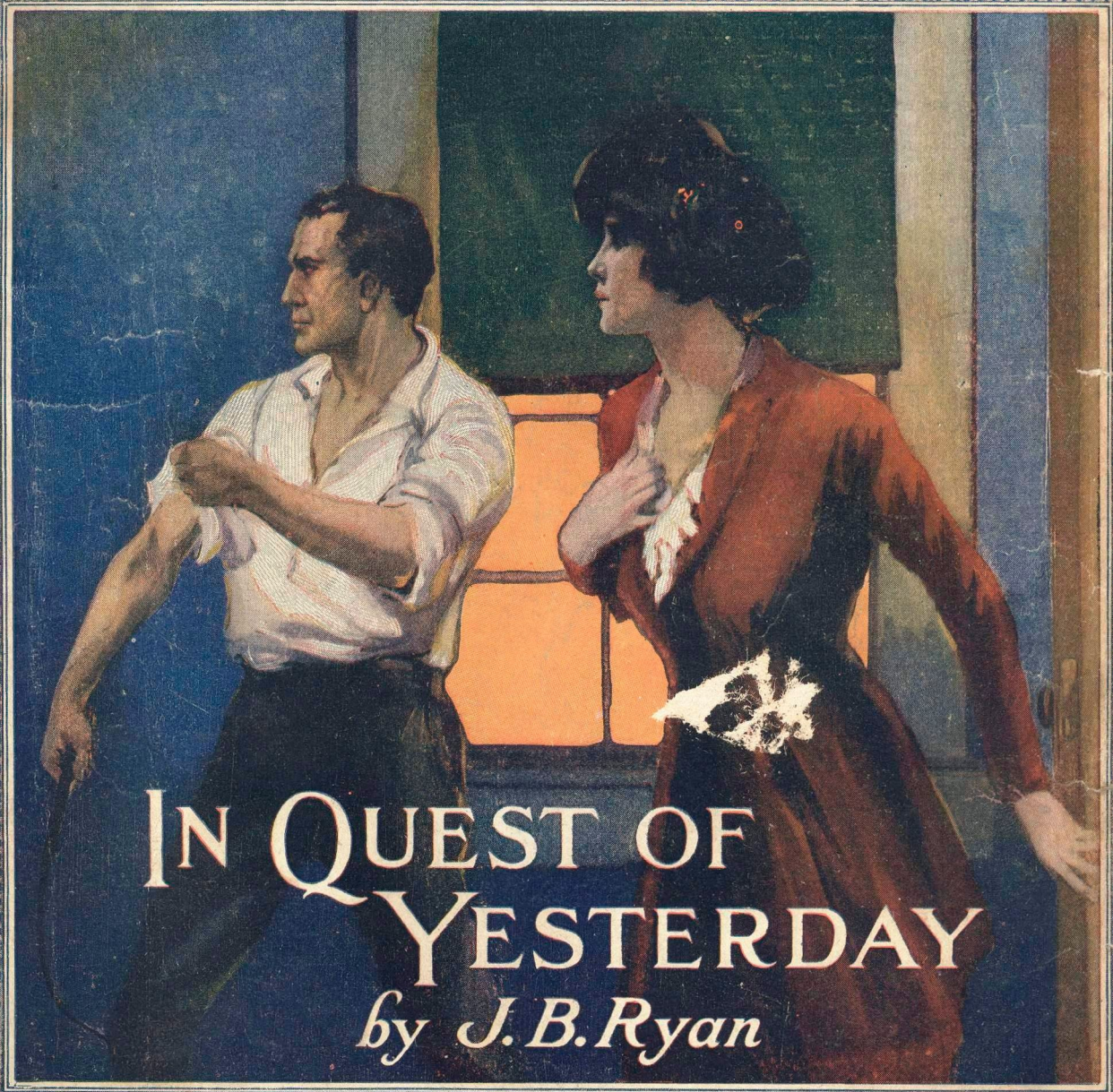
ARGOSY

Issued Weekly



IN QUEST OF YESTERDAY

by J. B. Ryan

DECEMBER 27 *4fg

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SCALES

NO SPRINGS - HONEST WEIGHT

THE ARGOSY

Vol CXYI SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 1919 No. 1

In Quest of Yesterday

by J. B. Ryan

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH I COME TO BE.

I FIND it very difficult adequately to describe my state of mind upon this particular morning of which I write. There are no other emotions or feelings of which I am aware that can be used as similes for the sensations which were mine when I opened my eyes and found myself lying upon a very white bed.

Did you ever wake up of a morning and not know what date or day it was? Nor who you were, nor where you were? Can you remember the sense of doubt, wonder, and helplessness that seized you. until memory came to your relief? Ah, the relief of memory! Can you, then, picture the utter bepuzzlement of one to whom no memory returned?

That is how it was with me.

I lay there, upon that bed, trying vainly to recall my name or something of myself. That I knew I had a name did not strike me as strange—then,

I held my open hand before my face and looked at it. The fingers were long and slender; the palm was white and firm, unmarked by the callouses of hard, manual labor. Was I what the world calls a gentleman? 4

I looked around the room. Beside the bed was a small stand upon which were several vials—medicine, no doubt. Had I been—or was I still—sick? I knew that sick people sometimes lost their memories. Perhaps that was what had happened to me. But I could not recall whether they had recovered their memories or not. I could recall generalities but not particulars.

In a corner of the bedroom was another stand—somewhat larger-than the one at my bedside—and on it were toilet articles and various miscellany—books, another medicine bottle, and a vase of flowers. Above the stand a fair-sized mirror hung upon the wall. I was seized by an intense desire to know what I looked like.

I flung back the covers and gingerly placed one foot on the floor. The contact with the cool carpet sent a delicious thrill through me. But when I stood upon both feet a great, nauseating dizziness swept over me. I steadied myself against the wall and fought the dizziness until it left me. Then I walked, somewhat wabbly and with

shaking knees, to the mirror. I balanced myself against the stand and gazed curiously into the glass.

That the face that peered back at me was mine, I knew, being well acquainted with the law of the looking-glass. Otherwise it would have been, to me, the countenance of a perfect stranger. Nor did the sight of my own face awaken the slightest flicker of my missing memory. My dark hair, dark eyes, and dark, swarthy complexion informed me that I must have come of a Latin race. But that was all I could tell myself, so to speak.

I looked down at the articles on the stand and my eye rested upon one of the books. On the cover was the picture of a kneeling man caressing a recumbent dog. I glanced at the title. It was: " The Call of the Wild," by Jack London. And then there flowed into my mind the first thing I remembered. *I had read this story!* Bit by bit the story of how Buck, the Scotch-shepherd-St. Bernard from the warm Southland had been shanghaied, as it were, into Alaska, came back to me. I recalled every stage of his development—or retrogression—into an Arctic semisavage husky, and finally into a wolf.

You do not know how that thrilled me! In this way—the recollections caused by the sight of familiar things — would my memory come back to me. To be sure, the sight of my own face had stirred no dormant memories, but my mind glossed over this disagreeable fact.

I turned the cover of the book. Upon the fly-leaf was written: " James Monroe, 1346 O Street, N. W. Washington, D. C."

Even then I knew that there had been a President of the United States named "James Monroe!" How I knew these things I do not know.

But, was that my name? James Monroe? I spoke the words aloud, but I might as well have said: " John Smith " for all the effect it had on me. The chances were, however, that that was my name. Then there was the address: " Washington, District of Columbia," which told me that if I were James Monroe I dwelt in the nation's capital.

A step sounded behind me and I turned to see a man standing in the doorway with a look of astonishment on his face.

" Why, Mr. Monroe!" he cried, and hurried to my side. " You must not stand here dressed like that!"

Ah! So my name *was* James Monroe! I resolved to say as little to the man as possible, and let him, by his own conversation, tell me many things that I did not know. I determined to tell no one of my lapse of memory because there lurked in my mind the fear of sanatoriums and asylums.

But the man's words brought me to a realization of the fact that I was standing clad only in pajamas.

" Do you feel strong enough to dress and go down-stairs, Mr. Monroe?" he asked me anxiously. Evidently he was a servant. " Or would you rather go back to bed?"

" Is there any one down-stairs?" I asked. Perhaps I had a wife or some other relative.

" I think Dr. Harding is down there, but I am not sure."

Now who, I wondered, was Dr. Harding? Was he a personal friend, or was he but the physician who had cared for me during my recent illness? I resolved to see the doctor; for only by letting the people who knew me talk would I learn facts about myself.

" Get me some clothes," said I, " and I'll go down-stairs."

The man opened a wardrobe and brought me out a complete outfit of wearing apparel. The clothes, I observed, were of very good quality.

The man helped me to dress myself.

" I don't suppose you know me, sir," said he. My heart stood still. Did the man know what I thought to be my own secret? But his next words reassured me. " You see, Dr. Harding engaged me as your valet while you were sick. The man you had before left to join the British Army. My name is David."

" David," said I with a smile. " Give me your hand, David!"

He looked at me in a startled way for a second or two, then extended his hand, and I seized it heartily. I think now that it was this action of mine that won for me the friendship of David and made him do for me the things he did do.

I had finished dressing now.

" Let me lean on your arm, David," said I, " for I am somewhat weak yet." Which statement was a lie, for I believe, now, that of the two — David and I — I was the stronger. But I had to feign weakness in order to get David to lead me down-stairs. I did not want to go down alone and probably get lost in my own house. Nor did I wish to be asking every one I met if he were Dr. Harding. It would be embarrassing, to say the least.

So, leaning on the supporting arm of David, I left the bedroom and walked down the hall. Fine tapestries and a few rare paintings hung on the wall. To all appearances James Monroe was a wealthy man.

" Tell me, David," said I as we slowly descended the stairs, I lagging back so that he unconsciously took the lead, " have I been sick very long?" I felt reasonably safe in asking that question.

" I have been here only a week, sir," said he, " but from what Dr. Harding says I gather that you must have been sick about a month. You were very delirious, too, I take it."

" And—er—what was the matter with me, David?"

" Brain fever, sir."

We had descended the stairs, and after moving down another hall, David pushed aside some curtains and led me into a room.

The room was a bachelor's den. A cheery, open fireplace threw its glow upon some bookshelves, several stands covered with magazines and cigars, and upon three or four easy chairs.

In two of these latter, before the fireplace, sat two men who rose upon our entrance.

Both men were tall and sparse. One of them had a trim, gray Van Dyke beard and was slightly bald. Instinctively I felt that this was Dr. Harding—Dr. Thomas Harding, whom I was later to know as the man of my destiny.

The other man was clean shaven, and wore glasses, which gave him a studious, grave look.

And strange to relate, I, the man without a memory, knew who he was. It later developed that the only thing I did not know was what I mostly wanted to know—my own past. This tall, thoughtful man, who bent upon me such a curious gaze, was the President of the United States.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH I HEAR MY HISTORY.

DR. HARDING came forward with a look of genuine pleasure on his countenance, and seized my two hands and shook them heartily.

" It gives me great pleasure, James," said he, " to see you upon your feet once more after your terrible illness." He retained one of my hands and led me to the President.

" James, this is the President of the United States."

The President shook hands with me and smiled gravely.

" Dr. Harding and I- were taking a stroll when he asked me to come in here while he had a look at his patient. I trust that this informal call does not disturb you, Mr, Monroe?"

He surveyed me with a kindly, yet searching gaze. , Little did I dream that I was being judged, that whether or not I was to live or die rested upon this apparently chance visit of the Chief Executive.

" No, indeed, Mr. President!" said I with a smile. Then I tried a chance shot. " It is not often that James Monroe has so distinguished a visitor." Dr. Harding shot a quick glance at me, but the President seemed to notice nothing unusual.

" Sit down, James, sit down!" cried the doctor, dragging another easy chair between the ones that had been occupied by himself and the President previous to my entrance into the room. " Lord, boy!" he said when I was seated. " We must not overexert you! You may go, David." This to my valet. David turned and left the room.

Then the President and Dr. Harding began a conversation in which I did not take much part. I, as a convalescent, was automatically excused from active participation if I so desired. So I sat there, listening to those two great men discussing current

topics, venturing a word or remark only when I felt that it was safe to do so.

I was as sensitive of my mental affliction as any cripple of his physical deformities. Part of this was due to a secret, unreasoning sense of shame, and part to the fear of the gray walls of sanatoriums and insane asylums that ever lurked in the back of my brain.

Finally the President glanced at his watch and rose, saying:

" I hope you'll pardon me, but it is time I was at my day's work. The time I usually allot myself for a morning stroll is up, and I am very much a creature of habit, Mr. Monroe."

And when I would have risen also, to see him off, Dr. Harding pushed me back into my seat, saying:

" No, James, rest yourself. I am sure the President will excuse you if I play the part of host."

The President smiled in acknowledgment of my understood apology.

" Certainly," said he. " And I am very glad to have met you, Mr. Monroe,"

After they had left the room I sat and gazed reflectively into the fire, greatly relieved that Dr. Harding had taken the duties of host on his shoulders; for I would not have known in what direction lay the street door.

The President and Dr. Harding had not evinced any knowledge of my mental blight. I was immensely relieved, and felt that if I but exercised a little caution I could keep my misfortune a secret until I had learned enough about myself to render discovery impossible.

The words of the President and the doctor, as they moved down the hall, were distinctly audible to me, as but a curtain covered the entrance into the room in which I sat.

" About that theoretical experiment we were discussing this morning, Mr. President," came the voice of Dr. Harding, " have you formed any opinion yet as to its practicability?"

" Well," Uie President's words were very thoughtful, " I think it may be a success. Of course, time will tell, as it has done before. But, whatever the result, Dr. Harding, I shall always think of you as the greatest of living scientists."

" Tut, tut, Mr. President," protested the doctor. " One can become an expert in any line if one learns all about it."

Came than the sound of a closing door and of footsteps in the hall without. Dr. Harding came back to me, beaming, and rubbing his hands together.

"Now for some dinner—or breakfast," he corrected himself, remembering, I take it, that I had not yet eaten this day. " I dare say you are nearly famished, James!"

" I am," said I.

So we went into the dining-room, where David served us a very delightful repast. The taste of the food was a delicious and unique sensation to me, I never having gone through such an experience that I knew of. I could not conceal my manifest delight, and Dr. Harding, though he kept up a flow of pleasant conversation, watched me quietly all through the meal; after which we again repaired to *my* den.

When we were seated before the fire once more (it being a chill, cool day in autumn), Dr. Harding extracted a cigar from a box that lay on a stand at his elbow, and, as a matter of course, handed the box to me.

I knew, somehow, what a cigar was for, but I did not recall whether I had ever smoked one or not. But the action of Dr. Harding, in handing me the box, seemed to indicate that James Monroe was addicted to the use of the narcotic weed. So I took one, quite casually, bit off the end, lighted it, and flicked the match into the open fireplace.

And then it happened.

I had got safely past the first few puffs when Dr. Harding said something to me (what it was I cannot remember), and I attempted to answer him with my mouth full of smoke. Followed then a short period of sputtering and choking until I had rid my lungs of the vile stuff. When I looked up with tear-filled eyes the doctor was again regarding me with that quiet, searching gaze of his.

A feeling of panic swept over me. With a trembling hand I would have once more put the cigar between my lips, but the doctor stayed me.

" Don't smoke any more, James," said he kindly. " I want to talk to you."

I tossed the cigar after the match that had ignited it and prepared myself for a mental battle with the scientist.

" In the first place," said he watching me with his keen eyes, " I want you to tell me the truth and nothing but the truth. Don't hide anything. Please remember that a doctor is the recipient of as many secrets as a lawyer or a priest."

He stroked his trim, gray Van Dyke beard several times before he went on, while my panic increased. Did he know?

" About two months ago," he began slowly and carefully, " your man brought you back from the West with a slight attack of brain fever. For several weeks you were confined to your bed with but scant attention. Then your condition grew much worse, and I took charge of you."

Once more he paused and gazed thoughtfully into the fire.

" I do not believe," he continued, " that ever in my entire professional career have I witnessed such a case of brain fever. For several weeks you were unconscious, and it took six weeks of constant, anxious watching before I even thought that you might pull through. And, James," impressively. " I was greatly concerned about the effects of two months' fever upon my patient's mind."

God! Then the doctor knew! I gripped the arms of my chair tensely.

" So I want you to answer truthfully, James," said he, " the question I shall ask you. Will you?"

For a second I hesitated, then glanced into the honest, luminous eyes of him, and threw all pretense to the winds.

" Yes."

" Well, then, James, *have you any recollections of your past lije?"*

" No, doctor I have not," was all I said, but it was enough, for it placed my secret into the hands of Dr. Harding.

He nodded. " I thought — I feared it would be thus." Then reading the misery in my eyes, he laid a hand on my arm and said, almost tenderly as a woman: " But do not let it grieve you, my friend. Loss of memory is a defect that can be easily remedied. True, I cannot bring back recollection, but I can supply you with all the important facts of your life. And I will be your constant companion to guide you over the many pitfalls you will encounter. Luckily, there are hardly any people in the East that you know, outside of myself; for, although your home is in Washington, you spent a great deal of your time in the West."

" Thank you, doctor," said I gratefully. " But, tell me: Who am I?"

" Why, James Monroe, of course!"

" Yes—yes—but what do I do? Am I rich or poor? Have—"

" If it's your history you want, I'll tell it to you," chuckled the doctor.

" Yes, please do," I entreated; " and tell me everything, for remember, I know absolutely nothing about myself."

" Indeed," said he, " there is not much to tell. You have always led a very commonplace existence."

" Are my father and mother living?"

" No, they are both dead."

" Can you tell me anything of them?"

" Yes, James, I can. You see, I anticipated this thing and gathered all the information I could about your parents and yourself. Your father's name was Frank Monroe. Your mother was a Cuban of Spanish descent. Inez Letorres, she was called. Though they lived here in Washington and you were born here, they are both buried in Cuba in the private burial-ground of your mother's family. You have no living relatives that I know of."

" How Old am I?"

" You were born August 20, 1885. You are now twenty-nine years old."

I was struck by a sudden thought. " What date is it?"

" This is the 15th day of October, 1914."

" All right. Now, what is my occupation?"

" Your father left you a comfortable income, and you, after finishing school—you are a graduate of Cardell University—were seized with the wanderlust and spent—"

" What year did I leave Cardell?" I interrupted him.

" You belong to the class of 1907," said the doctor. " And, to continue, you spent

the last seven years of your life in traveling over North, South, and Central America. You were in either California or New Mexico when you were seized by brain fever.

" And that is all I can tell you, James, about yourself, except that you are practically unknown in Washington, your home town.

" And you must not take your misfortune too much to heart. In a few weeks you will become accustomed to people calling you - James Monroe ' and be almost your normal self again.

" And do not forget that you always have Thomas Harding for a friend and counsellor. Whenever you are in doubt or are perplexed come to me and I will be more than glad to help and advise you."

He extended his hand and I clasped it. Thus began a friendship that, though it came close to renunciation—very close—is now one of the few treasures of my existence.

All that day Dr. Harding and I were together. He did a great deal toward the developing of my nascent mind. We talked much in my cozy den and took a ride around Washington, during which he pointed out and told me of things I was supposed to know.

Yet that night I stood before my mirror and surveyed myself long and earnestly. My dark features gazed cheerily back at me. But what struck me was the fact that my face seemed eloquent of health, overspilling with vitality. My eyes appeared clear and steady. It certainly was not the appearance one would expect of one who had just recovered from a terribile, two months' siege of brain fever. Which was but the first of many flaws I was to discover in the story of my life as narrated to me by Dr. Thomas Harding.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH I FALL IN LOVE.

A BOUT a year after my recovery from that fearful illness I was in the city of San Francisco. During that year I had obtained a firm grasp on what had been my previous history. Aided by my friend, Dr. Harding, I had unraveled the tangled skein of my life. Though I retained no mental recollections of the things I had done, still I knew of them.

And as it was here, in the Southwest, that the thread of my life had snapped, it was but natural that I should be as irresistibly drawn to it as a compass needle to the magnetic pole. I had come out of curiosity, and half-hopeful that the sight of the country in which I had been wandering would bring back my missing memory. My faithful servant, David, accompanied me.

But my sense of remembrance remained inactive, and once I had arrived I stayed out of sheer love for the virile Southwest.

' As this was my first visit to California's famous city I put up at a fashionable hotel and set about to enjoy myself, leaving David much to his own devices.

I " did " Chinatown, crossed the bay and explored Oakland, made several excursions on San Francisco Bay, and saw those pillars of nature that form the Golden Gate.

In a day or two there came to me a letter from Dr. Harding. My friend had taken charge of my affairs in the East while I was dallying in the West in a vain search for so chimerical a thing as an evanescent memory. The doctor had written me relative to a certain investment that he thought would be a good one.

I sat down and wrote him an answer telling him to go ahead—any investment he cared to make was all right with me—I didn't care a continental if he bankrupted me. Which shows how much I trusted this friend of mine. Then, having nothing else to do, I put on my hat and went out on the street to mail the letter in one of the numerous mail-boxes that stand on the street corners of our cities, instead of giving it to David, as had always been my custom.

Sometimes I wonder what would have been the course of my life had I not been on the streets at this particular time. Would I have ever found out, I wonder? Had I sent David to mail that letter the chances are that I would never have seen Mary Stevens. Dr. Harding was to have ample opportunities to regret the writing of a letter that called for an immediate answer.

I had almost reached the mail-box when I saw her. She was approaching me from the opposite direction in the company of a man, and because I am of an observant nature I noticed them as they passed me. They were both so deeply engrossed in conversation that they hardly glanced at me.

The man was a tall, muscular, sandy-haired fellow, and the woman, while tall for a woman, was not nearly so tall as he. Her hair was almost blue-black, and this accentuated the whiteness of her face. As she smiled at her escort dimples showed in her cheeks, and through her parted lips I caught the gleaming whiteness of her perfect teeth. I had not time to notice whether her eyes were blue or gray.

Now, in my one short year of conscious existence I had never met a woman who had held more than my passing fancy. And I had it on the authority of Dr. Harding that I had been equally immune in those twenty-nine years of which I knew naught. But there was something about this tall, pale-faced woman that made me turn and look at her after she and her companion had passed me.

A roguish urchin on the sidewalk snickered at my behavior.

" Some chicken, ain't she, boss?" he asked me, grinning widely; but I ignored him and began to follow the woman without any fixed purpose in mind.

She walked down the street, just ahead of me, a trim and graceful figure. But the man, too, won my grudging admiration. His tall, erect carriage, square shoulders, and mighty muscles that were evident, even through the clothes he wore, rendered him a fitting companion for the beautiful woman at his side. When I saw her look up at him and smile into his face, a sudden unaccountable resentment took possession of me and a sort of jealous dislike for the man was born in my heart.

They entered the Cosmopolitan—the hotel at which I was staying, and from the outside and through a window I saw the man write his name on the register and then hand the pen to the woman. A great relief swept over me. Evidently he had not the privilege to write " and wife" after his name.

After she had signed her name a bell-boy preceded the woman to her room while the man made his way to the dining-room.

" Come out of it, boss!" piped a merry voice at my elbow, and I looked down to see the same mischievous youngster who had found such delight in my antics back at the mail-box.

"Better mail your letter," he advised me, with another expansive grin, and I realized for the first time that I still carried the letter addressed to Dr. Harding.

" Gimme a quarter an' I'll mail it for you," cried the boy. " You might lamp another Janel"

I tossed him a coin and gave him the letter and he scampered away with it. As he was of that age when a boy considers a girl in the same class as toads, snakes, and other noxious creatures, I was content that my letter would be safely mailed this time.

I entered the hotel and, with a smile at the clerk to excuse my action, whirled the register around so that I could examine the names written therein. The woman's name caught my eye first: •" Mary Stevens, New Orleans, Louisiana." And above it I read: " Harry McShane, New Orleans, Louisiana." In spite of the dissimilarity in names, the fact that they both came from the one city suggested to me that they were of some kin—some blood relationship.

An impulse swept over me to follow Harry McShane into the dining-room and in some way make his acquaintance. Later on, naturally, I would be introduced to Mary Stevens, which was what I desired. Some people may sneer at love at first sight, 'saying that true love can only be the result of continued association and an appreciation and knowledge of the loved one's character. It may be that they are right, but I was certainly very much interested in Mary Stevens from the first glance—perhaps loved her—it is not for me to say.

But something made me fight down the impulse to go into the dining-room. I turned and left the Cosmopolitan and took an aimless stroll through the streets of San Francisco. Dear God! What a terrible scene would have been enacted in that hotel had I come face to face with Harry McShane!

Some hours later I returned to the hotel and went directly up-stairs to my room, David was there before me, though it was obvious that he had but just returned. He emerged from the wardrobe, where he had hung his hat and coat, just in time to take mine.

I had sunk into an easy chair when he once more came out of the wardrobe. He walked over to the table and began to toy with the pages of a magazine he picked up. David was a small man—almost as small as a Jap, but equally as tough and wiry.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see him, from time to time, glance at me in a hesitating, embarrassed way, make as if to speak to me, then finger his magazine once more.

Clearly there was something on David's mind that he wished to tell me. What it was I could not imagine.

Finally, however, he closed the magazine, placed it back on the table, then came over and stood before me.

" Mr. Monroe, sir," he began, " there is something I want to tell you."

" Yes, David," I smiled. " One can tell by your behavior that there is something on your mind."

" " Well, sir," he said, " I—I— Oh! Mr. Monroe, I wouldn't do this, really, if I could help it! It has been a very pleasant year to me—this year, during which I have served you, and no one can regret it more than I that I must sever our pleasant connections."

I sat bolt upright. This was indeed a surprise.

"Why, David!" I cried. "You're not going to leave me, are you?"

He nodded. " I am going to quit, Mr. Monroe. You and I have come to the parting of the ways. I have never had a master whom I so regarded as a friend. After all," he said somewhat bitterly, " what are friendships made for if not to be broken?"

" David!" I cried sharply, in protest of the cynicism. " That is uncalled for! Must you be my servant in order to be my friend?"

A great, glad light sprang into David's eyes. " Thank you, sir. I shall always remember your saying that thing. I would like nothing better than to remain in your service. But you are not the first man, sir, to whom I have been valet. I am tired of that sort of life. Asking your pardon, sir—but I am tired of being another man's servant. Tell me, sir, is there any great difference between my mentality and those of other men? Tell me, frankly."

"No, indeed, David!" I said heartily. Quite the contrary. David possessed one of the most astute and clever brains of all the men I ever knew. Whatever led him to become a servant I do not know. Circumstances, most likely.

" Then, sir, I am going to be as free as they," said he. " Henceforth I shall serve no man, and the time will come when lesser men shall serve me!"

" Where are you going, David?" I asked, sensing the futility of urging him to remain in my employ. And even if I could have done so I would not, for I have never yet seen a high-strung songbird beating his wings against the bars of his cage without feeling a desire to liberate him from his prison, which, though it be a golden one, will in time crush his spirit if he is not freed. To me, these creatures—man, beast or bird—who attempt to throw off the restraining hand of mastery are thoroughbreds.

David's eyes shone as he answered my question. He spoke with great enthusiasm.

" I'm going to Australia, sir," said he.

"Australia!" I cried in astonishment. " Why—why, David—what in the world are you going out there for?"

" I don't believe I can explain, sir," said he. " I imagine that I shall like it. It is a splendid country. I have a cousin out there—he wants me to come to Australia. And—and—well, Mr. Monroe," he smiled, " I just want to go, that's all."

I nodded. Wanderlust and the fascination of new countries.

" Well, David," said I, " I am sorry to lose you, but I would not advise you to do anything else. When do you sail?"

" To-morrow morning."

His answer startled me. I did not expect him to name so early a date.

I grinned. " You certainly made up your mind quickly."

" There is nothing to be gained by delay," he retorted.

" What time do you leave?" I asked.

" The steamer is scheduled to sail at half past nine."

" What port are you headed for?"

" Melbourne."

" Well, I'll go down to the ship and see you off, my friend," said I.

I glanced at my watch. It was the dinner hour.

" Come down-stairs with me, David," said I, " and be my guest this evening."

He smiled at me. " With pleasure, Jim."

I laughed. I could not help it. The metamorphosis from David, my servant to David, my equal was certainly complete.

Then the thought struck me that in the whole year of our association I had never known his full name. As my servant, " David " was sufficient. Now that he was my friend and equal it was essential that I know his full name.

" What is your name, David?" I asked as we descended the stairs. " Your full name?"

" David Robertson," he responded.

David and I spent a merry evening in the dining-room. There were many tables and they were all filled with cheery people.

I thought of Mary Stevens and Harry McShane, and my glance ran over the numerous tables until I located them about four tables removed from us. I had a very good view of them, while we were hidden from their sight by that accident of chance that had led David and myself to select a table in a corner that was screened from the observation of others by a tall, graceful palm.

Big Harry McShane sat with his back to us, and opposite him sat Mary. David sat with his back to McShane and could not see them. The light that came from an incandescent overhead shone^full on the girl's face. It was a thoughtful face, and the sheer beauty of it almost left me breathless, and did make me, for an instant, lose the trend of David's conversation. I fell to watching the play of her features as she talked to McShane. Her eyes, which I now saw were blue, sparkled with animation, and now and then her white teeth flashed through smiling lips.

On the street I had taken her for a mature woman; but now there was a youthfulness, a freshness about her that made her seem a mere girl.

And yet there was something in the blue eyes of Mary Stevens that I did not like. Did you ever look into the brown eyes of a timid fawn? There dwells therein a hunted look—an expression of awful fear that even the security of solitude, or the reassuring caress of a friendly hand cannot wholly banish. Such, as nearly as I can describe, is the sort of look that I fancied I saw from time to time in the girl's eyes even as she talked and jested with her companion.

Though they entered later, Mary and McShane finished their meal first and left the dining-room before we did.

When David and I had finally finished we went to a theater, after which we came back to the hotel. We talked for a while in my rooms, and then David, who in his new-born independence would no longer share my rooms but had engaged one of his own, arose and departed.

For a long time I lay on my bed before I finally fell asleep. Thoughts of Mary Stevens, whom I had seen but twice, kept crowding into my brain; and also thoughts of David, whose departure on the morrow I would witness with regret for, truly, I would miss him exceedingly when he was gone.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH I SURPRISE DAVID.

I HAD come on board the steamer City of Melbourne to see David off for his far country. He had engaged one of the best staterooms on the ship, and while I said nothing he evidently sensed my curiosity.

" First-class is the only sane method of traveling on ships, Jim," said he; " all the other accommodations are rotten! Take my advice if you ever sail the seas. Get the best. It will cost you more, but you will not regret it. You see, Jim, I've traveled before."

I nodded. But an ocean voyage was farthest from my thoughts then.

" And I am not penniless, Jim," continued David. " It will not embarrass me in the least to travel this way."

Again I nodded, and a silence fell between us. The time had come for me to bid my friend good-by and go ashore.

" Well, good-by, David," said I, taking his hand; " I am very sorry to see you go. I shall miss you greatly. Do you know, David, that I did not really need your services when I came West, but merely kept you because I desired your companionship?"

He grinned like a pleased boy. " I suspected it. Now, Jim, promise me that if you ever come to Australia you will hunt me up."

" I surely will!" I promised. " And you —you will come back to the United States sometime, David?"

A far-away look came into his eyes. " No, I think not, Jim. I have had this thing in mind for a long time. I think I will like Australia. I think I will stay there. No, Jim; the chances are that I shall never see San Francisco again."

"Well, good-by, David," said I again, and again we shook hands.

" Good-by, Jim," said he.

I walked out of the stateroom and shut the door behind me.

The deck was crowded with people. People who were to sail on the City of Melbourne were hurrying and mingling with others who, like myself, had come to see some friend or relative off. Porters hurried to and fro placing the baggage of prospective passengers. The shouts of the ship's officers giving orders mingled with the calls of good-by and bon-voyage that they who were not to sail were throwing behind them as they sought their way out.

Suddenly I halted and gazed into the crowd. There, making their way through the press, were Mary Stevens and Harry McShane. The big, muscular fellow carried two large suit-cases, while the woman carried a smaller one. Were they, too, bound for Australia?

They walked into the stateroom next to David and closed the door. I did not move, but watched until McShane emerged with but one suit-case and entered the stateroom next to hers, so that Mary was placed between him and David. A moment later several porters entered their staterooms with the larger and more cumbersome baggage.

So Mary Stevens and Harry McShane were going to Australia! Then I was to lose track of this tall, beautiful girl who had so greatly interested me from the first moment I saw her! A wave of helplessness swept over me as I realized that with the Pacific Ocean between us she would pass out of my life forever. She would be in another continent which, to me, seemed the equivalent of another world. Yes, she would pass out of my life unless—unless—

For a moment I dwelt on the idea that had dawned on me. *Why not go to Australia, too?* I was footloose and free. There were no ties that bound me to America. Dr. Harding was looking after my business affairs until I should return from my Western trip. And he could just as well do so until I returned from Australia. There was no reason why I should not go if I wanted to.

I glanced at my watch. Nine o'clock. The ship sailed at half past nine. Half an hour. Could I, in that time, secure the things I would require for an ocean voyage? I would try it, anyway.

I ran off the ship and sprang through the crowd on the wharf muttering, " Beg pardon!" and "Excuse me!" to those with whom I collided in my haste.

I sped up to a taxicab and shouted at the chauffeur: " First dry-goods store! Got to make that steamer! Hurry up!"

The car started almost before I had slammed the door shut after me. That man was a driver after my own heart.

When I felt the car slowing down I stepped on the running-board and leaped onto the pavement as soon as it was safe to do so. With a cry of " Wait!" to the chauffeur I darted through the door of the clothing-store.

A slender, smiling clerk with an oiled pompadour came toward me. Before he had time to say a word I shouted: " Give me a dozen size sixteen and a half collars

—Slidewell—half a dozen sixteen shirts—couple dozen pairs of socks—some shoes—size seven—hurry up! Get somebody to help you! Come here, you fellows!" This to several more clerks whom I could see farther down the aisle.

They all gazed at me with open-mouthed wonder for a moment while I continued to berate them. Then, sensing my urgent haste, they all fell to work with a right good will and began to stuff the articles I needed into a suit-case that I had grabbed from a shelf behind a counter.

When it was filled I slammed it shut and asked quickly, jamming my hand into my pocket and running for the door: " How much?"

One of the sweating clerks ran beside me. " Er—ah—about eighty some dollars, I think, or—"

I thrust four twenties and a ten into his hand.

" Keep the change!" I cried.

As soon as the chauffeur saw me dart out of the door he threw the gear-lever into low, and the machine was already in motion when I sprang into it.

" The Third National Bank!" I cried.

This was near by and was where I kept my account.

Reaching it, I wrote myself out a check for a sum of money large enough to pay my expenses to and from Australia and enough for any emergency that might arise.

I seized the bills that the cashier gave me without bothering to count them and shoved them into my pockets as I again ran for the car.

Back to the wharf we raced. I leaped out of the car and handed the driver a twenty-dollar bill. I was just about to dash for the ship when I remembered something I had almost forgotten.

Six months ago when I was leaving Washington, D. C., for the West Dr. Harding had asked me to keep him informed concerning my whereabouts.

" And Jim," he had said laying a gentle hand upon my shoulder, " if ever you should take it into your head to visit again the South American republics—or any other foreign country—promise me that you will tell me of it before you go."

It had been but a natural request of one who professed to be my friend, and I had promised him readily enough.

Here I was on my way to Australia, and I must keep my promise to Dr. Harding.

I took a pencil and a sheet of paper out of my pocket and, laying the latter on the running-board of the taxicab, wrote the following message:

Dr. Thomas Harding,
1247 C Street, S. W.,
Washington, D. C.

Am leaving for Australia in ten minutes aboard City of Melbourne. Good-by.

JAMES MONROE.

I handed it to the chauffeur.

" Would you mind taking this to a telegraph office and sending it for me?"

" Certainly, sir," said he, politely, taking it. That twenty dollars was a much larger tip than he had expected. He drove off, and I picked up my suit-case out of which protruded the sleeves of shirts and the ends of collars, much to the amusement of bystanders, and hurried aboard the City of Melbourne with a scant two minutes to spare.

I stood on the deck, panting from my recent exertions, while the gangplank was raised and the ocean liner began slowly to churn the waters. I was off! But on what a fantom chase! *This following of a woman, to whom I had never spoken, halfway around the world just to be near her, was as near an approach to Don Juan Quixote's senseless windmill expeditions as anything I had ever witnessed.

But no thought of the boyishness of my behavior disturbed me. A great elation burned through my veins like a fiery tonic. I stood there on the deck, under the spell of an exciting reverie, gazing at the waters until long after we were on the bosom of the Pacific Ocean.

I grinned widely at the thought of the astonishment my appearance would cause in David. I decided to surprise him after I had secured a stateroom.

One of the passengers was pacing the deck slowly, gazing over the wide expanse of waters with that feeling of awe which the sight of a vast, waterly universe always awakens in one who is dreamily or thought-

fully inclined. With the license of one who is seeking some one I asked him where I could find the purser. He obligingly pointed him out to me.

The purser was a short, stocky individual with grayish hair. He was talking -to several men when I approached him, but he instantly gave me his attention.

" I'd like to engage a stateroom," I began.

" Haven't you got one?" he asked. " Or can't you find yours?"

" I have none," said I. " You see, I did not decide to come until the last minute. In fact, I just got on board before they raised the gangplank."

" Have you a ticket?"

" No."

" Where are you going?"

I reflected. Melbourne was the ship's farthest port. I could buy a ticket for that city and then if Mary Stevens left the steamer at Honolulu, Auckland, or Wellington, I could leave it also.

" Melbourne," said I.

" Then you'll have to buy a ticket, of course," said he, " and that will entitle you to a stateroom. The steward will give you your choice of those that are not occupied."

He told me the price of a ticket, and I paid him the necessary^amount. He then summoned the steward, who conducted me to the unoccupied staterooms.

They were not as agreeable quarters as those occupied by David and Mary and Harry McShane. Then, too, they were considerably removed from my friend.

But I selected the best of them and did not complain, as, naturally, the first comers had secured the best quarters when they had bought their tickets.

I set my suit-case on the floor, and tipped the steward. When he had gone I surveyed my quarters critically. They really were not bad. They were simple and serviceable. They were better than I had expected to obtain on such short notice.

I performed some needed ablutions, and left my room to descend on David.

When I came to the door behind which I had bidden him good-by I knocked twice, sharply, before I heard him bid me to " Come in."

I opened the door, entered, and closed it behind me. I placed my back against it and waited, with a smile, for David to look at me.

He was seated in a cushioned chair reading a novel and smoking. He did not look up from his book when I entered, thinking, perhaps, that it was but the steward or some other ship's worker. For, you see, David knew no one on board, and was not expecting a friendly call.

But when he heard no sound after I entered he looked up with a quick glance. When he caught sight of me a puzzled look came into his eyes to be replaced by a wide-eyed stare a second later. A startled gasp came from him, and he sprang up, dropping his book and cigar in his astonishment.

He stood there for an instant in open-mouthed wonder, and then strode forward and seized me by the two shoulders.

"Jim, Jim!" he stammered. "Why, Jim! Jim! Is this yOu? Are you here? Where did you come from?"

" Yes, it is I, David," I assured him.

" Didn't you go ashore? Don't you know the ship-is on the ocean?"

" Of course I do!" I laughed. " I came on board knowing that the ship would sail the sea."

He eyed me a minute in speculative silence. Then he broke forth eagerly:

" Oh, Jim! Are you going to Australia, too?"

" Yes," said I. " You guessed it."

" But, Jim," he said, puzzled; " you said nothing about it when you bade me good-by. When did you decide to go? What made you do it?"

" Well," said I, " when I was leaving the ship, after saying farewell to you, I suddenly made up my mind to go with you. I hurried, and got some clothes and money and got here just in the nick of time." Which explanation was strictly true, although I omitted a certain part of it.

" Yes-s," said David doubtfully, " I see. But I can't understand how or why you changed so quickly."

" David," said I, " I am a man of independent means. Why should I not travel if I feel like it? A sudden desire came over me to see Australia, and, being on a

ship thither bound, when the thought struck me I just naturally stayed on it."

He laughed and slapped me on the back.

" Well, anyway, I'm glad you're going with me!" he said. " Come on over here and sit down. I want to talk to you."

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH I FRIGHTEN A LADY.

'T'HE rest of that day I spent partly in company of David and partly by strolling aimlessly about the ship. Not once did I catch sight of Mary Stevens; not even at meal-time. For some reason she kept to her room that day. I did not see McShane at table, either, although I did once see the big fellow walking on deck smoking a short, black cigar. He did not, however, see me, as he did not turn around, but walked straight on.

After supper David and I sat on our steamer-chairs talking. He was smoking, but I was not. I had never attempted another flirtation with my Lady Nicotine since the day Dr. Harding offered me one—the day he had visited me in company of the President of the United States.

" How long are you going to remain in Australia, Jim?" my companion asked me.

" Well, I don't just know, David," said I slowly. " The thought of visiting the island continent came on me very suddenly, and the thought of returning to the United States may come on me equally as sudden —the United States or some other country —it just depends." But I did not state upon what depended the direction that would be taken by my restless feet.

We talked until David's cigar burned out. Then he arose to his feet, saying:

" I'm reading the swellest yarn. Come with me to my room; I want to read it. I'll give you something to read, too."

" Not just now, David," said I. " Go ahead and finish your story. I'll come, too, in a couple of minutes. I want to watch the stars come out."

He departed after being assured that I would join him when the last of the stellar lanterns had been hung out.

The sun had sunk, seemingly, beneath the water. The twilight—the dusk—that marks the merging of darkness and daylight hung over the ship. In about half an hour it would be dark.

One of the most fascinating diversions a man can find is to watch the nightly birth of the stars. You look for a certain one intending to observe its coming—and, lo! there it is! It came without being seen! The riddle of the stars was the first mystery to baffle man's intellect.

I heard the sound of footsteps and glanced aside to see the figure of a woman approaching me. My pulse quickened. It was Mary Stevens!

She did not glance at me, but walked right past me and on. When she was about ten feet from me I heard something strike the deck-floor with a tiny, jingling sound. I looked, but could not see anything.

Apparently Mary did not hear it, for she gave it about as much attention as she did me and walked slowly on.

I got up and walked to where I had heard the object fall. I half-knelt and peered about. All at once I saw it and picked it up. It was a very small gold locket with an extremely thin chain of the same metal. The catch had come unfastened and it had fallen from the neck of Mary.

With no other thought than the restoration of this trinket to its rightful owner I hurried after her. I could just barely see her, in the darkening dusk, before me.

She had stopped and, leaning against the rail, was staring across the water.

I came up to her and stopped, just behind her.

" Madame," said I, " pray, excuse me, but you dropped your locket when you walked past me a moment ago."

She turned around and took the locket which I held in my extended hand.

At the same time she looked into my face.

The thanks she was about to utter died on her lips. Her eyebrows contracted into a puzzled frown, and she leaned forward and scanned my features more intently, with her lips slightly parted.

May it please God that never again, as

long as I live, shall I ever -witness such an expression of absolute terror, such a look of awful horror as came over her face then.

The locket fell to the floor again and her hands flew to her heart. All the blood receded from her cheeks, leaving them chalk-white. Her eyes dilated to their fullest extent, then, with an inarticulate moan, she fainted and sank in a helpless heap at my very feet.

It had all happened so quickly, and so astonished was I, that I had not time to check her fall to the deck-floor.

I cupped my hands to my mouth and let a hoarse shout out of me. Then I dropped onto my knees beside the prone figure and was raising her head when footsteps pattered on the deck. Help was coming in response to my cry.

" Wassa matter?" asked a score of excited voices. Some one turned the glare of an electric torch upon the unconscious girl.

" The woman fainted," said I shortly.

The stewardess bustled forward. " Carry her to her room!" said she.

A dozen willing hands came forward, but I waved them aside and picked up Mary's inert form in my arms and carried her to her room.

I gently laid her upon a divan. The stewardess unbuttoned the collar of the girl's shirtwaist while the steward cleared everybody out of the room but me. I guess he thought I had a right to remain.

The stewardess sprinkled some water on the white, drawn face while the steward and I rubbed and slapped her wrists.

" Looks like she had a scare," commented the steward, and I held my silence.

Finally Mary drew a long breath, a bit of color flowed back into her cheeks, and her eyelids opened. Her lips moved.

The stewardess bent down to catch the words.

" What is it, dear?"

" Send him away," said Mary faintly.

" Who?" asked the stewardess, while the steward and I looked on.

The girl's glance rove around the room and rested on my face. Once more I saw the horror spread over her fair features.

She pointed a trembling hand at me.

" Hini!" she cried. "Him! Sam, there! Send him away! Sam! Oh, God—" Once more she fainted.

The stewardess began her ministrations at once, and the steward turned to me, hostility and anger in his voice and face.

" What have you done to her?" he demanded fiercely.

I spread my hands out helplessly.

" Nothing, upon my honor," I protested. " She fainted when I was returning a locket she had lost. That's all I know, really."

" But, how—" he was perplexed.

" She called me Sam, didn't she? And you know my name is James Monroe."

" That's what *you* say!" said he. " How do I know? But we'll see about this when she comes to again. You'll hear from me later if you're in any way responsible for this poor girl's fainting fit. Now, you'd better go, so she won't take another."

I walked out, and he shut the door behind me. I walked down to my deck-chair where I had found the locket, the author of all this trouble. Half-way there, I paused and looked back in time to see Harry McShane hurrying into Mary's room.

Reaching my deck-chair, I slumped into it, my senses all in a whirl. What was the meaning of all this?

Why had Mary fainted when I had spoken to her? And that look of horrible fear that had overspread her face! The very memory of it made my flesh crawl and caused the hair on my neck to raise.

That it was the sight of me that had caused it I knew from her asking that I be sent from the room. Was it possible that some time, somewhere, in my veiled past I had met this woman before? And if I had, what had I done to her to bring such terror into her eyes?

The only ray of hope that I could perceive was the fact that she had called me Sam. It was barely possible that she had mistaken me for some one of that name. For my name, as you know, was not Sam, but James.

But was it? How did I know?- 1 had Dr. Harding's word for it. He was honest, I felt. But then—

I remembered, all at once, that Mary Stevens and Harry McShane had designated New Orleans as their dwelling-place

when they had registered in that San Francisco hotel. And what was it Dr. Harding had said to me? " You spent the last five years of your life in traveling over North, South, and Central America."

Had I, then, met the girl in New Orleans? Maybe. But the name Sam? If I were whom she thought I was, then I must have traveled under aliases; which did not say much for my past.

Was it possible that there was a dark shadow hanging over my life? After all, was there anything Dr. Harding had purposely concealed from me? Did he know? I would have given much, just then, for a half-hour's conversation with the celebrated scientist.

Where was the man who had been with me when I had been seized with brain fever? I felt that if Dr. Harding had told me all he knew, then, if there were anything more to be learned about my sealed, forgotten past, David's predecessor would be the logical one to seek. Where was he? In the British army, David had said. I had never thought of searching for him, for I had believed implicitly the story of Dr. Harding, never having had the opportunity to doubt his word.

I did not doubt it yet, wholly, but felt that there was a chance that the doctor did not know all about me; for he could not fill in the gaps of my existence when I was " traveling over North, South, and Central America." No one man is expected to know all that occurred in the hemispheric wanderings of another man unless he has traveled with him.

From chance remarks of the scientist and David I gathered that I had taken with me as a servant the man who was now a British Tommy. If Dr. Harding could not, and Mary Stevens would not (for I would not force my presence upon her uninvited) tell me this disturbing element in my misty past, then I would not be able to rest until I had found my erstwhile servant and demanded from him the particulars of what I had done while he was with me.

But the great war had been raging over a year now (it was then late in the fall of 1915), and my former valet had enlisted shortly after England had declared war on Germany, and had been, most likely, in the. thick of the fray ever since. Even before this he might have been killed by a Hun bullet; and if he were yet living, could I find him, a nameless, infinitesimal atom in the huge British army?

I could come to no decision other than to let future events determine the course of action I would pursue in this, my quest of a possible yesterday.

The sound of approaching footsteps fell upon my ear. I turned. It was the steward.

He was not seeking me, but was on his way to resume the routine of his day's work that had been interrupted when I had called for help with Mary Stevens lying unconscious at my feet, and so I intercepted him.

" How is she?" I asked.

He glared at me, did not answer, and would have passed on, but I laid a restraining hand upon his arm.

" How is she?" I demanded again.

He had to answer. "Leggo!" he snarled. " Fine nerve you got, asking me how she is, after scaring her out of her wits!"

The fellow's insolence angered me. He was but a ship's hireling, and not supposed to set himself up as my superior, or as my equal, for. that matter. I had left Mary's room, not because he ordered it, but because it had been the command of the girl herself.

"Here!" I snapped. "That's enough from you! What right have you to pass judgment on me?"

" You let go!" he roared. " I'll report you to the captain!"

"Go ahead and report!" said I. "I'll listen to censure from him for what has occurred, but not from you. You answer my questions and keep your mouth shut!"

His hostility vanished and he tried to smile.

" You'll excuse me, sir," said he, " but the sight of that poor girl's white, wan face stirred me up. It looked to me as though you were the cause of it."

My anger melted before his seeming chivalry.

" I may have been, steward," I admitted, " but not intentionally. I am as much in

the dark as you are. But, tell me, how is she?"

" Well, sir," said the steward, " she has recovered her senses all right, though die does kind of rave yet, you know. She's all weak and trembly, and Mr, McShane is in with her now, asking her to tell him what happened."

" Who is McShane, steward?"

He hesitated for a moment. " Well, I don't just know, sir," he said doubtfully. " It never occurred to me. I just naturally supposed that he was some relation of hers, although I wouldn't say for sure, you know."

I nodded absently. Then, as there was no more that he could tell me, I pressed a coin into his palm and we parted, friendly relations established once more between us.

When he had gone I turned with the intention of keeping my belated appointment with David. It was a long time since the stars and moon had replaced the sun, and my friend would be coming to see what had happened to me if I did not show up soon.

But I was not to fulfil my appointment that night.

Hardly had I turned from the steward when I again heard footsteps on the deck. I turned about once more to see who it was, just as a loud voice shouted at me: " Hey, you!"

It was big Harry McShane. The huge fellow was coming toward me with quick, determined steps. His hands were clenched together so that his great knuckles showed white and distinct, even in the pale moonlight. His freckled, good-looking face was contorted by a spasm of the blackest wrath. Murderous anger flared out of his blue, Irish eyes, and as he bore down on me he looked, for all the world, like the personification of Nemesis and Hercules rolled into one.

CHAPTER VI.

I HAVE HIGH WORDS WWH BIG M'SHANE.

IN spite of his threatening aspect, I welcomed the prospect of a meeting with McShane. It was evident from his manner that Mary had told him what had occurred between us, and surely, thought I, if the big fellow knew of any previous connection between the girl and myself, he would not be churlish enough net to enlighten me after I had told him the truth of the matter. Hope was high within me that it would develop that Mary Stevens had mistaken me for some one else..

" What is it?" I asked in response to his rather gruff hail.

He was close to me now, and he seized me by the shoulders and peered into my face, his brows knotted into a frown of concentration.

His eyes, too, grew wide, and I wondered, somewhat inanely, if he were going to faint also. His breath came in a whistling,, unbelieving gasp; he dropped his hands and drew back a pace.

" By God!" he muttered hoarsely. " Bill Sydney, as big as life! And me thinking for the past two years that he was dead!"

" Mr. McShane," I began, " I am' extremely sorry that I frightened Miss Stevens. All I did was to speak to her—"

The remark was an unfortunate one. The wrath and anger that had been in his face when he hailed me flamed into it again.

" All you did was to speak to her!" he burst forth in a very frenzy of emotion. *" Yoii speak to her—you!"* he gasped and panted for breath. " Why, you—you—Bill Sydney!"

So quickly that I did not know how it happened, he drew back his right arm and crashed his huge fist against my jaw, putting behind it every ounce of the Titanic strength that dwelt in the splendid body of him.

The blow felled me to the deck—a stunning blow that almost robbed me of consciousness.

I had a vision of the big fellow dropping onto a knee beside me. Through the mist that blurred my eyes I caught the gleam of a knife in his hand.

" I wish to hell I could finish you with a gun!" I heard him snarl. " I would, too, only I'm afraid the people on the ship will hear the shot. And I surely don't want to hang for the murder of such carrion as you,. Bill Sydney!"

Roused in a measure by the menace of

his words and his knife, I attempted to scramble to my feet. But he pushed me back on the floor with his left hand, and with the other thrust at me with his knife. I caught at his arm, and while I did not check the blow, I deflected its aim. The sharp steel cut into my shoulder like fire.

With a great effort I partly dislodged him—pushed him back enough to enable me to gain my knees. And there we knelt on the deck—deadlocked. McShane strove to free his knife-arm and strike at me in a more vulnerable spot. I was content to hold onto his arms—to keep him off and let my strength return.

Then came the sound of quick steps on the deck. They came toward us and stopped just out of my sight. McShane must not have heard them, for he gave no heed.

" Jim!"

The cry came sharp with surprise, and a man stepped from behind me and drove a fist into the face of Harry McShane. It was a tremendous blow—as powerful a one as that which had downed me. The giant shot over backward and the knife clattered to the deck.

I staggered to my feet, weak, spent, and trembling. My rescuer turned to me.

" Did he hurt you, Jim?" It was David.

" He gave me a cut in the shoulder," said I.

" Hell be put in irons for this," said a third voice. " Why, the man meant murder!"

I turned. It was the steward. He stood looking at the fallen man with an expression of horrified scorn.

" No," said I, " he'll not be put in irons! Let him go!" I don't know why, but I felt, somehow, that McShane had an unexplained justification for his attack on me.

I glanced at the Irishman. He had risen to his feet, steadying himself against the rail. He swayed to and fro like an inverted pendulum.

" Bill Sydney, you—" He spat out blood and curses together. " This isn't the last of this! I'll get you! I'll get you!" Then he turned and moved drunkenly away, clinging to the rail for support.

" Better have him put in irons, sir," said the steward apprehensively, gazing after the disappearing figure with something akin to sheer fear in his glance.

" Steward," said I, " this must be kept quiet for a while at least. Say nothing—not a word—of this affair until you hear from me. I'll settle with McShane myself, after I bandage this wound."

" As you wish, sir," said he, and took himself off, but in the direction opposite that taken by McShane. Evidently the steward regarded the Irishman as a sort of madman.

David then accompanied me to my stateroom and helped me to dress the knife-wound. It was not much of a cut. It was not very deep, and, while it would be painful, it would not incapacitate me in the least. While I was dressing myself again David told me how he had come to my rescue.

" You know, Jim," he said, " you promised to come to my room after you had seen the stars come out. Well, I waited a long time, and, when you did not come, finally decided to go and look for you."

He paused and surveyed me with a grin.

" It's a good thing for you, Jim, that I did," said he; " for when I got on deck I saw two men struggling on the deck floor. The steward was passing by and saw them also. We ran forward, and not until we reached them did I recognize you. The rest you know."

At the conclusion of this brief recital I grasped his hand impulsively. " I owe you my life, David," I murmured, but he waved aside my thanks and my hand with an embarrassed laugh.

" Nonsense," said he shortly. " Any one would have stopped the fellow from murdering you."

But I could not see it in that light. " Say what you will," I assured him, " but I will never forget what you have done."

David said nothing, and, having finished dressing, I ventured an inquiry as to the whereabouts of McShane.

" He'll most likely be in his cabin nursing his split lip," said my friend. " If his mouth hurts as much as my knuckles, it needs attention."

There was a great question in his eyes. I knew he was wondering what was the cause of the trouble between the sandy-haired giant and myself. For a moment I debated mentally, and then decided to tell David my whole sorry story. He had earned the right to hear it.

" Sit down, David," said I. " I have much to tell you."

" But, remember, Jim," said he, " you do not have to tell me anything unless you wish. There is much I do not understand, but I would willingly remain in ignorance rather than have you tell me things you should keep to yourself."

" No," said I, " I must tell some one, David."

He sat on a chair and I sat on the bed. Then and there I told him everything I knew concerning myself from the moment when he himself had found me, a pajama-clad figure, staring at my own features in the mirror that hung in the bedroom of my house in Washington, D. C. I told him the story of my past as Dr. Harding had told it to me. I told him the events of this night, my frightening of Mary Stevens, and the angry rage of Harry McShane.

He heard me to the end and, after a silence, exclaimed incredulously:

" And to think I never knew—never even suspected your grievous condition!"

" You could not know, David," said I, " for I was very careful in concealing everything from every one. But I could not have done so had it not been for the kind assistance of Dr. Harding."

David grew thoughtful. " I'm sure, Jim," said he, " that I have never observed anything in the year I have known you that would indicate that you were not what you seemed, or that your previous life was anything other than what Dr. Harding says. But it is hard to say whether he spoke the truth or not."

"Why shouldn't he?" I demanded heatedly. " Surely I have a right to know!"

" You have a right, I'll acknowledge," said my friend gravely, "but do not misjudge the doctor. He does not appear to me to be the sort of a man who would willingly do any one an injury."

That was true. I, myself, found it hard to reconcile the honest frankness of the scientist with what I considered his apparent duplicity.

" There are two possible explanations for this state of affairs," went on David; " either Dr. Harding did not know or, if he did, then the truth is some disgraceful thing that he thought best not to tell you, inasmuch as there seemed no possibility of you ever finding it out."

He paused, and I remained silent until he spoke once more.

" But now it is all changed. You suspect that some of your past is hidden from you. For your own peace of mind it is essential that you find it out. Dr. Harding should tell you now what he knows."

" And if he knows nothing?" I asked.

" Then, if we can find him, the man who was your valet prior to your attack of brain-fever is the one who should know."

" But he's in the British army," I countered, " We don't even know his name, and I don't think Dr. Harding does, either. We could never find him even if he is still living."

" Then," said David, " we'll learn the truth from Mary Stevens or Harry McShane. No, we'll just seek McShane. We ought not to molest the girl."

•" No," said I, getting up, " her dislike for me is too manifest. We will go to McShane and demand an explanation from him."

" I wonder," mused David, " why she called you ' Sam' and he called you ' Bill Sydney'? He, according to your story, knew nothing concerning your presence on the ship until she told him. She evidently knows you as Sam, and yet, as soon as he found you on deck he addressed you as Bill Sydney! I can't see through it."

" Nor can I," said I, clamping my teeth, " but that's one of the things I'm going to make him explain. Come on. He'll be in his stateroom. We'll make him talk." From my hip-pocket I drew the small automatic pistol that I sometimes carried, but which I thought I would never have occasion to use, and put it in my coat-pocket where it could be reached more easily.

We left my cabin on our errand of investigation.

" Do you know, Jim," said the man at my side as we walked between the rows of staterooms, " the name Bill Sydney sounds familiar to me? It seems to me that I have heard it before, but I cannot recall just where."

" Perhaps,"- said I, with a facetiousness that I was far from feeling, " perhaps you are slightly confused with the Australian city of the same name."

But he shook his head seriously.

" No," said he, " I am quite certain that I have heard of an individual of that name before."

" Nothing bad, I hope?"

" I don't know," said he; " it is an elusive bit of something that just escapes my memory. Maybe I'll remember it after a while."

We had now reached McShane's door, and without hesitation or any preliminary knock I opened it quickly and we stepped inside his cabin.

The big fellow was sitting on his bed, hunched up, with his elbows resting on his knees and his head clasped in his hands. He was staring moodily at the floor.

At the sound of our entrance he glanced up and sprang to his feet, ripping out the most horrible oath I ever heard issue from the mouth of man.

" What the hell you coming in here for?" he snarled as his outburst died down. His face was red with anger. The man's hair was tangled, and his eyes had a cold, murderous glare. His upper lip was bruised and swollen, and I could see traces of blood on his chin—blood that had flowed from an aperture in his gums where one of his teeth was missing. David grinned widely and delightedly at sight of the havoc he had wrought with the face of this huge giant.

Awful as were the anathemas that McShane had hurled at me, they were surpassed by the virulence of those he uttered at sight of the diminutive fellow who had struck him. He stepped forward with the intention of doing David bodily hurt when I pulled the automatic from my pocket.

" Stand still, McShane," said I coldly, menacing him with it. " You'll attempt no more cowardly murders to-night."

He broke into a short, hard laugh. I did not believe it possible that one man could evince such utter hatred for another as shone in his eyes.

" Damn you, Sydney," he grated, " the vilest murder I could perpetrate would be nothing compared to some of the things you have done!"

David, the silent, moved his position slightly.

I caught my breath. What did he mean?

" McShane," said I, " my name is Monroe. Why do you persist in calling me Bill Sydney?"

"Monroe, hell!" he sneered. "I think I ought to know Bill Sydney when I see him."

" But, why," I persisted, " do you call me ' Sydney,' and Miss Stevens—"

" You keep your dirty mouth shut about her!" he roared, and would have sprung at me, but I waved him back with the gun.

"You stand where you are!" I rasped out. " I have no wish to kill you, but if you attack me again I'll blow your insides out!"

Sullenly, he subsided.

" And another thing," I said sternly:: " it wouldn't hurt you to be civil enough to answer my questions. Can't you see that this may well be a case of mistaken identity? How do you know that I am ' Sam or ' Bill Sydney'? You should have more proof than mere facial resemblance."

He did not answer, but eyed me with his murderous eyes.

" Now, why do you call me Bill Sydney and Miss Stevens speak of me as Sam? Doesn't that prove there is a mistake somewhere?"

But still the brute remained obdurate.

"Man, man!" I exclaimed vexedly. " Can't you see we'll never arrive at the bottom of this thing unless you speak? Can nothing convince you that there is the possibility of a mistake?"

" There's no mistake," he snarled coldly. " I know what I'm doing. As for getting to the bottom of this, I'm going to finish the thing that this runt here "—jerking his head sidewise at the silent David— " spoiled when he knocked me out on deck. Next time, by God, I'll get you and get you right!"

" See here, McShane," I expostulated, " what have you against me? Why do you wish to take my life? Surely you wouldn't kill a man without any tangible, logical reason for so doing!"

" Without any reason for so doing!" McShane's voice was eloquent with—I know not what. " Why—why—" Then he collected himself angrily. " You must be a darned good actor, Bill. To listen to you reel off that spiel about injured innocence and about being a guy names James Monroe one would almost believe you. *But I know you,* Bill Sydney, and that settles it. You know as well as I do why Mary fainted and why it is my dearest wish to kill you; so don't ask any more fool questions."

" But just suppose, for the sake of argument," said I, with a final effort, " that I am neither Bill Sydney nor he whom Miss Stevens calls Sam. What then?"

" Oh, but you are," he asserted with positive finality. " If any one should know you, it should be Mary or I. I don't know yet, Bill, how you ever escaped with your life; but I'll get you!"

" Escaped what?" I asked quickly.

"Aw, shut up!" he growled disgustedly. " Let up on this play-acting. All this pretense of ignorance isn't going to deceive me. And I'm not going to answer any questions; so get out, both of you!"

The time had come for a showdown. I was determined to make this stubborn fellow speak.

" Very well," said I, calmly. " Now, listen to me: To-night you made a murderous assault upon me with absolutely no provocation whatever." I silenced his protestations. " Now, unless you tell me what you seem to know about me—what you and Miss Stevens have against me—unless you tell me—I will report you to the captain and have you put in irons for the rest of the voyage."

"You can't do it!" he snarled. "You can't prove it!"

" Oh, can't I?" I sneered, confident that I would make him talk. " I can prove it by David, here, and the steward."

McShane glanced at the little man, who had remained silent throughout our long, heated dialogue.

" David and the steward saw the wiole thing," said I, trying to impress him. " I just need to tell my story, and they will corroborate it. Then, too, your bruised lip and missing tooth will go against you. Oh, I can prove it all right."

There was no mistaking the venom in the glance he gave me.

" Go ahead," he said; " send for the captain."

He had called my bluff. With apparent harshness I turned to David. " Go and summon the captain, David," said I.

He glanced at me questioningly to see if I were really serious in my intention of placing McShane in irons.

" Go on, David," said I sternly. " I mean it. It would be folly, anyway, to let this creature roam at large on the ship when he persists in his declaration that he will kill me at the first opportunity."

My friend departed to do my bidding; while I, with leveled automatic, held at bay this burly giant who hated me with such a fearful hatred, who wished my life, and would not divulge why he did so, because he thought I knew.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH I RECEIVE AN AEROGRAM.

V/jcSHANE'S body relaxed from the tenseness it had maintained during our interview. His clenched hands now lay idly by his sides. He rested the weight of him upon one foot, the knee of the other one bent slightly, and he gazed at the floor with what I considered a tired look, as we both waited the coming of the captain.

I felt no real resentment against the fellow other than a slight anger that his mulishness prevented him from explaining his inexplicable animosity.

" Why don't you be reasonable, McShane?" I asked him persuasively. " Why can't we talk this over, man to man, to arrive at some tacit understanding? Can nothing convince you that I am ignorant of the cause of your feelings toward me? Tell me of this feud between you and Bill Sydney. Perhaps then I can clear it up. If I can prove to you that I am in truth

James Monroe will it not save you from a grievous error? And if I cannot, you may assume that I am Sydney. In all events, you should be a fair enemy and give me warning."

He glanced up at me quickly.

" I don't know what your game is, Bill," he said. " I can't see what your purpose is in assuming another identity. I don't know why you want me to narrate to you those hideous facts we both know—I don't know—I don't understand—but I'm not going to help you out any."

Then he stepped forward quickly, and, with a sudden, short blow of his left hand, knocked the automatic from my grasp. Swiftly and with a pantherish leap he sprang at me and wrapped his great arms about me in a Crushing grip.

My arms were pinned to my sides and he sought to throw me to the floor. Instinctively I braced my body this way and that to counteract the sudden pressures he brought to bear on me from quickly shifting, different angles. I strove desperately to free my arms, but his was an iron embrace.

Failing in this, I swiftly doubled my right leg and drove my bended knee sharply into his stomach—as hard and as vicious a blow as I could deliver. This sudden attack on his nether regions caused him to grunt with pain and to relax his iron hold on me sufficiently for me to extract my arms quickly.

I shot both hands for his throat and gripped it in a fierce, choking clutch. Thus we stood when David returned with the captain, the second and third officers, and two deckhands: I shutting off the Irishman's wind with relentless pressure, and he tearing frantically at my two hands, clawing and scratching at this imminent death. He writhed his body spasmodically and was kicking and striking at me with his feet.

The six newcomers hurried forward and separated us after first prying loose my rigid fingers. I believe I would have choked the man, such was the anger aroused by his second attack upon me. David and the second officer held me while the third officer and the two deck-hands restrained McShane. The latter was sputtering and sobbing for breath, caressing his marked throat. And yet he glared at me with frightful malevolence. As soon as he obtained sufficient wind for the purpose he.began to curse and vilify me.

With an angry gesture and a sharp word the captain bade him hold his foul tongue. When at last the big fellow fell silent the ship's commander looked at David.

" Is this Monroe, the man who sent for me?" He indicated me with a nod.

" Yes," said David, releasing me, " this is Mr. Monroe." Whereat, McShane laughed evilly—sardonically.

" Then, why, sir," asked the captain of me, " do you send for me and engage in a brawl while waiting?"

" The scene you just witnessed, sir," said I, " is sufficient proof of the charge I am going to make against that man, there. A short while ago he made a murderous attack upon me and was only prevented from knifing me by David Robertson and the ship's steward."

The captain started with sharp surprise while McShane's captors relaxed their hold on him in their amazement; then, suddenly realizing the full import of my words, they seized his arms more firmly than before. The Irishman himself heard my declaration with arrogant assurance and a smile for the memory of the scene.

" Is this true?" demanded the captain hoarsely of him.

" You're damned right it is!" admitted McShane cheerfully. " No use of me denying it since he can prove it in a hundred ways."

" I had thought," I went on, " to say nothing of that unfortunate occurrence since it appeared at the time that McShane had had some imaginary provocation. And I would still forget what has happened if McShane would let it go at that. I bear him no ill-will. But it appears that he still intends to take my life at the first opportunity. So, before we go any further, let me tell you, McShane, that I will let you go free if you promise not to lay violent hands upon me in the future."

Rage swept over the visage of the Irishman. He made an effort to step forward, but his guards jerked him back peremptorily.

" Promise you—promise you—" he panted, his face working convulsively. "You! No! Never! If it's the last thing I do in this world I'll have your heart, Bill!"

" You heard him, captain," I turned to that official. " Out of his own mouth he stands convicted! There remains nothing to do except jail him!"

But the captain hesitated. He wished to be more sure of his ground. He turned to McShane.

"Do you realize what you are saying, my man?" he asked.

"I do!" stormed the sandy-haired one. " Jail me if you wish, captain. I'll not hold it against you. But may I rot in hell before I give such a promise as that. Why, man, I dare not!"

" Why?" I demanded quickly, hoping to trap him into some admission.

He laughed at me and turned aside, shrugging his shoulders indifferently.

" Put him in irons," said I, and the captain nodded, whereat the two deck-hands stepped forward and snapped a pair of hand-cuffs on McShane's passive wrists. Then the second and third officers shouldered him roughly out of the room. The captain followed them, leaving me alone with David.

I picked up the automatic from the floor where it had fallen when the Irishman had struck it from my hand.

" Come," said I to David. " Come. Let us go to our rooms." We went to David's stateroom. He immediately lighted one of his everlasting cigars while I sat despondently upon a chair. I was not very well pleased with the results of my visit to McShane. To put the fellow in irons had not been my object. But circumstances had forced me to do it. What few hints I had heard from my avowed enemy's lips were of a very disquieting nature.

" David," said I, " what do you suppose he meant when he said that it was impossible for him to do anything more vile than some of the things I have done? In the name of Heaven, who is Bill Sydney?"

David extracted the cigar from his mouth, blew the smoke out slowly, eying me in a curious way.

" Jim," said he finally, "do you really want to know? Are you determined to learn the truth, be it what it may?"

" Yes," said I positively. " No matter how vile or unclean my past may have been, I must know it."

" Do you sincerely wish to know what McShane meant by saying he could do nothing more vile than some of the things you have done?" He paused, then said earnestly: " Do you want me to tell you who Bill Sydney is?"

I leaped to my feet and seized his arm.

"David!" I shrilled. "David! What did you say? Do you know who Bill Sydney is?"

He nodded. " Yes. You remember I told you that his name sounded familiar? Well, when McShane made that statement I recollected what and when I had heard of the outlaw."

" Outlaw?" I stammered. " Outlaw?"

" Yes, Jim," said David slowly. " Bill Sydney was one of the most terrible desperadoes in all Australia. Some of the things he has done are almost unbelievable in their awfulness. Perhaps McShane suffered at his hands."

" But," said I weakly, " why—how does that concern me? I am not Bill Sydney. I was never in Australia in my life."

" Is that so?" asked David, smiling queerly. " Can you prove it? May you not be Bill Sydney with his memory erased? Are you James Monroe?"

" But this Bill Sydney," said I triumphantly, " is he not in Australia? We will go to Australia and find him and thus prove that James Monroe and Bill Sydney are two different persons."

" Jim," said David; " Bill Sydney was hanged for murder in Melbourne over two years ago."

I gazed at him, startled. Then I said: " Can't I prove that? Can't we find his grave? Doesn't McShane know it?"

" Listen, Jim," explained David patiently. " This is the only way I could figure it out: Bill Sydney, as I remember it, was the leader of a desperate ga<u :> £ crooks in and about Melbourne. Sycmey was an utterly depraved, abysmal brute. Such were his cruelties that his very name struck terror into people's hearts. He was known all

over the world as the most ferocious beast that ever masqueraded in human form. About two years ago he was tried and convicted for the strangling of an aged woman who would not disclose to him the hiding-place of the jewels he thought she had."

He stopped for breath, and I waited impatiently for him to continue.

" Sydney, on the day before his execution, gave the police information that would help them to convict the rest of his band of outlaws for many crimes. Most of them were captured and some were later executed and others imprisoned for lesser crimes. Only three or four escaped.

" It was supposed that Sydney did this because, being doomed himself, it was not consistent with his evil nature to see his former companions live in peace and security after him. He was hanged the next morning after giving his band away.

" Now, what I am about to say now is merely conjecture on my part," he explained. " It is one way of solving this enigma. Sydney may have been promised his liberty if he would turn king's evidence and betray his associates. It was announced broadcast that he had been executed; but the government may have just published that to allay public feeling, which was very high against the outlaw. They may have secretly smuggled him out of the country to—say, the southwestern part of the United States."

I gasped, and my face paled. " Then I may be Bill Sydney?"

" You may be," said David. " It could be, don't you see?"

" No, David," said I; " I do not feel like the conscienceless savage you have described. Such things are entirely foreign to my nature. I hope I am an honest man. To be—"

He interrupted me with a kindly smile. " No, Jim," he said. " I cannot myself imagine you as a fiendish, murderous knave such as Sydney was reputed to be. I sincerely hope that the outlaw was hanged and buried, and that this confusing of him with you is due to a mere physical resemblance."

" You say Sydney was executed two years ago?" I asked. " I lost my memory about a year ago. Where was Sydney in the interim?"

" It is possible that the ruffian wandered about the United States for a year before he lost his memory. I am telling you this, Jim, not because I hope it is so, but merely in order to prepare you for any fearful revelation that the future may hold. When we arrive in Melbourne we can easily ascertain whether Bill Sydney was really executed or secretly freed."

" Yes," said I hopefully. " An investigation will soon dispel all this rot about me being a notorious criminal."

" We'll see, Jim," said David.

For a long, long time that night I tossed, wide-eyed, in bed. Twenty-four hours ago —ran my thoughts—I had been in a San Francisco hotel, a contented, carefree individual, and now here I was, miles away on the Pacific Ocean, a hunted man who could not call-his name his own.

I cudgeled my harassed wits in vain for a plausible solution of this strange riddle. Every theory or explanation I advanced was checkmated or contradicted by inexplicable facts.

Was I Bill Sydney? Had the famous outlaw really been smuggled into the United States and granted his liberty for betraying his companions? Had he roamed at will in America's Southwest while it had been officially announced that he had paid the penalty of his crimes? Had he lost his memory in some accident?

Perhaps. But how, then, did this exiled man come to be in Washington, D. C.? What connection could there possibly be between Bill Sydney, a coarse, brutal murderer, and Dr. Thomas Harding, the refined, esthetic scientist?

That was where my sole hope lay. Hadn't Dr. Harding assured me that I was James Monroe, just recovering from a terrible illness? Hadn't -he proved it to me? He had shown me the enormous wealth that my father had left me. He had introduced me to other scientists who had known my father and of myself before my brain blight. Why, he had even taken me to Cuba to show me the graves of my parents.

I recalled them vividly now. Two tomb-

stones, side by side, on which were inscribed the names of Frank Monroe and of Inez Monroe.

Why, the supposition that I was Bill Sydney was preposterous! How could this hunted, penniless, homeless man come into the possession of a fortune and the friendship of Dr. Harding? The chances were that the desperado was in truth dead—that the buying of his liberty with his Judasism was nothing more than David's imaginary, fanciful account of McShane's homicidal hatred of me. Such an idea could not withstand the array of facts I could bring against it.

After much debating and thinking I finally arrived at the following conclusions as the only logical ones: I was in truth James Monroe. I had really lost my memory through the ravages of brain-fever. Bill Sydney had really died upon the scaffold. My present embarrassing predicament was due to the coincidences that I had lost my memory and that I bore a striking, physical resemblance to the dead outlaw. A little investigation in Melbourne, where the villainous ruffian had been executed, would prove this to me and would silence Harry McShane, the big Irishman who sought my life.

What had Sydney done to antagonize him? Was the big, sandy-haired fellow one of the few of Sydney's band who had escaped the arm of Justice and who now sought to avenge the traitorous betrayal? I did not think so, for, in spite of his violent aversion to me I did not imagine him the type of man who would be found in Bill Sydney's gang of crooks. I felt that Sydney had done the giant a grievous wrong.

I reasoned that " Sam," as Mary Stevens had addressed me, was one of the aliases of Sydney, and the one by which she knew him. I regarded McShane as some relative of hers who sought vengeance for some wrong done to the girl by Bill Sydney.

But I would prove to these two that I was not he whom they considered me. I would secure proof of Sydney's hanging and back this up with the statements of Dr. Harding, and lay the blame of our misunderstanding to the likeness I bore to the outlaw.

Greatly comforted by these thoughts, I finally dropped into a fitful slumber in which I was troubled by hideous, nightmarish visions. Queer figures—one that resembled Harry McShane and another that I knew to be Bill Sydney—laughed at me and threatened me. But, strange to say, the thing that gave me the most concern—that seemed to menace me the more—was a horrible monster that was a grotesque caricature of Dr. Thomas Harding.

The next morning I narrated to David the conclusions I had formed during the night. He agreed, in the light of my arguments, that it was inconceivable to assume that I was Sydney. He also said the only thing to do was to wait until we got to Australia before attempting to prove to McShane that he was barking up the wrong tree.

" I guess I'll go down below and have a talk with him, anyhow," I said at last, and made to go, but he called me back.

" Better let me go," he advised. " The sight of you seems to make McShane close up like a trap. True, he will not be overjoyed to see me, but I may persuade him to talk more easily than you can."

I agreed to his plan and paced around the deck carelessly, thinking much, until he returned.

" Whew!" said he, wiping imaginary perspiration from his brow. " That was the most unpleasant half-hour I ever put in! And all to no avail. He imagines you have some dark purpose in denying your identity and is determined not to help you any."

" Then you made absolutely no progress whatever?" I was disappointed.

" Well," he said slowly, " he did say he might be tempted to believe that you are not Bill Sydney if you could furnish an account of your doings two years ago."

My heart sank. " But, David, I cannot do that!"

" I know," he said glumly, spitting savagely over the rail. " That's why I'm convinced that we can do nothing with him until we have concrete proof that you are not Bill Sydney."

" Did you tell him that Sydney is dead?" I asked.

"Yes, I told him," said David; "and he said the very same thing I said last night. He said that Sydney was secretly liberated."

I turned away just as a man approached us and stood before David. He had a sheet of paper in his hand.

" Are you Mr. James Monroe?" he questioned.

" No, that's he," and David pointed at me. The man handed me the paper.

" This just came over the wireless from Washington, D. C.," he explained, and left.

I glanced quickly at the few ominous words:

> James—For God's sake keep away from Australia! Wait for me at Honolulu. I will explain. Wait! DR. HARDING.

All at once the old fears and doubts that I had quieted sprang up again. At sight of my drawn face and trembling hands David uttered an exclamation, and I handed him the aerogram.

He read it through and then whistled softly.

"Great Scot, Jim!" he exclaimed. " What do you know about that? Looks like you might be Bill Sydney yet!"

" But I am not!" I cried almost hysterically. " How can I be?"

" It's a great puzzle, Jim," confessed David. " You can prove you are James Monroe, but how explain this wireless."

I shrugged my shoulders helplessly.

" Perhaps Dr. Harding knows of your resemblance to Bill Sydney and is afraid that you will run afoul of some of the outlaw's enemies in Australia."

" I'm afraid, though," said I pessimistically, " that there is something deep beneath the surface of this thing that we do not even suspect."

" Oh, buck up, Jim," cried my friend, with assumed cheerfulness. " Things will turn out all right yet. Don't you worry. We'll just get off the ship at Honolulu and wait for Dr. Harding. I'm sure he'll set matters aright."

" We will—like the devil—get off at Honolulu!" I cried, hot with anger. "I'll listen to no more of Dr. Harding's explanations. How do I know that he'll not tell me some cock-and-bull story and persuade me to go back to the States? I can't believe him now.

" I'm going right on to Melbourne, I tell you! If this thing is nothing more than a chance resemblance to a dead outlaw I'll soon satisfy the doubts of McShane and any one else who takes me for Bill Sydney. And if there is something that Dr. Harding is trying to keep from me I'll find out the truth myself."

" Of course, Jim," said David when I paused for breath, " if you no longer have any confidence in the doctor it is best for you to go on to Melbourne and see what happens, though, if I were you, I would either wait at Honolulu for him or go back from there to San Francisco."

" Well, I won't!" I said. " I will believe nothing now but what I learn myself. If I am James Monroe no harm will come of it. If I am Bill Sydney, then Dr. Harding is a liar and cannot be believed."

I crushed the wireless message into a ball and threw it over the rail.

" Aren't you going to answer it?" asked David. „

" No," said I shortly. " Why should I?"

" Jim," said he gravely, " you may be wronging the doctor, remember. He always acted as your friend. If you are not going to get off at the Hawaiian Islands you owe it to him to tell him of your decision."

I considered this for a moment.

" All right," I agreed with a poor grace. " I'll send him a wireless."

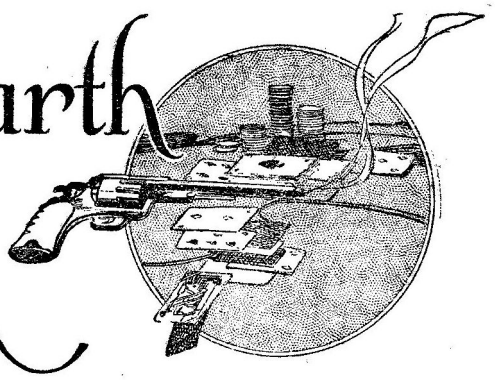
So I sought out the wireless operator and sent the following message to Dr. Harding:

> MY DEAR DOCTOR:—
>
> I am not going to wait for you at Honolulu. On this ship I have already been mistaken for the Australian outlaw, Bill Sydney. I do not care to listen to your explanations any longer, but prefer to obtain my information from more reliable sources. Hope this is the proper name that I sign to this.
>
> JAMES MONROE.

And little did I dream the course of action that Dr. Harding adopted immediately upon his recovery from the shock that the reading of my wireless gave him.

(To be continue! NEXT WEEK.)

The Fourth Notch



by James H. Thompson

THE thin-lipped coroner was bored. He presided with blase indifference at this inquest that promised nothing new in sordid sensation. All the tragedies from Nob Hill to the Barbary Coast had been reenacted before him, and he was weary of the stupid rehearsal of human banality.

There was no originality in the ceaseless round that Death traveled before his eyes. The track was well worn, and a blind man could trace it with his cane, or a fool follow its lead. No one of the many casuals that came under the coroner's judicial scrutiny stepped so much as an inch to either side or the other of the beaten path. They met Death, and walked with him according to formula. There was a tiresome and unoriginal sextet of modes they employed when they shattered the veil that hides the Hence—water, poison, rope, gas, bullet, and keen-cutting blade.

The coroner felt aggrieved that none took pains to bring novelty to his manner of exit. Why could not some of the men who were in such haste to forsake this pleasant, golf-piaying existence devise a new method of leaving off living? They made no effort to relieve the tedium of the coroner's court, but they persisted in supplying employment for that grim tribunal from day to day.- The coroner bore a grudge against all men who met sudden and violent death.

He was sometimes wont to philosophize on this stubborn lack of ingenuity. He would like at times to suggest new methods out of his broad experience and fertile inventiveness. But none who chose to cheat the death-bed gave advance notice of his intentions. Perhaps they were too weary or too hurried, the coroner reasoned. This departure from mortality is a much less fussy and preannounced affair than arrival.

So the coroner was a bit more tight-lipped than usual. He was eager to try out a new iron over on a Berkeley golf course, b: consequence of the unoriginality of routine in his court and of the new golf club, he was a shade more brusk and perfunctory than was his irritated habit. The evidence in this particular inquest at which he had been called to preside on this inviting golf morning was so patent and promised to run so true to form that he could well afford to allow his official thoughts to wander to the more perplexing hazards and bunkers over at Berkeley. Apparently this departed one had gone no inch astray from the well-worn pathway all the others had trodden.

There were but two witnesses to be called •—one the policeman who had found the body, whose testimony was given quickly, satisfactorily, and in the form learned by rote by police officers, and the other this doddering old palaverer who was now hobbling to the stand. The coroner politely shielded a yawn and nodded to the clerk to hasten the formalities.

" Name?" snapped the clerk.

" Whose name?" was the irritating reply. The witness spoke in a leisurely drawl, and

was quite evidently in no awe of official authority. The coroner resolved to put him in proper position at once, arid called to his aid a menacing frown and his deepest bass:

" Your name!" he almost shouted.

The witness was in no wise perturbed. " I thought maybe you didn't know Rob's name. Mine don't count so much. Nobody ever paid much attention to me, but Rob—"

" Answer the question!" barked the coroner.

" They used to call me Rob's Shadder," drawled the witness. " But o' course that ain't my real name."

The irate coroner summoned his greatest reserves to the aid of his offended dignity. He spaced emphatically his next demand, and accompanied it with the look that had stricken terror to other flippant witnesses.

" Will you tell me your name?" he roared.

The witness was unmoved as he intoned:

" Why, of course I will. I ain't got no reason to deny my name, an' I never did have."

" Well, then, for Heaven's sake, tell it!" snapped the coroner, betrayed into a lapse from dignity.

" Well, I will if you just give me time," babbled the witness. " It's Albert Murray, though I don't see what that—"

The preliminary questions of the inquest were a continued battle between the impatient coroner and the garrulous witness. They revealed a scant outline of the bothersome old gossip's career, no detail of which picturesque autobiography served to interest the coroner.

According to the facts prodded from him, Murray was sixty-eight years of age. He had lived through and in the boom times of the Western slopes. He had been a hanger-on in gambling houses throughout the unorderly days of the gold fever when money was easily earned and more easily lost, gaining a livelihood from attending to the wants of the players. But now he insisted on making the details of his picturesque career subordinate to those of another life — that of the redoubtable Rob, who, it appeared, had done all things but think for this, his Shadder.

The facts that the coroner's clerk winnowed from the chaff of Murray's verbiage left record that the witness had long known no other occupation than that of companion to Rob. He had rounded out the greater share of his allotted years, and was still a robust, self-reliant figure. Indefinable touches in dress—a shape to his hat, his flannel shirt, his full beard, the broad belt, the leather boots—all outlandish things in these modern times—carried with them an impressionistic picture of reckless, adventurous days.

When the history of the witness had been properly set down the coroner proceeded to urge the story of the tragedy from Murray, in hope of finding the elusive motive of which the law is always so eagerly in quest.

" Now, hurry up and tell us all you know about this case," he commanded.

Murray cleared his throat and began in a mellow diapason. He made great effort to marshal his facts in logical form and sequence as he kept his eyes fixed on the scuffed tip of his worn boot.

" Well, sir, you see, 'way back in '58, Rob an' me fell in together. I was stackin' chips in a Leadville house then, an' when Rob first drifted in I took kind o' a shine to him right away. The first time he spoke I 'member—"

"Here! Here!" interrupted the coroner. " We don't want the whole life history of you and Rob. Confine yourself to what you know about his death. That's all we're concerned with here."

For the first time during his gruelling the witness showed resentment at the official's urgency. He squared his shoulders and set them away from the back of the chair. He was a beast at bay.

" Now, see here, young feller," he said with a crude and impressive authority, " I've let you run this so far 'cause it didn't seem to have anything to do with anybody 'cept you and me. But now Rob's in the story, an' I've got to have my way 'bout it. I'm goin' to tell the whole story 'bout Rob all right, so's to get it on record just the way it was. If I told it the way you want me to, folks might get the wrong idea 'bout Rob. So I'm goin' to tell it my way, or I ain't goin' to tell it at all. An' I want this

young feller here to get it all took down right, so's it '11 be in the records."

The astonished coroner, the reins of authority so suddenly snatched from his hands, profited by experience with the preliminary questions, where his nagging had brought no expedition. He seethed with impatience and offended dignity, but the set of jaw of the witness and his imperturbable drawl warned him that this Murray came from a time and stock that would brook no meddling with its determinations.

" Oh, well, I suppose the long way around is the shortest way about," quoted the coron©- in graceful concession, and settled himself to such comfort as he could find. " Go on with your story."

Murray leisurely stroked his beard, and squinted his eyes in effort to recall some well-rehearsed beginning. It was evident he had given much thought to what he was about to say.

" Well, sir, 'way back in '58 me an' Rob fell in together. You see, Rob come to the house where I was stackin' chips, an1 the first night he set down to play I knowed right off he was a square gambler an' a good friend. You kind o' get so you know things like that. Something sort o' told me Rob an' me was goin' to have dealin's. You see, we got so in them days we sort o' watched for the crooks that' used to play, an' could 'most alius tell 'em every time they come in. Sort o' shifty eyes they had, an' alius looked at the other players kind o' suspicious like, if you know what I mean. When a gambler looks at the other players kind o' as though he was suspicious of 'em you can 'most alius watch him for some cheatin' of his own.

" But Rob, when he come in, looked straight out of his eyes an' paid no attention to the others.. He wanted to know what the limits of the games was, and picked out the biggest game they was goin' that night. He didn't do It like he was braggin', if you know what I mean, but just natural like. He didn't say much, he didn't, but just acted like a natural-born gambler. An' that's what he was, a natural-born gambler. Had a regular gift that way-—just like some folks have a gift for paintin', or singin', or preach in'.

" Well, I introduced Rob to the other players at the table he picked out. They was Cactus Sullivan, Two-Fingered Schaeffer, Louis Vito, Nugget Nearing, and Deuces O'Hara. Rob shook hands honest like with all of them an' looked 'em straight in the eyes. They all shook hands hearty an' met his eyes square, all 'cept Louis Vito, the greaser. A greaser never seems to look at anybody square, anyway, if you know what I mean.

" Rob spoke to 'em. I 'member his words as if they was just spoke: ' Gents,' he said, ' I play square. Any man that don't play square with me don't play again. That's my rule, an' I never break it. Art' this is security for my words.'

" Then Rob hitched his holster a little round front an' hauled out his gun. It stuck in the leather, an' I 'member I wondered then if maybe Rob wa'n't bluffin' a little. 'Cause a man that brags he'll make his words, good with a gun alius carries his gun loose in leather. I seen Louis Vito's mouth kind o' twist up at the corners, an' I 'member I wondered if he wa'n't thinkin' the same thing as me.

" Then Rob laid his gun down on the table. He didn't do it like a bad man does, but kind o' modest like, if you know what I mean. He wa'n't braggin' none. They was two notches cut in the butt of the gun —one of 'em kind **Q'** old and wore down, an' the other more fresh like. Rob didn't say nothin' 'bout the notches, but I noticed he laid the gun so's they showed. I had stacked the chips for the game, an' Rob put the gun right long side of his pile.

" ' Shuffle!'.he says.

" The rest^of 'em kind g' acted as though they expected him to run the game.

" In them days it wa'n't nothin' strange for a man to play with his gun on the table. Sometimes you needed it, an' when you did you needed it like hell, if you know what I mean. The play opened up kind o' slow and cautious like—like it alius does when a stranger sits in a big game. Rob was a good player, I seen right away. He played clean poker. He was a hard player, but he never forced a hand. He figured careful, an' I could see he knew where the deck laid. Most poker players never think of

anything 'cept the cards they hold in their hands. Rob was one of the kind that knows the percentages. He was as p'lite as if he was playin' with women.

" But all the time the old gun, kind o' rusty 'round the lock, laid there by his chips, an' the two notches sort o' made Rob's hands a little better than they deserved. But he never played the notches with his cards, if you know what I mean. He knew when he was beat, an' alius laid down easy.

" Nobody won much in that game. Nobody ever wins much in a careful, slow game. Then it come Louis Vito's deal, an' I noticed Rob's eyes. They sort o' squinted an' looked kind o' hard all of a sudden.

" Now, Louis Vito wa'n't a crooked player. At least, he never had got caught. But you know how a greaser is: they're so natural cussed that if you dare 'em to be crooked they'll try it just to be contrary. They alius 'mind me of a lion kitten Rob an' me had for a pet wunst. We fed that kitten an' played with him till he got real sort o' friendly and decent like. Rob liked him awful well, like he did all sorts o' animals. Then one day, when the kitten was rollin' round an' havin' a good time, all of a sudden he just snarled an' reached out an' nabbed Rob's hand. You see, it was the lion comin' out in him. Rob just pulled his gun an' said, ' If you can't play square you can't play at all.' But he didn't cut no notch that time, an' he kind o' wanted to be left alone after he'd killed the kitten.

" Well, I begun to watch Louis Vito. All the While Rob's eyes was gettin' harder an' harder, an' I 'member I thought he must o' seen something the rest of us didn't see. Louis played *at* Rob, if you know what I mean, kind o' spiteful like, an' Rob alius met him for just what his hands was worth.

" It got round to Louis's deal again. He was awkward with the cards an' spilled the deck on the floor. Now that's alius a dangerous thing to do in a big game, an' usually calls for a new deck. This time nobody asked for new cards, though I had 'em all warmed up an' ready, an' I 'member I thought that was funny. Louis dole 'em out with a funny little twist to his crooked mouth. Rob's eyes was gettin' harder an' harder, an' wunst I thought he kind o' looked at his gun sort o' mournful like.

" When the draw come Rob didn't play, though I saw he had a pair of kings. I kind o' took pains to get on Rob's side of the table. Louis Vito boosted the ante, an' Schaeffer and O'Hara stood the raise. Schaeffer called for one, an' O'Hara took two.

" ' I'll take one,' says Louis. When he took the card off the deck I saw him give it a little twist like so's it dropped off the table. He was a good while pickin' it up. Biggest fool thing I ever see a man do in a game. 'Peared like he was just puttin' his cussedness to test. While he was pickin' up the card Rob was watchin' him close. He kind o' shivered and sighed. I 'member I felt kind o' sorry for Rob.

" When Louis straightened up an' begun to book his cards Rob reached for his gun. He didn't do it quick an' sure, like a regular gunman does when he shoots from the hip, but kind o' awkward like an' fumblin', Louis Vito would 'a' had time to shoot first, but he kind o' sneered an' acted like he thought it was all a bluff. Anybody could 'a' told from Rob's eyes he wa'n't bluffin'.

" It was a clean shot, an' Louis Vito never knowed what hit him.

" Then Rob laid his gun down on the table. He never even stood up. Most shooters, when they've killed a man, keep their gun ready for action. But Bob didn't. The others all set still, though, an' not a one of 'em even moved a band toward his hip. They waited for Rob.

" There was sweat standin' out on Rob's forehead when he spoke:

" ' Gents, maybe you think it wa'n't none of my quarrel. If you look under his leg I reckon you'll find an extra card there.'

" Nobody moved, an' Rob turned to me.

" ' You look,' he said.

" I lifted Louis Vito's leg, an' there was a ace o' spades. I held up the card an' then picked up the greaser's hand. He was drawin' to aces up. He hadn't made his full on the draw, an' it was plain to see what he was plannin' to do.

" Nobody had spoke a word yet 'cept Rob. Then Deuces O'Hara kind o' come to like an' said, 'Well, I'll be damned!'

Then he stuck out his right hand to Rob. Rob shook hands, tremblin' all over.

" ' Gents,' he says, ' I told him what my rule was, an' he heard me. They ain't no meaner cuss livin' than a card crook. I hope you'll excuse me for sort o' breakin' up a pleasant little game.'

" Well, everybody made up real friendly to Rob. Even some players come over from other tables. It wa'n't none of their affair, an' most times they wouldn't 'a' interfered. But with Rob it was alius kind o' different. He never looked for trouble.

" Then Rob turned to me an' held out his old gun an' his knife that he had took out of his pocket an' opened.

" ' You do it,' he said.

" So I took the knife an' cut another notch in the walnut butt of the gun. That made three notches. Right then I knew Rob an' me was goin' to be awful good pards.

" Well, they wa'n't no fuss made over Louis Vito. We buried his carcass, an' they wa'n't no fol-de-rol, with inquests an' such like waste o' time. You see, his killin' was justifiable, an' in them days that was all there was to it.

" Rob, he stayed round a long while an' alius played in the big game. Everybody liked him. He alius laid his gun 'longside of his chips when he played, an' the story 'bout the notches was told all round.

" Without sayin' much about it, Rob an' me kind o' stuck together. I alius helped him when he played, an' when he quit playin' he alius shoved his chips over to me to. count 'em an' cash 'em in. He made a regular rake-off from all the pots he won an' kept it for a little private kitty of his own for me. No matter whether he lost or won, I alius got my kitty. ' Shadder's grub stake,' Rob used to call it."

Murray halted his recital as though to mark some chapter in the story. He had told it all simply, deliberately, and with painful efforts to be exact. But in it there had been a mighty dramatic sequence. He had addressed his words to no individual, but had never allowed his eyes to stray from the tip of the worn cowhide boot where the red of the leather showed through the scuffed black polish.

The impatient coroner had forgotten his new golf club and his engagement on the Berkeley links. He had hitched forward on his chair and leaned over his desk, the better to intercept the words of the witness. The policeman and a pair of news hunting reporters had silently edged close to the witness-stand.

"I'll tell it a little mite faster now," apologized Murray.

" Never mind. Tell the story," urged the coroner, all bruskness gone from his voice.

Murray again fixed his eyes on the scuffed toe of his boot and went on:

" I've sort o' been tryin' to get you to see what sort of a man Rob was. He was square an' honest an' awful good to me. He was good to everybody, Rob was. I seen him stop wunst on the trail when water was gettin' awful scarce an' spend a hour washin' out an' fixin' a gall on his old pack mule. Took good drinkin' water to do it, an' then Rob went thirsty 'cause he said it was his water, an' none o' my share that he used. But he wouldn't stand for a crook.

" Well, Rob an' me played all the big games we heard of in them days. We did a lot of travelin' round, not 'cause Rob wasn't alius welcome to stay any place as long as he wanted to, but 'cause he liked to be changin' round. He was knowed wherever we went, an' alius was welcome in any game. The story 'bout the notches in his gun was told all over. I dont know whether Rob or the notches was most famous.

" Rob wouldn't never play in a game for small stakes—piker's games, he used to call 'em. If he couldn't find a big game he wouldn't sit in at all. An' it was gettin' harder an' harder to find big games. The Slope was beginnin' to get sort o' refined like. They was law an' order leagues, an' preachers comin' in to every camp, an' they alius drove out the games, no matter how square they was. It got so we had to hunt round quite a lot to find the kind o' games Rob liked to play in. When we found one of 'em we stayed longer than we used to, but alius we had to leave 'cause the game got broke up.

" Rob was gettin' so he was awful dependent on me. ' You do it, Shadder,' he used to say. They was never no words 'tween us 'bout what I was expected to do or 'bout my kitty. We kind o' just *knowed,* an' got 'long together without talkin' 'bout it much, like regular pards does, if you know what I mean.

" While we was huntin' for big games Rob's old gun was gettin' rustier an' rustier round the lock, an' it stuck a little tighter in the holster. You see, it was gettin' harder an' harder for crooked gamblers as the games got scarcer. I used to ask Rob to let me clean up the old gun, but he never would. ' You don't need a clean gun for dirty crooks,' he used to say. Rob never looked for a crook an' never hunted 'em, an' we didn't run 'cross one for a good while. Maybe they heard 'bout the notches in Rob's gun. After Louis Vito, nobody ever thought Rob was bluffin'.

" Well, as I say, it kept gettin' harder an' harder to find games that Rob would set in. He was gettin' older an' more p'ticular like all of the while. Sometimes his winnin's didn't balance the hole our expenses made in his bank-roll. My kitty was never very big them days. But we got along all right.

" Rob says one day, ' Shadder I reckon the old Slope is 'bout played out. Reckon we'll go south.'

- " They was alius games in Mexico, but they was mostly piker games, an' full of greasers, too. Rob had never wanted to sit in with a greaser, not since he played with Louis Vito.

" But we went south. We hit all the silver camps, an' only found a few big games where white men played. Places like Mexicala we passed up 'cause Rob didn't like them sort of games. We found some old friends down there, an' they had told the story 'bout the notches in Rob's gun. But the games wa'n't nothin' like them on the Slope. Rob wouldn't stay in one place long, an' we was on the trail most of the time.

" Then somebody told Rob 'bout some big Spanish games down in Peru, an' we took a packet an' went down there. The games was big in Mex money, if you know what I mean. But they didn't stack up with gold-dust. So Rob never even set in 'fore we started back for Frisco.

" We found a few games when we got back, but they was under lock an' key. You had to sneak in an' sneak out, an' Rob wouldn't do that. All the time our roll was gettin' smaller.

" Then the Klondike boom started. Rob perked right up, an' we set out for Nome. Rob hadn't acted so well for a long time. You see, he thought he'd find another gold nugget game. One of the old kind of games where it was worth while to play square poker.

" But when we got to Nome we found a lot of Easterners there who didn't know how to play or 'predate good poker. They would fight over a dollar limit game, an' their cussin' an' drinkin' made the games too rough for Rob.

" It begun to look pretty bad for us then, an' one day Rob says, ' Shadder, I reckon we're through. There ain't much left for us to do 'cept to crawl off somewheres an' wait till it comes time to cash in.'

" From then on Rob sort o' give up. He quit lookin' for big-games, an' his old gun kept gettin' rustier.. He was just like any other kind of natural-born artist when you take 'em away from the thing they was born to do. It was just as if part of his life was gone. He was gettin' kind o' absent-minded 'bout things, an' oftener an' oftener I heard him say, ' Shadder, you do it.' He was just as kind to me as ever, an' I knew he was worryin' 'cause he wa'n't puttin' anything into my grub stake. But we had enough to get along on for a while.

" The only thing that ever seemed to make Rob forget his worry was a deck of cards. I heard a fiddler say wunst that every time he seen a fiddle his hands just itched to get hold of it. I guess that was the way it was with Rob when he saw a deck of cards. Sometimes I used to play cribbage with him, but they ain't much fun in a two-handed game. So Rob took to playin' solitaire. He figured out a game that was sort o' like poker, an' he used to seem to get a lot of pleasure out of it.

" It was pretty cold up in Nome, an' Rob didn't like it. We tried prospectin'

for a while to pass the time away, but Rob said it kept him from his cards, an' he was lonesome without me, so we give up our claim. Rob says, ' Shadder, 's long's we're goin' to cash in pretty soon, let's go somewhere's it's warm enough to dig a decent grave without blastin'.' So we started back down the coast to Frisco.

" Rob. was all the time workin' at his solitaire game. He took to playin' it with money just so's he could rake off for my grub stake when he won. I never said nothin' 'bout this 'cause I knew it pleased him. an', besides, the money all went to keep him an' me.

" Rob says, ' You needn't ever worry, Shadder, 'bout me ever cheatin' you.' I never did, 'cause I knew Rob alius played square.

" We rented a little room down in Kearney Street, in Frisco, where rooms was cheap, an' Rob set out kind o' half-hearted like to see if maybe they wa'n't another big game left somewheres. But he couldn't find none. One day he picked up a old poker table in a Jew's place an' brought it up to the room. The green felt was all wore off an' faded, but Rob said the slot for the kitty was all right, an' that was most that he needed. He used to play his solitaire poker on the table, an' alius raked off in the kitty. The rake-off was for me.

" Sometimes Rob would take his old gun an' kind of run his fingers over them three notches in the butt. His eyes would be kind o' mournful like then, like the time when Louis Vito played with him; an' one day he says, ' Shadder, there's one good thing 'bout it: we don't have to watch for no crooked players no more.'

" Rob's money was gettin' pretty low. Every night when I cashed in the chips out of the kitty I seen the roll was a little smaller. So I went out to rustle up a job. I was pretty old, an' didn't know much 'bout workin' an' city ways, but I got two saloons to clean out. I could do that work before Rob got up in the mornin's. I used to pick up a lot of things to eat round the saloons, an' that kind o' left more money for Rob to play his poker game with. But our money was goin' out faster than ever. Wunst Rob said he reckoned he'd have to lower the stakes in his game. But he didn't. Rob never would play in a piker game.

" Every mornin' when I got back from work Rob would have his game all laid out, an' he would play it all day. He played with chips, an' alius laid his old gun on the table 'longside of his stack just like he used to do when he played in regular games. Every night when he closed the game he would cash in the kitty for"me. I tell you, I was pretty careful how I spent the grub stake them days.

" Well, things kept goin' along this way, an' Rob never seemed to know how things was. He alius cashed in my kitty an' never said nothin', 'less it was, ' Had a pretty good play to-day, Shadder,' or, ' Luck was ag'in' us to-day, Shadder.' Rob alius spoke of' us' an' ' we,' but I never played.

" The day 'fore Rob's last game his roll was pretty near gone. Only a few little bills was left. I didn't have much left in the grub stake, either. Rob says that night, ' Shadder, the bank's pretty near broke. To-morrow we'll have to play more careful an' not take any chances.' He seemed to be thinkin' maybe I'd be afraid he'd forget 'bout the kitty, but I knew Rob better than that. I was worryin' over what we was goin' to do, an' I took the grub stake an' went down an' paid two weeks' rent for the room.

" Something was on Rob's mind that night. He was kind o' restless like, an' mumbled in his sleep. I heard him say, ' I play square,' an' ' Never play again.'

" I got up an' went out to clean up the saloons in the mornin'. I got what there was left from the free lunches for Rob an' me to eat. When I got back to the room, you know what I found.

" There was Rob all hunched up over the table with that hole in his forehead. The cards was all laid out on the table, an' I see that Rob had been holdin' a winnin' hand. His knife was on the table, an' I 'member I thought that was sort o' strange like. His gun was layin' on the floor. Somehow I opened the kitty in the table the first thing. I knowed what to do, just like the first time I met Rob I knowed we was goin' to be pards. They wa'n't no

chips in the kitty, but they was the note you got there. It says:

" I cheated you on your rake-off. The man that don't play square with me never plays again. You do it, Shadder.. ROB.

" 'Course you didn't know what that meant, but I did, an' I picked up Rob's old gun an' took his old knife an' cut a fourth notch in the butt, just like I did when he^olayed with Louis Vito.

"An' that's what I want to get on record, that Rob alius played square, an' alius had a good reason for shufflin' off a man that didn't play square with him."

Murray continued to sit with his eyes fixed on the scuffed toe of his boot until the coroner suddenly declared evidence closed. He addressed the clerk:

" The exhibits in the case may be turned over to Shadder."

Murray took the gun with the four notches in the butt that the clerk handed to him and mumbled, " Many thanks, sir. It may come in handy pretty soon."

The coroner allowed opportunity to suggest a novelty in exit to pass unheeded, while he abstractedly wrote on the slip where he had jotted down his preconceived verdict another word, neither legal in form nor official: "Justified."

A CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

THE snow was falling thick and fast,
The streets with lights were blazing;
The Christmas shoppers hurried on,
Or stood intently gazing.

I drifted with the throng until
A well-known face I sighted.
"A Merry Christinas, Bob!" I cried;
"To see you I'm delighted!"

I slapped my old friend on the back
And gave his hand a gripping,
For in the old days we had made
Of Christmas something ripping.

"Five years," I solemnly declared,
" Is some time to be parted
From the best chum I ever had—
The truest, biggest-hearted!

" Let's find the gayest place in town—i
I'll bet that you will know it!—
And we will make a merry night,
When you have brought me to it.

" We'll have the time of our two lives,
And feel like never quitting;
We'll celebrate this Christmas eve
In manner most befitting!"

" Just follow me," he promptly grinned,
" You gay and festive rover,
And I shall take you to a place
Where joy is bubblihg over."

He led me to a house where mirth
And gaiety were sounding—
He kissed a girl, snatched up a tot
Who to his arms came bounding.

" My wife and boy," he proudly smiled £
" His tree's all decorated—
Oh, won't we have the best old time
We ever celebrated?"

w y skeppard_

The Creepers

by

William Merriam Rouse

Author of "The Four-Leaf Clovers," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

black michaud.

THERE were those who said, afterward, that there had been a certain meaning in the manner in which Thomas Michaud first arrived at Ste. Anne des Monts. Gossips see signs in everything; but however may have been this matter of signs and portents, it cannot be denied that the stars of beautiful Canada never looked upon more terrible things than those that happened in the village. Red death, and black death, and the death that slinks by night, marched out of nowhere, with musty robes swirling and claws hooked for prey. The day of the arrival of Thomas Michaud had been overcast from the beginning, so that no one had seen the sun rise. For heat it was worse than the worst the old men remembered out of many hot summers; and in the valley, where the village lay surrounded by cliffs and mountains and frowning, dark forests, that heat was probably twice as great as upon the plateaus. All day storm-clouds gathered, only to break or go around the valley; all day men and women hoped for cooling rain.

The clustered stone houses, whitewashed or tinted pink or mauve or apple-green, seemed to have lost all their usual freshness —inside they were ovens—and those men who had no pressing business gathered under the overhanging roof of the shop of Antonin Benoit to wait for the storm. There were M, Georges Pujos, mayor for many years, Father Joseph Paradis, and perhaps a half-dozen others. And, naturally, a clutter of lolling dogs.

When the storm did come it spread so quickly over the bowl of gray sky roofing the valley that not all those who had prayed for it realized its presence until water came down as though from a leaky dipper. A black knot of clouds untied directly above Ste. Anne des Monts. Tongues of yellow flame licked along the granite edges of the cliffs; solid and familiar house walls quivered and blended in a cataract of sound.

The watching men in front of the shop, half stunned and pressing back against the wall for shelter, saw a huge ball of blinding fire strike down beside an ancient pine and send it teetering with roots stripped naked..

They had no more than time to breathe a prayer after this shock when those whose eyes were able in a measure to penetrate the sheets of falling water saw a shape that seemed like neither man nor beast coming up the long road from the south. The shape resolved itself into a little cart upon which sat a man driving a big and savage-looking *chien dompte*—a dog trained to harness. Man and beast were muddied and wet, but neither seemed to have been badly used.

A momentary lull in the storm gave a good view of the man as he left his dog and walked toward the shop. He was a lumpy, powerful-looking fellow, with a broad, dark face and with eyebrows forming a straight, black, bushy line above the bridge of his nose. He was dressed in shirt, homespun trousers, and moccasins—such clothes as any man might wear—so there was nothing remarkable in his appearance except that he grinned, with a twist at the corner of his mouth, as he glanced at Father Paradis. Two or three dogs that had remained outdoors rose up growling, with their heads lowered.

In that moment of abatement the storm had gathered itself for the climax. Before any one could speak to the stranger a sheet of white light blotted out the world—a sheet of light so near and vivid and terrible, with its instantaneous, ripping burst of thunder, that Alphonse Racine, a half-wit, was stripped of what little sense he had. He leaped into the air at the flash of lightning; and while the rolling jar of thunder still shook Ste. Anne des Monts he ran blindly, hands covering his eyes, to dash his skull against the sharp corner of the stone doorway. Alphonse sank dead at the feet of Father Paradis just as the old priest himself recovered from the shock.

Nor was this all. The *chien dompte* of the stranger lay singed and lifeless on the spot where he had stood; the cart and harness were in scattered fragments of wood and leather over the width of the street. The man, however, remained unharmed, hands in pockets, and smile still drawing back his lips. He stood like that, looking on indifferently, while they lifted Alphonse Racine and carried him home through rain which had suddenly reduced itself to a drizzle. The clouds broke immediately, curiosity revived, and public interest was almost equally divided between the death of Alphonse and the miraculous escape of the stranger.

He, having shrugged his shoulders at the carcass of his dog, leaned against the wall and appeared to invite the questions naturally put to a newcomer in any village. Now, among those who remained at the shop was Jules Perron, a young man who up to this time, as will be seen later, had been greatly blessed by Heaven. He was not as big as the stranger, by many pounds, but to the eye he seemed much more alive—alive from his smiling eyes and his fair, sun-bleached hair to the ease and rhythm with which he moved.

Just at this moment his body was braced gracefully backward and his tanned forearm corded with ridges of muscle as he strained to hold back Boule, his *chien dompte,* and the biggest dog in all the village. Bouie's teeth gleamed white, and a ridge of hair stood up from neck to tail.

" Your dog takes me for a bit of fresh meat," said the stranger carelessly.

Perron laughed and apologized.

" I don't know what makes him such a fool to-day—the little ones pull his ears and ride on his back when he is not at work. *Parbleu!* It must be the storm."

" Lay a stake over his head, and perhaps he'll learn to be polite."

"Not I! I have had Boule since he was a sprawling pup, and I have never struck him!"

Thereupon the stranger opened his mouth and laughed; and from that time until the end of the strange events that took place in Ste. Anne des Monts, Jules Perron and his dog were of one mind. At the time Jules kept his tongue still; partly from natural good nature and partly because *monsieur le maire* returned at that moment from the *maison* Racine and addressed himself to the man who had come out of the storm.

" Bonjour, monsieur!" he said gravely, as was befitting after a sudden death. " I am sorry for your misfortune—you are traveling north, perhaps?"

" The dog is nothing!" with a shrug. " I was coming to Ste. Anne des Monts to work. I am called Thomas Michaud, and I've been working at Lake St. John."

" You have a trade?" To Perron it seemed that M. Pujos did not like this Michaud. In the place of the mayor the young man would have invited the stranger to go on, or back to Lake St. John; but M. Georges Pujos, while not an old man, was weakened by a malady which doctors had said would some time cause his death.

Moreover, he was not accustomed to the need for exercising firmness.

" What trade do you need here?" asked Michaud. "I see the signs of a baker and a blacksmith."

" A man who could repair shoes and harness would be of great use, *monsieur."*

" Very well," with a smile. "I am a shoemaker, and I will rent any rooms that are vacant and buy any tools that are for sale. From now on, the feet of Ste. Anne des Monts shall tread differently."

M. Pujos laughed rather feebly, and he confessed afterward to Perron that he had hoped to get rid of the man, although labor was needed. He did not admit that he lacked the firmness to tell Michaud in the beginning that he was not wanted there.

" I shall be glad to sell *monsieur* the necessary tools, such of them as I have,"' said Benoit, who had come outdoors and joined the little group in order to hear what was going on. Michaud promptly followed him into the shop, and those who remained began to discuss the man.

" As black as the storm itself," grunted old Telesphore Vilas, scratching his nose.

"Black Michaud!" laughed Richard Bordeleau, who was ready to laugh at anything because he had for his wife one of the prettiest girls in the parish and for his first child a mischievous little witch who was a replica of her mother.

At that instant the face of the stranger appeared in the doorway, immediately to disappear after having cast upon the men of the village a look which justified his new name. Undoubtedly he had heard; and the memory of those careless words, spoken with no real intent of malice, now sent a kind of chill through those outside- They wandered away, one by one, each man to his own affairs and each with a little appearance of depression.

It had been a bad day, take it all in all, thought Jules Perron as he went home with Boule. However, an excellent supper prepared by old Melisse, the woman who did his housework, dispelled both the gloom of Perron and the ill-temper of Boule; and after supper Jules set out through the long twilight for the home of the mayor.

Here it is necessary to explain how Jules Perron had been especially blessed by Heaven. In addition to his good appearance and his friendliness, which created the same feeling in the hearts of others, he had been left an inheritance. He was young enough to enjoy everything and old enough to appreciate that enjoyment. But the great blessing in his life was Mile. Chloe Pujos, to whom he was betrothed. She was a little flower of the north, dark and delicate and beautiful, with the slender grace of one of the *haute noblesse* and the virtues of a habitant's daughter.

Jules knocked at the house of the mayor as a mere polite formality, and opened the door with a light in his eyes and a quicker heartbeat at the thought of seeing his betrothed. He knew how she would look up at him from beside the big table where she sewed or read in the evening. *Monsieur le make* would smile and call him " my son," and there would follow two or three hours of perfect happiness.

It was all quite the opposite of that. Mile. Pujos raised a face that seemed very sober and ill-pleased in the yellow lamplight, and her father said his " *bon soir, mon fils"* with fingers drumming nervously on the table. Black Michaud, so placed in a comfortable rocking-chair that he could watch all the occupants of the room, no matter where they sat, was the only one who smiled.

Perron stared at him in astonishment; and then remembered that it really was not strange that a new resident should call upon the mayor,

"•You've left your dog at home, I see," said Michaud, by way of greeting.

" Yes," answered Jules shortly. An impulse made him walk across the room with just a hint o| a swagger and find a place between his fiancee and Black Michaud.

That dog will die some time if his manners do not improve, M. Perron."

"Not before his time comes through old age," replied Jules, with the same feeling along his spine that had raised the hair of Boule,

"And do you like the brute, *mademoiselle?"* demanded Michaud, turning toward Chloe,

" I love him," she said, almost with de-

fiance, " both because he belongs to M. Perron, to whom I am betrothed, and because he is a faithful dog."

"Norn de Dieul" swore Michaud. Then he turned upon *mademoiselle* such a frank look of unpleasant admiration and desire that Jules half rose from his chair. " Both betrothals and dogs have been broken before this!"

With that insult he strode carelessly out of the house; while Perron sprang to his feet and looked expectantly toward M. Pujos. He would have tried to hurry Thomas Michaud with a kick had not the eyes of the mayor remained cast down and his voice silent. The door slammed.

" That fellow must be sent out of town!" cried Jules. " I would be in favor of telling him to-morrow!"

"He is a beast!" agreed Mile. 'Chloe. " He was here half an hour, with his insulting looks and his sneer, before you came."

The mayor cleared his throat and looked at the wall, after a quick glance at the face of Jules.

" It is better not to be too hasty, my son," he said. " M. Michaud is disagreeable and, I think, dangerous. Such men have been known to rob and set fires. *Eh bien!* He should not be angered—he will go when he finds that no one likes him. I should not be surprised if he were merely in hiding for a time after having had trouble with the law."

" If he is dangerous, then why not face the danger and get rid of it?" cried Perron. " I will undertake to deal with him myself if you will give me authority!"

" Could you watch the village night and day to see that he did not come back for revenge? Avoid trouble, my son, when you can!"

"•Fight it!" growled Jules; but after an argument he had to yield to the greater age and authority of *monsieur le maire.*

M. Pujos soon left them and went to his room; and the remainder of that evening Perron spent discussing with Chloe the case of Black Thomas Michaud. She was of one mind with Jules as to the quality of M. Michaud, and she was equally emphatic in the belief that her father would do nothing unless some act against the peace and security of the village were committed, when he would be forced to action by popular demand. The mind of the stranger seemed to have dominated his, enfeebled as it was by long illness. Jules was forced to go home with small comfort and considerable apprehension as to the future.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIFOLLET.

\Y7ITHIN the week that apprehension was fully justified. As to his relations with the village Thomas Michaud grew into a mixture of both good and bad repute. He paid cash for everything, a custom rare and much appreciated; on the other hand, he had broken the nose of young Fabien Beaudry with one blow of his fist for referring to him, all in jest, as Black Michaud.

He was a good workman, and reasonable in his charges; yet no one, man or woman, left the little house he had rented in the center of the village without carrying away a touch of gloom. It was as though the man absorbed the natural gaiety of others and left upon them instead the shadow of his own dark brooding.

The cause of this brooding Jules Perron learned all too suddenly; and from the time of the revelation dated the beginning of the greater things that were to come. This revelation took place on a Sunday afternoon—a perfect afternoon, filled with the rustlings of green leaves, and that happy, sleepy quiet which comes after every one had got home from, mass and eaten a good dinner and smoked a pipe or two of *tabac Canadien* in shirt-sleeves and contentment.

There was a garden in the rear of the *maison* Pujos, and Jules went there directly in making his Sunday call. He had passed the corner of the house when tense voices and the sight of the three persons in whom he was most interested brought him to a quick halt. That there was trouble seething like a kettle of *soupe aux pois* in that peaceful garden was confirmed by the first words that came to his ears.

" It is impossible, I tell you!" M. Pujos

was speaking with all the authority he could command, although in a voice shaken by a hint of tremor. " My daughter is betrothed to M. Jules Perron, whom you. know. There is a contract—"

" And I love him!" cried Chloe, carried out of all thought of deference to her father by her anger. " Do you hear that? Who are you, that you dare to come here and demand that I break my pledged word? You—"

In turn she was interrupted by Michaud. Jules, growing angrier second by second, but restrained by desire to know how far the fellow would go, could see his face. It was wholly self-possessed, with the lips parted in that disagreeable smile which all the village of Ste. Anne des Monts had come to know.

" I am one who gets, usually, what he sets out to get," said Michaud. " That is who I am. I saw you two months ago, when you were in Lake St. John with your father, and I made up my mind to have you. *Et voila!* Here I am! I shall have you!"

"Not even if I were never to marry!" exclaimed Chloe, her sudden anger cooling to disgust as she named a fate much dreaded by the young women of the province. Such egotism was not worthy of anger.

Perhaps it was her tone that forced Michaud out of his self-complacency. Certainly something stirred him so that, with one bound, he reached her side and laid hold of her arm. What his purpose may have been was not revealed, for at that instant the fist of Jules Perron hit him behind the ear, and he went reeling across flower-beds to come tg a ludicrous stop in a tangle of grape-vine.

He was up instantly, with the longest knife Jules had ever seen gleaming in his hand. Then Perron thanked the chance that had made him absent-mindedly pick up his belt with the hunting-knife attached this Sunday afternoon. He drew it, unheeding the shrill protests of M. Pujos, and moved to a spot where the footing was clear and not too soft.

That fight, however, was not to be. At the cries of the mayor, neighbors came pouring into the garden, and, after the manner of men under such circumstances, a dozen or more felt it necessary to cumber the arms of the fighters. Father Paradis, who had been passing, entered the garden and placed himself facing Thomas Michaud and in front of Perron.

" Put up that knife!" he commanded in a voice aged but strong with the strength of a spirit unbroken and unafraid. Very slowly the knife of Black Michaud sought its sheath, and cautiously the men relaxed their hold upon him.

" Where's the mayor?" demanded M. Michaud insolently. "Let him stand out there!"

The step of Georges Pujos was little less than faltering as he moved past those who were guarding Jules and placed himself beside Father Paradis.

"Now!" cried Black Thomas. "You can answer here before everybody so that they will know whom to blame later on! Will you let me have the girl to marry—with a priest and ring and book? Or will you give her to that other there, who has to keep a dog as big as a panther to guard him?"

At the insult Jules heaved against the grip of his captors, but there were too many of them. He swore softly and with a degree of ability he had not known himself to possess, while every one, even Father Paradis, waited for the answer. It came in the wail of a man pulled one way by fear and another by honesty.

" I cannot! I tell you there is a contract, and that my word is passed! You are mad—you cannot do the things you threaten—the law—"

" Bah!" snapped Michaud. " Thou doddering old fool—"

" Stop!" thundered the priest. " Scoundrel! Your presence is no longer welcome here—go before to-morrow, and be thankful that you are not punished any worse!"

" I care as much for a priest as I do for a louse!" Black Thomas put his hands on his hips and stared Father Paradis in the face. " I have had both on my back before this I I do not leave without the girl; remember that well!"

Now, had any one else shouted this defiance of Father Joseph Paradis, most of

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those present — and the number grew moment by moment—would have expected to see the sinner withered or struck dumb on the spot.

In this instance, on the contrary, not only did nothing happen to Michaud, but there was no patent astonishment at his immunity, no rush to overwhelm him with blows, no cries of horror at the sacrilege, Only murmurs here and there, the purport of which Jules could not understand. He saw the old man turn and look into the faces of the little flock with amazement no less than his own.

" My children," he began in a voice strong, despite the bitterness of his disappointment, " my children—"

" Pardon, mon pere!" spoke up a certain Mathilde Roberge, whose tongue had ever been hung at both ends. " Do you know that the dog of Cecille Senecal, who lives three houses from M. Michaud, bit him on the leg last Friday? And that the dog was found dead yesterday morning?"

" That is true," agreed Telesphore Vilas, " I saw the dog after it was dead, and I buried it for Mme. Roberge!"

" Poison, of course!" cried Father Paradis, his eyes now flashing fire. " What is this that has come to my children?"

" That's not all," stubbornly persisted Vilas. " I had the misfortune to displease M. Michaud the day he arrived, and I'll swear by the good St. Anne that I have not felt well since! Even my pipe tastes—"

" Enough! I have heard that you and Richard Bordeleau gave this man his soubriquet when he arrived, and it seems to fit him very well. Because of that you believe in what? Black magic? Witchcraft?"

" Oh, no!" protested half a dozen voices. " Not at all, father; only it is just as well—"

" Be silent!" Father Paradis lifted his hand with the familiar gesture of command which was still able to secure their respect, " How can the good God take care of those who pay homage to the devil?"

With that he turned on his heel, brushed aside the men who still had their hands on Jules, and led him into the *maison* Pujos with a backward glance which drew Mile. Chloe and her father. From the windows they watched while the neighbors left the trampled garden, with Thomas Michaud sauntering last.

Then Father Paradis set himself to talk to Georges Pujos as he had seldom found it necessary to talk to a man before; and all without any really good and permanent effeet. The mayor of Ste. Anne des Monts looked at the wal£ at the well-scrubbed floor, at the ceiling—anywhere but into the eyes of the priest. He was, as Jules had felt, intimidated by Black Michaud—probably a victim both of his own physical weakness and of the superstition which seemed to be in the very air. Twenty years before the father of Chloe would not have shamed himself thus.

When sunset came, and *mademoiselle* set about the business of getting supper, Father Paradis at last gave up his task, with a shake of the head at Jules, and went away to his duties. Perron realized then that Chloe, the priest, and himself stood practically alone against Thomas Michaud; and that they alone would have to make the fight against whatever villainy he might concoct.

That evening, when Jules was alone with the girl, he made her promise always to carry a weapon and always to guard herself night and day against the unexpected. He feared it in the form of a sudden attack or abduction—whereas Black Thomas chose to work in another way.

Contrary to all the expectations of Jules Perron, there was quiet in Ste. Anne des Monts for many days. He bought a little revolver for Chloe, and he kept Boule always with him so that there could be no chance of poison for the dog.

This was wise and well, for other dogs of the village which had the misfortune to show in some plain way the general dislike of all dogs for M. Michaud died sooner or later. As there was no tangible evidence of poisoning, Michaud was more feared than hated, and his reputation as a dangerous man maintained itself through the latter weeks of the summer. During this time he remained away from the house of the mayor.

On a warm evening in September, at the end of a day of showers and clouds, Perron

entered the store of Antonin Benoit to make some small purchase on the way to the *maison* Pujos. On the benches under the overhanging roof many of the men of the village were gathered, as usual, for their evening pipes and gossip.

Thomas was not an infrequent visitor there, where he had much the position of an oracle; speaking only when his words would have telling effect. He held himself aloof just enough to arouse a stir of interest when he did come and to create the belief that he was a being superior to the common need for companionship.

Perron halted in the store door to light his pipe, and saw that Michaud was sitting on a bench, occupying space enough for two men because no one dared to crowd him in the least. There was a little moment of silence, indicating that the oracle had said something of importance, when Telesphore Vilas came shuffling up out of the dusk, mopping his face.

It was this silence, at the right time, that made possible the understanding by all of what was said a half-minute later. Vilas found a place for himself and sat down with a puff of relief.

" Mon Dieu!" he exclaimed. " I'm tired! I've been setting posts for that new fence around the churchyard for three days now •—and to-day I was wet half the time. To-night the mist came up from the river—a chunk of it floated along until I couldn't see the post I was driving!"

" What did you say?" demanded the voice of Michaud with startling clearness.

" A big chunk of mist, *monsieur,"* repeated Vilas very respectfully, u that floated over the very spot where I stood, and took its own time about it, too!"

" The *fifoUet!"*

A quick, sharp breath here and there. Then stillness. Thomas Michaud could hardly have spoken a word that would have carried more dread into the hearts of those who heard him, filled with belief in his mysterious power as they then were, than this word *fifoUet*. For the *fifoUet* is an awesome thing, according to those who repeat the legends of the country. It cannot be described, because it is neither angel nor devil, man nor beast. It appears near cemeteries, in misty, changing shapes, and he who sees it will surely die within **a** twelvemonth. Men have been known to go home with " *fifollet"* on their lips—to go to bed and die in spite of the best-intentioned doctors.

CHAPTER III.

THE RED DEATH.

T H E hush in front of the shop was broken by Telesphore Vilas. He rose to his feet and stood for a moment with arms held pleadingly toward Black Thomas.

" No, *monsieur!"* he cried. " Oh, no! I beg of you! No! No! No!" He staggered away into the gathering darkness, still repeating his prayer.

Jules Perron ran, caught up with him at the end of a few rods, and put his hand upon the old man's arm.

"Stop that nonsense!" he barked. " Have you no faith in God or the prayers of Father Paradis that you should believe such a thing?"

Vilas halted long enough to see who it was, and then shook the hand from his arm in terror.

" Leave me alone!" he shrilled. " You'll only make it worse! You've brought this on us all, curse you!"

Perron made no further attempt to comfort Vilas as that stricken one started on toward his own house. Well Jules knew the hold which such superstitions had outside of the larger towns, and he thanked Heaven for that thirst within him which had made him read books and think beyond the other men of the village.

However, he had something more pressing than self-congratulation to occupy his mind —something that the parting words of old Telesphore had told him: " You've brought this on us all, curse you!"

So that was what they were saying behind his back! He had not thought of that angle of attack from Michaud, but it now seemed clear. If Jules Perron were not in the way Thomas Michaud could become betrothed to Chloe. Perhaps—yes, undoubtedly—he would remove that vague threat of evil which every one had now

come to feel in a greater or less degree: better still, perhaps he would marry her quickly and take her away to live.

Jules, knowing the minds of his people, followed their reasoning with a certainty as strong as though that reasoning had been written in words for him to read. He was thoughtful that night as he tried to talk lightly to Mile. Pujos; and he went home early in order to better consider some way of lighting the menace of Black Michaud.

• Three days later it was reported that Telesphore Vilas was in his bed, very ill. Inasmuch as there was no doctor within twenty miles of Ste. Anne des Monts, the older women, grown experienced by long practise, did most of the healing. Father Joseph Paradis was skilled in the use of certain drugs and the treatment of wounds, so that, with him and willing nurses, most of the sick ones of the village recovered or died without having to think of a doctor's bill. —

Jules Perron, on his way to the house where Vilas, long a widower, lived alone, met the priest and joined him. They saw a group of men and women before the house. These drew back at the approach of the priest and Jules; whispering together in a fashion that smacked of something more than ordinary illness. The story of the *fifollet,* however, was by this time well known, with a hundred details that had no truth in them, to every child in the village; and to the incident of sudden illness following the sight of the *fifollet* Perron attributed the whisperings.

Then Mathilde Roberge came out of the front door. She stopped at the sight of Father Paradis and Jules, crossing herself. There was no more expression now than at any other time on her wrinkled, yellow face; but her eyes were like big, black, shining buttons, and a glance was enough to see that she was filled with terror.

" Smallpox!" she cried to all those within reach of her voice. " Marie Laplante has looked at him, and she says the same thing!"

For a few seconds no one moved or spoke. Then Mme. Roberge clattered down the stone steps in her heavy shoes and made off toward her own home with all speed, looking at no one and muttering to herself words that might equally well have been prayers or incantations against the devil.

As snow goes in April, so the group in front of the house melted; some of the first to go mumbled excuses as to pressing business elsewhere, but as the contagion of panic spread men and women ran without saying anything, and in little more than a minute the house was left alone except for the sick man inside and the priest and Jules Perron without.

"Come!" said Father Paradis, his lips relaxing a little from the straight line into which they had drawn. " After forty years I have only you left!"

" You forget *mademoiselle, mon pere,"* corrected Jules, gently.

" Pardon!" apologized Father Paradis, as he stepped over the threshold. " She will come if we think best to permit it."

They found Vilas tossing, half dressed, upon his ill-made bed. There was the red rash which brought a nod and something in the nature of a groan from the priest—and fever and delirium. He sent Jules to collect remedies, food, and arrange the multitude of small affairs demanding attention before they settled down to take care of the sick man.

Perron left Boule in the care of Melisse and went away again, despite her hysterical protests, to do his errands. He noticed that Antonin Benoit filled his order with frightened haste, that heads peered at him from windows as he passed along the single street of the village, and that those whom he met took sudden pains to cross over to the other side of the road. At the time he was too occupied with his own affairs to give much heed to these things, and he got back to the *maison* Vilas with no thought but of immediate duty.

Father Paradis met him with the information that Mile. Pujos had been there, in admitted defiance of her father's order, and that he had had fairly to drive her away from the door. She had promised to keep them in food every day.

" A wife worthy of you, even as you are worthy of her, my son," said the priest.

" Neither of you yields to this superstition or to the fear of death—otherwise

I should be a broken man, for you are all I have left."

" Bah!" replied Jules, uncomfortable at the praise. " Vilas has made at least two journeys out of town within the past month or six weeks. He has been exposed to the contagion somewhere; that is all."

" And after this absurdity of the *fifollet* fear gripped him, he became weak, and the malady could lay him by the heels. *Mon Dieu,* how far my children have gone from the truth!"

" Be tranquil," said Perron. " We will make Vilas Well, and then perhaps Black Michaud and his *fifollet* will lose standing in Ste. Anne des Monts."

Such a happy termination might have come if Telesphore Vilas had recovered. But he grew worse that night. All through the next day he raved of the *fifollet* and pleaded with Thomas Michaud to spare him. Over and over he apologized in the humblest words his tormented brain could find for that remark of his as to the blackness of M. Michaud's appearance. Perron ground his teeth with rage as he listened and anew he swore to himself to drive Michaud out of the village.

During the second evening Vilas died, after having received final ministrations from Father Paradis. Perron, anticipating the end, had made a rough coffin from such materials as he could find during the day so that well before midnight the labors of the two men were practically completed. There was nothing more to do except dig a grave and carry the coffin to the churchyard.

They had burned sulphur in every room of the house and they now believed it time to go to their own homes, destroy their clothing, and purify themselves as well as possible from danger of contagion. It was agreed that if one fell ill the other would nurse him: if both were stricken Jules was to go to the presbytery, where he could at least die like a Christian.

Perron completed a long and thorough fumigation in his woodshed, using that place in concession to the terror of Melisse. At intervals during the process he fancied that he heard distant shouting, only to dismiss the evidence of his ears. Without doubt all Ste. Anne des Monts knew of the death of Vilas for, although the hour was late, news in a little village travels as though by electricity. There could be, Jules thought, only cause for relief to the fearful in the fact that Telesphore Vilas had left them.

But when he stepped into the street a red glare met him; and now came unmistakably the sound of many voices. The high flames, from which came the ghastly glare, had their source in the house where Telesphore Vilas lay dead. Perron ran lightly but with all his speed until he arrived Within the circle of light about the burning building. There he stopped; hands falling to his sides in utter helplessness.

Fire filled the whole house; it leaped out of the windows and streamed upward where the roof had been. Standing well back from the heat and falling embers was all that part of the village not bed-ridden or too young to walk. Among them, nearer to the flames than anyone else, was Black Thomas Michaud.

As Perron grasped the meaning of the picture he saw Michaud turn his head—he followed the look of triumph, red-lighted by the fire. A half dozen men, firm, but still keeping a semblance of respect, were barring the way of Father Paradis. The priest had evidently given up his attempt to get into the burning house, but he did not yield a step, and as Jules ran toward him he spoke.

" Because of your base fears of the pestilence you have burned this man!" he said. " You have denied him the right to lie in holy ground! And for this act of selfish cowardice toll will be taken out of your own lives—for such is the law of God! Beware!"

He moved away from them, his *soutane* whirling as though it would shake off the dust of their presence, and went toward the presbytery. There Jules Perron followed him a little later, and found him bowed with the sorrow of what had been done but determined to keep fighting the evil that had grown up in his parish. He still believed that, with the help of God, it could be conquered.

The next day Ste. Anne des Monts was much like a man after a hard spree, ashamed and sullen and nervous. Most of

all, the people were afraid. They knew how smallpox could, if it were so fated, wipe out every man, woman, and child in the village. Therefore, every window and every door in town was kept tight closed, although the weather was warm and damp for the season. The doors and windows remained shut to keep out the air which people imagined had become tainted. Black Michaud, the oracle, let it be known that he thought this a wise precaution: also, probably through him, came the ostracism of Jules Perron, which continued up to a time when the minds of the people were filled with a new and greater terror.

A week after the burning of the body of Telesphore Vilas the aged mother of Richard Bordeleau fell ill with a malady that was not at first taken seriously by those of her household, even though everyone was watching with all keenness for the first manifestations of smallpox. Chills and fever and pain throughout the body might easily be no more than a bad cold, the volunteer nurses agreed, with a hopefulness which they perhaps did not feel in their hearts. On the third day, however, the unmistakable red rash appeared; and on the fifth day Madame Veuve Bordeleau died.

By this time others were ill; old and young, the robust and the weak. Red death went stalking up and down the street, knocking at the doors of the stone houses and searching out its victims under the dormered roofs. Terror was abroad by day and by night. And about the time the plague had taken a firm hold upon Ste. Anne des Monts *monsieur le maire* showed a flare of initiative and sent a man twenty miles for a doctor.

When the physician came he swore. Being an educated and intelligent man he had not only the *patois* of the woods, but many new and strange oaths with which to express himself so that it was said afterward that he actually scorched the hair of Antonin Benoit's dog, which got in his way during the first fury of his wrath.

Immediately he ordered every window in Ste. Anne des Monts opened, except during such time as the rain might fall in torrents. Then he left medicine in each house, with directions as to hot drinks and food for such as might get well. He went away, cursing to himself.

The back of the doctor had not been turned upon the village for more than half an hour before every window save those in the houses of the mayor, the priest, and Jules Perron were closed again. His medicine, however, was taken in double doses by many; and it is likely that his visit did quite as much harm as good.

All the litde world hurried to Father Paradis to seek help, and to the now wholly inadequate supply of women who had skill in nursing; but there were many who made secret trips to the shop of Black Thomas Michaud, seeking some kind of a charm against the dread sickness.

To all these Michaud shook his head and disclaimed interest in the matter; but he nevertheless managed to let the village believe that he could stop the plague if he were minded that way. He was offered money, which he refused contemptuously, with the intimation that if he were able to do anything it would not be done for money, but for a'reward much nearer his heart.

During these days the ostracism of Jules Perron continued with such completeness that his proffered aid was seldom received by those families afflicted—and the number of them included nearly all. When the smallpox raged worst and there were half enough nurses and half enough men to bury the dead then Perron was of necessity allowed to work with his fellow men. Through it all he was careful to take such precautions as the doctor had ordered and of the half dozen households that escaped entirely his own was one.

The epidemic burned itself out, as had the fire in the house of Telesphore Vilas: the one left ugly, blackened walls, and the other broken families. An addition was made to the churchyard that fall and Father Paradis was very busy saying masses for the dead—the people still went to church faithfully, perhaps because they did not dare to stay away.

In all probability it was the cold weather, coming early, that brought an end to the disaster. Heavy snow fell before St. Catherine's day, which was unusual, and the *vieillards* shook their heads and predicted

that it would be a hard winter—hard to get firewood from the forest, hard to find game, and hard to work because of cold and deep snow.

So it proved. Men who had never grumbled before, or hesitated because of cracking cold and breast-deep snow, declared this winter too filled with hardships for steady-work. The belief that there was a curse upon the village was general—together with the general impression that Black Thomas Michaud could remove it if he so willed. But he would remove it only if his strange courting were successful. In the meantime Ste. Anne des Monts sighed and hoped and treated Jules Perroft with coldness.

CHAPTER IV.

LOUP-GAROU

INTO this atmosphere of strain, of fear, of hatred, Richard Bordeleau came back one day from a hunting trip with blood-shot eyes and deep lines cut into the brown of his face. He had lost his pack, and one of his snowshoes was broken when he staggered up to the shop of Antonin Benoit and flung himself inside as though he believed that Satan himself was at his heels. They had to give him a drink of whiskey *blanc* with a handful of crackers soaked in it before he could speak.

" Wolves!" was his first word. " They've come down from the north!"

At that everyone drew a breath of relief; and yet everyone leaned forward with interest because wolves had not been south of the Hudson Bay country for as long as twenty years. Older men had their stories of them—half fiction and half fact. In this experience of Bordeleau, then, there was promise of adventure and pelts without much danger.

" They're hungry, those wolves!" panted Bordeleau. " Only the fire I had saved my life last night. There was a strong pack, more than I could count, and they ate the ones I shot almost as soon as the bullets struck. *Dieu Seigneur!* It was horrible! I dozed off once, when the fire went down, and they closed in. It was then that I lost my outfit. I made a running fight until dawn, my friends, and but for the goodness of God I should not be here!"

There were shrugs at this. No doubt, said those who had hunted wolves in their time, Bordeleau had taken the matter too seriously: he had become frightened and run without cause, or he had not built a big enough fire. One old hunter boasted that he had slept from dark to dawn with a ring of shining eyes around him. All wolves were cowards, he said.

" Not these wolves," Richard Bordeleau told him, rising to go home to his wife and child. " Not the leader of this pack, for he jumped across the fire at me!"

" Not the *loup-garou!"* announced Black Thomas Michaud, from a corner behind the stove. " The *loup-garou* is no coward — and he of all the pack does not fear fire!"

That name was one with which to blanch lips and to make even those sitting nearest the stove suddenly very cold. The *loup-garou* is a wolf possessed by the spirit of a man upon whom the devil had already put his claws. He runs at the head of the pack and he seeks battle with mankind, for only through that can come his salvation—if blood be drawn from him by a man his soul becomes liberated for another chance in the world.

"Norn de Dieu!" swore Jules Perron, who had been a witness to all this. " The *loup-garou* is only a fear in the hearts of cowards!"

Unfriendly eyes turned upon Jules—Black Thomas laughed. Bordeleau, with a shrug, picked up his rifle and went out.

" I will lead a hunt for this *loup-garou!"* offered Perron, meeting the eyes of the men there one after another. " Who will go with me?"

For a long time no one answered; and again Michaud laughed from his corner. Then spoke old Charles Papineau, once a hunter of renown.

" I will stay in my house after dark," he said, " with the shutters barred and the rifle ready. If this animal is the *loup-garou* then the man who goes out to hunt him should first arrange his affairs and say farewell to his wife. Once I saw a dead man who had tried that trick—"

" Imbeciles!" said Perron, and went out of the shop to tell this new folly of Ste. Anne des Monts to *Mademoiselle* Chloe.

This was new strength given to the enemy; and both of them were wearing down under the strain. They longed for spring, when they were to be married. Black Michaud must do something before that time, if at all; for then Perron would have the right to take his wife away to a place not hung with the somber draperies of fear and death. But they felt that Michaud would strike somehow before the wedding day.

The coming of the wolves filled the imagination of the village to overflowing. At first even those who most firmly believed in the existence of the *loup-garou* doubted the permanent presence of any wolf near Ste. Anne des Monts. But one starless night a long howl sounded from the top of a cliff that overhung the churchyard; and another answered it from the direction of the black cedars on the opposite side of the village.

After that no arguments were needed to convince anyone. Men fastened their doors and windows at night as their forefathers had done in the old days when there were savages in the forests. No woman or child was allowed to go out of doors alone after dark, and no man went without his rifle in his hands. Thomas Michaud became finally the great man of the village—his place was fixed at last and he could give advice as to the best way, to be protected against the danger with the certainty that his advice would be followed as a law.

Now he grew aggressive, where he had merely had a kind of bold stubbornness before. From old Melisse and from Chloe, through her father, Jules heard little odds and ends of gossip and vague hints that made him think hard—made him sometimes awake at night sweating with the terrors which seemed to be inexorably closing upon him while he remained helpless. Jules prayed for an end to the torment; and as though in answer to his prayer the end came with stunning swiftness.

One afternoon, just before sunset, Thomas Michaud was seen upon the cliff above the churchyard with his face turned away toward the north. That night the wolf pack came into the village for the first time, and the dog of Antonin Benoit, locked out by accident was killed and eaten upon his own door-step. Benoit, crouching inside with hands that trembled too much to hold his rifle, heard the dog's cries as it died. Other men of the village, either braver or more curious, looked out through cracks in the shutters as the pack raced down the street. These swore that it was headed by a big animal, as big as Jules Perron's Boule.

That had been between midnight and morning. But the next night Perron was just leaving the *maison* Pujos, between nine and ten o'clock, when a torrent of swift moving forms came down the street. Their eyes seemed like a thousand yellow-green lights as they bore down upon him, and in that brief moment he regretted the scorn of Ste. Anne des Monts which had made him come without his rifle. A big wolf swerved from the trail of the gigantic leader —a leader truly as big as Boule—and leaped for Jules. He missed, stumbled, and went ori. With a sound of soft, rushing feet the pack vanished.

Then from a house a dozen rods away came a woman's scream. Jules had heard the sounds of suffering more than once in his life, but never had he heard from human throat the anguish of that cry. He ran toward it, seeing other human forms running in the darkness, and found that it came from the *maison* Bordeleau. Richard held his young wife in his arms and tried to comfort her; but she gave no attention to what he said. She stared out into the darkness and moaned, twisting her fingers in and out against each other.

The wolves had killed their little daughter, Helene; that laughing imp who had grown just big enough to dart here and there almost as fast as the eye could follow her. It appeared that Richard and his wife each had thought that the other had locked the kitchen door—and neither had done it. They had both seen Helene playing with the latch.

Then Madame Bordeleau saw the door standing open. A shriek of *"Mama.nl Maman!"* came from without. Richard leaped for his rifle, but he was too late—while he stood blinded by the sudden change

from light to darkness, seeking something to fire at, the pack went on. Of the child's death there was proof upon the snow.

Now indeed was Ste. Anne des Monts beaten to its knees. All that night many families remained awake: all the following morning no work was done. It was about noon when Melisse stumbled into the *maison* Perron from the shop of Benoit, where she had been on an errand, with a tale which she gasped out in fragments. A dozen men of the village, including Black Michaud, had been gathered there in secret conclave, and Melisse, not at all averse to eavesdropping, had overheard much of their talk.

" They are going to take Mademoiselle Chloe and give her to M. Michaud!" cried Melisse, crossing herself at the name of the shoemaker. " They believe they are going to save the village that way—they will force M. Pujos to consent! *Mon Dieu!* It is terrible! Either that, *monsieur,* or the *loup-garou—"*

Jules did not wait to hear the end of her prediction. His rifle had leaped to his hand as she talked, and without waiting to put on jacket or cap he ran for the mayor's house, taking a roundabout way which would bring him to the back door. He rushed through the kitchen and into the *salon* just as a heavy pounding sounded at the front door.

In the *salon* stood M. Pujos, pale as his own corpse and holding to the table for support, Father Paradis, and Mademoiselle Chloe, whose hand gripped her revolver and whose eyes were as steady as though worse than death were not clamoring for entrance.

Up-stairs!" cried Perron. They are coming to take Chloe—"

" We know," interrupted the priest. " Since the love of God has gone from their hearts I am not much good, my son, but such as I am, I am ready to die here!"

" Come, then! We can hold the stairs long enough for mademoiselle to get away—• she can jump into a drift from one of the windows!"

They ran, half carrying the mayor; while at the door a steady and insistent hammering went on. Once on the upper floor M. Pujos sank down upon one of the beds. Father Paradis stood beside Jules at the head of the stairs—and Chloe took a place behind them.

" Go! " commanded Perron. " While they're on the stairs, Chloe, jump from a window, and get to Melisse. She will harness Boule, give you blankets, and a chance to get away!"

" And leave you here to die for me?" exclaimed the girl, with red climbing up her cheeks. " What kind of a woman did you ask to marry you, my Jules? I shall live if you do—and die if you do!"

There was no time for Perron to voice the pride that filled him, for the end of a six-inch log swept the stout door from its hinges as though it had been made of cardboard. Through the opening tumbled a handful of men just as others found their way in from the kitchen. There were, as Melisse had guessed, about a dozen—including Richard Bordeleau, Antonin Benoit, and Black Thomas Michaud.

CHAPTER V,

PERRON GOES FORTH.

MICHAUD stood away from the others, looking up with a hint of that peculiar smile of his playing about his lips. The men of Ste. Anne des Monts hesitated a moment, and then pushed Antonin Benoit forward as spokesman. He advanced and set his foot on the lowest step, with an eye to the rifle of Perron, while the others gathered compactly behind. «

" We want to see *monsieur le maire!"* demanded Benoit.

" He is a sick man," replied Perron. " Say what you have to say to Father Paradis and to me."

" Jules," began Antonin, " you might as well give up. M. Michaud, here, wants to marry Mile. Pujos. It may be right or wrong. But there are some of us who think it is better that she should marry him than that all the village should die!"

Now at last Michaud had his desire. Other men were fighting to get what he wanted for him. What he could not have done by force in the beginning was being accomplished through the *loup-garou* and the fear that it inspired.

" So Black Thomas has agreed to take himself and the *loup-garou* back to the devil, where he belongs, if he can have mademoiselle? Is that it?" asked Jules.

"I've made no bargains!" snapped Michaud. " The people think what they please!"

"We know!" shouted Richard Bordeleau, almost a madman from his excess of grief. " The *loup-garou* must have what he wants! *Mon Dieu!* It might be my wife next!"

Then Father Paradis stepped forward and lifted his veined hand with all the authority of old. At least he held them in leash for the moment—they listened while he spoke.

" My children! Be warned before you bring upon your heads more sin than is already there! You left Telesphore Vilas to die alone because of your lack of charity, and you burned his body in his own house because of a crawling fear that did not save you from the red death! Who, in God's truth, killed the little child of Richard Bordeleau! You, no less than this *loup-garou!*

" You cowards! You should have gone into the forest and broken up this pack of wild beasts! Is there any blood in you? Turn on that helper of the Prince of Darkness—that Michaud—and drive him out! Then stand and face both good and evil with the love of God in your hearts and the wrath of God in your strong right arms!"

The voice of the priest died away, but he still stood with hand upraised and his eyes beating down the eyes of those who heard him. For a moment it seemed that he was about to conquer—and then Thomas Michaud laughed with a sound like the very mockery of hell.

" Say that to the *loup-garou!"* he said.

In the wink of an eye hope was lost. The men turned back to the memory of what they had come for—they wavered, and then took the stairs with a rush. There was murder in their eyes; and Michaud, waiting in the rear, smiled.

Perron's first impulse was to fire point-blank into the nearest face. He checked it, and instead, stepping down to meet them, drove his rifle butt into the stomach of the leader. He was swept back and downward, toppling the others over as though they had been wooden soldiers. One man was out of the fight for the moment; but the cursing tangle of bodies straightened out.

Now, added to the fear that had first impelled them, was the lust of battle, and as they gathered for the second attack Jules realized that this time both he and Chloe must shoot—they must shoot with intent to kill, but without any certainty that the victory would go to them. Perron fired once, a snap shot, at Black Michaud—only to see through the smoke and haze that his enemy had moved with uncanny deftness to one side. The bullet brought down plaster from the wall at the level of his heart.

The rush up the stairs was on again when something in the nature of an inspiration came to Jules—a plan that might gain a respite, if no better odds, in his battle with death. He held up his rifle, and cried out with all the power that was in his lungs:

"Stop! Attend to what I say!" They halted, uncertain, panting, while Michaud moved forward with a scowl.

" If you will leave this house in peace now I will go out to-night and fight the *loup-garou* when he comes! If I am killed then Black Thomas Michaud will be happy, and you can deal with Mademoiselle Chloe as God wills! If I kill the *loup-garou* you will be free—can Black Michaud do more than that for you? What do you say, men of Ste. Anne des Monts? Will you give me a chance to fight? Are you Frenchmen or savages?"

That appeal gained the respite. Heads turned questioningly toward one another; feet shuffled awkwardly. The attack had been broken by words.

"We are Frenchmen, Perron!" cried Antonin Benoit; and even Richard Bordeleau agreed.

"Nom de Dieu! We are not savages!"

Thomas Michaud, looking more blackly villainous than Jules had ever seen him, opened his mouth as though to speak—and thought better of it. He went out behind the others.

" Dieu merci!" breathed Perron, turning to Chloe with a great sigh of relief. " Boule and I will at least kill the *loup-garou* before we die!"

"You will drive the wolves off!" she cried, shaking his arm in a sudden fury at the doubt in his voice. " Go out with that belief—and remember that I shall be at our door here with the bar drawn! You will have a refuge!"

" And my prayers," added Father Paradis.

Suddenly their perfect faith flowed into Jules, and through him, as good wine warms even to the tips of the fingers. He took the hands of Chloe in both his own and with infinite gentleness kissed her on the lips.

" Until to-night," he said, " when I shall drive the devil out of Ste. Anne des Monts forever!"

Perron went down the stairs and to his own house with a singing heart, despite the danger which he must face before another day. With a kind of peace he had never before known he lay down and slept until supper time.

After the meal he cleaned his rifle, filled every pocket of his homespun trousers with cartridges, belted on two knives, and went out into the darkness with a wail from Melisse following him. The time of trial had come, he kept telling himself over and over; so he patrolled slowly up and down the street, from his own house to that of the mayor, for a time which he did not attempt to gage.

The upstanding ears of Boule first warned him. He made his own ears free by pushing up the sides of his muskrat cap, and caught the end of a long, thin wail from somewhere beyond the cliffs. The beasts would be coming now within a short time. Another call came from the forest, and much nearer. Boule growled, and trembled at the touch of his master's hand. In a sudden rush of affection Jules knelt and laid his cheek against the muzzle of the dog. Boule understood.

They came as they had before, swift as shadows, black against the snow, close together, either for protection or attack, as they brazenly tore through the lair of mankind. Perron was standing in front of the mayor's house, as he had planned, when he first glimpsed them bearing down upon him, and as yet unaware of his presence. At the first howl he had taken off his jacket. Now he flung up the rifle and fired deliberately.

At the second or third shot the pack came to a halt, and he knew that at least one bullet had gone home. There was a snarling fight over the wounded while Perron reloaded; then the wolves came on again, but not so swiftly. They had his scent, and that of the dog; but they would be cautious until they knew that there was no ambuscade of other men.

Three times more he stopped the pack with a burst of shots; and three times they delayed long enough to eat. those that went down. Again and again he saw the big leader, but never at a time when he dared take precious seconds to draw a steady bead on him.

. They drew quite near, circling, Jules began to think of getting his back to a wall when a sudden shift by Boule warned him of danger from behind. He wheeled. The shapes were all about him. They slunk along the walls on each side of the street—a row of eyes gleamed nearer and nearer from the rear.

He fired once from the hip and turned back to face the main body of the pack. Then it seemed that a hand of ice shut down on his heart for the giant that had been called the *loup-garou* was in the act of springing, and a score of his followers were behind him.

Jules clubbed his rifle. The big body had launched itself—to be deflected in mid-air by the impact of Boule. That was what the dog had been waiting for, that moment of greatest danger—thus Perron thought as he charged, firing into the faces of the animals that had crowded the heels of the leader. As they gave before him he turned and ran back toward the *maison* Pujos.

Boule was now fighting for his life with the *loup-garou,* and the other wolves were everywhere. Jules shot into jaws that snapped at him, he brought his rifle butt down on bodies that sprang up in his path. His shirt was ripped half way. A streak of fire down his right arm told him he had been wounded.

He reached the door at last, only to have his rifle spin out of his hands as he thrust it between his breast and one of the brutes.

He drew a knife in each hand, but a wolf was tearing at one foot and he sat down heavily upon the stone steps. This was the end he thought, as he slashed right and left. He hoped that it would come quickly. Poor Boule.

A big rectangle of lamplight struck the snow. The bark of revolver shots beat against his ears, and the smell of burning powder filled his nose. A kicking wolf lay before him as he staggered up—he finished it with a knife. The voice of Chloe rang like a paean of joy at his side.

"They've gone! You've won, Jules! You've won!"

It was true. The pack had faded into the darkness from which it had come. Only the dead wolf by the doorstep remained—and two struggling forms at the corner of the house. Perron ran to them; his knives gripped hard and ready for a thrust that would give the victory to Boule.

Through seconds heavy with fear for the life of his dog Perron waited. Then, just as he despaired of ever finding a mark on the shifting body of the wolf, the animals became suddenly rigid. Jules saw that the teeth of Boule had at last got their grip—at last they were set through and through the corded throat of the *loup-garou.* The hand of Perron drew back for a ripping thrust—but he stayed it.

When at last the wolf's great muscles yielded he went down to the hard packed snow like a stricken rabbit. The jaws of Boule set themselves more firmly—the leader of the pack that had terrorized Ste. Anne des Monts quivered and stiffened. The *loup-garou* was dead.

Coincident with the death agony of the *loup-garou* a scream pierced the cold, still air. From the house of Richard Bordeleau the night before had come a cry which vas the apotheosis of human agony, but the cry that now darted, serpent-like, to the ears of the village, was more terrible. It was such a shriek as might come from a soul wrung by terrors other than those of this world. It dripped with malice as a cavern drips ooze.

The sound held Jules Perron rigid for an instant: then he spun on his heel to make sure that Chloe was safe. She was almost at his side, trembling a little, but steadfast. Boule, his hair bristling at the echoes of the cry, wobbled toward them and licked the hand of Jules.

"Nom de Dieu!" whispered Perron. "That scream was frpm the house of Michaud!"

He ran toward the little place that the shoemaker had rented; to stop half-way there with a sudden thought for the other men of the village. It were better that they should be witnesses to the fullness'of the defeat he intended should be the fate of Black Thomas. He filled his lungs and cried out so that his voice penetrated the shutters of many of those houses of fear.

"Stand up, you creepers! Come out like men and help me drive the devil back to his own!"

They came; at first slowly, and then by dozens as the news that the *loup-garou* was dead flashed from house to house. They followed Jules Perron to the house of Michaud and watched him break in the door with his rifle butt. Then, while Chloe moved at his side with a lighted lantern, they followed him over that dread threshold and into the shop.

Chloe held the lantern aloft—to shudder at what she saw so that the light swayed and smoked in her grasp. Black Thomas Michaud lay upon the littered floor of his shop with his throat ripped open by a jagged wound—a wound the same as that by which Boule had let the life blood out of the *loup-garou.* He was dead.

This is the end of the story, *messieurs;* except that even now in Ste. Anne des Monts they will tell you that Black Michaud, who himself was the *loup-garou,* hoped to liberate his soul through a wound from the hand of man. He failed, they say, only because the devil needed his help in hell on the very night when Jules Perron and Boule fought for the prettiest demoiselle north of Lake St. John. Naturally, Father Joseph Paradis maintains that Michaud killed himself—but the good father admittedly does not believe in the *loup-garou.*

(The 2nd.)

Son of the Black Wolf

by Ckarles B. Stilson

Author of " Black Wolf ef Pieardy," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

RAYMOND JEHAN du CHfiNE, Vicomte de Mervalles, and son of the famous swordsman, the . Black Wolf of 1'icardy, on his way to Portsmouth with his companion, Concino, grievously wounded Black Roger Marsden, Earl of Templeton, who had thrust a roadside quarrel upon him. Marsden had killed an old beggar, who, defending Raymond when the earl sought treacherously to slay him, prophesied, before his death, that Marsden would meet his end at Raymond's hands.

Escaping from Marsden and his company, Raymond and Concino boarded a ship for France, and behind them, when the baffled pursuers returned, Lady Jean Murrie, who had been of Marsden's party, on the road from Tunbridge Wells, excoriating the earl in no uncertain terms, set out for Godalming and the house of the Wolf—the estate of the Comte de Mortemart, as the Wolf was known, he having been an exile from France for seventeen years. With Jean went Mary Murrie, her cousin, huge Archie MacGregor, and six gillies. Jean also took with her a souvenir of Raymond in the shape of a tress of dark auburn hair, which was all that the pursuers had been able to bring back.

There, after a pleasant evening, Jean, upon whom Raymond had made a striking impression, decided suddenly to go to France. Silencing Archie's objections, two days later the girl left England on a French packet-boat from Bexhili. MacGregor and his six gillies went with her.

Jean, too, had cast her gage of battle at the feet of adventure.

CHAPTER V.

MASTER NED'S AMBITIONS.

POISED at the ship's side and ready to leap into the sea and return to the rescue of his friend, Raymond relaxed and laughed merrily when he saw Concino come hurtling toward him through the air like an immense brown bird. " *Pardieu!* Messer Pazza, you have neatly fooled them! You leap like a grasshopper in the springtime!" he cried, as the Italian, letting his pole slip back over the rail, alighted on the deck with a grunt.

" But I grow old for such boys' tricks," said Concino ruefully, and he bent at once and rubbed with solicitude at his knee-joints. He found the damage not so serious as it felt. " We are here—by divers methods," he remarked more cheerfully, straightening up; the next matter for concern is, can we stay? Methinks the answer cometh."

Nearly all of the sailors on the decks had let fall whatever they had in hand and had run to stare at the two men who had come among them in such unheard-of fashion. Those aloft, finding curiosity more pressing than their business, deserted their posts and came swinging and leaping from the shrouds like monkeys. Within the clamorous half circle which they formed stood Raymond and Concino and the trembling horse.

" Hell's embers!" bawled a hearty voice somewhere in the rear. " Get back to your places, ye scum of the scuppers! Damned lunkers! d'ye want to get us fined for drifting broadside-on like a water-logged hulk and cracking some of these harbor cockle-shells? Jump, scuts! *Jump!"* The last word was accompanied by a swish and a howl of pain.

This story began in The Argosy for December 20.

Alternately cursing and swinging a rope's-end, a wide-shouldered young chap pushed through the gaping crescent of seamen and spun on his heels to face it, using rope and fist with a ready impartiality that set the sailors to scurrying and their fingers to foncliing sore spots.

Melodiously as a bull-calf the newcomer roared commands at the fleeing laggards, then flung the rope's-end after the last of them, and turned, grinning, toward the rail.

" What's the moil, sirs?" he asked good-humoredly, advancing to the horse's head and patting the beast's nose. " First the devil's own farrago breaks loose in Portsmouth town, with hell a hunting and powder burned, and then you board us break-neck, break-deck." He pointed smilingly to where the planks had splintered under the steel-shod hoofs. " Have you spitted a bishop, or kissed the wrong wench, or what have you done to stir up such a squall?"

Much relieved by the caliber of man with whom he had to deal, Raymond made answer in the same vein:

" I had the fortune to enter into argument with another cavalier concerning the width of the road," he said; " and though he is, I believe, persuaded, his friends yonder are not."

" Aye; and you gave him a bellyful of your persuader." The sailor nodded toward the bloody rapier, which the vicomte had not found time to sheath.

" May we trespass upon your courtesy to the extent of setting us ashore at a French port, captain?" Raymond continued. " I do not think you the man to turn us back yonder. My word for it, the quarrel was fairly settled. We will pay our passage well."

" You advance me too rapidly, young sir," returned the sailor. " Jem Berks of Bristol be captain of the Bristol Maid. He lieth at this moment in his berth, drunk as a hog, while a better man.than him sails his ship. I be Ned Wadgett, the first mate; but I make bold to say as you shall remain with us. God send that Jem keeps to the bottle, and I'll put you ashore as you desire—and naught to pay at all, sir."

It was at that juncture that Raymond, after thanking Wadgett, waved his ironic adieus to his balked pursuers, who were storming and threatening from the end of the mole. Glancing up the hillside, he fancied that he could descry there a small feminine figure that stood by the side of the road, and he thought that her face looked his way. He laid his hand on his heart and made a low bow.

" Farewell, Mile. Mystery," he whispered.

" Hark to 'em! Zounds! But one on 'em be a right rare hand at cursin'!" exclaimed the mate enviously. Lifting his voice, he shouted across the water to the men on the pier, and gave them a plenteous sample of his own powers in that direction.

" Go back, and be damned to ye; ye'11. get naught from Ned Wadgett but toad with an R!" he bawled coarsely; for though he had scant knowledge of the quarrel, the looks of the fugitives had enlisted Wadgett's sympathies, and the sight of the many against the two had stirred his sense of fair play. Jem Berks willing, Ned was resolved to deal well by his new-found friends. Should the captain prove recalcitrant, as Wadgett, knowing him well, thought highly probable—well, the mate had in his curly head certain plans of his own which such a situation might rather aid than hinder.

With a final shake of his fist toward the men on the pier, Ned quit his cursing and turned him back to the less pleasurable but more necessary business of wearing his ship out of harbor. Bidding his guests make free of the decks, he ran forward, the echoes of his stentorian orders resounding from bow to stern.

For all his rough ways and rougher tongue, it was to be seen that the mate was a prime favorite with the sailors. Scarcely a man-jack of them but would have stood stoutly at his back in no matter what undertaking.

" Fortune holdeth well," remarked Raymond, smiling at Ned's bellowings. " She provideth me that way to France for which I have prayed, and she hath this day sent me my first fight—which I hope with sincerity will not be my last."

" Have a care, *maestro;* he that rideth in quest of trouble seldom tireth his horse," rejoined Concino dryly. " When you have seen as much as have I of the jade For-

tune's sendings, mayhap you will look back with regret to the quiet home and peaceful bed you are leaving. I would rather at this moment be digging in my garden than on my way to France, which holdeth, I trow, enough of troubles to cool even your hot stomach. And what will your lady mother say? She will be sorely worried when you come not home to her to-morrow, *maestro.* A pest upon the English milord, say I!"

His spirits suddenly dashed, Raymond sat down on a coil of rope and fell to wiping the blade of his rapier with a bit of frayed cordage.

" True; I had forgot," he said contritely, returning the sword to its scabbard. " She'll not know a night of peaceful rest until she hears— We must find a way to send her news, Concino! How shall it be managed?"

Rather stiffly, for his leap had shaken him, the Italian crossed the deck to the horse and fetched and tethered the animal to the rail. While he walked he revolved matters in his mind. It was the nature of Concino to see things first on their dark side and then to turn them.

" When we be missing—to-morrow, or the day after at the latest—your sire will journey down to Portsmouth," he replied. " There will he meet Hugues Banel, and doubtless will hear from him or elsewhere the tale of our mishap—for the town will still be agog with it. Then will he instruct Hugues as to our disposal in France—whither the Wolf will know you will be headed. So your mother will learn of your whereabouts, and we will be provided; a refuge, should the matter of the quarrel hour.d us beyond the Manche. We shall have but to be careful, and to find Hugues."

Raymond nodded vaguely. The thought of his mother had stilled the lad.

None is more curious than a sailer. Every man on every craft in the harbor within eye-shot of the doings on the mole was sore ridden to know the meaning of them. Volleys of queries beset those who worked the Bristol Maid as she spread her wings to the breeze and headed out to sea. From the foredeck Wadgett met and parried the brunt of questioning, replying after his fancy with a deal of caustic vulgarity. When he found no answer pat to his tongue, he consigned the inquirer to the nether regions; and so, to his manner of thinking, had always the best of it.

It was not until the ship had rounded the Isle of Wight and stood well out in the channel that Ned returned to bespeak the guests in whose behalf he had done such doughty verbal battle. In the mean time under his orders both carpenter and cook had been busy. The one had knocked together amidships a stall for Raymond's black horse Tonnerre; the other had kindled his galley-fire and prepared a meal. It was to this latter refreshment that Wadgett came to invite the travelers.

As he approached, his face alight with good intentions, he chanced to step to leeward of Concino, and at once sheered off, his jovial countenance contorted* with the reflection of quite different sentiments.

"What, i' God's name—" he began, backing hastily.

Raymond, noting the abrupt change of face and the twitching nostrils, and guessing at the cause, roared with laughter.

"Of your courtesy, good Master Ned!" he cried when he could control his voice. " Let Messer Pazza have a bucket of water, and with it the strongest soap you have in store; for in sooth he hath need of the strongest wherewith to counter the perfume of that flower of the market-place which he weareth."

" Sapristi! Yes!" groaned Concino. " I have not drawn an easy breath since the vile varlet back yonder heaved it upon me—may the fiend have him!"

" But what *is* it?" questioned the puzzled mate, edging gingerly around to windward. " I had thought to be acquaint with all the stinks in the category, being a seafaring man; but never hath my nose been so offended since first I sailed the seas."

"What, Master Wadgett! you an Englishman, and not know the aroma of a Hampshire cheese when you meet it!" laughed Raymond.

" Nay; I be a Northumberland man," protested Ned. " Forby, I'll wager that the cow from which that came ne'er grew in England. Belike the stuff is Swiss, or made in Germany, where they have the trick of such foulness."

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After the bucket had been fetched, and Concino had removed the malodorous bouquet, the mate led them to the cabin below. While they sat at meat, which the vicomte insisted he should share with them, they brightened the eyes of Master Ned with the tale of the day's adventures.

" Zooks!" roared the sailor, thwacking with his fist on the table, when he had heard the story through. " I would ha' given a finger to see you peck the scurvy earl! The time be coming, masters, when our fine lords will not make so free a riding down common folk and putting their swords into 'em. Such time has been afore, and will be again, now mark me; for us commons will not endure it.

" Be you Tory, Whig, or, Trimmer?" he asked of Raymond; " not that I cares a louse; but these days politics be about all a body hears when he be in port."

Raymond answered that English affairs had no great interest for him, seeing that he was French by birth and sympathies; but that he was for the king's party in any land, providing that the king proved himself a man and ruled wisely,

" Why, for that matter, so be I," rejoined Wadgett. " Charles Stuart would do well enough; but he be overburdened with advisers. What with Godolphin and Sidney Hyde riggin' him one way, and Shaftesbury and Essex haulin' him t'other, and Halifax and Sunderland stirrin' in atween, and with James of York droppin' a lump in the stew now and then—what, 'twixt 'em all, I asks, is the poor man to do? I'd clap 'em all in irons and souse 'em in the bilge, an I were king, so I would, damn 'em!"

Perhaps Charles Stuart and his England had been much happier had the king adopted the remedy prescribed by the poor, outspoken sailor lad, and " soused" the wrangling ministers.

" So you be from France," went on Ned, reaching for a wine bottle. " I had thought ye furrin'. You do well to return across the channel after what has passed to-day. Though they be a making of new treaties yonder at Nymwegen—and time enough for hell to cool whiles they be at it—the Commons be just now sore against the French; though they do say as the kings understands one another, and that Louis of France be privately greasing Charles Stuart's palm, spite of William of Orange, who liketh it not."

Another pull at the bottle, and Master; Wadgett grew more confidential.

" To pot with politics, says I," he remarked, wagging his curly head sententiously. " Such pother be for idle lords with time and money to fritter. Meanwhiles a poor man must fend for himself, and shrewdly. We be bound for Marseilles with a hold full of sundries, to fetch a cargo of Provence wines; but we be lately from Jamestown and Manhattan in the Americas. There one heareth marvelous tales of the rich lands far to the south, where Carlos of Spain hath an empire—"

He broke off and studied his listeners keenly. His voice fell to a hoarse whisper, and he bent tensely across the table:

" What say ye, masters, to a v'yage to them waters for a whack at the dons' gold?"

The vicomte and Concino returned hisl gaze uncomprehendingly, thinking that thfl wine had mounted to his head. But Ned was still sober, and he did but fit his mouth to a plan that had lain next his heart foE many months. His next words made the matter clearer.

" My greatgran'ther sailed with Drake, Many the tale I've heard him tell from his ingle-seat when he was ripe with years, of the taking of great treasure galleons of the Spaniard."

Wadgett's eyes rolled and glistened over; the memories which he had evoked.

" Galleons still be a sailing, masters, and need only stout hearts for the taking. The crew of the Bristol Maid be with me to a man. Needs but to clap Jem Berks in' irons—or, for the matter of that, put a knifa atween his ribs—and away we goes to the southern main. Ye be men of spirit, masters; will ye come? You," pointing hig thumb at Raymond, " to lead, and stoutj Ned Wadgett to sail your ship, and to beat! his part when the guns begin to play. Ws be excellent well-gunned and provided. 1 like ye, masters! 'Tis a king's chance I offer ye! Say, will ye do it?"

Stirred by his own imagination to red-

faced excitement, the sailor rose and leaned on his knuckles on the table.

It was share in piracy which he offered, nothing less; there was no gentler word for it. But in those days the Spaniard on far seas was fair game, and the Englishman who returned successful from the southern main was thought none the less of if he had founded his fortunes by sending a few looted galleons of the enemy to the bottom. If he was unsuccessful, however, he did not return, but made fruit for a yard-arm or a tree.

Carried away by the rude, powerful imagery, Raymond felt his nerves tingle and a thrill run up his spine. With anxiety Concino saw a leaping flare in the lad's eyes that answered the call to adventure which the sailor had sounded. Wadgett saw it, too, and deeming his case won, was about to bring his fist thundering down on the boards. The Italian moved uneasily in his chair. From the tail of his eye Raymond saw the motion, stole a glance at Concino, and haled his fancy back to earth. He shook his head slowly in disapproval of the project.

Wadgett unclenched his hand and let it fall in disappointment at his side.

" Nay, Master Ned; it cannot be," replied Raymond. " I be set to go to France, where I was born, but which I remember not. But *del,* man, almost you had persuaded me!"

" I knows it," grumbled Ned, casting a sulky glance at Concino. Immediately he brightened again. " An ye won't, ye won't; so there's the end on't. And I knows you'll not say a word to do me harm. Ye be not of that kidney. Natheless, I would ha' loved right fine for ye to go. One of these days 1 be a goin', now mark me!"

Shortly afterward Wadgett donned his jacket, lighted a cutty-pipe and went on deck, A bright Irish cabin-boy entered soon after the mate's departure and cleared the table.

" I think I shall go up and see that Tonnerre wanteth for naught—poor beast," said Raymond, breaking a moody silence in which he had been thinking of his mother, and Concino had been nodding drowsily.

" Shure, yer warship, an' if ut's yer hor-rse ye mane, ye nade not, for Oi just done thot same mesilf," spoke up the cabin-boy. " He be all fed an' bedded, sor, the foine big black divvle thot he be."

Raymond gave the lad a coin, for which he bowed to the planking.

" Plaze yer warship, sor," he said. " Masther Wadgett tould me as yer honors was to turn in here whin ye would slape," and he indicated bunks at the side of the cabin. " An' he said if ye should be hearin' anny noises from beyant there," pointing to the partition which separated the adjoining cabin, " yez are not to moind thim, sor; for 'twill be naught but th' cap'n. He do see all manner of fearsome crathurs whin he be in liquor, sor, an' at toimes they frights him so thot he do squale an' groan like unto a banshee."

With a grin-and a bob of his head, the lad departed. The weary travelers were not long in following his suggestion, and their slumbers were profound. If the brandy-imps bedeviled Jem Berks in the small hours, his neighbors never knew it.

CHAPTER VI.

QUIDOR BORROWS A BAGGER.

MOT until the Irish lad came thumping at the door in the early morning with a bucket of cold water for them, did the occupants of the cabin bunks awake.

" Perchance the coast of France will be in sight!" exclaimed Raymond eagerly. He struggled into his clothes with all the speed he could muster. Concino followed his example, but more slowly, and with not a little inward groaning; for the exertions of the previous day had left a stiffness in the Italian's joints.

Still winking the sleep from his eyes, the vicomte tumbled up the companion-steps, then stopped short on the deck with a cry of amazement, at sight of a bizarre, blanketed figure which leaned against the mainmast, with arms folded and inscrutable eyes fixed on the tossing reaches of the sea.

" Voyez Concino—c'est un vrai peau-rouge!" The lad's pointing finger directed the attention of the Italian.

At the words, the swathed form turned,

its somber eyes suddenly alight with intelligence, Clanking chains sounded beneath the blanket as its wearer quit the mast and stepped forward.

" Eugh!" came in a surprised, guttural ejaculation from the broad chest.

It was indeed a true red-skinned son of the wilderness that stood on the English deck. Emaciated, dirt-stained, and bearing other marks of ill-usage, for his captors had not dealt kindly by him, the savage yet bore himself with a dignity which proclaimed that in his native forests he had been a personage.

He was a young man, not more than twenty-five, of a noble, high-featured comeliness which all the ill-treatment which he had endured had not been able to destroy. His straight black hair was unkempt and tangled. Below the frayed edges of his shabby blanket, furred leggings showed; and his feet were clad in the worn and shapeless remnants of what had been gayly-beaded moccasins of deerskin.

If the young French vicomte was astonished at his first view of a man with a red skin, the Indian was no less surprised. It was the first time in his life that ever Quidor, the Huron had laid eyes upon a man with hair of fire—for Raymond's long locks, with the morning sun shining through them, appeared to the astounded savage to be a living blaze.

"Eugh!" he grunted again, staring at what he deemed not the least of the many wonders he had seen since the winged canoe of the pale-faces had floated him across the salt sea water.

Mixed with his wonderment was a keen delight caused by the lad's exclamation in a tongue which the Huron knew well. So he continued to advance with a halting, awkward step until he was within a yard of the vicomte. Letting the blanket slip back from his naked shoulders, he raised his right arm in salute.

" M'sieu, est un francais?" he asked with a gravity which only half concealed the eagerness he felt.

It was the turn of Raymond to start at the sound of French words.

"Out," he replied; and to Concino in the same tongue: " A strange thing—the red man speaks French!"

" In the land across the big water," said Quidor, " the sons of Onontio* and the red Hurons are as brothers. They dwell at peace. Together they track the deer and hunt the great bear. Together they go on the war-trail against the accursed Yengees (English—Yankees}. So Quidor learned the tongue of Onontio. Quidor is a chief. He was taken in battle; but first he killed three of the Yengees braves. There is mourning in the Yengees lodges because of his deeds. Now the Yengees take Quidor in their big canoe across the stinking water. They beat him and starve him; but they cannot make fear grow in his heart. Doubtless they will burn him at their council-fire. Then they will learn how a Huron can die.

" But how is it that Quidor finds a son of Onontio in the big canoe of our enemies?" he asked. " He is not a captive like Quidor. He wears his knives," pointing to the vicomte's rapier and dagger, " and his limbs are free. Is the hatchet buried or—" The Huron hesitated, and his brow clouded.

" There is peace between the English and the French," answered Raymond. Quidor's face cleared.

"It is well. Quidor liked not to think that his brother with the hair of fire was a traitor. I have heard that the land of the Yengees and the land of Onontio lie not far apart," he went on eagerly. " Say, my brother, where is the wonderful land of Onontio?"

In the surprise of meeting the red man, Raymond had forgotten his purpose in coming on deck. The question recalled it. He turned to the east.

A league and a half across the water rose a line of white headlands, from which a great spur jutted into the sea. Beyond was a wavy belt of deepest green. It was the coast of Normandie, and the promontory was Cape de la Hague.

To Raymond it was the coast of a thousand dreams. Beyond those shining headlands stood Adventure and Fancy, and

* Onontio was the name by which the Indians designated the French governors of Canada.

beckoned to him with shadowy fingers. His heart swelled, and a sudden mistiness of his eyes dimmed the dear prospect before him. He pointed with a trembling hand. The voice which answered the Indian was both reverent and triumphant:

" C'est la France!"

Quidor, bending his haggard eyes upon the Frenchman, seemed to divine his emotion. Drawing his blanket around him, the Huron hobbled back to his station by the mast, where he, too, became absorbed in contemplation of the Normandie coast-line.

It was due to the clemency of Ned Wadgett that the Indian's arms were free, and only his legs shackled. The mate had taken advantage of the protracted drunkenness of Berks to give the miserable prisoner partial liberty by the removal of his manacles. The captain had purchased the Huron from a Virginia planter, and purposed in turn to sell him as a curiosity at some foreign port, and turn a pretty penny for himself.

Warned of the wild temper of his captive, Berks had taken the precaution to have him ironed heavily. A man of merciless ways, cruel when sober, brutish when in his cups, the captain had fallen into the habit of venting his spleen on the helpless red man. Quidor's broad back was scored with unhealed welts from the lash, which he had received without complaint, but which had left yet deeper scars in his memory.

His lips slightly parted, and a spot of color glowing in each cheek, Raymond gazed long at the cliffs and hills of Normandie. Concino, his habitual half-smile on his swarthy features, watched the lad.

He had seen that rapt expression before, had the Italian, on the face of another well-loved comrade, years ago. It had presaged high deeds then. What would happen, Concino wondered, before he could take this spirited eaglet back to the aerie?

A lady who is as old as the human race, who is known of all men, but whom none has ever seen, rested a hand on the faithful companion's shoulder and whispered in his ear: " Such souls belong to me. You must let him follow me for a time, my friend." Concino sighed. The lad was so very young. " Not younger than was the Wolf when first he harkened to my voice," whispered the lady, and passed on, leaving Concino thoughtful.

After a little time Raymond emerged from his reverie and went on to the mast, where he resumed his conversation with Quidor. The plight of the young savage, exiled and miserable, aroused the Frenchman's sympathy, even as his words had stirred the vicomte's imagination.

As they talked, a light of admiration grew in the Indian's dark eyes. Quidor felt that he had found a friend. He who had prepared for death took a step backward from the shadowy kingdom.

In his measurement of his new acquaintance, the eyes of the Huron lingered longest on the haft of a dagger which the vicomte wore at his belt, just below the baldric which supported his rapier. It was a straight, keen, well-balanced blade. Billy Huggs, the smith at Godalming, had forged it for Raymond. Its hilt of ebony, carved and inlaid with a pattern of ivory leafwork, was the handicraft of Concino.

Again and again the glance of the Indian returned to the dagger, as the breeze flapped the vicomte's coat and exposed it. Quidor would willingly have given his left hand in exchange for that knife; but he dared not ask for it.

Wadgett came bustling up.

" Keep a weather-eye on the redskin, young master," he advised Raymond; " his likes be treacherous as wasps."

" I do not believe that he would work me harm," Raymond replied. " Poor wretch; can naught be done to make his lot easier?"

Quidor hated and despised the English so much that he had troubled himself little to learn their speech—their whips he understood only too well—but he knew enough of the language to comprehend the vicomte's expression of confidence and the words of pity which followed.

" Le Cheveu de Feu (Fiery-Hair) and Quidor are brothers," he said gravely in French. At the same moment his chance came.

Raymond's back was partly turned. He stood between the Indian and the mate. Concino was looking elsewhere. The hand

of the Huron glided like a serpent to Raymond's belt. When the vicomte faced him again, Quidor was standing as impassive as before; but deep in his eyes was a flicker of triumph. The coveted weapon was hidden beneath his blanket.

Wadgett shook his head in answer to the question.

" He be the property of Jem Berks," he answered. " While Jem be captain, I durst not meddle."

The cabin-boy came to announce that breakfast was waiting. Ned went below with his guests. Wind and weather holding, the mate promised that he would land them at St. Malo before the fall of night.

In the midst of their meal they heard a violent outburst of cursing in the adjoining cabin. Something struck hard against the partition and fell with a crash and tinkle on the flooring. Again and again the sound was repeated.

Wadgett paused with a clasp-knife cargo of bacon half-way to his lips.

" There he be," he grunted. " Damn his yellow liver! Hark till him a breakin' bottles because they be empty."

Another salvo of profanity was followed by the slamming of a door and the thumps of heavy feet along the passageway. Ned sprang up, quitting his unfinished breakfast.

" Apollyon be loosed, gentles—and presently will he make his hell yonder on deck," he grinned; " but sit ye quiet." He hurried from the cabin and ran for the deck.

" Peste! I like not this captain, though I have seen him not," said Raymond. He pushed back from the table with a gesture of disgust. " Everything on the ship smacketh of him—and the smack be most evil. Now he cometh to breakfast with us and spoileth the taste of my good bacon."

" Not mine," said Concino, continuing to eat with relish.

When he had finished, the two betook themselves to the deck. Before they were half-way up the companion, they heard a sailor cry out in pain, and they judged that the hell which Master Ned had foretold was already boiling right merrily. An instant later the man met them at the companion head. He was stumbling blindly and holding his hands to his face, from which the blood was streaming. Raymond's mouth tightened.

In the ship's waist, near the improvised stall of Tonnerre, a group of men was gathered about a bony figure in a soiled red coat. An unremitting flow of profanity came from the man's throat. Across from him stood Master Wadgett, flushed and anxious, with all his good-humor gone. The two comrades turned that way. Quidor left the mast and limped after them.

" By the blood of God! Ned Wadgett, perhaps art not so much the fool as I called thee! 'Tis as fine a piece of horseflesh as ever I did clap an eye to. Passage money, forsooth! I'll sell the beast in the market at Marseilles, damme if I do not! A pretty handful of gold 'twill bring me."

The voice was a slow, grating drawl. It, as much as the words, called the angry blood to Raymond's face.

" Pardoh, *monsieur,"* he said, stepping forward, " the horse is mine—and it is not to be sold for any price."

Jem Berks turned quickly. He was not a sight to delight the eye: a lean, angular man with a long, deeply lined face, wherein small blue eyes, set close together, glared from under an overhang of shaggy brow, and a broken nose brooded over a cruel mouth. His eyes were inflamed and his face blotched from drink. His hair was the color of hay. He measured the vicomte with a long, insolent stare, and his lips writhed back like those of an angry dog.

"A comely boy, by God's rood!" he drawled; "comely as any wench. Ha, Ned! A monstrous witty quirk cometh to my mind! I'll do it, by God! I'll sell the redskin to some white lord, and—ha! ha! ha!—the milk-and-rose lad I'll sell to a blackamoor in Barbary! 'Twill be out of our way; but 'twill be worth the voyage. Beshrew me, young man, you may yet do well. Some Moorish princess may take a fancy to thy pretty face and make thee her garden-companion—if her lord doth not make thee chief eunuoh!"

Berks leered. His cheeks grew purple with horrible laughter.

" Sangdieu!"

The oath and the rasp of steel as his rapier left its scabbard -were the vicomte's answer.

Berks wore a sword. Never ceasing his laughing, he drew it. The long blade flashed toward him. His men fell away.

"Oh, aye, come on!" he sneered; "I can play at this game as well as any gen—"

The sentence was never completed. The swords never crossed.

A yell of savage exultation arose behind Raymond. Something bright that turned as it flew, hissed past his shoulder. The keen point of the ebony-hafted dagger struck the captain fairly in the soft of his throat, and he finished his laughter elsewhere.

Slowly and haltingly in his chains, Quidor had crossed the deck. For an hour the Huron had been weighing and balancing the dagger under his blanket. His aim was true, and his arm strong.

Berks let his sword fall clattering, clutched at his throat, and swayed backward. A jet of bright blood dyed the planking where he fell.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOMAN OF MYSTERY.

CWORD-ARM extended and body lunged forward to the attack, the vicomte paused in his stride. With mouth agape and staring eyes, he saw his adversary go down before him, nor did he for the moment comprehend whence had come the fatal blow.

As Berks's head thwacked on the deck, the Indian's lips opened again in a wailing, tremulous cry. So fierce and eery was the ululation that it chilled the blood of those who heard it. It was the war-whoop of the Hurons. At the sound of it a confused outcry arose among the sailors, who 'had stood like men of wax.

Raymond lowered his point and turned on the Indian.

" Why did you interfere when I was about to fight?" he asked sternly; " it was my quarrel."

" The death of a dog would add no honor to my brother's sword," replied the Huron. " Quidor struck to revenge older wrongs. See!"

He let his blanket fall to the deck and swung around. All down the muscular bronze back, deep written in the flesh, was the tale of the captain's whip.

Ned Wedgett came out of the daze which events had put upon him. Small love had the mate cherished for the captain; but the sudden taking-off of the man with whom he had trod the Maid's deck for four years thrilled Ned with horror, though he was not a squeamish man.

On the deck near the stall of the horse lay a sledge-hammer which the carpenter had left there. Ned caught it up and ran at the Huron, cursing heartily as he went. Before any one could move to stay him—Raymond did indeed shout; but his cry was unheeded—the wonderous weapon swung over the Indian's head, threatening to crack it like a shell. Quidor heard the danger coming and swung to face it.

As he had boasted, the red man was without fear. With folded arms he met the death which he read in the sailor's eyes, and he answered the oaths of the mate with the keening death-song of the Hurons.

Had Quidor blenched in the slightest degree, had he shown by the least quiver of an eyelash that he felt fear, that moment had been his last. But he did not. Already the hammer was descending, when Wadgett, struck by sudden admiration for that unquailing courage, let go his hold with a shout. Such was the power in the mate's arms that the formidable iron flew many feet through the air ere it crashed on the planking. Ned gazed from it to his reprieved victim, and swore with surprise at his own forbearance.

" I give you thanks, Master Ned," said Raymond; " he had not merited the stroke."

" Why, so it seemeth, sir," the mate replied; " but damme if I can tell why he did not get it—unless it be that I have not heart to strike a man who looketh upon death as do I upon an emptied flask."

Another thought laid its grip upon Wadgett. He smote his hand on his thigh at the bigness of it, and went into action at once.

" Where be the bo'sun?" he bawled.

" Here, sir."

" Pipe all'hands aft!"

From decks and rigging the sailors came hurrying to the whistle's call.

When all were gathered on the after-deck, Ned clambered upon a cannon and stood with his back to the sea. He was flushed and eager.

" I be no hand at fine words; but whiles the iron be hot, I strikes," he began, with a toss of his curly head. " Jem Berks be a lyin' dead yonder, and God above or Sir Satan below hath his soul. The Bristol Maid be lacking a captain. Now, I either takes her on to Marseilles, or back to Bristol harbor, or—"

He stopped and studied the upturned faces. What he read there seemed to satisfy him; for he nodded and went on:

" I have sounded the most of ye, one time and another. Ye know my mind." He pointed to the south.

" Down yon path old Sir Francis sailed —and sailed home again with chests of good red gold! 'Twas a noble game. The Indians dug it, the dons stole it, and stout Englishmen fought for it and fetched it home. There be more a plenty where it came from. Drake's drum be soundin', lads! The Maid be good as any craft that ever sailed the main! Are ye with me, lads?"

"Hurroo!"

It was the Irish cabin lad, Michael O'Toole, who yelled, leaping high from the deck and tossing his ragged cap in the air. His shrill piping was lost in the full-throated roar sent up by the sailors. Not idly had Wadgett said that the crew was with him to a man. Never did men hail piracy with heartier greeting.

Down from his cannon sprang Captain Wadgett, to disappear in a wave of men, who milled around him, seeking to press his hand and call him by his new handle.

" Easy, lads, easy—my fingers be but flesh and bone," grunted the highly pleased Ned, shouldering himself a way through the crowd. As he went his bull's voice shouted orders.

" Jack Bayles and Dickon Peebles advance from second and third mates to first and second! Third mate's berth shall be diced for by them as thinks they be man enough to fill it! Ben Oaks, broach a keg of rum—two kegs! You, Minton, get thy needles and canvas, lad, and sew Jem Berks a sailor's winding-sheet! We'll heave him off the plank with a cannon-ball at each end of him!"

Each command was received with a roar of approval by the members of the crew, especially that one concerning the kegs. Wadgett was proving himself a Roman. When he had disembarrassed himself of his followers by sending them about their respective businesses, he approached the two guests, to whom, in a way, he felt that he owed some share of his new fortunes.

" Ye had best to reconsider, young master," he said earnestly to Raymond. " Say but the word, and we two will go sea-dogging together, with your colors at the mast."

Again the vicomte thanked him, courteously, but with finality. Stretching his hand toward the French coast, he said: " My heart lieth yonder, Master Ned. I shall not forget your kindness or your offer; but our ways lead apart."

" So be it," replied the sailor, not hiding his disappointment, now more keen than before, in that his ambition was partly realized. " A day's sailing more or less counts for naught now," he volunteered after a moment of moody silence. " I'll 'bout ship and set ye ashore at Le Havre at the mouth of the Seine. Nay," waving his hand when Raymond protested that he would be troubling himself too greatly, " 'tis as easy as to make St. Malo; besides, Le Havre is the port nearest to Paris —which is accounted the world's center by all Frenchmen."

He at once gave orders to turn the ship.

Quidor came hobbling up with the dagger, which he had taken from the body of the slain man and carefully cleaned of its stains. He solemnly returned it to the vicomte. Catching sight of the Indian, Wedgett sent for the ship's smith.

" Strike the irons from off the heathen, Billy Greaves," the captain ordered, when the leather-jerkined functionary put in an appearance. " He hath served me a good

turn this day," Wadgett said to Raymond. " If the chance offereth in my voyaging, I'll set him ashore in New France. He pretendeth not to understand English. If it please you, tell him from me that if he worketh mischief on any man on this ship I'll break every bone in his red carcass, and have him hanged to boot."

" Quidor slew a dog. Between the Hurons and the Yengees the hatchet is buried. Quidor will not dig it up," responded the Huron with dignity when he had heard the translation. The first use he made of his liberty was to bathe; and therein he set an example which some of the Christians on the ship might have profited by.

Behind England across the channel the sun had hours gone down when the Maid dropped anchor inside Cape de la Heve, and the voyagers saw the lights along the wharves of Le Havre twinkling like fireflies at the edge of the water.

Blindfolded, trussed and tied, which he liked not, and with his hoofs padded so that they might do no damage, Tonnerre was swung from the deck in a canvas sling and lowered into one of the longboats. Wadgett himself and a dozen of his men manned the boat.

Short as their acquaintance had been, the English sailors saw the departure of the young vicomte and his companion with regret. A hearty farewell cheer and a shower of good wishes followed them over the side.

At this moment of leave-taking Raymond looked in vain for Quidor. The Huron was nowhere to be seen.

Noiselessly as possible, for Raymond had no desire to draw the attention of the authorities of La Havre to his landing in France, the party crossed the harbor and lay the longboat alongside of a deserted jetty. The sailors hauled the black horse from the boat. The lifting of Tonnerre was a task which strained the energies of all the twelve; for the position was awkward for lifting, and the animal tipped the beam at sixteen hundredweight. With much subdued cursing and grunting they managed it, however, and set Tonnerre on his feet on the pier and stripped the lashings from him, as much to his relief as their own. Straightway he shook himself, and would have greeted all France and the people thereof with a ringing neigh had not Concino forestalled him by clapping both hands about his muzzle.

Wadgett turned from superintending the landing of the horse. In the half-light, Raymond saw the big hand of the captain thrust toward him.

" Will ye shake it, young sir?" asked Ned a bit huskily. In turn, the vicomte and Concino wrung the hard fingers.

" I be main sorry to lose ye, sirs; ye have brought me luck. Fare ye well."

Ned leaped into the boat. The last they saw of him was a dark figure which stood in the stern-sheets and waved its hand as the longboat slipped away into the gloom of the night.

Poor Ned; his golden days were short. The " luck " of which he prated did not prevent his dangling at the end of a rope of Spanish hemp in the market-square at St. Augustine the following December. Be it told for their souls' satisfaction that the ghosts of Wadgett and those of his crew who perished went to their appointed place escorted by a column of shadowy Spaniards which outnumbered them by three to one.

Late as was the hour, it was the advice of Concino that they quit Le Havre at once, and strike cross country to Lillebonne, there to lie until the morrow, and then go on to Paris by way of Rouen. The Italian knew that if a search had been set on foot for the fugitives in France, it would be sharpest maintained at the ports of entry.

So, very quietly, with Concino leading Tonnerre and Raymond walking ahead, they traversed the length of the jetty and stood at last on French soil.

When his boots ceased to strike on the planking and he felt soft earth under him, the vicomte paused. With the glamour of his dreams of the morning yet upon him, he knelt on the land of his fathers and breathed a short prayer. Honors, adventure, advancement, and service were among the things he asked for—yes, and fighting, too; his hand was on the hilt of his sword as he prayed. Above him perchance the old and beautiful lady bent low and smiled, and perchance her fingers caressed

his hair with a touch as soft as that of a wandering breeze of the night. It is certain that the faithful companion at his back smiled down at him with a shake of his head.

Hardly had Raymond finished his brief orison when a prodigious hubbub of oaths and shouting belched out from a narrow, crooked street which gave on a crossway some twoscore yards from the jetty. Steel clashed on steel. The rich, contralto voice of a woman cried loudly on the saints, and then for human aid.

All caution banished by the urgency of that call, the vicomte ran like a hare toward the dark maw of the street, tugging at his rapier as he went. Stopping only long enough to cast Tonnerre's bridle over a mooring-post, Concino followed.

In the first reach of the street all was darkness when the two entered it; but at a turn a little way ahead a flicker of light played on the faces of the buildings. In that direction sounded the din, momentarily swelling louder. Windows began to open, and folk alternated queries as to the cause of the uproar with lusty bawls for the watch. But it was a poor, dark quarter of the town; and the watchmen, if they were awake, wisely minded their own affairs.

Sword in hand, and still running, Raymond rounded the corner into a flare of torches, and was like to have run a woman through, who came with almost equal speed from the opposite direction and who rushed violently into his arms, knocking the breath out of both of them.

As they recoiled from the shock, the vicomte had time to see that she was tall, slender, clad from head to heels in black silks, and wore a veil of gauze, through the meshes of which her eyes glittered like opals. Then she was upon him again, seizing his arms and nearly dragging him from his feet.

" Sauvez moil Sauvez moil" It was the same deep contralto that had called before. " In the name of Heaven, *monsieur,* aid a French lady who is beset by ruffians! The saints will bless you! Ah, hasten! Poor Baptista is down! *Mere de Dieu!"*

Two serving-maids, scared out of their senses, caught up with their fleeter mistress and fell upon their knees, clutching at her skirts and screaming.

Thirty feet farther on a coach had been backed across the street in such fashion that the narrow way was more than two-thirds blockaded. Under the horses' noses the battle was waging, four sturdy chaps doing their manful best to hold back a dozen who strove to press through, while the coachman, erect on his box, was wielding both sword and whip-stock to defend his position. A fifth of the defenders had reeled out of the fight and leaned against a doorway, nursing a punctured arm.

The woman threw up her veil. She was dark, queenly, and beautiful, with a beauty that went to the bewildered lad's head like strong wine. Vainly Concino caught at his elbow with a word of caution. He bounded recklessly down the street where the torches were flaring and the swords playing. Concino, not by nature a leader, but one of the best followers man ever had, shrugged his shoulders and sped after him.

Just before they reached the coach the valiant jehu on the box, struck by a pistol ball, threw up his arms with a wail and pitched headlong at his horses' heels. Through the breach left by his fall scrambled the leader of the attacking party, a young man the richness of whose dress, no less than the quality of his language, proclaimed him no common ruffler. He wore a waistcoat of pea-green velvet under a coat of pink satin, and a heavy gold chain gleamed among the ruffles of his shirt.

" Allons, mes enfants!" he shouted, standing on the coach and brandishing his sword. " *A moi!* Hasten! We have the *canaille* taken both front and rear!" and he leaped over the wheel.

" Malora!" groaned Concino when he saw this figure come into the light; " it is in my mind that we are on the wrong side of this affair!"

Ride side or wrong side, it was too late to change coats. Already the vicomte had crossed swords with the man in the green waistcoat, the noise of whose elegant cursing sent profane echoes scurrying up and down the alley. Concino shrugged his shoulders again and hunted him up a man to fight.

Such were not difficult to find. Following the example of their leader, men began to clamber over the coach. Some crawled through it.

"*Mort de ma vie!*" swore the young dandy, making his sword serve him in two places at once; "here is a dog of a different breed!" Just then he felt that the rim of the coach-wheel was pressing against his splendid coat. "Room, fellow! Give me room! So," as he drove Raymond back a pace and a half. "Now, the rest of you stand clear. This one to me; for, *heu!* This is fighting!"

The emphatic was occasioned by the fact that, to save his skin, he'd given up half the ground he had gained.

What might have been a very pretty duel was terminated early for the reason that both swordsmen were pressed for time. The defenders were giving ground before weight of numbers. The attackers feared that their quarry would escape them. It would have been terminated earlier, but that the vicomte was not fighting to kill. His adversary *was.*

"*Coquin,* you practise your sword like a gentleman," confessed he of the green waistcoat, beginning to breathe audibly.

"*Merci,*" bowed Raymond, "*vous aussi.*" The gallant's eyes widened.

"Mother of God and St. Denys! Almost you had me that time! It must be the vile light! Ah, *prenez gal*"

He knew a shrewd thrust, low-aimed and most deadly. With the words Re sped it.

"*Sacre bleu et Ste. Marie!*"

Weaponless he stood in the roadway, wringing his fingers. His sword broke a window across the street and fell back in the road. That downward turn of the weapon had made the opportunity, for which Raymond had waited.

Came then a rush of men, which Raymond leaped back and avoided. He glanced about him and found that he and the Italian were facing the foe almost alone. For at this juncture the fellows who had been defending the coach took to their heels as by common consent, all save that one who lay under the heels of the horses. They had made mincemeat of him. Seeing no profit in fighting twain against ten, when they knew not even the cause ©f the quarrel, the two followed.

With torches waving, the larger party came swiftly on. The battle had become a pursuit. At the turn- in the street the fleeing serving-men pulled up and faced about to make a stubborn stand for their mistress, who had stayed there, for the reason that she knew not where to go. Short, swarthy men were they, who chattered excitedly among themselves in a tongue which caused Concino to prick up his ears and to think that mayhap the quarrel was worth while after all. It was Italian.

No longer shielded by the bulk of the coach, the case of the hunted fast became desperate. After pounding vainly at the door of a burgher who was safe under his bed, they crowded the three women into his shallow doorway and formed a half-ring about them. The man Baptista had bound up his arm, and again took a hand in the melee; but he handled his weapon awkwardly and at once went down again with a gash in his throat which no bandage would ever heal.

The young leader had recovered his sword, and with it a desire to wipe out the disgrace of its loss. But this time it was Concino who engaged him. The narrow street rang like an armorer's shop.

All at once one of the torch-bearers, who was so placed that he could see up the street toward the harbor, threw his light on the ground and.with a squeal of terror took himself off in the opposite direction as fast as his legs would carry him. His fellows were surprised at his defection. An instant afterward they were all elbowing each other in their mad haste each to be first in following his example.

Magically the hard-pressed defenders of the door found the air in front of their citadel free of thrusting steel. The fighting narrowed down to the single combat between Concino and the dandy, who, though he hallooed in rage at the desertion of his myrmidons, did not for a moment cease his efforts to open heaven's road to the Italian.

Not long unaccounted for was the sudden dispersion of the foe. Around the crook

of the street passed an apparition which caused the legs of the lady's servants to quake and their eyes to goggle, and the maids to hold their agitated tongues-proof positive that it was fearsome indeed. Even the brave French exquisite, who alone had tarried to fight, fell back with a whispered oath when he saw it, but at once fell on again with a loud one after a second look.

A sable horse of extraordinary size, shadowy and gigantic in the flickering torchlight, a fantom steed, whose hoofs made no sound on the earth and stones where they struck; a ghastly rider, a man of metal-so it seemed, for his naked body reflected back the light like a statue of burnished copper—who sat straight as a lance in the saddle. This was the frightful wraith which struck fear to the hearts of all beholders.

Up and down the street windows rattled and shutters banged to in desperate haste. Why not, since the devil in person had come riding in off the sea to Le Havre, and might be seen plainly in the street outside, where none wished to see him? Raymond himself shrank before the vision for an instant, with awestruck face. Then a voice said in passable French:

" Let Quidor, who has no weapons with which to fight, take the woman."

It was the Huron.

Quidor had not bade farewell to the vicomte on the ship for the sufficient reason that Quidor was minded to see something of the land of Onontio, and meant to follow his new friend thither. The devilish phosphoresence of his skin was due to the fact that he had followed by water and had just come out of the sea. In the wake of the longboat he had struck out for shore, and had reached the jetty immediately after Raymond and Concino quitted it. He had trailed them, seen the fighting, and then run back and fetched Tonnerre. The muffings which had been left on the horse's feet had added the last ghostly touch.

Hardly had the Indian spoken when Concino, as forbearing as Raymond had been, disarmed his opponent.

The vicomte seized the fallen rapier, snapped it across his knee and threw the fragments over a wall.

" The boat, Francisco! Can you find the boat?" asked the lady in an undertone, coming forth from the shadow of the doorway, but not showing any inclination to share the saddle with Quidor.

" Si, contessa," replied one of her men. " We had best hasten, lest those rogues come back again."

" Come, young sir, you and your servants," the lady called to Raymond. " This way to safety."

Francisco knew the way well. Two minutes later the darkness of the quays had swallowed them up.

They left behind them a man who cast himself upon his face and groaned and' wept; nor minded in his rage and shame that his waistcoat of pea-green velvet and his satin coat were fouled by the earth and worse matters of the street.

" Mother of God! to be disarmed twice in one night—and each time by a *roturier!"*

For this young man had a reputation to sustain, and he had not sustained it.

He esteemed himself to be the most skilful swordsman at the court of Louis the Grand, which was France.

Many others had taken his word for it.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN FRANCE SHUDDERED.

I ED by Francisco, the fugitives stumbled on through the darkness, threading innumerable alleys.

The unveiled woman took Raymond's arm and hurried[1] along, saying nothing. The warm pressure of her hand sent a thrill through the lad. His irm trembled. The woman felt it quiver, and under her veil she smiled. Speech was not necessary, speech which might lead to explanations; and perhaps she was weary of lies.

Behind the party in ghostlike silence rode the Indian on Tonnerre.

Francisco turned at length, and whispering to the others to await him, crept out upon a wooden pier. In a few moment he returned.

" The boat is waiting, *contessa,"* he muttered.

"Come!" The lady dragged at the

vicomte's arm. " But *monsieur* will have to leave his horse. The boat is too small. The voyage will be long."

" Nay, *madame—mademoiselle—*" stammered Raymond.

" Madame."

" Madame, I but now landed in France. I would not leave it so soon. But I will go with *madame* to the boat."

" Comme il vous plaira," she replied with a shrug; and though she was relieved by his decision, she was feminine enough to be piqued by it also.

At the end of the pier a boat with two sailors in it was moored. The lady extended her hand, which Raymond gallantly kissed.

" I know not how to thank you—" she began.

" Do not—'twas nothing."

" Oh, *out,* but it was! Never shall I forget your fighting! Perhaps you will one day learn how great is the service which you have this night performed, and the knowledge will be more eloquent than any poor thanks which I can utter." As she spoke, she bent on the young man an enigmatic smile, which he did not see for the dark. " Farewell, *monsieur."*

" Farewell, *madame."*

He handed her into the boat, where the rest of her party had bestowed themselves. The craft shot rapidly away from the pier. Concino and Raymond stood for a moment to watch its departure. As they turned to go, something swished through the blackness from the water and fell at the vicomte's feet. He picked it up. It weighed heavily on his hand. Its contents chinked pleasantly. It was a purse of gold.

" Now by the holy St. Denys!" he ejaculated, half hurt, half angry, and made as if to hurl the gift into the sea. The Italian laid a gentle but restraining hand on his impulsive wrist.

" Bethink you, *maestro,* we are like to need gold, and that badly, ere we find Hugues Banel," he remonstrated. " Keep it, or give it me. I have no scruples."

" Take it, then." Raymond thrust the purse into his hands, adding: " Perhaps we will meet the lady again, when I shall repay her loan."

" If you do not, she can well afford it," rejoined Concino. For all his readiness, the Italian crossed himself when his fingers touched the gold.

" What! You know her?" queried Raymond.

" Maestro, we have this night rendered service to a very great lady, and—a dark presence is leaving France," replied Concino. Again he made the holy sign. " Unless my eyes be turning very bad, that lady is one of the nieces of the *feu,* His Eminence Cardinal Jules Mazarin, though which one of them, I know not. It is a score of years ago that I saw them at Fontainbleau, when they were in their youth. They are all as great as they are evil."

But Raymond, remembering how beautiful she was, and how she had stood straight and tall in the doorway and disdained to cringe when the swords were playing before her, could not believe that she was a thing of evil.

" We shall have to be doubly careful now, *maestro,"* continued Concino. " Unless I be mistaken mightily, those fellows that we fought wore the livery of the new police which King Louis is organizing as another arm to maintain peace within his realm while he makes wars outside it. We shall be as well hunted in France as we were like to have been in England."

" Concino, you do croak like a crow at whiles!" exclaimed the vicomte impatiently; and later begged pardon of his faithful follower for saying it. They rejoined the Huron.

" What spirit of the sea wafted you hither, Quidor?" Raymond asked.

" Quidor's manito bade him follow the brother who had been kind to him," the Indian answered. " Quidor will go with his brother."

" The devil you will!" thought Concino, and aloud: " We must get clothes for him, *maestro.* Him with us in that guise, we shall be marked men, and as easily followed as an army with music."

The Italian knew the lay of Le Havre passably well from previous visits. Making their way by the shortest route to the fields beyond the city, the three adventurers lay for the rest of the night under a rick

of straw in the open. The next morning they jtook the road to Paris.

Horror brooded over the great city that was the beating heart of all France, and from that throbbing center was pulsed like a malignant disease through the country's veins to the uttermost confines of the realm. Sister lands looked on aghast, fearing the dread infection.

For one of the most insidious evils in the history of humanity had begun its malevolent work in France, and none knew the limits of its daring, or where it might stop. The higher, the wealthier, the more powerful the man or woman, the more was the hideous enemy to be feared. Even Louis the Grand trembled on his gilded throne, whom no man or combination of men ever before had made to quail.

A word of six letters told the story:

Poison!

" Paris was inundated with murder.' No precaution sufficed for safety. Death lurked in every object of daily use—a glove, a perfume, a glass of water, or a missal, each in its turn did the work of the conspirators.

" Friends shrank from receiving the gifts of friends; fathers looked with suspicion upon the hospitality of their sons, and sons shrank from grasping the hands of their sires; the young beauty shuddered at the cosmetics upon her table, and the grave matron at the relics of her rosary; the soldier could not handle his weapon without suspicion, and magistrates bent with dread above their parchments."*

Some years before, two Italians, Exili and Destinelli, who had wasted their resources in vain labors with a German chemist to discover the fabled philosopher's stone which should transmute the baser metals into gold, had endeavored to recoup their shattered fortunes by the manufacture and sale of subtle and deadly poisons. They were found out and imprisoned in the Bastille, where Destinelli soon died.

Unconvicted, untried, but unreleased, Exili continued to live in the prison, and there was allowed to receive the visits of his former associates, to whom he contrived to impart the secrets of his draughts of death.

By means of those secrets, and through the machinations of jealous courtiers and a banished unspeakable, the Chevalier de Lorraine, Henrietta of England, wife of *monsieur*—Philippe due d'Orleans, brother to the king—was foully murdered on the twenty-ninth of June, 1670.

By those secrets, Marie Madeleine d'Aubray, Marquise de Brinvilliers, poisoned her father, her two brothers, and a sister; and for her crime was tortured, beheaded, and her body burned to ashes in Paris on July 16, 1676.f

For a little time after the terrible death' of the marquise the plague slumbered. But the serpent had been scotched only, and not killed. It writhed back to horrid life again and stung with redoubled fury, and the miasma of its hideous venom overshadowed the entire kingdom. Mysterious deaths multiplied. The terrors of the Borgias of Italy paled by contrast.

The public mind might long have remained in ignorance and doubt, had not the confessional enabled the Grand Penitentiary of Paris to ascertain the use of poisons in a number of instances. So alarming became the increase of the practise that he deemed it his duty to inform the authorities of the city.

There was in Paris at that time a celebrated pythoness and fortune teller, Catherine des Hayes, known as La Voisin, who was the vogue with all the high nobility of the realm, and who had often been personally consulted by members of the immediate household of the king, and even by the queen herself.

La Voisin had obtained the secrets of Exili. She soon saw the value of this diabolical traffic as an adjunct to her other nefarious pursuits. Expectant heirs found that her predictions of the deaths of wealthy relatives came out so well, that she soon became immensely popular, and was forced to» take on an assistant; another fortune

* Quoted from Miss Julia Pardoe's history: " Louis XIV and the Court of France."

t From Dr. Brewer's " Historic Note-Book."

teller, called La Vigoreaux. Fiendish results followed the association.

Aroused by the tales which his police brought up to him, Louis took personal charge of the investigation of the poisonings, and a *Chambre Ardente** was established at once, with full powers to try and to punish all suspected persons. Parliament complained of the powers of this exceptional assembly as an encroachment upon its privileges. Louis answered that, as many of the most exalted personages of his kingdom might prove to be implicated, it was necessary that the tribunal should hold its sittings with as much secrecy as fhose of Venice and Madrid. It was established in the arsenal of Paris, not far from the Bastille.

La Voisin and La Vigoreaux had formed an association with two unscrupulous men, Lesage and Davot. The extreme popularity of therr establishment at length aroused suspicions. On the twelfth of March, 1679, hardly a month before the landing of Raymond and Concino in France, the king's police had descended on the nest of the quartette of unclean birds, and they and various of their accomplices had been arrested. It was discovered that their place was the center of seduction and intrigue, and that their traffic, apparently so trivial,' was in reality a dread barter of death for gold.

Late in the morning of the day following the adventures of Raymond among the alleys of Le Havre, the members of the *Chambre Ardente* were bending their bewigged and voluble heads above the documents on their long table of deliberation. In their vast white periwigs, they much resembled a pack of fluffy poodles growling and worrying over a very large bone.

A door at the end of the apartment was opened. Two men entered. The first was a short, rotund, but exceedingly dignified gentleman, richly dressed, and with the finest periwig in all the kingdom shadowing a long nose, and a full, florid, tired face. The second man was a trifle taller, considerably less magnificently upholstered, and his square, hard-bitten countenance was much more tired and worn.

Jean Baptiste Colbert was wearing himself out in the service of one of the hardest masters a faithful servant ever had.

Marquis de Louvois was first of those at the table to perceive the pair.

" *Messieurs!* His majesty the king!"

As the light of the somewhat wearied royal countenance shone on them, the poodles — pardon — the councilors — arose from their chairs like obedient dolls all pulled by the same wire.

Louis bowed acknowledgement of their salutations, and proceeded to the head of •the table. The position of the chair which had been placed for him did not seem to suit, for he kicked it back a bit with his knee before he seated himself. Colbert, glowering at his ancient enemy Louvois, took his stand behind his master.

His majesty had not attended the sessions of the tribunal for a number of days; so M. de la Reynie, lieutenant of police who presided at its sessions, addressed to him a brief summary of its proceedings.

During this, Louis sat in approving contemplation of his legs, which he had stretched in front of him. Age and overfeeding had left little else that was shapely and admirable of his once trim figure but his calves. Perhaps he had moved the chair back so that he might have an unobstructed view of them; or perhaps it was so that he could more readily speak in asides to Colbert—which he continually did—and not be heard by the other councilors.

Behind his seeming abstraction, the king, as usual, was keenly alive to all which passed about him, and he missed nothing of the import of the proceedings which De la Reynie reviewed.

" And the witch-woman, Des Hayes, has she revealed aught that may serve us?" Louis asked, when he had finished.

" Nothing, sire."

" And the other—I fail to recall her name—has she confessed?"

*The *Chambre Ardente* was a meeting* established in each parliament by Francis II for the extirpation of heresy, whose sentences were beyond appeal, and in most cases put immediately into force. The tribunal of poison under Louis XIV assumed the same name from the fact of its awarding punishment by fire.—AUTHOR'S NOTE..

"La Vigoreaux preserves also a contumacious silence, sire. She has confessed nothing."

" Have been questioned with skill?"

" Both have been put to the ordinary question, sire—La Voisin to the extraordinary, as well—but without avail."

At this reply of,De la Reynie, one of the two of the younger and greener members of the council shuddered. For the " extraordinary question " meant that nearly every bone in the wretched prisoner's body had been broken, besides the administration of other excruciating tortures.

"A pest upon their stubbornness!" exclaimed the king aloud; and in a whisper to Colbert: "And yet methinks.I find their silence more endurable than might be their disclosures."

" Her grace of Bouillon has been apprehended, and M. le Due de Luxembourg has given himself up. They now await the disposal of the tribunal, sire," announced' Louvois. The war minister pronounced the second name with ill-concealed satisfaction, and flashed a glance of triumph at Colbert. Marshal de Luxembourg had incurred the bitter enmity of Louvois—and for that reason, if for none other, must be the friend of Colbert.

" No others?" asked the king quickly, and with an almost imperceptible trace of apprehension in his tone.

" None, sire—though we had hoped to have the Comtesse de Soissons in custody ere now. Agents of M. de la Reynie are in search of her."

Louis raised his handkerchief to conceal a sudden spasm of his lips.

" Let us have the DuchesSe de Bouillon before us for examination," he commanded.

Of all the nobility of the kingdom who had had traffic with the poisoners—and they had been many—only the three whose names Louvois had mentioned had been cited before the *Chambre Ardente.* The accusation laid against the Duchesse de Bouillon was absurd, that against the marshal no less so. The visits of both to the house of the fortune tellers had been impelled by innocent curiosity. The Comtesse de Soissons —with a soul as black with guilt as her face was bright with beauty—was Olympe Mancini, niece of the late Cardinal-Minister Mazarin, and sister of that Mary Mancini who had been the young king's first love in the old days before he came to power. And there had been a time when Olympe herself had been not without influence over the monarch's heart.

Escorted by two of the agents of M. de la Reynie, of whom she was as utterly oblivious as though they had been flies upon the wall, the Duchesse de Bouillon was brought into the room. The assembled councilors, who bent stern looks upon her, drew hardly more of the lady's notice; but she curtsied to the king, and then stood very straight and looked at one of the windows, where the sun shone in. Without deigning to glance at De la Reynie, she answered his questions in a low, clear voice and with perfect assurance of manner.

She had, she admitted, paid two visits to the house of La Voisin, the first time " to learn what the stars had in store for her "—she smiled faintly when she said it -—the second time to accompany a friend, who also had a mind to be diverted by the fantastic mummery of the seeress.

" Madame, the vile sorceress is accused of having on divers occasions conjured up the apparition of the devil," pursued the police lieutenant gravely; " did you see him?"

" No, sir; I had not previously seen him, but I do so at this moment; he is very ugly, and disguised as a minister of state," replied the intrepid duchesse.

De la Reynie frowned and chewed hard on his nether lip. Others of the council cast dark looks at the lady. Still others tittered audibly, and when they saw that the king was laughing behind his handkerchief, their mirth broke out and shook the windows. The duchesse stood unconcerned, watching the sunbeams playing on the floor. The examination was not pursued. The lady was set at liberty.

When the duchesse had departed and the council had regained its composure, Francis Henri de Montmorency Boutville, Due de Luxembourg, peer and marshal of France, was led into the chamber. He had been brought from the Bastille, where, due to the spite which Louvois bore him, he had been forced to occupy a dark and narrow

dungeon only six feet in length. But he brought his courage uncramped from those strait quarters.

The first question addressed to him was even less fortunate than that which had been put to her grace of Bouillon.

" You are accused, M. le Due, of having entered into a compact with the devil in order to effect the marriage of your son with the daughter of the Marquis de Louvois," stated De la Reynie; " what have you to say?"

" Sir," replied the marshal with a gesture of supreme disdain, " when Matthew de Montmorency married the widow of Louis le Gros, he did not address himself to the devil, but to the States-General, who declared that to secure to the infant king the support of the Montmorencies during his minority, the marriage was a matter of necessity."

At this retort, which pointed a finger at an incident in the political geneaology of the king himself, and carried the hearers back five hundred years and more, Louis at first scowled and then struck his hands together with an oath:

" Ventre Saint Gris! Enough! If any of the Montmorencies has had aught to do with the sovereign lord of hell, it is the soul of the devil and not his works that has profited therefrom! Reconduct M. le Due to the Bastille."

The marshal was acquitted on the instant; but, due again to the contrivances of Louvois, his captivity continued for many months.

This farcical " trial " of two innocent persons terminated the attempt of the *Chambre Ardente* to bring to penalty any of the high nobility of the kingdom who had trafficked with the prisoners. The frightful tragedy of the Marquise de Brinvilliers was not reenacted; for none of the truly guilty were summoned before the tribunal. In default of blue-blooded victims, however, there remained the common people—and upon them the hand of the *chambre* fell heavily. All who were convicted of having had dealings with the two witches—some of them had, and some had not—were summarily put to death. Thus Louis le Grand satisfied justice — and averted scandal.

With a great rustling of parchments and an air of weighty duties well performed, the learned councilors of state were about to call it a day and go to their dinners, when a disturbance broke out in the anteroom to the chamber and caused them to pause. Voices were heard calling loudly in surprise. There was a rush of feet. The door was flung open, and a young cavalier ran into the room, followed by a number of musketeers of the king's guard who had sought to detain him. His hair was disordered, his face streaked with dust and perspiration, his eyes stared wide from want of sleep, and his coat of pink satin was stained drab with a mixture of mud and foam.

" De Sarsay!" cried M. de la Reynie, recognizing in the wild figure of the youth one of his sub-lieutenants. " What is the meaning of this unceremonious entry, sir? Why are you in such dishabille?"

De Sarsay caught sight of the king, and fell upon one knee.

" Madame la Comtesse de Soissons, sire! She has escaped!"

(To Bg Continued NEXT WEEK.)

An Unburned Witch

by J. E. Grinstead

DR. VERNON HILLIARD sat at Ms desk preparing a* paper on psychopathology for a scientific journal. The bell jangled in the hall, and through the open door of his study he heard the catlike .tread of his mulatto servant girl, as she went to answer it.

Dr. Hilliard wondered what could bring a caller thus early. It was well known that his office hours were two to four **P.M.** That fact was plainly engraved beneath his name on the brass door plate. He had no urgent cases, never went out to see patients. In fact he rarely left his home, which was also his office, except to meet other great alienists in consultation.

As he sat in dressing-gown and slippers, his pen poised above the sheet, he heard the girl open the inner and the outer doors of his old-fashioned house. Then he heard the doors close again, and once more the soft, gliding steps in the hall. The servant approached his desk and handed him a telegram, which he opened and read:

DR. VERNON HILLIARD,
St. Paul Street,
Baltimore, Maryland.
Your nephew, Cartier Calvert, seriously, injured. Is in Naval Hospital at Norfolk. Advise come at once. "
MAJOR VICTOR BLAIR, Medical Officer.

Carter Calvert in Norfolk! What could he be doing there? Why, the Naval Hospital? Dr. Hilliard turned to the girl and said:

" Tell Mrs. Calvert I should like to see her in my study."

The maid departed, and soon afterward a pale, slender, middle-aged woman, of graceful carriage and subdued demeanor entered the room. Dr. Hilliard handed her the telegram, and sat back in his chair, observing her through narrowed, cold, unblinking eyes as she read.,

The woman went even paler. " Oh, brother, you'll *go,* won't you? Can't I go?'

" Yes, I'll go. No, you can't go," replied Hilliard, as coldly as if he were talking to a servant, instead of his only sister, and the young man in question were a perfect stranger instead of his nephew. " Tell Addie to pack my bag. I'll go down by the boat that leaves at 5.50," and Dr. Hilliard turned to his writing as if nothing unusual had occurred.

"Oh, Vernon! Couldn't you charter a launch, and get there quicker?" asked Mrs. Calvert.

" Yes, I could, but I won't. I don't practise general surgery any more. If surgeons can save him, they have the best in the world. If I am only to take .charge of a funeral, a few hours won't make any difference."

With a stifled sob, Mrs. Calvert left the room to obey her brother's orders.

The doctor's pen sped across the sheet for a few moments, halted, stopped. It seemed as if he were a mechanism that had been wound up and set for so many sentences, and had gradually run down. The last paragraph he had written, stripped of technical expressions, read:

" Science has demonstrated that there is no such thing as hereditary insanity, criminality, and kindred afflictions, except by the taint of blood. All pure-blooded individuals, not malformed, are born sane and honest. The theory of the born criminal is not supported by scientific investigation. Many an innocent mother is to-day living a life of misery at the thought of having borne a son who was born a criminal. There is no such thing, and womankind has needlessly suffered untold mental agony at the hands of those who advance the theory."

The great alienist rose from his chair, passed out into the hall, and climbed the stairs to his private room. This was at the front, on the third floor. That room, and indeed all that floor of the old house, had been sacred to his use since he was old enough to sleep away from the nursery. In his years at college the rooms had been closed, and cared for, so that every article in them was in its place when he returned home.

The old brown-stone house had never been occupied by any but the Hilliard family. The doctor's grandfather had built it as a town house, while he still owned an extensive estate, and an old colonial mansion, a few miles from the city. The Hilliard home stood on the west side of North St. Paul Street, two doors from a corner. The mutations of time had changed its neighbors into rooming-houses, stores, and what not, but this old house still stood, its front screened by a veil of ivy, as if ashamed of its neighbors, but too proud to move.

Dr. Hilliard sat down in an old leather-covered chair before the window, and gazed out across the way. His deep-blue eyes were no longer cold and hard. He seemed to have discarded his austere manner and forbidding countenance, as he would have laid aside his dressing-gown. The eyes were now wide and moist, with a vacant stare, as if he were looking inward and backward, and not at the things in front of him. Indeed, there was nothing attractive in the scene before him.

It was a gray day in early April. The thick, black smoke from the vessels in the basin drifted over the city on the south wind. The view from the window included the top of the old Calvert Street Station, and the gray walls and towers of the State penitentiary, which stood across Falls Way.

Hilliard was not thinking of these things. With the exception of the great driveway, which had taken the place of the unsightly Jones Falls, now muttering in its prison beneath the arched boulevard, these objects had been familiar to him since childhood.

His was an interesting personality. Well above medium height, with head and features of classic mold, Vernon Hilliard had been one of the most attractive young men in the city. Now, in his middle fifties, he had developed a distinguished air, and great dignity. His once soft, reddish-brown hair and beard were thickly shot with gray. He wore a neatly trimmed Vandyke and closely cropped mustache, revealing firmly chiseled lips. His calm, serious regard gave him the appearance of a work in bronze. In his corrugated brow and deep-set eyes was the look of a deep and earnest student, but back of this lay a stronger expression—the expression of an intensely human man, capable of deep feeling.

The Hilliards had come to America with the first Lord Baltimore. Vernon Hilliard was the only man of the name that had entered a profession. Indeed, no Hilliard before him, in all the seven or eight generations in America, had been anything but a gentleman. Fallen fortunes, and the vicissitudes of the years following the Civil War had made the business of being merely a gentleman a very unprofitable one in the United States.

Gradually the lands had been sold off. Dr. Hilliard remembered the old Colonial mansion of his grandfather, and the wide sweep of the estate, a part of which had recently been given to the city by a rich man as a public park. He remembered that his own father had inherited only the town house, and some interest in warehouses at the water-front.

The doctor's mind went back to his father's death. To the struggle of his proud, aristocratic mother to sustain her two children on the same social plane to which their parents had been accustomed. How, when he grew to manhood, he had determined to be a great surgeon, and the wonderful success he had made in college, and in the hospitals. How glad and happy he had been that instead of being merely an ornament to society, he was to be useful to humanity.

Then a cloud passed over his face as he thought of the lovely girl he was to have married as soon as his success was assured. Of the day he learned that she had gone suddenly insane, and shortly afterward had died. It had been many years, but he had not been attracted by any other woman. Then had followed the death of his mother, and the marriage of his only sister to Raleigh Calvert, who claimed to be a direct lineal descendant of the Lords Baltimore. How it wrung his heart to see his sister, whom he loved dearly, married to Calvert, whom he knew to be a dissolute, worthless young fellow, still posing as a gentleman, when America was crying for real men, who did things worth while.

It was in this hour of depression, when his world seemed toppling about him, that he had retired to his home, shut himself up, and began the study of psychopathology, in the hope of solving the mystery of the malady that had taken the life of his sweetheart, and extinguished the light of his life.

The years had passed slowly. At first he was known as a recluse, then as time slipped by people thought of him a hard, pitiless old man, despite the fact, that he was yet young. He was now a famous alienist, who had performed wonderful feats of brain-surgery, but the years of seclusion had .made him but a mechanism, seemingly without animation.

There had been but one bright spot in all these years. When Calvert had died in a debauch, leaving his wife with an infant' son, she had returned to the old home, and to her brother's protection. Still keeping himself away from the rest of the world, his stricken heart had gone out to his sister and the child, little Cartier Calvert. The boy grew up in the old house, and was a model child. At eighteen he refused to enter a college and prepare for a professional career, but stated his determination to enter a counting-house and learn business.

A position was secured for him, and for several months he made wonderful progress, then suddenly he became morose and secretive. Dr. Hilliard thought his nephew was ill, but examination disclosed nothing wrong. The doctor was sure that it was a mental state affecting him, but could not imagine the cause. Then it developed that young Calvert had embezzled certain funds of his employers.

Thinking it but a youthful error, and that the lesson would cure the boy of such shortcomings, his uncle straightened the matter oUl and got him reinstated in his old place. Not long afterward he was overtaken in the same fault, and this time he lost his place. Still unwilling to give up the career of the nephew he loved, Dr. Hilliard, who had replaced the misapplied funds, and avoided publicity, secured a responsible position for Calvert in another financial institution.

The boy seemed to have reformed his habits. He was now of age, and a favorite of society. He had become engaged to be married to Miss Nellie Paxton, one of the most charming young women in the city. The day had been set for the wedding, and the announcement made public.

Then one day it developed that Calvert had virtually stolen a large sum of money. Again Dr. Hilliard went 10 the rescue, but this time ittook his entire fortune to replace the funds, and avoid publicity and disgrace. When it was over Calvert had gone to his uncle and said:

" Uncle Vernon, I am going to leave Baltimore. You will never hear of me again until I have made enough money to repay you for all you have done for me, and can show a clean slate."

Still unwilling to give the boy up, Hilliard had begged him to stay, and live down his shortcomings at home, but to no avail.

Calvert disappeared. The newsmongers found out about it, and the papers were full of sensational stories, bringing Nellie Paxton's name into the mess as a deserted fiancee, and publishing pictures of the two

young people. The girl had been driven to the seclusion of her home, her life ruined.

This had occurred three years before, and no word had come from Cartier Calvert in all that time. They had been bitter years. Mrs. Calvert had eaten her heart out with the thought that she had borne a son whom some prenatal influence had caused to become a criminal. Woman-like, she refused to believe that her son had inherited criminal instincts from his father.

During those three years the name of Cartier Calvert had not been mentioned between Hilliard and his Sister, and now this message had come, like a bolt from the blue. It was not through cruelty that the doctor forbade his sister going to her son, but fear of the conditions, and circumstances in which she might find him.

Suddenly his eyes narrowed to slits of deep concentration. He rose from his chair and walked hurriedly into his dressing-room. Half an hour later, fully attired for a journey, he went down and called for his traveling-bag.

" Have you decided to go earlier?" asked Mrs. Calvert, in trembling tones.

" Yes," answered Hilliard. " I happened to remember that the vibration of the machinery disturbs me, and I do not sleep well on a boat. I shall start at once, and try to reach Norfolk in the early part of the night."

Mrs. Calvert stood on the little stoop and watched her brother as he walked down the street and caught a car at the corner. His lithe, slender body was erect in his closely buttoned rain-coat, and his step firm as that of youth. He set his face forward, and didn't turn. Hilliard never looked back, except with his mind.

Tears stood in Mrs. Calvert's eyes as she turned, entered the house, and sought a couch in a dark corner of the old parlor that she had known all her life. She worshiped this brother. His mask of bronze did not deceive her. She knew the great heart that beat beneath that stern exterior.

Then her mind reverted to the past. She remembered her son's infancy. Remembered that he had been born with the long, oval head of the Hilliards, and how she had wanted him to have the round head of the Calverts. She remembered the old negro nurse, whose family had been owned by the Calverts for generations. In her mind she could hear the old woman say:

" Why, lawdy, honey! His haid kin be round. All you have to do is to keep him layin' on his back while his little haid's soft, and it 'll jes' naturally grow round. 'Cose it will. Aunt Drusy gwine 'tend to dat. Don't you pester none. Go to sleep now."

She remembered, too, how Aunt Drusy had told her the traditions of the Baltimores. Of the witch that had tried to cast a curse on the family, and how Aunt Drusy looked when she grinned and showed her snaggled teeth as she said:

" I jes' lak to know how that ole witch think she kin cast a spell on real quality lak the Baltimo's. They jes' up an' burned her at the stake, that's what they did, and served her right, too. Pesterin' aroun' where she ain't got no business. I knows some of them Baltimo's went bad, and some fool folks said it was 'count of the witch and the curse, but the' ain't no sense in that talk. That old witch is done burned up and daid, and kain't pester nobody. Don't you pester none about dat. Jes' you let Aunt Drusy pat dem pillows, and then you go to sleep and res'."

She remembered how, far from soothing her, this weird tale had kept her awake through the night. The Hilliard women were orthodox religionists, and even the men, while perhaps only acquiescent, subscribed to the teachings. Mrs. Calvert remembered how it had shocked her when her brother came home from college and declared that the human heart was not the seat of the affections, and that if human beings possessed souls, the spirit must have its abode in the seat of reason.

A confusing medley of thoughts ran through her mind, and hours afterward she rose wearily and went to her rooms above stairs, her heart bleeding from the reopening of old wounds, and her anxiety about her son.

Soon after dark, that same evening, a long, swift motor-launch cut off its power and drifted to anchor in the rippling bars of light from the Naval Hospital at Norfolk. Dr. Hilliard went over the side, and was

rowed ashore. The hospital was still under war regulations, but a guard took the doctor's card and sent it to the officer of the day. Soon afterward Hilliard was escorted to»Major Blair's quarters.

Introductions over, a silence fell between the two* men. Each knew the other by reputation. Major Blair was hailed throughout the country as a great surgeon, and who had not heard of the famous Dr. Vernon Hilliard, psychopathologist and alienist? At last the gruff old major spoke:

" Dr. Hilliard, I have a rather embarrassing statement to make in regard to your nephew. He was a prisoner at the time he was injured."

" I am not surprised at that," replied Hilliard calmly. " Please tell me all about it."

" There is little enough that I can tell," said Blair. " I knew nothing of it until he was brought here. It seems that some time last year, when many young men were drafted, or had volunteered for the service, there were a number of vacancies in the clerical force at the Norfolk customs house. A young man, giving his name as George Carter, applied, furnished satisfactory references, and was employed. He gave perfect satisfaction from the first, but a few weeks ago the secret service discovered discrepancies in his books, by which certain persons could, and doubtless did, profit at the expense of the government. Early this morning, when Carter did not return to his work as usual, the secret service, who had kept watch on him, ordered his arrest at Old Point Comfort. They were returning to Norfolk with him. Just as they cast loose from a dredge, to which their launch had been tied, and on which they had found Carter, a pulley on the hoisting machinery broke, and a flying fragment of metal struck Carter on the back of the head, inflicting a severe wound, and rendering him unconscious. This being the nearest hospital, they brought him here."

" I understood from your message that the young man was my nephew, Cartier Calvert," said Dr. Hilliard.

" So you did, but I only learned that later.. In searching him, the officers overlooked a single thin card in the inside pocket of his vest. I found the card, while making an examination. It was an ordinary identification card, giving the name, ' Cartier Calvert,' and, ' In case of accident notify my uncle, Dr. Vernon Hilliard, North St. Paul Street, Baltimore, Maryland."

"I see. Has the young man regained consciousness?" said Hilliard.

" No. I am sure he will not, until an operation is performed, or rather, he may regain consciousness, but will be unable to speak. I think there is pressure of broken bone on the base of the brain. We would have operated before this time, but his heart has seemed to be gaining strength since righting itself after the shock, and we thought it better to wait until you arrived."

" Would it be possible for me to see him, with no one else present but yourself?"

" Certainly," replied Blair, with a questioning look in his eyes.

Upon reaching the ward where young Calvert had been placed, they were surprised to find that he had been removed.

" That's strange," said Major Blair. " I gave orders that he was not to be operated on until after your arrival."

" Some misunderstanding, I suppose," said Hilliard, when an orderly informed them that the patient had been taken to the operating room half an hour before they came in.

As they were leaving, the orderly said: " Beg pardon, Major Blair, but the man who was injured in that explosion in a coal bunker is dying."

" Yes. Well, nothing could be done in his case. I am very sorry," replied the major, as they passed out.

Dr. Hilliard followed the officer with the fixed expression of a bronze statue. When they reached the surgery they found that the operation on young Calvert was already under way. The operating surgeon had made an incision, turned back the covering and exposed the skull. At the entrance of the two men, he looked up from his work and said:

" This is a peculiar case, major. There is undoubtedly a fracture, but I am unable to locate it. There is a large indention in

the bone immediately above the external occipital protuberance."

" Let Dr. Hilliard examine it, Captain Osborne," suggested Blair.

At the name, the surgeon gave a start. Was it possible that he was about to be associated in a case with the great Dr. Hilliard, a man whose brain-surgery was the wonder of the country, and who was internationally famous!

Acknowledging the introduction with a nod, and no change of his set features, Hilliard stepped forward. He recognized the young man as his nephew, but there was no change in his countenance. The man before him was merely a subject. After examining the wound carefully, he turned to Blair and said:

" Major Blair, can't we suspend this operation for a few minutes. Captain Osborne can keep the patient under the gas, and care for him until we return. I should like to have a private consultation with you,"

" Why—why yes, I suppose so," replied the major. Then turning to Osborne: " Keep the patient just under the gas until we return," he directed, and led the way from the surgery.

Seated in a private room, Dr. Hilliard began: " Did you notice the peculiar formation of the patient's skull, Major. Blair? There is a deep indentation, wider than my finger, running across the back of the head, just above the occipital protuberance. I understand that the flying piece of metal made a jagged wound about the center of that depression. It cannot be that the depression was made at the same time, or death would have resulted instantly from concussion. Now, I have a theory that this depression was made long ago. It is not natural, and yet I do not remember that the boy ever sustained a serious injury in his childhood."

Hilliard went on at some length, speaking as deliberately as if he were in a lecture room. Finally Blair became impatient.

.'Well, what do you propose?" he asked.

" Is the man who was injured in the explosion, dead?" asked Dr. Hilliard abruptly.

" Why—I don't know, but—"

" Please find out at once," said Hilliard, in a tone of'command, taking charge of the situation as. if by right.

Blair left the room. When he returned, he said: " The man has just died."

" Very well. Have the body taken to the surgery, and tell the attendants you are going to make a post mortem examination in the interest of science. Then you and I will relieve Captain Osborne and his, attendant, and perform the operation ourselves."

Major Blair cast one rebellious look into the cold, blue eyes of Dr. Hilliard. What he saw there caused his will to crumble, and he turned away to obey the order, having recognized a superior psychic entity.

Ten minutes later the two great surgeons stood in the operating room. Calvert, still under the influence of the gas, lay on the operating table, apparently lifeless. On a stretcher, near by, lay the dead sailor. Blair and Hilliard, clad in white robes and caps, standing with apparent death on either side of them, made an uncanny picture in the white light.

" Now, Major Blair," said Hilliard calmly, "I am going to make a proposal to you. This sailor is dead. Were he alive he would give any reasonable quantity of his blood to save the life of a comrade. A piece of his skull can be of no further use to him. On the other hand, I am convinced that this depression in Calvert's skull, however and whenever it was made, is the cause of all his delinquencies. I propose that we remove that part of the deformed skull of Calvert, and replace it with a piece from the skull of the sailor."

Major Blair, accustomed as he was to daring operations, was aghast at the suggestion. Especially at Hilliard proposing such an operation on his nephew, even though he were ten times a thief, and a traitor to his country. For an instant it occurred to him that this great man had driven his own mind in the search of help for others until it had at last given way under the strain. But in the cold, direct gaze of the searching blue eyes there was nothing of dementia, and Blair yielded to the stronger will.

Hilliard became an automaton. Deftly

he uncovered the exposed skull of Calvert, wiped the bone clean, and made mental measurements. Then he took a pair of shears and a piece of paper, and cut a narrow, oval-shaped piece, with pointed ends. This he laid over the depression in Calvert's skull, saw that it was the proper shape and size, and turned to the dead sailor. Next he calmly opened the sailor's scalp, exposed the bone, laid the piece of paper on it, and marked around it as coolly as a carpenter would mark out a pattern. Then, picking up the proper instruments, he proceeded to cut out the piece of borrowed bone.

When he was through he replaced the skin over the wound, brushed the hair down, and turning quietly to Blair, said:

" Please have an orderly remove the body."

Blair obeyed, and when the man was gone with the sailor's body, he stood looking at Hilliard in doubt and amazement. He knew of the wonderful things that Hilliard had done, but still he almost doubted the man's sanity.

With the same unerring deftness, Hilliard laid the piece of paper over the depression in Calvert's skull, marked around it, and cut out the piece.

Minutes dragged into hours. Major Blair watched Calvert's pulse, regulated the anesthetic, and observed the operation in stony silence. He saw Hilliard remove the piece from the patient's skull and noticed that the cut had been made sloping, at exactly the same angle in each case, so that when the borrowed bone was placed in Calvert's skull it fitted perfectly, the sloping edge preventing it slipping out of place and pressing on the brain.

Scarcely a dozen words were spoken until the work was finished, the wound sewed up, and bandaged. Then Hilliard said:

" Call a couple of orderlies, and have the patient removed to the nearest thing you have to a sound-proof room. Put the best nurse obtainable in charge, and tell her that when the patient regains consciousness he must not move under any circumstances."

When this had been attended to, the two doctors resumed their usual clothing. Blair looked at his watch. It was 3.30 A.M. Hilliard had worked six hours under a nerve strain that could not be estimated.

" You will share my quarters for the remainder of the night, Dr. Hilliard."

" Thank you, major. A cot somewhere is all I shall require," and a few minutes later he was sleeping soundly in clothing and shoes, on a couch in the officer's room.

It was evening again. The lights from the hospital were making their rippling bars of gold on the water. Dr. Hilliard and Major Blair were sitting on a bench near the low sea-wall, smoking.

" Have you been in charge here long, major?" asked Hilliard.

" No, sir. I am here only temporarily, and am expecting my discharge from the service in a few days."

" You have not mentioned this operation to any one?"

" No, sir."

"Good! I prefer that nothing be known about it for the present. In fact, if it fails, no one need ever know of it but you and me. If it is successful, there will be time enough."

Then after a few minutes of silence, as the waves washed against the wall, from a passing motor-boat, Hilliard continued:

" I have no fear as to the bone grafting. It was normal, sound, green bone, and the fitting was perfect. The danger lies in the possibility of damage to the delicate inner tissues. I should say there was probably not more than a chance in a thousand for his recovery. All we can do is to hope that this is that thousandth chance."

" Have you known your nephew intimately, Dr. Hilliard?" asked Blair.

" He spent his life in my home up to about three years ago. Since then I had not heard from him until I received your message. I have risked his life on a theory. Carrier Calvert was a model boy, but about the time he grew to manhood he became secretive and cunning. He was employed in a banking house, and embezzled some funds. I righted the matter, and he went on with the work, but was soon caught in another fault. He left the place, and was employed at another bank. Here he was guilty of deliberate theft, which dissipated

my entire fortune in order to avoid publicity and disgrace for the family. After that he went away, and we did not hear from him until, as stated, you notified me that he was here.

" I had long since concluded that he was suffering from a mental malady. His mother, my only sister,^has broken her heart at the thought of her son being a born criminal. I know, in the light of scientific investigation, that there is no such thing. Every criminal act brings punishment, pain, or unhappiness, in answer to God's infallible law of compensation. No truly sane person will commit a crime. I do not mean that one must be a gibbering maniac, in order to do a criminal act, but he must be suffering from some malformation that interferes with the proper functioning of the seat of reason. I am firmly convinced that in the years to come the chamber now occupied by the electric chair, as a punishment for capital crimes, will be used as a surgery for the treatment of criminals whose moral nature can be restored to normal by brain-surgery.

" I am convinced that malformation of the skull bone has interfered with the functioning of my nephew's brain, and made him a criminal. If he recovers I believe he vffil gradually become sane, normal, and honest. If he does, it will solve a problem in psychopathology, and especially in criminology, that I have spent much of my life in studying."

" The theory is reasonable, and your discussion of it very interesting, but I asked the question for another purpose. Is he one of the old family of Calverts, descended from the Lords Baltimore?"

" His father so claimed, and I believe it to be true. I know the history of the Baltimore family, but scientific investigation has proved to me that there is. no such thing as hereditary criminality. Were that not so, Frederick, the seventh Lord Baltimore, died without legal issue, and no other of the old Calverts was a moral deficient."

" That, too, is interesting, but that is not yet my reason for asking about your nephew. Is he, by any chance, the young Calvert who v/as engaged to be married to Miss Nellie Paxton, and who disappeared after the engagement was announced, and the wedding date set?"

" I am sorry to say he is."

" Then, I have equal interest with you in his recovery, and restoration to a normal mental state. Miss Paxton's father and I were boyhood friends. I have never seen a lovelier young woman than the daughter. I was on duty in Europe at the time of young Calvert's disappearance, and did not hear of it. A few weeks ago I was in Baltimore, and was shocked at the change in her. Her father told me that she had become a recluse, and they feared for her health. In my haste I supposed the young man to be a common scoundrel, but you have thrown a new light on the matter. I am hopeful that he may recover, not only in the interest of science, but on account of the individuals whose lives and happiness have been effected by this affair."

The following day Calvert regained consciousness. There were no alarming symptoms, and Dr. Hilliard wired his sister that her son was alive, and that there was hope for his recovery. A week later she was permitted to visit him.

The recovery was slow, and the greatest care was used in his treatment.

Meantime, the two surgeons looked into the charges against Calvert, and found that he was wanted as a material witness against the j-eal culprits, who had probably paid him a small amount for his part in the crooked dealing. The principals in the crime against the government had long since been brought to book when Calvert was able to sit a few hours on the' sea-wall in the September sunshine.

Miss Paxton had been advised of Calvert's condition, and spent several days in Norfolk, returning home after she had said good-by to Calvert and his mother, and Dr. Hilliard, on the vessel that was to take them to the Bahamas for the winter.

It was more than a year later. Calvert had recovered entirely. His old, furtive expression, and secretive disposition were gone. He was now a fine, open, frank young fellow. He had returned to Baltimore in the spring, and had been given a position in the bank where he began his career, and was making good.

On a late November evening, Cartier Calvert and Nellie Paxton sat in the old parlor of the Hilliard home. The firelight from an open grate illumined the portraits of George and Martha Washington, which had been in the Hilliard family for more than a century. The old mahogany and rosewood furniture that had seen the glories of Colonial days, reflected the ruddy glow. The roses had come back to the cheeks of Nellie Paxton, and bloomed riotously when Calvert mentioned their wedding day, which had been set for the Christmas holidays. The bride-to-be was spending the evening, ostensibly with Calvert's mother.

Above stairs, Mrs. Calvert was entertaining her brother and Major Blair, now a civilian surgeon. Blair had been talking to Mrs. Calvert about the exploits of the marines in the recent war. Dr. Hilliard had sat for some time gazing into the fire, with an expression of deep concentration on his face. Suddenly he turned to Mrs. Calvert and said: " Sister, have you any of Carrier's baby clothes?"

"Why, what a question!" exclaimed Mrs. Calvert, who had retained much of her youthful loveliness, and probably did not want to be reminded just then that she was the mother of a grown man. " Certainly, I have. A trunk full of them."

" Well, this would be a good time to look them over. Blair and I, both being old bachelors, may not understand the uses of all of them, but they may be interesting, at that."

Mrs. Calvert, who had long since ceased to be surprised at her brother's peculiarities, and was willing to do anything to please the two men who had saved her son, left the room. Presently she returned with a small, old-fashioned trunk, which she set on the floor. Opening it, she began displaying the dainty garments that her son had worn twenty-five years before.

Dr. Hilliard paid these scant attention, but as they neared the bottom of the trunk he saw something that attracted his attention, and reaching down he drew out a wonderful twilled silk affair. It was a kind of circular cloak, lined with softest satin, and having a thick-quilted roll about the collar, surmounted by a strip of ermine.

"What is this thing?" asked Dr. Hilliard, holding up the garment.

" That is a cloak. It was the first cloak that was wrapped around all the men children of the house of Baltimore. It was a kind of robe of state in which the babies were wrapped to receive their fathers for the first time, and my little Cartier was wrapped in it incessantly for the first few weeks of his life. Aunt Drusy, the old negro nurse, insisted that it would keep off evil spirits. She was a credulous old soul, and used to tell me wonderful tales about a witch who had pronounced a cur§e on the house of Baltimore, and had been burned at the stake for her pains. Sometimes in the long bitter years I have almost believed there was something in it," ended Mrs. Calvert, with a sigh.

" Yes," said Dr. Hilliard, " I have heard those old tales that emanated from the ignorance of that long-past time, but Lord Baltimore failed to burn the right witch in that instance. This is the real witch that cursed the House of Baltimore," and he held the garment of shimmering silk before him, while Major Blair and his sister looked at him in wonder.

" Had the superstitious people of those days known of the iniquities of this cloak they would have had a grand conclave to witness its destruction. This cloak is the great menace, and should be destroyed for its black magic. That rolled collar under your child's head, before the bone hardened, deformed the skull, and when he reached maturity the pressure on his brain, in the sensitive quarter of the very seat of reason, interfered with the proper functioning of his mind. The seventh Lord Baltimore went to his grave, and down into history as a moral deficient, probably from the same cause. Beautiful as it is, I am in favor of consigning the cloak to the flames, even at this late date."

"Say, rather, that it should be preserved for its part in a great scientific discovery, which may serve as a lesson to young mothers in the care of their children, and thereby lend much aid in ridding the world of crime. Let us preserve the unburned witch, but give its story to the world," said Blair earnestly.

Alias Annie's Brother

by Neil Moran

Author of "Husbands and Wives," "Bringing Out Boothington," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I,

THE GIRL ON THE BUS.

THIS is the story of a man, a young man of wealth, who went to extreme measures to meet a certain girl. If you were riding in the subway, in a street-car, or perhaps in your own automobile, and should you see a girl, a very beautiful girl, whom you would rather know more than all the rest of the girls in the world put together, what would you do?

Should it be in a street-car, for instance, would you just admire this girl from afar, and after she got out wonder if you would ever meet her again? Or would you walk after her, unable to restrain the impulse to follow in her footsteps, just to be near her, knowing, of course, that you could not speak to her, but somewhat satisfied that for a few seconds longer you could watch her graceful figure go swinging up some side street or avenue?

This is what Craig Manning did. Afid when I tell you that Craig Manning had always been a confirmed bachelor, in fact, something of a woman-hater, and at the age of thirty-three had never been attracted particularly to any one woman, you will understand that there must have been something about this unknown girl which Manning had never seen in any one else.

It is just as well that we should give the Story from the beginning. So, we see Mr. Craig Manning leave his apartment in -a fashionable section of New York City, walk two blocks west to Fifth Avenue, and wait for an oncoming down-town bus to stop. Here arises now something which might have changed everything in this story. Indeed, there could have been no story, for if Mr. Manning had followed his first impulse, it is most likely that he would never have seen the girl.

For those of you who have never been in New York, and have consequently never ridden in a Fifth Avenue bus, let us explain that a bus has a top and a bottom. That is to say, there are seats below and above, the lower seats enclosed in the body«of the machine, and the upper ones on top of the body, where you can sit and watch the blue sky overhead.

Some New Yorkers are very perverse «in their methods. Mr. Manning was one of .them. There were days in the" summer when, upon entering a bus, he would sit in the lower section, when most everybody would be up-stairs enjoying the air. And there were days in the winter when Mr. Manning would climb up the .little stairway to the top, and sit there, sometimes alone, in the face of a cold dnd blustery wind.

So it was that this day, being a day in summer, Mr. Manning was about to enter the lower section, but suddenly changing his mind, started up the stairs to* the- top.

He had been riding for five minutes or so before he noticed the girl. She was sitting in a seat just diagonally across from him, where he could get a good view of her profile. The first thing he observed was the way several strands of her hair blew around her ear. It was a small ear, very pink and shell-like, which was identical with one he had read of in a recent novel. Mr. Manning then became interested. Already the girl had the ear of a beautiful heroine. You see, romance, which had been lying dormant in Mr. Manning for years, was getting its first stir.

He was surprised then, and rapturously delighted, to find that the girl's chin, the contour of her face, and her small, aristocratic nose were also identical with those described by the popular author. Romance was getting its second stir. Even the way she held her head, a small, well-shaped head, under an attractive, stylish, hat, corresponded with the poise of the aforementioned lady.

If he could only see her eyes! Ah, that was it! Were they those dark-brown, luminous eyes, in whose liquid depths could kindle the fires of love and passion? See how well he remembered everything about this adorable character. He was sure that this girl had such eyes. He was even sure that she was capable of all the love and sacrifice, the loyalty and devotion of the Active one. Yes, she was even more wonderful, for she was real.

Do you wonder now why it has been said that love makes the world go round? Or why a confirmed bachelor, immune for years and years to the charms of women, suddenly found himself dreaming over one of them on a slow-moving *bus? A half-hour before Craig Manning's mind had been filled with other things; with his business deals; with what kind of a new car he would buy; or with some week-end party or dance that he felt himself obliged to attend.

Never could he have remembered so accurately the character in the book, if it had not been for this girl, who sat across from him, totally unconscious that her pretty head was the cause of so much admiration. Once again it was romance. And romance, so the poets say, works wonders in the mind.

And here, indeed, was an odd situation. Just behind him sat a fat brewer, whose thoughts centered on the returns he was getting from his brewery. Next to him was a hawk-faced lawyer, who was figuring out the money he would receive in an accident case. Down toward the front of the bus was a sour-faced landlady, who was rehearsing in her mind a sweet little speech she would deliver that night to one of her boarders, if he didn't produce back rent for something like three weeks.

And in front of her, sitting by himself, was a crook; a high-class crook, as the saying goes, whose shifty eyes were studying the sky, while his mind was devising ways and means to trim a few poor victims.

It is not necessary to speak of any more. Suffice it to say, that not one of them at that particular moment felt the call of romance. And that is why the situation was odd. There was only one who was dreaming of things that are not in common with brewery receipts, room rent, or cunning schemes; things that are not even in common with the noise of New York traffic, or the crowds that were surging along the streets.

And so, Mr. Manning dreamed on; dreamed while his eyes rested first on a pretty nose, then on a shell-like ear, and back again to a pretty nose.

But there is always an end to bus rides; also an end to dreams. And very suddenly Mr. Manning came out of his, came out of it with something of a start, for the girl had pressed the signal button for the bus to stop. She rose, and as she did so, Mr. Manning sat bolt upright, his lips parted, and his hands clutching the back of the vacant seat in front of him.

Now he would see her full face; see her eyes, and involuntarily he rose, for the eyes he gazed at but which did not look at him were brown, dark brown, luminous eyes, in whose liquid depths burned the fires of—we were about to say love and passion, but that was not so. How could it be? Yet, in that instant, Mr. Manning saw that they were just the kind of eyes the book girl had, when she was in repose.

He might have been a block of wood as far as the unknown girl was concerned, for she brushed right past him, neither looking to the left nor to the right. He was undecided just what to do. He felt that he was facing a crisis in his life, a most serious crisis, for in another few seconds now the girl would be gone, and in all probability he would never see her again.

It was this thought that stirred him to action. How could he let her get away, without at least finding out where she was going, or better still, perhaps where she lived. That was it. If he could but discover her home, then he could come around nights and stand on the other side of the street, cheered by the consoling thought that his beloved one was only a few feet away, invisible, of course, but never the less near to him. Manning, you will by this time gather, had a very bad case.

So very quietly, then, without attracting attention, he picked up his cane and followed. He saw the girl going east, noticed now for the first time that he was in a section of the city where old New Yorkers once lived, and still do live, and fully convinced that she was returning home, he tripped merrily after her.

He remembered having been in the neighborhood before. It was a long time ago, easify two years, and yet the place hadn't changed any to speak of, or, if it had, he didn't notice it. All along were private houses—those old-fashioned private houses with wide stoops and heavy iron doors. And it was up one of these stoops that the girl hurried. She opened the door with a key and passed in.

Mr. Manning was about twenty feet in the rear, and his quick mind was making some lightning deductions. They were something like this: A girl is seen walking up the front stoop of a private house. She pauses for a second, removes a key from a hand-bag, and then inserts the key in the door lock. The door swings open, and she enters. Deduction: the girl lives in the house. Else why would she have a key?. Remarkable!

So, with a slow-moving step, Mr. Manning reached the stoop and glanced up. No. 12 was over the door, and he made a mental note of it. • It would not be well, he reasoned, to loiter around the house, so he walked right past the stoop to proceed up the street. As he did he glanced into the area of the -house, where a man, old and practically, in rags, was beseeching a woman servant to give him something to eat.

" Shure I will," Manning heard the servant say. He turned and saw that she was a good-natured looking Irish girl. " Come inside," she went on, opening the gate. And the beggar, mumbling his thanks, entered.

Mr. Manning dreaming dreams of love, departed.

CHAPTER II.

THE CALL OF ROMANCE.

D OMANCE, once started, is a very hard thing to stop. It has been said that love will find a way. And as romance and love go hand in hand, is it not true, then, that romance will also find a way? Yet, up to seven o'clock that night, Mr. Manning had found no way. The way, of course, was how to meet the girl.

It was after dinner that he sat in his library smoking, dreaming over a pretty nose and a shell-like ear. But dreams alone cannot bring the object nearer, only, of course, in the imagination. So, Mr. Manning realized that something had to be done. There may be those of you who will say that he was filled with a temporary infatuation, which would wear off in time, perhaps overnight. But that was not so. Remember, that he was never susceptible to women. And such a man, when he falls, falls hard, as the wise ones say.

So, for a time he sat thinking. Perhaps, he reasoned, he would meet the girl socially some time in the future. But that was not certain, and anyway, it was a long way off. Something to him like a thousand years. He also thought of a mutual friend. That, indeed, would be splendid. Being properly introduced was quite the right thing. But where to flfid the mutual friend? And then again, he did not even know the girl's name.

He wondered now whether Thomas, his butler, was versed in the affairs of the

heart. Two heads were surely better than one. But, then, how could he admit to his butler, or to any one, for that matter, that he had fallen desperately, yes, madly in love, with an unknown girl!

A nature like Manning's does not give up easily. Determination was one of his qualities. But now all that his determination brought him was a disturbed mind, exhausted from too much concentration. Suddenly he rose and walked over to the window. It was not the street below that he saw, but one way down-town, and what he pictured was an old beggar asking a good-natured Irish girl for something to eat.

With the movement of a panther, Manning swung around. There was the solution to his problem, the way out. Was it not reasonable to assume that beggars who called at that house were fed, and perhaps given a coin? Then might he not become a beggar for a night and do the same? And what would it bring should he gain admittance to that kitchen?

He smiled as he thought over the way servants gossip about their employers. By careful interrogating he, perhaps, could find out the girl's name and who she was. Then, with the possession of these facts, he could devise other ways of meeting her.

Only for a second did he waver. Within that second he deliberated the chance of being handed a sandwich at the gate, which would leave him nothing to do but mumble his thanks and go away. Everything, then, depended upon an invitation to the kitchen. And if he did not venture he would not win. That was what settled it. He would go.

Once again we are inclined to temporize with you; not to make excuses for Craig Manning in this extreme step that he was about to take, but to remind you that romance will find a way, and that once started there is no stopping it. And after all, put yourself in his place, with that one purpose which had become an obcession. What would you have done?

What he did was to go to his bedroom and rummage through a clothes-closet. From among his suits he picked one, and held it off at arm's length. Then, shaking his head, he put the suit back. That one would never do. It was tight-fitting, extremely stylish, and made him appear so. But then, he reflected, all of his suits were made that way, all of them coming from the same Fifth Avenue tailor.

Mr. Manning sat down on the edge of his bed to do some more thinking. To play the part of the beggar he must look like a beggar. Not necessarily to be in rags, but certainly not to appear fastidious or even well groomed. He could look respectable, but down and out. That was it. The thing then was how to look down and out.

And then it came to him. A loose-fitting suit would carry no style. And Thomas, his portly butler, who was about his own height, was the very one to get such a suit from. A soft shirt, old tie, the oldest pair of shoes, and a felt hat, would about complete the disguise.

Mr. Manning then summoned the butler.

" Thomas," he said, " I'd like to borrow one of your old suits. The older the better, Thomas."

" Beg pardon, sir," said Thomas. " I didn't quite understand."

" One of your old suits, Thomas. One like you wear when you go out."

The butler nodded. But he was puzzled.

" Yes, sir," he said, " one of my old suits. Any particular color, sir?"

" No, Thomas. No particular color."

" And may I ask, sir, what you—"

Certainly, Thomas. I'm—" Mr. Manning paused and rubbed his chin. " Well, never mind what I want it for, Thomas. Suppose you go to my tailor tomorrow and have him make you a suit, and send the'bill to me. How's that?"

" Oh, thank you, sir."

" All right, then. Bring in your oldest suit now. Hurry."

Thomas left the room, wondering what the master could want with one of his old suits. However, a fair exchange is no robbery, and it certainly was a fair exchange for Thomas, and one that pleased him very much.

He returned presently with a black suit, the conservative kind that conservative butlers wear.

" How is this, sir?" he said. " Or maybe a gray one would be better?"

Mr. Manning shook his head.

" No, Thomas. That will do nicely. By the way, isn't this your night out?"

The butler nodded.

" Yes, sir. And if you don't mind, I'd like to leave now. Is there anything else, sir?"

" No," Mr. Manning said. The sooner he got Thomas out the better. He didn't want his butler to see him leaving the apartment.

" Very good, sir," said Thomas. And he left the room.

Five minutes later Mr. Manning heard the apartment door open and close, and he knew Thomas had gone.

Mr. Manning then lost no time in making the change. When he finished he surveyed himself in a mirror. Thomas's suit certainly made him look different, but not different enough. He hadn't lost any of his personality, that something which made him stand out. So he rumpled his hair a bit, and then proceeded to collect as much dust from about the room as he could, which he rubbed on his face, making it look somewhat smudged. Just notice how resourceful he had become. What cared he about germs and the like. Nothing was to stand in the way.

So, satisfied at last that he could add no further finishing touches, he left the apartment, and stole quietly down the back stairway, which was used by the servants, and then out into the street.

Romance was calling—calling to him from everywhere, like a voice in the night. Never had the stars seemed more beautiful; never the air so balmy and sweet. And then in his mind's fancy he saw a pretty nose, a shell-like ear, and—

" All aboard, all aboard," a gruff voice growled.

Mr. Manning came out of his dream and saw the rear of the surface car that he had mechanically signaled to stop. A hard-faced looking conductor was glaring at him with that expression a man gets when he thinks the whole world's against him.

Mr. Manning boarded the car, and, after paying his fare, sat down in a corner seat with his soft hat pulled well down over his face. It would never do for any of his friends to see him. But almost immediately he forgot about friends and everything else. He was thinking of a pretty nose, and a small, shell-like ear.

CHAPTER III.

MR. MANNING MAKES BELIEVE.

IT was nine o'clock, perhaps a minute or two after, when Mr. Manning rang the basement bell of the No. 12 house. He heard an inner door open, the shuffling of feet, and then some one asked:

" What do yez want?"

Mr. Manning was sure he recognized the voice. There was no mistaking that brogue. It was the same servant who had befriended the beggar earlier in the day.

Mr. Manning pitched his voice to carry a note of pathos. In fact, in doing so, he almost sobbed.

" Can you give a poor man something to eat?" he said, trying to talk like a hobo.

There was a pause. Then: " Why don't yez come around in the daytime?"

He instinctively felt that the servant was a little bit afraid. To have a strange man enter the house at night might be dangerous, for he realized that in the darkness she couldn't make out whether he looked honest or not. And naturally, if a man didn't look honest, it wasn't likely that he'd receive an invitation to enter.

" Listen, lady," he said. " I ain't had nothing to eat all day. Honest, ma'am." He was almost crying by now; crying because if he didn't do this he would have burst out laughing. " But I'm willing to work for my feed," he went on. " Shovel coal, cut wood, or anything. Have a little pity on a poor man, ma'am."

The good-natured Irish girl believed him. There was something about his voice that rang true. And it was partly because she was possessed with a woman's curiosity to see what he looked like that made her open the gate and bid him enter.

" Come into the kitchen," said she. " The saints presarve us, but the poor should be taken care of."

" You're a good woman," Manning kept mumbling, unable to conceal his joy at the plan working out so successfully. " A good woman," he repeated, as he dogged after her. " Luolc will follow you, ma'am."

He said this as he stepped into a well-lighted kitchen. The girl turned and looked at him. Then her eyes enlarged, and admiration flashed from them, for she saw what a fine-looking " mon " he was.

" Sit down, sit down," said she, unable to conceal her delight. " Indeed, I'm glad 'twas here yez came," looking at him coyly, " for they say I make the best coffee to be had."

Mr. Manning followed up the lead.

" They, ma'am?" he said stupidly. " They who?"

" Shure and the family," said the girl, whose name was Annie. " But sit down, now; sit down there and make yezself comfortable."

Mr. Manning sat; although he wasn't very comfortable. He just didn't like the coy way the girl was looking at him, nor the blushes that passed over her cheeks.

" So, yez are out of wurruk," Annie said. " And what do yez do, lad?"

Lad! Mr. Manning almost fell off his chair.

" I'm a—a plumber," he gasped. " Yes—that's it; a plumber, ma'am."

" And shure 'tis grand," Annie said, clapping her hands. " Don't yez think for a moment that I wants yez to wurruk; but if yez don't mind, will yez take a look at that pipe on the boiler over there. It's a leak there is, and perhaps yez could fix it."

Mr. Manning was beginning to feel weak in the knees.

" But I have no tools," he stammered, wondering whether plumbers carried tools, or what it was they used.

Annie was just placing a cup of coffee on the table, and she looked up and smiled.

" Didn't I tell yez I wuzn't putting yez to wurruk," she said shyly. " Just take a peek at it, lad, and see if it can be fixed."

There was nothing for Mr. Manning to do but take a peek. He reached the boiler and began hunting" around for the pipe.

:i Underneath, lad," Annie said. " The one on the right."

Mr. Manning ran his hand over it and then looked up.

" Oh, that's all right," he said confidently. " You don't want to mind a little thing like that."

" But it should be fixed," Annie insisted. " Shouldn't it, now?"

" Have you any gum?" Mr. Manning asked desperately. " Or maybe a little mucilage?"

He was beginning to feel weak from the ordeal.

" Yes, a little mucilage," he went on hopefully, " might help."

" And do yez mean to tell me that yez put mucilage on a thing like that?" Annie asked, somewhat astonished.

" When we haven't our tools," Mr. Manning came back promptly. " But you'd better send for a plumber, ma'am," he added soberly. " The thing ought to be fixed properly."

Annie had been making some fresh coffee, which was ready.

" Come along, then," she said, " and let the pipe go."

She hurried to the ice-box and took out some cold chicken, half of a cooked ham, celery, lettuce, several tomatoes, and a large piece of apple-pie. Mr. Manning watched her with some misgivings. Was he expected to eat that ton of food after he had had a big dinner only two hours before? And yet, how could he refuse to eat when he was supposed to be hungry—nay, starving! He certainly was in for it.

" The lay-out looks good to yez. I can see that," said Annie. She had been watching Mr. Manning's wobegone expression. " And after yez ate all this," she went on, " I'll give yez some more."

Mr. Manning started, and grasped the back of a chair. After he ate all that she would give him some more! She wouldn't have a chance to, he reflected, for in all probability if he ate all that was there, he'd be carried out into an ambulance unconscious.

However, he sat down and began munching some lettuce. If he could only stall Annie off, secure the desired information, then he could manage to leave in some way or another. He might even say that he

had got a pain in the side, and suggest that Annie wrap up the rest of the food in a package to take away with him.

" Ate," Annie said. " Ate, lad. You've been doing nothing but tasting the lettuce."

Mr. Manning made a brave attempt at some chicken.

" The coffee's good," he said, knowing that Annie was susceptible to compliments.

" And shure everything I make is good," Annie said proudly. " I'll tell yez now what a mon needs these days is a good housekeeper. A gurrul that can cook."

She looked meaningly at Mr. Manning, and he, getting the drift of it, moved his chair a little bit away. He had got himself into all sorts of complications.

" Now, then," Annie went on significantly, " there's a friend of mine, a nice, hard-working Irish gurrul, that married a friend of us both. He's a strate-car conductor. Foine bye. But she doesn't know how to cook. The pity av ut."

Mr. Manning was wishing that Annie wouldn't keep looking at him with such adoring eyes. He didn't like that talk about the cook business, either.

" By the way," she suddenly said. " What's your name?"

Mr. Manning almost choked on a piece of tomato.

" Jack," he gasped. " Jack."

" Jack what?"

" Jack Murphy," he said, believing it would make a hit to give a name that flavored of Irish.

" 'Tis a foine name," said Annie approvingly. " Mine's Annie. Miss Annie Fogarty. But call me Annie. And I'll call yez Jack. How's that, Jack?"

Mr. Manning suddenly began coughing. A piece of chicken had gone down the wrong way, because he had started to laugh, unable to control his feelings.

Annie became alarmed. She jumped up and began clouting him on the back, something that is supposed to help any one choking on food.

" The saints presarve us," she kept crying. " Drink the coffee, Jack. Drink the coffee."

" I'm all right," Mr. Manning managed to say. " Stop clouting me, Annie."

He drew in a deep breath, and exhaled slowly. Annie sat down again and looked at him tenderly.

" Are yez shure yez are all right, Jack?" she said.

Mr. Manning did not answer. For a door suddenly opened, and a girl appeared. The girl with the pretty nose, and the small, shell-like ear!

Perhaps of the two, Annie was the more astonished. The more nervous, in fact, for there sat a strange man, with an elaborate meal before him, and a fork carelessly poised in his hand. Annie had always concealed from the family that she had callers. What they didn't know didn't bother them, she reasoned.

" Oh, miss," she exclaimed nervously, " this is—is-me brother Jack."

The fork dropped out of Mr. Manning's hand and clattered on the table. The girl in the doorway gave him a cursory glance, nodded civilly, and then turned to look at the cook.

" Annie," she said, " I rang the electric buzzer several times for you before I came down. It must be out of order. Uncle wants the name and address of that man who used to come to clean the furnace."

" You mean William, miss?"

" Yes, I believe that was his name." Mr. Manning closed his eyes as he listened to that delightful voice. Under the circumstances he was unusually calm.

." But William's gone "away, Miss Marion. It's out in Ohio, I believe, where he is."

Mr. Manning opened his eyes and glanced at the girl. At last he knew her first name. It was a pretty name, too, he thought. One that just suited her.

" Well, that's too bad," said Marion. " I suppose we'll have to advertise, then, and we haven't much time. Uncle has decided to leave for Summerville day after to-morrow, and he wanted William as sort of an extra man about the place."

Suddenly Annie looked at Mr. Manning, and then at Marion. " Maybe Jack would do," she said. " Jack is out of work, ma'am."

Something seemed to snap in Mr. Manning's head. The room was swimming

around. Then he heard that musical voice:

" Well, suppose your brother comes up and sees uncle now, Annie."

" Shure, Jack," Annie agreed. " Go up with Miss Marion." Mr. Manning felt a kick on the shins. Annie was doing some emphatic nudging.

Mr. Manning came to with a start. He rose and made a most dignified bow. For with his senses fully collected, now, he saw before him a wonderful opportunity.

" Yes," he said, and his eyes rested on a small, shell-like ear, " perhaps I'd do."

" If you will come with me, please," Marion said. And he followed her.

For a second let us stop and consider his feelings. Several times in this story it has been asked: what would you have done had you been in his place? How, then, would you feel now? Like Mr. Manning, who was most self-possessed, and, strange to say, not at all nervous? Or would you be agitated and rather dubious about the outcome? Was it the near presence of this girl that stilled Mr. Manning's fear? Or was it just his natural poise? Whatever it was, he was glad; yes, supremely happy, that he was walking up that second flight of stairs.

And the house? He had seen others like it before; had been in them many times. Those tastefully furnished homes, where everything is rich and appropriate; nothing overdone for display. The kind of a house which reflects the character of its occupants. Refinement was everywhere.

At the top of the stairway, Marion turned to the left and paused for a second before a heavy, mahogany door. Then throwing it open, she bade him enter. He stepped into a well-appointed library, which had for its sole occupant an old man, gray haired, thin, and rather stooped. This was Uncle George Van Buren, an aristocratic old gentleman, who was given to cranky spells and eccentricities. He glanced up at Mr. Manning, and his expression wasn't any too friendly.

" Uncle George," said Marion, " this is Annie's brother."

Uncle George looked at Craig over his spectacles.

"Indeed!" he said. - "What does he want?"

" William is out West," Marion began, " and Annie's brother—"

" What does Annie's brother want?" the old man snapped.

" He wants work," Marion replied, a lit-i tie severely. " If you'll give me a chance, Uncle George, I'll explain. Annie thought! that perhaps her brother would do for the extra man."

" Oh," muttered the old man stupidly, " Oh, I see. Well, why didn't you say so in the first place?"

He motioned Craig to a chair, and acting awkwardly, Craig sat down. It would never do, lie reasoned, to move about with his usual poise, nor talk in his usual way, As it. was, he noticed that Uncle George was looking at him sharply. So Mr. Manning assumed a nervousness that would have done credit to a finished actor. His idea also was to change his voice.

" Are you working now?" Uncle George asked.

Hahn?" Mr. Manning said stupidly. He had understood very well Uncle Georges question, but Mr. Manning believed -in putting as much technique to his role as possible.

" I asked if you are working now," Uncle George exclaimed irritably.

" Oh, no, sor," Mr. Manning grinned, He had unconsciously* affected a little brogue. He liked the way he said that " sor."

Uncle George nodded.

" What have you done?" he asked.

" Oh, I've done lots," Mr. Manning said, drawing himself up in his chair. " I'm a! plumber."

" A plumber?"

" Yes, sor."

" And what else?"

" That's about all, sor."

" What did you mean when you said lots?" Uncle George asked peevishly.

" Oh, lots of plumbing, sor," Mr. Manning replied. He saw that he would have to be quick in his answers to the old man.;

" Well," said Uncle George, " I suppose you'll do. Your plumbing experience may help."

" Yes, sor," Mr. Manning mumbled. He had grave fears that that plumbing " experience " would get him into trouble yet.

"You understand,"'Uncle George continued, " that you are being hired as an extra man to work around our place in Summerville. Your wages will be forty dollars a month and board. You will leave for Summerville to-morrow."

Mr. Manning looked happy. He glanced at Marion. She didn't seem a bit interested in the conversation, for she was turning the pages of a magazine.

" That's all," Uncle George said. " Come here to-morrow morning about ten o'clock, and I'll have your train ticket and a few other things ready for you."

Mr. Manning rose. He looked at Marion. She was still turning the pages of the magazine.

" And be on time," Uncle George thundered, .thinking of nothing else that he could make a fuss over.

" At ten, sor," Mr. Manning said. And giving Marion one last look, he shuffled awkwardly from the room.

" He's not such a bad-looking fellow," said Uncle George. " But he doesn't resemble Annie in the least."

Marion tossed the magazine aside.

" But he has Annie's brogue," she laughed. " There is something very earnest about him, though."

" Too earnest,"¹- growled Uncle George. " He kept looking at you all the time. For a minute there I wasn't going to hire him."

"Why, uncle!"

" Yes, I know. But his eyes were a little too ardent, my dear."

Marion walked over and patted the old man on the cheek.

" You silly old goose," she said. " Were you thinking that I might fall in love with a plumber?"

" Not that," Uncle George replied. " But what would stop him from falling in love with you?"

"Why, uncle, you're too absurd!"

The old man smiled.

" Well, I can't blame him for not taking his eyes off you," he said. " You're very beautiful, my child. The man who gets you will be lucky."

" Well, no man is going to get me," Marion said, laying her cheek against his, " while I have you. And, anyway, uncle, I'm a man-hater. Really, I am. You know that. A terrible, dreadful man-hater."

" Yes," said Uncle George, " like the rest of you women, until the right man comes along. And then—"

" And then?" Marion said, her eyes sparkling.

" It's the same old story," Uncle George sighed, shaking his head. " Love will find a way, my dear. And love doesn't recognize man-haters, nor woman-haters, either, for that matter. Love just takes both of them and gobbles them up. Yes, that's what love does, my dear, gobbles them up."

Uncle George shook his head knowingly. He had been in love once, and as he put it modestly himself, he knew all about the love game from A to Z, and then back again. But Marion, simple, young, and inexperienced, knew hardly anything, in fact nothing at all.

So she began to wonder now over what Uncle George had said. Some day, perhaps, she would meet a Prince Charming, and Prince Charming he would have to be. Tall, straight, and handsome, with attractive gray eyes like—she paused, and nodded her little head; yes, eyes like " Annie's brother" had. But of course Prince Charming would not be a plumber, nor an extra man, nor anything like that. He would have brains, talent, and above everything else, culture. That was it, a cultured Prince Charming, or none at all.

Now, then, Craig Manning could appropriately be called a Prince Charming. That is, one like Marion pictured. For he was tall, straight, and handsome, and he had attractive gray eyes just like Annie's brother had; also brains, talent, yes, and above everything else, culture.

Yet Marion had noticed none of these, with perhaps the exception of the eyes. Which speaks well for Mr. Manning's disguise, and the way he played his part. But just the same it did occur to Marion that Annie's brother was rather prepossessing. That is, prepossessing for a man who had done nothing but fix pipes all his life.

And the man who was supposed to be a pipe-fixer had just reached the kitchen, where Annie anxiously awaited him.

" Jack," she said eagerly, " did the old mon take yez?"

" He did," replied Mr. Manning. " I'm to call in the morning at ten o'clock, and then start for Summerville."

Annie clapped her hands in delight.

" Oh, Jack!" she cried. " That's foine. For I'm going up with the family the next day. Think of it, Jack! Do yez hear me, lad? We'll have a grand time. The roads are so beautiful to walk on at night." Annie sighed, and shook her head. " So beautiful, Jack," she went on. " And the moon, Jack! Oh, 'tis glorious, it 'tis."

Mr. Manning looked at her, dismayed. He had not counted on this unexpected development. And through his disturbed mind ran a picture of Annie persecuting him with her attentions.

" I'll have to be going," he said. He had become a little stern, and Annie looked at him, surprised.

" I'll see you to the gate," she said.

" The moon's out to-night," she sighed, as she opened the gate. " But it's nothing, Jack, like the moon in Summerville."

She was looking up into his face with (pleading eyes. Her elbow was nudging his.

" I'll have to be going," Mr. Manning 'said, somewhat distracted. " Good night, Annie."

" Good night, Jack. Don't forget about the moon and the roads in Summerville."

" No," Mr. Manning replied. " I have a special reason for keeping both in mind."

Mr. Manning's reason was Marion. But Annie misconstruing it, naturally attributed it to herself, and with a beating heart she closed the gate and went inside.

Mr. Manning indulged in some silent profanity when he reached the street.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT UNCLE GEORGE PLANNED.

'"THERE are just a few words to be said about the Van Burens. Marion was the only child of Colonel and Mrs. Van Buren, both of whom died when Marion was a little girl. Her father left as executor of the estate his brother, Uncle George Van Buren, who reared Marion according to his own old-fashioned ideas. He saw to it that she was well educated, spent a year touring Europe with her, and then brought her back to live in the old town-house her father and mother had occupied.

Since he had assumed her guardianship, Uncle George had practically held Marion in confinement. She never went to dances, had no parties, few girl friends, and no gentlemen callers at all. The theater was her one big diversion, but it was always Uncle George who accompanied her. He was, you understand, very old-fashioned in his ideas. And yet, his only reason for not bringing Marion out more, was that, she was too young.

But now Uncle George was beginning to change his ideas. And the only reason for this was that Marion was getting older, approaching the age of eighteen, when a girl can most properly be called a young lady. Now it was. that Uncle George began planning for her future. Of course he had in a way been planning for it all along.

But what he wanted to do most, now, was to build or buy for Marion a large house. It was to be something pretentious. With such a home she could entertain her friends; give week-end parties and dances, and then perhaps she would meet the right man and marry. That was Uncle George's big hope—that she would marry, and marry happily.

The place in Summerville which Marion's father had bought years and years ago was small, and altogether, according to Uncle George's future ideas, too quiet. It was nothing more than a fair-sized house, with something like nine or ten rooms, and a carriage drive leading up to it, which gave it somewhat the appearance of the larger and more imposing dwellings in the vicinity. There was also to the rear a small wooden house, which was occupied by the gardener and the extra man.

Imagine a few flower-beds, and a stone wall behind the gardener's house, and you have a fair picture of what the place looked like. You will now understand that Uncle George was slowly crawling out of his shell.

intent upon an elaborate plan, centered around what Marion's future should be. And he had not divulged this plan to Marion, because he was waiting for her eighteenth birthday, which was only a few months off, when he hoped to hand her the deed to this dream-house he pictured, or to the site on which it would be erected.

Let us now turn to Mr. Craig Manning. It was the following morning, and when he awakened the events of the night before flashed through his mind. When he thought of the way he had sneaked up the back stairway, like a burglar in the night, he threw back his head and roared.

He had been most fortunate in getting in before Thomas, who had returned about a half-hour later to find Mr. Manning dressed in a lounging gown, smoking a cigar in the library. And of course Mr. Manning thought of Annie. More cause for mirth, unrestrained mirth. But when he pictured Marion, his eyes softened, and a whimsical smile passed over his face.

He was still smiling when Thomas entered the room to announce breakfast.

" Oh, by the way, Thomas," Craig said, " I'm leaving town this morning."

" Indeed, sir!" It was evident the butler was surprised.

" I don't know just how long I'll be gone," Mr. Manning went on, as his eyes studied the ceiling; " but expect a phone call from me to-night, or—let me see—if not to-night, to-morrow, or the next day."

" To-morrow or the next day? Very good, sir. And shall I pack your things now, sir?"

" No, Thomas. I'm not taking anything with me. This is an impromptu visit."

" Yes, sir," Thomas said, wondering what that could be. " Very good, sir." And wheeling, he left the room.

Shortly afterward Mr. Manning entered the breakfast-room dressed in Thomas's suit and the other togs. Thomas looked at him, and then gasped.

"Mr. Manning, sir!" he exclaimed. " You—you—"

" I what, Thomas?" Craig asked, smiling.

" You—you—that is—that is—that suit becomes you very well, sir."

" Oh, come now," Craig laughed. " You know very well that it doesn't. However, I can't blame you for being surprised. You didn't know that I had it on last night, but I knew you would see it on me this morning. So it's just as well I come out in the open. The fact is, Thomas, I'm doing a little masquerading. Perhaps some day soon I shall tell you what it's about. But in the mean time I want you to follow instructions."

" Yes, sir," Thomas mumbled.

" All right, then. I'll phone to you as I said, to-night, to-morrow, or the next day. And if I can't phone I'll send you a wire. Pay attention to all my personal mail, and send it readdressed to me in the name of Jack Fogarty. You'd better make that John Fogarty."

" John Fogarty, sir? Yes, sir." Thomas was beginning to see double. He was like a man who has been trying to figure out a Chinese puzzle for six hours. " And the address, sir?" he asked.

"The address?" Mr. Manning looked at the butler and smiled. " Well, the fact is, Thomas, I just don't know the address myself, yet. I think the name of the town is Summerville. That could be New York, or perhaps Texas. That's why I said I don't just know when I'll be able to communicate with you. I have to reach the place first, you see."

"Yes, sir."

" You understand, then?"

" Oh, perfectly, sir." Good butlers are very often good liars.

" All right, then. Be a good fellow while I'm away, and just run things in the usual manner. If anybody should telephone or call to see me, just say I'm out of town for a few days."

" Yes, sir."

" And Thomas?"

" Sir."

Mr. Manning turned and looked squarely at the butler.

" Do you happen to know anything about Irish servant girls?"

" Why, why no, sir," Thomas stammered. Once again we feel it our duty to say that good butlers are very often good liars.

"Well, that's too bad," Mr. Manning said. " I thought perhaps you could help me, Thomas."

The butler suddenly shook his head.

" Well, on second thought, sir, perhaps I can."

Mr. Manning tapped his fingers on the arm of his chair.

" Suppose, then," he said slowly, " that an Irish servant girl insisted on flirting with you. What would you do, Thomas?"

"Why, Mr. Manning, sir!"

" That is, if you were I, Thomas," Mr. Manning went on, in apologetic tones. " What would you do then?"

" I don't know, sir. But—but on second thought, sir, I," Thomas paused, and scratched his head. He was a very sanctimonious butler, one who never intruded himself, or tried in the least to be forward. But now he saw that the master was in a jovial mood, so he decided to crack his first joke. " Well, sir," he went on, " it all depends. If she might be homely, I'd tell her, sir, to behave herself. But on the other hand, sir, if she was pretty, I'd—well, you know what I mean, sir. Now, does that help you any?"

" It cheers me a lot," Craig said, laughing. " I believe I shall follow your advice."

" Which way, sir?"

" Well, she's pretty, Thomas."

" Yes, sir. I understand, sir." Thomas was one of those butlers who could look very wise.

" But you don't understand, Thomas. The fact is, if occasion demands it, I'm going to tell her to behave herself."

" Oh, yes, sir. I see, sir. It's all a puzzle to me, sir. But beggin' your pardon, I'll take the liberty to say that I'm sure you're right, sir."

And with his nose in the air, Thomas started for the kitchen.

CHAPTER V.

THE DREAMS OF THOSE DOWN-STAIRS.

Y?THEN the basement bell rang around ten o'clock that morning, Annie ran to a mirror, gave a touch to her hair, and then started on a run for the door. She knew well who had sounded the bell, and it was a blushing, happy girl who opened the door.

" Jack," she said. " Good marnin'. Hurry, now, will yez? I have the grandest piece of apple-pie all waitin'."

" Not for me." Mr. Manning was becoming alarmed. " Pie doesn't agree with me in the morning, Annie."

" Well, come 'long, anyway," Annie said. " I have something to tell yez."

" What is it?" Craig asked, when they reached the kitchen.

" Ah, and shure 'tis grand," Annie said, feasting her eyes on him. " I had a wonderful dream last night, lad."

Mr. Manning remembered Thomas's advice. " Annie," he said sharply, " refrain from calling me lad."

" Do what?" Annie asked stupidly.

" Don't call me lad—lad—lad. I do not like it."

" And shure yez are a spunky divil," Annie laughed. " Where do yez learn all those funny words, Jack?"

"Plow about that leak in the pipe?" Craig asked. He was hoping to get Annie's mind off him for a while.

" Shure, and niverr mind the pipe," Annie exploded. " Will yez wait now and listen to the grand thing I have to tell yez."

"All right," Craig said. "Hurry. I have to go up-stairs."

" Well, I had a dream, Jack. I thought—I thought—I thought—"

" That's enough," Mr. Manning said, as he started for the door. " Tell me some other time."

" No such thing," Annie declared. " You must hear this, Jack. 'Tis wonderful, so it is."

Mr. Manning looked at her in despair.

" Annie," he said soberly, " how much will you take to go away by yourself for about four weeks? Go to Europe, or South America, or any place."

" Oh, you divil," Annie laughed, shaking a finger at him. " But yez are the lad that can throw the blarney. Stop kidding me, Jack, and let me tell the dream now, will yez?"

Mr. Manning sank into a chair. What was the use? he thought.

" All right," he said. " What about this dream?"

" Well, I dreamed we were in Summeryille," Annie began. " And you know those roads and the moon I spoke of, Jack? Well, we wuz walking down one of those roads, and it was dark and glorious. The moon wuz out, and it was a grand night, and—"

" That's enough," Mr. Manning said, rising. " Make a scenario out of it, and send it to some moving-picture company. I must be going up to see the old gentleman, Annie."

And darting through the kitchen door, Mr. Manning started up the stairs, leaving Annie speechless and very much annoyed.

" Was ever a man so persecuted?" he muttered, as he reached the first floor. And then he drew back. " Good morning," he said.

He stood looking at Marion, who had come out of a side room.

" Good morning," she replied graciously. " Uncle is up-stairs waiting for you." And she nodded for Craig to follow her.

Uncle George was in better spirits than Craig had found him the night before. He handed over the train ticket, and generously advanced part of the wages, which Mr. Manning accepted with an ironical inward smile. He then gave full instructions how to get there, and what to do when he arrived.

And it was now for the first time that Craig learned the family name, for Uncle George told him to ask for the Van Buren place. - You may think it strange that he did not quiz Annie about the family name the night before. But consider the complications he had got himself into, and you can readily understand how upset his mind was. And now he did not know whether Van Buren was Marion's last name, for it could be Uncle George's, and perhaps he was an uncle on her mother's side.

So, Mr. Manning, possessed with the spirit of adventure now, and the desire to be near the girl of his dreams, decided to see the game through. He would surely learn more about her in time.

" You'll find old Hiram on the place," Uncle George said. " He's the caretaker and gardener. Tell him to expect us tomorrow."

" Yis, sor," Mr. Manning said, not forgetting his brogue. He glanced at Marion. She was sitting in a chair with her back toward him, reading a book. " Is there anything else, sor?" he asked.

" Nothing," Uncle George said. " You may go."

In the lower hall Mr. Manning, was suddenly confronted by a rather pretty, dark-eyed girl.

" Oh," she exclaimed, " you are Jack?"

Mr. Manning drew back, surprised.

" I am Lucille," she said. " Ze maid, *monsieur."*

" Oh, yes," Tvjr. Manning said, trying to smile. He might have known, he thought, that the Van Burens kept more than one servant. " But how did you know my name?" he asked pleasantly.

" It ees secret," Lucille said, shaking her dark curls, and looking at him coquettishly.

" Oh, yes," Craig said, looking around to see if there were any more female servants ready to pounce on him.

" But it ees not nice to keep secret," Lucille said. *" So,* I will tell you. An-nie, your seester, she tell me las' night that you come to work as extra man. I wanna jus' say what you call hello."

" Oh, that was it?" Craig said, shaking his head. " Well, that's very nice of you." He was forgetting his brogue, but Lucille didn't notice it.

" You look more lak Frenchman than Irishman;" Lucille laughed. " But you no look lak either. You look lak American."

" So they tell me," Mr. Manning replied. He heard a heavy step behind him, and turned. A thick-set flunky, not unlike Thomas, was passing up the stairs, and happening to glance at Craig, he tilted his chin a bit higher.

" Who is that?" Craig asked.

Lucille giggled, and pinched Mr. Manning's arm.

" Oh, he Watkins, the butler," she said. " He vera nice, but nevaire talks to ze hired man."

" No?" Craig's face was a blank.

" No, nevaire, *monsieur.* Watkins he vera nice."

" Yes, I'm sure he is," Mr. Manning said. The whole affair was developing into a series of humorous situations.

" Yes, he vera nice," Lucille went on. " He laks me, oh, vera much. But," Lucille shrugged her shoulders, "I no lak him. Wance he try to take me walking in ze moonlight up in Summerville, but I no lak to go. Perhaps you may go walking in moonlight up Summerville? Perhaps, eh, maybe?"

" You'll have to excuse me," Mr. Manning said suddenly. He didn't like that talk about the moonlight and Summerville. " I must catch a train," he explained hurriedly. " Good-by."

He started toward the stairway.

" Ze roads up zere are beautiful," Lucille called after him. "And ze moonlight! Ah, M. Jack—"

But Mr. Manning was racing down the back stairs.

" Great grief," he muttered, as he landed at the bottom, " between the moonlight, those roads, and a couple of girls, I can see where I'll have my hands full." And he. dashed madly into the kitchen and snatched up his hat.

" Jack!" Annie cried. "Jack! What's the matter, lad?

" I have to run for that train," Mr. Manning panted, as he started for the door.

" But I want to tell yez about that dream," Annie shouted. " Come here, Jack, and let me finish the dream."

"Keep on dreaming," Mr. Manning called back. " But try to wake up soon, Annie."

And he darted through the door and made his escape. In front of the house he stopped, and a broad grin passed over his face. He had exactly two hours and ten minutes to get the Summerville local.

CHAPTER VI.

SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR.

IT was about six o'clock that night when Mr. Manning stepped off the train at Summerville. He engaged a hack to take him to the Van Buren place, which was about a mile from the station. Hiram, the old gardener, was on the lookout for him, having received that morning a letter from Uncle George, stating that a new man, Annie's brother, would arrive that afternoon.

Hiram appeared to be a good-natured old fellow, and right from the start he took a fancy to Craig. Said he was glad to meet Annie's brother; spoke of what a fine, hard-working girl Annie was; and how delighted she would be to have her brother so near to her. That last remark made Mr. Manning smile. He quite agreed with old Hiram that Annie would be just tickled to death, as the saying goes.

He learned from Hiram, who was rather talkative, a few facts about the Van Buren family, which have already been recorded, about Uncle George being her guardian, who her mother and father were, and how Uncle George was related to her.

He learned too, upon quizzing Hiram, that there was a drug-store in the village, and on the pretext of going for some toilet articles, he set out later that night to get stamps and writing material with which to send Thomas a letter. Thomas would receive it the next day, which would be time enough. The letter was brief, and contained instructions to send mail readdressed in care of Van Buren.

It was not until the next day that Craig's troubles and worries started all over again. Uncle George and Marion, commonly referred to as " the family," arrived on the five o'clock train. But Watkins, Lucille, and Annie had come up on an earlier train, and during the afternoon, Craig was running all over the place, dodging behind trees and big stones, to hide from Annie, who was bent on finishing that dream of hers.

He was obliged, however, to face Annie at seven o'clock, when he and Hiram were called to the kitchen for dinner. Hiram shook his old gray head, and kicked his heels together. ,

" Golly," he chirped, " that thar bell a-ringin' fer dinner sounds good ter me, Jack. I been eatin' canned food, and bacon and eggs all winter. 'Tain't always good, neither. But that sister of yourn, she's a mighty good cook. Come 'long, thar."

" I'm not hungry," Mr. Manning said. He'd rather starve than face Annie.

" Shucks," Hiram replied. " You ain't got no appetite? Too bad. Means that thar feller Watkins will get so much more."

" But couldn't you sneak something out to me?" Craig suggested, struck by a brilliant idea. " That's it, Hiram. Try to get something, if only a leg of chicken and a piece of pie."

" Thought yer warn't hungry," Hiram said.

" Well, I'm not," Craig lied. As a matter of fact he was ravenous. The country air, and that running, he had done from Annie, had created a ferocious appetite.

" Yer ain't got a bottle of booze?" Hiram asked suspicious!}'. " Maybe that's why yer don't want to come in."

Craig laughed.

" No," he said, " I have no liquor." And then he saw a way out. " The fact is, Hiram, I don't like Watkins. You understand?" He had gained the impression that Hiram didn't like him himself. " So," he went on, " I don't care to sit at the table. Not the first night, anyway."

" Oh, that's it," Hiram said. " Wall, 111 see what I kin dew." And he started for the house. I

" And where's Jack?" Annie demanded, as Hiram stepped into the kitchen.

" Oh, he ain't hungry," Hiram said. " Give me some food, and I'll carry it out to him, Annie."

" No such thing," Annie declared. " Go right out and bring the divil in."

" But he won't come," Hiram insisted.

" Then go say I'll be after him." And Hiram left to carry the cheerful news.

" You'd better come in," he said to Craig. " Or Annie says she'll be a coming after yer."

" Yes, I think I'd better," Mr. Manning said. He had got to know Annie by this time. " Lead the way, Hiram."

It was a rather solemn meal, punctuated by occasional musical sounds coming from Hiram's direction while he was eating his soup. Watkins was one of those deliberate eaters, being very careful to raise his fork just so, place it just so, and take it up again just so. He broke his bread carefully, and without making any sound, and appeared altogether to Craig to be suffering from too much restraint.

Craig, being hungry, ate heartily, and his excellent table manners were observed and inwardly commended by the dignified Watkins, who thought that Annie's brother might have been a butler once. Lucille chatted incessantly, looking at Craig most of the time, and passing him the sugar, the salt, the pepper, or something else. She was certainly trying to wait on him, all of which was observed by Annie, who wasn't particularly pleased.

" That's great soup thar, Annie," Hiram said, running the back of his hand over his faded gray mustache. " Yer shore kin make soup, Annie. Yes, sir."

"And what do yez think of it, Jack?" she asked.

" Excellent," Mr. Manning replied.

" And shure didn't I tell yez I was a good cook," she said, giving him a meaning glance. " Now take Lucille there. She knows how to be a maid, but for the love of her she couldn't bake an apple." Annie was trying to tear down any impression that Jack " might have made.

" So," Lucille said, shaking her head, and looking at Craig with soulful eyes. " But I know how to make zat won-derful love."

" I say," Watkins exclaimed. " Miqd yourself, Lucille, me girl. And conduct yourself with proper decorum."

Craig had to smile. He was getting a real insight into the ways of domestics.

" Shpeaking of love," said Annie, " have yez ever bin in love, Watkins?"

The flunky's nose pointed ceilingward.

" Hi should say not," he said.

" No wonder," said Annie.

" Hi beg your pawdon," Watkins exclaimed indignantly.

" Oh, shure, that's all right," Annie replied. " I know if you've niver bin in love, yez can't help it." She looked shyly at Mr. Manning, who was on to her.

" I wuz in love wunst," Hiram drawled.

"You?" said Annie. "What the divil would yez be doin' in love?"

" Just the same I wuz, wunst," Hiram went on. " Gosh, but she wuz a pretty gal! Her name wuz Sadie Crabtree, and she lived

over the next town with her paw and her maw."

"And what happened to her?" Annie asked, wishing to keep the love topic aflame. Hiram ran the back of his hand across his mouth.

" Wall," he said, in his nasal tones, " funny how some folks is lucky in love, and others ain't. I'm one of them fellers what lost out. Yes, sir," somewhat heroically, " she wuz mine, she wuz, until that traveling man comes along and cuts me out. Gosh, but if I had that feller here now, I'd—" Hiram rose, and began making wide circles with his arms.

" Sit down," Annie ordered.

" Want to hear how I met Sadie?" Hiram asked.

" Certainly," Craig said, on the verge of convulsions.

" Wall," Hiram began, " her name wuz Sadie Crabtree, and she lived over yonder with her paw and her maw. One day, her paw, who wuz a plumber—"

" A plumber?" Mr. Manning exclaimed. His hands were gripping the end of the table.

" An' a good plumber, too," Hiram declared emphatically. " Though he fixed a pipe in my paw's house wunst, what never healed up. Yes, sir. Didn't get paid fer it, neither. Now, thar's a funny thing 'bout that thar pipe in my paw's house. It—"

There was a crash, and Annie stood looking down at a plate she had dropped.

" Will yez shut up, Hiram?" she shouted. " Yez make me narvous, yez do."

" So," Lucille said teasmgly. " Butter fingers, Annie."

" Hold your tongue," Annie ordered.

Watkins rapped on the table for order.

" Let us dispense with rough language," he admonished. " 'Iram, me good fellow, sit down and calm yourself."

Craig was having the time of his life.

" Wall," Hiram drawled, " if you ain't got no sympathy fer a feller what's been in love, there ain't no use in listen' to that thar pipe story."

" No," said Annie. " We're not interested in pipe stories. Yez tried to tell us that same story last year, yez did, and I broke a pitcher."

Craig was glad when the meal was over. He saw that both Lucille and Annie were rather skilful in the way they had tried to keep the conversation revolving around love, and he knew well that it was done for his especial benefit. Watkins made a ceremonious exit, and Annie was trying her best to convince Lucille that the furnishings were much nicer up-stairs. She was figuring on having the kitchen all to herself and " Jack." But Lucille couldn't see Annie's kindness at all, and she sat down and rolled her eyes at Craig.

" Well," Craig said, " come along, Hiram. Let's go out for a smoke."

" Shore," Hiram said. " Calculate maybe I kin finish that thar pipe story."

" Leave Jack here," Annie said. And then she added, with a quick wink: " I have a letter from our Uncle Pat. Yez 'll be glad to hear some good news, Jack."

Craig looked at her and smiled. This Irish girl, he thought, was no fool. But he could be just as cunning.

" I read that letter to-day," he said. " I don't care to read it again."

And he followed Hiram down the kitchen steps, and onto the walk.

As he slowly went toward the gardener's house with his arm carelessly around old Hiram's shoulder, he deliberated what he should do. Why stay any longer, he reasoned, and continue in a role that was farcical from tire start, and was becoming worse and worse? He now had, thanks to Hiram, the very information he had wanted in the beginning. Why not plan then to meet Marion in some way socially, and let the future take care of itself? And if he did meet her, it was most unlikely that she would recognize him, other than to see a striking resemblance, if she noticed any at all. How could she associate the two characters? So he said:

" Hiram, have the Van Burens no friends who visit them?"

The old gardener shook his head.

" Seldom," he replied. " Seldom. Never any young folks. Uncle George is peculiar. Keeps that poor girl tied up like a bird in a cage."

" So, then, no young men call?" Craig asked eagerly.

" Jumpin' tigers, no," Hiram exclaimed. " Wunst in a while a girl friend or two come up on a visit. But that's all."

And no men friends at all! This was joyous news. But then if Uncle George kept her tied up like a bird in a cage, what chance had any one to meet her socially? So, Craig thought, the only thing to do then, was to stay a while longer. He was at last near to her. And in the. mean time he would try to think of some way of being introduced into the house as Mr. Craig Manning. But for the present he was baffled.

About ten minutes later he managed to slip away from Hiram, who had dozed off in a chair. He started down the walk toward the other house, thinking of a pretty nose and a small, shell-like ear. Once or twice he glanced up at the moon.

Annie was right, he thought; it was beautiful. And how much more beautiful it would have been, were he walking under it, arm in arm, with the girl they called Marion.

He suddenly drew into some shrubbery as he saw a figure approaching. The figure passed by him, and he recognized Lucille. She was heading straight for the gardener's house, and he smiled. He knew what was taking her there. He was about to step out on the walk again, when he heard some one else coming, and this time he saw Annie. As the cat chases the mouse, so was Annie chasing Lucille.

Making a detour, Craig reached the side of the front house, and paused. On the porch he saw standing a lone figure. It was Marion. Her head was tilted back, and she was gazing at the moon. Her two hands were clasped over her bosom. What a picture she made! Strikingly beautiful. Perhaps she was dreaming of love, the same as he had been dreaming of it for the past few days. He wondered.

What a desire he had to go up and speak to her. But what would she think? And what would she say? He smiled grimly as he thought of what he was supposed to be, an extra man. No, there was nothing left for him to do but go back to Hiram's house and be bored and pestered by Annie and Lucille. Just for a second did he pause to take one last look at that girlish figure, one last lingering look. For he was so near, and yet so far.

CHAPTER VII.

ME. MANNING RECEIVES A SURPRISE.

T T is well to say here that Mr. Manning worked hard. Don't think for a moment that all he did was to lolkaround and duck out of sight every time he saw Annie and Lucille coming. He was given a pair of overalls by Hiram, who was inclined to be a little bossy with the " extra man," which of course, amused Craig very much. Craig learned how to push a wheelbarrow with such skill that he would have astonished some of his society friends. And he enjoyed it; enjoyed it perhaps, because he was near to Marion.

It was the morning of the third day that he saw Marion picking flowers from one of the beds behind the big house. He was standing in the doorway of Hiram's cottage, smoking a pipe, and taking a respite from some laborious work Hiram had inflicted on him. For a minute or so he stood watching Marion, and then leisurely he started toward the flower bed, as though drawn by some irresistible power.

As he came within a foot of her, she glanced up. For the first time now she really noticed what a handsome fellow he was, as he stood there, hat in hand, with the sun beating down on his tanned face. Those other times it had only been a casual glance, but now she studied him more closely. What a pity, she thought, that he was only an extra man!

" The flowers are very pretty," he said. The words came in his usual tone of voice, and she noticed it. He had unconsciously forgotten his brogue; forgotten too, to act in an awkward manner. It puzzled her.

" They are pretty," she agreed. " I'm picking them for uncle."

Neither of them noticed Annie, who was standing in the kitchen doorway, glaring savagely, and muttering unintelligible words under her breath. Nor did they see Lucille, who was peeking out of the second-story window, stamping her little foot.

" Here's one for you," Marion said graciously. And she handed him a rose.

" Oh, thank you," he said. He took the flower, and looked at it.

The tender thoughts budding in his mind were rudely interrupted by the appearance of Uncle George, who came rushing toward them.

" Marion," he said angrily, " I want to see you. Right away, do you hear?"

Marion arose, and obediently followed him into the house. Craig felt that Uncle George had meant that to be a rebuff. So did Annie, and it elated her. Lucille giggled, and kicked her heels together. Marion felt rather mortified. And Craig, wondering whether she had given that flower just to be nice, or whether there was another meaning to it, dropped it into his pocket, and retraced his steps.

" Now, my child," Uncle George said, after they had entered the house, " you must not be too friendly with that Jack."

"Why, uncle!" Marion exclaimed. "I did nothing."

" You gave him a flower. I saw you do it."

" But what is there to that, uncle? I was picking some for you when he came along, and I—I gave him one."

Uncle George put his arms around her.

" There, there," he said. " But you must remember that he is only the extra man. The Van Burens are not snobs, my dear, and you can be democratic. But—well, the fact is, Marion, I don't just like the way that fellow looks at you. His eyes, as I told you once before, are too ardent. And don't you see, my dear, that he should not in the least be encouraged?"

Had Uncle George not spoken of it, Marion would not have remembered the expression in Craig's eyes. But now she did, and she wondered why he had looked that way.

" Very well, uncle," she said. " I'll remember."

And was Craig taunted about that little incident? He was. When Annie got him alone, she said: " Now, will yez be good, and shtop makin' eyes at Miss Marion? 'Tis the loikes of yez that should be thinking of other things. And if yez kape it up," she bellowed, " I'll tell the old mon yez are not me brother at all." Craig didn't mind the threat, but he remained discreetly quiet.

And Lucille, after a futile attempt that night to induce him to walk in the moonlight, shook her head and exclaimed: " So, you lak some wan you can nevaire have. Ah, foolish, *monsieur*. You make me seeck."

The next morning Craig met Marion' in front of the house as she was returning from the village, where she had called at the post office for mail.

" I have a letter for you," she said. She handed it to him and hurried into the house. He was more than ever convinced now that Uncle George had given her special orders not to prolong a conversation with the hired man.

Craig looked at the letter, and laughed. It was addressed in Thomas's minute handwriting, to Mr. John Fogarty. Craig waited until he was alone in the gardener's house before he opened it. Inside was another envelope addressed to Mr. Craig Manning. And when he finished reading the letter this envelope contained, an expression of astonishment passed over his face. Then suddenly, he threw back his head and laughed.

" Oh," he cried aloud, " this is too much. It's a scream—a scream!"

Hiram suddenly appeared in the doorway.

" Hey, you, Jack," he drawled. " What yer laughing at? You ain't been drinkin', Jack, hev ye?"

Mr. Manning turned, and immediately sobered.

" Hiram," he said loftily, " for some reason or other you insist on thinking that I have something in common with alcohol. You insinuated as much the other night. Permit me to inform you, then, that such is not the case. I was merely giving way to an uncontrollable mirth. Something that would be very hard for you to comprehend."

And trying to keep a straight face, Craig swaggered out of the house.

Hiram looked after him, and scratched his head.

" Wall, I'll be switched," he said. " That

feller talks like an Irishman one day, and a millionaire the next."

That night after dinner, Craig cleverly escaped from Lucille and Annie, who had not given up all hope of that walk in the moonlight. He stopped off at the gardener's house to get his pipe and pouch, and then started up the front road to take a moonlight walk by himself. Every time he thought of the letter he had received that day, he threw back his head and laughed. Something had happened. To him, the biggest joke of a lifetime.

A half hour later he turned around to come back, and as he approached the house, he saw again that lone figure standing on the porch. He didn't hesitate now, and turn away. But instead he walked boldly over to the side of the house.

" Good evening," he said. He was very near to the porch now.

Marion drew back, startled.

" Oh," she gasped. " Is it you? You frightened me."

" I am sorry," he replied.

Straining her eyes, she tried to study his face to get the expression that was there. For once again she noticed that he did not speak with a brogue; noticed, too, that his voice was very deep and melodious. And like the day before she was puzzled; only more so now.

She thought of Uncle George's advice. And yet, she could see no harm in exchanging a few pleasant words with the hired man. He certainly was different from most hired men, in fact, any she had seen. And he was so polite. Yes, very polite. And she suddenly remembered that that was just the way her Prince Charming would have to be.

" It's a nice night, don't you think?" she asked.

He came very close to the porch rail, and being tall, was able to rest his elbows on the top of it from where he stood. He was facing her now, and from the light of the moon, she could see that his eyes were sparkling with that same expression she had noticed before.

" I said, don't you think it's a nice night?" She was somewhat embarrassed.

" Glorious," he said. And his voice vibrated in a way that gave her—yes, that gave her the first thrill she had ever known in her life.

And then, becoming bolder, he raised nimself up, and swung a leg carelessly over the porch rail.

" Oh," she whispered, " you mustn't do that. Uncle George might come out, and he wouldn't like it."

And no sooner had she said this than Uncle George did come out. He had heard voices, and was on one of his investigating tours.

" What?" he thundered. " What's this? How dare you come up, and persist in your attentions to my niece?"

Marion was frightened. As she would have put it herself: " Terribly, dreadfully scared." But Craig was cool, and while he regretted Uncle George's intrusion, because it had interrupted what promised to be a pleasant tete-a-tete, yet he did not worry.

" Do you hear me?" Uncle George stormed. " I asked you a question."

" I heard you," Craig replied, " the first time."

" And it will be the last time," Uncle George declared. " You're discharged. There are no trains going out to-night. But leave in the morning."

" Oh, uncle!" Marion said feebly.

" And as I am discharging you," Uncle George went on, stepping back into the doorway, and switching on an electric light overhead, "I'll pay you your month's wages." He had taken some money out of his pocket, and whipped off a twenty-dollar bill. " The balance of forty dollars," he said, walking over and thrusting the bill into Craig's hand. " And now, Marion, we'll go inside."

Craig looked after them, and then at the money in his hand. Very slowly he shoved it into his pocket. Then smiling, he vaulted over the porch railing, and started in the direction of the gardener's house.

Inside, Uncle George gave Marion a severe reprimand. And while she tried to convince him that everything had been perfectly harmless, yet she could not get him in a good humor, and she felt dreadfully put out. When some ten minutes later she was alone at her window gazing up at the

moon, she wondered if the Prince Charming she hoped to meet some day would have a beautiful, deep voice like " Annie's brother " had.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANNIE STILL HOPES.

CRAIG was up early the next morning, and after leaving the gardener's house he went straight to the kitchen. Annie was alone, and she greeted him cordially. She had not given up all hope as yet, you understand.

" Jack," she said, " how's the bye this marnin'?"

Mr. Manning sat down and looked at her with an expression he might have bestowed on a two-year-old child.

" Annie," he said, " I'm leaving this morning."

"What? What, Jack?" Annie grasped the back of a chair to keep herself from falling.

" I'm leaving this morning, Annie." He decided to tell her the truth because he had an object in it. " The fact is," he went on, " Im discharged." Then he added gaily: " I guess it's back to the plumbing job for me."

" You're discharged? " Annie was utterly bewildered.

" Yes," he replied. And he told her how Uncle George had come out and found him talking to Marion.

Annie immediately changed her front.

" So, that's it?" she said, shaking her head. " Well, ye divil, it sarves yez right. 'Tis the loikes of yez trying to carry on with a Van Buren woman. Poof!" Annie tossed her head, and snapped her fingers. " After I takes yez in off the strate, puts the food in yure stummick, and gets yez a grand job, yez wouldn't notice me, would yez? Well, say I, yez got all yez desarved, yez did, ye divil, ye!"

Craig didn't know whether to laugh or become indignant. He smiled. It was so screamingly funny.

" Well, Annie," he said, " you just expressed there what I was going to tell you myself. Now, I think you'd better say nothing about our little make-believe to Mr. Van Buren."

" The saints presarve us," Annie suddenly exclaimed. " It's just come to me now. What 'll the old man think whin I'm supposed to have such a blackguard brother as you?"

Annie began moaning and tearing her hair.

" That's just the point," Craig said. " And yet how can you tell him that I'm not your brother without making a—a mess cut of it for yourself, Annie? Don't you see?"

" Oh, ye divil," Annie panted. " Had I known yez would have brought me to this, 'tis the gate that I would not have opened that night. And to think how I planned on other things! Oh, the grand walks we wuz to have m the moonlight. The—" She suddenly burst out crying.

Craig was really sorry for her.

" Annie," he said, " I'm sorry that—"

" And 'tis the loikes of yez that should be sorry," Annie roared. " What 'll I do now?"

" There is only one thing for you to do," said Craig. " If Mr. Van Buren should speak of me, don't deny that I am your brother. I have a reason for asking this."

" And how can I deny it?" Annie demanded.

" That's just it, Annie, you can't. He'll speak of me, of course, and 111 tell you what to do. Tell him that I'm the black sheep of your family."

Annie drew herself up haughtily.

" I'll give yez to understand," she said, " that we have no black sheep in our family. We raised nine byes, and they are all splendid men. Those, anyway, who are living."

" I'm sure they are," Craig said, trying to pacify her. " But tell him that, anyway. Don't you see, he will then sympathize with you. For you cannot be held responsible for what a brother might do. Tell him that I left for Kansas to visit-—" Craig suddenly banged his hands together, " to visit that Uncle Pat of yours, Annie."

" And shure Uncle Pat lives in Hoboken," Annie snapped. " What the divil—"

" Wait," Craig said. " It will do no harm for him to be transported to Kansas

for a while. Just say that, anyway. Understand? I want Mr. Van Buren to believe that I've started for some place a long way off."

Annie sat down, and folded her arms over her bosom.

" Will yez tell me," she asked, trying to control her temper, " what me Uncle Pat and Kansas has to do with this kittle of fish yez have got us both into?"

" I can't tell you now," Craig said. ." I want you to trust me, Annie. In a week's time I expect to return, and I'll—I'll have a present for you. It 'll be a surprise."

Annie look at him, astonished.

" Trust yez?" she gasped. " Yez 'll come back? And yez 'll have a present for me? Oh, Jack, darlin', don't tell me that yez are comin' back with a handsome ring?"

Craig almost tumbled off his chair.

" Wait," he said, holding up his hand to stop any advance Annie might make. " Wait, Annie. I'm not going to say any more. Understand? But I'll give you my word that I'll return in a week, and I'll bring you a present. That is, of course, if you tell Mr. Van Buren I've gone to Kansas, and don't deny that I am your brother. Now, is it a bargain?"

Annie nodded.

" Jack," she said, " yez are the funniest mon I ever met. But I kin see that yez have a rayson for not sayin' any more. It's a sacret yez want it to be. I believe yez, Jack, and I'll be waitin' fer yer whin yez come back, as true as when yez go away."

Mr. Manning was trying to keep a straight face. Annie, he saw, was trying to have it all her own way. But under the circumstances it was just as well.

" Very well," he said, and he started for the door. " A week from to-day I'll return."

" And will yez take me for a walk in the moonlight then?" Annie asked.

" I will," Mr. Manning said. And he hurried down the kitchen steps. On the way back to the gardener's house a broad grin passed over his face. Why say more?

He got his hat, and then bade Hiram good-by.

" What?" Hiram said. " Yer ain't going away, Jack, be yer?"

" Going to Kansas," Mr. Manning replied. It would be a good thing, he thought, to spread this around. " I got a letter yesterday, Hiram," he went on, " and there's a good job waiting for me out there."

" Dew tell," said Hiram. " What d' ye calculate to dew, Jack?"

Craig paused for a second, and then he leaned over and whispered in Hiram's ear: " Don't tell anybody, but I'm going to be a bacteriologist."

And after he had gone Hiram wondered whether that was some kind of a new name that folks gave to an extra man.

When he reached the front of the house, Craig saw Marion standing on the porch. He could not resist the temptation to say hello. He saw that she was about to answer, when Uncle George suddenly appeared, brandishing his cane.

" I don't want you hanging around here," Uncle George stormed. " Go, and never come back, do you hear?"

Craig looked up, and smiled.

" Oh, I'll come back," he said. And a; he started down the road, both Uncle George and Marion wondered what he had meant.

CHAPTER IX.

UNCLE GEORGE MEETS MR. MANNING.

IT was three o'clock that afternoon when Craig entered his apartment. He heard Thomas speaking over the telephone, and he hurried inside.

" Who is that?" he asked.

The butler turned, and almost dropped the phone.

" You scared me, sir," he said. " I didn't know—"

" Never mind," Craig interrupted. " Who's on the wire?"

" It's Mr. Jennings, sir. He wants to know if you're in."

" I'll speak to him," Craig said. And he took the phone. " Hello, Jennings," he said. "I've just this minute returned home. What? Yes, I was away on a little visit. Oh, I had a delightful time. Yes. Everybody was so nice. Especially one old gentleman. I received your letter, and I'd

better see you as soon as possible. At five this afternoon in your office? All. right. Fine. Good-by."

Craig turned to the butler.

" Thomas," he said, removing his coat, " I've had a wonderful time."

" Indeed, sir!"

" Very wonderful, Thomas. I've learned more about a certain class of people than I ever knew in my life. It's all been so interesting, Thomas."

" Very good, sir."

" Yes, Thomas. Very good, indeed. I'm glad to be away from one or two of them. And now you can get my bath ready."

" Yes, sir."

" And Thomas?" .

" Sir?"

" If you don't mind, I'll keep this suit of yours in fond rememberance of my experience."

" Certainly, sir." And Thomas left the room. His fondest hope just at present was that Mr. Manning would tell him what it was all about.

At five o'clock Craig sat opposite two men in a down-tow'n office building. After talking with them for about twenty minutes, he rose and said: " All right, then. I'll leave the arrangements to you, Jennings. And it's to be a week from to-day."

" A week from to-day," Jennings replied.

And a week from that day, about five o'clock in the afternoon, a big limousine stopped in front of the Van Buren house in Summerville, and Jennings, another man whose name was Winslow, and Mr. Craig Manning, stepped out of it. In a week's time Mr. Manning had grown a short, closely-cropped mustache, and when he removed his straw hat, Thomas, for instance, might have noticed that his hair, which he usually wore parted' on the side, was now combed straight back. He was wearing a tight-fitting, stylish blue serge suit, and dark tan shoes. On his arm hung a cane, and in his hand was a small flat package which he placed in his pocket.

" There's Mr. Van Buren on the porch," Mr. Winslow said. " Good afternoon, Mr. Van Buran. We're all here."

Uncle George rose, and walked to the porch steps.

" Welcome, gentlemen," he said. " Is Mr. Manning with you?"

Craig, with the others, had ascended the steps, and extending his hand, he said: " Mr. Van Buren, I'm very glad to know you."

Uncle George looked at him, and his brows puckered. He didn't recognize Craig, but he did notice a resemblance to " Annie's brother," who he had learned, was in Kansas.

" I'm glad to know you too, sir," he replied cordially. " Come up, gentlemen, and sit down."

" Now then," Winslow began, " Mr. Manning is willing to consider the proposition. When I got your instructions, Mr. Van Buren, that you were very anxious to purchase that piece of property in Grantville, I tried as you know, to reach Mr. Manning right away."

" Yes," Craig said, turning to Uncle George. " I was out of town. Had a most delightful visit." He paused, and smiled. " And then," he went on, " when I received a letter from Mr. Jennings, my real estate broker, that he had been approached by Mr. Winslow, your agent, who very easily found out that I was the owner of that property, and who happened to know Mr. Jennings, I hurried back from out of town."

" Well, then," Uncle George laughed. " I sincerely trust that we did not inconvenience you,'Mr. Manning."

" Oh, not at all," Craig said. " The fact is, I had to leave this place, anyway."

" Well, then, it's all right," Uncle George said. " You understand, Mr. Manning, that in looking around for a piece of property, I was delighted to find something that just suited me in a town so near Summerville. I was afraid at first that we wouldn't be able to get hold of you, but when I received Mr. Winslow's letter several days ago stating that he had had the pleasure of meeting you, and that you would come up to-day, I knew that we could get together. You say you will consider selling this property? What is your price?"

Uncle George turned suddenly, and looked at Craig. He had become very busi-

nesslike after having indulged in a lot of ingratiating words, and he was now ready to swing a deal.

Craig tapped his fingers on the edge of his chair.

" Mr. Van Buren," he said slowly, " may I ask what you want that property for? Mr. Winslow told me that he did not know himself."

Uncle George paused for a second. Then he said:

" I don't mind telling you. I have a niece, Mr. Manning, who will become eighteen years old in a few months. I want to present her with the deed to this property on her birthday."

Craig raised his eyebrows.

" But what will she do with the property?" he asked.

" I intend to build a house for her," Uncle George replied. " A big, roomy house, and this place that we're now occupying I'll very likely sell."

Craig sat back in his chair, and the flicker of a smile passed over his face. In that second he thought of a home he perhaps would build on the same site; and it would be for the same girl. But first he would have to find out whether she wanted him to build it for her.

" Mr. Van Buren," he said, " I told Mr. Winslow that I would consider selling the property. And I now tell you the same. The fact is, I may want to build on that property myself, but just at present I'm undecided. So I must ask you to give me a week's time to think it over."

" Very well," Uncle George said, shaking his head and laughing. " But I have a strange feeling, Mr. Manning, that my little girl will have a home there."

" I have the same feeling," Mr. Manning replied. And the other looked at him, perplexed.

" And now," said Uncle George, " our little business is over, and I'd be delighted to have you gentlemen stay to dinner."

Both Jennings and Winslow made excuses, saying they had to return to the city. But Mr. Manning said he would be " most delighted " to remain.

He called to his chauffeur, and told him to take Jennings and Winslow to the station. And after the machine had gone, Uncle George led the way into the house.

CHAPTER X.

PRINCE CHARMING.

" Y O U must meet my niece," Uncle George said, when they stepped inside. " She is a most adorable child. I call her child, Mr. Manning, but she is quite grown up. Ah, here she is now."

Marion was coming down the stairs. On the second step from the bottom she paused, and looked straight at Craig. In that second something passed over her, and she knew that there stood her Prince Charming. She did not recognize him, but was it not most natural that she should see a resemblance to " Annie's brother," who, she understood, had gone to Kansas? It was the eyes, she was sure, the same kind of eyes, and she waited for him to speak; waited breathlessly, wondering if he had a voice like " Annie's brother " had.

And as she came slowly forward, and bowed slightly to Uncle George's introduction, another thrill ran through her, for a deep melodious voice said: " How do you do, Miss Van Buren?"

Very slowly Marion raised her eyes to Craig's. Of course, it couldn't be Annie's brother. But what a resemblance! Only this man was well dressed, and had the appearance of being some one in the world. All she knew was that he had some business dealings with Uncle George. And he wore a small mustache, too. It was the only thing about him that she didn't particularly like.

Uncle George turned to Craig.

" If you will pardon me for a few minutes," he said, " I shall return. I must write a very important letter which I want sent in this evening's mail. Marion, my dear, you will no doubt find Mr. Manning as ardent a lover of the theater as yourself."

"Yes," said Craig. He looked at Marion and smiled. Blushing slightly, she led the way into the sitting-room.

There was an awkard pause, and then she said:

" Mr. Manning, you remind me of some one I know."

She sat down in a chair, and he sank carelessly into another, several feet away. His poise was admirable.

" Really?" he said. " Well, I suppose that's not so astonishing. You know one person will often remind you of another."

" Yes," she replied, " but—but the resemblance here is so striking that it's—it's really marvelous."

" Some one, perhaps, who lives in this town?" he asked guilelessly.

He saw that she was a trifle embarrassed. Imagine the situation for him.

" No," she replied. " Not exactly. But some one who was in this town—once."

" Oh, I see," Mr. Manning shook his head. " Some old friend who moved away, eh?"

" No," she said slowly. " But it doesn't matter. Though if you and here were in the same room talking, I couldn't tell your voices apart."

" Really!"

" And you know voices are not often alike, are they?"

" No, not very often. You might be surprised, then, when I say that you, too„ remind me of some one I know."

Marion bit her lip. It just occurred to her that he knew some girl, the only girl. Maybe (this thought was terrifying) he was married? But that couldn't be. Not her Prince Charming.

" Well, how do I remind you of this girl?" she asked.

" Oh, in every way," he replied. " You, too, talk like her. And she's just your height, and—had the same eyes. And," he bent slightly forward, " yes, and the same small, pretty nose, and the shell-like ear."

"Oh!" Marion didn't know whether to laugh or look serious.

" Well, you asked me how you reminded me of this girl," Craig said innocently, " and I am giving you an exact description."

" And does she really resemble me that much?"

" Every bit. As a matter of fact, I couldn't tell you apart."

"Mr. Manning!"

" Really, now, I'm not joking. Her first name is Marion. May I beg the liberty to ask yours?"

Marion? Why, that's my name, too."

" Really?" Craig was trying to keep from laughing. It's a pretty name," he added smiling.

Marion blushed.

" My first name is Craig," he said. " But do you know I've always thought that Jack is such a nice name."

" Jack?"

" Yes, Jack."

She was studying his face. What was there about him that made everything so mysterious? It was the room, she thought, becoming somewhat dark from the first evening shadows of twilight. And why did he look at her that way? She opened her eyes for a second and stared at him, Then suddenly she turned her head aside. But Craig had seen something in that look; enough to tell him what he had dared to hope.

• He rose, and very slowly crossed to her chair. He placed his hand in his pocket, and when he drew it out his fingers were closed.

" Miss Van Buren," he said.

" Yes." She did not trust herself to look up.

" Do you recognize this?" He opened his hind. And there on the palm was lying a pressed rose, its delicate perfume filling the air.

Very slowly Marion raised her eyes. That dead flower seemed to hold her spellbound. There was a peculiar fascination about it that awakened memories within her. Just why she didn't know, but in a flash it all came to her, and she jumped to her feet.

"You!" she said. "You!" She drew back startled.

" I," he said softly. " Please, please. I am sorry I startled you. Won't you let me explain?"

He flung out his hands imploringly.

" Annie's brother." That's all she could seem to say, though something told her very well that he was not Annie's brother at all.

" Supposedly Annie's brother," he replied. " But I'm not. I realized how—how extraordinary everything is, but surely you must know that there was a reason for it. Please, before your Uncle George returns, let me tell everything from the beginning; everything that has been in my heart. Ah, I know," he went on, as she turned her head away, dazed, and yet supremely happy, " how- it must sound for me to be speaking this way. How sudden and unusual it all is. But you must hear. You shall hear "—his voice had been tense, but now it rang out like a pipe-organ—" Marion, do you care to hear?"

She was utterly bewildered. It all seemed so unreal. So hard to comprehend. But she was anxious, most anxious, to understand. She sank back into her chair and nodded her head.

" Yes," she said, and her voice was little more than a faint whisper. " I am anxious to hear."

And hurriedly he explained everything, starting at the beginning with the bus ride, and showing no signs of embarrassment when he related how he had followed her. He was in love, as he put it, and that made the excuse for it all. And breathlessly, with lips parted and eyes closed, she listened to his voice, which he had pitched very low; listened to a tale that was remarkable, as remarkable as any Prince Charming story she had ever read.

When he spoke of Annie and the others, and how he had moved about among them, she laughed; laughed, perhaps, half hysterically. It was all so funny, and all so wonderful, for Prince Charming, her Prince Charming, the lover she had dreamed of those nights standing on the porch when he had talked silently to the moon, was near to her now; oh, very now, for his hand slowly reached out and clasped hers, and, yes, she wasn't a bit afraid.

And on he hurried, telling about Annie's mad infatuation, for this he had to explain. But it was done in compassionate tones. And when he finally finished, he looked at Marion and smiled.

" Now you know everything," he said. " That day I first saw you I knew you were the one and only woman in the world for me, and I wasn't going to let you pass out of my life."

" But I don't know everything," Marion said, conscious that he was squeezing kor hand, and squeezing his back a little. " How does it happen that you have come to see uncle?"

And now Craig unintentionally gave Uncle George's secret away, for he did not know that it was to be a surprise.

" And to think," he finished, " that after all I needn't have done what I did, for I would have met you, anyway."

" And Uncle George is going to build me a house?" Marion gasped. " Why—why, I didn't know that!"

"You didn't!" said Craig. He paused, and then his lips parted in a fascinating smile. " As I said before," he went on, " Everything has been so extraordinary, that I'm going to say the most natural thing of all now." He rose, and leaned over her chair. " Marion," he said softly, " will you let me build a home there for—for you and me?"

She looked up suddenly, and slowly her head nodded.

" Yes," she whispered. " Do you know you have eyes just like Annie's—"

But she got no further, for he leaned over, and his lips touched hers. And it was just then that Uncle George entered the room.

We won't try to explain Uncle George's expression. You can imagine how he looked and felt. But he didn't have a chance to say a word, for Craig, seeming to sense his presence, swung around, and the next second Uncle George was pushed gently but firmly into a chair.

" What—what is the meaning of this?" Uncle George thundered. " How dare you kiss my niece?"

" Gently, Uncle George," Craig said smiling. " I'm calling you Uncle George because I want to get used to it. For, you see, Marion has just promised to become my wife."

" What?" Uncle George shrieked.

" And I'm going to build a home on that property of mine for us both," Craig went on smiling. " And if you're real good, Uncle George, you can come and live with

us. That is, if you promise not to discharge the extra man."

Uncle George was dumfounded. He tried to rise, but Craig pushed him back.

" Have you gone mad?" Uncle George cried. " Or am I imagining all this?"

Marion rushed over and threw her arms around his neck.

" Uncle George," she exclaimed. " Look! It's Annie's brother. He's really not Annie's brother, but he was Annie's brother. Oh, dear, you know what I mean."

" I think we've all gone crazy," Uncle George cried, shaking his hands in the air. " Annie's brother, eh? Do you mean to tell me that he's here! Surely you're not Annie's brother," he yelled, pointing a finger at Craig. " I think I know it now; but perhaps I'm only dreaming all this."

" No, you're not," Craig said. " In a way I'm Annie's brother, Uncle George." He certainly was having his innings with the old man. " However, I was your extra man, Uncle George, and I told you that I would come back, and here I am."

And then for Uncle George's especial benefit, Craig related the whole story over again. And during that story Uncle George looked astonished, cranky, once or twice half dead, and then as the whole thing began to dawn on him, he began to laugh. And when Craig finished he looked at him, and then sank back in his chair.

" Well," he said, " it's dear enough. But—but bless my heart, I can't get over it yet. And you two are really in love with each other?"

Craig looked at Marion, and she blushed and nodded her head. Uncle George saw that nod, and he smiled. Then a tender look passed over his face, and when he spoke his voice trembled:

" Well," he said, " I might have known Marion, my child, that I could not keep you always. But it appears to me that the hands you are going into will care for you as I tried to."

Marion flung her arms around his neck and kissed him.

" But you are coming to live with us," she said. " Isn't he—Craig?"

Mr. Manning had slipped a twenty-dollar bill out of his pocket.

" You certainly are, Uncle George," she said. " And while I think of it I want to return this twenty-dollar bill you gave me when—when I was discharged. And if you don't take it from me, Uncle George, you can't come to live with us. That's final, you know."

The old man looked up and smiled.

" My boy," he said. " My—boy—" His voice broke, and he closed his eyes to hide the tears. When he opened them Craig was on one side of him and Marion on the other, and instinctively their arms went around his neck.

" My children," he murmured.

Just before dinner Craig drew Marion aside, and taking from his pocket a small, flat package, he said:

" This paper contains five twenty-dollar bills, and it is the present I spoke of for Annie. I think she'll be glad to get it. And I should like to give the other servants something, too. I'm sure Uncle George won't mind, and I think you understand why I want to do it."

" I do, and I don't," Marion said.

" Well, it's partly this. When we go to live in our new home with Uncle George, we can't very well under the circumstances take this set of servants with us. Particularly Annie," he added smiling. " You see. dear, they've seen me as one of them, and—"

Marion began to laugh.

"Isn't it awful?" she said. "Think of it, Craig. But what shall we do?"

" I'll arrange for all that," he replied. " I have an aunt, Mrs. Cartright Chesney, of Philadelphia, who can use more servants than any woman I know. She'll be delighted to find that there are a few more at liberty in the country."

Marion looked up into his face and laughed.

" Is there anything else?" she asked.

Craig drew her to him, and kissed her on the lips.

" Yes," he said smiling. " Just one thing more. After dinner to-night we'll take Annie for a walk in the moonlight."

(The End.)

Stopping the Leak

by Samuel G. Camp

WHEN a man is having trouble with his business, and you have racked your brain for a couple of weeks or so and have not found any way out of your trouble, you are an easy mark for 'most anybody's advice—even your wife's.

Looking back at it now I can see that the whole thing can be traced back to an egg, like a chicken-sandwich or something, This egg was an egg that ought to have been soft-boiled and was not. It was a hard-boiled egg. And if I had not said as much to the wife—because, starting with the egg, one thing led on to another—I would have been a big winner. You see, up to that time I had not said anything to Vivian about those business troubles of mine, and so she had not had a chance to give me any of her advice.

But anyway, as soon as I found out what had happened to that egg, I said to the wife:

" The kitchen clock is slow. You had better send it somewhere and have it regulated."

" How do you know the kitchen clock is slow?" asked the wife. " You have never been into the kitchen since you stopped wiping the dishes for me the second week after we started housekeeping. "

" I do not need to go into the kitchen, " I said, " to tell that the clock is slow. I can tell it by this egg. If this egg is a three-minute egg then I am only six years old."

" Well, " said Vivian, " maybe that egg is done a little more than usual; but, what with the price of eggs like it is now, I guess you will have to eat it. And as for your being six years old you certainly act like it. That egg is not done a bit harder than lots of other times when you have not had any complaint to make at all. But for the last week or so you have not done anything but complain about everything in sight. I have done the best I could to please you, but—what in the world has got into you, Alf? Are things going wrong at the all-night lunch or something? "

You understand, while I am waiting for something better to turn up, I am running a lunch-wagon at the corner of Railroad and Main Streets. It is a white cart with red lettering on it, and the lettering says: " The White Owl Lunch, Alf A. Grubb, Prop." Maybe you have noticed it some time when you were passing there.

" I will say they are," I said. " I will say things are going wrong at the all-night lunch."

"Just what seems to be the trouble?" asked Vivian.

" I will tell you," I said. " I have gone over the whole situation six or eight million times and—two things seem to be the trouble."

" What are they? " asked Vivian,

" One of them is named Mike, and the other one is named Barney," I said,

" How do you mean? " asked the wife.

" I mean those two Japanese that I have

got working for me," I said. " Mike Conley and Barney Gilhooley."

" What is the matter with them?" asked Vivian.

" Not a thing," I said. " That's just the trouble."

" What do you mean by that?" asked the wife.

" I mean there is nothing the matter with their work," I said.

" Then if there is nothing the matter with their work," asked Vivian, " what are you kicking about?"

" I guess you do not understand what kind of work I mean," I said. " The kind of work those birds are giving me—it's surely slick. There is nothing the matter with it at all. Anyway, I cannot hang anything on them."

" Oh," said Vivian, " I see. You mean they are holding out on you?"

"Somebody is holding out," I said, "and I am certainly not holding out on myself."

" No," said the wife, " the only person you hold out on is me. But have you been missing a great deal?"

" About the same as usual," I said, " I can't be there all the time. Of course if I was there all the time they could not get away with it."

" I mean have you missed a great deal of money?" said Vivian.

" Well," I said, " I have not missed such a great deal of money, but what I have missed I have missed it a great deal. No, so far what they have got away with is no killing matter; but just the same, I miss it."

" How much do you figure it is in dollars and cents?" asked the wife.

" I have not figured the cents," I said. " But judging from the business I have done in the past, I am running shy anywheres from four to six dollars a day."

" As much as that! " said Vivian. " Are you sure it is them?"

" Conley and Gilhooley?" I said. " No, I am not sure it is them. If I was I would first knock one and then the other of them for a goal, and then I would have them arrested and jailed. But I am not sure. And I do not want to do anything that I would be sorry for afterwards. Both of them have got good reputations and I do not want to spoil their reputations for them until I am sure that they deserve it. And besides, this bird Barney Gilhooley is a big strapping six-footer that can hit a blow that would dent the side of a brick house, and he is also a bad actor and the kind of bird that if anybody did anything to him he would be apt to go looking for some kind of a revenge. No, I do not want to go ahead and have them arrested or anything until I am sure I am right. I would not hurt their reputations for them for anything—especially this bird Gilhooley's.

" And maybe after all," I went on, " it is only one of them that is doing the knocking down. I have not been able to tell. And for that matter it may not be either of them. All I know is that the last two weeks or so receipts have surely fallen off quite a lot, and I cannot see any explanation for it unless there is a bug under the chip somewhere."

" Of course," I continued, " I could fire them. But it is hard to get help nowadays; and besides, there would not be much point to firing Conley when maybe it is Gilhooley that is doing the holding out; and as for firing Gilhooley—well, somehow I do not like the idea of firing Gilhooley. For one thing I happen to know that Gilhooley has got an old gray-haired mother that is dependent on him- for support; and for another, I would not like to fire Gilhooley anyhow. He is the kind of bird that it is a great deal better to have for a friend than an enemy. I will say so."

" But it must be stopped," said Vivian. " No business can stand a leak like that."

" No," I said. " It cannot—it certainly cannot. You are dead right. The only business that makes a profit on leaks is the plumbing business."

" What are you going to do about it?" asked the wife.

" That is what I have been asking myself for several days," I replied. " And so far I have not got the answer."

" Let me think," said Vivian.

'" Anything to oblige," I told her.

She must have thought for almost a minute. Then she said:

"I have it!"

"You do not mean to tell me!" I exclaimed.

" Here I have been figuring on this thing for days without seeing head or tail to it, and you get it just like that—in a minute! It is certainly great to have a little rapid calculator in your home. I will say it is. What is the big idea?"

" Listen, Alf," said Vivian. " At the last meeting of the Ladies' Neighborhood Club the speaker was a man that called himself an efficiency expert. His subject was 'Efficiency in the Household.' He told us all about how to prevent waste in the kitchen and the like. Just as if anybody was wasting anything nowadays anyway. But that is not the point. This man is a regular authority on how to regulate all kinds of businesses so as to stop leaks in them and make them pay. His name is Mr. Winthrop Wilkins; and I asked one of the ladies and she said he had an office in the Atlas Building.

" And now listen, Alf," she went on. " As long as you are not sure that Conley and Gilhooley are holding out on you, but maybe the business has sprung a leak somewhere and you have not been able to find it, but no doubt an expert like Mr. Winthrop Wilkins would be able to find it in five minutes—"

" Why do I not drop in and see Mr. Winthrop Wilkins and call his attention to this leak in my business?" I said. " I will tell you why. It is because I have heard of these efficiency experts before, and at the prices they charge you for stopping a leak in your business, unless your business has got more leaks in it than a sieve, a man could better afford a leak."

" Nonsense," said the wife. " Suppose you go on losing six or eight dollars a day for nobody knows how long. Think what that would amount to! Would it not be cheaper to go and see this man Wilkins, and have him stop the leak in five minutes, even if he did charge you maybe fifty or a hundred dollars for it?"

" It might," I admitted. " Provided he delivered the goods and plugged the leak. And believe me, if he did not, I would give him a run for his money."

" Well then—" said Vivian.

And after we had talked it over a little while longer, the upshot of it was I made up my mind to go and see Mr. Winthrop Wilkins and put the leak in my business up to him.

As I said before, this matter had been bothering me for quite a while, and I was sick and tired of worrying over it, and so it was a case of most any port in a storm. Otherwise I would not have paid any attention to that suggestion of Vivian's. But as long as I did—you might know. She had to go and take advantage of it. And now that I come to think of it, I would not be at all surprised if she had had some such little scheme in her head right from the first.

Anyway, for some time Vivian had been bothering me to get her something that she called a tea-wagon. No, Vivian was not thinking about driving round the streets peddling tea. She had no idea of crashing into the oolong business. The kind of tea-wagon Vivian wanted is a different kind of tea-wagon. She showed me a picture of one once, and this kind of tea-wagon is built something like a baby-carriage, only it is not exactly like a baby-carriage, but more like a kind of little table on wheels.

And when Mrs. Ed. Banks, the wife of the fellow that runs the Bijou movie theater—when she and some of your other society friends drop in on you some afternoon for their five o'clock tea, you load up the tea-wagon with the tea and things out in the kitchen, and then you trundle it in to where the company is, like a fellow rolling his own on a Sunday afternoon, and of course it saves you a lot of steps. But whether or not there is any practical advantage to it does not make any difference. According to Vivian, everybody has got a tea-wagon nowadays; that is, if there is any kind of class to them at all. You cannot be a real society lady unless you have got a tea-wagon any more than you can without a divorce. And—well, Vivian is nothing if not fashionable; though so far we have been able to settle our troubles between ourselves without taking them into court.

And so when I finally fell for Vivian's suggestion she said:

" And listen, Alf." " If this Mr. Wilkins makes good, and so the result is this sug-

gestion of mine save you a lot of money, will you do something for me?"

" What?" I asked.

" Will you buy me that tea-wagon?" said Vivian.

" I will see," I answered.

" Will you?" asked Vivian.

" I will think about it," I said.

" Will you, *please?"* persisted Vivian.

By this time she had got hold of one of the buttons of my coat, and was trying to twist it off, and looking up at me like she used to before we got married and quit all that kind of foolishness and got down to brass tacks—or anyway I did—and so I said:

" All right; have it your own way. And I wonder what will be the next thing."

That afternoon as soon as I could get away from business I hopped off for the Atlas Building. When I got there I asked the elevator boy what floor Mr; Winthrop Wilkins's offices were on. He said they were on the fourth floor—and where did I want to go?

" Listen," I said. " If you lived in Washington, and I came there and asked you where Woodrow Wilson lived, would you think I was looking for Senator Lodge?"

So he let me off at the fourth floor and after a while I found this efficiency bird's office. But for quite a time I did not get any farther than a dame wearing a pair of peroxide ear-muffs and an air as if to say she was some kind of a deposed queen or other simply killing time between reigns. I asked her if I could see Mr. Wilkins, and she said I could unless I had some kind of eye trouble, but I would have to wait a while because just now he was having a conference with some people. She did not say who these people were, but somehow I got the idea that they were John D. Rockefeller and J. P. Morgan.

Anyway, right away I began to think that, after all, that leak in my business was a pretty small matter, and that I did not amount to much myself; and if the conference with Rockefeller and Morgan had gone on much longer I would have sneaked away from there without stating my business at all.

But pretty soon a bell rang, and I guess this must have been a sort of signal to the dame that Rockefeller and Morgan had gone, and so now old Dr. Wilkins was all ready for the next millionaire that had something the matter with his efficiency, because she said all right, Jack, go ahead in. I guess she must have had a bad memory for names, because of course I told her when I first blew in that my name was Alf.

But anyway, so then I went into Mr. Winthrop Wilkins's private office, and he was there, sitting behind a desk with a flat top about the size of a tennis-court. It was the sort of desk that it did not require any very vivid imagination to see a bunch of great financiers sitting at it and signing papers that meant that the public was stung another couple of billion or so.

As for this bird Wilkins, himself—well, his clothes were meant to look like money, and looked it; and as for the rest, I gavei him one look and said to myself believe me, Winthrop, if I ever get into a game with you I will play my cards very close to the breast. I do not remember when I have seen any wiser appearing guy than Mr. Winthrop Wilkins.

Well, I stated my business: How I was running the White Owl Lunch at the corner of Main and Railroad, and there was a leak in the business somewhere, and so I had come to see if maybe he could not stop it, because it had to be stopped or I knew I would go out of business.

Somehow I had got an idea that when he found out that I did not own a steel works or a gold mine or something Mr. Wilkins would not be interested in my affairs. But it seemed that I had got him wrong. Probably he was not mixed up in so many big affairs that he could not afford to interest himself in a smaller one now and then. So I suppose the big desk and all the rest of it was what you might call front. Anyway, he was interested and asked me if I had any idea what was the matter. Did I suspect that somebody was giving me the work?

" Yes," I said, " I do suspect that somebody is giving me the work. I suspect that a couple of birds by the name of Conley and Gilhooley are giving me the work. But I have not been able to get anything on them,

and of course until I do get something on them I cannot do anything—and for that matter I am not sure that Conley and Gilhooley are holding out on me anyway. All I know is, there is a leak in the business of four to six dollars a day, and it has certainly got to be stopped."

" H'm/' said Mr. Wilkins. " Well, one thing at a time; and the first thing is to find out whether these fellows are holding out on you. How are your working hours arranged? Of course you use a cash register."

"Our working hours are arranged like this," I told him. " We work on eight-hour shifts. I go on at eight **A.M.** and work until four **P.M.** Then Conley goes on; and when Conley goes off Gilhooley goes on. Of course I am there more or less even when I am not working qn my regular shift—except on Gilhooley's shift, which is the night shift. Yes, I use a cash-register."

" I see," said Mr. Wilkins. " Well, then, I will tell you what to do. As I say, the first thing to do is to find out whether Conley and Gilhooley are holding out on you; and in order to do that we must have them watched—to see that the sales are all properly rung up on the cash-register. Does the register stand where a customer can see the figures?"

I said it did.

" Fine," said Mr. Wilkins. " Now listen. Of course it would not do to have only one man, or even two, do the watching—it would arouse suspicion. You can see that very easily. We must have a number of men, say eight, one to an hour, working in relays. You get the idea. Each man keeps tabs for an hour at a time—twice. You can make one of them a sort of foreman, and they can aff report to him. See? Eight men working two hours apiece will cover the sixteen hours that you are off; and it will be up to you to stay away from there and give them a free hand so if these fellows are holding out on you there will not be anything to stop them and then we will have the goods on them. Do you see?"

" Yes," I said. " I see what you mean. But will not all this be very expensive? And besides, where will I get these eight men you are talking about?"

" Oh, no," he said, " It will not be very expensive. You should be able to get the men for three dollars apiece. And I will give you the address of an employment bureau and 'phone them to see that you are fixed up."

" That would make something like twenty-four dollars for the men," I said. "But I guess it would be worth it. Well, this scheme of yours looks pretty good to me, and I think I will put it through. How much "

" Just a moment," he cut in. " Of course these men will have to have some excuse for being in the lunch wagon, and so you will have to give each of them a little piece of change on the side, so that they can order something to eat. Of course you could not expect them to pay for their order out of their own pockets."

" I had not figured that I would have to board them, too," I said, " but of course you are right. However, you will save me money if you do not try to think of anything else. At fifty cents apiece that'will make something like four dollars more, or twenty-eight dollars all told. But I suppose I will have to do it. And how much am I owing you?"

" You can pay me fifty dollars now," he said, " and then—we will see. All told, I think I can guarantee to stop this leak in your business for not more than one hundred dollars. And seeing that you are now losing money at the rate of about one hundred and fifty dollars a month, what could be fairer than that?"

Of course he meant outside of the twenty-eight dollars that I would have to pay the eight men; but, all things considered, it certainly did seem fair enough. So then I paid Mr. Winthrop Wilkins fifty iron boys, and he gave me the address of that employment agency, and then I hopped off for home. It was too late to do anything more about it that day.

When I got home Vivian wanted to know right away if I had been to see Mr. Winthrop Wilkins; and I said yes, I had. Then she wanted to know all about it, and so I gave her the dope.

" Well, Alf," she said, "what do you think about that suggestion of mine now? Was

it not a fine suggestion? Think of all the money it has saved you! "

" Where do you get that stuff?" I said. "So far that suggestion of yours has cost me exactly fifty dollars, and that bunch of cash-register hounds will cost me twenty-eight more, and "

" Why do you always look on the dark side of things, Alf?" asked Vivian. " You know as well as you want to know that Conley and Gilhooley—or one of them anyway—are holding out on you. And you know that this scheme of having them watched is sure to locate the trouble. And so why——"

" I will tell you what I know," I said. " I know this: I know that unless this bird Wilkins makes good and stops that leak I am certainly going to give him a dusty hunt for the rest of that hundred. And that is all I know."

Next morning I sent word to Gilhooley that he would have to work overtime for an hour or so because the wife was sick and I had to go and see a doctor. And then I hopped off for the employment agency to see about hiring those eight men. Well, as luck would have it, I had not gone very far when I saw a bunch of fellows standing on a street corner. There were exactly eight of them, and they looked as if they might be looking for a job.

So then I said to myself, well, Alf, maybe here is a chance for you to save yourself some money, because maybe you can get these men for two dollars apiece instead of the three you would have to pay if you went to that employment agency. There was one fellow, a big chap about the size of Gilhooley, that appeared to be the ringleader of the gang. I found out afterwards that his name was Barstow. Anyway, I braced this fellow Barstow and asked him if I could have a word with him. He said sure, buddy, but it will not get you anything. I em broke myself, he said. I told him he had got me wrong; and then I asked him if he and his friends were looking for a job, because that was the way it looked to me.

He said yes, they were looking for a job. He said that they were recently discharged soldiers and that so far they had not been able to find anything to do. So then I put my proposition up to him and the result of it was we closed the deal—at two dollars apiece. So it looked like I had saved myself eight dollars and done a pretty good stroke of business.

Then I happened to think how each of them would have to order something when they went to the lunch-wagon, so that Conley and Gilhooley would think they were regular customers instead of spies on them; and I tried to make Barstow think that it was up to each of them to pay for their order out of the two dollars I was paying them. But somehow I could not seem to make Barstow think that way, nor any of the rest of them. They said I would have to put up the money for the eats.

Well, after paying that efficiency guy Wilkins fifty berries—and believe me he would have to show results if he expected to collect the rest of that hundred—I was pretty short for cash. So ihen I got an idea. Here was a chance for me to show my patriotism, seeing these fellows were recently discharged soldiers, and at the same time do the cash-drawer a kindness. So I gave each of them a note addressed to Conley and Gilhooley, saying that the bearer, so and so, was a discharged soldier and that this entitled him to two meals at the White Owl Lunch at my expense—signed, Alf. A. Grubb, Prop.

So that was satisfactory, and a patriotic act on my part, if I do say it. Then I explained to them again how they were to keep tabs on Conley and Gilhooley and the cash-register; and I said they could all make their reports to Barstow; and the first man was to go on duty at four **P.M.** that afternoon, and then again eight hours afterwards, and so on, turn and turn about; and Barstow could make his report to me say at eight-thirty to-morrow morning—and then I would pay Barstow for all of them.

That seemed to cover the ground, and so then I left them.

Well, next morning when I got to the lunch-wagon, the minute I stepped inside the door it seemed to me that somehow things did not look right. Just for a minute I could not seem to realize what was wrong; but then I saw what the trouble was. There

was something missing. I will change that: Almost everything was missing.

The pie rack was cleaned out; there was not an egg in the place; there was not an ounce of hamburger, nor a single bean, nor a slice of bread; there was not one dog or a drop of milk; I make a specialty of clam fritters—and you could not find a single clam; the butter was all gone, and so was the coffee—and the ham—and the potatoes; there was not—but I will tell you what there *was;* about all there was left was a little bit of mustard. The wagon was cleaned out,

" For the love of Mike, Barney," I said to Gilhooley, "what has hit the place?"

"What has hit the place?" said Gilhooley. " The United States Army. That is what has hit the place."

" What do you mean?" I asked him.

" I mean those eight birds you gave the free meal-tickets," he said. " Do you get me now? Eat? Oh, boy! What a night! This is the third year I have been working in a dog-wagon, and I will tell the world that last night I did more work than all the rest of the time I have been working! Eat? Those birds are not *eaters!* They are food *destroyers!* I will say they are! Any one of them can eat more than an elephant—but an elephant eats hay! And listen! Six times, counting Conley and me, we have had to send out for stuff and stock up the best we could! And now look at the place! If a flea had a hollow tooth you could not fill it with what is left! Believe me, Alf, when you took the contract of feeding those escaped soldiers you certainly booted one!"

" Listen," said Gilhooley. " I will tell you what the first one of those birds ate—the first one I served, anyway. Here is what he ate: He ate fourteen hard-boiled eggs; three egg sandwiches; four hamburger sandwiches; three pickled-tongue sandwiches; two ham sandwiches; one mince pie and half of a custard pie; three plates of beans and half a bottle of tomato-sauce; five milks, four coffees, and on top of everything he had four orders of clam fritters. That is what the first one ate. The second

" Never mind the second one," I said. " It would take too long. You say you and Conley had to send out and stock up six times. How much do you figure those fellows ate all told—I mean in money."

" Well," said Gilhooley, " if those birds did not ruin eighty dollars' worth of chow, like they call it, they did not eat a cent's worth—you can take it from me."

I will say that it certainly looked to me as if I had not saved myself very much money by not going to that agency.

But anyway, in a minute or so Gilhooley left. And then pretty soon this fellow Barstow showed up. Well, as you might expect, I lit into him right away and gave him a fine bawling out on account of what had happened. He started to come back at me, but I cut in and asked him how about that report?

He said:

" You will get that report when I get the sixteen dollars we have got coming to us."

I said:

" Yes, you have got sixteen dollars coming to you after eating enough food to last you for a year!"

Well, with that we started in to have a few words. Pretty soon he began acting in a way I did not like, and so I put up my hands so that in case it was necessary to defend myself I could do it. I guess he must have misunderstood my intention; because, anyway, he cut loose with a blow that came very near tearing an ear off for me, but it did not because I saw it coming and blocked it with my nose.

Just then the door of the cart slid back and Gilhooley came in—I guess he must have forgotten something. Anyway, as soon as Gilhooley saw what was doing he took on this fellow Barstow himself, though I wished he had left him to me. No doubt Gilhooley bad it in for Barstow and the rest of them because they had made him work for the first time in three years.

Gilhooley and Barstow were about of a size, and pretty well matched on account of each of them having about the same amount of science, which was no science at all, and they had it all over the place. And everywhere they went they left something to remember them by. There were four fancy red-glass windows in the customers' end of

the wagon, and Gilhooley knocked Barstow through two of them, and Barstow knocked Gil* ooley through the other two. For a while there was one seat left that they had not torn up from the floor, but they finally got that one. And other things suffered in proportion.

Then Gilhooley knocked Barstow for a goal—he went backwards right over the counter and landed right in the middle of all the crockery and everything, and Gilhooley followed him in a flying leap and landed on top of him, and so then they went at it again. You could feel the wagon rocking underneath your feet; and I guess from the outside it must have looked like a bag with a live dog inside it.

Well, pretty soon the battlers got up on their feet again, and by this time they had made mince-meat of everything behind the counter, and as soon as they got straightened up they ruined the only thing that was not ruined before, the coffee tank, and it began spilling hot coffee and steam until you would have thought that it would have made fighting very uncomfortable, but they did not seem to mind it in the least.

But pretty soon it began to look like Gilhooley was getting the best of it, and that the fight would be over, when here came another of those fellows that I had hired to spy on Conley and Gilhooley. I looked over this fellow's shoulder and saw the other six of them coming, too. I guess they had been waiting for Barstow and had got tired of it. Anyway, all of them crowded into the car, and started to rescue Barstow from Gilhooley; and as the last one of them crowded in—I crowded out.

I kept going without stopping for anything until I reached home. I made up my mind that I would stay there until the excitement was over, and the police had gone, and then I would go back and look at the remains.

The minute I stepped inside the door I saw it. Vivian was taking the wrappings off it when I crashed in. A tea-wagon!

" What is the meaning of this?" I asked.

" Why, Alf," said Vivian, " what are you doing home at this time of day? And look at your nose! Have you been in a fight—did somebody hit you?"

Never mind about my nose," I said,. " or what I have been in, or whether somebody hit me. If they did, believe me they got what was coming to them. But never mind that. What is the meaning of this?"

" Oh, that?" said Vivian. " Why, you know, Alf, I was positive that that suggestion of mine was going to lead to your finding the leak in your business, and so yesterday I—I ordered it sent round."

" How much did it cost?" I asked her.

" Only sixty-nine dollars," said Vivian, "marked down from seventy. Was not that a great bargain, Alf?"

Just then the door-bell rang. I answered it. It was Barstow!

" Foiled again!" I said. " How did you happen to find me?"

" Ask me something hard," he said. " I left that big stiff that works for you to my pals, and followed you. Come across!"

Well, I looked him in the eye and then I happened to think: Would it be a patriotic act on my part to hold out on a fellow that had fought for my country like this fellow had? No, I decided, it would not. And so I came across. He said thanks; and as for the report he was supposed to make, they had not been able to find that Conley and Gilhooley were doing any cheating. I said all right, and it did not make any difference anyway, because what is one leak more or less in your business when there is nothing but leaks left to your business?

" But I want to ask you one thing," I said. " How do you get that way? Did they not feed you anything in the army?"

" Oh, yes," he said, " they fed us all right in the army. But I will tell you: When you hired us fellows we had just finished a test of condensed rations that lasted for two weeks. They called us the 'Condensed Rations Squad.' Everything we had had to eat for two weeks was in tablet form, as they call it, and—oh, boy, We were hungry!"

" I will say you were!" I said.

And I guess that is about all of any consequence except one thing: The next person that says "efficiency" to me I am going to knock him for a goal. Yes, and Mr. Wilkins is still looking for the rest of that hundred.

Pay Sand

by Victor Lauriston

Author of "The Man Who Could Not Quit," etc.

CHAPTER X.

LOVE S CAMOUFLAGE.

NELLIE LANDIS had returned David Wayne's ring for the self-same reason that she first put it on.

Five years before she was a girl of nineteen, with a girl's love of light and life. She wanted to shine before men, and, more still, before women. In that, she was partly her father's daughter and a good deal more her own bright, clever self.

Wallace township was deadly dull, for her. The country home was monotonous. The little town was perfectly stagnant.

She might have run away from it all. Yet there was always the potential prospect that her father's schemes might turn out hugely lucky.

For that, she stayed—for that, and for David Wayne.

In Wallacetown, young David Wayne was the outstanding figure. He had been practicing law for several years, and she had known him almost since she could remember. People whispered that he had it in him to make money, to win fame, to break into the legislature, to achieve even bigger things.

She shared his young dreams, had shared them since they were boy and girl; and they were all tinged with the same rainbow hues.

Life without David Wayne was a dead monotony of flat meadows, dreary landscape, and uneventful years. She saw before her the same big brick house, built for society functions that never materialized; the same old paternal schemes for money-making that invariably came to nothing. Nellie Landis, shrinking from monotony, ran eagerly toward the one avenue of escape.

That avenue was David Wayne.

She liked Wayne. That was an incident, but a quite pleasing one. Wayne liked her. He loved her. That fact she never doubted. Not once in all the years of waiting did she question that his love would endure.

She could trust her own charms for that. But, so long as her life was cast in Wallacetown, her one chance to shine was at the side of David Wayne.

Now, as she had fled from monotony into his arms, so, five years later, she fled from his arms to escape monotony.

He had palled upon her.

He had failed to fulfil his early promise.

True, he was making money, and saving it, to meet her father's provident stipulations. She had a hazy notion that he must have saved three or four thousand dollars, and that his claims to larger assets were merely so much fiction, designed to keep her interested and hopeful. Even four thousand dollars seemed a lot of money. Despite her New York styles and her black fox furs, her financial horizon was frankly that of Wallacetown.

But even had the vaunted nine thousand dollars been real money, it was an intangible thing. Before her imagination the mere sum did not glitter, as the things it could buy might have glittered. And Wayne himself had ceased to glitter.

From time »to» time other young men had come to Wallacetown She had flirted with all the likely ones, and had to confess that there was not one of them she Tiked so well as Wayne.

This story began in The Argosy for December 13,

Then Harry Egelton came.

Nellie Landis coldly analyzed the situation, between spells of flirting with Egelton and spells of tantalizing and soothing Wayne.

Egelton was handsome. He was young. He was ambitious. He was better looking than Wayne. He had money, and was under no compulsion to save it. He flattered her with his constant and ever ready attentions that had not yet become in any manner commonplace.

Yet she did not like him as well as she liked Wayne.

She realized that fact after she had handed Wayne his ring, and after Wayne had gone.

No man, she told herself, could take David Wayne's place, not even Harry Egelton. She had treated Wayne a bit shabbily, perhaps, but—well, she would not admit as much to him, or demean herself by asking forgiveness.

If he had palled on her, and grown drab and monotonous, it was just the outcome of his loyal drudgery for her, and love had inspired that drudgery. So she had to confess to herself.

There had been times when the situation irked her, when she realized and resented the moral obligation under which Wayne's patient devotion had placed her.

Now, she did not resent it. She secretly joyed in it.

" Davy loves me," she whispered to her mirror. " And he—he always will love me."

There was satisfaction in the thought of his loyalty. She could trust him where she wouldn't trust a man like Harry Egelton.

" And I love him," she admitted, in a whisper so low that even she could hardly hear it. "But he mustn't ever be sure—I daren't let him feel too sure."

Still', it wouldn't do to let the breach between herself and Wayne grow too wide. There were other girls in Wallacetown who might be glad to set their caps for an attorney with a couple of thousand saved and an income which he said was five thousand a year and which must surely be all of fifteen hundred.

Nellie Landis tossed her pretty head. She defied any other girl to take David Wayne from her, if she chose to hold him; and she firmly decided to hold him.

Yet she did not mean to take too many chances, even with such certainties as David Wayne's loyalty. She had heard of hearts being caught on the rebound. It might be well to check the rebound.

Next morning she telephoned Wayne's office.

Wayne, the girl told her, was out of town.

Nellie Landis sniffed. She had noticed Wayne's stenographer, and did not like her. The girl was blonde, she was brunette, their antagonism was mutual. She meditated making the girl's immediate dismissal the price of her forgiveness.

Still, she would just as soon have that girl working for David Wayne as another—for the other girl might be pretty, and might dress in style.

On after-thought she decided to let David Wayne wait.

After waiting for her so long, a man like Wayne would not give her up on impulse. And if she ran after him, seeking his forgiveness, she would have all the more trouble, after they were married, in keeping him in his place. If she could conquer him completely and bring him to his knees—

Well, that would be a very satisfactory foundation for married happiness.

For two days Nellie shunned Egelton.

Wayne had been jealous of Egelton, and she had used his jealousy as a pretext for taking offense. She had let the oil man pay her pleasant attentions, but—well, she didn't mean to take chances on losing Wayne. If, in this interval, she kept Egelton at arm's length, she would be able in the hour of reconciliation to claim pretty credit for her loyalty at the very time when Wayne was nursing a jealous grudge against her.

Besides Egelton would think all the more of her.

She had left word with the stenographer for Wayne to telephone her.

When three days brought no word from David Wayne, and no white flag of surrender fluttered from his battlements, Nellie Landis abruptly changed her tactics.

She dressed her prettiest, in the Burgundy suit and black military hat that so

well became her, put on her flimsy veil, and accepted Harry Egelton's invitation to motor in to Wallacetown and have a look at his new offices.

He took her down in his high-powered car, and with a proprietor's pride showed her the prosperous-looking quarters of the new company. She inspected the quarter-cut oak furniture, the rooms for the office staff, the president's room—her father's—the field manager's room—Egelton's own—the handsome rugs, the attractive wall finish, the black and gold sign on the plate-glass window that announced:

LAND1S OIL COMPANY, LIMITED

John Landis, Pres.
Harry Egelton, Mgr.

All the time that Egelton was explaining things to her, Nellie Landis kept a watchful eye on Wayne's office window, up-stairs across the way.

But Wayne, who had often come to that window in other days to wave his hand to her, failed to show himself.

This was aggravating to Nellie. She had come down here expressly on purpose to let Wayne see her in Egelton's company. It looked as though she were to have all her trouble for nothing.

Egelton talked smoothly, pleasantly, with that wonderful confidential air of his; and paid her compliments in the tone that intimated they were new discoveries all his own. She smiled, and almost hated him.

Yet, rather than show her vexation, she presently pretended a lively interest in what Egelton was telling her. She could follow him readily enough. Her years in her father's house had given her a comprehensive education in company promotion and wildcat speculation. Terms that might well have puzzled the average Wallacetown girl were perfectly understandable to her.

" But why did you capitalize the company at only fifty thousand?" she asked. " Isn't the well worth more than that?"

Egelton laughed, tolerantly.

"The trouble with most oil companies," he observed, " is that they are overcapitalized. We merely intend to sell a small amount of stock in order to raise money to drill more wells. All the money we get goes into development work. Ten thousand dollars, or twenty thousand, will, if the promise of the first well is fulfilled, secure us a production worth hundreds of thousands. Yes, worth millions!"

His face glowed with enthusiasm.

" Millions!" she breathed.

He smiled assent.

" And who gets the millions?" she went on, keenly.

" The stockholders "

" You mean dad, and ?"

She rased into his eyes.

" Y. r.r father owns a controlling interest. I hold ten thousand stock as my share in the venture. The rest we're selling. That will give us all the funds we need. The oil will do the rest."

With her daintily gloved fingers, Nellie Landis pulled down the filmy veil. It hid her lustrous eyes from him, and gave her face an alluring touch of the Oriental.

She was not her father's daughter for nothing. Behind the veil she mentally calculated. Millions, Harry Egelton had said. He owned one-fifth of the stock, he would get one-fifth of the millions; and even one-fifth of a single million made David Wayne's paltry ten thousand dollars seem poor indeed.

Nellie Landis gasped at the thought.

" But are you sure there's oil?"

Egelton crossed to a shelf behind his desk, and took down a glass jar. Pasted on it was a transcript of the analyst's report.

" Don't," she said, her eyes filled with wonder. " I believe you, Mr. Egelton. It *is* wonderful, isn't it?"

She breathed hard. She remembered how Egelton had come running up to the house to call her, with the good news. She remembered how, that evening, she had stirred the dark mixture of oil and water into yellow, harsh-scented foam; how she had triumphed over David Wayne.

That was the night she had handed him back his ring.

Had anyone told her, ten minutes earlier, that she would do that, she would have laughed the teller to scorn.

She had surprised herself quite as much as she had surprised Wayne.

" Millions!" she breathed again; and beside the millions, David Wayne's patient savings dwindled into nothingness and vanished entirely.

She let Egelton help her into the car.

" It's wonderful," she whispered. " Poor dad has always been so unlucky, too "

Her eyes sought the up-stairs window. She pushed back the veil again. She smiled.

She saw Wayne up there, pacing to and fro. Through the open window his voice floated down to her, droningly. In the corner where his desk stood, Nellie could just make out the stenographer's head bent over her note-book. Wayne was dictating.

" Wait a minute, Mr. Egelton," she urged, as he stooped[7] to press the self-starter. " Did I forget my handkerchief? No, you needn't get out. I'll feel in my hand-bag."

She fumbled, blindly; and all the while her eyes watched that up-stairs window.

Wayne, turning, glanced down into the street, mechanically. The droning voice halted in the middle of a sentence. Nellie, triumphant, could fancy the young lawyer's whole frame stiffen as he caught sight of her.

She leaned forward, breathing happily.

" It's all right, Mr. Egelton," she said, her head very close to his.

CHAPTER XI.

WAYNE STRIKES BACK.

TV/HEN Wayne, white-faced, turned to his desk, his eye rested on two documents.

One was a blank application for stock in the Landis Oil Company, Limited.

The other was a copy of that company's handsomely printed prospectus.

" You may go, Miss Maitland," said the attorney, without looking at her.

The girl felt unselfishly sorry for Wayne. She knew how the land lay. She herself had known hurt many times worse than this; still, she felt for him. He seemed so miserable. And she liked the new Wayne, however she might have despised the money-grubbing lawyer she had first fancied him.

" If that girl just knew[1]—" she mused.

That, however, could wait. If Nellie Landis learned what Violet Maitland knew without any of Violet Maitland's telling, so much the better for Violet Maitland.

From time to time the girl glanced up from her. typewriter at David Wayne. He was leaning back in his swivel chair, reading and re-reading that prospectus with a strange intensity. At sight of his grim jaw and furrowed brow she revised her feelings a trifle. Perhaps Harry Egelton might be entitled to a little sympathy.

But Wayne was too engrossed in his present problem to feel sorry for himself.

He had his suspicions regarding the Landis well. They were, even now, no more than suspicions. Those suspicions had sent him on his almost fruitless trip to Carisford and Millbury. Those suspicions had vanished almost when he questioned Bert Ringold. They had revived when he passed that stretch of bush-lined road back of the Erie lease, where he had been waylaid.

Waylaid—of that he now felt certain.

He raised his eyes, and caught Violet Maitland's pitying glance. He could not read the pity in her eyes; the light was against him; he saw only her face turned his way. He growled something inaudible, lit a cigar to steady his nerves, and resumed his perusal of the prospectus.

There might, after all, be oil in the Landis well.

The prospectus stated very positively that oil had been struck. The well looked like a big producer. It marked an important extension northward of the great Millbury oil field. The production could only be estimated; the possibilities were beyond calculation.

Wayne recognized, with a growl, all the familiar, hateful lingo of the oil promoter. Here was an alluring list of dividends paid by other oil companies—those few oil companies which had paid enormous dividends. That also was part of the promoter's stock

in trade. Here, too, was the familiar flamboyant panegyric on the myriad uses to which petroleum products were put. The war was worked in, deftly, with soul-stirring references to the need of oil in the " fight for liberty and freedom."

" Tautology," grumbled Wayne. " Doesn't the one word comprehend the other?"

But, regarding the Landis well, the prospectus was convincingly conservative. Even if it made only one hundred barrels a day, that production, at existing prices, would mean a steady daily income of $250. Here mere estimates of all necessary outlay, generously calculated. Here were estimates of income, figured most conservatively. The resulting profits, however caution might whittle them down, were enormous.

Multiply one such modest producer by the hundred wells that could be drilled on the Landis forty, multiply that again by the myriad wells that might be drilled on a score of leases covering hundreds of farms and thousands of acres, all as likely to produce oil as the Landis lease—surely there was no limit to the possibilities!

Then the limited capitalization, only $50,000, meant all the bigger dividends for the far-sighted few who snatched the present opportunity by the forelock and purchased stock.

Here the enterprising promoter had psychologically injected the striking likes of J. J. Ingalls's " Opportunity."

" Rot!" grumbled Wayne.

Yet back of his grumbling he had to admit that this prospectus was something more than mere rot. The average raw, rank oil prospectus bluntly promises the stockholder the earth and the fulness thereof, and baldly states that the entire globe is full of oil. But Egelton's prospectus improved that. It adopted a conservative tone that carried conviction; it promised great things, but it did so inferentially by discounting still greater possibilities; it piled up huge profits and whittled them down unsparingly, only to leave them still sufficiently huge to satisfy Croesus.

" It's clever," mused Wayne.

But on one point the prospectus was specific. Oil had been struck.

Wayne underlined a paragraph with a pencil that fairly cut into the heavy coated paper:

> Oil has been struck in the Landis No. 1. It is there in commercial quantities. Pumping apparatus is being hurried to the scene to make an actual test of the production. At the very least that production will run one hundred barrels a day; it may reach 1,500 to 2,000 barrels a day when the well is shot.

Wayne smoked, almost contentedly.

If Harry Egelton had put crude oil into that well merely for his own amusement, that was nobody else's business.

But if Harry Egelton had deliberately " salted " the Landis well for the purpose of selling stock—

" If he did that," exclaimed Wayne, viciously: *"I've got him."*

Wayne could have spent days and weeks in Millbury, at Carisford, elsewhere, putting together a positive case—but his soul was that of a lawyer, not that of a detective. He felt the urge to decisive action, so he took a lawyer's short cut.

He decided to smash his antagonist's witness.

Whatever Egelton had done, Honest John Landis of course knew nothing of it. It must have been done at night. The one man likely to know was Dan Griffith, the driller in charge of the night shift.

Wayne waited till Egelton had returned to his office. The crowds that in the first few days had visited the Landis well were now at the office, buying stock.

In the early evening Wayne drove out to the Landis farm.

He turned his car into a lane a few hundred yards short of the Landis gate, and took a short cut through a corn field to the derrick. Nellie, he felt pretty sure, would not be there; yet he spied circumspectly till certain that Dan Griffith was alone. Then he sauntered up with an air of easy nonchalance.

Griffith started. He had not seen Wayne coming.

Then he chuckled.

" Oh, it's you, Mr. Wayne. Thank God the rush is over. I've entertained all sorts of visitors the last few days, come to see a real oil well."

Wayne for the nonce asked nothing pertinent. He proffered a cigar, and the two lit up.

" The pumps aren't here yet," volunteered Griffith, " so we can't tell how much she'll make. Egelton's written to Pittsburgh two or three times, and he telegraphed this morning, to hurry up the outfit. It's the deuce of a note, the way these railroads ball things up."

Wayne sympathized, and smoked in silence, letting Griffith talk of a gusher he once drilled near Yenang-Yaung, and the coolies he had to work with. Most of the talk was to him mere jargon, the jargon of an oil driller; yet he kept an outward show of interest.

All the while his eyes searched the derrick frame and the engine-shed.

Presently he expressed curiosity regarding the drilling rig. So Griffith, glad of a chance to air his expert knowledge, explained it all.

Wayne, rising, followed the driller to the engine-shed Griffith's explanations were a maze of technicalities; but Wayne honestly tried to thread his way through the labyrinth. All the time he kept his eyes wide open for what he might see, what he fully expected to see.

His eyes were helped by clear moonlight.

Yet he turned away from the engine-shed, disappointed. On the derrick floor a. moment later he curiously scrutinized the barrel containing the oil. He peered here and there about the derrick.

Griffith, quite unsuspicious, settled himself again on the bench, and re-lit his cigar, which had gone out. Wayne's eyes roved toward the orchard, the distant house—its lighted windows seemed to beckon, as Nellie's eyes used to do. Then he glanced toward the lower meadow, and the field ,of growing hay.

He started to his feet.

" What's that?" he demanded. " A cat? Or a rabbitt?"

" Sit down," urged Griffith. " It's likely an Alaska sable." He chuckled.

" But it *is* a cat," argued Wayne.

As though to prove his case, he started toward the hayfield.

" Hold on," commanded Griffith. " You'd better be careful. I knew a Millbury girl who got out of a buggy once and started ' Pretty kitty! Pretty kitty!' and—darn it, the family wouldn't go near her for a week."

But Wayne was running toward the fancied rabbit. His eyes, aided by the moonlight, had discerned a half-formed path through the hay. He followed the trail to a ditch just inside the rail fence.

Then he came back to Griffith.

" Well?" chuckled Griffith. " Did you catch your cat — or was it a rabbit?"

" No," returned the lawyer, soberly. " You were right, Dan. I found the trail of a skunk—"

" A-ha! But you don't smell of it—"

" Don't I?" Wayne thrust his fingers under the other's nose. " I found the trail of a skunk—*named. Egelton."*-

Griffith sprang to his feet, menacingly.

" Crude oil, isn't it?" The attorney confronted him, unafraid, his hand, smeared brown, still outstretched.

" Sit down, Dan," he urged. " I want to talk to you. In there—" he gestured toward the gaunt derrick frame—" is a barrel that held crude oil. It came from the Erie lease. And down there among the weeds in that ditch are five more barrels that held crude oil. They've got Erie on them, every one, and nothing left in them but the smell. The oil has gone down that casing. It's the only oil you've struck here."

The driller's face was working.

Wayne felt no hatred of the man. At the worst, Griffith had been merely the instrument Egelton had used, that in another minute he would use to smash Egelton.

" That well is a dry hole. It always was. There isn't a sniff of oil or gas, except what you folks put there. John Landis wouldn't sell stock till he had drilled a producer—so you people made a producer to order, so you could sell stock."

Griffith found voice.

" I didn't salt the well—"

" But you knew?"

" I don't know nothing?"

" You suspected—?"

The driller shrugged his shoulders. He was on the defensive.

" What are you going to do?" he ventured.

" First, I am going to find out the truth —from you. What do you know?"

" I don't know nothing."

" You told me you brought that barrel from Millbury with your drilling outfit. And you didn't!"

Griffith gazed at the trampled grass, and was silent.

Wayne made a hasty mental calculation.

" That barrel"—he motioned toward the derrick—"was one of six brought here in. a motor car—on the twenty-fifth of May—at—about three o'clock in the morning. Or, maybe a little later. You were on night shift?"

The driller just grunted.

" You saw or heard the car?"

Griffith stared at him like a cornered rat.

" See here," he burst forth, desperately, " you ain't got no business—"

" You saw it?"

" You're—you're—"

The man dissolved into incoherent defiance. Wayne eyed him steadfastly. Now, he was in his element.

" You'll tell me the truth, or you'll tell the truth in court. You saw or heard that car?"

" We weren't running that night." Griffith evaded the issue. " They told me not to run, and Ben and I turned in. If a car came, I must have been asleep—"

" But the car woke you?"

Griffith hesitated.

" It woke you?" Wayne drove home the question with a look that was like a dagger-thrust.

" Uh-huh," assented the driller, reluctantly. " I—oh, I heard a car—"

" And you saw it?"

Griffith hesitated a moment. Then he nodded.

Wayne comprehended at last, just what had happened that night. The car he had chanced upon and followed was Egelton's, going to Millbury for the oil to be used in salting the well. Egelton could have shipped in the oil by freight, but that might have involved delay and stirred suspicion, and it would have left incontrovertible records. John Landis himself must in that event have discovered Egelton's scheme—and Egelton could not take that risk.

Hence the stealthy trip by car to the Millbury field at night, the return when John Landis and his household were asleep, the instructions beforehand to Griffith and his tooley not to run that night.

He had chanced on Egelton's car. He had followed, never knowing it was Egelton's. Egelton must have noticed, as they swept through lighted Carisford, that he was following, and suspected him of intentional pursuit.

The thing was quite clear now. And Egelton, fearing detection, had turned into the lane at the Erie lease and then had crept back, surprised him in the darkness, struck him down while he tried to crank the car.

And—Wayne remembered Violet Maitland's handkerchief. She had said she dropped it in the morning, when she searched for him. . . She must have been with Harry Egelton that night. That explained her opportune presence. Wayne felt sick at heart. . . He had actually believed her, she asserted her innocence with such an air of truth.

He came back to earth, and Dan Griffith.

" You saw the car. Then you must have gone to the door, or to the window, and looked out?"

Another nod.

" And you saw the barrels unloaded?"

Still another nod, barely perceptible.

Wayne leaned closer. Griffith looked up at him. The attorney heard a sigh. The man had decided, perhaps, to make a clean breast of things.

Griffith flung away his unfinished cigar.

" What's the use?" he exclaimed. " Yes, I did see those barrels unloaded. I saw him at work lugging 'em to the derrick."

" And then—"

" If he did anything, he did it then. Next morning Egelton started running himself. Then they came and routed me out to say they'd struck oil."

Wayne was in the mood to sweep all things before him. He had his case. He had his witness—Egelton's own man. He glanced at the lighted windows of the house —a light glowed in the room that Landis called his study.

Wayne eagerly gripped the driller's sleeve.

"You saw him—recognized him—"

"Ye-es," admitted Griffith. "But—hold on—hold on, I say—"

"No. You come right with me. We'll go right in and tell Landis."

Griffith drew back, staring.

"Landis," he muttered. "Why, it was Landis I saw."

CHAPTER XII.

THE BUBBLE BURSTS.

IN his shabby flivver, Wayne chug-chugged disappointedly towarS Wallacetown.

He had questioned the driller pertinaciously, challenging his story from every angle; and Griffith stayed stubbornly certain.

Honest John Landis himself was the man who had unloaded the barrels of crude oil from the car and lugged them to the derrick.

Beneath Wayne's bombardment, Griffith cast aside the last attempt at concealment. He spoke with every appearance of perfect frankness. Wayne watched him narrowly, but Griffith reacted correctly to every test of honesty.

David Wayne had cross-examined a good many witnesses in his ten years and more as law student and practicing attorney. A lawyer in course of time can usually tell, by certain indications, whether or not his witness tells the truth. Some lawyers might err, through inexperience or bias; but Wayne had faith in his own unprejudiced judgment.

And his judgment told him that Griffith spoke the truth; that beyond all question John Landis was actually the man Griffith had seen handling the crude oil from Millbury.

If there were exposure, not Egelton, but Landis would bear the shame. If there were criminality, the criminal was Landis. If punishment ensued, that punishment would fall on Landis.

Wayne, was bewildered. Had Landis acted in sheer ignorance of the logical consequences, misled by Egelton? Had Egelton prompted him, perhaps indirectly? Or had the old man, shaken by his many failures, yielded at last to temptation?

The last suggestion was incredible—yet—Wayne in ten years' experience had seen too much of the frailties of human nature to reject the hypothesis absolutely. Yes, even John Landis might have stooped to intentional dishonesty.

But Wayne was certain, at the outset, that Egelton must have prompted him.

These things Wayne turned over in his mind during the homeward drive. He turned them over and over during the indecisive week that followed.

In that week, Wallacetown became a boom town. The hotels were crowded with oil speculators. The farmers of Wallace township were harried for leases. In his resplendent office across the street, Egelton sold Landis Oil Company stock.

That occupation, mused Wayne, grimly, kept Egelton away from Nellie Landis. But it did not help David Wayne.

Of course, she would never be friend of his again; yet every time the telephone rang, he jumped up, fancying her call—and then, bitter, vowed that he would never, never yield an inch.

The secret of the well oppressed him. He saw men and -women, friends he knew, go into the resplendent offices; he knew that people were venturing their savings on the positive promise of oil—and he knew that the oil was a fraud.

He realized, a week too late, that in the very moment of discovery he should have confronted Landis and Egelton both and forced a show-down.

Twice he saw Landis on the street. Landis seemed to shun his questioning gaze. He seemed to Wayne to have shrunk and dried up into a frail wisp of humanity; his cough came more frequent; his step was more feeble.

The second time they met, Wayne, determined to question him, went up and shook hands; then, in sudden pity, turned away.

Guilty though John Landis might be, his feud was not with Landis.

That thought he turned over and over through another twenty-four hours. Then he reached an abrupt decision.

" Miss Maitland," he commanded, " will you call the Landis Oil Company and ask if Mr. Egelton is in?"

Wayne fancied that the girl did not respond with her usual promptness. He eyed her curiously.

Was there, after all, anything between her and Egelton? Had her seemingly frank answers held truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth; or did those blue eyes hide deceit?

The girl put down the receiver.

" Mr. Egelton," she announced, " has gone to Pittsburgh to hurry up the pumping machinery. He expects to test the capacity of the well as soon as he gets back."

Wayne lay back in his swivel chair, puzzled.

Had his suspicions of Egelton been unjust? Egelton, hurrying on the pumping machinery which must prove the well worthless, was a spectacle of supreme good faith. Was Egelton perhaps innocent, totally innocent? Was John Landis the sole culprit?

Or—his heart leaped—was the Landis well, after all, a real oil well; and were his heaped-up suspicions mere moonshine?

He clung to that hope.

Three days in succession Wayne telephoned the Landis Oil Company; but Egelton had not returned. There was nothing untoward in that. A trip to Pittsburgh might well consume four days, or five—even more, if Egelton meant to see the pumping outfit shipped before he returned.

The third day, Wayne, crossing to the hotel for lunch, met Pap Hoskins, the daddy of the Saturday Night Club.

Pap Hoskins greeted him excitedly.

" Say," he cried, " is it true? Has he skipped out?"

" Who?"

" This man Egelton. He's been gone a week, and they say he took nine thousand dollars that he got for stock. And there's not a drop of oil in his well."

Wayne hedged.

" I don't believe it," he muttered.

But before he finished lunch, a dozen people had asked him the same question.

" Say, Dave," whispered the hotel clerk confidentially.

He had two ten-dollar shares, and wanted anxiously to know if the story was true. The waiter's sister had put money into the Landis Oil Company. "Is it really true?" questioned the waiter.

Wayne soothed him.

Ferris telephoned that afternoon, in an anxious, whispery voice. Had he heard anything? Was there anything to this story that was going around? Did he know anything about the real condition of the well?

Wayne could understand why Ferris was anxious. Ferris had got the charter for the company; he had been named as a provisional director; a fraud might not affect him legally, but would get him in wrong with many clients—and he was eager to hedge.

Wayne hoped for everything, admitted nothing, promised nothing.

By nightfall the little town was seething with excitement, and the rumor was on every lip. Wayne himself had been consulted by a score and more of clients, certain that the company was sheer fraud, anxious to get their money out of it. He did his best to reassure them.

At the Landis Oil Company's office, meanwhile, a bewildered clerk, besieged by angry shareholders, tried to get hold of John Landis by telephone—and failed. Then she locked the offices, and went home.

Wayne, when a lull came toward five o'clock, paced up and down his sanctum, deliberating.

" Miss Maitland," he said, suddenly, " will you get me John Landis—Wallace township, 671 ring 23. Tell him I want to speak to him."

The girl obeyed.

She knew well enough why Wayne had deputed that task to her. Nellie Landis might answer the call; and David Wayne shrank from speaking to Nellie Landis.

She puckered her brow as she put in the call. She was weighing the pros and cons of a difficult matter, a problem in ethics—she, who at times in her short life had paid little heed to such abstract problems.

Nellie Landis answered, her voice thrillingly soft and clear. Violet gave her message.

" Mr. Landis is quite ill. He is in bed. He cannot speak to anyone."

So Violet Maitland, still holding the receiver, reported to Wayne. Wayne hesitated a moment; then caught up the instrument.

" Miss Landis"—his voice was hard—• " this is David Wayne. There is a report around town that Mr. Egelton has skipped out with the company's funds. Has your father heard that?"

" Oh, D a v y — "

Wayne thrilled, responsive to the well-remembered voice, soft, languishing, even in this hour of stress.

"Is it true?"

" Davy—Davy "

She could, it seemed, just murmur his name, and sob. The situation grew embarrassing.

" There are people coming to me, Miss Landis, asking me "

" Can't you call me Nellie?"

The voice was soft, tender, insinuating; Wayne fancied Nellie Landis smiling through her tears. Yet it was a trivial thing to say at such a time.

He felt like being harsh; he tried hard to be matter-of-fact.

" You see, Nell, I've got to tell these people something——"

" Oh, Davy, tell them anything you like —but dad can't see anyone. He's very, very sick, Davy"—and still there was that rustle of the clinging vine in her voice.

" Do you know whether Egelton has actually skipped out? Are you expecting him back? When do you expect him?"

Trying to play out his role of lawyer, Wayne continued to pelt her with relentless questions.

"Oh, Davy—Davy "

" Nell," he urged, " do try to calm yourself. Be brave, now, little girl." He felt her weakness; he wanted to comfort her. "I want to help you, Nell; you and your father; and I can't do it unless you help me. Tell me all about it—exactly what has happened—everything you know "

" Oh, Davy, I don't know—I can't tell "

She again fell to sobbing.

" Some other time, maybe Good-by, now, Davy. Do your best, won't you, to keep those horrid people away——"

" Good-by," muttered Wayne, gruffly.

It was no use. Puzzled, he hung up the receiver.

But the old habit of devotion tugged hard. He set his lips.

" I've simply got to say," he mused, " that everything's straight—that Egelton's coming back. And, whatever happens, I've got to play the game."

Next day, in mid-morning, Bert Ringold burst noisily into Wayne's office.

" You stay there," he roared, in the antechamber; then poked his head through the door of the lawyer's sanctum.

Wayne glanced up from his desk. The blustery inrush of the big oil man was a strain on his frayed nerves.

" What is it?" he almost snarled.

"I've got 'em where the hair's short," bellowed Ringold, from the depths of his huge chest. " This town's chuck full of lies, but I'm the lad with the facts."

"What do you mean?"

Wayne's face was chalky with apprehension.

" I took your tip, Dave. Whenever I got a chance I snuggled up close to those pumpers cn the Erie lease. Darn it, they were close as clams. But yesterday Putterby let out one of the helpers^ Pat Keck, and Pat came to town and had a drink or two with me and loosened up. It's every bit true "

" Hold on."

Rising, Wayne closed the door.

" Now, tell me."

" There's precious little to tell, but what I tell, I can prove. The Erie Oil Company sold six barrels of crude to the Landis Oil Company in May. Here's the written order, signed by John Landis. Oil to be called for. Landis himself came for it in a car on the night of the twenty-fifth of May. My man, Keck, helped him load the six barrels. Landis paid him by check, signed by Landis himself, drawn on his private account, and told him not to whisper a word of it. Keck filled out the usual receipt. Here's the stub, dated, initialed. I've got the proofs."

" Hold on. Have you got the number of the car?"

" N-no. Keck didn't notice that. It was a flivver, he thought, converted into a delivery car."

Wayne gazed at him expectantly.

Ringold volunteered nothing more.

" And Egelton?" demanded Wayne.

" Egelton? What about Egelton?"

" Wasn't he in this?"

" No. Keck says that Landis came alone and left alone. He never saw Egelton."

Wayne's fingers dug into his palms. Then, in a flash, he saw a reason—the reason that Egelton was not at the Erie lease during the brief time it took to load the barrels into the car. He was that reason—he, David Wayne.

Egelton had lingered behind, in the bush, to put him out of the way.

" Wait a minute." He drummed on the desk an indecisive moment with his fingers. " Let me see— how long will it take you to get Keck here? I'd like to question him before I do anything."

Ringold rose, and flung open the door.

" Come here, Pat," he bellowed; and the discharged pumper, a red-headed, clear-eyed young man, stepped into the room.

" You've got to hurry," added Ringold to the attorney, " if you want to get in ahead of the rush. The company's office is full of shareholders right now, and they're out to hang someone. Egelton's skipped out, they say, and taken all the funds—but I guess Honest John"—the big man sneered— " didn't pour oil into that hole for nothing."

" Hold on," interposed Wayne, " are they saying that, too?"

"That Honest John salted the well? Sure! Most folks are guessing, but we—we *know.*"

" Sit down," said Wayne to the pumper.

He went over the story with the young man, step by step.

" You see," said Ringold, when the attorney finished, " I've got the goods on Honest John Landis."

Wayne just then answered nothing. He rose, and went into the vault.

His self-possession had returned.

" I'm going down to the meeting, Bert," he said quietly, as he opened the door to the outer office. " But I've got to step into the bank a minute. Tell the crowd, will you, that I have full instructions to act for John Landis, and that I'll be there right away."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END OF THE ROAD.

"WAYNE was gone a long time. So long, indeed, that Violet Maitland finished typing her letters before he came back. So long a time, even after the letters were finished, that Violet Maitland, subtly alarmed for him, grew restless, and went time and again to the front window.

Thence she could gaze down into the offices of the Landis Oil Company, on the further side of the wide street.

Down there, people came and went; and through the door when it was open she heard the clack of excited voices.

But Wayne did not come out.

If anything serious had happened—thus she encouraged herself—his office would have been let know.

The telephone rang repeatedly, with calls for Attorney Wayne. These Miss Maitland dutifully referred to the Landis Oil Company, 3-2-3.

Eventually came a call in a languishing voice she had come to know.

" Mr. Wayne," she said, " is out. He is attending to that oil company matter for Mr. Landis."

Just a hint of acid stiffened the sweet voice.

" But Mr. Landis never "

Violet Maitland's answer was sweetly assured.

" Miss Landis, you can trust Mr. Wayne. There is no cause for worry—none at all. Mr. Wayne is looking after things for you."

Just what Wayne was doing, or trying to do, she did not know; but she had the utmost faith in Wayne, coupled with a trifle of doubt as to his safety down there with the angry shareholders.

" You might call 3-2-3," she suggested.

" No, no," exclaimed Nellie Landis. " I can't do that. No, I couldn't think of it for a moment."

She hung up the receiver.

Violet Maitland glowered at the silent instrument.

" If you only knew," she whispered, tensely. " If—you—only—*knew.*"

A long time after that, Wayne came in. He looked haggard, as though his conference with the angry speculators had been strenuous and perhaps disappointing.

Big Bert Ringold was with him. Ringold, too, seemed unusually subdued.

" I've got to catch the interurban, Dave," he muttered at last, in a choky growl.

He turned to go; then halted, gazing at Wayne.

"God, Wayne!" he ejaculated, "I owe John Landis an apology. Poor old duffer—I suppose it took his last cent—he's mortgaged to the hilt, they say. I feel like telling the folks they ought to hand back that hundred dollars. By gad, I will "

" It is not necessary."

Ringold hesitated.

" Then tell him, anyway," he burst forth, " that Bert Ringold is glad to have known one honest man."

" Yes," muttered Wayne, absently, " he's an honest man."

Violet Maitland listened while Ringold tramped noisily down the stair. Then she stole softly into Wayne's private office, and placed the finished letters on his desk.

She lingered, gazing at him with demure expectancy.

He said nothing.

Still she lingered, disappointed now, her downcast eyes fixed on her crepe de chine waist.

Wayne, busied in his task of signing the letters, sensed her presence rather than saw her.

" You may go, Miss Maitland. I'll ring when I need you."

Then, as she still lingered, he glanced up.

"Tell me, what did they do, Mr. Wayne?"

" Oh, it's all right, and every one's satisfied," he rejoined shortly. " The shareholders won't make any trouble." He hesitated. " Landis paid them back their money."

He nodded dismissal, and she went out, as one in a maze. She crossed to the telephone, and softly called the Landis home.

" Miss Landis," she said, in a low tone, that Wayne might not overhear, " it's all right—everybody's satisfied—there won't be any trouble—Mr. Wayne—"

She hesitated.

"—Mr. Wayne wished you to know."

" Oh!"

Then there was silence.

Nellie Landis had hung up the receiver without another word.

Violet Maitland shook her fist at the telephone, the white bosom of her crepe de chine waist heaving with her pent-up emotions.

She was very human, and had been—she shuddered now to think what she had been! But at least she still knew the primal emotions of love and hate.

Wayne vouchsafed nothing more of what had happened. Violet Maitland, knowing few folks in Wallacetown, caught only a disconnected word or phrase of comment here and there.

" They say Landis gave back the money?" remarked Mrs. Barton that night at the supper table.

She was probing for information, but Violet had none to impart.

" I think," pursued the minister's widow mercilessly, " that people who put their money into such schemes deserve to lose."

Wayne sent Violet Maitland to the newsstand next afternoon for his Carisford paper. Featured on the front page she read the story of John Landis and his honesty.

The moment Landis heard the rumors regarding the well—so she read—though on his sick-bed, he promptly instructed his attorney, David Wayne, to hand back their money to all dissatisfied shareholders.

John Landis had taken up the project on the distinct understanding that no stock should be sold till pay sand was struck; and if there were any loss, he fully intended to bear that loss alone. He did not mean any one else to suffer.

His action in this instance had merely vindicated the high regard in which Wallacetown had always held him.

On top of the news-panegyric, the Carisford paper went out of its way to pay editorial tribute to this amazing honesty.

Violet glanced at a Detroit paper on the news-stand. Her eye caught the headline:

FARMER LANDIS MAKES GOOD
LOSS TO STOCKHOLDERS

That item had been telegraphed from Carisford.

Violet went back to the office, handed Wayne his Carisford paper, and sat down at her desk, vaguely puzzled and inclined to be angry.

True, everybody called Landis " Honest John " - b u t -

Honest John was ill in bed. The paper said so. Never to her knowledge had Honest John spoken to Wayne since the day before the bubble burst. Nellie Landis had telephoned Wayne just once; but from Wayne's side of that telephone conversation, the girl knew that Nellie must have been distressfully incoherent.

When—when had David Wayne received from Landis the instructions of which the paper spoke?

In occasional idle moments Violet pieced these thing together with little bits of that talk Wayne had with Ringold, with the things Wayne had said after he opened the inner door, just before he went to the meeting.

Going her way in the days that followed, she heard Wallacetown folk who a few days earlier had clamored for Honest John's life-blood now lauding him to the skies.

She felt indefinably angered by it all. She felt the urge to walk into Wayne's sanctum, right up to Wayne's desk, and to question him relentlessly as he had questioned her.

One bright June afternoon Nellie Landis came fluttering into the office.

The worry of her father's illness sat light upon her. She was a vision of youth and life and joy. She wore a perfectly new outfit Violet had never seen before, stunningly simple in contrasting black and white, topped off with a simple black caterpillar straw with white ospreys. The severe black and white set off the rich radiance of her beauty.

Behind his closed door, Wayne was immersed in a brief. Violet, rising, drew forward a chair.

Nellie Landis edged away haughtily.

The fair girl shivered. Just so she had seen Nellie shrink from flashy, impudent Mame Donahoe. Nellie, without a word, crossed to the door of the inner office, and softly turned the knob.

" Davy—"

Violet, turning to the window behind her desk, gazed angrily down into the street.

" I hate her!" she whispered bitterly.

« Davy—"

The voice came to her like the ripple of sunlit waters.

She slammed herself down at her desk, and commenced angrily to pound the typewriter keys, just to shut out the soft sound of Nellie's voice.

" The little fool hasn't sense enough even to close the door!" she mused.

Wayne at his desk smiled a welcome to Nellie Landis. And Nellie Landis smiled back, that wonderful smile that had lured the plodding lawyer through all these years.

Wayne was asking about John Landis. It struck Violet that her employer seemed oddly sure of himself. She shivered, and rattled away at the keys, in a frantic effort to drown her own thoughts in noise.

Nellie Landis had drawn away from her, as from contamination. *How could Nellie Landis know?*

But presently into the forced clatter came other things than her thoughts. That sweet, rippling voice of Nellie's was wonderfully penetrating.

" Davy "—her voice was the whine of a spoiled child—" Davy, did you see this? Isn't it just horrid?"

She laid a copy of the Carisford paper on Wayne's desk.

Violet's typewriting fell silent. She could see Wayne glance through the item with a smile almost indulgent. Again the girl was struck with that hint of sureness in his manner. Yet she sensed, as he listened, and smiled, that he felt to the full the charm of the beautiful woman in black and white, of the radiant face, of the rippling voice.

" It isn't fair to print such things," went on Nellie Landis. Davy, I want to do something to the man who put that in the paper. You'll help me, won't you?"

Violet gazed down at the typewriter keys. " If she only knew," she whispered, almost pityingly. "The poor little fool!"

" The minute I read that I went straight to Mr. Ferris—"

The girl caught herself. Violet wondered at Wayne's silence. She could not see if his face showed the hurt. Nellie had gone first to Ferris for help. Surely that must have cut Wayne to the quick!

But Nellie had plunged into self-justification.

" He formed the company, you know. I thought he might do something, and I couldn't get you. I telephoned you first. You were out. Didn't that girl give you my message?"

Violet's nails bit into her palms; with an effort she conquered the urge to cry out. " That's a lie, a lie, a lie!" she whispered. " She blames me, just to excuse herself."

" And Mr. Ferris just laughed—oh, Davy, I want you to help me—"

She arose, leaned close to him. Her eyes lit with confident appeal.

" Sit down, Nell," said Wayne.

Till now, he had not spoken, since he asked regarding John Landis.

Nellie sat down, with a languid grace, and toyed with her gloves; but all the while her eyes were on Wayne's face.

" And that wicked editorial, too, on the inside page—- why, any one would think our company was a fraud—"

Still Wayne was silent. " Why doesn't he tell her?" mused Violet tensely.

" Davy, I want to find out who put that in the paper."

Wayne looked up now and smiled. That smile was his unconscious response to the old-time allure of of Nellie Landis; to the wonderful brown eyes that, in calm or storm, seemed always welcoming; to the charm of a voice that even in anger never lost its rippling loveliness.

" Surely," he urged, " there's no reflection on your father—"

" N-no—not that—"

Violet fidgeted now; it was not for her dying father's sake that Nellie had come; then for what? Was Nellie making that paper merely a pretext for reconciliation? Was her story of consulting Ferris merely a part of love's camouflage? Was this pretense of consultation her flag of truce?

Violet tinkled the keys again, spasmodically. She told herself she did not want to hear, had no right to hear. But why didn't they close the door? She wondered at Wayne, who had always in the past closed the door.

" Nell," said the lawyer, grimly, " I know the man who put that in the paper. The night of the meeting the Carisford editor telephoned me—and I gave him these facts."

" You?"

She was bewildered, but beautiful; angry, yet alluring.

" Oh, Davy—to do such a horrid thing—"

" I think the report is correct." Wayne strove hard to make his voice steady. " I appeared at the shareholders' meeting in behalf of Mr. Landis, who was too ill to come. I told them, just as the paper says, that Mr. Landis had acted in good faith—had insisted that no stock be sold till oil was struck—honestly believed he had a producing well—and any shareholder who wished could get back every cent he put in. That was a bomb-shell," concluded Wayne.

Violet's face was white. " Why don't you tell her the rest?" she mused.

Nellie's protest was the same babyish whimper.

" Davy, you—you took advantage—"

Wayne made no protest.

" And to pay out so much of poor dad's money—to persuade him to do such a silly thing—why, Davy—"

Violet could stand it no longer.

She arose, and swiftly crossed the room, and faced Nellie Landis, her face white, her blue eyes flashing fire, her lips twitching.

"Miss Landis!"

"Huh!"

And Nellie Landis turned away from the interruptor, and refused to look at her.

" Miss Maitland," interposed Wayne sternly, " will you please—"

" I will not, please. Mr. Wayne, you're

willing to sit there and let yourself be misjudged. But it's not fair, and I won't permit it. I'll tell Miss Landis—"

Nellie tossed her head.

" Miss Landis, half an hour before that meeting a man came to our office. He told Mr. Wayne that your father ' salted ' that well—"

" Oh?"

Just the faintest hint of sarcastic disbelief tinged the clear voice.

" That man had evidence enough to send your father to—"

Wayne half rose.

" Stop!"

" I won't stop, Mr. Wayne. You can't stop me. That man, Miss Landis, intended to have your father arrested. That's why he came to Mr. Wayne."

" Davy—"

Nellie Laridis gazed at him,, a question in her eyes.

" So it was for that you spent my father's money?"

" To keep him out of jail," cried Violet harshly. She would, if she only could, sting this butterfly thing into sensible appreciation of what David Wayne really was. " But it wasn't your father's money that kept your father out of jail," she went on, relentlessly. " It was Mr. Wayne's."

She swayed a little, sick from the very vehemence of her words, fearful of what she had done—fearful, even more, of what Nellie Landis must inevitably do, once she sensed the real worth of David Wayne.

" But the paper said my father—"

" Mr. Wayne put that story in the paper. Your father hadn't a cent to pay those shareholders, let alone ten thousand dollars. Your father was a criminal—he actually salted that well—yet if he came down town to-morrow, people would point to him as the honestest man God ever made and trust him with their lives, just because—just because David Wayne—oh, you little fool!"

She burst into a torrent of sobs.

At the epithet, Nellie flushed; but it was a flush beautiful. Swiftly she turned to Wayne.

" Davy—you paid them—with *your* money?"

He stood stubbornly silent.

" *Our* money?"

Wayne bit his lip.

" It doesn't matter, Nell," he said gruffly. " Let's forget it."

He gazed down at the rug. However blunderingly, he had stumbled at last to the show-down, after all these years of working and waiting. And the hurt heart of the blue-eyed stenographer with the fair hair, beating under her plain crepe de chine, sensed a bit of what he felt. Would the girl never comprehend? Would she never say to Wayne that one thing the moment called for?

Nellie Landis stood, looking uncertainly from_ one to the other of them. Violet turned on her impatiently.

" There," she exclaimed, " don't be a fool! Can't you see—"

She must see now, the silly thing, that no mere money could weigh in the balance against a man like David Wayne.

"Ten thousand dollars!" whispered Nellie Landis.

Her eyes filled with an odd expression. Not love, not gratitude, but a sort of dull amazement that Wayne—slow-going, easy Wayne—in these years of waiting had actually done so much.

" Ten thousand, Davy—our ten thousaad—"

Wayne turned to her, mechanically, his arms outstretched. Violet Maitland sobbed, and looked away. She had made this possible; yet she had no place in their supreme moment.

" Oh, Davy, you foolish boy—surely you didn't need—why, those people would have taken half—yes, a tenth of that— and—here you have to begin again, right at the beginning!"

Wayne's arms dropped to his sides.

" You meant it for the best, Davy, but—oh, you foolish boy!"

Wayne stood like a statue after she had gone. So Violet saw glancing up through her tears.

She had heard Nellie's footsteps tripping across the ante-chamber, lightly descending the stair, dying away in the street—careless as featherdown, thoughtless as summer zephyrs.

Her mind was in a whirl. The next she knew she stood sobbing beside Wayne's desk. He turned an ashy face toward her.

" Oh, Mr. Wayne, I—I'm so sorry—I did so want to help you—and—and—I spoiled it all—"

She stood waiting for Wayne's harsh dismissal.

For many moments he did not speak. Then his tone was very quiet and composed.

" It is six o'clock, Miss Maitland. You may go. I will lock up."

She hardly knew how she escaped from the office, or what way she took; till she found herself skirting the church lawn toward Mrs. Barton's house.

She passed from the open street, where it was bright and still sunny, into the shadow of the pines at the gate. Then she saw for the first time a young man standing at the gate, waiting for her.

" Oh!" she exclaimed as she realized who it was.

The young man was Harry Egelton.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

PIERROT and Pierrette are not to be taken seriously, except by the children. The stage is set for laughter, when they caper and flutter about in the dancing white moons in front of the black-velvet drop. If anguish is mimicked now and then in their frivolous posturings, we, •the audience in the dark theater, laugh with all the greater zest. You and I know they merely do an admirable bit of fooling! Amusing enough they are in their way, but light—very light—and to be forgotten on the way home. Just a pair of delectably absurd featherheads—Pierrot and Pierrette!

I.

" **IT'S** not what things are, that matters; it's how you see them," Nurse Sarah Witz often remarked. And the crudely phrased platitude, on *her* tongue, somehow became invested with great philosophic importance. People even responded: "You're right!" instead of looking bored or openly sneering.

Of course she was right! Else why Should she now be smiling, and the distinguished Dr. Hirschof frowning in gentlemanly protest, although both pairs of eyes had the -same target.

Gazing toward Goban's Ragtime studio, the " practical "• nurse found much at which to smile.

For instance, there was Beethoven—dancing on the window-sill, to the syncopating, titillating lilt of " Spoontime Down in Zululand," words and music by Morrie Goban.

That seeming smudge on Beethoven's

expansive, plaster brow no doubt was the gloom of horror. The bust was broken at the base, in such fashion as perhaps to account to cold science for its rocking backward and forward rather than sidewise. But anybody with eyes could see that the great composer, in an agony of shame, really was endeavoring to hurl himself to the flagging below and destroy himself in effigy.

For Morris Goban—who himself was worthy of a smile—had departed somewhat from the ways of his father. Old Mr. Goban had labored faithfully, at fifty cents a lesson, to attune his pupils with the celestial harmonies of the masters; and had discovered for the world a celebrity, the one and only Alcar Bishky. Morrie taught rag-time at a dollar quarter per head an hour; had three pupils to his father's one; and already had given to the cabarets that prince of " ivory ticklers," Solly Rosenblatt.

Moreover, Goban, Jr.'s pupils—a dozen usually wandered in at the same hour—could foxtrot, or employ feet or voice exactly as they chose, when the urge of their preceptor's itching, twitching, witching mel-o-dee-e-e proved too strong for human resistance. Then the whole two stories shook, from the very rafters to the low, broad sill on which waltzed the plaster Beethoven, an unwilling advertisement for " Ragtime in ten easy lessons."

Floating out the window, past the scandalized Beethoven, the tintinnabulating strains of Morrie's Zulu pastorale reached through the iron-picket fence inclosing a slight trace of front yard, and tickled the bare toes of Ros'e Epstein and her train of rather grubby admirers. So the " kids " of the tenements danced and hummed and blocked the sidewalk to the tune of the grandest music they ever had heard. They especially liked Morrie's music, because it didn't run away like that of hurdy-gurdy or pony-drawn merry-go-round or organ-grinder—none of which ever lingered long in one spot, among East Side folk who seemed to think pennies were made only to be hoarded.

Nurse Sarah Witz, plumply filling the doorway across the street, nodded her head *allegro vivace,* in time to the music, and smiled a broad smile of benediction upon all the scene. But Dr. Hirschof scarcely had motored east of that green oasis, Tompkins Park, when his scholarly brow was puckered by the gentlemanly frown already referred to.

Nor was it lifted when the perpetrators of this noisy harlequinade—their Saturday afternoon lesson over—poured tumultuously from Goban's Ragtime Studio, loudly caroling the refrain of " Spoontime Down in Zululand."

Morrie brought up the rear, in company with a slim princess of a girl, fashioned on lines popularized by the willow and the " straight-front." As they stood on the steps chatting, the girl fluttered upon her toes; unconsciously swinging and twisting and bending her body in ragtime rhythm. Her features—as clean-cut as a cameo—were agleam with animation. Ada invariably suggested to the mind a thoroughbred pawing up the turf in a mad impatience to be off upon a steeplechase. She had caught the habit from Morrie.

" It goes like this," quoth the rag-time prince, as he ditty-itty-um-tummed and um-um-tum-dittied in elucidation. Ada vivaciously nodded; then skipped across the pavement, and with a "Hello, dad!" bounced to the running-board of the doctor's car, which was forging a path through the children's favorite playground, the street.

" With a little pep, Ade, it'd knock 'em dead!" vociferated Morrie, who hadn't finished. He ran, shirt-sleeved and bareheaded; paralleling the course of the motor; slipping on and off the curb.

Now, Dr. Hirschof bore a scrupulous regard for the conventions. To have a hoydenish, grown-up daughter hanging urchin-wise to his car and conversing in shrieks, doubtless was annoying. But to have a hare-brained coiner of low ballads trotting like a Hottentot outrunner beside the vehicle and howling at the top of his voice, must have been quite an affront to the doctor's dignity.

First, he uttered patient reproof. This apparently unheard, he honk-honked vehemently and put on speed.

The hawk-nosed harlequin laid no stress whatever upon dignity. Beloved (though not by the doctor) for his very eccentricities, he could have galloped down the street in his pajamas, and even the " cop " would have applauded. Morrie's lithe limbs now simply moved more rapidly, he slipped on and off the curb a little faster and more gymnastically, and he and Ada raised their voices much higher to cope with traffic conditions.

It was with a frank sigh of pleasure that Dr. Hirschof drew up to his residence, in the row of well-kept, furnished dwellings which in this tenement district only physicians and lawyers can afford, and where park the only autos.

" Say, doc," exclaimed Morrie, up to this moment too busily occupied to notice the physician, " did Ade tell you of my zippy new rag—' Spoontime Down in Zululand '?" He obligingly hummed a few bars, while the girl swayed, contorted, and jerked in accompaniment.

Muttering something about not having time, Dr. Hirschof hastily betook himself up the door-steps. As soon as he arrived inside the vestibule, however, his frown disappeared.

Once upon a time such a show of vulgarity witnessed in his daughter would have brought the doctor to the depths of humiliation. But Ada's shameless frivolities had disgraced him so long and so often that now he was coldly indifferent to almost anything she might do. Past were his severe lectures on her lack of propriety, and her undignified association with that melodic charlatan — Morrie Goban — a young man who could do nothing but tinkle! tinkle! tinkle! on a vile-toned piano.

He had appealed to her sense of filial obedience; had reproached her for her ingratitude to an indulgent father; and she hadn't even understood what he meant! The girl was irremediably scatterbrained. Dr. Hirschof tried to do his duty by his daughter Ada; but naturally he could not have for her the affection he had for Miriam, Ada's slightly elder sister.

Miriam, who had heard Dr. Hirschof enter the vestibule, was bending with a faint, demure smile over her embroidery when the father paused in the doorway to gaze fondly upon his favorite daughter. Contrasted with the slim, wire-strung Ada and her touseled dark hair, white skin, and gray eyes, always open and ' alert and twinkling, Miriam was as brown and soft and sleek as a seal. And in her hazel eyes were many things, according to the will of long lashes that played no whit less cleverly than a senorita's fan.

" Well, Puss?" presently chuckled Dr. Hirschof, stroking the glossy brown head and pinching an olive-tinted cheek.

Miriam continued to smile demurely, and murmured sweetly without turning the glossy brown head: " Home again, father dear?"

This was the extent of her greeting; but it acted upon Dr. Hirschof like one of his own tonics.

" Good girl! Good girl!" he said kindly, as he beamed upon her and patted a sleek shoulder.

Before taking his desk-chair in the adjoining office, Dr. Hirschof stood thoughtfully caressing his Vandyke beard. How proud and happy he would be if the wild, heedless, unloving Ada were half as quiet and modest as her affectionate sister!

Meanwhile the demure smile on Miriam's lips had undergone a change. It now took a pronounced downward curve at the ends, and might have signified ennui or disgust. And when, shortly, she tiptoed to the hall and listened at the doctor's door, the gentle " love-light" which her father had seen in the hazel eyes had becpme a *different* flame —fierce, restless, and a little wanting in maidenly modesty.

Gliding swiftly to the telephone instrument in the alcove at the rear of the hall, Miriam softly called a number.

" Bert?" she whispered a moment later. Then—

" Can't talk now. You understand. Will I? Say! I'll meet you at eight. Same place? Sure! I'll be there with bells on. By-bye."

Barely a minute had elapsed from the time Miriam had dropped her embroidery until she again had it in her lap. Her actual interest now, however, seemed concentrated not so much on the needlework

as on a pungently seasoned novel which she had taken from its hiding-place beneath a sofa-cushion.

II.

ALTERNATING between the window and the bed where lay her little Isaac, who had come to grief while roller-skating at the tail of a heavy cart, Mrs. Feder exclaimed impatiently:

" He's late this morning again! It's the truth, there's no depending on Dr. Hirschof since the day of the scandal!"

She apparently resigned herself to a continued wait, and, settling back heavily in a creaking, cane-bottomed chair, emitted a gossipy sigh of reminiscence.

" You'd never think it—would you—of nice, quiet, innocent Miss Miriam, doing such a trick?"

Her sister, Nurse Sarah Witz—attending the " case " in both a sisterly and professional capacity—made in her throat a sound that might have meant anything. Presendy she observed:

" Them quiet ones are sometimes the worst—though Miriam mebbe wasn't so quiet a few blocks from home. I've seen her making eyes at young men in Tompkins Park, and in front of the vaudeville theayter on Avenue B. Bold, and sly, too."

" A theayter party she was supposed to be at, the night she disappeared, bag and baggage," eagerly pursued Mrs. Feder.

" Dear, oh, dear! Never in all my days will I forget how Mrs. Itkin—you'd think she was one of the Hirschof *family,* instead of their housekeeper and general servant—comes into Sussman's Fish and Herring shop, where I was looking for some forespice, and says to me something terrible is happened! She acts like she was going to faint. And I was about throwing some pickle-juice in her face, when she comes to and tells me all about it."

Nurse Sarah nodded, and commented: " Mrs. Itkin wouldn't likely leave anything out."

" She said the doctor didn't see Miriam at the breakfast table," Mrs. Feder continued. " Ada wasn't there, neither, being up-stairs, phoning people and rummaging in Miriam's room; hunting for some track of her sister before she went to spring the sad news on her pa.

" Mrs. Itkin says when he found Miriam had really left home, he went as white as the table-cloth.

" There was a note, too, Mrs. Itkin thinks—because just as she walked into Miriam's room, Ada quick crumpled up in her hand what looked like white paper. I guess she tore it up, 'stead of giving it to her father, like she should.

" The doctor was hurt sore. Didn't say much, except that his house now was disgraced altogether, and he was cursed in his children. Then he became bitter quiet—and it was as though Miriam had never been."

" Put her in Ada's class; huh?" grimly laughed Nurse Sarah, rising to " take " little Isaac's temperature.

" Oh—Ada? *She's* a *pretty* Satan's imp of a daughter to have!" Mrs. Feder rejoined. " Wouldn't you s'pose *any* girl would have sense enough not to play *jokes* on her father, at *such* a time? Well, the afternoon of the same day *it* happened, what does she do but have that crazy Morrie Goban—she must of put him up to it—go running up to the doctor and say, grinning all over his face:

" ' Swell afternoon, doc! Heard of the joke that Miriam played on you. Ha! ha! Tired of being only a doctor's daughter. Ha! ha! ha! Goes and gets a *real* job in a department-store. Saw her this morning—working like a busy, busy bee. Bet she'll own the whole place in a month. Inherited talent—eh, what?

" ' How's this for a new rag, Ade: " For Sister's Selling Silks to Meet the Mor-r-r-tgage!"

" ' Ripping! pipping! Oh, you department-store doll!' Ada then sings out, and she and Morrie scamper off like two children—after fooling poor Dr. Hirschof.

" Of course *he* feels better now—since finding out Miriam can do something besides ride in a motor and embroider. Still, Morrie can't keep the mean joke up forever. After a while he has to pretend Miriam has quit the one job for another—which is nobody knows where.

" This takes a lot of heart out of the

doctor. And on top of it, that ungrateful, cold-hearted Ada has to go leave him."

Mrs. Feder paused to stare at her sister, "who again was laughing queerly. However, Nurse Sarah obligingly agreed:

" *Wasn't* she the cold-blooded thing! There *are* foolish people who say Ada was practically forced out of house and home, after trying to pet the doc and make up for Miriam. Every time he saw her, the doc naturally was reminded of what he'd lost, and mebbe started to pity himself a little for having had a noble daughter taken from him and the worthless one left.

" Anyhow, 'they *do* say it got so he half turned his head so as not to see Ada. Now wouldn't you imagine a real daughter would overlook a little thing like that? But it. seems she didn't—neither did young Goban. Morrie said to her—so I've heard —what was the difference whether they got married now or later, because he had intended asking her *some* time, anyway. And Ada gobbled him up, without another thought of her poor father! Shameful, wasn't it? Just suppose she hadn't had Morrie to fall back on?"

Rocking in such noisy indignation as to call forth a feverish remonstrance from little Isaac, Mrs. Feder shortly made triumphant response:

" Well, she got punished for not doing right. She and Morrie went together to the doctor's office. Mrs. Itkin, who's always smelling some rat, was close behind them. She said she saw Dr. Hirschof thinking and mooning at his desk.

" Morrie asked the doctor if he minded if Ada and he got married?

" The doctor never says a word. He waves his hand careless like, just as though he didn't mind *what* they did.

" [1] Thanks, doc!' then says Morrie, who's as bold as brass, anyway. But Ada stands there, sort of expecting the doctor to congratulate them—or mebbe offer Morrie a marriage portion or something.

" When she see her father ain't going to stir, would you believe me? *Real tears* come to the young hussy's eyes. Then Morrie gets red—first time in his life, I guess—and he blabs out, cheerful-like, trying to make believe they don't care:

" ' We're booked for the vaudeville circuit, you know, doc. " Rag-time's Peppery Partners!" Ought to hit 'em a wallop; eh, doc? Small time, o' course—temporarily, y' understand. Then the big show for ours, with the electrics and a star on the dressing-room door. Watch us grow!'

" Those were his words, but the doctor wasn't interested enough for anybody or Mrs. Itkin to notice. So Morrie says: ' Come on, Ade; let's walk,' and you bet they ain't joking much as they goes out the door; leaving the doctor still dreaming about poor Miriam."

" And that's the last the doctor's seen of the worthless young scamps," muttered Nurse Sarah reflectively.

" Oh, but did you see any of the scandalous, light-minded picture-cards they been sending him from all parts of the country, Sarah? Two, that Mrs. Itkin shows me, read like this:

> It's a pipe, Doc! We're filling the barns! Seven calls and *some* hand here to-night. Went *great* at the big Smoketown, too.

"Think of it! Such awful nonsense—on post-cards—to a high-toned doctor as him. And that ain't the worst of it. After a while the doctor gets absent-minded—careless. He leaves a lot of post-cards on his desk—'stead of tearing them up, as he used to do, the minute they reached him, almost. Along comes Japh Kalfus, who has no more brains than to learn by heart the cards he sees on the doctor's desk:

> How's the old Doc's conduct? All's hunky-dory with the Ragtime Babes. Ta-ta.

> Have one on us, Doc. This burg's nutty over "Them Ticklin',Ticklin' Ragtime Kids!" Our latest hit. Klassy? You *said* it.

> Am mailing souvenir, profesh copy our new " Cuddle up 'n Kiss your Henry " Rag. Try it on the piano! With kisses.

" Japh gets this crazy stuff into his head, all right, but he don't know what it means. So out he goes, telling the neighborhood that Dr. Hirschof is carrying on with actresses—which is the nearest Japh can come to the meaning of it all. Mrs. Itkin and some of us that knows has had a terrible time setting people right.

" Don't you think Morrie and Ada send all these indecent cards out of spite, Sarah?"

" Mebbe you can form your own opinion, sister, after I tell you something," said Nurse Sarah dispassionately.

" First off, I ought to say I wrote to Morrie and Ade—after they'd been about a week on the road. I reported, as they'd requested, that the doc's health was failing fast, on account of his grieving over Miriam.

" One day last week I went up-town to the theayter district to see Mrs. Faulhaber. She keeps a boarding-house on a cross street up there, you know.

" And walking along Broadway, I spies Morrie and Ada, big as life. Morrie didn't have on as fine clothes as he used to wear; and Ada looked even skinnier than when she was here. Still, they was grinning as lively and impudent as ever."

" When in the name of goodness did they get back?" Mrs. Feder cried, in a tone considerably louder than the conventional sick-room whisper.

" That's what I'm coming to," was the calm reply. " According to the postals *I'd* seen in Mrs. Itkin's hand that morning, they *couldn't* have got back. So they must of written all them post-cards in advance, and got some actor friend to mail them from different towns."

" Then they was fired from their jobs, Sarah!"

" No; they broke their contracts as soon as they got my letter about the doc, and they've been here in New York all these months, playing round in cheap cabarets—*doing nothing but hunt for Miriam*—and going busted."

" Well, of all the nerve!" exclaimed Mrs. Feder. " Thinking *they* can find the poor lamb when Dr. Hirschof hisself can't!

" And it just shows what bluffs they are! I *knew* they couldn't 've been doing all them things they talk so big about on the postals!"

III.

MORRIE tossed his music-sheets, which he never used, on top the cabaret piano, turned to favor with a friendly grin the patrons of the snowy-white tables, and suddenly smiled broadly.

"La, la, the sun's out!" tittered Ada, as she flung aside her cloak. " Who *is* the bright inspiring angel?" she demanded with a droll wink, which Morrie ignored in his excitement.

" See that fat party with the overlapping chins, Ade? Yeh, to the left—about half-way back. His wife's behind the post. *That's* Goldthal—our future meal-ticket! On with the pep, kiddo mine."

Crashing out the opening chords, he swung into that Goban-composed classic: " Lead Me to That Nutty Sunda;, Sonny," with a riotously gay abandon that almost lifted the foot-tapping diners out of their chairs.

And, in the same spirit, Ada spun to front stage to translate laughter into song, and rare grace and agility into dancing.

"Going strong!" chuckled the elated Morrie. Things *were* breaking well—that is, *most* things. They had been covering all the cheaper cabarets in their search for Miriam—a search they merely called their "hash-house tour;" and it was a relief to " work " in this better-class restaurant—situated near enough to Sixth Avenue to be esteemed " Bohemian" and piquantly wicked, and close enough to Broadway's lobster belt to share in " White Light " radiance and prices.

You may know it by the potted firs that—all the length of its yellow fagade—substitute for uniformed flunkeys; firs being less expensive and more truly *en regie,* as any " Bohemian "—once found—will tell you.

Best of all, however, Morrie recently had interviewed Mr. Goldthal, who provided " the very best" hotels and restaurants with the highest-priced " talent" among entertainers. He had promised to look in and see how their " act" went—it being Goldthal's theory that " yuh can't tell nothin' from a stiff, office rehoisal; yuh wanta see 'em at *woik,* flashin' what *pers'nal magnertism* they got—see what I mean?"

Now Goldthal was here, watching and listening; doubtless keyed to catch, measure, and record whatever waves of magnetism Morrie and Ada might send rolling to-

ward him, over his soup. And " Ade " was " getting it across, putting it over!"

But *was* she? All at once her song had gone "flat!" He darted a glance out of the tail of his eye, and saw that her " steps " also had lost " ginger." " Strange Ade'd pull a stunt like that," he muttered, swaying rhythmically on the stool and making the piano " talk " as it never had chattered before.

'"Quitter, quitter, quitter! GoldthaPs got your goat!" he bantered smilingly as she rejoined him.

"'Goat' nothing!" she fiercely whispered back. " He's got my *sister!"*

Then Morrie saw that the woman half-concealed from them by the pillar was not GoldthaPs wife, but was Miriam Hirschof!

" She recognized me, and I believe asked Goldthal to take her away," whispered Ada. " He shook his head ' no.' Then she tried to get up and leave. He grabbed her arm and pulled her down. Look what he's doing now!"

Goldthal seemed to be pinning the girl's wrist to the table, • while she vainly struggled to free it. Partly screened by the pillar and a potted fern, they seemed not to have attracted general attention—or, if so, perhaps the scene was regarded as " bohemian atmosphere " included in the price of the meal.

Morrie and Ada reached the nearest aisle at precisely the same instant. They started abreast for the Goldthal table, but Morrie arrived first at the goal. At this instant Miriam desperately twisted her arm half free, and Morris saw the imprint of GoldthaPs fingers, in livid outline, on the girl's soft skin.

Then and there the rag-time prince not only punched his " future meal-ticket" so thoroughly as to destroy its value to him for all time to come, but he also forfeited his *present* meal-ticket.

While Mr. Goldthal lay prone, and—from the overturned plate above—globules of clear green-turtle soup dropped in a melancholy patter upon his face, Ada hurried with her sister toward the door, and Morrie rushed for his hat and Ada's cloak and hat—none of which they could afford to lose.

Shortly the rag-time prince found himself outside the restaurant, exit having been unhindered by the manager, whose delicacy and tact Mr. Goldthal, upon recovery, generously indorsed. The theatrical agent had no desire to see Mrs. Goldthal pick up tomorrow morning's paper and discover her husband figuring more or less prominently in the news.

Joining the girls, Morrie—by way of precaution—directed subsequent flight operations most conscientiously. In due season, and without untoward incident, however, the trio landed at the Goban apartment—of one room inclusive, in a " theatrical hotel " well known to the " roaring Forties."

While Miriam dropped into the lone chair, and Ada knelt affectionately at her side, Morrie perched on a trunk which a blue-denim cover had converted into a window-seat, and smiled encouragingly at a situation that Miriam seemed to find awkward.

There Obviously was nothing for her to conceal, and nothing that need be told. In her face—despite all artifices of cosmetics -—was the story of her suffering, and irrefutable testimony that Miriam had not won the pleasurable ease, gaiety, and romance she had expected to find away from home.

So Ada merely said: " Forget it, sis. What you want to do now is, get back home and take care of dad. The old dear needs you."

Miriam was quite eager to return home. Home might not be especially interesting, but it was a thousand times preferable to this. Still, she saw several obstacles in the way.

" Don't worry—dad never got that crazy note you left for him," Ada reassured him. " I swiped it."

But there was something else that " dad " *wouldn't* overlook, Miriam insisted. And she told them what it was.

By the silence that followed—so profound that the ticking of the battered old alarm-clock on the dresser crashed out like a clanging steam radiator—Miriam knew they agreed with her.

Ada's caressing arm about her sister tightened, her face was painfully averted.

Morrie looked out the window upon the crowds of theatergoers, hurrying and good-naturedly jostling on their way through the narrow canon to the playhouses. Yet, for once in his life, he seemed blind to every voluptuously modeled figure, or the turn of a pretty ankle—such, for instance, as was being exhibited by the girl window-dresser for Mme. V's French Gown Shop across the way.

Then Morrie twisted suddenly, arid ingeniously suggested that he and Ada adopt Miriam's baby as their own. It could be reared at the Hirschof home by Miriam herself, he pointed out.

" Nothing doing!" cried Miriam in passionate anger. " Either the baby goes with me—as *my* baby—or / don't go home. And you can't make me! What are you two trying to put over on me, anyhow?"

IV.

A TAXICAB rolled past the little yellow house with the green shutters, that once had been Goban's Rag-time Studio.

It stopped at the Hirschof residence and disgorged Morrie Goban, who walked, with either genuine or assumed jauntiness, up the Hirschof steps.

He stepped coolly into the doctor's office.

" Hello, doc! Just-back to town! Glad to see you looking so young an' healthy!" And he rattled on.

The doctor, whose head had doffed black for gray, and who had aged many years in the less than a year since his favorite daughter had disappeared, gave him a glance of mild inquiry.

" Sure; Ade's back, too," Morrie interpreted. " I got her outside in a taxi, together with a charming young widow I know you'll be glad to meet!"

He went on hastily, seemingly unaware that Dr. Hirschof, hands trembling on the desk, had raised himself out of his chair and was staring at Morrie as though the rag-time prince had brought him tidings from the dead—tidings whose trustworthiness he doubted.

" Said young widow eloped in a hurry, which she regrets, with a young lawyer here from the West," chattered Morrie. " Was afraid her father wouldn't consent.

" Said young lawyer dies recently. Poor but beautiful young widow alone, and anxious to meet father she loves, but afraid.

" Reminds me, doc "—with apparent irrelevance—" I thought I saw this same young woman in a department-store a good many months ago. Was mistaken, however."

Dr. Hirschof moaned as though in-pain. He covered hungrily staring eyes with his hands.

A few swift strides brought Morrie to the street door. He ran to the cab, and returned with an agitated Miriam, leaning on Ada for support, and carrying in her arms an infant son.

Now, if ever Miriam appreciated her father's caresses. She was glad to be home.

As for the doctor, *he* asked few questions, but never seemed to have his fill of gazing at his favorite daughter Miriam, whom he had lost and had found again.

Somehow Ada and Morrie felt quite in the way, so they quietly and smilingly tiptoed out to the cab, and drove off.

However, they often came back—whenever their " big-time " act (in which they landed almost overnight) made the swing of vaudeville circuit and brought them dancing and prancing into New York again. For they always were " wild " to see their " Rag Baby," as they arbitrarily christened Miriam's little son.

Dr. Hirschof always appeared a little ashamed of the daughter who was winning such a stage success. He responded with noticeable abruptness to neighborly inquiries about her. It seemed to be *his* opinion that Ada hadn't turned out well—not at all like quiet, refined, affectionate Miriam.

But the Rag Baby seemed to have an entirely different opinion.

It invariably looked uncomfortable, and wanted to cry when the doctor beamed full upon it. But whenever the harum-scarum Morrie and Ada came on a visit, they sang merrily: " Oh, you raggity-rag Rag Baby," and capered in a funny jig to the tune. Then the Rag Baby would look up with a crinkly smile and crow and gurgle and try to clap its pudgy hands.

Applause—and *true* applause this—for scatterbrained *Pierrot* and *Pierrette!*

The Golden Cat

by George F. Worts (Loring Brent)

A Further Adventure of Peter the Brazen

"The Sphinx must solve her own riddle."—EMERSON.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A STERN CHASE.

"/^xH-^oh—hum!" yawned a sleepy w voice of milk-and-honey at Peter's ear.

Gloria pushed herself away from him, and sat up, with her head thrown back and her arms thrust forward almost to her toes in a luxurious stretch.

Peter gave her a sidelong glance before venturing to commit himself on Belubar's important and dismaying announcement.

He did not, as a matter of fact, feel particularly brilliant just then. He had gone hours without sleep, he was mentally and physically exhausted. Only partly refreshed, his brain could not take hold immediately. And his body was as stiff as his brain. He was irritable and thirsty.

Gloria pushed the hair back from her forehead with energy. She looked as pink and fresh as if she had at that moment emerged from a bath of rose water. Her eyes and" complexion were radiantly clear; she seemed thoroughly vital—in many respects antithetical to the general early morning state of women, young or old.

She smiled at him sweetly, a little longingly, and drew the dark blue cloak about her with a little shiver.

Peter resented the contrast; he must be growing old, for he found, on helping her to her feet, that his bones, from neck to ankles, were stiff and aching; and he supposed that the old days, when he had rebounded buoyantly from hours far more arduous than those recently spent, were gone forever.

Peter considered Belubar's agitation with doubt.

" Is not the Si-Kiang filled from one brim to the other with black junks?" he asked.

Belubar shook his handsome head with firm emphasis. " Ah, no, Ren-beh-tung! I know that boat. It is his—the *Lao-tiao*—the Eagle. Will the heaven-sent come and look?"

Peter went down the steps to the stern of the boat, and shaded his eyes against the warm brilliance of the up-coming sun, which strewed the channel with boiling metal. And as the sleep was melted from his eyes, he made out clearly the flake of black in the golden roil which had so upset the boy from Indo-China. Immediately afterward, he detected the pearling of soft white foam as it sped forward, directly in their wake.

Belubar waited respectfully for Peter's decision, his gaze, too, fixed upon that ominous back flake.

" What does the celestial one desire his unworthy servant to have done?" the boy murmured.

" Are all of your men at the sweeps, Belubar?"

The boy nodded.

"Where is Jan Sing Chu—and the other *nan-tzu?"*

" Both are sleeping justly, Ren-beh-tung. I took liberty in waking you, because-—because Ren-beh-tung is the man who knows. What shall be done?"

Peter silently contemplated the ardent young eyes as the alternative to a long race

This story began in The ArgoSy for November 22.

entered his mind. If the two girls were not aboard, the swiftest decision could be arrived at by stopping and waiting, of chancing a free-for-all fight in mid-river. Personally he had nothing to lose, and he could promise the same for Johnny Driggs; yet the outcome of such a brawl in their present situation was too dubious.

" We will help at the sweeps," he decided briskly. " Have something prepared for our stumachs."

" Food is waiting in the forward cabin, master," the boy replied. " Boiled rice—dried fish—and very bad tea. That is all. We dare stop at no village."

On the bench under the deck rail Johnny Driggs was curled up, with both his scarred hands curled under his cheek for a pillow, his complexion damp and colorless under its overcoating of sunburn.

Peter prodded him in the ribs. Johnny Driggs's gray eyes flew open; he sprang up, grinning sleepily, and suddenly clapped his hands to the back of his head where he had been struck twice during the encounters of last night.

" Dzao; dzao an! Where are we? And what did you do to the little pig, old timer?"

" I made the mistake of not shooting him," Peter said grimly. " We are going up the Si-Kiang as fast as twelve coolies can paddle us. And the little pig is following; his junk is two miles astern—now—and gaining."

" Did you muss him up properly, Pete?"

" We exchanged a few harsh words," Peter admitted. " If I'd gumption enough to shoot him, we wouldn't be in difficulties now. He was down, you see."

"Too bad! But I'm glad he was foolish enough to follow. I want to have a long talk with Mr. Fong, and the middle of the river is convenient enough." Johnny Driggs shook his fist gleefully at the bright blue sky. " Well, why don't we stop?"

Peter shook his head. "Nothing I'd like to do better, but we've got to go on. I'll call Jan. The three of us will have to help at the sweeps. Lucky we're in better shape than I imagined."

" Aw, come on, old timer; let's stop and muss 'em around."

" With these girls aboard?"

" Oh-ho-ho! So we decided to kidnap the golden child after all, eh? Is—is she feeling a little gentler this morning? Lord, sonny; how that girl has it in for you! Like a nightmare, wasn't it? ' Strike him again, my dear little pig!' Well, how're the brave feet this morning?"

Peter grinned ruefully. "You'll find something to eat in the forward cabin. As soon as you can, relieve the coolie who seems to be most tuckered out. I'll be with you in a jiffy."

Jan was completing his toilet when Peter rounded the deck. The garb of the whining beggar had been replaced by the flaming silks and satins of an Oriental prince.

The bleached mustache had been shaved off; and while Jan's cheeks were sunken from the enforced wakefulness of three days and three nights, his satiny, olive complexion, was glowing warmly.

Jan Sing Chu was of a serious and hypersensitive type—not uncommonly found among Orientals who have been Americanized. His eyes were those of the skeptic; his nose was straight, with delicate nostrils; his lips were sensitively thin and tremulous, capable, you might have guessed, of uttering a bitingly sarcastic word now and then, although his stubborn jaw gave promise of a character sufficiently robust to hold the sensitiveness and snobbishness in check, except, perhaps, under trying circumstances.

He met Peter's glance unsmilingly, steadily, and lodged a shoulder of white satin against the jamb.

"I am sorry for—last night," Peter began, extending his hand; he felt rather embarrassed in the presence of the swollen blue nub on the side of Jan's handsome jaw.

Jan seized his hand warmly, and an emotional sparkle occurred in his sober green-black eyes.

" It was nothing, my dear friend," he replied with feeling. " Always before, when I was in doubt, I have valued your wisdom. Last night I was mad. We will not refer to last night as long as we live. Is—is that woman aboard?"

Peter nodded uneasily. " Some other time I want to talk these things over with

you, Jan. Now we are in danger. There is a black junk behind us—Fong is following, and gaining!"

" That pig!" Jan cried angrily. " He is a coward! What can he do? Stealer of virtue! He will not fight men; but he must steal their women! If it had not been for your courage, your fearlessness, my little sister—"

" Fong will be well guarded," Peter stopped him.

"With a crew of sots, of drunkards!" Jan took him up scornfully. " They will run a hundred *li* from a bullet! Pah! My men under Belubar are the cream of the Si-Kiang!"

Peter pointed in silence down the river. The flake of black had grown in size. The flashing of sweeps and the glow of the wash could be seen plainly. The black junk Was creeping upon them with the relentlessness of a brooding fate.

" He has gained in the last half-hour," Peter said quietly.

" Hsing-la! Then we will stop now!" Jan decided hotly. " I planned to square my account with him last night. I will settle with him now—the yellow hog!"

Peter shook his head with patient contradiction. " You must take your sister and—the other girl into account."

"Let the other one go back to him!" Jan snarled. " I tell you, I will kill her!"

" No! You will do what I say! I will be responsible. I intend taking her to your father."

Jan's expression was skeptical. " She will betray us into his hands again before we reach Ly-Chang; that woman has the heart of a crow! Give her back to the pig now! I will not have her on this ship!"

" And I have decided that she is to stay aboard this ship," Peter replied with firmness.

" Moore, remember, if you please—" Jan began angrily.

"—That I am no longer your superior officer?" Peter concluded coldly.

" Oh, Ren-beh-tUng, but she has betrayed me—tricked me!" Jan yielded sullenly. " You do not know the kind of woman she is! She will steal the gold from my father's fingers!"

" We will see — when we reach Ly-Chang," Peter answered. He looked wonderingly at the costly satins. " But first we must reach Ly-Chang. I want you to give me your word that you will not frighten her. If you haven't had breakfast, hurry. Will you help at the sweeps?"

" Whenever you are ready," said Jan.

Peter left him in silence. And as he joined Driggs in the forward cabin certain knowledge of importance which had until now been vague was suddenly revealed clearly. Sergeant Jan Sing of the battlefield was an entirely different personality from Prince Jan Sing Chu of China.

The two men breakfasted rapidly, gulping down mouthfuls of dried fish with tea which Belubar had not described eloquently enough. Until now Peter had confidently believed that Belubar's picked men could excel the efforts of Fong's cutthroats. Yet, in all probability, the other boat was manned by alternating crews. And it was not unlikely that Fong was laying the knout to their toiling backs.

The playfulness was all gone out of Johnny Driggs. Once during that hastily swallowed meal he remarked gloomily: " Damn my hide, Pete, if I wouldn't give my eye-teeth right now for a cup of smokin' Java and a platter of wheats!"

His other observations were restricted to his feelings in the matter of Gloria Dale. Peter listened with a growing sense of self-loathing. Johnny Driggs's behavior throughout the affair had been magnificent; he was as unselfish as sunlight. He, too, had known the Gloria of old, and he had adored her unfalteringly What she had done, as measured by the narrowness of the world, made no difference whatever; love to Johnny Driggs was bounded by no narrow conventions.

Evidently he was unaware of Peter's own interest in the matter. He repeated what he had said last night: " Somewhere in her is the stuff for the making of a decent wo-, man; and I am going to find it!"

When they got up from empty bowls they were filled with food, but still gnawi ingly hungry.

Driggs relieved a half-fainting coolie and Peter started aft.

At Shari's doorway .he came upon Jan in changed attire. He now wore a pair of dirty blue pants, but no shirt or shoes. He was a bull of a man, was Jan, when chest and arms were exposed.

Peter grinned cordially, and Jan replied with a sheepish smile. The black pursuer was hardly a rifle's shot away when Peter and Jan put their oars into the water.

And that was the beginning of an era of sore backs, of sun-reddened eyes—of a furious race against distance and a cargo of determined murderers.

The black junk fell off slightly before noon; by evening it had receded to its position of the early morning—-a black and harmless speck on the swimming horizon.

With the addition to their ranks of Driggs and Jan and Peter, the coolies of Belubar took heart. A Chinaman would rather gamble than eat; and this race had all the desirable features of a game of chance with the added zest of an unthinkable calamity if their ability was not sufficient for outrunning the evil hulk which was always behind them, sometimes in view, sometimes shut minutes from view by a bend in the winding Si-Kiang.

For Peter that day and the part of the night, until he was compelled to give up the sweep because his fingers refused to cling to it, partook giddily of the nightmare. It was a hideous day of foaming hot glass, of stabbing blades of sunlight; and the night which followed was, until the moon put in her late appearance, as inky as the heart of a pagan temple.

Belubar relieved him, and Peter crawled across the deck to a breezy space on his hands and knees; and he did not awake until the moon was slipping into the river.

Gloria, in the quaint and becoming garments of a Chinese maiden, with her golden hair lumped above her rapturous face, was squatting on the deck within reach of his hand. She had been fanning him with a .square of rice board, but paused when his eyes glinted sleepily at her.

" The Eagle has gained," she told him.

When Peter got to his feet he found that the muscles in arms and back and stomach were hard and swollen. He looked down at the girl with a rather painful smile.

" Before you go back," she said quietly, " I want to talk to you about Jan."

" Has he spoken to you?"

She nodded. " He feels the same."

Peter was regretful. " I remembered my promise, and explained nothing. But some one should, Gloria. It is not fair to Jan; and it is equally unfair to Johnny Driggs. What are you going to do about these men?"

Gloria shrugged.

" If you or I should explain to Jan, he would come to me on his knees. I don't want Jan to come to me on his knees. That young man is safer at a distance. It is different with Johnny. He is waiting. Have you had a talk with him? Does Johnny believe I am terribly wicked?"

" He believes what he saw, but he is big enough not to let what he believes make any difference. Yes; he is going to wait. What did Jan have to say?"

She started to speak, closed her lips, then burst out determinedly:

" Peter, you are carrying enough on your shoulders, but I must tell you this. Jan came to me and he said—he said if I did not leave the boat—he would kill me!"

CHAPTER XL.

SHADOWS.

I_IE did not make comment immediately.

That Jan had been so importunate, so unfair, in thus breaking his promise of the forenoon, was totally unexpected, and the discovery filled him with irritation.

This mood was followed by one of perplexity. The sounds of the sweeps, the grunting and groaning of the men, came as from afar. He was disturbed only by the confirmation of his belief that Jan firmly intended to make a fool of himself.

Peter's knowledge of Jan's sensitiveness, of the hateful quality which was so swift to kindle and so exasperatingly slow in expiring, gave him the firm opinion that Jan would either have to be subdued, or else—

" We cannot afford to have petty quarrels here now," he decided firmly. " I am going to find Jan now, Glpria, and tell him the truth. I'm sorry—"

" But you promised me, dear!"

" I know. I'm going to break it."

She threw up her hands and pressed his cheeks between her warm palms."

" You'll do anything in the world I want you to," said her milk-and-honey voice, " You do owe me a little consideration—not that I want you to pay me, but because—because I want to think as you do, and I want you to think as I do.

" When this has all been settled—when the golden pendant, and Shari, and poor blind Jan, are safe in Ly-Chang, you and I are going away. We will be always together, dear. So, mustn't we have perfect understanding now? You know, I will do anything you command me to do. And in return, all I ask is that you give in to my whims now and then. Is that unfair?"

" I will try to reason with Jan," Peter surrendered.

She pulled his lips down to hers, patted him softly on the cheek in the immemorial manner, and pressed him away gently with her finger-tips.

" Be stern," she commended.

The jealous lover was resting exhaustedly on his oar. Sweat was running in a glossy layer from the brawny arms and shoulders, the muscular chest.

" I have just talked with Gloria," Peter said.

Jan pulled the oar inboard, put his hands on Peter's shoulders, and regarded him broodingly. His expression was an Oriental mask, abolishing all emotion.

" Moore, I cannot tolerate that woman on this ship!" he began in a resentful voice.

" She said you had told her that," Peter replied. " And I told her that we cannot be bothered now by personal quarrels. We are in grave danger. Wait—please, wait, Jan, until we reach Ly-Chang."

Jan dropped his hands with an impatient growl. " Don't you realize, Moore, how her treatment of me must seem to a man who has pride? I have pride! She has thrown my heart into the mud and ground it under her heel! I will not tolerate her here! She must go!" He slapped his sweating chest smartly with the palm of his hand. " I cannot think of her without—madness!"

" ' A gentleman,' " Peter quoted pointedly from the Analects, "' is slow to anger—'"

" Pah! You do not feel as I feel, or you would be mad yourself!" Jan snorted indignantly. " She has stolen from my father's temple the most precious jewel in China! I told her of the golden cat of Shari. No sooner had I left for the war than she sent thieves to Ly-Chang and robbed the shrine of the wanderer!

" She subjected it—to what? That pig! If you had not taken it from her, he would have it now! What then? By Buddha, is it a personal quarrel, Ren-beh-tung? She is a traitor! She will betray us again. I am not mad now! I am talking straight talk!"

" You are forgetting that I have made myself responsible," Peter reminded him.

" How can you hold yourself responsible for a poisonous snake?" Jan snarled,

" I thought you—loved her," Peter said quietly,

" I despise her!"

" What is this talk, then, of a love that will outlive all wrongs, all persecutions, that will penetrate to the core of the vilest heart—"

" Her heart is nothing but a shell filled with poison!" Jan burst out furiously,

"I am sorry for you, Jan!"

" Save your tears for her corpse!"

Peter folded his arms and looked into the enraged face with a painful sigh.

" You can't mean this seriously," hemuttered.

" I say, I will kill her!"

" You will have to kill me first, Jan!"

Jan blinked; and his handsome olive countenance was not pleasant to look upon at that moment.

" No," he said tensely. " I will not do that! I shall marry her! I shall make her the third of my wives! She will do all of the menial work of the others!"

" What are you saying?" Peter gasped,

" It will be my first act on reaching Ly-Chang," Jan went on stonily. "If she does not obey me, I shall have her whipped! I shall put her to work in the fields! Humiliation! She will learn the meaning of humiliation! And she will bear me no

children! But she will be a slave to my children!"

Peter listened to the harsh voice in confusion. He was startled, nauseated.

" You have never mentioned these other wives before," he broke in finally.

" Why should I discuss my private affairs with any one?" Jan flared. " But I will tell you what I planned to do. I had planned all along to make her my wife, to put the others beneath her. Ren-beh-tung, why is it so .distasteful to you? Am I not the son of a prince? I will have as many wives as I please—and she will wash their hair, and their garments, and mine!"

Peter left him at once; he dared listen to no more. He had loved Jan. Had not Jan saved him from death at the Maine? But he could never have affection for Jan again. And the realization was brought to him more powerfully than in their earlier conversation, that the meek and dutiful Jan of the battle-field was no longer.

In spite of the recurrent and depressing knowledge, he realized fully that Jan was not altogether to blame. Certainly Jan did not lack stiff moral fabric; he was the victim of circumstances, and he was the ripening product of a frightful Old World custom.

It would be a terrific blow to that hypersensitive and vengeful young warrior when the truth was brought home. Here, indeed, was an unescapable tragedy.

Peter felt dazed. It is a painfully bitter experience when we must discard beliefs in our friends. And the sphere of their small lives was spinning crazily—whirling onward to bizarre conclusions in this tropical river.

Peter's hours at the sweep were crowded with unfruitful self-analysis. He knew that he had fallen madly in love with Gloria, that the event of relinquishing her to another man could only be attended by acute suffering, not alone in his heart, but in hers. Yet that other man must be considered with honesty.

What of the stanch Jonathan Driggs? What did this wretched tangle promise for him? Apparently he .was unsuspecting of Peter's rivalry. He was leaving Gloria to her reflections; she knew that he adored her. When the opportune time arrived he would go to her, present his case in the honorable, straightforward manner that characterized him, and—what then?

With no difficulty Peter argued to a conclusion that Johnny Driggs was the better man. He admired and envied his steadfast loyalty; his faith in her was as unshakable as the Himalayas. He had come to her across the seas and rivers and plains and mountains. He had been willing to give away his life in the effort to save her from some unknown embarrassment. Certainly there was a desert of bitterness ahead for one of the two.

For Peter?

He was aided in his furious denial by hot emotion which swept over him wave upon wave. Gloria loved him, not Jonathan Driggs; she betrayed it, not only in her speech, but by little acts perceptible to a blind man; she was happiest when nestled in his arms. She preferred him: the decision was not his to make.

The big, brave heart of Johnny Driggs was the one selected by Fate to be broken—his future that desert of bitterness. Peter redoubled his energies when that unalterable decision was made. Each stroke of the clumsy, heavy oar drew him inches toward happiness. He was dominated by the visions she had painted. They would leave Ly-Chang immediately; they would go on and on, searching the remotest quarters of the earth until they had tired of rainbow-chasing, until—

The delights of possessing her confused and befogged all perceptions but those of their immediate future. Life for a long while at least would be a fragrant soft dream, filled with the tenderness of her.

He glanced up with an unaccountable feeling of sadness and weariness at the moon. It was sailing like a ghost across the purple night.

CHAPTER XLI.

LOVE AND HAPPINESS.

FOLLOWING days and nights formed a parade of horrors—freezing silver, burning gold; hot, glassy, unreal days; cold, spectral nights, until the moon ap-

peared and engraved in deep intaglio that other junk pressing onward, its hideous eye of blood-and-white fastened upon them.

Once they paused at a village to replenish their store of provisions. Nourishing food was not to be had; only third-grade rice was available, some doubtful fruit, and tea that long ago had had the poor life boiled out of it.

One night Jonathan Driggs mustered up the courage that had been so slow in appearing. He sought out Gloria with determination whitening the skin in the region of his mouth.

She had retired to her favorite refuge—the bow—and was looking down, humming softly, at the wash of white which moved out lazily upon the watery mirror.

" Gloria, can I talk to you?" he began shyly.

She turned slowly with a faint smile around her eyes, quite unembarrassed.

" A neglected woman," she replied, " usually demands a very convincing explanation."

" I haven't spoken before," he went on in a low, rather shaky voice, " because I—I wanted to wait until you came to me. But I can't wait any longer. There is something I must tell you, Gloria. We are getting close to the end of the voyage—"

" But why should I have come to you, Johnny?" she interrupted him gently.

" I've been following you around the world," he went on in an earnest voice. " I've heard men make remarks about you that—that may have been true, and may not. And they were sorry! Gloria, it doesn't make any difference to me what you've done in the past. All I care to know is—are you through with it?

" I told you back there in Yow-hien that there's a good woman in you somewhere. I don't mean a tame woman, or a scared woman, but a faithful woman—a woman who will forget all the others and play square with one man who will play square with her. That's what I wanted to tell you."

" But, Johnny, what would happen if I said that there might be another man—"

" I will have to wait until you are tired of him, then," he stopped her. " Some day you will grow tired of them all. Do—do you realize what my life would amount to without you? Who—who is the other man? It can't be Peter Moore, after that night in Yow-hien? Oh—it's none of my business, I know, but I've been waiting a terribly—long—while. I waited for you to grow up. I waited until you had had your —your fling!"

" My fling?"

Johnny crowded closer to her. " Dear little girl, I wouldn't hold it against you if you'd fallen in love with fifty yellow devils, so long as you came to me and told me that you were tired of all that—"

"But perhaps I haven't loved even one of fifty yellow devils," Gloria exclaimed unguardedly.

" One way or the other—I don't care," Johnny went on. " All that I want to have settled now is, when are you going to be through? If it's Peter, or some one else—well, I won't even ask. I will keep on waiting. Some day, I think, you will be glad to come to me. All that I want in the world, Gloria, is the chance to make you happy.

" I know how restless you are, how restless you always were. Well, I'm just the same. But some day the restlessness will die in both of us, and when that happens I have a place where you will love to live—a spot beautiful enough to make you contented. You see, I'm not coming to you with empty hands. There is that place on Puget Sound, in the heart of forests and mountains; and there is money—all the money you can possibly spend."

Gloria's comment was incoherent.

" But we would travel first," he continued. "I want to take you to all of the beautiful places in the world, and after a while, when you're tired of wandering, we can go there."

" It—does sound beautiful," Gloria admitted.

" But I don't want you to think that I am trying to *buy* you," he said firmly. " I want you to look at my offer as one of—of love and—happiness." He paused and looked tenderly into her eyes. " Didn't you ever wonder," he added, with something of his famous impulsiveness, " if a

child of your own—a son or a daughter—wouldn't—well, wouldn't take some of that wild wandering spirit out of you?"

"Gracious!" she gasped. "Am I so wild that I must have a family to hold me down and sit on me?"

" Oh, I don't want you to lose that wonderful spirit!" he protested meekly. "I only want you to begin thinking now, a little, of the future, to ask yourself some questions. If you're contemplating marriage with—well, remember that the crash from heroic adventuring to the commonplace—"

" What do you mean?" she snapped.

" I am certainly not a hero in your eyes," he said contritely. " A sentimental old rolling stone, but from what I am now to what I would be as a husband is a gap "—he grinned—" that any girl could jump without hurting herself!"

" Johnny Driggs, I won't listen to such nonsense!" Gloria exploded. " You are fine and splendid and brave, you are heroic; but, Johnny—oh, Johnny—why—why—" Her voice trailed off into a little whisper. " You've said such wonderful things, and I don't want to hurt you, but—I *don't* love you!"

" Is it—"

She nodded with dewy eyes.

" Well, then, I suppose I'll just naturally have to wait a little while longer," Johnny said in an unpleasantly cheerful voice.

Gloria took her troubles directly to Peter. He was on the cabin roof, tightening a sail; a gentle west wind was helping them along.

" Peter, I am in difficulties again," she said, coming close to him.

" What seems to be the matter now?"

" Do—do you love me very much, Peter?"

He was silent, watching her with sparkling eyes.

" How much? Kiss me! Let me see!"

Peter lifted her up and hugged her, while the warm white arms stole around his neck. Her lips sought, and possibly found, the answer they had hoped to find.

She was serious, and not at all flustered when he put her down again.

V Johnny finally decided to get it over with," she told him.

Peter nodded. " What have you decided?"

" I decided ages ago! But he did put a thought into my head, and—isn't it perfectly all right to come to you with such matters—with all matters?" She regarded him with a proprietary little air. " You are mine, and I am yours. There is no other man in the world, and—there is no other woman in the world."

" Quite true," Peter affirmed benevolently.

" Well, Johnny said he had been waiting years and years—while I grew up and had my fling! He said he would love me when I was tired of all the others. He would wait patiently. Then, when I finally sent for him, we would go to the most beautiful parts of the world; and when I tired of that we would settle down in his home on Puget Sound."

" And he means that," Peter observed firmly. " If you don't accept Johnny Driggs, some day you will be very sorry."

"But I don't want Johnny Driggs!" Gloria exclaimed. " How many years have you and I loved each other, Peter? How old are you? It seems as if you must have been on earth always; there's something so—so perpetual about you!"

" Twenty-nine," said Peter regretfully; " and you are twenty-one!"

" Yes; I feel very old," she sighed. " Now listen, heart of my heart: Johnny did say one thing that bothers me. Rather, he intimated that to me you always have been—well, like a distant god. And he said that a terrible crash would come when I found out afterward that you could degenerate into a commonplace husband!"

" Then we must part and forget," Peter said sadly.

"Oh, please don't talk that way!" she wailed.

" Marriage is often a disappointment," he went on in the same voice.

Gloria pushed her fingers over his mouth and dropped her head on his shoulder.

" I won't listen to such silly talk! What if we never get anywhere? We are wanderers. We won't have a camp on Puget Sound, but we will be happy in having each other. Nobody has ever been able to live

on a. diet of nothing but love, but thousands of people have starved and died without it! We will not think about the future. We will never grow old!"

Gloria shivered, sighed. " I have been trying to picture what life would be like any other way. Peter—I'd rather die!"

CHAPTER XLII.

AT HAND-GRIPS WITH DEATH.

J-IOURS before sunrise a looked-for calamity occurred. The moon had only risen when the voice of a coolie at one of the bow sweeps rang fearfully through the small craft.

There was no time to veer away. With a shudder of timbers, a squeaking of staunch pegs, the red junk came to an abrupt halt. To left and right in the moonlight as far as they could see the sandbar seemed to reach. The incident was doubly tragic, because the journey would have been over by nightfall.

The feeling of panic which had been laboring subconsciously upon Peter came out strongly as he hastened to the bows and thrust an oar blade into the firm sand. He pushed with all his strength. They were hard and fast.

The thrill of consternation went through the boat. Every one on board, with the possible exception of Shari, was aware of the fate meted out to the victims of Fong's river battles. And it was not a pleasant death to contemplate.

One of the coolies looked astern and squealed. Shrill cries, rendered unearthly by distance, floated over the water from the black junk.

Peter's men were in bad condition for hand-to-hand conflict. In the ten days of the voyage it was doubtful if any one of them had averaged more than three hours' sleep. They had worked until they collapsed, to spring up again the moment new life flowed into them. They were all underfed and exhausted from the furious hours when the roasting sun sucked the vitality out of them.

Oars and poles were thrown down. The coolies went forward in a mass, instinctively seeking the counsel of the American adventurer in this new crisis.

The earlier panic had departed from them. The very mention of Fong's name in the presence of river men was sufficient ordinarily to cause looks of concern and fear. His reputation as a pirate without mercy had been given plentiful publicity. His name was feared as much as his actual presence; yet, now that his presence implied death, Belubar's coolies were eager to fight to the last.

Revolvers and cutlases, with here and there the longer gleam of a rifle, swam like a tossing wave above the determined faces.

Belubar pushed his way through and gained Peter's attention.

" What is to be done, Ren-beh-tung? I had no time to change direction!"

Peter saw the white faces of the two girls, like flames, which seemed to dance in the background.

There was a pattering of bare feet, a flutter of cloth; the fearful face of Jan Sing was pressed close to Belubar's.

" Belubar!"

" Aie! Jan Sing Chu!"

" Lieutenant Moore—what is to be done? Praise Buddha, we have you here to take charge!"

" Every man to the rail!" Peter whipped out. " Don't attempt to board her! Let 'em come over! Shoot 'em when they come! When I start over—follow me! Keep low! Keep cool! Shoot for their stomachs!"

" Up an' at 'em!" Jonathan Driggs contributed lustily. A mass of blackness had glided over the face of the moon, and a mountain slid with a rushing sound through the water and came to a stop with a great splashing of oars within twenty yards of the stranded junk.

Its sides were pointed immediately with explosive blazes of red fire. Terrific confusion followed. Then a crash of brazen sound—the war drum—broke upon the echoes following the broadside.

A coolie at Peter's side slumped to the deck, his face turned upward. A round hole was formed in the forehead above the glazing right eye.

Peter dropped to his knees, aimed and fired deliberately over the rail at a row of

bobbing heads. He saw one after another disappear, only to be replaced by others.

A figure danced down the deck and crouched near him. It was Jan.

"I am going when the sides touch!" he shouted. " I will kill that pig with my own hands—my naked hands. No one else shall touch him!"

"Wait!" Peter counseled him. "When that rail is clear we will go over. They are drunk—shooting wild. Look!"

A shriek of enraged voices burst out from both boats as the sides touched.

Peter crouched lower at the rail, concealed in shadow, picking off faces one at a time as they appeared. He fired, loaded, refired mechanically, holding the hot barrel upon the wood, exposing only his right cheek and eye.

A few yards away, near the stern, he saw Jonathan Driggs performing the same service with a Winchester shotgun, resurrected from some unknown quarter.

From the deck of the black junk men rose determinedly, goaded on by an invisible hand, to fall back, torn in shreds by the pump-gun, or as effectively displaced by the blasts of the automatic.

Out of the tail of his eye Peter saw Jan Sing, naked above the waist, climb upon the rail, cutlas in one hand, revolver in the other.

He leaped into the midst of them, slashing in all directions. The fighters seemed to melt before him as he hewed his way toward the junk's port side. In another moment he disappeared.

The reckless act seemed to inspire the faltering mob on the junk of Fong. Immediately one with more gumption and alacrity than the others gained the red rail, and leaped down to the deck with a shriek.

Peter shot him in the stomach when the newcomer staggered to his feet.

"Beat—back!" Peter shouted.

The words were smothered under instantaneous confusion — horrible, snarling, red confusion, pierced now and again by the shriek of a man stabbed, then by the bark of a quieting revolver, perhaps the Colt automatic, which Peter often did not recognize as the metalic thunder emerging from his own hand.

A grinning devil with curved knife sprang from nowhere, Peter lifted the revolver. He pressed the trigger. There was no response. The clip was exhausted.

He sidestepped as a howling voice surged past his left ear. A burly, almost-naked savage plunged past him, armed with a great black pole. It was Jonathan Driggs. And Jonathan Driggs never paused in his projectilelike flight until the point of the pole ended its swift flight in the abdomen of the unfortunate Fong man.

The rough-and-tumble character of the fight was giving way in points to isolated combats. Peter was engaged with a knife in the hands of a hairless giant when Belubar felled his immense enemy with a swift chop administered with a cutlas.

They sprang to aid Driggs, whose hands were well filled with one who clawed at his knees and another who sought to dash out his brains with a revolver butt.

"Beat—back!" Peter shouted again, as Driggs's assailants joined those motionless others on the deck.

Three of Belubar's coolies appeared from the stern. A number of Fong's force remaining aboard the invaded junk dropped to their knees. What became of these Peter never did discover. The remants of the crew were jumping back to the other boat; some in their haste leaped overboard and swam madly into the current.

A triumphant refrain was beating in his brain.

" Back—back—back—"

Others flung themselves over the rail. They had been outnumbered four to one—and they were winning!

Peter heard the sharp spitting of a low-calibred automatic at his elbow, accompanied by shrill, excited little screams. Gloria had sought the shelter of his broad back, was following each step he took, and was firing with admirable effect.

As they surged Over the rail, he discovered that Jan Sing was among the missing, and he realized simultaneously that not once during the fray had Fong-chi-Ah exhibited his yellow moon-face.

He shouted for Jan; shots and shouts drowned what reply there might have been.

Inserting his last clip he dropped to the

deck of the larger boat—and a white ghost fled after him.

Peter was not aware of this persistent presence until he turned suddenly.

A slender figure in white with golden hair afloat, glinting nickeled revolver clutched in hand, confronted him.

"Go back!" he commanded. "You've done enough! Go back to your cabin!"

" Oh, my dear!" she panted. " I have been watching as long as I could stand it. I will not let you go alone! Are you hurt? Why, you're bleeding!"

She looked fearfully at a splash of blood at his bared right shoulder.

" Nothing but a scratch," he assured her.

The last burst of fighting had subsided. This side of the black junk, except for themselves, was empty. A single revolver was spitting methodically on the other side.

" Let us go on," she pleaded. " Oh—please, dear; take me away from this dreadful place!"

" I intend to find Fong," he replied. " And I intend to find him—alone."

Gloria uttered a little cry of dismay. " I will go with you," she said decisively.

" You will be sorry."

" But you must not kill him, Peter! You must not kill Fong!"

" What!" he gasped. " Why not?"

" We are so near Ly-Chang now! Oh, Peter, I loathe him; I hate him! But—killing him—ah, that is too easy! Take him to Prince Chu! Take him to Prince Chu!"

They hastened to the cabin's port side, for here, in the lee of this bulwark, Peter was sure Fong would be seeking protection.

The lone revolver was still spitting methodically. Peter saw Belubar, perched high in the stern, calmly and deliberately firing at the heads of swimmers. One at a time these frantic ones disappeared beneath the river's surface. The decks of the black junk had been emptied.

Belubar went back to his own ship at sight of them, coolly tucking new cartridges into the cylinder of his revolver.

Peter stopped at sight of a bundle of black and white on the deck near the doorway. He knelt down with a groan. A thud occurred on the deck behind him.

The hilt of a knife, jeweled with rubies and fire opals, extended outward from the back of Jan Sing at a point squarely above the heart.

He was lying on his face, with the fingers of one hand closed behind him about the handle.

Peter sprang up with his head thrown back, his lips drawn against his teeth in a grimace of rage. His yellow hair was stirred by a vagrant breeze.

Nearby a splash occurred in the water, another, and another. The revolver shots had ceased. But Peter was conscious only of a feeling of growing horror.

Then he shuddered. The frame of his chest seemed to collapse under the long groan. The tears in his eyes were banished.

He sprang at the closed door.

" Fong!" he shouted.

The silence was disturbed only by the muttering of Belubar's men — and other splashings. Some one was calling his name; he identified the voice at that of Jonathan Driggs. He paid no attention to it.

" Fong-Chi-Ah! *K'uai lai!* Come out!" he snapped.

The door gave inward a grudging inch. Peter kicked the stout panel. The door crashed away from him. A howl of pain and anger followed.

A furiously snarling fat man seemed to bounce into his presence.

Peter lifted the revolver, and the revolver was struck out of his hands.

The force of Fong's unexpected rush threw him backward against the rail. Peter rebounded, as a prize-fighter rebounds from the ropes surrounding a ring. His surprise was overcome almost at once, and while the fight was furious it was exceedingly short-lived.

He dealt blow after blowupon the round, enraged face, upon the sleekly satin-covered breast. The fat man's fury did not subside until a stomach punch drove the wind out of him.

Then he staggered back, doubled over, reclining against the wall for support.

Peter recovered the revolver, and waited, with a grim smile at his lips. The tides were turning; and the face of Fong-Chi-Ah was doomed for an early fall.

The fat man groaned, lifted his convulsing features.

" I will surrender myself to you," he gasped, " only on one condition."

Peter looked at him somewhat incredulously, and laughed.

" Let us not be hasty, Ren-beh-tung," the Chinese persisted earnestly, as his breath gradually was restored to him. " You must not take me to Ly-Chang! I ask that as a favor. You have defeated me honorably in battle—"

" *Che-erh lai*—come!" Peter stopped him impatiently.

Fong-Chi-Ah endeavored to express his indignation by a grimace.

" *Pu-shih!* You must not take me to Prince Chu!" he insisted anxiously. " Let me go—send me down the river—I will make you a rich man! Listen!" he begged, his voice rising almost to a squeal as he saw the hardening expression in his captor's face. " You do not know what a devil that man is!" he wailed. "Oh, Ren-beh-tung—I am an old Chinaman—and I beg you—"

" I have promised to deliver you alive to Prince Chu. You can beg mercy from him."

"Oh, no. No! No!" Fong squealed. "I am a weak old man! I have heard of his room where men go mad. You must not give him the chance to put me in that room! No, Ren-beh-tung!"

Peter picked up the fallen revolver and jabbed the muzzle of it into the tender, fat stomach.

" *Hsing-gun*—march!" he said unsympathetically.

Fong expelled a shuddering breath. He hesitated. He ventured a crafty glance into the bard, brilliant blue eyes of his captor; and a cloud of dark worry settled upon his yellow forehead.

Half staggering, he went to the rail and climbed aboard the other boat while Peter lifted the unconscious girl in his arms.

Belubar's men were industriously scrubbing away all vestiges of the struggle. Belubar took Fong in charge, and conducted him to a cargo hold. Johnathan Driggs was huddled in a dazed heap near the forward mast, nursing a nasty cut on the side of his head—some unkind destiny seemed to harbor a perpetual grudge against the shapeliness of Driggs's head.

There was water at his side in a porcelain bowl, and he was dabbing foolishly at the new bruise with a cotton rag. He looked up with a pallid grin as Gloria struggled to her feet, and clung to Peter's arm.

" Good hunting, old timer!" he croaked.

" Let me do that for you."

" Fly away, young fellow; I am having the time of my life! Where is Fong?"

" Below—in chains."

" What are you going to do with him?"

" That is for Prince Chu to decide."

" I hope," Johnny expressed himself feebly, " that Prince Chu has a sense of humor."

Gloria had recovered sufficiently to walk unaided when they reached the door of her cabin she was weak and trembling.

A further revelation of Chinese fatalism was made by Belubar, when Peter told him that Jan was dead, after being assured that Fong was roped to a stanchion, and that the five surviving coolies were on their way to the sand bar to pry loose the bows.

The boy accepted the news with no change of face. He had not known. Yet he and his coolies, he said, had long ago determined that the death of Jan was written.

There was no grief in his voice, rather a gentle envy. Belubar had no belief in death; in his estimation, Jan was exceedingly fortunate to have been chosen. His goodness would be perpetuated; it would spread everywhere, like the air and sunshine.

CHAPTER XLIII.

What matter if the snow
Blot out the garden?
She shall still recline
Upon the scented balustrade and glow
With spring that thrills her warm blood into wine.
—Li Po.

r\ESPAIR has never accomplished anything. This must be the truth, the foundation, upon which rested the pure idealism of the white-walled city. What must be shall be. Lao-Tze and Confucius were fatalistic to no less a degree.

Now Belubar was a young man, although his countenance might readily have concealed all grief at notice of his master's death, for the Chinese learn repression before they learn to walk. Yet if the religion of Ly-Chang was followed as faithfully by Shari, whose emotions were never repressed, it could certainly be compared favorably with any Christian faith.

Grief in the presence of death is the most flagrant expression of selfishness. Peter believed that firmly, as firmly as he believed in a loftier existence after death. Death to him was merely a symbol of the transition to a divine state. It was a private view—he had never shared it with any one; and he wondered as he made his way to Shari's room if his belief was upheld by the people of Ly-Chang.

He had seen very little of Shari after the night of Yow-hien; and he presumed that she had remained in her room because she was of high blood; she was a princess, with no right to expose herself to the glances, however adoring, of lowly river men.

Shari came slowly to the doorway as Peter's shadow was cast across the varnished floor; and from the odor breathed out by the room he gathered that she had been sprinkling fresh incense in the burners before the altar of the green Buddha.

" Oh, Ren-beh-tung!" she cried, running to him noiselessly in her little sandals. " We are victorious! Oh, my own; how I have prayed for the black one to be defeated!"

She paused breathlessly on tiptoe and looked at him curiously with her soft, dark eyes.

" You have come to tell me that Jan is not here any more," she murmured.

Peter nodded in silence.

She did not cry out, nor did she touch his hands; her poise was unaltered.

" Let us go into the moonlight, Ren-beh-tung," she said quietly. " I must talk to some one who will understand. You loved him even when he lost his tongue."

They discovered a low bench that had been scrubbed white; and the girl fluttered down beside him, crossing her ankles. She gazed over the silvered water, and then unwinkingly to his face.

Belubar hastened past them on his way aft. 'The junk was moving. Sweeps were splashing.

" Days and days ago he told me that he would not live to see Ly-Chang. Do you remember what I told you the night you swam to me from behind the light? I saw it written in the stars—two times, and a third the night when we left Yow-hien. Do you see my eyes? I am not crying, Ren-beh-tung! Yet I love Jan dearly.

" Usually a brother has nothing but contempt and curses for his sister. She eats when he has finished; sometimes she does not eat at all. Until she is old enough to be married to some man she never sees until the day of the wedding, she is the slave of her husband. But it is not so in Ly-Chang.

" Jan—Jan loved me so! He would lie, he would steal, for me. But I will not be sad. You see, my *hsiung-di,* we do not believe in death in Ly-Chang, and unlike the followers of the common Chinese religions, we do not believe that the soul passes in the form of a man into some fine heaven!

" We believe that the soul goes out of a man or a woman into a great power which rules the world. That is the belief that has come down through the centuries to us from Shari, the wanderer.

" We are too selfish to feel happy, but none of us will cry or show our grief. We will not beat death cymbals to drive away the devils, because we do npt believe in devils. Nor do we believe in ancestral tablets, or gifts of food for the dead, or the burning of the wife in effigy. All those practises are barbarous, we think.

" Jan is as much alive at this moment as -—as before; the body was merely a vase which held the divine flower.

" You will bring joy to my father, for Jan loved you; and Prince Chu will love any one my brother or I love. Oh, Ren-beh-tung, let us not talk of religion."

She lifted and turned her head, so that the moon cast half her face into shadow; her lips moved softly.

" You will never leave Ly-Chang," the girl whispered. " You cannot run away from love. It is like a rope! You will stay and play with me as Jan and I played? Or are we not young enough to play?"

Peter did not reply for a little while; he was indulging in his favorite occupation of trying to analyze and understand a woman, although he was safer when he merely worshiped them.

" Some day you will grow up, and men will adore you, partly because you are beautiful and wise, and partly because they will not understand a third of the things you tell them!"

" Will I have to grow taller before you adore me?" she took him up promptly.

" No," said Peter, wishing that he had words to express his meaning.

" Oh, it is very sweet," said Shari, with unexpected cynicism. " Just the same, you will not adore me until I become a conundrum. Ever since the night you swam to me from the blinding light, you have grown away from me.

" But listen! Years and years ago one of my ancestors waited until he was very old—nearly thirty—and finally a wanderer came to his gate and he took her in. With one glimpse he knew he had been waiting for her all his life—and beyond. That is the way I have been waiting. Ho! What is that brazen sound?"

From the stern of the boat, within a dozen feet of them, rose the silvery twanging of a lute. The notes cascaded like a waterfall, then rose sweetly, languorously, like a bird to the sky. Needles to the imagination, the sounds were penetratingly shrill, then waveringly sad; and they wove a voiceless story of yer.rning and pulsing youth.

Shari was stirring uneasily; her expression was that of a sulky princess. She moved away from Peter, crept to her feet; and without an explanatory word, flitted down the deck to her cabin doorway.

Peter was mystified, for the sound of the lute stopped instantly.

It was Belubar who came forward with the pear-shaped body of the lute in the hollow of his arm. He slipped into the place emptied by the girl.

" Master," he said in a soft, reproachful voice, " your heart—is it quite without dimension?"

Peter either did not understand, or else pretended not to understand; he replied by asking Belubar the meaning of the lan-! guorous song.

" I am from Indo-China," the boy answered. " It is a love song—from the oriole of the hills to the oriole of the plains. Long before I came to Ly-Chang—I, too, was a wanderer, Ren-beh-tung—my mother taught it to me when we lived in Bassak on the Mekong. She said that only when love came to me would I play that song properly on my lute."

The eyes of Belubar were like garnets; his teeth were glowing, white and softly beautiful.

" Oh, master; I have played that song underneath her window—and once she smiled—and once she cried—and the third time she threw a white rose down to me. Is she too young to know the meaning of that song, Ren-beh-tung?"

" No," said Peter gravely.

" But what shall I do, master? I loved her—and you love her!" the boy protested tragically. " I do not know what to do! You are wise. Will you give me advice? But first—you do love Tsi-lo-lan?" he pleaded wistfully.

And Peter nodded, without explaining that his love for the Violet was like his love for a rare work of art, for exquisite music, for gems cut in the shape of poems.

" Then you will never consent to give her up?" Belubar cried in anguish.

Peter nodded his head slowly. And the boy sprang to his feet, radiant.

" Shall I go to her now? Tell me what to do. *Ni ts'o-la!"*

" Give her the chance to come to you, Belubar; that is what a woman prefers. But first, if I were you, I would go to the rail near her door, and play that song again—as sweetly as you know how!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

Gaily colored towers
Rise up like rainbow clouds. And many gentle
And beautiful immortais pass their days in peace.
—Po CHU-I.

'T'HE dawn of the second morning brought the red junk to the southern shore of a little tributary of the Si-Kiang, at an ancient, rugged jetty springing out from a

green meadow sparkling with daisies. Lotus blossoms lay in limp clusters among pads close to the shore.

That morning, the sun, growing out of the night sky, stood upon a range of blue mountains and sprayed its gold upon the verdant slope which ended with breath-taking abruptness at the walls of a city that might have been spilled from a jewel box.

There were toy houses of green and white and torquoise, all shining beyond a high, ivory wall. White clouds swam upward behind it from some remote and mystic source of vapor in the foothills.

The drawbridge was down.

Shari, in raptures, and Peter, silent with his own thoughts, started up the winding brown road to the gate. They were followed by Gloria and Jonathan Driggs, engaged in profound discourse. Belubar proudly brought up the rear, leading at the end of a humbling rope the fallen Fong, upon whom a great and surprising change had descended.

The love of life seemed to have departed from him; his expression was a mask, although now and then his flabby lips twisted, and into his lone reddened eye there came a look of superstitious fear. Closer observation revealed that his hands and legs were trembling.

Crossing the drawbridge, Peter was filled with surprise. Ly-Chang was a fragrant garden. Its streets of polished red tile were cleaner than the streets of any Chinese city he had ever visited. He was not, however, entirely oblivious to the intense conversation at his heels. Distinctly he overheard Johnny say, in an imploring voice:

" If it weren't for *him,* you might—"

" Oh, Johnny, I might! Yes! You've been so fine and true!"

There were flower gardens on all sides of them, and small houses of delightful, pastel colorings. Here in the area where China proper left off and India began, were marks of both civilizations.

Yet Peter was most impressed by the fragrant cleanliness of the city, so sharply in contrast with the filth and squalor which destroys the beauty of Canton, of Shanghai, and other cities beyond the eyes of the normal traveler.

They came at length to a courtyard ablaze with silks of all dyes; and here the pavement melted from the color of the sunset into a deep and lasting blue, like the floor of a windless tropical ocean.

Something in the Oriental brilliance of the place brought back old memories to Peter. Years ago he had explored the Schwe' Dagon in Rangoon. And the crowds of merry people were mistily reminiscent of his vivid days in the Burmese city.

Leading toward a pedestal a hundred feet away was a path in the blue pavement of silver and gold mosaic. Wind bells on eaves and *htis* were tinkling; there occurred the deep boom of a *gong* struck with a deer's antler, presumably to announce their arrival.

A pagoda of yellow rose up like a sputtering flame into the vast, cerulean blue above.

The courtyard's fairyland surroundings took him back to another land he had visited during that distant era. There were immense kanaro trees meeting greenly in a great arch over a splashing fountain. There were monstrous lianas, with waringins in their coils, and great orchids of purple and blood-red bursting from every hole. There were palms—areca-palms, banana-palms, palms with pineapple stems, screw palms, with their roots all above ground, as if they were trying to dance on their toes.

At the end of the mosaic path stood a throne of translucent green jade; and upon this throne an old man sat, stroking with affection his ivory mustaches, like a venerable mandarin. His twinkling eyes were wide set in a face as firm and brown as an olive. He was smiling his welcome, nodding benevolently.

Shari danced on ahead of the little procession, while the gong boomed, and the assembled, brightly-clad people of Ly-Chang laughed and clapped their hands. They were laughing, giggling people—like the Japanese; and there was the expression on their faces of a joke that could not possibly be withheld.

The girl knelt at his feet, and he drew her upon his lap and rocked her, while he looked blinkingly not at Peter but through him, and thousands of years beyond.

Peter knew that the girl was whispering the news of her brother's death, but Prince Chu did not stop smiling; and Peter marveled then, for above all things a Chinese prizes on this earth is his son.

A mellow voice, as old and as young as all the ages, was calling him by name, the name given him by the enemies who had hated him and the friends who had loved him.

" Ren-beh-tung!"

With a feeling of embarrassment, Peter made his way through the crowd to the base of the green-jade chair.

" My son," began Prince Chu with his benevolent smile, " I give you my heart and my city. We have heard much of you, of your deeds, and selflessness. It is a proud day for the people of Ly-Chang. We should like you to live with us forever. A room has been waiting for you a year. We want you to stay on and on. We are workers, but we have learned the art of living. We are a healthy, happy people; and I hope that you will find us to be a lovable people."

Peter opened his lips, but no words were available. He was a little in awe of the pomp and ceremony of Prince Chu's reception, and quite dumb in the face of the magnificence of Prince Chu's spirit.

In silence he lifted from the tattered sarong at his waist the small lump of gold and its necklace of sapphire cubes.

The slender old fingers of Prince Chu accepted the treasure. He held up his arm, with the cubes dangling high above his snowy head. There was an exultant sigh on the part of the crowd; the sweet laughter of a young girl; the approving ululations of one old woman to another. Silence again, disturbed by ecstatic murmurings.

" We have depended on wanderers, such as yourself, Ren-beh-tung, and the glorious creature at your side," the sonorous voice rolled on, " for our regeneration, our salvation, time after time for the past five hundred years. We are not a self-contained city as we sometimes profess to be. Often we have been compelled to throw ourselves upon the mercy of our friends, the wanderers.

" Both of you have demonstrated our meaning of love, because you have been willing to sacrifice yourselves for others. The love we have tried to keep burning without pausing since the day when Shari, the first of the wanderers to come to our gates, is that of sacrifice. That is the utmost in love, because it is the utmost in selflessness.

" We have tried to keep all evil on the outside of our walls; evil cannot exist in Ly-Chang. For many years a man from the north, who learned of our wealth, has been preying upon our weakness. He has demanded and taken tributes, knowing that, while love is strong, love is sometimes helpless."

He paused and looked gravely from Peter to Gloria, and out over the motionless faces to the garden of white roses which seemed to flutter like a field of butterflies in the steady sunlight.

" We are not a warring people. We will confess our defeat at the outset rather than go to war. Sapphires from our mines in Indo-Chino have been poured into his hands. Still he has threatened to come and destroy Ly-Chang. And how we have trembled! Yet each time we have been saved—by some wanderer. Once, a lost tribe of Thibetans, whom we repaid by guidance back to their land. Another time, we were protected from bandits by a British gunboat.

" My wife, whose body is no longer living, is the reason he has given for his hatred. He, too, loved her in his youth; he would have stolen her; he was brutal to her father; so she ran away. But he needs no excuses for his villainy; he is filled with evil thoughts."

He looked out beyond the crowd again; his gaze rested upon a bright green round hat.

" Belubar—bring that man forward!"

The voice of Prince Chu was no longer mellow; it was surprisingly harsh and cold. And Peter decided then, that no matter how glorious his professed faiths may be, an Oriental is at heart an Oriental in such a moment as this—too many years are behind his cold-blo6ded love for cruelty.

It was not an unpleasurable supposition, for Peter had feared that Prince Chu might deal lightly with his old enemy. And he

glanced with expectation from one to the other, with the vague feeling that the fallen pirate was nearer his fate than any of them, with the exception of these two, realized.

Fong came to the green-jade chair with the same expression of unconcern behind which he had shielded his feelings since Peter had captured him. Little beads of sweat were upon his skin, and his lips were trembling.

" On your knees!" Prince Chu ordered,

And Peter realized that Fong knew himself to be a doomed man; his face was almost blue with fright.

The ruler of Ly-Chang regarded the pigtail growing out of the round oily head; and a malicious smile touched the benevolent lips.

In his former gentle voice he continued, addressing Peter almost apologetically:

"We are a pagan people, Ren-beh-tung, as all the world is at heart pagan. But unlike the Christian world we openly worship those who befriend us. The golden likeness of the Queen Shari is the symbol of the greatest love we have known. For centuries it has been enshrined in the little green temple. I do not exaggerate when I say we would rather lose our city than the golden likeness of her!

" Sometime ago thieves were sent by this powerful enemy at my feet to steal the golden cat from the temple. We thought they were friends. It was so unexpected, We were powerless. My son had gone to the war of many nations; my greatest support was gone. And then, one nightfall in early spring, the small girl with the golden hair came to our gates—at the very hour when Shari came to Ly-Chang five hundred years ago.

" The golden wanderer offered to save Ly-Chang from this relentless enemy—offered herself out of gratitude, because of a very trivial favor I granted her father when we were young men—years before she was born. She had heard. She felt she owed us whatever help she could give.

" I looked at her, Ren-beh-tung, as I look at her now. And I smiled. Can you blame me for smiling? How could I imagine that one so frail and one so young could bring more than a ripple over the mighty affairs of Fong-Chi-Ah, of Shanghai?

. " His name was enough to make strong men tremble. And I could picture her—engulfed!"

Prince Chu regarded the head at his feet.

" Fong-Chi-Ah, of Shanghai—look at me!"

The prisoner ventured a watery, frightened glance upward into the benevolently grinning countenance. He looked away again hastily, and shuddered,

" Fong-Chi-Ah," the man above him went on mirthfully, " do you sense the contrast? You, the powerful—most feared of all villains in China?"

He clicked his lips, and his expression grew stern and sinister,

" Fong, do you realize now that this child was only playing with you? Pah! What an idiot you are! You, with your hundreds of cutthroats—undermined by this wisp of a girl! How she must have smiled to herself—this dear little wisp of a girl—when she saw how easily she could push over your massive foundations with her ten little fingers!

" Stand up, Fong-Chi-Ah!"

The miserable victim struggled, panting, to his feet, but he looked at the ground,

" You have nothing to say?"

Silence, disturbed only by the sweet tinkling of the wind bells and the distant wail of a parrakeet.

Prince Chu's smile hardened,

" I repeat, no evil can exist within the four walls of our city. We do not punish; we correct. We have no executioner's field, as in Canton; we employ no bastinado, no strangulation pens. The *Ling-chih*—the death of a thousand cuts—is unknown in Ly-Chang. For those with evil brewing in their hearts, we have only a room, whose influence is to extract evil. It is the white room of meditation."

Peter again detected the subtle suggestion of Orientalism in the prince's manner.

" This one you have roped, Belubar—conduct him to that beautiful room. Let him wander about and think; let him contemplate the white Buddha. All badness will be melted and drained from his poor

heart before the sun is high. When I am downhearted, or filled with the alum of selfishness, I retire there—to meditate. Take him away, Belubar!"

k " E-eek!" squealed the frightened Fong.

• Paying no attention, Prince Chu concluded with a gesture that was all kindliness—a blessing:

" My children, you are tired. Please forgive the babblings of an old man."

Peter had a last glimpse over turning shoulders of the wretched moon-face. Fong's blackened teeth were still clattering, and the sweat was spilling from the round, flabby chin on to the torn jacket.

And Peter wondered, as that frightened and bewildered creature was led away, if the rival for the hand of Prince Chu's dead wife had even a vague realization of what might be in store for him.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE DOOM OF FONG-CHI-AH.

COBBING, indeed, with the fear of a fate too terrible to be tolerated by his active Oriental imagination, Fong was taken out of the cool courtyard, past the flaming pagoda, through a garden of blood-red roses; he was finally brought to a door of bronze mossed with age, set in the front of a lonely building of weathered white marble.

No words were given up by his guardsmen. East of the Far East, these faces wore the inscrutability driven into them from childhood.

Belubar solemnly unbolted the bronze door, and opened it with a harsh grating of neglected hinges.

Fong was pushed ungently inside. A knife slashed the cords at his wrists. When the bronze door closed after him with a crash of thunder, he fell flat. He remained still for a space of seconds.

He pressed his face to the cold marble floor and waited, listening. He was oppressed by fears that would not be dismissed. In his imagination, swollen by years of samshu, aracka, and opiates, he had previously pictured a little hell on earth, peopled with man-devouring animals. Yet his imagination had rejected a torture so simple. He had maintained his perceptions at intervals all through the long harangue delivered by the sinister ruler of Ly-Chang.

He had been quick to grasp an undercurrent of malicious meaning. Ly-Chang was close to the border of India, where terrible deeds were frequently committed upon the souls of unfortunate mortals with devices beyond the ken of any normal Chinaman. Like all of his race, Fong-Chi-Ah was fearfully superstitious.

Gathering his courage, he struggled to his hands and knees, and wagged his head with the dumb fear of a captured animal.

His crooked mind was rather slow in grasping the purpose of the room into which he had been imprisoned " for meditation." Gradually it dawned upon him that he had been deposited in a chamber of horrors.

It was subtle as the ancient pulse of China.

It was white as snow. The marble floor was like a pool of new milk. The walls—

He sprang to his feet with a hissing indrawing of breath. Fie stared again—a third time. He wiped his fat little hands across his eyes; his vision was handicapped: one of his eyes had been gouged out by a methodically revengeful husband fifteen years ago.

Those walls were figments in the brain of a madman! They were white snakes, masses and layers, millions and billions of writhing, slippery white snakes!

If you looked at them thoughtlessly they did not move. Only when you stared at them with the fear of the unknown clutching at your pagan heart did the motion begin. Millions and billions of white snakes stealing and wiggling out of a vast white nothingness! It was hideous.

Fong-Chi-Ah shivered all over. His teeth began chattering again. He pressed both hands over his dancing heart.

For relief he stared wildly at an enormous white marble Buddha, squatting on a base of shimmering white stone. The stone eyes of the Buddha loomed like awful caverns. Eyelids of stone seemed to rise and fall.

He told himself with an anguished at-

tempt at self-control that he was the victim of optical illusions. Yes! The whole creation was an optical illusion; he was not himself. He must steady himself.

To steady himself, Fong looked at the floor. A new flood of cold sweat burst out upon his . skin. His fingers clutched convulsively at space. He leaped into the air, hissing.

There were wiggling white cobras in the floor! They squeezed out of the hairline cracks; they launched themselves wantonly at him, with white tongues darting venomously from horrible little jaws, white as a sun-bleached skull.

He stamped his feet angrily. He convinced himself that this was the result of staring over long with his weak eye at the creeping walls.

A snake, longer than its creeping companions, seemed to separate itself from the writhing layer on the floor. It was making its way ravenously toward him, lacing its snowy tail in the act of coiling. He could even detect the whispering of its scales along the cold marble.

A monster white cobra!

"E-eek!" he squealed, leaping into the air and bringing the sandals down thumping on the venerable head of the reptile.

The sandals slapped upon solid white marble. The head of the venomous thing was directly under his heels, of course. He looked.

He squealed again. The snake was no longer there! Indeed, there were no snakes on the floor. It was smooth, scrubbed marble. There never had been any snakes on the floor!

Now he was getting himself under control at last.

To support the fact, he darted a satisfied glance at the nearest wall.

Only for a pulse thump were the snakes inactive. They began crawling down to the floor. They reached the floor in huge wiggling masses; they crept toward him avidly from all directions, concentrating upon the frightened yellow man—millions—oh, billions—of white serpents.

The realization was too hideous. It was no optical illusion at all. These were the ghosts of dead snakes, who had carried with them to this white hell the power to poison, to devour.

Fong-Chi-Ah burst at once into pitiful screams. Next, obeying a frantic impulse, he disrobed. He tore away the remnants of the once princely satin robe. Silk underwear followed. In a moment he stood in the center of a small ring of clothing—this pinkly naked, enormously well fed, sweating Chinaman!

What a horrible fellow was Prince Chu! Rather the death of a thousand cuts than this.

True; the white room of meditation possessed no elements to soothe his particular soul. Its symbols were creatures of the devil. He stood in the ring of clothes, stopped screaming, because an unfamiliar note in his voice frightened him exceedingly, and concentrated on the tips of his yellow toes.

The toenails dismayed him. They were unnatural. The momentary reflection cleared his mind of the snakes.

They were gone! Buddha be praised! Gratefully he glanced at the massive marble lump. The cavernous eyes seemed to blink. For the first time he detected an expression of insuppressible mirth in the region of the Buddha's marble lips.

Why was the Buddha laughing at him?

Fong-Chi-Ah shuddered. He glanced away. Inexorably his eye was magnetized by the frightful creepings of the wall. And when the snakes took up their awful procession he chanced another inspection of the mocking white god.

He felt the snakes, cold, clammy bodies, gliding across his feet. There was an icy tapping on his left shin-bone.

" Oh, Buddha, be merciful!"

The marble lips were moving. Harsh, metallic words filled the whole room, seeming to drift in from hollow distances.

" You have sinned. You have sinned. You have sinned!"

The phrases measured time with his heartbeats. They were echoed from a million points about the gloomy white room. And all of the voices were keyed by the metronomic swing of his heartbeat.

" You have sinned. You have sinned. You have sinned!"

There were little voices, and squeaky voices, and wrathful bass voices, and the whimpering voices of women and children.

"You have sinned. You have sinned. You have sinned!"

Paralyzed by the accumulating terror in this madman's room, Fong glared imploringly into the leering white face of the Buddha, and from the Buddha to the crackling snakes. Their deathly white jaws were clicking. The snakes were shrieking at him!

The droning of the little voices grew louder. The room seemed to spin.

A draft of damp cold air, as from the vaults of the dead, floated upon his prickling, perspiring flesh. The breath was followed immediately by the sickly, decaying odor of the tombs.

There was no way of escape. He could no longer concentrate on his inhuman yellow toenails. The Buddha was calling more loudly to him. Its hollow eyes were boring into the innermost depths of his spiritual being, of his freshening supernatural dread of just such exquisitely horrible spots as this.

He was flooded with the sense of the doomed.

The breath of the dead swam closer about him. Next he was shaken by sight of a parade which wound whitely in single-file from behind the gabbling Buddha.

Fong-Chi-Ah was quick to recognize them. His ancestors! They advanced upon him without sound, their awful eyes lidded. The aura of rotting flesh attended them.

In the forefront of the detestable procession from his ancestral tombs he recognized the dead face of his father, who had been a strangler; behind that specter, his grandfather, who had given his life to banditry. The other ghosts were vague, but none the less impressive.

The coldness increased; the dampness of freshly turned clay obsessed him; the breath of the dead seemed to blossom bodily in his throat.

A monstrous transformation was taking place in the dreadful room. The whiteness was changing to gray. The Buddha was gray; the snakes were gray.

The grayness deepened. The room was turning to black; the snakes were black; the Buddha was black as jet, hardly discernible against the moving wall of greater blackness. Little tongues of green fire spit through the air. Two phosphorescent spots glowed where the vacuous eyes of the idol had been.

A cold spasm shook Fong until he tottered. Fie sprang across the room, shrieking. He stumbled. Fie tried with a frantic display of energy to recover his footing.

"Oh, Buddha, be—"

He sprawled, collapsing, with the tips of his fat, cold little fingers touching the white marble abdomen of the Buddha.

A tremor ran through his agonized body. A breath, like the dismal sigh of winter wind in hemlocks, ran out upon his blue lips. It was the last one.

Soft laughter, filled with benevolence, occurred behind the marble Budha.

CHAPTER XLVI.

PETER WRITES A NOTE.

/""\N the topmost floor of an ancient, airy pavilion overlooking the gleaming red tile of the village streets and the rapturous hues of the gardens, Peter had been ushered with much dignity on the part of a Chinese boy into a spacious room.

Here again the civilizations mingled charmingly. There were Ming rugs on the floor, and excellent reproductions of two Chao Chang paintings on the unbroken side wall. There was an enormous couch of Indian design along one side, and carved tables, perhaps from the Punjab.

In a smaller adjoining room of scrubbed blue stone he found a clay tub, filled with clear, warm water, awaiting his pleasure. On a round stool beside it were linen towels, and upon one wall near a grated window was hung a frame of silver filigree containing an oval sheet of Indian glass. A shelf underneath it supported several Japanese razors and a pot of mildly scented home-made soap.

Peter stripped to the skin before indulging in the dubious pleasure of a consultation with the mirror. And before he ven-

tured a glance he fully discounted the ferocity of the creature that would stare back at him.

He realized that he had cot discounted sufficiently. His cheeks and jaws and upper lip were coated with a heavy stubble; his eyes were areas of red, supporting piercing, deep-blue pupils; and his shoulders, arms, and chest, all partook of the hue of the boiled lobster. Healed and nearly healed scars stared back at him from shoulders and chest like angry, inflamed eyes. He had never gone through such an experience; he intended never to go through a similar one again.

He was sure that he had never in the past derived such tingling delights from the commonplace business of shaving. The soap was like fresh cream; and the razors would have split the-tongue of a mosquito.

He shaved first, bathed afterward, and the grin and the sigh with which he lowered himself into the pool of delicious water were the longest and the broadest he had manufactured for many, many days.

Pails of cold water were at hand, and he splashed these over his chest and down his back before the reaction of fatigue plus tepid water found the opportunity to set in.

It was a brand-new individual who climbed out of the clay tub. Vigor and adventure were larking through his veins.

Peter discovered a rough towel underneath the linen ones, and buffed himself till he radiated. In the other room he found undergarments of sheer silk, and a costume of outergarments befitting the most regal of wanderers.

The most precious discovery of all was a silver box full of Turkish cigarettes, which stood in company with a miniature charcoal brazier upon one of the dark-wood tables. Prince Chu had indeed developed the art of living to its highest power.

Peter dragged a wicker chair out across the broad, sun-dappled veranda, hoisted his slippered feet to the low rail, and inhaled the richly flavored smoke with his eyes shut, his eyes open, through his nose, and normally. He had passed days without the moral support of a cigarette; and he was famished for a smoke.

He listened with a feeling of dreamy and luxurious contentment to the sweet talk of the wind bells, of that solemn and important gong in some near-by temple; and he was filled with rapture that was closely ak!:\ to physical pain.

Here he was—in love with China a^ain! Temple bells—exotic flowers—a fascinatingly Oriental people—the sad murmur of a wandering, tropical river—blazing blue skies—the distant and alluring ghost of the Himalayas! It was wonderful! And it was life as he had learned to enjoy life.

Moreover, he was madly in love with an adorable girl. Again? What matter? This one would be the last. It had been unkind of Belubar to make that aspersion upon his heart. Large? Why not? Wasn't he in love with the whole world, and wasn't the world a pretty sizable place?

And abruptly across this jumble of happy nonsense a thought burned its way with the scorching heat of a flaming arrow.

What of Jonathan Driggs?

The love that Jonathan had laid at the shrine of Gloria's loveliness was pure. It was true; it was sublime; it was the superlative kind of love that asked no questions. Jonathan had traveled across the world to be near her; he had followed her, hoping to be of service, even when the tongues of the scandal-mongers might have blackened his respect for her.

What virtues had Peter to array in the countenance of these? He had not loved Gloria until he had been positive that her goodness was an existing thing; but he did not realize that he was convincing himself that a lie was the truth when he argued that conclusion. In reality he had loved her from their first meeting. Yet he believed that he had not accepted her until he discovered her to be innocent of all wrong-doing.

His mind leaped onward to the picture of her—her sleek loveliness, the amazing attractiveness of her high-voltage moods, her whimsical tenderness, the bodily perfection of her—yes, her warmth, the very joy of her being.

But what of Jonathan Driggs?

The struggle was making Peter vastly unhappy and uncomfortable. Quite suddenly he felt worn and old and valueless.

He began making absurdly unjust self-accusations. He pointed to the persistent doubt with which he had greeted the overtures of Betty Oliver, when a fool would have instantly recognized her to be in trouble. He passed over his cynical sparring with the innocent Shari. He devoted his thoughts lastly, and more fully, to his skepticism with Gloria.

He did not know what to do, and as he pondered, Peter heard the voice of a singer, a rounded, splendid barytone. He looked over the railing and saw the top of a head of curly brown hair' a pair of massive shoulders.

And then an incident of utterly no importance occurred and cleared a portion of his tangled thoughts: he saw a snow-white pigeon circle about in the air and alight upon the singer's extended hand.

It was rather beautiful, Peter thought, and in a way rather natural, for the singer was Jonathan Driggs.

The man continued to sing, while the pigeon balanced and blinked at him inquisitively. It was a wild little song, this one of Tchang-Tsi's, mixed with tears and smiles—and it was a meaningless little song, unless you happened to be pretty well acquainted with the twisty view-point of the old Chinese poets.

Softly and wistfully Jonathan Driggs voiced the concluding stanza:

" I have now no other love
But the love of wine,
And my cup full of wine is before me.
Once I had in my heart a thousand sorrows,
But now—-
I look at the mountains,
Glassed in the water! "

Peter drew back from the railing with' an expression of sadness and fatigue; indeed, he felt as if he were an old, a very old man, and at the end of the tether.

A face across the way was shining; a radiant smile parted red lips upon white teeth.

His contemplation of the vision was interrupted by a timid rapping at his door. He opened. Shari was standing in the hall.

She was blushing. " Ren-beh-tung, I—I—" she stammered. " Listen! Belubar has sent me to you. But he need not have sent me, for I would have told you! Oh, Ren-beh-tung, it was so noble of you—that sacrifice!"

" Sacrifice!" Peter muttered with an involuntary elevation of his blond eyebrows.

"With your heart, Ren-beh-tung!" the small girl rushed on. " How Belubar worships you! He has just told me of that night on the river when you—you wept, and—gave me up to him!"

She stopped with a wry little smile. " Belubar has sent me to tell you, also, that the yellow pig was blessed with no heart at all—when the wickedness left, what might have been the heart went with it!"

" Fong-Chi-Ah is dead?" asked Peter.

Shari nodded sadly. Her expression brightened. " Belubar sends his love, and asks if the great bronze one has everything that he desires."

Peter looked at her thoughtfully during a moment of silence.

" I am leaving Ly-Chang to-night."

"Oh!" Shari gasped. " With—her?"

" Alone," he said firmly.

She was mystified. " But—but we hoped you would stay!" she wailed.

The look they exchanged was a little frightened. Shari frowned, bit her lower 'lip, glanced suddenly away. To be sure, what must be shall be. Those were his favorite words. She could not help wondering about the other woman. But the ways of the white foreigners had always baffled her.

She said calmly: " Will you go into the mountains or down the river?"

" Thibet," he said.

'" I will tell Belubar. He will have mules ready for you." Tears dimmed her tender, green-black eyes. " But you will come back to Ly-Chang, Ren-beh-tung—some day?"

" Some day," he echoed. " Will you do me one final favor, Tsi-lo-lan?"

She nodded meekly. Peter went into the room, found rice paper, a tiny jug of black ink, and a slender brush of camel's hair.

He frowned. Anything would be difficult to say. Very carefully he painted two delicate symbols—modern ideographs, resembling two little crumbling pagodas.

Peter dried the ink by waving the slip of paper in the air. Shari accepted it and

glanced from the black signs to his eyes, which were very blue and very deep.

" I will give this to her—when you are gone?" she whispered.

He nodded.

Shari started away, hesitated.

" You must love that woman very, very much, Ren-beh-tung," she said.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole day long?
From morn to night, my friend.
—CHRISTINA G. ROSSETTI.

TTHE moon was creeping into the purple sky when a knock at her door aroused Gloria. Before she could open it a slip of paper was pushed over the sill, and when she looked down the hall it was empty of all but the sounds of scampering sandals.

She found matches, and with trembling fingers lighted a tapering candle. She had gone to bed filled with doubts, for she had not seen Peter except for a moment when he had abruptly left his veranda.

Gloria opened the crumpled paper under the fluttering candle. For a time she puzzled over the two markings, like two little crumbling pagodas. Then she understood.

They expressed in the poetic written language of China the most wistful word known to any language: farewell.

She stared at the note for a long while, hardly breathing, with her left hand pressed over her heart. Then she smiled faintly. Distress came into her eyes, was abetted by a trace of moisture. She winked it away. She nodded several times at the dancing candle.

" I knew," she murmured aloud. " I won't cry. I won't be dramatic. It wasn't any use trying to pretend even to myself. I won't try dissuading him—although I think I could. And I won't be a little fool —and follow him—although I—I could!"

She could struggle no farther. A haze had spread over everything. She had to grope her way blindly to the veranda rail. Her heart was beating frantically, as if it would burst.

" Oh, my—dear!" she whispered into the moonlit night. " You won't change your mind—out there? You won't ever come back—to Gloria?"

She dropped her arms, and stood there, a drooping little-figure, looking down with blurring eyes at the shimmering gardens, and beyond to the mysterious, silvered wall of the mountains.

A little later she saw two tiny, colorless dots moving up the road across the river. She saw them vanish from sight around a boulder, then reappear on the brown, ribbonlike ioact which led to»the granite shoulders of the pass into an unknown land.

Across the. way a cheerful voice was calling to her. The moonlight revealed a wistful smile crowding its way between the scars on the handsome countenance of Johnny Driggs. His long wait was nearly ended. She knew she would marry Johnny Driggs, would go to the remote corners of the earth with him, would lose her wanderlust and be contented in his home on Puget Sound; would, some day, probably, bear him children.

But deeper in her heart she knew that the other countenance would never be effaced. It would represent to her the pure gold of her youth. And that, perhaps, was as Peter desired it to be.

(The End.)

The Log-Book

By the Editor

"Tv ID you ever have a story run away with you?"

18 " Yes, many times."

I was chatting with an author whose serials have pleased you immensely during their course in THE ARGOSY, and had put to her the question set down above.

" That means," I went on, " that you do not plan your stories out completely in advance?"

" No, I confess I don't," was the reply. " You see, I prefer to get acquainted with my characters and let them work out their own destinies. Of course, in doing this I run the risk of their sometimes taking the bit in their teeth and bolting up paths I hadn't intended they should follow."

" But in your case, at any rate," I submitted, " that doesn't make the stories any less interesting."

" Well," she laughed, " it certainly renders them more exciting in the writing."

& 4 jt*

Romance and tragedy stalk hand in hand through the grim reaches of the north. And love, and the passions of revenge and hate flame just as darkly bright over the eternal snows as in tropic islands under the moon.

"THE BIG MUSKEG"

BY VICTOR ROUSSEAU

Author of " Wooden Spoil," etc.

is an absorbing story of a man who left to his best friend a legacy not merely of trouble and strife, but of something infinitely more dangerous and disturbing. The swift death that came from nowhere; the devious ways of a fox with the heart of a beast and the body of a man; the heart-breaking struggle against a failure fore-doomed—all this is woven into a fabric of singular fascination—of compelling interest. This begins as a four-part serial in THE ARGOSY for January 3, 1920.

Voices in the night, mocking, accusatory, jeering—disembodied voices, fantoms of the air; ghostly whispers, and satirical, loud laughter: these were effective when the still, small voice of conscience failed.

"THE JELLICO TURBAPHONE"

BY L. H. BOBBINS

came at the psychological moment to set the town of Ashland by the ears, literally as well as figuratively. And when *Larry Doyle,* amateur sleuth, received his cue, it was a tip from *Heller,* poolroom proprietor, which set him on the track. And as for *Old Ben Berwin,* the words of *Grandpa Quackenbush* revealed him at the end in

Tom Mix

QKe Daredevil of the world

is seen as a motion picture star only in

FOX ENTERTAINMENTS

//JEFORE going into the motion pictures <iomflTlix belonged to the famous *Texas Hangers* • He has had *actual battles* with outlaws, and in his amazing acting fox the screen he only lives over again what he has been through in life -

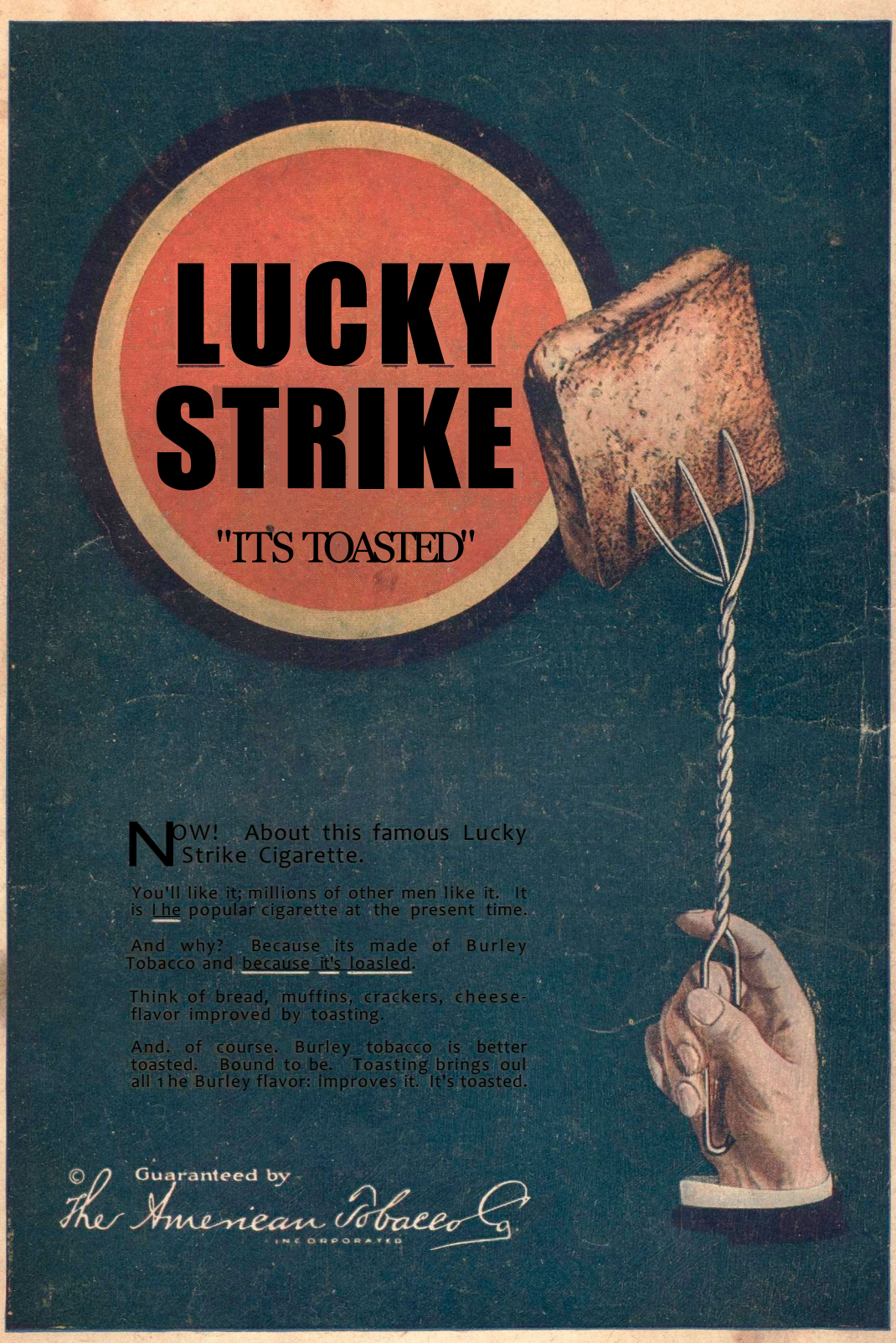
(jo to the theatres that show Jomcllijc }lays of which these are among the greatest

"ROUGH RIDING ROMANCE"
"THE SPEED MANIAC"
"THE DAREDEVIL"
"THE FEUD"
"CHINATOWN"

. Qomhlij is one of the brilliant array of stars who appear only in

FOX ENTERTAINMENTS*

WILLIAM FOX, - president
FOX FILM CORPORATION



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