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OBLIGATIONS

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ROMANCE CHOCOLATES

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

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THE MAY MUNSEY (on sale Friday, April 20) will present the opening chapters of "The Bathurst Complex," by Wyndham Martyn, setting forth the baffling mystery of a skeleton in the closet of a proud Boston family; also an absorbing novelette, printed complete, "The Girl from Pengarry," by A. L. Kimball, detailing the adventures of a small town girl in a large city. And there will be the usual attractive array of short stories

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY
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MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

APRIL, 1923

Vol. LXXVIII NUMBER 3

Obligations

CONCERNING THE FEES THAT HOPE AND FEAR AND PAIN AND HAPPINESS COLLECT FROM US ALL

By Elizabeth York Miller

Author of "The Greatest Gamble," "The Ledbury Fist," etc.

MANY years ago, when the city of Little Rock, Arkansas, was neither so big nor so flourishing as it is now, something occurred there which darkened the whole future of one of the people concerned. She was a little girl of seven, saddled in her tender infancy with a burden of guilt which, as time wore on, assumed monstrous proportions. It was a pity that fear kept her from taking anybody into her confidence.

The child's name was Virginia Montmorency O'Dare, and she lived with her father and mother in a small brown house on the outskirts of the town. Her parents were a very young couple—theirs had been a boy-and-girl marriage—and in those early days they had a struggle to make ends meet. Malcolm O'Dare, recently qualified to practice law, had set up as an attorney in Little Rock, with his wife saving him the salary of a stenographer and clerk. Edith went into town with him every morning, leaving Virginia to the tender mercies of Sophie, a German servant girl.

A porch ran across the front of the little brown house, and Virginia was supposed to play there with her toys, or at least not to venture beyond the gate. Sophie told her that if she disobeyed, the gypsies would catch her and take her away. Virginia, however, had an adventurous nature, and after a while the fear of gypsies wore off, since there did not appear to be any in the neighborhood.

Sophie, an industrious young woman, was forever cleaning house. Virginia always thought of her as washing windows, with her head tied up in a towel. When she was at her busiest, she forgot to bother about Virginia, who, for all she knew, actually might have been stolen by the gypsies.

The street ended abruptly at the foot of a low hill, where there was a little gray church surrounded by old tombstones, and below rippled a brook, banked on both sides with forget-me-nots. Beyond this was a meadow containing one cow and a cherry tree with a swing.

To whom the meadow, the cow, and the cherry tree belonged, Virginia did not know, nor did she specially care. In Sophie's diligent hours she sometimes slipped off there to play with other children—ragged, noisy little children from a neighborhood called the Ditch—children who went barefooted, and who possessed no pocket handkerchiefs.

In after years these children, with one exception, became shadow figures in Virginia O'Dare's memory. The one she had good cause to remember was Nicholas Wayne, a tall, black-haired boy of twelve, who bossed everybody, and who was regarded as a hero by his playmates. Virginia, who was of no consequence in his life, adored him, and Nicholas made good use of her slavish devotion. She was a sturdy, willing little thing, and he let her push him in the cherry-tree swing as much as ever she liked.

There was an overhead bough that he could manage to kick when he was high enough. Only Nicholas could achieve this feat, and only Virginia would work hard enough to get him well started. For that reason he tolerated her. She would take a long run, push him forward, and fly under him as the swing shot upward. Then she could race around and repeat the performance. Such shouts and screams!

"Higher, higher! Push harder, Jinny!"

And Virginia pushed and ran and got very hot and red in the face, stumbled down and scraped her knees, scrambled up again, and was after the flying figure in the swing before Nicholas could reproach her. There were holes in the knees of her stockings, and something would be said about that by Sophie, who had the mending of them; but no matter. Let the gypsies come. Who was afraid?

So it went on, day after day, during the long summer vacation. No one except Virginia noticed that every time she swung Nicholas so high that he could kick the top branches, the bough of the cherry tree creaked a warning protest. The old wood was growing weary of the strain. It was not going to stand it forever.

Then the thing happened.

It had begun as a perfect day, and they were having a picnic in the meadow. Virginia had been very diplomatic about that at home, waiting until Sophie was deep in window washing and the hour of noon was approaching. Sophie hated to interrupt her work to cook Virginia's midday meal. Sometimes she didn't cook it, but gave her cold things to eat.

"Sophie, can't I just have some bread and jelly and cookies, and take them to the meadow, if I'm a good girl?" coaxed Virginia.

Sophie debated. The meadow was quite close, and she was not entirely unaware that Virginia sometimes played there.

"Well, if you'll promise not to tell your mamma," she said finally.

It must be recorded that Virginia glibly gave that promise. She went off joyfully, with her lunch in a nice clean napkin. It was such a very good lunch, compared with his own, that Nicholas Wayne gave her the pleasure of sharing it with him. In fact, he more than shared it. Of the six cookies—Sophie's cookies were exceptional—Virginia got only one. When, for the sake of politeness, she offered her hard boiled egg to Nicholas, he promptly devoured it; and never—if judged by his appetite—could he have tasted such bread and jelly. Butter on the bread, as well as jelly!

Poor Nicholas! The one bright spot in Virginia's after life was in remembering how he had enjoyed her lunch. The other little ragamuffins were quite envious of him.

Screaming and shouting, they played games, racing like mad around the meadow, leaping the brook, and, of course, wading in it. Virginia took off her shoes and stockings and waded with the rest.

In the end, they came back to the swing. Nicholas must be the first, and, as usual, he gave Virginia the honor of starting him.

"Higher, higher! Push harder, Jinny!"

Virginia, pattering madly on her little bare feet, pushed with all her strength.

"Higher, higher!"

A monstrous push that took the whole of her breath and sent her staggering. Nicholas was kicking the top branches.

And then—it happened.

Down he came, swing, giant bough, and all. There was a rending creak and groan from the old tree, and Nicholas lay still and silent on the ground, surrounded by a litter of leaves and branches.

Virginia turned and stared at him. His face was deathly white; his eyes were closed. There was something hideous and terrible about his black hair straggling across that marble forehead.

The other children stood silent, also staring. Then one of them pointed a finger at Virginia.

"He's dead!" she said. "You did it. You killed Nicholas!"

A tremor passed over the group. They wavered, separated, ran—flying across the meadow in all directions. No one was fleeter of foot than Virginia. She forgot her shoes and stockings, and made for home just as fast as she could get there.

II

It was nearly four o'clock, and Sophie was still cleaning windows. She sat on a sill, with her back to the porch, and polished vigorously.

"*Ach,* you have returned," she remarked, catching a reflection of Virginia in the clean glass. "It is well. Go in the house and wash your face and hands. Your papa and mamma will be home soon. Remember, you are to say nothing about taking your lunch into the meadow."

Virginia crept around to the kitchen door, glad that Sophie had been too busy to notice her bare feet. That was a problem, if you like, but she daren't go back to the meadow for her shoes and stockings.

She went into the kitchen and washed her face and hands, as bidden. Then she went upstairs to the little room next her parents', where she slept. From a drawer she took her best Sunday slippers and a pair of stockings, and put them on, getting the seams of the stockings crooked, and finding it very difficult to button the straps of the slippers.

Sophie began to fly through the house, attending to odds and ends. She had a pan of baked beans and a rice pudding in the oven, and the table had to be laid for supper.

"Oh, you dirty child, you've torn your dress! Now I shall have to put you on a clean one. Come here and let me brush your hair."

Virginia submitted meekly. It was very strange that Sophie still failed to notice her feet.

"Now you sit on the steps and watch for your papa and mamma. Don't you make yourself dirty again. If you make yourself dirty, the gypsies will come and take you!"

Virginia sat on the steps, her clean little hands folded in the lap of her clean little dress. Her curls still ached from Sophie's hard brushing. Her eyes, smarting from the hurt of it, dwelt upon the street.

It was not a particularly beautiful street. Opposite there were a few new wooden houses, with building lots in between, advertised by "for sale" boards. The roadway was unpaved, and a double line of anæmic saplings marched with the sidewalks. At one corner the horse car line came to an end, and at the other the town melted away into fields. Virginia's street might have been the mother of all garden suburbs.

Across the fields, on the farther side of the big meadow with the brook and the cherry tree, one came suddenly upon a really unpleasant part of the town—a district given over to rows of ill conditioned houses, with trodden, littered yards, negroes' squalid cabins, saloons on every corner, gray lines of washing perpetually hanging to dry, squalling babies, squabbling women, and drunken men. It was over there, in the Ditch, as it was called, that Nicholas Wayne lived. Edith O'Dare would have been horrified had she known that her little Virginia had ever played with such children.

Sometimes a policeman walked through Virginia's street, and he shared with the gypsies the honor of keeping her behavior as correct as was humanly possible. Virginia was more afraid of him than of the gypsies, for sometimes Sophie had pleaded with him on her behalf.

"*Ach,* Mr. Cullom, she's been a good girl to-day. Don't take her away to-day, will you?"

And Mr. Cullom would nod gravely and say well, not to-day he wouldn't take her, but if ever she was naughty, why, just send for him.

This afternoon Virginia watched his approach from the end of the car line with a feeling of certainty that her time had come. She was as cold as death, and her poor little heart beat so fast that it choked her. The policeman came along slowly, swinging his club by its strap, humming to himself. Virginia would have run in and hidden under the dining room table, but for the fact that quite suddenly her legs seemed to have lost all power.

Cullom looked over the fence and saw her sitting there—just a prim, clean little girl waiting for her papa and mamma; but as his mind was occupied with something else, he did not even speak to her.

He came abreast of the gate, passed it, and ambled on down the lane that opened into the street below the church. Beyond that lay the meadow with the cherry tree, and there, no doubt, he would discover the corpse of Nicholas Wayne. Virginia crossed herself, as she had seen Sophie do when they went to the Grotto of Our Lady, with its lovely blue and gold Madonna and hundreds of winking candles.

From the other end of the street there now sounded the *clop, clop,* of the horses pulling the car. When the car came to a standstill, out got Malcolm and Edith O'Dare, with their arms full of bundles, one of which was a little white puppy dog. Virginia should have skipped to meet them, particularly when she saw the puppy; but she did not stir. They called and waved to her, and she waved back feebly, but she could not bring herself to move.

"Jinny, Jinny! See what we've got for you! Why, what's the matter with her? Jinny, darling, do you feel sick anywhere? Something's the matter with her, Malcolm—her face is *green.* Jinny, darling, tell mamma what's the matter. What have you been eating? Why, look, Malcolm—she's got on her Sunday slippers! Oh, my baby, don't cry! Let papa carry you upstairs. Where's Sophie? Sophie, come here! Something's the matter with Jinny. She's got her Sunday slippers on. How did that happen?"

"I'm sick all over—*all over!*" wailed Virginia. "I want to go to bed. The policeman's going to take me away. Don't let him take me away!"

Edith O'Dare's lips tightened.

"There!" she said. "That girl has frightened her. Poor little Jinny! The policeman's not going to get you, darling. He wouldn't *think* of such a thing. He only takes big, naughty men—not good little girls."

Malcolm gathered up his daughter.

"She's cold," he said to his wife. "I think perhaps we'd better—"

"Yes. Sophie!"

Sophie appeared, looking a little scared.

"Sophie, go at once for the doctor. Jinny's eaten something that hasn't agreed with her."

They carried poor Virginia up to bed, and the doctor came. She was ill for weeks, and the doctor said it was brain fever. Edith O'Dare went no more to her husband's office. Sophie, suspected of being the cause of this inexplicable seizure, was invited to seek another situation.

Gradually the little invalid recovered her health, but she was never the same child again. Even the white puppy failed to rouse her to the activities of normal childhood. She would not venture beyond the gate, unless her father and mother were with her, and the very sight of a policeman's uniform would bring on a convulsion.

Through it all, one irritating mystery remained. They never found out what had become of her missing shoes and stockings.

III

MALCOLM O'DARE did not practice law forever in Little Rock. He was one of those useful, tactful young men of good appearance and education who make invaluable private secretaries. He was first discovered in such a capacity by Douglas Perke, at that time United States Senator from Arkansas. Senator Perke ran into young O'Dare one day in the county courthouse, liked him, saw his special qualities at a glance, and offered him a job on the spot. It was not the career that Malcolm had planned for himself, but in this instance the office sought the man. The law business was slow and the O'Dares were poor, so it was really a temptation.

"Oh, take it," said Edith. "I should like to live in Washington. Ever since Jinny's illness, I've been worried to death about her, and a change may be just what she needs."

So they went to Washington, and perhaps the change did do Virginia good. She grew a little more robust and less timid.

The Senator from Arkansas, in one way or another, made a lot of money before he died three years later. He left his private secretary ten thousand dollars—which in itself was a high recommendation.

Malcolm O'Dare now passed into the service of a famous man of letters, a gentleman of the old school, who had once been an ambassador to France. In time this man also died, and he, too, remembered Malcolm in his will. Malcolm saved, invested prudently, and speculated in a guarded fashion. He became secretary to the President.

When the administration changed, a place was found for him as postmaster of Washington.

Before many years had passed he found himself modestly well-to-do, and the old Arkansas days, when Edith had been his stenographer, were seldom mentioned. Virginia, who remained an only child, was sent to an expensive boarding school in Georgetown. Europe began to be spoken of, and one day Malcolm came home to the charming house they had built in Chevy Chase and announced that he had been appointed first secretary to the American Embassy in London.

Virginia was then twenty-one, and had finished with her boarding school. Her father wanted her to go to college, but she had no particular ambition in that direction. Her own desire was to become a trained nurse, but her parents would not consent. Edith, who was only nineteen years older than her daughter and a very smart, vivacious matron, saw no reason why Virginia should not make a good marriage.

True, they were by no means rich as great wealth is counted, but Virginia's face was a pretty good fortune in itself. She was so beautiful that even her own mother, used as she was to the girl, often experienced a thrill at the sheer wonder of it. The yellow curls of infancy had turned to a rich old gold, with brown lights. Her complexion was perfect, her eyes large and gray. She had been "discovered" by painters, and in her first season she was proposed to by a prince. To be sure, the prince was a Russian, and had no money; but there it was—not a bad start at all for one so young and retiring.

That was the trouble with Virginia—she was altogether too retiring.

"Sometimes I think," Edith would complain to her husband in the seclusion of their bedroom, "that Jinny isn't all there. I know it's a dreadful thing to say, Malcolm—a *dreadful* thing to say of one's own child—but I can't help it. There was nothing the matter with her until she had that illness in Little Rock. Didn't you notice how changed she was afterward?"

Malcolm, who was very proud of his daughter, scoffed at these ideas.

"Nonsense! Jinny's quiet, if that's what you mean, but she's as smart as paint. London 'll open its eyes, you bet, when it sees Jinny. She'll give 'em something to look at!"

Nor had her mother any real fear that Virginia would not be a social success in London—if only it pleased Virginia to try.

"I wish I knew what she wanted," Edith said wistfully. "I'm sure I wasn't so difficult when I was a young girl!"

Malcolm sat on the arm of her chair.

"I expect," he said, "that what our little Jinny really wants is a sweetheart—only she probably doesn't know it."

"A sweetheart!" Edith laughed. "Why, she's a nun! The boys are scared stiff of her. How Prince Rasdoul ever had the courage to ask her to marry him I can't imagine!"

And this was true. The young men did fight shy of Virginia, and it looked very much as if the courageous Russian's scalp would remain the only one in her possession. Even his proposal had been in the nature of a misunderstanding. He had taken Virginia's perfervid interest in the Russian Red Cross, of which he was one of the promoters, as personal unto himself. She quickly disillusioned him.

Those were the dark days of the war, and sometimes it looked to Malcolm and Edith as if fate were compelling them to give Virginia her way about taking up nursing. Other girls were doing it. In fact, it was "the thing" to do. Why not Jinny?

"But somehow I can't bear the idea of it," Edith confided to Molly Shaw, her best friend, the wife of an attaché at the British Embassy. These two had met at Mrs. Shaw's house for a cup of tea in the intervals of war work. "It's all right for other girls, but not for Jinny!"

"Why isn't it right for her?" asked Mrs. Shaw, who privately thought that Virginia, aloof, matter-of-fact, and, above all, self-contained, would be quite safe no matter what occupation she took up.

Mrs. Shaw's brother was one of those who had been permanently chilled by Virginia's arctic treatment; but there was a baronet cousin, a very handsome young fellow, Sir Nevill Davies by name, to whom Molly Shaw felt convinced that Virginia must succumb, should the two of them ever meet. Poor Nevill was now fighting for his country, and perhaps Virginia would never see him; but now that the O'Dares were going to London there was a possible chance. Molly felt that it would be a salutary thing for the haughty young woman to have one good look at Nevill and then, perhaps, perish for love.

Not that Mrs. Shaw disliked Virginia. She told herself and she told Virginia's mother that there never was a sweeter or more beautiful girl in the world. Only—and when Mrs. Shaw got that far, she could not analyze her feelings further. She might not dislike Virginia, but neither could she honestly say that she liked her. And this setting up of any girl, in such tragic times, as being too good for the common work of all, rather annoyed her.

Edith tried to explain. What she really did was to attempt an explanation of Virginia. Thousands of mothers have done the same, with varying degrees of success.

"Jinny was always a timid little thing after an illness she had when she was seven," said Virginia's mother. "Until then she was, if anything, too daring. I sometimes think it was my fault, Molly—that terrible illness of hers. We were poor, and I used to help Malcolm in the office, and Jinny was left with a servant who frightened her about gypsies and policemen. You know what beasts they can be. Well, the poor little thing had brain fever, or something of that sort, and afterward she was utterly changed. I feel that she's not—not quite normal."

"Oh!" Mrs. Shaw gasped, mildly horrified.

"Don't run away with any silly ideas," Edith said hurriedly. "Perhaps I've said too much—more than I really mean. What I mean is that she's rather delicate, and very sensitive and high-strung."

Mrs. Shaw tried not to look as she felt. How tiresome it was to listen to these mothers of daughters, whose stories never varied, although the daughters frequently did! Tall or short, fat or thin, comely or otherwise, the description was always the same. A world filled with delicate, sensitive, and high-strung young women, it seemed!

Mrs. Shaw cleared her throat a little aggressively.

"Well, if you want my advice, what Virginia needs is something to fill in her time." This differed from Malcolm O'Dare's idea of his daughter's requirements. "A girl like Virginia, who doesn't care for balls or parties or young men or—or anything, as far as I can see, except hospital work, ought to be allowed to do it. You'll have her taking the veil, if you're not careful."

Edith looked hurt, and finished her cup of tea quickly.

"I must be going now," she said.

"I'm afraid you're offended. Edith, dear, you know I wouldn't—"

"No, of course not—only you don't understand Jinny, and it seems rather hopeless to try to tell you."

"Do you understand her?" asked Mrs. Shaw.

"Of course I do! I'm her mother."

The answer seemed conclusive enough.

The object of this controversy had found life difficult. She might be all that her mother said—delicate, sensitive, and high-strung; but the thing that burdened her beyond her strength was the memory of Nicholas Wayne.

She never actually knew the result of the accident, but in her own mind there was no doubt at all about it. He came to her in dreams all through her childhood, reproaching her for his untimely end—tall, lanky, black-haired Nicholas, whom she had so deeply adored, and whom she simply could not forget. She remembered his name and everything about him.

The dreams were not always the same. Sometimes she saw him lying on the ground, dead, among the litter of leaves and branches. Sometimes he was alive, and they raced and played together; but always there was disaster at the end. She had visioned him as drowned, with herself holding his head under the water; as being pushed off a precipice by her; as choking to death over food she had given him.

This consciousness of guilt, the belief that she had really been responsible for the cherry tree breaking, turned her to ice as the years wore on and womanhood dawned. There had been times when she tried to confess her sin to her mother; but when actually about to pour out the miserable story, she could not speak. The thing was locked in her heart. It was there, heavy on her conscience, but she could not get it out. She would go to her grave carrying that burden.

Yet Virginia had her bright, happy moments—many of them. She was uniformly sweet and cheerful, very fond of little children, very tender-hearted. She was a great help to her mother in the house, and always seemed pathetically willing to do anything they wanted her to do. In her first season, she went to dances and parties, and sat to the portrait painters who admired her beauty. She was agreeable to other girls who tried to become her friends, and polite

to the young men who voted her such an iceberg. She did all the things she ought to do, and made efforts to please.

That was another trouble—watching Virginia making efforts to enjoy herself. A curious thing about it was that the girls and the young men—despite what the latter said—were just waiting for her to show a gleam of real interest in them. They would have been all over her in a minute, had she done so; for Virginia had a remarkable charm. She was mysterious. Her very detachment was intriguing.

"Miss O'Dare—oh, yes, do you know her?"

"Can't say I *know* her, but we've met. That girl thinks she's too good for any fellow on earth."

"Oh, so you've been wounded, too!"

"Wounded? Never got close enough for that, and don't want to!"

Then, if these were two young men talking, a sense of artificiality would creep into their conversation, stifling its sincerity. They would have liked to know Virginia better; perhaps they would have enjoyed being wounded. The one man who had offered himself, and had been rejected, told his sad story all over Washington.

The Roumanian minister — a wise old soul who knew the world inside out, and history from its earliest recorded pages down to the chaos of 1914—said that in his opinion Virginia O'Dare was a composite reincarnation of all those women who had ruled the earth at various times, either personally or vicariously; but he always added:

"She doesn't know what she could do, and she wouldn't if she did!"

That was true enough. What the Roumanian minister did not know was that except for the tragedy of a common little boy named Nicholas Wayne, Virginia might have been a very commonplace young girl. Even her physical beauty, one ventures to assert, would not have developed so strikingly. The painters had tried, but they had found the shadows in her gray eyes difficult and a little awe-inspiring; the secretive pathos of her smile, baffling; the meek droop of her graceful carriage, misleading.

Yet not one of all who knew her—there were none who knew her intimately—had the wit to realize that this girl, who kept her own counsel so foolishly and so well, was the victim of a tragedy. If they had remotely suspected it, unpleasant ideas would have come to mind; but there was nothing to suspect where Virginia O'Dare was concerned. She had been as she was since the age of seven, a remote, lonely soul seeking the forgiveness and forgetfulness of a world which did not know the nature of her sin.

IV

EDITH O'DARE found London delightful, in spite of the fact that the war, then mercifully drawing to its close, had made its mark upon the life of the great metropolis. Prices were high, food—the sort of food one wanted—difficult to obtain. The town was fearfully overcrowded, and a suitable flat or house resembled the elusive needle in a haystack.

The O'Dares were not rich people, but they were comfortably off, and Edith was clever. She had provided herself with good letters of introduction and Virginia with a fashionable wardrobe; and through Molly Shaw's friendly influence, and Malcolm's position at the embassy, she was soon launched in a sea of social enjoyment and good works.

She went bargain hunting, and, being lucky, found a delightful house in South Audley Street—Mayfair seeming to her the only possible place of residence in London. Accustomed as she was to the high rents of her own country, twenty-five guineas a week did not seem exorbitant. Needless to say, it was a furnished house, belonging to a lady of title, who kindly deeded over to Edith a competent staff of servants, headed by the genuine thing in butlers.

In Washington they had only kept two maids, and the butler rather alarmed Malcolm, but Edith took to him like a flower to the sunshine. They could afford it all, including the butler, for a few years, at least—until Virginia had made her great marriage.

As Edith confided to Malcolm, she didn't want him to think that she desired marriage with a foreigner, even with an Englishman, for Virginia. She merely hoped for a good marriage, a solidly satisfactory alliance in every way; and since London was, geographically speaking, the center of the civilized world, they must take full advantage of their happy position.

In her heart, Edith thought a great deal about Molly Shaw's cousin, Sir Nevill Davies. Although relying somewhat upon her friend's favorable description of this young

man, Edith took the trouble to look him up for herself. She made the pleasing discovery that his title was an old one and his fortune solidly substantial. Moreover, he was just the right age for Virginia—a year or so under thirty. Of course he was in the Guards—the Coldstreams.

About this time Virginia made a discovery of her own. It came to her with a little shock that her parents, though unwilling to let her take up the only profession that appealed to her, nevertheless wanted to get her off their hands.

More than most married couples of their age, the O'Dares were devoted to each other. They had always been lovers, and they still liked to play at being in love. It grew more and more embarrassing for them to have their grown-up daughter's eyes perpetually appraising their tender, flirtatious ways. "Eyes too expressive to be blue, too lovely to be gray," they always seemed to wonder a little at this romantic father and mother, as if it were difficult to understand and approve.

Edith was now forty, and was getting to be rather careful about herself. She had a boudoir paneled and lighted to suit her complexion, and she watched her hair and figure with unwearying vigil. Her daughter was a burden on her mind, and mental worries bring wrinkles. What better than marriage for Virginia?

"See how happy your father and I are, darling!"

Yes, they were happy, yet her mother's remarks on that subject never failed to send a cool little shiver down Virginia's spine. Marriage was not for her; but there were times when she caught herself wondering what it would be like to fall in love, and how people accomplished such a thing. All lovers, all married couples, were not happy, as her father and mother were. Virginia knew a girl who had been engaged three times. There were plenty of women in her mother's set who had been married twice or more, and thought nothing whatever of it. They even talked about their several husbands, making comparisons, which were invariably odious.

It was disconcerting to discover that her parents really wanted her to get married, and that only through her marriage could they attain their perfect freedom.

The war ended, and Nevill Davies was sent with the army of occupation to Germany, so Virginia did not meet him that winter. Meanwhile Mrs. Shaw came home, and, as Nevill's privileged cousin, she motored the O'Dares down to Deepdean, in Sussex, and showed them Davies Hall.

It was a fine old place, shut up since the death of Nevill's parents, but kept in spotless order by caretakers. They had lunch at the hall, and Mrs. Shaw took great care that they should miss nothing of its beauties. Virginia came away with a confused impression of Elizabethan furniture, endless corridors, deer parks, and conservatories. Also of game pie—a famous local delicacy which gave her indigestion for two days at least, and started up a fit of melancholy brooding.

As time went on, and spring began, and Nevill's return to England was hoped for almost daily, Virginia began to realize that she had only one chance of escape from the matrimonial plot her mother was weaving—Sir Nevill Davies might not like her. Still, it was a pretty good chance. So far he hadn't been caught, though all the girls were "raving mad" over him, according to Molly Shaw.

V

It was in April that Nevill came home. The great event was not broken gently to Virginia. It was fired off at her at close range, and caught her unprepared.

Virginia had been painted that winter by Fedor Chiostro, and her mother and she were going to a private exhibition of that great man's work, which included, of course, the portrait of Virginia.

The girl had been a little appalled by Chiostro's conception of her. Alone of all the artists she had been begged to sit to, he seemed to have divined her secret. Virginia O'Dare, the radiantly young and beautiful child of society, had emerged from Chiostro's hands a haunted, tormented soul, with a story of suffering that spoke from her eyes and trembled on her lips.

It was a wonderful portrait, but Edith O'Dare hated it, and was very angry with Fedor Chiostro for making such a monstrosity of Virginia. Yet what could one say? Nothing. And what could one do, except make a sort of joke of it behind Chiostro's back? For he was so notoriously bad-tempered under adverse criticism that one seldom ventured to challenge his pictorial insults. It was such an honor to be painted by him that one sighed and let it go, whatever happened.

Virginia approved the portrait, although secretly it frightened her. She tried hard to recall how she might have betrayed herself to Chiostro. How had he discovered the shadow of Nicholas Wayne, which clouded her so heavily that now every one could see there was something monstrous in her past?

It was the usual fashionable picture show—the big studio on the Chelsea Embankment, the crush of smart women with their attendant dilettante men, the abundant tea furnished by a caterer, the artist's submerged wife playing timidly and reluctantly at hostess, and the great man himself, shaggy-haired and amusing, making rather a fuss of Virginia and snubbing her mother violently.

The tide ebbed and flowed, but there was always a crowd around Virginia's portrait. Although it scarcely savored of modesty, she herself was so fascinated by it that she came again and again to hover on the fringe, not so much to hear what people were saying as to gaze upon that stripped soul of hers which looked out so darkly upon a care-free world.

As she stood lost and spellbound, a voice at her elbow—the voice of a young man—broke into her reverie. Perhaps he was not speaking to her, but to himself.

"By Jove, old Chiostro's got a lot to answer for this time! There never was a girl like that this side of Purgatory!"

Virginia turned and looked at the speaker, and a queer little thrill went over her, like the pulse of a locked stream when the ice breaks in the springtime. She didn't at that moment think of him as handsome. She saw only the warm, radiant sympathy in his screwed-up eyes for the tortured creature on the wall that was herself.

"It's true enough," she said with an embarrassed laugh; "but it's the girl who has considerable to answer for, not Mr. Chiostro."

Then the young man looked at her, and reddened slightly.

"Why, it's you!"

"And don't you think it's like me?"

"Yes — abominably so. It's you, all right; but please forgive me—"

"You needn't apologize. Everybody is being so nice and comforting about it that really it's refreshing to hear the truth. Mr. Chiostro isn't afraid of the truth, but sometimes I'm a desperate coward myself."

What on earth had happened to Virginia? Indeed, the ice had broken and was tinkling merrily down the stream, and the stream was dancing and rippling and sparkling, as if the calendar held no such disagreeable season as winter.

Virginia and the young man migrated to a secluded window seat and talked about her haunted soul, as Fedor Chiostro had seen it. Virginia was mysterious and baffling, yet somehow she was longing to reveal herself. The young man, too, longed to lift the veil and see what the painter had seen; yet he was conscious most of Virginia's tender young beauty, the pearly sheen of her white throat, the stiff waves of old-gold hair, the reluctant, half wrung promise in her eyes. Here was something new, something almost divine, to a young man just returned from the harsh unloveliness of war!

There, in the window seat, after half an hour, they were discovered my Molly Shaw and Edith—who only a moment or two before had discovered her friend—and were made known to each other by name. They hadn't thought about their names before.

So this was the much discussed Nevill Davies!

Virginia drew in her breath with a sharp little catch, and tried, in her confusion of thought, to recollect herself; but the old Virginia was gone forever — the Virginia who did not like young men, who was frightened of life and burdened by the immense tragedy of her childhood. For the first time she glimpsed what love might possibly be like. Such burdens as hers could be shared, for one could tell one's lover, one's second self, things that mothers and fathers and the world at large—except the Chiostros—dreamed not of.

Virginia was in love—hopelessly, painfully, furiously in love. Fortunately for her, so also was Nevill Davies. They had lost not one precious moment of that half hour.

Frankly, Nevill's cousin didn't altogether like it. Mrs. Shaw had run hand in glove with Edith's matrimonial plans, had shown them Davies Hall, and had talked of Nevill constantly, but with something of the pride of a woman who displays her own jewels. At the back of Molly Shaw's mind there had always been the conviction that Nevill would be Virginia's Waterloo. She had foreseen the breaking of the ice, but she hadn't quite visualized Nevill's following so ardently at the side of the freed stream;

nor had she faintly guessed what Virginia O'Dare in love would be like.

Some half amiable squabbling marred the parting of the young couple that afternoon. It went on around them and over their heads. They were not allowed to take care of themselves at all.

"Molly, you must bring Sir Nevill to dinner. Let me see, this is Tuesday. What are we doing on Thursday, Jinny? That's the Mumfords' dance, but we can easily—"

"On Thursday I'm afraid we're engaged, Edith dear," Mrs. Shaw cut in. "Nevill's only staying with us for a few days, and he positively must go down to the hall early next week, if everything isn't to run to rack and ruin. Of course, our time's horribly filled in."

Edith looked at her reproachfully. Hadn't they planned, the two of them, that a match between Nevill and Virginia would be highly desirable? And here was Molly failing her at the very first opportunity for furthering the scheme!

The young people were only faintly aware of the friendly set-to being waged on their behalf. Edith came of an impulsive race, and perhaps her methods were a little too obvious. Molly Shaw, on the other hand, saw the need of caution. It wasn't as if Virginia were a millionaire's daughter. Besides, in Molly's opinion, she had certain defects of character, which a wise woman ought to point out to any relative who might be in danger of taking a hard fall.

Though younger than Edith, Molly Shaw was an older hand at diplomacy. She won the day, and carried Nevill off without a single thing having been definitely arranged as regarded the future. Some time next month, she hoped it could be managed; but not Thursday, nor even next week.

Poor Edith was depressed that evening. Chiostro's portrait had begun it, and Molly's standoffishness finished it; but Virginia went home in a trance of delight which no amount of depression on her mother's part could penetrate.

Mrs. Shaw had reckoned entirely without Nevill. He might not be allowed to dine with Virginia and her family, or to do anything else officially sanctioned; but there was nothing whatever to prevent him from ringing her up on the telephone and arranging a rendezvous in Hyde Park, by the Achilles statue. And there was nothing to prevent Virginia's falling in with his request. She didn't think it even necessary to ask her mother's permission; but had she done so, it would have been granted.

VI

THAT was on Wednesday. On Thursday afternoon they went again, Virginia and Nevill, to Chiostro's studio, to have another look at her portrait, and Chiostro left them alone at tea for an hour.

On Friday morning they rode in the Row at eight in the morning, lunched with Edith at Ciro's, and came home to tea. Nevill left just in time to rush into a change of clothes and join some party that his cousin had planned. On Saturday, the program of Friday repeated itself, and on Sunday Nevill came to lunch and met Malcolm, of whom, by this time, he was secretly thinking as his future father-in-law.

It was quite plain to Edith that Molly Shaw knew nothing of all this. The anxious mother fluctuated between two emotions—one, relief that Virginia had at last taken to just the right sort of young man; the other, resentment against Molly for behaving in such a peculiar fashion. She also experienced some slight annoyance at the fact that Nevill Davies seemed to find it necessary to keep his cousin in the dark.

But Edith need not have blamed Nevill. He broke engagements that Molly had made for him right and left in order to see as much of Virginia as he could, and naturally he had to give his cousin better reasons than the true one.

On Sunday afternoon Mrs. Shaw came in unexpectedly to tea at the house in South Audley Street, and caught him there. They walked back together across the Green Park to her flat in Westminster.

Molly had a nice husband of her own, of whom she was very fond; but after all a cousin is a cousin, particularly when he is so charming a young bachelor as Nevill. Molly had been sweetness itself to Edith and Virginia that afternoon, and had attempted a flirtation with Malcolm which so nearly came off that she knew she had roused the ire of Malcolm's wife; but she was very angry with Nevill. In her opinion, he had fallen too easily to the lure of the young sphinx.

As they walked along, she with her quick, short steps to match his lengthy stride, she looked up at him sidewise, wondering how to approach the painful subject of her disapproval. At that moment Nevill was both infinitely dear and somewhat hateful to her.

On the dear side, she counted such items as his clear, fine eyes, which always screwed up a little when he was puzzled, his schoolboy smile, and his not very distinguished nose. On the hateful side, she could not endure a new swinging way of walking he had recently got into, or the heightened color on his sunburned cheeks, or the faint expression of self-satisfaction that hovered on his features.

Nevill was dreaming, away on the wings of romance, and he flew over the ground as if covering some rich and secret heritage.

"Oh, please don't walk so fast!" Molly exclaimed, breathless and angry.

"Sorry! I didn't realize—"

"No—a man in love never thinks of anybody but himself—and the girl!"

Nevill pulled in his stride.

"So you've guessed it!" he said with a little laugh.

"*Guessed* it! Good Heavens, *guessed it!*"

"I thought you liked her. What's the matter, Molly?"

"Nothing very much is the matter with me," Molly replied, her voice shaking. "Only you've got a lot to learn about Virginia O'Dare. I suppose you know that Prince Rasdoul wanted to marry her?"

"Never heard of the fellow," Nevill said tolerantly. "I shouldn't think he was the only one."

"Well, he was," Molly went on, in a tone of mystery and caution. "It was all over Washington. She led him on and then threw him down hard. That's what she'll do to you, if you're not careful. The men were very shy of Virginia after that affair. Her own mother says there's something queer about her."

"There is," Nevill said slowly. He didn't want to quarrel with Molly, nor did he care to talk about Virginia with some one so utterly unsympathetic. "I think I like her because she's different. I want to make her happy—if she'll let me."

"Oh, well!" Molly gave a short, vexed laugh. "I think she's letting you, all right! They haven't a great fortune, and her mother is simply wild to get her married. Virginia knows that, and no doubt she'll marry you, if you ask her."

"I hope so," said Nevill. "I'd prefer that to being thrown down hard, which you mentioned as a possibility a moment ago."

"Oh, Nevill, you must be thinking me an awful cat! But I'm so fond of you—I can't help it—and I do want you to be happy. I don't believe—I honestly don't believe—that Virginia O'Dare has it in her to make any man happy. That's how she strikes me. She's cheerful and sweet-tempered and good, and she hasn't a single fault of the modern girl, and yet—I can't explain what I mean, Nevill. It's that queer, withdrawn manner of hers, that look in her eyes—well, Chiostro painted it. You saw for yourself. Dearest boy, if you marry her, and if she ruins your life in some way—oh, don't ask me how, I don't know—but if it happens, I shall never forgive myself, never!"

Nevill was not more conceited than most young men, but the idea struck him that perhaps this was all personal unto Molly. He did his cousin a slight injustice. She was not in love with him, she sincerely desired his happiness, and she was quite honest in what she thought and said about Virginia. That Nevill should slip so willingly into the power of that strange, mysterious girl had suddenly become repellent to Molly Shaw.

"Oh, well!" he said. "Aren't we taking a lot for granted? It scarcely seems fair to Miss O'Dare to discuss her like this. I haven't a notion whether she'd marry me or not. We'll assume that either way my fair young life is doomed!"

It was plain enough to Molly that she hadn't made the slightest impression on him.

Yet it was in a sobered mood that he sought Virginia the next day. Just a full week, now, they had known each other, and reason would urge that it was not long enough for either of them to know their own minds; but reason plays so small and mean a part on the stage of love that it might just as well not be there at all. It is chiefly noted for its quick and mortified exits.

Virginia was expecting Nevill, although Mrs. Shaw had contrived yesterday to prevent any definite arrangement as to their next meeting, and despite the fact that Nevill had been constantly reminding both her and himself that he really must go down to Davies Hall the first thing in the week. She was expecting him, although he hadn't telephoned, or perhaps because he hadn't. It had poured with rain in the early morning, so any idea of riding was out of the question. Virginia was engaged for lunch, and that he knew.

So at four o'clock she sat alone in the pretty little cedar-paneled room which her mother had turned over to her, and dreamed placidly, gently, untroubled by the memory of Nicholas Wayne for the first time in many years. She had on a soft white dress that clung graciously to her adorable lines. Her hair was like a heavy, wonderfully fashioned crown of Tuscan gold. Her lips held a new curve, a new mystery; and a new veil, lustrous and filmy, gave brilliance to her shadowed eyes.

She was thinking to herself that she had stepped into a changed world. Even if she never saw Nevill Davies again, she would always bless him, would always thank him and be eternally grateful, for this glimpse of something beyond and apart from herself that he had given her. At the same time, she knew she would see him again, soon—at any moment, now.

The doorbell rang, the feeling more than the actual sound of it carrying to the young dreamer in the cedar room. Toombes, the real thing in butlers, came to inquire if Miss O'Dare was at home to Sir Nevill Davies. It was a slight affectation of office on his part that he made the inquiry. Miss O'Dare hadn't said that she was expecting Sir Nevill; on the other hand, Toombes might have been guided by recent precedent.

Just a week. Very well—what then?

It seemed to Nevill and Virginia that they had been parted for a thousand years, although it was only yesterday that Molly had carried him off and delivered her severe warning.

Always they saw each other with new emotion and a new consciousness of being mutually complementary. There was something robust and matter-of-fact in Nevill that Virginia urgently needed. There was something fairylike in her elusive delicacy that gripped and wrung his heart all over again when they came face to face. It checked and incited him at the same time. He knew he could not—must not—rush and take her in his arms, yet there was always the little rush at the first, the glad assurance that they still liked each other, that she was as pleased as he was, that this satisfaction was not only important but precious, as much to her as to him, the joy of love exquisitely intensified because so wholly mutual. Their straightforward young passion was unsullied by the stigma of doubt.

But Nevill was Nevill, and of course he checked his impulse to rush at her.

"Hello! You must be pretty well fed up with me by this time! Old Tombstones wasn't so sure you were in, and I had a panicky moment waiting until he found out."

But Virginia was much more direct.

"You knew I'd be in," she said.

And then, suddenly, Nevill realized that introductory measures were a farce, and might easily have been dispensed with from the very first. He took her in his arms, and they clung together in a rapturous moment that could never be measured by time.

"Virginia, my dearest, you do love me—you do love me! Say you do! Whisper it!" He bent his head and caught the sweet fragrance of her breath on his cheek. "I was so afraid—I'm still terrified—until you say you love me!"

"You know I do!" Virginia whispered.

There was a wonderful hour. Outside, the April rain dashed against the windows in cold, spiteful little gusts, and gray twilight closed in. The logs in the grate threw out leaping flames, which cast shadows on the walls and inclosed their little world in a circle of love and firelight.

Virginia slipped to the floor and sat with her head against Nevill's knee. It was such a delicious, breathless spell, their fingers interlocked, silence falling in great warm patches, the glow of golden dreams enshrouding them.

"There's something I want to tell you. It's about me, when I was a little girl," Virginia said, when the wonderful hour had seemed to knit them as twin, undivorceable souls. "Something that happened to me—that I did. I've never told anybody, but it's always been there, hurting me. Until I met you, Nevill, I never thought I could be happy!"

So, with her head against Nevill's knee, she told him about Nicholas Wayne.

VII

THEIR engagement was not announced until June. Even Edith's desire to get her daughter married did not allow of any undue hurry.

Moreover, Malcolm O'Dare suddenly woke up to his parental rights and feelings. This was all very well, but rushing things was not to his taste. Besides, he wasn't so sure he wanted Virginia to marry an Englishman. Still, he had to admit that there

wasn't anything much the matter with Nevill Davies beyond the fact that he was an Englishman—which, after all, from Malcolm's point of view, was better than any other brand of foreigner. Nevill didn't, for instance, expect impossible money settlements, nor any settlements at all, as far as Malcolm could gather in a guarded interview with him. Neither on one side nor the other was there any cash bargaining for Virginia.

Though unannounced, the betrothal became an acknowledged fact in the bosom of Virginia's family, and of course Molly Shaw was told. Since it was inevitable, Molly took it very well, just as she would resign herself to a bad cold or the income tax. There was no use kicking, no use protesting. In this case, it would merely cause a breach between her and Nevill, and she didn't want that to happen for several reasons—one of them being that Nevill was the godfather of her eldest child, and had put young Christopher down in his will for a very nice sum, which it would be unwise to prejudice.

No one was more surprised than Molly at the unfolding of Virginia. Where there had been ice, there was now pure flame. The tightly locked bud opened, petal by petal, into a blossom of infinite loveliness. Her forced and detachedly patient interest in other people melted into abundant human sympathy.

Love had worked its miracle more obviously and pleasantly in Virginia than with most young girls. She was much nicer. Her eyes dwelt with affectionate toleration upon the perpetual game of flirtation that went on between her parents. Before, she had so often made them uncomfortable that they longed to get rid of her; now they grew pensively sad at the thought of losing her. Before, she had made them feel old and foolish; now she permitted them to be even younger and wiser than herself.

They found—such is the contrariness of human nature—that they didn't want to lose Virginia now. They put little hurdles in the way of her escape, which Virginia jumped neatly with cleared skirts and in a style they could not help but admire.

"If only we had waited and looked around for some nice young duke!" said Edith to her husband.

"What duke?" Malcolm inquired bluntly of his wife.

"Oh, I don't know!" Edith waved her hands in a vague gesture. "There must be some. Anyway, you know what I mean. Of course I like Nevill, but I never dreamed that a man—any man—could change Jinny so much. Do you remember what that delightful old baron—the Roumanian minister, wasn't he?—what he once said about Jinny?"

Malcolm signified that he didn't remember what the Roumanian minister had said. Edith repeated it, a little garbled.

"That Jinny was the reincarnation of Cleopatra and Catherine of Russia—"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Malcolm.

"Well, that's what he said, and he knows a lot about such things. He said Jinny could rule the world if she wanted to, only she wouldn't."

"Sensible Jinny!" Malcolm said dryly.

"I wish you wouldn't make fun of me! After all, there have been clever women, and no one can deny they have done great things. I guess I know what I'm talking about, and it's not quite nice of you, Malcolm, to try to make me feel silly, when I've always helped you and done everything I could, and I always thought you loved me, but of course I'm past forty now—although if you didn't know it I certainly wouldn't tell you, and everybody else thinks that I look so young for my age, and that I must have been married in the cradle to have a daughter as old as Jinny; but I know that at just about my age husbands always do get tired of their wives, and—"

Edith was equal to any strain, but Malcolm wasn't. The discussion, which had begun about Virginia's missing a nice young duke, ended in Malcolm's assuring his wife most earnestly, almost tearfully, and wholly truthfully, that she was the only woman he had ever loved or wanted to love, and that he couldn't go on like this, with her always doubting him. Very likely he would die, but with his last breath he would breathe her name, and with what he would leave her she could probably find a duke for herself, if that was the height of her ambition.

They crashed in each other's arms, Edith sobbing heavily but happily, and Malcolm taking back what he said about dying. He promised not to die for many years, when they would probably go together and be buried in one grave. This thought consoled her, and she found heart to smile again.

In June the public was informed that a marriage had been arranged, and would

shortly take place, between Nevill and Virginia; but by that time it was rather stale news to anybody who might be interested in the young couple. The wedding was set for October.

It was a happy summer, a wonderful summer. They were exquisitely in love, and very serious about it. They discussed their ideals, and made charming discoveries about each other. While the same may be said of most young lovers, with Nevill and Virginia it was somehow a little different.

They were going to make their home at Davies Hall. In August, Virginia dragged her mother from the delights of the trousseau, and Molly Shaw from Dieppe, and made them come down to Deepdean with her and Nevill, to help her plan some little changes which Nevill insisted upon for his bride. She felt almost reverent, when it came to that future home of hers. They were going to be real people, Nevill and she —real, serious people, who would give to life of their very best, and so would get from life a full return.

The estate required careful management, and that was Nevill's business. Virginia planned out all the things that she would have to do in making Deepdean a happier place because of her coming. She hoped that the village mothers wouldn't think her too young and inexperienced to take an interest in their babies, and that the vicar wouldn't resent her having a hand in parish affairs. She meant to be very tactful about all that.

The best times were when Nevill and she strolled under the old trees together, and talked about the greatest of all their blessings—their love for each other. It had become a holy thing, that love—something so precious that it made them draw breath in sheer wonder that such a thing could be.

Late one afternoon they sat side by side on the bank of the big lily pond.

"I wish we could be married to-morrow, and cut all the fuss and bother, and have the house to ourselves," Nevill said suddenly. "I like your mother immensely, of course, but old Molly's a bit of a bore. Let's run away and get married, Virginia!"

He never called her Jinny. Virginia smiled and gave him her hand to kiss.

"Oh, I do wish we could! Only — it wouldn't be quite fair to mother and father, would it?"

"I s'pose not. Still, I wish we would. Sometimes I'm a little frightened of losing you. I've dreamed about it. Last night it was awful—I was hunting all over the blooming place and couldn't find you."

"You haven't much chance of losing me," Virginia said. "Dreams are silly things. You remember what I told you about that poor little boy, Nicholas Wayne? For years and years I used to dream about Nicholas. I suppose one of those psycho-analyzers, or whatever they call them, could have cured me; but it was you who really did cure me. I've got quite over it now. Nevill, I was the most morbid child!"

"I'll wager you were an adorable child," Nevill replied.

"I was horrid! What my poor parents had to put up with! And all because I couldn't get the idea out of my head that I was responsible for that poor little boy's death."

"You don't know that he is dead," said Nevill. "Anyway, it wasn't your fault."

"Yes, I can see that now—it wasn't really my fault. Oh, yes, it was, Nevill! I had always had a horrid feeling that something might happen, the tree used to creak so. Poor, poor Nicholas!"

She shivered as a little breeze swept across the pond and touched her face with cold fingers.

"Virginia, you promised!"

"Yes, I know, and I'm not going to think about it any more, dear. I'll never forget how sweet and sensible you were when I told you. You made me see just what an idiot I had been, and I'm never going to be that kind of an idiot again!"

VIII

EARLY in September Virginia and her mother returned to town, and the trousseau was resumed. Molly Shaw went across to Paris, from where, after a fortnight, she wrote to Edith, advising her to bring Virginia over and finish the shopping there. The Parisian dressmakers, that autumn, had put forth a tremendous effort to make good the ravage war had wrought in their trade; and of course, wrote Molly, whatever people might say about it, one did benefit by the exchange.

So, coaxing another check out of poor Malcolm, Edith dashed over to Paris with Virginia. Virginia did not wish to go, and was sorry to see her father spending so much money on clothes that she was convinced she did not need, even though the honeymoon was to be spent in Biarritz.

The girl and her mother were to be in Paris for a week. Nevill was coming over for a day or two, and would fetch them home again.

In two months, thought Virginia, trying to be patient, both the wedding and the honeymoon would be over, and Nevill and she would be settled for life at Davies Hall. She was just a little bored by all the fuss and bother, and terribly tired of being fitted for so many dresses.

They joined Mrs. Shaw at the Regina, and forthwith the two elder women plunged into the pleasures of the Rue de la Paix, dragging a reluctant Virginia in their wake. During these excursions Molly Shaw discovered all over again that Virginia was not quite human. Who ever heard of a bride-to-be who was not interested in her own trousseau? Virginia had been enthusiastic enough about the smartening up of Davies Hall, but clothes had always seemed to be her mother's affair. It became plainer and plainer to Molly that when the trousseau was exhausted, Nevill's wife would degenerate into a hopeless frump, unless Edith kept up exhausting efforts on her behalf.

There was a stubborn quality in Virginia's meekness. She always let other people have their own way, she gave in placidly, but getting her to do what she did not wish to do was like pushing a ton weight up a steep hill. Molly was frankly glad when Edith gave up the task one morning. The two went out shopping together, and had a lovely time, finishing up with a cocktail at the Café de la Paix, and with the sort of lunch that Virginia would never have chosen in a restaurant where it would not have been quite the thing to take her. After lunch they went to see a new comedy at the Variétés; and it was just as well Virginia hadn't been taken there, either.

Left to her own devices, Virginia had announced her intention of spending the day in the Louvre—meaning, needless to state, the picture gallery, not the shop—and was advised to take Mrs. Shaw's maid with her for propriety and protection. She had meant to do so, but she wandered out of the hotel, forgetting all about Hedges sitting so patiently waiting to be summoned.

A little later, strolling happily along the river, Virginia also forgot that she had meant to go to the Louvre. She crossed over and spent a couple of hours browsing among the old book stalls, dreaming idly and deliciously. Then she lost herself in the maze of the Quartier Latin, thought about lunch, satisfied that craving with chocolate and cakes at a *pâtisserie,* and wandered out again into the golden, humid glow of the autumn afternoon. It was time to be getting back to the Regina, for there would be an awful fuss if her mother returned first and discovered Hedges still waiting—for by this time Virginia had recollected Hedges.

She took her bearings, intending to start westward. She was standing at the curb, waiting for a chance to cross the Boulevard St. Michel without unnecessary risk to life and limb, when somebody clapped her on the back, and a man's voice said briskly:

"How now, my little sphinx maiden? What are you doing here all by yourself?"

And Virginia, who knew that Paris was a terrible place for a girl to trot about alone in—although so far nothing faintly resembling an adventure had happened to her—turned deathly white, jerked away from the familiar hand, and was on the point of bounding recklessly into the traffic, when common sense came to her rescue, and she faced her accoster with a laugh.

"Oh, how you frightened me!" she cried. "Just for a moment I thought—"

"That I was the wolf, eh?"

It was Fedor Chiostro, with whom she was great friends. He was the only person in the world, except Nevill, who understood her—or, at least, who knew that there was something about her which required understanding.

"I oughtn't to be out alone," said Virginia. "Mrs. Shaw's maid was put at my disposal, but I forgot all about her. I've been having a lovely time. Look!"

She held up the shabby little volume of old French poems she had captured from one of the book stalls.

Chiostro admired her purchase. When Virginia told him that her mother and Mrs. Shaw were shopping for her trousseau, he laughed so heartily that her feelings were a little hurt.

"But if you will not waste your time in that way," he said, "perhaps you will come and idle for an hour over the teacups with me. I am just around the corner for the moment—a small hired studio, most inconvenient for my needs, but the owner, poor devil, needs the rent, and so I have taken it—or, rather, I am sharing it with him. Oh, my wife is there, of course!" Had Virginia hesitated? "She is really a nice, com-

fortable sort of wife — always there, but never in the way. If you take pattern by Mme. Chiostro, your husband will have cause to bless you, my dear!"

Virginia smiled faintly. She liked the shaggy-haired old man. *Was* he old? Perhaps fifty, but no comment is needed upon twenty-one's estimate of a fifty that quite looks his age and a little more. But that she should ever become like Mme. Chiostro, faded, useful, tolerated, and wholly lacking in the social graces, was unthinkable. Fedor Chiostro didn't love his wife, yet he must have loved her once; or had he married her for money? No, there wasn't any. He made a great deal, but they were always hard up, living generously yet precariously. Chiostro was never happy unless he owed more money than he had any immediate hope of paying.

Virginia had rather marveled at this sort of success, which, in a financial sense, was no success. Her own life had been so hedged about with caution. When her father lamented at expense, it did not mean that he was pawning his cuff links for tomorrow's bread. Yet with the Chiostros it might mean literally that.

She trudged along beside the old man, and felt subtly gratified when queer-looking students swept off their impossible hats in astonishing bows, thus acknowledging the presence of a master. Sometimes, although she didn't see, they turned their heads to look after Virginia, and perhaps to think things that she wouldn't have liked. Lucky dog, Chiostro!

Up a little side turning by an old railed garden filled with broken statuary and overgrown with shrubbery and weeds, they came to one of those great, blank-looking buildings which distinguish the untidy byways of Paris—an inexpressive house burdened, perhaps, with strange secrets, mysteriously attractive in spite of its sheer ugliness.

"Here I am domiciled for the present," said Chiostro. "Now you must take a long breath for the stairs."

He was right. The stairs went up and up, interminable little broken flights leading straight into the sky, it would seem.

"But when we get there," panted Chiostro, "the view is wonderful! It will repay you."

IX

This was in great contrast to the charming house on the Chelsea Embankment, but it had its attractive qualities. Here, Chiostro explained, it was good to play at student days again—those wonderful days which, alas, would never return with quite the same essence that youth imparted to them; yet it was good fun to pretend.

"And always I am poor, anyway, so in that way it is exactly the same," he said with his jovial laugh. "Enter, little sphinx maiden. Mamma, are you there? Here is a young friend of mine who wants her tea. Ah, Nico! How does the work progress? You must put it aside now and wash your grubby paws, for the sphinx maiden has come to pay us a visit!"

Thus Chiostro, shouting out as he ushered Virginia into the big attic room which served him for a temporary studio.

It was a bare room, scantily furnished even for a working studio. The great skylight harshly emphasized its general untidy unloveliness. A man sat hunched up on a stool behind a large canvas, painting for dear life from a lay figure in Greek draperies. He did not look up or return Chiostro's salutation, and all Virginia could see of him was a thatch of black hair, and a pair of legs wrapped around the legs of the stool.

Mme. Chiostro peered timidly out from some lair of her own leading to the rear, and smiled in a watery fashion when she saw Virginia.

"Oh, how do you do, Miss—Miss—"

"Surely you haven't forgotten me!" Virginia cried reproachfully. "Virginia O'Dare."

"Of course, of course—Miss O'Dare. There are so many of them coming and going all the time I sometimes forget. You must excuse me. You wish tea, papa?"

"If you please," said Chiostro.

The man behind the canvas unwound his legs from the stool, and, with a little clicking sound of impatience, laid aside his palette and brush. It was quite plain that he did not care for this interruption.

"Now then, Nico, show that you can be a gentleman!" Chiostro exclaimed. "Here I have brought you a charming countrywoman of your own. Sphinx maiden, this is Nicholas Wayne, who one of these days, a hundred years hence, will be hung in the Louvre. Just now he is my landlord, and that is all the glory he requires for the present."

Virginia's heart gave a sickening thump, as the young man let himself down from the

stool and came toward her. She felt that she would have known him even if Chiostro hadn't spoken his name—Nicholas Wayne, tall, lanky, dark-haired Nicholas, the boy whom she thought she had killed, the boy whom in her dreams, since the age of seven, she had murdered over and over again.

As he crossed the room, it was like watching the progress of some wounded animal. He was terribly, shockingly lame. Obviously there was something very wrong with his right hip joint. The beauty of his face was almost startling, yet at a second glance one felt repelled and frightened by it. Those cold, white features, so pure of outline, those great dark eyes, that finely chiseled mouth, were set in a sinister mold, as if somewhere behind there crouched a chained fury ready to leap, to strike, to kill, if only it got the chance. That sullen, limping creature was Nicholas Wayne!

Virginia stood looking at him, staring in fascination as he dragged himself toward her, all the color gone from her own face, her eyes wide.

"This young person was the sensation of the London season," said Chiostro. "All through me. I made her famous. I painted the naked fear in her soul."

"She is afraid of me," said the young man, with startling directness. "Haven't you ever seen a cripple before?"

"I'm sorry—I—really I didn't mean to stare," Virginia stammered. "I only thought I had met you somewhere before—a long time ago, when we were both quite small."

Nicholas Wayne laughed in a jeering way.

"Not likely." Then some faint response jogged his memory. "I heard you tell Mme. Chiostro that your name was Virginia. Did they ever call you Jinny?"

"Yes—I—yes, I thought you'd remember," Virginia said breathlessly.

"I don't; but there was a kid I knew once. I think her name was Jinny. Did you ever live in Little Rock, Arkansas?"

Virginia nodded.

"When I was a child," she said.

Chiostro rubbed his hands together and chuckled.

"An old romance, eh? But why do you both look so tragic? Were you parted by a lovers' quarrel?"

Virginia turned her strange gaze upon him for a fleeting moment.

"It *was* a tragedy," she said. Then she put her hands to her face. "Oh, dear, oh, dear!" she moaned. "Oh, what am I going to do?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"What's the matter with the girl?" he demanded of Chiostro.

"I don't know. Little sphinx maiden, sit down and take things easy. Here's mamma with a nice cup of tea for you. Nico, good lad, give the fire a poke, will you? Now we'll try to find out what it's all about."

Mme. Chiostro, entering with the burdened tray, glanced casually at Virginia, as if the sight of a grief-stricken girl being comforted by her husband was nothing out of the ordinary.

"Do you want me to pour?" she asked.

"No, mamma. You run away again. Nico and I will take care of the sphinx maiden."

Mme. Chiostro gave a faint sigh of relief as she departed. As her husband said, she was there when wanted, but never in the way.

"You know, Nico won't eat you," said Chiostro. "That savage glare of his means nothing."

Nicholas thrust his hands into his pockets and lolled clumsily against the mantelpiece, looking down at Virginia with a thoughtful, wondering expression.

"I guess you remember me better than I do you," he said. "What did I ever do to you to scare you so?"

"It's what I did to you," Virginia replied.

Chiostro cut himself a big slice of cake and munched it, rolling his eyes from one to the other.

"What did you do to me?" demanded the young painter.

"Don't you remember? The cherry tree? The swing?"

An expression as of black lightning swept his features.

"I had nothing else to think of for five years," he said; "nothing but that and watching the flies on the ceiling. I was strapped to a board flat on my back for five years—but it didn't do any good, as you can see. Were you in the meadow that day? Were you the kid whose lunch I ate?"

"I pushed you—in the swing when it broke," said Virginia. "I thought you were killed."

"I wish to God I *had* been killed!" he exclaimed passionately.

"Oh, come now, come now!" said Chiostro. "You've told me yourself that your life would have been quite different if it hadn't been for that accident. You might never have discovered your great talent, or found anybody to take an interest in you."

"That's true," Nicholas said with bitter emphasis. "My great talent! Great enough to starve — dragging through life with a sick body, when I should have leaped and bounded. What would you choose for yourself?"

"I would choose my art," Chiostro said.

"That's because you don't know what physical suffering is."

"No—it's because I do know what art is. Behold, a woman nobly and subtly beautified by the memory of your tragedy, and a man who will one day be a great painter. But for that, neither of you might ever have been heard of. This poor child blames herself—"

"Pah! She needn't," growled Nicholas.

He looked at Virginia contemptuously. Let her suffer! What were her sufferings compared to his? But he had no notion of blaming her for that accident of long ago.

"I must go," Virginia said, suddenly aware that the afternoon had waned. "Mother will be terrified. She doesn't know where I am."

"I'll drive you back to your hotel," said Chiostro. "Wait just a moment until I fetch my hat and coat."

He left them alone together.

"Shall I see you again?" asked Nicholas Wayne.

Virginia looked up at him, her eyes silently pleading. She wanted her freedom. She wanted him to say that he bore her no grudge, so that she could be happy, as she had been since Nevill had opened the exquisite door of love to her.

"I must see you again!" He spoke imperatively now.

"We are only in Paris for a few days," Virginia faltered.

"Then come here to-morrow. I want to talk to you. I want to tell you about my life. Will you come? It's not easy for me to get up and down those stairs, or I wouldn't trouble you, but—"

"Yes, I'll come," Virginia agreed hurriedly.

X

VIRGINIA got back to the hotel only a few moments behind her mother and Mrs. Shaw, and there was Nevill just arrived. They were all three in the lounge, a little perturbed, yet convinced that she could not be far away, in spite of the fact that the abandoned Hedges could tell them nothing.

Chiostro came in with her, and made his apologies to Edith.

"It is entirely my fault. You must not scold her," he said.

He was quite gracious to Edith, for a change.

Nevill's arrival was a surprise. He had not been expected until to-morrow or the next day. He was so boyishly pleased to see her, and Chiostro was so voluble and friendly, that Edith hadn't the heart to scold Virginia for roaming around Paris all day by herself. They asked Chiostro to dine with them, but he declined. There was something Mephistophelian in his expression as he glanced sidewise at the pale Virginia, and said hurriedly, in parting:

"Nico tells me you will look in again. That is good! Here is our address."

He gave her a card with the address scribbled in lead pencil.

A swift and subtle change had come over her, scarcely perceptible, at first, to her mother or Nevill. They thought she was merely a little tired.

"Now we'd better dress and go out somewhere to dinner," Edith said gayly. "Really, Molly, you and I are getting to be fearful gadabouts. What would our husbands say?"

"I don't think you're looking after them properly," Nevill remarked to his fiancée. "Your mother is so incurably young. Did she give you much trouble when you were a child, Virginia?"

Molly Shaw laughed heartily, but although Edith joined in, she did not quite like the way Nevill had put it. She knew she was a little frivolous, and staid, quiet Virginia sometimes made her feel ridiculous. Moreover, when one is past forty, one doesn't like to be called "incurably young." It means that one is trying, or pretending—making an obvious effort.

"You're a cheeky boy," she said. "Come, Jinny, I think you ought to lie down for half an hour. We'll dine here, after all—unless you specially want to go out, Molly."

"I don't mind in the least," Mrs. Shaw replied, with a little yawn.

She stayed behind in the lounge with Nevill. The O'Dares went to their rooms.

"Order me a cocktail, Nevill—that's a dear."

Nevill ordered it, and one for himself. They retired into a corner for a cousinly chat.

"Well, what's the news?"

"Nothing special, except that I'm here," Nevill replied. "Virginia looks a bit fagged. Aren't you overdoing that trousseau business?"

Molly lifted her shoulders languidly.

"Edith and I may be overdoing it. Virginia isn't. She's been mooning about by herself all day."

"Where did she run into Chiostro?"

"Don't ask me."

Without any particular reason that he could give, even to himself, Nevill felt uneasy. Virginia was tired—any one could see that; but she had looked at him with the frightened, haunted eyes of her famous portrait. It was all there in her face—the strange soul that Fedor Chiostro had painted, the shadowed, burdened soul, suffering and distressed.

A little fear clutched Nevill—just a vague, feeble grip of apprehension that perhaps she had suddenly discovered that she didn't care for him any more. This hotel afforded a poor setting for intimate confidences. He wished he could have Virginia alone for a little while in the familiar environment of South Audley Street; or, best of all, that they were safely married and at home.

All the while the clever eyes of his wise cousin were questioning him. Molly was almost too much a woman of the world. He caught her glance through a filmy haze of cigarette smoke, and resented it.

"Well," he said jauntily, "if you'll excuse me, I think I'll go up and change. The train was filthy, and I feel like a pig."

"Poor Nevill!" murmured Molly.

"What do you mean?" His voice was suddenly sharp.

"Nothing. I wish you wouldn't catch me up so!" Her voice was pettish.

They parted with the mutual conviction that something had been left unsaid—something concerning Virginia; yet neither had the faintest idea what it could be.

Virginia was glad that her mother left her alone, confident in the belief that the girl would lie down and rest for a little while. She entered her room and closed the door. Then she went to one of the windows overlooking the Rue de Rivoli, and parted the curtains. Lights flashed up, dotting the gardens across the way, and the street swarmed with noisy traffic. It was a familiar scene—Paris very busy at half past six in the evening, with everybody going home or elsewhere.

Her attitude was that of a sleepwalker. Something which had for a time relaxed its cruel hold on her had caught her again. Nicholas Wayne! She repeated the name, shivering with cold. If only she had gone to the Louvre with Hedges, instead of wandering around by herself! But it was too late to think of what she might or should have done.

It was more terrible than if Nicholas had died. His whole warped life stood out before her like the printed pages of a book. She didn't need him to tell her about it. She knew it all.

With fearful powers of imagination she saw him being carried back unconscious from the meadow to his sordid home in the Ditch. All the homes in the Ditch had been sordid. Perhaps he had no father, and his mother had supported her family by taking in washing. And then the doctor had come, and had said that Nicholas must go to the hospital, where they had then taken him to endure five years of horror.

She had known that some day that bough would break! Wasn't it a clear proof of her guilt that when Nicholas had shouted and urged her to push him higher, she had listened half expectantly for the ominous creak of the old wood?

Gropingly she explored the dim aisles of memory. She hated Nicholas Wayne!

So often she had murdered him in her dreams, the adored Nicholas of her childhood; but now that she had seen him again, knew how he had suffered, seen him crippled in body and warped in brain, she hated and feared and loathed him.

She drew a hand swiftly across her eyes, as if to blot out the vision of that cold, white face, that jeering smile. According to Chiostro—who was not given to unmerited praise—Nicholas was talented, and might become famous if he chose, but he didn't care about it. He was dead to everything but his lost youth, the years of pain he had suffered, and his disappointed manhood.

Edith tapped at the door that separated their rooms.

"Darling, are you awake? I think you'd better dress now."

"Yes, mother."

The door opened. Edith was full of chatter, and wanted to be hooked into her frock. She scolded just a little.

"You know, darling, you shouldn't have gone off by yourself like that, and I'm not at all sure that I approve of your going to Chiostro's studio, even though he is a great friend of yours. In London—well, London's different. I hope Mme. Chiostro was there!"

"Yes, she was there," said Virginia.

XI

THERE was every reason in the world against Virginia's keeping the engagement with Nicholas Wayne. To begin with, her own inclination was opposed to it. She did not wish to see him again; but now he had become a definite fact in her brain, no longer merely a nebulous personality. Nicholas Wayne was an idea made flesh and blood, a disincarnate bogy come to life; and if the memory of him had haunted her, the living man had power to break her spirit completely, even to ruin her life, should he choose to do so. She could no more resist or oppose him than previously she had been able to ignore the idea.

Nevill had laid her ghost for a brief season. He had taken her by the hand out into the sunshine of realities, and had showed her what a happy woman she ought to be. But although Nevill had laid the ghost, Virginia knew that he could not help her when it came to the living man.

She ought to do something for Nicholas Wayne. A little shamed by the thought, she wondered if money could mend matters. Would it be an insult to offer him money as some slight compensation for all he had suffered? The attic in the Rue Geneviève looked poverty-stricken, and doubtless Nicholas required many things which he could not afford. Struggling artists were always being assisted, and history scarcely recorded an instance of false pride rising above their urgent need.

Perhaps, thought Virginia, her father—poor harassed man!—could spare a couple of thousand dollars for Nicholas; or there was Nevill. After they were married, she and Nevill together would do something for the poor fellow. But there was no real conviction in her mind that money would solve this problem. There are some determining facts in life over which money has no power at all.

That evening she sat with Nevill in a corner of the hotel drawing-room, and they discussed the details of their approaching marriage. In another fortnight the important event would be safely over. By this time, of course, the bridesmaids had been chosen, and the invitations were out. Edith, always forehanded, had almost completed all arrangements, except that she would probably go on adding to the trousseau up to the lost moment, since shopping was a personal weakness of Virginia's mother.

Nevill did most of the talking. He was still uneasy concerning that something in the air which he could not define, and Molly Shaw's mysteriously veiled remarks had made him uncomfortable; but he told himself that it was ridiculous to imagine for a moment that Virginia cared any the less for him. It was flattering to observe that, if anything, she seemed to care rather more. Her shadowed eyes dwelt upon his face with hungry devotion, she slipped her hand into his when they could be sure no one saw, and when he talked about Davies Hall she sighed quickly and said:

"Oh, Nevill, I do wish it was all over, and we were home!" She brought out the word "home" with a shy self-consciousness that filled him with tender delight. "I know it's wicked to wish time away, but I can't help it. I want everything to be over. I want to belong to you and to be at home with you. Then, and then only, will life begin. Nothing else seems real. Mother says being engaged is the happiest time of a girl's life, and I thought so, too—until recently. Does it sound forward to say that I wish I were your wife?"

"I imagine you know what I think about that," Nevill replied. "What has happened, Virginia? I mean, since you've been here."

There was this curious understanding between them, inexplicable to both, that they seemed to read each other's mind by instinct.

"Nicholas Wayne," Virginia replied. "He's alive. I saw him to-day at Fedor Chiostro's."

Nevill whistled under his breath.

"That's a curious coincidence! Tell me about it."

Virginia told him. There wasn't much, of course, but imagination supplied the lacking details.

"Poor devil!" Nevill exclaimed. "You

mustn't let it prey on your mind, darling. Remember, you promised me—"

"I promised something quite different," said Virginia. "I didn't even know he was alive. I hadn't the faintest idea I should ever see him again. I must try to do something for him, Nevill!"

"Yes, yes—we both will. I'll go with you to-morrow."

"Oh, no! You don't understand. Nicholas would simply hate it, if we patronized him together. That's what it would look like. I must go alone, but you can help me. You—you can cover my tracks." She laughed nervously. "You see, I haven't said anything to mother. It would worry her if she knew that I had brooded over this thing so long."

Nevill frowned.

"You want me to take you to Chiostro's place and leave you to talk to the fellow?"

"Please, Nevill! Mme. Chiostro is there. Poor Nicholas is a cripple. There couldn't be anything you would object to."

"What does he want to see you for?"

"I don't know. He said something about telling me about his life. It can't hurt me to humor him."

"Stuff and nonsense!"

"Then, if you won't help me, I must manage for myself."

"What do you want me to do?" Nevill asked, frowning darkly into space.

"Just take me to the door. There's a little café at the corner—"

"There always is," Nevill muttered.

"You could wait there."

"For how long?"

"Until I've seen Nicholas."

"A quarter of an hour?"

By this time Nevill had completely forgotten being swamped by a wave of sympathy for Nicholas Wayne.

"Not more than an hour, certainly," Virginia replied.

Here was the stubborn Virginia, the Virginia whose purpose could be deadly, the Virginia whom Molly Shaw and Edith had found such a heavy weight to carry when it suited her not to fall in with their wishes. Like her mother and Molly, Nevill gave it up.

"Oh, well!" he said grudgingly.

"Thank you, dear."

"I don't like it at all," he grumbled.

"I can't see why. It will make me feel so much more comfortable if I know you're waiting for me at the corner."

"I don't mean that. Of course I don't mind waiting for you anywhere, as long as you like; but I don't see the sense of your going."

Virginia sighed. Nevill, who understood her so well, surely ought to understand how it was. She had to do what Nicholas Wayne asked her to do, and on the surface his request was simple and natural enough. He had known her as a child, and she was intimately and most unfortunately connected with the tragedy of his life. Why shouldn't he wish to tell her about it? Couldn't Nevill see that she could no more refuse to listen than she could help drawing breath?

And how could she possibly take Nevill with her? Unless Chiostro had told him, Nicholas Wayne didn't know that she was engaged to be married, and it would be—what was the word?—indelicate, presumptuous, uncalled for, to bring Nevill with her. It would look as if they had come to patronize, if not something a little worse.

Patiently she tried to explain to Nevill how lame Nicholas was, and what a misanthrope she suspected him to be; and yet he was a genius, according to Chiostro.

She did not tell Nevill that she feared and almost, if not quite, hated Nicholas Wayne. It seemed unfair to Nicholas—proof that her resentment was born of her own guilty conscience. It must be got over, and that could only be done by establishing sympathy between herself and Nicholas by letting him tell her what he wanted to, by asking him to forgive her, if he could.

It surprised and hurt Virginia to find Nevill so hard to deal with, to realize that he could not see eye to eye with her in this important matter. He thought it could be settled in fifteen minutes, if there was any necessity to settle it at all. Yet how clearly she had told him, when first they became engaged, that the tragedy of Nicholas Wayne had affected her whole life, had obsessed her to such an extent that people discussed her "queerness," and Fedor Chiostro saw and painted it! Now that she had met Nicholas again, he could not be dismissed with casual pity.

There was no quarrel, because it was impossible to quarrel with Virginia O'Dare. The thing had never been done. She simply sat wide-eyed under Nevill's sharp protests, and repeated:

"I wish I could make you understand, dear!"

Perhaps Nevill understood all too well. At least, he thought of an aspect of the affair which had not remotely occurred to Virginia. He knew that under the spell of this obsession, or belief, or consciousness of responsibility, she could be led far by the man Nicholas Wayne.

And the man was an unknown quantity to Nevill. Virginia's description of him did not inspire admiration or confidence—a crippled, bad-tempered painter starving in a Paris attic. Would he not be too ready to seize upon any advantage? How long would it take him to learn that he held Virginia in the hollow of his hand, as far as her conscience was concerned? Perhaps he knew it already.

Nevertheless, the next day, Nevill went with her to the house in the Rue Geneviève. How he detested the sight of that gloomy barrack, with its shuttered windows like heavy-lidded eyes! Then he adjourned to the café at the corner, just across from the garden filled with broken statuary and weeds, and waited patiently for her over a tumbler of vile coffee and innumerable cigarettes.

It came suddenly to Nevill, out of the soft haze of the autumn sky, that he detested Paris.

(*To be continued in the May number of* MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

MAN, THE DESTROYER

O SPIRIT of Life, by whatso'er a name
  Known among men, even as our fathers bent
Before thee, and as little children came
  For counsel in Life's dread predicament,
Even we, with all our lore,
  That only beckons, saddens, and betrays,
Have no such key to the mysterious door
  As he that kneels and prays.

The stern ascension of our climbing thought,
  The martyred pilgrims of the soaring soul,
Bring us no nearer to the thing we sought,
  But only tempt us further from the goal;
Love flees with frightened eyes the world it knew,
  Fades and dissolves and vanishes away,
And the sole art the sons of men pursue
  Is to outspeed the slayer and to slay.

Life! is it sweet no more? The same blue sky
  Arches the woods; the green earth, filled with trees,
Glories with song, happy it knows not why,
  Painted with flowers and warm with murmurous bees;
This earth, this golden home,
  Where men, like unto gods, were wont to dwell,
Was all this builded, with the stars for dome,
  For man to make it hell?

Was it for this life blossomed with fair arts,
  That for some paltry leagues of stolen land,
Or some poor squabble of contending marts,
  Murder shall smudge out with its reeking hand
Man's faith and fanes alike;
  And man be man no more—but a brute brain,
A primal horror mailed and fanged to strike,
  And bring the Dark again?

Fool of the Ages! Fitfully wise in vain;
  Surely the heavens shall laugh!—the long, long climb
Up to the stars, to dash him down again!
  And all the travail of slow-moving Time
And birth of radiant wings,
  A dream of pain, an agony for naught!
Highest and lowest of created things,
  Man, the proud fool of thought.

Richard Le Gallienne

Adjustments

IT IS A WISE WOMAN WHO KNOWS WHEN TO SAY YES OR NO — OR NOTHING

By E. F. Benson

FLORENCE MEDLICOTT closed her eyes for a few moments' rest and relaxation when her nephew, with whom she had dined and spent a solitary evening, finally went upstairs—not, as he was careful to explain to her, to go to bed, but to get an hour's quiet reading before doing so. He said that he did not usually occupy his brain with serious thought immediately before retiring, but he had positively done nothing all day except amuse himself.

It made his aunt feel tired to hear that, for to her knowledge he had spent a couple of hours at the British Museum in the morning, had attended a lecture at the French Institute that afternoon, and had endeavored to make her grasp the more elementary principles of relativity since dinner. Seymour was only nineteen, but he made her feel ninety. How her sister Isabel could possibly be his mother seemed to Florence one of nature's profoundest enigmas.

Hardly less difficult to explain was how he could possibly be the son of his late and little lamented father; but certainly the less he was like his father the better, and she was content to accept that without any demur. Seymour was only staying with her for a few days, for he had just arrived from a six months' sojourn in France, where he had been perfecting himself in the elegant tongue of that country, and he was shortly starting for Weimar with similar intentions in regard to German.

Florence saw with amazement that the hour was still only half past ten. In order to while away the time before her sister's return from her dinner and theater, she pulled a card table toward her and began occupying herself with some vague sort of patience. She did not usually indulge herself with so futile a pastime, except when she felt unwell, but to-night she wished to distract her mind from the thought of the talk which was soon due. She played it, in fact, with the intention of people in the waiting room of a doctor's house, who turn over the pages of ancient picture magazines as they wait for the step outside and the opening of the door which will summon them to their interview.

Even as that simile occurred to her, she realized that it must not be too strictly applied, for it was she, correctly speaking, who was soon to occupy the physician's rôle, and it was the step of the consultant for which she waited. The consultant was likely, so she guessed, to be rather obstinate, and to find the advice that was ready for her highly distasteful. She might, indeed, entirely refuse to take it; but Florence had made up her mind that no other treatment could possibly be successful.

She sat near the window in the front room on the ground floor, bending her shrewd, rather heavily lined face over the cards, and making quick, decided dispositions of them. The night was hot, the sashes behind the drawn blinds were open, and a medley of itinerant noises came drifting in. There were clacking heels on the pavement outside, disjected fragments of laughter and conversation, the warning hoots of motors at the corner of the square, and the faint cracklings of their studded wheels on the roadway.

A few doors away a dance was going on, and sometimes Florence thought that wheels had stopped at her door, and that in a moment she would hear the rattle of a latchkey. At that she would immure herself in her foolish patience again, for she wanted Isabel to think that she just casually happened to be sitting up for her. That would serve the purpose of the few introductory

remarks about the weather and so forth, with which the physician prefaced business.

At last a motor stopped precisely outside, and she heard two voices. Isabel's was unmistakable, and it was with certainty that Florence conjectured the other. The two had plenty to say, and their laughter seemed to indicate that it was of an amusing nature. Then came the rattle of the latchkey, an audible " good night," and the closing of the front door.

II

FLORENCE looked up as the radiant arrival entered, with laughter still hovering round her mouth and lurking in her dark eyes.

" Alone?" Isabel said. " Seymour's gone to bed?"

" Yes, a few minutes ago," replied Florence. " Relativity—most interesting."

Isabel Avesham's eyebrows raised themselves in a query as she saw her sister's occupation, and she advanced across the room with a quickened movement. She walked with a boyish ease and litheness, as if with simmering energy in reserve.

" Patience?" she said. " Darling, you're not ill, are you?"

Florence paused, apparently considering the destruction of the card in her hand. She wedged in, so to speak, the thin end of the business.

" Not to my knowledge," she said. " Ah, there's a space for it! Really, I began to play patience because I thought it would be useful to see what it feels like to behave as if one were old. Before many years are up I shall be playing patience every evening, I suppose, just because it's after dinner and not yet bedtime. I think I shall like being old. It will be very tranquil!"

These carefully chosen remarks served their purpose—they faintly suggested the sort of thing that was coming.

" I wonder if it will be tranquil!" said Isabel. " I don't think I shall find it tranquillizing to be tranquil. I should be anxious and alarmed if I found myself getting tranquil. Please don't practice getting old any more, Florrie. It's a dismal occupation."

Florence swept the cards together.

" I entirely agree with you," she said. " Tell me about your evening. Tell me about your play."

Isabel laughed.

" It was the simpler sort," she said. " Somebody in pyjamas kept going to bed and getting up again."

" How marvelous! So like life," said Florence.

" I never thought of that! There were people under his bed, and sitting on his bed, and coming in most unexpectedly, and telephoning; but we roared with laughter."

" I don't even know who ' we ' are," said Lady Medlicott. " I only found your note when I came in, saying you were going to the play, and would be out for dinner."

Isabel settled herself in a low chair, with a cigarette.

" My dear, what a liar you are!" she observed. " You know perfectly well who ' we ' were. Aren't you a liar?"

" I am," said Florence. " I guessed quite easily with whom you were going, and who it was who saw you home and chatted on the doorstep. Any one else?"

" No—just Tom Langham and I."

They had pushed off into mid stream by now, but it was with the intonation of a new idea that Florence spoke.

" Inclined for a little talk?" she asked.

Isabel gave a chuckle of laughter.

" That means that you are," she said. " To find you playing patience was evidence enough. You weren't practicing for old age, darling; you were waiting for me to come in, and planning to corner me. I know your diplomatic methods. Well, I'm cornered. You begin!"

Florence discarded her diplomacy and was singularly direct.

" I want dreadfully to know what you mean to do about Tom Langham," she said.

" I don't in the least mind telling you. When he asks me to marry him, I shall do so."

" And if he doesn't?" asked Florence.

Isabel's brilliant gaze circled round the room in a hovering flight before it settled on her sister again.

" I suppose, in that case, I shall not do so," she said; " but I don't reckon with that. He will ask me to marry him."

" And are you in love with him?"

Isabel's eyes seemed to dance on her sister's like specks of sunlight on dark water.

" I'm not quite certain," she said. " Now don't interrupt me with your quickness, and say that that means that I am not. I'm very near it, anyhow. A single turn of the screw may do it. We're the greatest friends. He's good-looking, he's young, and I find him perfectly charming."

Florence felt the pitilessness of her questioning, but she would not have been pitiless if she had cared less.

"And he?" she asked. "Is he in love with you?"

"My dear, what a catechism!" returned Isabel. "He's there or thereabouts. He's fascinated by me; he thinks me marvelous. He's on the point of being in love with me. How cold blooded it sounds when I put it into words!—and that's a wrong impression to give you."

Florence got up and regarded her own elderly shrewdness in the glass above the mantelpiece. She wanted, somehow, to remind herself of that by way of a tonic to her relentlessness.

"But he hasn't proposed to you yet," she said. "I'll tell you why that is. He is wanting to adjust himself to the situation, to look it in the face. He finds you adorable, darling, and I'm sure I don't wonder; but he has to face the fact that he's only twenty-five years old—I know that, because I looked him up just now in the 'Snobs' Bible'—and you're forty. That sounds absurd, but it's a fact, and you may be sure that his mother has told him. He's considering it — that's what he's doing. He's wondering whether in the years to come it won't terribly disagree with him if he swallows it."

Isabel's brightness had partly faded from her face. She rose and stood by her sister, also looking into the glass. It would have been almost as easy to imagine that their relationship was that of mother and daughter as to realize their sisterhood. Though there was scarcely ten years between them, age had set its stamp on the one face as surely as youth still blossomed on the other.

"That doesn't concern me," she said. "It's his business."

Florence shook her head.

"It will be the business of both of you, if you marry him," she said; "though I grant you that if you were in love with him, nothing would seem to concern you except that fact."

The brightness kindled on Isabel's face again.

"Perhaps, then, I am in love with him!"

"That would account for your letting sense and prudence go hang, for you would be blind to everything else but that. As a matter of fact, you aren't quite blind to everything else. You have a quantity of admirable reasons, ready to be produced for my benefit, to prove that you should marry him. If you were really in love with him, you would merely laugh in my face or yawn in it. To be in love is excuse enough for any folly."

Florence paused for a moment.

"I must justify that word," she went on. "It isn't that I call you a fool, for fools never commit follies. Fools only go maundering along, and the follies, so to speak, commit themselves. It is dear, splendid women who commit follies, and you're on the brink of an immense one. You're forty, and he's twenty-five, so that you'll be fifty—nearly as old as I am, and look carefully at me in the glass there—when he is thirty-five. Oh, Isabel, what manner of wife is a crone of fifty to a young man of thirty-five? Which of you would be the more miserable—you with your wrinkles, or he with his vigor? I grant you all the splendors of your youth now. I allow that no one in his senses would think you over thirty. But the years take their inevitable revenges. They will sit around you, ever so many of them, and make mock of you, each of them more hideous than the last."

Isabel's face remained unclouded under the pelting of these dismal prophecies.

"My dear, what a croaking noise!" she observed. "Fancy looking ten years ahead! Who cares about what happens ten years from now? Years last an enormous time. One's horizon doesn't contain more than one or two."

"They come up quickly," said Florence.

"I don't agree. Each one stays so long—at least, mine have, and it's mine we're talking about." She turned away, and now the cloud came over her face. "For nearly twenty years of my life," she said, "each year has been a century. The same years have made you peaceably and gradually old, but in spite of all their battering they've left me young. I refused to submit, I wouldn't give in, and do you suppose that I'm going to give in now, when happiness has dawned on me? You've had your life, Florence. You can look back on it, and stroke it, and make it purr to you—"

"My dear, I didn't mean—" began Florence.

Isabel interrupted her.

"But you should have meant," she said, "for it all concerns my decision. Supposing you had been tied to a brute of a husband for eighteen years, and had stood up to your misery and kept your youth in spite

of it, wouldn't you make the most of it when the struggle was over? What was the use of struggling, otherwise? Wouldn't you feel that life owed you something? When life, even late, came toward you with its hands full of gifts and wonderful things, would you turn your back on them, and say 'It's too late'? You told me I had plenty of admirable reasons to give you, and there they are for you. You inferred that I was not in love, and perhaps that's true; but oh, my dear, he's adorable! I can't argue, and I don't want to. You always had the brains of the family."

Isabel took a turn up and down the room.

"To console you for having utterly failed to affect me," she went on, "I'll tell you that you said one very shrewd thing. You suggested something that hadn't occurred to me before, and I think you must be right about it. For the last two days I've wondered sometimes why Tom didn't propose to me, and perhaps you've guessed the reason. He's getting used to the idea of marrying a woman who is—well, just a shade his senior. I don't like the notion. It rather revolts me."

"I'm delighted to hear it," said Florence.

"How very disagreeable of you! But don't take any comfort to yourself because of that, for I shall swallow it. In fact, I shall have a quiet few days in which to cut it up small and eat it in pieces, for Tom is going into the country to-morrow, and won't be back till the end of the week. Now I think it's bedtime—don't you? I give you a kiss to show that I forgive you for all the disagreeable things you've said, and another because you're a darling!"

Florence lifted her face toward the beautiful bent head.

"My dear, I feel a brute," she said; "but that's an illusion, because I'm anything but that. I only desire your happiness, but I do desire it with my head as well as my heart."

"As if I don't know that! But there's one thing you don't know, and that is what the hunger for happiness is, when you've starved for it for years!"

III

STRONG attraction, as Isabel began to find during the first two days of Tom Langham's absence, is not static in quality. It does not, that is to say, continue to exercise a stable, uniform force. Nor is it of the nature of some strain or pull which, if powerless to overcome the inertia of a certain object, remains forever incapable of moving it. Its action is rather that of some chemical process, which spiritually enkindles until —unless the ash of habit or disillusionment quenches it—a flame burns.

Some such process was at work in Isabel Avesham, and perhaps the very fact that the young man was away from her furthered the working of it. She missed him with an acuteness that surprised her. Not at first did she realize what was stirring and fermenting within her. She had moments of dismay when she pondered on Florence's odious surmise that Tom Langham was adjusting himself, looking the future in the face.

The thought of that had been repugnant to her even while she said it did not concern her. Now it began to concern her very intimately; and the closer it came to her, the more icy was its touch. She shuddered at it, and snatched at the cold fingers that clutched her, to unloose their hold.

There were other thoughts, too, that she discovered creeping about her mind, like folk who grope through some encompassing fog. These also must be wrestled with and mastered. They had peering eyes and stealthy glances, and as she caught them and scrutinized them, she knew that she wondered whether she was as confident as she had said about Tom's devotion.

It was scarcely likely that his affections were now engaged for the first time. How easily it might be that before he offered himself to her, he was now making a last appeal to some girl who had refused him! The notion had no foundation in knowledge, but jealousy needs neither clay nor straw for the making of its bricks. It builds with monstrous substantiality out of nothing at all.

The fact that Isabel had not heard from him was material enough to rear such an edifice of suspicion. If she had had a letter, she could have found a quarry in whatever he wrote.

As the change in her progressed, however, these imaginings withered on their sapless stalks, and a sense of starvation at Tom's absence came overwhelmingly upon her. It was not such starvation as that of which she had spoken to Florence, a starvation bitter and aching. It was a starvation sweet and exquisite, which feeds magically on the manna of thought, and, while it stays

its craving thus, securely waits for the true banquet to be spread.

Then the flame burst out. She was in love with him, and she knew that she was in love with him!

Florence, shrewd, wise Florence, had said that this alone would justify Isabel in letting prudence and reason go hang. With the blindness of love to guide her, it would account for her committing the immeasurable folly of marrying a man fifteen years her junior.

With the illumination bright about her, Isabel could have laughed at the amazing ignorance of these wise folk. What was Florence thinking of?

IV

It was late. An hour ago her sister had gone up to bed, but the clear shining in Isabel's heart made an insistent and immediate call to her. It clamored for the assertion of its own superb renunciation. Florence must know, not to-morrow, but to-night, how false had been her shrewdness. That clever, plausible conclusion of hers must be stamped on. Isabel found herself thinking of it as some baleful insect that could no more be permitted to live than those jealousies which had grouped about her own uncomprehending brain.

She went along the passage to her sister's room, and entered. Florence was already in bed, and the room was in dimness, with just a circle of light from the shaded lamp illuminating the book she read.

"Isabel!" she said. "What is it, my dear? Nothing wrong?"

Isabel sat down on the side of her sister's bed.

"No—something right," she said. "I couldn't wait. I had to come to tell you now."

Something in her voice, some exultant vibration, caused her sister to tilt back the shade of her lamp and throw its illumination upon Isabel's face. Her voice had been a true interpreter. Exultation was radiant in her eyes and mouth.

"But what has happened?" Florence asked again.

Isabel gave a long sigh.

"Everything has happened," she said.

She put up her hand and turned the glare of the light away from her.

"My dear, when we talked the other night," she said, "we neither of us understood. We were at cross purposes. You told me that my being in love with Tom would justify my marrying him. I believed that I was justified in marrying him without being in love with him. I love him—that is clear to me now, and what you thought would justify me is just what makes my marriage impossible. Don't you see now that it must be so? I can see nothing else but that."

There was a long silence. Isabel's hand sought and clasped her sister's, and held it tight.

"I've got to go through dark places, I expect," she said; "but I carry my lamp with me. It won't go out. Nothing will quench it, but the dark will be about me on every side."

She broke off again.

"I must be wise, too," she said. "If Tom asked me to marry him, I know I should not be able to refuse him. I couldn't do it. I'm flesh and blood, among other things. So he must not propose to me. If I don't prevent him, he will. Very likely you are right about his adjusting himself; but when he comes back, in a day or two now, he will have adjusted himself. I must prevent it. Oh, my dear, the years! The brutal things!"

Her breath caught in her throat for a moment.

"No, I'm not going to snivel," she went on. "I'm going to carry my heart high, with courage. It's of him that I must think. I must do all that has to be done with gayety and lightness. A stony way is intolerable, if you think about the stones. All that matters is where the way takes you, and what the way is. It's the royal road."

She stopped abruptly.

"Good night, you best of Florries," she added. "I had to come and tell you. I can't discuss it with you, either to-night or ever, I think. There's nothing to be said. If you used all the words in the dictionary ten times over, you wouldn't be able to say anything about it worth mentioning!"

V

Three mornings later the telephone conveyed an inquiry from Tom Langham as to whether Mrs. Avesham would be at home at half past eleven o'clock that day; and in answer to her welcoming response he appeared.

Isabel was not alone. A short young man with spectacles was with her. Appar-

ently he was in the middle of some voluble explanation, directing her attention with his forefinger to a chart that was spread on a table beside her low chair.

"Most interesting!" she was saying, as Tom entered. "Yes, dear, I think I understand, but you must tell me again. Ah, Mr. Langham! How nice to see you! Just back from the country?"

She grasped the arms of her chair, and with a wince hoisted herself on to her feet.

"You see me a perfect cripple," she said. "Nothing the matter, but I suppose, when one gets to my age, one must have something, and I have rheumatics. Ah, I forgot you don't know my son Seymour. Seymour, this is Mr. Langham."

She moved stiffly across to the fireplace and rang the bell twice.

"Seymour was just telling me the most wonderful things about the attraction of the sun on rays of light," she said. "Dreadfully difficult to understand, but most interesting, all the same. I long to know Mr. Einstein. Tell me what you've been doing. Wasn't the country delicious? I wonder how you tore yourself away to come back to this swelter of town!"

Florence Medlicott entered. The double ring had been a preconcerted signal. In the bright, reverberating glare that came in from the pavement outside through the unshaded windows, she looked amazingly wizen and old.

"You know my sister, don't you?" said Isabel. "You met the other night, surely? Yes, I thought so."

Tom Langham shook hands with Florence. He did remember her, but this was a new impression. Then he turned to Isabel.

"I just dropped in," he said, "to see if by good luck you were free this afternoon, and would care to drive down with me to Ranelagh. There's some polo—"

Florence interrupted.

"Dear Isabel," she said, "I must put my foot down about that. You would be awfully unwise to stand about, and perhaps get wet."

Isabel hastened to confirm this.

"Oh, I should have liked it," she said; "but—but I'm afraid my sister is right, Mr. Langham. Another day, perhaps."

He looked at her with kindly solicitude.

"I'm so sorry," he said. "It—it is treacherous weather. Well, I won't wait any longer now. I dropped in just to see whether you were disengaged and felt inclined. I hope you'll soon be better."

There was a moment's silence after he had gone out. Isabel's eyes met her sister's for one second.

"Now, Seymour," she said, "tell me more about that wonderful experiment!"

Seymour resumed his discourse.

"They adjusted the telescope so that when the eclipse came on—"

APRIL'S ANSWER

I ASKED of April why her smiles—
Was it for joy of love unborn,
When back across the weary miles
The birds return with rosy morn?
With sparkling eyes she looked at me,
Then turned and fled without reply—
She's like a child that laughs in glee,
But does not know the reason why.

I asked of April why her tears,
Was it for grief of love long dead,
That blossomed in the vanished years,
But drooped and died when summer fled?
She looked at me with streaming eyes,
Then hid her face without reply—
She's like a child that weeps and sighs,
But does not know the reason why.

William Wallace Whitelock

Exit Me and Cedric

A FEW FEET OF CELLULOID FILM THAT JUST ESCAPED BEING A COMPLETE EXPOSURE

By Frank Condon

I MAY as well confess openly, before all the customers, and without feeling ashamed, either, that I have been fired again. I have lost another job. My pay envelope has been amputated, and my employers, the Commonplace Motion Picture Corporation, have informed several of their friends that I am a person who is not to be intrusted with the serious responsibilities of business.

However, no disgrace attached to my dismissal. There was a good deal of annoyance, but no genuine infamy. As a matter of cold truth, I am just as good as I ever was. There is no better business manager, or efficiency expert, in all Hollywood than Thomas P. Whiteman—which is my label. Corporations wishing to employ a gifted executive, please write or wire, collect, general delivery, stating terms.

This makes the second time in one year that I have been unloaded by the Commonplace Corporation. After my first dismissal, they reëmployed me—which shows very clearly that they appreciate true merit. I am simply an unlucky individual. Misfortune drags around after me like a busted shoe lace.

My main difficulty seems to be that I lose things. I lose them, not through any fault of my own, but because I am a son of ill fortune. This time, I lost a full-grown leading man. You would scarcely think that an efficiency expert could lose a leading man, but it can be done.

He was working for George Mulberry. George is the peppery director with whom I was associated for seven active months, and who will swear on a stack of duck eggs that I can lose anything. They fired me eight months ago for losing two freight cars loaded with South Sea coconut palms, which had been made in Hollywood of Oregon pine, Pittsburgh nails, and Connecticut canvas.

A business manager for a movie unit has his own troubles, believe me. Above all, he is supposed not to lose things—which explains why I am now reading the want advertisements with a careful eye as to their personal application.

As you probably do not know or care, every motion picture unit begins with the director, who is the king upon his throne. It includes his personal staff, his mechanical staff, his electrical staff, his technical staff, his actors, his camera men, and his script girl. In the case of the Commonplace Corporation, it included a business manager, or efficiency hound, whose job is chaos and desperation, and whose life is one long-drawn sob of delirious misery.

That's what I was. I was the official who paid off the help, hired the cooks on location, rented tents, leased steamers, and ran errands. I also coaxed temperamental actors back to work; calmed indignant leading ladies who discovered their names in small type; discharged prop men for being audibly pickled; beat down the rent charges of aeroplane companies; trundled the outfit to the location; and saw that everybody had the best seats at the mess table, the best beds, a phonograph to amuse them after supper, hot water to bathe in, and so forth, without let or hindrance.

The business manager of a movie company does everything, beginning with the purchase of the railway tickets and winding up with the exciting job of clipping hangnails for the leading lady. He is held responsible by the corporation, and his main purpose in life is to keep down the cost of the production. He is also the bleating goat when anything goes wrong. That's the job, and Tom Whiteman is acknowl-

edged to be one of the slickest business managers that ever left Hollywood.

II

We were engaged, at the time, on a George Mulberry Special, which is simply a picture that costs more money than the other directors are allowed to spend. The name was, and still is, unless the New York office has changed it, "Left-Handed Money." It's about something or other, but I never knew the plot.

A business manager seldom knows what the story is about, and he doesn't want to know. He has enough troubles without that. Moreover, he knows from experience that no matter what the story was yesterday, it is different to-day, and it will be different again to-morrow; so there's no sense in fretting about it.

It's a funny thing, how I happened to be bounced by the Commonplace Corporation, during the filming of this "Left-Handed Money." Naturally, it isn't so humorous to me, because of the new bungalow which isn't paid for yet, and the wife talking about a maid and a coupé; but it provided giggles for the rest of the boys and girls who accompanied us to Catalina.

Early in the year, the officials decided to make this particular picture, and some genius in the front office happened to think of Cedric Bendix, the great New York actor.

"There's the man!" they said.

"Yes, sir," agreed the official "yes, sir" chorus, which can be found in any well regulated studio. "That's the very man to play the lead in this new piece — Cedric Bendix."

And so it was. They began sending telegrams toward Forty-Second Street, and eventually Cedric Bendix, the celebrated Thespian, consented to come out to California and play the lead in what would be his initial appearance upon the silver sheet, so called because it isn't silver and it isn't a sheet.

Accompanied by a gentle trembling of the entire western continent, Cedric Bendix started from the Grand Central shed, and arrived in Hollywood, flanked by his man, and by five trunks filled with beautifully tailored male lingerie. An extra taxi carried his clippings. He turned out to be a high-power egotist, with an utter disdain for all motion pictures and a lofty personal manner.

Mr. Bendix was one of these actors who can strut sitting down. He was famous on Broadway, New York, and he knew it. Metropolitan critics had said in their reviews that Cedric Bendix, playing the rôle of *Dr. Bique* in the French pathological drama, "Too Late for Medicine," gave a performance of such acute realism that well persons in the audience went home sick, and some of them hovered over the grave for weeks.

Cedric's career was largely fostered and blown upon by these French therapeutic plays, which usually dealt with the indiscretions of youth, and which were, liberally speaking, the sort of plays a respectable citizen wouldn't be caught dead looking at. Nevertheless, he was renowned in New York, Brooklyn, Newark, Hoboken, and Bayonne, and he naturally expected humble Hollywood to bow the bended knee and knock the servile forehead on the pavement when he hove in sight.

Hollywood did nothing of the kind. Hollywood can take more unexpected shocks than any place in the known world. Nothing astounds Hollywood, or quickens its pulse. It fools provincial persons from Chicago and New York, because it has an innocently rural appearance.

A lynx-eyed reporter from the largest Sunday paper in New York spent three months visiting the place, and all he saw was cafeterias and the lack of an art museum. He returned to Park Row and wrote a number of pitying articles, and the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce had its secretary read them aloud later on before an audience that hadn't laughed so much in years.

Cedric Bendix started in immediately to win himself a loving cup full of carbolic acid. On his first day he looked scornfully around the studio, and announced that he could, personally and unassisted, direct better motion pictures than the trash turned out by the imbeciles there directing. He stated, in his jolly way, that motion picture actors knew nothing about acting as an art, and were an ignorant, unambitious, and vulgar lot, who would be hooted off the boards in New York. He averred that movie plays were food for children of six and under, and that, as far as he could see, every one connected with the intellectual end of movie production had acquired his intellect in a livery stable.

Of course, there may have been a grain

of truth in what Cedric said; but it was the way he said it. He wore a thin, baseball mustache—nine on each side—at which he plucked during his discourse. In no time at all he had endeared himself to the ladies and gentlemen of the Commonplace Corporation. They welcomed him each morning like an exposed nerve shouting a merry greeting to the dentist's oncoming drill.

And then we began making our little picture. We started on a bright Monday morning, and did a hundred or more scenes under glass. Then we packed our bags, and the entire company boarded the steamer and sailed over to the serene isle of Catalina, celebrated for its goats, gum, golf, and glass-bottomed boats.

Catalina is a large, irregular mountain top sticking up from the sea, with a cluster of little mountains sitting on the chest of the mother mountain. It was once an active volcano, I am told, and it is still more or less volcanic when George Mulberry starts yelling at his hired hands and the cameras begin buzzing.

The island provides excellent scenery for any diligent camera man with an artistic eye. Regardless of what your picture may be, if you need ocean, with a mountainous background, you purchase tickets for Catalina. I have business-managed at least two dozen companies among the goats.

The Mulberry unit was immediately quartered at the Isthmus Rancho, in a long, low, rambling house, which is now abandoned, but which was once a fine home, filled with piano lamps, phonographs, and all that goes to make a domicile of affluence. The company principals occupied the big house on the hill, and the lesser fry were scattered down the side of the mountain in abandoned bungalows, which in other days had sheltered society folks on their week-end frolics.

I shared a leaky cabin with Noah Campbell, our highest-salaried villain, who is one of the calmest, quietest villains in the profession, and who does not drink, use tobacco in any form, or snore in his sleep. Once I was forced, by circumstances entirely beyond my control, to try to sleep in the same cabin with Wally Young, a snoring fool—in fact, the world's champion indoor shatterer of repose; so I was glad to be paired off with Noah, who breathes through his ears after nine o'clock.

Of course, Cedric Bendix had a large, airy room to himself in the big house.

Our leading lady was a nice little fluff named Lillian Purcell, with large brown eyes and just enough sense, but not any more. She was comparatively new to the business, and whenever George Mulberry yelled at her, she just looked at him and burst into tears.

Cedric seemed to take a fancy to this Lillian person, and nobody approved of that, either. She was young and inexperienced, and whenever Cedric took her by the arm for a long stroll in the moonlight, every one growled, especially little Ray Lougher. There probably was no occasion for alarm, because no doubt Cedric spent his time telling Lillian of his greatness, and how he was lowering himself by stepping down into the films.

III

It is painful enough, even in the studio, to be associated with a leading man whom everybody dislikes, but on a lonely location, where you cannot escape the pest, it is agonizing indeed. There he is, prominently, at the three daily meals. There he is, after supper, when the company throws itself into the porch chairs for a smoke. In Cedric's case, there was no avoiding him. His voice grew louder and more repellent day by day.

He found the largest and softest chair, and regaled us nightly with tales of his triumphs in New York. He told us how much they paid him. He reviewed his entire life, and repeated with gusto what David Belasco had said to him that day at the Empire opening, and what he had wittily retorted to Dave, to the latter's confusion.

Likewise, he openly flirted with the fair Lillian, who was flattered, fluttered, and a bit triumphant, because, at the time, little Ray Lougher had begun to think of marrying Lillian and settling down in a permanent home. A permanent home in Hollywood, matrimonially speaking, is any home that gives the same name twice to the tax assessor.

The New York acting gentleman immediately cast little Ray into the shade, and resentment among the rest of us increased. Cedric insulted everybody who could understand the English language. He made himself pointedly disagreeable at meals, comparing the food with the sumptuous edibles to which he had been accustomed in New York. At this point Mr. Bendix touched

noses with death, because our location cook was a proud, haughty, and impulsive Swede, with a mixture of Indian blood, and somebody told him that Cedric said his soups tasted always exactly like dishwater, except when a fly drowned himself in the stuff, which imparted to it a slightly Mexican flavor.

Cedric grumbled over the sunshine, which was too strong for his eyes, and over the cool breeze at night, which was too chill. He moaned about the hardness of his bed. He told Mulberry that if I was in charge of the business details, the company ought to discharge me immediately and employ a competent man. He admitted that he was doing his reputation a genuine injury by stepping into motion pictures.

There was no escaping the Bendix voice or the Bendix person. After one week of him on Catalina, the company began to act like a platoon of irritated rattlesnakes who have been dining freely on their own poison. It's queer how one disagreeable human being can utterly destroy the *entente cordiale* of an entire company.

Noah Campbell approached me.

"I've stood for a lot of birds in my time," said Noah, who, as I said, is easy to get along with; "but I swear I can't go this Bendix another day. Seems to me I'll just naturally blow up!"

I grunted assent, and little Ray Lougher stepped in.

"He makes me sick," Ray said. "I've been sick before, but right now I am at my sickest."

"He should have remained in New York," I added, "where he is so popular. Catalina could get on quite easily without him."

Mr. George Mulberry also paused to say a few remarks.

"What do you think of our leading man?" I asked him, after a few days of Cedric.

"Well," said George thoughtfully, "I've directed them all, and I know. Bendix is the worst actor in the world. In the first place, he doesn't know how to act. In the second place, he hasn't enough intelligence to do what I tell him. What can you do with a gogo like that?"

"And it's too late to do anything about it."

"We'll finish up this picture," said George, "as fast as we can, and that ends the career of Mr. Bendix in Commonplace productions. As far as I'm concerned, Cedric is all washed up!"

IV

ONE week before the picture was finished, and with about a hundred scenes to be taken, George Mulberry drifted into one of his usual battles with the home office. George is always fighting with the corporation about something. It wouldn't be a Mulberry special without at least one bitter fracas.

This time George insisted upon burning up, clear to the water's edge, the company's only three-masted schooner, which is now the Victory, but which has also been the Three Seals, the Viking, the Toreador, the Abalone, and half a dozen other vessels. She changes her name with each water picture. Nice boat, too—cost the Commonplace forty thousand.

The Victory is a mighty useful piece of property, and can be used for years to come. When George decided to burn her up, you could hear the roars of Commonplace executives in the remote islands of the Seven Seas. A couple of them came over to see about it.

"No, George, you cannot burn up the schooner," they said.

"The hell I can't burn up the schooner!" retorted George. "Who's making this picture?"

"You are making it, George, but we are paying for it, and we don't want our boat destroyed. We are fond of our boat."

George turned a bright pink, which is his favorite hue when indignant.

"Get me an airplane!" he shouted, though I was only a foot away. "I'm going to burn that schooner, or they'll get a new boy to finish the job!"

In fifteen minutes I had a fast airplane warming up, and at noon George left for Hollywood, to tell the Commonplace Corporation what he thought of them. That left the Catalina unit under my command, if you forget about Archie Rivers, who is the assistant director.

George being gone, there was nothing to do, and the company went in swimming or fished for yellowtail. Noah Campbell came up the hill in the early afternoon, with a grim gleam in his blue eye.

"Certainly gets my goat!" he muttered, shaking his head and sitting down heavily.

Of course, I knew whom he meant.

"What we ought to do," Noah con-

tinued, gazing out across the calm blue ocean, "is to give that fellow the terrible murder."

"Go as far as you like," I said, in a moment of indiscreet impulse.

And thus it came about, with my consent, that the boys slipped Cedric the location murder, which is not unknown in film circles. A location murder is a movie device used now and then by annoyed people to cause momentary distress or perturbation in the minds of disagreeable ones with whom they are forced to labor, and whom they have just and continued cause to dislike. Heaven knows that we had legitimate reason for disliking Cedric.

In particular, little Ray Lougher was getting raw around the neckband. Lillian Purcell, being a young idiot, and a female besides, seemed to find great delight in walking, swimming, and talking with Mr. Bendix. Instead of turning away from Cedric, she smiled at him. She fully realized that Ray was miserable. Keeping a man miserable is a jolly sport to some women.

That afternoon, about three o'clock, the murder began to get under way, with a casual conversation between Noah Campbell and Ray Lougher, whom we had selected to be the principals. The front porch was occupied by Cedric, who lolled in the big chair. Ray and Noah came on. In the idle conversation that followed, Ray announced that one of the reasons why he had lost so much money shaking dice was because Noah Campbell was generally in the game.

"Just what do you mean by that crack?" asked Noah, who was sitting on the coping and trying to light a pipe.

"What I said," Ray answered. "Whenever you're in a crap game, I lose, and so does every one else."

"You mean I'm crooked?" continued Noah, standing up.

"Take it any way you like," Ray sneered —and he's a fine sneerer.

"You," said Noah deliberately, "are a so-and-so, likewise a this and that!"

I purposely omit Noah's actual words, on account of innocent girls who would be sure to read them.

Little Ray got up out of his chair, poked his finger almost into Noah's eye, and began a long, hypothetical insult. I was listening. Rarely have I heard one man call another what Ray called Noah. It was a complete recital, going far back into Noah's history, and including some of his relations, now dead. Everything that Ray said could be translated into sudden death; but just as the incident seemed about to reach the mortuary stage, Archie Rivers, assistant, walked out and dragged the little man off the porch.

It was as bitter a quarrel as any one ever listened to. The participants went their separate ways, muttering to themselves. Of course, Ray Lougher and Noah Campbell are bosom friends, and have always been. If you want to commit suicide, say something about Ray when Noah can hear you, or *vice versa*.

Cedric Bendix heard the quarrel without any particular interest.

V

THAT night, at supper, Noah, who generally sits beside Ray Lougher, absented himself, and there was comment. Ray ate in silence. The vacant chair seemed to stick out like a sore thumb.

When the meal was over, Ray invited Cedric to walk down the hill with him to his bungalow, which is a squat little cabin, half a mile from the big house, surrounded by trees. Cedric went along with Ray.

At ten minutes after seven, Cedric was in Ray's cabin, listening to a few words from Ray on the general topic of what a bum Noah was. The door opened, and Noah entered. His face was redder than usual, his stride was unsteady, and there was a wicked look in his eyes. He was unusually drunk—extraordinarily drunk, considering that he doesn't drink—and smoldering with rage.

Cedric glanced at him with an amused smile. The quarrel of the afternoon was immediately renewed. Cedric inhaled cigarette smoke and listened. Noah's rage increased momentarily, and Ray answered him with as good as he gave. Thus the battle worked up to its natural climax, which arrived when Noah pulled a gun, poked it against Ray's wishbone, and shot him dead. A capsule of red ink helped the illusion.

Mr. Bendix, who had so often given his unfavorable opinion of Hollywood acting, turned a dirty, grayish white, and gulped. With the shot, the body toppled into a corner and lay there, with the face against the wall.

Ray Lougher has often been killed in Mulberry Productions, and his dying is almost always a bit of genuine art. He can pass out more spasmodically than any other

man I know, and he did a bit of his best dying for Cedric.

Still holding his smoking gun, and with his face distorted by savage rage, Noah Campbell turned his attention to Mr. Bendix. Cedric rose up from his chair and started to leave, but Noah waved him down. This was at fifteen minutes after seven, Catalina time, because our homicide was running on a schedule.

"And you!" said Noah. "I may as well finish the job and put a hole through you!"

"Oh, please don't do that!" Cedric begged, taking on the color of ripe limburger. "I never did anything to you!"

"You saw me kill him," Noah growled. "You're a witness. I can kill you where you sit, stick the gun in your hand, and one in his, and claim you croaked each other. That lets me out."

Cedric attempted to talk, but only a faint sound came from between his chattering teeth. I have always regretted that I didn't see him during this large moment.

"You wouldn't kill me?" he said finally.

"You're no good!" Noah shouted. "You're a faker and a pest, and you ought to be dead, anyhow! I'd be doing the human race a favor if I laid you and that skunk in the corner in the same grave!"

Cedric rose up again, as if to protest, but Noah waggled the gun at him, and New York's foremost actor dropped into his chair with a smothered sob.

VI

DURING the next ten minutes Noah paced insanely to and fro in the lonely mountain shack, with the body of his victim still warm in one corner and a chattering coward in the other. It was Noah's intention to walk and debate thus—whether to shoot Cedric and remove the only eyewitness, or to swear him to eternal secrecy and let him live.

After ten minutes of this, Noah was to decide upon letting Cedric remain a live actor. He was then to administer some frightful sort of oath, which he would think up on the spur of the moment, the object being everlasting dumbness. Cedric was to be forced to his knees, and to swear by the seven sacred swans that he saw Ray Lougher attack Noah and lose his life in the battle that followed.

It was a fair enough plan, but, as often happens with fair plans, a button came off in an important place.

At the time, there were twenty-two members of the Mulberry company on Catalina, some of them in the big house and others in tents and cabins. It was my job to load the entire assemblage, actors, near-actors, camera men, electricians, props, and all, into a six-ton truck and drive to Ray Lougher's cabin at what might be called the psychological instant. This would be at the striking of half past seven, at the moment when Cedric Bendix would be on his knees, with his right hand raised to heaven. At least, we assumed he would take any sort of oath rather than be shot.

We would burst in upon the scene, laughing heartily, and pointing the finger of scorn at the annoyed Cedric, who would have to admit he had been badly taken in by a couple of movie actors of no great renown. He would also feel sort of cheap, we expected, and we would have a good deal of fun joshing him.

I was to drive the truck with my own fair hands, and I did so. Ten minutes before the zero hour, I loaded up with ladies and gentlemen, all quivering with expectation. Every one had been acquainted with the joke and wanted to be in at the finish, and so I started with a full load.

We giggled and chuckled all the way down the long hill, in anticipation of the ridiculous sight that would presently meet our eyes. In advance, we could just about see the embarrassment and annoyance of Mr. Bendix, and hear him tell us that he had known it was a joke all the time.

As some great prophet has truly said, no bird seeth into the future, or, if he seeth, he seeth wrong. As we rumbled around a turn in the rocky lane leading to the Lougher cabin, I glanced up from my job of steering, and, looking off toward the dim, distant sky line, I seemed to perceive something bounding from peak to peak. It was a mountain goat, I thought. They are always bounding hither and yon, and the island is full of them.

Twenty-two or more anticipatory souls debarked from the motor vehicle at my low command, and we started to surround the cabin; but I almost immediately observed that something unexpected must have occurred. There was no one inside the shack—not a soul. Instead of finding Cedric Bendix with upraised hand, and Noah about to shoot him, we found complete silence. The shack was abandoned.

Presently, as I stood there in the dark,

surrounded by my wondering company, there was a crashing noise in the underbrush, and Ray Lougher dashed into the open, out of breath, and covered with pine needles. A moment later, Noah Campbell burst into our midst from the opposite direction.

"He's gone!" Noah gulped, struggling with his breath.

"Cedric's gone?" I said, thinking instantly of the goatlike figure on the horizon. "Where's he gone?"

"He went right smack bang out of the window," said Ray, who had entirely recovered from being shot to death, and was now more agitated than Cedric had been.

"How long since?"

"Five minutes ago."

We bade them inform us, and they did so.

It seems that, prior to our coming, Ray had gone on being dead in his corner, with a trickle of gore from his mythical wound, while Noah had paced to and fro realistically, wondering whether to let Cedric live or shoot him where he sat. Cedric's chair happened, by the merest chance, to be immediately in front of a window, and the New York matinée idol must have concluded, after deep thought, that conditions on the outside of the window would be more pleasing to him.

When Noah turned his back, in one of his angry pacings, Mr. Bendix did a flying leap that would probably have endeared him to the two-reel comedy people. He went through the window, taking a portion of the frame with him.

Outside the cabin was a shallow ravine, and Cedric fell into this. He must have recovered immediately and started running. It was Cedric I saw when I thought I saw a mountain goat.

"He might have injured himself," said Noah in a concerned voice. "It's quite a drop into that ditch."

"Where do you suppose Cedric is going?" I asked, the least mite worried.

"This joke," Ray remarked, "don't seem to be working out exactly right. We gummed it up!"

"I don't know when I ever saw a man so scared," said Noah.

Thereupon, with my full consent and urging, the Mulberry unit spent the rest of that long, chill night hunting the mountain wilds in search of a New York actor with fear in his eye. We did not find him, though we examined every crag and cranny between Avalon and the Island of the Sitting Birds. When morning came creeping over the distant peaks, we were still prowling, in an effort to find the gentleman and explain that it was all nothing but a crude Western jest.

At eleven o'clock that morning I learned definitely that Cedric Bendix would not be found on Catalina. Joe Leavitt, who owns a string of power boats, brought us news.

"I took a fellow across," said Joe. "He seemed to be in a hurry."

We figured it out. Mr. Bendix had run himself violently over a couple of tall mountain ranges, and had eventually come to the sea. He had roused up Joe Leavitt about eleven o'clock the previous night, and had hired him to kick life into a motor launch and start for San Pedro, which is thirty-two miles across the channel. Assuming the need to be urgent, Joe had transported our Mr. Bendix to the mainland.

There, as I learned in later days, Cedric had kept on going with unabated zest. Without even a change of collar or shirt, and carrying no baggage beyond a pocket knife, Cedric kept it up until he planted himself in an east-bound transcontinental train, where he probably hid behind a water cooler till they pulled out.

I assume that in due time he arrived in New York. He has never returned to the land of glorious opportunity. I doubt if he will ever come back, because he regards us as a low and unpleasant lot.

VII

Mr. George Mulberry, the well-known director of canned entertainment, arrived on Catalina, fresh from his conference with the officials of the Commonplace Corporation, about fourteen hours after Cedric departed. George had lost his battle. He was not going to burn the schooner. When he stepped out of his aeroplane, his mood was testy and his manner abrupt.

"Where's Bendix?" he asked, first of all.

I stepped forward, like Horatius or Marco Polo.

"He's gone," I said.

"Where's he gone?" George continued. "I want to finish this so-and-so picture in a hurry."

"He has left us," I said. "I doubt if he is going to be with us from now on."

"What do you mean?" George asked, loud and clear.

I gradually made George understand that Cedric had pulled his freight.

"You mean he's left us flat?" George asked, entirely bewildered, and getting ready to howl louder than ever.

I nodded.

"George," I said, "I wouldn't be surprised if Cedric was heading for Russia right now."

"Why?" George stormed. "Why did he go?"

I swallowed a long breath and told the truth, giving myself the full responsibility.

"And you let this happen!" George ruminated, lowering his voice to human tones, which always means "stormy, with hurricanes," for those around him. "You're the business manager, and you let this thing occur, the minute I go away!"

I admitted it.

George strolled off without another word, and I realized that Tommy Whiteman was going to meet a stranger with dark hair, and get a letter, and also take a journey.

I got the letter next morning. It was one of those two-line documents which can be read quickly, and which should never be shown to one's wife.

That is why, when you see "Left-Handed Money" on the screen, you begin to wonder about the leading character and his strange conduct as the piece nears its finish. George had to use a substitute actor, and naturally he had to keep the fellow a long way from the camera. All the closing shots are long shots. When you see the distant hero kiss the distant heroine, you feel entitled to a close-up of the closing smack, but you don't get it. I got it.

As said in the beginning, reputable firms wishing to communicate with a high-class business manager and efficiency expert, please wire collect. That bungalow of mine is far from paid for.

I feel no regrets over the Catalina Island incident, because regrets are vain. Anyhow, Ray Lougher and Lillian Purcell have about decided to be married; and who knows what might have happened if Cedric Bendix had continued to hang around Hollywood, with his fine city ways?

RESURRECTION

EACH year the spring is lovelier than before,
Its passing show more wondrous than of yore—
  The gay young corn, the rhythmic tossing grain,
  The rose parading with a flaunting train,
  The curtsying willows wrapped in gauzy rain,
The dance of wind and wave along the shore,
  The evening thrush's pensive solo strain—
Each year their joyous beauty moves me more.

For spring is spring, and one who never dies
Shakes off the dreams that soothe her weary eyes,
  Remembering that she dreams while I despair
  To think her lost in some far otherwhere.
  So she, with tender unforgetting care,
Forsakes the peaceful valley where she lies
  To call our memories forth from subtler air
And make of spring a reborn Paradise.

And then she tells me, ere again she slips
Into that dream where sorrow has eclipse,
  That year on year new understanding grows
  Of one continuous life which ebbs and flows
  'Twixt sleep and waking, summer rain and snows,
While memory hives the honey that it sips.
  So every spring restores each vanished rose
And wakes the immortal kiss upon love's lips.

Nelle Richmond Eberhart

The Mark Sinister

THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF MARY BLAKE, QUEEN OF THE STAGE, AND HER SISTER ANNE

By Lee Thayer

Author of "The Stonehill Mystery," "The Unlatched Door," etc.

DONALD VAN LOO MORRIS, rich young cosmopolite, is madly in love with beautiful Mary Blake, Broadway leading lady. He importunes her to marry him, but she hints of a tragedy in her life and will not say yes. At the street door of her apartment he takes her in his arms and she returns his caress. Then she repulses him and flees to her sister, Anne, with whom she lives. Anne has no family resemblance to Mary, and she is marked with a crimson blotch over one side of her face. The next day Donald is unable to get Mary on the telephone, and the following morning he receives a mysterious message from her. She says she has gone away until such time as she can clear up her "ugly and pitiful" secret. Donald hurries to the Blake apartment and finds protruding under the locked door an edge of the silk scarf that Mary had worn. It is blood-stained. He enlists the aid of Peter Clancy, head of a private detective agency, and they begin a determined search for the vanished sisters.

IX

MORRIS caught Peter Clancy by the arm as they hurried toward the taxi, the driver of which stood, expectant, by its open door.

"Did he take one lady, or two?" he questioned excitedly.

"Only one," said Peter in a low voice. "I don't know yet which one, but we'll soon find out."

He motioned Morris to get into the cab, and spoke familiarly to the chauffeur.

"Drive us over to the square, old top, and line up somewhere where it's quiet. We want to have a little talk with you. You can keep your meter ticking," he added, with a grin.

The driver, a big, strong young fellow, grinned pleasantly in response and jumped to his wheel. In a moment they drew up in a quiet spot on the old square.

"This do?" asked the taxi man, turning in his place and speaking through the open front of the cab.

"Fine," answered Peter, who was seated directly behind him. He leaned forward and spoke in a friendly, confidential manner. "We want to find out something about the lady you took from over there" —he pointed in the direction of Waverly Place — "yesterday afternoon. She went away without leaving any address, and something has happened which makes it necessary for her friends to locate her."

The driver nodded his comprehension.

"I want to be sure it's the lady we're looking for. It's an apartment house, you know," Peter explained rapidly; "so perhaps you'll describe her to us."

"Well," the driver replied hesitatingly, "I don't know as I can tell you so much what she looked like. She was dressed plain, in something dark, though whether blue, or black, or what, I couldn't be sure. She come hurrying along around the corner, but I was part way down the line, so I wasn't much interested, though she did seem to be looking for a taxi. She sort of gave the once-over to the two guys that was ahead of me, and then she stepped right up to my cab, and she says, looking at me sharp through her veil:

"'Could you carry a heavy trunk down three flights of stairs by yourself?' she says. It was kind of unexpected, 'cause they usually gets you to the place and then springs it. 'I'll make it worth your while, if you can manage it alone,' she says, flashing a five at me. 'It's this, over and above the fare,' she says, kind of nervous and excited like.

"'You're on, lady,' I says. 'Lead me to that trunk,' I says, just like that.

"So she told me 99 Waverly Place, and I took her there and carried down the trunk. Begobs, it was heavy enough, and worth the money!"

Morris was listening eagerly to every word. He could keep silence no longer.

"But the lady," he said excitedly. "Tell us more about her. Was she very tall and slender and beautiful?"

Clancy touched his arm. The detective was afraid that the chauffeur, if such a description was given him, would think he had seen what Morris so evidently wished him to have seen.

"You describe her in your own way, Bill," he interposed, addressing the driver. "Tell us everything you noticed about her. How about it—was she tall?"

"How'd you know my name was Bill?" asked the driver irrelevantly, with a grin. "I don't think the lady was so very tall," he went on, without waiting for a reply; "at least, not so you'd notice it particular. She was sort of thin, and she kind of stooped a little. She had on a thick veil, so I didn't see her face hardly any, when she come up to me on the street—only her eyes, and they was big and—kind of burning."

He hesitated a little. Evidently his powers of description were not often put to the test.

"Well," said Peter, as the man paused, "you went up to the apartment with her to get the trunk. I think you said you carried it down three flights of stairs. That would make it the floor next to the top one, wouldn't it?"

"No," said the cab driver, shaking his head. "It was the top floor, and thankful I was there wasn't any more of 'em!"

"Did you see any one else in the apartment?" asked Peter, carefully restraining his impatience.

"Not a soul," answered the man. "I don't think there was anybody else there. It was awful quiet. I didn't see anybody, and I didn't hear anybody moving around."

"Did you notice anything unusual about the apartment?" asked Peter. "Was it what you'd call tidy when you were there?"

"I don't know," said Bill, scratching his head. "I ain't much of a hand at noticing things, I'm afraid. Places is apt to be a bit upset when people are going away. I didn't think anything about that. I only just went into the back room to get the trunk, and"—a sudden thought seemed to strike him—"now I come to think of it, I did get just a little peek at the lady's face, as I was coming along the hall with the trunk on my back. She'd watched me strap it up, and then she went ahead of me into a room off the hall, toward the front. When I come along, she was standing over by the window, and there was a looking glass on the wall right in front of her. She'd held up her veil to look for something on the little table that was there, and I saw her in the glass, just for a second, before she pulled the veil down again." He paused, and added doubtfully: "Did the lady you was looking for have a kind of a scar or something on her face, on—let's see—on this side?"

He touched his right cheek. Morris surpressed an exclamation, and Peter leaned still farther forward.

"What kind of a scar, Bill?" he asked quietly.

"I don't know exactly," the driver replied hesitatingly. "The window was on the other side, and I couldn't see so very plain; but it seemed to me there was some kind of a dark red mark on her cheek and down on her neck. I can't be sure, but I thought there was. I only saw it for a second. Does that help you any?"

"H-m!" said Peter. "Maybe it will, Bill. And you're pretty sure there wasn't any one else in the apartment?"

"Well," said Bill, "I'll leave it to you. I didn't see nobody, and I didn't hear nobody. When I took the trunk out, she was out on the stairs, and she asked me to make sure the door was locked. Why would she be nervous about that, I ask you, if there was some one inside?"

"Doesn't seem reasonable, does it?" said Peter thoughtfully. "But there's one thing I don't quite see. You say the lady was in the bedroom when you passed the door, but she was outside, on the stairs, when you took the trunk out. How was that?"

"Why, I hadn't got the trunk just right on my shoulders, and I stopped a second to shift it over. By the time I'd got it good, she'd come into the hall from the front end, and she didn't waste no time getting the door open for me. She seemed in an awful hurry, and excited like. She went on down the stairs a few steps, to be out of the way of me and the trunk, and then she stopped on a sudden, and says:

"'Oh, I didn't think! You can't shut the door, can you?'

"'Sure I can,' says I, being proud of me strength.

"Then I backs around sidewise, and starts to shut the door, and darned if there wasn't a long trail of some kind of a lady's white silk dingbat caught on the bottom of the trunk. It had been dragging after me all the way down the hall, like a cat's tail."

Peter, hearing Morris draw in a sharp breath, cast a warning glance in his direction. The cabman, unobserving, went on.

"I thought I was going to have to get the lady back to pull it off and shut the door, but I give it a kick and it landed free, and I shut the door by my own self. The lady was standing part way down the stairs, awful impatient to be off. I guess maybe she was late for her train. She looks back and says:

"'Try the door, if you will, please, and see that it's fast.'

"So I did, and I guess that's about all, except that I took her and the trunk to the Penn Station, and that's the last I seen of her."

"The Penn Station! Good night!" muttered Peter, disgusted. "You can go anywhere in the country, almost, from the Penn Station." Then, after an instant's thought, he said aloud: "That was funny, what you said about the white silk thing following you along the hall like a cat's tail, Bill. Where do you suppose you picked the thing up?"

"Must have come from the storeroom where the trunk was," Bill readily replied. "Otherwise I'd 'a' seen it before I got to the door—if it had been laying on the floor of the hall, I mean. Must have been behind the trunk, too, down in the corner, where it was dark."

"Are you sure it fell entirely inside the door, when you kicked it loose?" asked Peter. "Try to remember, Bill. I have a particular reason for wanting to know."

The man looked at him curiously.

"Why, it must have, I should think, but I can't be exactly sure. To tell you the truth"—with a note of apology—"I didn't care so much where it went, so long as it didn't trail along and make me ridiculous, and I didn't look so very careful. The trunk was bearing down on me shoulders, and the lady was in a hurry."

"Yes," said Peter thoughtfully. "How far down the stairs was the lady when you shut the door, Bill?" he inquired. "Two or three steps, or more? Was she far enough up, I mean, to be able to see the scarf drop?"

"No, she wasn't, I'm sure." This time the driver answered with certainty. "She was halfway down the first flight, anyway, and me just able to see her head over the rail."

"H-m! Yes," said Peter slowly, "Yes!" He considered for a moment in silence. Then he turned to Morris. "Anything more you can think of that Bill might be able to tell us, Mr. Morris?" he asked.

Morris shook his head despondingly.

"All right, then, Bill," said Clancy. "You've given us quite a lot to think about, anyway, and we're much obliged to you. Just give me your name and address, will you, in case anything should turn up to make us want you again?" Having entered the direction in his notebook, he added: "Now beat it over to the Penn Station, and show us where you left the lady."

"And this is for yourself," said Donald, leaning quickly forward and slipping a bill into the man's hand.

The crisp slip of green-engraved paper must have been more effective than the most widely advertised gasoline, for no cab of its size and condition ever made better time than Bill's cab did in getting to its destination. It was only a matter of moments when they were gliding down the long incline inside the station.

"This is where I left her," said Bill, as the cab, panting like an animal, stopped opposite the express windows, the lights of which showed yellow against the outer sunshine and the blue of the gas vapors that strove to escape from between the tall pillars of the carriage entrance.

The two young men leaped out of the cab. While Morris was paying the man off, Peter asked in a low tone:

"Did you see where the lady went when she got out of the cab, Bill?"

"No," the man answered, as he put the money Morris had just given him into his trouser pocket. "She paid me as we were running down, and as soon as a couple of guys had jerked the trunk off, I beat it."

"Well, all right, Bill," said Peter. "So long!"

With a friendly wave of the hand, the cabman, realizing that the curiosity which he felt would probably never be satisfied, proceeded on his way, while the young de-

tective, followed by Donald Morris, began the next stage of his investigations.

He made searching inquiries at every ticket window in the great, softly echoing main room of the station, and at the express offices. He even went down to the waiting room of the Long Island Railroad, and inquired there at all the possible places. No one remembered seeing, on the previous evening, a lady answering the meager description that Peter was able to give. Her costume was obviously conventional, and, with her veil down, there had been nothing about her to attract attention.

Among the hundreds of people passing every hour through the vast station, Anne Blake also had passed, leaving no trace.

X

"But Mary!" groaned Donald Morris in agony, as the two men, their unsuccessful investigation over, stood for a moment in the loneliness of the great station. "I don't so much care about losing all trace of her sister. It's Mary, Mary, that I'm thinking about! Where has she gone? What has happened to her?" The fearful tension of the morning was apparent in every line of his weary, white face. "Let Anne go—she's nothing to me; but find Mary, Clancy! Find Mary! Put every ounce of strength you have, every resource of your organization, into the search. Spend any amount of money. Leave no stone unturned. I'm afraid—I'm horribly afraid—that she's—"

Clancy put a restraining hand on Donald's arm. He was wondering if the same sinister idea which was creeping into his own thoughts had already, by any possibility, found a place in Morris's less experienced mind. It was hardly probable, Peter comforted himself with thinking. A thing so far outside the experience of the young sculptor would scarcely suggest itself. If it did, it would be necessary to combat it as vigorously as possible, for in that direction, Peter was sure, would lie madness for Donald Morris.

"We'll get on the job at once, Mr. Morris," he said promptly and reassuringly. "We'll search the city over to find some trace of her. She didn't leave the apartment with her sister—we know that much, anyway. If she took another cab—"

"She's almost certain to have done that," Donald interrupted eagerly. "She hated to walk through the streets, even for a short distance, and all the railroad stations are a long way from Waverly Place."

"Well, if she took a cab, we'll find it," declared Peter confidently; "but it may take a little time. I'll have to go to the office now, and get things started. You can't be any help just now, and I advise you to get a rest. You aren't used to this kind of thing, and it's bound to wear you out. Go home and take it easy. I'll phone you if there's any news, or if there's anything you can do. Let's get a cab, and I can drop you at your house on my way to the office. There are a few things I'd like to have you tell me, and in that way we won't waste any time. How about it?"

"All right," answered Morris wearily; "but I wish you'd let me go with you. Somehow I feel—"

"Yes, I guess I know how you feel, all right," said Peter; "but it won't be any good. You can't help, and you need to get quieted down. Come on!"

With sympathetic consideration, he led Donald to a cab, selecting one which had the front windows closed, so that they might talk in privacy. As they turned into Seventh Avenue, he said:

"Now tell me everything you know about Miss Blake and her sister—every little thing. You can never tell what might come in useful. How long have you known them?"

"As you know, I've never met her sister, and know nothing definite about her, except that they lived together. I've always had the impression that there was something—I don't know just how to put it—something—well, something wrong about the sister," said Donald slowly. "Mary never let me come up to the apartment, and there was something odd in her face whenever her sister was mentioned. Of course, it happened but rarely, and it's a hard thing to define. Perhaps a person less interested would scarcely have noticed—"

Donald relapsed into thought.

"When was it that you first met Miss Blake?" asked Peter, after a moment.

"About a year ago," said Morris, rousing himself, his eyes kindling. "I shall never forget it! It was at my sister's. I had heard a lot about Mary Blake, and had seen her several times on the stage, of course. She seemed to me, even then, to be the most beautiful woman and the greatest actress of our time. My sister, Mrs. Atterbury, prides herself on knowing all the

literary and artistic people, all the eminent musicians and actors in town. It's almost a mild form of mania with her. Most of them respond readily "—with a little shrug —" but for a long time she couldn't reach Mary Blake, and the fact piqued her more than a little. Miss Blake's former manager, Arthur Quinn, guarded her like a dragon. It was amusing to see Helena—my sister—trying to cajole old Quinn, whom she knew well, into introducing her. It simply couldn't be done; but when poor Quinn died, and it was known that Miss Blake had signed up with Frederick Jones, Helena started to work on her new manager. Jones, it seems, has social ambitions, and that, I think, enabled my sister to induce him to let her go behind the scenes one night and meet Miss Blake. Helena has a way with her, I must say, and somehow she prevailed on Mary to give a reading at the house—a thing she has never done before, and has never done since. I don't know," he broke off, " why I'm telling you all these details, Clancy, only you said—"

" Go on—don't skip anything," said Peter encouragingly. " So the first time you met Miss Blake was at the reading at your sister's house?"

" Yes. Oh, it was wonderful, marvelous!" Morris spoke slowly, with the air of one who lives again one of the greatest moments of his life. " They used the big model platform at one end of my studio for a stage. The room, of course, was dark, and when the curtains were drawn aside, she stood there in the dim, blue light, her face a pale oval, shining faintly, like a star!" He had forgotten Peter. All his mind was filled with a poignant remembrance. " She spoke, and it was as if the stars sang together. It didn't matter what she said. The sheer magnetism of her personality, the beauty of the soul that looked out of her eyes—so near, so near—drew me like cords of steel. Her strange, sad face seemed oddly familiar—as if I had seen it before, perhaps in a dream."

The cab came to a sudden stop at a point of congested traffic. The change from the detachment and quiet of its smooth, forward motion to the confusion and roar of the busy crossing brought Donald, with a jerk, back to himself. He glanced at Clancy a trifle confusedly, and, as the cab went on, took up his story in a more normal tone.

" Everybody wanted to be presented to her after the performance was over, but she would meet no one except Francis Atterbury and myself. She received us, for a few moments, on the stage, after the curtains had been drawn. She was gracious and charming, but insisted on leaving at once. She had told Helena that it would be necessary for her to do this, that she was very tired. She allowed me to take her down to her cab, and I said good night to her in the dark street. The next night I went to the theater, and sent my card in to her between the acts. She let me come behind the scenes, and I talked to her for a few minutes in the wings. After that I saw her with increasing frequency. We dined together rather often, in some quiet place. The thought of attracting any attention to herself, when she was off stage, was always most distasteful to her. She lived very quietly, and never introduced me to any of her friends. I don't even know who her friends are. I know absolutely nothing of her past life, except that it was a very unhappy one. I could not force her confidence, and she volunteered nothing, even when she must have known—must have seen—"

He hesitated. Peter met his look with a comprehending nod.

" I understand, Mr. Morris," he said gravely; " but didn't you think it was strange? Don't you think it was strange now?"

" Yes," Donald admitted; " but it doesn't matter. I don't care how strange it all is. I don't care who she is, or who her people were, or what sad or even terrible thing she is keeping from me. She is beautiful to me—in body, mind, and soul—a wonder woman! There is no one like her in all the world, and I ask nothing of God but to give her back to me. I can trust her. I can be content to know nothing. Only find her for me, Clancy! Find her for me!"

He clenched his hands, and his eyes burned deep. Peter turned away his face.

" I'll do my best, Mr. Morris," he said with grave sincerity. " What it's possible to do, I pledge my word, shall be done. By the way," he added in a changed tone, " do you know Miss Blake's manager?"

" Frederick Jones? Yes," Morris quickly replied. " I've met him often."

" Would he be willing to do you a favor?"

" Yes—yes, I think he would."

" I may want to have a little talk with

him," said Peter reflectively. "Think you could fix it?"

"I'll give you a card," said Donald.

Drawing a case from his pocket, he wrote a few lines and handed the card to Peter.

"That ought to do it," said Peter, glancing at it. "Thanks. I may not use it, but it's best to be prepared."

They had turned into Gramercy Park. The cab drew up before the broad entrance of Mrs. Atterbury's house, and Donald Morris stepped out.

"I'm trusting you, Clancy," he said, as he held out his hand, "with something that is more important than life to me!"

"I know," Peter nodded, grasping the outstretched hand with a firm pressure. "I'll do my best," he repeated reassuringly.

He sighed, however, as the cab rolled swiftly through the busy streets.

"Nobody's best is any too good in a case like this," he thought to himself. "He's a fine chap, all right, is Morris. I hope she's what he thinks her, and then some. Wonder what kind of a woman she really is! He looks as if he might be a judge, but you never can tell. What is it that she's been hiding from him—from everybody, except one person? A woman as successful as she is wouldn't live the way she's been living, unless there was something! And the sister? Damn it all, I can't see—"

He was still cogitating thus when he reached his office. He was thankful to find that his partner and old friend, Captain O'Malley, was in and at liberty. It was always a help, a clearance of his mind, to talk over a case with the astute, experienced old man, who had trained Peter when he was a cub in the police detective service, and with whom he had been associated ever since.

The old man listened attentively while Clancy detailed the facts as they had been presented to him.

"It looked like robbery," Peter said, in conclusion; "but, I ask you, wasn't it probably intended that it should look like robbery? At least, isn't that on the cards? That broken window on the fire escape was a blind—I'm sure of that much. I didn't mention it to Morris. I thought he had enough on his mind as it was; but not only was the broken glass all on the outside window sill, but the catch hadn't even been turned. Whoever broke the glass wasn't very fly, or else they got scared, for they didn't unlock the window."

"Or else the thief stopped and locked it after he got outside," said O'Malley, with a little chuckle.

"Rats!" exclaimed Peter, feelingly. "Quit your kidding, O'Malley. This is serious. Both these women are missing, and there's blood in the apartment and on Miss Blake's scarf. We only know how one of 'em left the place. She left alone—with a big trunk. It was a big trunk, O'Malley. I could tell by the marks it had made on the wall of the storeroom, and by the place where there wasn't any dust on the floor. It was all pretty clean, but you just could see where the trunk had stood. And then, here's another funny thing—the closets in the bedroom were all full of beautiful clothes, the sort you'd expect Mary Blake to wear, and the bureau was, or had been, full of fine, expensive lingerie, before somebody chucked 'em around the place. Now I figure Anne kept her clothes in the storeroom; but there wasn't a rag there—nothing but a few worn things in an otherwise empty chiffonier."

"And you argue from that—" said O'Malley.

"I'm not arguing," said Peter. "I'm only thinking. It looked to me as if Anne had taken all her clothes—though there probably weren't so many, judging by the number of hangers and the size of the chiffonier—and that Mary hadn't taken anything. Of course, it's only a guess. I can't be sure; but that's the way it looked. And how would Mary get along without clothes, unless she might have been going to use Anne's? But they didn't go away together. Morris has the idea, and I got it myself from the letter he showed me, that there was a sort of—a kind of antipathy between them. Oh, hell, O'Malley! You see what I'm driving at. I've been mixed up with so much crime and stuff that I can't help wondering—"

"Yes," said O'Malley slowly. "Yes, I see. The bloody scarf that the cabby pulled through the door—the blood on the floor of the hall just by the trunk room—the big trunk—h-m!"

The two detectives looked at each other long and seriously. Then Clancy brought his closed fist down on the desk.

"It's Anne—it's Anne I want to find, O'Malley! We'll look for Mary for all we're worth. We won't leave a stone unturned, as I promised; but if you ask me what we must do to get to the bottom of

this proposition, I say the first thing to do is to find Anne Blake!"

XI

"YES—find Anne Blake," O'Malley repeated slowly. "In the mean time, son, you'd have to establish a motive, and it would have to be some little motive, at that! And after all, you know, Miss Mary may turn up at any time. It would be easy enough for her to make a get-away and nobody see her. Suppose she slipped quietly out into the street and picked up a cab on the avenue or somewhere? How could we find that cab, I ask you? We don't know where she was going, and there wouldn't be anything to spot her by but a description or a photograph, if you can get hold of one."

"I can do that easily enough," said Peter. "Morris gave me a card to her manager, and I can get one from him. I'm going to see him right away, to find out what he knows about Mary Blake. He's the only person, so far, that can give me a straight line on her."

He reached for the telephone and instructed the operator in the outer office to get Mr. Frederick Jones, of the Westmoreland Theater, on the wire. While waiting for the connection, he continued his talk with his partner.

"Get out the drag net for both these two girls, O'Malley. Spread it all over the country and up into Canada. Comb the city with a fine-toothed comb. If Mary really hadn't any luggage, it's on the cards that she may not have left town; but"—he shook his head thoughtfully—"I've got a hunch, O'Malley, that we won't find Mary Blake. 'There'll be no one left but Anne,' the letter said. Whatever was to happen has happened. I think—I can't explain it, but I feel it in my bones—that our only hope is to find Anne."

The telephone at his elbow buzzed sharply.

"Mr. Jones is very busy," Peter's operator informed him. "Can his secretary take a message?"

"Yes," Peter replied. "Let me have the secretary."

The connection made, Peter was informed that it would be impossible to see Mr. Jones that afternoon, and it was only by using Donald Morris's name that he was able to make an appointment for the following morning at eleven o'clock.

On Tuesday, therefore, prompt to the minute, Peter presented himself to the dragon—in the shape of a bobbed and powdered switchboard operator—who guarded the entrance to the offices of the Westmoreland Theater. He had to assure her that he was not an actor out of work, and to display his credentials, and it was not until his statement that he had an appointment had been verified that he was allowed to climb the three flights of stairs to the office of Frederick Jones, manager. Even here, he was subjected to a maddening delay before he could gain audience.

When he reached Mr. Jones at last, however, he found him genial and cordial enough. The few lines which Donald Morris had written on his card turned the trick, and the manager expressed himself as delighted to be of service.

Peter had had plenty of time to go carefully over his line of attack. He regretted the necessity, as he would have expressed it, of "putting any one wise," but, on the other hand, he felt confident that Mr. Frederick Jones must be aware of Donald Morris's interest in Miss Blake. He was also sure that her disappearance would come to the knowledge of her manager in short order. He therefore went straight to the bat.

"I want to talk to you about Miss Mary Blake," he said.

Leaning his elbow on the desk, with chin in hand, he regarded the manager keenly.

"What about Mary Blake?" Jones questioned sharply.

"She has disappeared," answered Peter, without emphasis.

"What?"

The manager started to his feet.

"She has disappeared from her apartment and left no address," Peter explained quietly.

"Good God!" cried the manager, leaning over and beating his clenched fist on the desk. "Do you know what you're saying? It can't be! Why, she was going to be in town all summer, and we start rehearsals on a new play the middle of July. She must have gone off for the week end somewhere. You're just trying to get a rise out of me!"

"I'm not," said Peter gravely. "She has gone away for some time, and under peculiar conditions. So far, we haven't been able to find any trace of her. If you think I'm kidding you, Mr. Jones, you can call

up Mr. Morris and ask him. He accidentally found out that she'd gone away, and he thought it was so serious that he called me in. I'm a detective."

Peter presented his business card. The manager looked at it and dropped heavily into his chair.

"This is bad news for me, Mr. Clancy," he said. "Damned bad news! She's worth forty or fifty thousand a year to me, I don't mind telling you. If anything has happened to her—if she's gone off her nut, or anything—for she's a strange sort of girl—"

"In what way is she strange?" interrupted Peter, his eyes narrowing.

"Well, she's the greatest emotional actress in the world to-day, you can take it from me. I said so to Arthur Quinn, many and many a time, when he was alive. She can take the heart out of your body and wring it like a wet sponge. She's beautiful, and as clever as the devil; but, like most temperamental people, she has her own peculiarities, and sometimes they were a bit hard to deal with."

"For instance?" prompted Peter.

"Well, for instance, she would never rehearse without a full costume and make-up, and the lights just as they would be at a performance. Said she couldn't feel the part unless the conditions were all the way they were going to be. It made it necessary to get her costumes ready before we started rehearsal, and sometimes it was a confounded nuisance."

"But it doesn't strike me that there was anything very unreasonable about that," objected Peter. "Might be a bit unusual, but—"

"Oh, that wasn't the only thing," Jones broke in. "I couldn't get her to meet anybody—not even people who would be useful to her. She would see a few newspaper men, but only in the theater, between the acts. She objected to being photographed, too, and I had the devil and all of a time getting the right kind of publicity for her."

"But you have some photographs?" said Peter eagerly. "Surely there are some to be had? That's what I want particularly."

"Oh, yes"—grudgingly—"I have some that were taken a year or two ago. Quinn didn't seem to have so much trouble with her. He got a lot, and they are beauties, and good enough to use. She hasn't changed since they were taken, but people like to see new ones."

"Can you spare me some?" asked Peter.

"Oh, sure!" answered Jones readily. "I'll do anything I can to help you."

He touched a button on his desk and instructed a sleek youth, who immediately appeared, to bring him the photographs of Miss Blake. They were produced, and Peter gazed at them with deep interest. There were four different poses—two full length, in evening dress, one of the head in profile, and one full face.

It was the latter which interested Peter the most. It was a striking portrait. The brilliant light, falling from above upon one side of the face, left the eyes in a transparent shadow, out of which they looked with a burning, compelling intensity. Haunting, magnetic eyes they were, full of dramatic possibilities. The nose was short and straight, with rather full nostrils, expressive of temperament and passion. The mouth was sensitive, not too small, and exquisite in its subtle lines and curves.

All the features were fine and beautifully modeled, the cheek bones and chin delicately defined. There was a nervous sensibility in the face, a tension and unrest about the pose of the head upon the slender, gracious neck and shoulders, which suggested an intense, artistic temperament.

"Great, aren't they?" said Jones, looking at them as they lay on the desk between the two men. "Wonder what club old Quinn held over her to make her sit for them!"

"She and Quinn were great friends, weren't they?" asked Peter. "Do you know where he picked her up?"

Jones shook his head.

"Haven't the faintest idea. He had a way of snatching them out of the atmosphere, had Arthur Quinn, and he was tight as a drum about it. Nobody had ever heard of her, so far as I know, and it's my business to know every possible bet, from the Keith circuit up. Quinn sprung her in the title rôle of 'Constance,' the first shot out of the box. Don't know where she got her training, but she had it, all right. She never missed a trick, and she was a success from the drop of the hat. Of course, Quinn was a wonder at putting 'em through a course of sprouts, but the girl appeared on the first night as if she'd been acting all her life. Maybe they're born that way sometimes, but I never ran across one that was."

"I suppose she made a good deal of money," hazarded Peter, following a train of thought of his own.

"Oh, yes, she earned a good salary," said Jones. "I don't mind telling you in confidence, Mr. Clancy, that I paid her, on my last year's contract, a thousand dollars a week—real money, too. I guess I can show you—"

He drew toward him a bank book, stuffed with vouchers, which lay upon the desk. Running rapidly through the canceled checks, he selected three or four and slid them across the polished mahogany to Peter.

"Just came in from the bank—end of the month," he explained. "Run your eye over those, if you don't believe me."

Peter ran his eye over them, and very carefully. They were all made out to the order of Mary Blake, and each was for one thousand dollars. He turned them over and studied the indorsements. They were all alike. At the top, in a clear, slanting, characteristic hand, was written:

Pay to the order of the Scoville Bank—MARY BLAKE.

At the bottom, rubber-stamped, were the words:

Pay to the order of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.—The Scoville Bank of New York, William Dunne, Cashier.

"I think I'll make a call on Mr. William Dunne, cashier," thought Peter, still following an insistent undercurrent of suggestion, as he made a mental note of the name of the bank. "It might be of interest to know how much of her salary she has saved, and whether she, or any one else, has drawn heavily against it lately."

Aloud he said:

"Gee, that's good money, Mr. Jones! I can see I made the mistake of my life when I picked my profession. Think you could get me the job of the man who says, 'Me lud, the carriage waits'? I'll bet he makes more than I do!"

A slight grin made its way through the concern on the manager's face.

"Better stick to your own job, Mr. Clancy," he said. "I guess you're pretty good at that; and not many people on the stage make anywhere near as much as Miss Blake."

Peter had gathered up the photographs and risen to his feet. Jones, following his example, caught his arm as he approached the door.

"For Heaven's sake, keep me posted, Mr. Clancy," he said anxiously. "I can't think she's thrown me down. Why, only about a month ago, she had a pippin of an offer from a movie concern—far and away over anything I could afford to give her; and do you think she would consider it? Not on your life! She turned it down cold."

"What reason did she give?" asked Peter.

"Didn't give any—to me, at least. I didn't know anything about it until Wolf, the producer, who's an old friend of mine, congratulated me on her sticking to me so tight. So, you see, I can't believe that she's gone back on me. It's a pretty safe bet that I shall hear from her soon. If I do, I'll let you or Mr. Morris know."

"Yes, do, by all means," said Peter. "I'll keep in touch with you, and for the love of Mike, don't let the story leak out! I'm sure I can trust to your discretion, Mr. Jones."

"Oh, sure—sure you can," promised the manager easily. "It certainly wouldn't be to my interest to have it known—at least for the present."

Peter did not like that last phrase very much, but he did not dare to place in jeopardy his present friendly relation with Jones by taking it up.

"By the way, Mr. Jones," he inquired, as he rose to go, "is there anybody else—anybody you know of—that Miss Blake might be likely to write to?"

"I don't think there is a soul," answered the manager, frowning. "She had nothing to do with any member of the company—pretty upstage with all of them, though not offensive about it. She just kept them all at a distance—same as she did me, to tell you the truth. As I told you, she would never meet anybody I wanted her to, except Mrs. Atterbury, and I nearly dropped dead when she asked me if it would be all right for her to give a reading there. I was pleased, of course—good publicity for her; but she never followed it up. Just like her!" he grumbled. "Other than letting young Donald Morris take her around a little, she let the whole thing slide."

"Had no social ambitions, evidently," Peter remarked. "And you never met any friends of hers?"

"Not a soul."

"Strange!" Peter said.

To himself, as he hurried from the manager's office, he repeated:

"Strange! So beautiful, so successful, and so alone," his thoughts ran on. "Why? There was her sister, and there was Donald Morris, and there was her manager—and besides them, nobody—nobody but Angelo, who had only just seen her, as he couldn't help seeing her—and an old lady, a stout old lady, who called there—and the voice over the wire. It was an odd voice—unusual—I'm sure I'd know it again, anywhere. By Gad, I'd give a hundred dollars to know who was the owner of that voice over the wire!"

XII

PETER looked at his watch, as he ran down the stairs of the Westmoreland Theater Building. It was nearly one o'clock, and he decided that he would have time enough to snatch a bite of lunch before he made the attempt to see Mr. William Dunne, of the Scoville Bank.

He stopped at a public telephone booth in a cigar store, and called Donald Morris and O'Malley. To the one he reported what slight progress he had made. From the other he learned that O'Malley had been down to the apartment and had seen the janitor, and that there was nothing new there. No one had called to see either of the sisters, and no word of any kind had been received from them.

"Get the photographs down here as quick as you can," O'Malley urged. "I've wired our correspondents all over the country, but you know, Pete, they can't do much without the pictures, and neither can the boys here."

"Send Maggie over to the Fifth Avenue Bank," said Peter quickly. "I've got to go there. Have her meet me in half an hour, and I'll give her the photographs. You can get them copied right away, and broadcast them all over the map. Tell her to meet me in twenty minutes—I can make it by then."

Hastily he hung up the receiver, snatched a sandwich and a glass of milk at a near-by drug store, met Maggie, his switchboard operator, at the Fifth Avenue Bank, where he delivered the photographs to her, with instructions to rush them back to the office.

"Holy cats!" said Maggie pensively, as she looked at the pictures of Mary Blake. "Ain't she sweet?"

"Never mind whether she's sweet or not, Maggie," said Clancy hastily. "Put them in your bag, and don't lose them. Chase yourself back to the office just as fast as you can, there's a good girl—and for the love of Mike, stop chewing that gum. You make me nervous! How many times have I told you—"

"But I ain't in the office now, Mr. Clancy. It's my lunch hour, and my time's my own and my tastes is my own. If you don't like—"

"There, there, Maggie—never mind," said Clancy soothingly. "I didn't mean anything; but if there's one thing more than another that spoils a pretty girl, it's that infernal chew, chew, chew. It gets on my nerves."

Mollified by the compliment, Maggie blew the offending gum nonchalantly into the gutter.

"'Sall right, Mr. Clancy," she said, and with a wide, freckled smile, she flapped rapidly away.

Peter's errand at the Fifth Avenue Bank, where he and his partner kept their modest account, was to get a note accrediting him to the cashier of the Scoville Bank. The reputation of the firm of Clancy & O'Malley was above question, and the note was easily forthcoming.

Armed with this, Peter proceeded at once to the Scoville Bank, and was readily accorded permission to interview the cashier.

Mr. William Dunne proved to be a pleasant young man of about Peter's own age, who looked attentively at the detective's business card, and asked him to state wherein he, the cashier, could be of service.

"I want to find out a few things about one of your depositors," said Peter, proceeding at once to business. "Anything you tell me will be treated in the strictest confidence, and I'm sure you can answer my questions without any trouble. It's about Miss Mary Blake."

"H-m!" said the cashier. "Miss Blake, the actress? Yes—she has an account here. Been running up bills somewhere?" he inquired with a slight grin.

"Nothing of the sort," said Peter readily; "though it may turn out to be a more serious matter than that. At any rate, it isn't anything against the lady. It's in her interests that I'm here."

"Why don't you put your questions to her, then?" asked Dunne shrewdly.

"Because she's out of town, and the matter is urgent," explained Peter.

The cashier hesitated.

"Of course, I should be glad to help you out in any way, Mr. Clancy," he said doubtfully; "but the relations of the bank to its clients are confidential. We have to be very careful about disclosing anything of their private affairs. You know how you would feel yourself. We have to be very certain that we're not doing anything prejudicial to their interests."

Peter saw that it was necessary for him to be very frank if he were to gain the information he desired from this conscientious young man. He therefore returned the cashier's questioning glance with an open, candid smile.

"I'm perfectly aware, Mr. Dunne," he said, "that all good banks protect their depositors' interests to the limit, so I'll just put my cards on the table. Miss Blake has disappeared, and her sister also, under most peculiar conditions, and I have been employed to try to trace them. I was summoned to their apartment by Mr. Donald Morris—"

"Stephen Morris's son?" asked the cashier.

"Yes," said Peter. Seeing that the well known name had its effect, he added: "Perhaps you'd like me to get him on the wire, and assure you that—"

"I don't like to seem to doubt you in any way, Mr. Clancy," the cashier interrupted. "I should be very glad to be of service to any friend of Mr. Morris. He has an account here. Suppose I get him on the wire?"

This suited Peter perfectly. Knowing that Morris would be at home, waiting for news, he realized that there would be little delay, and waited imperturbably, while the cashier verified his statements. In a few minutes, Dunne turned away from the telephone.

"So far, so good, Mr. Clancy," he said, smiling. "Now bring on your problem."

"Well, this is the way it stands," said Peter, with an answering smile. "It looks as if Miss Blake's apartment has been robbed. Of course we can't be sure, because we don't know what was there originally; but things were tossed about a lot, bureau drawers and desk drawers opened, and that sort of thing. Both the sisters have disappeared."

"All right—I get that," said the cashier. "Now what do you need to know about them?"

"First of all, do you know Miss Blake by sight?" asked Peter.

"H-m! I've seen her on the stage—yes; but I don't recollect ever having seen her in the bank here."

"Perhaps one of the tellers—"

"One of them might have, of course, but I doubt it. You see, I was paying teller up to a month ago. As far as I can remember, it was always Miss Anne Blake who came to the bank."

"You know her, then, by sight?" said Peter eagerly.

"Oh, yes! She comes in almost every week. Quiet, retiring sort of woman, with a bad birthmark."

Peter nodded.

"When was she here last, Mr. Dunne? Do you think you could find out for me? Would the tellers know her?"

"Think they would. In fact, I'm sure Parsons knows her. He was my assistant, and is paying now. I'll ask him. Just a moment."

He left his desk, and went through a glass door at the back of the tellers' cages. Peter could see him, through the grille, talking to first one man and then another. Presently he came back.

"Miss Anne Blake was in the bank and cashed a check on Saturday morning," he informed Peter.

"On Saturday morning!" Peter repeated thoughtfully. "Do you know how much she drew?"

"I do," said the cashier, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Would you mind telling me, in strict confidence, the amount of the check?" asked Peter persuasively. "I promise you, on my word of honor, that it will go no further. You can see for yourself that, if there was a robbery, it's important for us to know whether there was any large sum of money in the house."

"I see!" said the cashier thoughtfully. "Well, I don't think there's any harm in telling you. The Fifth Avenue vouches for you, and Mr. Morris does, too. No—there can't be any harm. It was a check for five thousand dollars."

Peter sat up in his chair.

"Five thousand!" he exclaimed. "Five thousand dollars? Did she often draw as much as that?"

"No, never anywhere near as much as that before. She took cash this time, too. Parsons warned her that it wasn't very safe,

these days, to carry so much money around, and suggested that she should take it in travelers' checks. He thought she was going to, for she asked to see the blanks, and then she decided that she wasn't afraid to take the cash."

"I'm not awfully familiar with those travelers' checks," said Peter, apparently, for the moment, losing interest in his main subject; "but I understand they're a great convenience when you're traveling. Got one handy? I'd like to see one."

"Yes, they're great," said the cashier, producing a pad of blanks from the drawer of his desk, and laying it before the detective.

Peter looked at it curiously for a moment.

"You sign here, in the body of the check, when purchasing, don't you?" he said slowly. "Then, when you sign again, here at the bottom, it identifies you. Yes—very clever, very convenient! I'll remember, when I have another long trip to take. Thanks!"

He sat considering in silence for a little time. Then he asked:

"How does Miss Blake's account stand with the bank? I mean, can she and her sister both draw checks against it?"

"Yes," Dunne answered promptly.

"Then, if Miss Mary should—die—Miss Anne could still go on drawing against the account without any bother about a will, or anything?"

"Naturally; but I don't quite see how this applies—"

"No," agreed Peter. "It probably doesn't. I was only thinking—"

He continued thinking silently for a moment.

"Would you feel that there was any harm in telling me how much money Miss Blake has on deposit here?" he finally inquired.

"I really couldn't do that, Mr. Clancy. It's against the rules of the bank. I'm sorry!"

Peter grinned—computing swiftly in his own mind.

"Would I be safe, do you think," he asked, "in extending credit to Miss Blake to the amount of twenty-five thousand dollars?"

The young cashier laughed.

"You would, Mr. Clancy—you certainly would."

"Suppose it were necessary, and I doubled the credit?"

Dunne's eyes twinkled with merriment. He shook his head.

"I wouldn't advise you to go much above that, Mr. Clancy," he said; "but, at the present moment, you wouldn't be risking your fifty thousand to any extent."

The grin left Peter's face, and his eyes narrowed. He had indeed found food for thought. A joint account for about fifty thousand dollars, which would be entirely under Anne's control if Mary—should die! Had he found a motive, a sufficient motive?

And why had Anne drawn so large a sum on Saturday? Saturday, the very day before the one on which Anne and Mary had both vanished, leaving no trace!

Did some one know of the large sum in currency which the sisters had in their apartment, presumably, on Saturday night? But Anne, at least, had left the apartment, unharmed, on Sunday evening. That was an established fact.

Why hadn't Anne made use of the safe and convenient travelers' checks, as the paying teller had advised her? She had evidently considered doing so, for she had examined the blanks. She had found, not only that she must sign them first when purchasing, but also that the signature at the bottom must agree with the one in the body of the check when it was cashed. There was only one possible conclusion in the detective's mind. She did not wish to use her own name, and that was why she would not buy them of the bank where she was known.

If she was clever, she would see that she could purchase the checks elsewhere, and use any name she saw fit. Peter was confident that when, or if, they found Anne Blake, it would be under some other name.

These reflections occupied but a moment, so swift were Peter's mental processes. He had noted and tabulated each circumstance for future application to the problem in hand, and there had been scarcely a perceptible pause in the conversation, when he said:

"I'm immensely obliged to you, Mr. Dunne, for the information you've given me. There's just one thing more. Would you mind showing me any vouchers you may happen to have on Miss Blake's account? It would be a great favor—"

The cashier pursed his lips and shook his head.

"I'm afraid I really couldn't do that, Mr. Clancy," he said apologetically. "Can-

celed checks are the property of the client, and not of the bank. I could show you the signature card, if you'd be interested in that. It shows both signatures, if that's what you want to see."

Peter did not care to explain that he had hoped to get some clew from the vouchers as to the various people with whom the sisters were accustomed to have dealings, or that he might stumble on some other valuable bit of information. This proving impossible, he might as well look at the signatures. "You never can tell," was a favorite saying of O'Malley's.

"Why, thanks—I would like to see them, Mr. Dunne," he said, "if it isn't too much trouble."

"Not a bit," responded the cashier, rising.

He passed again behind the network of grilles, and presently returned with the usual signature card in his hand. Seating himself, he laid it before the detective.

Peter examined the inscriptions carefully. Mary Blake's signature, so far as he could judge, was precisely like those he had seen at Frederick Jones's office, the writing rather large, and slanting in the ordinary way. Anne's signature was small and cramped and written backhand—very different from her sister's generous, spirited writing. And yet, in some ways, the two were closely similar, Peter noted—a fact probably due to long association. The "e's," for instance, were formed in both cases, not in a loop, but like a written capital "E," and they were separate, not joined to the letter "k" that preceded them in the word "Blake."

Peter remarked these points in passing, but their full significance did not dawn upon him for many, many anxious days.

XIII

"HERE he is," said Captain O'Malley, as Peter, having made a quick trip from the Scoville Bank, entered the door of his partner's private office. "You're just in time, Pete! Fox thinks he's found the lady."

"What, already?" said Peter, glancing sharply at the round, smooth face of the detective who stood beside O'Malley's desk. "And which one?"

"I think I've found Miss Mary Blake. Of course, I can't be perfectly sure yet," answered Fox, thrusting forward his chin. "I've been rounding up the hotels to see what ladies, traveling alone, registered on Sunday night. Been doing it ever since we got our orders, and I had no luck till just about an hour ago. I'd gone all through the smaller hotels, thinking she'd sure pick a quiet one, and then it suddenly occurred to me that maybe she'd think she'd attract less attention at one of the big ones. After running through several, I hit the Pennsylvania. Happens I know the clerk there, so he took some pains to help me. He was off duty Sunday, and there wasn't anybody registered that day that could possibly have been either of the Miss Blakes; but, as you know, Clancy, they're pretty particular about taking any ladies without luggage, and Watson—that's the clerk—thought she might possibly have tried to get in and they wouldn't take her. So he got hold of the man that was on duty Sunday, and I gave him my spiel. This lad — Franklin, his name is—said there was a lady, very beautiful and young, that came to the hotel on Sunday evening, about seven, and wanted a room. She didn't have nothing but a small hand bag, and she was so pretty that Franklin was cagy, and said they was full up. I asked him if he had any idea where she'd gone. He said she seemed so kind of timid and upset about not getting a room, and she didn't look exactly like a rounder—though you can't always tell, at that; so he suggested that she might go over to the station and talk to the Travelers' Aid officer that's always in the women's waiting room. He told her she could find out some respectable boarding house she could get into."

"Yes!" said Peter eagerly, as Fox paused for breath.

"Well, that sounded good to me, so I beat it over to the station, and sure enough, the Travelers' Aid woman there did remember that a pretty girl come in Sunday evening, and that she'd recommended a boarding house on Twenty-Sixth Street, where they take nothing but women. I chased over to the boarding house, and sure enough, she was there, all right! I saw the landlady. She's a respectable woman, but it's a big house that caters to a transient trade, and I guess they can't be too particular. Anyhow, she said the girl looked all right and paid for a week in advance, so she should worry. I described Miss Blake to her, and she thinks it's her. I couldn't do nothing more without a photo, so I beat it over to see if we'd got one yet; and that's as far as I've gone."

"Sounds good so far," remarked O'Malley. "What do you think, Pete?"

"Well, it fits what we know, as far as it goes," said Clancy; "but the acid test will be matching this girl up to the photograph. Have you got the duplicates yet, O'Malley?"

"Just come in, not five minutes ago," answered the old man, reaching for a large envelope which lay upon his desk. "Here, Fox—here you are!" He held out four unmounted photographs. "You can't make a mistake with all those for comparison; but see her yourself, and make sure."

Fox scratched his head.

"But how 'm I going to get a chance to compare 'em?" he asked doubtfully. "The landlady says that the young woman, who give her name as Mrs. Florence Smith, keeps in her room the whole time. She don't go out at all. Has her meals sent up. Says she's nervous about meeting strangers, but it looks to me as if she was hiding."

Peter and O'Malley exchanged glances.

"Find out anything else?" asked Peter, with ever increasing interest.

"Only that she hasn't had any more luggage sent in. She had nothing but the hand bag she come with. It seems she'd written and sent out one letter since she come; and last night, the only time she's been out at all, she asked where was the nearest place she could send a telegram."

"Wonder when she sent that letter, and if it was by messenger!" said Peter reflectively. "You didn't happen to ask, did you, Fox?"

"No, I didn't, Clancy. Does it matter?"

"Well, I don't know — it might — but that 'll be easy enough to find out from the landlady, I guess," said Peter. "Anyhow, the whole bag of tricks sounds pretty interesting, Fox. We're bound to follow it up. Somebody's got to get a peek at her, by hook or by crook."

"But how?" Fox inquired irritably. "How in hell am I going to get at her? I can't go and bust into her room; and if she never leaves it—"

"She'll have to leave it some time, son," O'Malley replied soothingly. "All you'll have to do is to stick around, and sooner or later she's bound to come into the open."

This suggestion of "watchful waiting" made no appeal to Peter, however. He thought for a minute, and then said to Fox:

"There's a way of getting to her, and I'll bet I find it. Your feet get cold too easy, Fox, and you've got no imagination. I'll take this thing on, here and now. Come on and lead me to that landlady, and I'll show you how the thing can be done!"

Fox, grumbling inwardly, did as he was bid, and the two men proceeded as fast as possible to Twenty-Sixth Street. There he introduced Clancy to the landlady, a lean, middle-aged woman of respectable appearance, with a cold, calculating blue eye.

"I don't know why I should help you to see Mrs. Smith," she said, in answer to Peter's request. "She's paid her board and lodging in advance, and she's quieter 'n any lady in the house. I don't know you, and—"

Peter interrupted her.

"Mrs. Comfort"—inappropriate as it seemed, that was the landlady's name—"Mrs. Comfort, we don't know whether or not Mrs. Smith is the lady we're looking for. In any case, there's nothing against her and we mean her no harm. The lady we're looking for"—he fixed the landlady with his eye and touched his forehead significantly, shaking his head in apparent commiseration—"has left her friends, and has left no address."

"You mean she's crazy?" asked Mrs. Comfort, in a horrified whisper. "I thought she acted kind of queer. I can't bear crazy people!"

Peter was quick to follow up his advantage.

"But this may not be the lady we're looking for, Mrs. Comfort. We only want to make sure. It would be too bad to worry you if we're mistaken. One thing—she sent a letter out since she's been here. Do you happen to know when it was she sent it?"

"Yes, I do know that, positive," said the landlady. "She asked Lily, the waitress, to take it out when she went home Sunday night."

"Was it to go by messenger?" asked Peter quickly.

"I don't know."

"Would Lily, do you think? And to whom was the letter addressed? Do you imagine she'd remember? Could you ask her for me, Mrs. Comfort? If I knew the address on the letter, I might not have to see Mrs. Smith to make sure."

"No" — irritably — "I can't ask Lily, for the simple reason that she hasn't showed up so far this week, at all."

"Too bad!" said Peter. "Well, never

mind, Mrs. Comfort. It won't matter, if you'll fix it so we can find out whether this Mrs. Smith is the lady we want. You will fix it, won't you?"

His tone was very persuasive.

"Well," hesitated the landlady, rubbing her long nose with a bony forefinger, "it would ease my mind to have you see her, after what you've told me; but how can I? I've got no right to let you go up to her room. This is a respectable house, and if there—"

"I know it is," Peter agreed cordially. "It's got a fine reputation, Mrs. Comfort; but even if you don't have men boarders, surely you must have men in to make repairs, or something. How about the telephone? I could go in to inspect the telephone. You could come along with me, if you like—"

"But there's no telephones in the rooms," objected the landlady. "What d'you think this is—the Ritz?"

Peter was checked for the moment. He glanced around the lace-curtained parlor for inspiration. The house was an old one, and lighted by gas. The fact, immediately noted, gave him an idea, and he was about to suggest that he should go up and pretend to do something to the burners in Mrs. Smith's room, when a sharp ring at the front door interrupted him.

"Them girls downstairs is so slow!"

With an annoyed gesture, Mrs. Comfort turned quickly, passed through the open double doors of the parlor, and opened the street door herself.

Peter heard but one sentence—and he was out in the hall in the twinkling of an eye. Without a word of explanation, he snatched a yellow envelope from the outstretched hand of a messenger boy who stood upon the threshold, dropped his own hat on the hall table, unceremoniously appropriated the cap of the asfounded messenger, and turned swiftly to Mrs. Comfort.

"Which room?" he whispered. "Quick!"

"Third floor back," gasped the landlady. "But you can't—"

Peter did not wait to hear her expostulations. He dashed up the stairs and was out of sight before she could finish the sentence.

He stopped for an instant before the door of the third floor back, to get his breath. Then he knocked softly.

"Who's there?"

The voice had a startled, anxious ring.

"Western Union Telegraph," Peter answered, in a quiet, assured tone.

The door opened the least crack, and then was flung wide. The envelope was snatched from his hand and torn open, the contents devoured. Peter stood stock still, with wide open eyes.

"Oh, thank God! Thank God! He'll take me home! He'll take me back! Oh, father, dear father!"

The girl inside was sobbing, beside herself. She turned, blindly, to Peter.

"How do I get this money? I want to go home—to go home to California. He'll save me from Roger. He'll protect me. I won't have to bear anything more. I'll be free at last!" The words tumbled wildly over each other, and again, almost without taking breath, she asked: "How do I get this money?"

Peter saw it all in a flash—the woman hiding from a husband who had illtreated her, the father who had sent the money, faster than on the wings of the wind, to bring his daughter home. It was an old story, with, Peter hoped, a happy ending, for the girl was beautiful and appealing—though not in the least, except in generalities, like the portrait that he carried inside the breast of his coat.

XIV

THE same sort of thing was destined to be Peter's experience for many days to come. Every waking hour, and many when he should have been sleeping, were spent in following up clews unearthed by eager detectives, spurred to incessant action by the large reward which Donald Morris had privately offered for any news of either or both of the sisters.

Morris had been inclined, at first, to limit the reward to news of Mary.

"I care nothing about the sister, Clancy," he said. "What does it matter to me where she is, or what she does? It's Mary—Mary!"

The agonized appeal in his eyes was almost more than Peter could bear. The two men, so unlike, but with the bond of a common interest, had become, in those few days, fast friends.

Peter could not bring himself even to hint at the sinister possibility which had presented itself to his mind and to Captain O'Malley's. Hardened as they were to the terrible crimes committed in this great city every day, the possibility of murder — a

word which they had not whispered, even to each other—was not one which Peter would willingly suggest to the client who had become his friend. It was, therefore, with great difficulty that he persuaded Morris to make the reward applicable to news of either of the sisters.

"If we can only find Anne," he said to O'Malley, after Morris had reluctantly consented, "I promise you I'll put the screws on her and find out what happened to Mary Blake, if it's necessary to have her arrested for murder to do it. You watch me—*I'm going to find Anne!*"

But for once, for all his confidence in himself, Peter seemed destined to failure. Each day and all day long and far into the night, all over the country, sharp-eyed agents trained to the last keen edge of observation sought for the missing women.

Always there were clews. Their name was legion, and Peter did not dare, in his own words, "to pass one up," for fear that it might lead true, at last. It seemed impossible that there could be so many unexplained women as were unearthed—so many women with birthmarks, so many who were young and dark, and, to the observer's eager eye, dazzled perhaps by the amount of the reward, so like the photograph which each detective carried about with him.

In his investigations, Peter traveled the country over. A swift journey to St. Louis—and failure. Returning, he had no more than reached his office when a report came in of a young woman with a conspicuous birthmark, who had recently taken obscure lodgings in a back street in Philadelphia.

The cases of those who were supposed to be Anne Blake were the most difficult to cope with, and took the most time. A decision could only be reached, in some instances, by finding out the antecedents of the suspects, and by determining that the person in question was definitely in some other place on the 28th of May.

There was nothing in Peter's possession with which to identify the woman he was seeking, except a meager description. He had endeavored to amplify this to the fullest extent possible. He had called again on the janitor, Angelo Russo, in Waverly Place, late in the afternoon, after his experience with the *soi-disant* Mrs. Florence Smith.

He had gone quietly into the old apartment house and, unheralded, had sought the janitor in his own domain. In the dark, stuffy basement he had interviewed Angelo and his invalid wife, who appeared almost too ill to answer any questions.

"She not know noding 'bout noding," Angelo said, interposing his short body protectively between Peter and his wife. "She sick long time. Doc', he say she mus' have fresh air—countree. How get him, me? Try ev' way I know, Godalmighty! But no good—Angelo have no luck—only troub'—jus' troub'!"

"Did your wife ever see Miss Anne Blake?" asked Peter, touched, in spite of his preoccupation, by the poor, stupid Italian's sincere distress. "That's all I want to know."

"Yes—me seen her long time 'go," said the wife, in a thin, weak voice. "Long time 'go," she repeated sadly.

"Could you describe her to me—tell me how she looked?" asked Peter kindly. "A woman sometimes sees more than a man."

But the poor woman's powers of description were little better than her husband's. She insisted, however, that Anne Blake was not thin, "not skinny," but—Peter supplied the word—slender.

"Yes, she was slend', but strong. Me see her lif' big heavy t'ing, carry 'em 'roun' easy. No, not skinny—what you say, slend'—yes."

This was the only way in which her description varied from Angelo's.

After leaving the Russos, Peter had found two or three neighboring tradesmen who knew Anne Blake by sight. He could learn practically nothing new. As to the birthmark, one or two thought it was on the left cheek, the others thought it was on the right. One lady, who owned a small bake shop, said she remembered it well, and that it was certainly on the right cheek, extending down on the neck. It looked to her something like the mark of a hand, a big spot below, and four—or was it only three?—smaller ones, running up on the cheek.

"Dark it was, like blood, and awful to have upon ye, the poor thing!"

This was all that Peter had to go upon in his subsequent attempts to trace Anne Blake. Only once, after investigation, had he been at all assured that he had found a genuine clew. This happened on the Wednesday following the disappearance.

He had sent a woman detective to interview the matron of the women's waiting

room in the Pennsylvania Station. This agent found that the neat colored woman in charge of the pay dressing room remembered seeing a veiled lady come in there on Sunday evening. She couldn't be sure, but she thought it was after five o'clock. It was not very long before the time when she went off duty, and that was at six. She recollected, too, that the lady had some sort of disfigurement on her face. She had received the fee and opened one of the pay dressing rooms for her; but whether it was because the lady stayed in there till after her time was up, or for whatever reason, the colored woman had no recollection of seeing her again.

After three weeks of almost incessant toil, this was the one thing that Peter had learned. Porters and conductors of every train leaving the Pennsylvania Station on that fateful Sunday night had been personally interviewed. Not one remembered seeing any such lady as Peter described. As far as he was able to learn, Anne Blake might have vanished into thin air.

The search for a cab which Mary Blake might have taken had proved equally fruitless. The city, as Peter had promised Donald Morris, had been gone over with a fine-toothed comb. All the big taxi companies, the smaller garages, and all the "free lances," from the Bronx to the Battery, had been investigated, to no purpose. No one had seen Mary Blake leave Waverly Place, and every trace of her was utterly lost. Like her sister, she had slipped out of all cognizance, leaving no ripple to betray her passage.

"It looks as if the only chance of getting results would be to let the story leak out to the newspapers," said Peter to O'Malley, late one afternoon toward the end of June. "Mr. Morris is dead against it — thinks that Miss Mary would hate the publicity worse than anything in the world. Even if we could persuade him to let us go ahead and practically advertise, I'm not any too hopeful." He sighed wearily. "I don't see, in any case, why Anne should come out of the woods. If she'd only draw some of the money that's lying up there at the Scoville Bank, it might give us a look in; but they haven't heard a word. I'm sure she's got plenty of funds in hand, all right, and is lying low. Wonder how she figures to pull out the money without any one getting wise as to where she is?"

"I've been puzzling about that, too," said O'Malley. "Seems as if she'd have to take somebody into her confidence to put it across; but if what we've doped out is true, and Mary Blake never turns up, for the simple reason that—"

He made an expressive gesture.

"That letter keeps coming back to my mind, O'Malley," said Peter reflectively. "I mean the one Mary wrote to Donald Morris. One phrase sticks in my crop—'There will be no one left but Anne, if I fail.' It looks like what we thought, and yet—somehow I can't get it out of my head."

Suddenly he banged his fist down on the desk and jumped to his feet.

"I'm going through that apartment again, O'Malley," he said. "I've been trying to do it ever since, but every day some bright guy thinks he has the whole thing cinched, and I've had to beat it somewhere on a wild-goose chase. I'm through with that for the present. I don't care who has a pipe dream, induced by too big a reward, I'm going to see if there isn't something in that apartment that 'll give us a lead. If we could only find out where they came from, and where their friends are, it might give us a line on where they'd be likely to go. The way it is, we've just about come to a standstill, as I see it. There must be something left in the place where they've lived for several years that would be a hint to the guy who was able to take it. That key's been burning in my pocket all these weeks, and to-night I'm going to use it. I don't want any gallery, so I'm going late, just before the street door's closed for the night. That's at twelve o'clock. I'll try to fix it so that I don't run into the janitor."

"Oh, I guess you needn't be much afraid of that, from what Rawlins says. He's been pretty well fed up with just watching the house when there's been absolutely nothing stirring, and he's sort of made friends with Angelo, to keep from being bored stiff. The poor old devil—Angelo, I mean—is just about crazy on account of his wife. She won't go to a hospital, and there he is, taking care of her and trying to hold down his job at the same time, with the result that he never goes upstairs except when he can't get out of it. So—"

"So you think there's no fear of my running into him," concluded Peter. "Well, I don't suppose he'd beef about it much, but you never can tell. Such fellows some-

times have an attack of conscience in the most unexpected places. I won't take any chances. I'll get Rawlins to give me the tip when he's out of the way."

"I guess it would be as well, at that," said O'Malley. "But what do you expect to find, Pete? You went over the apartment pretty thoroughly the first day, didn't you?"

"I did take a good look," answered Peter. "It was as thorough as I could make it at the time, and with Morris champing at the bit; but I'm not entirely satisfied—haven't been all along. There's a queer feel about the place, O'Malley. You may think I'm getting fanciful in my old age, and I can't explain to you just what it is. The place is shut in—airy enough, and all that, you know, but cut off from the rest of the world. You have a feeling that almost anything might happen there, and no one the wiser. The windows are all covered with curtains that are thin enough to let in the light and air, but thick enough to prevent you from seeing a thing from the outside. They're not the usual sash curtains, but run from the top to the bottom of the windows, and there's a rod through them at the bottom, so that they can't blow, and there are thick, dark shades. Of course, it might be that way in any apartment where the outlook wasn't very attractive; and it may be just that. You may think I'm a nut, O'Malley, but I've got it into my bean that there was something more—some purpose. I don't know what, but I'm going to find out. The thing's got me going. I'm going to find out, O'Malley, if it takes a leg!"

XV

It was a dark night, hot and close, with a feel of thunder in the air. The big arc lights near the arch in Washington Square made spots of copperas green on the close-trimmed grass, and flecks of emerald on the full summer foliage of the trees. Above, the sky was velvet black, thick and solid, like a pall, except for the faint, pulsating glow of heat lightning over in the west.

In the short length of Waverly Place, the shadows lay deep, like those at the bottom of a cañon. At the far end shone the lights of Broadway, dim here, in comparison with its upper reaches of flashing electricity. An occasional car banged and rumbled on its way north or south, serving to accentuate the silence of the cross street.

It was nearing midnight when Peter Clancy alighted from the stage at Fifth Avenue and made his way eastward. When he reached the corner of University Place, he softly whistled five notes in a minor key. That simple little call was as familiar to every man on his staff as the notes of a robin to a country-bred boy.

Immediately from among the shadows on the south side of the street, a shadow moved toward him. Peter advanced quietly.

"That you, Mr. Clancy?"

A voice from the moving shadow. As it came closer, Peter could just distinguish Rawlins's face.

"Anything stirring, Rawlins?"

"Not a blamed thing!" the man replied disgustedly. "This is a hell of a job to put a live man on, Mr. Clancy. Been hanging around here for weeks, and not a soul to speak to but Sullivan and the dago over there."

"Angelo swallowed the story of your being a plain-clothes watchman for the bank here all right, didn't he? He hasn't any suspicion—"

"Not a suspish," said Rawlins confidently. "He and I are good friends, all right. I can't help being sorry for the poor devil. He's such a fool, and he's up against it, sure enough. He ought to send that wife of his to a hospital."

"Those people haven't any sense about that sort of thing," commented Peter. "But never mind that now, Rawlins. Just slip over and see if the coast is clear. I'm going up to the apartment for a bit, and I'm not looking for an excited audience. Beat it over, and give me the high sign if he's out of the way."

Peter waited in the dark entrance next to the American Bank, which was directly opposite No. 99. He saw Rawlins's short, wiry figure silhouetted against the dim light which burned in the hallway of the house across the way. Then he saw him disappear in the darkness at the other end of the passage.

It seemed a long time to Peter's impatience before Rawlins again appeared, and, like a shadow, flitted across the street. He was out of breath when he reached Peter, and chuckling softly to himself.

"What's up?" Peter asked sharply. "What are you laughing at, Rawlins? Let me in on the joke."

"Gee!" exclaimed Rawlins under his

breath. "I'll bet the Federal authorities would give a good deal to have heard what I just did. Say, Clancy, did you ever hear that the dagoes in this old burgh have a big lottery running under cover somewhere?"

"Oh, there are always rumors like that going around," said Peter carelessly, "about the Chinese and the French and the Italians. What's that got to do with the price of cheese?"

"Why," said Rawlins, still chuckling, "there's a man over there with Angelo in his little front room—I gum-shoed through the hall and part way down the stairs, and I heard them talking. Angelo is crazy because he's lost some money on the thing, poor devil, and he talked louder than I guess he knew. They both spoke Italian, but you know I'm a shark at lingoes, Clancy."

"Yes, I know," said Peter impatiently, "but we aren't here to sleuth out things for the government. I'd have been interested awhile back, but I've got something else on my chest now. Do you think Angelo is likely to come up in the next few minutes? That's all I want to know."

"I should say, from the start he's got, that he'd go on cussing his friend for some time," answered Rawlins, grinning in the dark at his recollection of the little Italian's language. "If you chase over right away, you'll make it without any trouble. Angelo is what you might call occupied just about now."

"All right," said Peter softly.

Swift and quiet as a cat, he crossed the street, passed through the gas-lighted hall, and up the stairs.

There was no gas burning on the third landing, from which he inferred that the apartment was still unoccupied. The fourth floor was also dark, and Peter had to flash his electric hand light upon the door to fit his duplicate key.

The lock grated with an uneasy sound and the door swung slowly inward. Black darkness, which could almost be felt, still confronted him. Peter stepped across the threshold and carefully shut the door without a sound.

The closed rooms, after the oppressive heat of the outer world, seemed damp and cold, and Peter shivered slightly. In his rubber-soled shoes, he made no sound as he advanced into the living room, flashing his light carefully about to avoid running into anything.

There was little fear of being seen from the outside, since the buildings opposite were used for business purposes, and were empty at this time of night; but Peter was taking no chances. His first move was to pull down the dark shades at the windows.

Remembering how the outer halls were lighted, he struck a match to light the gas, and found, to his surprise, that the apartment was equipped with electricity. He had not noticed it before, or, if he had, it had made no impression on his preoccupied mind. He saw nothing significant in it now, though he was glad of the more brilliant light in which to make his investigation. There was a candle lamp over on the desk, and a big, shaded lamp stood upon the table. Peter switched on the smaller lamp.

In the quiet light that illumined the room, he could see that it was just as he had left it more than three weeks before. A little dust had drifted in through the chinks of the windows, filming the polished mahogany of table, chairs, and couch. Otherwise there was no change, except that the scarf, which had proved an open sesame to a world of anxiety, had been removed.

Peter knew all about the scarf. He had taken it to Van Dorn & Sawyer, to have the stain upon it analyzed. The chemists found it to be what he felt sure from the first it was—human blood. The scarf now lay in the safe at Peter Clancy's office.

Peter went into the bedroom and pulled down the shade, lest some wakeful person in the houses on the street above might catch a gleam from the light which he had left burning in the living room. Then he softly crept into the dining room and lowered the blinds there; then into the kitchen, where he noted that the broken pane of glass had been replaced, according to Morris's careful instructions to Angelo on the day when it was discovered. Peter had agreed with Morris that it was an unnecessary risk to leave the window in a condition in which any sneak thief might have entered from the fire escape with perfect ease.

Peter drew the dark blue blind down to the sill, and flashed the cold eye of his hand torch about, looking for a light fixture. He found it in the shape of an old-fashioned gas chandelier with two burners, suspended from the ceiling. He lit them both. The gas burned high, with a hiss that sounded loud in the remote stillness of the place. Peter lowered it to the point of silence.

Then, supplementing the light from above

with the clear gleam of his torch, he searched the kitchen with microscopic thoroughness, but found nothing that seemed to have even a remote bearing on his problem. The two significant details which he had noted on that perplexing Monday—the fallen glass upon the outside of the sill, and the piece of ice in the sink—having disappeared, the kitchen had no other revelations to offer.

He proceeded to the dining room, with a like result. Except for the disarrangement of the sideboard already noted, the room was evidently just as it ordinarily appeared when tenanted. He noticed again that there was but one chair drawn up to the small round mahogany dining table. The rest were standing tidily against the walls. He wondered if only one person had partaken of the last meal eaten in that room.

Passing into the hall, he sent the brilliant eye of his flash back and forth across the dark waxed floor. It was thinly covered now with a light, feathery dust, which would blow into the little gray rolls that hospital nurses call " kittens " if the air was let in.

" Gad, I wish I could open the windows!" thought Peter. " The air's as dead as—"

He paused before the open door of the small storeroom, still looking at the floor. There was one spot here where the dust had collected thickly. A big round clot of it lay there, and several smaller spots. With a slight, faint creeping of the flesh, Peter stepped carefully across this part of the floor and entered the storeroom.

The only window here gave upon a narrow shaft, across which was the window of the bath adjoining. There were only thin muslin curtains at these windows, but at this midnight hour it was very unlikely that any one would notice a light.

" Anyhow, I'll have to risk it," said Peter, half aloud. " I've got to make sure about this room."

There was only gas here, as in all the rear of the apartment, but the flow was good and the light fairly strong. Again Peter noted the slight abrasions of the wall where he concluded the other trunk had stood—the trunk which Bill, the taxi driver, had found so heavy—the trunk which Anne Blake had taken away with her to a destination that still remained veiled in mystery.

The length of the trunk—Peter measured from one little indentation in the wall to another—was three feet, four or five inches. Its height from the floor was approximately twenty-four inches.

" Big enough!" Peter muttered to himself. " Big enough for—almost anything!"

He folded up his pocket rule and turned to the large, brass-bound trunk which had been left standing against the wall.

" Makes me feel a bit like a burglar, but it's all in the day's work," thought Peter, as he knelt beside it and inspected the lock. " I guess I've got you," his thought ran on. " You're easy!"

He took a large bunch of small keys from his pocket, and, after a few minutes' work, found one that fitted.

A sharp crack of the lock, and Peter lifted the lid. The odor of camphor, in a great whiff, filled his nostrils, almost choking him. He drew back and took a long breath.

" Gosh, they've used plenty of it!" he exclaimed, half aloud. " I'd be sorry for the poor devil of a moth that took a chance with that!"

Carefully he lifted up the ends of the various articles in the trunk, in such a way as not to disarrange them. Except for a pair of woolen blankets at the bottom, there was nothing there but winter clothing of various sorts — extremely various sorts, Peter saw. First there was a magnificent evening wrap, trimmed with almost priceless fur. Beneath it lay a heavy winter cloak, plain, rough, and dark, and rubbed a little at the cuffs and collar, as with constant wear. There were carriage boots, satin, lined with fur, and next to them, wrapped in newspaper, was a pair of high, fleece-lined galoshes, old and shabby. Peter looked at the date on the newspaper.

" The *Planet*, May 25," he read. " Somebody packed this trunk not more than three days before—well, I don't see where that gets you, old top! Come, get a move on!"

In replacing the bundle of galoshes, he noticed that an article had been cut from the paper—not torn out, but cut with sharp scissors. The fact merely caught his attention in passing.

" Probably a notice of ' Dark Roads,' " he thought.

Dismissing the subject from his mind, he went on with his task. It proved somewhat trying, owing to the camphor fumes, which became more overpowering as he delved deeper into the trunk, and once they became so strong that he sneezed. He tried to choke it back, but it would come—a loud

" Atchoo!" which resounded horribly in the stillness.

Peter held his breath and listened. Nothing stirred. Far away he could hear the faint rattle of a passing street car, over on Broadway, and the low murmuring of thunder overhead; but within was the silence of the tomb.

" Cheerful, I call it," said Peter to himself, drawing a long breath. " Well, I guess that 'll be about all here."

He closed and locked the trunk. He flashed his light inside the open drawers of the small white chiffonier, but found nothing that could give him any help—not a letter, not a card, no piece of writing of any sort. The very few articles of clothing which remained were old and worn. A pair of gray leather gloves, shabby with wear, still held the shape of slender, long hands. There was something almost pathetic about them as they lay there, palms upward, as if in appeal; but Peter was in no mood for sympathy.

" Anne Blake's things, without a doubt," he thought. " Old things too badly worn to bother with, and her winter stuff packed away with her sister's. I wonder if *Sherlock Holmes* would make anything out of that? Does it mean that she plans to come back in the fall? Or are they all things she has no further use for? If so, why pack 'em away so carefully? And only a few days before she—quit. Was the whole business ' sudden at the last,' as they say of people who're a long time dying?" He shook his red head in perplexity. " Well, no use trying to think it out now, Pete! Let's get all the dope, and then patch it together the best we can."

So saying, he slipped softly down the hall, throwing his brilliant light over every inch of the floor and walls. Almost without sound, he drifted from the hall into the bedroom and stood still, looking about him. There was electricity here, and he boldly switched on the lights in the ceiling. The resulting illumination was so bright that it made him blink.

Then he proceeded with his investigation.

Nothing in the waste basket; nothing, not even ashes, in the small, old-fashioned grate; nothing left in the few pockets he discovered with exceeding difficulty, in the various articles of women's apparel that hung in the two closets; nothing of any interest in the rifled drawers of the big highboy, nor in the empty drawers of the dressing table. A little drift of pink toilet powder still clung in the corner of one of them, and there was a tiny smear of red on the inner side of the same drawer. Touching it, Peter found that it was a trifle greasy, and made his finger tip rosy red.

" Rouge! Aha, my lady!" he chuckled, with a little grimace. " Beauty isn't always even skin deep!"

For the hundredth time he wondered if Mary Blake was all that Morris thought her.

" Not that a little paint and powder is anything against a girl these days, when every flapper, from fifteen to fifty, makes up for the street, and some of 'em pile it on so thick you'd think they must have put it on with a trowel—in the dark! Well "—he looked about him—" there's no excuse for her if she didn't do it right."

He reached out and switched on the lights on both sides of the mirror, at the back of the dressing table. His pleasant, homely, freckled face appeared in the glass, dazzlingly illuminated.

" H-m! Mary took no chances of not looking her best. I'll say that for her," he thought. " I wish she'd left me some real light on the problem she's stacked me up against, instead of all this spotlight stuff! Well, I guess there's nothing here. Now for the living room!"

He turned off all the lights, and went through into the room at the front. Here the little candle lamp on the desk threw a gentle, intimate glow over the rather austere old furniture and neutral-tinted walls. There was nothing that even remotely suggested the theatrical — none of the customary signed photographs, and but few pictures. The " Mona Lisa " smiled her enigmatic smile over the mantel, and there were a few fine Japanese prints, but that was all. In front of the center window, on a slender pedestal, stood an exquisite little plaster cast of an Andromeda, chained to a rock. Scratched in the base was the signature, " D. V. L. Morris."

All these things Peter could see in the quiet light, but they did not appear to have any particular significance. He felt that he needed all the light, both mental and material, that he could get; so, without wasting any precious moments, he took off the shade of the lamp that stood on the table and turned on both its high-powered bulbs.

Again, as on that first day, he stirred the dead, cold ashes in the fireplace. No, there

was nothing. Every particle of paper was consumed. He could not even tell what sort of papers had been burned.

Sighing, he rose and looked again about the room. On each side of the fireplace were built-in shelves, laden with books and magazines. There was a good deal of fiction which Peter had never read—Thackeray, George Meredith, Henry James, Edith Wharton, and many others. There was a good deal of poetry, too, and many plays, old and new. On the top shelf stood a worn set of Shakespeare, in an old-fashioned leather binding.

Without knowing just why he did it, Peter took down one of the volumes at random. It chanced to be "Julius Cæsar," and on the fly leaf, in a bold, flowing hand, was the name "Winthrop Curwood."

"Winthrop Curwood," Peter repeated, half aloud. "I've heard that name before, somewhere. Winthrop Curwood — no, I can't place it. Anyway, it may not mean a thing. The books are old enough to have been bought second hand. I'll just see."

He ran rapidly through a number of the older books. The name did not occur again.

"However, I'll just make a note of it. There doesn't seem to be any other owner's name written in any of them."

In a little pocket memorandum book he copied the name "Winthrop Curwood," in his clear, microscopic hand.

In returning "Julius Cæsar" to its place on the top shelf, Peter's hand struck a pile of magazines which were closely stacked at the end. One of the slippery pamphlets loosened, and in a rush the whole lot came cascading down.

Peter caught his breath, and thanked his lucky stars that there was no one in the apartment below. As he carefully returned the fallen magazines to their place, he noted, with some surprise, that besides the more popular monthlies of the day there were a number of scientific and medical journals, and several copies of a publication called *Beauty*.

He had never even heard of this last, and he glanced through one or two numbers curiously, smiling a little, in spite of the seriousness of his quest. There appeared to be no end of ways in which one could heighten one's beauty, and no practical limit to the absurdities recommended for the purpose. That some one had taken the suggestions seriously there could be little doubt, for in several cases articles had been carefully clipped from the body of the magazine. This had also happened, in one or two cases, in the medical journals. Peter wondered, in passing, what the subjects treated had been, but could form no idea, since the entire article, in each case, had been cut away.

Peter had always been interested in people's books, their selection was a matter so strongly indicative of character. In this instance the evidence was distinctly contradictory.

"A lot of highbrow books," he thought, "and some of the rest of the stuff so lowbrow it makes even me feel intellectual. Did Anne pick out one kind, and Mary the other? If so, which? Oh, well, it's no use to speculate now. Better get on!"

He resumed his painstaking inspection. He had saved the desk till the last. Here, if anywhere, he was sure he would find what he so ardently sought.

And yet, when he opened the desk, never in his life had he found so noncommittal a lot of papers. A great mass of press notices, with the little yellow slip of the clipping bureau still attached, were mixed up with plain white letter paper and envelopes. There were a few business letters from Frederick Jones, but not one from Mary's old manager, Arthur Quinn. In fact, there were no strictly private letters to either of the sisters, and he could find none at all addressed to Anne.

To avoid the smallest chance of missing anything, Peter had seated himself beside the desk, and had drawn out, one by one, each of the four drawers, placing them upon his knees while he minutely examined the contents. Satisfied, at last, that there was nothing to his purpose in any of them, with a feeling of deep discouragement he slid them back into their places. They all ran in with the ease which one encounters only in very good old furniture—all but the bottom drawer on the right. This slipped in smoothly until it was nearly shut, and then stuck.

"Oh, damn!" said Peter, and pushed it hard.

It would not move. He pulled it out and pushed it in again, but it would not close completely.

It did not really matter in the least. He had found the drawers open, and there was no reason why this one should not remain so; but any one who has ever started to shut a drawer knows precisely how Peter

felt. That drawer simply had to yield before he could go on with anything else. Perhaps—

Peter jerked the drawer out and dropped to his knees, while his right hand sought and found the flash light in his pocket. There was a slight click, and a brilliant glare lit up the recess into which the drawer should have gone.

Peter uttered a forcible exclamation. Stooping low, he groped with his long fingers in the back of the recess, and drew out a small rectangle of stiff pasteboard. It must have fallen from the upper drawer and remained, perhaps for years, undiscovered. It had evidently fallen slantwise across the corner of the back when the drawer was pulled out, and had been slightly damaged by Peter's efforts to close it.

He automatically straightened a bent corner as he hastily took his find over to the table.

Apparently, it was not an especially valuable treasure-trove—just an old *carte de visite* photograph of a little girl, in a plain, somewhat countrified "best" dress of the last of the nineties. She appeared to be about seven or eight years old, and the childish face that looked up at Peter was one of such loveliness that he, always a lover of children, caught his breath.

Peter took an unmounted photograph from his pocket and laid the two portraits side by side upon the table.

There could be no doubt. They were the same, they must be the same. The gay, laughing, exquisite child's face had developed into that of a wonderful, sad, but equally beautiful woman. The great eyes, with their long, dark lashes, the small, straight nose, the curving lips, were the same. Only the expression was different, with an unfathomable difference. The spirit behind the eyes must have undergone a complete metamorphosis to have made the apparent change.

"It's Mary Blake, all right, all right—I'll bet my life on that!" muttered Peter.

Quickly he turned the little photograph over. There was no writing on the back, as he had hoped. Instead, in elaborate, filigreed lettering, were printed the words—

WALTER LORD, Photographer, Hobart Falls, New York.

"By Gad!" exclaimed Peter under his breath, bringing his closed fist down upon the table softly, but with emphasis. "The first look-in we've had—the very first! Hobart Falls, New York! That's where she must have come from—or somewhere near there, at least. And Walter Lord—who can tell what Walter Lord may know, if he's still there, and alive?"

With a rapid motion, he slipped the two portraits into an inner pocket and buttoned his coat over them.

"I'll find out something about her, at last! My hunch about coming here wasn't all to the bad. I'll find out something about the unknown past of Mary Blake — and Anne!"

With eyes alight with the first hope he had known for many a day, Peter put back the shade upon the table lamp, and readjusted various things about the room, so that they should be as nearly as possible in the order—or disorder—in which he had found them. Then he switched off the lights and crept softly to the door.

Gently, gently, with one hand on the latch and the other on the lock, he turned the two knobs and drew open the door. As he did so, a clock, somewhere outside in the darkness, boomed:

"One, two."

"Two o'clock!" thought Peter, as he sped noiselessly down the stairs. "Not much sleep for me to-night! I must find out where Hobart Falls is, and beat it for the first train in the morning. I have a feeling in my bones that I've struck something at last. A little light thrown on the past may reflect on the future—who knows? Anyhow, it's up to me not to leave a stone unturned."

The street door closed with a faint, soft creak, and the lean figure of the young detective slipped away into the warm darkness of the summer night.

(*To be continued in the May number of* MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

CONFESSION

I'M pierced by another dart,
Creating joy and pain supreme!
With twenty sticking in my heart,
Indeed Love's target I would seem!

Harold Seton

Blue Bottles

THANK HEAVEN FOR THESE TWO ISLAND CASTAWAYS WITH A SENSE OF HUMOR

By Leland Hall

IF the ship had not, on the very eve of reaching the American coast, run into a fog and slowed down to creep through the night on soundings, Angus might not have drunk quite so much. Still, he was naturally fond of good liquor. Moreover, the passengers—belated officers of the A. E. F., commercials with a nose for trade, and nurses flat as oatmeal water now that they had lost the effervescent war spirit—had bored him to dryness throughout the long trip. In any case, he would doubtless have drunk freely.

Well, he was happy. He slouched in the smoking saloon, smiling engagingly at nothing, babbling little airs to himself. His uniform was askew, his brown hair rumpled; but his eye was bright, and his smile was as winning as ever. Perhaps God gave him good humor to make it hard for him to attain heaven. Sometimes it seems that way. Angus, alas, had yet to deny himself the peaches of earth that fell into his arms. His smile brought them down—all the girls, all the widows, and now and then a wife.

He was singing away softly to himself, and, without knowing what he did, he was putting matches into a blue bottle. The matches happened to be scattered on the table. The bromoseltzer bottle, its contents having braced him against the movement of the sea, had happened to linger, empty, in his pocket.

The voices of the gamblers, whom Angus would not have disturbed for worlds, were low and infrequent. The air was thick with smoke. Some one returned quietly from outside to sit in at the game again.

"We just passed a bell buoy," he announced.

"Near land. Give me two cards!"

"Ding dong, ding dong," Angus sang dreamily.

He did not want to play cards. He knew enough not to play in this mood of benevolence. Frankly, he wanted to fall in love with some one. All through the voyage he had missed love. The nurses and lady physicians on board the steamer did not inspire any such feeling.

Angus went out on deck. A discreet serenade along a corridor in the darkened bowels of the ship might open a door to him; and all cats are alike in the dark.

The deck was deserted, and dripping with the fog. The steamer moved so slowly that not even the sound of water brushing at her side came up from below. The foghorn roared methodically.

Angus wandered down the wet deck. Forward of amidships, in shadow, he saw a person lying wrapped in rugs in a steamer chair.

He could not be mistaken—it was a girl, and one he had not seen before. Though her face was mostly in the shadow of her hat, a misty bar of light fell across her mouth and chin. Her lips were red, the only spot of color on the deck; and they were young lips. Even enveloped as she was in her rug, there was something shapely about her. The amorous devil in Angus went over the top.

"Having a good time by yourself?" he began, standing hatless and cajoling before her.

"Did you speak to me?"

She could not respond otherwise. Even though amorous devils were more than welcome on homeward-bound ships, there were habitual moves left in the game yet.

But Angus jumped several moves, and landed on the chair beside her. They were alone. He glanced swiftly along the decks. They were absolutely alone. Bending his head, he saw that she was pretty and select.

" I'm lonely, too," he murmured.

Women did not often move away from him after he had smiled. As a matter of fact, the girl's quiescence, which he found provocative, was due in part to her high spirit, and in part to her being so closely wrapped in her rug that she could not easily move. But all he saw was that she did not move; and in an instant he had done—skillfully, yet ingenuously, too—what no gentleman should have done. He kissed her.

She could not get out of her chair at once.

Angus was a little abashed; but he was not precisely sorry. When she called him names, he said:

" Oh, *là, là!*"

When she threatened to report him to the captain of the ship, he said again:

" Oh, *là, là!*"

Then there came a nasty shock.

" My husband will have something to say to you!"

He stood up, not hurriedly, but in woeful astonishment.

" Your husband? Oh, *là!*" Only one " *là* " this time, be it marked; but still the molehill rather than the mountain, and always the good humor. " But, I say, it's his fault! He shouldn't let you travel alone."

Angus thus dismissed the husband for the present. This meant that he entertained no thought of serious consequences; but he began to feel a little rueful—not for his act, which had sprung from an impulse in no way unfriendly, but for her reaction, which so disproportionately bristled with antagonism. She oughtn't to take it so hard.

He saw that she was trying to get out of her chair, and he stepped forward with outstretched hand, to take her rug and carry it for her. He had no sooner laid hold of the rug than she tried to wrest it from him. This was mere temper, and he held on the more tenaciously for a chance to explain, to make everything right. They tugged each other along the slippery deck, she in silence, he with soothing, mollifying phrases, half comical.

He couldn't take it quite seriously. She slipped more than he, and he saw that she would soon bring up against the railing—which meant that she would then be stalled, so to speak, and he could deliver the rug to her with a bow and a deep word of conciliation. He had already begun to hope that, their brief but high-spirited intercourse being thus terminated, they might begin again in an amicable moderation.

" Steady! Steady, now—that's a good girl! Please!"

She had brought up against the railing, as he expected. Then, to his staggering horror, she disappeared over the side of the ship. She screamed once, falling. The rug dangled in his hands.

He suffered the nightmare sensation of being rooted, for an instant's eternity; after which he found himself in the chilling sea. The ship, even as it vanished through the fog, vanished in every connotation from his mind. Only long afterward was he thankful that its slowness had reduced the suction in its wake.

She answered him, and he got to her. She was keeping herself afloat.

" For God's sake!" The water took his breath; she, too, was breathless. The thrust of her arm in swimming seemed to push him from her. " Let me help you!" he cried in despair.

Later he managed to say:

" Bell buoy this evening. We're close to the shore."

She was choking. He caught hold of her and held her up.

" What is your name?"

She could just whisper:

" Honorée—"

He caught a surer hold.

" Take it easy," he gasped. " Easy!"

Then his free arm struck a log that was floating in the sea. With the muffler that was around her neck, he bound her hands to the log.

II

THE feel of land beneath his feet restored him strength to stagger forward; but he had not the strength to lift her. He could just drag her like a sack up from the edge of the water. Then he collapsed on the sand beside her.

In the relativity of time and space, the recovery of his will was as infinitesimally gradual as the spread of life over the planet. He became conscious that he was alive; he willed to go on living; he remembered himself; he remembered the girl. Then began the painful struggle to move. He raised his hand; he extended his arm. They fell across the body beside him. Then the slow grasp of the fact that she moved, breathing. Patience that was almost geological,

measureless intervals; and at last the recognition of their danger—cold; and the conception of a purpose—fire.

So it came to pass, in time, that he crawled through the obscure fog for wood; that he opened his knife with his teeth; that, with hands rendered nearly uncontrollable by convulsions of shivering, he whittled a few dry shavings. So it came to pass, duly, that he searched his pockets for matches.

He laid his findings on the sand by his knees. Matches he had felt; but he saw their heads a phosphorescent paste on his finger tips. He put down his wet tobacco pouch, and the soft lump which had been a package of cigarettes. He put down what his numb hand was slow to recognize—a bottle.

Because it puzzled him, he took that up again. He pried out the cork; and there were dry matches in that bottle, which in any light had been blue.

III

WHEN Angus awoke, it was light; but there was no telling how far the day had advanced, whether it was morning or afternoon, for the fog clung thick over land and water. He was dazed, full of pain, thirsty. The reality was beyond his comprehension.

The girl lay by the fire, bent almost double. Angus went near her in aching suspense. She might be dead, all doubled up and motionless like that. When he saw that she was breathing, he stumbled away from the fire and wandered down the beach in the fog, seeking water.

By following the edge of the sea he came to a little rocky promontory, where, in the hollows of the rocks, he found pools of rain water. He drank again and again, and yet again; and then he sat down with his head in his hands. He began to shudder in dread, not of her blame, but of his own full consciousness of his responsibility. This, he knew, must come upon him.

He tried to recall just what had happened. He remembered that he had been slightly intoxicated, that he had kissed a girl without giving her warning, that she had taken a violent dislike to him and had threatened him with — her husband. Deuced awkward, now! He was sure he had not pushed her overboard. Some careless member of the old tub's crew must have left a gate in the railing unfastened. Yet his own responsibility was terrific.

The possibility of her being afraid of him presented itself to his mind; but its ugliness was so revolting, and he was so kind-hearted himself, that he simply refused to reckon with it. On the other hand, it was hardly worth while to reckon with other sentiments — anger, hatred, vindictiveness. Whatever she might feel, the whole affair was now up to him entirely. He was sorry to his heart's core, and he would say so; but for the time being they were here in this incredible situation, and it was his manifest duty to *do* something for her—to do anything, everything, to make it as easy for her as he could.

To begin with, she might be thirsty when she awoke, as he had been. He would bring her water in—the blue bottle he found in his pocket. As he held it in his hand and looked at it, he smiled with an affectionate gratitude.

He was still light-headed; and he looked for food in a daze threaded with memories of a wholly unrelated past. He gathered mussels from the weeds of the lower rocks, the deep, cold blue of their shells undimmed in the mist. He was thankful they kept their shells shut up tight, and did not stick out their heads, like snails. What did they call snails over there in France, where he had been a soldier, and where they ate snails? *Escargots*—that was the word. He had never brought himself to eat one. Perhaps the girl had. They could talk about France after they had eaten.

There were crabs in a pool; but one pinched his finger when he picked it up, and he concluded that they were not soft-shelled crabs, such as one ate with *sauce tartare*. It slid down the weeds into the black water, over which the fog seemed to float heavily. Angus shuddered even to look into the veiled water, the horror of the night before was still so quick in him. He hoped she would not refer to it; but, of course, she would.

"What's done is done," he said, as he stood on the sand, determined to go back to the girl.

That was most of his philosophy, and he knew not how to complain.

He was destined, before he returned, to come upon a clam; so he threw away his mussels and dug clams. When he retraced his way through the fog back to the fire, his pockets were full of clams. In one hand he carried an old lard pail that he had discovered in the jetsam along the shore, and

in the other the blue bottle, full of water for her to drink. He smiled in friendliness.

She was sitting up, dazed, as he had been, looking into the embers. For the first time he saw her face entirely. She was pale, but there were the red lips that had tempted him the night before. Thank God, they did not droop!

Her eyebrows, which looked, against her pale skin, as if they might have been penciled in black, were a little drawn, in an expression of bewilderment. The poor child's hat was floating somewhere in the Atlantic, and her hair, unequivocally red, tumbled abundantly about her head and shoulders, warm against the fog. The proportions of her face, even in its trouble, were remarkably harmonious. As he stood looking at her through the haze of fog and smoke and steam, Angus felt that she was reserved, a little willful, and — the Lord bless her!—wholly without rancor.

At last she looked at him, with gray eyes, well set. She was only a trifle startled, but she waited for him to speak.

"Are you warm now?" he began.

"Yes, thank you."

"Dry?"

"Fairly dry, I think."

Putting down his lard pail, he went around the fire, extending the blue bottle.

"What is that?" she asked him, trying to gather her hair.

"Water for you to drink. I thought you might be thirsty. I was."

Failing in an effort to get to her feet, she lay back, with her hands over her forehead. He knelt beside her, anxious, clumsy.

"You're not hurt?"

She shook her head.

"I am thirsty. Give me some water."

Propped against his knee, she drank from the blue bottle, which he held to her lips. She drank slowly, having to breathe between swallows. His arm was about her shoulders, his cheek was nearly touching hers. It gave him a strange emotion; and his heart swelled, too, with admiration for her pluck, with gratitude scarcely definable for the toleration which he so little merited.

When she had drunk, she became conscious of her position, blushed, and drew away from him—from his eyes, perhaps, which too ardently implored her to be merciful. Her own widened a little.

"Are you the man who—"

He answered her question mutely, with a humble nod. Her expression was that of a person making an effort to remember; and to Angus this was unpleasant, keeping him in suspense as to what her recollection might excite. Better have done with that, quick!

"You remember—I bothered you. I pushed you against the railing, and you—"

"There was a gate of some sort in that railing. I am never likely to forget how I felt when it gave way!" She paused, to look at him with a directness steadied by intent. "Up to that point I remember—very distinctly."

Angus swallowed. If he nevertheless returned her look without flinching, it was because he felt that if she saw him flinch, she could only think him mean-spirited; in which case she would certainly be afraid of him.

"After that," he said, "we were in the sea, I do not know how long; and after that, we were here."

"You got me here?"

"I think we just drifted. Now, please, rest a little longer. I've got something for breakfast. I say, do you like clams?"

"No."

She sighed, but not because of the clams, as Angus well knew. Her mind was not at rest. She was trying not to surrender to distrust and anxiety.

He had been kneeling beside her, and now he stood up.

"Last night I was intoxicated," he said. The color came and went in her face. "I'm not, now. Please understand that."

He went over to the fire, whence he called cheerfully to her:

"I'm going to make you some clam broth. It's nice, and it will be hot."

One by one, he dropped the clams into the lard pail. They brought up the level of the water so that it overflowed and sank into the sand. Thereupon he narrated for her the fable of the fox who had to drink out of the crane's jug.

All the time the thought ran in his head:

"She's the loveliest, pluckiest girl I've ever seen. If only she'll let me, I can turn this advantage to a happy ending."

His heart beat high with the hope of an expiation that would count for something more than mere words. He could *do* for her. He was already feeding her; and then, just as the broth was about cooked, the soft solder of the lard pail melted and let the liquor drain away.

It was with a sober face, if not a sad

one, that he invited her to sip what was left of juice in the hot shells, carrying them to her in fingers that shifted gingerly in fear of the heat. He himself ate the boiled clams without enthusiasm. They were, he realized, somewhat tougher than leather; and they so excited his thirst again that no sooner had they thus breakfasted than he limped off to drink up another pool of rain water.

Having slaked his thirst, and dashed water in his face as well, he rose gayly above his unwonted depression.

"Heavens," he thought, "she is wonderful!"

IV

ANGUS returned, humming, through the fog, to find her standing in the mingled mist and smoke, evidently refreshed and stronger. That was splendid of her! She was full of pluck.

She gathered her hair into a braid or twist; and this suggested, unhappily for him, that she was less helpless, less at a loss, less easy to do for, perhaps, than she had first seemed. He took in a little sail.

"We're in an awful mess," he said, uttering the truth more incontrovertibly than he had wished to do.

"How soon can you get me out of it?"

He had had a dear illusion that if they got on well together, it wouldn't be so bad after all. Evidently she had entertained no such idea. She wanted to know exactly where they were. He thought they might be on an island in one of the bays along the coast of Maine, near the mouth of a river, perhaps; for the logs along the beach had evidently escaped from lumber drives.

"But I'm afraid," he concluded, "that until the fog lifts, we can't form any definite notion of where we are."

"Can you get me to shore?"

He looked at her wretchedly; but she had no mercy.

"I believe the fog sometimes hangs for weeks over these islands," she said.

She had given no special stress to the words, but they fell like a heavy reproach upon Angus. He tried to say something, to speak out his sense of guilt. Unable to do it, he turned to rolling more logs into the fire.

She watched him thoughtfully for a minute or so.

"Did you build this fire?" she asked. "How could you ever light a fire?"

"I had some dry matches in a blue bottle. I don't remember how they got there."

"What a funny thing to have. Oh, you had been drinking!"

Her voice trailed off, and again the color flushed in her face. He bit his lip in silence before her; but when he looked up again, she was calm and serene and smiling, without trace of bitterness.

"Never mind now," she said. "You saved my life. Thank you!"

His eyes must have beamed. He half stretched out his hands toward her. From the frozen hours in the sea, her name swept into his heart, and from his heart to his lips.

"Honorée—"

"I am Mrs. Corliss."

It was as if he had bumped his head against a door ajar. There was, of course, no possibility of saying what he had intended. She was speaking anyhow.

"There must be some way to get word to my husband."

Angus, whose heart was smitten with love for her, and who could not immediately forgive her the bump on his head, coldly declared his inadequacy.

"I couldn't swim anywhere through the fog," he said.

For a moment he felt in himself something of the grandeur of an iceberg adrift. Then, at an opposite extreme, he turned and kicked the charred logs back into the fire.

He left her abruptly, and with no amenity, to wander; but his explorations were as futile as they were aimless. Land as well as sea was hidden in fog.

Back from the shore he came upon an impenetrable thicket of spruce. He gave up trying to explore further. He might easily lose himself in seeking for a trail, and she would then be worse off than ever. He smiled ironically, and to the dripping trees said audibly:

"Damnation!"

When he returned to the fire, she was not there. It was foolish to apprehend that anything serious could have befallen her; but very soon he began to call her name loudly. Presently she drifted into his vision out of the fog.

"I shall have to ask you to help me," she said.

He realized then that she was a little willful. It was in her voice, in the uppishness of her charming head.

He followed her some fifty feet down the shore, to where she had amassed a pile of wood. Angus comprehended at once that she had been trying to build a fire for herself. He gave her one deep look. She returned it.

"Run along back," he said quietly. "There is more fuel there, and the sand is somewhat dried out. I will stay here."

"Thank you!"

"Not at all," he muttered with a bow.

She turned away and faded into the mist like some insubstantial thing. He fancied that the dim glow of her hair lingered for a moment after she had disappeared.

When he had built up a roaring fire, he spread his wet tobacco carefully in the warmth of it. Then he sat down, alone, and deliberated.

V

TIME, presumably, went on through gray fog, which was day, and black fog, which was night. The changes in light were stealthy and uncanny. It might have been four days, as the tally goes; but four days may equal four months, four years, or four centuries.

On the evening of the third day, Angus and Mrs. Corliss may be conceived in such a conversation as this:

MRS. CORLISS—"I have not been warm for three weeks."

ANGUS—"I have not been dry for three months."

MRS. CORLISS—"I have eaten nothing but clams and crabs for three years."

ANGUS—"I have loved you for three centuries."

Whereupon the reader may pronounce: "For such lawless passion, let him burn in hell three hundred æons!"

But this is jumping ahead of the story, and an unwarranted conjecture, which shall not be borne out by the facts. The point is that from the start they were never thoroughly dry; they were never warm elsewhere than by their fires; they fed upon clams and boiled crabs, whose shells, anything but soft, they cracked with stones. Such was the measure of comfort that the island afforded them.

It was an island, for Angus made the circuit of the shore. On the other side he came across a hut. Shrouded in fog, it appeared abandoned; but when he approached it, he found it barred and locked. It was an evil place, a retreat for moonshiners, the odor of whose nefarious distillations hung about it.

Angus said nothing of it to Mrs. Corliss, but he respectfully advised her not to wander far from her fire. An encounter with the men who made use of it might prove very unpleasant for her. As for him, he meant to keep watch of it, for whoever came to it must come in a boat, of which Angus might procure the use. There might be trouble if several came, and in an ill temper.

He kept this to himself. He did not seriously apprehend trouble with the men, but he hoped that he would see nothing of them and their boat. For all the wretchedness of the two refugees' plight, he was in no hurry to leave the island. He was dangerously in love with his companion, dangerously and recklessly. He wanted to stay on that lonely island until—

Well, he set no definite limit. He had scruples, mild but nevertheless ingrained. He reasoned very subtly with them. He was not, he argued, in love with Mrs. Corliss, though she was lovely to look at. He was in love with Honorée, an entrancing spirit whose presence he felt rather than perceived. She, being a spirit, though she could be loved, could not be preëmpted legally. He had as much a right as any one had to take possession of her, if he could only catch her. She was maddeningly elusive.

Moreover, Mrs. Corliss was always getting in the way. That was what made Angus's love dangerous.

Mrs. Corliss was a cool, delicately assertive person. She was growing thin, but she still ate a boiled clam with a certain hauteur. She was perfect in her affability, with no flaw of friendliness that he could detect; but Angus could make no impression upon her.

Once he asked her if, with his stubble beard, he wasn't coming to look like a viking. He fancied, innocently enough, that a viking had a certain air. "Don't flatter yourself," Mrs. Corliss replied, with a clear, icy laugh. "You look like a mangy moose!"

Honorée, he believed, would never have said a thing so cruel. He sometimes surprised Honorée—if indeed she was more than an impalpable, faintly luminous glow of hair through the fog, more than the float of a melody along the shore—piteously gnawing a crab's claw; yet he had only to

approach, and she faded into the mist, leaving Mrs. Corliss in her place.

Sometimes, when the dark fog encroached upon the fire, and Mrs. Corliss fell to dreaming, how shyly did Honorée draw near and hover about her, how meltingly become one with her in half a smile; or in a sigh! Angus's eyes burned too ardently then, too longingly, in the shadow. Honorée melted into the mist, and Mrs. Corliss looked at him with raised eyebrows, as much as to say:

"If my husband knew how you sit and stare, you would regret it!"

That husband! A very paragon! His name was Rollo, which, Angus muttered, was a disgusting name, and made him think of a roller coaster. She was always throwing the fellow in between Angus and Honorée, as if he were a whole army. It made Angus furious.

It was unbelievable what she could do with a husband. Angus marked and analyzed three distinct maneuvers.

The first was defensive. Mrs. Corliss grieved for Rollo. She displayed her grief tellingly, exquisitely, in lonely sessions by the dingy little waves. Why, she even set a boiled clam aside for Rollo, that his place at their table of sand might not be ignored.

Angus triumphed over that by his very blitheness. He banished her sadness, whether she would or no. Observing which, and doubtless taking warning from it, she changed her tactics. She began to snipe with Rollo. It was deadly. If Angus, intent upon Honorée, were care-free or elated, *bing*—Rollo hit him hard. Rollo could dig more clams in half a morning than most men in a week.

"I suppose he cooks them better than a French *chef*, too," Angus retaliated.

"Oh, he's a wonderful cook, Mr. Littlejohn! If he were here, we'd have *such* good food! And, do you know, he isn't a bit afraid of anything. He'd put his hands in a pool of crabs without a quiver."

That threw Angus into a black mood, for to the last he greatly disliked to take hold of live crabs.

Oh, she sniped! Angus had a musical voice, and sometimes he sang in the fog so that it was sweet and cheerful to hear, soothing even the pangs of hunger for a while. He hoped it would please Honorée, and *bing*, Rollo once more!

"How care-free you are, Mr. Littlejohn! I like to hear you sing; but your voice is a barytone, isn't it? Rollo's is a tenor, which is much rarer, you know. What was the air you were singing this afternoon? Rollo used to sing it."

"Oh!" said Angus. "Then I won't sing it again. It must make you sad to hear it."

But he wandered off in the fog and sang it a dozen times in succession. That stopped the sniping. At least, she stopped sniping. He, on the contrary, began.

Indeed, he went beyond sniping, and opened up a volley fire on Mrs. Corliss and on that husband whom she so aggressively interposed between him and the Honorée of his heart's desire. His laugh was as good as a machine gun, and he let her have, as well, a few heavy shot. She had better give over grieving for Rollo; it was bad for her morale. She had better graciously accept Angus's protection, and withal his provisioning.

Whatever might be Rollo's colossal skill in the clam chase, it was Angus who dug her all she could eat. Moreover, he exhibited a fine sympathy for her appetite, alternating baked clams with boiled, boiled crabs with baked, in such a clever way as almost to introduce an element of surprise into their repasts.

Angus observed that a pleasant surprise threw Mrs. Corliss momentarily off her guard. At such times Honorée showed herself, and he felt very near her. He could almost hold her with his eyes, and with his smile could almost draw her away from under the guns of Mrs. Corliss and Fort Rollo. What he read in her glances of her own willingness to escape filled him with ecstasy. Perceiving this, the haughty married lady clutched Honorée, dragged her out of his sight, threw her into a deep dungeon, and preserved, marvelously, the attitude of sitting regally upon the trapdoor of it.

Furthermore, surely recognizing the fact that her fortifications were not proof against surprise, she abandoned them within an hour, and dug herself into trenches that were. Angus stole through the fog with a powerful surprise—spruce boughs for her to make a bed on. His eyes were afire with the hope of catching Honorée before Mrs. Corliss could recover; but, warned by his smile, the formidable lady was ready for him.

"Thank you," she said; "but I can sleep just as well on the sand. Nothing counts any more, unless you can get a message to

my husband. *Can't* you do that, Mr. Littlejohn? He must be beside himself with anxiety!"

Thus she was intrenched. Nothing he could do was to count, unless he could get a message to her husband—no subtle combination of boiled and baked, of clam and crab; no toys his jackknife could whittle; no soft and springy boughs.

Though he at once recognized the strength of her latest defense, he did not at once retreat before it. He laid the boughs cunningly on the sand, and patiently fitted them to make the best possible couch. Then he said soberly, without pretending to look for Honorée:

"You will at least sleep better on these, just the same, Mrs. Corliss."

He went back to his own fire, determined to the last fiber of his being. Nothing to count any more? Wait and see! He had in his mind the irresistible surprise. If it did not knock out Mrs. Corliss for good and all, and free the entrancing Honorée, he would confess himself a fool and a sinner.

He threw on wood and made a great blaze; then he peered cautiously about him. Satisfied that nothing saw him save his own black shadow on the fog, he sat down and rapidly took off one shoe and one sock.

Meanwhile his good-natured face, though pleasantly ruddy in the firelight, was half grim. It was only when he had furtively but rapidly taken a bit of wire from his pocket, and laid it on the sand by his sock, that his lips parted and the firelight gleamed on his teeth as he smiled and chuckled.

This was in the dense and foggy night of the third year—it seemed like the third year—of their diet of clams and crabs.

VI

THE next morning, Angus observed Mrs. Corliss closely. She was still in her trenches, and Honorée was not to be seen. He went away, singing, out of defiance, the air that Rollo used to sing.

When he came back, he sang more softly, in delicious triumph, and his smile was sunny in the fog; for he bore on a wooden platter a perfectly broiled codfish!

The proud but thinning Mrs. Corliss, who sat hungry upon the sand, got to her knees, and looked in ineffable rapture at the offering he held before her. She sniffed, and trembled; and out of her mouth came the very breath of Honorée.

"Oh!" the whisper ran. "Broiled scrod!"

And Angus, looking down upon the shattered Mrs. Corliss, said:

"They say the way to a *man's* heart is through his stomach."

They ate. Let Mrs. Corliss wander like an icy ghost through the fog! Not she, nor all the Rollos in the world, should wrench this adorable Honorée from her trencher.

After they had eaten, Honorée looked at him with dewy eyes. He went all the way to the rocks, to fetch her a drink of water in the blue bottle—their only goblet, veritably a phial for a love potion. Twilight had come. He returned from the fog into the soft, warm glow of her fire, which had fallen to embers, and sat down beside her, filling his pipe.

"Aren't you lonely?" he asked.

"Terribly!"

His heart gave a bound, for he still heard the voice of Honorée.

"Then I'll stay a while, if I may."

"Yes, stay. It can't be wrong."

There was a faint hint of Mrs. Corliss there, and he must be careful. He shifted his pipe to the other corner of his mouth, and the free corner smiled.

"At least, it can't be *awfully* wrong," he said. "What do you mean?"

She had turned her head away, so that her answer seemed to drift in to him from the obscurity. It was perhaps an answer from the banished Mrs. Corliss, a ghostly answer. It made Angus shiver.

"My husband is unreasonably—jealous."

The voice was still the voice of Honorée, though troubled, and with a catch in it; but the words were the words of Mrs. Corliss. What did it mean? Was the spirit, Honorée, in thrall to Mrs. Corliss's husband? Could it be that Honorée herself was married to Rollo, and that Rollo was a brute?

She sat with her shapely head bowed on her knees, her arms clasped around her legs, with the glow of the fire in her hair and the fog drifting behind her. To Angus, who loved her, she seemed repudiated, abandoned, the victim of his own intemperance.

"Honorée," he said slowly, "I may as well tell you now. I love you!"

She started, and looked at him with something of Mrs. Corliss's hauteur.

"It's all right, Honorée," he added hastily. "Please do not be afraid of me, as you have been."

"You forget who I am, and how we are situated."

He made a gesture with his arm.

"I mean I would never bother you now, even—"

"You *are* bothering me. You have no right to say such things!"

He could not quite believe that Mrs. Corliss had got her hands on Honorée again. He protested.

"I don't think morals come into it, Honorée. Just because you're married is no reason why I should not love you. I tell you of it because it's the richest surprise in my life—"

She cut him short with a laugh.

"Surprise! You, Mr. Littlejohn? How many women have you declared love to before?"

"Oh, lots," he muttered, "but I never meant it."

He knew that Mrs. Corliss was stealing back. The darkness of the night had come upon them, and the fog was drawing in close. He heard the endless plash of ripples along the sand, and smelled the cold of the sea drifting into the smoky warmth of the diminished fire, against which Honorée was shadowy. He could put out his hand and touch her hair—one touch before Mrs. Corliss took her away.

"Don't touch me!" she said.

So his hand was just too late. He laughed dryly.

"I was only thinking that if you would give me a strand of your hair, I could make a much better line than I made of my raveled sock. You know I found a piece of wire last night, and made the hook. If you'd give me a strand of your hair, I could catch—oh, perhaps a halibut, or even a bigger fish. Who knows? You like halibut, don't you?"

His mind was swimming in disappointment. He had just enough whimsy left to wonder if there was a chance that a halibut could make it hard for Mrs. Corliss to hold Honorée. A little codfish had done so much!

It was a minute or two before Mrs. Corliss, in a very sprightly and confident voice, put him miserably out of suspense.

"Mr. Littlejohn, I do not know whether to believe what you said or not."

"You may put me to the test."

"I won't do that, of course; but I will ask a favor of you. Will you let me take the blue bottle?"

Angus knew something was coming, but he was not sure what.

"Why do you want it?" He put the question bluntly.

"As a last resort, I should like to put a note in it for my husband. If I throw it into the sea, some current may carry it to him, or some one may find it and send it to him."

"You are fantastical," he said, knocking the ashes from his pipe. "I will not part with the bottle. It saved your life—and mine."

His pause had been very emphatic. Mrs. Corliss had never so haughtily raised her head; but when he jumped to his feet, she suddenly bowed her head on her knees again, as if weeping.

"There, there," he said mournfully, waiting in helpless dejection for her to calm herself.

This she did with a surprisingly sudden effort. She sprang up lightly, turning her face from him, so that he caught no glimpse of it. Her little figure was erect, and her voice, though vibrant, was fearless.

"You say you need a strand of my hair to catch a codfish?"

"I said a halibut, Honorée," he returned weakly.

"I am Mrs. Corliss."

"On ice," he muttered.

"Since you have the upper hand, being physically stronger than I and morally less trammeled, I am forced to bargain with you. I will trade you some of my hair—enough for a line—in return for the blue bottle."

After a minute's thought, smarting and sore, he walked away; but from the indeterminate borderland of fog he gave an answer.

"I'm sorry. The hair—that's practical, you know; but the bottle's a matter of sentiment."

By his own dull fire, he was not sure how much of a brute he had been. The trouble was, he was too much in earnest to play lightly any more; while she—suspicions that she was mocking him pricked his brain like tiny feathered arrows. Between his love and his suspicions, he could have wrought himself into a frenzy.

And then, with his heart in his throat, he was speeding through the fog to her; for she had called his name with a cry of terror:

"Angus! Angus!"

She was not by her fire. A brute of a man stood there, laughing grossly.

VII

HONORÉE smiled into the fog which hid Angus from her. She was thinking that she, too, might assert a claim to the bottle on the grounds of very vivid sentiments—which, in fact, under cover of the fog, were brimming in her eyes. And she sighed sadly for poor Rollo, the ineffectual, whom she would soon betray and perhaps destroy.

"Ho, ho! Here's a girl!"

Honorée spun round, affrighted. She saw a man leering across the fire, a rough fellow, unsteady on his feet, lurching toward her. She saw his monstrous and distorted shadow on the fog behind him. She screamed for Angus and ran away.

A minute later, safe enough in the obscurity of the fog, she was ashamed of her fear. With Angus at hand, there was nothing to be afraid of. She could never doubt that he was a match for any man who breathed.

There came harshly on her ears, long accustomed to the foggy silence of the lonely shore, a burst of riotous laughter—four or five voices, at least, upraised in roistering. Controlling her agitation, she stole back toward the fire, determined to stand by Angus if he needed help against so many.

When she had drawn near enough to see through the blur, she stopped, hardly breathing in her astonishment. She could not have imagined a more picturesque scene of rough joviality. Four ruffians were seated in the ruddy firelight, clad in slickers, their caps far back on their heads, their wide mouths agape with merriment, coarse but elemental. Angus, with tousled hair and jolly eyes, stood in their midst, with a bottle in one hand and arms like a rollicking windmill to slap them here and slap them there.

Honorée could hardly believe her senses; but her heart slowly sank in her breast as, in watching the scene, she realized that to Angus bottles were a matter of more sentiments than one. He was drinking often and deep, throwing his head far back, as if he would pour the stuff into his throat, sputtering, choking, until he began to sway on his feet and to shout wildly.

"Girl!" she heard him cry. "She's an old widow, and as cold as a dead fish in ice water. What do you want of her? Have another drink on me!"

Up they all got, and clapped him on the shoulders. He clapped them no less heartily, swung arm and arm with them in a crazy reel, and started to sing.

"This, boys, is the song that Rollo used to sing!" he cried.

"Oh!" Honorée moaned, clenching her fists.

As the melody which had once given her pleasure went billowing out over the invisible sea, she turned her face into the fog and fled down the shore. The darkness was incredibly dense and terrifying in itself, but she ran on till she was far beyond the sounds of the carousal.

She foresaw a night of endless agitation and alarm. She visualized herself in darting flights hither and yon through the fog to escape beasts of men. She felt that she was a desperate, hunted creature.

Safe for the present, however, she sat down to rest, got up again, sat down, waited. Gradually her panic died out. It left her, fortunately, not in numb exhaustion, but in indignation and the hottest chagrin. She knew not how she could suffer the insult of Angus's treachery.

To make matters worse, for the first time on that grotesque and impish isle it began to rain—to rain gently but coldly upon this luckless woman, who was without warmth and without shelter while Angus guzzled and danced with his mates about her fire!

When, worst of all, hunger began to gnaw at her, her bitterness broke bounds.

"He said he would catch me a halibut. Drunken moose!" she hissed passionately.

There was nothing for her to do but to sit and shiver in the fog and listen, forever listen.

It might have been two hours later when she heard an unfamiliar sound. At first it threw her into trepidation; but it was the regular thud of oars in wooden tholepins that she heard. It came from the water. Out in the impenetrable night some one was rowing a boat along the shore.

The sound diminished as it had grown; the boat passed on out of hearing. Another man gone up the shore to join the revelers about her fire!

Again the heavy silence, and the insistent, chilly rain. Honorée got wetter and wetter, colder and colder, more and more hungry; until, in the extremity of despair, she began to wonder how soon Angus would be sober again.

Into her misery, at last, there stole the

faint cry of a distant voice, very faint and very far, but coming nearer through the lightless fog, rapidly nearer:

"Honorée!"

It was Angus calling her name. She could have cried with the relief of hearing him, drunk or sober; yet she wouldn't answer, hoping both that he would stray by her without seeing her and that he would not.

Then she heard his tread, coming right on into her very ears. She sprang to her feet, startling him like a bird drumming up from cover.

"Honorée," he panted, "why in thunder didn't you answer me?"

Even now she wouldn't answer.

"You'll catch cold. Come back to the fire!"

She spoke cuttingly.

"Who drove me away from it?"

He was silent for a long while.

"There's been no one around your fire for two hours," he said at length. "I led those men off to their hut on the other side of the island. There's a trail—"

"Are you drunk or sober, Mr. Littlejohn?"

Suddenly catching hold of her, he picked her up in his arms without more ado, pinioned her in spite of her resistance, and carried her all the long way back to the fire. It was blazing brightly, and near it she saw a dory, turned on its side.

"Get into the boat," said Angus peremptorily, "and sleep. It's going to clear. We leave at dawn, if not before."

"You—you—"

"Just you hold your tongue. Good night!"

Abruptly he left her.

VIII

WHEN she was snug and warm in the shelter of the boat, she could not remember that she had detected any smell of liquor about Angus, albeit her face had been very close to his. Certainly he had not staggered while he carried her. He was angry with her. He was lying in the open; so she crawled out and made her way contritely to the soaked ashes of his fire.

"What is it?" he asked sharply, starting up invisible from the invisible ground. "Have they come back?"

"No, but you mustn't stay here in the rain. The boat is long enough for — for two."

"All right, if you don't mind. I'm pretty wet and cold."

On the way back, she murmured:

"I thought you were drunk."

"How like you, Mrs. Corliss!" he said coldly. "So did they."

"But you said insulting things—that I was as cold as a dead fish!"

"They were under the impression that you weren't," he explained.

She gasped.

"*They* were drunk," she said, recovering.

"You think that explains their delusion about you? It was an active delusion. Yes, they were drunk. They were totally drunk when I locked them in their hut and stole their boat. We must leave before they come to."

"But, Angus, you—I saw you put the bottle to your lips!"

"It is a gesture of mine," he said definitively.

They stowed themselves in the boat, she in the bow, he in the stern, so that there was a long distance between their toes. Yet she heard him say, in cold malice:

"What would Rollo think of this?"

Of course she made no answer, and they slept.

In the cold dawn he roused her. The rain had ceased, and the wind had blown the fog away. Even the clouds were torn and swift-moving, and there was a rosy light in the east. They were to see the sun!

It was like a miracle, and the wide sea before their feet was another miracle, even greater than the miracle of the mainland only a couple of miles away on their left. Honorée held her breath with surprise that Angus could walk down to the water's edge and not disappear from her sight, but move in all his manliness and strength before her delighted eyes. She thought he was a very clever man, a very noble man, to have put those ruffians in a good humor, to have made them drunk with their own moonshine, and, most of all, to have stolen their boat. She was in some ways primitive.

Angus, however, was cross. When she suggested that perhaps he could get a reward from the government for catching the villains, he told her to mind her own business. After all, he added, it was on her account that he had played such a dirty trick on the old boozers, and he felt heartily sorry for it. He would send the boat back to them by a man with a red nose, if he had to hunt the coast for one.

Thus rebuffed, Mrs. Corliss brought up Rollo.

"Rollo will be very grateful, I'm sure," she said.

Angus consigned Rollo to regions of fire.

"If you have any feeling for me, Angus, you should respect what is—"

"Oh, *là, là!* Do you think I'm going to respect your husband? Do you see me as Uncle Angus to all the little roller coasters? Do you hear the sweet children's voices saying, 'Poor Uncle Angus loved mother once'? I'd rather sit on that heap of clam shells there for the rest of my life!"

She was persistent.

"But may I not be Aunt Honorée to the little Littlejohns?"

He glared at her, and mumbled something about a relationship much closer than she had besought—indeed, a parental one. This put her to rout with a blush, and she left him to shove off the boat without her.

She wandered around the dull fire, merely pretending to look for trifles they had forgotten, just as if they had anything to forget save the clothes on their backs. Nevertheless, a trifle caught her eye, and she pounced upon it eagerly. It was the precious blue bottle, which must have dropped from Angus's pocket during his mock capers of the night before. Slyly she thrust it into her blouse. Then she ambled, smiling, down to Angus, who was yelling to her to make haste.

"Wait a minute," she said. "You have made me see that it was a dirty trick to steal the boat. I think we ought to leave a note for them by the ashes of our fire. Haven't you a pencil and a bit of paper for me to write a message?"

He growled as she wrung them from him, and she was certain that she heard him cursing under his breath as she lingered to write by the ashes.

But in time they left the island. The sun broke through the clouds, and the wind sped them on their way over waters which for the first time in many days danced blue.

"We're going too fast," she said shyly, to the taciturn oarsman.

Indeed, they were coming rapidly upon the land.

Honorée saw the spire of a church, bright against the spruce woods. Angus rested on his oars and looked at her. His eyes, tired but clear, looked straight into hers. He bit his lip.

"Turn and see how near we are, Angus."

"I shall see enough of that later, and nothing of you."

"There's a church spire—"

"That's for brides, not wives, Mrs. Corliss."

But he carelessly turned his head, to ascertain the drift of the boat; and in that moment she flung something into the sea.

"Oh, look!" she cried tremulously. "There's something bobbing in the water there!"

She pointed with excited finger.

"Mrs. Corliss," he said apathetically, "let it bob."

But she was so animated that he gave a pull on the oar, swinging the boat to pass within reach of the floating object.

"It's a blue bottle," he said grimly, as he picked it from the sea. He held it up. "Why, there's something in it. Shall we open it?"

She was blushing.

"No—don't open it."

He shrugged his shoulders, and made a motion as if he would throw the bottle into the sea.

"Yes—open it!" she cried then.

With bated breath she watched him as he extracted from the bottle a bit of damp paper, as he spread the paper, and as with puzzled brows he deciphered what was written on it.

There followed an endless minute of suspense in the gently rocking boat. Angus never raised his head. Whatever the emotions the little note had stirred in him, they were concealed from Honorée, who was watching him with sparkling eyes. He would not look at her.

At last, with a heavy sigh, he held the bit of paper toward her.

"Read this," he commanded, "aloud and clearly."

She temporized, being a little abashed and coy; but he thundered at her so astonishingly that she began to read, though not very loud or very clearly.

"Honorée, my own, the ship is sinking, and I am lost. If you meet a man you love, do not let memories stand in the way of a happy union."

Her voice trailed off.

"The signature!" he thundered.

"Rollo," she whispered.

Then silence, with the sun coming clear and warm and the freshening breeze blowing them on.

Angus grasped the oars, and with regular, powerful strokes swept the boat on toward the land.

"Is your husband dead?" he asked, at last.

"I fear he is," she replied.

"You killed him, my poor creature?"

Her silence confessed her guilt.

"Yet," said Angus soberly, "he seems to have been a good sort. Have you been perfectly fair to him, Mrs. Corliss? You led me to believe that he was selfish and jealous; yet even in dying he was sublimely generous to the woman who was killing him. I wonder if you realize what you have done!"

IX

WHEN he had run the boat up on the shore of the little village cove, Angus helped her to alight with such formal courtesy that it might well have seemed to her that they had come to the end of their common adventure. His face was set in an expression of heroic sternness.

When he had gone up into the street to make inquiries, she sat on the dock in the sun, marveling deliciously at the change that had come over him. She began to feel as if he had set her apart; and the few villagers regarded her as if she were some strange, golden creature whom he had recovered from the sea.

He did not return to her, but beckoned from the head of the wharf.

"Did you find a man with a red nose to take the boat back?" she asked, coming up to him.

He nodded, with a sober smile.

"We have about a mile to walk," he said. "Follow me, please."

The wind blew freshly against them, with the mingled fragrance of sea and balsam. The clearings were green with the damp, early spring. Under their feet the road was deeply muddy. She walked some ten paces behind him; but on a hilltop he halted and waited for her to join him.

Even here he would not look at her. He seemed to be embarrassed, and faltered many times, trying to make something known to her gently. Having no notion what he wished to tell her, she could not help him out. At last, with a great shake of his shoulders, and with averted head, he bluntly declared it.

"I have a wife and two children," he said.

She caught her breath. She looked down from the hilltop over the countryside and the wide blue sea beyond.

"You should have told me before," she said faintly.

"I know it. Come—let us go on."

They did not face each other again till they met for lunch at a table in the deserted dining room of the hotel. It was wonderful, what a shave had done for Angus and a brush and comb for Honorée. They admired each other with secret glances. He was reserved and courteous.

In the days of crabs and clams they had often dreamed of repasts in a land of varied fare. For all the sweet, sad air of resignation which enhanced Honorée's loveliness, she ate heartily. Angus did the same, but less openly.

"It seems to me," he said a little reproachfully, "that your appetite is excellent."

"One must eat," she said—a mournful little apology.

"Of course! We are to go up to Boston by boat. Do you mind? We have met with misadventure on boats."

"Great misadventure. I shall never get over it; but I am, as you know, full of fortitude."

"And criminal daring," he added, bending over his plate.

He ate seriously for a while.

"Shall you marry again?" he inquired presently.

"Doubtless. Did you ever know anything taste so good as these pickles?"

"The system craves acid after—" He suddenly put down his knife and fork and looked across at her keenly. "I say, do you want any dessert?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, hurry up, please. I want to get out of here."

She broke off a bit of bread and buttered it.

"Have you telegraphed your wife that you are safe?"

"That does not, I think, concern you."

"Oh, I'm sorry! I thought you were in a hurry to do so."

"It was the first thing I did, Mrs. Corliss."

After lunch he led her down to the bay.

He glanced up and down the shore. They were quite alone. He threw his cigar into the water.

"I say, Mrs. Corliss, I'm afraid I left the blue bottle in the boat."

"Oh, no—I have it here in my blouse."

"Let me take it, will you?"

"I will lend it to you for a minute; but it is a thing of precious sentiment to me."

He turned aside, so that she could not see what he was about to do; but evidently she had no curiosity, for she was looking across the water with a smile. He fished in his pocket for a note that he had written and folded small; but when he went to insert the paper in the bottle, he found another already there. This, he knew, could not be the damp missive which had informed him of Rollo's death, and which he still treasured in the breast pocket of his blouse.

Extracting the crumpled paper from the bottle, he turned and shook it before Honorée's smiling eyes.

"Is this your work?" he asked.

She nodded, still smiling, and humming the little air that Rollo used to sing. Angus grasped her by the shoulders and spun her around to face him. His voice was accusatory.

"Have you killed my wife, too?"

"She is dead, my poor Angus. Read what is written there."

This was the inscription on the crumpled paper:

I am drowning, Angus; and so are the two children. You had better find another wife, and one whose name begins with H.

"Honorée, you—*you* had no right to do this!" protested Angus.

"I do not see how morals come into it, Angus. Just because another woman got you—"

Then she tried to wriggle out of his grasp, but in vain.

"Before this goes any further," he said severely, "you shall hear the note I meant you to hear. Give me your strict and obedient attention. I'll read it:

"Angus is an ideal man. He is handsome and well mannered. He is full of wit, and a delightful companion. He is afraid of nothing, not even live crabs. He bears no resemblance to a moose, either mangy or silky. He is, indeed, akin to the lion, the king of beasts. He never drank a drop in his life, and has no other bad habits. In short, any woman might be proud and happy to have him for a husband.

"Now, Honorée, I am going to kiss you."

When they had come back to earth, he said:

"I have already engaged the parson. He is waiting for us."

"But, Angus, I can't—"

"You'll have to, my dear. I could get only one stateroom on the boat; and I am very sensitive to the proprieties. Moreover, no gentleman should spend four days on an island with another fellow's wife, and not mend matters as promptly as possible. I am thinking of you, dear. Don't lose the bottle, Honorée. We can fit a nipple on it when the time comes!"

She went with him to the church without another word.

MISTRESS APRIL

SHE's like an April day to me
In the Springtime of delight;
The fleeting frowns that cloud her brow
But make her smile more bright

And when the azure of her eyes
Dissolves in dewy showers,
I know that drops so sweet will bring
Kisses to bloom like flowers.

Like all things lovely, April moods
Must pass away too soon,
Yet, ah, they to my heart foretell
The constancy of June.

Wex Jones

It Seemed Reasonable

FAR BETTER TO DO IT YOURSELF, OR HAVE IT DONE BADLY—BY SOME ONE ELSE

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

CHRISTINE and Paul were peaceably reading that evening in their model sitting room. The room was properly ventilated, the air was kept at the correct degree of humidity, the lighting was restful and hygienic, the furnishings were all in the best of taste.

They were a serious young couple. Paul was reading "Post-War Conditions in Beluchistan," Christine was reading "Civilization's Last Sigh," and they concentrated their attention upon the books. Beside Paul, on the table, lay the three cigarettes which he allowed himself every evening, while Christine had three ounces of milk chocolate. There was not a sound from either of them, because the correct hygienic temperature, the bland light, and their own well balanced temperaments, prevented them from being fidgety. They had made up their minds that marriage should not make them frivolous, narrow, or dull, and it had not.

It was a January night of cruel, silent cold, black as the pit. It was nearly ten o'clock, and they certainly expected no intruders upon their serious quiet. Once, when Paul found that he had not exactly grasped the meaning of a paragraph, and had to turn back, he glanced up. By chance Christine also looked up, so that he met her eyes—her clear, honest blue eyes, so soft as they rested upon his face that he grew a little dizzy with the joy of it.

He could not take Christine quite sensibly yet. He knew that she was nothing but a human being, with many faults; yet very often he had wild hallucinations that she was an angel, a goddess, a mystery. She may have been subject to similar delusions, for she continued to look at her Paul, half smiling, as if lost in the contemplation of a miracle.

But suddenly their peace was destroyed—and for a good long time, too, as it happened—by the sound of the doorbell and the entrance of a glowing, dark-eyed girl with a tam-o'-shanter and a scarf of violent green. She brought an icy breath of air with her, but she herself seemed warm, almost fiery, with her rosy cheeks, her red hair, her gay and confident manner.

"Excuse me, people!" she said. "I know it's an awfully unconventional time to burst in on you, but I've locked myself out of my poor little house, and I'd rather be a little unmannerly than freeze!"

Paul drew forward a chair, and down she sat, drawing off woolen gloves from a pair of very pretty little hands. She was very pretty, altogether, in a startling sort of way, and she had an incomparable self-possession.

"My name's Lucille Banks," she remarked. "I've taken that little cottage down at the crossroads. I moved in this morning, and I was so busy getting settled that I forgot about dinner until awfully late. Then I went out to buy something to eat, and I forgot my key."

"But you're not alone in the cottage?" said Christine.

"Lord, yes!" replied the other cheerfully. "I don't mind that. I'm used to being alone. I like it." She laughed. "I look like a kid, but I'm not," she said. "I'm twenty-four. I was with the Red Cross in Italy. I've lived in Paris and London. I did a thousand miles by airplane. I've written a book. So you see!"

The serious couple were astounded and greatly interested.

"But where could you get anything to eat at this hour in this place?" asked Christine.

"I couldn't. I didn't; but that doesn't

bother me. I've never pampered myself by eating a certain amount of food at certain intervals. If I could possibly beg a cigarette?"

"Oh, by all means!" said Paul hastily, and brought out his case.

Christine protested.

"Let me get you something to eat, instead," she said. "It's so bad for you to—"

"Nothing hurts me," Miss Banks coolly interrupted. "Even if it did hurt me, I shouldn't care. I'm going to do all the things I like to do, and hang the consequences!"

This speech did not please Christine very much. She glanced at Paul. Somewhat to her surprise, she found him with a faint smile on his lips.

"Every one who says 'hang the consequences' thinks there won't really be any," he said.

"Consequences fall alike upon the just and the unjust," remarked Miss Banks, through a cloud of smoke.

She, too, was smiling now, with her strong little white teeth gleaming, her dark eyes alight. She went on to express her audacious theories of life, and her energetic and reckless views about everything else, at some length.

Christine liked it less and less. She admitted freely that this Miss Banks was extraordinarily pretty, and had a debonair charm of her own, but she imagined that the girl was not to be trusted very far. She felt sure that Paul would think as she did, for they always agreed; so she looked at him, and the expression on his face surprised her. He was regarding Miss Banks with a sort of indulgence, almost compassionate, as if she were a rash and silly child, and he a man of the world.

Until this moment, Christine had looked upon Paul as a comrade, a friend, whose heart she knew as she knew her own; but now it suddenly occurred to her that Paul had been alive for twenty-six years before she had seen him, existing and thriving by himself. For some reason this idea hurt and dismayed her. She no longer listened to the lively dialogue between him and Miss Banks. She wasn't good at talking; what she liked was to listen to Paul—but to Paul when he was talking to herself, not to Miss Banks.

"Of course I'm not interesting," she thought. "I've never done anything but grow up and go to college and get married. I've never seen Paul so interested!"

Her far from pleasant reverie was disturbed by Miss Banks springing up.

"Well!" she said. "If you *can* get me into my little house, please do. I've got to be up early to-morrow morning, to cover the Industrial Women's Peace Convention for my paper."

"Are you—" began Christine.

"I'm a free lance journalist," said Miss Banks. "I suppose they picked me for this job because I don't know anything about industry, and hate peace and women!"

Paul had risen.

"Do you hate women?" he asked in that same amused, indulgent tone.

"As much as Nietzsche did," Miss Banks assured him. "Only in general, of course. There are exceptions."

She smiled at Christine and held out her hand—which Christine had to take, and from which she received a fierce grasp that tingled through her arm and positively made the color rise in her face.

"You little beast!" she murmured, with energy, as Paul and Miss Banks went out of the front door.

II

As they stepped out of the tranquil, bright house, the cold sprang like a wolf at Paul's throat and made him gasp. The blackness and the stillness of that night!

"We'll make a dash for it," he said, taking Miss Banks's arm—a very solid little arm it was, too.

"No hurry," said she. "I like this kind of weather, and I like this awful, dismal little place. At night it doesn't look like a suburban residential park. It might be Siberia!"

Paul, being a man, was therefore obliged to conceal his extreme discomfort, and to stroll along at the girl's side, though the cold bit him to the bone and made his throat ache, though his numbed feet struck against stones and caused him anguish. He had to talk, too, and even to laugh, as they went down the long, lonely road.

Then they reached the corner, and turned off down a lane, not yet improved, but full of ruts and ridges of frozen mud. Paul had heard of the good old-fashioned punishment in which the culprit had to walk over red-hot plowshares. He thought that it could not have been much more painful than traversing this lane. The

friendly interest he had felt in Miss Banks was greatly chilled. He thought she was an inhuman little monster.

They came in time to her cottage, all dark and silent, with a low, white fence faintly visible, like a necklace of bones round the stark garden. There wasn't another house within sight. No one but an inhuman little monster could have endured to live here.

"Now!" said she. "Let's see you get in!"

She perched herself on the fence, quite blithe and unconcerned. She even whistled.

Paul and Christine had always agreed that woman should be man's comrade and helper. When woman, however, was not a helper and comrade, but sat upon a fence, whistling, and simply waiting, man was conscious of a new and not displeasing sense of obligation. He felt that he must display the primitive manly qualities of strength and cunning, that he must be practical, energetic, and so on.

Christine would have wanted to help and advise him. If he had insisted upon doing it alone, she would have thought he was "showing off." Well, perhaps he was. He deserved that privilege, set down as he was on a bitter night before a strange house and told to get into it.

He did get into it. After finding everything locked, he broke a window pane with a stone, inserted his hand, and turned the catch. The window then lifted readily enough, so that he could crawl through. Ingenuity, always ingenuity!

Nothing for him to stumble about in that musty, cold, strange blackness, find a lamp and light it, and open the front door. Nothing for him to light a fire on the hearth of the sitting room and another in the kitchen stove. Nothing to him that his hand and wrist were cut and bleeding. He pretended not to notice that, and Miss Banks really didn't.

Then he stuffed up the broken window pane with rags, and then Miss Banks had plenty of other little things for him to do—boxes to open, furniture to move, and so on.

"I can't do a blessed thing for myself," she observed.

Now Paul was grimy and very weary, and those cuts were painful. The sight of Miss Banks sitting comfortably in an armchair by the fire did not give him the unselfish pleasure it should have given.

"How did you manage to get on, then, in Siberia, or wherever it was?" he demanded.

"I've never been in Siberia," said she, "but I'd get on there—or anywhere. I know how to get things done!"

This struck Paul as a very tactless remark. Such knowledge was not a thing to boast of; but he happened to look at her, and she was looking at him, and his serious face broke reluctantly into a grin.

"Don't you know," said she, "that Adam delved while Eve spun? I'm perfectly willing to sit comfortably by the fire and spin, as long as there's a man to go out in the cold and delve; and there always is!"

Now Paul did not like this attitude. He thought Miss Banks a selfish, unscrupulous, and domineering creature—but challenging. She was quick and clever and audacious, besides being *very* pretty; and it was necessary to show her that he was not a cat's-paw.

Of course, he could not very well refuse any of her requests. He had to chop wood, to break open a cupboard door, and to nail up rows and rows of hooks; but he did all this with a bland and superior air. Being unused to such work, it took him a long time. When at last he had done, and had put on his overcoat, instead of thanking him, Miss Banks remarked:

"They say that if you want a thing done well, you must do it yourself; but for my part I'd rather have things done badly—by some one else!"

"Thanks!" said Paul frigidly.

Miss Banks was standing quite close to him, staring at him with candid interest.

"The trouble with you is," she said, "that you're spoiled!"

Paul was hard put to it to find a superior smile.

"Thanks!" he said again. "And now, if there's nothing more you want done I may as—"

"There'll be lots more things to-morrow," she interrupted; "but you've had enough, haven't you?"

This was too much for Paul. He saw by her self-satisfied smile that she fancied she had exploited him and made an idiot of him, and was laughing at him.

"No," he said, in a calm, reasonable tone. "If you want me to help you, I'll come again to-morrow."

Then he went off, scarcely feeling the

cold now, because of the wrath and resentment that burned in him.

III

PAUL found Christine just beginning to grow alarmed.

"It's nearly one o'clock," she said. "I thought—"

Her husband sat down and lit a cigarette.

"The silly girl has things in such a mess," he said, "I thought it would only be decent to stay and help her a little."

"Of course," Christine agreed.

She was uneasy at Paul's appearance. He looked pale and tired and severe. There were smudges on his face and on his collar; and then she caught sight of a grimy handkerchief tied around his wrist.

"Have you hurt yourself, Paul, darling?" she asked anxiously. "Do let me see—"

"Certainly not!" he answered, frowning. "I'm not one of those clumsy imbeciles who are always getting hurt!"

This was the first time that Paul had ever behaved quite so much like a married man; but Christine was prepared for it, and was tactful.

"She's a very pretty girl, isn't she?" she asked.

"She may be pretty," Paul answered judiciously; "but she's not the type that appeals to me. Personally, I think she's the very worst type of modern woman. She's —there's nothing feminine about her. She's an egotist." He paused. "After all," he went on, "what a woman should be is a man's comrade and companion. They should share their work and their play. This idea of a woman having all sorts of absurd privileges, and behaving like an empress, simply because she's a woman, is monstrous!"

Christine made a heroic effort not to cry. She knew Paul was not speaking of herself. Never had *she* behaved like an empress, or wished to do so, and she did share the work loyally. Of course it wasn't his fault if her share was composed of very monotonous, dusty, dull little tasks, and of course it wasn't his fault that there was mighty little play to be shared.

He went on, in that severe tone, talking about women, and she was certainly one of them. Indeed, she had a guilty consciousness that she was more of a woman than Paul suspected. She tried to stifle her shameful, ignoble feelings, and when she couldn't stifle them, she hid them. Never should Paul know how she felt about Miss Banks. He expected his wife to be a comrade, and a comrade she would be, at any cost.

Thus it was that a curious situation arose. Paul would denounce Miss Banks with great energy, while continuing to go and see her and to assist her; but Christine, who avoided the girl as far as possible, defended her chivalrously.

Miss Banks now had a telephone, and knew how to use it. Suddenly, in the middle of a calm, sensible evening, her voice would come over the wire, asking Paul to come and mend a leak, or kill a rat, or investigate a mysterious noise. Paul always said no, he wouldn't go, but Christine always persuaded him to go—and generally cried after he had gone, because he so obviously wished to be persuaded.

He never suggested that Christine should accompany him. Neither did Miss Banks. Indeed, she said things about tame husbands that prevented Paul from even considering such an idea.

Why he liked to see the girl he couldn't understand. She was as rude, as impertinent, as mocking, as she chose to be. She frankly admitted that she liked to "take him down a peg." She made fun of him, she kept him busy at arduous and humiliating tasks. And all this, instead of crushing him, had the odd effect of making him —well, Christine's private word for it was "bumptious."

He really was bumptious. He was bumptious while he killed rats for Miss Banks, and still more bumptious when he got home and told Christine about it.

Generally, when he went down to the cottage, he stayed there a long time. After he had finished the work she set for him, Miss Banks would graciously let him sit before her fire, and smoke, and be baited. One night, however, he came home so promptly that he almost caught Christine in tears. Although he was so much upset, he probably would not have noticed.

"That girl's a little too much!" he said. "Of course, I make allowances for her being so silly and spoiled, but—"

"Who spoils her?" inquired Christine unexpectedly.

"Who? Why, every one, I suppose," he answered, a little taken aback.

"Why?" asked Christine.

Well, Paul didn't know. He said it didn't matter; that wasn't the point. The

point was, apparently, that Miss Banks didn't understand what a man would put up with and what he would not put up with. Paul said he had already done too much for her, and would no longer submit to her outrageous claims.

"If she's so blamed independent," he said, "then let her be independent, and shift for herself!"

And their peaceful evenings began again. Christine was delighted. She didn't mind Paul's being bumptious and talking so sternly about women. In her heart she thought it was rather pathetic and sweet and young. She was very sorry that Miss Banks had hurt him, for he was hurt, though he called it disgust. He had firmly believed that the girl couldn't get on without him, couldn't light a fire or open a reluctant door; yet he hadn't been near the cottage for a week, and she still lived.

Now, in his heart, Paul didn't care two straws for Miss Banks. He believed that there never had been, and probably never would be, a woman in any way comparable to his own Christine. Christine was beautiful, good, kind, sensible, and brave; only Christine admired him and Miss Banks didn't, and by some diabolic art Miss Banks had aroused in him a violent desire to be admired by her.

Paul was almost ashamed to remember how boastful he had sometimes been, with what an air of unconcern he had done things frightfully difficult for him to do; but not once had Miss Banks praised or thanked him, or even been agreeable to him. Nevertheless he was obliged to go on and on.

He missed all that when it ceased. He felt like a warrior tamely at home after the war. He didn't miss the outrageous girl, but he greatly missed the inspiration she had given him to exert himself mightily. He found it irksome to sit still and read in the evening, without the least chance of an emergency arising in which he could distinguish himself. He became restless and sometimes a little irritable.

Christine, seeing this, believed that he was unhappy because he had quarreled with Miss Banks. That made Christine bitterly unhappy herself.

She set to work with all her heart, then, to win back her hero. She kept the most miraculous order in the house, and cooked the most appetizing meals. She worked out a number of ways in which to save more money. She read "Post-War Conditions in Beluchistan" and other such books, in order to discuss them with Paul. She dressed her hair in a new way. She did all she could think of to make herself and her home delightful to him.

He noticed everything, or almost everything, and he praised her; yet his praise lacked something for which she longed. It was sincere, but it had no enthusiasm. In some way she failed.

She had always accepted Paul's theories without reservation. It seemed reasonable to her that Paul should wish to find a helpmeet and comrade in his wife, and it also seemed reasonable to believe that Paul really knew what he wanted. When she made of herself exactly what he *said* he wanted, it seemed reasonable to expect that he would be satisfied; and yet he wasn't. He tried not to show it, but he wasn't.

IV

One evening Christine decided to make apple fritters. Not that she so little understood Paul as to imagine that fritters, even if made with apples from the Garden of the Hesperides, would move him to tenderness, or that she was so stupid and so gross as to think any sort of cooking a solution for spiritual problems; but he liked the things, and she liked to please him, even in the smallest way.

When he came home, she met him at the door, with the smile and the casual air she knew best suited him. She didn't ask him to hurry with his interminable routine of washing and changing his clothes, because it did not agree with him to hurry, and he could not, even when he tried. Instead, she wisely made due allowance for that time, and when at last she heard him coming down the stairs, she dropped the first spoonful of batter into the frying pan—

Paul heard her scream, and flew to her, but she had already flung a box of salt into the blazing fat, and she turned toward him, smiling again; only it was a distorted and piteous smile.

"What's the matter?" he cried. "What happened, Christy, darling?"

"Nothing," she answered, struggling with an anguish nearly intolerable. "The fat blazed up, and I burned myself a little—that's all."

"Let me see!" he demanded.

She held out her pretty arm, cruelly scalded. Paul was beside himself. He tele-

phoned for the doctor and then set to work to assuage her pain, with the best intentions in the world, but without much skill. He spilled a great deal of linseed oil on Christine's frock and on the rug, he put a frightfully thick and clumsy bandage about her arm, and he got cologne into her eyes, while trying to relieve a headache which did not exist.

All the doctors in the world could not have done Christine so much good. She lay on the sofa, and Paul sat beside her, looking into her face with miserable anxiety; and so great was her delight in his awkward tenderness, his terrible concern, that it needed no effort to smile.

"Don't worry so, Paul, dear," she entreated.

"I can't help it, my dearest girl. If we love each other, and share our work and our play, we can't help sharing each other's pain. And you know, don't you, little Christy—"

She could have wept when the telephone rang, because she wanted so dreadfully to hear the rest of that last sentence. She watched Paul cross the room and take down the receiver. Then he turned and dashed toward the hall.

"Miss Banks's house is on fire!" he called over his shoulder. "I'll leave the door unlatched for the doctor!"

Off he went. Christine sat up.

"You beast!" she sobbed. "You horrid little beast! You've spoiled everything! You did it on purpose—I know you did!"

This was manifestly unjust. Miss Banks might have been capable of burning down a house to attract attention, but she couldn't have known just the right moment in which to do it. She might have been glad enough to interrupt Paul's speech, but she couldn't have managed it so well unless chance had favored her.

Christine, suffering as she was, may well be excused for being unreasonable. Perhaps it would be kinder not to tell you all the things she thought about Miss Banks.

The village fire apparatus went tearing down the road with a noble uproar. Surely that should have released Paul, but still he didn't come, or the doctor, either, and Christine began to grow alarmed.

"He'll be hurt!" she thought. "She'll urge him to do all sorts of dangerous things! He'll be killed! He'll be killed, showing off!"

In another instant, regardless of the pain that made her sick and faint, Christine would have run out of the house and down the road, if she hadn't heard Paul's voice outside.

"Now, then!" he was saying. "Only a step more! That's a brave girl!"

Christine threw open the front door, and there he was, supporting a partially collapsed Miss Banks up the steps. Christine forgot all her resentment at the sight of that limp, helpless figure. She forgot her own bandaged arm, forgot everything except the honest sympathy and kindness that made her what she was.

"Oh, you poor child!" she cried. "Is she badly hurt, Paul?"

Paul half carried Miss Banks in, and she dropped face downward on the sofa — a pitiful little figure, with her bright, dishevelled hair and her slender body.

"The house," he said solemnly, "is burned to ashes!"

"But Miss Banks—is she badly hurt?"

"She's not exactly hurt," said he, still solemn. "It's more a nervous shock, I think."

All sorts of curious things took place in Christine's mind, but she said not a word. She watched Paul ministering to the nervously shocked one. She watched Miss Banks growing a little better, so that she was able to sob forth a catalogue of the marvelous things she had lost; but never a word did Christine say—not even when Paul sat down on a near-by chair, and wrote lists for the insurance company, dictated by Miss Banks with many sobs.

Suddenly she started up.

"Oh! My photograph of Deccabroni!"

"What's Deccabroni?" inquired Paul.

"He's a wonderful patriot—from one of those wonderful, brave little countries—I forgot which. It's a signed photograph. Oh, I can't bear to lose it! Not *that!* Anything but Deccabroni!"

She became hysterical about the lost Deccabroni. When the doctor came, she was in an alarming condition, and was making quite a disturbance. Taking it for granted that this was the patient, and with only a bow for the silent Christine, the doctor advanced to the sofa, and calmly and competently set about tranquillizing her.

He showed little enthusiasm for the task, and perhaps Miss Banks noticed this, for quite suddenly she became tranquil, and explained that the cause of her agitation was the loss of an invaluable photograph.

She even began to relate some of the exploits of Deccabroni, in so interesting a way that the doctor sat down to listen more comfortably. He might have sat there for a long time, if Christine had not fainted.

V

PAUL had not needed the doctor's blunt words to awaken his violent remorse. He walked up and down the sitting room for the better part of the night, hating himself, blaming himself beyond all measure or reason. He had neglected his own Christine, forgotten her suffering, in his shameful preoccupation with Miss Banks and Deccabroni. He wasn't fit to live!

As is often the way with human beings, he wanted very much to blame Miss Banks for everything; but he was, after all, a just and logical young man, and he refused to do that.

After Christine's arm had been dressed, and she had gone to bed, he had politely conducted Miss Banks to the door of the guest room. At intervals she had called down the stairs for towels, for cigarettes, for matches, for a glass of milk, for a book to read, and for the exact time. He had responded politely to each summons; but never in his life had he felt less chivalrous.

Toward morning he lay down on the sofa and dropped asleep. It was late when he awoke, with stiff limbs, heavy eyes, and the frowzy discomfort that comes from having slept in one's clothes. He ran up to see Christine, but she was sleeping.

His next idea was to take a warm bath; but Miss Banks had forestalled him. She required one hour and four minutes, and she took every drop of hot water.

When he came downstairs, she was waiting impatiently.

"Oh, do make some coffee!" she cried. "I'm worn out!"

"I don't know how to make coffee," he told her.

"You can try," said she.

"So can you," he retorted.

Christine had got up, and was just then at the head of the stairs, prepared to make coffee; but when she heard this dialogue, she stopped where she was, and listened.

"Not in my line," said Miss Banks. "I'm not domestic."

"It's got nothing to do with being domestic," said Paul. "You might simply be fair. You don't understand the rudiments of fair play. You want—"

"I want a cup of coffee, and I'm going to have it!" said she. "Fair play doesn't interest me. Women aren't expected to play fair."

"On the contrary," said Paul, "a man has no respect for the type of woman that—"

And so on, about sharing work and play and being comrades. Christine listened with great delight. So severely eloquent was Paul, so reasonable did his arguments seem, that she expected Miss Banks to be abashed. But—in the end, Paul made the coffee.

Christine went quietly back into her room, with an odd smile on her lips.

"Very well!" she said to herself. "I'm not too old to learn!"

When Paul came home that evening, the door was opened by a trained nurse.

"Is she—worse?" he cried.

"Oh, no!" said the nurse pleasantly. "Your wife's resting comfortably; but she's suffering from nervous shock, and the doctor thinks she'd better take a good, long rest."

He found Christine resting comfortably, to be sure, and not much inclined to talk; so he left her, saying that he would come up again after dinner. He went into the sitting room, where Miss Banks was reading and eating some fudge that she had made.

"Good evening," he said.

"Good evening," she replied.

Paul took up a book, to read while he waited.

He waited.

The nurse was moving about upstairs, but no sounds came from the kitchen. Still, with three women in the house, he could not credit the monstrous suspicion that was dawning upon him.

At seven o'clock the nurse came downstairs, in hat and coat.

"Good night," she said. "I'll be here at seven in the morning. Just give your wife her medicine at nine, and I think she'll sleep all night."

And off she went. Miss Banks continued to read and to eat her candy. Paul saw now that there was no dinner, that there would not be any dinner that evening.

At nine o'clock he went up to give Christine her medicine. He was as gentle and affectionate as he knew how to be. He knew she mustn't be worried; yet he

couldn't help asking, in a somewhat plaintive voice:

"Did you have any supper, Christy?"

"Oh, yes," said she. "The nurse made me some delicious soup and some nice, crisp toast. I think you'd better see about getting a servant to cook your meals, Paul."

Then she closed her eyes, and he didn't dare to disturb her repose by asking questions.

He was not afraid of Miss Banks, however.

"Can't you *help* me?" he demanded. "Just tell me what to do, if you're too high and mighty to do anything yourself. I'm hungry. I don't know how to cook anything."

"I always said you were spoiled," said Miss Banks. "You're a perfect baby. You can't even feed yourself!"

"My share is to provide the money," Paul began, when a horrible idea came to him.

It was one thing to provide money for the thrifty and ingenious Christine, but a trained nurse, a servant, and doctors' bills! He didn't care so much about dinner now. He ate some bread and butter, while he did some constructive and intensive thinking.

He came home the next evening, earlier than usual, bringing with him a cook—a masterful and unscrupulous woman who saw his deplorable plight and intended to take the fullest advantage of it. Still, she did go to market, and she did cook dinner; and if he paid an exorbitant price for the privilege of eating a collection of the dishes he most disliked, he was nevertheless grateful.

He sat down at the table with the nurse and Miss Banks, and he was in a better humor than he had been for weeks. Christine, upstairs, heard his cheerful voice and his laugh, and tears came into her eyes, although she smiled.

He came up later to sit beside her, and he was so affectionate, so genuinely concerned on her behalf, that her heart smote her.

"All this is a horribly heavy burden for you, Paul," she said.

"See here! You're not to worry, you know," he said. "I can manage very well, Christy. All you have to do is to rest. I want you to rest, my dearest girl, and to enjoy it as much as you can."

"But the expense!"

"I've arranged for that," he said magnificently. "I've got some extra work to do in the evening, and next month I'm going to a new firm, at almost double my present salary."

She knew he wouldn't like her to appear surprised or too much delighted, so she merely said:

"That's very nice, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes—nice enough," he replied casually; "but I shouldn't be much of a man if I weren't able to get you whatever you needed."

"And the more I need, the more you'll get," she reflected. "Oh, you dear, splendid, *silly* boy!"

She found it hard not to hug him violently.

"But isn't Miss Banks rather a superfluous burden, when you have so much on your shoulders?" she asked, after a long silence.

"Well, you see, Christy," he answered seriously, "now that her little fool house is burned down, she hasn't anywhere to go. We can't very well turn her out, can we? She'll be gone in a few weeks, anyhow. She's going to take charge of Deccabroni's publicity campaign, and she'll have to live in the city."

"Who's Deccabroni?" asked Christine.

"Didn't she have a picture of him that was burned?" said Paul. "I don't remember who he is; but Heaven help him!"

Paul rose.

"I've got to get at my work now, Christy, darling," he said. "You won't worry any more now, will you? You see that I can handle things fairly well."

Modest words, and a modest enough expression upon his face, but in his heart the fellow was shamelessly exultant. Certainly he could handle things, all things, and not fairly well, but wonderfully well. Wives, cooks, trained nurses, and Miss Bankses could all be borne upon his capable shoulders.

So full was the house of dependent females that he had no place to work except a cold and dismal little sewing room; but what did he care? His little world was revolving, and he was its axis. Everything depended upon him and him alone. He put on an overcoat, lighted a cigarette, and set to work on a pile of documents with zest and good humor. He didn't care any longer whether he had eight hours' sleep or a temperature of the correct humidity, or how much he smoked. Nor was he much in-

terested in post-war Beluchistan. He had a man's work to do!

He didn't hear Christine as she came down the hall and stood in the doorway. He was absorbed in his work, his black hair wildly ruffled, his overcoat collar turned up, and his feet wrapped in a quilt.

"Paul," said she, "I've brought you some hot soup."

He disentangled his feet as quickly as he could, and sprang up.

"You shouldn't have done that!" he cried, with a frown. "You're supposed to be resting, Christy."

She was ready then to tell him that she was a fraud, and her need of rest a deception; but she valiantly resisted the impulse.

"But I like to do something for you, Paul," she said. "I want to help you."

"I don't want help," he said proudly. "I don't need it."

She put down the bowl of soup on the table and threw her arms around his neck.

"Oh, Paul!" she cried. "You're *wonderful!*"

"Nonsense!" said he, grinning in spite of himself. "Now you run along and rest."

And she did. She had said that Paul was wonderful, and she knew, and he knew, that it was true. That was what he needed.

A RAINY DAY

THE beauty of this rainy day,
All silver-green and dripping gray,
Has stolen quite my heart away
From all the tasks I meant to do,
Made me forget the resolute blue
And energetic gold of things—
So soft a song the rain bird sings.
Yet am I glad to miss a while
The sun's huge domineering smile,
The busy spaces mile on mile,
Shut in behind this shimmering screen
Of falling pearls and phantom green;
As in a cloister walled with rain,
Safe from intrusions, voices vain,
And hurry of invading feet;
Inviolate in my retreat,
Myself, my books, my pipe, my fire—
So runs my rainy-day desire.
Or I old letters may con o'er,
And dream on faces seen no more,
Open old cupboards and explore
The buried treasure of the years,
Too visionary now for tears:
Sometimes for an old sweetheart's sake
A delicate romantic ache,
Sometimes a swifter pang of pain
To read old tenderness again,
As though the ink were scarce yet dry,
And She still She and I still I—
What if I were to write as though
Her letter came an hour ago!
An hour ago!—this postmark says—
But out upon these rainy days!
Come tie the packet up again,
The sun is back—enough of rain.

Nicholas Breton

Wild Bird

A STORY OF THE WILD NEW LANDS OF THE CANADIAN NORTHWEST

By Hulbert Footner

Author of "The Man Hunt," "Country Love," "Thieves' Wit," etc.

ANN MAURY has come into the wilds of North Cariboo in search of her father, from whom she has not heard for two years. At the frontier settlement of Fort Edward, on the Campbell River, where his last letter was mailed, she consults Cal Nimmo, the unofficial "mayor" of the little town. Nimmo identifies Ann's father as a solitary trapper and prospector locally known as Joe Grouser, who did not come down the river as usual the previous year. He tells her that it is useless to search for him, and advises her—orders her, indeed—to go back to her home in Maryland, where she is a school-teacher.

Ann is staying at Maroney's place, which bears the high-sounding name of the Fort Edward Hotel, but which chiefly consists of a rough dance hall. The principal attraction of this establishment is a pretty girl named Nellie Nairns, and there are many fights among rival pretenders to her favor. Ann witnesses one of these battles, between a local bully known as Red Chivers and a young fellow called Chako Lyllac. She is greatly impressed by Chako, and as he is a skilled river man she engages him—in defiance of Cal Nimmo's order—to take her up the Campbell in search of her father. They slip away in Chako's canoe. Ann finds him a surly and unsympathetic companion, who orders her about roughly, and laughs at her without mercy when she falls into the water.

XIII

ANN issued out of her tent, the next morning, braced to meet Chako's renewed derision; but his mood had changed again. Apparently all recollection of the day before had been sponged out, and their quarrel and Ann's lamentable accident were alike forgotten. Perhaps laughter had purged his spleen. At any rate, he greeted her with careless good humor.

He was shaving. The sight gave Ann a little shock. She had seen pictures of men shaving, and had peeped into barber shops, but she had never been actually present at the operation. But why not, she asked herself? Chako was more sensible than she, she thought, because he took everything as a matter of course.

Fully dressed except for his outer shirt, he was squatting cross-legged in the grass, with his little mirror propped up on the grub box in front of him. The white singlet clung to his swelling breast like an outer skin. His arms were faintly golden with old sunburn. The hair stood out from his head in a wild, bright tangle.

An exclamation escaped him.

"Cut myself again! That damned mole! Got any court-plaster, Maury?"

"Yes," said Ann.

She got out her indispensable little dressing case. Chako squatted on his heels, and Ann knelt beside him. This brought their heads on a level. Ann's heart beat like a bird's. Chako's freshly shaven cheek was peachy. Upon the point of his jaw there was a ruby drop that stirred a strange emotion in Ann. She hastily dried it with a towel, put the little square of court-plaster on her tongue tip, and applied it with a gesture that was like a blessing. She pressed it with a velvet finger tip.

"There, I think that will stick," she said anxiously.

Chako suddenly turned his head. His eyes were dancing with the zest of earth, his lips turned up mockingly.

"Kiss!" he murmured.

Ann darted her head back as if he had stung her. Chako jumped up with a gay laugh, and, snatching up towel and shirt, ran down to the water's edge. A sound of splashing was heard.

He came back presently with all the kinks nicely dragged out of his hair, and

with his shirt on. Ann was moving blindly around the fire, still in a very tumult of emotion. Chako appeared to have forgotten the incident.

Ann gave him a wide berth. A hot little flame of resentment scorched her breast.

"It means nothing to him—nothing!" she thought.

Chako always had an eye cocked toward the sky for weather.

"South wind to-day," he announced. "We'll be able to sit back and sail up the lake. You watch the coffeepot, Maury, while I rig a sail."

He used two of the little tent poles and one of his red blankets. The sail made a gay splash of color in the scene.

Presently he stuck his head up over the edge of the bank.

"Hey, Maury! Fetch me that coil of tracking line yonder."

Ann looked at him without speaking.

Chako looked away across the river; he actually blushed.

"Please," he mumbled.

Ah, how Ann's breast warmed over him! The dear, the *dear!* She forgave him everything on the spot. He had learned his lesson. He *could* learn a lesson! She flew to get him the tracking line. She could have hugged him.

When they embarked, Ann sat in the bottom of the canoe, with her back against the mast, facing astern. She held the sheet. Chako perched on the stern seat, steering with a paddle. They sailed out on the lake.

"I feel great!" Chako announced.

He looked it. But a sense of well-being only made him harder, Ann thought bitterly. There was still no humanity in him. His keen gaze was never still; it embraced the sky, the shore line, the sail, but never rested on her. His unawareness of her made her feel like nothing at all in the bottom of the boat. Sometimes Ann felt as if he must be aware of his cruel power over her, and was deliberately exerting it; but in her heart she knew that it was his unconsciousness, his spontaneity, that constituted his power.

The old songs rolled forth.

"Tom Pearse, Tom Pearse, lend me your gray mare;
All along, down along, out along lee!
For I want for to go to Widdicombe Fair
With Bill Brewer, Dan Stewer, Peter Gurney, Peter Davey, Dan'l Whidden, Harry Hawk, Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all;
Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all!"

"Where did you learn those old songs?" asked Ann.

"When I first came north, I batched with an old sourdough. He used to sing 'em," said Chako. "He hadn't learned any new ones in fifty years, I guess. Those old ones roll out better than the ragtime the girls sing in the settlement."

"Rather!" said Ann.

"Here's a funny one," said Chako.

"Oh, sweet Kitty Clover, she bothers me so;
Bothers me so, bothers me so.
Her cheeks are round and red and fat
Red as church cushions—oh, redder than that!
Oh, sweet Kitty Clover she bothers me so;
Bothers me so, bothers me so.
She's three feet tall, and that I prize
As just a fit height for a man of my size.
Oh, sweet Kitty Clover, she bothers me so;
Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh!"

"Tell me more about the old sourdough," said Ann. "It must have been a funny combination. You were fifteen years old, weren't you?"

"We meant nothing to each other," Chako said coolly. "Just happened to be thrown together."

Ann's heart sank. Did anybody mean anything to Chako? But perhaps it was just his pose to make out that he had no feelings. She tried again.

"Where did you live before you came north?"

Chako closed up instantly.

"Men up here don't talk about their beginnings," he said.

That was the end of Ann's attempts to question him.

The south wind held during several days. For hours at a time they sat in delicious idleness, letting it waft them. The first lake was Beaver Lake; another stretch of river followed, then a lake without any regular name, Chako said, but called by some Breeches Lake, from its shape. A favorite joke of the country was to send tenderfeet down the left leg of the breeches, which ended nowhere. The last and the largest of the chain was McIlwraith Lake.

There were moments when Ann, quite without reason, became wildly happy; when she could throw back her head and shout Chako's songs with him, satisfied merely to be alive under such a sky. Such moments were brief, for Chako would always in some unconscious way be reminding her that she meant nothing to him, and the twentieth time hurt her just as sharply as the first.

She kept her feelings to herself, of course, and on the surface they got along very well together.

Chako was really a first-rate companion, if you were content to take him as he was. He was willing to meet you on neutral ground, but he never allowed you to set foot over the threshold of his castle, and he didn't care in the least what was inside your castle.

While travel was so easy, Chako had to find other means of working off his superabundant energy. At their spelling places along the lakes, he would disappear, and presently Ann would see him swimming out with long over-arm strokes. He would tread water, wave an arm to her, and shout. Then he would swim on almost out of sight, while Ann waited in terror for his return.

After McIlwraith Lake, the final stretch of the little river was called Pony River. It went down steeply at the end, and the constant succession of rapids was highly exhilarating. They made a morning spell beside the Pony River, in a lovely spot beside a quiet backwater, with a rapid foaming down outside like millions of gallons of root beer. Great trees arched overhead.

After they had eaten, Chako took a snooze in the grass—he could always sleep. Ann climbed into an inviting poplar tree which, half uprooted from the bank, leaned out horizontally over the stony beach and the quiet water. She found a comfortable perch, swinging her feet, resting her arms on another branch breast high in front, and pillowing her cheek on her arms. A sweep of loosened hair crossed her brows.

There she sat for a long time, dreaming in a state of soft unhappiness—dreaming of Chako. The object of her dreams lay sleeping unromantically in the grass below her, a few feet back, but she had turned her head that she might not see him. It hurt her to look at him.

How could this go on, she was asking herself—this living in such a terrible physical intimacy with a man who presented an invariably glassy surface to her? The intimacy daily grew closer, and daily softened her heart more to her partner. Not so Chako—his glassy surface was unaltered. A dozen times a day she broke her soft heart against it. She had continually to restrain herself from quarreling with him insanely, even from striking him, in her exasperation. Anything to break up his inhuman indifference!

At the same time her better sense told her that if she did reveal the wild feelings that filled her, it would only make him stronger and more cruel in his callousness. It could not go on—but it *had* to go on! So it went endlessly back and forth in her mind.

She suddenly became aware that Chako had awakened, and was looking up at her with eyes full of sleep.

"You look like a wild thing up there among the leaves," he murmured.

There was a new quality in his voice that set Ann's heart to beating wildly. She hastily worked herself along the branch, and dropped to the stones. Chako's sleepy eyes followed her about with a warm and dangerous look she had never seen in them before. He smiled mockingly.

"What's the matter with you?" Ann said sharply, in a panic.

"I was thinking," he drawled, "how great it would be if there were really wild girls in the woods. That would be some hunting, eh?"

"Rubbish!" said Ann, but her heart beat tumultuously.

They embarked. She looked forward with dread to the next camp. If his hunting instinct was aroused, who would be the hunted one but herself?

XIV

THROUGHOUT the middle part of the day the little river kept them on the *qui vive*. On every bend there was a tossing rapid, and they were flung around, never knowing what they were to see below. It was madly exciting. They shouted together as they took the plunge.

Sometimes the stream spread out wide and shallow, and Chako had to leap overboard and let the canoe down slowly over the stones. In one narrow place a tree had fallen across from bank to bank, and they just escaped crashing into it. Chako chopped a way through.

Toward the end of the afternoon the country flattened out. The river now sucked swiftly and silently around low islands, covered with gigantic cottonwood trees that made a green ceiling high above. All the lower world was filled with a cool, greenish light. Both scenery and lighting had a curiously theatrical effect.

They took their afternoon spell on a low, dry bank at the edge of one of the half submerged islands. During this stop there was

bread to be baked. Ann had by now taken over the baking from Chako. Chako gathered dry wood, made her a hot fire, then sat down with his back against a log, to watch.

He was thoroughly aware of Ann now. His eyes followed her every movement with a secret and intent look that made Ann feel as weak as if he were the snake and she the bird. The suggestion of a mocking smile clung about his lips. He was aroused, but he was none the less savage.

That smile embittered Ann. It seemed to say that he was ready for her now—let her come, but no hurry. Never, she vowed, while he looked at her like that! To be held so lightly hurt her worse than not to be regarded at all. It was the crowning humiliation.

Chako picked up a twig and whittled it, glancing up to woo Ann with shameless, dancing eyes and smiling lips. He was trying to force her to meet his glance, to melt into laughter. Ann felt as if her fate depended upon not meeting his eyes.

"Think yourself quite a cook, don't you?" he drawled.

"A better cook than you, or I wouldn't have the job," she retorted.

"Some little cooky boy!"

"If you're not satisfied with my cooking—"

"Oh, your *cooking's* good enough!"

"What's the matter with me, then?"

"Oh, to see you skipping round in your little pants, I just got to laugh!"

And laugh he did. There was a warm quality in his laughter that melted Ann like wax. Warmth and mockery! He wanted her, but he wanted her lightly. She kneaded her dough desperately. She would not let herself meet his eye, but she could see him only too well. She was tinglingly conscious of him slouching there on the small of his back, his knees up, his broad-brimmed hat pulled a little forward, his wicked, laughing eyes glancing from the shadow.

She was divided clean in half. How his deep, teasing voice seduced her breast! How she loved to have him chaff her! And his eyes, asking, asking! Careless love—it was nature. Chako was pure nature. Was not all the rest mere imaginings? Wasn't she a fool to torment herself asking for more, when that was all he had to give? Wasn't she a niggard to ask at all what she was going to get out of it? How easy to let herself go!

But the other half fought hard. The sneering devil, how contemptuously sure he is of you! He only lays himself out to please because he hasn't got you yet. Once he had you, he'd treat you like dirt. Such is his savage nature. He doesn't even trouble himself to hide it. Better throw yourself in the river than give yourself in exchange for that!

Chako watched her agitated hands pounding the dough.

"Bet you'd like to do that to me," he drawled. "I can see it in your eye. Go ahead! I'll hold my hands behind my back. Beat me up, kid! Make you feel better."

"Don't be silly," said Ann.

They embarked again without anything having happened, but Ann was despairing. She had resisted him for the moment. What good did it do her? There were still days and weeks of this ahead, and each day it would become harder. Nobody has unlimited powers of resistance. What was the use? She couldn't fight him and half of herself, too—an Ann that sulked when Chako sulked, an Ann that shrugged at the impending catastrophe with a devil-may-care grin like Chako's own.

Within a few hundred yards of their camping place they were suddenly shot out on the bosom of a great, brawling, whitish-green river, almost as wide as the Campbell, but shallow and without majesty.

"Rice River," said Chako. "Going down like a locomotive."

A violent, disorderly stream, continually eating under its banks and depositing wide bars in mid stream, on which the torn, wrecked trees grounded and piled high in fantastic jams. Some of the cut banks were two hundred feet high — towering slopes of sand, with a fringe of jack pines looking over far above. Harder strata stuck up through the sand in castellated masses, where shallows hollowed out their nests. A curious hissing sound filled the air.

"What is that?" asked the startled Ann.

"Nobody knows for sure," said Chako. "I take it that it's the stones rolling along the river bed."

Rapids followed one another at short intervals. Ann was alarmed by the speed at which they were carried down.

"How much of this have we got?" she asked.

"About a hundred and fifty miles."

"How in the world can we ever get back again?"

" The water will be lower then. It's done all the time, but it's no cinch. Take us a week or more, this stretch."

A wetting in a rapid obliged them to camp for the night an hour earlier than usual, in order to dry out. It was a dreary spot that they chose—a burned-over river bottom with jagged black sticks rising here and there, and charred trunks lying half concealed in the weeds. The high water covered the beach, and they had to pull the canoe up on the bank beside them.

When the supper was eaten, and the tents put up, it was still too early to go to bed. Ann got some sewing, and sat on a fallen trunk with an air of composure which she was far from feeling. She was making a cotton bag to hold the beans, which had burst their paper wrappings. Chako lay down on his back near her, watching her from under his hat brim.

Suddenly he tossed the hat aside, and, rolling over with graceful abandon, lay at her feet, with his cheek pillowed on his arm, and a hand behind his head. He looked up at her with his intolerable and alluring grin of mockery.

" You think I'm a pretty hard case, don't you?"

" Don't flinch!" whispered a voice within Ann.

" Why, yes," she said coolly.

Chako laughed ruefully.

" The hell you say!"

" Well, you asked me."

" Do you know you're damned pretty?" he said suddenly.

Ann shrugged.

" I didn't realize it at first," he went on; " you keep yourself so much to yourself. In those clothes and all—say, I'm going to call you Billy. Why don't you let yourself go a little?"

" I like that!" said Ann indignantly.

" Hey?"

" You take pretty good care never to let yourself go!"

" Oh, when we started, I was sore on the world; but I'm over that now. Don't look so sour, Billy! Be my playmate."

" No, thanks!" said Ann.

" What's the matter with me?"

" You're too condescending."

" What do you mean by that?"

" Too lordly." She mimicked a lordly manner. " ' You may play with me now, little girl. I am in a good humor.' "

Chako shouted with laughter.

" So that's me, is it? Well, here's you." He gave what he considered an imitation of a little girl's prissiest manner. " ' Run away, boy—you're too rough!' "

In spite of herself, Ann had to laugh. She quickly called it in. Laughter was so dangerous! Even that single note of laughter encouraged him to put up his hand in search of hers—daring her with his laughing eyes to refuse him. Ann delicately pricked the back of his hand with her needle. Astonished, he clapped it to his mouth.

" You little wasp! I've a good mind to pay you out for that!"

" You'll get worse!" warned Ann.

" The size of it!" he said, grinning. " Why, kid, I could keep you in the air with one hand, while I ate my dinner with the other."

" Very likely," said Ann. " What does that prove?"

" Proves you better be polite to me, little feller!"

" Oh, you're big enough," said Ann, with a scornful glance; " but strength isn't everything."

" What else counts?"

" Will power."

He laughed loud.

" Will power, eh? The little feller thinks he's got will power!" He suddenly scrambled to his knees and brought his face close to hers. It was all alight, joyous, devilish. " Want to match will powers with me, Billy? You say you won't, and I say you shall!"

Ann got up without haste.

" You're tiresome," she said. " I'm going to bed."

He followed her, scowling.

" Aw, can't you take a bit of fun?"

" Oh, it isn't that," said Ann coolly. " The mosquitoes are coming around."

" Then come sit behind my mosquito bar," he suggested cajolingly.

" No, indeed!" returned Ann sharply.

He chuckled mischievously.

" What's the diff—a rag of mosquito netting? Here we are—you and I."

" Good night," said Ann.

He swore under his breath, and kicked a stump.

Next morning Chako was still sulky. His self-love had received a wound, and he regarded Ann with an injured scowl.

It hardened Ann. She regretted nothing that had happened. She ignored the scowl,

and succeeded in giving a good representation of cheerfulness—which, in turn, increased Chako's rancor.

The weather turned bad. All day brief squalls of cold rain swept across the river. One after another the charged, yellowish clouds stuck their heads over the hills on the left bank. Sometimes by racing down ahead, sometimes by holding back, they could escape, but more often they were caught. Then they paddled doggedly through it, their shoulders hunched under the icy downpour. Between showers a hot sun made them steam.

Each time they went ashore to eat, Chako watched Ann, but with an ugly gleam in his half closed eyes to-day. Hour by hour his appetite became sharper, and he made no scruple of letting it show naked and unashamed. He intended to show her that he meant to satisfy it. This was the pure savage without the mask of mocking laughter, and infinitely more dangerous.

Nevertheless, Ann's spirits steadily rose. What terrified her had been that he would cajole her with his infernal attractiveness. When he became merely brutal, she grew strong. He could never intimidate her into giving in. He should never have her against her will.

She knew that the test would come when they camped for the night, and braced herself to meet it. They found a fine camping place on a high, dry bank under virgin pines. The canoe was pulled up on a lower level. Ann cooked the supper, while Chako made all snug for the night.

When they sat down opposite each other to eat, Chako's sullen eyes embraced her in an extraordinary look, cool and proprietary. In his mind he already possessed her. Her feelings were nothing to him. He had only to put out his hand when he was ready.

Ann's extreme danger stimulated her. She ignored his look, and contrived to talk as if she had nothing on her mind but the usual details of their journey. Chako never troubled himself to answer her; but she played her part so well that it intimidated him to a certain degree. It kept him quiet and sullen. Ann fought desperately against the realization that it was all for nothing—that he was content to bide his own time, sitting there, wary, contemptuous, crouched to spring.

This final meal of the day was always eaten late. The sun was down when they finished. According to their usual custom, Ann washed the dishes, while Chako gathered a store of dry wood for the morning's fire. Ann put everything in the grub box, and fastened down the cover against four-footed prowlers. She rose.

"Good night," she said coolly.

He faced her from the other side of the fire.

"Wait a minute," he said.

His voice was a little thick. Ann would not run from him.

"What do you want?" she asked.

With a spring, Chako was over the fire.

"You!" he said. Before Ann could gather her forces, he had flung his arms about her. "You pretty thing! You pretty thing!" he murmured, contemptuous even in his passion.

Only for the fraction of a second was Ann at a loss. All her faculties sprang into action. She fought him off, every fiber of her being charged with denial.

Chako began to laugh.

"Whoa, Emma! Whoa, Emma!" he murmured. "You little devil! You hell-cat!"

Delighted laughter rumbled deep in his throat.

His laughter angered Ann more than the original attack upon her, and nerved her to a still greater effort. She succeeded in tearing herself clear of him. She leaped down to the lower ground, where the canoe was, with Chako after her. There was a paddle lying there. Ann snatched it up, swung it high, and brought down the edge on Chako's head.

He grunted, and clapped his hands to the spot. It was a light stick, and he was not much hurt, but he was thoroughly sobered.

"What the hell? What's the matter with you?" he growled.

"Don't you touch me, that's all!" gasped Ann.

"Ah, what's the matter with you?" he repeated. "You like me."

"What makes you so sure of that?" Ann cried furiously.

"All women do."

Ann groaned in intolerable exasperation.

"Well, I'm not like all women," she said. "You've known only cheap and common women. They've made a fool of you!"

"You *do* like me," he grumbled, puzzled. "When I come close to you, I can feel it. Why deny it?"

"If I did feel anything for you," she cried, "I'd never give in to it—never,

never! I'd throw myself into the river sooner!"

"Yes, you would!" he sneered.

"You put your hands on me again, and you'll see!"

He made no move. He believed her.

"You're not worth it," Ann went on passionately. "You're empty and hard and shallow. There's nothing to you but your strength. Well, a horse is stronger!"

This got under Chako's skin.

"I know what's biting you, all right," he snarled. "You want a man to fall in love with you, don't you, and come crawling? Oh, I know women!"

"What sort of women?"

"Ah, they're all the same—not satisfied till they tame a man! I've felt it in you from the first. Well, by God, no woman's going to trim my wings! None of this love business for me!"

"But it's all right for women to love you, eh?"

"I ask for no more than I give."

"You're incapable of loving!"

"All right! I'll take 'em and I'll leave 'em. That's all I want."

"Ah, there's the truth at last! You despise women!"

"Why shouldn't I, when I see what they are?"

"And what are you? Selfish, stupid, and unfeeling!"

"Book words! Book words!" said Chako furiously. "You're no flesh and blood woman. You've read so many books, your blood has turned to printer's ink!"

"All right!" retorted Ann. "Treat me like a book after this. Books don't trouble you much!"

"You're damned right they don't! And you won't, neither! You've cured me of wanting you!"

"Thank God!" said Ann scornfully.

Shouting angrily at each other, they sought their respective tents. Within the shelter of hers, the inevitable reaction set in in Ann, and the scalding tears welled up. She wrapped her head in her arms, to keep any suggestion of a sob from reaching Chako's ears. She had won, but it was a dismal victory!

XV

THE next day was a black one. If only they could have got away from each other! But there they were, tied hand and foot together. Ann was presumably the better off, because, at least while they were afloat, she could turn her back to Chako. On the other hand, Chako was the tougher of the two.

There was an absurd side to the situation, too. Ann was conscious of it while she suffered. Forced together as they were, each was pretending that the other simply did not exist. Ann waited until Chako put a thing down before she would pick it up. Chako did everything for himself sooner than admit that there was anybody with him. Dependent upon each other as they were, they nevertheless contrived the feat of not addressing a single word to each other all day.

Always, as they were hurried down the disorderly Rice River, the shores were becoming higher and bolder. Through gaps in the hills, to the east, they caught occasional glimpses of veritable snow-clad peaks, flung up calm and lovely against the blue.

At evening of this day, rounding the shoulder of a high hill, they issued into a sort of vast amphitheater. Ann supposed this to be the scene of the meeting of the rivers—the Grand Forks of the Spirit. The stony Chako volunteered no information.

The Rocky Mountains were now fully revealed, a company of Titans seated in noble dignity. There was a great gap in the center of the chain, where they drew back to give passage to the great river.

Presently, ahead, Ann could see the Stanley River, which was sharply differentiated from the jade-green Rice by its brown color. The two streams, which were of about equal volume, rushed at each other pell-mell, and tilted for possession of the channel to the east. At the moment the swollen Rice River had the ascendancy, and the brown waters of the Stanley were sullenly backed up as far as one could see. Some skill was required from Chako in order to nose the canoe from the rushing green torrent into the standing brown water safely.

Where the rivers came together there was a broad bar of white sand, and in the middle of the sand Ann beheld an astonishing sight after their many lonely days—a little weather-stained A tent, with a fire before it sending up a thread of smoke. A man came to the water's edge to meet them. Ann's heart went out to this fellow creature. Whoever he was, he must surely be more human than the stony Chako. He provided unexpected relief from an intolerable situation.

It was a very strange figure—a little, oldish man dressed in a rusty cutaway coat, of all garments. The coat was pinned across at the neck, to hide the lack of a shirt, and the man's feet were bare. His grizzled hair hung to his shoulders; his beard had perhaps never been cut, but both were scrupulously combed. He shook Ann's hand, and seemed as simple and full of pleasure as a little child.

"Shoot me if it ain't a little gal!" he cried. "A little gal! Ain't seen a little white gal in years and years!"

His bare toes dug themselves self-consciously into the sand.

"Hello, Tom," said Chako, sulky and offhand.

"Interjooce me proper," requested the little old man.

"Miss Maury," said Chako, with a jerk of his head toward Ann. "Tom Catlett."

"But most gen'lly called Hairy Tom, to distinguish me from Tom Holden, who traps down Fort Cheever way," said the old man. "Some calls me the Hermit of Grand Forks."

"I wanted to see you," said Chako in his lordly way. "Thought you'd be down Selwyn way."

"No," said Tom, pleased and self-important. "In fine weather I gen'lly camps right here. 'Tain't much of a camp, with the sand and all. I eats sand with all my meals; but it's an elegant lookout. I can see up the Rice, and up the Stanley, and down the Spirit. Nobody gets by me. How'd you get them scratches on your face, Chako?"

Chako turned a dull red.

"Ah! I ran against a jack pine in the dark."

"Must 'a' rubbed your face on him good," said Tom innocently. "They're all up and down, like. I have tea on the fire. Sit ye down! Sit ye down!"

But the evening horde of mosquitoes was gathering, and before they could take any refreshments Chako had to pitch his lean-to tent. Hairy Tom seemed to be immune to mosquitoes; he didn't bother with any netting. He went to put on his moccasins in Ann's honor, and afterward the three of them sat in a row behind Chako's mosquito bar, and ate their supper.

Ann was unspeakably thankful to have the gentle, garrulous old man for a buffer between her and Chako. How could she have got through the dreadful evening without him? Companionship of any sort was a precious boon.

Hairy Tom did most of the talking. He chattered about his life. It appeared that he was a sort of innocent mendicant, who levied tribute on all travelers. A privileged character in the country, everybody contributed to his support, and took it out in playing harmless jokes on him.

Finally Chako said stiffly:

"Miss Maury is looking for her father—him that went by the name of Joe Grouser."

Hairy Tom started, and cast a commiserating side glance at Ann.

"She!" he murmured. "She!"

"You think he's dead," said Ann quietly.

"I wouldn't say it. I wouldn't say it," said Tom distressfully; "but—"

A shake of the head completed it.

"You needn't hesitate," Ann told him. "I've had it in mind from the first; but I have to go and see."

"I knew him well," said Tom. "Me and him were good friends, bein' as we were both on our own, see? Made a fellow feelin', like. Near every year I'd see him comin' out or goin' in, and we'd spell together, and sass each other. Last year, when he didn't come out, I thought perhaps he'd saved enough grub to see him through the summer, and was goin' to wait until fall and spend the winter outside, seein' as he hadn't been out for 'most as many years as I haven't. I never knew he had a darter outside, he kept his affairs so private. When the fall came, and he didn't show up, then it was too late in the season for me to go look for him. Nobody has dogs in these parts. In the winter we just got to hibernate. And when this spring came, and still he didn't come, then I knew 'twas no use to go after him. A queer old feller Joe Grouser was, to be sure! Me and him—"

Chako wearied of Hairy Tom's reminiscences. He broke in.

"What I want to know is, where was his range, his hang-out?"

"Somewhere up the Ouananeca River," said Tom.

"The Ouananeca!" said Chako, surprised. "They say nobody's ever been up there. They say you can't get up."

"Joe Grouser found a way," said Tom. "Maybe he's the only one. Tell you how I know it. You can bet he never told anybody where he lived, but I stumbled on it by accident. Two years ago I was campin' with some fellers a couple o' miles down

the river, when some other fellers come along in the morning, and they says they'd just left Joe Grouser at the forks—overtook him comin' down the Rice River with his outfit. Well, I wanted to see Joe. I was countin' on him for bacca; so I gets in my canoe, and comes right back, and on up the Stanley. I reckoned, in my light bark canoe, I'd catch him in a couple o' miles, but she sprung a leak on me, and I had to go ashore and mend her. Still, that didn't take half a day to dry and all, and I made sure I'd come up with him where he spelled that night; but no, sir—I paddled all day without seein' him.

"I knew I must 'a' passed him somewheres, so next day I come back. Never thought of the mouth of the Ouananeca at first, 'cause nobody goes in there. It's just a what's-this—a colored sack, I guess they say; but I went in. You can only go up the Ouananeca a couple o' miles, and then you're stopped by a gosh-awful cañon. Well, I found Joe Grouser's skiff at the mouth of the cañon. He'd taken part of his load and gone on. I thought he might be sore at my stumblin' on his retreat, so I didn't wait for him to come back. I took the bacca and left my I. O. U., and I ain't never seen him since."

"The Ouananeca comes in about thirty or forty miles up the Stanley, doesn't it?" asked Chako.

"About that."

"If my father's skiff is still there, it means he has never come out again," said Ann softly.

"It means just that, deary," said Tom, his dim old eyes soft with feeling.

He stroked her hand.

Next morning Ann faced their departure with a heavy dread at her heart. In spirit, she clung to the kind old man as a child might cling to one who would save it from unknown terrors.

Tom was such a feather-brained old child himself, she was half hoping that the lure of a trip would stir him to accompany them. Throughout breakfast she listened with strained ears for some such suggestion to come from him; but it appeared he had no intention of forsaking his point of vantage right in the height of the season. There were several exciting events in prospect. He was looking for his friend Frank Bower on his way out to Fort Edward in ten days or so. Two explorers were due down the Stanley almost any day. Jim Sholto's boy had promised to come up from Selwyn to spend a Sunday with him.

Nevertheless, while Chako was away packing the canoe, Ann said with a painful attempt at a joking manner:

"Why don't you come with us, Tom?"

The old man's face closed like that of a secretive child's. He energetically shook his head.

"Me and Chako wouldn't hit it off," he said. "He's too surly a lad for my likes. I like good fellowship!"

Exactly!

Ann was tempted to plead illness as an excuse to delay their journey; but while she played with the idea, her fate hurried her on. Chako called out that the canoe was ready. She went and took her place like one going to her doom.

For the first twenty miles or so, the current in the Stanley was sluggish, and they progressed upstream at a good rate. Ann was a full-fledged canoe man by now, and paddled every trick as a matter of course. She was glad of it. The scenery along the Stanley was wild and grand in the extreme. On either hand fine mountains rose close to the river, with higher and higher peaks ever peeping over behind. The forest swept up their flanks, unbroken and superb.

After their first spell they came to rapids, not dangerous, but tedious to ascend. They waded in the stream, dragging and pushing the canoe against the tearing current, and lifting her over ledges of rock. Ann worked like a man, but received no word of commendation from her flinty partner.

That night stood out in Ann's recollection as the worst night of the whole trip. Their camp was at the edge of the virgin forest. The ground was cumbered with fallen trunks, and so small was the clear space that the two little tents had to be pitched touching each other. Chako went to bed after eating, and, with his amazing insensibility, instantly fell asleep.

The awful stillness was abroad like a seeking creature. Ann's imagination pictured all the miles that separated her from a peopled land. She was obliged to lie there listening to Chako's deep breathing. She could have screamed at his lack of humanity.

Next morning found them in the Ouananeca. It was a big stream, larger than the Pony River; it must have delivered a good half of the water that constituted the Stan-

ley below. It was a deep, swift, narrow river, silently swirling between steep, high banks walled with pines. They could see nothing beyond the banks, except that occasionally the very tip of a mountain towered up, surprisingly close.

It was nip and tuck with the current. Chako, in his stubborn way, having elected to paddle up, would not give in and take to the tracking line. The two miles or so had all the effect of twenty. All the way up Ann was hearing a dull, insistent murmur that made her breast as uneasy as a native drum.

Finally they rounded a bend, and a cliff of naked, yellow rock, perhaps a hundred feet high, sprang out of the world of green. It ran right across the vista; the river seemed to end there. Ann did not need to be told that this was their present goal. That rumbling voice issued from somewhere within the cliff. Not until they got quite close could Ann see how the river snaked out sidewise through a cleft in the yellow rock. She searched the shores with strained eyes.

"We never asked which side of the river," she said breathlessly.

"The backwater works in at the left," Chako told her.

"There's no boat there."

"He would draw it up out of reach of high water."

Just before they landed, Ann had a peep into the narrow cañon—only a peep, because of a farther bend in the walls. The water came swirling out sluggishly, covered with stale foam.

The backwater led them to a natural landing on a little green bank. Without speaking, Chako pointed to some stumps of little trees that had been chopped. His landing-place, thought Ann! She looked under the pine trees that came to the edge of the narrow bank, and saw his boat. Her breast was somewhat quieted. She knew at least that they were on his track.

They landed, and went to the boat. Even Chako was a little moved by the sight of it. It had been pulled up under the shelter of the trees, and turned over. It was a skiff of clumsy design, made out of rough pine lumber. For further protection, pine branches had been thrown over it; all the needles had fallen off. Beside it lay the rough pine rollers upon which Joe Grouser had worked it up from the water.

Ann put her hand on the bottom.

"This carried my father!" she murmured.

Chako looked away with the hardy scowl with which he always faced any display of emotion.

"Which way do you suppose he went?" asked Ann.

"Around the cañon, most likely," said Chako gruffly. "I don't see any way to get up the cliff, but I'll look around. You stay here."

"Oh, do be careful!" exclaimed Ann involuntarily.

"Ah!" said Chako, scowling like a bravo.

He struck into the woods. Ann pulled the canoe up higher, and carried everything ashore. In a little while Chako came back to report that there was a way to scale the cliff, and that they could get the canoe up, too, though it would take some managing.

They immediately set about their preparations to continue their journey. Chako made a fire for Ann, so that she could cook a meal while he was making the packs.

"We'll take all we can carry on our backs first," he said. "If it's far to carry, we'll make camp on the other side. Soon as we make sure he took to the water above, we'll come back for the canoe."

Presently Ann noticed that one of the packs was getting to be three times the size of the other.

"You're not giving me enough," she said.

"I'm the best judge of that," said Chako, instantly getting sore.

"I'm not going to let you baby me!"

"You 'tend to your cooking."

Ann jumped up in a little tempest of anger. Picking up a bag of sugar from the big pack, she added it to the little pack. Chako snatched it back. Ann laid hands on it again. They glared at each other.

"Let go!" said Ann.

"Let go yourself!" said Chako. "By God, you try a man's temper!"

Suddenly he picked her up, and, carrying her back to the fire, dumped her there none too gently. Ann gave up the unequal struggle. Angry tears forced themselves to her eyes, but she called them in. It suddenly occurred to her that he was bullying her to save her strength. What an enigma he was!

They ate in a stiff silence. Afterward, leaving everything secure against marauders, they shouldered their packs and set off. Chako's big pack was partly supported by a canvas strap across his forehead. It se-

cretly distressed Ann to see the proud head bowed under that weight. Her pack felt like nothing at all.

XVI

STRIKING back from the river, Chako led her around through the trees to a spot at the cliff's foot. All along the base of the cliff there was a great slide of broken rock fallen from the top in ages past. Chako started to clamber up these rocks on all fours. Ann followed, without any idea of where they were going, for there was nothing to be seen above but the smooth face of the cliff.

When they got to the top of the broken rocks, an exclamation of wonder broke from Ann. There lay the way! A great perpendicular slab had cracked away from the face of the cliff, leaving a narrow fissure behind. Into this fissure entered a well beaten path, which descended into the blackest of holes, and rose, beyond, by easy stages to the top of the cliff. High above, the trees looked over the edge.

Seeing Ann glance curiously at the hard-beaten path, Chako said laconically:

"Bears."

They went in. In the bottom of the hole they crossed over a pool of ageless black ice. The way up the other side was harder than it looked. At the top Ann's burden seemed to have increased fourfold in weight. She was thankful to follow Chako's example, and cast it off, and rest. At their feet was a vast bowl of green, with the river finding its way out, and hills above hills rising steeply all around.

When she was a little rested, Ann crept forward, and looked into the cañon. It was a magnificent and dreadful sight, though she couldn't see very far into it, because of the bend in the walls. She saw the white water come tearing around this bend, sweeping high up one side with its impetus. From side to side it was flung between the smooth walls. Great billows crashed against the rock, sending up sheets of spray. One expected the rock itself to crumble under such blows. Then the water sullenly flattened down, and found its way out, heaving like a human breast after a storm of passion.

This was just the bottom of the cañon. Around the bend came a hoarse roar that suggested unimaginable terrors.

Shouldering their burdens, they plodded on. Chako professed to be following a trail, but Ann could not distinguish it. At intervals, though, he would point out where a fallen tree had been chopped to give passage, and Ann knew that her feet were upon the same earth that had been pressed by her father's feet before her. It was only here and there that the trail touched the edge of the cañon, and she could look into it.

One such look she never forgot. They came out on a little plateau of rock, and threw down their packs. Ann went to the edge. She was astounded. Here she could look straight up the cañon for perhaps half a mile.

The walls were not sheer here, though steep enough. It was like a steeply inclined trough down which that awful volume of water came leaping and crashing, as upon a gigantic flight of stairs. Like stairs, the huge, thick billows, regular in form and equidistant, converged from the sides to a point in the center. The noise was not loud so much as it was earth-shaking in volume. In all her life Ann had never received such an impression of power. She and Chako gazed in silence. The sight beggared speech.

It was difficult going, for the trail was of the roughest. Ann used up a good half of her strength in stepping over obstacles. They had many a stiff little ascent to climb. Ann conceived a new respect for Chako's strength, seeing how easily he carried his great pack, while she sank under her little one. It seemed to her as if they were hours upon the way, though she could not see that the sun altered his position much.

Finally, after a steep climb, the trail went down for the first time, the trees opened up, and a lovely, placid little lake of brown water was presented to their surprised eyes.

"We appear to be here," said Chako. He looked about him. "Just as I thought," he added. "He took to the water here. We'll have to bring over the canoe."

"All that way!" said Ann, aghast.

"Matter of five miles," said Chako coolly. "That's nothing."

At first glance the little lake appeared to be landlocked, but they soon saw how the current began to creep slyly along the shore, ever gathering speed. Around at the right they felt rather than saw the cleft that sucked it in. Having divested themselves of their packs, they climbed around the rocky shore to have a look.

A ridge of brown rock ran across the end

of the lake, like a dam. On the side on which they stood there was a break in it, not more than ten yards wide, and through this gap the whole volume of water poured smoothly, without a sound. It poured down a long, steep slide smooth as oil, boiled up madly at the bottom, and swept around a bend out of sight.

"There's all hell around that bend," observed Chako.

They returned around the shore. Chako glanced at the sun.

"Not yet one o'clock," he said. "We've got time to go back for the rest of the stuff, if you feel equal to it."

"Certainly," replied Ann, though her heart sank.

"Or you can wait here, and I'll make two trips," he suggested, with his maddeningly indifferent air.

Ann flashed a hurt and angry look at him.

"I'll help," she said.

"Well, you needn't get on your ear about it," returned Chako.

Returning light was a simple affair. At the other end of the portage they ate heartily, and Chako said they had time for a sleep before starting to work again. They lay down, each in a blanket, on the pine needles. Ten feet or so separated them.

Ann flung an arm over her eyes, and watched Chako through a hole in the crook of her elbow. Sleep did not immediately visit his eyes. He lay on his back, staring up gravely at the pine boughs. What would not Ann have given to know his thoughts! There had been moments to-day when he had appeared almost human, only to become sullen again directly.

He suddenly turned his head and looked at Ann in an odd, intent way that startled her. He scowled, but not in anger—a hurt scowl, one might say, if one could conceive of anything hurting the self-sufficient Chako. Ann had been too sorely wounded to be easily convinced that Chako could be human.

They slept.

Of their second trip across the portage little need be said. It was just a dogged struggle for almost every yard of the five miles. How they got the canoe up through the fissure in the cliff Ann could never have told, but get it up they did. Ann did not see how Chako could have managed without her help, small as that might be, but she did not expect him to acknowledge it.

Up on top, Chako took the canoe on his back, the middle thwart resting on a blanket padded across his shoulders, his hands caught under the bow thwart. He was in continual difficulties with the trees. Though they left every ounce that could be spared, Ann herself had a heavier pack the second trip, and in addition she had to carry Chako's rifle, which always accompanied him.

The sun was going down when they arrived. Ann was all in. She sat down by the lake, white-faced and mute. Chako looked down at her with an odd shyness flickering in his face that made it wonderfully attractive.

"Tired, Billy boy?" he said.

Ann looked at him in speechless astonishment, then quickly turned her head to hide the springing tears. In the whole trip it was the first, the very first, word of human sympathy she had had from him. At such a moment it was too much. The tears gushed forth. Her shoulders shook.

"Oh, hell and damnation!" stormed Chako, striding down to the water in a rage.

Above the cañon the Ouananeca was a perfectly normal brown river, peaceful and charming in effect, giving no hint of the terrors below. Its course tended generally to the northwest—that is, parallel with the mountains. Close on either hand there was a high range, that to the east snow-capped, doubtless the main chain of the Rockies. The valley was invariably flat, and densely timbered with virgin pine. The current was moderate, but there were many little rapids, and progress was arduous and slow.

The relations between the partners slowly improved, but they were still wary with each other. They avoided frank speech. Ann's bitterness yielded slowly. She so passionately desired to believe that Chako was human and lovable that she was afraid to let herself believe it.

Chako was envious of Joe Grouser's old range.

"What a fur country!" he would say a dozen times a day. "And not even any Indians to compete with. They wouldn't come in here. Evil spirits live in the cañon, the Indians say."

"I don't wonder," said Ann.

They now had the added excitement of searching the shores for evidences of the man they were trailing. On every bend Ann held her breath a little, expecting a discovery; but the first day passed, and the

second, and the third, and they saw nothing. Neither did the character of the river change.

"We must be nearly at the north pole," Ann said nervously.

"Not at this rate," replied Chako. "We're not doing twenty miles a day."

"Could we have passed his camp, do you think?" said Ann. "He was so secretive. Perhaps he hid it back from the river."

"Not likely," said Chako. "A man's natural instinct is to build on a river. Who would ever follow him up here?"

"How did he ever get a boat up here?" asked Ann.

"Built it."

"Dugout?"

"There are no cottonwood trees. It was a bark canoe. There were birches around the lake that had been peeled."

"I see nothing escapes your eyes!" said Ann.

Chako was much flattered.

"But at that," he presently added, "I don't see why he came so far. The fur would be about the same anywhere in this valley. He must have had a reason."

"My father was a prospector, too," said Ann.

Chako glanced at the peaks.

"Those don't look like gold-bearing mountains," he said. "Pure rock!"

Like a turtle, Chako would sometimes come cautiously out of his shell, watching Ann suspiciously to make sure that she took no advantage of his exposed condition. Ann, with a wild hope at her heart, became very still at such moments, afraid of the effect of each word she uttered.

Little by little she made sure, from certain mute, boyish glances which she intercepted, that there was a Chako who longed to open his heart to her, but that the proud, savage, stubborn Chako stood watch over him like a jailer. The issue was always in doubt. Ann saw very clearly that she was likely to lose in the end. Years of indulgence had given the savage part of him an overwhelming ascendancy.

There was nothing that she could do. Her instinct told her that if anything was to come of it, he must work out his own salvation.

One evening they were sitting quietly on a point, watching the mountains darken against the western sky. Ann silently pointed among the shadows upstream, where a wild goose was bringing her yellow brood down with the current.

"You have good eyes for a person who reads so much," said Chako, a little resentfully.

Ann smiled inwardly.

"Does reading spoil the eyes?"

"Sure!" said Chako. "Everybody who reads wears glasses."

"Not everybody," murmured Ann.

"I don't see what good it does you," observed Chako truculently.

"I don't know that it does one any particular good," said Ann; "but it's fun."

"Oh, reading for fun!" said Chako. "I can understand that; but heavy stuff! What makes me tired is the way bookish people think themselves so much better than others."

"Do I?" inquired Ann, hurt.

"Well, not so much as you did," replied Chako grudgingly.

"It's true I used to set books too high," said Ann. "I know now that life is more important than books."

As soon as she took this side of the argument, Chako was bound to switch to the other.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "I suppose books form a person's character."

"So does living a natural life," returned Ann.

There was a silence. Then Chako blurted out with touching boyishness:

"Do you think I've got any character?"

How Ann's nature poured out to him in the dusk!

"Yes," she replied simply.

"Not much, I guess," said Chako gloomily. "I've got good feelings," he went on, very low, "but there's a sort of devil inside me. It makes me do all kinds of crazy things—makes me say just the opposite of what I think."

It was enough. All Ann's hurts were healed. Her spirit brooded over him passionately.

"My dear! My dear! I understand!" it cried.

Aloud she said soberly:

"Oh, everybody's got a devil to fight!"

Chako got up with a flippant, jarring laugh.

"Gee, what stuff a pretty evening will make a man talk! That's what women lay for, isn't it?"

"Never mind!" thought Ann. "If I am patient, he will come back again."

On the afternoon of the fifth day from the cañon they rounded a bend no different from hundreds of other bends, and a little choked cry escaped from Ann. The paddle dropped from her limp hands.

"There! There!" she gasped. "We have found it!"

Ahead of them on the river bank, in a clearing just big enough to hold it, stood a little shack built out of logs that had been chopped down. It was roofed with sods. At one end rose a rough chimney, constructed of stones from the river bed. Alongside the shack a large bark canoe was turned over on the ground.

"Now we shall know!" murmured Ann.

Chako's voice came unexpectedly gentle.

"Not yet. You mustn't be disappointed. He's not there."

"But his body?"

"Look at the door."

Having no hardware of any sort, the builder of the cabin had contrived a swinging bar to hold the door to, while he was away from home. The bar was swung into place.

XVII

It was true that Joe Maury was not in his cabin, dead or alive. It was not merely for a day's journey he had set forth that last time, for everything had been carefully stowed in order. His hammock, too, was gone. Yet he had expected to come back, for most of his property was there.

The interior was quite ingeniously and comfortably contrived. It contained a little stone fireplace, and a table and chair made out of pine poles. There was even a glazed window sash. They wondered at the trouble he must have had to bring that all the way in intact.

This was his winter shack. Traps, snowshoes, winter moccasins, and fur garments were hanging from the rafters. In a corner was piled his winter's store of grub, all spoiled now, except tea and sugar. He must have set out from here two years before on his summer's prospecting, never to return.

"His bones may be lying anywhere in all this wilderness," Ann said. "How are we to know even where to start looking?"

Chako betrayed a dawning solicitude for Ann. To be sure, these unaccustomed feelings only made him appear gruffer than ever, but Ann felt the change.

"Oh, well," he said doggedly, "we've got grub enough to stay here ten days or so. We'll have a try, anyway."

No use starting off at random, Chako said. They must remain where they were until they discovered some definite clew to the way he had gone.

Early next morning he started off to look. He bluntly told Ann that she only messed up the woods with her tracks, and bade her remain in camp.

He had no success all day. For three whole days he searched in vain.

"Beats all!" he grumbled. "I can't find anything but his fur trails, which he blazed plainly enough on the trees. They just take you around in big circles. He must have lived here all of ten years, and there's not a thing to show that he ever set foot to the ground when there wasn't snow on it."

However, on the fourth day Chako returned triumphant.

"I've found it!" he cried. "By golly, a crafty old fox! If anybody came up the river, he was bound they shouldn't track him beyond this cabin; but I doped it out bit by bit. This is what he did—he started *down* the river shore, with his pack on his back. Who would ever have thought of that? He walked along the stones, to leave no tracks. At the first rapid, half a mile down, he crossed over to the other side. I found some stones that he'd placed in the shallow water; that gave the snap away. He came back on the other side as far as a stream that comes in on that side, and he turned up that stream, still walking over the stones, and climbing the fallen timber. Not an ax cut to give him away! In a quarter of a mile or so, thinking he was safe, he struck into the timber, and from that point on there's a trail anybody could follow. He must have gone the same way every year. Almost looks as if he had something in there worth going for, eh?"

With Chako's last words an oddly desirous look leaped up in his eyes. It caused Ann a vague disquiet.

But it was fine, after the forced inaction of the past three days, to prepare to move on again. Before they turned in that night, they were ready for a start in the morning. Enough food to carry them down to the cañon was to be left in the shack, and all the rest packed on their backs, together with absolutely necessary utensils, blankets, an ax, some ammunition, and Ann's little tent. Chako's tent was to be left behind.

They were now rising above the altitude of mosquitoes.

In the morning, a few minutes in the canoe brought them to the spot that Joe Grouser had so laboriously reached on foot. They hauled the canoe up out of harm's way, adjusted their packs, and set off across the flat floor of the valley, through a forest of closely springing jack pines. Their predecessor had taken much pains to chop an easy trail.

" Each year he improved it some," Chako said, pointing out the marks of the ax, some old, some new.

On the trail Chako became absolutely absorbed in his work, and Ann was no more to him than something that followed behind and had, provokingly, to be waited for. Ann, beginning to know him, was no longer resentful. His great preoccupation was with a water supply. They found a living spring at the root of a solitary spruce tree, and spelled forthwith.

Soon after the ground began to rise, and became more broken. The pines gave place to gigantic fir trees of a species strange to Chako. Hoary old monarchs they were, of an infinite majesty.

" Been here since the flood," said Chako.

Each tree took a lot of room, and there was no undergrowth in the twilight aisles; but the fallen monarchs of ages past lay sprawling up and down and crisscross; some making stout bridges over which the trail carried them, some crumbling to powder at a touch. Cushiony green moss masked many a treacherous hole where a trunk had rotted out of the ground. Back and forth, in and out, among these obstructions the trail wound, always climbing. The whole way was made beautiful for Ann by the fact that once, on a sort of log bridge across a crevasse, Chako half turned, and extended an arm for her to steady herself on. Firm as an apple bough it was.

By and by they came to a steep plane of naked rock, up which they were forced to climb on all fours. The great trees ended at the foot of it, and at the top a forest of little sticks began. The way became steeper. Now, at intervals, they caught glimpses ahead of what seemed to be the summit of the mountain they were upon—a huge knoll of naked rock sticking up into the sky.

Chako became uncertain about the trail. Every now and then he slipped his pack and darted off to one side or the other to investigate, while Ann rested.

" Goat tracks everywhere," he muttered.

Finally they left the trees behind them altogether, and came out under the vastest sky that Ann had ever beheld. Nothing grew on the mountain above this line but scrubby bushes in the interstices of the rocks, different colored mosses, and strange, delicate flowers. A pair of black and white ptarmigan fluttered crazily ahead of them, the fool hens of higher altitudes. A higher knoll now poked up behind what they had at first taken for the summit.

Chako stopped altogether.

" We're on the wrong track," he said, thinking aloud. " It goes straight up. Joe Grouser certainly wasn't aiming to prospect on top of the mountain. If he was going over to the other side, he wouldn't go over the highest part. He must have turned off on one of the tracks below."

" What must we do?" asked Ann anxiously.

Chako had already slipped his pack.

" I'm going up to have a look," he said. " You rest here."

" Ah, be careful!" breathed Ann involuntarily.

Chako scowled in his hardy fashion, pretending not to hear, and set off.

He went up the mountainside with great strides. He never once looked back. Ann watched him with all her heart in her eyes. How tireless he was! How graceful in his strength!

He reached the first knoll of rock, and disappeared over it. Later, Ann saw him on the second knoll, a mere atom. He stood outlined against the blue, and waved both arms over his head. Ann could just get the tiny gesture. He was like an eagle up there. Her heart swelled in her breast.

In an hour he was back at her side.

" That's not the real summit that we see," he said. " There's more beyond; but it was high enough to show me. If Joe Grouser wanted to cross this chain, he'd make off around to the right. We'll go back to the first track in that direction."

They found a track that led them off around the face of the mountain, across a steep slide of broken rock. It took them in and out around an awful gorge. Chako, with an exclamation of triumph, pounced on a little object lodged under a stone and held it up—a sodden little mass.

" His moccasins wore out here, and he changed to a fresh pair," he cried.

There in the empty, upper world the lit-

tle human relic seemed doubly piteous to Ann. The tears sprang to her eyes.

Beyond the gorge the track started straight up the steep face of rock. It was grueling work for Ann, burdened as she was. Ten steps and a rest was the best that she could do. Chako, obliged to wait for her continually, scowled blackly out across the valley.

At last he said gruffly:

"Give me your pack."

"I won't!" replied Ann hotly.

"This is no fit work for a woman."

"It is for this woman."

"Well, then, drop it, and I'll come back after it."

"Go on," said Ann stubbornly. "I'll follow as quickly as I can."

But he would wait for her, always scowling and looking away.

When they finally reached the top of the ridge, Ann flung herself down, too exhausted even to look.

When the pounding of her heart eased down, she sat up. The ridge was about ten yards wide, of some shaly substance, flat and bare. It was not unlike the top of a vast cinder pile. Down the middle of it ran a curiously natural-looking path, worn by the goats in their journeys from summit to summit.

Looking back the way they had come, across the valley, twelve or fifteen miles away, the carved shapes of the Rockies faced them, stretching right and left as far as eye could see, glorious in the level rays of the lowering sun.

Chako had his back to this.

"Hey, Billy, come here!" he cried in an excited voice.

Ann dragged herself stiffly to his side. Quite unconsciously he dropped an arm across her shoulders. He pointed with his other hand.

"Look, kid!"

On this side there was a whole troubled sea of mountains close at hand; but Chako was pointing down. Below them lay a deep bowl in the mountains, and within it a little lake that caught at the breast in its strange intensity of color, which was neither blue nor green. All around it was a fringe of blackish pines, then the heights. For most of the way around sheer cliffs of gray rock backed the pines.

"See that white sand at the edge of the water yonder?" Chako said excitedly. "Looks like pay dirt to me!"

At the passion in his voice—a passion in which she had no part—Ann's heart sunk heavily.

"And look at the other side of the lake," Chako went on. "Do you see what I see?"

Ann strained her eyes. Gradually a significant little rectangle shaped itself on the shore.

"A shack!" she murmured.

"Nothing else! There's the end of our journey!"

"Good!" said Ann. "Let's go on."

Chako glanced in her face.

"From the look of you, we ought to camp right here," he said.

"I'm all right," said Ann. "There's no water here."

"I could bring snow from the summit."

"There's no wood."

"True, and there will be frost to-night. We'll have to go down; but not all the way. We'll camp on top of those cliffs below."

"It'll be easier going down," said Ann stoutly.

"Easier on your wind, but harder on your legs," said Chako.

They ate a little bread, and went on. They did finally make the spot Chako had in view—a grove of pines on top of the cliffs, a couple of hundred feet above the lake. A little stream came down from the snow-covered heights, and fell over the lip of the cliffs into the lake with a hoarse rumble that filled the whole bowl with sound. It was almost dark, and there was an insidious chill in the still air.

Ann was exhausted. She could but fling herself down on the pine needles, and bury her face in her arms. Chako, in his concern, looked absolutely brutal.

"You're a game pardner," he growled, hating himself for saying it. "Dead game!"

Though his face was streaky with fatigue, he was all activity. He chopped poles, cut armfuls of pine boughs, and quickly constructed a little lean-to shelter, just big enough for Ann to lie in. In front of it he made a log fire. The heat was deflected down from the sloping roof of boughs over Ann's head, and she lay, deliciously warmed. She was too weary to care whether she got any supper, but Chako presently brought it—hot rice and bacon and tea.

"You are too good to me!" she murmured, with the tears of pure fatigue rolling down her cheeks.

" Ah, forget it!" said Chako roughly.

When she fell asleep, he was still busy constructing a similar shelter for himself on the other side of the fire. At intervals during the night he got up and replenished the fire. Ann heard him dimly.

XVIII

In the cold, bracing freshness of the morning they came down over the last broken rocks to the lake level, and, breaking through the narrow belt of pines, saw the little shack before them. It looked strangely alone in that wild place. It was of similar construction to the other shack, and had a chimney, but no windows. The sod roof was sprouting greenly.

Slipping their packs, they circled around it with fast-beating hearts. The door had a bar, like the other door, but it was perpendicular.

" He's inside!" said Chako huskily.

A shuddering sound escaped Ann's lips.

" You wait outside," Chako told her.

Ann turned away to the lake shore, fighting the hysteria that gripped her. Chako put his shoulder against the little door, but it refused to yield. He picked up a great stone and heaved it, and the door went in with a crash.

Chako paused on the threshold. He snatched off his hat. Ann's knees weakened under her, and she sat down on the stones. Chako went in.

He presently reappeared, glanced up at the bright sky with relief, and clapped on his hat again. He came to Ann. He had something in his hand.

" He's in there," he said simply.

As Ann made a move to rise, Chako put a hand on her shoulder.

" Ah, don't go," he said, strongly moved. " Let me 'tend to everything for you."

She sank back.

" No need for you to see him at all," said Chako. " Look, this will identify him to you—his ring."

Ann took it—a plain gold band. Inside were some initials—" A.B. to J.M."—and a date.

" My mother's initials," murmured Ann.

The tears began to fall. The horrible constriction in her breast was eased.

Chako's face was tormented at the sight of her tears.

" It's all right," he said harshly. " He died real comfortable, sitting there in his chair before the fire. He hadn't been sick long, because everything is in first-rate order—his hammock all fixed ready for him to turn in. He died July 23, two years ago."

" How do you know that?" Ann asked, surprised.

" There's a calendar on the wall with the days marked off. I take it it was a cold night like last night, and so he fastened the door and sat there comfortably in front of a good fire, and just passed out. No man could ask for a better death. Don't take on so!"

" I'm all right," faltered Ann. " It's just relief, knowing at last."

" Look what was on the table!" Chako went on in a thrilled voice. He had a colored handkerchief in his hand. Opening it, a handful of shining yellow grains was revealed. " The real stuff!" he murmured. " Must be a hundred dollars' worth in just that little bit."

Ann had no heart for gold.

" Take it," said Chako. " It's yours."

" You keep it," said Ann.

He thrust it into the pocket of his shirt.

" It can go against what you owe me," he said coolly. " I'll fix everything seemly and proper," he went on. " I can't make him a coffin, of course, and the earth on these rocks is too thin to make a proper grave. I'll tie him up in his hammock, and carry him to the top of the cliffs, where he can look down the lake. We'll heap a pile of stones over him, and put a cross on top. It'll be a fine grave for a man. You take a sleep on the pine needles while I'm fixing things. You need it."

" Can't I help?" said Ann.

" I'll call you when I'm ready for you."

The weary Ann thanked him with her eyes. She obediently went and lay down under the pines.

Some time later he called her. He had tidied himself as well as he could, and combed his bright hair. After all they had been through, the freshness of him was amazing. He had put on a great air of gravity, such as he thought suitable to the occasion.

Ann, though softened and tremulous, was inclined to laugh at him. The dear, simple fellow! For herself, she was unable to feel any normal emotion. She was just empty inside; immeasurably relieved that their journey was finished, and the result known.

They went soberly up over the rocks behind the shack, up to the top of the cliffs,

and through the pines. The spot Chako had chosen was beside the little stream, where it plunged over into the lake. The body was already in place, and covered with stones. Chako waved his hand over the prospect—the green-blue lake like a peacock's breast, the bare, heaven-mounting heights full of lights and shades like beaver fur.

"He has a fine outlook," he said. "I hope I may get a grave like his! It's fine to be buried alone and far off from people!"

"Alone!" Ann thought with a sad heart. She glanced at Chako through her lashes. "I wouldn't care where my grave was if it was beside yours!" was her unspoken thought.

"Too bad we haven't got a prayer book," said Chako. "We ought to have known we'd need it."

"He wouldn't care about a prayer book," murmured Ann, looking down at the shape vaguely outlined by the stones. "If he can see in our hearts, he knows we wish him well."

"You're right, we do!" said Chako heartily. "But say a prayer anyhow," he added uneasily.

"I don't feel fit to pray for another—only for myself," replied Ann.

Even as she spoke, the impulse to pray came to her, and she dropped to her knees and repeated the Lord's prayer. Chako stood with bowed, bared head.

"That's the dope!" he said quite innocently and devoutly. "By rights, we ought to sing a hymn now."

"I don't know any by heart," said Ann.

She was thinking that if he could sing one of his rollicking old songs with its strange undercurrent of wistfulness—so like life, so jolly, and so strangely sad—it would make a better requiem for this man than a hymn; but she was afraid the suggestion would shock Chako.

Chako picked up stones in the bed of the creek, and carried them to drop on the pile.

"I only started this," he said. "I thought you'd like to help, out of respect, sort of."

"Surely," said Ann.

For a while they worked in silence, picking up the stones and dropping them, passing each other back and forth.

Ann, who had been blaming herself for her lack of feeling, was surprised when Chako stopped short, stared at her a little wildly, and let his stones drop with a clatter. Suddenly she realized that the tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"You mustn't! You mustn't!" he cried hoarsely. He indicated the cairn of stones with a passionate gesture. "*He's* all right! No more tracking up the rapids for him—no more rain on the trail, and cold grub, and soaked blankets at the end of the day! His work is done. He's gone home!"

"Ah, it isn't that!" murmured Ann. "One wouldn't regret a full life; but such a life! It's so pitiful! Not to love anybody—not to let himself be loved!"

"I wouldn't call it a wasted life," said Chako queerly.

She looked at him. He had forgotten himself. The absurd, boyish braggadocio had vanished. His eyes met hers squarely, and the man himself looked out. In his eyes Ann saw the deep and wistful passion that she knew belonged there. At that moment his face had an inner beauty that made his physical comeliness seem like nothing.

"What do you mean?" she stammered.

"Well—he was your father," said Chako.

Ann lowered her eyes. She could not bear his look. A quiet and tremulous joy stole into her breast.

"I was right," she thought. "He *has* a soul!"

No more was said. The spell passed, and they went on picking up stones again.

Soon they started back. Arriving at the little shack, they sat down on a broad, shelving rock at the lake's edge, and tossed pebbles into the water. A heavy constraint lay upon them. Chako still wore his Sunday gravity.

"Joe was a good man," he said heavily.

At his tone, the shadow of a dimple appeared in Ann's cheek. Whatever befell, Ann had to be natural. In her, laughter and tears were twins. She loved the shadow that represented her father to her, but she had no illusions about him.

"How do you mean?" she asked.

"Well, he was square," said Chako. "I never heard a man lay anything crooked or sharp or mean against him."

"Did you know him well?" she asked.

"Nobody knew him well."

"Did you ever have talk with him?"

"Once," said Chako hesitatingly.

A dull red crept under his skin, and Ann's curiosity was strongly aroused.

"Tell me about it," she said.

"It was nothing—not worth telling."

Ann kept after him.

"You won't like it."

"Never mind!"

"It was four or five years ago," said Chako. "I overtook him tracking up the Pony River with his winter's catch. I offered to join in with him, but he wouldn't."

"What did he say?" Ann asked slyly.

Chako got red again.

"He said—he told me—oh, he declined," he ended lamely.

Ann pictured the scene. Chako glanced at her uneasily, and saw her eyes brimming with laughter. His face cleared. They suddenly burst out laughing together, and felt enormously refreshed; but Chako was presently overtaken by remorse.

"I don't mean him any disrespect," he apologized.

"Why be so solemn about it?" said Ann. "Why act as if we were at a stuffy funeral outside? Here we ought to be natural, surely."

"Gosh, it was a strain," said Chako, grinning; "but I thought you'd expect it, being a woman."

"You have a funny notion of women!" remarked Ann impatiently.

"What sort of notion should I have?"

"Not any sort of notion. Just treat us as human creatures like yourself."

"Sometimes I treat you like a boy, and it makes you sore."

Ann surrendered with a laugh.

"Well, maybe it does!"

"So you see!"

"Well, just act as if you liked me, and never mind my sex at all," said Ann.

"You know I do," confessed Chako, looking away.

"Most of the time you're doing your best to hide it from me."

"I know it," said Chako softly. "I'm a fool—always getting in my own light."

Ann called attention to the extraordinary color of the water. She was obliged to change the subject. Her happy breast was lifted up so high that it hurt her.

Ah, how happy she was! Chako, with a great parade of unconsciousness, flung an arm around her shoulders, as he had done before, and drew her warmly into the hollow of his breast—the very spot that throbbed under his shirt when he paddled. Ann pretended to take no notice of the act, though this time she knew by the curious still poise of his head—she dared not look into his face—that it was *not* unconscious.

They sat on, and Ann chattered away just as before, though she could hardly find the breath to speak. Chako, with his curiously brooding fair head, said never a word further.

Then they grew hungry. Getting dinner was an uproarious sort of affair. It seemed as if the solemn occasion of the morning forced them to be uproarious in order to strike a balance. The scornful Chako lighted up with laughter, and was as attractive as Satan. How they ate!

After dinner, Chako got restive. Ann was reminded that he was still the wild bird. Finally he said with a self-conscious air:

"Believe I'll run off for a while."

"All right," said Ann quickly. "Where are you going?"

"Just down the shore to have a look at that sand."

Ann experienced the same unaccountable sinking of the heart. She said nothing. In her silence the queasy Chako found cause of offense. She could see hostility in his eyes.

"Are you trying to tie strings on me already?" they seemed to ask.

"You can see me from here," he muttered sullenly.

"Run along," said Ann, lifting her chin. "I don't want you hanging around here. Come back when you get hungry."

XIX

When Ann had the afternoon meal ready, she went to the water's edge and shouted for Chako. He came in excited and, for him, strangely talkative. There was an unwholesome glitter in his eye that filled Ann with a dull, grinding anxiety. He took no notice of what he ate.

"It's richer than I ever expected! I've already got a fat pinch of dust—the first gold I ever washed. Joe Grouser's outfit is there just where he dropped it—the shovel and pans and all. The pans are in bad shape, but they'll last out our stay here. A wonderful place! You must come down there. It's only a small place—just about two claims, I should say—one for you and one for me. You get the side your father's already worked. That's only fair, of course. That's what you'd inherit from him."

Ann looked at Chako in quick astonishment and pain, but he never noticed her look.

"A small place in extent," he went on, "but as deep as the lake itself, very likely, and probably richer the deeper you go. You strike water at two or three feet, but it would be simple to sink a crib and keep her pumped out. That's for the future, though. At present there's plenty on top. You see, those mountains at that end are of a different formation from this big son of a gun we climbed up. They're streaked, you see; the tops are reddish. The gold is in them, and those two streams, one on each side, wash it down to the lake. They've filled up that end of the lake with the stuff they've brought down. That's what makes the beach. You can actually see the yellow grains in the sand, if you look close—enough to set a man crazy. There must be gold washed down on the other side, too. Some day I'll go look.

"We can stay here five days. I'm going to work my claim every minute of daylight. That 'll give me enough to buy a bang-up outfit. I'll carry my dust right through to Vancouver, so nobody will get on to it. I'm coming right back this summer. I can make it before frost. That 'll give me a whole month's start in the spring. I'll bring in a son of a gun of an outfit—enough to see me through to next spring a year. By that time I'll have a proper pile!"

"How about me?" murmured Ann.

His loud, confident speech was suddenly called in. He scowled at her through his lashes. It was only too clear that he suddenly found her damnably in his way. Ann lowered her eyes. She comprehended that a sort of struggle was going on in him. She would not stir to influence it. It was his struggle.

"Of course, you can come back with me if you want to," he said grudgingly. "I suppose you have a right to; but it would be hell on a woman. Eighteen months without seeing anybody—two winters. You might get sick."

"I don't want to come back," Ann said quickly and softly.

His face cleared.

"That's right!" he said, with a sort of deceitful heartiness that made Ann a little sick. "It wouldn't work. You couldn't stand it. Anyhow, our coming in together again would start talk. They might come nosing around. If this got out, there'd be hell to pay. Wait till I come out, two years from now. I'll write to you. I'll find some way for you to work your claim."

"Two years!" thought Ann.

The moment he had finished eating, he started back. He forgot that he had asked Ann to go with him. Ann had no desire to see those yellow sands. She hated the place without having seen it. Little yellow grains that in a moment could destroy all that was fine in a man! She felt no resentment against Chako, but only against that which had corrupted him.

She sought to buoy up her spirits by telling herself that this was but a temporary madness which had carried him off his feet. In a day or two he was sure to regain his balance. A nature so sane and healthy would soon throw off this distemper; but reason as she might, her dreadful anxiety remained.

When he came back at dusk, he was, if possible, more excited than before. He came in cursing the darkness that had interrupted his work. He was so full of it that he had to talk, though he already looked upon Ann with suspicion. Chako was by nature a silent man, and it was painful to Ann to see him so lose himself in gusty talk.

"It's rich — rich!" he cried. "In six hours I've washed enough to pay for a summer's grub. That handful of dust I found on the table in there, I figure that was just Joe's takings the last day he worked; and I can beat that. Suppose he got in here the 15th of June each year, and worked till the 1st of September. Maybe he could stay in a little longer; but say seventy days at a hundred dollars a day—that's seven thousand for the summer!"

"Little enough for what he went through," observed Ann bitterly.

"Oh, you're a woman!" said Chako contemptuously. "You don't understand. A man would go through anything for a stake like that."

"So it seems," said Ann.

He did not hear her.

"Seven thousand's pretty damned good for seventy days' work, if you ask me," he went on loudly. "And all the rest of the year your own to bat around and spend it!"

"You said you hated cities," Ann reminded him.

"Oh, that was when I had a head on me," he said, with an empty laugh. "It's different when you got money to spend. I'm not going to stop at a hundred a day, either. Why, in ten years Joe Grouser has scarcely scratched the surface with his

trifling pans! I'll bring in a saw and make a sluice. I'll wash thousands for his hundreds!"

Suddenly Chako's thoughts took a new turn.

"By Gad, if he didn't die until the 23rd of July, he'd been here more than a month! There ought to be a tidy little sum in dust somewhere around the shack. Three thousand or more—all in a lump sum! By Gad!"

In the quality of Ann's silence he perceived something accusing, and pulled up.

"Of course that's yours," he went on sullenly. He was silent for a moment, looking at Ann with eyes full of cupidity. "I suppose you'd divvy with me, wouldn't you?" he went on in a wheedling voice. "I brought you here. You couldn't have made it without me. It's only fair. If I'd known there was anything like this, I'd have stipulated it before starting."

"You can have it all," Ann murmured, sickened.

This angered him.

"Oh, you think you're very high and fine, don't you?" he sneered. "Above money and all that! And I'm a low hound to mention it. You know you're safe in offering it to me. You know I wouldn't take it all!"

He relapsed into a sullen silence; but he could not maintain it. He soon recommenced building his glittering plans for the future.

"I wonder if there's a book that would tell you the latest wrinkles in placer mining! I wouldn't dare ask any miner. If Joe Grouser could wash a hundred dollars a day in a pan, I ought to be able to take out thousands with a sluice and a few pounds of mercury. And of course I don't know that his last day was a good day. Maybe some days he doubled that."

Chako's thoughts flew off at another tangent.

"You must be a pretty rich woman," he said, with a sharp glance at Ann.

"Do I look it?" she returned, with a wry smile.

"How much dust did Joe Grouser send out to you the last ten years?" Chako asked boldly.

"None," said Ann.

"Huh! Expect me to believe that?"

Ann was silent.

"Then what did you come up here for?"

This hurt her to the quick.

"Oh!" she breathed. "Do you think it was for that I came?"

"Then what was it for?"

Ann shrugged helplessly.

"He said in his letters that he had found no gold. In the settlement they told me there was no gold up here."

"Oh, Joe Grouser would be cute enough to keep it from them," said Chako scornfully; "but he could sneak it out to you in parcel post packages."

"Four times during the last few years he sent me fifty or a hundred dollars, which he said he had left over after buying his year's supplies. I supported myself by teaching a country school. Six hundred dollars a year they paid me. That was my riches!"

Something in her manner convinced Chako that she was telling the truth. He stared at her across the fire. His face became livid with excitement, his voice husky.

"By Gad, if that's true, do you realize what it means? It means that all the gold he washed here in ten or twelve years *is still here!*"

For a moment they remained staring at each other. Ann froze with horror at the insane light that blazed up in the man's eyes.

"Chako! Chako!" she murmured imploringly, putting out a hand toward him.

He disregarded it. He was already on his feet.

"Gad, if I had a lantern—a lantern!" he cried wildly.

He ran to the little shack and disappeared inside.

(To be continued in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE*)*

UNDIVIDED

YOUTH, they say, comes back with love,
But I doubt the truth thereof.
Youth departs when love is lost—
Hold love fast at any cost.

Granther Green

The Samurai Strain

THE STORY OF A PIT-BRED BULL TERRIER WITH A BOUNDLESS PASSION FOR WAR

By William MacMahon

NOVICE LANSON, a blond, slow-speaking six-footer, was foreman on Daddy Bob Waltring's hundred-thousand-acre ranch in the New Mexican foothills. He was good-looking in a leonine way, and barely twenty-two—either of which circumstances would have been a heavy handicap to any but an exceptional graduate from the cowboys' ranks.

Besides superlative horsemanship, his position demanded lariat work and trigger tricks to satisfy the ideals of the bad men and renegade Mexicans of that borderland outfit, who temporarily rode range for their keep. Lanson filled these specifications in all directions, and, if anything, bulged over on the side of daring.

Then, with his caste firmly established and his commands promptly obeyed—sometimes even anticipated—by that crew of hard riders, he made the worst executive blunder possible in Dona Ana County. His was the universal male excuse since the time of Adam.

"No-vice is plumb locoed if he acts in that low-down capacity!" was the verdict of incredulous neighboring cattlemen.

"He signed on with me to do a white man's work," the indignant Daddy Bob agreed. "It isn't my fault if he persists in doing this fool thing!"

Nevertheless, the young foreman relinquished ranch authority for a full month, and chaperoned across nine sovereign States to the Atlantic seaboard a dozen carloads of Angora goats. Removed only a shade from the white shame of sheep herding, this was a colossal comedown for a prideful *caballero*.

The much criticized shipment owed its existence to an *Agricultural Bulletin* idea communicated to Daddy Bob Waltring's motherless chick, Daisy Loretta. She was nineteen years old, a brunette belle where good-looking dark-eyed girls are plentiful.

Had this outdoor young woman gone in for some useful household stunt—say laundering—the ranch folk would not have been surprised to see the gallant foreman at her dimpled elbow, blowing mouth sprays for the hot iron, like any soulless Chink.

So here is the willing victim at the mercy of the imperious heroine. Given this lead, the running story will now write itself.

The Angoras got the goat of the Eastern market. Jersey City buyers of mohair and purveyors of "venison" paid top prices for this high class shipment.

After the sale, Mr. Lanson remitted the proceeds by telegraph to the Dona Ana Nacionale for the ranch account, and arrayed an athletic form in its New Mexican best. This consisted of broadcloth trousers, velvet vest, corduroy coat, and a wide-brimmed beaver Stetson, offset at the foundation by a knee length of glove-fitting calfskin boots.

Then, convinced of his inconspicuousness, he gingerly mounted a bridle-wise old ferryboat and crossed the North River to sight-see the Big Corral. This is an alluring adventure, whether the stranger goes to Gotham in chaparajos, oilskins, or butternut jeans.

On lower Broadway Novice tilted a bared yellow poll at the tall buildings, but he was not properly impressed, remembering certain mountains where the persistent forest finally had to desist at the snow line. Also, these alleged skyscrapers were the works of the men with whom he now was mingling. His broad shoulders made the city breed appear puny.

As to their womenkind? Shucks! The wide-eyed, absorbed outlander, thoroughly enamored of the distant Daisy Loretta, was

immune to the speculative glances of sophisticated charmers. A man is thrall to his admirable monomania just once between the cradle and the grave. Foreman Lanson was in the acute stage, so there will be no dark word of metropolitan philandering on this fair page.

The young rancher had compensatory thrills on the Elevated and in the Subway, where he imagined himself in turn squirrel and mole. You may be sure he did not sit while there stood in the aisle an American queen of any age or color. Once he sent a half amused, half indignant conductor the length of the car to fetch a fair standee to his seat. Moreover, she thanked the stranger. This is not a fictional touch. There is a trustworthy New Yorker who avers that once the same experience happened to an acquaintance of a friend of his.

By eleven o'clock that night the New Mexican had wandered to the junction of the Bowery and Pell Street, where he paused for a few minutes to view the tawdry panorama of Chinatown. A grimy little gamin, having cannily appraised the Wild West visitor, approached and tapped him on the elbow.

"Say, boss," the urchin whispered furtively, "d'you want to buy a thoroughbred Boston tarrier cheap? On'y five dollars!"

He slyly disclosed under his ragged coat a puppy of points—a squirming mite probably two months old, with a dark body, white face, feet, and markings, and upstanding ears.

"Vamose, you little maverick!" the amused Lanson remarked. "That isn't a screw-tail dawg, and—"

"But you c'n have his tail cut off, can't you?" the lad insisted. "Aw, come on, cap'n—make it two dollars!"

"Would eight bits buy the mutt?" the ranchman idly inquired, drawing forth the silver dollar without any idea of consummating a bargain.

"You're on, mister — I need dat iron man!" the vender exclaimed, grabbing the coin, fairly throwing the puppy into the purchaser's hands, and then darting into a side street.

"Well, this beats Dick's hatband!" Lanson ruefully confided to a near-by policeman. "Here I've gone and squandered a perfectly good dollar for a baby cur dawg! Wonder if I can make a certain young lady back home believe this here is a sure-enough Boston bull!"

"Tough luck, friend—I'm afraid not," the officer amiably replied, strolling away from nothing less than promotion or a substantial money reward.

The following morning every ambitious cop in Greater New York was on the lookout for that particular seal-brown and white puppy, by then proceeding in a baggage car toward the great Southwest under care of the reluctant New Mexican.

II

Daisy Loretta Waltring christened the gift dog Lancer, because of his mania for using his needle-pointed milk teeth. She made a pampered pet of him, even to a blue ribbon about his neck. Considering that the small brute's heritage was that of an assassin, this early environment worked wonders in him.

At the age of six months the pup would endure the house cat's snuggling, although every cruel tradition of his kind urged Tabby's instant destruction. When Lancer was a year old, the stately greyhounds and dignified collies on the ranch instinctively began to give him gangway.

In another half year, Daisy Loretta went to the metropolis for the cultivation of her really fine mezzo-soprano. Novice Lanson had voiced his eloquent best against this move, but Daddy Bob made no determined objection. That proud parent would have trusted his beautiful and self-possessed daughter anywhere on the civilized globe, and he was inordinately vain of her voice. He would not have been surprised at a telegram, the very first week of his girl's vocal tuition in the great city, announcing that grand opera needed her.

Daisy Loretta fetched along Lancer, now a grown terrier, as a guardian. Living in residential Flatbush, Brooklyn, it was her after-dinner custom to take a five-mile constitutional along Ocean Parkway with the dog. On these occasions, notwithstanding the lovely young lady's gentle murmur of "He isn't cross," passers-by gave a wide berth to the virile brute tugging against his chest harness.

One evening a certain notorious Tenderloin gambler, whirring cityward in a raceabout, happened to see Beauty and the beast on the cycle path. At command, the chauffeur turned the car alongside the curb, with brakes squealing, to follow on at a safe distance.

"Pipe that shape, Henri!" the gambler

exclaimed. "Ever see such a head and chest?"

The French driver twisted a spike of his mustache, and critically surveyed Miss Waltring's athletic stride.

"Ver' nice—*distingué*," he politely conceded, his personal taste leaning to the blond and *petite*.

"Me for that, if I have to steal it!" the sporting gentleman declared. "Hop out, Henri, and don't show up at the club until you have the address."

The chauffeur pulled the visor of his cap as low as any plain-clothes officer. "Aha, you weesh me play detectif on ze dark-eye ladee, where she spend her evening, eh?"

"No, you frog-eatin' dope!" the aggrieved gambler retorted. "You know me better'n that! I mean that beautiful fightin' dog, not the skirt. I'd lay a thousand to one he's about thirty-five pounds of straight-bred Pilot stock. If game is as game looks, I'll match him up with Big John Regan's Tiger. If I win, it 'll mean a new limousine and a job for you all winter. Beat it, Henri—locate that dog's kennel!"

Late that night Lancer was lured away from his backyard trolley run, only a professional dog stealer could tell how.

III

On the following day Daisy Loretta plaintively advertised the loss of her "pet terrier." She also notified the police, who paid the usual perfunctory attention to her complaint.

In the late evening an interested party interviewed her over the telephone.

"Say, leddy!" huskily came the inquiry. "What's de name an' pedergree of dat dawg what was stolen? Dis is a reporter at de New York *Sun* office."

"I call him Lancer. I don't think he was stolen—merely strayed after breaking his chain. He's just a plain everyday terrier, but I'll give a hundred dollars for his return. I never had a pedigree for him."

"Aw, what 're you givin' us?" the interviewer expostulated, with an incredulous snort. "Did he ever have any turnups?"

"I don't understand."

"I mean, did you fight him?"

"Sir?"

"Hey, cut out de comedy, young woman! Yer dorg's a pit-bred bull terrier, an' you knows it, too! Now—"

"Who is this at the *Sun?*" Miss Waltring indignantly demanded.

The "reporter" hurriedly hung up the receiver, and central, as usual, could not trace the call.

Thereafter the day's work became warlike for Lancer, recently a pampered pet. Immured on the isolated Berkshire Hills farm of a former New York saloonkeeper, he became bond slave to Dago Frank, a professional pitter.

To make recognition difficult, the dog's prick ears were trimmed to points. If his new owner, Bernard Manchester, gambler—legally, Benjamin Manowitz—had come by him honestly, Lancer would not have been mutilated. It is the modern dog-pitting custom to leave the animal's ears intact, so that when an antagonist lays hold there it will not necessarily be close to the skull. This gives the bitten one leeway to twist about and take a revengeful mouthful.

That grievous lopping was two weeks in healing, and then Lancer's fighting spirit was scientifically aroused. First, to give him added strength and energy, and a spur to his temper, his diet was gradually changed from table scraps to raw meat and green bone.

Encouraged to grip a skein of rope ends in his trainer's hands, Lancer would shake it and growl threateningly in a long-drawn-out tug of war. Sometimes the muscular Italian could swing his charge in an overhead circle for many minutes without breaking the hold.

One day a house cat, squalling despairingly for its nine lives, was imprisoned in a canvas sack and hung from the barn rafters just out of Lancer's reach. Tempted by the squirming thing, he basely forgot purring Tabby of the ranch, and sprang repeatedly at the hidden feline, his curiosity soon turning to anger.

This is fine exercise for a pit dog; and almost always Lancer's forepaws pushed away the bag before his teeth could take purchase.

That last apologetic phrase is to placate the tender-hearted layman. Dog pitters, who are not tender-hearted, naïvely confess that they seldom use the same cat twice.

At the end of another two weeks' training a large, rough-haired cur dog was muzzled and thrown upon the unfettered terrier. This arrangement is to determine an untried fighter's punishing ability without risking injury to his hide or disheartening him.

Dago Frank called the result good. The

woolly dog, unable to bite, attempted sparring and wrestling, and howled loudly while his foreleg was being broken. Then the smooth-coated one shifted his hold to the throat, and soon a silence ensued that was startling in contrast with the previous uproar.

Finally, to round out the preparatory course, a forty-pound trial dog was brought up to the farm by a Bowery fancier. Slasher, all white excepting a black patch over one eye, was lightning fast and a great cutter, but was given to quitting after a half hour's work, unless the other dog showed signs of weakening. In this latter event the white bully fought on as insatiately as a wolf at a mired ewe.

The intention now being to test Lancer's grit under the gaff, Dago Frank held him by the head while the snarling thirty-minute brute fastened to a shoulder. At that reversal of his last experience, the seal-brown warrior frantically thrashed about, bitterly reviling his bloody gods for permitting this outrage.

Lancer broke his foe's advantageous hold in fifty seconds. After ten more minutes of furious fighting the white dog decided that his adversary was too fast and punishing for him. Badly bitten, Slasher began to retreat on three legs around the walls of the box stall, whining to be lifted out until some other trial day.

"Fifty dollars if you let my pup have him! He'll be a cripple, anyhow," Mr. Manchester suggested.

This test had been arranged for a Sunday, so that he could be absent from his gambling house. The offer was accepted, and the white dog never returned to the city.

Being now a proved fighter, Lancer went into the composite training of champion athlete, thoroughbred race horse, and game cock. Daily he worked the treadmill for an hour, or trotted ten or fifteen miles behind his bicycle-riding trainer over the country roads.

Arriving home, his fierce jaws were invited to seize and destroy now the bagged cat and then the muzzled cur. Sometimes he was wrestled and thrown about by Dago Frank until that toughened Neapolitan nearly dropped from exhaustion.

Always, at the end of these severe stunts, the terrier was massaged as conscientiously as a professional prize fighter. After a solid month of that rigid routine—dieting, tearing down fat, building up muscle, and improving lung power—Lancer had achieved that much-desired pitting state called "at hickory." He was ready to do his murderous best or die.

IV

THERE is no bench show class for pit-bred bull terriers, but for many doggy generations the savage purity of the strain has been zealously guarded by furtive individuals of the *Bill Sikes* stripe. The battling breed must not be confused with the English bulldog, which has ample fighting spirit, but is too much undershot to gain a killing grip. Nor must it be compared to the long-nosed English white terrier, or, worse yet, the short-muzzled Boston terrier; or, worst of all, the bat-eared French toy, whose blood lines have been debased by crosses with the apoplectic pug.

The brutal employment of the handsome, virile pit dog is more widespread than the humane reader imagines. Occasionally a battle-tried specimen is seen on the streets, leather-muzzled to the eyes, and swaggering along unafraid of man or beast. The animal usually pulls so strongly that the leash must be fastened to a chest harness instead of a collar, or he would choke.

Every large American community with sporting pretensions has its professional fighting dogs, and clandestine pitting occurs frequently. These are local affairs until a warrior develops exceptional punishing ability, and then he goes on to intercity or interstate matches. If successful here, he is sure to appear in New York.

For the last ten years all the world's champions, lightweight and heavyweight, have come from the kennels of a prominent Manhattan politician—Big John Regan, of the Bowery. He personally handles his pets, which have been evolved from Great Britain's inbred strain and America's whirlwind outcrosses, with a ruthless weeding out of faint hearts or uneven mouths.

The pride of Regan's breeding was Tiger, a four-year-old, thirty-five pound, ten times winner, with a buckskin body and white head so battle-scarred that he seemed blue-ticked. In the champion's veins flowed the blood of an English grandsire that never knew defeat, with the admixture of unbeaten American Pilot outcrossing. He was the acme of canine gameness.

Tiger's chops had been partly cut away with a scalpel, to give the fangs full play.

He was largely self-trained, having the convenient habit of springing at a platform punching bag and striking it with his forepaws until thoroughly exhausted. And here follow the stipulations of his impending combat:

Agreed between John Doe and Richard Doe that they match, for five thousand dollars a side, their respective pit bulls, the tried dog Tiger, color known, and the unfought Lancer, dark brown body, white face, feet, and markings, for a fair scratch in turn fight to a finish, at thirty-five pounds.

One thousand dollars appearance money is hereby posted by each party, of which there shall be two hundred dollars forfeit for one pound overweight or fraction thereof; five hundred dollars for second ditto; three pounds to disqualify, and underweight dog's owner takes appearance money.

In event of fight being interrupted by authorities, last dog to scratch wins.

For the non-pitter's information, "scratch" means that Doe's dog, if first turned loose, must straightway cross the pit and attack its opponent. "Scratch in turn" requires that in the next encounter Roe's entry shall return the compliment—and so on to the crimson climax. A really game dog will stagger over with his last breath. Incidentally, one pound advantage at an agreed weight of thirty-five pounds is a perilous handicap for the lighter beast.

The encounter was set for midnight of a specified date, at a secret spot. There a pit was built, ten feet square, with three-foot walls. Its clay floor, firmly tamped, was sprinkled with sand to afford foothold and absorb blood.

Lancer came to the city after dark in an express car from the Berkshire Hills, Dago Frank frequently deserting the smoker to see how his charge was behaving. The terrier, having been deprived of food, and allowed water only sparingly for twenty-four hours, showed some temper.

The seal-brown amateur seemed to sense that he was to sink his gleaming fangs deep in some other dog's throat, and then to indulge in the canine delight of shaking his foe. Riding down town through partly deserted West Side avenues, he stared straight ahead from Mr. Manchester's raceabout, whining eagerly when Dago Frank mimicked a throaty growl or sharply grabbed a handful of glossy hide.

The Italian was not too sanguine of victory in the approaching combat, but he knew that Lancer would show himself to be a "waster." That is the last word for efficiency in the pitting vocabulary, and no fancier asks more of a terrier.

John Regan's Tiger knew for a certainty that a fight impended. If he could have voiced his wish, it would have been to ask that the antagonist should be both strong and determined. The buckskin did not reach his height as a warrior until he called upon his reserve force to outgame and overwhelm the other dog.

When only a pup of six months, running loose on Regan's country place, it had been his amusement to attack some large stray brute, seize a foreleg, and suffer reprisals until the stranger's nerve failed. The larger the quitter, shepherd, Newfoundland, or St. Bernard, the louder the resultant outcry, and at a full-voiced capitulation the puppy's whiplike tail would beat a rapturous tattoo. Now, on fight nights, Big John took his champion in a limousine to the battleground, cuddled in flannels like an infant.

By twos and threes, so as to allay suspicion, men began to stroll past a policeman stationed on a certain East Side corner. The officer was there only for the laudable purpose of turning back panhandlers who might annoy the pit frequenters.

There was no boisterousness in this crowd, and very little betting. The prevailing odds were three to one—with Tiger the favorite, of course. Rumors were in circulation that Manchester's unknown would furnish a surprise for Regan's unbeaten champion, but sporting men do not relish forlorn hopes.

The scales disclosed Lancer an even pound overweight. Mr. Manchester did not hesitate.

"Dock him!" he commanded.

Dago Frank's beady black eyes flashed dangerously. Then he turned from the gambler and tried to catch Mr. Regan's glance.

"Strap him down, and don't be all night about it!" Manchester said impatiently.

But the handler, instead, took a towel and shook it, and Lancer promptly laid hold. Fastening the free end to a hook in a beam overhead, and leaving the dog dangling like a hooked fish, Dago Frank drew forth a murderous blade, grasped the terrier's tail, pressed the skin upward at the intended point of amputation, and in another instant would have performed the operation.

"Don't do that!" Mr. Regan expostulated in a low voice, but swiftly.

There was something in his outraged tone that made the usually imperturbable Mr. Manchester flush uncomfortably.

Dago Frank put away the steel, jerked the towel from the hook, and boastingly held out the clinging Lancer at arm's length.

" It's worth more than the two hundred forfeit not see the dog docked," Big John remarked apologetically to Dago Frank.

The gambler's furtive eyes looked everywhere but at Regan.

" That dog of yours," he said, attempting lightness, " will think my pup's extra pound is a ton!"

V

UNDER the watchful eyes of the opposition, the dogs were separately tubbed with castile suds, washed again in clear water, and then rubbed dry.

Their owners now were entitled to demand that the opponent's entry should be " tasted " by his handler. This means just what the word implies—the touching of human tongue against brute hide, as evidence that no poisonous or disabling drug has been employed. Both Regan and Manchester waived the ceremony, like managers of prize fighters scorning to suspect oil of mustard on the other man's gloves.

Lancer was first to appear before the critical crowd. He rushed into the pit on the leash, head and tail up, whining eagerly, and dragging Dago Frank to all four corners.

A buzz of commendation greeted the dog's whetted condition. When he stood still for a few moments, his attitude was that of a hackney stallion, his hind legs stretching exaggeratedly rearward.

Tiger was led in, wagging calm acknowledgment of the acclaim due a champion. Catching sight of the seal-brown dog, the buckskin veteran growled in a minor key, as if mumbling sneeringly to himself. Lancer heard, and his indignation mounted to a screaming pitch of defiance. Then the referee stepped into the pit, the dogs were quieted, and the spectators' hubbub was hushed.

" Genelmun—*an' ladies!*" the official intoned, with the time-worn quip of his calling. " The scratches will be of five minutes' duration, with one minute rest. This intermission counts from when the dawgs are pried apart. The last one to scratch will be declared the winner, this bein' a fair scratch in turn fight to a finish. Is there any objections from stakeholder, owners, or handlers?"

No one answered. The referee held aloft a silver quarter.

" A toss for first scratch!" he shouted. " Heads or tails?"

" Tails!" came the yell from Lancer's corner.

" Head!" quietly remarked Big John.

The coin dropped into the sand, face up.

" Tiger to scratch!" the master of ceremonies announced, as he vaulted over the side of the pit. " May the best dawg win!"

Harnesses and muzzles were removed and the dogs held facing each other. Up went Lancer's neck hackles, and he struggled to escape from Dago Frank's grasp. Tiger waited calculatingly.

The word was given.

Suddenly ablaze, the buckskin dog leaped across the pit with mouth open and roaring, a tiger trying for the kill.

Lancer met the attack with a shoulder, but the impact threw him upon his haunches. Before he could regain balance, Tiger secured a foreleg and turned him down on his back.

In revenge, Lancer seized a shoulder hold, and with this leverage broke free and regained his footing. Thereafter he tried to keep his precious front legs well under him in warding off attacks.

For the next two minutes the fighting was fast and furious. There appeared to be no decided advantage on either side until Lancer, retaliating for a severe shoulder hold, sank his fangs into Tiger's nose.

" Hundred even my dog breaks the hold before time is called!" Regan politely remarked to Manchester.

" Taken!" the gambler replied. " That mutt of yours 'll soon be yelling like a pig caught under a gate!"

The helpless but uncomplaining buckskin went sprawling on the floor, with Lancer viciously hauling and shaking him by the sensitive snout. Then time was called, the handlers jumped into the pit, and both dogs were carefully lifted from the floor.

Tiger's tail joyously fanned the air, his desire for revenge subordinating an extreme torture. Dago Frank put a steady pressure on Lancer's gullet.

" Let-a go now, Lance!" the Italian ordered. " You get-a heem by da t'roat nex' time, and keel-a heem before da five minute up!"

When the hold was choked off, Tiger

made an ineffectual try for the throat, and then the two dogs were hustled to their corners. Big John casually handed over the lost wager to Manchester.

Distilled water, which had been sharply guarded in the rival camps, was sponged about the battlers' eyes, nostrils, and mouths. No other remedy was permitted, although on both animals there were wounds that steadily exuded scarlet.

The majority opinion around the pit was that the seal-brown fighter had a lightning fast style, but that he would prove "a flash in the pan" when the buckskin "cut loose."

It now was Lancer's turn to scratch. When released, he went out of Dago Frank's skillful hands so swiftly that Tiger was surprised in his corner. The champion reared in the nick of time to evade a slash at the throat. Then for a few seconds they stood on hind legs sparring, like pugilists, for an opening.

Suddenly Lancer came a cropper, landing on his side with Tiger uppermost. By an unexpected, snakelike dart of the head, the experienced dog had gained a hold on the lower jaw.

There was a crunching sound. Lancer's tail did not stop wagging, but an involuntary grunt came from his throat as a long, white tusk fell to the floor.

"Two hundred to one hundred Tiger keeps the hold," Big John observed conversationally.

"I'll take two thousand dollars' worth at that price!" the gambler shouted, not actuated by sentiment for his handicapped dog, but greedy for advantageous odds.

"I withdraw my offer altogether," the level-headed Regan rejoined. "You've turned down hundreds, and I won't let you win thousands!"

He had hardly finished speaking when Tiger, unaccountably quitting his advantage, tried for a leg hold and missed. Lancer whirled a hip, knocking his adversary against the pit side, and on the rebound fastened to the pluck of the neck.

The buckskin worked desperately for a leg-crippling retaliation, but was held captive until the end of the scratch. Lancer's teeth had to be pried loose this time from a badly torn scruff.

"One thousand to five thousand my dog wins, tooth or no tooth!" Manchester yelled aggressively.

Congressman Regan gently shook his head. He liked to bet, but the battle was not yet old enough for such wide odds.

Dago Frank, just ahead of the next encounter, guardedly pressed a thumb against Lancer's left eyeball, that being the side on which the tusk was missing. Because of this temporary blinding, when Tiger "scratched," the brown dog met him with the intact side of the jaw.

The buckskin, divining his antagonist's dilemma, turned and went for the left shoulder. To Lancer this was reminiscent of the easily slain Slasher, and he instantly whirled, tackled low, and took a foreleg. He gave it a twist so forceful that it cost him his footing, but the bone gave way with a snap that could be heard throughout the large room.

A dismayed curse came from the buckskin's handler, but the game dog did not cease to wag his tail. Permitting Lancer to tear at the dangling leg, Tiger systematically began to cut at an unguarded side, and soon there was a decidedly crimson tinge to the sanded floor.

Just at the close of that session, Regan's champion viciously struck high up on the left side of his enemy's head. A fang found the eye, and, like a surgeon's knife, completed Dago Frank's crude effort.

Agonized but raging, the half blinded Lancer tried for the throat, but missed; and so both animals were easily shunted to their corners. They snarled ferociously, as if promising that the real fighting was yet to come.

"One thousand to ten thousand on my blinker!" Manchester yelled to Regan.

"I wouldn't bet ten to one that Monday is Tuesday's yesterday," Big John softly replied.

There had been condensed into fifteen furious minutes enough fighting to kill or utterly discourage average terriers, but here was Tiger, the peerless, going on three legs against an unknown that could not be stopped by the loss of an eye and a fang.

"Where did you get him, Manchester?" Regan inquired cordially.

"From a fool skirt who thought he was a toy dawg!" the gambler answered—truthfully enough, but those within hearing believed the explanation a great joke.

"Well," the politician rejoined ruefully, "if she found him in my kennel about eighteen months ago, there was a reason for her story. I lost a dark brown dog pup, same breeding as Tiger, that should have

grown into a crackerjack. I suspect some one teased him with a piece of rope until he gripped it and was pulled right over the fence. I may be fighting my own pocket to-night!"

At the fourth scratch Lancer recaptured that dangling foreleg. He fairly shredded it as the scarlet minutes wore on. Tiger broke out another tooth from his opponent's left jaw, and then seriously set about doing general damage.

And in this wise the battle waged back and forth for many bitterly contested scratches, the seal-brown dog obsessed by that inviting leg hold, and the buckskin edging toward victory through sheer butchery.

Slackening in strength and speed, but never in spirit, they fought on and on for a full three hours, until hardened followers acknowledged that this was the fiercest fight they had ever witnessed. Reminiscence went back to Galvin's Turk, Racine's Danger, Lloyd's Pilot, and that legendary British terrier who continued to seize the nose of the Spanish bull after first a forepaw had been experimentally amputated, then another, to be followed by the hind feet in turn, and still the undaunted dog crawled to the attack on four bleeding stumps.

VI

AGAIN had a Santa Ana shipment of Angora goats arrived at Jersey City in charge of Novice Lanson, but this time there was only one carload. The crafty coyote had learned that the trusting mother nanny hid her new-born kid in the chaparral and returned alone to the ranch sheds for the night. As a result, such serious inroads were being made on the flocks that New Mexican mohair growers despaired of succeeding in the industry.

Lanson estimated that the thousand dollars received for the goats was too picayune a sum for banking by telegraph, so he put the bills in his pocket and hurried out to Flatbush, to see Daisy Loretta Waltring. He found her pretending not to be homesick for the sagebrush country, but genuinely distressed over Lancer's disappearance.

As to the young lady's affections, she struck a chill to the foreman's loving heart by reminding him of her intention to tackle Europe for advanced vocal instructions, "even if the coyotes get dad's goat entirely, and he has to send on a trainload of prime beeves to pay my way abroad!"

"And you won't run back to the ranch for a little visit before sailing?" Lanson commented dismally. "Why, say, I've learned to handle Daddy Bob's new touring car without bridle, spurs, or quirt. She eats right out of my hand, and goes a mile a minute on the prairie. The jack rabbits are thinking of hanging out tail lights, so we won't run into 'em!"

"It wouldn't seem like home without Lancer pretending to be a greyhound after those same rabbits," Miss Waltring replied discouragingly. "See here, Novice — if you'll find him, I'll go back for a little visit."

Leaving the girl at eleven o'clock, as a considerate suitor should, the young foreman relieved his mind to the noncommittal conductor of a trolley car.

"This rage for a grand opera career is all bunk," he remarked. "Singing in a church choir among your home folks has it beat from a gopher jump to the Rocky Mountains. How do I get to Chinatown from here?"

At the scene of Lancer's acquisition there was no pup-selling urchin in sight, but a lobbygow — a Chinatown guide — sized up the New Mexican as a "safe" slummer. They accordingly invaded the underground underworld of Pell and Mott Streets, where the smoking of opium is a real and deadly vice, and not a burlesque staged for credulous sightseers.

Then, going from bad to worse, the lobbygow steered his client into a front seat at the secret rendezvous of the dog pit.

The buckskin beast had just been choked from a high chest hold, which was Tiger's lethal choice, because a severe shaking there literally breaks the heart of an antagonist. Concluding his "scratch," it looked like the finish of that long-drawn-out contest. The champion had made his foray inch by inch across the reddened sand to gain the automatic grip of the bulldog jaw, and it had been a supreme effort against failing strength and dimming senses.

The seal-brown dog, bronzed with his own blood, went to the corner in Dago Frank's arms. It appeared impossible that Lancer could be revived in time to make even a crawling onset where, tortured hours ago, he had rushed across the pit.

"Big John Regan's thirty-five-pound champ' in dat odder corner, never beaten,"

the guide whispered to his patron. " In dis one, Benjy Manowitz's dark brin'le an' white, a stolen dawg, trimmed on de ears. His foist match—an' it looks like de last!"

Novice Lanson edged closer to the pit, moved by some impulse he could not have named, for the sight of those torn and mangled animals was sickening to him.

" Good Lord!" he groaned, staring incredulously. " Why, say, this tuckered-out, done-up brute is our Lancer!"

Hands clenched, he towered over Manchester.

The gambler had heard the stranger's remark, recognized the surprising truth, and took instant advantage of it.

" Mister," he said guardedly, watching the ranchman's fists, " if you start anything, you'll never get out of here alive. You haven't a Chinaman's chance. Now listen to reason. If Lancer makes one more ' scratch,' it's his fight. Tiger's all in, and there's a five-thousand-dollar purse to be had if your dog can make a crawl over. All the damage has been done. Win or lose, here he lies. It's up to you!"

Without waiting for an answer, Manchester announced loudly:

" Gentlemen, here's the real owner of the brown terrier! He will handle him now."

Dago Frank looked up appealingly to Lanson.

" Speak-a to Lance', mistaire!" he begged. " Speak-a to heem, so he keel-a dat red dawg!"

The young ranchman swiftly appraised that hardened crowd. He was as alien there as an American at a Mexican bullfight.

Vaulting into the pit, he gave the rallying cry of the terrier's puppyhood on the ranch.

" Whoop 'em up, Lance'!" he yelled to the recumbent dog. " Whoo-o-o-op-ee-e-e!"

That happy call of the free days penetrated like an electric shock to Lancer's memory cells. He whined querulously, opened the uninjured eye, and then slowly, very slowly, struggled to his feet.

Just at the flood tide of that galvanic recuperation, time was called. Tiger, the unyielding, growled hoarsely from where he lay on his side, too weak to rise. The brown warrior, harking back savage generations beyond the play period in New Mexico, turned from Lanson and painfully crawled across the pit. There he took his elder brother by the throat, unresisted—and so held him until declared the winner by killing in the thirty-eighth " scratch."

VII

In the weighing-in room, Dago Frank, breathing loving curses, doctored the victor's many wounds, indulging the dog and himself with alternate sips of sherry.

Later, Congressman Regan said resignedly:

" Mr. Lanson, I'll waive the self-evident fact that this terrier as a puppy was stolen from my kennel. Take this thousand dollars for him, and call it square. I'll never pit a one-eyed, half fanged dog, you may rest assured. He shall be the sire of champions. Moreover, you couldn't handle Lancer now. Indeed, I'm surprised that his cleverness—that is, his friendliness toward humans—lasted as long as it did. His father, when only a year old, tried for my throat. Some day, without warning, Lancer would have attempted murder on your ranch. Come, take the money, and I'll add a pair of six-months-old pups that are bred right. Raise 'em among your Angora goats, and when they're full-grown turn 'em loose on the hills at night, to guard the kids. They make silent rushes, you know, and that 'll mean the end of the coyote pest."

The Regan limousine rolled out to Flatbush early on Sunday morning, with Lanson lolling in the cushions. He had with him two alert puppies, Meg, a buckskin, and Major, a brindle.

Miss Waltring sat at the piano in the boarding house parlor—which term she much preferred to the " drawing-room " of the effete East. She was not exercising the mezzo-soprano full register, but merely half voicing a homely little New Mexican ditty about a foolish calf that had the *wanderlust,* and came to grief on a barbed wire fence. The theme matched her mood.

Novice entered the room without being announced. Made brave by Lancer's winnings, he swept Daisy Loretta upright to his breast. She fended away his lips with her hands, sparring for time.

" Bootleg courage, Novice?" she demanded reprovingly.

" No, ma'am!" the foreman replied indignantly, making a more determined effort to kiss her, and again failing.

" Then you've found Lancer?"

" Well, Daisy, I—er—say, he might have turned cross some day, and mebbe it's just

as well that you lost him!" Then an inspiration came to the tall, blond gallant. "Oh, say, I'm always forgetting something when I see you!" he exclaimed, releasing the flushed beauty. "Here's the money Daddy Bob sent for your trip abroad!"

Miss Waltring glanced, without enthusiasm, at the thick roll of bills. Then tears, and they were not of joy, came to her dark eyes.

"Novice, I—I—" she began, and broke off. "It would be a shame to waste all that money! I have a nice voice, but—oh, there are half a dozen girls at the school who are real nightingales, and all the teaching in the world couldn't make my throat like that! So—"

"Aw, the dickens it couldn't!" Lanson interrupted loyally. "Anyhow, none of those birds can be a New Mexican thrush for Daddy Bob and me!"

Daisy Loretta raised her eyes, like brown pansies drenched with dew—and this time she did not defend her lips.

Then they went out to the Regan limousine, to get the two gift pups.

"If they aren't the sweetest, cutest, cunningest ever!" the delighted girl exclaimed. "I'll teach them to be just like Lancet. All they need is pink ribbon and blue for their darling necks. And won't we have fun on the ranch with the gophers and jack rabbits! Oh, Novice, sweetheart! I'm ho-homesick! I—I want my daddy!"

THE POET'S LIFE

(From a City Man's Point of View)

O POETS, howling of your lot,
Methinks you have no bad a time,
Secluded in some flowery spot,
Setting your woes to honeyed rime.
When anything goes wrong with you,
It only means a song for you,
When things go right, you sing them, too—
So, right or wrong, all's one to you.
When love is kind, you praise his name;
When cruel, sing him just the same;
And, be the weather fair or fine,
It's always something in your line.
You sit all day beside the stream,
Or under greenwood branches lie,
And scribble verses by the ream—
And sell them after, pretty high:
And call it work! If only you
Took on my job a week or two!

When duns are knocking at the door,
And sternly state they'll wait no more,
You turn them off a little poem,
And pay the little bill you owe 'em.
You pay the butcher's bill with lyrics,
And, when your wife falls in hysterics,
Because she has no clothes to wear,
Two or three ballads off you tear,
And say, "There, darling! There now, there!"

Work! By the stars of heaven above,
You call it work to sing of love!
The rising moon, the opening flower,
And white-armed Helen of the Tower;
And even Death must lose its sting
When a man's business is to sing.
Your grief, no doubt, sincere, intense is,
And yet, however deep it be,
You turn it to an elegy,
And pay the funeral expenses!
A poet's life's the life for me!

Richard Leigh

Sunrise House

FOR THOSE OPTIMISTS WHO LIVE IN DREAMLAND AND WHOSE DREAMS COME TRUE

By Gladys Hall

FRANCES moved about restlessly, with a distaste for what she was about to do. She was about to "make a scene." All her life she had prided herself on her secession from the family traditions, chief among which was that sincerity is one of the seven deadly sins.

"I always see things through," Frances was wont to say of herself.

To-day, however, seeing things through turned a different face to her.

Because of her thoroughgoingness and other equally admirable traits, Frances Carey was generally characterized as a "fine type." When she was mentioned among her friends, some one always said:

"Frances is a fine type of girl."

Subconsciously, perhaps consciously, she began to believe it of herself. In fact, she had never had any doubts on the score of herself at all until now — until Stephen. That, perhaps, was one reason why she loved Stephen as she did.

After her father's death, which left the family proud and penniless, when she was in her sophomore year, Frances had worked her way through her two remaining years at college. Her family said that it was "just like Frances." Her mother told anecdotes of her infancy, pointing unmistakably to the fact that she would be a departure in her maturity.

After college, Frances gave out that she was going to write. Her family, somewhat at a loss, duly informed their friends that Frances had gone to New York to write. The friends said that they didn't see why Frances needed to go to New York to write. Couldn't one write at home?

The family replied that they didn't understand it very well themselves, but they thought not. Frances had said that she must create her own atmosphere.

More than ever it was said of Frances that she was fine. The family were very proud of her. As a family, they were rather uneventful. Frances was different. She was some one to talk about, to extol, sometimes to defend. She was a justification of her period. Her mother, inutile in person and performance, felt proud of having, albeit inadvertently, produced Frances.

Frances had gone to New York, had taken a small studio apartment in the general vicinity of Washington Square, and had started in to write. It wasn't so easy. She had voluminous things to say and an inconsiderable audience.

Things were pressing when, at a tea, she met the editor of a woman's magazine. The editor had remarked that Frances was a "fine type." Frances overheard, and talked eagerly, at her best. Her youth broke from her in enthusiasms. She exploited her beliefs.

The editor of the woman's magazine was a little weary. The magazine needed new blood. She asked Frances if she would like to do a page. Frances would. She said she would call it "Modernisms."

She was still doing the page. Since she had met Stephen, however, it didn't seem to matter so much. No writing seemed to matter so much. It would have been absurd for her to storm around about a career in view of marrying Stephen—Stephen, whose name and whose books were famous nationally, even internationally.

But she still mattered enormously to herself. Her old slogan of seeing things through was with her now. She loved Stephen, as she had done most things, with all of her. She wanted all of him in return, and she wasn't at all sure that she had it. That was why, when he came in for tea, she was going to make a scene.

She knew he would dislike the bad taste of her intrusion. Still, if he felt it to be intrusion, then her worst fears were substantiated.

From the beginning these two had struck a fine mutual attitude. Their spirits had touched, they said, and they meant to keep them touching. That was all right. Frances wasn't afraid of her complete ownership of Stephen's spirit, or of her intimate comradeship with it. All that was within her of ardor and understanding, of depth and sweetness and strength, had risen to meet Stephen's needs, had met them fitly—she knew that.

Stephen, like every one else, thought her fine. Lately—she didn't know why—that old characterization had savored to her of staleness, of mere words. After all, she wasn't so very fine, or she wouldn't be going to make a scene with Stephen.

It was all about a woman whom he hadn't met in fifteen years—the woman who, briefly and disastrously, had been his wife.

He might hate her for it—for her intrusion. Why, she asked herself impatiently, did she keep thinking of it as an intrusion? Was intrusion possible for her, with Stephen? And yet how they had always dwelt upon the essential privacy of every individual! Yes, she was going to violate that.

Well, she couldn't help it. Every time he kissed her, something smote her in the heart of her delight. She wasn't morbid. She wasn't neurotic. She was normal and fit. She had only her just share of imagination. There *was* something smiting her bliss.

Then there was Stephen's book. She always thought of it as " Stephen's book," despite the fact that there had been seven since. Moreover, it was only a slender volume of youthful verse, so inconsiderable that it had never been reviewed. In his biographies his publishers omitted the fact that the young novelist had been first of all a younger poet.

Nevertheless, in the field of his literary activity this book of verse was like the stab in his kiss. He never wrote like that now. She had told him so once.

" Thank God!" he had answered.

Still, she had been unsatisfied. Something worried her, gnawed at her sensibilities.

The book was called " Stranded Gold," and it was full of academic phrases about a woman's " quivering hair," and " blue eyes in honeyed seas," and " rapturous roses of a red delight." It breathed a sensuous spirit that Stephen—*her* Stephen—did not have. How could he have written, how could he have felt, such things?

Frances had discovered, through an acquaintance who had known Stephen's wife, that she had been very fair. Gold hair, of course, and blue eyes; but what about the honeyed seas and the red delight? Stephen didn't talk that way now. He was older, of course. Was it his youth that she was craving?

But that would be neurotic. Frances detested neurotic people, always howling for the moon. No, she was sure it wasn't his youth, otherwise she couldn't have fallen in love with him as he was. Why, it was his balance that she loved.

" Stephen is so exquisitely balanced," she said to her friends.

Theirs had been a relationship perfect in its rarity. Now she was going to profane it. It was like stepping rudely upon holy ground; but she couldn't help it. There were some things one couldn't help. She and Stephen had decided that one could always help things if one willed to. They had said that people who offended against good taste were merely stupid. Now she was to be one of the stupid ones.

Twilight was drifting down. She was glad of that. She felt, uncomfortably, that she might blush, might appear physically awkward. One of the things Stephen loved about her was her composure, her steady hands, the poise of her head. Her physical appearance, she thought now, must have had much to do with people calling her a " fine type."

She was tall and dark. Her nose was rather large and proud. Her mouth was generous, and of a dark red color. Her hands and feet were slender and long. She walked freely, with her head high. She wasn't pretty, but she mattered. She mattered very much indeed to Stephen; but *how* much?

She fingered his volume of verse restively. Why didn't he come?

He hadn't given her the book. She had come upon it inadvertently. She had read it through several times, first with amazement, then with a sensation akin to pain. She had questioned him about it. For the first time in their relationship she had approached him with timidity. The book

was dedicated to "The House Facing the Sunrise."

II

TWILIGHT was deepening when Stephen came. He didn't knock. It was one of their formulas that he should come into her living room freely, sure of an unwavering welcome.

"You're in the dark," he said.

He seemed surprised. Frances loved generous light.

"Yes," she replied.

She sat quietly. Stephen came to her and kissed her. It seemed to her a gray delight. His hands were quiet upon her shoulders. His mouth was firm and tender.

Ah, but he did love her! He loved her protectingly. He loved her as a good comrade; he loved her as a woman, too. Surely she had had proof enough of that! Why couldn't she be satisfied? Why must she blunder now, for the first time?

"Stephen," she said, "I want you to tell me about this."

She pushed the thin volume of verse toward him, so that, in the dusk, she saw his hand reach for it questioningly, touch it, and push it away again.

"It speaks for itself," he said. He laughed, puzzled. "What can I tell you, dear?" he asked.

He always called her "dear." It meant much, the way he said it. It meant that she was infinitely dear to him in a world full of lesser things—things not dear at all.

To-night it matched the twilight. Why didn't he call her "sweetheart" and "precious"—words that he had used for the golden one in the book of early verse? He was too fine. He hadn't always been so. Why must she assume that he had been less fine in his fever-smitten youth?

"I want you to tell me all about it," she persisted. "Stephen, I want you to tell me about your first wife. I feel that it's necessary."

Now he was surprised. Imperceptibly he gathered himself together on the end of the davenport. He lit a cigarette. It pierced the veil of dusk with a golden star. Golden! Frances, gray-clad, hated golden things.

"This is unlike you, dear," he said finally.

"*This* is unlike *you*," returned Frances, indicating the book.

"That was my youth."

Ah, he didn't say "in my youth"! He said "my youth," as if it were all contained in that golden book.

"Now is *my* youth," Frances said. "Forgive it, please," she felt like adding. "It has its importunities, its immaturies, even as yours. Compromise with it, be tender with it!"

Perhaps Stephen understood.

"Of course I will tell you anything you care to know," he said kindly. "Ask me."

Frances's voice came, thickened. Her heart was beating stupidly.

"Blunderer! Idiot! Vandal!" her mind kept saying. "Did you love her very much?" she asked Stephen.

He laughed so heartily that Frances felt relieved, felt eased of her cluttering fears.

"I didn't know what love was then, my child," he said.

"But you *thought* you did!"

"Oh, thought! Yes, I suppose so. It was so long ago. Time covers up carefully. What does it matter now?"

He touched her hand.

"Supposing you were to meet her now?" she said.

"That would be unfortunate, undesirable."

Did he withdraw from her then? Frances felt afraid again. Was he resentful?

"But supposing?"

She was persistent. Stephen laughed again. What a dispeller his laughter was!

"I never knew before," he said, "how young you are!"

Frances was resentful now.

"Is that a fault?" she said.

"One I thought you had miraculously overcome," he answered her, still in light vein. Then, more seriously: "You are such a fine type, my dear one, why do you need to dig and delve?"

Frances felt like a child lost in a dark room.

"I don't know," she said, pitiably enough.

Stephen moved over to her, pushed aside the book, gathered her into his arms, and kissed her. She was so close to him that she felt his heart, surely all her own. "Red delight"—"honeyed seas"—what was she missing? First roses were gathered long ago, but second blooms may be as warm, as sweet.

She drew away from him. The room was very dark now. His cigarette had gone out, and lay on the tray.

"I'll light the lights," she said. "Then we'll see about dinner."

She switched on the lights. She blinked a little.

"Funny!" she said. "I don't see any better now."

Long after she had gone to bed that night she lay awake. She felt newly unsatisfied. She hadn't been quite "nice." "Nice" was a word she detested. Her mother had used it constantly, when she had been a child.

"Francie," she would say, "do you think that's quite *nice?*"

Priggy little word, anyway. What *was* nice that really mattered? Life couldn't be said to be nice, certainly. Love wasn't nice — "not," thought Frances suddenly, scarletly, "not my way of love, anyway. Not the way I love Stephen!"

III

FRANCES heard that Stephen's former wife was to be at a tea to which both she and Stephen had been invited. The news confused her, upset her. She didn't know what to do about it. Then she thought:

"I'll see this thing through. I'll have them meet. I'll lay this stale ghost forever, or forever give it life. It may be dramatic, but it's not any more dramatic than the way I feel about it!"

Stephen didn't like teas. He said they were parasitic; but he liked to please Frances.

"I didn't think you liked them, either," he said. "This one will be particularly silly. Awful people!"

"I know." Frances was detached. "But I think we need some playing, Stephen. I've been feeling too serious. I shall grow introspective. I should hate that!"

Frances made ready for the tea with a sort of desperate sense of going over some sort of top.

The inmate of the house facing the sunrise! The woman to whom the youthful fevers and fervors were dedicated! The woman who, in a shadow, seemed always to come between her lips and Stephen's! What would she be like?

Stephen had given her glimpses. He had spoken briefly of himself, just igniting to life, to its possibilities — igniting enthusiastically, passionately, arms flung wide, heart too. After his college days came two years of travel; then he went back to the house facing the sunrise, where his mother had lived and died. A little way down the road there was a farmhouse. The farmer's daughter was very young and not wholly uneducated. Life up there among the laureled hills had become purely, essentially, the girl. Then the swift marriage, the few swift years—two or three; then the city, and more money, and the beginning of Stephen's fame.

Frances knew that Stephen's wife had left him — for another man, she thought with distaste. Stephen had avoided particulars. What she knew she had gleaned, here and there, from other people, through the months of their friendship and love.

After all, the little book of verse had told her what Stephen—was it because he didn't care, or because he didn't dare?—had never spoken of. In two of the poems the name of *Lydia* appeared. Frances knew that that was his wife's name. It had a full, sweet sound. Frances was more austere, more worth while. It seemed to matter more; but did *she* matter more?

At the tea Frances looked strained, but she looked beautiful, too. Pain had etched purple about her eyes, had clouded them a trifle. Her mouth, unaccustomedly tremulous, was more vivid, more appealing. Stephen looked at her constantly.

Frances kept close to him. Now that he was here, to meet, any instant, the woman of the house facing the sunrise, she felt a sudden and imperative need of shielding him, almost physically; of protecting him. Perhaps he had had an old wound. Perhaps it would reopen now. Perhaps—who could tell?—it would bleed before her very eyes, before the eyes of all of them, before the eyes of Lydia.

Frances could not bear that thought. She could not endure to have Stephen humiliated. She loved his pride. She knew that he would sacrifice to it. Lesser things would go that it might remain inviolate.

They drank their tea together in the embrasure of a window, smoked their cigarettes, and made casual remarks about the people gathering and foregathering in small groups. Stephen thought them pretty poor, as a whole. His comment was whimsical, caustic. Frances said they were earnest. Stephen said that wasn't always the same as sincere. People didn't discriminate enough, he said. That was why values were so confused. People didn't think what they were doing, but went ahead, like moles.

Frances pondered this. Had she thought what she was doing when she maneuvered Stephen here? Did she blur the line when she wanted the voluptuousness of the house facing the sunrise, rather than the garnered beauty he gave her now?

A large, blond woman had come into the room. She was heavily made up, and she wore an immense corsage of flowers, mingled with drooping laces. Beauty had fallen into desuetude upon her face.

Frances puffed smoke, and inhaled two or three times successively. After a minute she looked at Stephen. She looked candidly. *Now* she wasn't afraid, for she knew two things in the same moment. She knew that this woman was Lydia, and she knew that it was unthinkable that Stephen should love her. Of course he didn't! Of course he *couldn't!*

She felt an arrogance rising within herself. Her nostrils dilated. She became thrillingly conscious of her slender hands, of her cleanly lines. She met Stephen's eyes; she smiled.

"You know—" he said.

"That that large woman was your wife? Yes, I guessed."

How bravely she was able to say it!

"How? How did you guess?"

"Instinct — your expression. Do you wish to meet her?"

"Heavens, no! This is abominable! Can't we make a get-away? This is altogether abominable for you."

For her! Always for her! Ah, and she had wanted the cheap outpouring of an early passion—no more, no less, than he had loaned for sundry swift delights!

He was right about discriminations. She had been gauche, middle-class. She had been guilty of nagging Stephen about a woman. That was what it amounted to. She had been deliberately guilty of nagging him about a woman with whom he had fancied himself in love. How horrid!

Stephen began to talk about their own marriage—when it should take place, where they should go. Frances felt, for the first time, wholly acquiescent. Lydia was laid. That buxom woman with the huge corsage had nothing whatever to do with herself or with Stephen.

IV

WHEN they were married, Frances decided that they would go back to the house facing the sunrise.

She suggested the plan to Stephen the week before their marriage, when they were discussing their honeymoon plans. She looked for distaste, but Stephen was pleased. He said that it was not at all a bad idea. Of course, there were associations—his mother, and later on—but still, it was his home, and he thought he might be able to work there better than anywhere he knew.

He expatiated on the country, the forest-clad hills, the mountain laurel, the pines, very tall and straight, with night-black aisles; the silver running of the streams. He said that the house was wonderfully placed. It faced the sunrise as if in invitation. He had, he said, spent the sunrise of his life there.

Frances, understanding, thought he must have been a heavenly little boy—just the right kind of little boy. She thought it wistfully. She could picture him, dark and serious, reading fairy tales in the orchard. Then, older, more determinate, with the mantle of his pride laid lightly upon him. Later—but she didn't want to think of him later. She would stop then, and begin again now.

Stephen talked, she noticed, mostly about the country. There was none to compare with it, he said. The wintergreen berries carpeting the woods—the sleepy little villages, reminding one of peace—the way the winds blew about the house facing the sunrise, as if they couldn't leave it alone, as if they loved it.

He said it was a house for romance. He said it so frankly that Frances felt an added, glad assurance. She was, she thought, doing the right thing in going back to the house facing the sunrise. It was Stephen's home, where he belonged. Stephen seemed to her to have a right to the background of ancestral soil.

It was a fructifying thought. Frances felt replete. There were no ghosts now. Why, right now, on the threshold, she and Stephen were more married than ever he had been to the girl who companioned him in the house facing the sunrise years ago!

V

THE house was intimate to her at first sight. She had known it would be as it was. The time was spring, and the green was everywhere, delicate and expectant.

It stood on an eminence, and on both sides rolled wide vistas of mountains and

silver streams. The orchard started a few yards from the flat stone of the back porch, and meandered gently down a hill. To the front were bordered paths where old-fashioned flowers would grow—hollyhocks, zinnias, larkspurs, and starry asters. There was the road, winding peacefully away upon an errand of its own. Across the road, a few lengths down, was the farmhouse, painted yellow, golden yellow. That was the farmhouse where—

Frances didn't pursue that train of thought. The large, blond woman stood like an effective blockade to her most distressing conjectures. Besides, Lydia's people had long since abandoned the farm. Frances knew that. There would be no aged member of the family to call things back to Stephen.

Frances was all enthusiasms. She saw some opportunities for remodeling. She knew much about interior decorating, especially old houses, and had never had an opportunity before. She thought what fun it would be to work transformations before Stephen's eyes. She said he could have the attic transformed into a studio. She would make some sketches and show him just what she meant. Every one with a really good attic was doing it.

Stephen seemed abstracted a little. He felt tired, he said. He was tender with her —very tender. He asked her whether she thought he was too old for her. Frances was amazed. He had never before, she was certain, entertained such a thought.

She was rigorous in her denial. Of *course* he wasn't! She meant it, too. Stephen as her true lover was every day more delightful. His thoughts were like warm wings brushing her body and spirit with sensitive finger tips. There was no place blurred, no single phase blundered.

He had imperfections, too — dear ones. They gave Frances moments of superiority. She cherished them. When he deferred to her, she felt important. That was because she knew Stephen to be important.

The old housekeeper's daughter was there to greet them on the evening of their arrival. She had tears in her eyes. Stephen told her she didn't look much like her mother. She was like her father, as he remembered him.

She regained her composure, and said that she remembered the very jam Mr. Stephen used to like best—damson—and she had it for their supper. She had New England baked beans, too, salad and cold meat, and hot coffee.

Frances sighed with pure joy. It was perfect. Her family had always been so commonplace. This was a story-book atmosphere.

The dining room had a huge old stone fireplace, hung with crane and pots, soot-black. There were pewter things and quaint candlesticks of brass. The old mahogany shone with a dim pride. There were gay scarlet chintzes at the long windows. The early spring breeze pushed them aside with agile impertinence. There were bowls of fresh flowers. Peace lay over all.

Stephen didn't eat much. Rena, the housekeeper, observed it.

" My mother used to tell tales of the appetite you had, Mr. Stephen," she said.

There was reproach in her voice. He said he remembered—he had been a terror for food. To-night, he said, he felt tired.

Frances experienced a sensation of disappointment. She didn't feel tired at all. She felt keyed up to the night, to the occasion. Stephen did look tired. Once or twice, too, she found him looking at her with an expression in his eyes that she had never seen before. It seemed almost as if he were studying her, questioning her. It seemed to her to be a puzzled look. She felt impatient. She began to feel tired, too. The best thing would be for them to go to bed early. In the morning they would both feel differently.

Again Frances felt a lack of desire to follow her thoughts through to a conclusion. She didn't want to go on thinking about Stephen being tired.

After supper she said she would like to walk in the garden before retiring. Stephen gently begged off.

" Not to-night," he added, fearful that he had hurt her. " Let's take it by degrees, dear—little by little."

The night was so sweet! Frances remarked it, and sighed for it. Stephen agreed with her. He gave a little sigh.

Their bedroom was charming. It was furnished with old mahogany. The chintzes had birds and tiny, gay flowers. They were ever so slightly faded. There was a fireplace, and against the chill of the evening Rena had laid a fire. There were gathered roses, and fire and roses mingled their breaths together.

" This *is* home!" said Frances.

" Yes," said Stephen.

Frances thought he looked younger to-night than she had ever seen him—younger, and at the same time more tired. She had the odd fancy that the young Stephen was looking out at her from the grown Stephen's eyes, asking something of her. Was it something that she could give? Brushing her heavy dark hair before the glass, she reflected that Stephen made her probe herself continually.

In the morning they went over the whole house. Frances again suggested that the roomy old attic might be transformed into a studio where, once Stephen got to work again, he could write, apart from the household.

"But there will be only you and Rena and the second maid," he said. "I can use the old desk in the living room, as I used to do. I can see the flower garden from there—and the road."

He said the last words almost under his breath. His eyes again held their faintly puzzled look. Frances felt her heart clutched.

"And the *road!*"

Was it by that window that he had written the little book of verse, watching—not to go unrewarded, perhaps—for the golden girl to come walking toward him? But how absurd! Deliberately Frances conjured up for herself the blond, buxom woman at the tea.

Somehow the figure failed to materialize distinctly. No woman such as that, Frances sensed, had ever come down that sun-stained road. No—a girl had come, powdered with magic and gold!

In the morning Stephen arranged his desk and sorted papers and manuscripts. In the afternoon, after luncheon, they took a walk. They walked away from the farmhouse down the road. Both chose the opposite direction instinctively.

In the evening they sat in the garden at the back of the house. They didn't talk very much—not as they had been wont to talk. Frances felt that here, on this night, the things they used to discuss would be out of place. The dreaming peace of the whole might be too rudely shattered.

Stephen talked a little about his boyhood, and some of his haunts; but he talked to her as to a stranger, explaining carefully.

In their own room she held him again, and he drew near to her. Frances felt the same instinct of protection that she had felt when she realized that he was to come face to face with Lydia. The flowers and the country road—they had powers to draw him from her, back, back into his youth, which was not hers. Frances felt that it was not in any sense hers. He had sealed it up, away from her. He had garnered it and laid it away.

To-night — last night — it had escaped even him, and had stolen with ghostly footsteps about the house and garden, as of old. No—not quite as of old. Its light footfalls were restless now. They kept coming and going. They were in search of something.

VI

SPRING grew stronger, grew into midsummer. The countryside was heavy with fulfillment. Stephen hadn't started to work again. He kept saying that he was "out of form," and needed a rest. He spent most of his time at his desk, just fiddling with things, looking down the road.

Of course, as Frances told herself, it was the only place he could look, sitting there, waiting for inspirations that didn't seem to come—waiting for other things, too, perhaps. That was his attitude—as if he were waiting, expecting. He wrote one or two poems, but they were desultory, spiritless, and he tore them up.

Coming in from the garden at twilight, Frances found Stephen sleeping on the couch in the living room. He had drawn it to the window facing the road.

She stood still, looking down at him, and her throat hurt her. He looked, for the first time in many weeks, at rest, at peace, as if he had ceased to wait, as if he had found, in a dream, that for which he had been looking. A faintly triumphant smile was on his mouth.

Frances drew in her breath, dropped to her knees beside him, and slipped an arm under his head. She felt like cradling him, like mothering him.

He stirred, and she saw, with a sharp wonderment, that on his face which she had never seen before—that for which, as she knew now, she had been hungry. His face was flushed with a warm delight. His breath was gusty. In his sleep-tranced eyes was the imperiousness of passion as elemental as instinct—at one with it. His years broke away from him, leaving him young. His voice came, broken, vehement.

"Lydia!" he said. "*Lydia!*"

Pepperpot

THE ADVENTURES OF THORNE FAIRFAX, LATE FIRST LIEUTENANT, UNITED STATES NAVY, ON A TROPIC ISLE OF ROMANCE

By Henry C. Rowland

Author of "The Sultana," "Pearl Island," etc.

XVIII

WE went back aboard the Integrity, and thereupon there developed another complication. I had the crew mustered aft.

"This is where we part company," I said. "You have kept your bargain with me, so I shall now keep mine with you. Get into your boat. I shall then pay you the twenty dollars apiece I promised you, and pass you down the supplies I agreed to furnish you."

They glanced at one another, but made no sign of moving.

"Come now! Get along with you!" I said impatiently.

"But our rotten old boat is done for, captain," whined the anarchist. "She will scarcely float."

"She has floated you thus far," I answered; "and in weather like this she'll float you to Dominica, or some other island, where you can land and scatter." I waved to the side. "Now over with you, and no more talk about it!"

Still they made no move to obey. My temper was rising fast. Seeing that it was about to break, the anarchist, who appeared to be the mind of the gang, said in his oiliest voice:

"Listen, *monsieur*. It would be much better for all concerned if you were to land us at Guadeloupe as the discharged crew of this yacht. Otherwise we are likely to be suspected and arrested. It would be very evident that escaped convicts could not be in possession of clothes and money and supplies unless they had taken them by force. Much to our regret, we should have to tell how we had been assisted, and by whom. That, unfortunately, might lead to serious embarrassment for you, our benefactor."

I saw at once that I had put my foot in it. So did Andersen, for he gave a snort of anger and disgust. The covert threat of blackmail was plain enough. This was what came of being compassionate with such a gang of bandits; but it would not do to let them think that they had any hold on me.

"So that's what you think, is it?" I said, and jerked my revolver from its holster. "No doubt you are right. In that case I'll take you back to Fort de France and turn you over to the police. Get forward, the whole gang of you!"

They had scarcely counted on this move; but the wily professor anarchist was quick to realize that he had overshot his mark.

"And how about your promise, *monsieur?*" he asked.

"That stands," I answered; "but you'll have to be quick about it. Get in the boat and shove off, or stay aboard and go back to Devil's Island. How much is the statement of a gang of escaping convicts worth?"

This appeared to settle the matter. For the moment there were some ugly looks, but with Andersen and myself both armed, they saw that there was nothing to be gained from any desperate attempt. Muttering among themselves, they moved toward the rail, the professor in the lead, and I thought I was about to see the last of them.

But here was where I made a mistake. I forgot that we had been dragging the leaky whaleboat alongside with as much of

a strain as I dared take on the boat falls to prevent her filling. The davits were those for one of the launches, which was now swung inboard and resting in its skids.

Partly on this account, partly because of the whaleboat's rotten condition, what immediately followed was disastrous. The first man to jump down into her was the professor. Whether by accident or by design, though I suspect the latter, instead of letting himself down easily, and upon a thwart, he sat for a moment on the yacht's rail, then jumped directly down into the punky bottom of the boat, from which the flooring had been torn up to make their paddles. He was a big-boned man, heavy in spite of his leanness, so that he landed on the rotten bilge strakes and went clear through them. He tore out such a hole, in fact, that he jammed in her at the hips, his legs in the water underneath.

At the look on his face, and at the "*Sacré cochon!*" jolted from his lips, the whole crowd of us burst into a roar of laughter. Even the taciturn Andersen joined in.

We tossed him a halyard end and hauled him out; but here was a serious business. I could not in all humanity land them on the island, to face certain capture or to starve. If I gave them one of the yacht's boats, and they should happen to be picked up by some passing vessel, there would be no excuse that I could offer. Things were bad enough as they already stood, but to aid and abet the escape of these criminals by presenting them with the yacht's cutter would be an act I could not hope to explain away. And the seine boat was done for.

"Well, here you are, and here you'll have to stop a few days longer," I said. "Happily for you, I'm not only a man of my word, but a man of heart."

"I believe you, commandant," the lion tamer agreed, nodding his head. He no longer looked the patriarch, but rather a retired soldier or explorer, by reason of the deep lines that gashed his face, the tropic tan baked into his dominant features, and a clear and healthy skin that told of hardship in equatorial climes. "If you were a man of your word alone, you might have tacked a piece of canvas over the hole and driven us into the boat, to sink or swim."

"Cast her off and let her go," I said. "As long as you men behave yourselves and obey orders, you've nothing to fear from me."

I went below, angry and disgusted. This whole adventure appeared to be a little more than a series of bad jokes, of which I was the butt. One absurdity followed another, and now here I was, encumbered with a gang of convicts whom I had no desire to keep, but whom I could not see how to get rid of, like a hunter who grabs the paws of a bear on either side of a tree and does not dare let go.

The situation threatened to be all the more embarrassing because I was fairly sure that Mme. Saint Cyr would not dare to hold Carol in custody any longer now that I had escaped, while Carol would be almost certain to report my having compelled the convicts to take me back to Martinique. In that case the police would board the yacht on our arrival at Fort de France and take the men in custody. Whatever their deserts, I hated to see them sent back to the terrors of Devil's Island, especially as I had promised them a chance for liberty.

It was not my fault, however. I had kept my word, and I could not help it if one of their number had stove the bottom of the boat—purposely, as I more than half suspected. The *ci-devant* professor was a wily man—*rusé*, as the French would say. He had been quick to appreciate my embarrassment and to profit by it.

So we held on for Fort de France, and, the breeze freshening, rounded up at our former anchorage in the middle of the afternoon. No official boat came off to us. I decided that the best thing for me to do would be to see Benton, tell him what had happened, and get news of Mr. Grosvenor. We could then call on Mme. Saint Cyr together, and listen to what she might have to say.

So, leaving Andersen in charge of the crew—whom I scarcely expected to see on my return—I drove myself ashore in the motor dinghy, tied the boat to the jetty, and walked around to the office of the United States Trading Company on the Rue Victor Hugo, where I found Benton at his desk.

He stared at me in astonishment.

"Now where the devil have you been?" he demanded. "What's the matter with your face?"

The stain, though wearing off, still gave me a complexion something between that of a mulatto and a Carib Indian.

"Disguise," I said. "Mimicry of local color. How's Mr. Grosvenor?"

"Out of immediate danger, but he can't speak or write. Where's his daughter?"

"Not far from here, I reckon. Have you seen Mme. Saint Cyr lately?"

"Why, yes," said Benton, and laughed. "You were all wrong about her, Fairfax, just as I told you. She's a fine woman! Mr. Grosvenor is at her house. You see, she nursed through the war in France, and she kindly put her house and her experience at his disposal."

It was my turn to stare. I sank down on a crate of sardines.

"When did this happen?" I demanded.

"The morning after your disappearance. She came into the hotel just as I was going to the office. She inquired after his condition, and when I told her that Dr. Morry had advised moving him to some villa on higher ground, where it was cool and quiet, she made her offer. She said that she had a nice big room overlooking the sea, out past Bellevue, and that she would be very glad to undertake his care. Awfully decent of her, wasn't it? But the people are like that, here on Martinique. Hospitality is their middle name."

"Right," I answered. "She's been entertaining the whole family and myself. Carol and I have been her guests for the past week."

I got up and closed the door. Then, as briefly as I could, I told him all that had happened since I had so abruptly parted from him. Benton went into a sort of trance, though I could see that his alert brain was hard at work.

When I had finished, he offered no comment, but got up and reached for his hat.

"Well, let's go," said he.

We went down, got into his car, and spun out to the end of the street, then along the canal, across the bridge, and up the steep, winding road to Bellevue. A little farther on we fetched up in front of a modest but pretty villa on the brow of a hill overlooking the sea. Our arrival had been observed from the house, for as we walked up the path a woman's figure appeared in the open doorway, and I discovered that it was Jasmine.

Though quite prepared for anything of an exciting sort, I was again the victim of that curious thrill which I had felt at first sight of this girl's photograph. I suppose that for every man there is a woman to react upon him like this, even when the view of her is transient.

At this moment the sight of me had unquestionably an even more disturbing influence on Jasmine. Her face turned as white as a camellia. She stood motionless, then moistened her lips and reached out one hand to steady herself.

Benton could not have missed her agitation, but he saw fit to ignore it.

"Good afternoon, Miss Saint Cyr," said he in English. "Is your mother at home?"

Jasmine appeared to find her voice with some difficulty.

"No, Mr. Benton," she replied, in her throaty, liquid tones. "She went to St. Pierre this morning, but said she would return about the middle of the afternoon."

Benton turned and presented me, as if ignorant of the fact that we had already met. He was, as I had discovered, a man who went forward step by step.

I bowed, and Jasmine slightly inclined her head. A sudden tinge of color glowed in her cheeks.

"How is Mr. Grosvenor?" I asked.

"The doctor says that he is better," she answered. "At this moment he is asleep."

"Has he tried to speak?" Benton asked.

"Yes," said Jasmine, "but he has not yet been able to do so. He is beginning to move his hands a little."

Benton looked at me questioningly.

"Perhaps we had better go now and come again a little later," he said, and glanced at his wrist watch. "I have rather an important interview at this very moment—some consular business that can't wait."

"Then go ahead by all means," I said; "but if Miss Saint Cyr will permit me, I shall wait here."

I said it in a manner to leave no doubt that I intended to remain there whether Miss Saint Cyr saw fit to permit it or not. It seemed to me that we had got past the point of diplomatic procedure. To my surprise, Jasmine appeared to welcome the suggestion—almost eagerly, I thought.

"All right, then," said Benton. "I'll call back in about an hour and a half."

He bowed, went out to the car, and drove away.

"Will you come in, Mr. Fairfax?" said Jasmine, in a voice which she tried hard to steady.

She led me through the house and out on a tiled and covered terrace, which commanded a magnificent view of the sea, the port, and the mountainous promontory be-

yond. The yacht was lying beneath us and to the left, and I was relieved to see no police boat alongside of her.

Jasmine motioned me to a chair, then seated herself directly opposite, her back to the strong light. She studied my face for an instant in silence.

"How are your arms?" she asked.

"As good as ever, thank you," I answered. Then, fixing my eyes on hers, I said slowly: "I wonder if your mother has come to her senses enough to realize what a very serious business this is, and how badly it may turn out for her?"

"She felt herself to be justified," Jasmine murmured. "That is, in the moral sense," she added.

"I don't know anything about that, so far as the Grosvenors are concerned," I answered. "I don't so much blame her for shooting me up, but she had no right of any sort to stick me out there on that island. I might have started blood poisoning and lost both arms, or my life."

"There was no danger of that," said Jasmine. "Your wounds were clean. Besides, Jean Baptiste had orders to make a big smoke if anything went wrong. His son would have gone with the boat to fetch you."

So here was the explanation! Jean Baptiste must have made a smoke after I had started across the island to the convicts' camp. The boat that I had seen was that of his son, who had waited for our sail to pass on its way before running out there. I wished now that the old soldier had signaled sooner.

"Your mother is playing a very daring game," I said. "Can't you tell me what it is? I don't want to make trouble for you and Count de Gonza if it can be helped."

Jasmine looked distressed, but shook her head.

"Not now. If only you will wait until Mr. Grosvenor recovers consciousness, and is strong enough to speak and to understand what mother has to say to him!"

"But that may not be for many days, or even weeks or months," I objected. "Meanwhile there is his daughter, who was placed by him in my care, subjected to indignity and danger and imprisonment. I can't let that go on indefinitely."

"If you take action to prevent it," said Jasmine, speaking eagerly and leaning toward me, "you will make things infinitely worse for her and for her father!"

"I'm afraid that you will have to tell me how," I said. "Can't you see that I am to be trusted, and that I want nothing better than to put an end to all this horrible mess?"

Jasmine nodded.

"I believe you, Mr. Fairfax," said she; "but only Mr. Grosvenor can do that. If he had his daughter with him, he might not wish to do it," she added naïvely.

"If I am any judge of men," I said, "he certainly will not listen to any demands of yours until his daughter is restored to him. She told me herself that his motto was 'millions for defense, but not a cent for tribute.' When he learns that she has been kept prisoner in a rum storehouse and on a desert island, guarded only by native servants, there's going to be a fearful row!"

Jasmine's face darkened at this statement. Evidently her proud French blood did not take kindly to threats.

"Mr. Grosvenor will be the first to see that he should be the last to make a row," she replied quickly. "Jean Baptiste is an old family servant and a brave, honest man. Miss Grosvenor is in no more danger while in his care than she would be aboard her father's yacht."

"Oh, isn't she?" I said. "And what if a savage crew of half a dozen desperate outlaws were to land on the island and attack them? What could two men hope to do, and only one of them with a revolver? A gang like that could creep up behind the rocks in the darkness, rush them with knives and stones, and quickly overpower them, perhaps with the loss of a man or two. They would take that chance, not knowing Jean Baptiste for what he is."

She sat suddenly upright, pale again from the sternness of my voice at the picture I suggested.

"What do you mean?" she cried. "There are no such desperadoes as you describe. There used to be, of course, but they have all been suppressed."

She gave me a puzzled look, and I noticed again that her eyes, oddly enough, were the color of Carol's—a deep violet, which in Jasmine's eyes was almost a purple. I observed also that she was under some peculiar emotion—neither fear nor anger nor perplexity, but a sort of eagerness, as if she were waiting to hear something that she very much desired to know, yet dreaded being told.

Faint waves of color were coming and going upon her face, like the hues on a live coal in an unsteady draft. Her gaze remained with fixed intensity upon my eyes, as if I had her hypnotized, and she was unable to look away. Perhaps this was to some extent the case, because I was calling upon all my reserves of will power to make an ally of this girl before her mother arrived.

Past training and exercise of this sort of force had taught me how to concentrate the projection of an insistent desire. And in this I was supported physically, because my eyes are a very light shade of gray, and, set against the artificially darkened background of my face, they must have exercised on Jasmine so startling a contrast as to have been mesmeric, like some scintillating object.

Seeing now that I had caught and held the focus of her attention, I described as graphically as I could all that had happened on the island—the swift and stealthy attack made on Carol and myself, and what might have resulted if Hercule had not come so quickly. I told her how I had tricked Jean Baptiste into giving me his weapon, how I had commandeered the services of the convicts through threat and promise, and now found them on my hands.

To all this she listened in a fascinated way. On concluding, I discovered, to my surprise, that she had not known of my escape until she saw me coming up the path with Benton. I had taken it for granted that Jean Baptiste or Señor de Gonza had telephoned the news to Mme. Saint Cyr, and that this was the reason of her absence.

"We never thought of anything like that," murmured Jasmine, without taking her eyes from mine.

To break this spell, if such it were, I looked down at the yacht. To tell the truth, I found it difficult to break the circuit that seemed to have established itself between us, as if I were getting the repercussion of that fluid force. There was something about this girl that not only inspired me, and seemed to bring out all my latent force in a sort of vibrating flood, but also made me receptive to hers. Yet the two forces, instead of being opposed, appeared to flow in the same direction, combining rather than combating, like the opposite poles of two magnets. When I was with Carol, the same current seemed contrarily applied.

This is perhaps an unwieldy attempt to describe the sympathy that I instinctively felt with Jasmine. It was so unmistakably present that I was suddenly struck by the ill adjustment of our relations through circumstance. Impulsively, and scarcely realizing how oddly it must sound, I turned to her and said:

"Oh, what's the use of our playing at cross purposes, when we understand each other so perfectly?"

The words were out before I paused to consider how such a positive assertion was bound to strike her. To my astonishment, she replied, as if to herself:

"That's what I've been thinking!"

"Have you?" I cried. "Then it's true, isn't it?"

She nodded, then looked dismayed, and a wave of color came into her face.

"What am I saying? We scarcely know each other!"

"Perhaps we know each other better than you think," I said. "Some people don't have to get their convictions through a process of logic. You made a mistake about me at first, when you saw Carol in the car; but I was never mistaken about you. I knew that you had been dragged into this thing against your will. I saw it in your face when your mother was on the point of killing me. She may be right in her convictions, but her methods are terribly wrong. I don't know why, but I'm as anxious about the possible result of this for you as for Miss Grosvenor."

"But she's your fiancée!" cried Jasmine.

"She's nothing of the sort," I answered.

"But she told the Comte de Gonza that she was!"

"I know it," I answered; "but it wasn't true. There's another thing that's bound to make her father furious—locking up his daughter with a man whom she scarcely knew. It was a shame!"

"Then you're not betrothed at all?"

"Of course not," I answered. "We never shall be, either. There's nothing between us. She was put in my care, and I was in honor bound to get her out of the hands of people whom I at first supposed to be dangerous and ruthless enemies, who for some reason wished to be revenged upon her father."

"It is not revenge," said Jasmine. "There is an old claim to settle, and this appeared to be the only way." She leaned forward and dropped her hand on the back

of mine. "Can't you believe me, Mr. Fairfax?"

My hand turned upward and grasped hers.

"I believe anything you tell me!"

For a moment we sat there in a curious attitude for two arch enemies. The contact thus established set in circulation a current that seemed to swell and strengthen. I must have lost my head a little, for I leaned toward her and said in scarcely more than a whisper:

"Jasmine, can't we put a stop to this?"

She did not appear to notice the familiar use of her name. Her eyes had a sort of stricken look, as if I had overwhelmed her with some act of violence. It would seem impossible that a girl so carefully brought up as Jasmine must have been under the system of the old French régime could be so swayed and dominated by a strange man. Perhaps that was the very reason. She had never learned how to cope with such a situation, had never been inoculated against such attacks as mine.

"You—you frighten me!" she said, and made a feeble effort to draw her hand away, but I held it firmly.

"That's not the word," I declared. "You could not possibly be frightened of me. You know in your heart that I wouldn't do anything to hurt you in any way at all, don't you?" I leaned closer, holding her eyes as firmly as I was holding her hand. "Don't you, Jasmine?"

She nodded.

"Then I'll tell you something more," I went on. "I am thinking as much of your good as of the Grosvenors, and I'm just beginning to find out why. Of course, I was in honor bound to serve them first, but if it hadn't been for you, and what you made me feel, I should have gone about it differently. I shouldn't have come here to treat with you at all. I should have gone straight to Lamonte, the *commissaire de police*, told him the story, got a writ of habeas corpus, and had it served on your mother without ceremony."

"Then why—" Jasmine began.

"I can't tell you that," I answered.

"Why not?"

"Because, all this tangle aside, I'm in no position to do so. I'm little more than an adventurer, though an honest one, with a perfectly honorable record, and no loose ends trailing out astern. No girl I've met has ever made me glad of this before. It's worth a lot to a man like me to have an ideal, and I don't intend to let this absurd affair destroy it!"

I released her hand and leaned back, feeling in a good deal of a turmoil; but if I was carried off my head by words that seemed to have been tumbling out pell-mell, Jasmine seemed stricken helpless. There was in her scheme of things no formula for dealing with such a declaration; but I could see that at least she was not offended.

"It's got to be stopped," I said. "Carol must be set free before her father regains full consciousness. This might happen any day, and then one of two things will surely happen—either he would have another stroke, which would finish him, or else he would make accusations that I should be in duty bound to support."

There came at this moment the sound of a motor at the front of the house. Jasmine, very pale, sprang to her feet.

"Mother!" she whispered, and ran into the house.

I heard an exclamation or two, then the murmur of Jasmine's voice talking rapidly in French. The sounds dwindled as the two went into an adjoining room. Several minutes passed; then Mme. Saint Cyr came out on the veranda, followed by Jasmine. The faces of both were very pale, but that of the older woman showed distress. Without any salutation, she asked me:

"What do you propose to do now?"

"I have come to demand that Miss Grosvenor be liberated as soon as possible," I said. "Otherwise my plain duty requires that I should place the matter in the hands of the police."

She stared at me intently for a moment, and then, without taking her eyes from mine, she said:

"Such an act on your part would mean the ruin of that young girl's life. What is less important, it would bring dishonor to her father."

"Please explain yourself," I said. "What is Mr. Grosvenor to you?"

She drew herself up haughtily.

"Mr. Grosvenor is my lawful husband," said she. "Jasmine is our legitimate daughter, and heiress to his whole estate."

XIX

I CANNOT say that this statement overwhelmed me with astonishment. While not expecting such a dénouement, I was never-

theless prepared for something startling. But I had looked for an accusation of some early crime on Grosvenor's part—a killing, or perhaps some commercial irregularity which had obliged him to quit Martinique and of which Mme. Saint Cyr might have the proof; or possibly there might have been some compromising love affair between them.

"Then you mean to say," I said, "that Carol is illegitimate?"

"Most evidently," replied Mme. Saint Cyr. "She could not very well be otherwise, since his marriage to me was a civil contract followed by the usual religious ceremony, and has never been dissolved."

"In that case," I inquired, "why have you put yourself to all this trouble, and nearly killed your husband, to say nothing of having subjected Carol and myself to violence and indignity?"

"I abducted the girl because I thought it best to have a greater hold on MacNeil Grosvenor in the event of his being so dishonorable as to dispute my claim."

"How could he dispute it, if it is a just one, with all the necessary proofs?"

"There's the difficulty, Mr. Fairfax—there are no proofs. We were married clandestinely, but with the consent of my parents. This was because of reasons connected with Mr. Grosvenor's commercial affairs at St. Pierre. A certain man who was his financial backer wished to marry me, and if he had known that Mr. Grosvenor was his rival, his backing would have been withdrawn. We therefore decided to keep our marriage a secret for a year or more, when Mr. Grosvenor hoped to find himself able to redeem his notes and assert his independence. Then, about three months after our wedding, he was obliged to return to the United States, to the deathbed of his father, a very rich man from whom he had been estranged. Three days after he sailed came the eruption of Mont Pelée, and in that catastrophe the records of our wedding were destroyed. I had gone to spend a few days with friends in Fort de France, and I found myself the only surviving member of my immediate family."

I murmured some word or two of sympathy.

"All the people concerned with our wedding — priest, witnesses, clerks—were killed," continued Mme. Saint Cyr. "The very buildings were demolished, and the surrounding coffee and sugar plantations destroyed, including our own. At first, no doubt, Mr. Grosvenor thought that I must have lost my life also, as I was so prostrated by the calamity that I was ill for weeks. When I recovered, I learned that he had been informed by cable and by letter that I had escaped; but not one word from him did I receive. By that time I knew that I was going to be a mother, and I wrote twice to my husband, but received no reply."

"Are you sure that the letters reached him?" I asked.

"Yes—the second was not posted, but was delivered personally by a friend who went to New York. This friend called on Mr. Grosvenor, who stated that his father had cut him out of his will, and that he was bankrupt and could do nothing for me. My race is a proud one, and that was enough. I asked no more than never to hear his name or see his face again."

"Was this man who took your news to Grosvenor, and brought back his reply, the suitor who had financed your husband's venture?" I asked.

She hesitated.

"No—that man also lost his life in the catastrophe. Everybody in and about St. Pierre was destroyed, some fifty thousand souls in all. There was an absurd story of a prisoner in jail having lived through it, but that is not possible. The man who sent my cablegrams, and who later took my messages and brought me Grosvenor's answer, was a childhood friend in whom I confided. He was killed in the war."

"It is hard for me to believe such a thing of Mr. Grosvenor," I told her.

"He was a hard man," she said quickly, "and his habits were not of the best. We had already quarreled about them, for I had a hot temper. He thought that I had been killed, and was glad to be rid of me so easily. No doubt he had already picked out my successor, for his daughter cannot be more than about a year or two younger than Jasmine. Then, when he learned that I was still alive, it must have occurred to him that all proof of our marriage was probably destroyed, and he decided to take the chance, since it had been kept a secret."

"Then you made no further effort to communicate with him?" I asked incredulously.

Mme. Saint Cyr shook her head.

"No. For one thing, my pride would

not permit; for another, my love had turned to hate. I was terribly ashamed. I felt like a girl who had been deceived by her lover—in fact, that was precisely my position, as there was no person left alive who could swear to our having been married; so I kept my secret. Three months after the catastrophe I went to some relatives in France, the old Comte and Comtesse de Saint Cyr. They were childless, and adopted me. I told them that I had been secretly married to a penniless adventurer who had deserted me. I doubt if they ever really believed that I had been married, but it made no difference to them. Perhaps they thought that I had suffered punishment enough in the loss of all my immediate family, and were glad to have some cheer brought into their dismal old château, near Épernay. Jasmine was born there. The countess died two years later, and the count the year before the war. I inherited the old place, which was later demolished by the Germans, and about fifteen thousand francs a year, for they were not rich."

"And you never heard any news of Mr. Grosvenor?"

"Never a word. I did not wish to hear news of him. I did not know whether he was living or dead, and I did not care, for I had no desire to marry again. When the war broke out, I became a nurse of the Croix Rouge. I served in Chaumont, and was decorated with the Croix de Guerre. I sent Jasmine back to Guadeloupe with a Mme. Dieudonné, who was also a nurse, and whose husband was killed in the battle of the Marne. Her family and mine were old friends. I did not return to Martinique until a few months ago."

She paused, and looked at me challengingly.

"So you see, Mr. Fairfax, that my life has been in some respect a tragic one; but I am a devout Catholic, and have tried to bear my sorrows with fortitude. I do not pretend to have been a saint, for the terrible wounds my heart received when so young left scars that could not help but harden it. In all these years I have fought to banish the hatred I felt for the man who deserted me so cruelly, and I have not allowed my mind to harbor any spirit of revenge; but the other day I happened to be on the Savana when Grosvenor's yacht came in, and I was curious enough to ask whose it was. I saw you land with this young girl, and I saw him land a little later. I should have known him anywhere, even after all these years. When I made some inquiries, and learned that this was a *milliardaire Américain* and his daughter, something seemed to set my brain on fire. A *milliardaire!* And *his daughter!*"

She paused, breathing rapidly, her face white and tense. I looked at Jasmine. She was pale and distressed, as if ashamed, and her eyes were fixed on her mother with an expression that seemed imploring her not to continue. Jasmine's hands were so tightly clenched that her finger tips were actually colorless.

Now, as I studied her face, I understood the reason for the elusive familiarity of feature that had baffled me. She and Carol were strongly alike in all but coloring, and even in that their eyes were closely similar. There could be no doubt of their half-sisterhood.

Mme. Saint Cyr got herself in hand and resumed her story in a curiously dry, staccato voice.

"I had never thought of that—I mean his wanting to marry the moment I was got rid of, or possibly before; and I had never in my wildest dreams pictured him a millionaire, a multimillionaire. He had never shown any commercial ability, and he drank too much. He was strong and handsome, and could be charming when he wished, with a sort of masterful gentleness, or gentle masterfulness, whichever you please. He had fascinated me; but I have known others like him since, and I know what most of them deserve—a bullet, or a prison cell!"

Jasmine made a gesture of protest.

"*Maman,* please!"

Mme. Saint Cyr ignored the interruption.

"I was innocent, and knew little of men, having been brought up like all French girls of family. This swaggering, dissolute young man completely fooled me. When he bullied me or others, I thought it masculine domination. When he sneered, it was the cynicism of experience. His poor head for business seemed to me a lordly quality, and I forgave even his excessive drinking as being due to hearty good fellowship. He had also a niggardly streak, which I saw fit to consider good sense, or thrift, or a refusal to be swindled. You see, I made a virtue of every vice, and looked upon my husband as a lion, when actually he was no more than a swine!"

I was looking at Jasmine, and saw her wince.

"*Maman,*" she implored, "please remember that you are speaking of my father!"

She looked at me appealingly.

"Your daughter is right, *madame,*" I said. "You must remember that a husband is no kin whatever to his wife—no blood relation; but the joint children have as much of him as of her."

This seemed to strike her as a new idea.

"That is true," said she. "I will try to be more temperate; but perhaps you can imagine a little of what I felt when I saw him standing there, well groomed, self-satisfied, and with the power merely to express a wish in order to have it gratified. I understood immediately—either he had lied to my friend about his father disinheriting him, or else some other relative, of whom I knew nothing, had left him a fortune. He could never have made it himself. He had neither the industry nor the ability. I walked over to the taxi stand close behind him, and heard him ask one of the chauffeurs which way his daughter had gone. *His daughter!* I thought of my poor Jasmine, his lawful daughter and heiress, and of the petty economies we are forced to make through the depreciated purchasing value of our little income. Jasmine must often walk to town because she cannot afford the hire of a car, and this yellow-haired *bâtarde* has a great glistening yacht!"

"But, *maman,* it was not her fault."

Jasmine's eyes were full of tears. She looked on the point of breaking down. I could not help but wonder what Carol would have said and done if the situation had been reversed.

"In that minute," said Mme. Saint Cyr, "I decided that for Jasmine's sake I could not let such things be. Whatever my own sentiments, my pride and scorn and hatred, I owed it to my defenseless daughter to make an effort to get her at least a part of what was rightly hers. I knew that it would have to be a desperate effort—a criminal effort, if you like. I realized that even the brute beast has its powerful affections, its paternal instincts. It was probable, I thought, that Grosvenor had taken the trouble to discover that all proofs of our marriage had been destroyed; but no doubt he loved this girl, and if I could get custody of her there was a chance that he might listen to terms. It seemed to me, also, that a man of his wealth and social prominence would shrink from the scandal and exposure that must follow any attempt to prosecute me. I am well known and respected, and have strong friends who would support my statements, both here, in Guadeloupe, and in France. There are even men who would cheerfully kill him if they heard my story. My family has been a distinguished one. My father was a general in the French army and an officer of the Legion of Honor. Grosvenor would not be such a fool as to think I could be lightly set aside, but it would give me an added hold if his daughter was in my custody."

"How did you manage it?" I wanted to know. "And where does Señor de Gonza come in?"

"The Comte de Gonza is a dear old friend devoted to us. Like most of his race, he is chivalrous and hot-headed. I knew that he would do blindly whatever I asked; and I could count, of course, on our old family servant, Jean Baptiste. Down here in the tropics folk are rather medieval in their ideas of loyalty. I determined to abduct this girl, if opportunity should offer. Naturally, I had not counted on the effect of such a shock. The man looked to be strong and robust, and of course I had not reckoned on such active interference from yourself."

"You played a very daring game," I murmured; "but after what you have told me, I cannot say that I blame you."

"You are generous, Mr. Fairfax. No doubt the girl has told you the rest. Jasmine and I were visiting the Gonzas for a few days. The count is a widower who spends part of his time here with his widowed sister. I had come to town in one of his cars, driven by Jean Baptiste, our old servant, now in the count's employ. It was impossible to form any plan on the spur of the moment, but destiny favored me. I met the Comte de Gonza and Jasmine, who were coming in to dine with me at the hotel and go afterward to the theater. I told the count, who knew my history, what had happened. As I had expected, he agreed without hesitation to help me. While we were talking, I saw you and the girl pass around the Savana, stop at the kiosk, then go to the other side and stop."

"I know the rest," I said.

She gave me a challenging look, then finished her narrative with:

"So that is the story, Mr. Fairfax. It is now for you to do as you think best. There has been violence enough. I had not expected that there would be any at all,

but that the affair would be quietly settled between Grosvenor and myself."

XX

I SAT for several moments reflecting on what I had been told. It was impossible to doubt the truth of any detail of this tragic story. Mme. Saint Cyr was evidently a French lady of the old *noblesse,* of a proud colonial family of this passionate island. She had sucked up in her veins its ardor and intensity, like the seedling of a transplanted flowering shrub that in its native place may be small and delicate and dainty—like a jasmine, which, under the pungent solar rays, soon naturalizes into a vivid tropic type.

Yes, I believed without question what she had told me; but I found it impossible to admit that my compatriot, even in his youth, could have been such an abominable beast as she described. This sort of arch villain of melodrama may possibly exist. Police records would seem to indicate that it does; but scarcely in a man of Grosvenor's birth and antecedents and traditions, newly married to as lovely and highly bred a girl as Jasmine's mother must have been, and after so frightful a calamity. The eruption of Mont Pelée had bereft her, in the space of an hour or two, of family and fortune to the very smallest of her possessions, even to clothes and trinkets and household goods—and she but seventeen, and destined to motherhood. It was not as if they had parted in anger, or as if Grosvenor had been destitute. Carol had told me that he had inherited a fortune from his father.

No, there weren't any such villains. I doubted whether they were to be found even in the archives of crime. Grosvenor might have been the overbearing, spoiled son of a rich man who desired to discipline him, and a veritable tyrant to his gentle and lovely bride. Intolerant, dissolute at times, and disposed to play the high hand with these quiet, courteous people, he had no doubt shocked and frightened her, and she had been subsequently hardened and embittered by his cruel desertion.

But I could not accept her description of him. The truth was not all out, the evidence by no means in. There had been some tragic error or some abominable deception.

There was an impediment in the way of my mental defense of Grosvenor. Carol herself had told me of her vague suspicion that her father might have some secret motive in visiting Martinique, where the heat could hardly be beneficial to a plethoric habit and a diseased heart. It also struck me as odd that he should send me off to show Carol about, then come ashore himself so soon afterward, get into a car, and expose himself to its jolting and the sudden change of altitude by rushing over the road to St. Pierre.

I was also convinced that he had tried to avoid seeing us, or being seen by us, when he swept past as we were turning out on the highroad from the road branching off for Absalon. It had occurred to me then that he had suggested our visiting the falls and baths, and that he counted on our remaining there long enough to avoid meeting him on the road—which would have been the case but for Carol's silly, self-willed deception.

Turning this in my mind, I could not help wondering if perhaps his errand might not have had something to do with Mme. Saint Cyr. Perhaps he had learned only recently that she was actually alive and living with her daughter on Martinique, and he had come there to make atonement for his cruel neglect in not having made a personal visit to the scene of her destruction years before; or possibly he was moved by a purely sentimental impulse to visit the devastated scenes of their brief happiness.

But all of this could wait. My first obligation was the release of Carol, come what might of it. The rest could be adjusted, or fought out, when Mr. Grosvenor returned to full consciousness.

It had taken me several moments to turn these considerations in my mind, and Mme. Saint Cyr was beginning to show signs of impatience, moving in her chair and tapping the cement floor with her foot.

"Perhaps you don't believe my story," she said in a low, strained voice.

"Pardon me, *madame,*" I said. "I have been trying to imagine such a scoundrel as you describe Mr. Grosvenor to be, and I must confess that I find myself unable to do so. I doubt very much if such exist."

She sprang up in her chair, her face aflame.

"You think I—I lie?"

"Of course not," I answered. "I believe implicitly every word you've told me, so far as it concerns yourself. There is no question at all of that; but I believe also that there has been either some horrible

mistake, or, what is worse, some devilish deception. Who and what was this man who received and sent your cablegrams and letters, who went to Grosvenor with your message and brought you back his answer?"

"He was a true friend and a gentleman," she answered. "He died on the field of honor, leading a bayonet charge at the head of his company. You will do me the kindness not to impeach his good faith!"

"I impeach nobody's good faith, not even Mr. Grosvenor's, until I have more evidence," I said. "I think that for the moment we had better put these considerations aside and confine ourselves to the present situation. Before we go any further, I must insist that you set Carol at liberty."

She sprang to her feet.

"And what if I refuse?"

"In that case," I said, "I shall be obliged, in spite of my deep and sincere sympathy for you, to put my knowledge at the disposition of the police, through the official channels of Mr. Benton, our American vice consul."

I had expected an outburst of anger, and braced myself to meet it; but perhaps the strain of what had happened was beginning to exhaust her, for she answered wearily:

"Very well—if you think it better to bring this scandal and disgrace upon all of us, you are free to go ahead and do so."

"That is not in my hands, but in yours," I said. "If you will give up this girl, I shall see to it that the story never gets out; and Carol will keep silent, if only for her own sake and the credit of her father. My own position in the matter is this—Carol was put in my care, and I am responsible for her physical welfare. I ignore whatever shameful conduct her father may have been guilty of in the past. That is none of my business. I am not the guide, counselor, and friend of the Grosvenor family, but the sailing master of their yacht—a sort of upper servant, if you like, like Jean Baptiste. I can do no better than to model my line of action after that brave old servitor, and obey orders."

Feeling that there was nothing more to be said, and that even if there was, I had no wish to say it, I bowed.

"I have the honor, ladies, to wish you good day."

Mme. Saint Cyr sank back into her chair with an expression of hopeless fatigue; but Jasmine sprang to her feet.

"*Maman,*" she cried, "Mr. Fairfax is right! What is the good of prolonging this miserable affair? For myself I now believe that Mr. Grosvenor came here to make amends. Please, *maman,* please"—she sank on her knees in front of her mother, and took her hands—"please let her go—for my sake, since you say that it was all for me!"

Mme. Saint Cyr looked at her daughter stonily, then shook her head. She seemed past the power of argument, as if she were going on automatically in a sort of blind obedience to her determined plan, and no longer had the power of reasoning on the result of it. She looked physically and mentally exhausted, yet stubborn to the end, and driven solely by momentum. She was like a soldier who, having fixed his mind on arriving at the objective designated before the advance, bores obstinately ahead, regardless of the fact that the charge has been shattered so that he alone of the company remains, and oblivious to the destruction that awaits him. I had never seen such determination, such blind inflexibility of purpose, in any woman.

As if to be rid of Jasmine's importunings, she rose with some effort.

"I am very tired," she said. "I am going to lie down. Where is the nurse?"

"With Mr. Grosvenor," Jasmine answered.

"I have not slept for many hours," murmured Mme. Saint Cyr. "I shall take a powder and lie down."

She stood as if waiting for me to leave. I rose.

"Then you refuse absolutely to release Carol?" I asked.

Mme. Saint Cyr threw out her arms with a gesture of despair.

"I could not release her if I wanted to," she cried. "I don't know where she is!"

XXI

Mme. Saint Cyr had evidently reached the limits of her strength. Her head fell back against the rounded wicker top of her chair, and her eyes closed. Her face was so white that for a moment I thought she had fainted; but her breathing was full and regular, and she slightly moistened her lips.

I wanted to question her further about Carol's disappearance; but Jasmine, standing behind her mother's shoulder, and fanning her, gently motioned with her head for me to go. It would have seemed brutal to

continue my interrogation at that moment, with Mme. Saint Cyr in such a state of collapse, so I bowed and went out.

There was no sign of Benton or the doctor, nor was there any car in sight, Señor de Gonza's machine having apparently returned after leaving Mme. Saint Cyr at her door. It was only about a mile back to the town, and downhill most of the way, so I started to walk; but I had not gone more than a hundred yards when I heard the patter of hurrying feet behind me.

Glancing back over my shoulder, I saw that it was Jasmine. Her face was slightly flushed, and her eyes looked frightened.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Has anything happened?"

She shook her head.

"*Maman* must be saved from herself, Mr. Fairfax. She scarcely knows what she is doing. She is exhausted to the point of not being able to reason. You must not go to the police. It is true that I took matters into my own hands. I think I know where Carol is. We must go and get her, you and I."

"But that won't do at all," I protested. "Your mother—"

"Mother will sleep for hours. I have mixed her a strong draft. We can get back before she wakens."

There came the sound of an automobile horn from below, around a turning of the road. Jasmine seized me by the wrist.

"Quick!" she said. "That may be the doctor or Mr. Benton. There is a path down here. Hurry!"

I resisted no longer. We plunged through a great mass of bougainvillea and through a breach in the wall over which it grew, and found ourselves on one of many little paths hard packed from the naked soles of native feet. A car zoomed past, but it was not that of Benton or the doctor.

"This is a short cut," said Jasmine. "I often go this way. It's steep and slippery, so you must watch your step."

I immediately discovered a new and astonishing phase of Jasmine. She appeared suddenly to have become the full-powered tropical variety of the honey-sweet flower after which she was named. It was as if this gentle, self-obliterative beauty, in stepping off the open road into the tangled, perfumed jungle, had also stepped out of one personality into another—had passed from the jurisdiction of traffic regulations into the freedom of the wild. Not that she began to swing giddily on a liana, or garland herself with flowers, or anything of that sort; but there was an abrupt transition from her shy retirement to a girlish but emphatic frankness.

"*Maman* is like that," she said, as we made our way cautiously down the steep, slippery track. "Once she is aimed and sighted, and the trigger pulled, she is not to be deflected, even if she knows that the explosion will destroy her when she strikes."

"The simile is apt," I admitted; "especially in the present instance, where her power and direction have been reduced and altered by a ricochet."

Jasmine nodded.

"You may think what I am doing very bold, but it seems to me that I have kept in the background long enough. If it is all for me, as *maman* says, then I should have the right to say or do something about it."

It was borne in on me that Carol had not inherited all her father's self-willed traits. In the case of Jasmine the exhibition of independence was the more striking because of her restrained French rearing; but then she had also a rich inheritance of initiative on her mother's side.

The path, scarcely more than a goat track, and in places a sort of monkey trail, wound steeply down over ancient terraces, brilliant green with moss, and with portulaca springing from the crevices of the stones. Little native huts nestled on these terraces, half hidden in the lime trees, some wattle, others built of nondescript planks picked up on the beach and roughly slapped together, with a roof of thatch or corrugated iron. Pigs and poultry were abundant, and there were many goats, pretty little chocolate-colored animals with black stripes down the back and withers and white ones on either side of the nose.

We came presently to a big stone trough, into which a little stream was led for the washing of clothes—a primitive *lavoir*. The yellow native population of Martinique does not greatly care how ragged its clothes may be, so long as they are brilliant of color, and clean.

The washing was over for the day, and so was the day itself, for that matter. Through a vista in the vivid green we could see the waters darkening. Jasmine seated herself on a big flat stone, worn smooth and polished through generations of pounded *robes Josephine*.

"I think we had better wait until it is

almost dark," she said. "They are frightful gossips in this place, and I would rather not be recognized."

"Where then?" I asked.

"If I tell you now, will you promise not to make any fuss about my going with you?" Jasmine demanded.

"You take the words from my lips," I said. "I was just going to start promising."

She smiled.

"I thought as much. I could see it coming; so I'll tell you as we go along."

"But that won't do," I objected. "Your poor mother already has about all the worry she can stagger under. Besides, as you've just said, there's yourself to think about. Nobody who has ever seen you is apt to forget you."

Her smile widened to fetch a dimple. As I looked at Jasmine sitting there on that big slanting rock, with her hands clasped around her knees, I understood better why I had been so impervious to Carol's coquetry. This girl's image had been lurking somewhere in the shadows of my mind. She had all of Carol's vivid prettiness, laid on a background of real beauty, like cloisonné on a basis of gold. In her pretty muslin gown, with its trimmings of old lace, she shone out against the deep, lustrous green behind her like some wonderful tropic flower. This was what had held me so securely.

"No time for pretty speeches, sir! *Maman* will have to make the best of it. I have left a note for her. 'You are worn out and must rest!' I wrote. 'I am going to take matters in my own hands. Do not worry if I don't return to-night.'"

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed. "You don't mean to tell me that you are going to be away all night?"

"I'm afraid so," said Jasmine calmly. "We are going to be away all night and part of to-morrow. I have a veil, and as soon as it gets dark nobody can recognize me."

"But why can't I go alone?" I demanded.

"For a number of reasons, sir." She raised her pretty hands, and began to enumerate the reasons on her finger tips. "First, they would not give Carol to you without me."

"Let's say 'without a fight,'" I suggested.

"Well, then, without a fight, and there's been too much of that. Second, if I'm away, mother will have to stay at the villa, and that will keep her out of mischief. Third, I am sure that when I say what I have in my mind to Carol, she will be quiet and reasonable, and will leave the affair to my management. Fourth, if we should fail to find her where I hope to, then you can hold me as a hostage, sir, for Carol must be returned before her father regains his consciousness."

At the expression of my face, she tilted up her chin and laughed in a way to show her pink little mouth and double row of pearly teeth.

"Aren't those reasons enough, sir?" she asked, suddenly serious, or mockingly so.

"You're a wonder, Jasmine!" I said. "The last is reason enough for any man to get killed for. Well, then, I withdraw my opposition." I felt that she was right about seeing Carol before her mother did. "Where do we go from here?"

"Back to the island," said Jasmine.

"Back to the—but I've already been there. Have they taken her back there again?"

"I am very sure that she was never taken away from there, *mon capitaine*. We shall have to go to the Savana, get a car, drive to St. Pierre, then find the son of Jean Baptiste, Achille, and have him take us to the island in his boat."

"But what makes you think they are still on the island?" I demanded. "There wasn't a sign of them, and there were grooves in the sand where they had dragged down the stores and tent poles and things."

Jasmine gave me a teasing look. She seemed to be finding a lot of amusement in all this mess. It was rather comforting to know that somebody was getting some fun out of it, and I remarked as much.

"There is humor in almost everything, sir, if you look for it," said she. "For instance, you look very funny with your colored skin and white eyes blazing out of it. But if there is humor in most things, then there is even more reason in them, and sometimes that takes more searching than the fun."

"What are you driving at?" I asked.

"Listen, captain!" She raised her finger to her lips, while her long-lashed eyes mocked me. "You are very brave. I discovered that when you chaffed *maman* as she was on the verge of killing you—even after she had shot you through both arms, and you expected to feel the next bullet

through your heart. I thought that I was going to die; but, instead, I grew up in those few frightful minutes. I had seen something—a man. No, listen!"

She gave me a warning gesture.

"Admitted that you are brave. You are also very *fidèle*—very loyal. You proved that a few minutes ago when you told *maman* that there could be no compromise, and that you would take steps to recover Carol, even though you must have known that you might lose the favor of your millionaire employer by doing so. This showed that you are honest and disinterested."

She paused and looked at me thoughtfully.

"Oh, please go on," I said, and reclined a little on the stones. "This is balm!"

Her demoralizing face suddenly filled with mischief. She looked like a naughty, teasing jungle nymph, or a *Titania* of the tropics. She nodded complacently.

"So we have proved you brave and faithful and honest. Otherwise you would have made love to Carol, and I'm sure you haven't."

"A safe bet!" I agreed. "Brave, faithful, loyal, honest—let's see, what the dickens else is there?"

"Intelligence," said Jasmine. "You are brave, faithful, loyal, honest, and—stupid!"

"Oh, come!" I cried, and sat bolt upright. "How stupid?"

"Well, then," said she, "put yourself in the place of the brave, faithful, loyal, honest, and wise and crafty veteran Jean Baptiste, from the moment when he saw you sailing away from the island with the convicts in their boat. French lawyers always try to reconstruct a crime from the facts known about the situation and its premises, and the workings in the minds of the principal actors. Now let me see, sir, if you can reconstruct the thoughts of Jean Baptiste!"

She smiled with a sort of mock encouragement.

"Let me see," I said, and immediately set that boasted imagination of mine to work, trying to think in the channels of the *brigadier*. "His first thought would be: 'Damn that American, he's put one over on me!' Spliced into the tail of this true and justifiable reflection would be: 'I wonder if he'll get away with it?'" I looked at Jasmine. "Am I right so far?"

"Absolutely. What then?"

"Well, then he'd think"—I had a sudden inspiration. "'What if he doesn't put it over? What if they should get away with him somewhere between here and Martinique?'"

"Splendid!" cried Jasmine in her low-pitched voice. "You're getting warm."

But I thought that I was more than that.

"I'm hot—scorching!" I exclaimed. "Of course, you are right about the ivory."

"The what—" She gave me a puzzled look. "What ivory?"

"Well, call it mahogany, to match my outer coat—the solid contents of my skull. Jean Baptiste would immediately begin to figure on what might be expected to happen if these thugs were to rush over me pell-mell and jab me full of holes, or brain me with a cleaver. Being a veteran soldier, and no blockhead like myself, he saw at a glance what might immediately happen while the sharks were holding a post mortem on me. I had bamboozled him out of the only firearm in either camp, now in the possession of the enemy, and this enemy had discovered that our camp was rich in a great many things that they ardently desired; so back they'd go to help themselves."

Jasmine clapped her hands.

"Wonderful!"

"Wherefore," I continued, "since he couldn't hope to fight, he decided to try to trick them into thinking that he had managed to signal to a boat and quit the place. He laid a false trail, to indicate their taking off, then moved all the duffel back up into the bush, taking pains to leave no trace of this." I looked at her and laughed. "Easy when the teacher tells the answer, isn't it?"

"Is that all?" she asked.

I pondered for a moment.

"Well, it's enough, isn't it?"

"Not nearly. Oh, dear, some pupils are so backward!"

"You mean about not coming down or giving any sign of life when I went there with the schooner?" I asked. "Well, he'd scarcely do that, would he?"

"Probably not, since you were opponents so far as Carol was concerned. What I mean is this—you only got half of Jean Baptiste's reason for laying a false trail to indicate their departure, and then moving their quarters back into the bush. You only got the smaller half." Jasmine shook her head sadly. "Scarcely a quarter—perhaps not an eighth!"

"Hold on!" I protested. "Leave me

something, if it's only the wormy core. You mean he did all this not to fool the convicts, but to fool *me?"*

" Of course," said Jasmine. " I don't believe he doubted for an instant your ability to hold the convicts. Consider the workings of his Jean Baptiste mind. He's brave and cunning, and he is quite well aware of that fact, and takes a good deal of pride in it that he does not hesitate to express."

" I get you," I interrupted. " He would reason: ' If the American could get the best of me, Jean Baptiste, *brigadier,* veteran of a thousand assaults, then there can be no fear but that he can handle a crew of mangy convicts.' That's precisely the way his old bean would have sprouted. He set his little fool trap, not for the convicts, but for me; and I bit. Upon my word, I bit so hard that my teeth ache at the thought of it! I say, Jasmine, you can cut out the rest of that string of decorations you just pinned on me, and leave the ' stupid.' That's my road number!"

Again she threw up her tantalizing face and laughed, and again I writhed in the grip of temptation. I could not help wondering how firm I would have stood if this girl had been in Carol's place, coquetting with me as Carol had; but such a thing was unimaginable.

" Well, then," I said, " it's a safe bet that they are still on the island. If they had come ashore, your mother would have known of it. Since we've got to go back to the island, then why not go aboard the yacht?"

" I thought of that," said Jasmine; " but if we were to go in the yacht, they would keep on hiding, and we'd have to search them out. That brush is not a good place to tramp about in, either for them or us."

" Then there *are* snakes," I said.

" Lots of them, and the very worst—the fer-de-lance. They don't wait to be stepped on, so the natives say. They attack anybody that comes near them. I think we could save trouble and danger by going in Achille's boat. They would recognize it and go down to meet it."

" All the same," I objected, " I think I ought to get aboard the Integrity. I don't like to leave the mate and steward alone too long with that gang. With me aboard there would be nothing to fear. I've got 'em where I want 'em. Why can't you go across and meet us at St. Pierre?"

" Oh, dear!" cried Jasmine. " I thought it was agreed that I was to go with you. Besides, I've got another detail in mind. I'll tell you about it when we get aboard. It's very important."

" Just like a woman to hold something back," I grumbled. " All right, then! It's almost dark. Let's be taking steps to get aboard."

We made our way down to the road that leads up to the old fort, then followed this to the creek. Here, instead of crossing on the funny little ferryboat that the passengers haul across by hand, thus saving fare, Jasmine turned down toward the water front on the right bank.

" But I left my boat at the jetty by the Savana," I objected.

" Nobody will disturb the boat," said she. " I don't want to be seen there. We can get a fishing boat to take us off."

So we kept on our way. It was fairly dark, and we attracted no particular attention from the people about. With my stained face and white clothes, I might have passed for a colored official of some sort, while Jasmine had let the front of her veil drop a few inches and kept her head bent forward.

We came presently to a bit of beach, where nets were drying, and a few big, open fishing boats with sails furled were lying off the shore, one or two of them against the shingle. Seeing a man by one of these, I asked if he could set us aboard the yacht.

He agreed, and, calling a mate to take another oar, we shoved off. The two men looked a little curiously at Jasmine, but made no remark. I took the tiller, and we soon came alongside the yacht. Andersen's voice challenged us, and I heard him mutter something when I answered " Captain Fairfax." I imagine that the poor fellow had spent a long and anxious afternoon.

At sight of Jasmine he let out a gasp.

" You haf got Mees Grosvenor, sir?"

" Not yet, but soon," I answered. " This lady knows where she is, and has a message for her. As a matter of fact, she is still on that island."

" Where we ban, sir?"

" Why, yes," I said. " If I hadn't been so thick, I should have known it. They shifted their camp to fool me. Break the beggars out, and make sail as soon as you can manage it. There's a nice little breeze."

" I'm glad you come, sir," said Andersen. " Dey been gettin' pretty fresh."

"Oh, they have, have they?" I said. "Well, we'll soon sweat that out of them."

I turned to pay the boatmen; but Jasmine, who had been whispering to them in a low voice, laid her hand on my arm.

"Can you send these men ashore in one of the yacht's boats, captain?"

"Do *what?*" I asked.

"Send them ashore in one of your boats," said she. "I've engaged the use of theirs for the next twenty-four hours, for five hundred francs. They think you are up to a little affair of contraband while the *patron* is ill ashore. They have already seen the yacht go mysteriously out and come back with a strange crew. You passed close to them coming in. I told you that this was a gossipy place."

"But what the dickens do we want of their—"

I got thus far, then stopped—barely in time to save any scrap of reputation as a man of brains. It struck me so suddenly that I nearly fell overboard. I had explained to Jasmine my predicament about the convict crew—how their old punk basket had been stove, and my perplexity as to how to get rid of them while yet keeping good faith; and now her nimble mind had solved the problem for me. More than that, she had thought of it immediately back there on the terraced slope, when I had told her that I ought to get aboard the Integrity.

"You good fairy!" I muttered, and helped Jasmine to the deck. "Lower the gig," I said to Andersen, "and you and Ito put these boatmen ashore."

"Lower de gig, zir?" he said stolidly.

"You can guess why I want their boat," I began, when he interrupted me.

"I got some sense, zir! Yoost what I ban t'inkin' about myself. I t'ink it not too soon, if we don't want to wake up und find our t'roats cut!"

He spoke to Ito, who had come on deck, and they started to lower away the gig.

XXII

ANDERSEN had taken the precaution of sending the convicts into the forecastle and bolting the booby hatch when darkness fell. I needed them now to make sail, so I lighted the saloon and the owner's cabin, and, finding that Ito had given the latter an extra polish, I asked Jasmine to take possession. She hesitated a moment, then said:

"This is too magnificent for me. I would be ill at ease. Are all rich men's yachts so luxurious and beautiful?"

I set the electric fans to whirring.

"This would be considered a very simple seagoing vessel, inside and out," I said. "Some of the big steam fellows are sybaritic enough to make you gag. This one is practical, for all of its piano finish." I looked at her and added slowly: "You might as well get used to it by degrees. I've got a hunch that you are destined for this sort of thing."

Jasmine shook her head.

"I'm not so sure, captain. A new and very astonishing idea has come into my mind; but I mustn't keep you now."

"Then take up your quarters here," I said. "I'll tell the steward to get you what you need."

"Very well," she said. "After all, it's only fair. I gave up my room to Mr. Grosvenor, so now I'll help myself to his. Life may not be always funny, captain, but it's sometimes very bizarre!"

This was no time to philosophize, so I went on deck. I had a little more than five hundred francs in my pocket, and this I gave to the boatmen, telling them that if I failed to bring back their craft, I would pay them a fair price for it. They seemed satisfied at this promise, and, the gig having been lowered, they pulled themselves ashore, with Andersen in the stern to bring back the boat.

Telling Ito to get us some supper, I went below. I found Jasmine walking about and examining the details of Mr. Grosvenor's cabin.

"I think you'd better stay below until we get rid of these men," I said. "I don't anticipate any trouble with them, but now that they've got fed up and rested, and clipped and clothed, they might get their heads together and pass a vote that their valuable services were not receiving due recognition. It's likely to be that way with the morally and mentally lopsided brotherhood known as the criminal class."

Jasmine nodded.

"It's more or less that way with any class," said she. "Most people who have got down to the depths of things are grateful for help at first, and then discontented at the extent of it; and finally they consider themselves positively injured."

"Well," I said, "let's hope they won't have time to reach that phase. I'm sorry for them, but my pity has its limit. A

great many people commit some criminal act in a moment of folly or resentment, or when faced with an overwhelming temptation; but if they keep on committing crime after crime, it's a pretty good indication that there's a constitutional fault. After all, the French have got the right idea for dealing with such — the removal of the nuisance. The labor unions haven't much kick at the work they're made to do in Cayenne."

I busied myself, then, in fitting out the fishing boat with such things as I had promised, taking care that no article should be directly traceable to the yacht. I gave them a dory compass, a chart, matches, mess gear, some odds and ends of clothing from the slop chest, and tobacco and food enough to last them for a fortnight. Perhaps I was wrong in doing all this, but I had made a promise when in a pretty desperate fix, and the least I could do was to stick to it.

I must say that my conscience bothered me a little at unleashing so desperate a gang in these peaceful waters, where for all I knew they might make distress signals to some passing vessel, and, once aboard, take possession of her with fatal damage to her people. I thought it more probable, however, that they would avoid such craft as might be sighted, large or small, and concentrate their efforts on making Porto Rico or Santo Domingo, there to scatter and go their different ways. And I was careful to see that there should be in their outfit no more lethal weapon than a can opener.

Andersen returned, and we hooked on and hoisted the gig. I then went forward, unbolted the booby hatch of the forecastle, and ordered all hands on deck. There was no immediate response to this summons. When I repeated it more roughly, the voice of the Apache answered sulkily:

"*Pourquoi?*"

"What for?" I echoed angrily. "Because I tell you to. Come along and be quick about it, or go back to Devil's Island —at your choice!"

This fetched them; but they came out sulkily, in shirts and breeches, growling and muttering. They were like savage animals, trained but not tamed, responding sullenly to the trainer's command, and emerging from their cage in a crouching, prowling fashion, yet with cringes at the sight of rod or lash.

I did not like this change of attitude, and it surprised me a little, as they had been docile enough when I left; but it was just as I had said a moment or two before to Jasmine. We had here to treat with folk morally deficient, of criminal tendencies, lacking the corrective of that subtle sense of right and good known as conscience. They were like a steamship that has had a knockdown in a gale, and started a spontaneous combustion in her coal bunkers, which smolders away and needs only the lifting of a hatch to burst into open conflagration.

I put them on the halyards and made sail, then had the windlass manned. They obeyed in silence, but I could sense the vicious undercurrent. These men might face privation readily enough, but it was not in their natures long to endure any regular work under discipline.

Watching them keenly, I began to understand a little better the violent abuse that became a routine with the officers of old-time sailing ships, whose crews were so often shanghaied from a dangerous criminal class. Perhaps their cruelty was less hard-heartedness than a necessary system of intimidation, on which the safety of the vessel depended.

We got away in a light and steady breeze, and stood out again on what I fervently hoped might be the last lap of all this tortuous and outrageous adventure. I had kept the convicts forward of the mainmast, not wishing them to discover the fishing boat made fast close under the stern, as that would have been to let them know our plans for getting rid of them. I could not be at all sure that they had not seen the boat, however, for a man looking aft over the rail might have caught a glimpse of her.

Once under way, I ordered all hands to the forecastle again. There seemed nothing much to fear with Andersen and myself armed, but I was taking no chances that could be avoided with that precious passenger below. The mate and myself and Ito, on call if needed, were quite crew enough to handle the schooner in this ladies' weather.

Ito came up to say that our supper was served, and I went below, to find Jasmine examining the interior of the saloon.

"I've never been aboard a yacht before," she said. "What fascinating things! Piano and gramophone and oils and etchings and lovely silver, and such a library of beautiful books!"

"A yacht is a sort of glorified toy," I said; "and I'm the demonstrator who winds it up and makes it go," I added a little bitterly.

"You're more than that. All the children who play with it put their lives in the hollow of your big, strong hand."

"That's a prouder aspect of it for me," I admitted. "Where did you learn to say such pleasant things? But let's sit down and catch up with our appetites, if you'll forgive the breach of yachting custom."

"What breach?" Jasmine asked.

"Supping with the sailing master. That's not done, you know; but we're a little short-handed at this moment. The cook was shipped off with the rest of the crowd. Not enough captain, and too much Martinique!"

"I'm afraid it is rather a demoralizing place," said Jasmine. "I felt that myself when first I came from France. We've only been here since the war, you know."

"How did it affect you?" I asked.

"Well," said Jasmine thoughtfully, "in France you get most of your impressions through your mind; down here you seem to get them through your senses. In France, you think; down here, you feel."

"That lets me out," I said. "It explains the negative action of my headpiece. Looking back, I can see where I must have checked my brains when I crossed the Tropic of Cancer!"

"What happened then?" interrogated Jasmine.

"I found, quite by accident, the portrait of a girl in a French novel loaned me by a fellow passenger. Nothing about this portrait was very distinct except the face; but that did the business. When I looked at that face, I kissed my common sense good-by!"

A little line drew itself vertically down the middle of Jasmine's forehead. Carol had that line when vexed, and so did Grosvenor, but his was a gash.

"Was the face so disquieting?" she asked.

"Call it inspiring," I said. "It inspired me to chuck my plan of going to the Mazaruni after diamonds, and accepting a billet on this yacht. You see, I learned that this face belonged to the flora of Martinique."

Jasmine looked puzzled and a little irritated.

"Do you mean to tell me that you are the sort of man to give up a fixed project and fly off at an angle at sight of the picture of a girl?"

"Guilty!" I answered. "More than that, this person who had been so careless with the portrait of her friend would not even tell me who she was, or where to find her, or even if she were still on the island."

"Well," said Jasmine crossly, "then all I can say is that I am disappointed in you. I should have given you credit for more fixity of purpose."

"That," I answered, "was an unsuspected latent quality that I only developed on seeing the portrait. It has now been printed and toned; and the irony of the business lies in the fact that it isn't going to do me any good."

"Why not?" asked Jasmine.

"Because she is out of my reach."

"Then you've found her?"

"Yes—the way you find a rainbow."

Jasmine turned slowly. Her long lashes swept up, and she gave me so intense a look that I must have got a little rattled, for I said:

"Anyhow, it's some comfort to get square with the woman who loaned me the novel and then flatly refused to tell me anything about the original!"

"You're just as bad," said Jasmine, "half telling something. Who is this girl?"

"You," I answered.

Jasmine looked down at her plate. She did not speak. I was seized with a sudden and violent self-disgust.

"There!" I said. "Now you see what sort of man I am, to tell you this when you're here alone with me on the yacht, with no avenue of escape. Do you think me a cad?"

She shook her head.

"Not if it's the truth, sir."

"It's all that and more," I said; "but you mustn't let it spoil your supper, because I have told you that it can't possibly do me any good. What I've said is not to be considered in the light of a declaration. It's just a curious paragraph—an annotation in my log of this singular train of circumstances."

Jasmine smiled, as if to herself—a little musing smile, one might almost have said—an amused smile; but it brought back the pale glow of her face.

"From the time that I began my studies," she said softly, "*maman* was determined that I should perfect my English. When I was sixteen, she got me an Ameri-

can teacher, and one day she told me why. 'It is necessary to know the enemy's language thoroughly,' she said. 'Foreign men who speak but little French are more dangerous than Frenchmen, because one is so apt to give them credit for qualities they are unable to express owing to the language difficulties. If these are removed, you can easily discover them for the liars that they are—especially Americans.'"

I could feel my face getting hot.

"One can scarcely blame your mother," I said a little stiffly; "but still, perhaps one may when the returns are all in."

"Are you angry?" Jasmine asked.

"Yes," I answered. "I don't much mind your calling me a fool, but I object to your intimation that I'm to be considered a liar."

She dropped her bare, round elbows on the table, rested her chin on the knuckles of her clasped hands, and looked at me with a smile.

"I'm sorry to offend you, Captain Fairfax, but I absolutely refuse to believe two things that you have told me."

"Then, if you'll excuse me," I said, rising, "I'll go on deck. I ought to have stayed there, anyhow."

Jasmine did not move or speak. I stepped to the door, and there curiosity triumphed over injured pride. I turned and asked:

"What are those two things you absolutely refuse to believe?"

"The first," said Jasmine, "is that you changed your plans entirely because you saw the portrait that I shall some day slap Edmée Dieudonné for not having destroyed. Wouldn't you have accepted this position had you not seen the portrait?"

"Yes," I muttered.

Jasmine nodded.

"I'm sure that you believed what you were saying, but I'm glad that you are telling the truth now, sir. I'd rather have you admit you were—romancing, than have to think you foolish and vacillating."

"Then let's call it one lie nailed to the counter," I said. "What's the other?"

She tilted up her chin and looked at me with her wide, teasing smile.

"Is it true that, having met the girl of the picture, you believe her to be out of your reach, so that she is never going to do you any good?"

"No," I answered. "You've got me with both barrels."

Not daring to stay there any longer, I turned and made a break for the deck.

(To be concluded in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

COMRADES

He sat upon the ancient bench
  On "Lovers' Cliff" and watched the sea,
And saw some far horizon which
  I think was quite unseen by me.
He looked as one who softly dreams
  Of spring amid the winter's snow,
And smiled as if they were not dead,
  The vanished days of long ago.

I think he wandered by the side
  Of one who was no longer there,
Again as in the golden time
  When he was young and she was fair.
For on his lips there was the smile
  Of happiness that lovers know,
And they were warm again to him,
  The vanished days of long ago.

I think he had forgot the years
  That lay between to-day and then,
That he was only twenty-one
  And life was at the flood again.
And when he rose and moved away,
  Although his feeble steps were slow,
She held his hand, I think, as in
  The vanished days of long ago.

Sheward Bulstrode

On Behalf of the State

HOW AN EFFICIENT STAFF OFFICER SHOULD BEHAVE IN AN UP-TO-DATE CELTIC CRISIS

By George A. Birmingham

DICK MAHONY — Colonel Mahony of the Connaught Lancers—looked about him with satisfaction. He had every reason to be pleased with his surroundings. The smooth white cloth on the breakfast table, the shining silver, the vases of fresh flowers, the background of dark walls and old portraits, the carpet under his feet—all these appealed to his sense of what was beautiful and fitting.

In front of him was a plate of bacon and eggs—Irish bacon and fresh eggs. At his elbow were a dish of hot scones and a rack of toast. On the side table behind him were covered dishes and a cold ham. After two years abroad the abundance of a home breakfast was delightful.

The windows of the room were wide open, and beyond them lay the lawn, green as only an Irish lawn ever is. The soft, warm air of a southern Irish summer filled the room, laden with the scent of limes and many flowers. After the baked streets of Budapest and the brown plains of Hungary, this was paradise.

Susie Graydon, Dick Mahony's sister, sat at the end of the table. Her husband had not yet come in to breakfast.

"After all, Susie," said Dick, "you may grumble and grouse as you like, but there's nothing in the whole world equal to this."

Susie sighed. As a member of the Inter-allied Mission of Control, Dick had spent two years in various capitals of Europe, seeing to it that Germans, Austrians, Hungarians, and the rest of the old foes did not get ready for another war. Susie had spent these same two years in Ireland. She was not sure that it was the pleasantest place in the world to live.

"If you'd been living in stuffy hotels," said Dick, "and getting nothing for breakfast except a thimbleful of coffee and a jug of whipped cream, you'd know better than to grumble about Ireland, even if politics are a bit thick sometimes."

It was the memory of the Hungarian breakfast which lingered unpleasantly in his mind. He had always resented the whipped cream.

Then Dermod Graydon walked into the room. He carried a scrap of dirty paper between his finger and thumb, holding it stiffly in front of him at arm's length, as if it had an offensive smell or was laden with the germs of an infectious disease. He was just in time to hear the end of his brother-in-law's eulogy of Ireland.

"When you've been here a week," he said, "you'll be jolly glad to go back to Jugo-Slovakia."

Budapest is not in Jugo-, Czecho-, or any other Slovakia, but Dick had more sense than to try to teach his brother-in-law geography.

"Look at that!" said Dermod. He laid the dirty paper on the table in front of Dick. "Would even an Albanian brigand do a thing like that?"

Dick picked up the paper and read it.

Rialtas Sealadac na Heireann.—Your motor car has been commandered for the service of the State.—JOHN COYNE, Chief of Staff, I. R. A.

Between the words "been" and "commandered" the composer of this interesting document had written "recuis"—no doubt an attempt at "requisitioned"—and then had scratched it out.

Coyne, though chief of the staff, was evidently doubtful about the spelling. Even "commandered" had not turned out right, lacking one of the e's that it normally possesses.

"Johnny Coyne," said Dermod, with fierce contempt, "is a fellow who six months

ago was cleaning my boots and knives. I found that precious document nailed up on the door of the garage, and the car was gone. They've probably got it in the barracks at Ballymure, and I paid eight hundred pounds for it three months ago."

"I'd never have thought it of Johnny Coyne," said Susie. "He was always such a civil boy!"

Dermod was at the side table, cutting ham. He had six or seven slices on his plate when he sat down at the table. The loss of his car had not spoiled his appetite. Even if his house had been burned down and he had been driven out on the road, he would have dined heartily in the first decent hotel he came to in his flight. He would also have cursed.

He cursed while he ate his ham, muttering imprecations with his mouth full. If his wishes had been effective, society in hell would have been of a mixed kind that morning. The whole English government would have been there, all the Irish leaders, alive and dead, the editors of nearly every daily paper, and, of course, Johnny Coyne.

"Johnny seems to have got a bit bogged over his spelling," said Susie, who had the paper in her hand. "You'd expect a staff officer to make a better attempt at 'commandeered.'"

"A damned ignorant savage!" growled Dermod. "I'm surprised that he can even write his name."

"Lots of staff officers are shaky about spelling," said Dick. "I'm never quite sure myself how many g's there are in 'agreement.'"

Dermod then cursed the Irish system of education, more because of what it did teach than for its failure to teach spelling.

"And after all," Dick went on soothingly, "our friend Coyne knows two languages, which is more than you do, Dermod. I suppose that's Irish at the top of the paper?"

"Johnny Coyne knows no more Irish than I do," said Dermod. "He copied that stuff straight off a postage stamp. I don't suppose he has the faintest idea what it means."

After breakfast Dermod's temper improved slightly. He became almost normal when he had smoked his first pipe, but he was still liable to sudden outbursts of blasphemy. Dick, walking around the stables with him, suggested that it might be possible to get the car back.

"What about the police?" he asked.

"You'd better have stayed in Budapest, if that's all you know about Ireland," said Dermod. "There are no police now—haven't been for the last eighteen months. Those that weren't shot have cleared out of the country."

Then Dermod gave his brother-in-law a short, vividly worded account of the existing state of Ireland. Dick, picking his way carefully among the adjectives, gathered that the more ardent Irish had taken to fighting one another, now that there were no longer any police or English soldiers in the country.

"Free Staters and Republicans—is that what you call them?" said Dick.

"That's what they call themselves," replied Dermod. "I call them blackguards and super-blackguards."

"And which side is Johnny Coyne on?"

"I don't know," said Dermod, "and I don't care. Probably on both—one to-day and the other to-morrow. That's the way with most of them."

"If we knew which side he was on," suggested Dick, "we might get the other fellows to go for him and take away the car. I suppose they'd do it for a ten pound note?"

"They'd keep it themselves if they did," said Dermod, "and I'd be no better off; so that plan's a washout!"

Dick was rebuffed, and went away. At lunch time, having spent several hours in quiet thought, he attacked the subject again.

"Suppose now, Dermod, you had your car back—"

"There's no earthly use supposing that. I can't get it."

"But suppose you did, what would you do with it. Wouldn't it just be taken from you again?"

"If I had it back," said Dermod, "I wouldn't be fool enough to keep it here. I'd drive it straight up to Dublin and ship it to Holyhead. That's what I'd have done months ago, if I hadn't been a damned fool!"

"Dick, dear," said Susie after lunch, "I wish you wouldn't talk any more about that car. It only makes poor Dermod worse. He's irritable when these things happen."

Dick had taken possession of Johnny Coyne's misspelled note. He took it from his pocket and spread it out in front of Susie.

"I suppose that stuff at the top of the paper really is Irish," he remarked.

"I expect so," said Susie. "It's what's printed on all the postage stamps, anyway."

"Tell me," said Dick, "did any of your servants know that Coyne fellow well?"

"They all knew him, of course," replied Susie. "He used to be in and out of the house constantly, doing odd jobs."

"I'd like to have a talk with one of them," Dick went on. "Which would you say is the most intelligent and trustworthy? What about Jeffares?"

Jeffares was the butler, entirely trustworthy, but, according to Susie's report, lacking in general intelligence. She recommended Jessie McNiece, her own maid.

"Jessie's a bright girl," she explained, "who takes an interest in things, and has had a flirtation with every man about the place under forty. I think you can depend on her. Her father's an Orangeman from Ballymena, or some place like that, up in the north."

"I'd like to have a chat with Jessie," said Dick. "I suppose she won't want to flirt with me?"

"She will if you give her the least encouragement," rejoined Susie.

"Well," said Dick, "I must risk that."

II

At half past five that afternoon Dermod and Susie were sitting under the lime tree on the lawn, with the tea table between them. Dick Mahony was not there. They were speculating mildly about what had happened to him when they heard the hoot of a motor at the avenue gate.

A few minutes later the car swept toward the house. It was Dermod's car. Dick was driving it. He jumped out of it when he saw the Graydons on the lawn. Dermod and Susie leaped from their chairs and ran to meet him.

"You've got the car!" shouted Dermod.

"There she is for you, safe and sound," said Dick; "but I don't think you'll be able to keep her here for long."

"I'll drive up to Dublin to-night," announced Dermod. "How the devil did you get her back?"

"And, Dick," added Susie, "where on earth did you get that hat?"

It was a sufficiently remarkable hat—a grayish green, soft felt hat with the brim looped up at one side. Dick took it off and looked at it admiringly.

"It belongs to the butcher's boy," he said. "Jessie borrowed it for me when he came this afternoon with the meat. The way the brim is looped up shows that I'm a brigadier general in one of the Irish armies. Jessie knew all about that, and fixed it up for me. She's an invaluable girl, that maid of yours. Just look here!"

With a sweep of his hand, he pulled a wisp of his hair sidewise over his forehead. It had been carefully oiled, and stayed where he put it, the end of it just touching his right eyebrow.

"That," he said, "is what's called the Sinn Fein quiff. Only the out-and-out whole-hoggers wear their hair that way, so Jessie says, and she appears to know. She's a tiptop hairdresser, Susie!"

"She's the best maid I ever had at doing my hair," observed Susie.

"I wish you'd tell me how you got the car," put in Dermod.

"I am telling you," said Dick. "My hat and coiffure — that's the right word, isn't it, Susie?—are part of the story. Just look at my coat."

He was wearing a Norfolk jacket, grayish green, like the hat, a good deal frayed about the cuffs, and badly stained in front.

"That belongs to one of your gardeners," explained Dick. "Jessie offered to take the stains out of it for him. He's rather a friend of hers."

"They all are," said Susie.

"She lent it to me for the afternoon," Dick went on. "It's a most patriotic kind of coat. I'm not at all sure it isn't a uniform. Anyhow, the man who owns it is going off with a flying column next week. That's why he wants the stains removed."

"Go on about the car," said Dermod. "I don't see how dressing up helped you."

"Arrayed as you see me now," continued Dick, "and with my quiff pulled well out under my hat, so that every one could see it, I walked into Ballymure. I expected to find our friend Coyne in the barracks, and I was perfectly right. The car was standing in front of what used to be the officers' mess, and Coyne was inside. There was a kind of sentry fellow lounging about, with a cigarette in his mouth. I didn't know the Irish for 'Attention,' so I said, 'Harrum hup!' an international phrase used by drill sergeants everywhere, whatever language they or their men speak. That made the sentry jump, and he showed me in to where Johnny Coyne was without asking any

questions. By the way, Johnny is quite a decent fellow, much more inclined to be friendly than most staff officers."

"I always said he had good manners," agreed Susie.

"He gave me a drink," continued Dick, "and offered to take me out for a joy ride in the car. He said he was waiting for two young ladies to join him, and that I might sit in the back with one of them if I liked—a telegraph clerk, and quite good looking. I saw her afterward."

"Who the devil did he think you were?" inquired Dermod.

"I don't know who he thought I was," said Dick. "What I told him was that I was an *etteremik*, which impressed him tremendously. Jessie told me that he didn't know six words of Irish, so I felt perfectly safe."

"But is that Irish?" asked Susie.

"Certainly not," said Dick. "It's Hungarian for 'dining room.' It was written up over the door of the restaurant in the hotel I stayed at in Budapest, and as I read it two or three times every day while I was there, I remember it pretty well. Then I told him I had come for the car, and gave him a letter authorizing and commanding him to hand it over to me. I thought you'd like to see that letter, so I kept a copy. Here it is."

He handed over a sheet of note paper to Dermod. At the top of it were the words which Johnny Coyne put on his original order for the motor car. They were recognizably and plainly Irish. Next came "*A chara.*"

"Jessie told me," said Dick, "that letters in Irish always begin that way, so I put the words in just to reassure Coyne. The rest of it—"

"The rest of it looks like gibberish to me," observed Dermod.

"No doubt it does," admitted Dick; "but as a matter of fact it's perfectly good Hungarian, though it's a little disjointed, and doesn't mean exactly what I told Johnny Coyne it did. The first three words, '*Kir dohány jövedék,*' are the name of a cigarette that I used to smoke. The next bit is a sort of prayer, I think. It's stuck up in all the street cars in Budapest, and ends in 'Amen.' But I left that out for fear of exciting suspicion. After that I put in the Hungarian words for 'opera box' and 'Turkish bath,' the name of a rather nice white wine, and a few more things that every fellow gets to know. I was afraid the letter was a bit short, but I knew no more Hungarian, and I didn't like to repeat myself. However, it was all right. Johnny Coyne read it through three times with the deepest respect, trying to look as if he understood every word of it. Then he handed me over the motor car. I felt quite sorry for him and the two girls, who turned up just as I was driving off."

"Well, I'm damned!" said Dermod.

"If I were you," suggested Dick, "I'd ship that car off to England at once. Johnny Coyne kept my letter, and I expect he'll send it up to Dublin when he writes his report of the affair. I don't suppose any one there will be able to read it, but they may know that it isn't Irish."

"I'm inclined to think," said Dermod, "that I'd better ship you off as well as the car. This won't be a healthy place for you when Johnny Coyne finds out what you've done."

"Well," said Dick, "I'll be sorry to leave you and Susie, but perhaps—I say, what about that girl Jessie? Won't they suspect her?"

"Jessie must stay where she is," declared Susie. "I can't spare a girl who's so good at hairdressing. I'm thinking of taking to a Sinn Fein quiff myself. It's rather becoming to you, Dick!"

FOR KNOW, MY FRIEND—

WINNING or losing, goalward
Lift your face
And hold the right direction
Of the race—

For know, my friend, at imminence
Of defeat
It is the conquered heart
Makes loss complete!

Harry Kemp

The Scar in the Hills

A ROMANTIC SIDE-LIGHT ON WHY FIRST CLASS PIRATES BURY THEIR GOLD

By George F. Worts

IN the course of my travels I have been honored, at different times, with the confidences of four bandits. Three of these gentlemen were not authentic, having merely borrowed the name from an honorable profession by applying it to their methods. One had the hat rack privilege in a celebrated San Francisco cabaret. Another was the proprietor of an owl taxicab in Chicago. The third maintained orchards of plate glass and lustrous mahogany furniture on the nineteenth floor of a building adjacent to Wall Street.

These three were bandits upon whom the law bestowed a salutatory wink. They were merely enjoying the benefits of a civilization that is predatory anyhow. The fourth one, the one that the law could not forgive, was the one whose confidences I prize the highest—a copper-haired rascal who was a philosopher and a grim comedian. His confidences I prize because he was genuine. He had used pistols, and had obtained ingots of beautiful, lustrous gold. There was no flaw upon his authenticity.

I met Jase Raider outside a sleepy little town away down south on the Pacific coast of Mexico, on a morning that must always be recalled with pleasure. I was strolling down the scimitar of dazzling white beach westward of Acapulco, enjoying the tropical perfection of jungles and hills and blazing blue salt water, when Jase Raider came upon me and said "Good morning"—in English.

He was wearing the garb of a Mexican *caballero,* from gilt-spangled sombrero to wicked silvered spurs, and his pony was grazing in the juicy grass at the jungle's edge. He had, I remember, a pair of the finest blue eyes I had ever seen, and a complexion that might have been smoke-cured, of an even, rich burnt umber, and beautiful teeth as white as the foam on the waves breaking there at our feet.

His smile, upon that dark, smooth countenance, was a little startling. You were a trifle uneasy about him until he smiled; then you ceased to think about the dull, curious scar that wended downward from the left corner of his mouth to underneath his chin. It was not a deforming scar, but it looked—well, sinister. It was as if his thin-lipped mouth dipped down at that end and went wiggling down toward his neck. It was mighty disturbing at first, but you no longer noticed the scar when he smiled. When he smiled, you knew that here was a man who had established a satisfactory compact with life.

He said "Good morning" with a curious upward inflection, which put it into the form of an unfinished question, a really charming question, which might have been:

"Good morning—and I trust you are at peace with your Maker?"

I replied politely, and he supposed, with the same amiable air, that I had come off the Pacific Mail boat that was lying out in the Puerto de Acapulco, to stretch my legs. He himself, he confessed, had just run down for the northern mail and a breath of salt air from his banana plantation up in the hills near Ayutla.

"Now," he said, with surprising familiarity for so recent an acquaintance, "you would never suppose that right where we are standing old Admiral Morgan buried a lot of Spanish gold, would you? You know about Admiral Morgan, the buccaneer, don't you?"

I nodded.

"Well, right where we are standing, mister, I dug up some of it," he went on. "Yes, sir—a double fistful of old Spanish doubloons — two big fistfuls of big gold

coins! I tell you it was fine, finding that old gold that way! I'd heard that he buried some of his treasure near here, and I dug around with a spade. I struck an old leather sea chest, rotted away and full of sand, and a few of these old doubloons sticking in chinks and corners. Let me tell you, Morgan was a man! You see that cleft in the hills back there?"

I looked where he pointed toward a distinct V in the hills, the slopes of which were rank with luscious green. Beyond the V the breakfast smoke of Acapulco, like a lavender haze, was still rising.

"That cleft didn't used to be there," my companion informed me enthusiastically. "It's called the Abra de San Nicolas—did you know that?—and it's been there since 1666, when Morgan was here. He spent a whole winter in Acapulco, and all winter he had the townspeople cutting out that V, so the town would get fresh air—the sea wind. He was a great pirate," the young man sighed, "and those were fine old days!"

I sighed, too, and regretted that nowadays crimes were executed by pale-faced youths who wore silk shirts and took cocaine to give them courage, after they had got the lay of the land from some immoral girl with bobbed hair. There was too much viciousness connected with crime nowadays.

"But in Admiral Morgan's time—"

"Ah!" my companion breathed. "Looting cities and sinking whole armadas—and with those fiery old eyes of his always on the lookout for a pretty girl! What was a chest of gold to the like of him?"

We warmed to the theme, growing excited, and a light kindled in the young man's fine blue eyes. There was sprouting in the rich soil of our understanding one of those remarkable friendships which mature in an hour between perfect strangers who meet and are gone. They are the choicest flowers in the whole bouquet of friendships.

Well, we sat down on the forepeak of an old wrecked schooner under a tamarind tree, squinting against the blue glare of the sea, pulling fiercely at villainous black cigarettes, and exulting in the discovery of our mutual sympathy. You have to be young to fall under that kind of spell.

"Now, the fun is in getting the gold that way—like old Morgan did," my friend confided. "And then the fight, the chase, the get-away. The chase is great, but after that there's no fun. Just having the gold gets tiresome. That's why pirates buried so much of their gold and never came around after it. Ever stop to wonder why so much pirate treasure stayed where it was buried? No fun going back after it—that's why. No fun just nursing a lot of gold. Well, I ought to know. Now, take Morgan that time when—"

"Hold on! Why ought you to know?" I said, beginning to tingle.

"That time when Morgan sacked Maracaibo—"

"Why — ought — you — to—know?" I pinned him down firmly.

Jase Raider gave me a long, merry look out of those clear blue eyes. He inspected the charring tip of his black cigarette critically, then lifted the wet end of it to touch that dull scar running down from his mouth under his chin, as if lava had trickled out of his mouth some time.

"Why ought I to know? You see this scar? Well, I'll tell you," he said. "I'll just tell you why."

Things must have mingled just to his liking, to pin him down to the story of that scar so easily. Of course, he was tremendously sensitive about it—any man would have been; and I still believe that he hadn't told that story to many.

He settled back against an old hatch coaming that had whiskery seaweed all over it and looked out across the undulating blue water, letting the breeze blow against his dark, rather sinister face—the breeze that was on its way toward the cleft in the hills, the Abra de San Nicolas, which Sir Henry Morgan had made the people of Acapulco cut through there almost four hundred years ago. And it struck me that Jase Raider ought to have been wearing a cocked hat, a leather doublet with big brass buttons down the front, a colored sash with pistol handles and the hilt of a cutlass protruding, and four-gallon boots, while he sat there on the schooner forepeak and cursed a gang of cutthroats as they buried a heavy brass-bound chest in the sand "twenty paces N. E. by E. from the big tamarind tree."

II

"LIFE has only two lessons worth knowing," Jase Raider got out finally, as if he was searching around for a good place to begin. "The first is how to enjoy yourself, and the second is how to size up men—to know what men will do under given circumstances; what power for good or evil there

is in each of these collections of legs, arms, head, and trunk, which, for lack of a more insulting name, we call a man.

" Of course, that second lesson kind of interferes with learning the first one; but once you learn these two, they make all the philosophy that you and I will ever need. Take it from me, *amigo,* the education that a pot-luck grab at books will give you is apt to leave you finishing this existence on your sweating pinto three miles back of nowhere; but after Professor Hard Knox has whispered a few words to you on the gentle art of sizing up your fellow creatures, you'll find yourself actually cussing because you have to go to sleep on the finish wire waiting for the other fellow to catch up.

" That is, provided you don't go to betting on what a man will do when the cards are shuffled too rapid for the naked eye to follow. That's what the *other* fellow's got to learn. There's less nourishment in that than bucking one of those government-controlled games up at Juarez. Are you with me on that?"

His figures were a little confusing, but I said:

" It sounds reasonable."

" Sure!" he cried, taking off his sombrero and letting the breeze play with his coppery curls. " Just take the three of us who were mixed up in that game of hide and seek up in the Llano de los Cristianos. I was a real bad man—see? I was an outlaw with five thousand on my scalp, dead or alive. Yea, bo—that's why I'm down here educating banana plants, instead of punching dumb cattle up yonder. I'm from Texas, *amigo*—and always will be, I guess.

" Yes, I'd been cutting up; and ten thousand on top of that to anybody who got the gold away from me and delivered it to the express company — nice yellow ingots of gold! The whole of my native State was out looking for me and that gold, and two of the lowest good-for-nothings west of the Mississip' had to be the ones who knew where me and the gold were going. Shucks!

" There was I, hitting the trail out of Texas for my shanty in the bush, with those two village cut-ups behind me. They weren't bad men; they were just *putrid.* They were strangers to each other, but I knew them both well—too well. Hub Bragon was a hoss thief and a rustler and a squaw man, and Lem Reknor was plain white trash—a wife beater, a cheap street corner flirt, a pool room wall-flower. You get the picture? Two wuthless hounds after a nice, clean-cut young outlaw? Out of the pack and passel of real men trackin' me, those two yeller dogs had to corner me!

" Well, that was a man hunt that didn't end up very pretty. Yes, and a gold hunt. Sixty thousand of it—sixty thousand dollars' worth of beautiful, smooth yellow bars, so soft you could scratch 'em with a finger nail, and hanging down in leather sacks from my pommel. It took a good horse to carry it, too."

" Where," I asked weakly, " did you get all that gold?"

My amazing acquaintance flipped his cigarette into the air.

" Why, I just took it away from the expressman on a Santa Fe train. I'll give it to you the way it happened, because I'm aiming to show you that what I say about pirates' unclaimed treasure is correct. Shall I start with me on the trail there, and those two custard-hearted, lily-livered hoss thieves closin' in?"

" Oh, just begin anywhere," said I.

" *Esta bueno.*"

III

So he began with those two bad men closing in on him—a " nice, clean-cut young outlaw "—on the trail through the Llano de los Cristianos.

Dusk was coming on, and Jase Raider was thankful that the race was nearly over. His hand was resting on an automatic at his hip, but this was only a touch of habit. There had been a painful delay in his getaway, and in an exchange of steel-jacketed compliments he had left one steaming automatic on the ground, and the one in the holster was empty.

Behind him, far to the north, where the low hill merged with the gray evening mist of a valley, he contemplated a moving speck. Steadily it had been moving, twisting in and out along the trail, rising, descending, seeming to maintain a measured distance. The speck could have overtaken him long ago, for the outlaw's horse could hardly stagger on under that weight of gold.

It suddenly came to Jase that he had been tricked. There had been two pursuers on the trail—the last clear space had shown that. Now there was only one.

Around the hill he was climbing there ran a wider, longer trail. One of the pair had taken that route. Now he was probably

climbing the other side, and Jase Raider would be between two fires.

But he smiled, sitting there all dusty and tired in the saddle. The long flight was over. A hundred feet up the hillside, to the left, the edge of a rickety roof could be seen—if you had sharp eyes and knew just where to look for it. The outlaw dismounted, and, leading his horse, cleared the way as he quit the trail and broke through the underbrush.

Progress was slow here, although both man and beast knew the twisting course well. Suddenly, the shanty loomed up from the bushes—if "loom" could be used in connection with an object eight feet in height by fourteen in length.

Jase had calculated nicely in placing his retreat. There was not a foot of clear space around the shanty. Not a branch or twig seemed displaced. It was as if the little building had been dropped from the skies neatly into this crevice. At the rear the planking of the roof overhung a few feet, to provide shelter for the horse.

The man led the horse there. He removed the four sacks of gold and dragged them to the door of his cabin.

He looked about warily. There wasn't much to look at. Across the eight-foot end was a bunk—a bundle of gray blankets on barrel staves. A rude pine table stood beside the bunk, an oil lamp hung from the rafters a few feet from the door. A dry goods box was nailed on the wall for a cupboard. Near it stood a sheet-iron cookstove. To the left of that there was a tin basin on a shelf, with a galvanized water pail under it. The floor was sand.

Jase dragged the heavy leather bags into the middle of the room, opened his jackknife, and slit the leather sides, letting the gold bars spill out over the sand.

He hastened to the bunk, caught up the blankets, and threw them down again, so that they fell half on the bunk and half on the ground. He then reached beneath the bunk and brought out a four-ounce bottle labeled "carbolic acid" in scarlet ink, with a skull and crossbones. Placing the bottle on the little table beside the bunk, he went to the door, opened it a crack, and listened. He heard faint voices down the hill.

There had been plenty of time for the pursuers to reach the shanty, and Jase surmised that they had stopped down there for a council of war. They were not quite sure that he was unarmed. Perhaps they would spend the better part of the night in a stalking approach; or they might even have the patience to starve him out. Well, he would have to make them hurry!

Jase lighted the lamp and turned the wick high. It was only a cheap little lamp. Its pale flame chased few shadows out of the darkening cabin, but through the square, paneless window its rays would beacon across the night. The brighter objects in the room caught them—the tin basin, the handle of the water pail, and the gold bars piled there higgledy piggledy.

"That ought to annoy them some," Jase said to himself.

Then he opened the door, and slipped down through the bushes to a thicket of myrtle, beyond which was a widening of the trail that might almost be called a clearing. Here his two pursuers, Hub Bragon and Lem Reknor, were squatting on opposite sides of a tiny fire.

Hub Bragon and Lem Reknor were a queerly matched pair. Hub was a big man, whose microscopic soul was enveloped in layers of lazy fat. Lem was a scrawny little man, with the nervousness of a weasel. In their eyes, however, there lay a marked resemblance. The eyes of both men were blue, fiery, and close-set. In Hub Bragon's purplish face they reminded you of pigs' eyes; in Lem Reknor's leathery face they reminded you of horses' eyes.

At this moment Hub's pink, round face was reduced to a pair of drooping jowls, furrowed where sweat had trickled cruelly through the caking dust of travel. Lem's recessive jaw and long, horselike nose were twitching. The strain of the hunt had told.

Lem had become scornfully humorous.

"Huh! I wish you could see yourself in a lookin' glass. You jest ought to see how funny you look!"

"No funnier than you," the fat man wheezed. "Huh! You look like an old mare with the colic."

The little man, bristling, uttered a single, withering word:

"Hawg!"

Hub sighed wheezily, with the air of a man above such coarseness.

"Well," he said, evidently continuing a previous conversation, "if you say he's up there in that shanty, it's a wonder you wouldn't trot up there and smoke him out, 'stead of sittin' there readin' a lot o' stale newspaper clippings!"

"Oh, we got plenty time," Lem respond-

ed, addressing himself again to the ragged clippings in his hands. "Ten thousand reward for the gold," he continued, in a rapturous, self-communicative undertone, not unlike a chant. "Five thousand reward for Raider—dead *or* alive. When a man's been through the hell I've traveled for the past five days, he needs something to cheer him up. Fifteen thousand! Well, that cheers me up—some."

The fat man, Hub, scowled. The undercurrent of malice that had tinctured the conversation was now stressed in sharp-cut words.

"Seventy-five hundred, you mean, sonny. Just get that twisted out straight in that fuddled ole head o' yours!"

"Sure, sure," the little man mumbled. "Course, it's fifty-fifty. We said that when you caught up with me this noon, didn't we? Ain't we here on this deal together? Ain't we two honest men?"

Hub nodded placidly.

"Well, one of us is goin' to see that the other one is. We got to be careful—that's all, young feller. We got to keep rememberin'—that's all. We're kind o' touchy, with that blamed sun burnin' us up all day."

Lem's greedy eyes had returned to the clippings.

"Reckon that reward must have sent a hundred reals and a thousand amateurs scoutin' for this feller; and we two—we *got* him!"

"Yeah, that's so," the other approved. "Say, buddy, how come you picked this trail, anyhow?"

"Oh, I heard about it from a greaser who knows this Raider. I grabbed the chance, and found he was right. How'd you come to?"

The fat man smiled slightly.

"Why, I jest follered you. Figgered you knew more about it than I did, and—"

The little man jumped up, sputtering.

"What? You damned sneak! You dirty, low-down—"

An exclamation of consternation from his companion checked him. Through the gathering darkness the yellow rays of Jase Raider's beacon were shining.

"What do you make of that?" Lem panted. "That's right where his shanty is. He's lit a lamp! *He's lit a lamp!* Why did he light that lamp?"

Both men were nervously grasping their pistols now. Hub cursed low in his jowls.

"I don't figure it. I would 'a' sworn he didn't have a ca'tridge left. Huh! He must 'a' filled up in the cabin, else he wouldn't be takin' that chance. I—don't like this. Say, we better smell around. I'm *leery!*"

Lem was breathing noisily.

"You go ahead, mister."

"No," said Hub. "You go ahead."

"See here, I've carried you this far, ain't I? You jest tracked me, didn't you? No, sir—you go ahead."

The fat man yielded.

"Well, you stick close behind me. We don't want no rushing. I know that feller, and he shoots like hell!"

Silently they stole through the thick growth, crouching, at times crawling. At length Hub whispered wheezily:

"You cut out and around, and come up on the other side—savvy? Get as close as you can, and then crack one of them big twigs. Then we'll rush him!"

"Do you know which side the door is on?"

"No, I don't. I never been near the place."

"Well, the man on that side takes the big chance. Looks to me like it's fifty-fifty."

Hub crept away. Lem kept to his course, slowly, a step at a time, pausing to listen, to stifle his thundering heart, to regather his courage. Closer he ventured to the spluttering light rays, drawn to them like a moth. They slanted through the dusk like the vibrations, the emanations, of some terrifying riddle.

He stopped short, shivering. He felt that the shanty had sprung up out of the ground. Within arm's reach were the dull outlines of bleached planks. The pale rays from the window passed over his head. His fingers worked nervously over the handle of his revolver, and his breath caught, as if to await the danger that the silence seemed to shout.

The shanty might have been a tomb. No sound, no signal of habitation, issued from it, save the pale yellow glow from the foot-square window.

IV

SUDDENLY the crisp splitting of a branch sounded on the other side of the cabin. Lem Reknor leaped up and forward, not toward the door, but toward the window.

The automatic returned from the win-

dow, unfired. Lem bleated once with terror. He was suddenly bathed in cold sweat as he stared at the bunk. He shouted hysterically:

" He's dead! He's killed hisself! Come on!"

He ran around to the door, where the fat man joined him.

There lay their outlaw, half in the bunk and half out, in the unmistakable attitude of death. His feet and legs were on the bunk; the trunk was twisted, and the arms and head stretched down to the sand. The face was upturned, the eyes staring, lids drawn back, the pupils two round black points focusing on the doorway.

And in explanation of this sudden, shocking reduction of eager life to stiffening clay, a dull, worm-like burn trailed off from the left corner of the outlaw's mouth to underneath his chin, as if lava had flowed out of that dead mouth. The four-ounce bottle with its scarlet warning stood, uncorked, on the little pine table.

Lem was babbling:

" Lost his nerve—end of his rope—knew we had him—took and killed hisself! Took and drunk p'isen!"

But Hub didn't hear him. That worthy had wasted hardly a glance on the scarred thing that lay on the bunk when, at the threshold, his eyes caught the yellow glow of gold. He crouched over the pile of it, and lifted and hefted one of the smooth, bright bars.

He dropped the bar and glanced up critically at his companion.

" Yeah, and made a messy job of it," he agreed. He grinned. " Well, I guess this makes it pretty soft. Fifteen thousand for just ridin' a mite on a horse!"

" Seventy-five hundred, you mean, mister," Lem corrected him irritably.

Hub looked up again from the beautiful gold. Their eyes met, held a moment, then dropped uncertainly.

" Sure, sure," the big man agreed.

But this time the words were a mumble. A new thought—an *idea*—had entered the stuffy air of the shanty. Hub's gaze roved from the bars to the bunk. He seemed to shake himself.

" Well," he said, " are we goin' to spend the night here?"

" I'll stay here," the little man replied coldly, without untangling his gaze from the mellow, glowing bars. " You?"

Their eyes raised and caught again.

" Uh—now—" Lem began, but Hub had spoken simultaneously.

Lem stopped politely. So did Hub.

" What was you saying, mister?"

" Nothin' at all. What was *you* saying?"

They eyed each other craftily. Then Lem, being the more impulsive, burst out petulantly:

" Well, who the hell knows we came down here?"

" Not a damned soul, young feller," Hub replied jovially.

" Ain't thirty thousand a sight sweeter than seventy-five hundred?"

" Huh! Well, you said it! A sight sweeter!"

" Shake on it," Lem commanded nervously.

" No, no, nix on that. Look here, pardner, if we're goin' to pass the night here, carry that—that thing outside, will you? I couldn't bear to touch it!"

" All right." Lem started for the bunk.

The click of metal stopped him, and he whirled with his own gun leveled. Hub's round face was innocent of malice. He had only accidentally rested his tired right hand on his holster. Lem regarded him skeptically.

" Supposin'," he said, " supposin', just for form's sake, just to conform with the custom hereabouts, you know, we toss our guns together out that door? We'll understand each other a heap better."

Hub didn't hesitate. He unlimbered and swung his automatic out of the door. Lem followed suit. The thuds of the guns as they struck the sand outside were not a second apart.

Lem returned to the bunk. He reached over the outlaw's body and dragged a blanket from behind it. For an instant his eyes rested on the belt and holster at the outlaw's waist. The automatic in the holster was of the same caliber as his own. He drew the blanket over the body, enveloping it from head to foot.

" Reckon that 'll spare your delicate feelin's," he said.

Hub nodded.

" I don't s'pose either of us wants to go down after the horses and grub packs. Well, let's see what this here palace offers in the way of nourishment!"

He went to the little dry goods box on the wall. Rummaging within it, he made discoveries.

"Well! Here's a hunk of bread that ain't a day over ten weeks old; and here's a can o' coffee and a real coffeepot. We're playin' in luck, buddy!"

"One of us has got to fetch a bucket of water," Lem said mournfully.

"Look in the bucket first," Hub directed.

Lem inspected the pail. There were three or four inches of darkish water in it.

"No tellin' how long that water's been in here."

"It 'll do," said Hub. "I've drunk worse. I'll boil it—that 'll kill the germs. I like my coffee good and strong, anyhow."

Hub busied himself at the stove, starting a fire and putting a potful of water on to heat.

Lem appeared not to be interested in these proceedings. He stood with his legs straddling a pile of the gold bars. His lips were working, framing figures — fifteen—thirty—sixty.

He glanced once at the blanketed thing. His narrow red brow was wrinkled like an ape's. So preoccupied was he that he did not observe the neat gesture with which the fat man secured and concealed in his palm the little bottle of carbolic acid. Hub, having executed this maneuver undetected, grinned fondly and wagged his head.

"My, a feller can buy a lot with all that money!"

The little man emerged from his dream.

"You can sure do a heap of purchasin' with—thirty thousand," he said.

The minutes passed, silent and slow, while the coffee boiled; but suddenly Hub spoke up with brusque cheeriness.

"Here, quit your mooning! I got everything ready for you, pardner. Table's even set—all regular like."

He was bending over the coffeepot, his hands fidgeting with the warm metal. He reached behind him and produced an empty pint flask from a hip pocket.

"I gave the solid silver cup to you, pardner," he said with a nervous laugh, indicating the battered tin cup on the table. "This old empty flask will do me." A cackling laugh continued to emerge from his puffed lips. "First time I ever knew an *empty* flask to come in handy!"

Lem did not smile, but looked hungrily at the coffeepot. He encircled the table and appropriated the lone box that served as the sole chair of the establishment. He seated himself with his back to the bunk, and with a lively light dancing in his greedy little eyes. Scarce a yard from him was the blanketed thing.

Hub, with hands that shook, started to pour coffee into his flask.

"It ain't very hot, but it's hot enough, and it's probably goin' to taste mighty funny with that old water; but we've got good meals ahead of us—eh, pardner?"

Lem crumbled a bit of the bread.

"Say, big boy, what you goin' to do with all that money? Got it planned out?"

"Nope," Hub muttered. "Never expected to have so much."

Some of the coffee spilled on his fingers. His lips tightened with a grimace, and his eyes flew open wide, while he drew in a slow, tremulous breath through distended nostrils.

A lump of bread fell into Lem's lap. As he recovered it, he removed a cartridge from his belt. His hands went back to fidget with the bread. He watched Hub painstakingly pouring the coffee into the narrow mouth of the flask, spilling it on his fingers.

"Ah-h-h! Shoot some good, warm coffee into your system! It 'll keep you awake."

Lem jerked.

"Sure! I—I sure need some good old coffee."

He reached for the battered tin cup. It bounced from his hand, and rolled beside the box he was sitting on.

"Hell!" he grumbled.

He pushed the box back and fumbled about in the darkness for the cup. The other hand darted surely up under the blanket, returning with the outlaw's empty automatic. Lem gripped it between his knees, replaced the cup, and began to talk in a loud, jesting voice, while he expertly fingered the cartridge into the firing chamber.

Hub filled the tin cup for him with a hand that shook violently.

"Reckon I ain't built for roughin' it. Look at that old hand shake!"

He stood back with the flask in his hand, while Lem lifted the brimming cup.

"Here's to crime!" he said huskily.

Lem tilted the cup. It was pleasantly warm, not hot. He swallowed in long gulps.

Pain dawned slowly in his eyes. Then his lips twisted, skinning back from his teeth. He threw the cup to the ground. He spat and cried out hoarsely, grasping his neck in both leathery hands, kicking the table over as he sprang up.

"You put that acid—" he gasped.

He choked. He began to sob, and, sobbing, he strangled.

The big man watched him, stepping away with the flask in his hand, the expression upon his moon face one of grave interest. As the little man's agonies increased, his lips compressed, as if the sight pained him.

Then Lem Reknor reached down blindly to the sand, where the automatic had fallen. The poisoner saw and understood. With a howl, he sprang to seize the gun.

Hub had forgotten that the loosely piled gold bars lay between him and the little man. He stumbled over them. A red flash streaked out from the poisoned man's hand, and it was upon the gold that the big man fell and ceased to move.

The little man, moaning and clawing at his throat and chest, sank down there and writhed beside him.

Whereupon Jase Raider, the outlaw, pushed away the blanket and stood upon his feet.

V

"Of course," said Jase Raider modestly, gazing down at his cigarette, "if those two had been *real* men, I wouldn't be here to tell the story; and I don't say I had planned it to work out exactly that way."

I was moved. It was a much better story than I had expected to hear, and a hundred questions flew to my lips.

"You started out to prove that pirates bury their gold because—"

"Well," he interrupted reproachfully, "didn't I bury it there—because I got all the fun there was out of it? Sure I did!"

"You left the gold there?" I gasped.

"I buried it there, and I sent a letter from Mazatlan to a real nice fellow up in San Antone, who needed that ten thousand dollars reward for the purpose of marrying a mighty nice girl. The fun was—"

"Well!" I said. "Well! And what—did that little fellow die right away?"

"Oh, I reckon he must have."

The outlaw got up and stretched himself, while I stole another look at that scar.

"I got to be hittin' for home. My wife gets lonesome up there."

He whistled for his pony, and turned to give me my last glimpse of him before he swung into the ornamental Mexican saddle. His eyes were shining with their former wistful and admiring light as he gazed straight past me toward that scar in the hills, where the red tiled roofs of Acapulco were glistening in the sun.

"*That* fellow was a man!"

And I knew he wasn't referring to the fellow who had drunk the carbolic coffee.

AS I WENT SOUTH

As I went south a wind blew up
And fanned to flower the crocus cup,
And set amid the umber mold
The little stars of jonquil gold,
And roused the reeds by many a creek
Along the tawny Chesapeake.

As I went south a monochrome
Of amber lit the nation's dome;
A giant needle in the sun
Shone the great shaft of Washington.
And like a flood of shining ore
Potomac rolled from shore to shore.

As I went south the dipping day
Brightened the Old Dominion clay,
And lightened with its crimson flames
The Rappahannock and the James,
And made the spires of Richmond seem
Like the aërial spires of dream.

As I went south I had for boon
The vernal Carolinian moon
Above the pines that waved their hands
To welcome me to those fair lands
Where the dawn came with lyric mouth,
And bade me hail as I went south.

Clinton Scollard

Mary Gets a Raise

WHAT, MR. MARRIEDMAN, WOULD YOU DO IF CONFRONTED BY THIS SITUATION?

By Frank B. Elser

THE partition ran clear to the ceiling, and the door was frosted. It bore an inscription designating the room within as the private office of Richard Walbridge, vice president and sales director. Thus Mr. Walbridge and Mary were isolated, and most of the day they were alone together, for the greater part of the vice president's work was correspondence. At timed intervals known to both of them a small girl entered, bringing a departmental memorandum, or a boy came to take the outgoing mail from the upper tier of the wire basket.

On this day, which was a Thursday in November, and at this time, which was about half past two o'clock in the afternoon, the boy had just gone. His whistle had grown thin and thinner down the hall, and then had ceased altogether. He would not be back again for an hour.

Walbridge wheeled softly about in his chair and sat looking at her. Mary closed her book and yawned. It was a little bit of a yawn, and ever so naturally executed.

"Isn't there going to be any dictation this afternoon?" she asked, as she tore a piece of paper for a book mark and put it in her book.

"In a minute—I guess so."

Walbridge tapped the edges of the pile of letters on his desk, as if it were important to make them even.

"You're funny," said Mary. "You've been sitting there for nearly half an hour, fussing with those letters. I've had to laugh!"

Hardly a formal speech for a private secretary to her employer. Mary was astonished at herself.

Walbridge smiled. He watched her face, the movement of her lips, her eyes. No words exactly fitted her. Walbridge's head was full of gorgeous phrases, but none was good enough. Besides, he had never said them. He had only thought them, and that had made them nebulous, like dream phrases. The whole thing was like a dream, anyway. He a married man, and an officer of the company, and in love with his stenographer—and about to tell her of it!

No, not his stenographer. Even in his thoughts he had never applied that term to her. He had tried many pet names he was going to call her. These he had repeated away down inside, where he himself could hardly hear them, and even then he was a little fearful of the acoustics. But they all grated; they had a back spin, and he rejected them one by one. He just couldn't—yes, he could—

Out loud he had never called her Mary. It had always been "Miss Plante"—that is, until now.

He leaned toward her, made a funny little noise with his throat, and instantly regretted it. It sounded stagy and final. He would have to say something now; but Mary's voice came, carrying a tone of interruption.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Walbridge, I think we ought to get at those letters."

Walbridge got out of his chair awkwardly. He came and stood by her.

"I love you," he said suddenly.

Mary did not spring out of her chair—she simply got up. In her cheeks there was more color than usual, and wider than usual were her blue eyes. These distress signals were entirely involuntary. Mary was distressed, but she was not terribly shocked. Indeed, she was not shocked at all. She had been expecting this announcement, though not in just this way.

She faced Walbridge, feeling behind her for the curved back of her chair, which she

grasped with the fingers of both hands. Her heart was pounding; yet she was game —game and curious. She was trembling a little. She did not speak, but her look said:

"Go on!"

"I know it isn't right," Walbridge went on; "but you've got to forgive me. I've loved you since that first morning, and I've been miserable." His face grew tense. He lowered his voice. "Please understand, Mary. It would be terrible—terrible for both of us—after what's gone on in here, if they knew, if anybody should find out."

"Gone on in here! *Nothing's* gone on in here that I know of!"

Mary sharply emphasized "nothing," and the color flamed in her cheeks.

"I didn't phrase it very happily. What I meant—"

"I should say you didn't!"

"What I meant," he continued in quick defense, "was my loving you the way I have, and my not being able to do my work properly, and the whole atmosphere in here."

Mary tried to meet his gaze squarely. She felt a little ashamed of herself. He was so earnest, and such a fool!

"I haven't noticed any particular atmosphere."

Walbridge laughed for the first time.

"Yes, you have. You couldn't help noticing how I've looked at you, and how silent I've been at times."

"I thought you were just moody."

"Come on now, be honest!" he persisted. "This may sound caddish or bumptious, but haven't you, haven't you—no, I'll put it the other way. You haven't exactly tried to make yourself unattractive to me, have you, Mary?"

"Why should I?" she cried indignantly. "You're a gentleman, aren't you? I've always thought you were. I guess I still think you are."

She removed her left hand from the chair back, and rested it on the flat board contrivance pulled out from her desk. For possibly ten seconds there was silence.

"If you really love me, I'm terribly sorry—more sorry than I can tell you," she said in a placid, even tone. "Nothing could come of it—nothing good. How could there?"

For just an instant she looked up at him. Then, lowering her eyes, she pushed the board back into its slot. She did this very slowly, and kept her eyes on the operation.

Walbridge came closer to her.

"And are you mad at me for speaking as I did?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because it makes a lot of difference to me—all the difference in the world, Mary. It is everything!"

Mary's eyes were on the board again. When she made belated answer to his question, she used the same childish word that he had used.

"No, I'm not mad." She paused, raising her eyes again. "How I feel toward you doesn't make any difference, though. That shouldn't make any difference at all."

"But it does!"

His face was pleading. Mary shook her head.

"You're married, and it would all be very messy. It wouldn't be fair!"

Walbridge drew a sudden deep breath, and seized her hands. He pulled her away from the chair and took her in his arms. Half honestly she tried to shield her face. On her lips he pressed one vigorous and definite kiss. Then, like a schoolboy, he released her. He stood away from her, shaken and astonished at what he had done.

"Do you hate me now?" he asked.

Mary began fixing her hair. She moved to the frosted door and half opened it. She spoke softly over her shoulder.

"No, not exactly that."

Walbridge took an eager step forward.

"You love me, then?"

"I'll not answer that," said Mary, and went out.

II

If he is not very stupid, every man who kisses a woman can tell whether she really resents it or not. If you have had experience in such matters, this statement may be a trifle elementary; but to Richard Walbridge, who commuted and had a boy of six, and who, until the coming of Mary Plante to his office, lived for his family and his work, it was a new truth and a shining one, and it came to him with a thrill.

When Mary had gone, he sat and thought about it. He was depressed, and he was elated. He felt devilish, and he felt ashamed; but more than anything else he felt relieved. For weeks he had fidgeted in Mary's presence like a Methodist parson trapped in the front row at the Winter Garden. Now he had elected to relax and see

the show out. He had a wonderful girl, and he loved her, and she would be near him every day. It was all very charming and piquant.

He reconstructed the day of Mary's coming, three months ago. He recalled the sniffs and nudges in which the other girls indulged as she walked through the office that day, and the men's *sotto voce* chorus, which, being put to formula and translated, ran about as follows:

"Look at the pippin that Richard's got! What's come over him?"

Almost wincing in the radiance of her smiling face on that first morning, he had somewhat vaguely asked himself the same question. What *had* come over him? Was he going to keep this pretty girl—he who had always specialized in scrawny stenographers, who had always insisted that no man ought to impair his efficiency by having a pretty woman about?

Apparently he was. He found himself giving her dictation, seizing with satisfaction on the fact that, in the pauses, she did not raise her eyes and her pencil and try to look pert and intelligent—a trick which he had always associated with good-looking stenographers. When she had done his first letter, he saw that she was rapid and accurate.

"The salary to start is twenty-five dollars a week," he had said in an embarrassed sort of way. "Perhaps you know that. About lunch—the office librarian will tell you the best place near by."

When he went out, and his fellow department heads spoofed him about the attractiveness of his new secretary, he returned an astonishing reply for one so puritanical, for one who had always taken his work and his wife and himself so seriously.

"What if she *is* pretty?" he said. "She'll do her work!"

"I'll say she will!" some one remarked significantly.

Which was to be construed lightly, for, as everybody knew, Walbridge was not only a family man, but a stickler for formality.

He had launched on a pleasing theory. He was going to prove that there was nothing in these stories about propinquity. His romance, as far as women were concerned, was over. His own wife was quite pretty enough.

Now, sitting alone at his desk, with the perfume of Mary's hair still on his lips, he smiled at the incident and the remark.

"By Heaven, she has done her work!" he thought.

He set his mouth. It would be awful if the office suspected anything; but it didn't. His record for ultraconventionality was almost a guarantee of immunity.

He smiled again. Once more the devilish feeling was predominant. Mary was an extraordinary girl. He had kissed her, and every day she would be right there beside him!

Mary Plante was an extraordinary girl, principally because she was extraordinarily human. If you had heard her laugh, which was infectious and uncorseted, you would have said that she was altogether irresponsible, and a flirt, and about eighteen years old. If you had seen her smile, which was quizzical and a trifle worldly, you would have said that she was cautious and intelligent, and about twenty-four. Neither assumption would be far wrong. Her age, to be exact, was twenty-two and a half.

Unlike her earnest young employer, who became an early and zealous convert to the close style of punctuation and religiously inserted commas before and after each clause of a sentence, Mary decidedly inclined to the open style. She believed in few commas, in letters or in life. Exclamation points, dashes, and, at times, question marks appealed to her enormously. This was characteristic, for she abhorred unnecessary pauses, and adored the dramatic, the tense, the quick, and, on occasion, the baffling, but not the dead. She liked live people with a sense of humor.

Then she met Walbridge, a good-looking man of thirty-four, given to seriousness, and obsessed with the idea that no stenographer was going to disturb *him*. He might be married, but—well, was it necessary to be so apparent about it?

To Mary, taking his dictation, hearing his brusque "Good morning" and "Good night," smiling to herself when she inserted commas where she did not believe commas belonged, his state of mind was as plain as the keys on her typewriter. Being an adept at the touch system, she did not have to use her eyes. She could feel it, and it annoyed and piqued her. She did not propose to be a grain of dust for anybody.

During weeks of rigid—almost frigid—reserve on his part, she used to sit with her fingers resting on her typewriter keys and study his profile. He had an interesting face, she thought; a good chin, a good

mouth, nice ears. Too bad he was such a prude! His gray eyes didn't suggest it. Nothing about him suggested it—that is, nothing but his manner.

"Too much married," thought Mary. "He would be much nicer if he were more human."

III

LEAVING the office on this Thursday afternoon in November, her hair still a little mussed, her cheeks still burning, Mary went over the situation ruefully. Walbridge's sudden declaration of love, and his almost pathetic earnestness, had frightened her a little. It was dismaying to think that he should have skipped all the familiar and easily rebuffed preliminaries, and presented his climax first, leaving the dénouement for her to work out. She would tell him in the morning that it must never occur again.

But morning is always different, for better or for worse. When she arrived at the office, he was there ahead of her. There were flowers on her desk. Mary felt sorry for him, and touched. He was such a boy!

They worked briskly. Both were obviously self-conscious, and neither referred to the distressing episode of the evening before. Once or twice their eyes met and held. When this happened, Walbridge looked as soulful as he could, and Mary, her face coloring marvelously, would lower her glance—not, however, without first giving him a look that left him weak. They were like children.

Just before the closing hour he came and stood close beside her chair, as he had done the day before.

"No!" said Mary firmly, getting up.

His face fell like a child's.

"Not here—not now," she added with a quick smile.

In a flash she hated herself for having said it. She avoided his eyes and rushed out.

Walbridge sat gazing at the blotter on his desk—the blue blotter on which, since Mary's coming, he had made so many pencil marks. In a moment she would be back. It was Friday, pay day, and Mary always returned after going to the cashier's window.

She kept her purse in the upper left-hand drawer of her desk, with her vanity case and gloves; and every Friday afternoon she went through a certain routine. She would come to her desk, take out her purse, and unobtrusively tuck her salary into it. Then she would tear the envelope in tiny bits and drop them in the wastebasket.

This always affected Walbridge strangely. It made him want to caress her and give her things. Her twenty-five dollars seemed so little!

As the door opened, Walbridge looked up and smiled. Mary sat down at her desk. Her hands trembled just a little as she went through the familiar operation. She kept her face averted from him. The bits of the torn pay envelope fluttered down into the basket like old-fashioned stage snow. Her purse snapped metallically, and she placed it on the desk in front of her. She turned toward him.

"I'm very much obliged," she said, coloring.

Walbridge looked puzzled.

"I got a raise," said Mary. "Quite a big one—ten dollars."

Walbridge's ears got red. He felt guilty, and was on the point of disclaiming any responsibility for the sudden increase.

"I wish it was a million," he said, instead, and rather clumsily tried to take her hand.

Mary shrank back in her chair, away from him. It was all too obvious. She knew the company's conservative policy in the matter of salaries—especially stenographers' salaries. She bit her lip.

"But, Mary, I love you!"

Again he tried to take her hand.

"Don't, please!"

Mary stood up, an odd little smile on her lips. She was grateful, but she wished he hadn't got her salary raised just the day after he had kissed her.

"My God, what have I done?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Mary; "but this is the end of it. I'm sorry about yesterday. If I have led you on, I'm sorry about that, too."

She started to push open the door, but Walbridge sprang from his chair and blocked her way.

"Wait a minute!" he pleaded. "Weeks ago I spoke about an increase for you. It just happened. You mustn't think—"

"I tell you this is the end of it," repeated Mary. "It isn't the raise. It just made me think—that's all."

Her face had grown a little gray.

"No, it isn't the end!" cried Walbridge. "It's the beginning. I don't care what you say. I don't give a damn what anybody

says. I'm not going to lose you. I want you, and I'm going to have you!" He stopped and fumbled for words, his face drawn, his eyes burning. "Oh, Mary"—his voice almost broke—"please say you love me!"

To Mary, Walbridge's outburst had the sobering effect of one very drunk person on another not so drunk. A wonderfully fitting dénouement occurred to her. The telephone was going to ring. It would be Mrs. Walbridge speaking. She would announce that the little Walbridge boy had been run over.

Mary looked at the telephone. It did not ring. She looked at Walbridge. His jaw was set. There was an almost fanatical light in his eyes.

Mary gazed at him with a strange and quizzical calmness. The color came slowly back to her cheeks. When she spoke, it was with great deliberation.

"And you love me so much that your wife doesn't matter, and your boy doesn't matter, and your position doesn't matter? It's me and nothing else?"

Walbridge swallowed two or three times.

"I do," he said.

"I believe you really think you mean that. Do you?"

"Of course I do," he said stubbornly. "Why do you ask?"

Mary began drawing on her gloves. She looked up at him, eyes and lips synchronizing in a worldly smile.

"Because, if you do, something might be arranged. Everybody wants to be happy. That's all we want, isn't it?"

She spoke placidly, as if summing up after a long speech. Walbridge's jaw dropped. He moved toward her as if dazed by a blow.

Mary picked up her purse.

"Good night," she said soberly; and before he could recover himself she had gone.

Walbridge stood by the window and looked at the light patterns in the windows of the neighboring buildings.

"She's game," he muttered. "I wonder if I am? Oh, Lord, I love her so!"

IV

DR. WEININGER, a German psychologist, says in his book on "Sex and Character":

When a union has taken place between two individuals who, according to my formula, are not adapted to each other, and if later the natural complement of either appears, the inclination to desert the makeshift at once asserts itself, in accordance with the inevitable laws of nature.

Richard Walbridge had never read Weininger, but since the coming of Mary Plante to be his secretary he had been slowly evolving, for the sake of his racked conscience, an axiom something like the foregoing. To be sure, the word "desert" had never actually figured in it. When one has a wife and a child and a career, it is one thing to evolve a formula of expediency under stress and quite another to apply it in cold blood.

Saturday forenoon was a terrific strain. It would have been more of a strain if he had known that Mary had brought her traveling bag to the office that morning. It was in the women's rest room now, by the lounge.

Again their eyes met as they worked, and when this occurred it was his gaze that faltered, not hers. Mary looked glorious. She wore a new street dress, her color was higher than usual, and her eyes shone. She sat very near him as she took his dictation, but he did not speak, except in office platitudes.

The lunch hour came—for Walbridge a delicious respite, an opportunity to think. They would be alone nearly all afternoon. He would speak then. It would naturally require some discussion. He hurried out ahead of her.

When he had gone, Mary continued to sit at her typewriter. Presently she put a sheet of letter paper into the machine, and began writing. She wrote for perhaps fifteen minutes. The length of the composition did not justify this consumption of time, but her corrections and recastings did.

When she had finished, she addressed an envelope to Richard Walbridge, in longhand. She put it, with the inclosure, on his inkwell, where he would be sure to see it. Then she went into the rest room, saw that her bag was all right, and ran out for a hurried lunch.

When Walbridge, returning, walked down the hall, Mary followed within two minutes. She had her bag. She waited outside in the hall. He would be reading it now!

This is what Walbridge read:

I thought it all over last night. If you love me as you say you do—and I believe you do—I am ready to go with you. As you say, nothing else matters much. The sooner we go the better. We can make our plans after we get away.

Things could not go on as they have without the office knowing. There would be only one other

remedy. That would be for you to stop loving me, and you say you can't do that.

I brought my bag with me to the office to-day. I am planning not to go home to-night. The details I leave to you. The divorce, also, I leave to you. Personally I should love to have your little boy with us, if that could be arranged.

The frosted door swung open almost noiselessly. Mary came in and sat down at her desk, placing her bag beside her. For a moment he did not turn toward her; but she could see that his face was white.

She coughed. Walbridge swung about. He gave the bag a funny, disturbed glance. Then he turned the strangest look on her.

"Well?" Mary smiled up at him.

Walbridge stood up.

"God, I can't!" he groaned. "Forgive me, forgive me if you can. Oh, Mary, I've been a bum!"

Mary, too, had risen. She spoke half under her breath.

"No, not a bum—just a bum sport; and so have I been!"

She picked up her bag.

"Louise," she said, a few minutes later—she was addressing the office librarian—"where did you say that cleaning shop was—Rector or Liberty?"

"Liberty," said Louise.

"I want to get this cleaned," said Mary.

She opened the bag and held up a *crêpe de Chine* waist.

Walbridge sat alone, drumming his fingers on the blue blotter.

The frosted door opened, and Miss Betson, the homely little assistant cashier, came in. She was apologetic. Walbridge had always awed her; he was so formal.

"Where's Miss Plante?" she inquired.

Walbridge looked dismayed.

"I don't know. She just stepped out somewhere. Why?"

"We made a mistake yesterday," said Miss Betson. "We gave somebody ten dollars too much, and we think it was Miss Plante. I'm awfully sorry!"

Walbridge spoke with his customary precise formality.

"Mistakes are likely to happen in any office," he observed.

OH, YOU BELONG UPON THE SEA

Oh, you belong upon the sea,
  Gray fog that steals across the town,
A phantom and a mystery
  That wanders up and down.

Oh, you belong upon the sea,
  At least the sailors tell me so,
And yet to-night you drift so free
  In every street I know.

And hear! The ships are calling you!
  The fog horns in the river moan,
They wail and cry as if they knew
  You'd lose your way alone.

You blur our buildings in a mist,
  You soften outlines, dim the light,
And every lamp along the curb
  Becomes a pearl to-night.

You bring us beauty in the air
  And shroud our ugliness with veils,
Although the sea may call you back
  To ways of ships and sails.

I thank you, friend, this misty night
  For coming to my window pane
And leaving jewels in the streets
  I could not find again.

And though the ships are calling still,
  They will not welcome you, my dear;
A fog is beauty on the land
  But on the sea is fear.

Charles Divine

The House in the Hollow

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE — THE MYSTERY OF A LONELY RETREAT ON THE CALIFORNIA COAST

By Camilla Kenyon

AFTER a three days' diet of stale buns Leslie had an uncertain feeling in the knees which made her glad to drop into the chair indicated by the other woman's gesture. She reminded herself that she must not seem too eager, and tried to meet with a composed indifference the keen but curiously covert gaze that was taking her in. It had the effect of making her intensely and uncomfortably self-conscious, as it deliberately appraised her.

It was as if everything counted — her tall, slender, rather boyish build, the fair, crinkly hair that showed beneath her hat, the deeply blue eyes that tried not to be anxious as they met the odd green ones. She felt her cheeks flush a little, and an uneasy wonder filled her. Was there a smudge on her nose or a runner in her stocking, or wasn't her hat on straight? When people stared at you so, and at the same time pretended not to, it was usually for some such reason.

She was relieved when the other spoke.

"You are the Miss Kent who answered my advertisement?"

"Yes, Mrs. Deming."

"You understand that if you take the position, you will be obliged to go out of town?"

"I have not the least objection to that."

"It would mean an exceedingly quiet life. I am afraid I could promise you few opportunities of seeing your friends."

"I have no friends in California."

Leslie breathed a little quickly. This was the part of the interview which she had dreaded. Of course Mrs. Deming would want references, and she hadn't any to give —not on this edge of the continent, at any rate; but the explanation must be made. She decided to take the plunge immediately.

"My home was in the East until my father's death, a year ago, threw me on my own resources," she went on rather hurriedly. "I had enough to finish my college course, and then I took a position as companion to an old lady traveling to the Orient. On reaching San Francisco she suddenly died, leaving me—well, rather stranded. I have no near relatives. Even if I had, I would have wished, of course, to stand on my own feet; but among strangers, and without any special training, it has been difficult. I am very willing to meet any requirements you may make, to get this place."

She stopped, feeling that she had put her case badly, in admitting so freely that she was completely at the end of her rope. This Mrs. Deming, with her remote, impassive air, would probably be the very last person in the world to engage an unrecommended young woman as governess for her little girl, on no better grounds than the fact that the young woman might starve if she didn't.

Instead of rising and offering the polite dismissal which the girl's sinking heart foresaw, Mrs. Deming remained seated, her head slightly bent and her short, heavily ringed fingers meditatively tapping the table at her side.

She was a woman in the early thirties, with a full, vigorous-looking body and a handsome dark face skillfully touched up with rouge. A severely elegant gown of black crape gave length of line to her somewhat stocky figure. Smooth black hair was drawn down almost to her smooth black brows, and at her ears were heavy gold hoops in the form of twisted serpents, set with a green stone darker than jade, which repeated in a bizarre but effective fashion the green note of her eyes.

She was not beautiful—no, that was not

the word—but striking, arresting, and at the same time almost—but of course it was absurd to call her sinister. It was merely odd, that sidelong, covert way she had of watching one. Perhaps, too, that guarded look that her face had, almost as if it were a handsome mask, affected one rather disagreeably.

At this point Mrs. Deming's carefully modulated voice broke in.

"Ah, then there would be no difficulty about your going out of town, would there? How very fortunate! Mimi—not my own child, but recently adopted—is such a fragile little thing that my physician insists on an open-air life for her this winter. I have taken a house at Briones, a little place a few miles up the coast—gay enough in summer, I believe, but in winter absolutely dead. My idea is simply to vegetate—to make the most of the months I am obliged to spend there, not only for Mimi, but for myself. I want to give my own nerves the most complete rest possible—to see no company, but just to bury myself alive, so to speak. Do you think you could put up with it, Miss Kent?"

Could Leslie put up with it? What couldn't she put up with that meant a roof over her head and three meals a day? These weeks alone in San Francisco had brought her face to face with life in its grim reality, stripped of those gay illusions in which her inexperience had clothed it.

The last few days had been actually terrible. There was a depth, she had perceived, even beyond living on stale buns, and that was the depth one reached when the stale buns were gone. They were not quite gone yet, but only half a bagful remained for supper and breakfast. Her room rent was paid for the rest of the week, and she had two dollars and thirty-four cents in her purse. Beyond this slender barrier lay the void of downright hunger and desperation—unless Mrs. Deming decided that she would do.

The green eyes considered her as she replied, a little breathlessly:

"Oh, I should not mind living *very* quietly! And I like the country—so if that's the only difficulty, Mrs. Deming—"

"As to Mimi's education," the other interrupted smoothly, "that is hardly so important as her health, I think, just now. I should want her kept out of doors a great deal. As to lessons, you might arrange as you thought best."

With an air of treating the matter as settled, she mentioned the salary to be paid—a fairly liberal one—and said that she would leave for Briones, if it suited Miss Kent, the next day but one.

Leslie's head swam a little as she listened. She hadn't dreamed of it going so easily and smoothly. She remembered how she had faltered at the very door of the hotel, how an impulse had come to her even there to turn back—just why, she hadn't understood, except that she dreaded a rebuff. Yes, it must have been that, of course. It frightened her to think how near she had come to obeying that ridiculous impulse, to letting this chance escape her. Thank goodness, she hadn't!

She began to calculate how far that odd thirty-four cents would take her in a cafeteria. She would actually dine to-night; and she would have coffee to-morrow for breakfast.

She recovered herself enough to be aware that Mrs. Deming was speaking.

"You must meet your little pupil," the smooth voice was saying. "Left a childless widow, I decided that I must have something, some one, to love. It is a necessity of my nature; so I have taken this little one to bring up as my own child."

She rose, crossed to a door, opened it, and spoke in a low tone. In a moment she turned back into the room, pushing before her a little girl of about seven, with thin legs, big eyes, and a wistfully drooping mouth.

"Miss Kent, this is Mimi. Mimi, shake hands with Miss Kent, who is coming to live with us."

Mrs. Deming spoke suavely. Mimi stood still, staring from one to the other with a timidly distrustful air. The faintest pucker appeared between Mrs. Deming's brows.

"Shake hands with Miss Kent, dear," she said again, and this time the softness of her tone held a suggestion, somehow, of the velvet moss that covers granite.

Mimi walked hastily across the room and offered a small hand. Leslie took it in her firm clasp, drawing the child gently toward her.

"We'll be very good friends, shan't we, Mimi?" she asked. "And you'll try hard to like me?"

Mimi considered her earnestly. After a moment she nodded.

"All right," she agreed. Then, surpris-

ingly, she added: "It will be nice to like somebody!"

II

On the appointed day Mrs. Deming's touring car, driven by herself, with Leslie and Mimi in the tonneau, was ferried across the bay to the North Shore. Before beginning the twenty-five mile drive over mountain roads to Briones, they were to stop for luncheon at the bachelor home of a cousin of Mrs. Deming, a Mr. Condon Crosby. He painted, she explained, and had a particular talent for marines. Fortunately, she added, with one of her rare laughs, he didn't depend for a living on selling them.

Having rounded a cove, in which various small craft were lying at anchor, they stopped under a steep hill before a bungalow built almost at the water's edge. Mr. Crosby, about thirty years old, fair and rather slight, met them with an easy hospitality, greeting Mrs. Deming as "Maude," Mimi as "Brownie," and Leslie with a look suddenly intent from beneath the rather languid lids of his blue eyes.

Luncheon was waiting for them in a long, many-windowed studio, with rugs and hangings in soft, harmonious tones. The room was floored and paneled with oak, and in the great brick fireplace smoldering logs took the edge from the perennial mild chill which makes winter and summer so nearly alike on the shores of San Francisco Bay. The luncheon, served by a noiseless Japanese, was excellent.

Mr. Crosby was evidently something of a sybarite. He was also a charming and attentive host. Mrs. Deming, Leslie had already discovered, was by no means conversable, but she made an excellent listener to their host's easy, discursive talk. He must be a very favorite cousin, Leslie decided, Mrs. Deming's handsome eyes dwelt on him so continually—so devouringly, almost.

Under the reserve of her manner, Leslie began to perceive, Mrs. Deming gave a hint of intensity—as if, perhaps, she held herself in so closely because it wasn't safe to let go. Mr. Crosby's manner, on the other hand, seemed to imply that in his opinion there wasn't much in the cosmos to interest him. Over his eyes, as blue as Leslie's own, the lids drooped as if in indifference to a world that he knew too well. He had altogether the air of one who has thoroughly sounded and tested life.

This gave him, in spite of his comparative youth, a curious air of age. Gulfs of experience and sophistication seemed to yawn beyond the faint mockery of his smile.

Leslie might have been less analytical of Mr. Crosby if he hadn't so plainly let it be seen that his indifference to things in general didn't extend to her. Exactly how he showed this she couldn't have said, but she was aware of it beyond mistake.

As the meal progressed, she saw that Mrs. Deming also became aware of it. Twice or thrice Leslie caught the green eyes including herself and Crosby in a glance that swiftly veiled itself against detection. She felt a faint uneasiness—more than there seemed need for when you thought of it. Could Mrs. Deming possibly, and with such trifling cause, be jealous—about a cousin, a man obviously several years her junior? Did she dislike the idea of a governess who attracted the masculine eye?

Leslie did her best to indicate that she had attracted this particular eye from no will of her own. She pretended not to hear when Mr. Crosby spoke, and devoted her attention to Mimi; but she felt uncomfortable, and was glad when luncheon was at an end.

Leslie declined Crosby's offer of a cigarette, but Mrs. Deming accepted, and, after a low word or two which escaped the girl's ear, sank into a chair before the fire. Leslie strolled to the far end of the room, and, seating herself on the window seat, leaned upon the sill and looked through the open casement out upon the foam-feathered waters of the bay.

There was a jetty before the house, and moored to it was a good-sized motor boat, painted dark gray, and looking more serviceable than the usual pleasure craft. She was leaning out to inspect it when she heard Crosby's voice behind her.

"How do you like my view?" he asked.

"It's lovely! I suppose, when you want inspiration for a picture, you have only to look out of the window?"

"By no means. I go out on the high seas after it, like a pirate after booty. Don't you see the 'long, low, rakish craft' lying at the wharf? I'm sorry she isn't flying the Jolly Roger just now."

He leaned over her to point out the motor boat. As his shoulder brushed hers she felt, a little to her own surprise, a sharp sensation of repugnance. To cover the

suddenness with which she shifted her position, she said:

"And do you actually go right out to sea in that little boat?"

"Often. The Sea Dragon is quite seaworthy, I can tell you; and as to size, she's a match for most of the fishing boats that cruise off the Heads. If there were another hand aboard, so that we could take alternate tricks at the wheel, I could go as far as I pleased, so long as the weather wasn't too heavy."

"Then why not take somebody along?"

"Oh, the charm of the thing is the solitude. Of course, if I could absolutely pick my company—"

He had changed his position, too, so that his face was still close to hers. From beneath his drooping lids a significant look flashed suddenly forth. To her annoyance, she felt her cheeks glow.

"There's a risk in picking seagoing company ashore, isn't there?" she said lightly, ignoring his glance. "Personally, I think there ought to be a board of examiners to license people to go yachting. One hopeless landlubber, like me, can spoil a whole party."

"You a landlubber? Never! I was just wishing I could paint you at the wheel of the Sea Dragon, the wind whipping your hair while you sang a deep-sea chanty. I'd call it 'The Viking's Daughter.'"

"But you couldn't paint the chanty," she objected, still with the lightness which seemed her best defense against the increasing intimacy of his tone.

"I'd rather paint the lips it came from," he said in a caressing tone, with a movement which brought him closer.

Only their own voices, his discreetly lowered, broke the silence of the room. Opposite Mrs. Deming, who was still silently puffing cigarettes before the fire, sat the equally silent Mimi, her thin legs sticking straight out before her, her owlish gaze on the pair at the window.

During luncheon the child had hardly opened her mouth except to put food into it. Her air was watchful, timid, and darkly speculative, especially when she looked at her adopted mother. For Leslie she showed a shy and furtive liking; but Mrs. Deming evidently hadn't the knack with children that attracts them. Indeed, she took hardly any notice of this child whom she had chosen to fill the emptiness of her widowed life.

She didn't look at Mimi now, or speak to her. The handsome green eyes were staring into the fire, and her manner was one of strained and listening attention. As Crosby's murmur, indistinguishable as to words, reached her through the silence of the room, she rose abruptly, threw her cigarette into the embers, and spoke in a voice harshly unlike her usual smooth tones.

"Well, Condon, your house and your food and your fire are delightful, and so of course is your society—to any one who's favored with it. I'm sorry to ask Miss Kent to give them all up so soon; but I'm afraid I must. Katya can't start dinner till we get there, because we've got it with us in the car."

Leslie had risen quickly. Crosby followed suit.

"Go now? Nonsense, Maude! How long will it take you to make twenty-five miles, even allowing for the road? You must think you're driving an ox team!"

"No—only dealing with a donkey."

The retort came from her with a sudden leap, like the swift spring of an animal seeking blood. There was a momentary silence. Leslie had a shocked feeling, as if she had unwittingly laid hands on a live wire. Then Crosby said smoothly:

"Too bad you have to go, Maude! It was good of you to stop. Sorry I can't explain to you more about my painting methods, Miss Kent. It's nice to have a listener—so few people care to talk about anything but personalities."

Between Mrs. Deming's queer violence and the suave mendacity of their host the girl had a suddenly giddy feeling, as if the floor were slipping beneath her feet. Recovering, she advanced.

"I'm quite ready to go, Mrs. Deming. Come, Mimi—we'll get our hats on."

She seized the child's hand and hurried her away. Ten minutes later Crosby escorted them to the car. What had passed between him and his cousin in the interval Leslie did not know, but Mrs. Deming's manner was again equable, even permeated with a certain warmth.

"Well, it was very nice of you all to drop in on a poor lone bachelor," he said smilingly. "I'll return the compliment some time. The Sea Dragon would bring me to Briones in a couple of hours."

At this suggestion Mrs. Deming's face most inhospitably darkened.

"Oh, you'd find us a very dull house-

hold! Mimi is to be the motive for everything, you know. Miss Kent's time will be quite taken up with her; and as for myself, I am going to let down frightfully—wear bungalow aprons, get as sunburned as possible, and make myself an object of horror to any man whatsoever. No, I think you had better *not* come, Condon."

Leslie, glancing from one to the other, saw Crosby smile faintly, while from beneath his languid eyelids shone a mocking gleam.

"Of course, if that's the case, Maude, I'll bid you a long good-by."

He bent and lightly kissed her cheek, into which the color flooded darkly. When he had closed the car door on Mrs. Deming, he held out his hand to Leslie, who had been delayed in entering the tonneau by Mimi's scrambling in before her.

"Good-by, Miss Kent. I'm sorry Maude won't let me come to Briones."

For a second too long he retained her fingers, looking into her eyes with a level gaze, so nearly were they matched in height. He was good-looking, certainly, though his features were almost too symmetrical and clear-cut for a man. His nonchalant ease, too, had a certain charm; but behind the charm was a something that repelled—something to which Leslie couldn't give a name.

That smile, which meant mockery, and not mirth; those languid lids, behind which those sudden darting glances seemed to lie in ambush; that odd sense of an old, old man wearing the mask of youth—all these seemed like signals which, in spite of himself, he must show to his own betrayal. Leslie drew her hand from his and stepped quickly into the car, with an involuntary sigh of relief. She was perfectly willing never to see Mr. Condon Crosby, his delightful bungalow, or the far-going Sea Dragon, again.

III

BEFORE the coming of the gringo, a few adobe houses crouched on the shore of a little and almost landlocked bay ten miles up the coast from the entrance to the great bay of San Francisco. On the mesa above roamed herds of gaunt Spanish cattle, the wealth of the land's easy-going masters.

Then came '49, and men of other speech and ways. Though the little village and bay—lagoon, rather—of Briones hardly felt the change at first, presently small trading schooners began to slip through the narrow passage between the isolated hill around which the village curves, and the mile-long sand spit thrusting out from the farther shore. They brought merchandise and they took away lumber, stripping the ridge at the head of the lagoon and behind the mesa of the best of its fir and redwood, to help in the mushroom growth of the city a dozen miles away.

Some of the Yankee traders, and a wandering sailor or two, remained in the sleepy little village; and soon, league by league, the great ranchos slipped through the fingers of their Spanish owners. The Spanish girls, with languorous dark eyes and delicate feet, intermarried with the newcomers, and their descendants to the fourth generation may be seen in Briones to-day, olive-skinned and dark-eyed, with names that smack of Cape Cod. They live, not in adobe houses, but in neat frame cottages smothered in roses, with dooryards opening on the single winding street.

Something of the dreamy languor and slothful ease of Spanish times still hangs about the place. Sheltered under the lee of the point, which some two miles to the westward ends in the cruel spurs of Brigantine Reef, the village turns its face to the southern sun, touched only by soft south winds and a surf that falls lightly on the sand; but on the great bleak mesa above it the northwest gales blow fiercely, and in all the miles of its desolate expanse only cattle wander—sleek dairy cattle now, instead of the Spaniards' lean herds bred only for their hides and tallow.

Page Hamlin had been familiar with the little place for years, and he knew that it is at its best when the summer people who have found it out and infest it year by year are gone, and the village returns to its sleepy quiet. Autumn there is a golden dream. Winter is full of soft sunshine, alternating with magnificent storms that whip the surf over the sand spit. Spring is a burst of blossoms that turns the surface of the mesa into an exquisite mosaic.

Moreover, in the off season living is cheap, and a young author with his second novel to write on the rather slender proceeds of the first could hardly do better than settle down in one of the brown bungalows that climb the road above the village—bungalows belonging to the summer people, and standing empty after their seasonal departure. Hamlin had secured the

smallest of them, near the bottom of the ascent, and only three minutes' walk from the little hotel, where you got excellent Italian cooking.

The power schooner Jennie Tobin, plying twice a week between Briones and the city, carried him, with his suit cases, his typewriter, and quantities of stationery, to the little wharf on the lagoon, and the wheelbarrow of Chicken Charley, local odd-job man, transported these effects from the wharf to the brown bungalow. Hamlin intended to divide his days between his work and the outdoor life needful to keep him in condition. One could swim, tramp, row, fish, shoot waterfowl on the lagoon, dig clams, and hunt for mushrooms on the mesa, sure that the Italian *chef* of the hotel—the husband of its half Spanish proprietor—would do justice to the trophies of the chase.

One got plenty of human nature, too—a richly local phase of it—as one hung about the single store at stage time, and listened to the gossip. Page was already on familiar terms with Mr. Smithers, who ran the combination store and post office, and one of the first bits of news he heard from him was that the gulch house was rented.

"To a party named Deming," Mr. Smithers pursued. "Widow lady, I believe, though whether grass or sod I ain't inquired. A real good-looker, but not what you'd call sociable. Gets through with business short and snappy, and gets out. Been here about a week—her and a kid and a young lady. She'd took the house a while before that, though, and left her help in charge—a sort of Roossian party, or something like that. I should think 'twould be real lonesome for a passel of women up there, and so I says to Mrs. Deming; but she give me to understand 'twas what she'd took the place for—didn't want to be bothered with folks. I ain't seen the kid or the young lady, except as they've drove through town once or twice. Struck me the girl was considerable of a peach—one o' them real dizzy blondes. Mebbe you'll git to know 'em, spite o' Mrs. D. not carin' for company. You can see the widow herself in here any day about stage time. She comes for the mail and grub for the house and all —never asks us to deliver anything."

Hamlin felt a mild annoyance. He did not want the house in the gulch to be rented. Its isolation and loneliness had always appealed to him, and he had smoked many a pipe in its neglected garden, listening to the wind in the tree tops and the variable mutter of the sea at the foot of the cliffs.

To reach it you followed the hill road past the empty summer bungalows, nearly to the top. Then you turned off into a gulch, or hollow, which indented the surface of the mesa like the print of a giant's thumb, close to the edge of the cliffs. Dark clumps of pine and cypress nearly filled it, hiding the house at the farther end, where the land sloped up to the level of the mesa. The house was further sheltered by a windbreak of close-set pine and eucalyptus, planted along three sides of its acre or two of ground. Beyond this inclosure lay the mesa, stretching up the coast for miles, and ending at last in a jumble of heathy hills.

It was, as Mr. Smithers had remarked, a lonesome place for a "passel of women," but its loneliness held no element of danger. Still, one would have imagined that this Mrs. Deming and the unknown young lady would have preferred to make their winter quarters in one of the brown bungalows, with their splendid outlook on the sea, and their greater accessibility and convenience. Perhaps it was a question of economy. The gulch house had probably gone cheap.

The day after Hamlin's first conversation with Mr. Smithers, the latter pointed out to him a woman who was receiving some mail at the post-office window.

"That's her," he said. "Party that's rented the gulch house, you know. Mrs. Maude Deming—that's the way her mail comes. Ain't been any yet for the young lady, though, so I ain't able to give you her name. This party's quite a looker, ain't she? I mean she has a real smart, slicked up kind of air about her. And them earrings—kind of classy, ain't they? Looks like mebbe she don't aim to stay a widow long!"

Hamlin, who was standing with Mr. Smithers on the other side of the ill lighted country store, was in a position to stare quite frankly at the subject of these remarks, without risk of being caught at it. She was a woman in the thirties, not tall, but with a vigorous, lithe, yet somewhat full figure. Her plain dark dress and cape were well made and correct.

Her face, as she turned from the window, bringing it into view, was handsome, yet for some reason he found it unattractive. Was it the expression, so singularly

reserved, cold, ambiguous—he couldn't decide on the word—or the slightly eerie effect of the greenish eyes under strong black eyebrows? Or was it the earrings that matched the eyes so oddly, and seemed so much out of place with the rest of her costume?

Hamlin didn't know, but he did know quite well that he would never try to overcome Mrs. Deming's reluctance to be bothered with "folks." There was at least this bond between them, he reflected humorously—that he didn't want to be bothered with folks, either.

Several times, walking on the mesa, he saw in the distance the figures of a little girl and a tall young woman, and concluded that they were the other members of the Deming household. They were wandering rather aimlessly, he thought. He wondered if the tall girl didn't find it pretty dull here. With increasing interest he looked forward to meeting her in the village some day. Even at long range there was a grace about her movements that made itself felt.

For a time the encounter he anticipated didn't occur. For a week the girl remained only a distant vision, intriguing his thoughts with the piquancy of the unknown.

That he should finally stumble upon her somewhere was inevitable. On an afternoon when a low tide had left the reef for an hour naked above the sea, he was returning along the beach with a pailful of rock clams, toilsomely extracted from their habitat in the dripping black ledges. Rounding an angle of the cliff, he came suddenly upon the pair who had so often engaged his attention. They were seated on the sand, the child sobbing, with her head in the other's lap.

Hamlin seized his opportunity. Having set down his pail, he stood before her with his pick on his shoulder and his cap in his hand. At his question, she lifted a face at sight of which he thanked the fates that had befriended him. It was nothing, she explained—Mimi had cut her foot slightly on a clam shell, and was much more frightened than hurt. It was the voice, he mentally noted, that should go with such a face, but all too often didn't.

Meanwhile, kneeling beside them, he gravely inspected the foot, met with friendly ease the scared, round-eyed stare of the little girl, produced and applied some surgeon's plaster to the cut, and strapped on the little sandal. Then, having suggested that the rapidly rising tide would shortly make this bit of beach untenable, he helped them both to their feet and fell into step beside them with all the naturalness of long acquaintance.

He had a talent for swiftly and effortlessly making friends, and never had it served him better. In all his life he had not cared so much to exercise it as now, when he looked at the lovely face of the girl at his side.

"May I introduce myself? My name is Page Hamlin."

"Oh!" Her eyes widened. "Not the—*not* the Page Hamlin who wrote 'Grass of the Field'?"

There was a little thrill of excitement in her voice. He flushed with pleasure. Such recognition was still new to him.

"Very nice of you to know about it!"

"I've read it—and loved it. My name is Leslie Kent."

His heart warmed at the almost awed interest of her gaze; but he was shy of the topic of himself.

"You are living, I believe, in the gulch house?"

"Is that what they call it?"

"The village seems to, generally. It ought to have a more romantic name, I think—at least it always seemed a romantic kind of place to me. I used to like to prowl about the garden, and to lie on my back in the grass, listening to the wind in the tree tops. Down near the apple tree a solitary daffodil comes up every spring, all by itself. And you should see the rose vine that covers the tank house when it's in bloom. It's so red it seems to drip blood!"

As they kept step side by side, he was aware through a sixth sense of something that faintly stirred or disturbed her. He often had these flashes of insight — only they were usually so bafflingly vague. Now, for instance, he wasn't sure of anything—even that he hadn't imagined what he seemed to perceive.

"I should have thought, though," he went on, "that for all its charm the place would be a little dreary, when it came to living in it. I hope you don't find it so?"

He heard her draw her breath in quickly.

"Oh, yes, it is dreary!" she exclaimed. "You don't know how dreary!"

To his astonishment, her voice broke a little. As he glanced at her with sudden keenness, he saw for the first time some-

thing more than the beauty of her face—a shadow of trouble or perplexity that seemed to cloud its fresh youth.

"I'm sorry," he said thoughtfully. "Couldn't you persuade your friend—"

"Not my friend," she made quick disclaimer. "Mrs. Deming is my employer. I am Mimi's governess."

He felt a sudden satisfaction, almost relief, which revealed to him how much greater than he had realized was his distaste for the lady of the green earrings. What there was about her to arouse distaste he couldn't have said; but though indefinable, it was there, and it seemed to him that the same sentiment animated Miss Kent's swift disavowal of Mrs. Deming's friendship. How could it be otherwise? The gulf between the two was wide as the sea.

"Mimi is her own daughter?"

He didn't know why he asked this, except that the little girl clinging to Miss Kent's hand seemed to belong on her side of the abyss.

"No—an adopted child."

"Ah! Well, I was going to say, can't you persuade Mrs. Deming to transfer herself to one of the bungalows on the hill road? They are ever so much more cheerful, and, while the village is hardly a social center, you wouldn't be quite so much cut off from humanity."

Again he saw on her face that shadow of trouble.

"Mrs. Deming isn't very anxious for society, I think. She came here, I believe, on purpose to be quiet. She does not care to have her household make acquaintances."

She paused abruptly, and he knew she was letting him understand that their encounter had transgressed an unwritten law.

"Mrs. Deming is free to indulge her misanthropic notions, I suppose," he answered, as she turned her eyes from his searching look; "but I don't think that you need share them. She could hardly expect you to go on, week in and week out, and not speak a word to any one but the youngster and herself. She might as well ask you to maroon yourself at once on a desert island. Now, we both wander about a good deal on the beach and mesa, and if we *should* happen to meet again—well, I warn you I shan't pretend you are invisible, or submit without a struggle if you pretend I am!"

He laughed, but in a fashion that only half disguised his seriousness. There was no reason that he could see why Miss Kent should be so cut off from her kind, or why he should lose her pleasant companionship.

It was absurd to be strict about conventions here. One talked to everybody as a matter of course—particularly, if one had the chance, to Miss Kent. She was not only beautiful in a fresh, frank, almost boyish fashion, but there was a touching, puzzled wistfulness about her which convinced Hamlin that she was not happy. In contrast to the darkly enigmatic lady of the earrings, her face was an open book, and he read in it trouble and perplexity. A friend would count to her—he felt it in her quick responsiveness—and he meant to be that friend.

Where the tiny stream that drained the hollow had cut its way down to the beach, a steep trail ascended. The girl paused.

"Good-by. This is our way, you know. Thank you for your kindness."

"But I shall see you again? Perhaps to-morrow?"

She looked at him with doubting, troubled eyes. As clearly as if she had spoken, he understood her.

"I don't know," she said at length, at the same time turning from him up the path. "That must be—just as it happens, I think."

Just as it happened! Well, he would make it his business to see that it happened as it should. What she meant, of course, was that Mrs. Deming might learn of their acquaintance, and forbid it. Why she should forbid it, why she wanted to keep her household isolated, was a question to which Hamlin found no answer. It was the mere caprice, probably, of a domineering woman; and yet whatever lay behind the unrevealing face of the lady of the green earrings, one would hardly have guessed that it was caprice.

Be Mrs. Deming's motives what they might, it seemed a pretty sure guess that to pursue his acquaintance with her governess he would have to observe a certain caution. Well, he would observe it, for he by no means intended that this walk on the beach with the girl who had read and loved "Grass of the Field" should be his last.

IV

HAMLIN had not been mistaken in his guess that Leslie Kent was something less than happy. While Mimi paddled her bare feet in the foam at the edge of the returning tide, Leslie had been sitting on the sand,

struggling against the depression that weighed her down. Something which had happened that very day had brought to a head the vague sense of uneasiness and strangeness that had haunted her since her arrival at the gulch house. Questions that she had managed to keep in the background now thrust themselves forward, demanding to be answered.

Why, in the first place, had Mrs. Deming come to Briones? On Mimi's account, as she had said? Leslie, her eyes on the sand that filtered through her restless fingers, shook her head. No, Mimi had had nothing to do with it.

And there, when you thought of it, was another puzzle. Why had Mrs. Deming taken the child—from an orphan asylum, as Leslie now knew—when she cared absolutely nothing about her? For that Mrs. Deming felt in reality no interest at all in this daughter of her adoption Leslie was sure. Now and then, as if recollecting herself, she would attempt the rôle of the fond parent—would call Mimi to her, kiss the child, express anxiety about wet feet and colds. Mimi responded to these demonstrations with her solemn, owlish stare, and with a shrinking that Leslie understood. How *she* would have shrunk, she thought with a little shiver of dislike, if Mrs. Deming had kissed her!

Mimi understood, quite as well as the onlooker, that behind these gestures of her so-called mother lay a vast indifference. She escaped from them when she could, and clung more and more to Leslie, with a pathetic intensity of devotion.

No, Mimi didn't explain their being here; she merely complicated the problem.

Was it Mrs. Deming herself who, as she had said, had wanted to rest her nerves? But she was strong, strong—you felt in her presence the impact of an immense vitality. She didn't need rest, and she didn't like the country. Except for her daily trips to the village, she rarely left the grounds of the gulch house. Indeed, she spent her time mostly in the seclusion of her own room, or reading novels on the porch. Twice she had taken them motoring some miles back into the country—joyless excursions these, in spite of the quiet beauty of the landscape, for Leslie in the tonneau, behind a driver who never turned her head or spoke.

She was a curiously silent woman. Leslie might have thought her a lethargic one, if she had not two or three times seen flashes of the fire within. The cause of her silence might be boredom. One had the feeling that both the place and her companions utterly and profoundly bored her, afflicted her with a sort of somber exasperation. Then why were they here? And there you were back at the beginning.

Of course, there was the question of money. Was it to economize that Mrs. Deming had come to Briones?

Leslie had gleaned, from her employer's reticence, almost nothing of her past or of her circumstances. Her clothes, her rings, her car, all showed easy means. The furniture of the house was a conglomeration of shabby old stuff brought up from the village, where some one had had a sale, and new and handsome articles of Mrs. Deming's own. There was, indeed, an effect of luxury and expensiveness about her. She showed a catlike fondness for the creature comforts. Still, she must live far more cheaply in Briones than in the city.

On the other hand, if she wanted to economize, why engage a governess? Why not let Mimi play by herself about the garden, or, if she must be educated, send her to the village school?

True, Mrs. Deming so much objected to Mimi mixing with the village people that Leslie was forbidden to take her down into the little place at all. As Mimi was on her hands from morning to night, this made it impossible for Leslie herself to go, and she found the restriction more trying as the seclusion and silence of the gulch house wore on her.

Silence—how the place seemed steeped in it! The only sounds were melancholy ones—the unresting murmur of the sea below the cliffs, the rustle and creak of boughs, the strange moaning note of the wind on the mesa. Indoors it was more silent still. What little talk there was at meals had a strange air of the unreal about it. It came merely from the lips of the two women who sat facing each other, their minds busy with hidden thoughts.

Padding around the table on heavy yet softly stepping feet would come Katya, the maid, turning on her mistress a gaze of doglike cringing, or a dully hostile look on Leslie and the child. She was a peasant of some remote type of eastern Europe. She had little eyes above prominent cheek bones. Eyes, skin, and straight, straggling hair were all of a depressing tint, like baked

clay. A primitive, alien being, she made you think of endless, barren steppes and Tatar hordes and stifling, smoky huts.

Life, when you looked at Katya, took on strange and ugly aspects—savage, harsh, destructive, yet led in chains by its own brutish desires and fears. She had great hands and bowed, massive shoulders. You could imagine her some day suddenly running berserk, tearing and maiming and killing, her huge hands bloody; but to Mrs. Deming she crouched like a dog.

Yes, Mrs. Deming and Katya understood each other—and in their understanding there was no room for Leslie or the child. Except for Mimi's dependent, clinging love, the girl felt lonelier than if she had been actually alone, because of that something which seemed, on the part of the two other women, to thrust her away, to exclude her with cold hostility from a bond they shared.

Then why was she here? Why did Mrs. Deming, who so obviously didn't like her, keep her? Why did she keep the neglected little Mimi? And why did she herself stay where you felt that high tide of passionate life in her chafing like a flooded river against its shores?

These questions Leslie, sitting on the sand, asked herself with intensity. Yet until this morning she had more or less refrained from asking them—had thrust them, as best she could, from her mind. There had seemed a disloyalty in such speculations about the woman whose bread she was eating. Mrs. Deming had always been at least negatively courteous—and then today she had been rude.

It was all over a thing so absurdly small—it seemed smaller and smaller to Leslie as she thought of it — to have been the cause of that pallid, deadly anger—deadly, although controlled so swiftly. She herself was the object of it; and yet she had done nothing—nothing but unlock the door of the tank house and go in.

It stood, the tank house, at the back of the inclosure on the side toward the sea, fitted snugly into the angle of the windbreak. It was three stories high, with the tank inclosed in the top story, and the fan rising from the roof. The fan was locked and the tank, presumably, dry, for the gulch house was now connected with the village water system.

The immense rose vine mentioned by Mr. Hamlin nearly covered the two sides of the tower toward the garden. On the other two sides the windbreak hugged it closely, though the trees had been topped to prevent interference with the fan. In the top story, looking toward the sea, there was a window, which, as Leslie had noticed from the beach, was quite clear of foliage. It had occurred to her that the view from this window must be very wide and beautiful, and she promised herself that she would some day ascend the tower and enjoy it.

The air that morning, after a night of rain, had been peculiarly clear, and Leslie had proposed to Mimi that they should go to the top of the tank house and see how many ships they could count upon the ocean. Mrs. Deming had left a few moments before for the village, and Katya was putting out the washing on the other side of the house. Their absence from the scene did not affect Leslie, except as it gave her in general a greater sense of freedom. She did not dream of any objection being made to her entering the tank house.

She did not dream of it even when she found that the door was locked and the key missing. It was locked, no doubt, against possible prowling village boys, for Mrs. Deming might have something stored there. However, in the absence of the key she would have given up the project, but that the spectacle of Mimi's silent, tragic disappointment—the look that came so easily to her face, as if a faintly reviving trust in life had again been blighted — stimulated her ingenuity.

"Let's try the key of the kitchen door," she suggested.

The shadow lifted from the small face, and the thin legs flew.

The key turned in the lock, and they stepped into a dim and dusty chamber, from which a steep stair, open between the treads, led to a trap in the floor above. In the center of the floor of this room was the well cover, and above it a rusty mechanism which had once, with the power supplied by the windmill, carried the water from the well to the tank at the top of the tower.

Leslie was explaining this to the child, when a shadow darkened the door. She glanced up to find Mrs. Deming looking in at them.

In the dimness of the place, with the light blocked by her figure, her face was at first a mere blur; but her silence had a quality which sent through Leslie an unexpected thrill of apprehension. It had the

breathless stillness of the silence that presages storm.

"Will you come out—at once?"

Her employer's voice, usually so smooth, had an edge which carried Leslie back to that moment at the Crosby bungalow, when it had broken in upon her conversation with their host. She obeyed in silence, the child clinging to her hand. Mrs. Deming stood aside to let them pass, then closed and locked the door, withdrawing the key from the lock.

Consumed with angry humiliation, Leslie waited, with Mimi's small cold fingers in her own. One couldn't exactly walk off at this stage of the episode, unless one were ready to walk completely and permanently off the scene. Almost she felt that she was ready—and then she remembered, with a chill about her heart, what it had meant to her to get this place, and what it would mean to lose it. And there was the child, the poor little unloved child, pressing tremblingly against her—

When she had dropped the key into her hand bag and viciously snapped the bag shut, Mrs. Deming faced them. She was lividly pale, and there were spasmodic twitchings at the corners of her lips, which drew back a little, rather horribly, from her teeth.

"You thought I had gone—I *had* gone—but I forgot my purse and came back. You didn't think of that, did you—that I might come back? No, you had only waited till I was out of sight—to break into my desk after this key. You never thought about my coming back!"

She seemed to force the words out through her clenched teeth, from her constricted throat.

"Mrs. Deming!" Was the woman mad? "I don't know what you are talking of. How can you accuse me of such a thing as breaking into your desk? I didn't know you had a desk. I've never seen it, nor have I entered your room at all."

"This key—where did you get this key?" The woman's chest heaved as if she had been running. She breathed pantingly through expanded nostrils. "Where did you get this key?" she repeated with effort.

"It is the key of the kitchen door. Of course I did not dream of any objection to our going in. I am very sorry, but much more sorry that you can have thought possible—what you accuse me of!"

For a space they faced each other silently. Leslie, her head up, young, tall, defiant, towered over the rigid figure that confronted her. Anger had returned upon her in a flood. To be accused of such a thing—to be rated like this over such a trifle! The woman's rage, for such a cause, was like insanity. Yes, she looked a madwoman as she stood there, with that livid face, that tense body, those furious eyes.

Yet already a change was coming over her — an infinitely subtle change, but it made all the difference between fierce passion and recovered self-control—a self-control that seemed to grope for a way out of an untenable position.

"I—I see there has been a mistake—no doubt unfortunate; but of course, having left the key in my desk—"

"Then it is there still, Mrs. Deming," said the girl coldly.

"No doubt; but doesn't it rather require explaining that you should have opened a locked door—even with another key?"

By delicate degrees her manner became that of one who asks, unwillingly, a difficult but necessary question.

"I should think the explanation might be taken for granted. Of course it did not occur to me that the door was locked against any of your household. I thought I should like to see the view from the top, and as the kitchen door key fitted the lock, I didn't hesitate to use it."

"Ah, then I was right in the thought that flashed instantly into my head—you *did* mean to take my little Mimi up those break-neck ladders! The first flight is bad enough, but above there is just a loose, rickety ladder. It was the fright the idea gave me that made me speak so—so hastily, I'm afraid. A strong, vigorous girl like you doesn't realize, but my frail little Mimi is much too timid for such a climb. *I* was timid, and frail, and it makes me understand. No, no — you must promise me, Miss Kent, never to dream of such a thing! But about this lock—if other keys will fit it—the fact is I have some things—rather valuable—stored on the second floor, and of course we can't tell who might get in. I'll put a padlock on the door at once. Nothing less will make me feel safe. Well, don't think of this again. If I seemed rude, I apologize, I am sure. You must put it down simply to my fright—because, you know, this little girl is all I have now!"

She caught at the little girl, who clung defensively to Leslie, so that the latter

thought, with a flash of hysterical amusement, of Solomon and the contending mothers; but Mrs. Deming successfully hauled the child to her and bestowed on her a kiss. Then she abruptly turned and walked toward the house. A minute or two after entering it she emerged again, and went rapidly down the path to the gate.

It was this scene that Leslie had been living over as she sat on the sand, on the day which was to be made even more memorable by her encounter with Page Hamlin.

She had seen her employer since, of course. They had sat opposite each other at luncheon, and Mrs. Deming had evidently put herself out a little to smooth things over; but let outward appearances be what they might, in reality things could never be smoothed over. Not only would the girl always remember the face she had seen, for once, without its mask, but Mrs. Deming would know that she remembered it. She would know, too, that perpetually in Leslie's thoughts must be the question why the tank house was forbidden ground.

The girl pondered it now until in her wearied mind the sharp edges of it began to blur. She reflected that, after all, it probably wasn't forbidden in any mysterious sense, and that Mrs. Deming's anger had arisen from her conviction that Leslie must have robbed her desk. Horrible to be suspected of such a thing! Horrible to live with a woman who could suspect her! Would any one harbor the suspicion who wasn't capable of such a thing herself?

Who was Mrs. Deming, anyhow? What was there about her which so subtly, indescribably, but surely, made her different from any woman Leslie had ever known.

All her perceptions of this, latent until now, or deliberately ignored, crowded in on the girl's mind. Mrs. Deming was—was—what was she? Something she was that made one shrink, as Mimi shrank; but it was something for which Leslie found no name.

She had not yet found it, when Mimi cut her foot and came limping and crying to be comforted. And then around the angle of the cliff had come a tall young man—tall even as compared with her—with a pick over his shoulder and a pail swinging from his hand. And this young man, by one of those bright chances which occasionally redeem the drabness of life, had turned out to be the author of "Grass of the Field," a book that she had read with such delight.

He had expressed his wish to see her again, and she had not dared to promise, because of Mrs. Deming. True, Mrs. Deming had made no ruling that covered a case like this; but Leslie felt a deep inner certainty that her acquaintance with Mr. Hamlin could continue only if Mrs. Deming didn't know of it. Twenty-four hours earlier she would have felt herself bound to speak of the encounter, but she felt so no longer.

Already the padlock had appeared on the tank house door, and the glitter of its new brass affected her like an affront. The padlock wasn't put there against prowlers—it was put there against her. Mrs. Deming didn't trust her, and flaunted her distrust in Leslie's face. She had accused the girl of breaking into her desk, and now she was afraid to let her see what was stored in the tank house. To a woman like this nothing was owing beyond the strict letter of the service that she paid for.

But if Leslie did not speak of Mr. Hamlin, would Mimi? Before this possibility the girl was helpless. Whatever her duty to Mrs. Deming, her duty to this little trusting virgin soul was clear. She couldn't teach the child secretiveness. If Mimi, in one of her rare lapses into speech in Mrs. Deming's presence, was moved to speak of Hamlin, why, speak she must.

This evening, at least, she had not done so, until they were alone upstairs in their communicating rooms. Then she began to babble of him, but in a fashion which made Leslie hopeful that the child, too, felt him to belong to that happier world into which they escaped when they left the gulch house, and which must never be spoken of to their companions in that gloomy place, lest it might vanish at their frown.

V

Leslie and the child were walking on the mesa, under a sky softly clouded, and melting at the horizon into the gray of the still sea. Hamlin, who had been lying on the grass at the edge of the cliff, where he could watch both beach and mesa, waited until they were well away from the dark line of the windbreak inclosing the gulch house. Then he rose and took his way across the wide green level, so as to intersect theirs.

As he came up with them, he smiled engagingly and removed his hat, but his air was tentative.

"If you don't want me," it seemed to say, "you have only to hint it—but I hope you do want me!"

Leslie didn't try to pretend otherwise. The sight of his friendly face was too welcome. She greeted him with frank cordiality, and even Mimi vouchsafed him a shy smile.

His eyes brightened at the welcome. He felt himself admitted to a securer footing than that of a mere chance acquaintance of the day before.

"Well, you see we are bound to cross each other's paths—unless we make a cast-iron agreement to take our walks at different times!" he said teasingly.

"Mimi and I take walks at all times. Persons who don't care to meet us will simply have to give up walking," she returned in his own vein.

"But couldn't we arrange," he suggested, "that you should have the beach to walk on, say, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and the mesa Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, while I should have them on the other days? Then I think we could avoid each other."

They laughed, more for the sheer joy of living than at his nonsense.

"But how about Sundays?" she inquired.

"Sundays? Oh, on Sundays we might meet to arrange about not meeting the rest of the week."

"I'll think it over. The trouble would be that on the days when I was supposed to walk on the mesa I should feel irresistibly compelled to walk on the beach."

"Exactly the same here," he agreed. "If we each obeyed our compulsions, it would work out quite as well, don't you see?"

"Shall we begin now?" she proposed, her blue eyes mischievous. "For instance, this is Tuesday, so the beach is yours and the mesa mine; but because of those irresistible compulsions—"

"The only irresistible compulsion I feel at present," he interrupted, "is to remain in your society. So unless you feel irresistibly moved to forbid me—"

Her eyes laughed into his. After all, what did it matter—Mrs. Deming's rages, the surliness of Katya, the gloom of the gulch house? What did it matter out here where the larks were singing, and the soft wind blew across the mesa, and the murmur of the sea lulled the ear? Lonely—when she knew Page Hamlin, whom she had never even dreamed of meeting, but who had written "Grass of the Field"—or so it had seemed when she read it—specially for *her?*

Strolling together over the rough, short grass, they talked easily and intimately. She told him a little of what his book had meant to her, and he, his heart unlocked by the magic key of understanding, spoke of the new one which he intended to be so much better. It was a bigger idea, by far, and of course one's technique was bound to advance, if one kept one's artistic conscience and didn't write down to the mob.

The difficulty, of course, was to hold on to one's ideals while the rewards went to the fellows who did write down. The publisher's first statement of sales had been rather a blow between the eyes, but the reviews—at least, the ones that counted—had made up. However, one couldn't live on reviews. There was still a chance of the movies wanting "Grass of the Field." There had even been two or three nibbles. He was standing out stiffly for his price, though, and so far none of them had come up to it. Fortunately, out-of-season living in Briones was cheap.

He broke off, delightful as it was to talk of his work under the encouragement of Leslie's eager interest; but what he really wanted to talk of, even more, was herself. Yesterday's shadow was gone from her face to-day. Her gayety had an exhilarated, holiday quality that charmed him. He thought he understood it, and decided that his surmise of yesterday was confirmed, when she told him, responding to a rather cunning lead he gave her, that Mrs. Deming had driven down to the city that morning in her car.

"Ah!" So, with the cat away, the mouse was daring to enjoy herself! "She has relatives there, I suppose?"

"Not that I know of. She said she was going on business—I don't know what."

"But she *has* relatives, of course—connections whom you've met or heard of?"

"I have met her cousin, a Mr. Condon Crosby."

Leslie went on to describe the artist's delightful bungalow on the bay shore.

"An old bach, I suppose?"

"No—a young one," she laughed.

He felt a moment's keen distaste for the unknown Mr. Condon Crosby. It lent brusqueness to his next question.

"Who is this Mrs. Deming, anyway?"

She flushed a little.

"I—I'm afraid I can't tell you so very much about her. She wanted a teacher for Mimi—and I wanted a position."

He glanced at her sharply.

"But surely," he said, after a brief silence, "before coming up here you found out something about the woman?"

She looked at him rather helplessly.

"Well, I couldn't exactly ask her for references, you know, when she accepted me without any."

"Without any! You mean you had none?"

She repeated what she had told Mrs. Deming, but with some filling in of that meager outline, for his sympathy tempted her to confidences. She indulged in no self-pity, yet he perceived that her father's sudden death had torn out the whole foundation of a life until then all happiness and ease.

She had been left, at twenty-one, without family, home, or money, and she had gone bravely to work, as best she could, to make her own way. She let Hamlin understand, in excuse for her rashness about Mrs. Deming, what her plight had been at that time, and what a priceless boon it had seemed when that lady had taken her into her employ.

"So you see I couldn't exactly ask her for her pedigree," she ended, with a rather forced lightness.

"No, I suppose not; but no doubt you explained your own circumstances to her fully?"

"She knew I was without friends here. I suppose I ought to be grateful to her for taking me so entirely on trust."

Hamlin wondered. Mrs. Deming, in the glimpses he had had of her, hardly struck him as a person to take any one or anything on trust. Of course, as regarded Miss Kent, it wasn't a question of trust. You looked at her, and that was enough; but was it just possible that the girl's lack of references or friends, far from being a drawback, had been the very thing for which Mrs. Deming had chosen her?

He caught himself up sharply. What nonsense! What was he imagining about the lady of the green earrings? Could anything be more quiet, more sedate, more respectable, than her establishment at the gulch house? Let him get his feet back on the earth!

"Well," he said cheerfully, "it's great luck — for me — that you came to Briones, anyway. *I* came because I wanted quiet, and cheapness; but after a week of it I realize that I've badly needed some one to talk things over with. When the story won't march, as R. L. S. says, there's just one of two things to do—go for a solitary hike, preferably at night, or find some sympathetic soul to mull it over with. Last night, for instance, I was prowling all over the mesa. Here we are where we can look down on the reef. Let's rest awhile."

The tide was only a little past the turn, and the reef was still buried under a tumult of roaring, yeasty waters. They sat upon the grass and talked, while the waves gradually retreated and the glistening black ledges began to appear. Mimi chased butterflies, started a jack rabbit, discovered a tiny deserted nest in a bush.

Sometimes the talk lagged, and they sat in a companionable silence. From beneath his drawn-down hat brim his eyes dwelt upon her face, framed in bright hair a little ruffled by the wind. How tall and how divinely fair she was, like Tennyson's daughter of the gods! A little out of date, too, her type, now that the movies set the fashion; and particularly out of date her lack of make-up, the ingenuous candor of her gaze.

A little jaded, a little sated he was already with the hectic life of the city. How impossible to realize that it was only about ten miles down the coast! How fresh and quiet and innocent all this was—and how lovely *she* was!

For the second time that afternoon he caught himself up. What was he thinking of? Certainly not of falling in love? Why, he couldn't marry on sales like those of "Grass of the Field." He must take care. He mustn't let himself go.

Almost as if aware of his thoughts, she stirred and rose.

"I think Mimi and I must be on our way," she said, looking down on him with a wistful smile, as if she felt the shadow of the gulch house creeping up on her again.

He did not try to prolong the hour, which seemed to have come to its appointed end.

"Let's drop down to the beach and walk home that way," he suggested, rising also.

They descended the cliff by a path that Hamlin knew. As they followed along the strip of damp, firm sand at the edge of the retreating tide, he said suddenly:

"I have never seen you in the village.

You miss a lot in not getting to know it. It's the quaintest, queerest little place!"

He had been thinking of things he would like to show her there, of people he would like to have her meet. She would appreciate it all, he knew.

She turned to him eyes in which again he caught that faint look of trouble.

"Mimi and I never go to the village," she said with an evasive air.

"But why?"

"Mrs. Deming—well, it seems a little absurd, but she has asked me not to take Mimi there."

"For what possible reason?"

"I don't know. She objects to her mixing with the village people, I suppose."

"Of all the plain darned foolishness! But she doesn't forbid *your* going?"

"I suppose not; but as I always have Mimi with me, it amounts to the same thing."

"Isn't it possible," he hazarded, "that the objection is really to your going, and that Mimi is the excuse?"

In the troubled eyes she turned to him he read that this idea, fantastic as it seemed, had occurred to her before.

"I don't think it can be possible," she replied. "Why should she object to my going? It has seemed the quietest little place when we have driven through."

"It is the quietest little place; but there are people there—a few—and she seems not to wish you to know any. Would she approve, for instance, of your knowing me?"

He meant, as he said it, to clear away whatever of ambiguity might lie between them. He wanted her confidence wholly.

She flushed quickly.

"I—don't think she would," she replied in a low voice.

"It looks, doesn't it"—he drove his point home—"as if, having found you without friends, she wishes to keep you so?"

"It—it sounds too impossible, when you put it that way; but certainly she prefers that we should all live very quietly. She—she said she was coming up here to rest her nerves, and I suppose she thinks strangers would upset them. I—I hope you'll understand, Mr. Hamlin, that it's a—a difficult situation."

"I'll do nothing to complicate it, of course," he assured her, but his tone was sober.

Again that handsome, sophisticated face had arisen before his fancy, with the odd green eyes and the odd green earrings. It was not the face of a woman loving solitude, or the quiet of Briones in winter, or the gloom of the gulch house. It was a face that asked of life its deepest, most intoxicating draft, its wildest music, all its pomps and vanities and fleshpots—a face in which his eyes read much to which the eyes of the girl beside him would be blind.

He felt it well to drop this phase of the subject. Glancing up, he saw above the margin of the cliff, some distance ahead, a dark mass of foliage, and above that the fan of a windmill.

"By the way," he asked, "is it that husky servant of yours that sleeps in the tank house?"

Leslie turned a startled face—rather oddly startled, it seemed to him.

"In the tank house? No one sleeps in the tank house. What makes you ask?"

"Because I saw a light there late last night."

"A light?" She stared incredulously.

"As I've told you, when the story comes to a sticking point I usually find a walk, especially a night walk, the best way to clear up my ideas. Last night I went out about ten o'clock, hiked across the mesa for a mile or two, and dropped to the beach for the home stretch, just as we have done today. It was a lovely night, and the sea so calm that it hardly rippled on the sand. I was strolling along, watching the lights of passing vessels—there was one big steamer, and another that I took for a lumber schooner, probably, and a smaller craft near shore — I dare say a fishing boat — when somewhere about here I happened to look up, and over the edge of the mesa I saw a light shining. I couldn't think what it was, at first, but a few yards farther on I made out. See, we have struck the place now. It's the only point on the beach, I think, from which you can see more than just the fan of the windmill; but right here you get a view of the upper window of the tank house, where the trees have been trimmed back. Well, the light was shining out from that window. I could dimly make out the fan of the mill above it, black against the stars. I was a good deal surprised, for I should have supposed the tank would fill up most of the space there on the top floor. Then I concluded that it must have been torn out, and the room fixed up for use, and I went home thinking what a dandy place it would be to write in."

She was silent for a minute.

"I can't understand it," she said finally. "No one sleeps there. Mrs. Deming has some things stored on the second floor, and keeps the door locked. I opened it the other day with another key, and she was—greatly annoyed. She has a padlock on it now."

He raised his eyebrows. Between the lines of this bald narrative he read something like the truth.

"Ah, a tantrum!" he reflected, and put it down in his mind to the credit of the lady with the green earrings.

"Well, the plot thickens, doesn't it?" he said aloud. "A locked door, a supposedly empty tank house, and a light that shines out from it when all Briones, except a vagabond like myself, is decently in bed. It sounds deliciously mysterious; but I dare say it is really disgustingly simple."

His tone was jesting, but he kept an observant eye upon Leslie, noting the puzzled frown that faintly puckered her smooth forehead. With his last words her face cleared a little.

"Simple—of course. Why, it *must* be!" Her eyes asked him to agree with this. "No doubt among the things Mrs. Deming keeps in there was something that she needed for her trip to-day. Her room is on the first floor, and Mimi and I are upstairs, so she might easily have gone out without my hearing her. There's nothing mysterious about it."

"Of course not," he agreed.

Mimi ran toward them, to show a stranded sea urchin that she had found on the beach. Then she found a piece of coal, and this brought from Hamlin the story of the great coal ship from England that was wrecked on the reef years and years ago. Until lately it had kept the people for miles around supplied with coal, which washed up after every storm from the hold of the sunken ship.

This brought them to the foot of the trail up the cliff. Here Leslie held out her hand.

"Good-by."

"Good-by—*hasta mañana?*"

"I suppose so."

They exchanged a smile which conveyed a deeper understanding than their words. Leslie and the child climbed the trail, and Hamlin turned away.

As soon as the pair were out of sight, he retraced his steps to the point on the beach from which the tank house was visible. There was a small but perhaps significant discrepancy between his story and the explanation that Leslie had offered. He had refrained from telling her of it; but when he reached the spot from which the tank house could be seen, he found he was right in thinking that the window of the second story, where Mrs. Deming's things were supposed to be stored, was completely hidden by the foliage of the windbreak. The light had been in the room above.

VI

OCTOBER had dreamed itself goldenly away, and November, soft, mild, a little rainy now and then, had taken its place.

About two weeks after Mrs. Deming's first trip to San Francisco she went to town again, leaving, as before, immediately after an early breakfast. About the middle of the morning Leslie and Mimi established themselves on the porch where the mistress of the gulch house usually sat, as a convenient place for doing lessons.

The formal part of Mimi's education was usually struggled through in the morning, leaving the afternoon free for rambles on the beach and mesa, where she picked up much more valuable lore. Often Mr. Hamlin was with them, and he had taken to bringing along chapters of the new book and reading them to Leslie. She couldn't help understanding that these meetings were deliberately planned on his part, and the knowledge shot a little thread of gold through the dull warp of her days.

Forty-eight hours of rain had kept Mimi and herself indoors, but to-day the sun shone, and she was looking forward to a long afternoon in the open, when almost certainly somebody would come swinging along the beach to join them, and there would be laughter and talk. Then the latest chapter of the book would be produced, and they would settle down, he and she, to read and discuss.

She was thinking of this, rather than of the page of blurred and sprawling alphabets over which she was poring with Mimi, when she heard the click of the gate. She raised her eyes, and for a moment she could only imagine that the figure coming up the walk was that which had been in her thoughts.

Then she saw that the visitor was not so tall and broad, that his clothes and walk and air were different. Somehow his figure was a familiar one; but he was smiling up

at her from the foot of the porch steps before she recognized Condon Crosby.

"Good morning! You see I've come, in spite of Maude's refusal to invite me."

She rose, furious with herself for the flushing of her cheeks. Of all days, how had it chanced that he had come to-day?

"Oh—good morning, Mr. Crosby. I'm so sorry—Mrs. Deming has gone to the city."

He displayed the lifted brows of astonishment, but the eyes beneath them held a mocking gleam.

"What frightfully bad luck!" he cried gayly. "To have come all this way from cousinly devotion, and then to miss her! Well, unless you have a heart of stone, you'll be very, very nice to me, to compensate. You haven't a heart of stone, have you, Miss Kent?" he inquired, as he ascended the steps and seated himself on the topmost.

Leslie hesitated, then sat down. There wasn't the least doubt of what he meant—he had come *because* Mrs. Deming was away. Somehow, by letter probably—or had she dropped in on him on her way to town?—he had known of her absence and made his plans accordingly. Yet, since he was here, he must be treated as a guest. Leslie couldn't dismiss him.

Tranquilly aware of this, he lounged comfortably on the step, looking up at her with eyes that appraised and approved without disguise. His silence had so intimate an air that she broke in upon it.

"How did you come—by water?"

"In the good ship Sea Dragon. She's tied up now at a ridiculous little wharf down below. Various yokels gathered to explain to me that I should have waited for high tide. It seems there's a legend that no boat can get through the channel—or perhaps it's over the bar outside—but at the top of the flood. I'm sorry to disturb so venerable a tradition, but the Dragon made it very nicely on a half tide."

"For a newcomer you did well. I understand the channel is difficult to find."

"One of those legends invented to exalt local prowess and scare off strangers. I did it at first try."

"Then you have never been to Briones before?"

His expressive eyebrows once more registered astonishment.

"And not dropped in on my dear cousin?"

"Your cousin hasn't always been here."

"That's so. Come to think of it, it was I who discovered this retreat for her—through a newspaper advertisement. I was able to tell her that, viewed from offshore, the place seemed a rather attractive little hole; and a hole is what you want, of course, if the idea is to bury yourself."

"I sometimes wonder why she wanted to do that. Mimi and I have a wonderful time prowling about the country here, but Mrs. Deming seldom leaves the house."

On a sudden, daring impulse Leslie had uttered the question that so haunted her. Crosby gave her a keen glance, but when he replied he spoke in his usual easy tone.

"Oh, Maude has always had spells of wanting to play country mouse for a month or two — like Marie Antoinette with her dairy, you know. Of course she doesn't really like it—you're right there; but for the time she thinks she does, and that answers just as well, you know. Then suddenly she chucks it all, goes back to town, and dives into things up to her neck. I'll bet she's been about as lively as a clam ever since you've been here!"

"Well, not to seem disrespectful—"

"I'm right, eh? Of course I am! Only, having renounced the world — for the 'steenth time—she thinks she has to stick it out awhile. It's just the same way with —a certain little person who shall be nameless. I could have told Maude she didn't like small fry; but she got it into her head that her maternal instinct needed developing, or satisfying, or something, and nothing would hold her back from doing what I dare say she regretted the next day. All the same, she's a good enough sport not to own up she's been stung; so she gets out of it by delegating her maternal joys to some one else. That's where you come in, I expect!"

He laughed, but his eyes did not leave Leslie's face. Was he watching the effect of what he said?

It had an effect, undeniably; for it explained Mrs. Deming so easily, so simply. If, instead of a mysteriously taciturn, enigmatical woman, she were merely a bored one! You had it, then, in a nutshell.

With this key to Mrs. Deming's silences, she seemed transparent as glass. Even her temper appeared less unreasonable. To have saddled yourself with a child you didn't want, and couldn't, in decency, drop as precipitately as you had picked her up,

might disturb a more even disposition. It was, for Leslie, like a gleam of reassuring daylight through a murky cloud. Why, she had been imagining things, manufacturing ghosts out of Monday's washing on the line!

Even her feeling toward Crosby underwent a change. She couldn't like him, exactly, but she could at least stop absurdly disliking him.

"Mimi, run and tell Katya we have company for luncheon," she commanded gayly. "You needn't mention fatted calves, because she wouldn't know what you meant, and also because it mightn't seem quite kind to Mr. Crosby; but implore her at least to let us have more than warmed over chowder, which is the best we could have hoped for, for ourselves."

By the time they were seated at table, Leslie's spirits had begun to flag a little. She kept wondering whether Mr. Crosby meant to go directly after luncheon. If he didn't, she would lose the afternoon to which she had looked forward, and she didn't want to lose it. Every moment she knew better how very, very much she didn't want to lose it!

And then Mr. Crosby was making it difficult for her to go on being friendly, by that air of his which gave an undercurrent of unwelcome meaning to everything he said. His eyes, insolent under their languid lids, pursued her—it was pursuit, no less. They told her that he approved—but it was an approval that filled her with an angry humiliation faintly tinged with fear.

Besides, there was Katya. Leslie had never succeeded in making friends with her, in banishing the hostility from the dull, small eyes. To-day, while the strange, sullen creature served the meal, the girl caught once and again a glance that chilled her, it was so filled with suspicion and ill will.

She understood it, of course. She knew perfectly well that Katya was angry for the same reason that Mrs. Deming had been angry, that day in the studio. She was watching, fiercely, suspiciously, every move of Crosby, every glance of Leslie, in the interest of her absent mistress. She would tell—who could say what absurd story she mightn't tell?

Crosby was either oblivious of all this, or indifferent to it. His air grew more intimate, his laughing glances held a bolder admiration. Leslie seemed to herself to be thrusting him back with all her frightened strength, while she sat opposite him almost in silence, trying to hide her discomfort, her awareness of his meaning and of Katya's savage watchfulness, behind a mask of indifference.

Luncheon over, Mr. Crosby looked at his watch. The girl's heart gave a joyous bound. He was going, and the afternoon was still before her! But he only said:

"Flood tide—no chance of bumping on the bar. Come along, and we'll have a little run up the coast!"

Her refusal was so emphatic that she tried to soften it by murmuring something about Mimi—Mrs. Deming wouldn't want the child to go on the water, she was sure.

"Mimi? Who mentioned Mimi?" he asked coolly.

"Do you imagine I'd go without her?"

"Why not?"

"I never go anywhere without her. We're absolutely a sort of Siamese twins."

"Then let me separate you. I'll do it bloodlessly."

She shook her head.

"Don't ask me to desert my post. I'm a perfect boy-on-the-burning-deck when it comes to duty."

"Duty? Abominable word! Drop it from your vocabulary, if you expect to get anything out of life. In the mean time I'll engage to make it all right with Maude about the young person. Katya can look after her."

Leslie was aware of a sudden fatigue, as if she had been too long resisting the relentless pressure of his will on hers. How coldly, mercilessly purposeful he was—enjoying the pursuit the more because she fled!

She changed her tactics suddenly.

"All right—I mean about going; but I can't leave Mimi. We'll both go."

"Suit yourself, of course," he returned sulkily. "Bring the kid along; but don't blame me if there's a case of *mal de mer*."

"Don't blame me if there are two cases," she said with a faint smile.

The Sea Dragon, outwardly a weather-worn gray, like the fishing boats that sometimes hovered offshore, but inwardly trim and shipshape, was bobbing at the wharf on the lagoon. They reached it, not by way of the village, but by passing under the bluff that overhung the channel.

The lagoon, girdled by hills and dotted with tiny islands, lay quiet as a lake. A mile-long arm of shining sand walled it

from the sea, and on the outer edge of this the surf was rolling. In spite of herself, Leslie felt a certain zest in the adventure.

"And we go right out there—right into the breakers?" she asked.

His avid glance took note of her wide, bright eyes, her warm, flushed cheeks, her bare throat turned to cream by sun and wind.

"Right out. If we were bigger, the rollers might bump us on the bar a bit; but they won't bother the Sea Dragon."

He did mysterious things to the machinery. The boat, released from its moorings, shot away, heading for the narrow channel between the sand spit and the cliff. They slipped through, and the white waves leaped at them. Foam stung their faces, and a sudden sweep of wind, salt and keen, whipped loose a long strand of the girl's bright hair.

Straight on through the smother of foam, the long lift of the rollers. Then the open water hissed before their bows. The exhilaration of it sent her blood racing.

"Oh, glorious! And you can have this every day—whenever you like! How wonderful! Oh, I should think it would inspire you to paint and *paint!*"

"Oh, if one *could* paint it," he replied, gesturing widely.

"Of course, one could get it only by bits —a phase of it, a mood—"

Leslie turned to him as she spoke, and met his eyes, fixed not upon the sea, but upon her. She was beautiful, they told her, with the splendid blond beauty of the north, of a sea king's daughter. Her sweater, scarf, and little hat were blue. Her bright hair caught the sun, her lips and cheeks glowed in the stinging wind. Her tall, supple body seemed made for free adventuring by field and sea. Life, youth, vitality radiated from her. Pale little Mimi seemed like a thing of mist beside her vivid beauty; yet, as she met his look, she put out a hand suddenly to the child — not protectingly, but as if seeking protection.

At her gesture, so unconsciously significant, he averted his gaze and stared ahead upon their course.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"Oh, up the coast a little."

"Shall we pass the reef?"

"Close. I like to dare the hungry, ravening thing. It seems to rage when I come too near, and I think I hear it shouting, 'Look out, I'll get you yet!'"

"I hope not this time," she shivered.

"I hope not any time," he laughed.

Over the reef, in a madness of leaping foam, roared the flood tide. The thrust of the long array of saw-tooth ledges, continuing that of the point behind it, is southwest, so that it shatters like a breakwater the force of the seas that roll upon the beaches near Briones. On the ocean side the whole might of the Pacific seems to spend itself.

Crosby kept the Sea Dragon just clear of the churning froth that marks the outmost fringe of hidden rocks. The air was filled with spray and thunderous sound, and alive with the wings of gulls that hovered above the tumult, answering it with their raucous crying.

They passed the reef and came into the heavier swell of the open sea. The Sea Dragon skimmed it lightly, and drove on, her course parallel with the unbroken wall of coast cliffs. The miles dropped behind them.

"Shall we go much farther?" Leslie asked presently.

The first thrill of the adventure was past. What bore upon her now was their complete isolation, her utter dependence upon him, her helplessness in his hands.

From beneath drooped lids his glance considered her.

"Well, why not? You are such a good sailor, it's enough to tempt a man to keep on, and on, and on!"

He gave an intimate, meaning smile.

"Oh, yes, on and on—until we're hungry!" she scoffed, but her clasp of the child's hand grew closer.

"Hungry? We are provisioned for twenty-four hours, at least. We could put in somewhere—"

"We'll put in at Briones, please! Mimi and I have an unfinished spelling lesson on our consciences."

"I don't know which is more absurd, the lesson or the conscience. What is a girl like you throwing her life away for, anyhow?"

"You talk as if I were in the act of leaping overboard. Instead of throwing my life away, I am doing my best to preserve it by honest toil."

"It amounts to the same thing. Why, child, you're not living at all—don't you know it?"

He leaned toward her, putting a hand for a moment upon hers.

She withdrew her own quickly.

" Perhaps not—people have such different ideas of what living means. Besides, unless you conclude to send the Sea Dragon to the bottom, I have probably a good deal of time ahead of me."

" Yes, but youth, youth! It's precious, girl, and you're wasting it. Don't wait for —to-morrow and regrets."

" To-morrow's regrets," she laughed, determinedly obtuse, " will be mostly caused by sunburn, I expect. Still, I shall think to-day was worth it."

He shrugged, as if tired of the effort to get behind her defenses. The Sea Dragon described a sweeping curve and turned her bows toward home.

The run back was rather silent. Crosby took no pains to conceal his feeling that he had been cheated—that she hadn't played up. If he could have guessed, she thought, how cheated she felt—of that afternoon to which she had looked forward, because, of course, she was so anxious to hear about the progress of the book. To be admitted behind the scenes, to witness the mysteries of creation, almost to share in them, was so high and wonderful a privilege, when the book was like Page Hamlin's!

Suddenly she turned to Crosby.

" You are so different from—some one I know—who is writing a book. He can hardly talk or think of anything else; but you have never mentioned your work once."

" My work?" For an instant he frowned, as if at a loss for her meaning. " Oh!" His face cleared. " My painting? Well, I seldom do talk of it, you know, unless with the people who—understand."

" And you assume I couldn't?"

" How can I suppose you understand art, when you don't understand the most important art of all—the art of living?"

His look, at once bold and subtle, invited her to take him up on this; but she retreated into silence.

" By the way," he added after a moment, rather suddenly, " this writing person—who is he, if you don't mind telling?"

Under the keenness of his look she realized her blunder. She stammered a little.

" He—he—well, it's a sort of secret. I don't think I ought to mention names."

Crosby looked at her harder.

" I thought you had no friends in San Francisco?"

She recovered herself.

" Oh, I was there almost two months, you know!" she said innocently, and caught her breath with the narrowness of her escape.

They slipped over the bar and through the channel, and came alongside the wharf. When they had climbed the ladder, and stood among the crates and butter boxes, she turned to him with a certain firmness, extending her hand.

" Good-by," she said significantly.

" Good-by? Aren't you going to ask me to dinner?"

" In Mrs. Deming's house? I couldn't presume to. I leave the giving of invitations to her, and she—refused you one, you know. Besides, Mimi and I have to work hard to-night to make up for our holiday. I have to earn my salary, you know."

" Shan't I walk up the hill with you? It's getting toward dusk."

" No, thanks. We're used to wandering about everywhere. We've had a splendid time—it has been wonderful. Thanks, and good-by again. It's such a pity you missed Mrs. Deming!"

She flung it over her shoulder as she retreated, in a tone of laughing irony. It had come to her suddenly that she wanted him to understand how perfectly *she* had understood. For all his cleverness, this must go down in his accounts as a day wasted. His returns from it had been exactly nothing.

VII

IGNORING Mrs. Deming's edict for once, Leslie returned to the gulch house by way of the village and the hill road. In case she were to meet Page Hamlin, she preferred that it should be where Crosby, as he put forth in the Sea Dragon, could not witness the encounter, as he would if it occurred on the beach.

As the road brought them in view of the sea, she saw the motor boat issue from the lagoon, and, having passed the breakers, turn and speed southward under the shadow of the great cliffs that line the curving shore. A little farther on, where the lane into the hollow forked from the road, she found Hamlin sitting on the fence.

He dropped down and came toward her, but there was a shadow of constraint upon their greeting.

" I needn't ask where you've been. From the window of my bungalow I saw you coming into port just now," he said a little stiffly.

" Yes—Mrs. Deming's cousin turned up

in her absence, and we had to entertain him as well as we could."

For an awkwardly long moment they were silent. He hadn't, of course, the least right to be angry, or she to assume that he was.

"I—I had been hoping to hear how the book got on," she said at last.

"I had been hoping to tell you," he unsmilingly replied, meticulously aiming at a pebble with a stick he carried.

"It was disappointing to miss it."

His face cleared a little, and he left the pebble undisturbed.

"Well, at least I don't have to go, as I was afraid I would, without seeing you," he said.

"Go?"

At the note in her voice the last of his reserve fell from him.

"There's an Eastern editor, a big fellow, in San Francisco just now, who wants to talk about the new book. He has an idea he might use it as a serial. More than that, there's another movie nibble at 'Grass of the Field'; so in going to the city I may possibly kill two birds with one stone—or miss them both, of course. Anyway, I'm off in the morning."

"Of course I'm very glad for you," she said in a low voice.

"You know it's not for any length of time that I'm going. It will all be decided in a few days, probably, and then I'll be back. If the book is to be serialized, I shall need your advice more than ever."

She smiled with trembling lips.

"I shall hope and hope and hope for you, of course."

"Will you?" He checked himself rather suddenly. Then, after a brief pause, he went on: "*I* shall hope and hope—to get back. I'm footsore already, just thinking of the pavements. And by the way—"

"Well?"

"I wondered whether you were any nearer to solving the mystery of the tank house?"

He spoke lightly, but with a certain purposefulness behind his half jesting air. Leslie looked up quickly.

"No," she said.

"Because I saw the light there again the other night."

"The other night?"

"Night before last, to be exact. It is not in the room where Mrs. Deming keeps her things. It's in the room above—the tank room. That is still the tank room, too. Smithers, down at the store, who knows everything, tells me the tank has never been torn out."

"But what could any one be doing there?"

"That's the question. Anyway, night before last, when it cleared for a while after the rain, I came out for exercise after a long spell of work on the book. The mesa being wet under foot, I kept to the beach; and when I came to the place where the tank house shows, there was the light. Well, I walked up the beach quite a distance, and then I sat down on a stranded log and thought. The more I thought, the more I couldn't make out what anybody would be doing in that tank house in the middle of the night. After I got tired of thinking, I hiked back again. The light had disappeared; but when I got down near where your trail turns up the cliff, I—well—"

"You what?"

"I got another surprise. I saw ahead of me, in the starlight, somebody coming up the beach toward me."

"Somebody?"

"A woman. I was more or less in the shadow of the cliff, where I couldn't have been seen. I stopped short, in the surprise of it, for I have never before met any one on the beach at night, and I felt sure that no one ever prowled there but myself. Well, when I made out that it was a woman, and that she was turning in toward the cliff, as if she meant to go up the path, I don't know why I did it exactly, but I just stepped up close to some driftwood that somebody had piled there, and kept quiet. She was within six feet of me when she turned up the trail. I could swear I recognized her, and it was Mrs. Deming."

"Mrs. Deming! You are sure?"

"Quite sure. I suppose she was merely out for exercise, as I was," he added, but his tone lacked conviction.

"I can't imagine what she could have been doing on the beach. I have never known her to go down there, even by daylight. That night we had all retired early, as usual. Are you certain that it was Mrs. Deming?"

"If not Mrs. Deming, who was it? No woman from the village would have had a reason for going up that trail. Besides, it *was* Mrs. Deming. Height, build, walk, everything was right."

"I can't understand it; but the thing must have some explanation—a perfectly simple one, I'm sure."

"Yes, I suppose so. Well, good-by. Think of me, won't you? If things go right, I—well, I'll be in the biggest hurry ever to get back here and tell you!"

"I shall be wanting awfully to hear," she replied, her voice trembling.

"Good-by, then!"

He released her hand and turned away. If he didn't go, and quickly, he would be saying things he had no right to say, until he knew how his affairs were going to turn out. When he read the letters that the stage had brought that noon, his first thought was that Leslie Kent must hear this great news—that all his expectancy was worth while only as he could share it with her. It was for her, he had suddenly realized, that he wanted success.

Then the sharp stab of jealousy that the sight of her with Crosby gave him had taught him what it would mean to lose her. Yet he wouldn't speak now—not until success was really within his grasp. It meant only a few days of waiting, most likely. He would be back within a week, he thought, and then, if the fates had been propitious, he could offer her a home.

Only a few days! Why, then, did he feel this strange uneasiness? What, after all, did it matter if Mrs. Deming made unexplained visits by night to the tank house, and took unexplained walks on the beach? What was there in this that endangered Leslie?

He didn't fancy the woman, certainly, and he disliked to have Leslie in her company and subject to her moods; but still he had no reason to suppose that the girl was anything but safe beneath her roof. The worst thing that threatened her there, one would think, was a vast and fathomless boredom.

He insisted on this to himself while he made his preparations for departure. Early next morning, as the Jenny Tobin chugged down the coast, he saw the dark clump of trees that marked the site of the hollow fade from view. Again he assured himself that he would find her leading the same tranquil, monotonous life there when he returned. And still that faint uneasiness persisted.

VIII

WITH Page Hamlin gone, Leslie understood for the first time what their almost daily meetings, the sense of his strong and friendly presence close at hand, had meant to her. With this withdrawn, she felt herself engulfed by a loneliness that was almost fear. What she feared she did not know, and she tried to shake off the vague, haunting dread that seemed to have neither cause nor name.

If Crosby's sketch of his cousin's character and motives had brought her a momentary reassurance, Page Hamlin's account of the light in the tank house and the figure he had met on the beach had banished it again. Yet, when she resolutely faced the facts, there seemed nothing in them, after all, which was more than puzzling.

For instance, Mrs. Deming did not sleep well. She had mentioned this in explanation of having taken a room on the first floor for her own. The least sound disturbed her, she said, and it was necessary for her to be as far as possible from the others. Perhaps, then, it was sleeplessness that had driven her to the beach; but had it driven her to the top of the tank house also? Or was it some one else, some one unknown and unreckoned with, who was in the habit of resorting there at night, for reasons unimaginable?

This point at least Leslie resolved to clear up, and she laid her plans accordingly.

Meanwhile, late the next day, Mrs. Deming returned. For some time she was closeted with Katya, and Leslie, listening to the murmur of voices from the room below, knew that they talked of Crosby and herself. When she met Mrs. Deming at dinner, the lady of the green earrings was outwardly the same composed and distant person as before; but inwardly there was a change, of which Leslie was every moment more aware. Once, twice, she looked up suddenly, to meet the gaze of the handsome green eyes across the table—cruel, catlike eyes, with something in them that seemed to hide, and lurk, and threaten—an ambushed something that bided its time and fed its eager hate with the promise of a glut to come.

The impression, or fancy, whatever it was and however generated, hung over Leslie's dreams at night and haunted her the next day. As often as she encountered Mrs. Deming it gained strength, until her feeling of a hostility, of an invisible, silent menace that surrounded her, grew suffocating.

Better to have the woman rage at her, better the white, drawn face and twitching

lips that had confronted her before, than this terrible unspoken enmity. It was horrible, like a poison gas that hung about one, against which nothing availed—a veritable miasma of hate, clouding the sun, its darkness lit by flickering corpse lights.

In this mood action of any kind seemed a relief, and she rejoiced when night came and she could put her plan into execution. She waited until Mimi was asleep and the house quiet. Then she put on knickers and a heavy sweater, hid her fair hair under a cap, and opened her window softly.

Close to the sill spread the broad, strong bough of an oak. Leslie had measured the distance by daylight, and now she swung herself out upon it without fear, working easily down to the main trunk, whence there was a drop of only about four feet to the ground, broken by a seat that encircled the tree.

It was but a step to the side gate. She slipped through it noiselessly, and was out upon the mesa.

At once she seemed lost in a gulf of night and silence—silence only deepened by the low, continual mutter of the sea. A cool flutter of wind touched her cheek, died away, came again caressingly. The smell of earth and grass, damped by dew and sea mist, was in her nostrils. Far above a few faint stars were visible, but on the earth darkness lay like a black pool.

She moved cautiously along under the windbreak toward the margin of the cliff, dimly discerning, as she neared it, the featureless gulf which lay beyond, and from which arose the broken mutter of the sea. Turning, she looked up at the tank house, which was almost above her, and in which, by day, she could have seen the window that was visible from the beach. Now she saw only a vague black mass, above which the fan of the mill stood out grotesquely against the stars. No light was there, no indication of a human presence.

For a long time she waited, while the penetrating chill of the sea air crept slowly into her blood. Far out in the distance showed a faint, motionless ray from the lightship anchored off the end of the reef. The voice of the tide grew louder as it crept in upon the shore, and the wheeling stars marched grandly across the great spaces of the sky; but no light shone from the window of the tank house. Leslie wearied at last, and returned to the house as she had left it, by the ladderlike bough of the oak.

For three nights following this she maintained her watch. The tank house remained dark, and she began to wonder how long her vigil must go on. Mimi had caught cold, and her sleep was so restless and feverish that Leslie dreaded to leave her, for fear that if the child woke and Leslie, from her bed in the communicating room, did not respond to her call, she would be frightened and scream, rousing Katya on the other side of the partition.

On the fourth night Mimi was so long in falling asleep that it was nearing eleven when Leslie made her exit. She had achieved her cautious descent of the oak, when a slight sound reached her ear. By this time she was familiar with the ceaseless light rustlings and murmurs that fill the night, and they no longer startled her; but at this sound she was instantly alert.

Crouching, she crept into the shadow of the porch and across the front of the house. As she reached the angle, she heard at a little distance the infinitely gentle creak of a closing door, and then a faint click of metal. It was the door of the tank house, and the click of the padlock as it snapped shut. She dropped behind a hydrangea bush, and waited breathlessly.

Soft steps were coming along the path that led past Leslie's hiding place. Then, close by, a shape appeared, just visible in the leafy gloom of the garden. It passed within a hand's reach — the figure of a woman—Mrs. Deming's figure. She moved lightly, almost noiselessly, and her long, dark cape made her hardly more than a blur in the darkness.

Instead of entering the house, as the watcher had expected, she turned into the path leading to the gate, and in a moment was lost to sight among the shadows. Presently a sound imperceptible to any but a listening ear told that the gate had been gently closed.

Leslie rose to her feet. Her impulse was to pursue, to find out where it was that Mrs. Deming went, with whom she held these mysterious trysts. Probably, almost certainly, she had first shown her signal from the tank house window—for a signal the light must be.

Leslie was halfway to the gate when she paused. What if Mimi should wake in her absence? The sleep into which the child had at last fallen had been uneasy and light. Leslie had left her with trepidation, promising herself that to-night her vigil on the

cliff should be brief. If she followed Mrs. Deming, how long mightn't she be gone? And in the mean while Mimi's outcries might betray to Katya that the child was alone.

Reluctantly she turned back. It was her great chance—and she could not take it!

When Page Hamlin returned—surely within a few days now—she would tell him what she had seen, and together they might find the key to what now seemed so baffling. Leslie's heart went out to him with longing. Oh, that he would come back—happy and fortunate, if it might be, but in any case that he would come back!

IX

NEXT day Mimi's cold was worse, and by afternoon her temperature had risen rather alarmingly. Leslie put the child to bed, and sat beside her as she tossed, dozed, and woke—always frightened, always putting out a small, hot hand to make sure that Leslie was there.

Once Mrs. Deming came up, stood for a moment at the foot of the little girl's bed, asked a few questions, and went away. The clasp of Mimi's hand on Leslie's tightened, while the child's big eyes, hollow with fever, stared at the lady of the green earrings as at the embodiment of her half delirious terrors. Mrs. Deming pretended no emotion at the sight of the small flushed face, but remarked that as it was probably merely a cold, and would be over in a day or two, it would be absurd to ask a physician to come twenty miles across the mountains for so trivial a thing. At the same time, until it was certain that there was no infection, Leslie had better take her meals upstairs.

With this she went away, and Leslie sat on into the dusk beside the tossing child. She reflected that a little while ago Mrs. Deming would have been less openly indifferent, would have affected at least some slight concern; but since the episode of Crosby's visit she was changed. It was as if some inner fire were eating its way to the surface, so that at any moment the shell of her reserve might crumble and the flames burst forth.

So far the catastrophe had not come. The shell was still there, but it wore thin. She would look at Leslie with a deliberate, sidelong consideration, as if she weighed the merits of two different courses, pondered a question of loss and gain, of thirst slaked now or a richer vintage tasted by and by. The girl felt herself to be the object of this secret calculation.

One element in it, indeed, she could understand — jealousy, however absurd, on Crosby's account; but there was more to it than this. Something there was in which she herself was being moved, like a counter or a pawn, by hidden hands to which her fate was nothing, which sought only the winning of their game.

What the game was, what the stakes might be, she could not guess; but of the players Mrs. Deming at least was one. Was Crosby another? Was he, after all, the cousin of the lady of the green earrings? Or was their relationship of quite another order? Who, and what, was Mrs. Deming?

For three days and nights Leslie remained beside the child. Katya brought up their food, and Mrs. Deming came occasionally to the door, to inquire whether Mimi had broken out with anything, and whether her throat was sore.

On the fourth day Mimi was much better. By the middle of the afternoon, having returned to bed after sitting by the window for a while, she fell into a sound, deep sleep.

Leslie, restless from her confinement to the house, decided that she might snatch time for a walk on the mesa. Looking in on Katya to let her know that the child was alone, she left the inclosure by the side gate and struck across the rough green pastures, drawing deep breaths of the sea air.

It was a gray day, and the pastures stretched northward to the edge of a low sky heavy with coming rain. The ridge behind them buried its crest in clouds, and out over the sea a dark veil hung broodingly. Leslie walked with her free, swinging step over the short new grass, kept cropped by the wandering cattle. Following a route by now familiar, which avoided fences and the deep, brushy ravines that cut into the level here and there, she came at length to the cliffs which looked down on Brigantine Reef.

It was an extreme low tide, and the reef rose stark above the receding waters. The sea was quiet, its surface etched with long, slowly crawling lines that marked the motion of the ground swell. A tiny speck against the dull horizon was the anchored lightship, and close inshore another and apparently larger speck was the head of a placidly drifting seal.

Leslie lay on the grass, looking out with

wistful eyes upon the sea. Gradually, as if unconsciously taking the direction of her thoughts, their gaze turned southward across the gray, wrinkling surface of the water, to where the dark projection of Point Bonita marked the entrance to San Francisco Bay.

It was a week now since she and Page Hamlin had said good-by. How had things gone with him, she wondered, and was he really coming back as he had said? What might not have happened in a week to change his mind—to convince him that New York, not Briones, was the place for a rising author?

Had he meant all that his look, his handclasp, had seemed to mean, in that moment of farewell? Was it possible that the man who had written " Grass of the Field " really cared for her? If he didn't—well, even his friendship counted for more than another man's love. Above all, it counted to have him *here,* so that this chill sense of solitude, of a something darkly approaching before which she was helpless, wouldn't haunt her so.

What was it that oppressed her now so heavily, like a cold hand laid upon her heart? Merely these tedious days at the sick child's bedside? Merely this dull afternoon, with sea and sky so monotonously gray, the silence so drearily broken by the low, recurrent mutter of the sea, the melancholy cheep of a bird? Was it because for weeks she had had no letters from the old friends at home, on whose loyalty she had counted, though she had been too proud to ask for help in her time of need?

Whatever it was, the sense of apprehension, vague, indefinable, grew upon her momentarily. She was afraid—she didn't know of what, but she was afraid.

Suddenly an impulse came to her not to return to the house, to go down into the village and ask somebody—perhaps the people at the store—to let her stay that night with them.

She put the idea from her. What reason could she give for such an act? Besides, she must go back, she must — her clothes, her small amount of money, everything she owned, was there at the gulch house.

Then go to-morrow, urged her fear. Don't stay beneath that roof!

This, too, she resisted. Go back to the city where she had so nearly starved? Leave poor little Mimi, who loved her, and who trembled and shrank from those two terrible women—leave her to them? She couldn't. The child's devotion, her dependence, her trust, were a tie she couldn't break—at least not now, with no better reason than this silly, causeless fear of hers.

Page Hamlin would return in a day or two, and then her terrors would be over. Nothing could harm her while he was here. And indeed what was there to harm her? What nonsense was she talking? What was there about lights in the tank house, or the mysterious comings and goings of Mrs. Deming, that threatened *her?*

Leslie couldn't answer this question—there seemed to be no answer—but still the impulse to flight possessed her, and that inner voice said *" Go!"* She had to remind herself again of the impossibility of forsaking the desolate little girl. Very soon, perhaps, Mrs. Deming, thoroughly weary of the charge she had undertaken, would return the child to the orphanage, and then Leslie would be free. Until then she couldn't desert her post, couldn't leave the helpless little creature with the two grim women she so feared.

With unseeing eyes she had watched a moving spot slipping over the surface of the water from the south. Its nearer approach roused her attention, and she saw that it was a launch, and that it was making swiftly for the farther end of the reef. A fisherman's launch, probably, she told herself, and after mussels. When both tide and sea were like this, it was possible to land on the reef, where it thrust out into deep water, and sometimes the fishermen did so to gather the mussels that grew there. Page Hamlin had told her this, and she watched with interest while the fast-moving little craft slowed down and seemed to come alongside the rocks.

Then on the black surface of the reef the figure of a man appeared—the fisherman, of course, and with need to be quick, for already the tide must be on the turn. Leslie tried to follow his movements, but his shape blurred with the background, so that she kept losing it, and could glimpse it only now and then—closer inshore, it seemed.

The light was draining from the sky, the area of visibility steadily diminishing. Ten miles down the coast lights were flashing out at the Golden Gate. Night, with stir and movement and gayety, was coming to

the city, as it came here with silence and an immense, engulfing gloom. It was time to return to the gulch house, or she would be lost in the darkness on the mesa.

As she rose to her knees, she threw a glance out over the reef. The tide was running in, and there was a change in the note of the sea, a steadily increasing volume in its roar. The fisherman must have put off before this—for the moment she had forgotten him.

To her astonishment she saw, midway of the long, black expanse of the reef, a figure hurrying shoreward, slipping, floundering, falling, rising again, and hurrying on. She remained kneeling, her lips parted in amazement. What could the man be thinking of? Didn't he know that his boat was being battered to splinters by the rising tide? Why in the world had he abandoned it? Had it already been stove upon the rocks, and was he making for the shore for his life?

She watched, straining her eyes through the falling dusk. Then, with the suddenness of sea weather, a drift of mist seemed to come from nowhere, which blotted reef and all from her vision.

She got to her feet and turned homeward across the mesa, a little awed by the desolateness of its face under the murky twilight. It would be dark before she reached the gulch house, and she would have to watch her direction carefully. If the fog shut down, she might wander distractedly all night.

It seemed that the fog had chosen to drop its deadly curtain on the sea, and the air on the mesa remained clear. Leslie made her way without trouble to the gulch house. In her haste, the man on the reef passed from her mind. It had seemed certain, when she last saw him, that he would make the shore, and the strange way in which he had abandoned his boat ceased to occupy her thoughts, as they turned again to the difficulties of her own position. She had been away longer than she had intended. Poor little Mimi was probably awake and frightened.

But Mimi had slept out the afternoon. Leslie and the child had supper together, and then Leslie told her stories until she was sleepy again.

When Mimi was quiet, Leslie went to bed herself, noting, as she opened the windows after extinguishing the lamp, the blackness of the night outside.

She woke from her first sleep, her senses suddenly alert. What had roused her? Had Mimi called, or what noise in that quiet house had wakened her?

She sat up, her face turned to the open door of Mimi's room. No sound but the child's light breathing came from that direction. She listened, in a hush that seemed to make audible the beating of her heart. Then, unmistakably, she heard the stair creak under a cautious ascending tread.

X

EIGHT days after his departure Hamlin returned to Briones. Everything had gone well—amazingly so. On the basis of the chapters he had written, and a synopsis of the rest, the serial rights of the new novel had been contracted for by that important editor from New York. More immediately profitable was the sale of the film rights of "Grass of the Field," which had swelled Hamlin's slender bank account into unwonted fatness.

Best of all, these two things made possible a third, which, he had proved to himself beyond doubt in the days of his absence, mattered immeasurably more than either—he could tell Leslie that he loved her. To tell her that, and to take her away from Mrs. Deming with the least possible delay, was more important even than the finishing of the novel, vitally important as that was.

Of course it didn't follow, by any means, that because he invited her to exchange Mrs. Deming's home for his she would accept, or that the love he offered would be returned; but, remembering how her eyes had looked into his when they parted, he was hopeful.

They had been such good pals, too! She was the best and most understanding critic he had ever come across. She had loved "Grass of the Field," which was so wholly the expression of himself. Why, then, shouldn't she love him? Oh, she would, she would, when she knew how he wanted her, how he couldn't do without her! She had that divinely maternal spirit—hadn't he seen her with the child?—which must answer to a need like his.

From the deck of the Jenny he watched for the first glimpse of the woods of the hollow. There they were!

Presently he saw the fan of the windmill rising above the trees. It reminded him of that queer circumstance of the light in the

tank house window, and of his encountering Mrs. Deming so unexpectedly that night on the beach. Something odd about the whole thing!

Of course, when you really analyzed the oddity, it seemed more or less to vanish, to resolve itself into nothing more than a pair of green eyes and earrings to match; but if you didn't analyze it, if you let yourself get just the general sense of it, that queer sinister quality was there again.

Well, if only Leslie was of the same mind as himself, it needn't matter to either of them much longer. There was the poor little kid, of course—if Mrs. Deming didn't care much about keeping her, perhaps Leslie would like to have her with them for a while, till they could find her another and happier home than she had now. It would be as Leslie said, of course.

Then they were swept in over the bar by the rollers, and had slipped past the end of the sand spit and were tying up at the wharf. He was ashore before the boat was moored. Of course, there wasn't much chance of seeing her before afternoon—their meetings had usually been then; but that was only a few hours off. Then he would see her, he would see her!

He was crossing the village street, to turn up the hill to his bungalow, when a car swept down the winding road. He stood aside, and the Deming automobile hummed past. Mrs. Deming was at the wheel, and in the tonneau, as on the other occasions when he had seen the people from the gulch house driving, were Mimi and her governess.

Hamlin's heart leaped into his throat at sight of Leslie, muffled to the chin in the deep collar of her coat, but with the fair hair showing from beneath the familiar little blue hat—that fair, shining hair that he so longed to touch! They were driving rapidly, but she must have seen him—yes, she *must* have seen him!

The youngster had seen him. He had caught that queer, frightened stare of hers—more queer and owlish than ever, it seemed—fixed on him, as she sat rigidly on the back seat, as if afraid to move a muscle; but Leslie—couldn't she have managed to give him the smallest sign of recognition, even a significant look? She could have smiled, safely enough, behind Mrs. Deming's back; but she had simply not taken the least notice of him as they passed—hadn't even turned her head.

Hamlin walked on to his bungalow, pondering. The keen edge of his joy was blunted. Suppose, after all, he had only imagined that she cared? Suppose, once he was out of sight, she had forgotten him? Suppose that cousin of Mrs. Deming's—that fellow Crosby—had been coming up every day in his launch, and Leslie had found she liked motor boating better than wandering about the beach with a self-centered author who could talk of nothing but his work? Suppose—anything to account for that unmistakable cut she had given him!

He argued himself out of this mood by and by. It hadn't been a cut. She hadn't seen him—that was all; or perhaps she was really more browbeaten by Mrs. Deming than she had let him know, and had thought it prudent to ignore him, lest their friendship should be found out and interfered with. Of course there was at the bottom of it some such reason as this.

He went down to the beach after lunch, and wandered there for hours, with occasional ascents of the cliffs to the mesa; but no two figures, a tall one and a small one, rewarded his anxious searchings. He came home disappointed, wrote a few pages, tore them up, and went to bed.

He didn't sleep much. As he lay tossing in the dark, he remembered, more clearly than the preoccupations of the last days had allowed, the mood in which he had left Briones a week ago. It had been a mood of queer, unaccountable misgiving. He had had to argue with himself that he was leaving her for only a few days, that nothing could possibly go wrong before his return.

Well, nothing *had* gone wrong, had it? He had seen her only that morning, and the straight, slender shoulders were as straight as ever. Nothing was wrong, except that she had not chosen to recognize him, and that the meeting to which he had looked forward for that afternoon had not occurred.

Perhaps the youngster had a cold, and couldn't play outdoors to-day. Perhaps any of a dozen things accounted for it. To-morrow, certainly, they would be back in their old haunts, and he would meet them, and the queer episode of the morning would be explained. He fell asleep assuring himself that he would see her to-morrow.

The next day, bright and beautiful, brought no Leslie. By now Hamlin was beginning to fume. He had told her that he would be back within a week. More than

a week had passed, and she knew that he must be counting on seeing her, must have important news of some kind, good or bad, to tell.

Why didn't she come? Had things at the gulch house changed so that she no longer had her old freedom? No, the change was in Leslie herself. He was sure, now, that he had felt it in that instant when the car swept past. There had been a shock, a sort of blow about it. The impression had been more or less latent in his mind, but now it was coming to the surface.

It was all a dream, that joyful hope, that almost certainty, with which he had come back to Briones. The girl of his memories was a myth, the creation of his own imagination. While he was gone, she had taken counsel of prudence, and had decided to break off this clandestine friendship. Clandestine—a ridiculous word under the circumstances; but how many people in this world were hypnotized by words!

The next day he waited for her awhile, then went home raging. He tried to work, but as the dusk came on restlessness drove him forth again. He walked down the street to the sands, then turned up the beach. A little distance farther on was the trail up the cliff into the hollow, by which Leslie usually came and went, and by which Mrs. Deming had ascended that night while he watched from the shadow of the timbers. The weather was again dull and gray, and a thin mist filled the air.

As Hamlin strolled on slowly, his mind on the puzzle of Leslie's changed behavior, he saw through the gloom a figure approaching from the opposite direction. A moment's inspection showed that it was Leslie's. She was alone, and he saw that his chance for the interview he wanted had come at last.

He quickened his steps, for she was nearer than himself to the foot of the path, and he could not be sure that in the gloom she would know him and wait for him. After a moment he seemed to perceive that she also walked faster. Was it to hasten their meeting? The hope of this lightened his heart as he hurried forward.

As she turned in toward the cliff, so did he; but no sooner was his purpose clear than she broke into what was almost a run, and gained the foot of the trail. Without a pause or backward look, she ascended it rapidly and was lost to sight among the trees at the top.

He had stopped short when he saw that she was bent on avoiding him, and stood watching her, with a dull realization of the finality of the blow. She had seen him, certainly, and most certainly and unmistakably she had fled.

When she had disappeared, he turned on his heel and went back to his small, cozy house. He wanted its shelter, as a hurt animal wants the shelter of its burrow. The gray, misty, lonely beach, the melancholy voice of the sea, struck too poignantly upon his pain. He wanted to be alone, to lie face downward in the dark, to give himself up for an hour to the grief which must at last be conquered, but which would have its way with him now.

"Why, why, why?" cried his sore and astonished heart.

Why had their friendship seemed the thing it was, so that he had believed that it needed only the right word to make it a dearer thing—why had it seemed like that only ten days ago, if now she didn't even care to speak to him? Had those clear, honest eyes of hers lied to him, when they two had said good-by that last day? Had her lips lied, when she said she would be wanting to know how things went with him, that she would be hoping and hoping for his success? He could feel her hand now in his, and the lingering clasp of her fingers.

It was a bad night for Hamlin. Through the sleepless hours of it pain pursued him, and a dull, unsatisfied questioning. How could she have done this, how could she? It wasn't like her, it wasn't like her! Or, he corrected himself, it wasn't like what he had imagined her to be. How little he had really understood her, these last days had plainly shown.

Morning found him unrefreshed. It was hardly more than daylight when he woke from a brief sleep, but he rose, dressed, and went out. He wanted air and space, he wanted to tire his body and dull his aching mind.

The village seemed slumbering as he went through it on his way to the beach, where a low, gray fog still hung. The chill was bone-searching, but the bleak air seemed to tone his jaded nerves, and the monotonous sound of the crawling, foam-edged water came to him soothingly. His own footprints of the night before were still distinct in the sand, and he followed the track until it turned toward the cliff.

Continuing on, he came to footprints

pointing the other way—the footprints left by the figure which he had vainly tried to intercept. Suddenly he stopped short. For a full moment he stood staring down intently at these tracks in the sand. Then he walked slowly along beside them for a few yards, taking care not to merge his own footmarks with the others.

Presently he turned, and followed the track, still keeping carefully outside of it, to the foot of the cliff. He walked slowly, looking down, and several times he bent and measured a print with his hand, or compared it with that of his own foot.

When he reached the bottom of the trail, he stood staring up it for a time. Then he turned away and went slowly back to his bungalow. His face was pale, and his eyes looked a little dazed. When Pete Smiley, who owned a boat that Hamlin sometimes rented, passed him with a greeting, Hamlin did not see him.

For he had discovered a strange thing—the footprints, though somewhat smaller than his own, were unmistakably those of a man.

XI

THE driftwood fire had smoldered all night upon the hearth of his living room, and he built it up and sat down before it. He felt curiously calm. The discovery he had made seemed to have benumbed his mind with sheer amazement.

Gradually the power to think returned, and with it the realization of all that the discovery implied. If that figure on the beach was not Leslie, then it was probable that the figure in the automobile was not Leslie, either. Who was the masquerader? And what had become of the girl herself?

With this latter question lay his immediate business, for the answer to it was, for him, the one supremely important thing in the world. Where was she, while this unknown took her place? Had she, during his own absence, been suddenly dismissed?

Mrs. Deming might have taken her down to the San Francisco ferry in her car, and might have returned with the double in her stead, and no one in Briones would have been the wiser. But if she had gone peacefully and unsuspectingly, she wouldn't have left her clothes behind—and they were Leslie's familiar garments that the double had been wearing.

Was she a prisoner at the gulch house? Or had the sinister brains that planned this substitution been satisfied with no security short of that her death would give them?

With this last possibility Hamlin's mind absolutely refused to deal. The voice that whispered that it was the most likely hypothesis of all he resolutely stifled. To listen to it was to unfit himself for the work before him. This was to find out what was going on at the gulch house before the conspirators there, whoever and whatever they were, so much as dreamed they were suspected. By not the least sign must they guess that he or any one was on their track, until he had the key to the mystery.

Of all the evidence against them, nothing could be so strong as Leslie's own story, if she were still alive to tell it. Therefore, if they knew themselves in danger, it was very unlikely that she would be left alive. He must act, then, not only swiftly and decisively, but with the utmost caution as well, and with the single aim of rescuing Leslie, if—but that "if" he desperately thrust from him.

His mind ran back over the whole story as he knew it, seeking some clew to the mystery of this latest phase of it. His instinct had been right about the lady of the green earrings—she had needed explaining all along, and how much she needed it now!

That light in the tank house—how blind he had been not to understand it as a signal! Both times that he had seen it there had been a light on the water as well, as of a small boat not far from shore. If he hadn't thought of signals, it was simply because the thing seemed too fantastic, too romantically out of date, for this prosaic day. A signal it must have been. If Mrs. Deming afterward descended to the beach, it was to meet some one who had thus announced his coming, and who, after receiving her response, had put into the lagoon.

In all probability she was coming up from the wharf when Hamlin saw her that night. As to whom she had met there, he could only guess, but the fact that her cousin — if he were her cousin — Condon Crosby, had a launch, and had actually visited Briones in it, was at least significant. Was it Crosby, then, who was masquerading as Leslie Kent? For a moment Hamlin felt a jealous twinge; but the suspicion that she could be a consenting party took no hold on his mind. No, she was the victim, as she had been all along, of the sinister woman who had brought her here, perhaps with some such end as this in mind.

Again his thoughts groped among the facts, reassorting and arranging them. Mrs. Deming had had her reasons for coming to Briones—of which reasons one, certainly, was its accessibility by water. The village street, turning almost at a right angle, touched the lagoon at one end and the beach at the other. Within this angle stood an isolated hill, at some time part of the mesa. The wharf lay under this hill, divided by it from the village. At night it was absolutely lonely, and Mrs. Deming and her unknown visitor might rendezvous there without the least danger of discovery.

But for coming to Briones she had needed, besides her secret reasons, an ostensible one. Mimi had supplied it. Mimi, moreover, had made it possible to engage a governess, and the governess engaged had been of such height that her rôle could at need be taken by a man. She had been, also, a girl without relatives or near-by friends, and she might be impersonated without the least risk of anybody turning up who would detect the imposture. She had also, Hamlin remembered, been kept away from the village, so that neither her face nor her voice was familiar to any there.

The thing, as he considered it, had every mark of a farsighted and carefully laid plot, and he marveled now at the blindness which had not suspected it before. His vague doubts of Mrs. Deming, his mystification over the light in the tank house and the encounter on the beach, seemed to him now like warnings that only his selfish preoccupation with his own affairs had allowed to pass unheeded.

While he poured out his ambitions and hopes to Leslie, while he claimed her sympathy in his difficulties and triumphs, she had been living under the roof of those whose deliberate aim, perhaps, was murder. Oh, how could he, deaf to the warning voice that bade him stay, have left her to meet her fate alone? How could he have turned from her, there in the dusk, at the entrance to that gloomy hollow, blackening already in the twilight, without speaking a word of what was in his heart? He had wished to speak, but he had let cold prudence sway him, and he had gone away, full of his own affairs, his own ambitions, leaving her to this fate that was to come upon her—in what a moment of anguish, of terror, he could only writhingly imagine.

He forced himself to breathe deeply, to loosen his clenched hands. This was not the time for vain regrets. It was the time for action. If that proved too late, he had all his life before him for his grief. He must think, he must plan as deliberately as if this were no question of life and death, but a situation in one of his novels.

There were serious difficulties in his way. Briones was without a constable, and to get aid of that sort he would have to telephone to the county town, twenty miles across the mountains. And if he telephoned, what, after all, had he to say? That a young lady with whom he had been on friendly terms ten days ago now declined to recognize him, and that her footprint in the sand seemed larger than he remembered it? Portentous as both these circumstances were to Hamlin, he knew that in the ear of a policeman twenty miles away they might have quite a different sound.

Could he, on the strength of such a story, get help here in the village to invade the gulch house? He doubted it. He flushed at imagining the slow smiles that would reward such an attempt. No, his evidence, put into words, was thin, however convincing it might be to himself.

If, alone or in company, he went to the gulch house and made a fluke of it, he increased Leslie's danger—he held persistently to the belief that she was still alive—a hundred fold. So far as he knew, Mrs. Deming and Crosby—if this was Crosby—were ignorant of his existence. The woman's reserve, her unsocial ways, would have kept any village talk from coming to her ears. Almost certainly, unless by the mouth of Mimi, she knew nothing of his friendship with Leslie Kent; and Hamlin understood that the child was unlikely to confide in Mrs. Deming.

Of course, he himself might have given it away by his attempt to speak to the supposed Miss Kent last night. On the other hand, it was quite as likely to be thought that he was merely trying to strike up an acquaintance. The strong probability was that the conspirators were entirely unprepared for any interference on his part. His business was to keep them so—to strike, when he did strike, with a suddenness which would take them by surprise, and give no time for a counterstroke.

While daylight lasted, then, his must be a waiting game. Of course, if Mrs. Deming and the pretended Leslie Kent went motoring again, leaving only the servant on guard

at the gulch house, he would at once adopt bolder tactics; but probably they drove out only to allow the village a sight of Miss Kent in the tonneau, that her disappearance from her usual haunts might not lead to conjectures.

There was a certain risk in their going, if they left Leslie a prisoner with Katya in charge, and they were unlikely to go often. Still, Hamlin would watch hopefully.

Meanwhile he remembered that he had had nothing to eat. There being still time for the hotel breakfast, he compelled himself to go over. He felt no need of food, but he couldn't afford to live on his nerves just now.

He managed a substantial meal, sitting at a table from which he could see the car if it came down the hill. There was only one way out by automobile from the gulch house—the road past his bungalow.

After breakfast he went home and sat at his window, waiting hopefully, for if the car did pass it would enormously simplify matters. As long as it did not, he could only wait in an agony of ignorance of Leslie's fate, or of what she might be undergoing at that moment.

No automobile appeared. After the stage came in, he went down to the store, first dropping in the wheel ruts before his gate some stalks of wild parsley, which grew in his little garden. The stems being hollow, they would be easily crushed, and he would know on his return whether or not the car had gone by.

It now occurred to him that he had not seen Mrs. Deming at the store since his return, though before that he had frequently glimpsed her in her comings and goings. To-day he looked for her appearance with an interest painfully intense. To his disappointment, the big servant came in her place, carrying a huge market basket, with which, when filled, she walked off effortlessly. She passed him near the door, and for an instant she turned on him her little fierce, suspicious eyes. Then she went on with her heavy, lumbering walk, the loaded basket on her arm.

It seemed another twist in the screw of Hamlin's suspense. Of course, to have seen Mrs. Deming could have led to no results; but his imagination insisted that if there were murder behind that inscrutable face, it must somehow betray itself to his gaze. He went back to the bungalow, found the parsley stalks intact, and sat for a time watching the road. Then, finding the quiet and solitude intolerable, he went out again and wandered down to the beach.

A little way along on the sands he saw two men, Chicken Charley and Gabe Hennion, the storekeeper's assistant, stooping over some large pieces of driftwood that a retreating tide had left behind. Strolling on idly, he joined them, and found that the fragments were part of the bow and gunwale of a good-sized boat, which bore signs of heavy battering on the rocks.

"Them pieces is off'n a launch, sure as shooting," said Gabe, examining them with an expert eye. "Look to 'a' been chawed up somethin' awful, I should say with bangin' on the reef. She belonged to the fishin' fleet, I expect, though I ain't heard of any of 'em bein' lost, and there ain't been no wind to speak of. How in time did she get herself wrecked, I'd like to know? There sure ain't none of the fishermen but knows enough to keep clear of the reef, unless he was caught sudden in a blow, and there ain't been no blow."

"'Twas a launch, all right," Chicken Charley agreed. "Ain't been long in the water, either."

The raw edges of the wood bore him out.

"Well, the guy what ran her on the rocks will be comin' ashore next," remarked Gabe.

"There ain't no certainty about that," Chicken Charley corrected him. "There's a lot o' big fish off the reef."

The men had recognized Hamlin by nods, and their looks included him in the conversation, though he had stood by silently, taking in their remarks with an interest which they did not guess. Was there a connection between these bits of wreckage and the subject which occupied his thoughts? Crosby, or whoever it was that was hiding at the gulch house, had either come to Briones by land, or else he had somehow disposed of his launch, whose presence in the lagoon would have awakened inquiry. No, if he wanted to conceal himself he would never have left such a clew behind him; but how had he managed to wreck his boat off the reef?

There were times, of course, when just the right combination of sea and tide made it possible to land there—perhaps that explained it. Hamlin felt a sudden conviction that these fragments were a link in the chain of which the greater part was still hidden from his sight.

Meanwhile the two men, with an interest

in the wreckage very different from his own, dragged it up the beach, out of reach of the tide, and piled it against the cliff. Wood thus placed was recognized as already owned, and might be safely left until the salvagers saw fit to come for it with a wagon.

Hamlin went on. The morning tide had washed out the footprints which had told him so much, and over those beyond high-water mark the drifting sand had blown. A little farther on the tank house came into view, the third-story window reflecting back the sunshine above the dark mass of the windbreak. Hamlin stared up at it musingly. That light, that signal—what had it meant? The light at sea had been an answering light, of course; and then the boat had run in, and Mrs. Deming had met it—

While his eyes were still on the window, suddenly his mental focus shifted. He forgot the boat, forgot Mrs. Deming, forgot the mystery which a moment before, while his mind was busied with it, he had seemed to be just on the point of solving. What mattered enormously more than all else was Leslie, and it had come to him abruptly that if she were a prisoner up there, the tank house itself was most probably her prison.

He uttered a low exclamation. Before this, except that he had intended in some fashion to make his way into the gulch house that night, nothing had been clear. Now, all at once, he saw his way.

XII

THE November day had been dull, with low-hanging clouds that veiled the hilltops and brought the sea horizon near. Night closed in dark and starless, and with a rising wind which portended rain.

All this suited Hamlin perfectly. He dined at the hotel, then returned to his bungalow and smoked a cigar before the fire. Before his recent piece of luck it would have been a pipe, but he had brought back a box of cigars as a visible token of good fortune. In his disturbance over Leslie's strange behavior he had forgotten them, and the box had lain unopened; but to-night he got it out deliberately. He meant to succeed, and the cigar was the sign of his belief that he would.

Nevertheless, he had to force himself to patience. He referred to his watch a dozen times, and at last the hands pointed to eight. He rose, put an electric torch in one pocket and a revolver into another, buttoned his coat over a warm sweater, pulled a cap down over his eyes, and went out.

He did not approach his destination directly, but took a short cut up the hill to the mesa, made a wide detour around the gulch house, and then, on reaching the margin of the cliffs, swung back toward it. The night was pit-black, and he had to grope his way slowly across the hummocky sod, mindful of the irregular edge of the precipice on his right hand. At last he felt, rather than saw, the solider blackness of the windbreak before him, and smelled the mingled fragrance of eucalyptus and pine, pungent on the damp air.

Feeling his way along, he turned the corner, and knew that he was beneath the tank house. Awhile he paused, listening. From the sands below the cliffs rose the uneven mutter of the sea, and from the air above him came a fitful sighing, dying away drearily into space as the wind swept on. At a lower level these gusty blasts brought from the trees that surrounded the gulch house an ebb and flow of sound, incessant, but swelling and sinking confusedly in tones and overtones of moaning complaint and ominous rustling whispers.

Hamlin blessed these noises, which would cover those of his own movements. Having carefully calculated the distance from the corner of the fence, he embraced the trunk of a pine which he judged to grow directly beneath the now invisible window, and began to ascend it.

The trunk was rough and gnarly, with bulging knots and low-growing lateral shoots. He could have climbed it without much difficulty by daylight, but in the dark he had to feel for every hold for hand or foot. He was scratched and torn, he lost his cap, he trusted to a dead limb that snapped beneath him, leaving him swinging by one hand, and all the while he was uncertain whether he had estimated his distance correctly. The wall of the tank house he could feel by putting out a hand, but he was not certain that he was beneath the window until he found himself suddenly at the top of the pine, which had been trimmed back to the fork of two main branches. Then, by reaching out and a little up, he felt the smooth chill of glass under his fingers.

Hunching his body still a little upward, he worked his nails carefully under the lower rim of the sash. It moved, and he

slipped his hand beneath it and lifted it without noise. Grasping the sill firmly, he flung his weight out, caught with the other hand, hung for an instant, and then scrambled up and in.

As he had expected, he came in contact at once with the iron-bound wall of the tank, which occupied nearly the whole space, leaving only room to pass. He waited, listening, but the rustle and creak of boughs, which struck and scraped against the building as the wind shook them, and the groaning of the fan overhead, which, though locked, seemed straining to be free, was all that he heard. Even if there were persons near at hand, in this continual hum of sound the noise of his entrance must have passed unnoticed.

He began to feel his way around the tank, alert for the opening in the floor which would lead to the room below. He found it suddenly, and, dropping on his knees, sought for the ladder by which to descend. Below was blackness—and then suddenly there was a noise which was not the wind, and instantly afterward a blink of light.

The light increased, and Hamlin saw that a trap in the floor of the room below was being lifted. In the same breath he realized that between him and the lower floor there was no ladder, but a drop of some ten feet.

The trap rose, pushed upward by a man's hand and arm. A head and shoulders appeared, strongly illuminated by the lamp which the man held in his other hand. He was a young man, fair, rather handsome, but in a somewhat effeminate fashion. He stepped into the room, shoved the trapdoor back into place, and looked about him.

The light of the lamp showed rough-finished walls, a dusty litter papers and boxes, and in one corner a mattress spread with blankets. Some one was lying under the blankets, who now moved suddenly, as if aroused from sleep, and sprang up with a cry. The watcher peering through the opening in the floor above caught his breath quickly. It was Leslie, her clothes dishevelled, her hair disordered, and her face white and haggard.

She stood staring with black-shadowed eyes at the man with the lamp.

" Well, how goes it?" he inquired affably.

Setting the lamp on a cross piece of the wall, he sat down upon a box, clasping his knee with his hands. The girl said nothing, but stared at him with a face of fear.

" There, there!" he remonstrated. " Calm yourself, there's a good child, and sit down. What with your attitude and the general *mise en scène,* you are frightfully suggestive of melodrama. Virtuous heroine registers horror at entrance of villyun—all that kind of thing, you know. The scene should be labeled ' Midnight in the Castle Dungeon,' whereas it's really only a quarter to nine in a tank house. Let's not do melodrama, Leslie, please!"

" I think you are a devil," said the girl.

" You flatter me. I have always thought the devil would be a charming person to meet—extremely intelligent, and of so wide an acquaintance with men — and women. But if you have in mind, as I fear, the gentleman's less attractive qualities, then you do me a great injustice. Do sit down, Leslie! I can't tell you how nervous you make me, behaving in this jumpy way!"

" I am not interested in your nerves. What have you come for? Go away or I'll scream—I can make myself heard at the house."

" Not now, girly! Nobody at the house will hear you now. Possibly the brat might, but she's locked in her room. As for Maude and Katya, they are both sound, sound asleep. They fell asleep rather shortly after dinner, when I mixed each of them a cocktail. For a person who objects to melodrama, I seem doomed to get an awful lot of it. I was obliged to adopt that old, hackneyed, melodramatic trick of dropping a white powder—they do it on the stage to slow, creepy music—in each of the dear things' drinks. They promptly went to sleep, which left me free to slip out here for a little visit with you—hoping, of course, that you would be gracious enough to make me welcome."

At the terror in her face he smiled—a cold, cruel, evil smile under a thin veneer of amiability. She did not move.

" But instead of that," he went on, " you treat me to this confounded melodrama. It's ungrateful of you—abominably. Don't you know that if it had occurred to Maude to do what I have done—or if she had dared do it—and she, instead of I, were your visitor under these extremely private circumstances, you would soon be sleeping a sounder sleep, a much, much sounder sleep, than she is enjoying now? Don't you know that I have had to put myself out to the extent of personally overseeing the preparation of your food? Don't you know that

when Maude insists on going driving I am obliged to take possession of the key of the padlock on this door, for fear the gentle Katya should pay you a visit in my absence? Don't you know that you are greatly embarrassing the movements of several persons, and that I am the only advocate of humane considerations as against convenience? There is nothing in the world to prevent Maude's discovering that she is tired of the place here, and packing herself, her beloved child, her maid, and her governess, into her car and leaving for parts unknown, except the presence of—if I do say it—an extremely unaccommodating young woman!"

Through his suave speech there sounded a hard note of meaning and purpose. The girl shrank a little, but her head lifted in an effort at defiance.

"You mean, I suppose, that Mrs. Deming wants to murder me, and that you won't let her—yet. Well, don't interfere any more—I refuse to accept my life from you! What all this means I don't know. You are criminals of some sort, of course. It seems to me now that I always knew it; but why you have cared to entrap *me*—oh, it's all too wild, too horrible! It can't be true—such things simply don't happen! I'm dreaming—and I want to wake up!"

As she lifted her arms despairingly, Hamlin saw for the first time that they were linked together at the wrists with handcuffs. At the sight, a red wave seemed to pass before his eyes, but he held himself in. Crosby was as yet too cool, too nonchalant, too collected, to be successfully attacked by one who had to swing down on him through a hole in the ceiling.

True, Hamlin might shoot the fellow as he sat; but could he trust his aim, with Leslie almost in the line of fire? And if it came to a pistol duel—Crosby was likely enough to be armed—what of the girl amid a fusillade of bullets?

"But, my dear Leslie, you get worse and worse!" said Crosby, with a deprecating gesture. "This is straight out of 'The Two Orphans,' or some play of that sort. I should have expected you to realize, after having honored my poor domicile with a visit, that I am a person of a certain cultivation. These overdone emotions are intensely unpleasant to me. Even falling in love is a thing I never do to excess — if Maude could only realize it! I believe all women must be partial to these emotional debauches. I fall in love like an epicurean —which I humbly profess to be — and I never carry the affair beyond the bounds of artistic restraint. For instance, with yourself—I'm not pretending that I shall love you always, or anything so absurd as that. I'm not even pretending that I haven't loved other women quite as well, or that I don't expect to in the future; but for the present you, my pearl, have the call—pardon the colloquialism. Just now there are no other eyes into which I care to gaze, no lips that will satisfy me but yours. In my opinion, at his moment, the tall, willowy blonde is the only beauty. Poor Maude looks horribly dumpy and stumpy and sallow—and her make-up is badly done. Now you, my fresh young peach, require no make-up—you dewy, downy sweetness!"

Hamlin could hardly restrain his rage; but as long as Crosby sat there talking, it might be wise to listen.

"Even in your present dishabille," the man below went on, "you are delicious. Fancy Maude after two or three days of this! No, Maude bores me—she began to bore me the instant she walked in at my bungalow door with the new governess in tow. I was supposed to be taking pointers —studying the rôle I might be required, at very short notice, to play; but in reality I was just delicately, deliciously, deliberately falling in love. Maude recognized the symptoms—she has seen my wayward fancy preparing to stray before. Her jealousy is absurd. Of course she knows I'll never throw her over altogether—she's too useful. Why not allow me my small diversions, then? But no, she must behave as agreeably as a dog who's being robbed of a bone. Well, as I have remarked, Maude is out of the question for the moment—dreaming, I suppose, of a world in which, like that celebrated couple on the Grecian urn, forever will I love and she be fair. Maude is disposed of, and the interest centers about you. We are alone—really, except on a desert island, we could hardly be more so. You might, if you cared to be so silly, shriek your lovely head off, and not a soul would hear. So don't, but use your sweet lips in sweeter ways. I don't mind a little coyness —in fact, it's a sort of *sauce piquante;* but don't carry it beyond a joke. Kiss me, and promise to be good, and I'll go so far as to take those bracelets off. I've got the key in my pocket."

He had risen. As she shrank from him

with a little moan of fear, he sprang forward and caught her in his arms. At the same instant Hamlin slid through the opening and dropped to the floor. A wild cry of joy came from Leslie's lips.

"Page, oh, Page!"

As Crosby let go of the girl and swung around, Hamlin whipped out his revolver.

"Hands up!" he shouted.

Crosby dodged behind the girl and thrust her before him as a shield. Over her shoulder showed a gleam of metal, and a bullet sang past Hamlin's ear. He dared not fire, and with the realization of his helplessness he knew the cold taste of fear—of the death that confronted him, of the fate to which he left his love.

His thoughts, his sensations, as he recalled them afterward, seemed to have filled a long period of time; yet even as the draft of the passing bullet fanned his cheek, Leslie, by a violent movement, had wrenched herself half free of Crosby's grasp. Crosby, shouting out an oath, clutched at her, but the vigor of her struggles forced him to use both arms. If she freed herself for an instant, Hamlin would shoot.

He caught her by the throat, throttling her with fingers sunk deep into her flesh. Choked sounds came from her, her body writhed and twisted, with her manacled hands she tried to tear away his grip. Then the butt of Hamlin's pistol fell on Crosby's skull, his hold slackened, his arms went limp, and he collapsed on the floor.

He lay there forgotten; for Hamlin had Leslie in his arms, his lips were on her hair, her cheek, her poor bruised throat. Her closed eyes, the droop of her body against his, made him fancy that she had fainted, and that she heard nothing of the words he was whispering at her ear. Then her eyes opened, she turned softly in his clasp, and put up her lips to his.

Crosby, lying manacled in the tank house, his head bloody from contact with the butt of Hamlin's revolver, and the two women, still dazed from their drugged sleep, were arrested before daybreak by the county sheriff. That official had decided to come in person when Hamlin, over the long-distance wire, had mentioned the name of Condon Crosby.

Crosby was wanted, and very badly wanted, by the authorities, though, in a belief that the Sea Dragon was bound for Mexico, they had been watching the southern coast. He had slipped through the fingers of the law almost as they closed upon him, and partly through the foresight which had provided against emergencies, partly through the good fortune which had enabled him to land on the reef, leaving his boat to be battered out of recognition, his retreat had remained undiscovered.

It appeared that he was the leading spirit in a ring of drug smugglers who had frequented the artist's charming bungalow on the bay shore. As a painter of marines, he could go and come in the Sea Dragon without question, whether along the San Francisco water front, in and out of remote arms of the bay, or outside the Heads in the path of incoming steamers, from which small floating packages might be dropped by unseen hands.

Lately, other devices having worn thin, he had disposed of his dangerous merchandise through the agency of Mrs. Deming. She was as unscrupulous and nearly as clever as himself, but he dominated her through her love for him, as she in turn dominated Katya through the woman's drug-debased cravings. After an exchange of signals, he would run into the lagoon at night and hand over his wares to his confederate, to be taken by her to the city and distributed through various underground channels. A quantity not yet got rid of was found in the disused tank.

But as Maude Deming's weakness was Crosby, so Crosby's was any fresh face whose beauty caught his eye. Mrs. Deming had carefully chosen, as the governess whom he might be called on to impersonate, a woman as like him as possible in height and build; but her prudence had been neutralized by Crosby's sudden, reckless passion for Leslie Kent. Otherwise the real Leslie would quietly and permanently have vanished, while the sham Leslie drove off some day in Mrs. Deming's car, never to return.

Mimi, nearly idiotic with bewilderment and fright, was taken charge of by Hamlin at the raiding of the gulch house. He and Leslie would have given her a home, but a rich and lonely woman, interested in the child through the story which filled the newspapers, offered to adopt her. Leslie and Page Hamlin were married within the month, for, as he assured her, with his serial to finish, he had no time to be engaged.

THE END

Mother and Child doing well

Every year these glad tidings are sent out by more than two million proud fathers in the United States. They are sent from the bedsides of the two million or more happy mothers who have had competent care.

Motherhood is Natural—and where the mother's health has been safeguarded before the coming of her baby and where she has had proper care at its birth, the happy report follows: "Mother and child doing well."

Two-Fifths of the Deaths from Childbirth are the result of ignorance or criminal carelessness. The medical name for the direct cause is Septicemia. Septicemia is infection, caused by germs on attendant's hands, on instruments, on linens, or on some other article used in caring for the patient. Soap and water alone cannot produce the *cleanliness* necessary. Hands must be made antiseptically clean. Instruments must be sterilized (boiled). A little everyday knowledge and scrupulous care in each case—Septicemia is prevented—and these mother-lives saved.

5000 mothers die yearly from bodily neglect before their babies are born. The mother's body is working for two. This puts extra strain on the kidneys and other organs. Precautionary examinations by a physician show whether the kidneys are in good working condition, and care reduces danger from convulsions to a minimum.

But what of the thousands of unfortunate mothers who have no pre-natal care and who, when their hour comes, are in careless or incompetent hands.

20,000 Such Mothers Die Needlessly—die *needlessly* every year in the United States. "Put just one of these mothers in a vast hall. Let her die publicly, where thousands can see her, and observe the outcry. Imagination fails!" So writes a great editor. Multiply that one dying mother by 20,000 and

you get a picture that not only fires the mind beyond the realms of imagination, but one that stuns by its brutality—for most of these deaths are needless deaths. *They can be prevented.*

10,000 Men Killed—

When this news was flashed from the front during the Great War, our entire nation was hushed to tears and bowed its head in grief. Yet twice that many mothers die *every year* from childbirth here at home!

Millions are working for World Peace—working to save the loss of life in war. Then why permit the unnecessary sacrifice of mother-lives—the choice lives of our Nation?

Mothers in every part of the country need help—

What shall the answer be? Husbands, physicians, hospitals, communities must ensure absolute cleanliness and provide skilled care.

More women in this country between the ages of 15 and 44 die from the effects of childbirth than from any other cause, except tuberculosis.

From its very beginning in 1909, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's nursing service considered the care of policy holders, before and after childbirth, as one of its chief obligations.

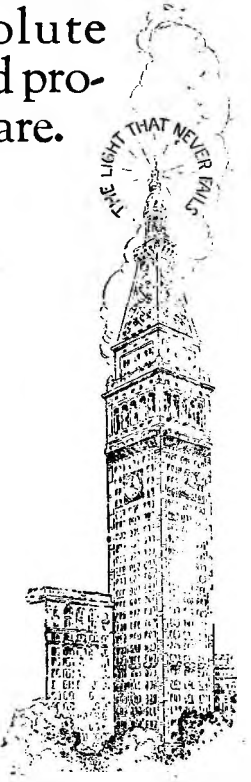
From January 1, 1922 to December 31, 1922, Metropolitan nurses made over 700,000 visits to policy holders in maternity cases, not only giving pre-natal care but after-care to mother and child and teaching the mother how to care for the baby when the nurse's visits were no longer necessary.

The death rate among Metropolitan policy holders from child bearing has been reduced, while the death rate among women lacking the visiting nurse service has actually increased.

Results obtained by the Metropolitan, together with the fact that wherever public and private agencies are working, the maternal death rate is being reduced is an indication of the possibilities when every mother shall have pre-natal care and proper attendance during and after confinement.

The company is ready to send a simple but scientifically prepared booklet entitled: "Information for Expectant Mothers". Your request by letter addressed to Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, New York, will bring this booklet without charge or obligation.

HALEY FISKE, *President*



Published by

METROPOLITAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY—NEW YORK

Why they stick

On the ground floor of the telephone building a man worked at the test board. It was night; flood had come upon the city; death and disaster threatened the inhabitants. Outside the telephone building people had long since sought refuge; the water mounted higher and higher; fire broke out in nearby buildings. But still the man at the test board stuck to his post; keeping up the lines of communication; forgetful of self; thinking only of the needs of the emergency.

On a higher floor of the same building a corps of telephone operators worked all through the night, knowing that buildings around them were being washed from their foundations, that fire drew near, that there might be no escape.

It was the spirit of service that kept them at their work—a spirit beyond thought of advancement or reward—the spirit that animates men and women everywhere who know that others depend upon them. By the nature of telephone service this is the every-day spirit of the Bell System.

The world hears of it only in times of emergency and disaster, but it is present all the time behind the scenes. It has its most picturesque expression in those who serve at the switchboard, but it animates every man and woman in the service.

Some work in quiet laboratories or at desks; others out on the "highways of speech." Some grapple with problems of management or science; some with maintenance of lines and equipment; others with office details. But all know, better than any one else, how the safe and orderly life of the people depends on the System—and all know that the System depends on them.

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AND ASSOCIATED COMPANIES

One Policy, One System, Universal Service, and all directed toward Better Service

If a Snake Had Brains

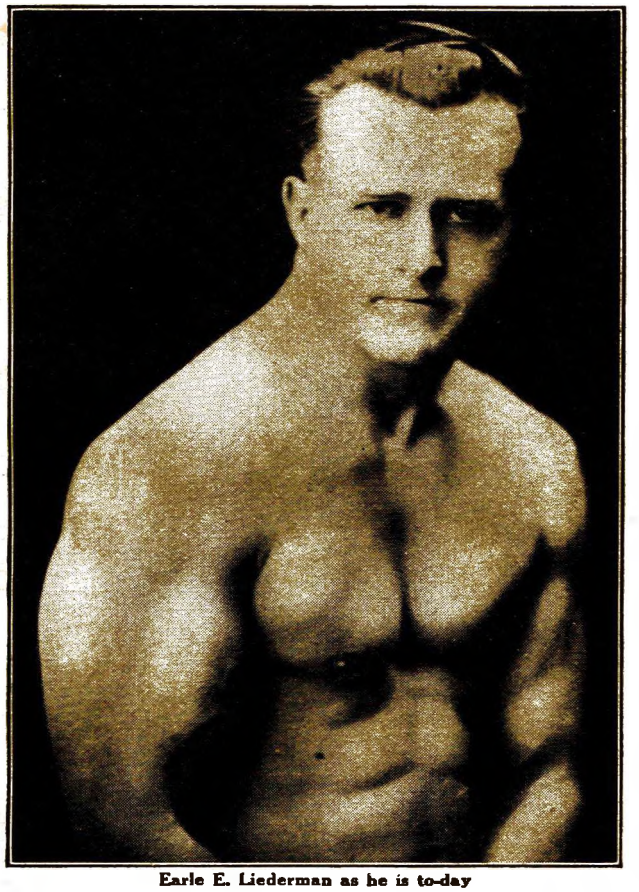
—he would still be a snake. With his present body he would be forced to continue crawling on his belly. So he would be no better off.

Of What Use Is Your Brain?

A snake is the lowest and meanest of animal life, while mankind is the highest. Do you make use of your advantages? Your brain is used to direct your body. If you don't keep the body in fit condition to do its work, you are doomed to failure. How are you using this wonderful structure? Do you neglect it or improve it?

EXAMINE YOURSELF

A healthy body is a strong robust one. Do you arise in the morning full of pep and ambition to get started on the day's work? Do you have the deep, full chest, the big, mighty arms and the broad back of a REAL HE MAN? Do you have the spring to your step and the bright flash to your eye that mean you are bubbling over with vitality? If not, you are slipping backward. You are not a real man and you cannot hope for the admiration or respect of others. *Awake!* Get hold of yourself and make yourself THE MAN YOU WERE MEANT TO BE.



Earle E. Liederman as he is to-day

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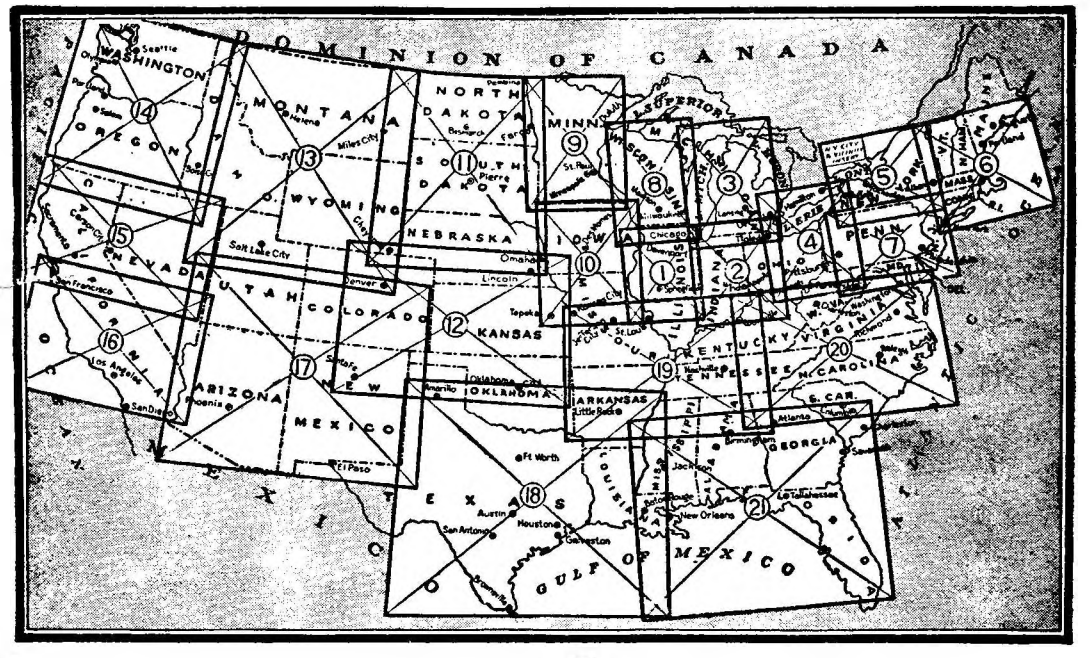

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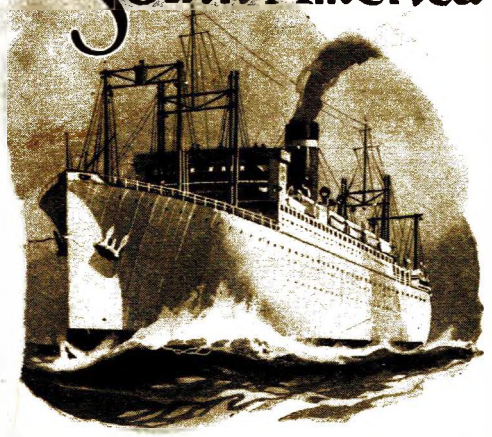

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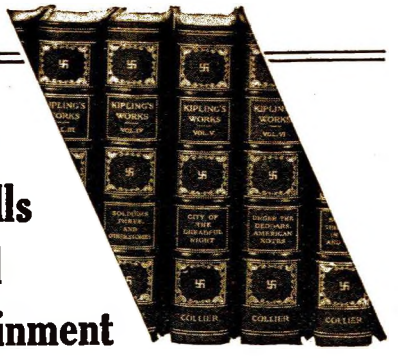

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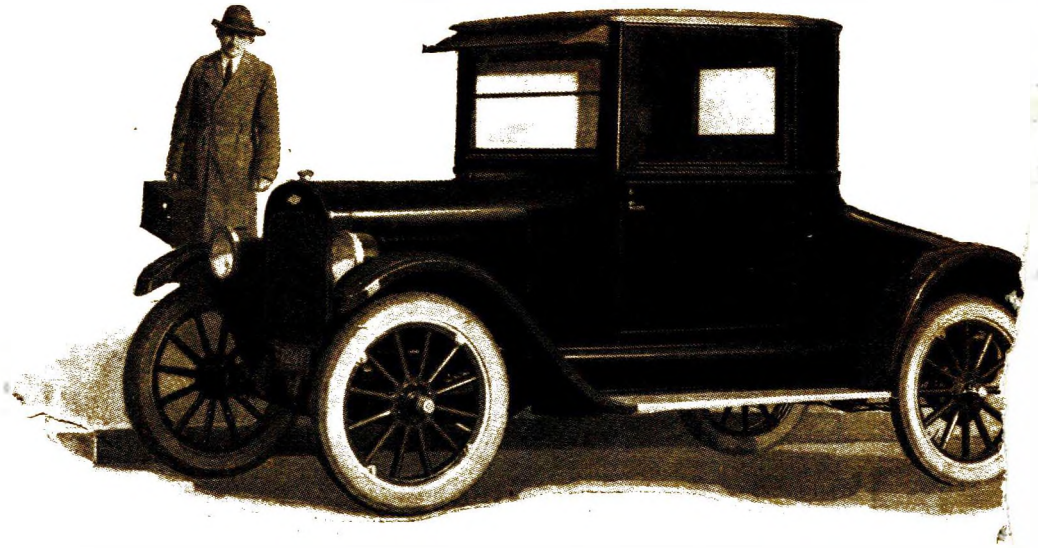

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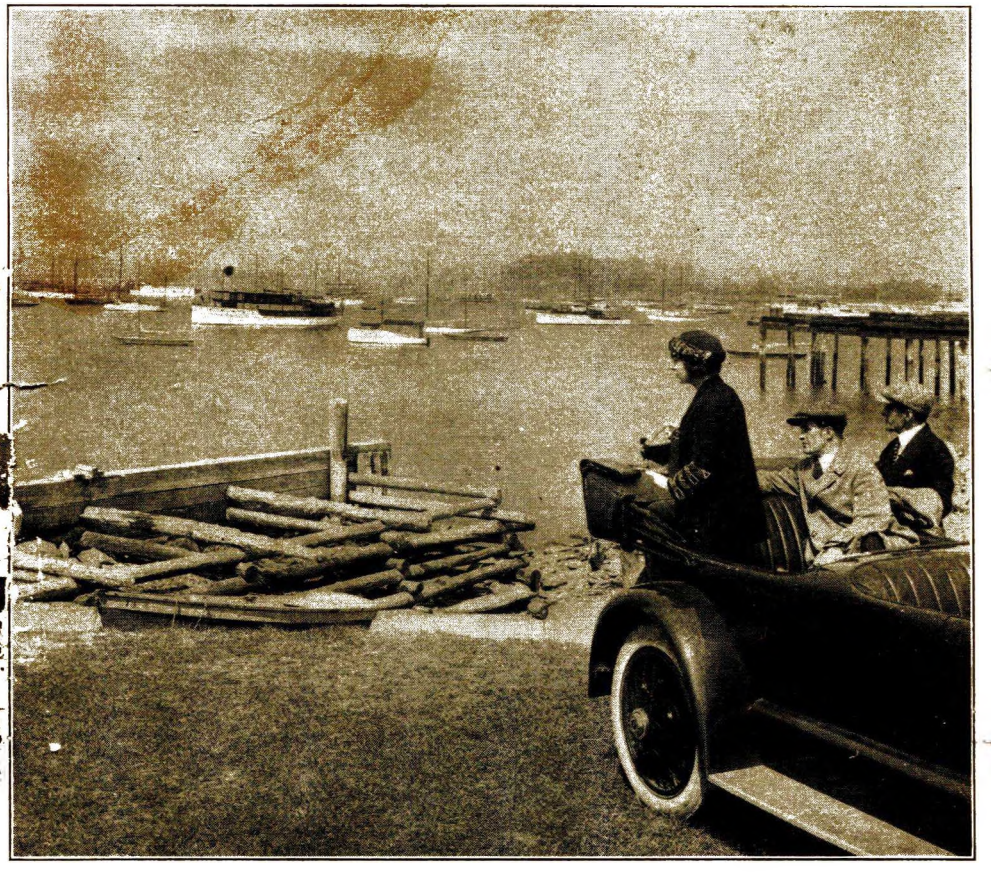

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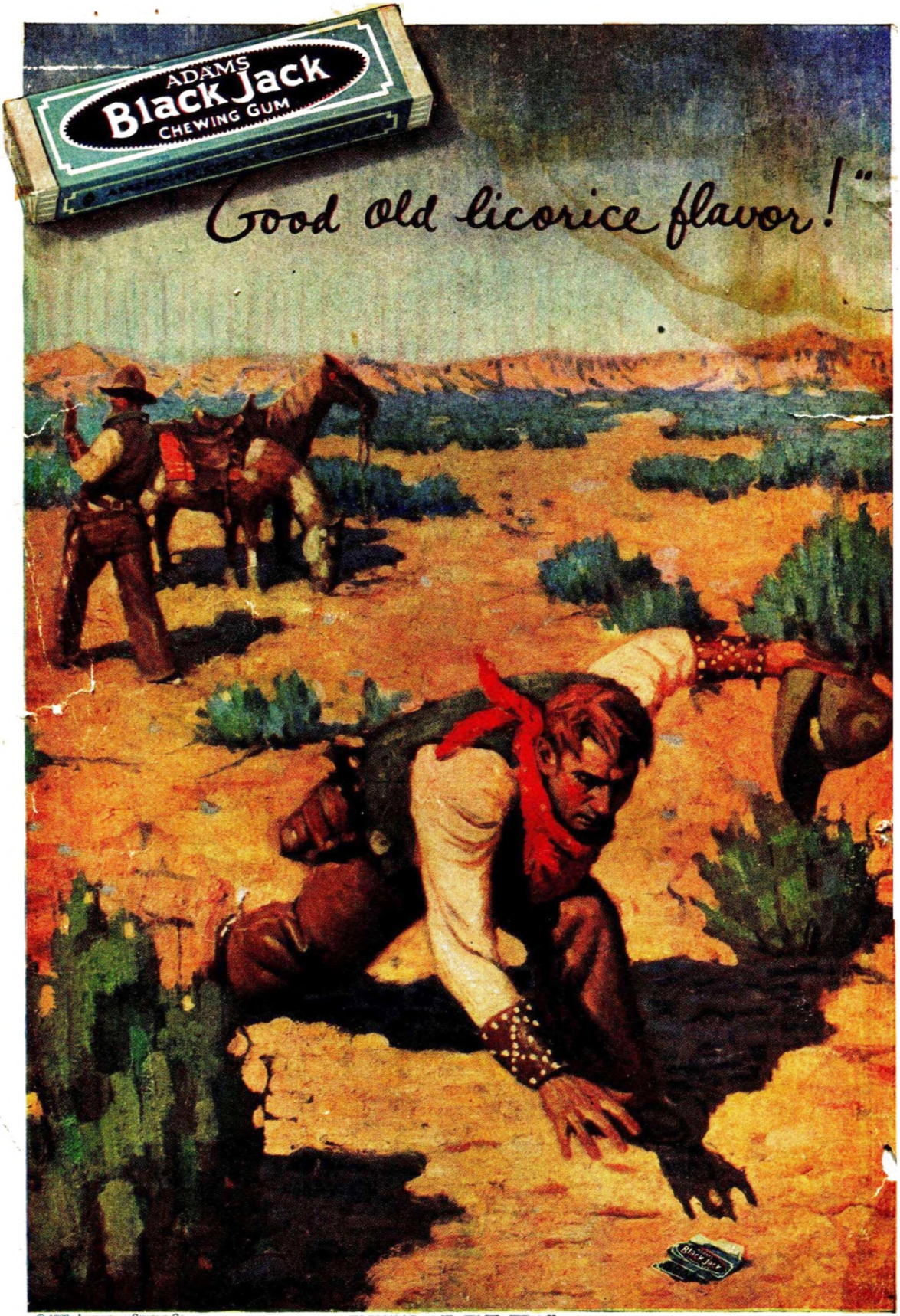

PICKING UP THE TRAIL