own room and locked the door. Then she took off her coat and hat, and flung herself, face downward, on the bed.

Hour after hour she lay there, fighting her battle alone, trying to school herself to think calmly of this terrible thing that had come to her.

On Gerald Maxfield's motives for acting as he had she would not allow her mind to dwell. There would be plenty of time for that in the future, in the long days and evenings when she would be alone. She would always be alone now.

She had never cared much for society; had always kept more or less to herself; and, since Maxfield had come into her life, she had gone out but little, withdrawing more and more from her few intimate friends, and devoting her time entirely to him. She shuddered to think of the awful blank that his going would leave.

Well, she must face it, must bear it bravely. She would smile, even if her heart were breaking; would laugh, even if tears were perilously close to her eyes. Just now she could not cry; she had been far too deeply hurt. With dry, burning eyes and throbbing temples she lay, going over and over the events of the past few hours.

Whatever happened, she must not see him again. She had let her whole heart go out to him, and he had deceived her, wantonly, cruelly.

Protesting that he cared for her alone, he had accepted all that she had to give, while carrying on a clandestine love-affair with another woman—a woman who had said she was not jealous of him because she was so sure of his love!

Why, Mabel wondered dully, had he asked her to be his wife? Not for money, surely; he had plenty of his own, and Mr. West was far from wealthy. Not for social position; his was assured. She could find no answer to the problem.

Only one thing was certain—she would put him out of her life, absolutely and entirely, and try to forget him—try to think of him as he was—a coward and unworthy of the love and devotion she had so freely given him.

It was late afternoon when she rose, bathed and dressed, and rang the bell for Jane.

"Did any one call?" she asked, when the maid had answered the summons.

"Mr. Maxfield, Miss. He had a lady with him. I told him you were not at home."

"A lady? How was she dressed?"

"In dark blue, miss, with a big white feather in her hat. They seemed real disappointed to find you out."

And the girl she had seen with Gerald in the Grand Central Station had been gowned in dark blue and had had a white feather in her hat!

"Mr. Maxfield said he would call this evening," pursued Jane.

In a moment, Mabel's resolution was taken. She would not see him—he should not triumph over her.

"When he comes, Jane, tell him that I do not wish to see him, and that he need not call again," she said quietly.

"Not call again, miss? I—" There was amazement in the maid's voice.

"Exactly! Tell him that I will not see him at any time, and that it will be perfectly

useless for him to come. And tell father that I have a headache, and would like to be excused from dinner. That's all, Jane, thank you."

With round, wondering eyes, the maid departed, and Mabel sat down in a rocking chair by the window.

Not satisfied with the wrong he had done her, Gerald Maxfield had dared to bring that woman to her house! This was adding insult to injury. Probably he had not yet missed the letter, and had brought her that she might meet "that tiresome Mabel"—that they might laugh together over the way in which she had been hoodwinked.

Oh, it was cruel, cruel! But she would show him—would let him understand that she had found him out before it was too late.

Her father knocked at her door, inquiring solicitously after her headache, but she sent him away with the assurance that she needed only rest, and that she would be better in the morning. She felt that she could not bear night—alone with her trouble.

It was after eight o'clock when the sound of the door-bell startled her from her chaotic thoughts. That must be Gerald.

She wondered how he would take his dismissal—what he would say. Jane was going through the hall now to answer the bell. In a moment he would have her message. Impulsively, she unlocked her door and tiptoed out to the banister.

She could hear him as he asked for her, and then Jane's voice, hesitatingly delivering her message.

"Are you joking, Jane?" she heard Maxfield cry. "You've made some foolish mistake. Go up at once and ask Miss Mabel to come down—I want to see her particularly to-night."

"There's no mistake, sir," protested Jane. "That's just what she said—just what she told me I was to tell you when you called, sir."

"I don't believe it," he declared flatly. "You go up—or stay—I'll call to her."

Mabel could hear his footsteps coming toward the stairs, and she fled softly back to her room and turned the key in the lock.

"Mabel! Mabel, dear!" he called.

She did not answer, though her heart gave a leap at the sound of his voice. She had loved his voice so—and now she was never to hear it again.

He called a second time. Still she was silent.

"You see, sir," said Jane, following him. "I told you exactly what she said, sir."

"Why, this is absurd!" exclaimed Maxfield, half angrily. "What can be the matter? If she won't answer me, I'll have to go up."

He mounted the stairs, two steps at a time, and rapped sharply on the panels of the door.

"Mabel—Mabel—open the door! What is the matter, dear? Are you ill?"

The girl's nails dug deep into the palms of her hands, but her voice was calm and steady, as she answered him:

"Jane has given you my message, I presume, Mr. Maxfield. I have nothing more to say. Kindly go."

"I'll do nothing of the sort, Mabel," cried Maxfield in amazement and dismay. "What does all this mean? What have I done that you refuse to see me, and send me word that I am not to come again? I don't understand it at all. Come—open the door, girlie, and tell me what ails you. If I've offended you, tell me how. Don't act this way."

"I have nothing more to say."

"Very well, then." His jaw shut with a determined snap. "I'll go down to the library and wait until your father comes home. I met him at the club, and he said he'd be in early. I'll find out from him what the matter is, since you won't tell me. Once more, will you open the door?"

Mabel knew that he would be as good as his word. If he waited for her father, she would be called upon to explain the whole matter; and she felt that she could not go through such an ordeal that night.

Indeed, there was no need that her father should know anything, except that she and Gerald had parted. Perhaps it would be better to see Gerald and tell him that she knew all—that she was through with him and his lies and deceit forever.

"If you will go down to the library, I will come in a moment," she said after a pause; and she could hear his retreating footsteps on the stairs.

There was no help for it; she must face him; must tell him the whole miserable story that she had found out. After a moment, she followed him to the floor below.

He was standing by the library table as she entered, and started forward with an exclamation of dismay at the sight of her white, miserable face. But she checked him with a gesture, and, without a word, unlocked the drawer of the desk and took out the note she had found on the floor that morning.

"I believe this is your property, Mr. Maxfield," she said coldly, holding it out toward him. "It may interest you to know

that I was at the station when the twelve-thirty train arrived to-day, and saw you keep your appointment with 'your loving little girl.'"

She stood with her head thrown back, her chin uptilted, while her voice rang with irony and scorn.

"I think," she continued, "that I have said all that is necessary. Naturally, there is but one thing for me to do under the circumstances, and that is to refuse to see you again. I dare say, you have some facile explanation ready, but I do not care to hear it. Here is your ring. Good-night and good-by."

She flung the diamond circlet at his feet, and walked toward the door.

"Stop!" Maxfield's tone was peremptory.

"You read this note—you?"

"Yes. I read it. Why not?"

She was facing him again, her eyes blazing with anger, her hands opening and closing at her sides, as she strove to control her emotion, to stifle her outraged pride and love.

"Perhaps it is a mean, small thing to read another person's letters, especially his love-letters," she went on quickly. "But I saw the beginning—and I believed that those words justified me in reading on to the end. I do not care whether I was justified or not. I did it—and thank Heaven that I did!

"For that letter, and the fact that you kept the appointment mentioned in it, showed you to me for what you are—a coward and a cad—the sort of man who wins a woman's love and affection, and carries on affairs with other women behind her back.

"I despise you, Gerald Maxfield—despise you from the bottom of my heart, and I never want to see you again. Go to your 'loving little girl'—but I wish never to see your face again. And if I should meet you on the street, I should never speak to you, even if you begged me on your knees."

She turned from him toward the door; but with a bound Maxfield sprang in front of her, closed it, and set his back against it.

"So that is it," he said very slowly and deliberately. "That is it. Very well. You shall have your wish. You shall never see me again, if I can help it. It is quite unlikely that I shall come to you on my knees or any other way. But first, you must hear what I have to say about this matter. Then I'll go."

"I will hear nothing! Open that door!"

"No!"

"You shall!"

"I will not! You have told me your opinion of me. Now, I'll tell you what I think of you. And you shall not leave this room until I have. After that, I'll never trouble you again. Sit down!"

He pointed to a chair.

With trembling limbs, the girl sank into it, her eyes fixed on Maxfield's face. His expression frightened her. In all the time she had known him, she had never seen him look so.

His eyes were glittering and his mouth was set in a firm, hard line. All the tenderness, all the gentle deference she had been wont to see there, had been blotted out.

It seemed to Mabel that their positions were suddenly reversed; that he was the accuser and she the accused; that she and not he had been guilty.

He came forward and stood in front of her, the open letter in his hand, looking down upon her with a hard, appraising glance that was intolerable. She felt her self-control slipping away from her; with difficulty she repressed a scream.

It seemed to her that she would go mad, if he did not say something, do something, besides look at her in that cold, calculating way, as if she were beneath contempt.

"I'm that 'tiresome Mabel,' am I?" she cried, half hysterically. "And you're to try to get rid of me! Well, you've succeeded; you've got rid of me for good. I'll not bore you and your little girl any more.

"And then you dare—dare to bring her here—to my house—to insult me! Oh, you brute! You brute! And you professed to love me!"

She covered her face with her hands.

"I believe you also professed to love me," Maxfield remarked coldly. "It is unfortunate for both of us that you did not add a little trust to your feeling for me.

"Any common criminal is entitled to a hearing; and yet you have condemned me without a word, because of this."

He tapped the letter.

"You, who have known me for three years, believed me capable of a dastardly action such as you describe. It seems impossible to me. Why, no matter what it appeared that you had done, I would trust you. Had you not told me yourself that you read a letter intended for some one else, I would not have credited it."

"I had the right—" she began weakly; but he interrupted her.

"You had no right! The letter was clearly not for you. Why, simply because I had dropped it, should you read it, any more

than I would open your desk and read any of your private correspondence? You yourself characterized your action as mean and small. I am forced to agree with you.

"And when, on such flimsy evidence, you convict the man you pretend to love and trust, I can hardly tell you what I think. However, that is of no consequence. You have told me you loved me; you have promised to marry me—had promised, I should have said. I venture to doubt your love. Love cannot exist where there is not perfect faith and trust; you have not that for me.

"This letter," he continued, his voice harsh and strained, "came to me this morning by messenger, enclosed in a hasty note from Jack Dodge. It was from his *fiancée,* Miss Merton. Dodge was busy on a picture, and had to utilize every moment.

"He could not leave to meet her, as she asked, for the work had to be finished by five o'clock this afternoon. So, as he could not go to the station, he asked me to do so, and enclosed her note to me, because he was pressed for time and it would save explanations.

"I came here this morning to ask you to go with me, and waited an hour for you. When you did not come, I was obliged to go alone.

"Miss Merton and I called on you this afternoon, and I then took her to Dodge's studio, as '*that tiresome* MODEL' left at four o'clock. As Miss Merton does not know you, and as she has met me but once before, she could hardly have referred to you, or written the letter to me.

"That is all, Mabel. I'm going now. But I would suggest that both you and your friends would be more comfortable, if you used a little more charity in your dealings, and jumped less hastily to conclusions."

He stooped and picked up the ring from the floor, where Mabel had flung it, put it into his pocket, and stepped to the door.

Mabel burst into tears. She could see it all now. "That tiresome Mabel" had really been "that tiresome model." She had not read aright, that was all.

Jack Dodge was an artist, and was Gerald Maxfield's best friend. What more natural than that he should ask Maxfield to meet Miss Merton, since he was unable to do so? It was all so simple—so easily explained.

And she—Mabel—had been unfair and unkind; she had hurt and wounded Gerald beyond pardon, and all the while he had been true to her, had been thinking of her.

He had even waited an hour, that she might go with him to the station that morning. For three years he had been her friend, as he had said; for three months her promised husband.

In all that time she had never had the slightest cause to mistrust him, never had the faintest reason to complain of anything that he did. Yet, at the first breath of suspicion, all this had gone for naught; she had condemned him unheard.

He was right; she had been small and mean—and worse.

The front door shut sharply, and she raised her head. She was alone in the room. He had gone! And he would never come back. She knew his intense pride, his love for fair and square dealing. No; he had gone forever.

She had lost him—all through her own unworthiness, her own foolish jealousy and hateful suspicions.

She sprang to her feet and darted into the hall. Seizing the knob, she jerked open the door and ran out upon the stoop. A dark figure was passing under a street lamp, a few doors away—a figure that walked with weary steps and bowed head.

"Gerald! Gerald! Come back! Come back!" Her voice rose in a piteous cry.

He hesitated—stopped—half-turned.

"Come back, Gerald! Oh, come back!" she pleaded frantically.

In another moment he was with her, had swept her into the library, and she was sobbing out her love and contrition in his arms.

THE CREATION OF ART.

A SHAPELESS chaos void and lifeless lay
  Before a dreamer in his mighty hour;
He breathed his soul between the lips of clay,
  And all the empty arteries flowed with power;
Then, leaping at the master mind's control,
It stood an angel with its maker's soul!

Freeman E. Miller.

On the Altar of Fashion.

BY FORREST HALSEY.

The High-Priestess of Fashion All But Slaughters Our Hero, Who is Saved in the Nick of Time by a Piece of Chewing-Gum.

"IT'S not what you are in this world that counts with women," thought the youth bitterly.

Mr. George Graham Parker was on his way downtown toward the offices of Lohenheime & Co., manufacturers of millinery.

The bitter reflections in Mr. Parker's mind were the result of a call he had made the night before upon Miss Cora Drew. Miss Drew tried on hats for the purchasers at Mme. Corinne's on Fifth Avenue.

Fat old ladies of wealth were disfigured hideously by purchasing and wearing the confections that looked so wonderfully upon Miss Drew. After the confection had been held up before the eyes of the victim several times by Mme. Corinne, the victim would murmur:

"But don't you think that is a little young for me, *madame?*" Whereat *madame* would scream once, twice, and say two "*Mon Dieus*" with a Dublin accent. Then she would look at the victim with deep pity and add:

"Oh! Look in that mirror—see—see the youthful lines of your face—and see the lines of this superb feather, and the line of this velvet edge how it carries the eye of the admirer on into the charming contour of *madame's* so charming cheek. Look into that mirror, *madame,* and never say you are too old for this again."

Whereat the victim would gaze into the mirror, and though she saw a face that would have been considered middle-aged for Methuselah's first wife, she would begin to smile —such is the power of suggestion—and think that her husband was a brute when he had hinted that a bonnet would be more suitable to her age. Still, if an exceptionally strong-minded victim should resist *madame* up to this point, then the great Corinne would play her final card.

"Let me see," she would say thoughtfully, "which of my young ladies has a contour that resembles yours. One can only tell how this hat looks by seeing it from all sides. Ah! there is Favette. Favette is exactly your style."

Then Favette, otherwise Miss Cora Drew, would come smiling up in answer to *madame's* call, and put on the head-gear.

Favette could have worn the Singer building, and still look charming; so, after a glance or so the victim fell, and went proudly forth to be a shame to her husband and a wicked joy to her friends.

One day Mr. George Graham Parker was sent upon an errand to Mme. Corinne's. He waited in the white-walled, green-carpeted room, gazing darkly at the hats, perching like gorgeous birds of many-colored plumage, in long wands. But these beautiful things did not soothe him. Neither did the great mirrors, or the white-carved ceiling, bring balm to his soul.

He was wondering why it was he did not get on down at Lohenheime's. He had been with Lohenheime for three years, and was still little more than an errand-boy; other fellows passed from the stock-room to the salesroom, thence out to the broad road as salesmen, but he, George Graham Parker, honest, frugal, saving, industrious, and ambitious, still numbered crates of feathers, and at need ran errands like this one.

He gloomed darkly at his counterfeit in the mirror. Why was it? What was the matter with him, anyway? The mirror showed a commonplace young man in an overcoat much too long for the style; in fact, though George did not know it, the overcoat

made him look strangely like a black sugar-scoop.

One needs a very bright and brilliant countenance, if the rest of one is to resemble a sugar-scoop. George's countenance was neither bright nor brilliant. It was a pale countenance with a deep frown upon it, such a frown as would have become Napoleon at Elba, but Napoleon could afford to frown—his overcoat was cut for just that sort of thing.

Although the ambitious George Graham Parker did not know it, the solid bar across his business path was his taste in his clothes. He was trying for success in a town where people judge you by what you look like, and George, in some subtle manner that was almost akin to genius, always managed to look foolish.

If he bought a derby hat it was either so large that he resembled the good old Quaker on the back of the magazines, or so small that he seemed as though dressed for a turn between the moving pictures, and had lost his way. When short jackets were the fashion he got long ones, and when long came in, he bought the short, because that style was cheaper.

George was fond of saying that it was the man that counted, not the clothes, which is true enough of a hobo, but not of an ambitious young man in a wholesale millinery house, where most of the big customers are women. His salary at Lohenheime's was small, so small that it left him little or nothing for clothes after he laid by for the rainy day of which his cautious mother warned him.

So he wore misfit clothes and saved money, thereby in reality recklessly wasting his only real capital, opportunity. So, also, he came to sit strangely out of place among the feathers and furbelows of Corinne's, waiting until that personage should have finished pressing a bright green-and-yellow parrot hat upon a reluctant lady, whose complexion was of somewhat the same tones.

"What!" exclaimed the shocked and agonized Corinne. "*Madame* thinks the hat too bright for her complexion. Oh! How many poor women would give their very souls for that beautiful, clear pallor. But let me think. There is one of my young ladies who resembles *madame*. One can only tell how this hat looks upon one by seeing it from all sides. Call Favette."

"If Favette looks anything like that one," thought the ungallant and morose Mr. Parker, "Heaven help her, because she'll need it."

Just then Favette came tripping up the room.

Had Heaven, where we are told marriages are made, condescended to such a thing, no more complete trap could have been laid by it for a lover than the sight of Miss Drew, alias Favette, parading slowly back and forth, her radiant, high-colored youth crowned with a high-colored, radiant parrot.

Parker sat enthralled. The hideous duplicity of the terrible scene caused him no shudders, neither did he cast one throb of pity for the poor victim, who must have had some one to love her, as she evidently had money. Poor victim, destined to go forth in plumage that in combination with her face would scare young children and turn intending youths from all thoughts of matrimony lest their chosen ones should grow in their old age to look like that. Mr. Parker had eyes for Favette only.

Nor a little later, after a number of calls at "Corinne's," did it shake his faith to learn Favette's real name. Somehow—just how never can be revealed—he prevailed upon her to let him call at her home. Perhaps she pitied him; perhaps—well, a certain young bank clerk may have needed a lesson.

Any way, George Graham Parker was permitted to sit under the bromid enlargement of her mother's photograph. Owing to the artist's too free use of Chinese white, the eyes glared down at him maniacally. George survived the portrait, but he scarcely survived the Sunday walk that he was permitted to take with his angel.

He dressed carefully for that walk. His mother had always impressed him with the fact that dark colors wore longer than light ones. So he wore a new black necktie that was about the size of a cabbage and gave him the look, with his long black coat, of a sporting undertaker. A wide-brimmed derby of some bygone harvest crowned his head.

When one saw George Graham Parker thus arrayed one had a general impression that all hope was lost and the bitterest agony yet to come.

Outside of "Corinne's," Miss Drew had a heart and a conscience. She did not turn him from the doors in scorn; she even took the walk, and was most gracious in spite of the grin of the bank clerk when they passed him on the corner. Oh! how George Graham Parker hated that bank clerk, who was dressed in expensive checks.

He was certain that he would eventually develop into an embezzler. When the bank clerk suddenly joined them, George Graham

Parker was sure that he was one already. To tell the truth, the bank clerk certainly stole a march upon him. He accompanied the pair on their walk and entertained them with accounts of how exceedingly smart one had to be to assist in managing a bank nowadays. Over the tie like a black cabbage George glared in hatred as the youth in checks told of how he had assisted the third assistant cashier to detect and capture a forger.

To tell the truth, the youth's part in that noted transaction had been to put on his hat and go get a policeman while the bank watchman and four clerks prevented the criminal's escape—but too much detail spoils a story; effect is all that counts. The effect of this story resulted in his being asked to stay to tea, to the exclusion of George Graham Parker.

Hence that youth's bitter reflections as he strode down-town toward the unappreciative Lohenheime's.

"A woman," thought the morose one, "just looks at a fellow's clothes. As though they made any real difference to a man. It's what a man is that counts. That check suit of his must have cost fifty dollars. Where did he get fifty dollars?"

A passing dray barred his crossing and he paused beside a long window marked:

NUHEIMER'S NEW CLOTHES FOR NOBS.

and filled with beautiful wax gentlemen smiling blandly at him. On each manly bosom a ticket announced the price at which the superb garments were obtainable.

The third gentleman from the right first arrested George Graham's attention, then grappled it and held it with hooks of steel. The figure wore a beautiful check suit, a duplicate of the bank clerk's. On the head was a green plush hat, and on the ticket hung round its neck was the legend:

THIS HANDSOME SUIT
$9.50, marked down from $15.00.

George rushed to the window. Yes, there were the three curious little buttons on the cuff that the villain had said were a cute idea of his own. Yes, the suit was a duplicate of the bank clerk's.

For a minute George thought of going to Corinne's and leading the fair deceived one down to this window, so that she might see how her affections were being won under false pretenses; and then:

"I'm about that size," thought George Graham Parker; "and nine-fifty is cheap."

At five o'clock that afternoon a pale young man, dressed in a bright check suit and a green plush hat, was strolling up the avenue toward Corinne's.

The passing show-windows and an occasional mirror flashed back reflections to his eyes that fairly dazzled him.

George Graham Parker had always dressed in dark colors—"they wore better"—but now, as he gazed upon himself, he was almost intoxicated with pleasure.

Why, he looked like a sport! Like somebody who had money! He had "side" and "flash." His legs flew, and his eyes twinkled with desire to carry all this startling transformation to Corinne's.

The psychology of clothes was upon the youth, transforming him. He no longer looked like a sugar-coop. Alas! poor George Graham Parker, he now looked like a tenderloin crook. Women felt for their pocketbooks as he passed—men laid their hands on their watches—the policemen looked after him, trying to recall his number in the rogues' gallery.

All oblivious, the youth passed onward, scanning the mirroring shop-windows. Suddenly he paused and frowned. His necktie! It made a somber patch amid his splendor. Entering a haberdasher's, he purchased a scarlet scarf, which he at once donned.

The young confidence-man who sold it to him further induced him to purchase a pair of bright yellow gloves and a large green cobblestone to adorn the red tie. All speeds were now on in the sartorial "jag" of George Graham Parker.

He gave no thought to his poor old mother, waiting so patiently at home. Even Corinne's and the fair Miss Drew would have to wait.

After years of sober righteousness, he had fallen. The clothes had gone to his brain. He intended to promenade the avenue.

He even had thoughts of going into a hotel and buying a cocktail, but he was not sure how much they would charge for it. His mother had always warned him never to buy anything without asking the price. Surely it would never do to go in and ask the price of a cocktail while he was in those clothes. In them he looked like a millionaire to whom price was nothing, thought the modest youth.

Suppose he should become a millionaire? How sorry Miss Drew would be that she had not asked him in to tea; and that bank clerk! He would go, the first thing, down to that

bank, and make a huge deposit, so that the young "stiff" would have to keep busy adding up his money for him. Oh, that would be a revenge!

How people stared at him! Why—that rural-looking old gentleman, with the bag and gray whiskers, actually hurried to get out of his way. That was polite—just showed what clothes could do. He wondered if he had not better go in and get a cocktail. Well, he would go into the hotel and walk about a bit.

Filled with the courage of his clothes, the youth entered the huge, gilded portals of the caravansary where people from the country come to spend their honeymoons.

On fifteen dollars a week one does not generally frequent fifteen-dollar-a-day hotels. George Graham Parker had lived in New York all his life, yet never had seen the inside of this hostelry. The gilded walls and the gaily got-up women hit him a staggering blow upon his mental solar plexus. He wandered slowly, staring at everything like the true New Yorker that he was.

"Do you see that flashy-looking sport in checks, green hat, and yellow gloves?" said a young man from Wall Street to a young man from Chicago. "That's Terry McGovern, the ex-prize-fighter. He's retired—lives on his money."

The Chicagoan stared.

"See that young fellow in the checks?" whispered a bridegroom from Hohokus to his bride. "He's the young fellow that trimmed Willie Hardgold out of two hundred thousand. I had him pointed out to me when I was here traveling for the United Flour-Sifter Company, last fall."

By the time George Graham Parker was half-way down "Mincing Lane," his checks had made him a reputation as a crook for which other men have labored years, alas! in vain.

Half-way down the lane, between the gilt chairs, George suddenly was aware of a golden-haired vision. It emerged from the paler room, and, after dazzling his brain for a brief moment, swept onward.

Without the support of the checks, George never would have raised his eyes to those glittering charms. Clad in all his sinful splendor, seduced by all its subtle gaiety and wickedness, he fell. George Graham became a "cut-up." He followed the vision.

Some day clothes will be recognized for the enemies of the human race that they are, and laws will be passed forbidding their sale except on prescription by a graduate psychologist.

The vision swept her trailing velvets into a side-room, where a famous jeweler had an exhibition and sales place. Haughtily she approached the counter, and, after a disdainful glance at all the sparkling wealth under the glass, desired of an awestruck clerk to see some unset stones.

While the clerk sped upon his quest, George, who stood a little behind her, saw her remove some chewing-gum from her mouth. He was not much astonished, for he knew several ladies who chewed gum. Did not the fashionable Miss Drew follow the habit?

The clerk returned with a black velvet case, from which the great white gems spit phosphorous fire. Never had George seen such beautiful stones.

The vision examined first one and then the other; then, choosing one which the clerk had laid on the counter, asked to see some settings that were in the case.

The clerk turned and reached into the case for the settings. In a moment he had spread them before the woman. Then he started, and took up the jewel-case, examined it, then examined the counter carefully, then the case again; at last he looked at the woman.

"Madam," he said, "are you—did you—Madam, one of these stones is missing."

"Do you mean this one?" she asked, pointing to the stone which she had selected and which lay on the counter.

"No; I mean the one that was there."

He pointed to a gap in the stones on the black velvet.

"Do you mean that you think I have taken it?" Her voice would have made the north pole think it was the equator.

But the clerk was not the north pole. For answer, he raised his voice and called: "Mr. Simmons!"

A short, well-dressed gentleman—the manager of the shop—came up to them. In a few words the clerk detailed the loss of the stone. When he had finished, the manager turned to the woman; but, before he could speak, she said:

"I am Mrs. Zebidee B. Lawton, of Wilkesbarre. Here is my card."

She laid it in his hand. The manager hesitated. Wilkesbarre sounded so respectable; still, the stone was gone.

"Madam," he said.

"One word." She raised her head majestically. "I am accused of stealing this stone."

The manager made a curious noise—it might have been protest.

"Well, since you have made this accusation, I insist on being arrested. I demand to

be searched; I insist on being arrested. I shall not leave this counter until you call a policeman."

She spoke coldly and deliberately, yet with iron determination to defend her good name. The manager looked cowed, the unfortunate clerk grew pale; yet, the diamond was gone.

"Get the officer at once," commanded the woman. "I demand to be searched."

By this time a crowd had collected. The rumor had gone about the corridors that a burglary had been committed. In a few minutes the newspaper offices were telephoned to that a bold hold-up had occurred and the safe blown open.

Taxicabs filled with reporters began to rush toward the hotel. Meanwhile, the manager had a thought.

"Madam," he said to the lady, "if you would consent to be searched by our lady manageress, we could, in case of a mistake, avoid mutual trouble."

"I should prefer to be arrested," said the lady; "but, however, I will consent to be searched by your manageress."

The manageress arrived, and the two retired to her office. In their absence more crowd arrived, also reporters; last of all, two plain-clothes detectives.

Just then the lady and the manageress returned. A thorough search had failed to reveal the jewel. The lady manageress was an expert in her line. Many a scandal had been quietly hushed up and arranged in her office; but she reported that there was no jewel concealed upon the person of Mrs. Zebidee B. Lawton, of Wilkesbarre.

Meanwhile, the telephone from Wilkesbarre revealed the fact that Mrs. Zebidee B. Lawton was the wife of a noted and respected coal dealer of that city, and that she was the second vice-president of the Home Missionary Society; also, that she was then in New York.

The manager grew pale; the clerk began to tremble violently; yet, the diamond was gone.

"Madam," said the manager falteringly, "we are very sorry, but—"

"I, of course, accept your apologies," said Mrs. Zebidee B. Lawton, of Wilkesbarre. The manager tried to smile. "But," she continued icily, "I, of course, cannot say what view my husband and his lawyers will take of the matter."

The smile froze on the manager's face.

Sweat broke out on the clerk's forehead.

Mrs. Lawton, of Wilkesbarre, had not taken the diamond; yet, the diamond was gone.

"May I be permitted to speak?" said a voice.

The manager turned, and beheld a gentle old man with spectacles and the kind face of the father of a family.

"What is it, sir?" said the manager.

"I happened to be standing near this lady when she looked at the diamonds."

He paused.

"Yes, yes," cried the manager eagerly.

Mrs. Lawton, of Wilkesbarre, drew herself up coldly.

The clerk wiped his forehead and leaned across the counter.

"And I saw what became of the diamond," said the kind old man.

The two plain-clothes detectives thrust themselves forward. The reporters gathered near. The manager quivered with eagerness; the clerk shook with relief; Mrs. Lawton, of Wilkesbarre, glared.

"The diamond was stolen," continued the kind old man.

"Yes," cried the manager.

"We thought so," said the detectives.

"By whom?" asked a young reporter.

"By that person—I saw him," the kind old man, speaking with righteous indignation, pointed an accusing finger in the face of George Graham Parker.

There could be no question of his guilt; that was plain to every one the moment their attention was directed toward him. His clothes alone would have convicted him in any court.

In a moment the detectives had seized him.

"Hand it over, quick!" they cried.

"Yes, hand it over," cried the manager.

"So young, too," said the lady from Wilkesbarre.

"What's your name?" demanded the reporter.

"Give up the diamond!" cried the manager; then to the detectives he cried:

"Make him give it up."

"I haven't got it," wailed George Graham Parker.

"None o' that," cried the detectives. "Give it up."

"He can't." All eyes turned to the gentle old man who had just spoken.

"Why not?" cried the astonished manager.

"Because—" The voice of the gentle old man was tremulous with emotion.

"Because when the clerk accused that lady of taking the diamond—"

"I didn't accuse her," cried the clerk.

"No such accusation was made," interjected the manager.

"What has he done with the diamond?" demanded the reporters.

"He has swallowed it."

There was a gasp of surprise. George Graham Parker jumped as if he were shot. Could the old man be crazy—was every one crazy, was he crazy himself, could he have gone mad and swallowed the diamond without knowing it? He gazed from face to face in agony.

"Look at him," said a bell-boy. "The jool's tearing up his in'ards now."

"Get the hotel doctor!" shrieked the manager. "Tell him to bring a stomach-pump!"

"I wish to warn you," said a severe, legal-looking gentleman, "that you cannot use a stomach-pump without committing an assault."

"I don't care," shouted the manager.

"But we do," cried one of the plain-clothes men. "Us cops has had trouble enough wit' the mayor already. Nobody can't commit no assault on our prisoner unless the captain says so. You'll all have to come down to the house."

"Hurry before he has a chance to digest it, then," begged the manager.

"But I didn't do it," wailed the youth.

"Tut, tut! Likewise bunk," replied the plain-clothes men as they slipped on the handcuffs.

"Shut up the place and come on with me," directed the manager to the clerk.

The detectives waited until the shop was closed; then, escorted by a throng, they dragged their prisoner down the corridors.

"What did I tell you?" said the bridegroom, pointing to the prisoner.

"Oh!" cried the bride. "Hasn't he an awful face? What did he do, and how?"

"He attacked that beautiful lady and stole her jewelry."

"Who is she?"

"The wife of a millionaire coal-mine owner."

"Oh, the wretch!"

By the time the prisoners were half-way down the street a special edition of the *Evening Whoop* was on the press, announcing:

TERRIBLE SCENE IN FASHIONABLE HOTEL.

Highwayman Attacks Multimillionairess.

Mrs. Zulia B. Boughton, Wife of a Coal Baron, Robbed.

Three-quarters of the way to the station a large drop of rain fell upon the green-plush hat of the prisoner. Then a sheet of water burst upon the street, and by the time they arrived at the police station the crowd was drenched.

The sergeant on the desk heard the complaint with amazement.

"Well," he said, scratching his ear with his pen, "we'll have to look up the law."

"What did you swallow it fer?" he demanded of the trembling prisoner.

"Help, help!" cried the prisoner. "Help, I'm choking! What's the matter with me? Oh! *Oh!*"

A curious tightness had seized on George Graham Parker. His body seemed to be bursting from his clothes. He could scarcely breathe. He writhed and twisted. His eyes glared. His chest seemed about to burst. His swollen throat was held as in iron bands.

"Help! Oh, what is it?" he cried.

"It's the diamond he et killing him," said a detective. "Git a doctor, quick, or he'll die on us!"

Hearing this awful thing, with a moan of anguish George Graham Parker fell to the floor. Four men held his limbs.

"Hurry up, doc, a feller's et a lot of jewelry, an's now doin' the Dutch!" cried the sergeant into the telephone.

"We can get it back at the autopsy, anyway," whispered the clerk to the manager.

A deep groan came from the dying youth.

"'Tis a priest we ought to be callin'," said a red-nosed policeman.

"How long will he live?" asked the awe-struck clerk.

"No time at all unless we get these clothes off him," said the brisk voice of a young policeman who had been holding one of the patient's arms.

"What's that?" cried the sergeant.

"This fellow's clothes are shrinking every minute something terrible," said the cop. "He'll be squoze to death if he don't get out of them. At that, I think we will have to cut them off."

And so it proved. The nine-dollar garments, under the sudden wetting, were reduced to boy's size, and making valiant efforts to reduce their wearer with them.

Some minutes later, clad in a blanket and overalls, George Graham Parker, looking very small and pitiful — far, far from the young, dashing crook of the hotel—listened to the manager relating his tale. George Graham's face was white—that is, where it was not a bright green, his hat having betrayed his confidence. The sergeant looked

at him almost in pity—this the daring robber, the swallower of gems?

"Where's the old man that see him swallow it?" he said.

They looked. The kind-faced old man was not there.

"He left the party a block from here—said he couldn't bear the sight or thought of so much wickedness any longer," volunteered a bell-boy, who was filling his off-time with a little excitement.

"Where's the lady from Wilkesbarre?" asked the sergeant.

"She went wit' him. She said she would be round in the morning."

"I never did it," repeated George Graham Parker for the thousandth time. "All I did was follow the lady. I didn't look at the diamonds at all. I just watched her. I never thought of the diamonds—I was just wondering what kind of gum she was chewing."

"What's that?" A gray-haired, quietly dressed man, with an air of authority, pushed his way through the listening policemen. They made way with deference.

"What's that about gum?" he repeated.

George gazed at him blankly.

"Was that woman chewing gum, boy?" demanded the man.

"Yes, sir."

"What did she do with it?"

"Chewed it."

"That all—think, what did she do with the gum?"

"Well, she took it out of her mouth and stuck it under the case."

"Quick!" said the gray-haired detective. "Lieutenant, I'll call a cab. Here, you"—to the manager—"you come with your clerk! We may be too late. Here, boy, put on my rain-coat."

A few minutes later a small group stood in the dimly lighted room where the diamond had been lost.

"Now, boy," said the sergeant, "where did the woman stick the gum?"

The youth went over to the counter and slipped his hand under its outer ledge.

"Here's the gum," he said, and held it out to the other; then he started back with a cry.

Embedded in the soft gum a huge diamond flashed and blazed.

The detective sergeant smiled, and said to the manager:

"Some time to-morrow a gentleman will come to your store; he will ask you, nodding to the clerk, to see some jewels. He will not buy any, but he will go away with a diamond, for all that. That is, he would have done so if this boy had not told me about the lady who chewed gum.

"I rather think the kind-faced old man was my dear friend, 'Old Pa Perkins.' This trick listens like him. He would probably have secured the jewel at once but for the fact that you had the lad arrested and closed your shop, and the woman had had no chance to tell him where the jewel was, so you see the lad saved your diamond.

"Now," he laid his hand on the boy's arm, "come back to jail."

"What!" cried the horrified George Graham Parker.

"Yes, because I want 'Old Pa' to think that we are not suspecting him—in that case he will come here to get the diamond where the woman will have told him she put it—and we will get him, with your help."

"In the meantime"—the manager turned to the smartly dressed young clerk—"you get this boy's measure and get him a suit of clothes. He has saved your job, and possibly mine. Get him good ones. You have taste."

Next day the papers were full of the capture of the notorious "Old Pa Perkins" in the trap laid for him by the noted detective sergeant. No mention was made of the assistance rendered by George Graham Parker. Reputations cannot be shared on the police force—or off it, for that matter.

But when an elegantly and tastefully dressed young man called on Miss Drew that night she placed entire credence in his story of his assistance in the capture of the criminal; also, she was pleased to hear that Lohenheime himself, just returned from Europe, had complimented the youth upon his business improvement and promoted him to the front office as a salesman; also, she asked him to stay to tea, to the exclusion of a certain bank clerk in checks.

It was during this meal that Miss Drew paused a moment to listen to the rain driving against the windows.

"Ain't it awful?" she said. "That poor fellow will get that handsome check suit all wet. I wonder what could have become of his umbrella? He certainly had it when he came in."

George Graham Parker said nothing, but there was an evil smile on his face. Three days later the bank clerk's umbrella was found behind the hat-rack. But the bank clerk no longer wears checks. He says they've gone out.

"Ain't it awful, the troubles of the rich?" said Mrs. Zebidee B. Lawton, of Wilkesbarre, to the ladies of the missionary society

at her first "at home" after her return from the city.

"Why, when I was in the city I read of a woman that was attacked in a store and almost murdered and robbed. That's what comes of havin' your name in the papers all the time. The feller knew she was rich, an' went for her. I declare it made me nervous when Luella Bailey sent that notice to the paper about our being in New York."

"What was the name of the woman?" asked the second secretary.

"Mrs. Zulia B. Boughton. Ever hear of her?"

A JAPANESE IDYL.

One flush carnation flower,
In mellow vase,
In one small room before
A window's space;
Swart walls of smooth veneer,
A polished floor;
A beaded screen hung sheer
Against the door;
Pale glimpses of the sea,
Red flower alone like thee
In beauty peerlessly
To love, adore!

One lily lucent pale,
In rosy vase,
Cannot with walls avail
As thy bright face;
Thine amber eyes are full
Of slumberous fire,
Thy lips too beautiful
For love to tire.
Rose splendors of the sea,
Pale flower alone like thee,
In beauty peerlessly
Above desire.

Faint winds from o'er the sea,
And passioned calms;
Thick flocks of doves let free,
And sighing palms;
The glimmering heat of noon
In copper skies,
The romance of the moon
When daylight dies.
Dim wastes of grayest se
Ripple for thee and me,
And charm thee tenderly
To grant the boon.

Edgar Lee Masters.

The Devastator.

BY ROBERT KEENE.

Savant and Sleuth, Millionaire and Manager, All Hopelessly Stalled by a Power as Irresistible as It Is Silent.

CLYNDON ELLIOT, curator of the Municipal Museum of Art, was only amused by the coming of the first letter. Some harmless lunatic—or it might be a practical joker, he supposed—had sent the communication.

And then came the second menacing missive:

I am neither a crank nor a fakir. I mean what I say.

The trustees of your museum must, in a *Harbinger* personal addressed to "Devastator," agree to pay me fifty thousand dollars, or I will destroy the entire collection of pottery loaned you by Mr. H. A. Duane.

As proof that I can do as I promise—to-morrow morning you will find several pieces in this set utterly ruined.

Over this businesslike epistle Elliot stroked his heavy blond mustache — under which there was now no smile.

What did it mean? Here an anonymous some one threatened to destroy the most highly prized art treasures in the Municipal. And that was impossible.

Nobody could harm anything in the institution by day, when the vigilant attendants kept every visitor's movements under constant surveillance. Nor by night, when the locked-up building was as impregnable as a fortress against unlawful entrance.

How, then, could this mysterious unknown, if he was not mad or joking, carry out his threat?

He couldn't, that was all.

Yet—he offered to demonstrate, by the destruction of several pieces in a priceless collection, his ability to do so.

Elliot debated the matter. Should he take it seriously, and go to the trustees with the letters? If he did, and the thing turned out to be a hoax, he would be laughed at for his pains.

Elliot hated to be laughed at. He decided not to go to the trustees.

But he doubled the guard in the gallery where the menaced ceramics were displayed. He himself visited the threatened territory as often as a dozen times before the day was over. Though he did not sufficiently believe in this "Devastator" to risk being scoffed at by his superiors, the tone of assurance pervading the last message—particularly in its concluding lines—made him vaguely apprehensive.

He sighed with relief as the closing hour found everything in perfect order.

It was nine-thirty precisely the next morning when he returned. And outside the turnstiles in the entrance-hall he stopped stock still. One look at the white face of the doorman was enough to halt him—to set his pulses pounding alarmedly.

"The Duane potteries?" He threw the question at the attendant.

The man nodded excitedly.

"Yes, sir!" he replied. "You've heard already, sir?"

"What is it? Tell me quickly—what has happened the collection?"

"The Roman urn, the vase, the water-pitcher, and—and three more pieces," stammered the other, "they're all ruined, sir; broke to bits!"

Elliott gasped, and gripped the railing beside him with such force that he split the palm of his glove.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "You—you don't mean that, Clayton?"

Again the guardian of the museum turnstiles nodded.

"Yes, sir; it's the truth. Head of the night-shift told me when I came on duty an hour ago. They sent up to your apartments,

sir; but I guess you must have missed the messenger."

Waiting for no more, the curator pushed his way through the revolving gate, and made for the stairway.

How—how, in the name of all that was achievable!—could any one have got into the building? After it was closed for the night? When it was guarded inside and out?

The thing was preposterous, absurd to suppose, unthinkable, even—yet evidently it had happened.

And what did that mean? Why, that this blackmailer was able to do as he threatened—devastate the entire collection he had partly, illustratively, destroyed!

Glyndon hesitated to think what the destruction could mean. The invaluable pottery was only loaned to the Municipal by Mr. H. Ainslee Duane, connoisseur, art-lover, and globe-trotter. The museum was responsibile for it. If it met with injury while in that institution's charge—

Elliot entered the gallery, and hurried toward the railed-in pedestal supporting a group of early-Roman earthenware. The cluster of attaches fell away at his approach.

He looked down upon—utter ruin.

The doorman was right. Six precious pieces—urns, pitchers, and the like—were literally "broke to bits." They could never be repaired, never replaced.

Their loss to the art-world was incalculable. Though it could be calculated to the museum, entrusted with their safe-keeping, at approximately ten thousand dollars!

And for it all, Elliot was accountable!

Hadn't he been warned that this was to occur? Hadn't he kept the news of that warning from the trustees, assuming alone the responsibility of ignoring it? He had. Upon his head alone would fall the blame for this irreparable calamity.

But how had it happened?—he angrily demanded again of his seething thoughts. Was the perpetrator possessed of some fairy power of invisibility that had got him into the guarded building?

Nonsense! The havoc Elliot saw before him had been wrought by human ability.

Very well, then! he made up his mind, with a grim tightening of his jaws. By human ability, plus persistency, the means would be discovered—the culprit apprehended!

II.

He faced about and addressed the group of attendants crisply:

"Tell those of the night-shift who are still here to come to my private office immediately!"

He strode away toward his quarters, and there, five minutes later, the men he had summoned found him pacing the carpet, set-lipped and stern-browed.

"Greene!" he snapped, as the first man entered. "You were in charge last night? Tell me all about this affair!"

The head-guard answered slowly.

"I don't know anything to tell you, sir. It was seven o'clock this morning when I first heard the news. I went right up to the gallery with Peterson, here, who discovered the—accident. And I found those six pieces lying there in ruins, just as you saw 'em."

"You say 'accident'?" questioned Elliott quickly. "Do you mean—were those pieces broken by the clumsiness of any of you men on duty here last night?"

His eyes swept over the members of the night-shift and met an emphatically negative headshake from each one.

"Well—speak up! If any of you know anything about how this happened, let me hear it."

He paused; then, as no one spoke, "Peterson!" he called. "Tell me when and how you discovered this catastrophe?"

An aged attendant stepped out of the group.

"Well, sir," he began hesitatingly, "I was stationed, as I always am, on the floor with that gallery. When I came on duty everything was all right, I know."

"One minute!" interrupted the questioner. "How did you know that everything was all right? Did you go to the pains of inspecting the collection in the ceramic chamber?"

"I did! I looked over every single, solitary piece. I'm a bit interested in pottery, sir, and I spent a good hour with the Duane set, early that evening. I know that every piece in it was in perfect condition up to half-past eight last night!"

"Go on!" commanded his interlocutor.

"That's all, sir—I found those six pieces broken and crumbled at a little before seven this morning, just as you've seen them. How it happened is a mystery to me, I'm sure!"

"How many times did you visit the gallery during the night?"

"I should say I passed through it as many as eight or nine times, sir."

"Everything was all right each time?"

"As far as I could tell, sir. I didn't closely inspect the collection more than that once. But I didn't see anything wrong from eight-

thirty till—I found the set injured this morning."

"You saw no one in the gallery—nothing suspicious going on—any time that you passed through?"

"No, sir; not a thing."

"You heard nothing, either?"

"No, sir."

Elliot clicked his tongue exasperatedly.

"Then you must have been asleep!" he broke out petulantly. "The noise made by the breaking of that pottery could certainly have been heard, easily, anywhere on the same floor. And if you didn't hear it, you must have been sleeping, and not on guard!"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I was not asleep.

"Man and boy, I've done night-duty in this museum, sir, for going on to twenty-eight years. And I never went to sleep on the job. Never. And last night was no exception. I was wide awake, honestly earning my pay, from seven in the evening, till the same time this morning!"

The curator did not doubt that the old man was telling the truth. But—believing him meant that the collection had been injured while its guard was alertly on duty!

The mystery, instead of clearing, thickened!

"None of you heard anything disturbing during the night?" asked Elliot of the knot of men before him. "You were all awake, as was Peterson? And you are sure—you heard nothing?"

They had not heard a sound.

"You, Greene?" he questioned the head of the night-shift again. "You're certain nobody was in this building who did not belong here, from the time you took charge till now?"

Greene would take oath upon it.

"Are any of the men here who patrol the grounds outside?" called the curator.

Four watchmen stepped forward.

"Did any of you see anybody trying to force an entrance to the museum during the night?"

"No, sir!" came the chorused reply.

"You saw no one lurking round the building?"

"No, sir!"

Elliot sighed tiredly. He took a slow look over the assembled men. All were tried, trusted, and truthful servants of the Lyceum.

"That will do," he said, turning away.

The men filed out. When the door closed, the curator crossed the room to his desk and sank heavily into a chair.

He drew his handkerchief from his pocket. As he lifted it to his damp brow, his elbow struck lightly against the telephone before him.

He started. With a muffled ejaculation, betokening the arrival of an inspiration, he reached out quickly and pulled the instrument toward him. For a moment he sat, holding the receiver on its hook, thinking.

Then he jerked it to his ear and called a number into the transmitter.

"Let me speak with Mr. Blake!" he requested, after a minute's wait. He was calling a friend, the head of a private detective agency.

"Is that you, Blake? This is Elliot—Glyndon Elliot—of the Municipal. Yes, if you can spare a minute or two. I've a job for you, I think. Listen!"

In less than a hundred words, he explained the details of the mystery.

"Can you solve that?" he concluded with quizzical bitterness.

At the other's answer, he leaned eagerly forward. For a full minute he listened intently to the words poured into his ear from the other end of the wire.

Then, hanging up the receiver, he rose slowly to his feet—beneath his mustache a smile of relief.

III.

He touched a button on his desk. And, in response, a museum messenger almost instantly appeared.

"You rang, sir?"

"Yes. Bring me down from the third-floor gallery the broken bits of the pottery you will find there."

Again Elliot paced the carpet—though now with a lighter step, and calmer countenance, than had been his before.

Blake had suggested so simple a solution of this puzzle that Elliot wondered he hadn't thought of it earlier.

Everything was now as clear as it had been opaquely impenetrable before.

His friend had given the affair a twist by suggesting that, probably, no one had entered the museum at all!

This was the latter's theory.

Pottery of great age, like the Duane collection, he had reminded the superintendent, was susceptible of destruction through climatic change. Brought from dry atmosphere to damp, these antiques were liable, after a time, to meet with natural dissolution.

Blake believed that the author of the menacing correspondence Elliot had received was

aware of this fact. That he had visited the collection often enough to know, approximately, when some of it would break—"automatically," as it were.

So he had planned to blackmail the Municipal by threatening the entire set's destruction unless he was paid a fortune. And, to make that threat seem a real menace, he had predicted, not accomplished, its partial ruin!

Actually, he was no more able to harm the collection than he was to prevent its impending devastation! He had merely accepted the opportunity of his knowledge to attempt a daring hold-up—which attempt would now be foiled!

Best of all—Elliot was no longer accountable for the damage done.

"I am going out for an hour," he said to the messenger, who returned with the fragments of pottery. "Let every attendant on duty here to-day know that I wish nothing said about this matter. You understand? The news is to be kept absolutely secret!"

"Yes, sir," answered the other.

Elliot dismissed him with a nod. Then, depositing the half-hundred ragged bits of molded clay in a black-leather grip, he put on his hat.

Five minutes later, he was riding downtown.

He was going to the shop of an obscure antique-dealer whose knowledge of ancient pottery was supremely authoritative. If this expert verified the detective's theory, it was stamped, finally and forever, as authentic.

"Is your father in?" he asked of the shopman's daughter, whom he found in the small show-room.

"I'm sorry, sir," answered the girl, "but father's gone to Washington to see about some pictures."

"When did he go?" asked Elliot disappointedly.

"This morning. He'll be back to-night, though, if there's anything you want to see him about that can wait till to-morrow morning."

"I'll leave a note," replied the curator. "Please give it to him with this bag—to-night. Say that I will stop here in the morning, the first thing, to see him."

Entrusting the valise and a brief note on his card to the girl, he departed.

He was a little disappointed at not being able to get at once the antiquarian's opinion. He hesitated to consider the matter settled till he had done so.

But it was only till the next morning; so—with what patience he could—he waited.

"You got my note?" he demanded of the venerable art-dealer when, early on the morrow, he hurriedly entered his little shop. "You have examined those bits of pottery I left?"

"Mr. Elliot," said the antiquarian, "why did you think those ceramics ruined through old age or climatic change?"

The curator's face paled.

"What do you mean?" he whispered aghast. "Isn't that—so?"

Silently the elder man handed back Elliot's satchelful of broken clay.

"No," he said simply. "I assure you the vessels whose fragments I examined were good, under any conditions, for another twenty to thirty years!"

IV.

STUNNED, Elliot walked out of the shop, boarded a car, and rode up-town to the museum. His ears ringing with the last words of the infallible expert, he entered his private office in a daze.

Suddenly he stopped.

Topping the neat pile of his morning's mail laid on his desk was an unpleasantly familiar-appearing envelope.

It was another communication from the blackmailer!

The curator strode quickly forward and snatched up the letter. Ripping open the envelope, he drew forth a single sheet of plain writing-paper, and read these few lines:

> Since you have not communicated with me, I judge that you still doubt my ability to do as I have threatened: force you, by the complete destruction of the Duane potteries, to pay me the money I demand.
>
> I have fulfilled one promise to you, in the destruction you found yesterday morning. Now, I will give you another proof of how absolutely I hold the trustees of your institution at my mercy.
>
> To-morrow morning you will find a few more pieces in this set wrecked beyond all possibility of redemption or repairs!

Elliot threw the note down on the desk before him and grabbed up his telephone. He called the number of the detective agency, and waited impatiently for the answer.

"Hallo!" he called after a few seconds' wait. "This is Elliot, Blake. You must drop everything and come right up here. The tip you gave me on this pottery mystery was wrong—positively. I can't go into details now. Come up and see me—at once, please. You must take this case and handle it personally. All right, I'll expect you in a quarter of an hour, then!"

He sat down in his chair to wait. And, promptly in fifteen minutes, Blake appeared.

"What's wrong now?" he questioned briskly.

Elliot told him.

"And this 'devastator' promises to pay us another of his unwanted calls some time before to-morrow morning, too!" he concluded. "Now what do you make of this wretched affair?"

The detective scratched his chin.

"You keep a turnstile system for checking the number of visitors to the museum every day, don't you?" he asked.

The curator nodded.

"Do you keep a corresponding count of the number of people that leave?"

With a quick glance of puzzlement, Elliot shook his head.

Blake struck his hand decisively on the arm of his chair.

"Then here's the answer to your mystery!" he announced triumphantly. "Since the pottery did not encounter its fate at the hand of nature, some person was responsible for it. The problem is: How did that person get in here at night to do the job—which the guards made out of the question by day?

"I'll tell you. The vandal came in as a visitor, hid here all night, and left the next day as a visitor, again!"

Elliot sprang to his feet.

"The thing is impossible!" he cried.

"How so?" asked the detective quickly.

"How so?" repeated the curator petulantly. "Why, because there's no place anybody could hide when the attendants inspect the building after it closes!"

"I think you'll find you are mistaken, and that I'm right," answered Blake quietly.

Again Elliot stared at him. He knew the Municipal better than the other; he was sure there was nowhere any one could hide in it. Its bare floors with glass cases, its walls hung with pictures, its ceilings absolutely clear—all made an open series of connecting rooms and adjoining floors. Positively nothing—not even the size of a mouse—could successfully hide there!

"How about the cellars?" interrogated the detective.

"Nobody could get down into them without being seen!" replied Sir Jasper curtly.

"The roof, then? What's the matter with some one going up there during the day to hide till night?"

"Because they would be instantly detected and thrown out."

"Um-hum!" commented Blake imperturbably. "What are the rooms nearest the chamber where this pottery is displayed, please?"

"The room adjoining it on the left," answered the curator, "is the gallery where the mummies are exhibited. On the—"

"That's enough, thanks!" interrupted the detective sharply. "If you don't mind, I'd like to go up to the mummies' room right away."

"Certainly," said Elliot. He led the way to the third floor.

"Now," he remarked caustically, when they entered this gallery, "if you think anybody could hide in here—show me where!"

He swung his hand in a flourish that indicated the room's bareness of possible hiding-place.

Blake walked forward and tried the top of the nearest show-case.

"Think anybody could have crawled in there?" asked his guide.

"You never can tell," commented the other good-naturedly.

He whistled softly as he walked to the second, third, and fourth sarcophagi of Egypt's dead.

"Why, you chump," Elliot called after him, "don't you suppose any one with a single eye could see through the plate glass that those cases are made of? Nobody could get out of sight in there."

"No?" replied the sleuth. "But they'd be pretty effectually buried out of eye-reach inside one of these empty coffins."

"After they get inside, perhaps!" reminded the curator. "And you'd have to break the glass to do that; they're all locked."

As Blake continued his rounds of the room without heed, the curator turned disinterestedly away. He looked behind him into the pottery gallery directly at his rear. Which pieces—and how many—would the museum's nemesis break on his promised visit before the next morning? he wondered.

"Elliot!"

The detective's voice recalled him with a start. He turned to see him standing beside a show-case half-way across the gallery.

"You said all these were locked, didn't you?" asked Blake.

With a sudden lifting of his right arm, he raised the lid of the case before him for a full foot.

"This one isn't, strange to say."

In a dozen strides Elliot crossed the floor to his side.

"The lock, you see, to this particular one has been broken."

"But that might have been done by some

careless visitor to the museum," protested the curator. "And whoever leaned against this lock—which must have been defective—was afraid of getting into trouble, and didn't come to us with the news of the accident. That is why I didn't know this thing was open."

"But, now that you do know it," suggested Blake, "gain the further knowledge that this is your blackmailer's hiding-spot. Look!"

He lifted the lid with a confident shove.

Over his shoulder Elliot looked with him into the boxlike coffin reposing in the interior.

Then, as the curator drew back with a scoffing laugh, the detective let the lid drop with an astonished ejaculation.

What he saw in the bottom of the empty sarcophagus amply proved this second theory of his a weak fallacy.

On the bottom of the antique coffin was an almost inch-thick layer of undisturbed dust!

V.

UNDER provocation such as this, any other detective than one possessing elements of greatness would have succumbed to some disappointed outburst. Blake did not in the least give vent to what must have been his mightily unpleasant feelings just then.

Instead, he stood quietly beside the showcase, tapping lightly with his finger-ends upon its rail of rosewood.

"Um-hum," he said softly to himself.

"Now you are satisfied, I hope," said Elliot, "that nobody could have hidden in these mummy-cases — you found all the others locked securely?"

The other nodded slowly. "And a hiding-place anywhere else in this building—"

"Is impossible," replied the curator.

"Is impossible," repeated Blake. "I see. Well, well!"

"Look here! This is no time to stand there calmly saying 'Well, well!' when things are distinctly bad. Something has got to be done—either give up this case, Blake, as an unsolvable problem, or clear up the mystery as fast as ever you did anything. Remember that this 'devastator' has promised another attack upon the pottery in the room behind us by to-morrow morning."

Blake stepped briskly away from the showcase. Give up this case? Never, he determined. Never in his career had he been so thoroughly and artistically "stumped" as in this affair. But then, never yet in his professional life had he failed to win a case that he had once taken.

"This chap, whoever he is, is going to do a second little job here within the next twenty-four hours, is he?" he demanded hardly.

"So he threatens."

"Well, he'll fall down this trip, all right, believe me!"

The sleuth pulled out his watch.

"It's just five minutes of ten; this museum will be open to the public on the hour. Close up that ceramic chamber before any visitors arrive, and keep it closed all day."

"I say, you know," hesitated the curator, "this is a public institution, and I don't like to shut off an exhibit—"

"But you do that—anything, rather—before you'd see that exhibit harmed, wouldn't you?" interrupted Blake. "Very well, then. Close that room for the day; station two guards inside it; keep everybody out, and we'll see if this anonymous letter-writer can't be checkmated for once."

"For once, you may do so, perhaps. But, frankly, I fear this fellow! I believe in his amply proved ability. What good will it do us to prevent his destruction of part of the collection to-morrow morning, if, after we open up the room again, he calls to carry out his threatened purpose?

"The only way to prevent that is to keep the gallery closed always. And, in that case, we might as well return the loaned potteries to Mr. Duane, for good and all. I'm not so sure that that's not what we should do, anyway; we'd relinquish our responsibility then."

"I don't agree with you," said the detective. "If you returned Duane his goods now, you'd have to pay him for what has been lost. The whole set, I believe, was rumored to have cost him six hundred thousand dollars. On that basis, the pieces already destroyed would cost your trustees about ten thousand.

"Now, if you keep the collection here in this building, where you can guard it better than an individual could—keep it safer than Duane, if he took back the pottery, and this vandal blackmailed him at once—you stand a chance to catch the criminal.

"And if you do get him, he may have enough money that can be forced from him at his capture to pay for the damage he has done up to date."

Elliot nodded slow concurrence to this common-sensible view of the matter.

"Very well," he said. "We'll close up the chamber for the day. And to-night—"

"To-night," answered Blake forcefully, "you and I will sit up together till morning with the set. We'll personally guard it ourselves—if you're game?"

"I'm game, as you say," responded the curator, "to do anything that can be done to put a stop to this harrowing affair."

"Good! And who knows but what we may catch our friend at it, even, while we're doing night-duty?"

At seven o'clock they relieved the two attendants who had been locked up in the pottery-gallery throughout the day. Locked up themselves. they examined critically every art object in the room. All was in perfect order.

And then began their vigil.

Slowly the hours dragged away. Not a sound—a night noise, even—disturbed their wide-awake, silent watch. Midnight struck unheard by them. At last the pitch-blackness of the chamber faded into gray shadow, lightened to faint pink, burst at last into full day.

"You see," exclaimed the detective, as a knock at the door announced the coming of the day attendants again, "we've made this 'devastator' fall down on his threat!"

Elliot rose stiffly from his chair and walked to the door. Unlocking it, he stood aside while the two museum attaches entered.

"Come on to breakfast," invited Blake, as he passed out through the opened portal. The other turned to follow, but wheeled to look back into the gallery with a suddenly white face.

"Great heavens!" cried one of the attendants.

The curator, pursued by the detective, bounded to the man's side.

"What is it?" gasped Elliot.

"Look!" answered the guard, pointing dramatically to a roped-off pedestal before which he tremblingly stood.

Elliot, with Blake, obeyed.

And a startled cry broke from each.

Nine pieces of antique pottery lay wrecked before their staring eyes—*broken during the night under their very noses!*

VI.

"He asks fifty thousand dollars to stop!" answered Elliot to the question asked of him by the Municipal's trustees, gathered in executive session upon his invitation in the curator's office.

"And so far how many pieces of the collection has he ruined?" asked one of the gentlemen seated before him.

"Fifteen!"

"Worth, all together—how much?"

"About, roughly, twenty-five thousand dollars."

Every one of the trustees stirred restlessly.

"For which we are accountable to the set's owner," reminded the curator.

"Heaven bless my soul!" ejaculated a trustee, after this remark had ceased to echo in the silence of the room.

"Gentlemen," said Elliot quickly, "time is precious; we have this blackmailer's word, in a letter just received, that every day will find some of this collection ruined, till we pay him his bribe to stop his dastardly work. Please decide—shall he be paid, or will you risk losing the six hundred thousand dollars the entire set is reported to have cost the owner, Mr. Duane?"

"Pay him!"

"Never!"

"Give him the money!"

"Don't think of it!"

Thus the body of bankers, trust-presidents, etc., comprising the board of trustees of the Municipal Museum.

"If we pay this hold-up charge we will immediately be placed at the mercy of any one with a clever scheme for blackmail, by establishing a precedent," counseled a corporation lawyer, who was also secretary of the board at present assembled.

"And if we don't," countered a railroad owner, "and if we don't—we have to establish the precedent of paying the owner of a collection that has been loaned to this museum six hundred thousand dollars."

There was silence again.

"Gentlemen!"

Blake, the detective, was on his feet.

"May I be permitted a word?" he asked politely. "It is this: pay this man his price—and catch him when he takes the money."

He sat down again.

And again there was silence—this time charged electrically with thought.

"How does the anonymous author of the threats you have shown us ask that this money be paid him, Elliot?" asked the secretary.

"He hasn't explained that yet," said the curator. "He tells us simply to announce our willingness to do so in a *Harbinger* personal addressed to 'Devastator'—presumably meaning that he will give us further directions by mail."

"Then make the announcement that we will pay him," said the trustee. He looked into the faces of his colleagues, and met their agreement.

"'In an hour from now you will receive the money from us'—and, when he tries to get it, capture him as Mr. Blake has cleverly suggested."

The meeting adjourned. Elliot sent his advertisement to the newspaper, where it appeared the next morning. And at four o'clock in the afternoon of that day, he received a characteristically brief note from the unknown destroyer.

You alone must bring the money to the circle in Central Park where the pedestal that once held the statue of Bolivar stands.

The fifty thousand dollars must be in bills, wrapped in one package, and placed at the edge of the grass bordering this circle of gravel.

Lay the package under the lamp-post at the northeast side of the pedestal. Then retire to that block of stone. And I will—collect my price.

But, remember—unless these directions are carried out to the exact letter, I will leave you worse off than you are now, by ruining all of the collection I have partially destroyed!

"You won't go!" said Blake, reading this missive carefully.

"Why not?" demanded Elliot.

"It's work that I'm better suited for," explained the detective. "I think I can catch this man where you might fail. So I will disguise myself as you, and place the decoy package of money myself."

"Let me go with you," pleaded the curator.

"Doesn't the letter read that you must go alone?" reminded the sleuth. "No—I believe myself that this fellow is clever enough not to show himself at the rendezvous he has named unless every detail of his instructions are carried out. He would know, I feel sure, if anything was not according to his directions. And to have him fail to appear tonight would be just what we most wish to prevent."

And so it was arranged.

At twelve o'clock that night, Blake—or Glyndon Elliot, as even an intimate friend of the latter would have recognized the dark figure lurking in the shadow of the granite pedestal to be—was waiting for the appearance of "Devastator."

In plain view, under the lamp-post across the circle from where he stood, lay the package of bills. Waiting, with drawn revolver held ready at his side, the detective never once took his eyes from the bundle.

Half-past twelve! Still the package of money was untouched.

At a faint crackle in the shrubbery behind him across the circle, Blake whipped his head round—listening. The loaded gun he held swung up; then dropped again to his side as the noise was not repeated.

Again his eyes were fastened unblinkingly upon the package under the incandescents a hundred feet away.

Two o'clock—and the bundle was still there!

Three! Half-past!

Blake walked quickly over the gravel, picked up the package, and slipped it into his pocket. Then he went home.

"Never showed up!" he muttered dejectedly on his way. "Scared—afraid of a trap!"

Entering his rooms, he turned on the lights and threw the bundle he took from his pocket upon a table.

And the next minute he fell upon it—his face pale and coldly sweating with a great fear.

String, paper, and cardboard—string, paper, and cardboard again—he pulled from the package till it was left—nothing!

He had the wrong bundle!

This was what he had been watching from the time he heard the crackling in the shrubs—made to draw his attention for an instant by some confederate of the blackmailer—till he went home!

It was not the money he had laid under the lamp-post.

That had been taken, this one substituted, in the second his eyes were elsewhere.

And the "Devastator," with fifty thousand dollars, was gone!

VII.

THE next morning, twenty-four pieces in the Duane set of pottery were found ruined! What is more, they were discovered broken to bits inside the showcase which held them!

That showcase was found locked by the guards who had been stationed all night and all day in the room—thrown open to the public on the expectation that the blackmailer, having been paid his bribe, was through with his nefarious operations!

He had not kept his word! And Elliot, including the trustees, and, besides which, Blake—were frantic!

At twelve o'clock a fresh communication arrived through the mails from the anonymous source which nobody knew.

Gentlemen, it's too cheap!

Give me fifty thousand dollars more, or—you know my ultimatum!

Really, I am letting you off easily, if you will stop a minute to think. I am absolutely able to ruin the entire collection of this pottery, which will cost you six hundred thousand dollars if I do.

Now—for one hundred thousand dollars I won't,

"What strikes me about this," commented Elliot anguishedly, "is that the author of this confoundedly impudent missive seems to know quite a good deal about the inside of how much the collection he menaces is worth! How does he know that it cost Duane the sum he states?"

Blake bounded startedly to his feet.

"Elliot!" he shouted. "Let me think a minute. Here! Let me see all the letters you've had from this fellow!"

He poured over the half-dozen short notes for five minutes. Then, snatching up his hat, he started out of the office.

"What's wrong—Blake!" cried the curator, staring. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going out to bring back the 'Devastator!'" answered the sleuth, over his shoulder. "We'll both be here inside of an hour—if this last clue of mine isn't a fizzle like the rest!"

How that hour passed, from the minute the detective left the museum, Elliot couldn't tell even while it was in transit. Despite the former's numerous failures in this affair, the curator of the Municipal nevertheless had faith in Blake—and he had also a pleasant premonition that this time the man wasn't going to fail, that he would bring back the vandal in sixty minutes!

So he was somewhat surprised, and more than disappointed, when the detective returned at last with—Mr. H. Ainslee Duane!

But imagine his petrified amazement when Blake coolly said:

"Here, Elliot, is your 'Devastator!'" and pushed forward the elderly owner of the collection that had caused all the trouble.

"Will you oblige us by telling your story, sir?" the detective asked Duane. His attention thus centered on the art connoisseur, Elliot noticed for the first time how haggard, pale, and trembling the man was.

The detective took pity on his plight, as the collector voicelessly shook his head over the invitation to speak, and himself began:

"Mr. Elliot, when you remarked on the strangeness of the anonymous author of the last letter you received knowing how much this set of pottery was worth, you gave me an idea. I, too, was struck with the oddity of the thing you mentioned, and I thought to myself that the most likely person to know the price of this collection would be—its owner.

"Had he sent that letter you showed me? If he had, the others were from him, too. I looked them over to find out—and this is what I stumbled upon.

"I will quote from memory the second letter you received:

"'Unless you agree to pay me fifty thousand dollars, in a *Harbinger* personal addressed to "Devastator," I will destroy the collection of Mr. H. A. Duane. As proof—etc.'

"I noticed that the name of Mr. Duane was written in a style slightly different from the rest of the letter. For instance, the 'H' in *Harbinger* was not like the first initial in the name of H. A. Duane. The same was true of the 'D' in 'Devastator' and 'A' in 'As.'

"Clearly, whoever had written that name was attempting to disguise its writing. An attempt to alter its looks from the rest of the assumed handwriting would only be made because—it was the real signature of the author!

"Then that meant that Mr. Duane, the owner of the pottery that was threatened, was menacing its destruction himself. Why would he be doing that? Because he could get the museum into whose safe-keeping he had loaned it to pay him for its loss. He would have to need money badly to do that—and I immediately went out to find out if he did!

"I knew that it would only take me a short time, through my agency, to learn if my suspect was in financial difficulties. And I was right—in fifteen minutes I found out that he was.

"That was enough for me. I did not know, of course, how he had done the deed of which I suspected him—but a little third-degree work would drag that out of him, I felt sure.

"So I went to his apartments, accused him, and—got this confession.

"Two years ago, when this pottery was loaned to you people, Mr. Duane, here, knew that he had just enough money to last him twenty-four months. When that was gone, he would be absolutely broke, and unable to make a dollar for himself.

"He had in his possession this set of pottery, for which he had paid six hundred thousand dollars. He knew that he could not sell it for nearly that sum—few men have the three things necessary to make such a purchase as he had had—the price, the knowledge that the goods were worth it, and the inclination to buy.

"So he evolved this scheme. In his possession was a certain chemical preparation, which he had picked up on his travels in Persia. This stuff, applied to pottery, in-

stantly dried and left no trace behind of its presence.

"But, in practically two years, it caused certain ingredients in the composition of the clay to expand—thus breaking whatever pottery it had been applied to!

"You see, now, the whole scheme—and how it was worked? The owner of this collection doctored it before he loaned it to you, knowing that it would break and that you would be responsible for it.

"And to make that responsibility stronger, he wrote you the letters you received—thinking he could make the destruction of his goods appear that way to be more your fault, than if they broke without apparent cause.

"Besides that, knowing when thinner pieces in the set would break, he offered to demonstrate his threats, thus figuring that you would pay him the fifty thousand dollars he demanded quicker.

"For he needed money badly, and this afforded him an easy means of getting it quickly. And this is why he wrote you the last note, demanding fifty thousand more. He thought he might as well get all he could at once, for, till the entire set was gone, he would not be paid his price by you.

"That, Mr. Elliot," ended Blake, "is the exact confession I extracted, ten minutes ago, from—Mr. Duane!"

There was silence for a full minute. Then the curator rang up the trustees on the phone—to determine what punishment should fit the crime of the perpetrator of the museum mystery.

DRIFTING.

AFAR from land they go together sailing,
Forgetting all save new-discovered bliss;
Her idle hand, above the waters trailing,
The playful waves leap laughingly to kiss.

His arm is thrown with love's protection round her;
With trustful peace she nestles by his side,
Unheeding all except that he has crowned her
With dual sovereignty of queen and bride.

Content they float in love's ecstatic rapture,
Nor care nor strife mars their serenity;
All other fetters, loosed by Cupid's capture,
Fall far away and sink into the sea.

About the twain the circling sea-gulls hover
And pipe low, laughing cries of feigned distress
In mimic envy of the loved and lover,
Sailing the haven of their happiness.

The darkness falls upon the story olden;
The sapphire night displays a single gem;
Above the brink the moon lifts round and golden,
And spreads a dimpled pathway out to them.

Yet on they drift, their fond hearts never fearing;
And though dark clouds may come athwart the skies,
Faith falters not; they know that Love is steering
Along that golden path to Paradise.

William Richard Hereford.

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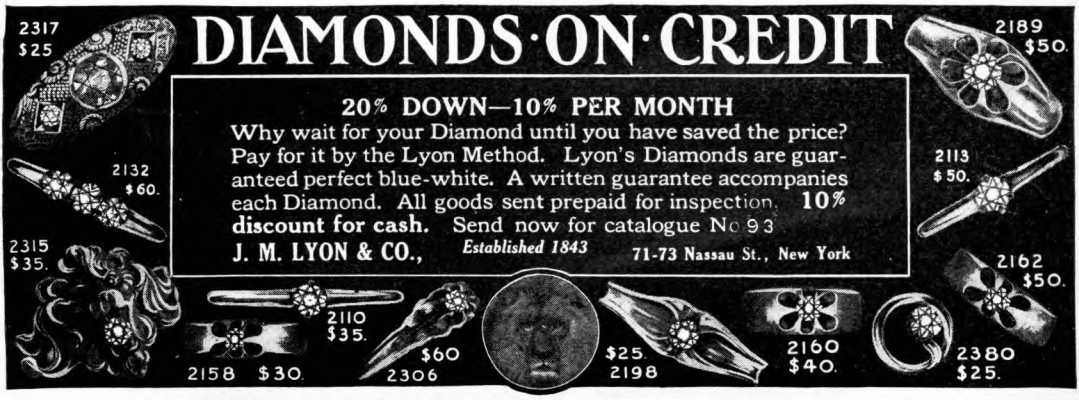

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KELLOGG TOASTED CORN FLAKE CO. Battle Creek, Mich.

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