OVER A MILLION READERS EVERY ISSUE
No 5
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TWICE-A-MONTH
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DEC. 15, 1909

The Popular Magazine

MONTH-END EDITION

DRAWN BY EDWARD PENFIELD

"Can't Come Too Often," Say Readers.

FAIR WARNING.

Gentlemen:—I think if you attempt to return to monthly publication you will receive such a strenuous kick from your friends that you will wonder what struck you; so to avoid trouble you had better complete arrangements to continue THE POPULAR bi-monthly. Personally I would like to see it published weekly.

Baltimore, Md. JOHN MILNE.

WHY NOT DAILY?

Gentlemen:—I wish to say that if THE POPULAR was a daily magazine I would manage some way to get it. I wish you the most of good luck in the double edition.

Burnside, Ky. WILENCE UHL.

HOW ABOUT THIS PROPHESY?

Gentlemen:—I should be glad to see THE POPULAR published every week, and if kept up to its present standard I believe that it is only a matter of a very short time until you may consider the advisability of doing so.

Three Rivers, Mass. W. M. BALDWIN.

COME, FILL UP YOUR GLASSES.

Gentlemen:—Long may she wave and her shadow never grow less, and if every reader in the country felt the same as does yours truly he would say not only let her come twice a month, but three and four times would be none too many. May this magazine ever continue to be popular in management, popular in principle and POPULAR itself.

Sedalia, Miss. A. A. CROOKS.

YOU NEVER CAN TELL.

Gentlemen:—This bi-monthly plan is great, but—aren't you afraid that we will be asking for a weekly next? ELLIOTT B. HILTON.

Newark, N. J.

THAT LONG WAIT BETWEEN.

Gentlemen:—I'm sure glad that THE POPULAR is coming twice a month. Even then it will be a pretty long wait between.

Jamaica Plain, Mass. R. E. WARREN.

IN THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE.

Gentlemen:—I take a large number of magazines to be used by patients in my waiting room. Although they all are read more or less, I notice that your magazine is the one most asked for. I am very glad that you are to have two issues a month for a time at least. My family would be very glad to have it twice a week so eagerly do they look for it.

Peterboro, N. H. F. B. FOSTER, M. D.

FROM AN ARTISTIC VIEWPOINT.

Gentlemen:—Your new idea of a twice-a-month issue is really fine. Your magazine is certainly a work of art as far as stories go, and we could stand it once a week.

Walkerton, Ont. E. H. LEESON.

LIKE AN OLD FRIEND.

Gentlemen:—I am very glad to express my approval of your decision to issue THE POPULAR twice a month. For one, I would be extremely glad to welcome my old friend every week. J. W. TANSEY.

Fremont, Mich.

HOW ONE READER FEELS ABOUT IT.

Gentlemen:—THE POPULAR is well named. If you would issue it once a week it would suit me a whole lot better, as it is the finest and largest magazine I have ever read.

Pittsburg, Pa. R. W. SUMMERS.

TWO STARTLING POSSIBILITIES.

Gentlemen:—I would buy THE POPULAR if it keeps up its past and present standard if published weekly; and I would likewise buy it if sold at twenty-five cents a copy.

Dayton, O. L. A. ELY.

REALLY CONSTANT.

Gentlemen:—I have not missed an issue of THE POPULAR. I can therefore claim the title of "constant" reader; and if it was published weekly I should never fail to get each number as issued. A. A. DUBOIS.

Philadelphia, Pa.

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XIV. DECEMBER, 1909. No. 5.

Number Two, Schuyler Place

By Howard Fitzalan

Author of "Red Reef," "The Men With The Scars," Etc.

You will find this one of the strangest stories which it has ever been your privilege to read. The author's name is guarantee enough for that. In a good many ways it is Howard Fitzalan's greatest story. The extraordinary adventures which befell a man of curious profession, and the mystery of Black Cross House, will keep you turning page after page until you have come to the end—when you will have something to ponder over.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

A PROFESSIONAL JAIL BREAKER.

TO begin at the beginning sounds easy to do; but when a man has a story to tell, it isn't. Accustomed as I am to those rigid rules of construction that apply to the stage, I look upon recapitulation and explanations dubiously; yet, unless I take it for granted that you believe locks, bars, handcuffs, iron gratings, and nailed-up boxes to be powerless in the matter of holding Richard Regent prisoner, it would seem to be necessary that I explain, step by step, the education he gave me in these things. But these secrets are not my own; they are Richard Regent's. Therefore, it seems that my story will have no real beginning at all.

Without choice in the matter, then, I take the sight of the Lilac Lady in a stage box at the Coryphée Theatre, Washington, as the spool on which to wind my yarn. For it is highly problematical to me whether or not Mr. Regent would have braved the terrors of Black Cross House, had he not coveted the jewel which was added, in her person, to the contents of that mysterious casket. But, even had not Miss Schemhorn bequeathed to Mr. Regent that house on the river, the incident would be worth mentioning by his biographer; for it was the first time in five years' service under him that I ever knew Richard Regent to be attracted by a woman.

The evening was remarkable for another incident, also; for it was the "first time on any stage" that a man permitted himself to be nailed up in a packing case, in full sight of the audience, managing to free himself and replace the nails in the box exactly as they were—all this, without making any noise that could be heard by the fifty people invited by Mr. Regent to sit on the stage during the performance of his feat. The thing has been done since by other performers; but this was its *prémière*.

I am not at liberty to explain to you the method; you will find it, and other explanations, in the five volumes upon which Richard Regent has been engaged for the last decade.

I had been a bit nervous when they nailed him up; for, so far as the packing box and the nailing were concerned, there was no faking. Neither was there a trapdoor under the black-curtained space in the centre of the stage; nor was any accomplice secreted there. As for the box itself, several of those who came out of the audience marked it with pencil in their own peculiar fashion.

Yet, after ten minutes of droning orchestra and buzzing audience, Richard Regent threw back the curtains, and the eager spectators hauled the box down to the footlights, looking for their marks. They found them. Also, they discovered that, apparently, not a nail had been strained. Mr. Regent never addressed the audience himself; he left that to me. I held up my hand for silence, and questioned the men who had examined the box as to whether they imagined that another had been substituted in its place. Having satisfied the audience, which broke into tumultuous cheering, I held out my hand to Mr. Regent, in the wings. He came out, and bowed in his best saturnine manner; but I noticed, as he looked toward the left stage box, that he lost a little of his composure, and all his Mephistophelean narrowing of eyes.

"Did you see her, Jacopo?" he asked eagerly, as we returned to his dressing room. My name is Jacob Winters; but Jacopo Scarlatti is the professional rendering of the same.

"She's in lilac," he added, as he absentmindedly broke an expensive cigar between his fingers. "She might be the great-granddaughter of Greuze's model—the one with the pitcher. Then, again, she might be Mrs. Richard Regent, some day; for, so help me"—he used a characteristic phrase—"I'll never compel any girl who looks like that to accept my unfortunate family failing."

He referred to his actual patronymic—which was, to say the least, a handicap to an enterprising magician. What it was, I have no intention of revealing, until it becomes positively necessary.

He discarded the remnants of the expensive cigar for a very vile Virginia cigarette—a taste for which he had acquired in his poverty, and was powerless to shake off, much to the discomfort of those who were in his company.

"Lilac," he said, blowing out odious vapors. "And amethysts," he supplemented, after a pause. "By the way, Jacopo, did you ever see any eyes that matched amethysts? No? Then"—regretfully—"I suppose the color scheme was broken. What's the equivalent for auburn? I detest that word! And anyhow, auburn doesn't describe the Lilac Lady's hair."

Not a word, mind you, about the successful consummation of the packing-box exploit, which had cost us both many sleepless nights!

"Lilac Lady—rather neat, that, eh?"

I left him in a reverie—if staring hard at the toe of a patent-leather pump may be so dignified in description—and took my call. The bag of tricks which I opened for the audience's mystification was one of the "fillers-in" of Korsakoff's Magicians, the show which had secured Mr. Regent for its headliner, and, necessarily, me; for, although I was practically in his service, and his business affairs got into a hopeless muddle when I was away, he had insisted that I should learn the simpler feats of sleight of hand, so that his death would not throw me into that helpless condition in which he had found me—a clerk at twelve dollars a week in a vaudeville agency.

So, I produced a rabbit from a hat, and a handkerchief from the rabbit, and so forth, and so on, finally picking an American flag out of the air, and disclosing, after several flutterings, a duck and her brood, placidly unaware of spectators. All this, of course, was simple trickery, discarded long ago by headliners like Richard Regent,

Korsakoff, Oudini, and others of their class. Nevertheless, the public still liked the old stuff well enough to give me a recall; and, having no further examples of my skill to display, I turned toward the lower left-hand box, and bowed, while I looked straight at the lady whom Mr. Regent had fancied.

She was beautifully gowned, and had shining eyes and hair; she applauded me with the naïve pleasure of a child. I did not take her to be more than eighteen; certainly her lace lacked sophistication, and her smile was peculiarly haunting and sweet.

I said as much when I returned to Mr. Regent's dressing room and found him obliterating his Mephistophelean make-up, and scowling dissatisfaction at the glass.

"Perhaps you've forgotten," I reminded him politely; "but you've got another appearance to make—and within the next half hour."

Disregarding me, he removed his pointed beard and waxed mustache; then he brushed his hair flat, removing the two little points intended to suggest horns. This done, he seemed to be better pleased with his reflection.

"I shouldn't call myself ill looking—not at all—not at all. Now, should you, Jacopo?"

"Ill looking" would have been the last descriptive term to suggest itself to any one observing him, particularly as he stood there, arrayed as are English gentlemen at a court function—satin knee breeches, silk stockings, ruffled shirt, and diamond paste buckles. Richard Regent was thirty-five, but his profession had demanded a steady hand and a cool brain. The possession of these precluded dissipation of any sort; although, indeed, he had never been disposed toward that sort of thing. Consequently, he failed to look his years; and his blue-black hair, in contrast to his clear white skin and bright gray eyes, produced a striking effect. He was strangely born—a Welshman for father, and a gypsy mother who never learned English.

Another professional requisite was a sinewy, muscular body; not an athlete's development, but one that made it as easy for him to swing from a bar by his chin, the back of his neck, or his toes, as it is for the average person to "chin up" in the usual manner. This had resulted in a slim figure that had been the envy of countless women; but Regent looked upon it simply as a stage asset, disguising it with loose clothes in private life, as he was inclined to believe that it smacked of the feminine.

No one, passing him on the street, would have associated him with the renowned "Jail Breaker and Handcuff King"; for to the casual passer-by he was simply an exceptionally good-looking young gentleman, of considerable property and unlimited leisure. His stage make-up and theatrical photographs represented a gloomy, Satanic person, with heavy, raised eyebrows, fixed, staring eyes, and beard and mustache both pointed, in compliance with the general idea of the appearance of the diabolical one.

To-night, however, he had a few rude remarks to make about men who made themselves up in so silly a fashion. I let him talk; he would have done so, anyhow.

"Don't you think it would be a decided novelty if I let them see just exactly what I do look like?" he asked.

"It would be like selling fifty-cent cigars without the label," I remarked.

He thought this over for a while; then, with a deep sigh, he proceeded to restore the Mephistophelean make-up. I accompanied him upstairs, and stood in the wings, while he made his appearance amid the clamorous applause that always greeted him. It was part of the game that he should never speak; he simply bowed, and stepped back to the black-curtained space. Here, according to regular precedent, he should have folded his arms and sunk into the gloomy abstraction of a captive fiend, forced, in expiation of his crimes against mankind, to amuse them. But this time he did not scowl. He looked flattering things at the young lady in the left stage box.

"Ladies and gentlemen," I said, stepping forward, "Mr. Regent wishes me to announce that, upon his arrival in any city in which he is to play, he always extends a cordial invitation to the police department to send, each night, officers, with handcuffs of the regulation—or any—variety. He is willing that they bind him tightly, besides; but, if this be done, he insists that he gain his freedom behind the curtains. The ordinary handcuffs he is able to shake off with his hands behind his back, and in full view of the audience."

Cheering began as a number of policemen, in uniform, started down three separate aisles.

"Mr. Regent also wishes me to say that, on his last visit to Washington, he was confined, by his own request, in a cell of the central police station; he was stripped to his undergarments, and searched for mechanical devices; yet, two minutes later, he made his appearance in the cell corridor. The lock was examined and found to be, apparently, untouched. He has offered to repeat this performance, but the police have refused to allow him to do so. Therefore, if any member of the audience has a safe-deposit vault, or any secure strong room, Mr. Regent wishes to say that he will take pleasure in allowing himself to be confined therein as a test of his skill. Does any one in the audience wish to take advantage of this offer?"

No one did, apparently, although the statement occasioned the usual awed whispering. I welcomed the five blue-coated policemen as they came to the stage. One by one, they fastened on their handcuffs; and each time Mr. Regent backed toward the black curtains, dropping the handcuffs on the way, and holding up his freed hands. Then they fastened on another pair, and lashed him tightly with manila rope; in three minutes he pulled back the curtains, and handed them the rope, uncut, and the handcuffs.

"Are you satisfied, gentlemen?" I asked.

"Shouldn't like to have him in my charge," asserted the burly, red-faced lieutenant who had charge of the five. "Guess I'd get an anchor chain and a five-hundred-pound ball."

"Bring around chain and ball any time," I said urbanely, "and Mr. Regent will make you lose faith in them, too. Good night, gentlemen. Is there any other person in the audience who would like to test Mr. Regent's skill."

"Yes," said some one quite near to me; and, to my surprise, I saw that it was a dignified old gentleman who sat next to the Lilac Lady. She moved, to let him pass, and he stepped from the box to the stage.

"I have here a very peculiar set of hand and legcuffs, used during the Spanish conquest of Mexico by the Inquisitors." He held up some steel curves, from which dangled fine steel chains.

"These are peculiarly constructed," he continued; "and before Mr. Regent puts them on, I want to warn him that they are made in such a way that, the more a person tugs at them and tries to free himself, the more tightly they fasten on him; so that, after they were worn for a few hours by the average prisoner, he was shrieking with the torture of the steel, slowly eating into his flesh."

I waved that aside airily. Nothing in the way of handcuffs had power to resist Richard Regent. He came forward, and the dignified man fastened them on, with what I thought was a gleam of unholy joy. Regent backed away, but more slowly than in the other cases; however, before he reached the curtains, both chains and cuffs dangled, then fell. I restored them to their owner. Regent nodded toward the curtains.

"Mr. Regent, having no desire to give away his methods," I stated, "will go behind the curtains to remove the anklets."

Almost before I had finished speaking, the curtains went back, and the anklets were put into my hands. The man dropped them, and sprang across to the curtained space. Regent stopped him as his hand caught the curtains.

"Oh, very well!" he said; and the audience jeered him. After the applause had died down, the next performer came on; and we retired below to make ready for the street, our part of the performance being ended.

"I wish," said Richard Regent suddenly, "that you would step around front and find out who that girl is; get into conversation with the old codger, and find out their address—and her name."

I came back with the information that the occupants of the left stage box had taken themselves off. Regent heaved a very deep sigh, indeed, and then, apparently dismissing the subject from his mind, whistled, as though there were no such person in the world as a Lilac Lady. His sibilant effects were cut short by a knock at the dressing-room door, which preceded a stage doorkeeper's entrance, with the information that "the old gent with the Spanish handcuffs would like to speak to Mr. Regent."

Regent surprised the hardened Cerberus with half a dollar, and, when the dignified man entered, greeted him cordially.

"Yes, I know. I don't look like the devil, but I'm Regent, all right. There's the rest of the get-up." He waved toward the dressing table. "Have a cigar—don't mind the signs about not smoking. What can I do for you?"

The old gentleman was plainly puzzled, and he looked at Richard Regent with eyes at once eager and bright. He was of the type which one seldom meets in America—the peppery remains of an aristocrat, his satiated mind craving a new sensation.

"I'm blunt," he said. "When I want a thing, I ask the price. Don't tell me it hasn't one——"

"Spare me the trite aphorism which bids fair to follow that statement," said Regent. "And try one of my cigars."

"Bluntly," said the old gentleman, "I don't want one of your cigars. Cigar choosing is an art. You're too young to have it. What I want to know is how you got rid of those handcuffs?"

"I can be just as blunt, and tell you I'm not going to reveal the secret of my salary," replied Richard Regent. "I'm sorry——"

He broke off abruptly, and stared at the old gentleman. I saw he was possessed with an idea.

"But first I should ask what you're willing to pay?"

"Your price, if I can afford it," was the old gentleman's reply.

"Well—look me over," said Richard Regent, "and decide whether there's anything about my personality to which you object. Then consider whether or not it would be too much if I asked you and the other members of your party to supper at the Collingwood to-night?"

White eyebrows came together; a voice became a rumble. "There are *ladies* in my party, sir!"

"Just so," agreed Regent blandly.

Now a white mustache was blown like a windflower. "Just *so!*" snorted the old gentleman furiously. "Just *so,* you damned stage mountebank!"

Regent was never remarkable for keeping his temper. In one second, he had thrown open the door of his dressing room and pushed the old gentleman forth. We heard, from behind the bolted door, arguments advanced by a doorkeeper who did not like his job.

As the voices died away, so did Regent's anger, and he sat down, with a discouraged look.

"Although, I don't know," he voiced, after a while. "Mountebank's a nasty word!"

Until the Lilac Lady again crossed our leisurely arranged life lines, I heard no further reference to her from Regent. But when we looked at her face from that unlighted window on Schuyler Place, I was not surprised that Regent instantly recognized her.

I based my lack of surprise on the fact that, half a dozen times in the next year, he absentmindedly asked if it was possible that there was no synonym for "auburn."

CHAPTER II.

THE BLACK CROSS.

One undeniable failing is mine—a weakness for puzzles, anagrams, acrostics, et cetera. The failing admitted, I must be just to myself, and declare that I am rather clever at finding solutions. But the heading to the letter that I held in my hand one morning—nearly a year after the Lilac Lady incident—was just as runic to me, half an hour afterward, as it had been when my eyes first rested upon it.

Regent never opened his mail. He had no intimate friends; he was ignorant of living relations, and not at all interested in his admirers. So, it was my task to weed from the miscellaneous collection of requests for his autograph, "how-do-you-do-it" letters and invitations to the homes of people whom he did not know—bring your bag of tricks, understood—such genuine wheat as engagements at big affairs—check enclosed—statements from his vaudeville agents as to his booking next year, and legal folios regarding his property.

His lawyer—Mr. Klammer, of Thirty-fourth Street, New York—should have been approached in the matter which the letter with the cabalistic heading touched upon—an offer of forty thousand dollars for that house and garden at Number Two Schuyler Place, New York City. This was a piece of property to which he had fallen heir under the will of Arabella Schemhorn, spinster—a lady who had conceived a violent and unrequited attachment for him, and to whose private library he owed much of his knowledge of the early magicians; Lulli, Bacon, Albertus Magnus, Rosicrucius, Cagliostro, and the like. For the work upon which Regent has been engaged, ever since my first acquaintance with him, aims to be a complete history, in five volumes, of all those who have, during modern times, mystified the great public.

Altogether, the Schemhorn bequest amounted to something like seventy thousand dollars, as we had been informed, several months before, by Mr. Klammer; but that had been on a valuation of Number Two Schuyler Place, at eighteen thousand dollars, with a question mark. The house had been unoccupied for years, the lawyer said, and was in an undesirable locality, facing the East River, and rendered intolerable to any one of peaceful disposition by the shrieking, night and day, of steam whistles. There had been many attempts to lease or sell it; but the infinite difficulty with which it was reached—it was two crosstown blocks from any car line—rendered this difficult. It could be turned into a tenement, and rented, if Mr. Regent cared to expend a few thousand dollars in converting the spacious rooms into rabbit hutches; but, the lawyer warned him, rent had to be extracted from that class of tenants with the devil's pincers, and their poor belongings were easy to move on the night before rent day. "Pay taxes and hold on to it until the warehouses begin to move up that way," the lawyer had advised as the course which he, personally, would pursue; and we had taken him at his word.

Now came an offer for more than twice the value that the lawyer had put upon it—an offer written on paper headed tantalizingly thus:

E. C.
N. Y. S.
NUMBER ONE SCHUYLER PLACE
NEW YORK CITY

and signed:

Secretary, E. C.

There was no name given; the secretary had simply written the concluding words with a fountain pen, in a very commonplace vertical hand. The letter was as curt as the initials:

MR. RICHARD REGENT, *care of Orpheum Theatre, San Francisco.*

SIR: It is understood that you have come into possession of house and lot No. 2 Schuyler Place. I am authorized to offer you

$40,000 for the property. Address your letter to yours respectfully, SECRETARY, E. C.

Now, I had rearranged those initials in every possible way; I had used three cipher codes on them—added, subtracted, multiplied, and divided—but still I got no result that would justify a sane man in disposing of a valuable property. Later, when I showed the note to Regent, he suggested that I take a chance and address a letter, as suggested, to this mysterious secretary of the initials, informing him that within three months' time we should return to New York, and that Regent would take up the matter, after considering other offers previously made.

The matter escaped the memories of us both, after that; for we had two months of one and two-night stands in the smaller cities up and down the Pacific Coast—and when one plays Sacramento one night and Pasadena the next, one's chief interest is the study of those eccentric tabulations called time-tables. Some time afterward, I learned that the mysterious secretary had written several other letters; but mail seldom reached us in those two months, and I have one curiosity in the shape of an envelope—covered, back and front, with theatre addresses—which followed us faithfully, just missing us in every town, until it came finally in a post-office envelope to New York.

Once back in the quaint little house in Greenwich Village, New York, which Regent had purchased, several years before, as a permanent metropolitan residence, and had turned into a veritable treasure house for those interested in alchemy, illusions, and "white" magic—once back at home, and having little or nothing to do, I remembered the letter, and suggested that I go and consult Mr. Klammer about it. But this Regent forbade.

"If you stir up that old clam," he said resentfully, "he'll be down here, bombarding us with deeds, and bonds, and mortgages, and titles, and God knows what other infernal documents. I've had a hard three months, and I want a rest; besides, as I told you, I've just received an old book, printed in Leipsic in sixteen hundred and twenty, and throwing an altogether new light on all the resurrectionists. One hundred and fifty English pounds it cost, under the hammer, and ten more pounds that scoundrel Jennet charges for getting it for me. But it's worth it—it's worth it. Listen!"

He took up the moth-eaten, wormy, smelly book, and bored me with it for an hour. It was written in Latin, and he was not a ready translator. Unfortunately for his great work, some enterprising magazinist has since procured a copy of the same work and, under the title of "Evil Exposed," given it to the American public.

When he grew weary of searching his Latin dictionary for fine shades of meaning, I put on my hat.

"Where are you going?" he inquired.

"Going to take a look at Number Two, Schuyler Place," I responded.

"But you haven't got the key," said he.

"That's true," I admitted, moving toward the door. "But I'll have a look at the outside, anyway."

It happened that, at that moment, a ray of sunlight fell across the mahogany table at which he sat. It lit up the old wainscoated room with a rare golden light. He wavered, was tempted, and walked to the window. In the little back garden the lilacs were in bloom. He threw up the sash, and their fragrance drifted into that musty atmosphere. He, too, reached for his hat.

"It's a pity," he said reflectively, "that there isn't a decent synonym for 'auburn.' There used to be a woman with brick-red hair in vaudeville, and she billed herself as 'The Girl With the Auburn Locks.' She had the beastly taste to be on the bill with me, more than once. Ugh!"

"Shall I ring for the motor?" I asked.

"On a day like this—bah!"

So, we walked through the sunshine of an April day and the quaint streets of old Greenwich. Regent was as mercurial as a barometer; when the day

pleased him, he had a totally irresponsible way of smiling at every pretty girl he met, and greeting her like an old friend; of giving away quarters to apple women, and throwing fruit to begrimed urchins, whom he would astonish, at other times, by producing bananas from their pockets and cherries from their ears; of buttonholding policemen and telling them, in confidence, that there was a man around the corner who had just tried to kill him, and showing, as evidence, the policeman's own revolver, which he had abstracted while giving the details of the attempted crime; of halting bicyclists and mounted officers with a ventriloquial "H-e-y!" in stentorian tones, emanating, apparently, from a person just behind them; and of performing many other schoolboyish tricks, totally unworthy of the future author of "The Magicians; An Exposure of Alchemy, Illusion, Spiritualism, and Fakirs Generally, with an appendix relating to the so-called Esoteric; by Richard Regent."

On such occasions, he would entreat me to call him Dick, and, as a great favor, to make it Dickie. And in solemn truth he looked more like a young undergraduate, just free from lectures, than like a famous wonder worker. Personal dignity he had not, except when engaged in performing or writing. Moreover, he knew more people than anybody in New York, and had drunk milk and vichy in every bar from the Battery to the Bronx. Very few of the bartenders, whom, as a class, he called "Bill," had any idea that the "young sport" in the marvelous Parisian neckties and well-tailored clothes was capable of earning more in a week than they in a year. In fact, they were inclined to patronize him, and called him "Jack," or "young feller," scenting superciliousness on the part of one of "them rah-rah boys."

Journeying in this desultory manner, we were several hours in reaching Schuyler Place; the latter half of the second hour being devoted to locating it, for it appeared to be a thoroughfare outside public interest or knowledge. Indeed, we might have wandered in vain, had we not come upon an ancient party, sunning himself on a landing stage. He, it appeared, had, thirty years before, delivered eggs to the last original Schuyler at Number One.

So, following the unlovely East River front, we finally came to two houses, bounded by two streets, facing the river, set in the midst of gardens, iron-gated, stone-walled. The walls and the houses had that dirty black-gray appearance with which the London fog and grime invests the more ancient buildings.

We walked around to the back of Schuyler Place, and found that the wall of Number One ran half a block on Entwistle Street, and that an alley twenty feet wide divided the rear walls of both houses from the back yards of the dingy tenements that faced Elm Tree Square—a squalid court, where dirty children played about the basin of a fountain, long since dry, set into a grassless plot of ground where, I presume, the fabled elm trees flourished. We crossed Elm Tree Square to Hartogensis Street, where the wall of Number Two took up the corresponding half block to that occupied by Number One on Entwistle Street. Within its spacious garden, chestnuts, "sweet beans," and oaks lifted their heads above the walls.

As we passed the front gate of Number Two, Richard Regent stopped, toyed with the lock, and opened it; and we passed through a tangle of weeds, rosebushes, and other plants to the Corinthian columns of the old stone house.

A lock was like a toy to Richard Regent. He opened the front door of the house before the ordinary person would have found the key and fitted it. The interior was depressing—a fit place for ghosts, bats, and caretakers.

We wandered from cellar to roof, elated at finding some bits of antique furniture worth transferring to the Greenwich home. But as a property fit for habitation, Number Two lacked points. The roof leaked, the cellar was damp, the flooring was insecure, the

stairs creaked, and the whole house needed repapering. Its sole advantage lay in the fact that it faced the river—a lively marine view; ships, tugs, dredges, all kinds of boats. We stood for a while on the bricked pavement, looking at the river in the sun.

A flight of stone steps led down to the water edge from each of the garden gates, and I saw iron rings fastened into the cement, apparently for mooring boats.

"There's our magical friend at it again," said Regent, as we passed the sheer iron door that had been set into the stone wall of Number One. We both stopped and examined it. An enameled black cross decorated the mathematical centre, and beside the gate was an iron letter box, labeled:

E. C.
N. Y. S.
NUMBER ONE
LETTERS

"I think," said Regent, in a hoarse, conspiratorial whisper, "that I have a h-hated r-rival in this accursed house. Hist!"

"It seems a silly business to put on a letter box," I agreed. "Guess it's some new advertising scheme."

While I was speaking, the iron gate slid noiselessly open, an eye observed us, and the gate closed again.

Richard Regent laughed, and knocked; but he got no answer. Then he kicked and, annoyed, was about to open the gate, in that peculiar way known only to himself, when I suggested that there was a thing called law, and another called burglary, and that to use professional tricks on strangers' locks violated the first, and laid the perpetrator under suspicion of the second.

"Just for that, I shan't sell them Number Two," said Regent, in a loud voice, and grinned. "Come on—let's get home."

He walked me speedily around the corner, and then halted.

"I want to get an eyeful of one of those lunatics," he whispered. So we waited until a man in a frock coat, silk hat, black ascot, and black gloves stepped forth from the gate of Number One, and started toward the corner.

Regent observed him from around the corner, and hurried me off.

"Plain, ordinary individual," he informed me. "Come on."

But when we boarded a street car at Second Avenue, the "plain, ordinary individual," somewhat out of breath, climbed in, too. We changed at Twenty-third; so did he. And when we finally reached Greenwich, we left him on the other side of the street, staring at our windows.

"Jacopo!" said Richard Regent, gripping my arm, and hissing melodramatically in my ear. "We are in the midst of a plot, Jacopo. Stories are going to be written about us, my friend. You won't forget to mention that I hissed at this juncture, will you? Because every respectable character hisses under strong emotion. You promise me?"

I did not promise; but I hope that, when he sees this, he will be satisfied.

CHAPTER III.

THE MIDNIGHT VIGIL.

You must not think ill of me if I present to you the true Richard Regent. Like most geniuses, he had the instincts of a child; and it was his childishness, rather than his genius, that made him beloved. Therefore, when I tell you that all thought of the spy of Number One vanished from his mind when he found a new suit of evening clothes just arrived from the tailor's, and that, had it not been for that suit of clothes, Number Two would probably have been sold in the usual manner, you will realize that I put down his acts of childishness because they are necessary to the unfolding of the story.

He had seen some foreign nobleman in New Orleans with a dress coat cut

on new lines; and immediately his own costly raiment lost charms for him, and nothing would do but that he must make a sketch of the dress coat, and forward it to his New York tailors, with instructions to have one like it made speedily, against his arrival in New York. Hughes, his valet, brought the box to him as we stood observing the spy at the window; and nothing interested Regent, then, except dressing for dinner. He came down shaved, barbered, manicured, and attired in the new creation, demanding my admiration. Not one person in a thousand would have noticed that the coat was different from any other dress coat; but it made for absolute impeccability in his eyes, and when he wanted approval I could not hurt him by denying it.

After dinner he yearned to show himself to others in his new splendor, and sent me to the telephone, to have set aside for him a box at the Buskin, where an acquaintance was starring in a musical comedy.

Hughes went around to interview Schmaltz, the chauffeur, and presently announced that the motor was ready. Arrived at the Buskin, Richard Regent preened himself contentedly before all New York, and smiled his approval upon his friend on the stage. Between the acts, he became the centre of an animated group in the lobby, and insisted that they should all drink with him. He gave me no sign of having noticed anything in particular, nor did he speak of what he had seen until the curtain went up on the second act.

"That fellow is in the audience, Jacopo," he said, as he bent forward, apparently studying his programme. "That man from the skull-and-crossbones place. Old Mr. Mystery, the gentleman detective."

"The man who followed us from Schuyler Place?"

"I see that you grasp me, my dear Watson. Do you know," he continued reflectively, "I've got a hunch that my profession has something to do with their eagerness to buy Number Two. They apparently didn't worry about it in Arabella's time. It's possible, after all, that Number One is up to some new dodge."

I cannot say that I took much interest in the matter. The cross, and the initials, and the spy all seemed infinitely childish to me; poor business for grown-up men. And Regent appeared to forget it, for the time being, himself. But that was always his way; he could look naïve and childish when contemplating his most monumental hoaxes.

The second act was in two scenes, and there was a dark change of one minute between them; during which time I felt my hat, coat, and stick thrust into my arms, and heard his whispered command to follow him. I stumbled down the steps—we had a second-tier box—to the main floor, and he opened the door that led from the auditorium to the stage. Scene shifters, chorus girls, property men, and assistant stage managers were jumbled together behind the black curtain; and some one, not recognizing Regent, told us to get out. We did so, and speedily, by the stage entrance at Thirty-eighth Street.

Regent slipped into his coat, and turned up the sable collar, motioning me into a taxicab. He gave an address on Second Avenue—a saloon that he had noticed at the corner of Hartogensis Street—and promised the man an extra dollar if he made the journey in fifteen minutes. The chauffeur took the risk, and managed it in thirteen and a half. All this time Regent had been so deeply sunk in contemplation that I did not dare to disturb him, and we entered the saloon by the "family entrance" in silence.

He proceeded to the inner room, called the white-aproned negro, who was dozing in his chair, and donated a greenback.

"Jim," he said affably, "go in and borrow the bartender's coat and hat—borrow two coats and two hats, if you can. There's more in this for you, if you look sharp."

"Yessah!" grinned Jim. I don't know how long it takes to say Jack

Robinson, but certainly Jim was back before a man who stuttered could have mastered its enunciation. He had the two coats; one was of blue serge, the other of black alpaca. Regent was kind enough to take the latter. The hats were of flappy felt; one black, the other a dirty gray. Seeing Regent slip off fur coat and silk hat, I followed suit; and we gave Jim the charge of them.

"You're open until——"

"One o'clock, sah. After that, if you knock three times at the door, and call my name—it ain't Jim, sah; it's Mercutio—Cutey, they calls me!"

Regent promised to be familiar to the extent of the diminutive, and off we pelted down Hartogensis Street, past Elm Tree Square, and into the alley back of Schuyler Place, keeping close to the wall, and edging up to the back gate of Number Two, which Regent opened without difficulty.

That garden was like a jungle—alder bushes, young cherry trees, rosebushes, milkweeds; all tangled together with vines and creeper, and the home, apparently, of many toads. Above, the oaks, the sweet beans, and the chestnuts curved their topmost branches toward one another, almost interlacing—certainly shutting out the light of day, not to speak of the half shadow of night. There was, of course, no light from the windows of Number Two to aid our vision; and Number One was equally noncommittal.

I walked carefully, touching Regent's back; for, as he had spent much of his life in dark cabinets, he had an owllike indifference to darkness.

We stepped into a musty basement. Though I could conjure a rabbit out of an opera hat, and Regent could materialize one from the air, neither of us was able to produce lights in a house that had no electric wiring or gas pipes; even a thing as simple as a candle was beyond us. However, we were fortunately acquainted with the interior architecture. We stumbled through the basement hall, up a pair of smelly steps to the drawing-room landing; then passed up the broad stairway to the second floor, and into the second-story front, facing the river. Here a few sickly rays of cloud light forced their way through the interstices of the shutters; and in one place, where two of the shutter clapboards had rotted away, the light was augmented. One could peer out, here, and gain a very fair view of the river, the two gardens, the bricked pavement, and the flights of steps leading from the two gates to the water's edge.

"Well, we're here!" I snarled. My socks were wet from sole to calf—thanks to the dew in the garden—and my feet were sopping about in my thin pumps. And all for no end that I could make out.

Regent nursed tenderly a finger nail that he had broken on the basement door, and said nothing.

"I hope you're satisfied," I said sulkily, dusting off an ancient horsehair sofa sufficiently to sit down without spoiling my dress trousers.

"What I can't understand," said Richard Regent gently, "is that, if this man knows I'm Regent, he should think he can keep sight of me in a theatre, when the police can't keep me in a cell—as everybody knows, or ought to!"

"Well, you called him a fool. Why take the trouble to prove it to him? He won't believe it, anyway."

"You're talking to hear yourself talk," said Regent; and that did not increase the atmosphere of geniality in that bare room. I shivered, and wished I had my fur coat. He lighted a cigarette. He had drawn up a chair to the window, and, by piling two hassocks on it, had put himself at a height from which he could observe, seated, the river through the broken shutter.

Having nothing to do, and preferring not to think of the incredible asininity that had brought us away from a warm, comfortable theatre to a dismal, rat-haunted house, I presently forgot the shocking condition of the sofa, and, I suppose, fell asleep. At any rate, I remember that I was shaken by Regent and, far from gently, urged to observe something.

"Look at what?" I asked, still sulky.

"Out of the window," he said, in an excited way.

"What?" I grumbled; but I obeyed.

"At Number One's landing stage," whispered Regent, seeing that I, having made no comment, apparently saw nothing out of the ordinary.

Undoubtedly there was a boat there, rocking gently with the tide. No ordinary boat, either, but a motor craft, with almost indistinguishable outlines. Its peculiarity lay in the fact that it was twice as large as the usual launch of that type, and that the high bow was sheathed over almost three-quarters of the way to the stern. A flag fluttered from it; my excited fancy told me that it was a black flag.

Presently a man stepped out upon the second step of the landing place; I heard the boat grate against the stone as another man followed him; then something seemed to be handed to the two men, and they backed up the steps, holding it. What it was I could not see, as their backs were turned to us and their movements thereby hidden, since we were watching at so peculiar an angle.

When we next made out anything, the party had changed to three men, and they were walking slowly toward the garden gate of Number One. I could not conceive that I had miscalculated; for I had surely seen only two leave the boat. As they came nearer the gate of Number One, I observed the reason for their measured tread; the man in the middle apparently took no steps. His chin was on his chest, his knees scraped the ground; altogether, he was like a sack of meal, half full, and squeezed in the middle. His hands, sticking out like fins from under the arms of either of his supporters, seemed to be very large, very white.

The trio had now reached the gate, and the suspended man suddenly vanished from my sight. There were the two upright men in the cloud light, apparently chatting amiably to some acquaintance within the gate; but there was no third man. There was nothing remarkable about the two men, except that they wore black—or, it might have been, dark blue. They did not slink, or crouch, or betray any evidence of wishing to be unobserved. Indeed, one of them lighted a pipe, and casually blew out the match. Then they strolled back to the motor boat, and climbed in; and the boat, without a sound, slid away from the landing place and got lost, somehow, in the shadows.

I did not notice the omission at the time, but afterward Regent mentioned to me that it was somewhat peculiar that the boat did not carry lights.

There was a slight embarrassment between us, as we turned from the window and stared silently at each other. It was as though two sensible men had each believed himself to have seen a ghost, and both wondered if they dared ask each other for corroboration. Regent struck a match and lighted one of his vile Virginia cigarettes.

My unsettled nerves betrayed themselves in my exasperation. "Blow that smoke the other way!" I said.

He complied. "I wonder," he said suddenly, "if that man was dead."

I wanted to be scornful and say "Drunk," but somehow flippant cynicism seemed out of place. If there had been but one detail on which I could have hung ridicule—a raised finger, for silence; an averted face, a melodramatic gesture. But the grim business—for it appealed to me as grim—had been conducted with a cold-blooded commonplaceness that awed me into respect. These conspirators, murderers, thugs, assassins, spies—whatever they were in Number One—were modern.

"I wonder, too," I heard myself saying humbly.

"He might have been senseless," suggested Regent, after a long pause. His tone seemed to appeal for confirmation.

"Or drugged," I contributed.

"Yes," he said, pondering it over, and drawing out the single syllable into half a dozen sibilants. "That's so; I didn't think of that. He might have been drugged."

Then suddenly:

"Jake, I think I'll sell this house—yes, I think I'll sell it!"

"*I* would," I said, with conviction.

"Would you?" he asked, apparently delighted. "Well, I will. Come on—let's get out of this."

Let me confess to many shivers and shakes as I followed him. For five years, both he and I had been making our livings by playing on the superstitions of thousands—millions, rather—of spectators; but never before had either of us been thrown into contact with something inexplicable, conducted with all the trappings of tragedy. As we crawled out of the basement and into the garden, I fancied that eyes watched from the darkness and marked me for their own.

But we got into the alley, and closed the gate noiselessly behind us; and by following the wall, as before made our way into Hartogensis Street, and back to the saloon; where Regent rewarded Mercutio and telephoned for a cab. While we sat and waited for the cab to come, he took whisky instead of his usual seltzer and milk.

"Undoubtedly," he remarked, "I shall sell that house. First thing to-morrow, I'm going to see Klammer, and put the matter into his hands. You've got the letter offering the forty thousand dollars, haven't you?"

CHAPTER IV.

THREATENED.

After breakfast, next morning, I did not ask Regent where he was going; I simply accompanied him, making no remark when he gave Klammer's address on Thirty-fourth Street to Schmaltz, the chauffeur. Neither did I call his attention to the fact that our friend of yestere'en was sunning himself on the steps of a house across the way. Both Regent and I were somewhat shamefaced, as Americans or Englishmen are apt to be, when they have given way to either sentiment or superstition.

I think that he rather resented my accompanying him; had I asked him where he was going, he would probably have taken advantage of the question to remark offhand that he was about to call on some woman whom I did not know, and to ask if he could drop me anywhere. But, knowing by my silence that I was perfectly aware of his destination, he did not have the impudence to bluff; and he gave the address in a loud, clear, insulting tone, glancing across at our step-occupying friend on the opposite side, who arose, yawned, and walked toward the Christopher Street car line.

Klammer welcomed Regent with effusion, and me with a scowl; for I interfered with Klammer's gross overcharges, and had written him chastening letters about percentages. In matters of business, Richard Regent was a child; and, seeing from the expression of my face that I was about to take the matter in hand, he contented himself with wishing Klammer good morning, and making some banal remark about seasonable weather.

"We have come about Number Two Schuyler Place, Klammer," I said.

Klammer depreciated the value of the property with upraised eyebrows. "You got my letter, then?" he asked.

Regent shot at me a questioning look—a look somewhat tinged with suspicion. It was true that he lacked business ability; but he did not lack instinct. I caught his meaning.

"Somebody wants to buy the house?" I asked.

"Yes. Didn't you get my letter?"

"We've received pretty nearly no mail in the last two months," I informed him. "One-night stands, you know. Funny that somebody should have written you about Number Two, Schuyler Place. We were just thinking of having it torn down and putting up a theatrical clubhouse for people who own boats, and yachts, and things," I added, embellishing.

Klammer looked annoyed. "It isn't worth while," he said. "Besides, I've got an offer—a good deal more than it's worth. Twenty-five thousand. I'd take it like a shot, if I were you. You won't get another chance. Eccentric

person, you know. What do you say, Mr. Regent?"

Regent refused to allow me to me disregarded. As for me, I arose.

"We'll let you know in half an hour, Klammer," I informed him.

"But——" he protested.

"Mr. Winters is quite right; half an hour," agreed Richard Regent, giving me the support which my eye demanded.

"But look here," said Klammer, and pulled out a deed of sale from a pigeonhole. "This chap was in here only this morning—an old codger, he is, and an eccentric, as I said before. He wants an answer before noon, and I promised to give it to him. Here's the deed of sale; you sell it to me at twenty-five thousand dollars, and I'll give you my check the minute you sign your name. I get a commission both ways, and I'm satisfied; and you get more than the house is worth, and——"

"And incidentally," I remarked coldly, picking up the bill of sale, "we dispose of the house to you."

"Matter of form," he said. "You're here to-day and gone to-morrow, Mr. Regent; and it takes time to settle these matters. As your agent, with your power of attorney and——"

"Half an hour," I said again; and we left Klammer mightily incensed. At the doorway of the building, we found our friend from Number One gazing idly at the list of names on the walls. We ignored him, and passed out; he followed us, ambling aimlessly, and apparently unaware of our existence.

"Klammer," said I abruptly, "is a thief."

"He probably got the same letter we did," agreed Regent. "Fifteen thousand dollars profit, not to mention commissions. He ought to be in Wall Street—Klammer."

"He ought to be in jail!" I said viciously, as we turned into Fifth Avenue, and I saw that the spy was still following us. "He's lost your business by to-day's work."

Regent never argued with me on such questions. "So he has," he agreed amiably, and followed me into the offices of Ashford and Company, real-estate brokers, on Thirty-third Street.

After some delay, we saw the head of the firm. Mentioning the names of some of my friends who had had business dealings with him, I informed Mr. Ashford that Mr. Regent had decided to withdraw the management of his property interests from the hands of Lionel Klammer, and to place them in the hands of Ashford and Company; after which, I gave him a detailed description of the various properties belonging to Richard Regent—those he had personally purchased, and others inherited under the will of Miss Schemhorn. Mr. Ashford prepared some papers, and Mr. Regent signed them, thereby depriving Klammer of at least a thousand a year.

"Now," said I, "about that property at Number Two, Schuyler Place."

Mr. Ashford called in a clerk who, he said, was familiar with the property; it having been examined by him in the interests of a client. The clerk —a very assured young man, with hair too sleek, and shoulders too round, and boots too shiny—said that he had been through the house in the interest of a warehouse company, who had thought of using it for their own purposes, but who had found that they could not acquire the house next door, and did not care for one property without the other.

"Number One, Schuyler Place—ah, yes!" said Mr. Ashford, staring. I scented something in his sudden recollection. "What do you say the place is worth, Haynes?" he asked.

"From fifteen to twenty thousand—to my mind," replied Haynes. "That is, the ground. The house is worth nothing—have to be torn down. Pity Number One and Number Two can't go together. Fetch a whacking price, coupled." He mentioned several firms who were willing to buy the two houses.

"No good for a residence," he continued. "Too far up—or too far down, just as you like—for a boat club, or

anything of that sort. Anyhow, no water-front privilege. Flats? No good —unless you spend a cool ten thousand on it. And then, there's all those gardens gone to waste."

"Tenements? Yes; two thousand there for partitions and things, though, and maybe a fire escape. These rotten insurance commissioners, y' know. And then, the ceilings are too high to make much profit—and waste gardens again. If I had the property," young Mr. Haynes finished candidly, "I should chuck the insurance, and hope that some day Number One would sell jointly. That's my idea."

"And Number One?" I questioned.

Haynes and Ashford exchanged glances.

"They won't sell," said Ashford, after a pause. "That's all, Haynes."

Haynes went, having the satisfaction of hearing Ashford turn to us and give an assurance that he was right.

I quietly put the letter from Number One before the head of the real-estate firm. "You'd advise Mr. Regent to accept that, then?"

Mr. Ashford, after glancing at the letter, got suddenly to his feet and walked across the room; then he walked back. He repeated this pedestrian performance several times before speaking.

"By all means," he said finally. Even then, his voice was not what you would expect from a stolid trafficker in houses and land; from such you look for stolidity, not nerves. "The offer," he continued, surer of himself, "is a very good one. Shall I put it through for you immediately?"

Richard Regent thought that he would act a little. He touched the black cross and the heading of the letter that I had given Mr. Ashford.

"But this silly business," he complained, his voice having a contemptuous lightness.

"Hypocrite!" I muttered. He knew better than to meet my eyes.

"One doesn't like to take an offer seriously, when it looks like a boy's pirate association," continued that arch deceiver.

"Four-flusher!" I whispered. This time, he had the assurance to smile brightly at me.

"The offer is bona fide enough," Mr. Ashford assured us, in a dull, preoccupied tone. "I can hand you our own check for the amount at this time, if you like."

"Well, then," I broke in impatiently, "who are these people?"

He started. "How should I know, Mr. Winters?" he asked, as though my question were an unreasonable one.

"How should you know?" I retorted, in bitter contempt. "Didn't you say you'd back up this letter with your own check for forty thousand dollars? Strikes me you couldn't go much further than that if it were the Stock Exchange. And—forgive me—Mr. Regent has some natural curiosity as to the purchaser of his property."

"I don't think," disagreed Mr. Ashford, playing with the lapels of his coat, "that I should let curiosity stand in the way of selling a property for at least twice as much as its highest market value."

"Nevertheless," broke in Regent, "I'd personally like to know how it is that you're willing to go guarantee for these people, when you say you don't know who they are."

Mr. Ashford's tone was that of a driven man, pettish. "Well, I *don't!*"

"Well—look here, then," I said. "In view of this letter, can we sell this house to *you* for forty thousand dollars?"

"I'm sure I wish you would." He was at once plaintive and full of alacrity.

"Knowing," I continued, "that the house is worth only, as far as you know, twenty thousand dollars?"

"It's worth forty thousand dollars, in view of this," he replied conclusively, tapping the letter.

"That settles it," said I. "You know something about them, and we shan't sell unless you tell—that's flat!"

"Well, then," he replied, goaded, "if you must know, I sold Number One for Mr. William Schuyler to these very same people. I don't know any more

about them, now, than I did then. I got a check signed 'Secretary, E. C. N. Y. S.'—Cotton Exchange Bank. It was cashed without difficulty, although I got no satisfaction when I made inquiries of the bank manager. As for the title deeds—according to law, *I* own Number One, Schuyler Place. It's in my name; but they hold my note, witnessed, for the price of the house. I pay the taxes, and get a check from them to do it with—and so forth. I never saw any one connected with that side of the sale, and I don't know anything about them. But I don't mind telling you this."

He paused for a moment, and wiped his face with a silk handkerchief.

"The police commissioners made a row about 'Black Hand' societies, and all that sort of thing, a few months after these people entered into possession of the house. The chief of police is a friend of mine. I went to him, and explained my predicament with regard to Number One, Schuyler Place—which, of course, I am credited with owning; and which, also, the records show I do not rent. Therefore, it is to be presumed that I use it for my own purposes.

"The police chief was a new broom—a clubman here. Police reform—you understand. It's periodical in New York. He was mightily interested, and somewhat indignant—saw a chance for exposure—oh, he would look it up, all right, and bring the thing into the light! None of your secret societies in New York! This wasn't Sicily, or Naples, or Corsica! Would I call the next day? He'd show me!

"Well—I called. And a very humble young chief of police told me that, for certain reasons that he wasn't at liberty to explain to me, I'd better let Number One, Schuyler Place, go its way and do what it liked. Perfectly harmless—oh, quite! And why shouldn't they have their own private affairs undisturbed. He was mightily indignant. Why, indeed? He would just like to know that! Weren't there Odd Fellows, and Masons, and Knight Templars, and all that sort of thing; and didn't he belong to a fraternity, and wasn't I a Greek-letter man, too? Well, he should rather think so.

"But all the while, gentlemen, that he was trying to deceive me, he succeeded just about as much as he succeeded in deceiving himself. Young Mr. Chief of Police was scared out of his wits, gentlemen—clean out of his wits. And if these people can scare a reform chief of police out of his wits, I reckon that's good enough for me. I don't want any investigation. How about you?"

I looked at Regent. He nodded.

"Sell the house," I said. "Good day, Mr. Ashford. And, by the way, when you see Klammer, I wish you'd tell him for me that we're taking our affairs out of his hands, because he deliberately tried to rob us—or, rather, Mr. Regent—of fifteen thousand dollars. You won't forget? Good day."

Mr. Ashford followed us to the door, requesting that Regent should call either late that afternoon or early next morning, to affix his signature to the deed of sale. Having promised, we passed out, and found our Old Dog Tray still enjoying the sunshine. I scowled at him; he pretended not to see, and wagged after us as we passed on toward the Altendorf.

"I think," I said suddenly, "that I'd like some whisky, Dick." I never called him Dick unless we were both intensely absorbed.

"For me," he murmured apologetically, "vichy and milk has lost its charms. My nerves are all shot to hell with a revolver shaped like a cross, and having five barrels, each loaded with a letter. Therefore, I'll take the same."

We paused at the swinging doors, and I watched the spy amble up and shamelessly follow us into the hotel. He was aware, no doubt, that one is not compelled to quit that great caravansary by the same way as that used for entrance.

"Maybe," said Regent, suddenly halting; "maybe our faithful henchman yearns for whisky, also. I shall ask him."

He waited for the spy to come up, and then took him by the lapels of his coat. Regent was angry—so angry that he purred gently, like a tiger kitten.

"To save you trouble," he said, "we'd as soon have you know where we are going. The bar, my friend, is the place. Will you join us?"

The man eyed him dispassionately. He was a difficult person to place. Looking at him closely, I saw that his black clothes did much to distract attention from a peculiarly striking face—thin lips, flattened perpetually, a button of a nose, a jaw that curved outward like a sledge runner, a broad, white forehead, and slaty eyes. He looked at once intellectual, emotionless, ugly, and profoundly uninterested in anything.

"Thank you," he said. "I do not drink."

He said it as though drinking were an amusement confined to the unintelligent classes.

"But you spy," purred Regent.

"That's true," he admitted carelessly. "I do spy."

"On us," said Regent, still more softly.

"On you," agreed the man in the black clothes, as though we had told him that he breathed.

One can be angry with a person; but this man was an abstraction. It would have been just as sensible to plant a blow on the title page of an offensive book. Richard Regent retired from the fray, worsted.

"I may as well tell you," he said sulkily, "that, if you're following us about for fear I won't sell that damned rat trap on Schuyler Place, you'd better go spying on somebody else. Ashford has just been instructed by me to accept that offer from your people. So quit dogging us, will you!"

"When do you sign the deed of sale?" asked the man in the black clothes. But there was nothing human, like eagerness, in his tone.

"To-morrow morning," said Regent, still sulkily. "I'll be damned if I do it before. I've got to go down to Long Island this afternoon, and will dine there, and——"

"To-morrow morning will suffice," said the man. "You have been wise, Mr. Regent. I'm sorry my attentions have disturbed you."

He did not speak as though he were sorry. He said it as people say "Must you go?" when they've been waiting for you to do so for some time.

The sulkiness still sat upon Regent, however; he felt that he had been unfairly dealt with, and the fact that he was without scathing comment to make turned his sulkiness to surliness.

"Good day," said the Raven. That was what we afterward christened him, for we never learned his name.

"Good-*by!*" corrected Regent, adding childishly: "I don't know when I ever disliked a man's face as much as I dislike yours. I trust I shall never see it again."

"I trust so, too," said the Raven courteously; and he turned and went. But there was in his tone a sombreness that I did not like.

"What did he mean by that?" growled Regent.

The answer he got from me was not an explanation; it was merely profane, and had nothing to do with the case. Man has a limited vocabulary when he is annoyed.

CHAPTER V.

THE BLACK BOAT'S PASSENGER.

It is apparent to you that, in the preceding interview, Richard Regent came off second best. It was apparent to him, also, and he did not like it. All that morning he remained taciturn and meditative, and I knew that he was better left alone; but at three o'clock I took the liberty of breaking in on his reflections with the information that, if he had any idea of accepting a certain charming lady's invitation to dinner that night, he had best be throwing some things into a bag, and preparing to take the four-o'clock train from Long Island City.

He rang for Hughes, in response to

this; and Hughes did what was necessary. Then I was calmly informed that I was expected to accompany him.

It would be difficult for me to explain to you the relations that existed between Richard Regent and me. He paid me a tremendous salary in exchange for my personal freedom—that's about the size of it; for he was a man who peculiarly hated to be without companionship. He often dismissed me summarily when he was working; oftener, he sat in the same room with me, and addressed me not once in several hours; but without me he was lost. In certain ways, I looked on him as a nurse looks upon a precocious child.

Now, I had no invitation to Mrs. Pendleton Ewing's for that evening; in fact, I was personally unacquainted with the lady. Nevertheless, I had Hughes pack my evening clothes, and got into the motor with Regent. We took the four-o'clock train, but we did *not* take our bags. For a reason that he did not then deign to give, Regent dismissed Hughes with the motor, and, walking across to the baggage room, checked the bags, to be called for.

And, although our tickets were taken to Long Point, we descended at a station just about twenty miles from Long Island City, and took a train immediately back to that railway centre from which we had started. Followed .the writing of a telegram to Mrs. Pendleton Ewing, urging sudden sickness as an excuse for non-attendance; a dinner in a Hungarian restaurant on Houston Street, a visit to a Chinese theatre, and a repetition of our former methods of entering Number Two, Schuyler Place.

It was not until we were in the second-story front, and he was peering through the broken shutter, that Regent returned to his normal cheerfulness. He had all the determined obstinacy of a child; and, like a child when it had achieved its point, he chose to ignore the fact that he had been sulky all day.

"This is what I call having a good time," he said, smiling at me. My intimation that our ideas on such things differed did not dampen his spirits in the least. Out of various pockets he took several articles which had been spoiling the shape of his Fifth Avenue clothes—a pair of binoculars, fitted with tiny electric reflectors; an electric arc lamp, small enough to be concealed in the palm of one's hand; a pair of steel nippers, and a small automatic pistol, shaped like a cigarette case, except for the projection of an inch of muzzle.

He used the pocket arc in order that I might observe the others.

"Mind you," he said, with the air of an aggrieved man; "they didn't even trouble to put a good spy on me. Just a common, ordinary spy, who sat around on steps and let us see him. And they think that will go down with me—*me!* It's the contempt for my reputation that makes me mad, Jake. Why, they act as though I hadn't any intelligence! They don't take any precautions—perfectly barefaced. 'There's the mystery,' say they; 'we dare you to find it out. We bring senseless people in black motor boats at midnight; we use black crosses and cabalistic initials on our paper; we defy the police; we put the fear of God into real-estate agents of prominence; and we detail spies that look like college professors to sleuth really remarkable magicians. That's what we do. Now, go to bed and forget it.' And they think that'll work with me? Hmphm!"

The gist of the speech was contained in the last exclamation; but, as it is impossible to put feeling into a combination of letters that doesn't spell anything, I report Regent in detail.

He then settled down to what was his idea of spending a pleasant evening, smoking many cigarettes of vile materials, and speaking derogatorily of the Raven. As for me, while I shared his desire to learn the secrets at which the cross and the initials hinted tantalizingly, I had an uneasy premonition that we were opposed to a combination that was one too many for Richard Regent even. However, I had one con-

solation—there was not another man in the world as capable of solving it as was he; and it seemed, to my mind, that the gentlemen of the black cross would have been wiser in not putting a barefaced insult upon a man of his peculiar proficiency in certain lines. Human nature should have told them that, when you make light of a performer's ability, you are approximating an insult to the average man's mother.

We talked in whispers for the better part of two hours; but the conversation consisted chiefly of conjectures—all inaccurate, and consequently not worth recording. We were in the heat of an argument about the occult—in which I had some slight faith, and he none—when his eloquent discourse was suddenly checked, and he put up his night glasses, staring intently at the river.

The night was of much the same character as the preceding one—an occasional glimmer of moon or stars through masses of gray cloud. But with those glasses, the character of nature's light made little difference, providing it was not a London fog. Regent stared steadily for several minutes; then handed the binoculars to me.

After adjusting them for my own sight, I made out the motor boat, slowing down just above our own landing steps, and watched it drift opposite those of Number One.

It was not in the nature of things that I should hand the glasses back until he asked for them; consequently, I watched two men spring out, as before, receive something—still, as before, with their backs turned—and quickly transform themselves into three people. Only, this time, I saw that they were still two men; for the senseless person between them was a woman!

I gasped; then, as they came to the top of the steps, and her head slipped back, revealing her face, I gasped again. It was an astonishingly beautiful face, even with the eyes closed; and the glimmer of precious metals seemed to hang about her hair like a halo.

She was clad in a plain, ill-fitting dress, without ornament; a veil fell as her body pitched backward; and the two men were content to let it lie, rather than release her on either side. So, I got a clearer view of her, and saw that her hair was of that peculiar golden red which occurs about as often, in the natural course of hirsute growth, as a swan is hatched by a duck.

Without ceremony, Regent snatched the glasses from my hands. He trained them on the party of three, just as the woman's head was in the act of falling forward on her breast; and, as he looked, I heard him give a queer, half-choking cry—the sort of cry which one expects from a child who has been unjustly and suddenly punished.

The glasses smashed on the floor, and I put out a hand to steady him. His body stiffened, but he said nothing.

Meanwhile, the trio had advanced to the gate of Number One, and, with the same illusion of magical disappearance, became once more resolved into two men, who returned to the motor boat.

"Did you recognize her?" asked Regent harshly.

"Vaguely, yes; personally, no," I replied.

"It was the Lilac Lady," he said, in dull, preoccupied tones.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BODY SNATCHERS.

When he spoke again, it was in a brisk, business-like way, as though we were about to execute some hoax. "We shall wait until that moon goes out of business again, of course."

I knew I was in for it. When Richard Regent got business-like, all was lost, save honor, unless he carried through his contemplated scheme. Visions of failure never entered his mind. He had a fashion of catching a will-o'-the-wisp on the wing, and pinning it to his cap, like a butterfly hunter. But every time he went after one, I saw visions of him floundering inextricably.

He was not even irritated with the

moon for coming out just at that moment. When he had really set his heart on doing anything, he regarded that thing as already done; and if it had occurred to him that, by fixing his mind on it, he could have done a Joshua trick with the sun, I believe in my heart that he would have possessed his soul in patience for years, sitting on a rock, and turning his mental current upon the orb of day.

"I knew I should run across her again," he kept murmuring. "I knew I shouldn't have seen that gorgeous creature once, never to see her again. All along I knew that, some time or other, she'd pop up again. Didn't I say so to you, Jacopo?"

He had not; but I said he had, to avoid argument.

"Of course I did," he repeated, looking at me uneasily. He knew I was lying. "Of course I did. Certainly I did." By this time he believed it.

Then the moon, having found nothing of great interest below, closed its eye, and resumed its sleep behind several mountains of cloud. Regent arose; and we went downstairs, and, noiselessly, out into the garden. Having discreetly observed the rear of Number One, and found it without a gleam of light—shuttered, tomblike—he nodded to me.

I made a cup of my hands; into this he put his foot, and I gave him an upward toss. He caught the top of the wall, hung on, drew himself up; then, gripping the wall with his toes, swung downward on my side, and caught my upraised hands, hauling me up. And on the edge of the wall we sat, like two boys with the peculation of apples in view.

The garden of Number One was bricked, hygienic, and denuded of weeds and bushes. We saw no watchers, and swung down lightly. There was little difference between the construction of this house and that of the one which Regent owned; and we found our way down the basement steps without difficulty. Here Regent brought his pocket arc into play, hiding its rays by keeping a hand over it. His steel nippers came out; he probed for something, got it, and snapped it.

"I was afraid of that," he told me afterward. "The door had one of those electric connections that ring until you've closed it. However, that's settled."

Such being the case, he opened the iron door—if not with that dispatch which usually characterized such feats on his part, at least with commendable promptness, considering the trouble that had been taken to make that door impregnable. It opened inward, on greased hinges, making no sound; and we were face to face with absolute blackness.

The gods had been kind. It appears that, in cutting the electric connection at the door, Regent had in some way deranged the whole system of insulation. I heard another door open, and a man come within a few feet of us, groping, swearing, uncertain.

At the noise of the knob turning, Richard Regent had closed the basement door hurriedly; and we now stood, our backs against it, waiting to find out what had happened. I needed no light to tell me that Regent had that automatic pistol in his right hand.

The prowler in the darkness found a match, and struck it. His back was toward us. The match flickered, showing him bent over, with a couple of creases in a fat neck, ill-fitting clothes wrinkling about him. Regent's pistol slipped into a pocket; Regent himself leaped and landed on the man's back. I heard a gurgle and a thud, the latter twice repeated. Something slid to the stone floor, and rolled. There was a very long silence.

Then a pin point of light flowered into a yellow ball, and I saw Regent bending over the man, whose perfect inertia appeared to be eminently satisfactory and unworthy of serious interest. The yellow ball danced about, showing a stone-floored corridor lined with iron-grated doors. It came to a full stop at one of the gratings, and I saw a segment of derby hat pop up alongside it.

"Come here, Jake," whispered the

man beneath the hat. I stepped to his side.

A streamer of light fell across a cot inside, on which a man slept peacefully beneath a black coverlet. Inspecting him more closely, I saw that the coverlet was tossed away from the sleeper's chest, and that the upper part of his body was clothed in a sleeping jacket, also of black. The man's face was turned from us.

We moved on to the next iron grating. The light presented a similar coverlet, a similar sleeping jacket, an identical cell, but a different man. He was blond, dissipated, weak of chin, unsatisfactory; but, if he were aware of his failings, his peaceful slumber gave no hint of it.

In the third cell, we saw a woman's thick braids of hair hanging over the side of the cot, and for the moment Regent trembled. But the hair was black—shinily, greasily black.

Regent gripped my arm. "This sleep——" he began, but did not finish.

I took some satisfaction in the thought that his fear was as great as mine.

"Anything's better than not understanding," he added presently.

To convey to you some idea of how scared he was, I must record that, for the first time in his life, he found it difficult to manipulate a lock. And all because of a few sleepers, a few black coverlets, a few black sleeping jackets —and an intense silence!

After a while, he got the door open.

The task of turning over the woman's face devolved upon me. He stood back, shuddering, and motioning to me fiercely. A sudden fear that he felt toward me as I did toward him, and a remembrance that he had a pistol in his pocket, displaced the fear of the unknown. I took a quick step forward, turned over the face, and averted my own.

"Oh, pshaw!" he said presently; and, reassured by his tone, I turned.

The woman was a half-caste—a mulatto, I should have said. Her thick lips were parted, showing large, white, carnivorous teeth. She was in perfect health, and slept tranquilly. I felt her heart. Then I said "Oh, pshaw!" too, and looked a little ashamed. Regent shook her, at first gently, then harder; after a while, he shook her very hard. She slept on, undisturbed. He flashed the electric light before her eyes. They did not even tremble.

Quietly, we stole out of the cell, and closed the door. His hand trembled against my shoulder; a great shudder went through him.

Presently he raised the arc light, and we peered into the next cell. Little exclamations escaped us both; for within was she whom we had come to find. We had only seen the gleam of her hair, it is true; but I think, perhaps, that there was not such another head of hair in the world.

He had no need to use his skill here; the door was ajar. It occurred to me that the man who lay senseless in the corridor—he of the two fat creases in his neck—had recently quitted this room. I don't think that Regent wasted any time in conjecturing. Rather, he approached the cot, and gathered the girl into his arms, handing me the arc light before he bent down.

Quite accidentally, the yellow ray fell upon a hypodermic syringe, that lay on a little shelf just above the cot. Alongside it was a vial, containing some liquid, that gleamed, emerald-like. Acting on impulse, I put both syringe and vial into my pocket.

We passed out into the corridor, nearly stumbling over the prone person. The silence continued to be absolute and awesome. At the door, Regent let the girl's body slip down, and motioned that I should support her. He fumbled at the lock with trembling fingers, got it open, and made a sign that I should pass out with my burden. I continued to keep her aloft until we reached the garden gate, where a multiplicity of bolts, chains, and padlocks kept us in shivering anticipation for several minutes. I was very glad that the hinges were oiled.

The alley was neither hygienic nor sweet smelling; but I found the air

much to my liking, taking great breaths of it, as though breathing had been forbidden me for some time past.

With the closing of the gate, Regent resumed charge of the girl. I was not sorry; for all her beautiful slimness, she weighed a great deal, and I am not a strong man.

We thought it better to proceed to Hartogensis Street, rather than to Entwhistle; and, as it was necessary to pass Elm Tree Square, with its possible nocturnal wanderers and its inevitable policemen, I made a suggestion to Regent, and we proceeded on our way, giving a passable imitation of the methods adopted by the men from the motor boat—the girl's drooping body held up by our arms on either side.

Continually, I glanced behind me; continually, I reassured Regent, after glancing. In this fashion we reached the "family entrance" that led to the domain of a certain Mercutio, who bore grateful memories of "generous bosses."

Leaving Regent in charge, I passed in, and hailed Mercutio, who was serving oyster sandwiches and beer to the patrons of the place.

Mercutio put down sandwiches and beer, and listened to me; then he closed the door leading to the bar. When Regent and I staggered up to the saloon front on the avenue, it was discreetly opened, and we were admitted to a room smelling of whisky that had not come out of the original bottles. The donation of a five-dollar bill checked the inquiries of the German proprietor, and obtained for me the use of the telephone.

It took five minutes to awaken Hughes.

"Wake up Schmaltz, and bring the car here," I directed, after giving him the address of the saloon. "And bring it here quickly, too," I added. "Don't bother about dressing. Slip on one of Mr. Regent's fur coats. Tell Schmaltz that, if the machine is out of order, he'll lose his job to-morrow. And if he persists, ring this number up immediately, and come as fast as you can in a cab."

Schmaltz had a habit of finding the car at fault whenever it was inconvenient to break some engagement of his own; also, when he needed pocket money, he would discover the necessity for a new carbureter, or something of that sort. But, evidently, Hughes had found means to impress him; for less than half an hour elapsed before we heard a car come to a standstill outside, and, after rewarding Mercutio, we got the Lilac Lady safely into the tonneau. A little later, we installed her in a guest room in the Greenwich house, with a recently awakened parlor maid to attend her. And still she slept peacefully.

"Well?" said I to Regent, as we descended to the dining room, where the disgruntled Hughes was setting out some cold meats and wines.

For answer, Regent took down a telephone receiver and, after ten minutes, succeeded in awakening a great specialist.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SLEEPER.

James Cotton had so many degrees from universities and learned societies that he insisted on being called "Mr. Cotton." His words were more precious than the finest gold, and, being without alloy, were just as soft. He was so great a savant that he had no need to clear his throat, say "Hum!" and look like an owl. Yet his decrees were final in the United States; although there were two other men in the world—one in Berlin, another in Paris—to whom he would recommend dissatisfied patients who had no consideration for cost.

He was a close personal friend of Regent, and had helped him with the alchemy portion of his five-volume work. But, when I say "friend," I mean simply that he liked to be in Regent's company. Mr. Cotton was incapable of human friendships; he was a man of science—perhaps only the materialization of scientific principles, and not a man at all. He liked to study Richard

Regent, whom he described with some Latin phrase which meant a freak of nature. According to him, there was only one head in the world shaped like Regent's, while the prehensile character of the latter's toes had been the subject of a paper read before a very learned society which had "atavistic" as the descriptive portion of its name.

Therefore, Mr. Cotton came from a warm bed to the Greenwich house, in care of the frothing Schmaltz; who, being unscientific, and having only a passion for rest and beer, had all the outward signs of a man about to give "notice."

To Mr. Professor Doctor Chevalier Pasha Cotton, Richard Regent said nothing of Black Cross House, burglary, kidnapping, or motor boats. Instead:

"Cotton, there's a young lady upstairs. She may be asleep, she may be drugged. I don't know, and I can't give you any idea of how she got into that condition. Please don't ask me. I want you to look at her, and tell me how she can be awakened. Everything that the ordinary person can do has been done—except using cruelty."

Mr. Cotton bent his bald pate, and popped off upstairs, like a child on Christmas morning.

The maid admitted us. "I've undressed the lady, sir, and put on one of my own nightgowns—if you don't mind, sir—there not being anything else in the house she could wear. A job it was, too—her sleeping like that!"

Sniffing like a hungry mouse confronted with a new variety of cheese, Mr. Cotton bent over, dilating and contracting the nostrils of his huge jack-in-the-box nose, the sole feature of his face that had the dignity of size.

"No sign of awakening; no eye-winking; no sighing; nothing like that, eh?"

"Oh, no, sir! *Nothing* like that!" the maid assured him earnestly.

"Well, then," said he, with intense satisfaction, "all of you get out and leave me alone with her."

At the expiration of perhaps ten minutes, he pattered out. "Most curious," he said. "Extraordinarily curious. Damnably cu-ri-ous!"

He went down to the dining room, took a sip of wine, and looked hostile.

"Von Brahm ought to know about this—Pescara, too," he remarked further, referring to the specialists whom he, and the European world, considered superior to himself.

"I'm a poor medical man," he confessed to the ceiling, as though the ceiling were aware of it and had for some time been trying to convince him.

"Oh, come, Cotton!" said Richard Regent anxiously. "You don't mean to tell me you're puzzled."

"Puzzled?" purred Mr. Cotton. "No, I'm not puzzled. I'm stumped! I don't know anything! The girl's sleeping like a baby. No evidence of drugs, no odor, no stiffening, no abnormal relaxation. Just sleep—ordinary sleep. And I can't wake her up—*I* can't."

He nodded to the ceiling, as if it were the only thing in the world that really understood his futility. Silently, I placed before him the hypodermic syringe and the vial containing the green liquid—the articles which I had purloined from the shelf above the cot in the Lilac Lady's cell.

"I think," said I judiciously, after he had smelled of both and was looking an inquiry at me, "that her condition was brought about by this stuff."

Again the cheese seemed to dangle before him, and he lost faith in the ceiling's infallibility. He got up.

"Home," he said. "Laboratory. Analysis. Will telephone." He went out so speedily that we had to run after him.

"What about the young lady?" shouted Richard Regent.

"Let her sleep," he replied, and pattered down to the sulky Schmaltz.

Actuated by the same impulse, both Regent and I ascended the stairs, and knocked on the door which contained our sleeping guest. The maid awoke from a fitful slumber, and opened for us, rubbing her eyes.

"Go to bed, Marie," said Regent. "It's not fair to keep you up. I'll watch. Come in as early as you can in the

morning." He waved aside her assurance that she did not need rest, and compelled her to go.

Together, we stood looking down at the girl beneath the silken coverlet. Marie had taken down the sleeper's hair, and brushed it, and it lay loose about her rose-leaf cheeks. Beautiful the girl undoubtedly was—with a tiny nose, and a mouth exquisitely shaped. Her complexion was that of youth, health, and innocence; no anæmia there. The slender, ringless hands lay folded over the coverlet, expressive of contented rest.

"It's incredible," said I.

"It's damnable!" said Richard Regent. "To think of Cotton not knowing—Cotton!" He clinched his hands. "I'll get to the bottom of this. Mind you, Jake, I'll get to the bottom of this."

"When Cotton doesn't understand?" I asked weakly.

He turned to me a face full of futile wrath. Perhaps he was beginning to realize that he was out of his depth, that evanescent cleverness and dexterity were of little use in some situations.

"Why," I said bitterly, "we know nothing—nothing! It's all for nothing—everything we've done. Those devils have——"

An electric bell jarred sharply below.

"I hope that's coincidence," I remarked, after I had got my breath.

"You and your occult!" he sneered fiercely.

The bell rang again.

"Give me your revolver," I said, suddenly making up my mind. "I'll answer it."

"You!" His contempt stung me.

"That's the reason," I said. "You're the valuable one. I'm not. If you hear me whistle, bar the door, and telephone for the police. Understand?"

He concurred reluctantly, and slipped the little automatic pistol into my hand.

A third ring occurred.

"I must say, that's pretty decent of you—going down. But why answer it at all?"

"Anything's better than not understanding, I suppose," I replied, using the expression that had become a catch phrase with us since this affair began.

"Don't get hurt, Jake," he said, moved, and gripped my shoulder affectionately.

"Thanks," I replied, in a husky tone. "Look out for yourself, Dick."

He remained by the door. Hughes, pajamas under an overcoat, was slipping down from the servant's floor; above showed the frightened face of Marie.

"Go to bed," I directed them. "It's all right."

I waited for them to reascend; then, as the bell rang for the fourth time, I snapped on the hall lights below, opened the door, and admitted the Raven.

We stared steadily at each other. He saw that I held the automatic pistol in my hand, and nodded comprehendingly. Deliberately, I tried to pucker my lips; it was not an immediate success, and when the sound did come it lacked volume.

However, I knew that it had reached Regent; for from above came the distinct sound of a door shutting. By drawing on my imagination, I could also delude myself into believing that I heard a telephone receiver click.

CHAPTER VIII.

WE LOSE.

The more I looked at the Raven, the more I wondered at his unconcerned attitude. The fact that, at nearly three o'clock in the morning, he was ringing up people who disliked him—people who could hand him over to the police by mere telephoning, as I was sure Regent was now doing—and that he entered with all the boredom of a social lion who came to a public dinner against his will, evoked more than ever that feeling within me that he and his were irresistible, and that he looked on me much as I should consider a snapping dog.

I sought refuge in rudeness. "What in hell do you want?" I demanded.

"Sorry to disturb you," he said, with

no more feeling than a dentist inflicting horrible pain, and betraying hypocritical solicitude. "But that young woman will have to come back, Mr. Winters."

He was not posing. He was speaking naturally, and voicing what he evidently considered to be a conservative statement.

"What young woman?" I asked angrily.

"The young woman you and Mr. Regent took from Number One, Schuyler Place," he replied, in his common-sense manner. "We thought Mr. Regent had gone down to Long Island for the night. Otherwise, we would have been more careful. You have been indiscreet. It may result seriously for you both. Although that depends on how you conduct yourselves hereafter."

"Are we going to school to you?" I asked, infuriated.

"It may be necessary for you to do so, yet," he replied seriously. "Come, Mr. Winters—I can't dally here. I say that young woman must go back within the next hour. Believe me, we do not wish to do either you or Mr. Regent harm. Please do not force us to do so."

"Now, you listen to me!" I said. "When you came in, I whistled. That was the signal for Mr. Regent to telephone the police. He has, no doubt, already done so. As for you and your schemes, you'll find out who's going to do the harm—you or us. Mr. James Cotton has been here——"

"James Cotton?" he asked, with respect—the first note that voice had ever struck outside purely detached unconcern.

"Yes, James Cotton," I gloated. "He's seen the young woman, and I gave him the syringe and the bottle of green stuff that I took from the shelf in the cell when we released her."

"Thanks for telling me about Mr. Cotton," he said. "I must go and see him."

"You think you can scare him?" I asked contemptuously.

"We do not go about frightening people," he replied quietly.

"And how about the police?" I mocked. "Aren't you thankful to me for telling you about them?"

He allowed his lips to twitch into what he evidently considered to be a smile. "The police! Ah! The police! Yes—of course."

The doorbell rang again. We eyed one another.

"The police?" he questioned.

"Yes, the police," I said savagely. "And don't you move, my friend!" As I spoke, I backed toward the door, with the pistol leveled at his forehead. He showed no concern. I opened the door by twisting my hand behind me.

"Oh, you, Winters!" I heard abruptly. "Yes—just the man I wanted to see. What's this—this tomfoolery?"

It was Mr. Cotton, returned. He shut the door behind me, and pulled down the leveled pistol.

That I was surprised to see him, instead of the police, is putting it mildly. He had not had time to reach his house in Bryant Park; certainly that he should have analyzed the green fluid was beyond the wildest flight of imagination. However, his presence bolstered up my dwindling determination.

"Now," said I triumphantly to the unwelcome visitor. "Now is your time to threaten Mr. Cotton, if you wish."

"You are Mr. Cotton?" asked the Raven. It was apparent that he regarded the eminent man with considerable respect.

But Mr. Cotton had no time for him, just then, and said so, without appearing to be rude. "If you'll step into the dining room for a moment," he added, to me, "there's something I want to say to you."

"I shan't let this fellow out of my sight," I responded firmly. "I'm just holding him there until the police come. We've telephoned for them, and——"

The Raven smiled tolerantly.

"Look here, then," said Cotton, and mopped his brow. "I haven't any time to waste. I don't know what all this is; but I've got to have some light shed on something, if I'm going to help you."

He threw open the door of the little reception room, and addressed the Raven. "Oblige me—for a moment."

"Certainly, Mr. Cotton." And in the Raven went.

Mr. Cotton turned the key in the lock. As he again turned to me, I noted that he was a man in very evident distress. He fished out of his pocket the bottle of green stuff and the syringe.

"I was examining these in the motor," he said, "by the electric light. And I want to know how they came to be in your hands—eh?"

I knew by his tone that there was something wrong. Then I saw that his finger indicated a monogram on the silver syringe. This I had not noticed before; now I saw it to be that accursed black cross, with the letters E. C. N. Y. S. interwoven below it.

"Do you know what those initials mean?" I asked eagerly.

"Initials, bah! The cross—I know that. Don't you see that it is inverted?"

It was strange that I had not noticed this before; but now I saw that the cross in question was, indeed, upside down. In other words, the vertical stroke was longer above the horizontal than below it.

"That means nothing to me," I said.

He had worked himself into a fury, and was dancing about the hall. "Nothing to you? No—no—of course not! Why should it? That is as it should be. What should it mean to you, this symbol? But to me—ah! You have been meddling in something that does not concern you—you and Regent, with his superficial, monkey-like cleverness. Prying locks open, eh? Eavesdropping? Spying? Small wonder I couldn't discover why the young woman slept—small wonder! Out with the story, you meddler!"

I felt as a man might feel whose own father suddenly joined hands with a set of street ruffians in attacking him. But, before I could answer with the indignation which the occasion seemed to warrant, I heard Regent's voice on the landing above.

"Jake! Jake!"

"Yes, Dick. Don't bother me," I answered. "Go in, and shut the door."

But I heard his feet on the landing, and now he appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Come here, I tell you! Come here! Have you got that man safe?"

"For the present, yes," I replied, not knowing, then, that treachery was still to come from one of his best friends.

"Well, come here for a moment. Where is he?"

"Locked up in the reception room. Mr. Cotton's back."

But Regent was too worried to do more than notice Mr. Cotton's presence casually. "Just a minute, Cotton, won't you? Keep an eye on the door, and don't let that fellow out. Jake!"

I went up the stairs wrathfully. "What do you want?"

"Come to the telephone. The police won't pay attention to me. They say I'm drunk, or crazy. I want you to talk to them."

By this time I was like a man clinging to a log in a stormy sea, with other survivors of a wreck continually trying to immerse him. Into the room I went, and grabbed up the telephone receiver, jamming it down half a dozen times.

"Well—well—well! What number?" asked a fretful female voice. Regent supplied it; I transmitted the information, with an adjuration for haste.

"Now, then," a man's voice entreated; "who are you, and what do you want? Yes, this is police headquarters."

"I want to speak to the chief of police."

This was greeted with a kindly laugh, which aroused me to desperation.

"See, here, lieutenant—sergeant—or whatever you are. This is no joke. I'm a respectable citizen, and I demand police protection. I'm a householder, a taxpayer, and a voter; and there'll be an investigation that'll set you on your ear, if you don't give me a little more respect. Now, sharp's the word; you send two policemen around here, in the biggest hurry you ever sent anybody in."

I added the address, and was again treated to a superior chuckle.

"Thought it was you. That kind of fake telephone message don't work,

gentlemen. It's another voice, but that doesn't matter. If you want policemen, you come around here and state your case—or go to the station in your own precinct, if you're in a hurry. We've had enough of those phony calls for help." He terminated the interview by hanging up his receiver.

As best I could, I repeated his words to Regent, who stamped across the room.

"They said that to me, the beasts! I'd like to——" He paused. "Cotton's the man. Cotton's known and respected. We'll send Cotton. Come——"

I did not come. I let him go. Myself, I sat down beside the bed, and put two ice-cold hands to a throbbing forehead. Lifting my eyes presently, I looked at the cause of our troubles. She still slept peacefully.

Gradually, I quieted down as I watched her. This girl must be protected, and protection was best given her by cool heads. The mystery became a secondary consideration. If people chose to surround themselves with the trappings of a melodrama, that was their affair. What principally mattered was that we had brought this girl to safety, and that we needed all our wits to keep her there. Those few minutes of gazing at her face did me a great amount of good. I rose, a man prepared for anything.

I needed to be. At the bottom of the stairs stood Richard Regent, staring at nothing in particular.

"Where's Cotton?" he asked dully.

After looking about me, entering the dining and drawing-rooms, and calling three or four times, I turned to unlock the door of the reception room, in which I had locked the Raven.

The door stood ajar.

It was necessary for me to conjure up the face of the sleeping girl before I had the courage to push it open and turn on the electric lights. I guessed that I should see no prisoner; I was correct in my surmise.

The reception room was empty!

I stepped from the hall into the cool night air, the automatic pistol in my hand. The street was deserted.

For the first time in my life, I gave Richard Regent an order; and the tone in which I gave it sent him off without a question. "Go into the garage and see if you can find Schmaltz."

It took him just about two minutes to discover that Schmaltz was not in the garage, or in his sleeping quarters above it.

"The machine's gone, I suppose?" I asked dully.

"It's not there," he replied, in the same tone.

So, it was not enough for Cotton to betray us, to decamp with our enemy, and leave us in our time of need! He must convey our prisoner by means of Regent's own motor car—yes, even to the extent of using his chauffeur! Of course, Schmaltz had returned with Mr. Cotton; and it was natural that, Regent having placed Schmaltz under Mr. Cotton's orders, the chauffeur would convey the eminent man, and any companion, wherever Cotton manifested a wish to be taken.

"Now, Dick," said I, after I had managed to remember that, the more complicated affairs grew, the more necessary was a steady brain; "I've got something to tell you. But you've simply got to keep cool. There's no use in stamping, and raving, and swearing vengeance; it won't do any good. If we're really going to be of any assistance to the little lady upstairs, we've got to do some brain work. And more than either of us has ever done before."

And I told him quickly just how matters stood with regard to Cotton.

He turned away, and began to pace the hall, his face stony. "Got that letter, Jake?"

"We left it with Mr. Ashford," I reminded him.

"But the cross was inverted?"

"I noticed that it was on the syringe, when Mr. Cotton pointed the fact out to me. I suppose it was on the letter, too."

"Funny I didn't notice it!" he said.

There was a half-unbelieving, half-horrified look on his face that gave me uneasiness.

"It doesn't mean anything?" I asked.

"It's m Lulli and Albertus Magnus," he replied, staring steadily at the floor.

"The—the alchemists?" I was glad of the chance to sneer a little.

"It meant," he continued, without expression, "something unholy—diabolical. It was the devil's trade-mark. Black magic. Poisons used to be labeled with it."

"The devil's trade-mark? Dick, don't be childish! This—why, Dick, we haven't done anything but poke fun at the personal-devil fiction for five years! You make up as Satan; you—— Man, you're crazy!"

"Do you understand this business?" he whispered.

A silence fell between us. He refused to meet my eyes.

Somebody tapped on the door outside.

We were on our feet simultaneously, stark terror in his eyes and—he assured me afterward—in mine. For a moment neither of us stirred; then he mastered his feelings and, bending over, pulled aside the curtains, and peered through the glass.

"Jake—they sent the police, after all!" he half sobbed.

I sprang to his side. The reassuring sight of two broad chests, adorned by rows of glistening buttons, met my eyes. Eagerly, I reached forward to open the door; but Richard Regent was ahead of me.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said the taller of the two officers—a man surely six feet two. The other—a mere six-footer—removed his helmet, and wiped perspiration from his forehead.

"We're sorry to put you to all this trouble," I began, "but the fact is that we——"

The taller man spoke again huskily, glancing around as though he anticipated trouble: "Where might we find Mr. Regent—Mr. Richard Regent!"

"And Mr. Jacob Winters?" added the six-footer, also uneasy.

We disclosed our identities.

"Sorry to put you to so much trouble," I repeated, since he had not seemed to hear me at first. "But the fact is our prisoner escaped. We want you to watch this house for the remainder of the night."

"What are you going to do with that pistol?" asked the taller policeman, disregarding me. Then his tone changed to one that was wheedling, as though he were addressing a child. "Let's have a look at it," he entreated.

I let him have it unsuspectingly, and he slipped it into his pocket.

"We'll do all the shooting that's necessary. Look at these!" He displayed a pair of nickel-plated handcuffs.

"Yes, you may need them," I agreed.

"They're not much good, I'm afraid,' deprecated the policeman. "I'm afraid they wouldn't hold a prisoner. Would you mind putting them on?"

"If you like," I laughed, as I thought of the many times that I had seen members of the constabulary encircle the wrists of the man who stood moodily beside me.

The taller man snapped them on. I made a show of releasing myself; but I am no Richard Regent, and my hands remained prisoners.

"They're good enough to hold me," I assured him, stretching out my wrists to be released. "And so I guess they're good enough for the average prisoner. But they couldn't hold Mr. Regent, over there, for a minute."

"And why not?" asked the six-footer, with scorn.

"My name," said Regent, forgetting all else in a burst of professional pride, "is Regent—*Richard* Regent!"

"What!" I burst out, staring at their stupid faces. "Don't you know Mr. Regent? There isn't a pair of handcuffs made that will hold him; there isn't a jail he couldn't break out of; not—not even a penitentiary, if it wasn't for the guards."

"Is *that* so!" ejaculated the taller man. He had evidently made up his mind to humor my wild statement. "Then, perhaps, your friend will break away from those."

As he spoke, the six-footer fastened the "bracelets" on the man who made his living by getting rid of them. Both officers looked triumphant.

"Come along, now, you two. Don't

you make any trouble!" said the taller man, and opened the door.

A sergeant stepped in.

"We've got 'em, sir!" said the six-footer, and saluted.

And now our pent-up wrath broke loose. We cursed the policemen with every curse known to Americans; but, seeing that our auditors remained impassive, I managed to calm myself sufficiently to ask a question.

"What does this foolishness mean?"

Perhaps we had impressed the sergeant by our command of descriptive epithets. At any rate, he condescended to explain.

"We have our orders," he said tersely. "If you'll glance over that, I think you'll find it correct."

He had taken from his inside pocket a printed form which, on being unfolded, seemed to have had its blanks filled in by some one in a desperate hurry. It was a warrant calling for the arrest of Richard Regent and Jacob Winters. The charge was homicidal mania.

It was preferred against us by James Cotton, spoken of as a medical expert!

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAW.

As we raised our heads from the document, I knew what Regent was going to do. He wasted no time. The handcuffs dropped suddenly at the policemen's feet, and a blow from Regent's clinched fist drove the taller man into the glass-paned door, the upper part of his body toppling backward, set in jagged glass. Regent stooped and caught his feet, and the man's heels went up. There followed a heavy thud in the vestibule.

The other men had drawn revolvers. Manacled as I was, I threw my body against them; and the sergeant caught me in a savage grip. This disposed of him for the moment, and Regent grappled with the six-footer. The policeman's size and strength was of little avail against the trained muscles of a man like Regent. Down he went on his head, and up jumped Regent, with his antagonist's big revolver in his hand.

But our success was momentary. Out of the darkness at the back of the hall sprang a figure, sponge in hand. The figure climbed on Regent's back, and thrust the sponge under his nose. The revolver went off in air. The policeman who had been tumbled into the vestibule tore open the front door, returning to the fray. But his services were unnecessary; the sponge had done its work.

Now I saw that the man with the sponge was no other than the Raven. He looked down at Regent's relaxed body, nodded to the policemen, and walked out of the house.

Helpless, I was led from the house by the sergeant. The two policemen followed, carrying Regent. At the corner, a motor car waited. It conveyed us speedily to Washington Square. Here I was told to alight, and the sergeant led me into a house which I knew for that of the mayor of New York City.

Somehow, Regent had been restored to consciousness, and, by the time I had been comfortably seated in a leather chair, he was brought in by his two guards. He was enraged beyond words, pale, and silent.

"We'll take off the handcuffs, sir," said the sergeant to me. "That is, if you promise not to make trouble while you're in this house. Otherwise——"

"Promise them nothing," scowled Regent. I noted they had not gone through the farce of handcuffing him again.

"Very sorry, sir," said the sergeant regretfully; "but we'll have to give you a clubbing, if you start to kick up any monkey shines. Good evening, Mr. Mayor."

The man whom he addressed was genuine enough. I had seen his pictures too often not to know his face—young-looking, clean-shaven. Evidently he had attired himself recently, and in haste. He nodded to the policemen.

"Better take off those handcuffs," he suggested, nodding toward me.

"He won't promise not to raise a row, Mr. Mayor!"

"Take 'em off, anyhow," said the mayor testily. "And stand outside the door. If I strike this gong, be ready."

"Come in, Mr. Cotton," he said, further; and in came the traitor, who had the assurance to nod cheerily to us both, disregarding our unconcealed hostility.

"Better have the policemen out, George," he suggested.

The three constables withdrew, at the mayor's glance, taking my handcuffs with them. When the door closed behind them, the mayor pushed forward a silver tray, on which stood a seltzer siphon, a bottle of Scotch, a bottle of rye, and a silver box with a glass top, divided into two compartments, one holding cigars, the other cigarettes.

"Drink up, and light up," he suggested, with a smile. "Oh, come, gentlemen! Surely you will not disregard the etiquette of a truce. Say when."

"When," I responded promptly, as the whisky half filled the glass. "No —not any seltzer, thank you."

"I dare say you need it," approved the mayor, as I swallowed the fiery stuff. "Now, Mr. Regent——"

"None for me. Oh, well—when!"

The mayor proffered the silver box. "Now, we can talk," he said comfortably. "It appears, from my friend Mr. Cotton's statement, that you gentlemen have a harmless attack of hallucination; in other words, you have been reading too many novels about Cæsar Borgia and Gi'an' Galeazzo, and have grown to imagine that a fourteenth-century state of affairs exists in a certain place in New York. This delusion includes a belief that you have rescued a beautiful girl, in a strange sleep, from the clutches of some sort of Black Hand or black letter society. Mr. Cotton assures me that a word from me will clear all that away, and that you will walk out of this house perfectly sane men."

"I don't think we will, if you continue that style of conversation," said Regent steadily. "We know what we know, and——"

"Come, gentlemen," pleaded the mayor suavely. "You wouldn't care to be incarcerated in Matteawan, or some other insane asylum, simply because of a harmless delusion. And do you realize that, if it came to my ears, after I had allowed you to leave here to-night, free men, that you had been telling queer fictions about black crosses and sleeping maidens, it would be necessary for the Department for the Criminal Insane to take you in hand. Really, gentlemen, that would be a pity."

Regent and I exchanged glances, our mouths open.

"Is it possible," I asked, trying to speak quietly, "that you are in league with these people—that they have you in their hands?"

"Winters," broke in Cotton, "the mayor is acting at my request. I woke him out of a warm bed to come down and explain to you. I didn't care to hurt Regent's professional reputation. Can't you understand?"

"You!" I spluttered. "*You* dare to say we are insane—you, who couldn't tell why that girl was sleeping!"

"What girl?" he asked simply.

"Damn you!" frothed Regent, getting to his feet. "Damn you, Cotton—you don't dare say you didn't see that girl!"

"What girl?" he asked again.

Regent sank back into his chair.

I took up the conversation, addressing the mayor. "If you will be good enough to come around to Mr. Regent's house, in Greenwich, and look at the young lady we speak of, and then, if you will bring in a physician who will manage to awaken her, we shall be gratified."

"Willingly," agreed the mayor, arising, "if you will give me your word to attempt no violence, should I consider it best for you to return here—or to be sent elsewhere."

I assured him as to this, and Regent confirmed me. We descended the stairs to the main floor, where the mayor slipped into a greatcoat and a soft hat, which he pulled down over his eyes.

The motor car was a large one; but, with seven people to carry, it was

crowded. The prospect of getting to the bottom of the affair in a few moments dismissed all thought of discomfort from my mind, however; and I listened to the mayor's polite small talk on affairs of the day with an interest which I hoped was flattering.

We reached our street, cold and deserted under a yellow moon. Our house was dark. Regent opened the front door and that of the vestibule, snapping on the hall lights. The broken glass had been removed, and the silk curtain drawn over it.

"If you will come upstairs, gentlemen," suggested Regent.

We led the way, and were followed by Cotton and the mayor, the policemen remaining below. Regent snapped on the lights at the second landing, and paused.

"It may be better to have the maid-servant go into the room first," he suggested, and sped off to the top floor, to fetch Marie. We waited for some time before he returned; we could hear him opening and shutting doors above, and calling for Marie and Hughes. He came down, his face troubled.

"Marie and Hughes are gone," he said to me. "They're not up there! Well, we'll chance it."

He knocked on the door of the room which the Lilac Lady had occupied. Getting no answer, he pushed open the door, and called for Marie. Then he reached inside, and turned on the light, irradiating a pink-and-green room.

"Is this the room?" asked the mayor.

Regent turned to me in a puzzled sort of way. "This surely *is* the room, Jake?"

"Yes," I replied grimly.

"Well——" He was staring at the empty bed. "Well, then—— Jake!"

I entered. The room looked as though it had never been occupied; there was no sign that any one had ever slept beneath that silken coverlet. He followed me and, idly, began to open cupboard doors.

I wondered if he thought that the Lilac Lady had arisen from her bed, made it neatly, and then hidden in a wardrobe. But, then, we all have queer fancies when our brains are numb.

CHAPTER X.

BY SPECIAL LICENSE.

I dislike those harrowing portions of a story in which the intimate feelings of the characters are revealed, with reference to some disaster. Therefore, I pass lightly over the two days that elapsed between the first disappearance of the Lilac Lady and the afternoon when the Raven winged his way back to us of Greenwich.

Believing that we were better able to ponder over the situation outside an insane asylum, Regent and I passed our words to keep still tongues and idle pens in the matter which the mayor was pleased to describe as our "hallucination." We were two men against the world, the law, and the devil's trade-mark.

Mr. Cotton provided us with some sleeping tablets. He said that we might need them, and admitted that the use of morphia under certain circumstances was not to be deprecated. And, so, we had managed to sleep through the remainder of that eventful night and half of the succeeding day; indeed, I slumbered until I was awakened by our cook, a French Swiss, who had come to lay his troubles before me.

"That Marie—she has not come!" he said. "And it is I who have a dinner for *messieurs* to consider this night, when five guests are to be here. And that Gaspard—he is here not to help me! Even the chauffeur I cannot find. *Monsieur* has allowed them to have the chuck—they are discharge'?"

"Get out!" I ordered him, putting a hand to my head.

Somehow, I managed to make an untidy job of dressing myself. Investigation of the servants' sleeping rooms disclosed that, not only had Hughes and Marie taken themselves off, but their luggage, also, was absent. A visit to the garage showed that Schmaltz had evidently cleaned and oiled the motor car, before following the example of Jasper Hughes and Marie Thomas. His

quarters, above those of the car, were denuded of all his personal belongings.

Not one of these three worthies have I ever seen since. I do not speak harshly of them, however, in the light of recent knowledge; for I am aware of the arguments that were used to make them decamp so speedily.

I called off the dinner party for that night, and busied my mind, as much as possible, by visiting employment agencies, in the hope of replacing our domestics satisfactorily.

As for Regent, he kept to his room; and I did not get a sight of him that day. A man from Ashford's office called with the deed of sale for Number Two, Schuyler Place; but Regent only answered, through his bedroom door, that he would see no one. The second day brought Mr. James Cotton.

It is needless to say that my part of the interview was icy. Mr. Cotton seemed to take my attitude for granted, wasting no time in urging me to forget and forgive. He merely suggested that it would be better for all persons concerned, if I would yield to common sense, and advise Regent to sell the house, and be done with it.

When I followed his suggestions, through the medium of a door ajar, Regent suggested that I should enter. He was pale, but no longer distraught.

"I'm not going to sell that house, Jake," he said. "I'm going to live in it. Is Cotton downstairs?"

Learning that he was, he had me request the eminent man to come up.

"Now, Cotton," he said, "I'm not going into any discussion of your motives in throwing us down the way you did. I assume that, in some way, you are forced to do what you are doing. We'll leave it at that; a man's got a small chance, with the police and the city government intimidated! But you ostensibly come from these people—whoever they are—urging me to sell a piece of property that most certainly belongs to me. Now, I've got one answer to make to that. I'll sell the property when that young lady is restored to this house. And not before!"

"Regent," said Mr. Cotton—a little sadly, I thought, "you think me a scoundrel, don't you?"

Regent shrugged his shoulders. "Not after I didn't go to Matteawan," he replied. "That's what I suppose I I should have done. But they've put the fear of God into me—and into you, too, I suppose. But that's the message you can give them. They can't keep me from living in my own house, you know."

Mr. Cotton leaned over. "Regent," he said, his tone fatherly, "if I were you, I'd forget about that woman. It would be best if you did."

There was a certain whimsical smile about Regent's face when he asked Mr. Cotton if he were acquainted with all the diseases.

"Well, I hope so," returned Cotton, somewhat puzzled at the turn the conversation had taken. "But——"

"Including love?" pursued Regent softly.

"You——"

"What *is* love? You don't know? Of course not! Then, why be surprised when I say I'm in love with a woman I've never spoken to, even? But I am!"

He checked Mr. Cotton's attempt to begin another sentence.

"Do you mind going, Cotton? And you'll tell them? Thanks. Yes, really, I want you to go."

At the street door, Cotton paused. "If he—persists——" His eyes reflected a certain consideration and pity.

"You know, it's stuff and nonsense about him being in love with this woman, of course. That's what makes me furious. If he were sacrificing himself for a real woman—a——"

"Oh! So you still have the nerve to insinuate that we dreamed the young lady," I sneered.

"Most of her," he replied enigmatically. "But—well, there's no use in arguing with knight-errants and romantic fools."

"Mr. Cotton," I said, infuriated. "I shouldn't like to hit you in my own house!"

He went, shaking his head; and I

rejoined Richard Regent, telling him what the eminent man had said.

"Of course, Dick," I said gently, "he's right—in a way. You can hardly be in love with a woman whom you've only seen. You must admit that."

"You'll do me a great favor by not discussing the matter," was his reply; and he rang for his new valet to bring up his breakfast.

There are such things as premonitions, and I suppose he had one when he took such extraordinary care in making himself beautiful. He argues that it was because he had nothing better to occupy his mind, since he did not care to dwell upon our mutual obsession. He was fond of color schemes, and to-day he fairly reveled in blues—his favorite color, since it matches his eyes. When he strolled into the library downstairs, where I was going over the housekeeping book, he seemed to have shed his hunted look with his dressing gown; and now he stood, in all the glory of a new lounging suit of blue flannels, a tie in which ultramarine and navy blue alternated in stripes, pierced by a magnificent sapphire pin.

He asked me whether I considered the new chauffeur reliable; and when I had shrugged my shoulders, expressed a wish to test him by a trial spin uptown. His peculiar calmness made me suspicious, and the elaborate care with which he extracted his cheap cigarette from his expensive ruby-monogrammed case heightened my suspicions. He was entirely too casual.

"You've got something up your sleeve," I said.

After considering for a while, he showed me to what depths the incident of Mr. Cotton's defection had brought him. "Well," he said, "I'd rather manage this affair on my own, if you don't mind."

"You distrust me?" I asked fiercely. "Me!"

"Well, Jacopo," he admitted, "if you want to know, I'm going to see a private detective. I promised not to tell anybody about the black cross, and the house, and all that; but I certainly didn't promise to refrain from hunting up a pack of scoundrelly servants. If I can find Hughes, or Marie, or Schmaltz, and learn from them why they were frightened out of the house, I might get something to go on. Because, of course, my dear boy, you don't imagine that I'm done for yet; especially when—well, under the circumstances."

I rang for the new maid, and told her to fetch in the chauffeur; but, as she started off, the doorbell rang. She went to answer it first, after getting a nod from me, and returned almost immediately.

"A gentleman to see both Mr. Regent and Mr. Winters," she informed us. "He won't give his name."

"Send him in," said Regent.

Neither of us was surprised to see the Raven appear, and stand in the doorway, holding the brim of his glistening silk hat with both hands, apparently awaiting our pleasure.

"You needn't mind calling François just yet, Edna," I told the girl, having reference to the chauffeur. When she had closed the door, I asked the Raven to be seated.

Every time I saw the man, I noticed some other point of peculiarity about him. This time it was the massive size of his head, which seemed to be too heavy for his shoulders, weighing him down, and giving him that humped-over appearance which, in conjunction with his sable attire, had been the occasion for the nickname with which Regent had tagged him. As he sat down in a great carved chair, which seemed to swallow him up, leaving only his shining silk hat a distinct note, I could see the justice of another of Regent's descriptions of him—that he resembled a college professor.

"I suppose you have a reason for calling," said Regent coldly, after he had tendered whisky and cigarettes, and they had been rejected by our visitor.

"I have called about the sale of Number Two, Schuyler Place," returned the Raven, as coolly as though he were a house agent on regular and legitimate business.

"I sent a message to your people by

Mr. Cotton," Regent told him, trying to copy his detached air as much as possible. "Did you get it?"

"We did. And I come to offer you just twice the original sum—or, to be more exact, four times what the house is really worth. If you will do me the honor to follow me, negotiations were pending with Miss Schemhorn when she was taken ill and ordered to the Bermudas. She remained there for seven months. During that time, she forbade her agent to trouble her with business matters. When she died, and we learned that you were West and would not be home for some months, we hoped to conclude the deed of sale before you revisited New York; but our first letter miscarried, and after you received the second one, all the others we wrote failed to reach you.

"When you came to visit Number Two, three days ago, I was detailed to watch you, and see that you did not come back without our knowledge. But, in some way, you eluded me in the theatre—and saw what you had no business to see. The next day—still without knowing that you had visited the house the previous night—I had a telephone conversation with Mr. Ashford, and he told me that you had agreed to sell the house. Yet I took care to follow you until you took the train for Long Point. I was stupid not to understand that you might double on me.

"Then came last night! It is partly your fault, partly ours. We wish to palliate what it was necessary to do to you, and we are willing to pay eighty thousand dollars for the house. Ashford's man will be here in half an hour. Do you agree?"

To hear him recount it, one would have imagined that he had done a number of praiseworthy deeds, and that we were ingrates. His conclusion was a triumph of self-sacrificing philanthropy.

"I'm afraid," said Regent, "that you don't give me credit for much stability of character."

"If you will name your price——" The Raven waved his glossy hat. "That ridiculous condition aside, of course. We'll consider that a momentary aberration."

"The aberration, as you please to call it," was Regent's stiff response, "is the only thing we need to discuss in that connection." He was as prim as a solicitor of fifty years' standing.

"My dear sir——"

Regent arose. "I'm afraid I'm not very hospitable," he said. "But I'm going out for a drive; so you will excuse me."

By this time the Raven recognized that he was in earnest.

"Sit down, Mr. Regent," he said. "I'm doing you a very unfriendly act, I suppose, but it is impossible to deny your legal right to Number Two, Schuyler Place. Nor can we deny your equally indubitable right of residing there, if you choose—a contingency which we do not care to face, since your constant residence there would prove too much for your sanity, and—well, we have no grudge against *you*. Your condition was, then, that we return the young woman to this house. What, may I ask, do you intend to do with her?"

He had Regent there; for Regent certainly did not know. Being in love, he was under the foolish delusion that only a miracle from heaven could make the Lilac Lady care for him.

"It is necessary for me to state," the Raven went on calmly, "that I may surrender the young woman to one person only—her husband!"

He waited a moment before adding: "And she has no husband."

He stared steadily at Regent, who trembled, caught his breath, cleared his throat, and disarranged a perfectly knotted tie, under some vague impression that he was straightening it.

"Well," he growled, avoiding the Raven's gaze, "I can't *make* her marry me, can I? She doesn't know me—can't possibly give two raps for me. Why—why—she's never even *seen* me."

"You forget about Washington," I reminded him.

"Oh—Washington!" he said, growling. "That doesn't count. I was made up like—like——"

The thought gave him a fancied grievance against me, and he eyed me reproachfully: "Something told me it would be better not to come out in that make-up; you remember, I wanted to shed it, then. Ah, well!"

His sigh made me responsible for all the tragedy in his existence.

"The point Mr. Regent wishes to bring out," I informed the Raven, "is that the young lady has never seen *him* as he is, and he is, therefore, doubtful of her willingness to marry him."

"The point is getting a bit twisted," said the Raven smoothly. "It is, rather —is *he* willing to marry her?"

"Look here, my dear sir!" said Regent impatiently. "I'm not a thorough-going ass, you know, even if I do think I'm in love with her. I don't want to buy a Turkish slave; I want to win a woman. I gather, from what you say, that she can be forced to marry me. Well, I don't want that. I want to make her care for me enough to marry me. Catch my point?"

"I understand you perfectly," returned our visitor, "but that's something I've got no control over. See here."

He handed Regent a folded paper. Dick looked it over, and gave it to me. It was a special license permitting the marriage of Richard Regent and Jane Smith.

The Raven understood from our silence that he was to continue. "That license," he said, "shows that, after our recent dealings with you two gentlemen, we gave you, Mr. Regent, more credit for stability, or—er—pertinacity, than you seemed to think. And, so, we are prepared to accede to your very disastrous desire. Ashford's clerk will be here in a few minutes, and he has the deed of sale for Number Two, Schuyler Place, made out. If you will sign it, the young woman—Miss Smith —will marry you, and be very glad to do so. Take my word for that. But the marriage involves no explanations, Mr. Regent. She is just Miss Smith, a person of antecedents unknown. You will have to accept her as such. No mystery is going to be explained. She may never love you in the way you wish; you are taking that chance. But we can surrender her to you only as your wife. Are you willing to take those chances?"

I was responsible for breaking Regent's troubled silence. I said: "Don't take a leap into the dark, like that. The more you love her, the more you will want to know about her past. You'll go crazy—sure! And, think what you will of me, a woman who's willing to marry a man she's never seen——"

"Maybe it's a question of an alternative," he answered me quietly.

"It is," said the Raven, "a question of an alternative. She prefers to marry you, Mr. Regent. Having no grudge against you, I do not advise you to marry her. Take a friendly tip; accept eighty thousand dollars for your house, and forget all about this wretched business."

Richard Regent looked up, and regarded the Raven thoughtfully.

"Before binding myself to do anything," he said, "may I have a short conversation with Miss—Miss Smith?"

"You may—most certainly. But she will not tell you anything. She will simply say that she is willing. You can send Mr. Winters in to see her, if you like. She will promise to marry him, just as willingly—believe me."

"Good Lord!" I breathed. "Dick—Dick——"

"It's pretty awful," he agreed; "pretty awful to think what sort of an alternative it must be to drive a girl like that to marriage with a strange man. It's—it's—— But, Jake, I—I shouldn't have a moment's rest for the remainder of my life, if I didn't do it. I've got to, Jake—I've got to! Lord knows how it'll all turn out. I'm doing the best I can."

He faced the Raven again. "Will you take me to her?" he requested coldly.

"She is waiting outside in a closed motor car," replied the Raven. "Please ring for your maid. Thank you. And tell her to request the lady and gentleman outside to go into the drawing-room."

Marie's successor appeared, and was given her instructions. Regent trembled violently as she went out.

The Raven arose, and opened the folding doors between drawing-room and library, arranging them until there was perhaps half an inch between them.

"I want to satisfy you that I am telling the truth, and that she really is coming," he said, "because I can't allow you to have that interview with her until you have signed the deed of sale. That clerk has it made out for eighty thousand dollars. If you decide, after your interview, to marry Miss Smith, and your conscience prompts you to return half of that, it will be appreciated. If, however, you do not wish to marry Miss Smith, we hope you will accept the entire sum. Look, now!"

Both Regent and I advanced to the peeping point, and saw a man and a woman enter the darkened drawing-room. Then, as the maid drew the curtains, and admitted the afternoon sun, we saw, gleaming under the woman's hat and veil, that remarkable red-gold hair.

She was attired in a long coat of black fur, that fell to her ankles; her hat was a black toque of the same material; her veil was heavy and dotted; but, for all her shrouding, one familiar with her face was not apt to be mistaken. I saw from Regent's face that he was thoroughly convinced of her identity.

Her companion, also, was in black, and I felt a thrill of indignation go through me as I saw that his was canonical black, his iron-gray hair topping the vestments of an Episcopal clergyman.

The Raven closed the folding doors again. "You recognize her?" he asked Regent.

Regent nodded.

"You see, I have provided everything," said the Raven, with grim humor. "License, clergyman, and bride—yes, even the ring! You see?" He exhibited a plain gold band. "And if you are looking horrified because that dear old man in there appears to be my accomplice, let me assure you that he knows nothing of the matter, except that he has been given a substantial contribution to his charity fund, to marry and provide spiritual counsel to a fair young orphan. He will no doubt invite you and your beautiful helpmate to take tea with him and his wife, after the ceremony. Hello! This should be our young friend from Ashford's."

He had broken off his banter at the appearance of Edna, who announced "Mr. Haynes." This gentleman we both recognized, on his entrance, as the cocksure hobbledehoy who knew all about Number Two Schuyler Place, and who didn't believe in flat dwellers having gardens. He said a few commonplace things, while Regent was glancing through the document—banalities which I returned in kind.

"I'm a notary," he informed us, "and I can execute the deed, you know."

He showed his stamping machine in a box he carried, and put it on the great mahogany desk, to which Regent had drawn up chairs. He also drew out a fountain pen, shook it at a blotter, and proffered it to Regent; but Regent demurred, and began to search through his pen tray for a certain favorite penholder.

"I shall have to have two witnesses," said Haynes. "You, Mr. Winters—and this gentleman?" He looked inquiringly at the Raven. It was apparent that he had never seen him before.

"Not I," responded the Raven hastily. "I never sign my name to anything—anything."

"The maid will do," I suggested.

What followed reminded me very much of a play. Regent had tried the pen on a blank sheet of paper, and was dipping it into the ink, preparatory to signing, smoothing the deed out with his other hand, when a terrific ringing at the doorbell startled us all. It was the ringing of some one in a desperate hurry—those short, staccato pushes of a thumb on the button which one generally employs for a sleeping elevator boy in the basement. The peals continued, without intermission, for half a minute; and Regent laid down his pen, with a fretful lift of the eyebrows,

"Somebody's got a nerve," remarked young Haynes, in his pert, familiar way.

We heard Edna expostulating. The decisive voice of a man who had an object interrupted her; and at the sound of that voice I saw the Raven get to his feet with a haste that proved him to be human, after all. Then the door was flung open, and a man with a fur collar turned up about his ears, and a soft black hat pulled down over his eyes, appeared in the doorway. Immediately, he addressed the Raven:

"Who is this?" He pointed to Regent.

The Raven told him.

"And this?" He indicated Ashford's clerk.

"A Mr. Haynes, from the real-estate office."

"Ask him to withdraw, and come tomorrow. Quickly!" He had turned from the Raven to Regent, and, although the tones were curt and abrupt, they were pregnant with serious portent.

Regent turned to Haynes, his glance implying that he wished the clerk to adopt the stranger's suggestion. I rang for the maid; and Haynes, after sulkily gathering up his notary's seal, fountain pen, and other accessories, was conducted out of the room.

The stranger closed the door. "This is Mr. Winters?"

I said it was.

"Good, then!" he said, and turned to Regent. "You haven't signed that deed?"

"I was about to do so," replied Regent.

"I am glad you haven't. We do not wish you to yield anything under false pretenses. We are still willing to yield eighty thousand dollars for the house. But the marriage—that cannot happen!"

A newspaper slipped from his fingers. The Raven picked it up, opening it idly. As his glance rested upon the front page, I saw that it was just as possible for him to be aghast as for us. His face was whiter than the marble statuette next him.

I leaned over, and caught a glimpse of the headlines before he folded the paper.

JUSTICE BLIND INDEED

Terrible Miscarriage of——

Neither the stranger nor the Raven was looking at me. The latter stared into vacancy; the former had his eyes upon Regent.

"I cannot tell what you think of us," he said. "You have suffered at our hands. Some day, we may make amends. Meanwhile, our affair with you is closed, unless you wish to sell the house at your own valuation. We can do nothing more for you."

He turned to the Raven. "Would you mind stepping out into the hall?"

As the Raven started past him, he caught his arm and said something in a foreign language, but so softly that I could not catch even its characteristics. The Raven nodded, and the stranger turned again to Regent.

"For your own sake," he said, "I must ask you not to attempt again the solving of this mystery. It may be possible to explain to you, some time—but not now. Believe me, we shall try to do you justice. But please do not interfere again."

"You mean," choked Regent, who had, by this time, got his breath, "that you now go back on everything that your precious friend has agreed to in the last hour?"

"If you mean that we no longer have the power to compel the young lady to marry you—yes! Some day she may marry, but it will be whom she chooses. The necessity for her marrying at all has disappeared. Not even to gain that house of yours are we willing to put pressure upon her, now. Believe me, we are acting according to our own lights, and we think they are above a few conventions. You may see the lady again; we sincerely hope you may be happy."

Three honks from an automobile horn broke in on his peroration.

He opened the door. "Good day," he said.

The door closed after him, and he

was gone before we had any further impressions of him than that he wore a fur coat, a soft hat—which he did not remove—and a thick black beard, shot with gray. Then I emerged out of stunned silence, and sprang after him; but the front door had closed before I reached it. I ran to the street, and saw two motor cars speeding away.

Slowly I returned to the house, and entered the drawing-room. The old rector sat there, tracing a pattern in a Bokhara rug with the point of his neatly rolled umbrella.

"Pardon me, doctor," I said, "but—the young lady?"

"The gentleman just took her out," he said, looking up. "He said something about the bridegroom being ill. Poor fellow! I was wondering if I could be of any assistance."

I said that I thought not, and thanked him, seeing him to the door. I was in no mood to be polite. We passed Regent at the doorway. There was no need to explain to him.

"So the Raven took her off, while we were talking to the other man," he said. But he was neither angry nor amazed. We had long ago passed beyond the reach of such sensations.

"Yes," I responded viciously, and clapped on my hat.

"You're going to try to follow them?"

"No," I replied. "I'm going to buy the latest edition of the New York *Sphere*."

CHAPTER XI.

THE NEWSPAPER STORY.

The Raven, as I have said before, was a person of imperturbable calm. That a glance at a newspaper should reduce his complexion to chalkiness, was sufficient upon which to base an opinion that the press had, in some way, got wind of a nefarious transaction which threatened the safety of those who worked beneath the shadow of the black cross.

A newsboy was shouting an "extra," the price of which he rudely stated to be a nickel. But such news as I was seeking was cheap at any price, and I did not trouble to get the change from a dime. Nor did I return to the house to read the news. For a full half hour I leaned against a lamp-post, the paper clinched with both hands.

I copy the following from the clipping, which I have in front of me as I write:

JUSTICE BLIND INDEED

Terrible Miscarriage of Law's Intent

ROSEMARY FFRENCH IS GUILTLESS!

Hollenden Ffrench, Her Father, Returns and Makes Good Her Alibis

An injustice that cries aloud to Heaven has been perpetrated by the State of New York.

Rosemary Ffrench, the beautiful girl who stood trial for the murder of Morris Coin, is absolutely without guilt!

She advanced only one statement in proof of her innocence.

Nine months before this story opens, a man and a woman, both fashionably dressed, were dining at the Unicorn Hotel. At the next table sat Jerome Levy and Morris Coin, members of the brokerage firm of Thomas and Company, Wall Street. They were attracted by the looks of the woman, and Coin deliberately flirted with her. She responded in kind, and invited Coin over to the table, introducing him to her companion—an Englishman of good manners, who insisted that the two men should join them at dinner.

The party drank a great deal too much champagne, and, after dinner, the Englishman insisted on going the round of gambling houses. The woman pointed out that she could not accompany them, and entered a protest. She suggested that, as a compromise, they hire a private sitting room in the hotel, and that she would play poker with Messrs. Coin and Levy; and when the Englishman felt that he was able to understand the game, he could join in. He assented, in a somewhat drunken manner.

Coin and Levy, it appeared, were not averse to shearing the lamb; and both had checks for a thousand dollars cashed by the management of the hotel.

The arrangement was that they were to share the proceeds with the woman, who called herself Mrs. Dale; she taking one-half, each man having one-quarter. Mrs. Dale asked her companion for money with which to play, and he took out a sheaf of "yellow backs" which seemed to amount to more than both Coin and Levy had. They engaged the private sitting room, and began to play—Mrs. Dale, Coin, and Levy.

Mrs. Dale lost to the two men nearly six hundred dollars; then the novice took a hand, and shuffled and dealt clumsily. He lost steadily, but Mrs. Dale began to win from everybody, until she had won the two thousand from Levy and Coin. They wanted to continue to play with I. O. U.'s; but the Englishman became suddenly abusive, called them offensive names, and insisted on going immediately.

By this time Coin and Levy began to suspect trickery, and tried to detain the pair. The Englishman knocked Levy flat. Coin grappled with him, got him to the floor, and was choking him, when the woman picked up a champagne bottle, and struck Coin across the head.

This Levy claimed to have seen happen, as he raised himself from the floor.

The two, perceiving that Levy was unconscious, bound and gagged him. Then they left the room, and locked the door.

Levy remained bound and gagged until the next morning, when the maid entered with a pass-key. Coin was found to be dead; he had evidently died immediately, as an effect of the blow.

A week passed, during which time there was absolutely no clue to the two criminals. Then Levy happened to visit a theatre, and in one of the boxes he saw a woman who reminded him of Mrs. Dale. He studied her through opera glasses, and became convinced. He then telephoned to police headquarters, and had a detective sergeant in plain clothes sent to him. At the conclusion of the play, Miss Rosemary Ffrench was arrested. Levy swore to her identity with Mrs. Dale.

Miss Ffrench, it transpired, lived with her father, Mr. Hollenden Ffrench, in Washington Square. She swore to her innocence, but Levy reiterated his identification. Her story was that, on the evening of the murder, she had been at home with her father. Asked to produce her father, she had to admit that her father had not appeared at breakfast the next morning, nor since that night.

The Ffrench family were poor, and lived in the old Washington Square house, with only one servant, who was ill that day, and who, after leaving a cold supper ready, had retired to her attic room at six o'clock.

When Miss Ffrench's picture was published in the newspapers, a French banker, on a visit to New York, absolutely identified her with a "Mrs. Grentville" who, in company with just such a man as the Englishman was described to be, had swindled him in a private dining room at Maxim's, a year before. At that time Miss Ffrench and her father were in Paris, stopping at the Hotel de l'Athené, of the Rue Scribe—as the foreign correspondents of the New York papers testified.

On the night of which the French banker, Jules Gavrotte, spoke, Miss Ffrench again could not establish an alibi without the assistance of her father. They had dined, she asserted, in some little restaurant in the Latin Quarter, and had afterward gone to the Concert Rouge. She could not remember the name of the restaurant; and, although her photograph was sent to the proprietors of the Concert Rouge, no identification was forthcoming.

Miss Ffrench chose to look upon the charges as absurd, and her relatives threatened a suit against the State when her father should return to clear her. But he did *not* return.

Mr. Ffrench's photographs bore no resemblance to the Englishman. Some people assumed that Rosemary had confessed to him, and that, rather than perjure himself, he left the country. Others hinted that his daughter had made away with him, also.

Public sentiment was against Miss

Ffrench, and she was brought to trial. The case was a simple one. She clung to her story of absolute innocence, and Levy and Gavrotte as steadily clung to their identification.

Such was the story until the *Sphere* reporter found Mr. Hollenden Ffrench leaning over the rail of the *Kloptic*.

Mr. Ffrench established both alibis. His daughter had been at home with him that night; she had retired at eleven o'clock. As for Gavrotte's story, he riddled that, also, with substantiation, and requested that the papers wire M. Achille Legumbret, a Breton gentleman, who had exchanged some words with him, Mr. Ffrench, in the Medaille d'Or, Rue Vaugirard, on the evening in question.

He could account for his own disappearance without any trouble whatsoever. "Mr. Halsey Grahame will bear me out," he had said, turning to a man who had stood beside him on the *Kloptic*. He added that he was sorry to have to draw Mr. Grahame into such publicity; but the young man owed him a debt of gratitude for nearly a year's exile, and now was the time to help him out. Mr. Grahame, a young, well-groomed man of twenty-six, blushed, and told the story.

He was a passenger on a ferryboat going from Twenty-third Street to Jersey City. He was very drunk. He had leaned too far over the rail, and had gone overboard. It was a foggy night; the sirens of half a dozen craft were screaming. There had been few passengers at that hour, and only one stood near him—Mr. Ffrench, who, being a good swimmer, had plunged after him and managed to get hold of his coat. The fog and the noise of the siren had, no doubt, caused the incident to go unnoted by the people of the ferryboat. Both men had been standing forward, near the chains of the upper deck.

Mr. Ffrench explained his presence on the boat by stating that he never managed to get asleep before three o'clock in the morning, and to induce sleep he walked the streets, rode on the cars, or went back and forth with the ferryboats, after his daughter had retired. He stated that he could produce a dozen ferrymen who would swear to having had him for a passenger on the late boats for the past four or five years. He had friends who knew of his insomnia and his idiosyncratic method of treating it; he referred to a number of well-known men.

Mr. Ffrench knew young Mr. Grahame, and, finding him aboard the boat, had urged fresh air as the best means of producing sobriety. Therefore, he felt somewhat responsible for him when he fell overboard. He had a hard time keeping the young man up, and very little lung power left for shrieking, even if he could have been heard. The current had carried them down river, and Mr. Ffrench, exhausted, had made out a ship passing just above them, and had caught at the dory which trailed after her. After pushing Grahame into the boat and hoisting himself aboard, he had become unconscious; and when he was revived, he found that he had unceremoniously thrust himself upon a sailing ship, loaded with cotton goods, and bound for Liberia.

The ship was wrecked off the African coast, and the survivors had spent months before reaching a trading post. Here a ship carried them to Capetown, from which Halsey Grahame had wired for money, and Mr. Ffrench had wired to his daughter at the Washington Square address. He could not imagine why the message had not been delivered.

This matter was investigated in a later edition of the *Sphere;* and a cablegram to "Ffrench, Washington Square," and reading: "Safe. Home in three weeks. Pater," was found in the cable company's offices, marked "Undelivered," the house in Washington Square being closed.

Mr. Ffrench gave the names of other survivors of the *Susan Dorset,* who would bear out his story; also the name and address of the captain who had brought Halsey Grahame and himself to Capetown. Also, he showed the passenger list of the liner from Capetown to London.

He had sworn that his daughter should be free before nightfall. The governor was in New York City, he was told, and could issue a pardon—which would suffice to release Miss Ffrench from Sing Sing. The equity in her case could be readjusted by a new trial.

The positive identifications of Levy and Gavrotte touched upon a serious family scandal, Mr. Ffrench admitted; but, necessarily, it must be aired, since his daughter's safety demanded it.

Mrs. Hollenden Ffrench, Rosemary's mother, was a daughter of the Winchesters, of Washington. She had eloped with a young attaché of the British embassy, as the age of sixteen. Her family forgave her, however; and, on the news of the birth of a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Hector Crancourt, a year later, at Boulogne, Peter Winchester settled a hundred thousand dollars on his granddaughter.

Hector Crancourt had been a decent enough fellow at bottom, but he had an unconquerable mania for cards. He dissipated his own patrimony at the casinos along the French and Italian coasts; and the late hours and terrible strain had caused him to seek the support of morphine. Inherently weak always, he formed the drug habit, which soon brought out all that was evil in him; and he became impossible as a husband. Mrs. Crancourt—afterward Mrs. Ffrench—deserted him at Trouville, and came to London, where she had wired her brother, then in Paris, to meet her.

The baby, Edith Winchester Crancourt, was but a year old, at the time; and the income from the hundred thousand, settled upon her, was all that Crancourt had to depend on. He followed his wife to London. She refused to return to him, and he instituted suit for divorce and the custody of the child. Mrs. Crancourt tried to leave England for America, but was detained by English law. In view of her absolute refusal to live with her husband, the English courts granted his plea, and gave him the child. She refused to give it up, and again tried to leave England; but Crancourt demanded the enforcement of the law, and the child was taken from its mother.

An effort was made to buy Crancourt off; but it appeared that he had an affection for the baby, just as much as for the money, and would not yield it, Mrs. Crancourt offered to return to him, then, and be remarried; but he no longer wanted her.

So, when she was barely eighteen, Helen Winchester was taken home, a grief-stricken woman; and her sorrow remained unabated until she met and married Hollenden Ffrench, two years later.

Crancourt disappeared with the child—going to Australia, some said. Others claimed that they had seen him in Shanghai. At all events, the early efforts on the part of Mrs. Hollenden Ffrench to locate her firstborn were unavailing; and, after a while, when she bore a child to Hollenden Ffrench, it was so perfect a replica of her first little girl that she called it Rosemary—which, if you remember the play, stands for remembrance.

Edith Winchester Crancourt had been little over a year old when her mother last saw her; but she had had a pronounced individuality, for a baby—as distinct as her own—and Mrs. Ffrench was continually remarking upon the resemblance between Edith and Rosemary. Her fondest wish—to bring together the two little girls—was never realized. She died four years after Rosemary's birth.

Mr. Ffrench had recommended that the reporters go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where was hung a portrait of Mrs. Ffrench by Reeves; and it would be found to be, barring the difference in styles of hairdressing and costume, a replica of Rosemary.

He passed on to an account of his meeting with Edith Crancourt. He had seen her in Paris, sitting in a box at the Opéra Comique. He was unaccompanied; Miss Ffrench was dining with some school friends, who were passing through Paris. At first he thought that it was Rosemary herself,

come to the theatre after dinner; and he went to the box door, opened it, and entered. He greeted her, and then saw that, though the resemblance was sufficient to delude a casual acquaintance, it could not stand for all those intimate things which a father knew of a daughter who was also a companion.

He was in the midst of a confused explanation when he caught sight of her companion—an Englishman of forty-five, hollow-cheeked, ashy gray of complexion, and staring and glassy of eye. He had seen the effects of drugs, and immediately recognized the habit in this man. His mind traveled quickly back to the unfortunate first marriage of his wife, and he called the Englishman by name.

The effect of the name was instantaneously apparent, although the man denied it. But Hollenden Ffrench would have no denials. He introduced himself, and professed himself eager to introduce the half-sisters who so miraculously resembled each the other.

The girl turned suddenly, and said bitterly that she was not fit to meet a girl like Miss Ffrench. Mr. Ffrench looked at her closely, and saw the same glassiness of eye which her father possessed. And he knew her, also, for a user of drugs.

Before her father could interfere, Miss Crancourt had declared that, to prove her assertion of unfitness, she would like to inform Mr. Ffrench that her father had—after an unsuccessful attempt to break the bank at Monte Carlo, backed by her own money—taught her to be a card sharp; and that they made their living in that manner. She gave him her address—a small hotel in the Rue Vingt-neuf de Juillet—and asked that Mr. French bring his daughter past her window on the following afternoon, in order that she, the elder, might see what she might have been.

Mr. Ffrench had granted her request, saying nothing to his daughter about it; and, after walking past the hotel with Rosemary, on the following afternoon, had proceeded to the Rue de Rivoli, left Rosemary with friends, and returned to the hotel. He was informed that "Mr. Harlowe" and his daughter, "Mrs. Grentville," had taken themselves and their luggage off to Biarritz, just ten minutes before.

Altogether, Mr. Hollenden Ffrench was armed at every point with facts, dates, and addresses. The reporters had had a merry day of it.

On one point, I found, when I purchased the other papers from a news stand on Sixth Avenue, they were all agreed. There had been a serious miscarriage of justice. Rosemary Ffrench must be set free; and, if the law wished to avoid the ridicule of the public, it had better take quick steps to locate Miss Edith Winchester Crancourt, alias Grentville, alias Dale.

I was certain that I could tell them just where they could find her.

CHAPTER XII.

ROSEMARY FFRENCH.

"Can't you understand where our bounden duty lies?"

That I was angry, you may well believe; for, although Richard Regent had, by this time, read all the newspapers, he was absolutely blind to justice. His pigheadedness annoyed me.

"See here," I said patiently. "You were in love with the girl whom you called the Lilac Lady—the one you saw in Washington in the box. Now, that was Rosemary Ffrench; don't you understand? This other woman was her half-sister—Crancourt, Dale, or whatever she calls herself. Mr. Ffrench's story is all very well; but it won't get his daughter out of prison until they have verified his statements, sent pictures to Paris, and God knows what. In plain justice to an innocent girl, we've got to go and have a private confab with the mayor."

"A lot of good that will do," he returned bitterly.

"The situation's different now. He may be in fear of this infernal society, but he's a hanged sight more in fear of the public. If we tell him that the girl who was in this house was the woman

that's needed to keep the State from looking silly, he'll change his tune. And, at one sweep, you've unearthed the devilish mystery, and made yourself popular with the girl you love."

"With one of the girls, I think you mean," he responded quietly; "while, on the other hand, I'm condemning the second girl I love to life imprisonment —and no mistake, this time!"

"But," I almost shouted, "you never *were* in love with the Crancourt woman! You never saw her except when she was sleeping; there's no use counting this afternoon, when she had a heavy veil on, and all we could see was her hair. It's the other girl you love. What could you tell when this Crancourt woman had her eyes closed? Ffrench says himself that, except for the weariness and glassiness of Miss Crancourt's eyes, the two girls were ringers for each other. If you'd gone into the room and met Miss Crancourt, you'd probably have seen the morphia look in her eyes, and you wouldn't have loved her at all. Can't you see that?"

"I can see that you have a theory to that effect," replied Regent; "but it doesn't necessarily follow that it's true. The matter stands this way—I was willing to marry the woman whom you want me to send to the penitentiary for life. And, only about three hours after, I came near being her husband."

I shuddered. My affection for Richard Regent has always been a real thing; and to think of him as married to a woman who allowed her innocent sister to be convicted for her own crime, was to conjure up a picture at once horrible and pathetic. To me, the matter was plain enough. He had never cared for the sleeping woman, but only for the thought of the Lilac Lady, as he had seen her that night in the box. Yet there was some justice in his standpoint; he did not know that what I said was necessarily true. To him, Rosemary Ffrench and Edith Crancourt did not have separate personalities; he saw only the Lilac Lady.

Kemp, the new valet, spent the remainder of his time, that evening, in going to and from the news vendor's on Sixth Avenue; and the dining room and library floors had to be cleared, every half hour, of rustling sheets.

The New York press was raving, staring mad!

The amount used up in cable tolls that day would have provided a prince with an income for life. Wires sang to the tune of questions—wires to Capetown, to London, to Paris, to Liberia. The proprietor of the hotel in the Rue Vingt-neuf de Juillet was interviewed, and shown newspaper pictures of Miss Ffrench, whom he recognized as "Mrs. Grentville." Her residence at the hotel included the night when Gavrotte was swindled. The captain of the *Susan Dorset,* still in London, verified the story of the wreck and of the wanderings of the survivors. The English correspondents sent reams of cablegrams anent Crancourt vs. Crancourt. M. Achille Legumbret was located at Tours; and produced his diary, in which the meeting with Mr. Ffrench and "the American miss, *très joli, très chic,*" shared part of a page with his comment on the stained-glass windows of St. Chappelle, visited earlier in the day.

Meanwhile, Hollenden Ffrench had seen the governor. Halsey Grahame's father—the vice-president of Standardized Cotton—had accompanied him; and a former governor of New York, now its most brilliant criminal lawyer, accompanied Mr. Grahame.

New York hung expectant on the result of the session. Reporters sat on the steps of the governor's New York house; others waited in the alley behind. Cameras had sprung up like a band of goblin sentinels.

Concerning this I speak authoritatively; for, at nine o'clock, after having tried to eat for several hours, Richard Regent and I traveled slowly down the block on Madison Square, where the governor lived when in the metropolis.

The crowd was not confined to reporters. Ordinary citizens, hoodlums, boys, peddlers, and police swelled its numbers to parade size. The constabulary had established an imaginary fire line, within which only reporters and

themselves were allowed. The crowd hooted them when not employed in urging the invisible governor, in hoarse voices, to set Miss Ffrench free, if he cared anything about the vote of New York City. Newsboys came running through their ranks, every little while, selling papers at five cents apiece.

We halted the motor at the corner, and were walking toward the crowd, when a well-preserved man of about fifty, wearing loosely woven light clothes, a knitted silk scarf, and a Panama hat, stepped out on the steps of the governor's house, and raised his hand for silence. He got it.

"I am Hollenden Ffrench," he began, but was drowned by hoarse cheering and bits of advice. He waited for silence again, and continued:

"I thank you, in the name of my daughter, for your kindly interest. And I know that you, like every honest citizen, will be glad to know that the governor has signed——"

We got, then, an example of what a New York crowd will do when it is genuinely stirred. Hats went up in the air; shrieks, hurrahs, the sound produced by whistling over two fingers, yelps, and the cries of some people trampled under foot, made a pandemonium that would have swelled the head of a stage-mob driller.

But they saw that Mr. Ffrench had more to say, and quieted down.

"You, gentlemen," he said, turning to the reporters who were besieging him, "had better say that what the governor calls a 'pardon,' I look upon only as a means of releasing my daughter immediately. This matter will be brought to the attention of the New York law courts, through a suit that I shall bring against the State. I have no more to say, now, except that I am going to Sing Sing, with this paper, to bring my daughter home!"

Then it was that Richard Regent showed that agility can destroy all belief in a ring of policemen, with regard to the efficacy of a fire line. He got through them before I knew that he had left my side, and caught Mr. Ffrench by the sleeve.

"See here, sir," he said, loud enough for everybody to hear. "My name is Gyllwydd, and I've got a forty-fifty racing car at the corner that'll take you to Sing Sing quicker than any special train that's made. I'm not a reporter; I'm not anything but a plain citizen, who sympathizes with you and your daughter; and the occasion is such a peculiar one that I think you'll agree it's not one for the observance of conventions. Do you agree with me?"

"I can have my motor here in ten minutes, Holly," said a man of Mr. Ffrench's own age, who came out after him.

"Ten minutes! Heavens! Good Lord!" He turned abruptly to Richard Regent.

"You're very kind," he said. "I accept, Mr. Gull-wudd."

I pause for a moment to call your attention to the fact that I refused to mention Regent's real name at the beginning of this narrative. Written Gyllwydd, it seems unpronounceable, and is, therefore, of no use for a theatre poster; articulated properly, according to the Welsh pronunciation, it sounds like a man engulfed in mud shouting his last appeal. As Gull-wudd it lacks romance. So you may forgive Richard Regent for adopting the name by which he is best known.

But Gull-wudd he was to Hollenden Ffrench; else, perhaps, matters would not have ended so smoothly for the gentlemanly magician. The name may lack points; but it was an open sesame to the mystery-locked door of Black Cross House—as you will presently learn.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOG OF FO.

When Mr. Ffrench had climbed into the motor and directions had been given the chauffeur, Richard Regent leaned over, and began to speak rapidly. "Have you thought of where you will take Miss Ffrench after she joins you?"

Hollenden Ffrench remaining silent, Regent continued:

"If you go to a hotel, you will be besieged by reporters and curious people. Your house in Washington Square is closed, and it will require some time to put it in order. If Miss Ffrench is taken to her relatives, she will be sympathized with, and wept over, to such an extent that I have no doubt she will wish herself back in—er—seclusion. And yet, it is necessary for her to remain in New York City, that you may speedily bring about another trial. Is this not so?"

"Well, Mr. Gyllwydd," agreed Hollenden Ffrench, "I have no doubt that it is. But what—er—do you suggest—since you have been so extraordinarily kind as to give the matter your consideration?"

"Well, sir," answered Regent, "the idea just occurred to me. I give it to you for what it's worth. As I said before, the conventions are out of place in a matter of this kind. Therefore, perhaps, you won't consider this arrangement amiss: I have an old-fashioned house in an old-fashioned part of town—Greenwich. I live there, with Mr. Winters and a few servants. The upper floors of the house, larger than the ordinary flat, is furnished solely because I have a hobby for collecting old furniture. The name Gyllwydd is unknown in New York City. Very few people know of the existence of my house. If you care to accept my hospitality, I will have the servants put the upper floor in order for you, engage a maid for Miss Ffrench, and have your meals served to you upstairs. You need never see either me or Mr. Winters; for it would certainly embarrass your daughter to be brought into contact with strangers, especially at such a time. If you feel that you are imposing upon me, I will submit our household book to you, and the extra expense caused by your residence and that of your daughter you are at liberty to pay. But the rooms will be all the better for your occupancy, and payment for them is out of the question."

"What sort of a man are you, anyway?" asked Mr. Ffrench curiously.

"Just an ordinary fellow, with a little money, Mr. Ffrench. But say the word, and Winters and I will leave you the car and the chauffeur, and return to the house. It will be necessary to put the rooms in some sort of order, you know. Come—the State's treated you and yours pretty badly. It's a pity if an individual citizen can't help to atone for it a little."

"Mr. Gyllwydd," said Ffrench, "your proposal is astounding; but, then, so are the circumstances. I accept you as a friend, and it is upon a friend that one relies in time of need. What is the number of your house?"

Regent gave it. "The chauffeur knows where to take you," he said. Leaning over, he gave some orders which brought the car to a stop. We descended.

"Good-by, Mr. Ffrench," said Regent. "We will have everything ready for you on your return. Better tell Miss French you've hired a flat. And trust us to keep mum about your proposed residence. Good luck!"

We had reached One Hundred and Eighty-fourth Street by this time, and returned to Greenwich by the subway and a crosstown car.

There was no time to hire an extra servant, that night; so we put Edna and the valet to work on the upstairs rooms. It was a labor of love, with Regent. He deprived the library and the dining room of paintings to adorn the third-floor front, which was to serve as the Ffrenchs' sitting room. The choicest blooms in the garden were placed in his costliest Bohemian-glass vases, and set about on ornamental tables. A Chippendale desk, a Sheraton cabinet, and a Louis Quatorze *chaise longue* were dragged upstairs; and as many bedroom fripperies as could be found about the house went into the room designed for Miss Ffrench. The holland blinds came down from the windows; and curtains of yellow lace, backed with heavy portières of brocaded stuff, were substituted.

Out of Regent's immense library, we selected all the newest and more brightly bound books, which we arranged in a little squat mahogany book-

case, behind diamond-paned doors. Then we directed Edna to show the lady and gentleman to their apartments when they came, and, on no account, to disturb us. To-morrow, we told her, we should engage another maid for upstairs; but to-night she was to consider herself under the lady's orders. Breakfast was to be served to the lady and the gentleman in their rooms.

We were in the library when the motor arrived; we heard the voices of our guests, and their steps on the stairs. Then, satisfied with a successful conclusion to an exciting day, we retired.

The Ffrench case was still the leading excitement, next day; the morning editions told of Miss Ffrench's release from Sing Sing, and her disappearance, with her father, in a motor car belonging to a stranger who had offered his services to Mr. Ffrench on the steps of the governor's house. All the reporters had heard Regent make his proposal; but none had recognized him, in a motor coat, buttoned up to his chin. The name was reported as Gully, Gullward, and Gudd—cognomens not to be found in the city directory. The reporters commented, with some surprise, on the fact that the whereabouts of the girl and her father were unknown.

However, they had done their best with imaginary photographs of Miss Ffrench leaving Sing Sing, and throwing herself into her father's arms, and real ones depicting Mr. Ffrench on the governor's steps.

Verifications of Hollenden Ffrench's story continued to come in. If there were any doubters, they were convinced by the morning editions. I shall not go into details here; in fact, I should not mention the fact at all, if I were not sure that this story will be published so many years after the events transpired that the story of Rosemary Ffrench will have faded from the memory of most people.

For, while there are surprises yet to come, Mr. Ffrench's adventures were as he had told them, and they need not again be referred to in this narrative.

Regent and I went out early to procure a maid for Miss Ffrench. We found a jewel—a Parisienne just landed, who knew very little English.

On our return, Edna came in, with the information that the gentleman had requested that we should come upstairs; and we went, taking the new maid with us. Mr. Ffrench shook our hands cordially, and said that his daughter was charmed with her surroundings and wanted to thank us in person. He, himself, was going out to see his cousin, Mr. Foljambe, of the great banking firm, and other influential men, in order to consult with them and the best legal talent as to what must be done to bring about a new trial for Miss Ffrench. Meanwhile, as he feared that his daughter would be lonely, he would like to think that we should drop in on her occasionally for a friendly chat, "since circumstances at present, do not permit her to go into the street."

It appeared that Mr. Ffrench had stopped the motor at the Washington Square house before coming to Greenwich, and had, with the assistance of the chauffeur, brought down several trunks, containing a wardrobe for his daughter. Consequently, when she emerged in excellently fitting clothes, we were not surprised; but that she should have chosen a suit of tailored linen, colored lilac, set us to blinking stupidly for the minute.

So, at last, we saw her as a companion, and heard her speak; and how a jury and a judge could have convicted a girl with that voice and carriage, only the psychology of injustice—in a thousand volumes—can make clear. It was enough to look into her eyes.

One imagines an adventuress, a dangerous woman, always with either red or very blonde hair. Looking at this girl, I could easily see how Edith Winchester Crancourt could be her double, without in the least resembling her. Given eyes of that brown—of so peculiar a shade that, taken in connection with her vivid hair, they seemed to be of the color of amethysts—only the influence of a mind instinctively pure could make them soft and gentle. For it needed that, in addition to the graces

of breeding and race, to make so striking a woman feminine. Even then, it was necessary that she should be simply dressed. In the attire of a Parisian woman—a hat crammed over the eyes, a rakish feather, a figure too definitely shown, a pair of shoes too high—she was too decided of coloring to pass without notice. It was the triumph of soul in the case of Rosemary Ffrench—a soul revealed in her eyes and voice.

As Regent advanced to meet her, I could see that she had taken that instinctive liking to him that is the basis of all lasting affection between men and women; it was the flesh and blood within her calling for its mate; and, consciously ignorant of the fact, but unconsciously wise, she gave him a smile which, contrary to her desires, had nothing of gratitude or politeness in it.

What she said does not matter. I have forgotten it, anyhow.

To you who read, it has been a surmise, all along, that Richard Regent was going to marry the Lilac Lady. It is patent, obvious, plain, that I should not deliberately write down these happenings, if my very dear friend's disappointment was to be their climax. But, for all the strangeness of most of this tale, I cannot give you a love story that is anything out of the ordinary.

Nor did he tell me anything about his courtship; but it seems to me that it could not have been any more than the average number of *tête-à-têtes* between a man and a woman. And it dragged itself out, as courtships often do.

Mr. Ffrench was absent daily for almost all the afternoon, in consultation with lawyers and relatives; which made it possible for Regent to have her much in his company. Heavily veiled, she sometimes went out with him in the motor. Myself, I seldom saw her; for, even had it been my misfortune to be the victim of an unrequited love, I should have taken that preventive against heart laceration that hopeless lovers do take—which is, briefly, to stay out of her sight.

It took two months for the case to be brought up again in the courts; and it was on the night before the new trial, when it had become necessary for Mr. Ffrench and his daughter to return to their Washington Square address, that Richard Regent asked Mr. Ffrench to step into the drawing-room. There, in as few words as possible, he told him of his love for Miss Rosemary.

"I have not asked her to marry me," he concluded, "because you are guests in my house. Therefore, it is my old-fashioned belief that your consent is necessary. And, before I receive it, I want to explain about myself. My name is Owen Gyllwydd, as I told you; but I am better known by another. You think me a man of income, dabbling with old books and preparing scholarly treatises. I am that, too; but most of my income was gained on the stage as a magician, a handcuff expert, et cetera. My mother was a gypsy, honorably wedded; my father was a Welshman, of good stock, but no money. Castell Gylwydd still stands near Caernaervon; and I believe I own it, together with a few barren acres, if I choose to assert my rights. I have enough money to support this establishment permanently, without putting foot on the stage again; and if that is necessary to your consent, I will give up my work."

Hollenden Ffrench smiled, sighed, and smiled again.

"My boy," he said, "a year ago, I probably should have thought a stage magician a sort of bounder. But I've herded with seamen, Krooboys, slave dealers, and small traders since; and I've found out a lot about other people. Besides, the name of Ffrench has been a public word—a shameful word. There is no pride left in it. You look like a gentlemen; your hospitality has been that of a lord, or an old seigneur of the South. Personally, I like you. I hope Rosemary does. Come back here, and tell me your luck!"

He had a very short time to wait. And two people came in to tell him, not one. Rosemary put her arms around her father's neck, and, for some reason, sobbed.

Now we leave the pleasant paths of straightforward manly and womanly love, and return to the devilish mystery of the black cross—of which neither Regent nor myself had spoken since the arrival of our guests. It may be said that, except for two accidents, Rosemary Ffrench might never have come to love Richard Regent. The first accident was brought about by intention; but it was an accident, so far as its effect was concerned. Richard Regent had given his true name of Gyllwydd to Mr. Ffrench, because he was afraid that the gentleman in question might shy at favors proffered by a stage trickster. As a matter of fact, Mr. Ffrench had never heard of Richard Regent; but a performer's vanity is such—in common with an author's—that he believes that, if he is advertised in big print, his name must stick in the public memory.

So, you see, the name of Gyllwydd did not do the work for which it was intended. But it was an arrow that flew straight at a mark for which it was *not* intended, as you will see for yourself when you have come to the next chapter.

The second accident was pure accident—chance, luck, whatever you will. For all Miss Ffrench's residence of two months in the Greenwich house, she had never once put foot in the drawing-room, until she came in with Regent to declare herself his future wife. And, as I have set down before, at that moment of entrance, she did nothing except throw herself into her father's arms and sob. And for a full two minutes, she kept her head hidden on her father's shoulder.

Then she looked up—and back came the black cross and its minions.

Had Richard Regent's been an ordinary drawing-room, we might have waited a longer time for the beginning of our mystery's conclusion. But it was, most distinctly, not an ordinary drawing-room.

Commonplace enough, perhaps, in view of its mahogany doors, white pilasters, and oak floors. But it was furnished as are, perhaps, only one or two houses in New York—with Spanish Renaissance furniture of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, designed by Castilians with Moorish ideals, and executed by the descendants of the Central American Aztecs. Most of it had been designed for churches. Huge carved Doges' chairs, in red and gold; a cardinal's couch, with each bedpost cut like a candelabrum, a stump of thick candle burning in each; a low, splay-footed confessional stoop, covered with old wine-colored velvet, traced with dim gold; a great "mystery" picture, atrocious in technique, but marvelous for its living gilt, a color mixture that was the display of the room and the despair of artists—and other like curiosities; although a revolutionary and anachronistic note was hideously apparent in the great "Dog of Fo," which stood on the mantel and surveyed the room with sightless eyes. Chinese this—loot from the Forbidden City—an emperor's guardian.

And the dog was the first thing to catch Miss Rosemary's eyes when she opened them. She shuddered; and I, following her glance, did not blame her. He was not a pleasant sight, in the dimness of candle light.

For a long time, she stared at the Dog of Fo, until her eyes became as blank as his; then, in a frightened, childish way, she pulled at Regent's coat sleeve, and got to her feet. Her terror increased as she gazed about the room. Cardinal's couch, confessional stoop, mystery picture—she had a recognition and a terror for each.

And then, quite suddenly, she fainted.

Give me credit for no acumen greater than that of my companions; I was as much in the dark as to the reason for her attack as were they. The fact that the terror began with a sight of the Chinese dog, and continued unabated—even increased—with the sight of other familiar features of the room, gave me no clue. For, you see, they were familiar to me; I did not realize that they would have been more in place at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Regent took an easy, egotistical solu-

tion of the matter. He imagined that Miss Rosemary had been overcome with sheer joy. Mr. Ffrench seemed to think so, too; and thought, also, that such manifestations of happiness were carrying the thing entirely too far.

We laid her on the confessional stoop, and got smelling salts, eau de cologne, and brandy. As she lay unconscious, the resemblance to the sleeping lady ceased to be a resemblance; it became an identity.

"It isn't possible for two people to be as alike as that," I murmured. I caught myself wondering what Regent would do if, while wandering about alone, he came across Edith Winchester Crancourt, and she had made up her mind to make him believe that she was Rosemary.

My reflections were cut short by Rosemary's return to consciousness. Regent put his arm about her, tenderly solicitous. She caught hold of his arm, and pinched it, literally pinched it, so hard that he gave a little surprised yelp. She reached over to her father, and repeated the strange performance. I think that, had she known me well enough, I also should have suffered; for she eyed me rather wistfully.

Presently she drew a long breath.

"It's real! Everything's real! You're real, Owen—thank God! And you, father!"

"Joy," said Mr. Ffrench ruefully, rubbing his arm as he spoke, and carrying the silly theory which he shared with Regent a few yards farther, "is all very well. But I never heard of pinching."

"I thought," she said simply, "that I was dreaming—that all of you were going to fade away, and that I should wake up in that prison cell again. I can't understand—I can't—I can't! I've been taught not to believe in the supernatural, in dreams, in illusions, and portents. Owen himself"—she called Regent by his given name—"has read me parts of his books, explaining just how magical tricks are accomplished. I should believe in them less than ever, now. But——"

She wandered from the dog to the mystery picture, from cardinal's couch to confessional stoop; then, with a despairing gesture, she threw herself on our mercy.

"I can't help how absurd it seems to you. I sat in that chair, once."

She indicated one near the window.

"In a dream. I stared at that ugly dog, once—in a dream. I watched the sunlight play on that picture, over there—in a dream. And I dreamed that dream just before you, father, came with my release from prison."

As my eyes were irresistibly drawn to Regent's, so were his to mine. In utter stony silence, we regarded each the other. Then we became conscious that she had begun to tell of her dream; and we listened as though we, too, were dreaming.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DREAM THAT WAS NOT.

"I was ill, they told me, at the prison; I had had a violent fever, and had tossed about for three days. They kept me under the influence of morphia, most of the time—because of the delirium, they said. And it *was* three days, I knew, because I always kept a diary in prison, and I remember writing in it before I went to bed that night.

"But the peculiar thing about it was that, when I awoke, I didn't feel as though I'd been ill at all; and the whole thing seemed so real—so terribly real! And I never once, during the whole dream, *thought* I was dreaming. It wasn't confused and tangled; and I didn't jump from Arabia to Paris, and then on to the North Pole, for no particular reason, and in no defined way, as people do in dreams. I went soberly about in motor cars, and I can't remember being sick, at all. That's the oddest part of it all.

"I was quite well when I went to bed that night. The last things I did were to read a chapter in Horace—I translated, because reading didn't pass the time quick enough; the chaplain suggested it—and then to write in my diary.

"I fell asleep in the usual way, too. And if I grew to be delirious, I don't remember it. I simply jumped into the dream, and jumped back again.

"The dream began when I sat up in my cot—that was real enough—and saw a queer-looking man in a black frock coat bending over me. I didn't know him, and I asked who he was. Then he said to me: 'Miss Ffrench, you are a convict, and you will remain in prison all your life. But the law is going to make an exception, in your case, because you are so very young. There is a man who wants to marry you. He doesn't know you are a convict, and you must never tell him. If you do, you will be taken back to prison, and kept there all your life. You are Jane Smith from now on; and if you marry this man, and keep silent about your past life, you will have all the luxuries you used to have, and your personal liberty. If you refuse—that's the end of it!

"And then he sat and looked at me.

"Now, I'm coming to the part I'm ashamed of. For, although it was a dream, it was just like any other part of my life to me; and I reasoned and thought just as I should under ordinary circumstances. But I had been in prison nearly three months. I can't tell you the hopelessness of it. I wasn't Rosemary Ffrench; I was convict seven six five four—just a number. I had long ago lost hope of seeing you, father, again. Uncle Foljambe, and all the others, had done everything that money could do; but, you know, the papers took up the cry that, if I were a common person, with no rich and influential friends, there would be no talk of a pardon.

"It seems silly to excuse yourself for a dream; but I tell you it—well, I cannot explain.

" 'Remember,' he said, 'that you are not Rosemary Ffrench. After you marry him, Rosemary Ffrench will be reported as having died in prison. You are Jane Smith, and you have lost your memory, so far as the past is concerned. After you have married him, you will persuade him to take you away from New York, to some place where you will not be recognized. We leave that to you. This is the law's mercy to you. Do you accept?'

" 'Who is the man?' I asked. 'Do I know him?'

" 'You've heard of him, maybe,' he replied. 'He saw you in a box in the Coryphée threatre, in Washington, he says, some time ago; and he's been crazy in love with you, ever since. His name is Richard Regent.'

"Then I remembered the man, and shuddered. He was a man who did tricks on the stage—a handsome man, not common, or anything of that sort; but he scared me, then, with his wonderful tricks and his terrible eyes, and —— I could not see how I could love a man like that. Then I remembered that this man could open handcuffs and locks—and I thought, maybe, he had these penitentiary people helpless, and that they had to appease him, and—— How can I tell what I thought? I was alone. This man wanted me. He was willing to marry me, knowing nothing about me. My life was ended, unless I accepted.

"And—Owen, forgive me!—I accepted!

"When I told this man that I would go, he pointed to some furs, a coat, and a hat, and other things. I looked around, when he had gone, and saw that it wasn't the cell I had gone to sleep in. Then I saw that I was dressed decently in black alpaca stuff, and had on black lisle stockings, and dull black shoes.

"I could tell you so many things; but, after all, they don't matter, since it was only a dream. When I had dressed, they gave me two heavy veils, and then bound a black handkerchief across the veils, after I had put them on. After a while, I was led out, and I knew that I was in a motor. Then the handkerchief was taken off, and the blinds of the motor drawn. We didn't go very far in the motor before it stopped, and an old gentleman got in. He was an Episcopal minister, and he thought that I was a girl who had been left alone in the world, and was going to be married for protection. And

again the motor stopped, and the other man—the man who had been bending over me in the cell—got out, and told us to wait until we got word from him. The blinds were still down, and I couldn't look at the house; and I unconsciously put my head down when I came in, and—*it was this drawing-room that I came into!*

"Then we waited, the minister and I; and presently the man who had bent over me in the cell came in quickly, and said that I would have to come to another place, because the man I was to marry was sick. We left the minister, and went out into the motor. Then, as it rolled away, he asked me to turn up my sleeve and let me see whether I had been vaccinated—the man had smallpox, he said. I said I had been vaccinated, years before. 'Then I shall have to vaccinate you,' he said. And I rolled up my sleeve. I felt a little pain, and then it seemed as though the motor was running on a glass plate, or on smooth ice—and then——

"I woke up, and saw the chaplain at Sing Sing, and the warden, and a trained nurse. They told me how sick I'd been.

"And it wasn't an hour after that when I heard that you'd got back to the States, and that, maybe, I was going to be set free. But the dream—— Owen, somehow, I feel that I'm not worthy, when I think of my consent to marrying a man whom I had only seen once—and then only to be afraid of him."

I looked at Regent, wondering, mouth flabby. But he was the master of the situation, and he smiled.

"You need never argue for the supernatural again, dear Rosemary," he said, "nor plead the truth that 'coming events cast their shadows before.' It was ordained that you should marry me. I do not attempt to explain the fact, any more than I can explain why you recognize the articles in my drawing-room; but the man you were to marry in your dream is no rival of mine. My stage name is Richard Regent, and the make-up in which you saw me was mostly false hair and grease paint. You are one of the few mortals who can claim a miracle!"

And he took her into his arms, as though miracles were, if not commonplace, at least as existent as four-leaved clovers.

CHAPTER XV.

THE EXECUTIONERS.

Directly, now—without any further reference to our twisted states of mind—I lead you to the conclusion of the affair which, though it has not tortured you as it did us, must, at least, have mystified you considerably.

At eight o'clock on the following morning, we rang the bell at Mr. James Cotton's Bryant Park residence. Knowing the great man's habits as we did, we expected to be shown into his breakfast room; and we were not disappointed. Mr. Cotton, looking up from a table liberally provided with poached eggs, muffins, ham, and marmalade, greeted us cheerily, and invited us to be seated.

He showed no surprise at seeing us at such an unusual calling hour. He merely inquired if we would have coffee; and, as our own breakfast had been a somewhat hasty one, due to the desire to catch Mr. Cotton before he left his house, we acceded.

"We've come about the Ffrench case, Cotton," said Regent.

"Supererogative to tell me that," replied Mr. Cotton, out of a corner of his mouth.

"Been expecting us?" asked Regent ominously.

"Well—the trial's on to-day. Imagined you'd be here before it began; that is, if Miss Ffrench talked. That was a clever move of yours, Mr. Jackanapes—that getting the girl and her father to make free with your house."

"Association with diabolical cleverness has naturally affected me a little," returned Regent.

Mr. Cotton laughed. "We didn't know where they were until it was too late," he remarked, and cracked another egg. "Well—what's to be done, eh?"

Briefly, Regent outlined to him the strange dream of Miss Rosemary Ffrench; to which Cotton nodded gravely.

"She still believes it a dream?" he asked, at the conclusion of Regent's narration.

"Yes."

"And her father?"

"Oh, we've argued it to him on scientific principles," said Regent, with a ghost of a smile. "And, now, I want to know under what authority the State of New York gives in marriage a convict sentenced to life imprisonment; for there's not a single doubt in the world that Miss Rosemary Ffrench was the lady whom we rescued from Number One, Schuyler Place. See here—I'll play with you, cards up.

"In the trial that's coming off, I have a story to tell which will make Miss Ffrench's dream a reality. That'll look pretty bad for the State, won't it? And I don't think Black Cross House will stay a mystery very long, afterward. That's my ace. Now for another high card. I'm willing to sell Number Two, Schuyler Place, for forty thousand dollars, on condition; first: That the mystery be explained; second: That Miss Ffrench and I have no obstacles placed in the way of our marriage, and are not threatened or molested in the future. Now, Cotton, what sort of cards have you?"

Cotton smiled, drummed on the table, rang for the servant to clear away the things, and then pushed cigars and cigarettes toward us.

"I'll go upstairs and use my private wire for a little telephoning, if you don't mind," he said.

It was perhaps fifteen minutes before he returned; then he nodded to us to follow him. We went upstairs to the attic floor. He unlocked a barred door, and revealed an iron grating, beyond which was a room, plainly furnished. Some toys were scattered about the floor—among them a number of letter blocks, and some picture books.

"Jimmy," he called.

Mr. Cotton, junior—or, rather, young Doctor Cotton—in a white smock-frock, opened a door on the other side of the room, and came forward.

"Give Mary her lesson for the benefit of these gentlemen," said his father.

Young Doctor Cotton nodded to us. He was a striking example of the exception to the adage; for he was the successful son of a successful father, having made a considerable reputation as an alienist. "Close the door," he said.

Mr. Cotton pushed back the iron-barred door, after first having thrown off the catch which held a slide within. A little sheet of iron dropped, and gave us a peephole about a foot square. Young Doctor Cotton went to another door, unlocked it, and called. A capable looking young woman, in hospital dress, came out.

"Has she had her breakfast?"

"Yes, doctor."

"Bring her in, then."

The nurse went within, and we heard a cooing noise. Presently something on four feet came crawling through the doorway, making those gurgling sounds associated with babyhood. At first we thought that it was an ape attired in a child's swaddling clothes; but, as it squatted down in the centre of the room and cocked a bright eye toward young Doctor Cotton, we saw that it was a full-grown human being.

Young Doctor Cotton seemed to understand what the creature wanted; for he took some candies out of the pocket of his smock-frock, and, presently, little satisfied grunts issued from the creature —also the odor of peppermint.

The doctor sat down by her side, and picked up one of the letter blocks, marked with a large "A" in red.

"What?" he asked.

"A!" screamed the creature delightedly.

He held up another. "What?"

"Q—Q!" cried the creature, as though recognizing an old friend. As she spoke, she turned her head; and we recognized her.

It was the mulatto woman who had occupied the cell in Black Cross House!

We watched her with strained eyes. Woman grown though she was, there

was no doubt that she was not acting the child—the baby. She went through her letters satisfactorily, was rewarded with more peppermints, and then—the nurse on one side and young Doctor Cotton on the other—was given lessons in walking. Presently, we turned to Mr. Cotton.

"Is there any object in showing us this?" asked Regent. "Because it doesn't help to clear the mystery; it only intensifies it. We saw that woman asleep at Number One, Schuyler Place, on the night that we took Miss Ffrench away."

"I was hoping you had," was this strange man's answer. "Well, you've seen enough of that. Come into my study."

He was careful to lock his door when we entered. Then he lighted a cigar, and advised us to do the same.

"It's a pretty long story," he said. "You'd better follow my example, and make up your mind to wait until the end, without asking any questions. But, before I tell it to you, it is necessary that I should have your solemn promises that it is to be repeated to no one."

We gave him what he desired, trembling with eagerness.

As for the explanation that followed, it was longer than the one I have set down, and much more explicit; but I am not a scientist, and, consequently, I cannot remember the ramifications of the various subjects which Mr. Cotton discussed in connection with the main theme. But you will find the meat of his explanation here; and, if it does not satisfy you, go to the friendliest man of science in your acquaintance, and ask him to give you the details that I have omitted.

You will have no fault to find with the strangeness of his story.

"First," he began, "let me go into the matter of the inverted black cross, which first attracted my attention to this affair. As you, Regent, probably know, this symbol was used by the earliest monkish investigators to indicate something connected with Antichrist, Sathanas—evil, in fact—black magic. But its use did not necessarily signify that the monks thought that anything so marked was evil. It merely implied that they considered investigation of it unwise for the general public. Alexander Borgia, who was once a Pope of Rome; Cæsar Borgia, his son; Lucretia, his daughter—all possessed vials upon vials, containing the deadliest poisons, and marked with this inverted cross. Raymond Lulli—who is credited with having discovered vitriol—marked his first vial of it with this cross. The sign was disregarded by his assistant, who lost two fingers in consequence. And so on.

"In other words, the only way in which the early investigators could keep the unthinking horde away from dangerous secrets was by hinting at diabolical origin.

"In the days of the Renaissance, as you know, Europe was full of secret societies. Therefore, there sprang up one among the surgeons—the chemists. They were the poisoners of their day. From them one might obtain a love potion, a drink to make men mad, a deadly brew. On the other hand, one might obtain relief from the most terrible pains, and—well, you probably know as much of that as I do. The symbol of this society—which bought its right to continue investigations by providing princes, bishops, cardinals, and nobles with poisons—was the inverted black cross. The society was supposed to have died out centuries ago. It did not. It became only more secret. To-day, the greatest men in the medical profession belong to it. I am a member of this society.

"Its aims? I am about to tell you of them.

"The society is not one to which the average physician or surgeon gains admittance. Laws are made for the average man; and it is best that the average man should believe it a crime to break them. It is the exceptional man who can be trusted to make his own laws. So well has the secret of the black cross been kept that you are the first men who ever forced an acknowledgment from a member.

"Now, to proceed. When I came to

you that night, and saw the sleeping woman, I had no suspicion that our society was mixed up with it. I deemed it only a curious case, and went off to analyze the chemicals contained in the green liquid. As I have told you before, I then noted the inverted cross on the hypodermic syringe. I came back to investigate. Regent called you, Winters, upstairs. Meanwhile, the man who was locked in the reception room gave me the password of our order. I was, necessarily, forced to release him. Within two minutes, I saw that you were unknowingly threatening a great scheme; and we two cast about in our minds how to scare you out of your intentions.

"Of course, you are surprised that the police and the mayor of New York City should have played into our hands the way they did. Let me tell you, then, that the chief of police and the mayor are both in the secret of the society; and that the initials, 'E. C. N. Y. S.' represent 'the Execution Committee of New York State.'

"That explains something to you, of course. The people you have been fighting are backed by the civil and military power of a great State—yes, even of a country. But, although what they do is legal—being sanctioned by the governor—it is not the sort of procedure that it is wise to make public at the present time.

"You, Regent, have heard me speak of Von Brahm, the greatest medico-experimentalist in the world. I will begin with him. Ten years ago, a man—a celebrated German statesman—fell, while hunting, struck his head on a stone, and utterly lost his memory. He was as sound in body and limb as you or I, and his brain had in no way become diseased. But there was a pressure upon that brain which reduced him to the mental activity of a newborn child.

"Von Brahm had him for patient seven months, and finally made a great discovery. He found the pressure, and removed it. I shall enter into no explanations which neither of you would understand; but the pressure I speak of was one applied to the outer covering of the brain, and was so simply and easily caused—although it involved a great deal of momentary pain—that, after the pressure had been released and the German statesman about to enter upon his old life, Von Brahm, still experimenting, threw the pressure back, and again made a child of him. This caused the man terrible agony; and Von Brahm realized that, before he could make any humanitarian use of his great discovery, he must find some combination of drugs which, without risking loss of life in their use, would render the patient dead to all pain.

"It is needless to state that he again freed the statesman, who went his way with only gratitude for Von Brahm, and no knowledge of the pain that had been caused him.

"To return to the drug. After six months, Von Brahm found the green liquid to be efficacious in the matter of harmlessness and deadening to pain. He then brought together a number of the members of the Black Cross society, and announced his discovery. Several of the members, eager to advance the cause of science, offered themselves for experiment. Von Brahm put them under the drug for a matter of two days, then applied the pressure, and awoke them children. He called another meeting of the society, exhibited them, and then, putting them under the influence of the drug once again, returned them to their normal state, without any knowledge of what had happened during the five days of their service as subjects.

"We now come to the use to which Von Brahm put this discovery of his. He had always believed that capital punishment and life imprisonment were the blackest crimes of our times; and he went to the emperor with his solution of the problem. According to Von Brahm, a criminal was merely a victim of his environment and training. Von Brahm's idea was that, by putting the pressure on the brains of convicted prisoners and removing their memory, they could be taken in hand and trained to be useful citizens. The

emperor gave him permission to try. Von Brahm was uniformly successful; and it was found that, after memory had been destroyed, and a new childhood began, it was not difficult to bring the intelligence up to that of a child of six years in six months. In other words, a year of education was represented by a month, in these reconstructed individuals. Consequently, two years of training would mean a fairly well-educated man or woman.

"The men and women—reborn, so to speak—were given careful training, and placed in the hospital service of Germany, making faithful, obedient, and intelligent servants. In no case was the viciousness recurrent, since the ex-criminals, due to their training, shunned evil companionship. So great a success did the experiments prove that the emperor installed Von Brahm as executioner of the empire.

"But all this was done without the knowledge of the people. A decree was passed abolishing public execution—that was all. Electrocution in a certain secret chamber was supposed to have taken the place of the previous system. From this room, the body of the criminal was borne, under the influence of the drug, seemingly dead, and carried to the great vault, where criminals were supposed to be cremated. So that the public knew nothing of the innovation.

"After the system had been in operation for a year in Germany, Von Brahm sent his assistant, Growitz, to propose the installation of his system in France. The proposal was favorably received; but the French temperament is so peculiar that they dared not pass a law forbidding public execution. The experiments were therefore confined to the 'life-term' criminals.

"England has, so far, rejected the proposition. But the President of the United States approved it; and it was on his suggestion that the governor signed the by-law that made it possible in this State. A bill providing for the abolishment of public execution is now before the legislature; but, meanwhile, for the past year, long-term convicts have been experimented upon successfully.

"I was not in the secret, there being between Von Brahm and myself a professional quarrel which has widened into a personal breach. But when the man whom you call the Raven found that it was necessary to trust me, he took the liberty of informing me just what I was arraying myself against. As a humanitarian, as a scientist, as a physician, I had no choice to do anything except what I did.

"But the governor has taken alarm at the Ffrench case. He has gone back on his agreement, and taken away the authority of Von Brahm's assistants. The Execution Committee of New York State is dissolved. You will find a 'For Sale' notice board on Number One, Schuyler Place; and, as for your own house, you will be lucky if you get twenty thousand dollars for it.

"Now, about Miss Ffrench. She was taken from Sing Sing under the influence of the drug. She remained under its influence while in your charge. When it seemed to be the only way to buy your silence, the committee determined to give her a chance to be your wife, without submitting to an operation. Had she told you who she was, Regent, I'm afraid it would have been necessary to recapture her and apply the pressure. I am glad that her father returned when he did."

He looked at his watch. "Ten o'clock," he said. "I'm afraid I'll have to see you out, my friends. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes," said Regent, "and sorry. It's a pity you couldn't have trusted me with the secret. I'm not a bigot. I think I can understand the broad humanitarian principles of Von Brahm's system. It is a pity it is ended."

Cotton shrugged his shoulders. "In the United States, its success can only be assured by the will of the people; and the people are not now sufficiently educated to understand. The system must be confined, as yet, to countries where the rulers decide what is best for the people. The rulers of the United States have become frightened; they

dare no longer act on their own initiative; to make the system public is to destroy the fear of punishment on the part of criminals. A man may be afraid of death; he may be afraid of life imprisonment; but he would hardly fear the mere removal of his memory and the chance for a fair start. In fact, it might encourage crime—that desire for a fresh start.

"Besides—once let the system be known, and the wives, daughters, brothers, sisters, and relations generally of the condemned prisoners would be on the watch to prevent any new career on the part of the man without a memory. No; when the day comes that it is possible to make some laws without the knowledge of the public, then this system may prove successful. Until then, perforce, we must butcher our offenders against the law, or keep them in cages, like wild beasts."

He smiled whimsically. "And now that our little melodrama of the cloak-and-sword variety has resolved itself into a commonplace scientific statement, are we friends again, Regent?"

Regent turned away his face; so did I.

"You'll have to forgive a couple of children, I guess, Mr. Cotton," said Richard Regent. "Will you come to my wedding?"

POSTSCRIPT.

Were I writing a play or a story, I should have terminated my narrative with Regent's invitation; but, as this is something of a history, and may have some value in other days than mine, I think it better to add a few words, which will dispose of those uncertainties which now stand out like ragged ends against the otherwise finished fabric of my yarn.

Hughes, Marie, and Schmaltz were —I was told afterward by Cotton— provided with situations no less permanent than those which they occupied with us. The Raven went back to Berlin, and gave valuable aid to Von Brahm in his Jovelike task of making new men and women. The other man —he who had so rudely disrupted our session—went with him.

As for Edith Winchester Crancourt, a person answering her description was buried at the expense of the Prince of Monaco on the day after Rosemary Ffrench's acquittal by unanimous vote. This person had come with a man, who was evidently her father, to play a carefully devised system at Monte Carlo. Their winnings had been enormous for one day; on the second day they lost all they had won, and more; and, after the third day, the young woman was removed to the burying ground, and a hypodermic syringe added to the collection of lethal instruments in the possession of the Monte Carlo police.

Her father had left the hotel, with his luggage, an hour before the body was discovered.

As I write, Rosemary has been the wife of Richard Regent these last ten years; yet she still believes that she dreamed on that day of her release. As for me, I abide with them in the Greenwich home, and await the time when Von Brahm's black cross may again be set up in this City of New York. Often I go to the site where the two houses once stood; and, as I gaze on the great warehouse which has replaced them, I wish that I might see the great crucifix emblazoned on the door; for, black and inverted though it be, it is a sign of mercy and forgiveness.

Perhaps, when you read my narrative, long after my hand has penned it, this may come to pass, and the needless legal butchery of unfortunate men and women be brought to an end. I trust that I may live to see the day.

For Dear Old Yale

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "The Stroke Oar," "How Hector Won His 'Y',' Etc.

Boys will be boys, even when they have nearly ceased to be so. And college youths are no exception to the rule. With this peculiarity in mind, Mr. Paine has written one of his very best college stories—a story in which more than one human characteristic is depicted with admirable clearness of drawing. It concerns the members of the Yale glee club, snowbound in Altoona, and their attitude toward some simple people whom they found there.

NOWBOUND in Altoona! There *is* a proposition to make a strong man burst into tears," declared Hector Alonzo McGrath. "The conductor says we will be lucky if we get that far before we stall up in these big drifts. Were you ever marooned in Altoona? That sounds like a good title for a song. Where is my guitar? I need some rhymes. Altoona—fair Luna? But she isn't doing business in the midst of this howling blizzard. Did you ever write poems for the *Lit,* Jim? Wake up, and show some animation!"

Jim Stearns yawned, nodded a drowsy negative, and continued to look out at the swirling clouds of snow which drove by the car window. The heavy express train was buffeting its slow way, with frequent halts and lurches, as though making a losing fight, against the storm which was blockading the passes of the Alleghenies.

Homeward bound from their winter concert tour in the West, the members of the Yale glee club, surfeited with a fortnight of receptions, dinners, and smokers, organized by loyal alumni, were in a mood to enjoy repose and let the weather go hang. The melodious company of light-hearted undergraduates was luxuriously traveling in a special car; and the lamentation of the assistant manager, Hector McGrath, awakened no more than a languid interest among his thirty-odd companions. Some of them were asleep, others seeking diversion in penny ante, and a few nodding over books or magazines.

After trying in vain to interest his neighbors in his inspiration for a topical song, Hector voiced his disgusted opinion of them:

"And you are the bright-eyed college boys who line up on the stage and tell the audience, in tuneful numbers, that all you live for is 'mirth and jollity.' Oh, fudge! You are the deadest lot of live stock this railroad ever handled, outside of a refrigerator car. Come on, Jim—let's wander through the train and find some real people. That Pittsburg concert, last night, seems to have put this crowd all to the bad. They ought to have cut out that midnight supper at the club; but you and I are no weaklings. Don't be a paper sport."

With good-humored compliance, Jim Stearns arose lazily, and followed toward the front of the train, grumbling, as he forsook his comfortable quarters:

"You are as perniciously energetic as a terrier pup, Hector, and almost as much of a nuisance. If *you* could be safely marooned in Altoona, I might get some rest and sleep between here and New Haven. What for do you yearn to go charging up and down this train? Hasn't it troubles enough?"

"I want to find some interesting people, Jim. When I travel, I like to have something doing. My bump of curiosity is as big as an egg. An oyster has no curiosity, so he never gets anywhere. I don't want to be an oyster —do you? Now, here is this trainload of humanity, all sorts, from everywhere, stuck in a blizzard. They will probably keep fairly good-natured; but if they were cast away on a raft instead of in a train, they would begin eating each other, after a week or so. That's enough to make 'em interesting."

Jim Stearns, oarsman and football captain, looked down at his volatile classmate with a tolerant grin, as though it were not worth while to combat his odd theories. They passed through the sleepers into a crowded, stuffy day coach, where a motley assemblage of weary pilgrims was damning the blizzard and the railroad company in several languages.

"They look as if they might begin eating each other a good deal inside your time limit," said Jim. "Let's push on into the smoker. We may find the conductor, and extract further information about the chance of butting our way into Altoona before dark."

A very pretty girl, who looked travel worn and disconsolate, turned to gaze, with obvious interest, at this pair of well-groomed, attractive youths. Jim Stearns brightened visibly as he returned the glance, and appeared to waver in his course; but Hector pulled him by the sleeve, and objected:

"Break away, old man. If you make eyes at that charming young passenger, it is at your peril. She belongs to the theatrical company that hems her in on every side. The heavy villain sits facing her, blue shave, fur-collared overcoat, and all; while the leading man, the black-haired *Romeo,* just in front of her, is already transfixing you with a cold and glassy stare. I sized them up when they got on the train at Johnstown. I wonder if we could persuade the outfit to come back in our car and do a few stunts."

"Oh, stop your nonsense. You needn't lecture me at the top of your voice," muttered Jim, as he stalked toward the smoker. "They look as if they had been playing in hard luck, don't they? Kind of seedy, and fagged, and sore on the world in general—and one-night stands in particular. You don't want to ask them back into our car, Hector. The ice box is almost empty, and the fellows want to be let alone. Um-m! But that was a bully-looking little girl! Something sweet and nice about her. She isn't in the same class with those other barnstormers. I wish I knew——"

"You're the same old sentimental driveler," said Hector. "Have a cigar, and dream away. Maybe she is the long-lost daughter that was driven from her fireside by a cruel misunderstanding. They always wander back to the old homestead, and fall fainting on the cold doorstep, in just such a snowstorm as this—slow, wailing music by the orchestra."

The train had stopped between eddying drifts higher than the car windows. A gang of Italian section hands, who were shoveling alongside, came stampeding into the smoker, to seek a moment's warmth and respite from their benumbing, blinding task. The icy wind whooped after them through the hastily opened door, as if eager to overtake them and finish the job of freezing them as soon as possible. Dropping their shovels in the aisle, they wrung their mittened hands, and shrilly bewailed their misery between chattering teeth. With a dislocating jerk, the train got under way again; and the refugees caught up their shovels, stumbled from out this fleeting shelter, and plunged, waist deep, into the snow.

"Which shows that we might be a whole lot worse off," observed Hector, the philosopher, with a sympathizing shiver. "Some people may think it a

hardship to have to hear you sing baritone solos in a glee-club concert, Jim; but, honestly, they are not as much to be pitied as those dagoes shoveling snow. By Jove, where *is* Altoona? Maybe the engineer has frozen to death at his post, and we have run past it."

"Not much. If we are held up there to-night, I am for sidetracking our car and going to a hotel. Here comes a brakeman. Let's ask him, while he is thawed out."

"Five miles more, and every one of 'em a case of buckin' and backin' and shovelin'; but we'll make it by dark, if the engine holds together," growled the weary man in blue. "No, you won't get out of Altoona to-night. The next division is worse balled up than this."

As he passed on, pestered by questions on one hand and the other, Hector saw the "heavy villain" and the "black-haired *Romeo*" enter the car. They found a vacant seat within earshot of the two young collegians, who eyed them with lively curiosity. The elder Thespian—he of the blue gills and pompous front—was at no pains to soften his heavy voice, as he declaimed to the other, with an oracular flourish of a dingy forefinger:

"Don't I know how the part should be played? In the campus scene, when the students discover that I tried to bribe the trainer to dope the football team, the speech in which I declare my innocence is one of the best bits I ever did. Look how it fetched 'em in Terre Haute. Two curtain calls, and the papers said it was great! And you have the gall to tell me to chop it—me, who was on Broadway with Mansfield before you carried a spear!"

"Oh, forget it," wearily sighed the younger man. "What difference does it make? You and your art be damned! We play Altoona to-night, which means we go broke. There won't be twenty people in the house. It's been getting worse from Chicago east—you know that. And here's where we smash. Play your part any old way, for all I care."

The speaker was a morose-looking young man, clad in a loud plaid suit, which needed pressing. He lighted a stogie, pulled his soft hat over his eyes, and paid no more attention to his indignant companion, who sonorously declaimed:

"Altoona will remember *me* as *Sir Hamilton Ashmead* in 'Her Ladyship's Honor.' The weather can't keep 'em at home, when they see my name on the billboards. Business is sure to pick up, my boy. We are getting back East, where the public flocks to see a college play with a name like 'For Dear Old Yale.' How the devil could we expect to make a hit with it out West, unless we renamed it 'For Dear Old Chicago,' or 'For Dear Old Indiana State University'?"

Jim Stearns and Hector McGrath were listening to every word of this colloquy, and their ingenuous young faces betrayed emotions of disgust and resentment.

"Cincinnati was plastered all up with the posters of their rotten show," whispered Hector. "You remember them, don't you? The pictures were enough to make a Yale man sick—the cheapest kind of melodrama, a libel on the college. The Harvard coaches put up a job to drug our eleven, the night before the game; and, when this plot is foiled, they kidnap the Yale captain—and rot like that. I'll bet the sore-headed young man with the stogie is the brave *Jack Bruce,* captain of the Yale team. How do you like the looks of your double, Jim? Better introduce yourself. If you don't, I think I'll have to tell him who you are."

"I don't want to meet the cheap actor," growled the captain of the Yale eleven of the preceding season. "If he didn't look as if he were on his uppers, I'd like to punch his head. That show will never dare to come to New Haven. The college would mob it."

"There would be a riot, sure enough, if the fellows could see the poster of the campus scene," chuckled Hector. "The chorus of 'Yale men' pretends to be soused, and sings a drinking song, sitting on the fence at ten o'clock in the morning. Oh, it's great—so true

to college life! 'For Dear Old Yale!' Doesn't the name make you gag?"

"If we lay over in Altoona to-night, I'm going to see the show, Hector. That pretty girl in the other car can't be so bad. I suppose she is the heroine."

"Yep; and the football captain makes love to her through three acts, Jim. Maybe you can pick up some useful hints. Let's go back and tell the gang about it. Won't they just whoop at the chance to turn loose and play horse with this show. Come on! We must get to the theatre to-night, if we have to dig a tunnel through the snow."

They passed from the smoker into the adjoining day coach, and rapidly scanned the other members of the "For Dear Old Yale" company, who appeared to be even more unhappy and disheveled than were the young man of the plaid clothes and the self-satisfied person who had "fetched 'em in Terre Haute." The pretty girl was asleep, her blonde head pillowed upon an ulster.

Jim Stearns was sorry for her. She ought not to be one of this battered, God-forsaken band of players, skirting the edge of financial disaster, he thought; and, with a chivalrous impulse, he said to Hector:

"Don't put the crowd up to going to this show. If it is as bad as you picture it, they will raise Hades, from the minute the curtain goes up. I know it is a great chance to take a fall out of one of these fake college plays, and the very name of it is a red rag. But we don't want to spoil the record of the trip by kicking up a shindy."

"*Cherchez la femme,*" laughed Hector McGrath. "If we put the garrison to the sword, the women shall be spared. I perceive that the girl has you sitting up and taking notice; but we can't be balked of our prey. 'For Dear Old Yale' is fated to be ripped up the back, and Altoona will remember the show a good deal longer than it did our friend, *Sir Hamilton Ashmead.* Don't spoil the sport, Jim. You will thirst for your share of revenge, as soon as you see the Yale football captain on the stage."

Unwilling to expose himself to the ribald teasing of his comrades, yet inwardly uncomfortable because he did not take a firmer stand, Jim Stearns made another half-hearted protest, and decided to wait upon the tide of events. The young men of the glee club were in a more vivacious mood, by this time; and, amid a hubbub of talk and laughter, they bestirred themselves to make ready to invade Altoona for the night. The impetuous assistant manager, Hector McGrath, ever on the alert to find "something doing," lost no time in shouting, at the top of his voice:

"Free tickets to the theatre to-night! This is my personally conducted party. Front seats for all. We are bringing the company with us. Now, listen, and cheer like real 'rah-rah boys.' The name of the show is 'For Dear Old Yale.' Wouldn't that jar you some?"

"We won't do a thing to it."

"Oh, what a cinch!"

"And they said Altoona was slow!"

"We'll throw Jim Stearns on the stage, and let him play the hero."

"What do the girls look like?"

These, and other delighted rejoinders, were chorused from one end of the car to the other; while Hector beamed with the air of a dynamiter who, having lighted the fuse, awaits the explosion of the bomb with the most pleasurable anticipations. He was about to prod his friends to further uproar by outlining the heinous offenses of this foredoomed melodrama, when a brakeman pushed into the car, and shouted:

"Altoona it is, and you're welcome to dig your way out of the station, whenever you like. Your car will be at the upper end of the train shed, if you want to find it again to-night."

"Come along! Let's make a break for a hotel, and line up for supper," exhorted Jim Stearns.

The afternoon had darkened into wind-swept dusk, as the collegians trooped through the station and plunged into the street, whose gleaming ramparts of snow were being at-

tacked by brigades of shovelers. The pavement had been kept sufficiently clear to permit passage from one corner to the next; and the Yale invaders plowed their way along in high spirits, careless of the nipping air and the pelting flurries of snow. The hotel in which they sought shelter and clamored for food was swamped by their patronage; but they stormed the dining room in relays, and cajoled the waitresses into finding places for them.

Jim Stearns looked in vain for the luckless actors and the pretty leading lady. Apparently, they had sought quarters elsewhere. As his gaze roamed absently from one table to another, Hector McGrath nudged him, and said:

"Eyes in the boat, Jim. She is not here. The troupe is probably munching snowballs out in the bitter night, while she pawns her diamonds to buy a hot meal."

"Guy me as much as you like," hotly replied Jim, "but don't get gay with the girl when she comes on to-night. I wish you fellows would cut out going to the show. It won't do to have any rough house—you know that."

"Why, we are going to help the show along, you blockhead! Thirty-five tickets will get 'em on to the next town. I'll promise to try to keep things quiet, Jim, if you are really worried about it."

Alas, for Hector's praiseworthy resolution! He was in a mood for mischief; and in hearty accord with him were all the other effervescent undergraduates, out for a lark in a strange town. They tramped down an aisle of the almost empty theatre, and, with ominous decorum, sat in patience while the orchestra butchered a medley of Yale songs. A few townspeople trickled in behind them, and the gallery began to fill with a noisy company of more or less roughly dressed young men and boys, who had defied the weather, lured by the flaming "three sheets," which promised an evening of hair-raising melodrama. It was a beggarly house to play to, when the curtain went up, and the glee club sat glowering at the opening scene of "For Dear Old Yale."

Jim Stearns shut his eyes, and groaned. According to the programme, the first act took place in the "Yale training quarters." In a room, littered with boxing gloves, dumb bells, bottles of liniment, rolls of bandages, and so on, *Jack Bruce,* "captain of the varsity," was declaring to *Mike McCann,* the trainer:

"If the Harvards beat us to-morrow, dear old Yale is disgraced, and the girl I have loved for three long years will never speak to me again. The team is fit to fight for its life, but I fear foul play. Are you sure no spies are lurking about the quarters?"

"We'll eat 'em alive. I've bet me last dollar on you," said *Mike McCann,* who was an evil-looking person to be put in charge of young men sent to college from Christian homes. "The tip is straight. There is a plot on foot to cripple our team before the game, but the place is guarded night and day. S-s-sh! Here comes the boys. Not a word!"

"The boys" entered, to the number of four low-browed young men, monstrously padded in football clothes, and armored with nose guards and metal head protectors. Without the slightest excuse, they grouped themselves about their captain, and sang a song entitled: "We Are the Pride of Dear Old Yale."

With the greatest difficulty, the glee club held its emotions in check.

"Time for practice, boys," cried *Jack Bruce,* whose football make-up could not hide the fact that he was round-shouldered and a trifle knock-kneed. "It is the last practice, remember. The college expects you to do your duty. Three cheers for Yale."

The boys brayed dutifully, and clinched their fists, as though sighting "the Harvards" from afar off. It was such a wretched, scandalous caricature of a cheer that Hector McGrath could keep still no longer. Jumping upon his chair and waving his arms, he yelled:

"Show 'em how! Three times three! *Now!*"

Rhythmic, stentorian, explosive, a genuine Yale cheer was volleyed from almost twoscore lusty throats. It filled the theatre with a reëchoing din, and startled the actors, as though a battery of field pieces had been fired at them from the orchestra. *Jack Bruce* forgot his lines, and stood staring from the shambling group of his comrades. So taken aback were they by the vocal eruption, that it was plain to see that they were not aware of the presence of the Yale glee club. As suddenly as the interruption had occurred, it subsided, and the two rows of youths down in front sat in demure silence, waiting for the play to go on. *Jack Bruce* blinked across the footlights, stammered, wavered, and then made his exit, his nerves considerably shaken.

"Be good. Here comes the girl," commanded Jim Stearns, as *Nelly Hemmingway,* daughter of the Greek professor, entered timidly, made sure that she was alone with *Mike McCann,* and confided the details of the Harvard conspiracy, which she had learned by a singular chance. In a simple white gown, she looked so fresh and girlish, and her demeanor was so unaffected, that Jim Stearns sighed like a furnace, and thought her far more attractive even than when he had seen her in the train. He felt a pang of mild, yet genuine, jealousy, when she told the trainer:

"Not a word to your captain—promise me that. It would never do to excite him just before the great game. But I shall not sleep to-night unless you can promise me that no harm will befall him."

"The pie-faced, pigeon-toed mucker! She ought not to waste a minute on him," muttered Jim to himself. "But, unless I have this gang of ours sized up wrong, he will get what is coming to him, before the show ends."

So long as *Nelly Hemmingway* was on the stage, or when her bevy of "school friends" and her comedy "maiden aunt" appeared, the behavior of the collegians was flawless, and their applause unstinted. Trouble began to brew, however, when *Bob Nolan,* the bookmaker, took a hand in the plot. He was the egotistical gentleman who had aroused the ire of Stearns and McGrath in the smoker, and he pervaded the play as the villain subsidized by the Harvard coaches to "do up" the Yale captain and his team. The glee club disliked *Bob Nolan* with unanimous enthusiasm. His rôle was a grotesque slander upon the fair name of Yale's ancient and honorable foe, and his swollen vanity was an added provocation.

He was in the midst of a calcium-lighted scene with *Mike McCann,* the loyal trainer who refused to be bribed, when, at a signal, the glee club arose as one man, and chanted solemnly, in unison:

"Where did you get that face? If it hurts you, why not take it off, Mr. Robert Nolan!"

Refusing to finish the scene, *Nolan* carried his obnoxious face into the wings, and clamorously demanded that the manager of the theatre quell the rioters by calling in the police. The gallery gods were siding with the collegians to the extent of yelling that the play proceed, and the manager, after surveying the scene, preferred to try diplomacy before resorting to arms. His persuasions, and the reappearance of fair *Nelly Hemmingway,* helped to preserve order until the second act.

When the Yale campus, sacred fence and all, was profaned by a band of alleged students, who sang: "Bright College Years" in various stages of maudlin intoxication, and the football captain openly bet on his own team, even Jim Stearns was moved to righteous wrath.

That Altoona audience never knew how *Jack Bruce* was kidnapped by the Harvards, and how he escaped in the nick of time, to win the game. It was Hector McGrath who cut the melodrama short by seizing the dramatic moment, and shouting to his allies:

"Come on, fellows! Let's chase those muckers off the campus. It's a howling disgrace to let them sit on the fence. Up, guards, and at 'em!"

In any other circumstances, this in-

sane suggestion would have been hooted down. The place and the motive conspired to make these usually reputable young men ripe for any folly, and they ardently desired satisfaction for what they viewed as an insult to their college. With a gleeful war cry, they followed Hector McGrath over the front row of seats, pell-mell among the amazed musicians, who dropped their instruments and scuttled beneath the stage for cover. Turning to one side, to skirt the end of the footlights, Hector vaulted upon the stage, and after him streamed the Yale glee club, Jim Stearns lagging in the rear, much concerned for the fate of *Nelly Hemmingway*.

The hero, villain, and lesser lights of "For Dear Old Yale" tarried not. Outnumbered as they were, flight was no disgrace. Heavy-footed *Bob Nolan,* pompous to the last, stood his ground, and would fain have stayed the onslaught with a burst of extempore eloquence, but he, too, gave way and fled, leaving a coat tail in the grasp of Hector McGrath. Halting at the fence, the attacking column turned to face the audience, and cheered with spectacular effect.

Hector was at a loss to know what to do next, when Jim Stearns, who had been making a sally behind the scenery, ran back to announce:

"The manager is telephoning for a wagon load of police. Get out of this —quick!"

The triumphant undergraduates started to retreat by the route of their advance; but by this time the emotional horde in the gallery had decided that matters were going entirely too far. They were willing to permit a certain amount of foolery, as so much added entertainment; but when it came to spoiling the show entirely, something had to be done about it. Whereupon, they came clattering downstairs, *en masse,* with the intention of clearing the stage as promptly as possible. Hector McGrath's punitive expedition found its retreat cut off by a buzzing mob of very determined-looking railroad hands, and other muscular patrons of the drama, who showed great willingness to engage at close quarters—the closer the better.

Jim Stearns, no longer a laggard, was looked to as the natural leader in this awkward situation. He was spoiling for a fight; but he had no seasoned band of picked football players to follow him in a hammer-and-tongs rush to gain the front exit. A glee club, however plucky, was hardly a match for these embattled sons of Altoona, who were no more than a dozen yards away, when he yelled to his friends to run for the stage door and escape as best they could.

There was a helter-skelter scramble back upon the stage, and the glee club sifted into the wings, and scampered hither and yon to find the exits. Jim Stearns, disgusted with the situation, doggedly hung back, from a sense of duty, to act as a rear guard. Hector McGrath ran to him, and insisted on sharing the post of danger.

"Make a sneak, you little fool!" said Jim. "One of those big huskies would make two bites of you."

Just then, a brawny miner leaped over a chair and swung a fist, which Jim Stearns parried, while Hector ducked behind him. Anxious to protect his comrade, whose courage far outmatched his physique, Jim closed with his assailant, floored him with two herculean punches, and began stubbornly to retreat. Catching up a heavy stool, he whirled it viciously, and kept a path clear, while Hector scurried on ahead.

When they stumbled out into a gloomy alley, Jim was dizzy from a blow behind the ear, and nursing a set of bleeding knuckles. In silence, they ran heavily through soft snow until they were sure that pursuit had ceased. Then Stearns observed bitterly:

"I hope I never get mixed up with such a pack of idiots again! You and the whole crowd make me tired. A fine, sandy lot you are! It took a lot of nerve to chase a bunch of bum actors off the stage, didn't it? What if they did give a rotten show? They couldn't help it. Now, where is that

hotel? I want to go to bed and forget it."

Hector was silent. Perhaps these reproaches were deserved. He had been the ringleader. In the light of Jim's censure, it didn't seem like such good sport, after all. However, there was no mending matters, and sulkily the two trudged along, until Jim said:

"You had better find Moffett, and collect the crowd, and steer them down to the car for the night. If you don't, they will be racketing around town till all hours, and stirring up trouble in the hotel, and, most likely, getting into rows with some of those toughs who came after our scalps in the theatre. Altoona looks like a hornet's nest to me, thanks to your asinine conduct."

They found Moffett, the glee club manager, in the hotel office; and he promptly agreed with Jim Stearns. With much difficulty, the exuberant college songbirds were corralled, and herded toward the railroad station, after one or two minor collisions with irate groups of homeward-bound gallery gods. Having driven the unruly flock into the car, Moffett and Hector McGrath counted noses, and discovered that two freshmen were missing.

Fearing lest they might have fallen foul of the police, Jim Stearns suggested: "You stay here, Moffett, and take charge of things; and Hector and I will run uptown and look for the kids."

As the searching party of two sallied into night, Hector observed, with returning cheerfulness:

"We ought to have a Saint Bernard dog, with a neat little rum cask strapped under his chin, Jim. That's the proper way to rescue lost pilgrims in snowdrifts like this. I move we investigate the restaurants. Those two freshmen don't drink, but they are confirmed victims of the eating habit."

For Hector, the advice was unusually sane; and after two "cafés" and an "oyster house" had been investigated, the missing freshmen were discovered in an alcove of the "Little Delmonico," playing havoc with a platter of steak and onions. Demanding an extra plate, Jim calmly helped himself. Hector followed suit, and the baffled freshmen meekly ordered more provender. Loath to leave this warm and cozy retreat and face the bitter cold, the quartette lingered, to smoke and talk about the evening's episodes.

Jim Stearns commanded a view of the front door, from which his companions were screened by the partition of the alcove in the rear of the room; and, while he chatted, he idly watched the patrons of the place drift in and out. The two freshmen were matching coins to decide who should foot the bill, when Jim looked up from this diverting gamble, and saw the luckless *Jack Bruce* push back the door and hold it open for *Nelly Hemmingway* and the comedy maiden aunt, who was down on the bills as *Miss Agatha Trumbull.* Behind them stalked ponderous *Bob Nolan,* grand even in disaster, frowning as though lost in thought.

They sought a table near the stove, and, with some perturbation, Jim Stearns whispered to his friends:

"'For Dear Old Yale' is getting ready to feed, just beyond the partition. If you want to introduce yourselves, go ahead. They'll be delighted to meet you—not. I wouldn't blame them if they put you in jail. I don't want them to see me in such disgraceful company."

"Is the pretty girl out there?" murmured Hector. "Now is your chance to make a grand-stand play and repudiate us. Go ahead. We won't butt in."

Jim flushed, scowled, and put a finger to his lips.

Bob Nolan was saying, in his declamatory fashion: "Youth is cruel and thoughtless, my boy. One does not learn to feel for others until he himself has lived and suffered. Those college lads, who ruined our performance, did not regard us as human beings, seeking honestly to earn our bed and board under conditions of the most damnable adversity. We were material for a joke, nothing more. Our play was not true to life as they knew it.

But you and I neither wrote nor staged the wretched play."

"Which balderdash doesn't hide the fact that they acted like hoodlums, and that it was the climax of our infernal luck to have a crowd of Yale cubs stranded in Altoona to-night," grumbled *Jack Bruce.* "How are we going to get out of town to-morrow? That's the real issue. This town isn't a frost —it's an iceberg."

"Such nice-looking boys, too. Wasn't it a shame!" said *Miss Agatha Trumbull,* smiling in spite of herself; and *Nelly Hemmingway* added, with a musical giggle which delighted Jim Stearns: "It *was* funny when they cheered and guyed our friend, the villain. They were courteous to me; so I can't be very angry with them."

This was, indeed, heaping coals of fire upon the scampish heads of the eavesdroppers beyond the partition; and Hector McGrath, already uneasy in the region of his conscience, whispered to Jim:

"Do you really suppose they are flat broke? They don't seem to bank on their manager pulling them out of the hole. And they certainly are white and decent, to talk about us that way."

"You are the head devil of the lot. I'm glad you do feel mean about it," was Jim's unsatisfactory reply. "What hurts me is to hear that absurd old bag of wind, the villain, excuse us on the ground that we didn't treat them as human beings. He's right, Hector. I wish you fellows had the sand to do the square thing, and walk right up, and apologize for the crowd. Hanged if I don't do it alone, if you won't back me."

"Couldn't we pass around the hat in our car?" queried an abashed freshman, who took his cue from the great Jim Stearns, captain of the eleven. If this demigod of the campus wished to make reparation, he was ready to chip in his last dollar.

"No, I can find a better way. These people are not beggars," snorted Jim, in high dudgeon; whereupon the freshman felt himself unutterably squelched. Hector stared at the table, and was evidently wrestling with a painful problem. Jim glowered at the wall; and the other freshman, who had not been annihilated, waited timorously to side with the majority.

The deciding voice was that of *Nelly Hemmingway,* who quavered, with a forlorn little sigh: "So the show is going to pieces in Altoona, of all places —and in a blizzard, at that! It's very bad walking to New York, isn't it?"

"Well, it isn't going to pieces, and I'm going to apologize for what we did to it!" declared Jim Stearns, in a voice that could have been heard across the street. With that, he kicked his chair aside, strode from the alcove, and confronted the downhearted derelicts of "For Dear Old Yale."

Poor *Bob Nolan* gaped like a fish, threw up an arm, as if to fend off an assault, and sat staring up at the tall, commanding figure of the real Yale football captain, who felt awkward and hesitant as he stammered:

"I beg your pardon, but my name is Stearns. I am awfully sorry about the row in the theatre to-night. So are the rest of the fellows. That is"—honest Jim blushed, fidgeted, and went on —"I hope they are. We didn't realize —I mean, they didn't know how unsuccessful your tour had been, and— and—the play is pretty bad, you know. It gives a wrong idea of Yale, and the fellows took it as a personal insult."

Jack Bruce looked up, with sullen anger in his tired eyes; but he was disarmed by the frank demeanor of this humble pleader for forgiveness, and checked the hot words that were at his tongue's end. *Bob Nolan,* ever theatrical, was pleased with the "situation," and, gathering his wits, arose, with a courtly bow, and extended his hand to Jim, with the orotund greeting:

"The quality of mercy is not strained, my dear boy. Far be it from me to spurn the impulse of an honest heart. Bygones are bygones."

Jim grinned as he shook the veteran actor's hand; but his eyes were for *Nelly Hemmingway,* who may have been moved to forget any grudges of

her own by the fact that Jim Stearns was considered the best-looking man of his class. With a kindling interest mirrored in her fine eyes, she said:

"But why are you the scapegoat, Mr. Stearns? I saw you trying to quiet the others and make them behave themselves."

Jim looked behind him, as though expecting a real culprit or two to reenforce him. Hector McGrath could play the laggard no longer, and with a shamefaced demeanor he emerged from hiding, followed by the brace of freshmen. Inasmuch as Hector's emotions and convictions were ever impatient of halfway measures, he was volubly repentant, and ready to eat any amount of humble pie, as he announced to the company:

"Here is the real villain of the plot, the blackest sinner of the crowd. I thoroughly dislike myself; and you are welcome to throw dishes at me, put me to the torture, or ring up a patrol wagon. As for these two freshmen with me, spanking is too good for them; and you may begin whenever you like. What else do you want me to say, Jim?"

Jack Bruce smiled in a sickly way, and said: "It is very decent of you, I'm sure. Mr. Stearns looks strong enough to do the spanking. I'm willing to leave it to him."

"He is captain of the Yale eleven, and stroke oar of the crew," cheerily returned Hector, with the light of mischief in his eye.

"Oh-h!" said *Jack Bruce,* who looked as if he would like to crawl under the table; while the girl was wicked enough to laugh at his discomfiture.

Jim Stearns put his hands in his pockets, and shifted his feet, as though he did not know what to do next; but Hector was boiling with eagerness to express some kind of concrete sympathy, and spoke up:

"I have an idea. When one of those things hits me, it cries for action. There must be something doing. Sit down, freshmen, and twirl your thumbs. Thank you—I will have a chair, if you don't mind. Ho, waiter! Fetch me the wine card. Now, as a repentant blackguard and disturber of the peace, it is distinctly up to me to get busy and organize a strategy board. We put your company out of business, and 'For Dear Old Yale' has something coming to it. What I propose doing, in behalf of the Yale glee club, is——"

Hector stopped in full flight; for the front door was banged open, and there entered *Mr. Mike McCann,* followed by a red-faced, truculent-looking gentleman in a long gray ulster, and a massive-looking individual, conspicuous for a blue uniform, many brass buttons, and a cap, lettered "Chief." As they tramped toward the table, the good-hearted *Bob Nolan* whispered to Jim Stearns:

"The beefy party is Hoskins, the manager of the show. He is bad medicine, my boy. You'd better duck upstage."

There was no time for "ducking." Mr. Hoskins and *Mike McCann,* exploding simultaneously, mingled their denunciations, as follows:

"Here's the very lad that put the show on the bum!"

"You thought you'd bluff it out, you gay little Willie boys, did you?"

"What do you think of the gall of 'em, anyhow?"

"Here, chief—do your duty. Pinch the lot, and I'll appear against them in the morning. What the hell are our people doing with 'em? You can count on 'em as witnesses."

The chief of police of Altoona was hanging back, as though in doubt. He pulled at his gray mustache, and Jim Stearns could have sworn that he winked at him. However, his duty was plain enough; the offenders had been guilty of disorderly conduct, riot, and attempted assault, and there was no lack of complainants.

Hector McGrath was flabbergasted by this tragic shift of events; and it was the more mature and masterful Jim Stearns who pulled himself together to meet the crisis. Even the belligerent manager subsided as the square-jawed football leader towered above him and said:

"This won't do. You look to me like a rank four-flusher. You're sore because your show is no good. We haven't made you lose a dollar, and you know it. You ought to be jailed for putting such a cheap and nasty counterfeit of Yale College on the road. Your own people, here, will tell you that we have apologized and are ready to do the square thing—not because we have to, but because we are sorry for failing to be gentlemen to-night. Now, if you will shut up and cool off, I will talk it over with the rest of our crowd, and persuade them to help your show, somehow, before we leave town. We can't run away. You will find our car in the station, first thing in the morning. If you want to fight it to a finish, I guess we can hire lawyers enough to give you a run for your money."

The chief of police laid hold of Mr. Hoskins, and led him into an alcove, as though desirous of arranging a truce. *Nelly Hemmingway* softly clapped her hands, and bestowed upon the valiant Jim so brilliant a glance of admiration that he forgot to watch for the dimple when she smiled. *Bob Nolan* thumped himself on the chest, and hoarsely assured Jim:

"You were right in the spotlight that time, my boy. I couldn't have carried it off better myself. It would have done credit to my rôle of *Sir Hamilton Ashmead,* when he defies *The Duke.* Unless I sadly err, you have put a crimp in our unpleasant friend Hoskins."

Hector McGrath was sagaciously eying the chief of police, who was nodding a series of emphatic negatives to the protestations of the manager, as though unwilling to lug the miscreants off to jail. *Mike McCann* had been unable to resist the enticement of a glass of champagne and a cigar not made in Pittsburg, and was beginning to temper his wrath. It was the psychological moment for making a swift retreat, and Hector pointed at the door. Jim Stearns muttered assent, and kicked the freshmen's legs. As one man, the quartette clattered from the restaurant with fleeting farewells, in dumb show, to their friends of "For Dear Old Yale."

Losing no time in a forced march to the glee-club car, they found Moffett, their manager, and a wakeful group of comrades, mildly dissipating over bottled beer, pretzels, and cheese, and most melodiously declaring, in long-drawn close harmony: "I am selling kindling wood to get along."

They were about to assert their melodious praise of a certain "Little Old Red Shawl," when Jim Stearns rudely ended the concert by delivering a concise narrative of the adventure in the restaurant, Hector chiming in with sundry lively embellishments. Finally, Jim declared, with much earnestness:

"I've called off the manager and the police, and we can make a sneak in the morning, if the snow blockade is broken. But the row is going to get into the newspapers, and it will be copied far and wide, and it will queer the glee club. But, more than that, we owe these people something. They have acted like trumps. You ought to have seen them, broke and discouraged, yet trying to excuse us for behaving like young ruffians. It put a lump in my throat—honest, it did!—to hear that seedy, pompous old *Bob Nolan* telling me, as brave and fine as could be, that 'bygones were bygones,' because we were not old enough to know better."

"Well, what about it? I think you are dead right," said Moffett; and the other singers murmured: "Same here."

Hector, who had been fidgeting with impatience, made haste to answer: "If you will agree to stay here to-morrow, I will tell you what I want to do. And it is a corker of a scheme! The club has made a pile of money on the trip. We planned to lay over in New York for Sunday, and it means paying for the car only another day. If the crowd won't stand for that, hanged if I won't dig it up out of my own pocket."

"We won't kick about that part of it, if your campaign looks good, Hector," said Moffett. "Fire away."

Thus encouraged, Hector began to

talk with great animation; and, one by one, the sleeping songsters awoke, and crawled from their berths, to furnish an applauding chorus, clad in pajamas of many vivid hues. Hector's eloquence took them by storm, and his programme was so singularly entertaining and original that indorsement was noisily unanimous. At length, he turned to Jim Stearns, and said, in conclusion:

"It's only one o'clock, and I'm going to chase up to find the morning newspaper offices. We can catch the editors in time to tone down the story of the ruction, and give them a red-hot sensation to take its place. Of course, we haven't consulted the 'For Dear Old Yale' people; but they will fall over themselves to agree to it."

Next day, Altoona, released from the grip of the blizzard, found something to talk about in the theatrical news. After reading the newspaper announcements, they found further diversion in scanning the emblazoned posters, which shouted from every store window and billboard. The mayor, the chief of police, and other prominent citizens were personally interviewed by the indefatigable Hector Alonzo McGrath, and given tickets for boxes. The editors had so tactfully glossed over the account of the riot in the theatre that it appeared to be part of the bold and novel undertaking. As a result of the combined endeavors of the pacified Mr. Hoskins and the enterprising young men of the Yale glee club, the house was packed, and the "Standing Room Only" sign hung out, shortly after eight o'clock in the evening.

The curious audience found the first page of the programme filled with the following announcement:

FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY!

The Great College Melodrama, FOR DEAR OLD YALE, is presented by its own company, supported by the Yale Glee Club and the real athletic heroes of the Yale campus. Captain James Montgomery Stearns, of the championship eleven which defeated Harvard and Princeton last season, will make a special appearance in one scene as *Jack Bruce*, who takes this part in the play.

In the great scene depicting the Yale campus and the famous fence, the chorus of college students will be played by the full strength of the genuine Yale glee club, nearly forty in number, who will sing the famous songs with which they have delighted splendid audiences during their present tour of thousands of miles in their own private car.

In the realistic football scene of the last act, when the students carry the victorious heroes from the field upon their shoulders, the players will be genuine Yale gladiators of the gridiron arena, who have worn the dark blue in battling for the fame of their college.

"That last statement is a bit strong," said Hector to Jim Stearns, as they waited in a dingy dressing room under the stage. "But I played football for a week in junior year, before the varsity captain fired me from the squad. Williamson was a substitute on your team; and McArthur captained the freshman eleven. How is your nerve? Your final rehearsal this afternoon was all to the good. Lucky you don't have any lines to speak when you have the desperate struggle with the kidnappers. Too bad you can't do the final scene with *Nelly Hemmingway*, where she throws her arms around Jack Bruce's manly neck and kisses him—bing!—right on his noble countenance."

"You're too fresh," said Jim, and no make-up was needed to give his cheek a ruddy glow. "Say, Hector, this is more fun than a barrel of monkeys. Old *Bob Nolan* had tears in his eyes when he grabbed me by both hands, after sizing up the audience."

"They will have no tears to spare after seeing you act, Jim. Come along. There goes the curtain bell. I hope our gang of Indians won't get funny and try too many original stunts."

To this day, Altoona talks about the "all-star" performance of "For Dear Old Yale." What mattered it if the actors jumbled their lines and mislaid their cues? The crudely exaggerated melodrama was brought into focus, made genuine in its appeal, and pervaded with the spirit of youth, by the presence of these rampant undergraduates, who did not try to act, but were merely themselves. They appeared on the stage when least expected, and made a shifting background.

"Specialties" were introduced as the humor prompted. A sophomore who had won fame in college theatricals came on as an "old-clo' man," whose Hebraic personality and extraordinary dialect had been familiar to the Yale campus for a dozen years. He drove *Bob Nolan* to distraction by dogging his steps, in a vain effort to buy his flashy raiment for: "Two-fifty—not a cent more, so help me!"

Moffett, the glee-club manager, shuffled on as Julius Cæsar Jones, the venerable colored mascot of Yale athletics, and insisted on playing a scene from "Uncle Tom's Cabin," with *Nellie Hemmingway* as *Little Eva.* Now and then, the glee club strolled in, sang a rollicking chorus or two, and called the villain names.

The action somehow proceeded, without a breakdown, until two freshman and a junior proposed to *Nellie Hemmingway* while *Jack Bruce* was trying to tell her the story of his love. The long-suffering hero became peevish, and Jim Stearns came to the rescue by leading a party which grabbed the suitors bodily and hurled them off the stage.

The gallery was as friendly as it had been hostile the night before. There were such clamorous cries for the "real football captain" that Jim Stearns was compelled to share the curtain calls with *Jack Bruce.* In the kidnapping scene, his prowess was so formidable that, when the villain's henchmen tried to overpower him, he made a headlong diving tackle, caught the nearest assailant above the knees, and propelled him, smash! into the footlights—and together they slid down among the musicians, with a discordant crash. The kidnapper was plucked from the ruins of the bass drum, and welcomed to the stage amid frantic cheers by the delighted glee club.

"You're due to be kidnapped, you lunatic!" yelled Hector McGrath, as Jim was about to sail into the terrified conspirators with ardor renewed.

"Give 'em hell! You can lick the pack of 'em!" roared the top gallery. "You're the real thing!"

Jim surrendered, was neatly bound and gagged, and carted off to "a lonely barn on the outskirts of Bridgeport," while his comrades sang:

> I don't know where I'm goin',
> But I'm on my way.

When the little group of students were disclosed, lounging along the wooden fence, with a row of ivy-clad dormitories on the back drop, the audience was quick to respond to the unique appeal of the scene. These were unmistakably undergraduates, trousers turned up, cloth caps cocked on their heads, hands in pockets—a careless, wholesome, boyish company, with never a care in the world.

After the tangles had been unraveled and virtue was triumphant, the glee club added a tableau of its own. Crowding around *Nelly Hemmingway,* they pelted her with roses, for which Jim Stearns had scouted far and wide, and sang to her alone:

> How can I bear to leave thee?
> One parting kiss I give thee,
> And then, whate'er befalls me,
> I'll go where duty calls me.
> Farewell, farewell, my own true love—
> Farewell, farewell, my own true love!

In genuine confusion, the girlish actress escaped as soon as she could; but, turning as she fled, she wafted kisses with both hands to her gallant admirers. The curtain fell, and the collegians trooped toward the stage-door exit.

Jim Stearns and Hector McGrath lingered to look for the jubilant Hoskins, who fairly fell upon their necks, and bellowed:

"It was the greatest ever! Box-office receipts broke all records for Altoona. You're thoroughbreds—God bless you! 'For Dear Old Yale' is on velvet, and we all feel like blubbering for joy. You've made some friends that'll never forget you."

"It wasn't so much what you did for us, as the way you did it," tremulously observed *Bob Nolan,* feeling for a handkerchief.

Jim Stearns smiled, with an emotion of honest affection for these grate-

ful actor folk, and said, as he shook hands: "It was the best we could do, but no more than we ought to do. Our car will be hitched to the New York express that goes through at midnight; so I guess this is good-by. If you come to New Haven, we will give you another good time."

He moved toward the door, reluctant to depart without saying good-by to *Nelly Hemmingway*. Perhaps she desired to see the Yale football captain again; for she happened to be standing at the top of the stairs that led down to the dressing rooms.

"I—I don't know your right name, *Miss Hemmingway*," said Jim. "Anyhow, I want to say good-by—and, if it isn't too cheeky, I'll say something else. I wish I were the stage football captain, instead of the real Yale captain. My scene on the stage wasn't nearly long enough. It was a blessing of a blizzard that gave me a chance to meet you."

She gazed up at his clean-cut, resolute face, and smiled—a little wistfully. Honest and tender were those frank gray eyes of his; alight with a passing fancy, perhaps, but nevertheless disquieting. Her slim fingers toyed nervously with a ribbon of the white frock in which she had played the part of a professor's daughter.

"It has given me sincere pleasure to know you, Mr. Stearns," she said, with feeling in her voice to make the reply more than a commonplace. "You will have a better opinion of us poor player folk, won't you? Thanks to you and your friends, Altoona will stay bright in my memory. Tell them good-by for me, please."

"But I don't want it to be good-by for me," murmured Jim. "I can't let it be good-by. Won't you let me write to you, and——"

She started, and bade him hush, with a quick, appealing gesture. Jim turned, to follow her gaze. *Jack Bruce* was coming toward them—by no means a heroic figure, even in his football make-up. Jim stole a glance at the girl, and fancied that her mobile face had clouded. Before *Jack Bruce*, the stage lover, had addressed them, she said quickly to Jim, as if it were better to have done with what must be told him:

"My husband will want to thank you, too. I am Mrs. Walter Jeffrey, off the stage."

"*Jack Bruce* is your husband!" gasped Jim. "I will be—— Oh, certainly, Mrs. Jeffrey! I shall be delighted to say good-by to him, too."

As one in a trance, Jim Stearns managed to speak a few words of perfunctory greeting; and, not daring to look at the silent girl, he clasped her offered hand, which lingered in his for an instant, and bowed gravely, as he murmured:

"I beg your pardon. But what is said, is said."

As he hurried from the theatre, Hector McGrath overtook him, and remarked, as they turned into the street:

"I was watching you from the doorway, Jim. Did you do anything foolish? When will the wedding bells ring out? I thought I was going to carry you back to New Haven, unscathed, this trip."

"She is married to that bum actor, *Jack Bruce*," gloomily replied the other. "Um-m! By Jingo, she *did* look sorry to have me go! I'll swear to it."

"I don't doubt it, Jim. They all do. But that isn't what we have tarried in Altoona for, after all. Think of the fun we have had, and the good we've done. Now, it's back to the good old campus, and hurrah for dear old Yale. 'Ships that pass in the night, my boy,' as *Bob Nolan* would say."

Jim strode onward, in meditative silence, while Hector hummed aloud:

> When I was a student at Cadiz,
> I played on the Spanish guitar;
> I used to make love to the ladies——

Jim Stearns flung his arm across his companion's shoulder, and cried, with his old heartiness:

"Right you are! And aren't you glad we were marooned in Altoona? We have played square, and helped some folks that were down and out. And, after all, that is a good deal more worth while than the girl proposition."

The Red House on Rowan Street

By Roman Doubleday

Author of "The Hemlock Avenue Mystery," Etc.

It is not often that a writer can be depended upon to excel his best effort, especially when that work has become justly famous in a short space of time. Therefore, when we received this story from Roman Doubleday, we started to read it with the knowledge that it would be a good story, but with little hope that it would measure up to "The Hemlock Avenue Mystery," which met with tremendous success, not only when it ran as a three-part story in the "Popular," but also in book form. But we were pleasantly surprised. "The Red House on Rowan Street" is a bigger story than the other, with one of the most unusual plots ever conceived, and with a mystery that seems absolutely insoluble.

CHAPTER I.

HATE AT FIRST SIGHT.

WHEN Hugh Burton stepped from the train at High Ridge, he wondered—in his ignorance of the events that were about to engage him—whether he would not be able to catch a return train that evening. He had no desire to linger in this half-grown town on the western edge of civilization one minute longer than his fool errand demanded. He called it a "fool errand" every time he thought of his mission. That he, who had secretly prided himself on the "disengaged" attitude which he had always maintained toward life, should have consented to come halfway across the continent to hunt up a Miss Leslie Underwood, whom he had never met, and ask her if she would not be so kind as to reconsider her refusal to marry Philip Overman—because Philip was really taking it very hard, don't you know, and particularly because Philip's mother would be quite distracted if the boy should carry out his threat to enlist and go to the Philippines—oh, Lord, he must have had some unsuspected idiot among his ancestors! Did Rachel Overman know how heavily she was drawing on his friendship?

An Indian woman, sitting on the stone steps of the railway station, made him realize how near the edge of civilization, in very truth, he had come. There was, he remembered, a reservation for Indians on the northern border of the State. It could not be very far from High Ridge. With her bright shawl about her shoulders, and her beadwork and baskets spread about her, the woman made a picturesque spot in the sunshine. At another time Burton would have stopped to examine her wares, for among his other dilettante pursuits was an interest in Indian basketry; but in his present impatient mood he would have pushed past with a mere glance, had it not been for one of those queer little incidents that we call accidental. A man who was coming down the steps that Burton was about to ascend passed near the black-eyed squaw, and she looked up, with smiling recognition, and laid her hand arrestingly upon his coat. But he was not in a responsive mood. He gave her a black

look, and struck her hand away with such impatience and violence that a pile of her upset baskets rolled down the steps and over the platform at Burton's feet. At once he stepped in front of the man, who was hurrying heedlessly on.

"Pick them up. You knocked them over," he said quietly.

The man gathered up one or two, with instinctive obedience to a positive order, before he realized what he was doing. Then he straightened up, and glared wrathfully at his self-appointed overseer.

"What the devil have you got to say about it?" he asked.

"What I did say."

"You mind your own infernal business!" the man cried, and, flinging the baskets in his hand at Burton's feet, he rushed on.

Burton beckoned a porter, who gathered up and restored the woman's scattered merchandise. For himself, he walked on toward the booth marked "Bureau of Information," and wondered what had possessed him to make him act so out of character. Why hadn't he called the porter in the first instance, if he felt it to be his affair? Something in the man's brutality had aroused a corresponding passion in himself. It was a case of hate at first sight; and he rejoiced that, at any rate, he had declared himself, and had put the uncivilized paleface into a humiliating rage.

The particular information of which he stood in immediate need was Leslie Underwood's address. He opened the city directory, and turned to the U's. There were a dozen Underwoods—a baker, a banker, a coal heaver, a doctor, a merchant. Where did Miss Leslie belong?

"Have you a blue book?" he asked the lazy-looking attendant.

"Naw."

"Anything with ladies' addresses—a society list, you know?"

"Naw."

"I want to get the address of Miss Leslie Underwood," Burton went on, with grim patience. "And I don't want to waste time. Can you suggest how I can find it?"

The attendant had tipped down his tilted-up chair so abruptly that it cracked. He was looking at Burton with lively curiosity and amusement.

"You a friend of Doctor Underwood's?"

"Miss Underwood belongs to the doctor's family, then, does she?"

"Sure. You coming to visit, or are you going to write him up?"

"I didn't know this was a bureau to extract information," Burton remarked, as he made a note of the doctor's home address from the directory. "What is there to write up about Doctor Underwood?"

"Aw, you think I'm green!"

"No—merely ill-mannered," said Burton politely, as he turned away.

Outside, a row of cabmen, toeing an imaginary line, waved their whips frantically over it to attract his attention. He selected the nearest.

"Do you know where Doctor Underwood lives?"

The man held Burton's suit case suspended in midair, while he honored its owner with the same look of amused curiosity. "Sure. The Red House, they call it, on Rowan Street. Take you there?"

"No. Take me to the best hotel in town," said Burton, coolly stepping into the cab.

Why the mischief did everybody grin at the mention of Doctor Underwood's name? Burton was conscious of being in an irritable state of mind; but still it could not be altogether his sensitiveness that made him hear innuendoes everywhere. What sort of people were the Underwoods, anyhow? Philip had met Miss Underwood in Washington, and had fallen crazily in love—after a fashion he had. Hadn't he been crazy about Ellice Avery, a year before? But this time he had emphasized the depths of his despair by falling ill of a low fever when his suit failed to prosper.

Beyond the fact that the girl was "an angel," "a dream," and other things of the same insubstantial order, Burton had little knowledge to go upon. The

family might be the laughingstock of High Ridge, for all he knew. When a boy of twenty-two fell crazily in love, he didn't think about such matters; but Rachel, who, in a panic over her boy, had hurried him off to intercede with the cold-hearted damsel, would, as he well knew, hold him personally responsible for the consequences of his unwelcome mission, if they should prove to be unpleasant. Well, he would have to put in his time thinking up something to demand of Rachel that would be hard enough to even up scores a little.

It was with deliberate intention that he said to the hotel clerk, after he had registered: "How far is it to Doctor Underwood's house?"

The clerk looked up with the sudden awakening of curiosity that Burton had expected, then glanced at the registered name.

"You want his office?"

"No. His home."

"It's out on Rowan Street, not very far from here. Know the doctor?"

"No. I'm a stranger here. Is he a regular physician?"

"Oh, yes."

"In practice?"

"When he gets any."

"Is there anything peculiar about him?"

The clerk permitted himself a languid smile. "There is nothing about him that isn't peculiar. Have you seen the morning paper?"

"Not any of your local papers."

"I'll find one for you. Did you want lunch?"

"Yes." Burton gave his order, and went to the room assigned to him, where he made himself as presentable as possible for his proposed call on Miss Underwood.

When he returned to the dining room, he found a newspaper by his plate, folded so as to bring out the headline:

DOCTOR UNDERWOOD DENIES.

Under this appeared the following card:

To Whom It May Concern: Having been informed that there is a report abroad to the effect that, as a masked highwayman, I robbed Mr. Orton Selby on Crescent Terrace last Friday evening, I beg to state to my friends and the public that the report is without foundation in fact. I never robbed Mr. Selby or any one else, either as a masked highwayman or as an attending physician; and I defy anybody and everybody to prove anything to the contrary.

Roger Underwood, M. D.

Burton read the card several times while the waiter was placing his order before him. The hour was late, and the dining room practically deserted; but Burton saw the clerk through the doorway, and beckoned to him. He sauntered in, with an amused smile, and leaned against the window while Burton questioned him.

"This is the most extraordinary announcement I ever saw in my life. Are people in High Ridge in the habit of publishing cards of this sort?"

"Doctor Underwood is rather original in his methods."

"I should judge so. What does he mean by this? Surely there is nothing to connect him with a highway robbery?"

"Well—there has been some gossip."

"You really mean that? Why, what sort of a man is Doctor Underwood? I wish you would tell me about him. I am entirely ignorant, but I have some business in hand involving some friends of mine and of his, and I'd like to know what I am up against."

"Well, there's a good deal of talk about the doctor and Henry Underwood, both. People are ready to believe anything."

"How old a man is the doctor?"

"Between fifty and sixty."

"And his family consists of——"

"His wife, who is very pious; his son Henry, who is rather less liked than the doctor, if anything; and a daughter."

"Anything queer about her?"

"Oh, no! She's rather pretty."

Burton recognized the point of view, but he did not feel that it solved his own problem. Miss Underwood would have to be very pretty, indeed, if her

personal charms were to cover the multitude of her family's sins.

"Are there any specific charges against them?" he asked.

"Not exactly. It's more a feeling in the air. There's a good deal of talk about his keeping a cripple shut up upstairs in his house. He's the son of the housekeeper—Ben Bussey is his name. Kept him there for years. Mrs. Bussey says he ain't treated right."

"That might be investigated, I should think. Anything else?"

"A few months ago, an old man died while the doctor was attending him. There was some talk about poison in his medicine."

"Was anything done about investigating it?"

"No, it just dropped. Nobody likes exactly to tackle the doctor. They're afraid. That old man had been complaining about his treatment, and then he died, and there are people who say that something is sure to happen to anybody that says anything against the doctor. This Orton Selby, now, had been making a lot of talk about old Means' death; saying it was malpractice, if nothing worse, and that something ought to be done about it. And then, last Friday, he was held up. Somehow, it always seems to happen the same day. That's what makes people talk."

"What specific reason is there for connecting the doctor with the robbery?"

"Well, it is known that the doctor was not far from Crescent Terrace at the time; for some one saw him driving very fast from that locality a few minutes later. It was in the dusk of evening. The man that held Selby up was masked by having a handkerchief tied over his face, with slits cut in it to see through; but Selby says he was the size and height of the doctor, and walked like him. But the closest point is that, after he left Selby, with his hands tied above his head to the railing that runs along the terrace, Selby saw him go and pick up a gray cloak from the ground and throw it over his arm as he walked off."

"Well?"

"The doctor commonly wears a gray cloak, something like a military cape. Nobody ever saw any one else wear another just like it. Everybody knows him at sight by his gray cloak."

"But he wasn't wearing it."

"That's the point. It looks as though he had thrown it down on the ground so as to conceal it. Selby swears it was a gray cape, or cloak, not a coat, because he saw a corner fall down over the man's arm as he hurried away."

"What sort of a man is Selby?"

"Why—his word is considered good. He's a builder and contractor. Worked himself up from a common workman, and is very successful. He's built some of our best houses. Ben Bussey, the young man I told you lives at the doctor's, does wood carving for him."

"I thought you said he was a cripple."

"Oh, his hands are all right."

"Do the people consider that Selby is justified in his charges?"

"Well, they don't know just what to think. I guess most of them would rather like to have Selby prove something against the doctor, for the sake of justifying all the talk that has gone before. But I think it's mostly Henry that makes the family unpopular."

"How does he do it?"

The clerk shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know all the stories, but they say there was something queer about the things he did when he was a boy. Anyhow, he got the town down on him, and that's the way it has been ever since."

"The latest about Doctor Underwood," a boy called at the door. He tossed a crumpled sheet of paper to the clerk, who read it and then smilingly laid it before Burton. The sheet was typewritten, not printed, and it bore the following legend:

Search Doctor Underwood's house. You will find evidence of his guilt.

Burton frowned. "It strikes me that there is either too much or too little said about all this business. If there is any substantial evidence against the man, he ought to be arrested. If there isn't, his

accusers ought to be. Why don't the parties who send out a bill like this sign it?"

The clerk smiled his disinterested smile. "They're afraid to. I told you it wasn't considered healthy to oppose Doctor Underwood. Something is bound to happen to them."

"Nonsense!" said Burton impatiently.

"Of course," agreed the smiling clerk, and sauntered away.

Burton sat still, and considered. His personal irritation was swallowed up in this more serious complication. How did this curious and unexpected situation affect the commission with which he was charged? He thought of Rachel Overman, fastidious, critical, ultra refined; and in spite of his preoccupation, he smiled to himself. The idea of an alliance between her house and that of a man who was popularly supposed to indulge on occasion in highway robbery, struck him as incongruous enough to be called humorous. At any rate, he now had a reasonable excuse for going no farther with his "fool errand." The rôle of Lancelot, wooing as a proxy for the absent prince, had by no means pleased him, and it was with a guilty sense of relief at the idea of dropping it right here that he called for a time-table.

He figured out his railway connections, and went to the office to give his orders. As he passed the open window, his attention was caught by two men who had met on the sidewalk outside. One of them was talking excitedly and flourishing a paper which looked much like the typewritten sheet the clerk had shown to Burton. It was the man with whom Burton had clashed at the station.

"Who is that man—the smaller one?" he asked.

The clerk glanced out, and smiled. "That's the man I was telling you about —Orton Selby."

"So *that's* the man who is bringing this charge against Doctor Underwood! Who's the other?"

"Mr. Hadley—a banker, and one of our prominent citizens."

Burton crumpled up his time-table and tossed it into the waste basket, quite as though he had had no intention of taking the next train out of town.

"Will you direct me to Doctor Underwood's house, now?" he said.

CHAPTER II.

THE RED HOUSE.

Burton could have found his way to the Red House without any further direction than the clerk had given him, and it was chiefly curiosity that made him try another experiment on the way. He had come on by the side street, and half a block away he saw the large red house facing toward Rowan Street.

At the rear ran a high board fence, separating the grounds belonging to the house from an alley which cut through the middle of the block. As he passed the end of the alley, he noticed a man and a woman talking together by the gate which opened into the house grounds.

It was the woman's excited gestures that caught his attention. She was shaking her hands at the man, in a way that might have meant anger, or impatience, or merely dismissal—but which certainly meant something, in a superlative and violent degree. Then she darted in through the gate, slamming it shut; and the man came running down the alley toward the street, with a curious low lope that covered the ground amazingly, though it seemed effortless.

Burton had stopped, with the idea of seeing whether it was a case that called for interference. Now, as the man jumped out just in front of him, he spoke to him—as much from a desire to see the face of one who ran so furtively, as from curiosity anent the effect the doctor's name would have. "Pardon me," he said. "Can you tell me if this is where Doctor Underwood lives?"

But this time his cast drew nothing. The man stopped a moment, cast a sharp though furtive glance up at his questioner, and shook his head. "Don't know," he said curtly, and hurried on.

Burton took the liberty of believing that the man had lied.

The Red House had a character and quality of its own that set it immediately apart from the rest of this half-baked town. It was a large house, with signs of age that were grateful to him, set back in extensive grounds which were surrounded by high hedges of shrubbery. The house itself was shaded by old trees, and the general effect of the place was one of aloofness, as different as possible from the cheap, new, easy-going publicity of the rest of the street. If it be true that human beings mould their surroundings to reflect their own characters, then the Underwoods were certainly not commonplace people.

Burton was sensitive to influences, and, as he stepped inside the grounds and let the gate shut behind him, he had an indefinable feeling that he had stepped into alien territory. He glanced back at the street outside, as an adventurer who has strayed into an enchanted land may look back, for reassurance, to the safe and commonplace country he has left.

A man in the rough dress of a gardener was down on his knees beside a flower bed in the garden, and Burton approached him.

"Is this Doctor Underwood's house?"

"He lives here," the man said coolly, without glancing up.

"You mean he doesn't own it?" Burton asked, more for the sake of pursuing the conversation than from any special interest in Doctor Underwood's tax list.

"He couldn't own that, could he?" asked the man, pointing dramatically at the tulip about which he had been building up the earth.

"You are a philosopher as well as a gardener."

"I?" The man stood up; and Burton saw that he was young, and that his face, in spite of its sombreness, was intelligent and not unattractive. "Oh, I am a human being, like the rest of the impertinent race. I try to forget what I am, but I have no right to. You do well to remind me."

"Why do you wish to forget?" asked Burton curiously.

"Who that is human would not wish to forget? Who that is human would not wish at times that he were a tulip, blooming in perfect beauty, and so doing all that could be asked of him? Or an oak, like that one, fulfilling its nature, without blame and without harm?"

"Are you Ben Bussey?" asked Burton, on a sudden impulse, remembering the name of the young man whom the hotel clerk had mentioned as being the subject of popular stories. This young man was certainly queer enough to give rise to legends.

He was not prepared for the effect of his question. The young man drew back as though he had been struck, while a look of mingled fear and distaste and reproach darkened his face.

"Who are you?" he asked harshly. "What do you know about Ben Bussey?"

"I have heard the name mentioned, that's all, as that of a young man living with Doctor Underwood. I assure you I meant nothing offensive." Unconsciously he had adopted the tone of one speaking to an equal. This was no common gardener.

"No, I am not Ben Bussey," the young man said, after a pause, in which he obviously struggled to regain his self-control. "I have often wished I were, however. I am Henry Underwood." He looked up, with a sharp defiance in his eyes, as he spoke the name. It was as though he expected to see some sign of repulsion.

"I am very glad to meet you, then. My name is Burton. Mrs. Overman, of Putney, asked me to bring a message to your sister."

"You will find her in the house, I suppose," the young man answered carelessly. He turned away indifferently, as though he had no further interest in his visitor; and in a few minutes he was bent over another flower bed, absorbed in his work.

Burton walked up to the house, his pulses curiously a-tingle. No wonder the Underwoods got themselves talked about in the neighborhood, if this was a

sample of the way in which they met the advances of strangers! After ringing the bell, he glanced back at Henry Underwood. The young man had risen from the ground, and was standing with bared head, looking up into the branches of the oak, with an expression that struck Burton, even at that distance, as one inexpressibly sad.

The door was opened by a middle-aged servant, in whom Burton recognized the woman he had seen gesticulating so violently in the back yard. She looked out at him with obvious surprise and caution, and with no obvious intent of admitting him unless cause were shown.

"Is Miss Underwood at home?"

"I don't know. Likely she is," the woman answered, still with that uncomprehending look of wonder at his intrusion.

"Will you take her my card, please?" With a little more muscular effort than he was in the habit of using when entering a house, he forced the door back far enough to enable him to pass the guarded portal, and, with an air of assurance that was largely factitious, walked into a room opening from the hall, which he judged to be a reception room.

The woman followed him to the door, and looked dubiously from him to his card, which she still held in her hand.

"I will wait here while you see if Miss Underwood is at home, and whether she can see me. Please look her up at once," he said positively.

The tone was effective. The woman departed.

The same evidences of old-time dignity and present-day decay which he had noted in the grounds, struck Burton in the drawing-room. The room was a stately one, built according to the old ideas of spaciousness and leisure; but the carpet was worn, the upholstery dingy, and a general air of disuse showed that the days of receptions must be long past. Evidently the Underwoods were not living in the heyday of prosperity.

To do Rachel justice, she would not care about that, except incidentally. But she would care a great deal about the family's social standing. Burton tried, to the best of his masculine ability, to take an inventory of things that would enable him to answer the questions she was sure to pour out upon him—always supposing that his mission were, in any degree, successful.

He walked to the window, and looked out upon the side garden. Not far from the house was a rustic seat, and here a lady was sitting—a tall, gray-haired lady, reading a ponderous book. The conviction that this must be Mrs. Underwood made him look at her with the liveliest interest. The servant to whom Burton had given his card came out, in obvious haste and excitement; but the reading lady merely lifted a calm hand to check her, and turned her page, without raising her eyes. But she shook her head, seemingly in answer to some question, and the messenger returned hastily to the house. The lady continued to read.

Burton smiled to himself over the little scene. Mrs. Underwood, if this was she, would be able to give points in self-possession to Rachel herself.

But the moment that Leslie Underwood entered the room, Burton forgot all his hesitations and reluctances. In the instant while he bowed before her, his mind took a right-about-face. It was not merely that she was unexpectedly beautiful. That would account for Philip's infatuation; but Burton was a keener judge of human nature. Behind the girl's mask of beauty there looked out a spirit so direct, so genuine, that it was like a touchstone to prove those qualities in others. Burton felt something pull him erect as he looked at her. Philip had drawn a prize which probably he neither understood nor deserved—and the High Ridge tales about Doctor Underwood were preposterous absurdities. All this in the stroke of an eye!

"You wished to see me?" she asked. Her voice had a vibrant ring that corresponded with the full tide of her vital beauty.

"Yes—though I am merely an ambassador." No thought, now, of mod-

ifying his commission! "I come from Philip Overman."

Her face flushed sensitively at the name.

"Philip has been seriously ill," he said.

"I am sorry to hear it."

"Even yet, his condition causes keen anxiety to his mother."

A little change passed over her sensitive face—could it have been a flicker of amusement? The suspicion helped to restore his nerve. Who was this young woman, after all, that she should dare to smile at Rachel Overman's anxiety for her boy? People who knew Mrs. Overman were accustomed to treat even her whims with respect.

He continued, a shade more stiffly: "His physician, I may say, admits that her fears are justified. He is in an extremely nervous and excitable condition, and it is considered that the best hope for his recovery lies in removing the cause of the mental disturbance which is at the root of his physical overthrow. His unhappiness is sending him into a decline."

She looked at him quizzically. There was no question, now, about the hidden amusement that brought that gleam into her eyes. And she answered with a rocking, monotonous cadence that flared its mockery in his ears.

"Men have died, and worms have eaten them," she said slowly, "but—not for love."

Burton flushed to the roots of his hair. He knew that he had not been honest in his plea; that it was for Rachel's sake, and not for Philip's—confound the boy!—that he had turned special pleader in the case. But, for Heaven's sake, why couldn't the girl have pretended with him for a little while? Couldn't she see that he had to present the best side of his cause?

"I think the matter is possibly more serious than you realize," he said, dropping his eyes. "Philip is a high-strung young man. His disappointment was profound. It has seemingly shattered his ambition and his interest in life."

"Philip is a self-willed young man," she said, in a carefully modulated voice that was so palpable a mimicry of his own that he was torn between the desires to applaud her skill and to box her ears for her impertinence. "He cried for the moon; and when he couldn't have it, he evidently made things uncomfortable for his dear mamma and his self-sacrificing friend. But I believe, speaking under correction, that the best modern authorities, as well as the classic one I have already quoted, agree that the probabilities are highly in favor of a complete recovery—in time. Don't you agree with me?"

"I am sorry not to be able to do so. In the first place, I have been retained as a witness by the other side. In the second place, I can judge, as you cannot, of the rarity of the treasure that he thinks he has lost. I cannot say that his despair is excessive."

She smiled appreciatively. "That was really very well done, under the circumstances. Well—now that these polite preliminaries have passed, what is the real object of your visit?"

"Allow me to point out that you make an ambassador's task unusually difficult by pressing so immediately to the point; but, since that is your way, I can only meet you in the same direct manner. My object is to ask whether it is not possible for you to reconsider your refusal to marry Philip Overman."

She lifted her head, with a look of surprise. There was a sparkle in her eyes, and this time it was not amusement. "Did he send you?" she asked.

"He raved of you in his delirium. He talked of you incessantly. He has begged me, times without number, to ask you to come and let him see you for a minute—for an hour. We pulled him through the fever and the rest of it, but his physical recovery has not restored his mental tone. He will not take up his life in the old way. He vows, now, that as soon as we let go our present surveillance, he will enlist and get himself sent to the Philippines. I think he means it. And it would be rather a pity; for, in his state of health, to go to the Philippines as a common soldier would be a fairly expeditious form of suicide. It would, beyond the slightest

question, break his mother's heart. And she has no one else—her husband died less than a year ago. Philip's death would mean a rather sad end for a good old family that has written its name in its country's history more than once."

She had dropped her eyes when he began, but at the last word she looked up.

"And what of my family?" she asked. There was in her voice a vibrant undertone of suppressed feeling which made Burton look at her questioningly. Exactly what feeling was it that brought such a challenging light into her eyes? He took refuge in a generalization.

"In America, the families of the high contracting parties come in only for secondary consideration, don't they?" he suggested. "But I have discharged my commission very poorly if I have failed to make you understand that Philip's family is waiting to welcome you with entire love and—respect." In spite of himself, he had hesitated before the last word.

She laughed—a forlorn little laugh, that was anything but mirthful.

But whatever answer she might have made was interrupted by the sounds of an unusual commotion outside. A woman's excited voice was heard, in exclamations that were, at first, only half distinguishable.

"Oh, doctor, doctor! For the love of Heaven, what have you been in, now? What have you done to yourself? You're hurt, doctor—I can see that you're hurt!"

"Nonsense, Mrs. Bussey! Don't make a fuss!" a man's voice answered impatiently.

But the housekeeper who had admitted Burton now rushed into the drawing-room, calling hysterically: "Oh, Miss Leslie, your father is killed!"

And thereupon she threw her apron up over her head, to render her more effective in the emergency.

She was followed almost immediately by a sufficiently startling apparition—a powerfully built man, of more than middle age, with a keen blue eye and an eager face. But just now the face was disfigured by the blood that flowed freely from a wound on his temple, and he supported himself by the door, as though he could not well stand alone.

Leslie ran toward him, with a cry: "Father! Oh, father, what has happened?"

CHAPTER III.

THE HIGHWAYMAN'S MASK.

Burton had jumped to his feet.

"Let me help you to a couch," he said, offering his arm as a support.

"Not into this room," sputtered Doctor Underwood, wincing with pain as he spoke. "Good land, man! Do you suppose a man with a sprained ankle, who isn't going to be able to walk for the rest of his natural life, and then will have to go on crutches for a while, wants to sit down on one of those spindle-legged chairs that break if you look at them? Get me into the surgery. And, Leslie, if you have an atom of filial feeling, you might show him the way, instead of standing there like a classical figure of despair on a monument, smiling at a bloody temple. I'm ashamed of you. Where's your equanimity? Ouch! Jerusalem! Santa Fé! You don't need to try to carry me, man! I can walk. Leslie, if you haven't any religious scruples against really opening the door while you are about it, perhaps this procession could get through without scraping the skin off its elbows——"

Burton had slipped his shoulder under the doctor's arm. Guided by Leslie, he got him through a hall which seemed interminably long, and into the room which the doctor had called the surgery. He helped his charge to the leather couch.

"Get me some hot water," he said, in a hasty aside to Leslie; and she left the room quickly.

He stripped off Doctor Underwood's shoe, and began to manipulate the swollen ankle. "This isn't going to be serious," he said soothingly. "It's merely a strain, not a dislocation. It will be painful for a while——"

"*Will* be! Jerusalem, what do you think it is now? You are a doctor?"

"No. But I have had some experience with accidents. If you want me to go for a doctor——"

"You are all I can stand at present, thank you. I know you are a doctor by your confounded nerve. Will be *painful!* I wish it was *your* ankle, confound you! And I'll never grumble again when my patients swear at me. I never realized before what a relief it is to swear at your doctor. How did you happen to be here? I suppose it was an accident, and not a special dispensation of providence."

"I was the bearer of a message to your daughter, and so happened to be on hand at the right moment—that's all. My name is Burton—Hugh Burton, Putney, Massachusetts."

"A message? From whom? What about?"

"There! Doesn't that begin to feel more comfortable?"

"Humph! That's a neat way of telling me to mind my own business."

Burton merely laughed. "Let me look at this cut in your temple. So! Any more damages?"

"My little finger was knocked out of joint, but I think I put it back. I guess that's all they had time to get in——"

"Who?"

The sharp monosyllable made them both start. Leslie had returned, with Mrs. Bussey, who was carrying a kettle of hot water; but, in her surprise at her father's remark, she was very effectively blocking the way for the timid servant.

"Leslie, your curiosity unfits you for any useful career," exclaimed her father, with a great show of irritation. "Do you suppose Doctor Burton wanted that hot water to ameliorate the temperature of the room? If so, it will probably be just as well to keep Mrs. Bussey holding it in the doorway; but, if you think he possibly meant to use it as a fomentation——"

"You needn't think you are going to put me off in that way," said Leslie, making way for Mrs. Bussey. "I am just as sorry as I can be that you are hurt, you know; but that isn't all. I want to know what has happened, now?"

"Doctor Burton assures me it is only a strain, though he goes so far as to admit that, if I make the worst of it, I may be able to imagine that it hurts. But, of course, it doesn't really. It will merely be nerves."

"Can I help you with that hot application, Mr. Burton?" asked Leslie.

"Mrs. Bussey can do this. Do you know where to find some court plaster—and scissors?"

She got the required articles deftly, and watched in silence while he dressed the doctor's temple. Then she asked, "May he talk, now?"

"I should not undertake to prevent him."

"Now, father——"

"Well, those little imps of Satan that live in that tumble-down house on King Street, where you went Friendly Visiting——"

"The Sprigg children?"

"That's the name. They have heard Aristides called the unjust so long that they thought they would throw a stone or two to mark their ennui; but they misunderstood the use of the stone, and so they threw it at me instead of for me——"

"Do you mean that they stoned *you?*"

"Oh, *I* shouldn't have minded the little devils; but they threw stones at Dolly, and they might easily have broken her leg. That's what made me jump out of the buggy to go after them, because I thought they needed a lesson; but I jumped on one of their infernal stones, and it turned my foot, and that's how I twisted my ankle. So I got back into the buggy, and was glad I didn't have to go far to get to it. Then I came on home. I never knew that walk from the street to the front door was so long."

"But your face——"

"Oh, that was one of the stones that flew wide of the mark. The little heathens don't know how to throw straight. They ought to be kept under an apple tree, with nothing to eat, un-

til they learn how to bring down their dinner with the first throw."

Leslie clinched her hands. "It is outrageous! I don't see how you can treat it so lightly. That they should dare to stone you—to try deliberately to hurt you, perhaps to kill you—— Oh, they would never dare, if it were not for this shameful, unendurable, wicked persecution!"

"Leslie, after the example which I have always carefully given you of moderation in language——"

"It *is* wicked! It *is* unendurable! I feel as though I were in a net that was drawing closer and closer about me. It is the secrecy of it that makes me wild. If I could only fight back! But to have some one watching in the dark, and not to know who or what it is—to suspect everybody——"

"Leslie, don't you realize that Doctor Burton will think you delirious if you talk like this? If you are jealous of my temporary prominence as an interesting patient——"

Leslie turned swiftly to Burton: "My father has been made the object of a most infamous persecution by some unknown person. The most outrageous stories are circulated about him—the most unjustifiable things are done—like this. Those children don't go around stoning people in general. They have been put up to it by some one who is always watching a chance—some one who has used them as an instrument for his malice!"

"You must make some allowance for the intemperate zeal of a daughter, Doctor Burton," said Doctor Underwood. A twinge of pain twisted his smile into a grimace. He had a wide, flexible mouth, and when he grinned he looked a caricature. Burton reflected that a man must be sustained by an unusually strong consciousness of virtue to risk his character on such a grin—or else it was the very mockery of virtue.

"Then you think Miss Underwood overstates the case?" he asked thoughtfully. He was glad to have them talk about the matter. It was a curious situation, even without considering its possible effect on Philip's life.

"Well—I have seen too many queer things that turned out to be mere coincidences, to be sure that there is really a conspiracy against me," Underwood said quietly. "Public opinion is a queer thing. It takes epidemics. At present, it seems to have an epidemic of suspicion of me. It will probably run its course and recover."

"What form does it take?"

"The latest and, for the time being, the most embarrassing form is that it takes me for a highwayman. I have been pretty hard up, at times; but I confess I never had the originality to think of that method of relieving my necessities. And yet—confound the sarcasm of the idiots!—they are determined to give me the discredit without the cash. If I had only got Selby's money—I've no doubt he got it by holding up his customers, in his turn—I wouldn't mind these innuendoes so much."

"Oh, well—so long as the grand jury doesn't think it worth mentioning, you can probably afford to take it with equal indifference," said Burton lightly.

But Leslie turned upon him, with immediate dissent. "I should much rather have the matter taken up and sifted to the bottom. Then there might be some chance of finding out who is behind all these mysterious happenings. They don't happen of themselves. As it is, there is talk, and suspicion, and sidelong looks, and general ostracism; and I go around hating everybody, because I don't know whom to hate! Oh, if I were only a man! I would *do* something."

"I have done something now, Leslie," said her father. "I have invited a committee to come here this evening and make a search, as those fool bills suggested."

"This evening?"

"Yes. You will have to do the honors, if I am going to be laid up. I don't suppose your mother will care to see them. And Henry is not exactly the one." A shadow passed over his face, and he fell suddenly silent.

"What do you mean by a search, if I may ask?" Burton put in. They were so frank in their attitude that he felt

that his interest would not be regarded as an impertinence.

"Why, ever since this rumor went abroad that I had held up Selby, there have been handbills distributed about town—posted up on fences, and thrust into open doors—urging that my house be searched. It got on Leslie's nerves. So, just to let her see that something was doing, I told them to-day to come and search, and be hanged to them."

"And they are coming this evening?"

"Yes. That's the plan."

"Is Selby one of them?" asked Burton, with sudden interest.

"Oh, yes. He's the one I spoke to about it. I understand he takes an interest in the matter."

"Well, have you made ready for them?"

"What do you mean?" asked Doctor Underwood.

"Have you searched, yourself?" laughed Burton.

"I don't understand you," said Doctor Underwood. His tone was stern, and his manner indicated plainly that he considered it a matter of politeness not to understand.

"Mrs. Bussey, may I trouble you to bring some more hot water? This is getting too cold. Thank you." Burton closed the door behind her, and came back to Doctor Underwood's couch. "It seems to me that my suggestion is perfectly simple, and the reason for it perfectly obvious. Some enemy is urging that your house be searched. I say enemy, because it must be clear that no friend would urge it in that manner. Now, if it is an enemy, he is not doing it for your benefit. He must have an idea that a search would injure you. How could he have that idea—unless he knew that it would result in discovering something that—we will say, for the sake of argument—he had previously concealed where it would be found at the right time? And here you are, walking right into the trap by inviting a public search, without taking the precaution to make a preliminary search, yourself!"

Leslie had listened with breathless eagerness, never moving her eyes from Burton's face. Now she turned, with earnest reproach, to her father. "Father!"

Doctor Underwood shook his head impatiently. "Do you mean that you would have me ask them to come here to make a search, and then look the place over first and remove anything that they might think incriminating? That would be a farce. I should be ashamed of myself."

Leslie turned her reproachful eyes upon Burton. "Of course," she said, with that same earnestness.

Burton laughed. "Why, what nonsense! Beautiful nonsense, if you will—but utter nonsense, all the same. According to your own account, you are dealing with some unscrupulous person, who is trying to turn suspicion upon you. Why should you help him? He certainly wouldn't be trying to bring about an investigation unless it would help on his purpose—assuming that he has the purpose Miss Underwood attributes to him."

Doctor Underwood moved restlessly. "I should feel mighty cheap," he said.

"Do you happen to have one of those handbills you speak of?"

"There's one on the mantel. Give it to him, Leslie."

Burton crossed to the mantel and picked up the paper. It was a single sheet, typewritten. It read:

Search Underwood's rooms. You will find proof.

"These have been distributed generally?"

"Not many at a time but a few in one place one night, and in another place the next night. Every day, since that damnable hold-up, I have heard, directly or indirectly, that some one has received or seen some such notice."

Burton's eye wandered around the room. "When they come, I suppose they will begin here. This is the room where you would be most likely to conceal the evidence of your crimes, I take it. Now, let me consider where you would hide it. There might be a hiding place beneath the bricks in front of the fireplace, or behind some of the loose

tiles back of the mantel. I see that one book has recently been disturbed in that set of medical encyclopedias—the dust on the shelf shows it. Did you put something behind it?"

Laughingly, he pulled out the volume he had indicated—and with it a handkerchief which had been thrust behind it. He shook it out, and then he laughed no more. There were two holes cut in the handkerchief for eyelets, and the wrinkled corners showed that it had been knotted hard, as a kerchief that had been tied over a man's face would have been.

"Santa Fé!" gasped Doctor Underwood, wrinkling up his face in one of his peculiar grimaces. It served to conceal his emotions as effectively as a mask.

Leslie sprang to her feet, and stared hard at the rag, with a fascinated look. She had unconsciously clasped her hands together, and there was a look of fright in her eyes.

"Now, do you see?" she cried. "That's the sort of thing we have to expect, all the time!"

Burton crushed the kerchief in his hand. "A very crude device. Your committee would have to be very special fools to believe that a man would preserve such a damning piece of evidence when there was a fireplace in the room, and matches were presumably within reach. Shall I burn it up?"

"No," said Doctor Underwood suddenly. "Give it to me. I feel in honor bound to show it to the committee, and tell them just how and where it was found."

Burton shrugged his shoulders. "I am rather inclined to believe that you need a business manager, my dear Doctor Quixote."

The door opened, and the gray-haired woman, whom Burton had seen reading in the garden, entered the room. Her composure was so insistent that Burton felt suddenly convicted of foolish excitability.

"Mrs. Bussey understood that you had been hurt," she said, going up to the couch and looking down calmly at the doctor.

Doctor Underwood squirmed. "Yes, Angelica; some sin or other has found me out, I suppose, for I have hurt my ankle. This is Mr. Burton, who happened to be on hand to take the place of providence."

Mrs. Underwood acknowledged Burton's bow with a slight inclination of the head, but with no slightest indication of curiosity. She sat down beside her husband's couch, and thoughtfully placed her finger on his pulse.

"Land of the living, Angelica! My ankle hasn't gone to my heart!" muttered Doctor Underwood, with some impatience.

Leslie spoke aside to Burton: "What can we do? It isn't this thing only—this is just an instance. You don't know how horrible it is to have the feeling that some enemy is watching you in the dark. And my father is not practical—you see that. We have no friends left!"

"That is not so," he said quickly.

"You mean that *you* will help him?" she asked eagerly. "Oh, if you would! There is no one to whom I can turn for advice."

It was not exactly what he had meant, but he recognized at once that it was what he should have meant. If ever there were two babes in the wood, needing the kind attentions of a worldly and unoccupied robin—— Aside from that, if this girl was going to marry into the Overman family, he certainly owed it to Rachel to see that she came with a clean family record, if any efforts that he could make would establish a fact that should have been beyond question from the first.

"Let me be present this evening, when this committee comes," he said slowly. "I will consider the matter, and tell you what I think I can do, after I have seen and heard them."

"Stay and dine with us, then," she said quickly. "That will give me a chance to tell you some of the other things that have happened—the things that father would like to call coincidences, but that I *know* are all parts of one iniquitous conspiracy."

"Thank you, I shall be glad to," he

answered. "If I am going to undertake this case, I certainly want all the facts that have any bearing upon it."

Leslie turned quickly to her mother: "Mother, Mr. Burton will stay for dinner."

Mrs. Underwood had arisen, and she turned her calm eyes from her husband to Leslie. "Will he?" she said placidly. Then she drew her shawl about her shoulders, and walked out of the room.

Leslie exchanged a look with her father. "I'll speak to Mrs. Bussey," she said, and, with one of her characteristically swift movements, she crossed the room and threw open the door which led to the rear of the house.

"Why, Mrs. Bussey!" she exclaimed, with surprise and annoyance.

That faithful servant—doubtless on the theory that her further attendance might be required—had been crouching so close to the door that the sudden opening of it left her sitting like a blinking mandarin in the open doorway. She arose somewhat stiffly to her feet, and turned a reproachful look upon her young mistress. Leslie shut the door, with some emphasis, as she went out to the housekeeper's domain.

Doctor Underwood laughed softly. "Poor old soul! It's hard on one with such an appetite for news to get nothing but the crumbs that float through the keyhole. I'm mighty glad that you are going to stay, doctor."

"Thank you. But your giving me that title makes me uncomfortable. I am not a physician. I'm afraid I am not much of anything but a dilletante."

"You are a good Samaritan to come to the rescue of the outcast," said the doctor. "Perhaps you didn't know what an outcast I am—or did you?" he added keenly, warned by some subtle change in Burton's face.

"On the contrary, I thought, when I saw your patience to your servant, that you were the good Samaritan," said Burton quickly. This old man was so sharp that it was dangerous to think in his presence.

The doctor's manner changed. "The poor woman is a fool, but she can't help that," he said. "We keep her for the sake of her son. Ben is a cripple—paralyzed from a spinal injury. He has no other home. Are you to be in High Ridge for some time?"

"That will depend on circumstances. By the way, Miss Underwood has asked me to be present this evening when the committee comes. If you have any objection——"

Doctor Underwood looked quietly at the young man for a moment before replying. When he spoke, it was with courtesy in his tone; but he made no apology for his hesitation.

"Not in the least. You will put me under further obligations by staying. Anyhow, if Leslie has asked you to stay, I know my place too well to object. Did you meet Leslie in Washington?"

"I never had the pleasure of meeting Miss Underwood before; but I have heard a great deal of her from my friend, Philip Overman."

"Oh!" said Doctor Underwood, with a keen look. Then he threw his head back, closed his eyes, and murmured: "I am glad you arrived in time to meet the other investigation committee in active operation, Mr. Burton. The theatrical attractions in High Ridge are dull just now."

"I am finding High Ridge anything but dull," said Burton, ignoring the covert thrust of that "other." "And I can see possibilities of much entertainment here. For instance, in investigating your investigating committee while your investigating committee is investigating you."

He laughed as he spoke, little guessing how far afield the pursuit of that entertainment was going to carry him.

CHAPTER IV.

PERSECUTION.

It was a curious meal, that dinner. Burton often thought, afterward, that in all the varied experiences of his life—and he had had a good many, first and last—he had never met at one time, and under circumstances of such sudden and peculiar intimacy, four people so unusual.

Doctor Underwood had been helped to a couch in the dining room, and had his dinner from an invalid's table. His eager face, with its keen blue eyes and flexible mouth, was so vividly alert that no one could forget him for a moment, whether he spoke or was silent. When he laughed, which was often, he wrinkled his face into a mask. For a simple device, it was the most effective means imaginable for concealing an emotion.

Mrs. Underwood presided at her own table with the detached air of a casual guest. "Mistress of herself, though china fall," Burton murmured to himself, as he looked at her—and he had an intuition that china would quite frequently be exasperated into falling by her calm. Henry sat mostly silent, with downcast eyes; though occasionally he would look up, under half-lifted lids, with an expression of scorn or secret derision. If he had shown more animation or kindliness, he would have been a handsome man; but the heavy melancholy of his look had drawn bitter lines about his mouth, and his very silence seemed half reproachful, half sullen.

As for Leslie, the only discomposing thing about her was her beauty. Every time that Burton looked at her, it struck him anew as incongruous and distracting that she should hand him the bread or have an eye to his needs. She should have been kept in a case or a frame. She belonged in a palace, where she would have due attendance and ceremony. Well—Philip had not been such a fool, after all.

"Now, I am going to begin my story," said Leslie, "because I want Mr. Burton to understand what lies back of this present persecution. The story goes back six years."

Henry gave his sister one of his slow, curious looks; but dropped his eyes again, without putting his silent comment into words.

"Six years ago we were kept in hot water all one summer by some malicious person, who played mischievous pranks on us and wrote anonymous letters to us and about us. For instance, there were letters warning people to be on their guard against papa, saying he had learned from the Indian medicine men how to put spells on people and make them wither away and die."

"If I could have done half the wonders they credited me with," laughed Doctor Underwood, "I should have out-Hermanned Hermann. Indian fakirs and black magicians wouldn't have been in it with Roger Underwood, M. D. It was like accusing a man who is shoveling dirt for one-twenty-five a day of having money enough to pay the national debt concealed in his hat band."

"Then there were a lot of letters about Henry," Leslie went on. "They would say, for instance: 'Henry Underwood is a liar.' 'Henry Underwood is a thief.' 'Henry Underwood ought to be in the penitentiary.' All one summer that kept up."

Henry had dropped his knife and fork, and sat silent, without looking at his sister. His face was the face of one who is nerving himself to endure torture.

"Were there any accusations against the other members of the family?"

"No. Only Henry and father."

"Who received the letters? Friends of yours—or enemies?"

"They were sent to the tradesmen and the more prominent people in town. We heard of them here and there, but probably we didn't know about all that were received. I remember, more clearly than anything else, how angry I was at some of the tricks."

"There was something more than these anonymous letters, then?"

"Yes. The letters continued at odd times all summer, but there were other things happening at the same time. For instance, one day an advertisement appeared in the paper saying that Doctor Underwood offered fifty cents apiece for all the cats and dogs that would be brought him for the purpose of vivisection. Now, papa does not practice vivisection——"

"He does not now," Mrs. Underwood interrupted, with impressive deliberation, "but I am not at all sure

that he never did. And, as I have said before, if he was ever guilty of that abominable wickedness, at any time or under any circumstances, he richly deserved all the annoyance that advertisement brought upon him."

Doctor Underwood wrinkled up his face in a grimace, but made no answer.

"Well, he doesn't now, and he didn't six years ago," Leslie resumed pacifically. "But it was hard to convince people of that. You should have seen the place the next day! Farmers, street boys, tramps, all sorts of rough people kept coming here with cats and dogs of all sorts. Oh, the forlorn creatures! And when papa refused to buy them, the people were angry, and threatened to have him arrested for not carrying out his agreement. And all the ministers and the women's societies called on him to remonstrate with him for such wickedness; and when he said that he had not had anything to do with the advertisement, they showed plainly that they thought he was trying to crawl out of it because he had been caught. Oh, it was awful!"

"Did you make any attempt to find out how the advertisement came to the paper, doctor?"

"Yes, they showed me the order. It had come by mail, with stamps enclosed to pay for the insertion. The dunderheaded fools hadn't had sense enough to guess that, when a physician wants 'material,' he doesn't advertise for it in the morning paper."

"Under the circumstances, Roger," said Mrs. Underwood gravely, "your flippancy is not becoming."

"It certainly was a neat scheme, if the object was to embarrass you, doctor. What else, Miss Underwood?"

"One day every grocer in town appeared at the door with a big load of household supplies—enough to provision a regiment for a winter. They had all received the same order—a very large order, including expensive and unusual things that they had had to send away for. And of course they were angry when we wouldn't take any of the things. They said that, after that, they would accept no orders unless we paid for them in advance; and *that* was sometimes embarrassing, also!"

"Were the orders received by mail, as in the other cases?"

"I believe they were."

"Did you get any of the original papers? And have you preserved them?"

"No, I didn't preserve them," said Doctor Underwood. "You see, the disturbance was only a sporadic one. It stopped, and I dismissed the matter from my mind. I didn't realize that Leslie had stored so many of the details in her memory. I think she attaches too much importance to them."

"I am not all sure that she does," said Burton promptly. "They certainly constitute a curious series of incidents. Was there anything more, Miss Underwood?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. One morning we could not get out of the house. During the night, every door and every window had been barred across from the outside. Strips of board had been fastened across all of them—with screws, so there had been no noise that would awaken us. On the front door was a piece of paper, and written on it, in big letters, was: 'This is a prison.' Henry found it when he came home—he had been spending the night with a friend—and tore it down, and unscrewed the bars on the front door, and let us out of our prison."

"You could have got down all right from the second story, by the big oak on the east side," said Henry. It was the first time he had contributed anything to the recital; and he spoke now in an impatient tone, as though the whole conversation bored him.

"Has it occurred to you," asked Burton thoughtfully, "that all these incidents bear the same marks of freakishness and mischief, rather than of venomous malice? They are like the tricks a schoolboy might play, to get even with some one he had a grudge against. They are not the revenge a man would take for a real injury or a deep-felt grievance."

He glanced up at Doctor Underwood as he spoke, and caught the tail-end

of a scrutinizing look which that careless gentleman was just withdrawing from Henry's unconscious face. The furtive watchfulness of that look was wholly at variance with the offhand tone in which he answered Burton.

"I have not the slightest doubt you are right about that. It was mere foolishness on the part of some ignorant person, who wanted to do something irritating, and probably enjoyed the feeling that he was keeping us all agog over his tomfoolery."

"Oh, but it was more than nonsense!" cried Leslie. "You forget about the fires. One night, Mr. Burton, Mrs. Bussey left the week's washing hanging on the lines in the back yard, and in the morning we found that it had all been gathered into a heap and burned. That was carrying a joke pretty far. And soon afterward there was an attempt to burn the house down."

"Come, Leslie—let me tell that incident," interposed her father. "We found, one morning, a heap of half-charred sticks of wood on the front doorstep. It looked sinister at first sight, of course; but when I examined it, I was sure that there had been no fire in the sticks when they were piled on the step, or afterward. It was a menace, if you like; but, as Mr. Burton points about those other matters, it was rather a silly attempt at a scare than a serious attempt at arson. Don't paint that poor devil any blacker than he is, my girl. He has probably realized long ago that it was all a silly performance, and we don't want to go about harboring malice."

"Of course not. Only—those things did actually happen to us, Mr. Burton."

"Don't say happen, Leslie," said Mrs. Underwood, with the curious effect she always had of suddenly coming back to consciousness at any word that struck her ethical mind. "Things don't happen to people unless they have deserved them. What seems to be accident may be really punishment for sin."

"Well, these things befell us after that fashion," said Leslie patiently, picking her words to avoid pitfalls of metaphysics. "Then they stopped. Everything went on quietly until a few weeks ago. Then things began again."

"Let me warn you, Burton," interposed Doctor Underwood again, "that this is where Leslie becomes fantastic. She has too much imagination for her own good. She ought to be writing fairy tales, or society paragraphs for the Sunday papers. Now, go ahead, my dear. Do your worst."

"Papa persists in making fun of me, because I see a connection between what happened six years ago and the things that have been coming up lately. But I leave you to judge. There have been no tricks on us, no disturbances about the house; but there have been stories circulated—perfectly outrageous stories——"

"The highwayman story?"

"That is one of them."

"But surely the best way to treat that is with silent contempt."

"That isn't papa's way. He answers back. And it certainly is annoying to have your neighbors repeating such tales, and humiliating to find that they are ready to go more than halfway in believing them."

"It is not only humiliating—it is expensive," murmured Doctor Underwood, letting his head fall back against the cushions of the couch, and closing his eyes, a little wearily. "You can't expect people to call in a doctor who is suspected of robbing the public and occasionally poisoning a patient. I have practically nothing left but charity patients, now; and pretty soon they will consider that it is a charity to let me prescribe for them."

Burton's eyes were drawn to Leslie's face. She was looking at her father with a passion of pity and sympathy that was more eloquently expressed through her silence than by any words.

Mrs. Underwood broke the silence with her judicial speech. "I do not think," she said, "that there has ever been anything in your treatment of your patients that would at all justify the idea that you poisoned Mr. Means.

Therefore, you can rest assured that the story will do you no harm."

Underwood opened his eyes, and looked at Burton with portentous gravity. "We'll consider that matter settled, then. Some time I should like to lay the details of that affair before you, Mr. Burton, because you would understand the wild absurdity of it all. As a matter of fact, strychnine in fatal quantities *was* found in the bottle of medicine which I made up myself, and I have not the slightest idea who could have tampered with it. Some one had. That is one of the mysteries which Leslie wants to fit in with the others of the series. But we haven't time for that, now; for my committee is almost due, and I am going to ask you to help me back to the surgery. I will meet them there."

"One moment," said Burton. "You surely must have laid these matters before the police. Did they make no discoveries—have no theories?"

Underwood glanced at his daughter—plainly and obviously a glance of warning. But he spoke in his habitually easy way.

"Oh, Selby has put it before the police," he said. "As I understand it, he has been neglecting his business to labor with the police by day and by night, trying to induce them to arrest me. It strikes me that he is becoming something of a monomaniac on the subject, but I may be prejudiced."

"I didn't mean the recent hold-up, but those earlier affairs," explained Burton. "Didn't the police investigate them?"

"Our police force has fallible moments, and this proved to be one of them. They chased all over the place, like unbroken dogs crazy over a scent, ran many theories to earth, and—proved nothing," said the doctor, in an airy tone, as one dismissing a subject of no moment.

But Mrs. Underwood looked down the table toward Burton, and spoke with her disconcerting and inopportune candor. "They tried to make out that it was Henry," she said calmly. "I think I may say, without being accused of partiality, that I do not consider their charges as proven; for, though Henry has much to answer for, he——"

"So, you see, we are very well-known people in the town, and have been much in the public eye," interrupted the doctor smoothly.

"Not so well known as you might be," said Burton, catching wildly at the first conversational straw he could think of, in his eagerness to second the doctor's obvious effort to put a stop to his wife's disconcerting admissions. "I asked a man who was talking to Mrs. Bussey at your back gate if this was your house, and he didn't even know your name."

"That is as gratifying as it is surprising," the doctor responded, also marking time. "I wonder who the ignorant individual could be."

At that moment, Mrs. Bussey entered the room with her tray, and, to keep the ball going, he turned to question her. "Who was it you were talking to at the back gate this afternoon, Mrs. Bussey?"

"Wasn't nobody," said Mrs. Bussey, with startled promptness.

"A man. Didn't know my name. Was he a stranger?"

"Didn't talk to nobody," she repeated doggedly, without looking up. "Who says I was talking to a strange man?"

"It doesn't matter," said the doctor, with a surprised glance. "He was evidently unknown, as well as unknowing, Mr. Burton—or, at any rate, we keep peace in the family by assuming that he was nonexistent. There are things into which it is not wise to inquire too closely. Now, I believe that I'll have to ask for help in getting back into the surgery."

Burton waited just long enough to assure himself that Henry was not going to his father's assistance, and then offered his own arm. At the same moment, he caught a slight but imperative sign from Mrs. Underwood to her son. In silent response to it, Henry came forward to support his father upon the other side. As soon as they got Doctor Underwood again

into the surgery, Henry withdrew, without a word.

Burton felt that there was something wistful in the look which the doctor turned toward his son's retreating form. But he was saved from the embarrassment of recognizing the situation; for immediately Mrs. Bussey flung open the door, without the formality of tapping, and burst into the room.

"There's men a-coming!" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"What's that? What d'ye mean?" demanded Doctor Underwood, startled and impatient.

"There's three men a-coming in at the gate! Shall I let loose the dog?"

"Go and let them in, you idiot. You will make Mr. Burton think that we have no visitors. Don't keep them waiting outside. They didn't come to study the architecture of the façade. Bring them here—here—to this room. Do you understand?"

Mrs. Bussey departed, muttering under her breath something that evidently expressed her bewildered disapproval of this break in the familiar routine of life; and Doctor Underwood looked up at Burton with his peculiar grin, which might mean amusement, or embarrassment, or any other emotion that he wanted to conceal.

"My investigating committee," he said.

CHAPTER V.

THE INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE.

If Doctor Underwood awaited his investigating committee with any special anxiety, his mobile face did not show it. Burton read in it excitement, interest, even satirical amusement; but nothing like dread. Surprise and disapproval came into it, however, when the door opened abruptly, and Leslie entered.

"I'm going to hear what they have to say," she announced.

"Now, see here, Leslie—it's bad enough to have a daughter bothering a man to death in his own home. But when she begins to tag him around in public affairs, so that he can't even meet a committee of his neighbors, who want to search his study in order to arrest him for highway robbery, without having her putting herself in evidence, it becomes a regular nuisance. You go back to your spinning wheel."

"You neglected to bring me up to a spinning wheel, father."

"You go back to your mother."

"I am going to stay here. I'll be reasonably quiet, but that's the only compromise I'll agree to. Don't waste nerve force scolding me, father. You need to conserve your strength." And, with the evident intention of making herself as inconspicuous as possible, she took a low chair, half hidden by the heavy curtain of the window.

Burton could not help thinking how futile any attempt at obscurity on her part must always be. Her beauty lit up the shadowy corner as a jewel lights its case. He had to make a conscious effort to turn his eyes away.

Again the door opened, and Henry entered. The contrast between his attitude and that of his sister was striking. He entered hesitatingly—one would have said reluctantly—and his eyes were not lifted from the floor.

"Mother thought I ought to be present," he said, in a low voice.

Doctor Underwood regarded him with a baffled look; and Burton understood, and sympathized with his perplexity. He himself looked curiously at Henry. The son's youthful escapades, so out of the ordinary, had evidently made him something of a family problem.

"You might profitably take for an example your brother's ready obedience to a parent's wishes," the doctor said dryly. He spoke to Leslie, but it was Henry who winced at the jibe. His face darkened, and he shot an angry look at his father.

The tramping of feet in the hall announced the approach of the committee.

"Here they be," said Mrs. Bussey, opening the door, and herself entering at the head of the little procession of

three men. Her lively interest in the affair was comically evident.

Doctor Underwood saved the situation from its awkwardness with a *savoir faire* which Burton could not too much admire.

"Good evening, gentlemen!" he cried genially. "You are very welcome. You will excuse my remaining seated, I hope. I have sprained my ankle. Let me present you to my friend, Mr. Burton—Mr. Hadley, who is one of our most distinguished citizens; Mr. Ralston, who forms the opinions of the public of High Ridge by virtue of his position as our leading editor; Mr. Orton Selby, who was the unhappy victim of the highway robbery of which you have heard, and who is justifiably anxious to let no guilty man escape. Be seated, gentlemen."

Burton bowed in acknowledgment of the several introductions. He was touched by the simple-heartedness of Doctor Underwood in presenting him so frankly as a "friend," and felt more bound by it to act the part of a friend than he could have been by any formal pledge. He took quick appraisal of the three committeemen.

Hadley was evidently prosperous, pompous, and much impressed with his own importance. Ralston had the keen eye and dispassionate smile of the experienced newspaper man, so accustomed to having to-day's stories contradicted by to-morrow's that he has learned to be slow about committing himself to any side. Selby he had already met.

That Selby remembered the fact was quite evident from the look of surprise and suspicion which he cast upon Doctor Underwood's guest. A striking man he was, with a dark, narrow face and a nervous manner. His eye was so restless that it seemed continually flitting from one object to another. His lips were thin, and, in their spasmodic twitching, gave the same sense of nervous instability that his restless eyes conveyed. Burton had an impulse to pick him up and set him forcibly down somewhere, with an injunction to sit still.

"If you have formed any plan of procedure, gentlemen, go ahead," said Underwood. "We stand ready, of course, to assist you in any way possible."

"Sorry you've had an accident," said Ralston, with friendly interest. "I hope it's not serious."

"Oh, no! It interferes with my walking for the present, but I'll be all right in a few days. Those pestiferous little imps, the Sprigg children, threw stones at my nag, and some of them took effect on me. Tormenting little wretches! They are bound to be in the fashion, if it takes a leg—my leg, I mean. I told them fire would descend from heaven to burn up children who stoned prophets, but they didn't seem to realize that I was a prophet."

"I hope you may not prove so, in this instance," laughed Ralston.

"Yes, if fire should descend upon them, it might look as though you were responsible," said Hadley, with a ponderous air of perpetrating a light pleasantry. "They say it is dangerous to go up against you, doctor. Something is apt to happen."

"Oh, laws!" gasped a frightened voice. Mrs. Bussey had been an open-mouthed listener to the conversation.

Underwood turned sharply upon her, perhaps glad of an opportunity to vent his irritation indirectly. "Mrs. Bussey, while I regret to interfere with the liberty of action which belongs to every free-born citizen of this great republic, I think we shall have to dispense with your presence at the ceremonies. I mean, Mrs. Bussey, we shan't need you any longer. You may go."

The woman muttered a grumbling dissent, but withdrew slowly. Burton was divided between amusement over the scene and wonder that the Underwoods, whatever their financial stress, should keep so untrained and untrainable a servant. She seemed to have all the defects, and none of the merits, of an old family retainer.

"Well—we came here for business, and we don't want to be wasting time," said Selby abruptly. "You

probably know how to get even with the Spriggses without delaying us."

"Certainly," said Underwood courteously. "But there is something I'd like to say first——"

"If you are ready to make a confession, of course we are ready to hear you. I don't think anything else is in order at this point," said Selby, in the same aggressively abrupt manner.

Burton was suddenly conscious of an impulse to go up to the man and knock him down; and by that token he knew, if there had been any reservation in his mind before, that he had taken sides for good and all. He was for Doctor Underwood. He glanced swiftly around the room, to see how the others took this wanton rudeness. Ralston was watching the doctor quizzically from under his eyebrows. Hadley did not know that anything had happened. Henry was still as impassive as a statue; but Leslie, in her low seat by the window, was leaning forward, with a look of lively indignation that was more eloquent than words. Burton went quickly over to her, and sat down beside her, without speaking.

"What I have to say is entirely in order at this point, even though it be not a confession," said Doctor Underwood quietly. "I invited you here, in good faith, to conduct any sort of an investigation that you might consider necessary. An hour or so ago, Mr. Burton found this handkerchief concealed behind the books on that shelf. As you would, of course, have discovered it if he had not found it, I consider it only proper that I should place it in your hands." He picked up the mutilated handkerchief, which had been left on the table, and, after a moment's hesitation, said: "Henry, will you hand this to Mr. Hadley, as chairman of this committee?"

As Henry took the handkerchief from his father's hand, it fell open, and the staring eyelet holes glared at the company. He stopped suddenly, and a look of dismay went, like a wave, over his face. He glanced swiftly at his father.

But, while he hesitated, Selby sprang forward and snatched it from his hand, with something like the snarl of an animal. "Look at that! *Look* at that, will you?" he almost shouted.

Hadley blinked at it, and Ralston got up and took the handkerchief in his hand.

"It seems to be the orthodox thing," he said, with interest.

"*Seems* to be! Seems to be pretty conclusive, I should say. It's proof!"

"It's proof that Doctor Underwood has a malicious enemy, and a rather stupid one," said Burton, thinking that it was time for him to take a hand in this remarkable scene. "I found that handkerchief, an hour ago, tucked behind one of the books there, where you would certainly have found it if you had made any search. It is, of course, perfectly evident that it was placed there for the express purpose of having you find it."

"I don't see that that is so evident," interrupted Selby. "What have you got to say about this, anyhow?"

"Do you think that, if Doctor Underwood had had such an incriminating piece of evidence, he would have kept it, instead of destroying it? If he was bound to keep it, do you think he would hide it where the first careless search would bring it to light? If he had so hidden it, would he have invited you here to search? You can't answer yes to those questions, unless you think he is a fit subject for the insane asylum rather than the jail."

Leslie shot him an eloquent glance of thanks. Hadley coughed, and looked at Ralston, who was attending closely to Burton.

"I agree with you perfectly," the editor said, and Hadley nodded.

Selby turned a face of deliberate insolence upon Burton. "I don't know who you are, Mr. Burton; but you are here as a friend of Doctor Underwood, that's clear."

"Yes," said Burton. "I love him for the enemies he has made."

Ralston looked at him with evident enjoyment.

"Well, a friend's say-so won't go very far in clearing a man, when facts

like these stand against him. We're here looking for a thief. If it wasn't Doctor Underwood that held me up, let him explain that handkerchief, found here in his own private room."

Hadley nodded sagely.

"I can't explain it," said Doctor Underwood. The life had gone out of his voice.

"It explains itself," said Burton impatiently. "Some one is trying to make trouble for Doctor Underwood by a very clumsy and transparent device. Of course," he added, suddenly realizing that he was not taking the politic tone, "of course such an obvious trick might impose on ignorant people; but, to three men of more than average intelligence and experience, it must be perfectly clear that the very obviousness of the evidence destroys its value."

Ralston cocked his left eye at him, and laughed silently. Hadley nodded, but with some dubiousness. He agreed heartily with that part of the speaker's last sentiment which bore witness to his more than average intelligence, but he had a dizzy feeling that he was getting himself somewhat tangled up as to what he was committed to.

But Selby was a Cerberus superior to the temptations of any sop.

"Then we'll look for some other evidence," he said aggressively. "We're here to search, and I propose to search."

"The house is yours, gentlemen," said Doctor Underwood.

Selby took a truculent survey of the room, which was not a large one. He walked over to the bookcase, ran his hand behind the books on the shelves, and lifted heaps of loose papers and magazines, without disclosing anything more deadly than dust. Then he opened the door of a medicine cabinet on the wall, pulled out the drawers of the table, and ran his eye over the mantel. He suggested a terrier trying to unearth a rat, and apparently he was perfectly willing to conduct the search alone.

Leslie was watching him, with a look of so much indignation and repressed scorn that Burton bent to her and said, in a low voice: "Wouldn't it be better for you to leave?"

She shook her head.

"Don't waste your good hate on him," Burton urged gently. "He isn't worth it."

"There is some one behind all this who is!" she flashed.

"Yes. We'll find out who it is before we are through."

She gave him a grateful look—and on the instant he begun wondering how he could win another. They seemed to be especially well worth collecting.

Selby had dropped on his knees before the open fireplace, and was examining the bricks that made the hearth.

"Some of these bricks are loose," he said accusingly, to Underwood.

"Careless of them," murmured the doctor.

But Selby was in no mood for light conversational thrusts and parries. He was trying to pry up the suspicious bricks with his fingers, and breaking his nails on them.

"Hand him a knife, Henry," said Doctor Underwood.

In the same passive silence that had marked him throughout, Henry took a clasp knife from his pocket, and mechanically opened the large blade. It slipped in his hand, and Burton saw him wince as the steel shut with a snap upon his finger. But he opened it again, and handed it to Selby, who took it with an inarticulate grunt. Burton kept his eye upon the cut finger; but as Henry, after a hasty glance, merely wrapped his handkerchief hard about it and made no motion to leave the room, he concluded that the hurt had not been as serious as it looked.

Selby was busy trying to pry up one of the bricks with the knife, when suddenly the point snapped.

"You've broken it," exclaimed Henry, who was standing nearest.

"If I have, I'll pay for it," said Selby, with a vicious look. "I pay my debts in full, every time. Hello! This looks like something interesting! Well, perhaps this can be explained away, too!" He picked up from the mortar under the loose brick a glittering some-

thing, and held it up, with a triumphant air.

"What is it?" asked Ralston.

"It's my watch chain and my charm, that I was robbed of—that's what it is!" He shook it, in his excitement, until the links rattled. "Is that evidence, or isn't it? Does that prove anything, or doesn't it?"

"Is that chain yours?" asked Underwood gravely.

"Of course it's mine. My initials are on the charm, and the date it was presented to me. I guess there isn't any one going to claim that chain but me."

He took it to Ralston and Hadley, talking excitedly. Underwood sat silent, with his head a little bent and his eyes on the floor. He looked as though a weight had fallen upon him. Burton tried to catch Leslie's eye for a reassuring glance; but she was anxiously watching her father, and was regardless of everything else.

"It looks bad—bad," muttered Hadley, handing the chain back to Selby.

Henry had been glowering at Selby in sombre silence, and now he startled every one by speaking out, with a slow emphasis that stung. "I've heard it said that those who hide can find," he said.

Selby whirled upon him. "Meaning me?"

Henry lifted his shoulders in an exasperating shrug. "You went pretty straight to the right brick."

Selby walked up to Henry, with outthrust chin, and spoke in a manner that struck Burton as deliberately offensive and provocative.

"That's what you have to say, is it? Now, my advice to you is that you say just as little as possible. You're not far enough out of the woods, yourself, to holler very loud."

"How so? Do you mean, now, that it was I that robbed you?" asked Henry tauntingly. "It would have been quite easy for me to wear my father's cloak, if I wanted to throw suspicion on him, and to hide these things in the room—wouldn't it? Come, now! Was it I, or wasn't it?"

Selby hesitated an instant. Burton wondered whether he were considering the advisability of changing his line of attack to that so audaciously suggested by Henry. Perhaps he regretted that he had not accused Henry in the first place, but saw that it was impossible consistently to do so now.

"It's the sort of thing that you might do, easy enough. We all know that," he said bitingly. "We haven't forgotten your tricks here six years ago, and you needn't think it. Just because the police didn't catch you, you needn't think that you fooled anybody."

"Gentlemen!" The doctor tried to interpose, but no one heard him.

Henry was evidently enjoying himself. He seemed to be curiously determined to provoke Selby to the uttermost, and the insolent mockery of his manner was all the more strange because of its contrast to his former taciturnity.

"You're a poor loser, Selby. What's a few dollars, more or less, to make a fuss over? Some time you may lose something that you really will miss. As for this robbery, if you really were held up—I don't know whether you were or not, since I have only your word for it—I'm sure you didn't have money enough to pay for that cheap handkerchief. And, as for that plated chain!" He lifted his shoulders.

"What's mine is mine," said Selby, with the ineffective viciousness of a badgered animal.

"But the point is, is everything yours that you think is?"

"I'm going to find out who got my money," said Selby doggedly. "And as for you—I'll get you yet."

"Sorry, but you can't have me. I'm already engaged," said Henry deliberately.

The retort seemed to carry Selby entirely beyond his own control. "You're very clever at making speeches, aren't you? Almost as clever as you are at throwing people and breaking their backs——"

But Doctor Underwood again interposed, and this time successfully.

"All this is aside from the question.

We are not here to study ancient history, in any of its forms. This committee was invited here to consider the robbery of Mr. Selby, and anything else is beside the mark."

"And my watch chain? Is that beside the mark? Found concealed here under your hearth! Does that mean nothing?"

The doctor looked so unhappy that Burton took the answer upon himself.

"It means exactly as much and as little as the handkerchief," he said. "It means that the place has been 'salted' in expectation of your visit, and, if you want to go into the investigating business to some effect, you'll set yourselves to finding out who did it."

"Never mind going into that," said Underwood, a little anxiously. "These gentlemen were invited here to investigate me, and here my interest in the matter ends. If they are satisfied——"

"But we are not," interrupted Selby. "Satisfied! I'm satisfied that we've got evidence enough to hang a man on, and I shall demand the arrest of Doctor Underwood."

"Then you will do so on your own responsibility," said Ralston, in decided tones. "I think Mr. Burton is right. The evidence was so plainly intended to be found that it amounts to nothing. I, for one, shall not allow myself to be made a laughingstock by taking action on it; and I am sure that Mr. Hadley agrees with me."

"I—certainly—ah—should not wish to be made a laughingstock," said Mr. Hadley, with a reproachful look at Selby.

Selby picked up his hat, and made for the door. "You needn't think I'm going to drop this," he said, with bitter emphasis. He addressed the room in general, but his look fell on Henry Underwood.

Hadley and Ralston arose.

"If he acts on this evidence," said Ralston, addressing Doctor Underwood, "you may count on Mr. Hadley and myself to state exactly how it was found. We will say good night, now, and I hope your foot will be all right in a day or two."

"Thank you," said Underwood. "Henry, will you see the gentlemen to the door?"

Henry went out with the committee. Incidentally, he did not return to the surgery. From his place by the window, Burton saw the men depart. Selby, who had left the room some minutes before the others, was the last to leave the house. Indeed, the others waited at the gate some minutes before he came hurriedly out to join them. Burton wondered if he had occupied the time in poking into other rooms in his absurd "search."

Leslie had sprung up and gone to her father. She put one arm around his neck, and lifted his face, with a sort of fierce affection.

"Why do you look so depressed, father?" she demanded. "How dare you let yourself go down like that?"

He wrinkled his face in one of those queer smiles. "I know, my dear, that it is the proper and right-minded thing for a man with a sprained ankle to go around capering and dancing for joy; and I am sorry not to be living up to your just expectations. I'll try to improve."

She turned, with one of her swift transitions, to Burton. "What do you think of it?"

"Exactly what I told the committee," he said, and was glad that he could say it promptly.

"You can understand, now, how I feel—as though a net were drawing around me. It is so intangible, and yet so horribly real. What can one do?"

Instead of answering, he asked a question in his turn. "Why does your brother hate Selby?"

"Wouldn't any one hate him?"

"Well, then, why does Selby hate your brother?"

"I don't know that he does."

"Yes, he does. They hate each other royally—and it is nothing new, either."

Underwood groaned, and Leslie promptly patted his shoulder. "Poor papa, does it hurt?"

"Yes," he sputtered.

Then he pulled himself together, and

turned again to Burton. "Henry has an unfortunate way of provoking antagonism. But all this has no more to do with this robbery than it has to do with the spots on the sun. Even Selby doesn't accuse Henry of holding him up. I am the target of his attacks—thank Heaven."

"Why this pious gratitude?"

"I can stand it better than Henry. Possibly you did not understand Selby's slur. It has been the tragedy of Henry's life that he crippled Ben Bussey. It was ten years ago that it happened. They had a tussle. Ben was the older; but Henry was larger and stronger, and he was in a violent temper. He threw Ben in such a way that his spine was permanently injured. But the effect on Henry was almost equally serious. His hand has been against friend and foe alike. I don't consider that he was responsible for what happened here, a few years later."

"Of course not. He had nothing to do with it," said Leslie.

Burton saw that she had missed the significance of the doctor's remark—and he was glad she had. As the doctor said, that matter had nothing to do with the robbery, and Henry was not implicated in the present trouble. He turned to the doctor.

"I don't want to force myself upon you in the character of a pushing Perseus; but, if you have no objections, I should like to spend the night in this room."

The doctor looked at him, with the countenance of a chess player who is looking several moves ahead. "Why?" he asked.

"I have an idea that the person who made such elaborate preparations for your committee may be curious to learn how much of his cache was unearthed; and, knowing that the committee has been here, may come before morning to take a look. I'd like to receive him properly. I can't, at this moment, imagine anything that would give me more unalloyed pleasure. As no one knows of my being here, I hope the gentleman may not yet have been put upon his guard. It is evident that he has been able to get into this room before, and possibly he might try again."

"But you won't be comfortable here!" protested Leslie.

"I shall be more than comfortable. That couch is disgraceful luxury compared with what I am accustomed to when camping. May I stay, doctor?"

Doctor Underwood's grave face relaxed into a sardonic smile. "The house is yours."

"Thank you. I was horribly afraid you would refuse. Is this room locked at night?"

"No."

"This door opens into a back hall, I noticed. Where does that lead?"

"To the kitchen and back stairs. Also, at the other end, to the side door of the house, opening out into the garden, and to a path which runs down to the side street."

"Is that outside door locked at night?"

"Oh, yes."

"Yet—some one has been able to get into this room, without detection. That could only have been at night."

"But why should any one wish to?" protested the doctor uncomfortably.

"The heart is deceitful and wicked. Your faith in human nature does you honor, but I am afraid it has also got you into trouble. However, we'll hope that it may also serve to put an end to the trouble. When we find the man who hid these claptrap stage properties in here, we will find the man who knows something about the robbery. It seems to me a fair guess that he may come back to this room to-night to investigate; but, in any event, there isn't anything else I can do to-night, and it will flatter my sense of importance to feel that I am trying to do something. Now, if I may, I will assist you to your room, and then say good night."

Leslie, who had been waiting beside her father, arose. "I hope you won't be too uncomfortable," she said.

"My dear," her father interrupted, "I recognize in Mr. Burton the type that would rather be right than comfortable. We are in his hands, and we may as well accept the situation gracefully.

The couch isn't a bad one, Burton. I have frequently spent the night here, when I have come in late. Yonder door leads to a lavatory. And I hope you may not be disturbed."

Burton laughed. He had all the eagerness of the amateur. "I'm hoping that I may be. Now, if you'll lean on my shoulder, and pilot the way, I'll take you to your room."

The doctor accepted his assistance with a whimsical recognition of the curiousness of the situation. "That I should be putting myself and my affairs into your hands in this way is probably strange; but, more strangely, I can't make it seem strange," he said, when Burton left him.

When Burton came downstairs, Leslie was waiting for him.

"I want to thank you," she said impulsively.

"I haven't done anything yet."

"But you are going to."

"I am going to try." Then the conscience of the ambassador nudged his memory. After all, he was here for another and a specific purpose, and it behooved him to remember it. "If I succeed, will you have a different answer to send to Philip?" he asked, with a searching look.

She clasped her hands together upon her breast, with the self-forgetful gesture he had noticed before; and her face was suddenly radiant. "Oh, yes—yes!" she cried.

Very curiously, her eagerness made Burton conscious of a sudden coolness toward his mission. Of course, he ought to rejoice at this assurance that she was really fond of Philip, and that nothing kept them apart save her sensitive pride; and he had sense enough to recognize that he was going to be ashamed of his divided feeling when he had time to think it over. But, in the meantime, the divided feeling was certainly there, with its curious commentary on our aboriginal instincts. He smiled a little grimly at himself, as he answered:

"Thank you! I hope that I may claim that promise from you very soon. I shall certainly do my best to have a right to remind you of it. Now, I am going to say good night, and walk ostentatiously away. That is a part of the game. You can leave the front door unlocked, and I'll let myself in when I think the coast is all clear. The door bolts, I see. And I'll find my way to the surgery, all right."

"There is always a light in the hall."

"Then it will be plain sailing. Good night. And be sure to keep Mrs. Bussey out of the way while I am breaking in."

She laughed, as though he jested. But, as he walked back to the hotel to make some necessary arrangements for his night's camping, he hoped she would not wholly disregard that injunction.

CHAPTER VI.

A MIDNIGHT WATCH.

Half an hour later, Burton returned—most unostentatiously. In fact, he made himself think of a beginner in burglary, as he hugged the shadowy side of the street, and sought the shelter of the trees in getting across the garden. If one were going to do this sort of thing, one might as well do it in proper style.

The front door yielded noiselessly to his touch, illustrating the advantage of having an accomplice within, and he was safely inside. He bolted the door, and made his way through the dimly lit hall to the surgery. The whole entry had occupied less than a minute.

He was breathing quickly, but it was from excitement. It was years since he had been in any sort of an adventure. He felt like a college boy again.

The surgery was sufficiently lit by the diffused light of street lamp and moon to enable him to see his way about. He had brought with him the electric pocket lamp which he carried with him when traveling, but he did not intend to use it unless it were necessary. His plan was to keep as quiet as possible and wait for the anticipated visitor. If the person who had had access to the room to "salt" it was at all

curious about the result of the committee's visit, he ought, logically, to come at the earliest possible moment to investigate.

Burton had planned to occupy the time by writing to Rachel, and he now pulled an armchair into such a position that he could get enough of the thin moonlight from the window to see his way across his writing pad, and settled himself to the familiar task.

"My adored Rachel," he began, and then he stopped. It wasn't going to be the easiest letter in the world to write. He had been less than a day in High Ridge, yet already he had got so far away from the Putney atmosphere that he was conscious of a jolt in trying to present the situation here to Mrs. Overman.

Rachel was, of course, the paragon of womankind. He had been a freshman at college when she married Overman, and he had accepted in perfect good faith the theory that, as a consequence, he was always to live the life of a Blighted Being. It had been the tacit understanding between them ever since, and he was hardly conscious that her new widowhood had put any new significance into their old relation. For years he had come and gone at her beck and call, lived on her smiles, and survived her frowns with more or less equanimity, all as a bounden knight should do.

But, as time went on, occasions had arisen when his account of facts had to be somewhat tempered for the adored Rachel. She was just as adorable as ever, of course; but—she didn't understand people who didn't live her kind of a life. Burton felt instinctively that the whole Underwood situation would strike her the wrong way. She would simply regard it as something that could never, by any possibility, have happened to any one in her class; and that would end it. If Philip was going to marry Miss Underwood—and Philip was mighty lucky to have the chance—it behooved him to tell his story warily, so as not to prejudice Rachel against her future daughter-in-law. He started in again, with circumspection.

I am writing you by the light of the fair silver moon. Does that make you think of the lunar epistles I used to write you—the almanac man alone remembers how many years ago! I wrote by moonlight, then, for romantic reasons; now for strategical. But that is a subject which can only be continued in my next; so please keep up your interest.

I have seen Miss Underwood, and I wish to assure you in the first place that Philip has shown his usual good taste and discrimination in falling in love with her. She is a beautiful girl, and more. She has charm, and sweetness, and manner, and dignity. I'll report any other qualities she may possess as I discover them. I should judge her to be somewhat older than Philip, but I am the last man in the world with a right to regard that as an obstacle.

She has given me as yet no final answer in the matter which you commissioned me to lay before her, for the following reason:

Her father, who is a physician, and who impresses me as a very original, attractive, and honorable man, is at present under a curious shadow of popular distrust. There was a highway robbery here a short time ago, and the man robbed charges that Doctor Underwood was the robber. I am sure there is not the slightest ground for such a charge, but the people seem to have taken an attitude of distrust and suspicion toward both the doctor and his son, and you can understand Miss Underwood's natural feeling that, until her father is vindicated as publicly as he has been assailed, she will not give any encouragement to Philip's suit. I have her word for it—and, what is more, her radiant look for it—that this is all that keeps her from listening, at this time. If you will tell Philip this, I am sure it will have upon his spirits the effect which we have both so anxiously desired. I have not the slightest doubt about the doctor's being cleared. He is a most delightful man, and his son——

Burton held his pen suspended. Henry did not lend himself to a phrase. There was about him something that ran off into the shadowy unknown. Burton ended his sentence lamely:

——is something of a character.

Of course I shall stay on at High Ridge, and bend every energy to clearing up this matter without delay. It can hardly prove very difficult, though there are some curious and unusual features in the case.

It is unnecessary for me to say that the thought that he is carrying out the wishes of his adored Rachel is the chief joy in life of her

BLIGHTED BEING.

It was the way in which he had always signed his letters to her since her marriage. He wrote the words, now, with the cheerful unconsciousness of

habit, and folded his letter for mailing. Then, after a moment, he arose and walked softly to the window. Putting the curtain aside, he stood, for some time, looking out across the lawn.

His window looked not toward Rowan, but toward the side street, a hundred and fifty feet away. The moon was clear and high, and the black and white of its light and shadow made a scene that would have appealed to any lover of the picturesque, he thought. It would delight a poet or a philosopher, he fancied romantically; and that brought Henry Underwood again to his mind.

That was a curious man—a man to give one pause. There was in him something of the poet, and something of the philosopher, as witness his speeches in the garden. But there was something else, also. If the moodiness which was so obvious had manifested itself in the tricks that had defied the police and scandalized the family, it went near to the line of the abnormal. It would seem that the accusation was neither admitted nor proved; but the hotel clerk had referred to it, Selby had openly charged him with it, and the doctor evidently did not wish the matter discussed. Well, it had nothing to do with the present affair, unless—unless—— Oh, of course it had nothing to do with the present affair.

The figure of a man, moving with a sort of stealthy swiftness among the shadows of the garden, caught Burton's eye, and instantly he was alert. The man crossed an open patch of moonlight, and, with a curious feeling that it was what he had expected, Burton recognized Henry Underwood. He came directly toward the side of the house where the surgery was, and a moment later Burton heard the outer door of the back hall open, and footsteps went past his closed door.

Burton pressed his electric light to look at his watch. It was two o'clock. He turned back to the window, with a feeling of irritation. Henry Underwood might be a poet and a philosopher, but he was also a fool, or he would not be wandering at two a. m. through a town that was already smouldering with suspicion of the Underwood family. It was, to say the least, imprudent. Burton wished that he had not seen him. Probably his errand was entirely innocent and easily to be explained; but the human mind is a fertile field, and a seed of suspicion flourishes like the scriptural grain of mustard.

There was a red glow in the sky over the trees of the garden. Burton wondered if it could be the morning glow. It was hardly time for that. He was speculating idly upon it when his ear caught the sound of returning footsteps in the back hall—though this time they were so soft that, if he had not been alert for any sound, he would hardly have noticed them. He drew aside from the window, hid himself in the shadow of the long curtain, and waited. Unless the person in the hall entered this room, he had no right to question his movements.

The door was opened with noiseless swiftness, and a man stood for an instant in the opening. His head was bent forward, and he carried a light in his hand—whether small lantern or shaded candle, Burton did not have time to see, for almost at the instant of opening the door, the light was quenched. Burton was certain that neither sound nor movement had betrayed his own presence; yet, after that single moment of reconnoitring, the light went out, and the door was shut sharply.

Burton sprang toward it, stumbled over the armchair he himself had placed in the way, picked himself up, and reached the door—only to look into the blank blackness of the back hall. There was a faint quiver of sound in the air, as though the outer house door had jarred with a sudden closing, and he ran down the hall.

The door was unlocked, and yielded at once to his touch. For a moment everything was still; then he heard the clatter of feet on a board walk. It was as though some one, escaping, had waited to see if he would be pursued,

and then had fled on. Burton ran around to the rear of the house, thankful that the moonlight now made his way plain. There was a board walk running from the kitchen door to a high wall at the end of the lot; but the sound he had heard was momentary, not continuous. So, on the theory that the man had crossed the walk, and had not run down the hundred feet of it to the alley, he ran on to the east side of the house.

There was no one to be seen, of course. Any one familiar with the location could have hidden himself in any of a hundred shadows. The lot was filled with trees, and one large oak almost rested against the house. It reminded him of Henry's remark at dinner about getting down from the second story by the oak on the east side, and he glanced up. It looked an easy climb—and two of the house windows were lit. On the impulse of the moment, he swung himself up into the branches.

As he came level with the lit windows, Henry Underwood passed one of them, still fully dressed. He was so near that Burton was certain for a moment that he himself must have been discovered, and he waited in suspense. But Henry had passed the window without looking out.

What Burton expected to discover was, perhaps, not clear to his own mind. If he had analyzed the intuition he followed, he would have said that he was acting on the theory that Henry had looked into his room, and then, fleeing out of doors to throw him off the scent—by that side door to which he obviously carried a key, since he had let himself in, that way, shortly before—had regained his room by this schoolboy stairway.

The feeling had been strong upon him that he was close on the trail of some one fleeing. But if in fact it had been Henry, how could he challenge him, here in his own room? Clearly, he was within his rights here—a fact that was emphasized when, after a minute, he came to the window and pulled the curtain down.

Burton dropped to the ground, and retraced his steps around the rear of the house. Here he saw that the board walk ran down to a gate—the gate in the rear by which he had seen Mrs. Bussey talking in excited fashion to a man, earlier in the day. The gate opened at Burton's touch, and he looked out into an empty alley. It was so obvious that this would have been the natural and easy way of escape that he could only blame himself for folly in chasing an uncertain sound of footsteps past the gate around to the east of the house.

A good deal humiliated, he found his way back to the surgery. The mysterious intruder had been almost within reach of his arm, and had got away without leaving a trace; and all that was gained was the knowledge that hereafter he would be more alert than ever, knowing himself watched. It was not a very creditable beginning. Burton threw himself down on the couch, and his annoyance did not prevent his dropping, after a time, into a sound sleep.

Therefore, he did not see how that red glow on the sky above the trees deepened and made a bright hole in the night, long before the morning came to banish the darkness legitimately.

CHAPTER VII.

BURNT OUT.

Burton awoke from his short and uneasy sleep with a sudden start, and the feeling that some one had been near him. The room was, however, empty and gray in the early morning light.

As full recollection of the events that had passed came back to his mind, an ugly thought pressed to the front. Was it Henry who was persecuting the doctor? Or, rather, was there a possibility that it was not Henry?

It certainly was Henry who had been abroad at two in the morning—that was indisputable. Burton had seen him too clearly to be in doubt. Was it not straining incredulity to doubt that it

was Henry who had tried to enter his room, a few minutes later? If it had been a stranger, would Henry not have been aroused by the opening and shutting of the outside door?

It was not a pleasant idea that Miss Underwood's brother was the culprit in the case, but it appeared that he had already laid himself open to suspicion in connection with the series of petty annoyances which his sister had narrated. The local police might not be expert detectives, but they must have average intelligence and experience. And that Henry was moved by a sort of dumb antagonism toward his father was quite obvious.

Burton jumped up from the couch, where he had been revolving the situation, and a scrap of paper, dislodged from his clothing, fell to the floor. He picked it up, and read:

SPY!

Go back, spy, or you'll be sorry.

In spite of nerves that were, ordinarily, steady enough, Burton felt a thrill of something like dismay. An unfriendly presence had bent over him while he slept, had left this message of sinister import—and had vanished as it had vanished into the night when pursued. The thought that he had lain helpless under the scrutiny of this soft-footed, invisible enemy was more disturbing than the threat itself. It gave him a sensation of repulsion that made him understand Miss Underwood's feeling. The situation was not merely bizarre. It was intolerable.

He examined the slip of paper carefully. It was long, and narrow, and soft—such a strip as might have been torn from the margin of a newspaper. The writing was with a very soft, blunt pencil—a pencil such as he had seen carpenters use in marking boards might have made those heavy lines. The hand was obviously disguised, and not very skillfully; for, while occasional strokes were laboriously unsteady, others were rapid and firm.

He folded the paper, and put it carefully away in his pocketbook. If this was Henry's work, he undoubtedly was also the author of the anonymous typewritten notices which had been circulated in the town. Why was the message written, this time, instead of typewritten?

A typewriter in the corner of the room caught his eye, as though it were itself the answer to his question. With a swift suspicion in his mind, he sat down before it, and wrote a few lines. Upon comparing these with the typewritten slip which the doctor had shown him the evening before, and which still lay on the mantel, it was perfectly clear that they had both been produced by the same machine! Some one who had easy and unquestioned access to this room used the doctor's typewriter to tick off insinuations against its owner!

It seemed like substantial proof of Henry's guilt. Who else could use this room, without exciting comment? The audacity of the scheme was hardly more surprising than its simple-mindedness. Burton crushed his sheet in his hand, and tossed it into the waste-paper basket, with a feeling of contempt.

While he made a camp toilet, he wondered why he had let himself in for all this. He had acted on a foolish impulse. There were roily depths in the matter which it would probably be better not to stir up, and it must now be his immediate care to get out of the whole connection as soon as possible. He had no desire to play detective against Miss Underwood's brother. Thank Heaven that her acceptance of his tender for Philip had been so conditioned! He would withdraw while the matter was still nebulous.

There came a tap at the door, and Mrs. Bussey entered.

"Breakfast's ready," she announced. Then she waited a moment, and added, in a shamefaced undertone that betrayed the unfamiliarity of the message: "Miss Underwood's compliments!" and vanished, in obvious embarrassment.

Burton had to laugh at that, and, with more cheerfulness than he would have thought possible, he found his way to the breakfast room.

Miss Underwood herself smiled a welcome at him from the head of the table. "You are to breakfast tête-à-tête with me," she said, answering his unconscious look of inquiry. "Mother always breakfasts in her room, and poor father will have to do the same this morning. Henry has been gardening for hours. So you have only myself left."

"I can imagine worse fates," said Burton. And then, with a curiosity about Henry which was none the less keen because he did not intend to make it public, he asked: "Is your brother an enthusiastic gardener?"

"It is the only thing he cares about; but it would be stretching the word to call him enthusiastic, I'm afraid. Poor Henry!"

"Why?"

"I mean because of Ben Bussey."

"Oh, yes."

"It has made him so moody and strange. You see, he has had Ben before him all his life as an object lesson on the effects of temper, and mother has rather pointed the moral. She thinks that all troubles are the punishment of some wrongdoing, and she has always had a good deal of influence with Henry. It has made him resentful toward every one."

"It's unfortunate. Wouldn't it be better to send Ben away?"

"Father hoped to cure him, so he kept him here. Besides, he couldn't afford to keep him anywhere else, I'm afraid. It would be expensive to send him to a hospital—and father can do for him everything that any one could. No one realizes as I do how father has worried over the whole unhappy situation. He has tried everything for Ben—even electricity. And that made trouble, too."

"Why? Did Ben object?"

"No, but his mother did. I think the popular prejudice against father on that score is largely the effect of Mrs. Bussey's talking. She is an ignorant woman, as you can see."

"What is Ben's attitude? Is he resentful?"

"Not at all. He is a quiet, sensible fellow, who takes things philosophically. He knows it was all an accident, of course. And he knows that father has done everything possible, besides taking on himself the support of both Ben and his mother for life."

"That is more than mere justice."

"Oh, father is like that! Besides, they would be helpless. Ben's father was a roving character, who lived for years among the Indians. He hasn't been heard of for years, and no one knows whether he is dead or alive. He had practically deserted them, years before Ben's accident. So father felt responsible for them, because of Henry."

"I see," said Burton thoughtfully.

Just then the door was thrown suddenly open, and Mrs. Bussey popped in, her face curiously distorted with excitement.

"The Spriggses' house is burnt!" she exclaimed, with obvious enjoyment in chronicling great news.

"How do you know?" demanded Leslie.

"Milkman told me. Burnt to the ground."

"Was any one hurt?"

"No," she admitted regretfully. Then she cheered up, and added: "But the house was burnt to the ground! Started at two o'clock in the night, and they had ter get outer the winder to save their lives. Not a rag of clothes to their backs. Jest smoking ashes, now."

"I must go and see them immediately after breakfast," said Leslie. And, by way of dismissal, she added: "Please bring some hot toast, now."

As soon as Mrs. Bussey was out of the room, she turned to Burton. "That is the family whose children threw stones at father yesterday. I'm awfully sorry this happened."

"Yes."

"Because—oh, you can't imagine how people talk!—some one is sure to say that it happened *because* they stoned him."

"Oh, how absurd! *Who* would say that?"

She shook her head, with a hopeless gesture. "You don't realize how eager people are to believe evil. It is like

the stories of the wolves who devour their companions when they fall. They can't prove anything, but they are all the more ready to talk, as though they thought it might be true. But, at any rate, they can't claim that he set fire to the Spriggses' house, since he can't walk. Oh, I'm *glad* he sprained his ankle yesterday!"

"Filial daughter!" said Burton lightly. But his mind was busy with what he had seen in the night. Where had Henry been, that he should come back from town at two o'clock in the night? It would be fortunate if popular suspicion did indeed fall upon the doctor, in this case, since he could more easily prove an alibi than some other members of his family.

"You will see father before you leave, will you not?" asked Leslie, after a moment.

"Yes. And if you really think it wise to visit the scene of disaster this morning, will you not permit me to accompany you?"

"Wise!" she said, with a look of wonder and a cheerless little laugh. "My family is not conspicuous for its wisdom. But I shall be very glad to have you go with me. I am going immediately. Will you see my father first?"

"Yes," he said, arising.

Doctor Underwood had already heard the news. He was up, and nearly dressed, when he answered Burton's knock at his door.

"So you think you're all right again," the latter said.

"It doesn't make any difference whether I am all right or not," the doctor said impetuously. "I've got to get out. You've heard about the fire?"

"Yes."

"I would have given my right hand to prevent it."

"You weren't given the choice," said Burton coolly. "So, your hand is saved to you, and you will probably find use for it. What's more, you are going back to bed, and you will stay there until I give you leave to get up."

"The devil I am! What for?"

"Because you can't walk a step, on account of your sprained ankle."

Underwood turned, to look at him in amazement. "Oh, can't I?"

"Not a step."

"Suppose I don't agree with you?"

"If my orders are not obeyed, of course I shall throw up the case."

Underwood sat down on the edge of the bed. "So you think it's as bad as that!" he muttered. Suddenly he lifted his head, with a keen look at Burton; but, if a question was on his lips, he checked it there. "All right," he said wearily. "I—I'll leave the case in your hands, doctor. By the way, you didn't have any reward for your vigil last night, did you? There was no attempt to enter the surgery?"

"Oh, an amateur can't always expect to bag his game at the first shot," said Burton lightly.

He found Miss Underwood ready and waiting when he came downstairs, and they set out at once for the scene of the fire. She looked so thoughtful and preoccupied that he could not fail to realize how serious this affair must seem to her. Could it be that she entertained any of his own uncomfortable doubts as to the accidental character of the fire?

"I am consumed with wonder as to why you are going to visit the Spriggs," he said, as they went out into the shaded street. "Is it pure humanitarianism?"

"No," she said slowly. "I am worried. Of course they *can't* connect father with it, and yet—I am worried."

"And so you want to be on the field of battle?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's gallant, at any rate."

"But not wise?" she asked seriously.

"I withdraw that word. It is always wise to meet things with courage."

She walked on in silence for a few moments. "But they *can't* connect father with this, can they?" she asked earnestly, at length.

"Of course not," he said, and wished that they need prepare to face no more serious attack than one on the doctor.

There was a small crowd about the smoking ruins of what had been a sprawling frame dwelling house. A

couple of firemen were still on the grounds, and uncounted boys were shouting with excitement and running about with superfluous activity. The nucleus of the crowd seemed to be an excited and crying woman, and Miss Underwood pressed toward this point. A large man, pompous even at this early morning hour, his back toward them as they approached, was talking.

"I have no doubt you are right, ma'am. I heard him say, myself, that fire would come down and burn them because they threw stones at him. It is an outrage that such a man should be loose in the community. We are none of us safe in our beds."

It was Hadley. Some exclamation made him turn at that moment, and he saw Leslie Underwood, and suddenly fell silent.

But the woman to whom he had been talking did not fall silent. Instead, she rushed up to Leslie, and screamed at her, between angry sobs: "Yes, you'd better come and look at your father's work. I wonder you dare show your face! Burnt in our beds, we might have been, and that's what he meant, and all because the boys threw some bits of stones, playful-like, at his old buggy. Every one of us might have been burnt to death! And where are our things, and our clothes, and our home—and where are we going to live? Burnt up by that wicked old man, and I wonder you will show your face in the street!"

Miss Underwood shrank back, speechless and dismayed, before the furious woman.

Burton put himself before her. "Mrs. Spriggs, your misfortune will make Miss Underwood overlook your words, but nothing will justify or excuse them. You have suffered a loss, and we are all sorry for you, and Miss Underwood came here for the express purpose of offering to help you if there is anything she can do. But you must not slander an innocent man. And as for the rest of you," he added, turning with blazing anger to the crowd as a whole, "you must remember that such remarks as I heard when I came up will make you liable to an action for defamation of character. The law does not permit you to charge a man with arson without any ground for doing so."

"If Doctor Underwood didn't do it, who did? Tell me that," a man in the crowd called out.

"I don't have to tell you. That's nonsense. Probably it caught from the chimney."

"The chief says it's incendiary, all right. Started in a bedroom on the second floor, in a pile of clothes near a window."

"Even if it was incendiary—though I don't believe it was—that has nothing to do with Doctor Underwood. He's laid up with a sprained ankle, and can't walk a step, let alone climb up to a second-story window."

"Well, Henry Underwood hasn't sprained an ankle, has he?" This came from Selby, whom Burton had not noticed before. He thrust himself forward, now, and there was something almost like triumph in his excited face.

"What do you mean by bringing his name in?" asked Burton sternly.

"It looks like his work, all right. More than one fire has been started by him in High Ridge, before this. There are people who haven't forgotten his tricks here, six years ago—writing letters about his father, burning clothes, and keeping the whole place stirred up. I'm not surprised he has come to this."

"He ought to be hung for this, that's what he ought!" burst in Mrs. Spriggs. "Burning people's houses over their heads, in the dead of night! Hanging's too good for him."

"You have not an atom of evidence to go on," cried Burton, exasperated into argument. "You might just as well accuse me, or Mr. Selby, or any one else. Henry Underwood has no ill will against you——"

"The doctor said that fire would come and burn the children up—Mr. Hadley heard him."

"That was nonsense. I heard what he said, too. He was just joking. Besides, that was the doctor; it wasn't Henry."

"If the doctor had 'a' wanted to 'a' done it, he could," said an old man judicially. "He knows too much for his own good, he does; and too much for the good of the people that go agin' him. 'Tain't safe to go agin' him. He can make you lay on your back all your life, like he done with Ben Bussey. He'd 'a' been well long afore this, if the doctor had treated him right."

"Come away from this," said Burton, in a low voice, to Leslie. "You see you can do no good. There is no reason why you should endure this."

She let him guide her through the crowd; but, as they turned away, Selby called to Burton.

"You say we haven't any evidence. I'm going to get it. There is no one in High Ridge but Henry Underwood who would do such a trick, and I am going to prove it against him. We've stood this just long enough."

Burton made no answer. He was now chiefly anxious to hurry Leslie from an unpleasant scene. But again they were interrupted.

Mr. Hadley came puffing after them, with every sign of anxiety in his face.

"Say, Miss Leslie," he began breathlessly. "I didn't mean what I said about not being safe in our beds. You won't mention that to your father, will you? I don't want to get him set against me. I'm sure he wouldn't harm me for the world. I know I'm perfectly safe in my bed, Miss Leslie."

She swept him with a withering look of scorn, and hurried on, without a word. "You see," she said to Burton.

"Yes, I see. It is simply intolerable."

"How *can* they believe it?"

"I think your father should know what is being said. May I go home with you, and report the affair to him?"

"I shall be thankful if you will."

"You really mean that, don't you? Of course, I know that I am nearly a stranger, and that I may seem to be pressing into purely family matters. But, apart from my interest in anything that concerns Philip, I shall be glad, on my own account, if I can be of any help to you in a distressing situation."

"Thank you," she said gravely. And after a moment she added, with a whimsical air that was like her father's: "It would hardly be worth while for us to pretend to be strangers, after turning our skeleton closet into a guest chamber for you. You know all about us."

Burton wasn't so sure of that. And he was even less assured after his half hour of conversation with the doctor, whom he found dressed, but certainly not wholly in his right mind.

"I have come to report the progress of the plot," said Burton. "I am glad to inform you that you are not suspected of having fired the Spriggs house with your own hand. Your sprained ankle served you well in that emergency. But your son Henry had no sprained ankle to protect him; so they have quite concluded that it was his doing."

Doctor Underwood looked at him thoughtfully, with no change of expression to indicate that the news was news to him. "Was the fire incendiary?" he asked, after a moment.

"So they assert."

The doctor closed his eyes with his finger tips, and sat silent for a moment.

"Was there any talk of—arrest?"

"There was wild talk; but, of course, there was nothing to justify an arrest—no evidence."

"There never is," said the doctor. "This disturber of our peace is very skillful. He swoops down out of the dark, with an accompaniment of mystery and malice, and leaves us blinking; and that's all the satisfaction we get out of it. And the anonymous letters he scatters about are always typewritten."

"Not always," said Burton, resolving swiftly to throw the game into the doctor's hands. He laid before him the slip of paper that had been served upon himself in the night. "You don't, by any chance, recognize that handwriting?"

The doctor took the slip into his own hands, and read the message gravely. "Where did you get this?"

Burton told him the night's adven-

tures in outline, mentioning casually Henry's return to the house at two, and the subsequent attempt of some one to enter his room, and his ineffectual pursuit. He omitted, however, any reference to what he had seen from the tree. He felt that in that matter he had been unconsciously betrayed into a spying upon the doctor himself, which was rather embarrassing to acknowledge. Besides, it was not essential to the purpose which he had in mind in posting the doctor.

Doctor Underwood listened with a more impassive face than was altogether natural. At the end of the recital, he picked up the slip of paper again, and studied it.

"I think one of those handwriting experts who analyze forgeries and that sort of thing would say that this was my handwriting, somewhat disguised," he said.

"Yours!" exclaimed Burton, taken by surprise.

"That's what struck me at first sight —its familiarity. It is like seeing your own ghost. Of course, it is obviously disguised, but some of the words look like my writing. You see how I am putting myself into your hands by this admission."

Burton fancied that he saw something else, also; and the pathetic heroism of it made his heart swell with sudden emotion.

"A clue!" he cried gayly. "You did it in your sleep! And you wrote those typewritten letters and handbills on the typewriter in your surgery, when you were in the same somnambulic condition! I examined the work of that machine this morning. It corresponds so closely with the sheet you showed me last night that I have no doubt an expert would be able to work out a proof of identity."

"I'll see that the room is locked, hereafter, at night," said the doctor, with an effort.

"You'd be more likely to catch the villain by leaving the door unlocked and keeping a watch," said Burton, lightly assuming that the capture of the miscreant was still their joint object. "And I'll leave you this new manuscript to add to your collection. It is of no value to me."

With a smile, he presented the incriminating paper to the doctor and took his leave. To himself, he hoped that enough had been said to make the doctor realize that, if the disturber of the peace of High Ridge was *not* to be caught, it would be best to—get him away.

As he walked toward the hotel, he let himself face the situation frankly. If Henry was, as a matter of fact, the criminal, his firing of the Sprigg house was probably less from malice toward the Spriggses than from the conviction that it would be attributed to the agency of the doctor, whose rash speech about calling down fire on his persecutors had fitted so neatly into the outcome. Like the freakish pranks of which Miss Underwood had told, it was designed to hold the doctor up to public reprobation. Only, this was much more serious than those earlier pranks. If a man would go so far as to imperil the lives of an entire family to feed fat his grudge against some one else—and that one his own father —it argued a dangerous degree of abnormality. Was it possible that Leslie Underwood's brother was criminally insane?

Suddenly Rachel Overman's face rose before Burton. He saw just how she would look if such a question were raised about a member of the family from which Philip had chosen his wife.

"Oh, good Lord!" he muttered to himself.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE ISSUE OF JANUARY 10TH.

Man's Inhumanity

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "Raw Gold," "The Man With the Limp," Etc.

How old man Landon took a chance with an applicant without references, and how the new hand made good, despite the record which he had left behind him

AS a general thing, old man Landon was an optimist. Once in a while, though, he would veer to the opposite extreme. One of these periodic reversions from his habitual outlook cropped up on a particularly hot and uncomfortable August evening, when, by long-established precedent, old man Landon should have spread himself over a big easy-chair on the front porch and smoked his pipe in peace. This evening he finished his supper, and rested his elbows on the table, gibing peevishly at his son and daughter.

"Darn it!" he finally declared, with more heat than the occasion seemed to warrant. "I'll sell out, next year, if things don't come my way a little more. What the dickens is the use of a man raisin' boys, if they all pull out quick as they get so they can grow a little fuzz on their chins? There's Henry, tied up in the police, and Buck hellin' round in Montana, and Tom, here, just achin' to pull his freight for parts unknown. Darn it! There's hay to put up, and hosses to break, and cattle to gather—and nobody to do it. Nothin' but work like a hoss from spring till fall. They ain't a man in fifty miles to be hired for love or money."

Tom leaned back in his chair, and smiled calmly at his father's unlooked-for outburst. "Oh, I guess 'love' might get yuh a good man or two," he bantered. "If sis would just say the word, I know lots uh slashin' good stock hands yuh could get a life mortgage on."

"Smart talk don't fork no hay, nor do any hard ridin'," the old man growled. "And there's a heap uh both to be done on this ranch before snow flies, let *me* tell yuh, young man."

"Well, you're a pretty good hand—and I'm not so few, myself," Tom responded, quite unperturbed. "We'll pick up a man or two, before long. No use to get excited, dad. We've never died a winter yet."

"Talking about men," Sarah Lou put in, "there's one riding up now. He's a stranger to me. Maybe *he's* looking for a job."

Bred on the range, a part and parcel of the oldtime cattle country, old man Landon kept open house for whosoever rode in. Hence, he gave over grumbling, and went out to bid the stranger put up his horses—asking neither his name, his business, nor his destination, but merely making him welcome.

In a few minutes, the two came to the house. Tom, on the porch, nodded to the stranger, sizing him up with one quick, careless glance. Landon ushered him within. Sarah Lou brought fresh food, hot from the stove. He ate—quite at ease, apparently—and if his gaze wandered toward Sarah Lou oftener than was needful, why, he could scarcely be blamed.

Old man Landon's only daughter was a beauty, and not wholly unconscious of the fact. Moreover, she was a true daughter of Eve, quite appreciative of admiration. The stranger was neither

good nor bad-looking—just a straight-backed, brown-haired, blue-eyed young male, of medium size, with "cowpuncher" written all over him. And Sarah Lou was partial to cowpunchers.

He finished his supper, and betook himself to the porch. Cigarettes, dusk, and bed came in due order. Breakfast likewise transpired. In the cool of the morning, the stranger saddled one horse, and packed his bed upon the other. As he gave his latigo a final tentative pull, old man Landon addressed him casually.

Landon, in his normal mood, was somewhat given to snapshot judgment of men and things; and usually he made a bull's-eye. He liked the look of this rather diffident young man. "Say, yuh don't happen to be thinkin' of a job, do yuh?" he inquired.

"Well"—the cowpuncher turned so that he looked Landon eye to eye—"I hadn't thought of it—not here. I was thinkin' uh the Seventy-six round-up."

"I need a man or two bad." Landon went straight to the point. "If we hitch, yuh can draw wages from January to January. We'll use yuh better than the Seventy-six."

The stranger pursed up his lips, and seemed to be considering. A faint smile flitted across his face as, in glancing toward the house, he caught a flash of Sarah Lou's gray skirt. He kicked a pebble out of his way, and regarded meditatively the toes of his boots.

"I tell yuh," he said frankly, looking straight at Landon again, "if yuh take me, yuh got to take me on trust, and take chances on havin' me quit yuh in a hurry—'most any time. I've come from across the line, and I've come on the dodge. *Sabe?* I ain't advertisin' my troubles; but you've made me a proposition, and I don't want to take it under no false *pre*tense. A round-up's different; they take a puncher as he comes."

He looked wistfully toward the house as he spoke; and old man Landon's heart warmed toward him.

"If that's all that ails yuh," he observed, "yuh can pull your saddle off and make yourself at home. I don't give a damn who yuh are, nor where yuh come from, nor what yuh done there, so long as yuh behave yourself here. I'll take a chance with yuh, anyhow."

"You're the doctor," the stranger returned slowly, and set about loosening his cinch. "I suppose you'll want to have some way of identifying me? Smith's a good general-purpose name, ain't it? Well, you call me Smith—Dave Smith."

That was the extent of the information he vouchsafed about himself. He fulfilled all old man Landon's expectations as a ranchero, however. Whatever he set out to do, he did heartily and well. All through the month of August, and well into September, Landon, Tom, and Dave Smith toiled at building a great stack of bunch-grass hay by the stable, against the needs of winter. When that was done, and the horse-breaking and cattle-gathering, whereof old man Landon had complained, came to the fore, Dave was the best man of the three—and Tom Landon and his father were accounted first-class cattlemen on those broken ranges that run north from the Cypress Hills.

But, whenever it came to a pinch, Dave Smith was the man who delivered the goods. Many strenuous seasons in American cow camps had taught him all the fine points of a cowpuncher's work, though no one on Birch Creek knew him for a Montana man.

Landon saw to that. A few words, carelessly dropped in the right place, created in the minds of the male gossips—there are such, even in the cattle country—an impression that Dave Smith hailed from Calgary way, up where the big Canadian outfits ranged. So Dave made another cog in the Landon machinery; and everybody, including Sarah Lou, seemed to be quite satisfied with the arrangement. The only one who didn't quite relish it was Charlie Lepp.

The brothers Lepp were from the other side, too—"the other side," in the language of western Canada, referring to all that lay south of the in-

ternational boundary. Their ranch was on Birch Creek, ten miles above Landon's. Horse raising was their specialty. They had good ones, and plenty of them. Withal, they were a pair of energetic, pleasant-spoken young men.

Charlie was a regular visitor at the Landon ranch. He and Sarah Lou would take a mandolin and a guitar out on the front porch, after supper, and play through their entire repertoire. It was very good music; but, for some reason, it didn't appeal to Dave Smith. Not that he ever said so; but Tom astutely observed that Dave was generally missing from these impromptu musicales.

Thus, time passed uneventfully until the crisp October days were at hand. Dave Smith had, apparently, become a fixture at Landon's. He and Tom were saddle-breaking a string of colts, and there was nothing monotonous about that work—especially with Sarah Lou to perch on the rail and applaud when a colt got ugly and made a valiant attempt to "get" his rider.

Presently, for the simple reason that Dave could handle the shy, flighty brutes better than Tom, old man Landon pressed his son into service for cattle gathering, and left Dave to gentle the bronchs a little more—ere he, too, should begin to ride the range. That was before the day of association round-ups in the Hills. Landon had, as he put it, no more cattle than the law allowed; and, when any strayed afar, he had to find them himself, or let them go.

So, Dave worked in the corrals alone, with sometimes a smiling audience of one. Between sunrise and sundown, old man Landon and Tom were miles away. Often they didn't get home until all hours of the night. Dave considered that he had all the best of the deal; his work lay in the corrals. He had nothing to do but saddle, and ride, and unsaddle, and ride again—and, between times, talk to Sarah Lou. And Sarah Lou had only to cook breakfast, dinner, and supper, and watch Dave ride—and talk. They did plenty of that.

Sarah Lou soon discovered that Dave Smith would talk about anything and everything under the sun but himself and his previous condition of servitude, if any. In spite of that, they were pretty good chums—as healthy-minded young men and women are apt to be, when they are a trifle interested in each other. Charlie Lepp kept away for a longer period than usual, and Dave almost forgot his existence.

Late one afternoon, Dave had business with a broken panel in the horse-pasture fence, a quarter of a mile below the house. Hence, he did not see Charlie Lepp ride up. But when Dave had finished his engagement with the fence, the first thing he saw was the familiar red horse, standing, droopy-headed, before the door. Dave walked slowly to the house. He wanted a drink of water. Also, his tobacco and papers were lying on a table in the front room. He saw no reason why he should shy around because Charlie Lepp happened to be there.

A distinctly uttered sentence or two halted Dave when his foot was on the first step of the low porch. It was Sarah Lou's voice. Her tone was mildly resentful.

"But I don't like you *that* way. I don't want to marry *anybody*. Besides, you're—you don't know what you're talking about."

Dave had not meant to eavesdrop. Furthermore, since he had inadvertently done so, he half turned, to retreat. He felt some delicacy about intruding on a man and a woman who were discussing that subject. He knew how *he* would resent interruption at such a moment; and Mr. Dave Smith was not particularly anxious to renew an acquaintance with his old friend, Mr. Trouble. At the same time, he hesitated. He didn't like Charlie Lepp. He didn't like the idea of Charlie Lepp bothering Sarah Lou. In that instant of hesitation, he heard the quick movement of feet on the floor inside.

"Mr. *Lepp!*"

There was no mistaking the emphatic note of protest. Dave walked in.

Sarah Lou was backing toward the

kitchen door, and Lepp was following her. He whirled about at Dave's entrance. Dave gathered in the situation at a glance, nor was he blind to the look of relief that Sarah Lou flashed at him. Charlie Lepp was just about half drunk.

"Howdy," Dave greeted, with outward coolness. "Just come out from town?"

"What's it to yuh?" Lepp challenged. "Yuh better drift. Nobody asked yuh to get your fingers in this pie. Three's a crowd here, just now."

"Oh, I don't know," drawled Dave. "Keep your clothes on. Don't be too hasty. Be a gentleman—if you can."

"Say"—Lepp turned his back on Sarah Lou—"you doll-faced pup, for two pins I'd bust your head wide open!"

"If I had two pins," Dave returned slowly, "I'd sure donate. I sure would. Just to see how you'd perform."

Lepp, aflame with bad whisky and rejected love, leaped at him forthwith. Dave met his rush, without moving out of his tracks, and floored him with a right swing that landed under the ear. Lepp came up, swearing. At his second rush, Dave sidestepped. In the same motion, he jabbed his left hand straight into Lepp's face, and kicked both feet from under him—in consequence whereof, Mr. Lepp's head struck the floor before the rest of his anatomy.

It didn't seem to be much of an effort for Dave. He didn't appear to be angry, even. In fact, he was laughing. But it wasn't really a pleasant laugh; it gave Sarah Lou an involuntary shiver. She hovered in the kitchen doorway, half scared, half fascinated. She had no idea that Dave Smith was so devilishly quick, so muscular. It amazed her to see him make a monkey of a man who stood four inches taller and outweighed him by thirty pounds.

Lepp scrambled up, this time, spitting blood and fumbling under his coat. When he did that, Dave fell upon him with silent viciousness; and at the end of a short minute of savage scuffling, he had Lepp jammed, face down, in the seat of old man Landon's Morris chair, with an arm twisted across his back, so that he was unable to do more than squirm feebly. The offending gun he sent spinning across the floor. Then he held Lepp a minute longer, while he gave him some good advice.

"You're too drunk to fight," he said. "Yuh ought to be ashamed to act like this before a lady, anyhow. Now, if I was you, I'd get on my hoss, and ride off home—'cause the best you'll get out uh this deal is the worst of it. And when yuh get that Medicine Hat red-eye out uh your system, you'll know yuh got off dead wrong, and there won't be any hard feelin's. *Sabe?*"

Whether he *"sabbed"* or not, Lepp knew that he was whipped. He went angrily out, mounted his horse, and rode away.

Sarah Lou watched him over the first rise. "My, my!" she said plaintively. "I do wish things like that wouldn't happen."

"They sure will, though," Dave returned lightly, "so long as men is just men, and *will* drink that fightin' whisky."

Which summing-up, while correct so far as it went, was inadequate, and not quite pertinent to what Sarah Lou was thinking of when she spoke. She had unconsciously meant Charlie Lepp's inebriated attempt at lovemaking, and Dave divined her meaning. But he chose to turn it off in that way. He picked up Lepp's gun, laid it on a shelf, and went off to the corrals.

Charlie Lepp did the handsome thing the very next day. He rode in and apologized humbly to Sarah Lou. After that, he sought Dave at the stable, and proffered his hand.

"I was half shot," he declared straightforwardly, "and when I get to that stage, I ain't got a lick uh sense. You did right, and I haven't any license to be sore at yuh."

"I didn't know but you'd be after my scalp," laughed Dave.

"Oh, nothin' like that," Lepp assured him, "I'm no quitter when it comes to

a ruction; but I know when I've made a fool uh myself."

"Just the same," Dave muttered, when Charlie Lepp finally departed, "I wouldn't trust yuh as far as I could throw a bull by the tail. Yuh got a snaky eye in your head, old boy."

After that, things ran smoothly enough for many a moon. Lepp told old man Landon and Tom the details of his "fuss" with Sarah Lou and Dave Smith—told it with an air of half-amused penitence that made the whole thing appear in the light of a joke on himself. He was just as earnest in his courtship of Sarah Lou as ever, and he was, apparently, just as welcome at the Landon ranch as before.

So, fall and winter slipped by. The green grass came again, and with it the spring cattle gathering and branding of calves. Dave Smith rode, and roped, and branded—did a man's work in a man's way, quietly, effectively, without any fuss and feathers. He was practically a member of the family. Old man Landon had almost forgotten that Dave was supposed to be "on the dodge"; that he was "wanted" across the line for some unknown deviltry. Old man Landon wouldn't have cared, anyway. Dave Smith was "white," in his estimation. Not what a man had been, not what he might be, but what he *was*—that describes old man Landon's measuring stick for his fellows.

One June morning, Dave sat on the front steps with the old man. He had a pencil in one hand, and a piece of paper in the other. The paper was sprinkled with figures.

"Say, I've been here ten months, now—pretty near a year," Dave suddenly observed.

"That's what," old man Landon agreed, after a period of mental casting back. "Ten months, all right. Seems longer."

"And I haven't drawed any money," Dave continued.

"Well, that's your own fault," Landon retorted placidly. "Want to draw the bunch, and go celebrate?"

"Not much," Dave smiled. "I want yuh to pay me off in cows—cows with calves at foot. *Sabe?*"

"Huh!" Landon looked at him curiously. Cowpunchers who wanted their pay in stock were a rarity, in his experience. He had often secretly wondered why Dave never asked for money; and he had usually found his answer in the fact that Dave seldom went to town, and drank little when he did go. "Why, I guess I can do that, all right. Gettin' ambitious to be a cowman proper, eh?"

"I've been lookin' for a place to light for quite a while," Dave returned absently. "I've got along here all right. Nobody has bothered me. Maybe they never will. If I can work here, and let my cattle run with yours, and put what money I can save into more cows—why, it don't take long to build up a bunch. I don't want to work for wages all my life."

Now, this was quite an admirable plan. Many a cattle king has laid the foundation of his herds in substantially the same manner. Dave's proposition gave him a distinct boost with old man Landon.

"Yuh never hit on a better idea in your life, Dave," remarked the old man kindly. "Cattle are the goods, if yuh know the business. You stay with that idea, and some day you'll be able to buy diamonds. I expect," he concluded whimsically, "you'll be filin' of a claim next, and buildin' you a cabin on it, and gettin' married."

Dave blushed, and turned the conversation back to its original channel.

When they had settled the details, Dave, Tom, and the old man rode forth, and bunched what Landon cattle were ranging close. Out of the herd, Dave selected ten of the best young cows, each with a fat, wild-eyed calf by her side. The idea had simmered in his brain for a long time. He had registered a brand early in the spring, and he was ready to use it.

They drove the cows down to the corral. Amid smoke, and dust, and throaty bawling, they ran a big D—S on each sleek side. Dave sat sideways in his saddle, and looked thoughtfully

after his cattle, when Tom threw down the bars and they struck the long trot for the upland ranges.

"Item for the local paper," Tom chanted jestingly. "New outfit gone into the cow business. Brand, D bar S. Earmark, crop the right, split the left. Owner, D. Smith. Range, Birch Creek and vicinity."

Dave laughed. His start was a small one—but it was a start. He liked the feeling of ownership, briefly as he had experienced it.

"I guess D. Smith won't overcrowd the range with his stock," he retorted. "Not for a while, anyway. Ten years from now, maybe, it'll be a different story."

Shortly after that, Dave had another heart-to-heart talk with old man Landon; and the two of them rode up and down Birch Creek all one day, casting critical eyes over the land. And the upshot of this was that Dave Smith made a long journey to the territorial capital, where he legally declared his intention of becoming a British subject, and, in connection therewith, filed his homestead right on the hundred and sixty acres that butted up against Landon's lower pasture fence.

Then haying time came again. There were days and days of heaving and straining on a pitchfork handle—hot, sweaty, palm-blistering work, that is little to a cowpuncher's taste. Finally, the haying ended. There ensued a short breathing spell, during which Tom saddled his pet horse and rode away to visit a cow camp on the Seven Persons.

The first cool day after that, old man Landon drove off to town. There was no pressing work. Dave camped on the porch, taking life easy, keeping up a desultory conversation with Sarah Lou. A little past midforenoon, she called to him from the kitchen.

"Oh, Dave!"

"Yours truly," he answered. "What's the trouble?"

"The cover on this jar of chokecherry jam is screwed down so tight I can't get it off. I wish you'd come and loosen it. I want to make a cake for dinner."

That jar of jam may or may not have been responsible for what followed; but it certainly was a contributing factor. Probably it would all have happened, anyway, sooner or later. Dave laid hold of the thing, and it defied the grip of his muscular fingers. Sarah Lou brought a towel, to give him a firmer hold on the smooth glass and metal. That failed. As a last resort, Sarah Lou held the towel-wrapped glass, while Dave twisted at the screw top. And he twisted with such energy that he broke the glass mouth of the jar. A jagged point cut his fingers slightly when the thing gave way.

Of course, Sarah Lou was properly sympathetic over his hurt, and straightway insisted on wrapping it with a strip of linen. She was, perhaps, not altogether without guile. The wisdom of Solomon was not competent to analyze the way of a man with a maid—and wiser men than Solomon have since confessed themselves baffled before the way of a maid with a man.

At any rate, Dave Smith and Sarah Lou presently found themselves smiling into each other's eyes in a way that was new to both of them. Slowly, as if he were a bit doubtful at his own temerity, Dave bent and kissed her, and drew her close to him. Sarah Lou burrowed her face in his coat lapel, and didn't seem to mind at all. Only, he could feel her heart thumping hard against his breast; and a flood of color swept to the roots of her copper-brown hair.

For a little while they stood so, without a word. Then Dave tilted her head back, and looked long and earnestly. She blushed again, and Dave smiled. He kissed her once more, and gently took down the soft arm that had stolen around his neck. He went out of the kitchen by the rear door, and walked slowly away to the corral. He wanted to think—and he could not think coherently with his arms about Sarah Lou.

If she could have seen the sober look on his face, Sarah Lou might have

been puzzled. But Sarah Lou was sitting by the kitchen table, her hands clasped in her lap, smiling faintly, and looking straight past the broken jar—at visions.

Whatever else they may have seen or been thinking of, it is a certainty that neither thought of Charlie Lepp—nor saw him dismount, come up on the porch, and look through the open doors into the kitchen, while Dave stood there, with Sarah Lou in his arms. But Charlie Lepp's eyesight was tolerably keen just about that time. He saw *them*. He backed softly off the porch, saw Dave leave the house, and followed, coming up as Dave abstractedly began to roll a cigarette, in the shade of the stable wall.

"Why—hello!" Dave greeted. "Where did you spring from so sudden?"

Lepp regarded him silently for a moment. Then he showed his hand. That momentary glare, however, was a tactical mistake. It warned Dave that something unpleasant was coming.

"Damn yuh, I'll learn yuh to cut in on *my* trail! I seen yuh—yuh——" Lepp punctuated his sentences with blows that somehow missed their mark; and the epithets he applied to Dave were of the sort to make a man fight, if there be a drop of fighting blood in him. It did not occur to Charlie Lepp that he might have pitched on the wrong way, and the wrong man.

At his first swing, Dave backed up, and reached involuntarily for the six-shooter, which he always carried inside the waistband of his trousers. But when Lepp's words gave him the key to the situation, he snarled like a wolf to think of any man spying on him and Sarah Lou at such a time, and let go the gun handle, to meet Lepp at his own game.

It took him no more than two or three minutes to make Charlie Lepp realize that, in the homely phrase of the West, he had "bit off more than he could chew." Dave was mad, and fought back accordingly. All the things he had once done to Lepp drunk, he now did to Lepp sober—and more. He battered Lepp down, resisted the temptation to kick him in the face, and, when he got up, knocked him down again. The second time, Lepp stayed down. He was out. Dave stood over him a second or two, his blue eyes ablaze, white about the mouth, and quivering all over with anger. Then he stooped, and felt to see if Lepp was armed.

He was not, and so Dave hurried to the creek below the corrals, assured that he would not be potted on the way. There he washed the blood off his face and hands, and carried back his hat full of water to revive Lepp. That gentleman presently sat up, blinking out of the one eye that was still in commission.

"Drunk or sober, you're the biggest damn fool I've met for many a day," Dave told him. "If you've had enough uh this, the quicker yuh hit the trail, the better. I'll bring your hoss down here, and yuh can ride off without *her* seein' yuh."

Dave got Lepp's horse down to the stable without attracting any attention from the house. Not that he was a magnanimous young man—far from it. He would have hurt Charlie Lepp a good deal worse, and been glad of the chance—after what Lepp had said. Dave merely wanted to spare Sarah Lou the knowledge of a disagreeable episode. That was all.

"If anybody finds this out," said Dave contemptuously, when Lepp swung painfully into his saddle, "it'll be from *you*. There's just two things I want yuh to keep good and plenty in your mind: Yuh can't whip me at no turn in the road—and yuh have no mortgage on Miss Landon. *Sabe?* I'm givin' it to yuh straight. Don't get gay around here, any more."

When he was gone, Dave walked straight to the house. Sarah Lou had not yet emptied the broken jar. She was still dreaming. Dave drew her over to a window, and cuddled her up close to him.

"Do yuh like me much, little woman?" he asked.

Sarah Lou nodded vigorously, and

then hid her face against his coat again.

"You're foolish," he said tenderly. "I might be most any kind of a hard citizen. Yuh don't know much about me. Ain't yuh afraid to take chances?"

"I guess I'd like yuh, just the same," Sarah Lou murmured, without looking up. "I couldn't help it."

"I tell yuh, Lou-Lou," he went on, after a little, "I don't want to put any string on yuh. It wouldn't be fair. Maybe I've had a dream about a little shack and just us two in it—and maybe that dream'll come true by and by. But not right now. We got to wait. There's reasons. I can't tell 'em to yuh, but they're there—bigger'n a wolf."

"It isn't anything about any other woman, is it?" Sarah demanded suddenly, as she threw up her head.

"Lord bless yuh, no!" Dave exclaimed. "I should say not. You come first—and you'll be last and all the time."

"Then I don't care what else it is," she assured him trustingly. "Anyway, you'll be here. That's one comfort."

They stood by the window for a while longer, and then Sarah Lou came back to earth and discovered that it was past dinner time. She made no cake for dinner, that day. They lunched on what the cupboard contained, and saddled up and went galloping out over the cool, high ridges—riding, for the pure love of motion, straight into the teeth of a clean, sweet wind that purred over the big, dun-colored land. They came home, quite tired and happy, and, with old man Landon's evening return, fell back into the commonplaces of everyday existence. Still, Landon *père* was not blind. He knew. And he smiled to himself, for he liked Dave Smith.

Tom came trailing home after a lapse of three days. "I come by Lepp's," he mentioned casually. "I guess we won't see Charlie come ridin' in for quite a spell. He's skinned up in great shape. One of the bronchs fell with him, a day or two back, and got up and walked all over him—by the looks. He's a sight."

Not long afterward, two range riders from Piegan Valley stopped at Landon's for dinner. In the course of the meal, one of them volunteered a bit of information when Tom spoke of the Lepp outfit.

"We met Charlie pullin' south with a packadero layout, this mornin'," the cowpuncher said. "He's goin' across the line after a bunch uh horses they bought—over to Miles City."

"Why, I thought Mark was going to make that trip," Tom returned. "He told me he was."

"I guess maybe Charlie wanted to get out uh the country for a while, so everybody wouldn't be askin' him how he got his face all marked up," chuckled the rider.

Dave looked up. "Miles City, eh?" he observed.

"That's what he said," the cowpuncher repeated.

"Miles City, eh?" Dave muttered to himself, as he swung across his horse after dinner; and "Miles City, eh?" he whispered again, when he lay down on his bed that night. He blinked up at the shadowy ceiling for a long time, sleepless after a hard day.

"Hell!" he mumbled impatiently, at last. "What's the use uh worryin'? Maybe he will, and maybe he won't."

After that, Dave went about his work as usual, except that he suddenly developed a streak of animosity toward coyotes. Wherever and whenever he rode, a Winchester carbine was slung under his left stirrup leather. He was a good shot, too. He could pot the gray calf killers at two hundred yards, offhand.

Thus, a month faded into the limbo of the past, and on a smoky October afternoon, three MR men from the Seven Persons rode in to the Landon ranch. Their horses were weary. Old man Landon urged them to stay overnight. An hour later came two more from Walsh Flat. To these, also, was hospitality extended. And the closing dark found Mark and Charlie Lepp unsaddling at the stable door.

"Yes—I got back the other day," Charlie answered Tom's query. "We've

been out after that XS bunch. Run them on the creek below here till we're about afoot. I guess we'll have to camp with yuh to-night."

Sarah Lou cooked another supper; and the Lepps ate it, and then joined the others in the front room. Dave was backed in a corner, smoking. Mark Lepp, an elder edition of his brother, grunted: "Howdy"; Charlie greeted Dave quite casually—as if he had quite forgotten or forgiven the fierce mauling of his last visit.

Dave kept to his corner. No one but Sarah Lou noticed that he was not so much at ease as he outwardly appeared. There was a certain wariness under his quiet. Sarah Lou wondered what was the matter. She did not observe that Charlie Lepp—Mark, too, for that matter—was covertly watching Dave. But Dave knew it, and he thought he knew why.

The evening was not long drawn out. The riders were slated for an early start, and they needed sleep. Old man Landon and Tom arranged beds. Presently, all were provided for but the Lepps.

"Well, boys, we're sort uh crowded all round," said Landon. "I guess you'll have to bunk three in a row to-night. We haven't got enough blankets to spread another layout; but Dave's got a good, wide bed, and lots uh covers. I guess the three of yuh'll make out all right."

The Lepps declared that any old place to sleep would look good to them; and Dave smiled, and said that he didn't mind, if they didn't. But he lay on the outside of the bed all that night, wakeful and alert, acutely conscious that neither of his companions was asleep.

At sunrise, Sarah Lou had breakfast ready. The MR riders and the men from Walsh Flat ate, saddled, and rode away. The Lepps lingered for a while. Finally, they, too, mounted, and disappeared. Dave stood in the stable door until they were over the first hill; and when he turned, his eyes rested speculatively on his own two horses, coralled with the rest.

"Maybe I ought to hit the trail," he said to himself. "But still—I guess I'll take a chance. I ain't goin' to run from no shadows—now."

He caught a horse, and went down the creek, in search of a work team which had escaped from the pasture a day or two earlier. Hard on the heels of his going, old man Landon pried Tom loose from a newspaper.

"Dave's gone to hunt that team," he said. "Let's you and me go out and get a beef. I'm tired uh bacon."

"I'll go yuh," Tom acquiesced. "There's a good fat yearlin' in a bunch a little ways down the creek."

Following this suggestion, they rode down the Birch, some thirty minutes behind Dave. Just below the pasture fence, Tom's horse pricked up his ears at a distant sound.

"Hear that, dad?" Tom asked. "Dave's givin' it to the coyotes hot and heavy."

"There was two guns talkin', then," the old man answered. "And Dave don't generally shoot more'n once at a wolf."

They loped on, thinking little of the shooting, beyond a mild speculation as to what might have called forth the half dozen or more reports they had heard. Just about a mile farther on, they swung around a curve in the creek bed, and pulled up short—to keep from riding over Dave Smith.

He was lying on his back, with his head and shoulders resting on a deserted ant hill; and he was holding both hands to a place on his breast, where the blood oozed out from under his fingers.

They got down, and stooped over him.

"Dave! Say, Dave!" the old man appealed. "What happened? Are yuh hurt bad?"

Dave opened his eyes; they were glassy with pain. There was no recognition in the look. He stared straight up at the sky for a few seconds, and began to mutter.

Old man Landon had to lean low to catch what he said. Even then, they could only get scattered words and

short phrases. Once or twice, Tom heard his sister's name. After a little of this, Dave closed his eyes and shuddered; and the Landons, father and son, thought that was the last of him. But presently he looked straight up at them; and they heard every word distinctly, though he could only whisper.

"I slept in the same bed with 'em, and they shot me down like a dog—shot me down like a dog." Then, after a pause: "But I got 'em—got 'em both! I win—even if I lose—I——" He choked over the words. A frothy stream bubbled out of his mouth. He stiffened suddenly, and then went limp.

There was nothing much they could do for Dave Smith, after that. Tom took off his coat and laid it over the blood-stained face. The old man stood by, stunned, puzzling over what Dave had said. He didn't quite understand. His old eyes, roving restlessly about, caught sight of an object on the south bank—an object that was not a rock, nor an animal, nor anything that should have been there.

"Get on your hoss!" he said harshly to his son. "Let's ride up there and see if he knew what he was sayin'."

Up on the bank, they saw two horses standing back in a tiny hollow; and on the rim of the hill that overlooked the creek, they found the brothers Lepp—one with a hole in his head, the other punctured at the top button of his coat. Dave Smith *was* a good shot.

Charlie Lepp lay on his side, drawn up as though he had died of a cramp. The wind, playing hide and seek about him, had flirted some papers out of his inside pocket. Old man Landon picked them out of the grass, and glanced over them mechanically. One he read, and reread; he got his glasses out, wiped them with shaky fingers, and read again.

It was a small poster, describing, with much detail, one David Jardine, wanted in Custer County, Montana, for murder, arson, and grand larceny. In heavy-faced type, it offered a reward of one thousand dollars for the arrest of this man, or for information leading to the same.

He handed it to Tom, and looked back into the creek bed. There was the description. He had it from Dave himself that he was "on the dodge." For all that, old man Landon couldn't reconcile Dave Smith, as he knew him—as he had known him for more than a year—with murder, arson, and grand larceny.

"I don't care a continental," he said, at last. "I guess Dave Smith was David Jardine, all right. But he was a damn sight better boy than these dirty dogs that killed him. I guess this come uh that Miles City trip. I guess they come to the ranch last night lookin' for a chance to collect that thousand dollars. Come on, Tom. My God! I'd just about as soon be shot myself as take Dave home to Lou—like that."

Man's inhumanity to man does make countless thousands mourn. A poet said that, a long time ago; and no man ever penned a truer word. Yet, it is a comforting thought that, sometimes, the apostles of inhumanity get the worst of the deal.

Dave Smith was not as dead as a dead man should be, when Tom and his father rode back to him. Nor did he die. They carried him home, and sent for a doctor. A detail of mounted police came and took charge of Lepp brothers, deceased. One redcoat stayed at the ranch, to keep an eye on the third party to that mysterious shooting—the mystery arose by reason of Tom Landon keeping the reward circular in his pocket, and his mouth shut, so that there was no apparent reason for so much blood spilling.

And then old man Landon took his pen in hand, and wrote to the prosecuting attorney of Custer County, Montana, for the facts in the case. He got his answer, straight from the shoulder, long before Dave Smith was in any shape to talk.

In part, the letter ran:

I carefully investigated this case, and could find no grounds for prosecution. Jardine was clearly justified in shooting Hurley. The burning of the ranch house at the time of the killing was accident, pure and simple.

The grand larceny charge rests on the fact that Jardine took a horse away from one of Hurley's men after the trouble, and turned the horse loose on the range at Markham's—where he had a horse of his own. This fact makes a charge of larceny absurd.

Hurley's people, however, are hot-headed Texans; and they naturally wish to make as much trouble for Jardine as possible. At the same time, in view of the coroner's jury returning a verdict of justifiable homicide, no officer of Custer County would arrest Jardine, at any time or place. They are all familiar with the facts in the case, and know that there are no grounds for prosecution. Of course, I could not prevent the Hurley people from offering a reward; and, as they have sworn to a complaint, I should have to proceed, in case Jardine were apprehended. But a trial would simply result in acquittal.

Speaking unofficially, I know Dave Jardine pretty well; and he is made of good stuff. When the Hurleys began to stir things up, I have it on good authority that the sheriff of our county gave the boy a quiet tip that he would perhaps avoid a lot of unpleasantness by leaving Montana until the thing died down. From the tone of your letter, I am making a guess that you have come in contact with Dave Jardine. I can assure you that he is a *man*, in every sense of the word. Sincerely yours, A. J. HART.

Pros. Attorney, Custer County, Montana.

Armed with that missive, old man Landon tackled the Canadian authorities. Mr. Hart, of Custer County, came to the fore with a long, legal statement of facts. To such good purpose did the pair exert themselves that, by the time Dave was on his feet again, he had only one thing to worry him. There was only one cloud on his horizon—and that was Sarah Lou's blushing argument that *no* girl could be expected to marry at a week's notice, however much she loved a man.

THE CHEAPEST DINNER ON EARTH

YOU must go to Russia, and dine in a Russian restaurant—say at St. Petersburg—if you wish to obtain the biggest dinner in the world, and at the cheapest possible price. Foreigners there usually eat but twice a day, and one needs a voracious appetite to do justice, even then, to the meals given.

Before beginning the serious business of dinner, you are expected to roam round the restaurant and help yourself to appetizers of caviar, olives, sardine sandwiches, vodka, anchovies, and many other things, which are laid out temptingly on side tables.

You sit down feeling as if you had already eaten enough; but a couple of full plates of good soup are brought to you, and you are expected to eat them both. Then follows a big helping of fish, and sometimes two different kinds of fish. Next comes a veal cutlet large enough to satisfy a hungry tramp; and after that huge platefuls of roast beef, roast goose, chicken, ham, roast pork, and boiled mutton.

You cannot escape. The waiter, from experience, knows that his customers want everything, and so brings you enormous helpings of every dish, and looks grieved if anything is left on your plate. You finish up with big saucers of preserved fruit, plates of various puddings, cheese, fresh fruit, and coffee.

This dinner, in the United States, would cost over five dollars; but there your bill—including the waiter's tip—comes to about forty cents.

SEEING THE WIND

ON a dry, windy day, get a polished metallic surface of a couple of feet or more—a big hand saw will answer the purpose—and hold this across the wind; that is to say, if the wind be East, hold it north or south, and incline it to an angle of forty-five degrees. Now look at some small, sharply defined object over the edge, and you will see the air flow over the edge quite clearly.

The Night Alarm

By General Charles King

Author of "Captured," "A Ride and a King," Etc.

Soldiers are as human as other people; they have their tragedies and comedies of life, their buried secrets and their apparent eccentricities of character. But the iron hand of discipline holds them in check, and teaches them a certain reserve; so that outsiders rarely learn what goes on behind the guarded confines of the barracks. When an outbreak does occur, however, it is all the more impetuous because of the long confinement, and matters take on a serious aspect. General Charles King knows the soldier folk as do few others, and he writes of them out of a large sympathy and understanding.

(*A Complete Novelette*)

IT was just nine-thirteen p. m. by the clock in the adjutant's office when there broke out in town the row that brought the populace of Fort Sibley—men, women, and children—thronging out on the eastern bluff. Down in the intervening valley lay the stables and the corral. Beyond them, half a mile on a bee line, and just outside the reservation, stretched a double line of rude wooden buildings, with a score of outlying "shacks" that made up a metropolis of the northern slope of the Big Horn, some twenty years ago.

"Shootin' up our fellers!" was the excited cry that passed from group to group, as the sound of distant firing, swift and vicious, and punctuated by many a fierce and vengeful yell, came throbbing on the still night air. Some men rushed for barracks and their revolvers; but cool-headed sergeants, speedily backed by the officers, checked and controlled them. Some few darted away to the aid of their comrades, before any one could interpose.

Then the guard was seen, with the officer of the day, double timing away to town. Then, bareheaded and gray, the colonel commanding had appeared on the bluff, ordering all men to their quarters; the trumpets pealed the assembly, and reluctantly the soldiers ran for the company parade grounds, to answer to their names.

"Hold them in ranks for the present," was the order carried from troop to troop by the adjutant; and presently the firing died away in town, and the chatter at the fort.

The trumpeters had just begun to sound the tattoo, when new excitement broke forth—a carbine shot close at hand, and frantic shoutings from the lone sentry at the post of the guard. Another shot, another, and yells of panic and dismay—and then, on a sudden, a broad glare of ruddy light illumined the garrison; from the roof of the guardhouse a sheet of flame went roaring on high; and, with one impulse, all that was left of the garrison came tearing to the spot, to find the sentry shrieking like one demented, and three or four men stumbling blindly out from the dense, suffocating smoke clouds that rolled through the hallway.

The sentry's ravings were suddenly

understood. "The prisoners—my God, those prisoners—in the inner room!"

A stalwart captain seized him by the collar. "Who has the keys?" he demanded.

"The corporal—Corporal Ward, sir—and he isn't here!" A dozen men, bearing a long, heavy beam, burst through the crowd, and were lost in the stifling hallway, just as an athletic young soldier, almost breathless, came bounding up the slope from the stables.

"In God's name, Corporal Ward, where have you been? Where are your keys?" demanded the officer.

"Answering sentry call, sir!" gasped the lad.

"But the keys, sir—the keys!"

"I never *had* them, Captain Darrell. They've gone with the sergeant to town."

"Then God help you, boy! Those poor devils are roasting alive—and, between you, you've done it. Come back out of there, you men!" shouted Darrell, with a leap to the smoke-vomiting doorway. "It's useless! Come back, I say!"

Indeed, any one could see that it was useless. All aloft was now one mass of flame; all below was doomed. Gasping, choking, jumping over each other—some dragged out senseless by the heels, some borne in the arms of comrades—the last of the would-be rescuers had only just been laid beside his exhausted fellows, when, with a stunning roar of timbers, to the accompaniment of an awful groan from the stricken crowd, the roof came crashing down; and Fort Sibley's big guardhouse, with all it contained, was now but a raging furnace. Nothing short of cremation could be the fate of any living thing left within its walls.

That was a fearsome night at the post; yet there was jubilee in town.

It was a fortnight thereafter, and just after one o'clock, the dead hour of the night, when Sergeant Morris, saluting, said briefly: "Yes, sir," and his captain turned away. Black, silent, and statuesque in the pallid moonlight, the garrison guard stood at attention in front of the shack that had been hurriedly built on the site of the guardhouse. Two weeks earlier, that guardhouse had suddenly gone up in smoke, and with it, said the colonel, the spirits of three prisoners, whose calcined bones were to have been sorted out from the smouldering ruins and decently interred.

But the bones were never found—not so much as a scrap of them. The few scattered specimens unearthed—or, rather, unashed—proved to be palpable frauds, selected from other forms of the animal kingdom.

The befogged authorities awoke to the fact that a jail delivery had doubtless been "pulled off" right under their martial noses. Then it was remembered that, on the night of the fire, the guard had been sent in haste to stop a riot in town—an exultant, exuberant row between cowboys and troopers, who had been sworn friends ever since the latter's rescue of the former's stampeded herd, when the Sioux swept the valley, in the previous year.

Then it was remarked that, in spite of a furious and sustained fire between two score of combatants—many of them dead shots—not a man had been hit. Then it was discovered that the McKinney mail coach had been harmlessly held up an hour after the fracas and just after the fire, and then driven away, deeply laden with cowpunchers in high state of hilarity.

Five days after the fire old Colonel Riggs, the post commander, began to realize that some one had played him a practical joke and relieved him of three of the most daring malefactors, civil or military—according to all accounts—that even Wyoming could furnish twenty years ago.

It made a tremendous stir. The trio had been run down red-handed; had been turned over for safe-keeping at the guardhouse until marshal and sheriff could arrange for safe conduct to Cheyenne. All preparations, even to the detail of a lieutenant and twenty troopers as escort, had been completed, and the convoy was to start on the mor-

row; but, when the morrow came, the guardhouse and the guarded were gone. It was then that Colonel Riggs began to realize further that cowboys and soldiers, both, had been concerned in it.

He was feeling the sting of it yet. The commanding general had wired caustic comment. The department inspector had come to investigate, had looked unutterable things, and had reported worse. Adjacent post commanders, recently made to smart when Riggs had been acting inspector general, wrote words of sympathy that savored too much of sweet content. Riggs had planned to go on leave of absence, and a still hunt for a brigadier generalship while hovering about the throne at Washington. Now he dared not go and leave this matter unsettled, and these malefactors at large.

One of his best captains, on this short June night, was officer of the day. One of this captain's best "non-coms" was sergeant of the guard; and one of the best young corporals in the Sixteenth Cavalry was in charge of the first relief, on post at this moment, when Sergeant Morris said "Yes, sir," and Captain Darrell turned away.

Morris stood for a few seconds gazing after his superior and considering his parting instructions, before returning to the guard. In those high latitudes, so near the snow-covered shoulders of Cloud Peak, one may feel a bit chilly, even in summer. Something, at all events, set the teeth of some of the men almost to chattering. Something had started a shiver in the ranks of the guard.

"Aw—hurry up, Morris!" muttered big Tim Scanlan—like himself a sergeant not three months before; but now, for the fourth time in two enlistments, serving Uncle Sam as a private.

The sergeant eyed him keenly for a moment before commanding: "Break ranks." Morris stood and gazed after Scanlan as the latter slouched away, almost the last of the score of guardsmen to reënter the low building. Then Morris turned to Corporal Ward, who, all this time, had been standing, carbine in hand, at the edge of the rude porch—the nattiest, trimmest, best looking young soldier in the Sixteenth Cavalry.

Morris, more than ten years his senior in the service, and more yet in years, looked upon him with evident approval. Ward was still gazing intently toward the night lights of the distant town. The sound of wrangling voices in the guardroom seemed to disturb him; he shouldered his carbine, and stepped briskly out toward the edge of the steep descent into the valley, where the swift mountain stream could be heard rushing over its stony bed. Apparently, he had not noticed the sergeant's coming. There was anxiety in the clear-cut beardless face. The lad was barely twenty; yet, within two years of his enlistment, he had won his stripes. He started at sound of the sergeant's voice.

"Did you hear what the old man said?" was the blunt question.

Ward halted short, turned, and faced the speaker; then silently shook his head. Again he seemed to be listening for sounds from the valley.

"He wants a corporal and two men at his quarters at three o'clock."

"Well, it's Shea's turn," was the reply, calmly indifferent.

"It's Shea's turn, but—I'm going to send you."

There was no mistaking the start. Ward regained control of himself with obvious effort. "I had hoped to get a little sleep to-night," he said. "Except when making out the guard report —*also* Shea's business, or yours—I've been on my feet ever since we marched on."

"That's what you get for writing the best hand and wearing the best clothes at the post. You're more of a dude than the last lieutenant, Ward; an' it doubles your details."

"By day, perhaps, but it shouldn't by night," was the half-aggrieved reply; "especially when I've been at it since guard mount. Now Captain Darrell has had no use for me since the fire. I don't *want* to go, sergeant, and Shea does."

"It's not what Shea wants, nor what

you want. It's what the old man wants——" began Morris.

"D'you mean he—picked me for it?" questioned Ward, the young face flushing eagerly.

"He—— Less noise in there, you fellers!" began Morris; then he made a sudden spring for the dimly lighted doorway.

The wordy altercation within had developed swiftly into a row. There was a sound of scuffling, two or three heavy blows, then a crashing fall. Then "Big Tim" came lunging forth, two guardsmen clinging about him.

"Let go!" he swore, in a fury of blasphemy. "I don't 'low no man to talk to me like that!"

Another soldier, springing from the guardroom, flung himself upon Scanlan's back, and twined his arms about the brawny neck.

"What's happened? Who'd he hit?" demanded Morris, closing in from the front.

"Corporal Shea," panted one of the men; but he could get no further.

"Let go!" raved Scanlan, beside himself with rage. "I'll *smash* you men, if you don't let go!"

"Hold him!" was the sergeant's muttered order. "Choke him, Kraus! Scanlan, sit still, now, and quit, or you'll get the butt square in the face. We're a dozen to one, man."

But only after tremendous struggle, when borne down by sheer force of numbers, battered, breathless, exhausted, and half stripped, would Scanlan yield.

Meantime, the boy trumpeter of the guard had been started on the run for the hospital and help. Shea, the victim of Scanlan's savage blow, lay limp and senseless. Cold water could not revive him.

"What had Shea said to rile him?" demanded Morris, brushing the dirt from his dress, and looking ruefully at the wreck of his best blouse.

"Not a damned thing, that I heard," answered one of the men.

"Not a word, that I know of," answered another.

Scanlan, it was remarked, had been in savage mood ever since he came off post at half-past eleven. He had been over to barracks for half an hour, about midnight, until Morris sent for him and rebuked him for overstaying his time.

"Scanlan hadn't slept any," said little Lanigan. "Kept us fellers awake, an' cursed at Shea for tellin' him to shut up. Then the guard was turned out by the O. D.; and soon as they got inside again he began pickin' on Shea. They jawed a second or two; then Scanlan shoved him back on the bunk, and Shea flew at him like a catamount, an' Scanlan just side-stepped and let him have an awful crack that sent him down like a log. Scanlan's crazy wid drink—or somethin'."

It was certainly something; it was certainly not drink. "There isn't a sniff of liquor about him," said the hospital steward, examining by order of the officer of the day, whose vigilant ears had caught sound of the disturbance far out over the parade.

"It's sheer brutality," said the young assistant surgeon, who had hurried over at the summons of the guard, and was laboring vainly with his soldier patient, stanching the blood, but by no means reviving the man.

By this time Scanlan, limp and unnerved, was sitting in one of the barred cells, his swollen face buried in his hands, heedless of the sponge and water brought for his comfort. Sullen, half dazed, he seemed to be just beginning to realize the plight into which his ungovernable temper had plunged him. Shunned for the moment by his fellows, he sat apart, sole occupant of the dark corridor. He had refused to account in any way to his captain, or to assign a cause for his fury. "It's no use," was his one reply. "I done it; but he started it, an' no man would believe me if I told him why."

Then they carried Shea to hospital, breathing stertorously now. The sentries had called off half-past one, and the first relief should have been on its way round the garrison to take the place of the third; but there was no order to "fall in."

"Let Corporal Ward post them, and

bring in his own men," said Captain Darrell. "I'll have another corporal over directly."

Briefly Sergeant Morris conveyed the order to Ward, standing well away from the nervous group, and listening, evidently, for possible call, or something—listening certainly and intently.

Only seven men fell in at his command. "Where is number four?" he demanded, and no man opened his lips to reply. In the old-fashioned forage cap and trimly buttoned blouse, the seven stood aligned in double rank, heads and eyes straight to the front, carbines at the carry, silent, yet some of them tremulous.

"Who is number four?" rasped Captain Darrell impatiently.

"Private Kerry, G Troop, sir," answered the sergeant of the guard. "He asked permission to get his overcoat; but he's had time to go there and back six times already."

Captain Darrell turned and gazed diagonally across the level parade. Bounding it on two sides of the diamond there stood in échelon the low, one-storied wooden barracks, one to each troop. Only in one of these was there light of any kind. The window of the first sergeant's room, at the end of the second building, was dimly glowing. That was the home of Shea's troop, and Shea's substitute was evidently already astir. All the other buildings loomed black and sombre in the pallid moonbeams. Faint as was the light, the form of the sentry at the main gate, beyond the farthermost barrack, could be discerned; but not a human shape was visible about the quarters of Troop G, barely halfway.

"Go and tell Kerry to hurry up," said Morris sharply to the orderly musician; then, saluting, he faced his captain again. "Shall I have them posted, sir, and relieve four when Kerry comes?"

"One moment. Why should he need an overcoat on a night like this?"

"It gets chilly about dawn, sir. Some of the men seem shivery now." There was certainly something shaky about the two on the left of the relief.

"It can't be you're cold," began the captain, addressing the men of the relief. "What makes you shiver?"

No answer.

Presently the question was sharply repeated: "Are you really cold, you two?"

The eyes of both avoided those of the officer. One of them finally mumbled: "A little, sir."

The trumpeter came back on the run, brought up short as he neared the officer of the day, then hurriedly announced: "Kerry ain't there, sir. His overcoat's with his kit, but—they ain't seen him."

"Post the others, then, Corporal Ward," said the captain. "Tell number four he shall be relieved in ten minutes; and when a corporal comes to take over charge of this relief, I wish you to report to me at my quarters."

The handsome face of the young soldier seemed slowly to blanch. Instinctively he saluted: his left hand, in snowy glove, coming with a snap against the muzzle in the hollow of the shoulder. His voice broke a bit as he gave the necessary orders for the inspection of his relief.

The officer of the day was looking on, when, from far down in the creek valley, somewhere among the stables, there rang out, sharp and distinct, though softened by distance, the sudden shout of a sentry: "Halt! Halt—I say! Halt, or I'll fire!"

A second or two of suspense. Then a shot—the full, resonant ring of the old Springfield. Then, close together, barely a second apart, two shots; then —silence.

A moment more, and Captain Darrell was racing down the camp toward the stables, with Ward, Morris, and half a dozen men bounding at his heels.

II.

All Fort Sibley awoke, that morning, long before daybreak. One after another, the barracks lighted up, and men came hurrying forth, muttering excitedly. One after another, officers appeared in their doorways; the younger

and the unmarried hastening, as a rule, to the colonel's quarters, or even double timing over to the guardhouse; the elders inquiring petulantly of any passers-by as to the cause of the excitement; then, more bulkily and deliberately, finishing their toilets and joining the nearest gathering.

At some of the upper windows feminine faces could be dimly seen, and feminine voices not so dimly heard, their shrill, penetrating treble carrying far and troubling the already agitated nerves of the veteran colonel.

Down at the stables of F Troop there had been saddling in hot haste. A solemn little procession had slowly climbed the long slope from the creek bottom to the big wooden hospital. A clattering little column had rumbled across the stout wooden bridge, and then, spreading out fanlike over the rolling prairie, had disappeared in the direction of the few blearily twinking lights which still lured the belated in town. One member of the guard had vanished, no man could say whither or why. Another member—a veteran soldier of years of frontier service—had been felled at his post in the discharge of his duty, shot down by unseen, unknown hands.

Following so closely the strange episode of the burning of the guardhouse, this murder of Private Stein—for murder it must be, as the poor fellow's hours were numbered, his lifeblood ebbing fast—had suddenly aroused intense feeling at Fort Sibley.

Stein was a simple-hearted, sturdy German soldier, without an enemy in the regiment, or a friend outside it. He had joined in the week of his landing on our shores, and without the knowledge and consent of the Fatherland. He was then twenty-one, sound and strong; he wanted to enlist; we wanted men; and the sergeant at the recruiting office did the rest. To the questions asked by the recruiting officer Stein had answered yes or no—about all the English he could command—according as the sergeant nodded or shook his head. Six weeks from his first night under Uncle Sam's blanket he had his first fight with Uncle Sam's red wards—after which the men wasted no more wit in trying to "guy" him. Content, cheerful, he had plodded along in the service, meddling with no one, minding his own business—a trifle dull, perhaps, but helpful and kindly—"too slow for chevrons," but absolutely reliable for anything else. But now "Old Steiny," as the youngsters called him, had been done to death while doing his duty; and the men of his troop were enraged.

It was two o'clock when F Troop trotted away on the trail of the murderers. There were two, poor Stein had been able to gasp, before swooning away—"one of our own vellers, an' a gowpy-looking veller mit."

Stein had heard a stable sergeant's dog barking furiously, had made a search, and had come suddenly upon two forms kneeling at the east door of G Troop's stable. At his challenge they sprang up and rushed for the creek, not ten yards away. Obeying his orders, he had twice shouted to them to halt, then fired, and almost instantly he heard the double report, close at hand, and felt the sting of two revolvers. One bullet had pierced his lung and grazed an artery. That was more than enough.

It was three o'clock when the first courier came trotting in from the chase. They had scoured the prairie and searched the saloons of the little cow town without a sign of the fugitives. They were still at it, and would be until recall. How was Stein?

"Dying," said his auditors. "Dead," solemnly added a soldier, hurrying by from the hospital. "It'll be a lynching, then, if we get 'em," said a voice at the outer edge of the crowd, whereat everybody whirled toward the sound, and a dozen voices, in a dozen tones, low and suppressed, said: "Shut up! Hush!"

And now, in his irritation and nervous excitement, the colonel had summoned the officer of the day, and in presence of his regimental staff and two or three captains—everybody who could do so had sidled away—was venting his spleen on Darrell. As a post commander, Riggs had some objectionable traits. He was irascible, uneven,

and prone, when aroused, to say to his officers things which he would forget in a day, but which they would remember for years and find hard to forgive.

Darrell, one of his very best, was the one whom he liked, perhaps, the least. Darrell was grave, deliberate, dignified, well read in his profession; whereas Riggs was nervous and impetuous, and hated the sight of a book or the sound of a lecture. He had been "laying" for Darrell, as the adjutant admitted, for more than a month; and now came a chance to get even.

"I can't compliment you on the excellence of your guard to-night, Captain Darrell," he began, his shrill voice audible, as he meant that it should be, to many who stood at a distance. "One of your corporals knocked out by a tough; one of your sentries shot down, probably, by one of your own guard; one of your guard deserted, and hell to pay generally."

For answer Captain Darrell simply stood attention, the picture of unruffled composure, saluted, and said not one word.

"I've sent for your sergeant, sir; and I wish you to hear what I have to say to him. The other men may not belong to your troop, but *he* does; and if I can't have better guard duty out of the sergeants, then the lieutenants will have to go on again, and you gentlemen will get only four or five nights in bed."

Another calm and deliberate salute, and still not a word in reply.

Swiftly approaching from the direction of the guardhouse came the veteran sergeant in command, a fine specimen of the American trooper. Nearing the little group, he halted and stood in silence, at the carbine salute.

"Sergeant Morris, how did it happen that you did not sooner send after that man Kerry?" angrily began the colonel.

"I didn't know he was gone, sir, until we turned out for the officer of the day."

"Didn't know he was gone! Why, you reported that you had given him permission."

"I hope the colonel will pardon me. I reported that he had *asked* permission. I refused, sir. He got it later, while I was visiting sentries."

"Who gave it, then?"

The sergeant hesitated just a second before answering reluctantly:

"Corporal Ward, sir."

"Ward again! Look here, Captain Arnold," said Riggs, turning upon a tall soldier who stood at a little distance from the group; "I told you that young fellow was too green and immature for corporalcy. He's forever in a snarl of some kind. He was on guard the night of the fire. He was mixed up in that muss at the post office in town. Now, he's responsible for much of this night's bad work. Three breaks in less than three weeks. By gad, I've a notion to break *him!*"

Patterning his behavior, possibly, after that of his elder comrade, Darrell, Captain Arnold held his peace.

This was maddening to Riggs. Could no one be made to dispute with him, and be snubbed? Once more he turned on the sergeant. "Go send him here," he said.

An awkward silence hung over the party as Morris strode away, the moonlight glinting on the polished buckle of his sling belt.

It was nearly five minutes before Corporal Ward appeared, and when he came it was almost at the run. He was flurried, panting a bit, and obviously ill at ease. Yet, even under these unfavorable circumstances, the trained eye of every soldier in the group could not but note the many points in his favor.

His features, though flushed, were fine, clearly cut, and handsome. His eyes were big and blue, with a straightforward look in them that appealed to all. His face was cleanly shaven, and the complexion, though tanned, was as clear as the whites of his brave young eyes. Less tall of stature and broad of shoulder than Morris, he was every whit as erect, sinewy, and graceful. His simple trooper's uniform was faultless in cut, fit, and finish, and sat him like a glove. Even the regulation boot he wore had been trimmed down

to match his slender, shapely foot. "As much of a dude as the last lieutenant," as Morris had said, Ward stood before them a "dandy" trooper, and in spite of the black frown of the commander, many an eye lighted on him in approval.

"Corporal Ward," snapped the colonel sharply, suddenly, yet impressively, "what is your *real* name?"

For a second or two there was no reply. The corporal stood squarely before them, the flush dying out of his face. Then, in guarded and respectful tone, he replied: "Ward, sir."

"What was your mother's name?"

"Ward, sir."

"Before her marriage, I mean."

"Ward, sir."

"Then, being a Ward, she married a Ward?"

"No, sir."

"What was *his* name?"

Silence—a painful silence. But Captain Darrell, who had been holding a little aloof, suddenly stepped forward and stood gazing earnestly, intently, at the young soldier; and now the corporal's eyes, sombre in their trouble, found those of the captain fixed upon him—found, he could not say how, support and sympathy, and it gave him courage. One quick look at his own captain, and, at this mute appeal, Captain Arnold spoke:

"Pardon me, colonel. Few of our native-born Americans give their real names at enlisting. The corporal was accepted as Ward, and promoted as Ward. I beg——"

"Captain Arnold," interrupted Riggs, with sarcastic severity, "in the rare possibility of my ever needing your advice, I'll ask it. Until I do, you will be wise to restrain your impulse to meddle. Now, Corporal Ward, give me your attention—and your right name."

Arnold, flushing quickly and biting his lip, turned on his heel; but Ward had read encouragement in his interference. Very calmly, now, he answered:

"My rightful name is Ward. The court gave my mother her maiden name again, and she gave it to me. I have known no other since—boyhood."

"Well," rasped Riggs, nettled, "what was your baptismal name?"

"I never had one."

"Never had! Well, you *know* your father's name, do you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, what was it?"

Another moment of awkward silence, then:

"Colonel Riggs, I have never called him father, or mentioned his name, since the day he—since ten years ago; and I—I decline to—now."

III.

Captain Darrell was compelled to call upon the adjutant for still another corporal to fill the place of Ward, who had been sent in arrest to his quarters for insubordinate language to his commanding officer. As first worded, by Colonel Riggs himself, "conduct" appeared instead of "language," but even a meek and long-suffering adjutant felt obliged to dissent.

"If you charge insolent conduct, and it comes before a court, you may count, sir," said the adjutant, "on two captains—and possibly others, declaring, as witnesses, that the accused was entirely respectful in manner. A military court may, and a civil court would, question your authority to demand of a soldier that he give his father's name, when the courts had long since divorced the father and awarded the children to the mother."

The colonel stared wrathfully at his staff officer, pondered a bit, compromised as a starter, and came down still further as the day wore on.

"I had my reasons for asking," he said, "and I'm not bound to tell my officers what they were. That young feller"—to use his own words—"connived at Kerry's getting away. He was corporal of the guard, the night the guardhouse was burned. He was seen holding a long conversation with one of those rascals, not three hours before; and I'm betting my head he knew

of their escape, if he did not personally effect it."

This was at noon, by which time F Troop was back at the fort, having found no trace of Kerry or of Kerry's companion in crime. The cow town had been searched, and the inhabitants searchingly questioned, but all to no purpose. No one would admit having seen the deserter, or having heard of his pal. No other soldier was missing. Something—possibly the same something that had so scared three or four of the guard—had impelled Kerry to seek safety in flight. Something had prompted him to try to steal a horse at the stables, for his spurs were missing from his kit, and a spur was found at the bank of the stream—a spur freshly cleaned and polished. Kerry, in quitting, meant to ride, and to ride light—and, therefore, probably, fast—and, possibly, far.

This was at noon, by which time Corporal Shea had recovered his senses, and, partially, his speech; but not one word would he say in explanation of the row between Scanlan and himself. "It was a personal matter," was all he would admit, "and one only he and I can settle. Let no man meddle."

The garrison grinned at the idea of Shea's settling with a man like Scanlan. "Big as two of him," as Sergeant Murphy put it; but Shea neither grinned nor murmured. "I'll be up in another day," he said, "and then we'll——" But there he broke off.

Scanlan, sweating in the banked-in, torrid heat of the ovenlike cells, begged to be told how Shea was getting on, and whether Shea seemed likely to tell things.

"Shea won't," said the sergeant of the new guard, responsible, since eight-thirty a. m. for the safe-keeping of Shea's herculean assailant. "*Shea* won't; but there's others that will, I'm thinking. What's the matter with you fellers on last night's guard, anyhow? Had you seen a ghost?"

Whereat Scanlan turned his back on an old comrade, and dropped his face in his hands.

This, too, was at noon, when the prisoner's dinner was sent over from the troop kitchen and was sullenly declined. Scanlan couldn't eat, but begged for beer, or else an hour out of the cell. His captain, a merciful man, went to the colonel, found him tramping nervously, irritably, up and down the porch, and asked that Scanlan be placed in the general guard-room, as no longer defiant or dangerous.

"What's got into this garrison, anyhow?" demanded Riggs of his junior. "Here's Darrell, one of my best captains, holds himself aloof and, when I need his counsel, says he's had no sleep for thirty hours and needs a rest. Here's Arnold behaving like a spoiled schoolboy because I spoke sharply in my irritation. Here's my adjutant taking sides against me, and says I should release a corporal from arrest who actually defied me in presence of my officers. I have removed the charge of insolence, and simply say insubordination; but that doesn't satisfy him. Here's Stein, one of my best soldiers, shot down on sentry post, and his murderers get away from a whole troop. Here's Sergeant Morris, as good a non-com as I've got, says there's something back of Stein's shooting that the men are getting onto, and more mischief in the wind. The men have been whispering together ever since F Troop got back. Captain Conway, what *is* the matter?"

"Will you send for the guard book, sir?" answered the captain addressed; and the colonel's orderly was summoned and sent.

The day had turned hot and sultry. The wind had shifted. At dawn a cool breeze had been winging down from the snow-crested peak to the southward; but it soon changed, and was blowing now from the southeast, up the dry "washes" and the broad, bare, sun-baked slopes of the Powder River country. Here and there to the south and southwest, the foothills of the Big Horn stood gleaming in the sunshine against the heights beyond, black-green with their dress of pine. Away to the north and eastward, in

huge billows, seamed with deep cañons and ravines, the glorious upland heaved and rolled away toward the distant Yellowstone—a cattle country beyond compare—once the favorite feeding ground of myriad bison.

Like snow-white clouds against a summer sky, along the gentler slopes to the northwest, dense herds of sheep were grazing, vigilantly guarded. Like an ugly scar upon a fair, soft shoulder, the rude, uncouth, one-storied buildings of the frontier cattle town sprawled against the gray-green hillside, half a mile downstream. Herded by the thousand, far to the east, roamed the "longhorns" of the range; many seeking in the dim coulées the shade of the cottonwoods, standing knee deep in the plashing waters, lazily switching at the flies; others slowly browsing their way down the winding trails from the hot, unscreened reaches of the lofty bluffs and divides; and here and there, in a dozen nooks among those deep, secluded valleys, tiny smoke wreaths were drifting to leeward from the cook fires of men who ate their noonday bacon and conferred warily, but with malice in their hearts—sheepmen against cowboy, cowboy against sheepman—for the rights of the one were the wrongs of the other, and there was bitter feud between them.

And over this turbulent frontier, where marshals and sheriffs had been powerless until backed by the strong arm of the government, the garrison of Fort Sibley stood guard, with orders to keep the peace and, when occasion demanded, give aid and comfort to civil officials, who were carefully taught to make no public mention of soldier support—a subject repugnant to the populace at large.

Hard and distasteful duty it had been, both to officer and to man. Armed neutrality was their rôle; but cavalry sympathy went with the cowboy. Yet cowboys, to a man, had been the victims of their occasional arrests; cowboys, to a man, had been the three malefactors lodged in Sibley's jail, the guardhouse; and cowboys and cavalrymen both, said the sheep interests, had figured in the famous plot by which that trio was freed.

And now it was nearly an hour past noon; the orderly, sent for the guard book had long since gone on another errand, and summoned to the quarters of the colonel half a dozen of that officer's most trusted advisers. The guard book, for the time, lay neglected.

The colonel, with Major White, Captain Darrell, the adjutant, the quartermaster, and the post surgeon, were deep in conference; for a courier had ridden in, hot, dusty, and weary, just after high noon, bearing a letter from the commander at Fort McKinney, nearly four days' march away. The wire was down in a dozen places, cut in many more than a dozen; and the commanding officer at Fort McKinney had tidings for his comrade colonel at Sibley that would bear no delay.

Briefly and curtly, the dispatch announced that the desperadoes, escaped from Sibley, had been located at a cattle camp on Crazy Woman's Fork; but they had received warning of the posse sent to arrest them, and had fled to the mountains. "With your coöperation," said McKinney, "it will be possible to surround and secure them. The department commander wires orders that we give all possible support to the civil authorities."

With this missive had come another, addressed to Sheriff Follansbee, over at the cow town. Colonel Riggs had sent it on by special messenger, and was momentarily expecting the result. Follansbee would doubtless be over to ask for horses and men, and lots of both.

"By good rights," said the colonel, in a way he had of thinking aloud, "I ought to send Arnold. He was officer of the day at the time of the fire. It was on his guard that the fire started and the prisoners skipped."

In silence, the others looked at each other, and listened, but kept their own counsel. Darrell had theories which he did not care to broach. He had picked up the guard book as he sat in a camp chair, close to the rail; and now, resting it there, he began turning

over the leaves. A bit of paper fluttered on the floor; the adjutant bent, recovered it, and began idle examination.

"Tell me again who were on first relief, the night of the fire," said the colonel, and Darrell obediently read:

"Number one, guardhouse — Trout, F Troop. Number two, southwest front—Sweeny, F Troop. Number three, northwest front—Cox, F Troop. Number four, north gate—Behnke, G Troop. Number five, corral—Lund, G Troop. Number six, lower stables—Stein, G Troop; Number seven, upper stables—Jennings, G Troop. Number eight, storehouses—Kraus, A Troop."

"As good an eight as you will find in the garrison," said the adjutant presently, as no one else had anything to offer, when the captain had finished the list.

"Weren't there two more left behind when the colonel ordered the guard to town?" queried the surgeon.

"I *didn't* order the guard to town!" said the colonel testily. "Gentlemen, I wish you, once and for all, to rid yourselves of that impression. It has done too much harm already. When Arnold called me out to hear the shooting, I told him to go at once, with the first twenty men he could find. It never occurred to me that he'd take the guard."

But Arnold had taken the guard, it seems—and a very natural action it was, too. There they stood in ranks, all ready—the sergeant, two corporals, and fifteen men. Arnold had rushed them off in double time. At that moment, the third corporal was away down at the stables, posting number seven, who had been taken off long enough to appear as witness before a board of survey—number seven of the second relief taking his place. When the corporal returned to the guardhouse, the guard was more than halfway to town.

Five minutes later, as the sound of firing died away, there had come a sudden call for the corporal from far out at the corral. Number five had yelled lustily.

This was how it happened that Corporal Ward, for nearly fifteen fatal minutes, had been legally and properly away from the building in which the prisoners were confined. When he returned, panting, and on the swift run, it was all ablaze.

"Then there *was* one member of the guard left," said the surgeon. "Number seven, of the second relief."

"Yes," was the adjutant's reply. "But he had run out to the point of the bluff, to join the crowd listening to the disturbance in town."

"Who was he?" inquired some one idly.

"Poor old Steiny, whom we bury tomorrow."

"Stein!" cried the surgeon. "Then, by Heaven, I know why he was shot!"

IV.

A board of officers had convened at Sibley, to examine into and report upon the destruction by fire of the guardhouse and the escape of three prisoners. Captain Arnold was not of the detachment sent into the mountains to aid in the capture of the alleged desperadoes. He was a necessary witness before the board, and was credited with having said that the desperadoes in question were by no means as black as they were painted.

Sheepmen had declared that all three took part in the murderous affair that left two ranchers dead on the open prairie, and a sheep shack in ruins. Soldiers, scouting after Crow Indians beyond the Greasy Grass, had declared that the sheepmen involved were black sheep who, in far superior numbers, had pounced upon the cowpunchers and had kicked and hammered one of them into pulp, before his two comrades had opened fire. One of the captives, the eldest by several years, was a wretched mass of bruises when lodged in the guardhouse at Sibley; and Doctor Jayne, the junior surgeon, said that he was so pounded with pistol butts that his own mother could never have known him. Another of them, the youngest, had told a straightforward story, which bore all the elements of plausibility.

They belonged, he said, to the Lazy Eight outfit, on the lower Rosebud. Hawkins, the hammered man, was admittedly of morose and ugly disposition, especially when drinking; and, as luck would have it, they had run foul of a whisky peddler over toward Custer. Hawkins had got drunk, and affronted a lone sheepherder; and in two hours the offended party turned up, with half a dozen friends, and proceeded to "do up" the drunken man. The two younger cowboys had begged for fair play, couldn't get it, and, seeing their old friend being kicked and pounded to death, had finally opened fire, as a last resort—with the result described.

Then came the sheriff's posse, with the sheep side of the story, and, "to protect the trio from vengeance," as they said, wagoned them upgrade to Sibley until they could be sent on to Cheyenne. Then there would be a trial—ten witnesses for the prosecution to one for the defense, and nothing to hope for short of the halter.

During the four days of their incarceration, Hawkins had been sorely in need of the surgeon's care, and never outside of the prison room; but the other two had caught the ear of more than one corporal of the guard, and their version of the affair began to reach the garrison, even as the cow town began to fill up with casual comers from the Lazy Eight and other outfits. Then had come the "fake" fight in town, and the fire at the fort, under cover of which—augmented by the darkness—the three had been spirited off to the Fetterman Road, and, doubtless, to the stage for McKinney.

Circumstantial evidence was certainly strong that many soldiers had been mixed up in the matter. Suspicion pointed unerringly to big Scanlan as one of the ringleaders in the improvised row. Kerry, too, was prominent in the pistol shooting. A dozen of the turbulent element at Sibley were, by this time, known to have been "on pass" that evening—probably in town, and presumably in the scrimmage.

Court martial, dishonorable discharge, and five years in the penitentiary was what Scanlan, Kerry, and certain others might expect, if but a single witness could swear to that suspicion. Such a witness, probably, would have been Stein; but there might be others. No honest soul at Sibley was either surprised or aggrieved at the possible predicament of these men. What disturbed many an honest heart was the plight of one of the brightest and best among the junior noncommissioned officers.

Ten minutes after the excited outburst of the surgeon, and immediately following a brief conference between him and the post commander, and in spite of earnest protest or appeal from Captain Darrell, an order was issued placing Corporal Ward in close arrest —not, as is usual in the case of a noncommissioned officer, in quarters, and on his own recognizance, but actually as a prisoner in the very premises which he had so recently been set to guard. Astounded, dismayed, indignant, the young soldier found himself locked in the cellroom, though not actually caged in a cell.

In the prison room proper were Scanlan and three or four other culprits, confined for breaches of military discipline. A corporal could not be placed among these, said the colonel; therefore, he must be baked in the ovenlike heat and darkness of the cellroom. And all Fort Sibley sorrowed and wondered.

Exceeding care had been taken by the adjutant in choosing the men to go with the sheriff, and the officer to go with the men. Follansbee asked for a whole troop, and reluctantly compromised on thirty. In the unhappy emergencies of the reconstruction days, in which our soldiery had most unwillingly to go in the train of civil officials, there was never a time when those gentry did not strike for many more men than were actually needed.

"You are going out to get three men, one of them wounded," said Riggs, recalling in his wrath those sorrowful times. "What do you want of even thirty?"

"There's worse things in the Big

Horn than three jailbirds," answered Follansbee; "an' maybe you'll find in the end 'twill be cheaper to do as I say, 'stead of havin' to send a squadron to pull your squad out of the fire."

Darrell, and Arnold, and others who heard, remembered the words and the look that went with them.

Follansbee, with a brace of deputies, Lieutenant Gwinn, and thirty picked troopers, had spurred briskly away five hours before sunset, the sheriff swearing that, if the wires were not down, he would have orders out from Cheyenne compelling the colonel to give him all that he asked for, and promising double trouble for him if any trouble came to them. Long before seven o'clock, they were far up Evergreen Cañon, headed southward; and they hoped to find, late on the morrow, the posse sent out from Buffalo and McKinney.

That they failed to meet, as planned, was no fault of their leaders. Each found himself, when twenty miles from the home station, following the trail of a score or more of horsemen. Obviously, the cow town and the cattle ranches, adjacent to Sibley and McKinney, had sent their quota to aid in defense of their desperadoes.

But Riggs knew nothing of this, that night. He gave no reasons, though he had them, when he refused Captain Darrel permission to see and speak with the imprisoned Ward.

Darrell went home, indignant and distressed. A bachelor of forty-five, he had been sharing his soldier quarters with an old comrade, Captain Watson, a widower whose children were being educated in the East. Cronies were these veterans of the Civil War, comrades who had much in common; yet even Watson said that there was over Darrell's distant past a veil, which he never sought to penetrate. There were times when Darrell seemed to shrink from even Watson's company, and to shut himself in his room. In addition to the bookshelves, desk, and reading lamps in their sitting room, used very much as common property, there were bookshelves, desk, and reading lamp in Darrell's big bedroom that were exclusively his; and the desk, when not in use, was always locked.

Watson, smoking in the sitting room on the ground floor, was surprised, this evening, to hear Darrell go at once upstairs and close behind him the heavy door. A visitor, Watson's friend and first lieutenant, looked inquiringly up.

"The colonel has rubbed the fur the wrong way again," said Watson, noting the look. "That's Darrell's way. Whenever he's too indignant about anything to trust himself to speak, he goes and shuts himself in till the fit is over. I wish I knew what roughed him."

"I think I do," was the reply. "Captain Darrell had some discussion with the post surgeon, a while ago, and asked him *how* he knew why Stein was killed. Major Maddox hemmed and hawed, and said he had been practically ordered by Colonel Riggs to tell no one else, until he had finished the investigation already begun. The captain asked how it involved Corporal Ward, and Maddox said he was bound to secrecy. I fancy the captain has been having it out with the 'K. O.' By gad! What if the colonel should have *him* in arrest?"

Watson started at once for the hall. "Excuse me a minute," he said, and, climbing the stairs, tapped at Darrell's door. "Anything amiss, old man?" he asked, in the affectionate way of the oldtime army.

"Nothing much, Wats," came the answer. "I want to look over some papers, and will be down after a while."

"Carson's here, and I could get Scammon, if you'd like whist," suggested Watson.

Poker they tabooed. Bridge was then unheard of. Whist was Darrell's favorite game, but he would have none of it to-night. So Watson left him.

From an inner drawer of the big, solid desk, Darrell had drawn a flat photograph case of sealskin. He opened it, and seated himself where the light from the student lamp fell full upon the lovely face that met his reverent gaze.

It was one of those old-fashioned "vignette" photographs, so well known shortly after the close of the Civil War. The picture had been delicately tinted, and the colors were still fine and unfaded. It was the portrait of a girl of eighteen, with a fair oval face, an exquisite, smiling mouth, a wealth of brown hair, waving and tumbling to her shoulders, and eyes of deep blue—large, sweet, and tender. It was a face to live long in one's memory, and it had lived long and unrivaled in that of Frank Darrell.

There were two other photographs, obviously of the same girl, in the somewhat trying costume affected by our womenfolk of that period; but it was upon this larger portrait that his eyes lingered long, sadly, wistfully.

When at last he closed and replaced the case within the desk, he drew forth some papers from the same compartment, opened one packet of legal cap, erased a few lines near the middle of the page, wrote firmly and rapidly a paragraph of equal length, which he pinned to the original, carefully refolded the papers, wrote two brief letters, which he duly stowed in substantial envelopes and carefully addressed, and presently came quietly down the stairs.

Watson was now sitting alone, awaiting him. His grizzled face clouded with anxiety at sight of Darrell's. "What's happened, Frank?" was the earnest question.

"It isn't so much what *has* happened as what's going to happen, Watson, that makes me a worry to you to-night. For the first time in my life, I'm going deliberately to do an insubordinate and forbidden thing."

"You are out with Riggs?"

"I am utterly done with Riggs!" A bang on the handbell on the centre table was answered speedily by a soldier form at the dining-room door. "Doyle, saddle the roan for me, and the gray for yourself."

The soldier vanished.

"Where are you going, Darrell?"

"To town—the post office—to catch the night mail."

"Without sleeping on the matter—your old rule?"

"No time for that now! I *would*, if there were a stage to-morrow, perhaps—but not as it is. One of these must be registered."

Watson thought for a moment. "Is there anything in which I can help?" he asked presently.

"No, not to-night—but later, perhaps. Will you do it—for me?"

"You know there is little I wouldn't do."

"Then—it's to be counsel for young Ward, if he's brought to trial. You will?"

"Suppose he would rather have some one else—you, for instance?"

"I shan't be here, probably. At least—well, I shan't be available."

Outside, over by the flagstaff, the trumpeters in unison suddenly struck up the first notes of the tattoo marches, as the friends clasped hands. Then, abruptly, Darrell left the room, went swiftly to his own, and soon returned, in riding dress.

By this time, the marches were over. The men were out in front of their quarters, awaiting the assembly and the invariable roll call of that day and generation. Those nearest the gate saw Captain Darrell, followed by his orderly, ride away to the open prairie.

In ten minutes the adjutant was at the door, inquiring for him; and Watson fairly started at sound of his voice. "What is up?" he asked, his face paling a trifle.

"Nothing, 'cept that no one reported for Darrell's troop. Was that Darrell I saw riding off for town? What on earth's got into him? He's been flighty ever since I gave him that address."

"What address?"

"Why, a woman, somewhere. It fluttered out of that guard-report book when Darrell opened it, at the colonel's suggestion. I picked up the paper, read the name on it, and tossed it aside; and, after a while, what should he do but pick it up. The moment he read it, he sprang to his feet. I never saw a man so startled."

"Remember the name?"

"Mrs. Clara Something Ward—somewhere in Philadelphia."

Watson pricked up his ears. "The mother of the young corporal who is in trouble, perhaps," he suggested.

"Reckon so—it's his writing. But why should *that* make Darrell daffy?"

Why, indeed, thought Watson; and what on earth was the insubordinate deed that Darrell had in contemplation? All too soon, he was to know.

"Taps," in those days, sounded sharp at ten o'clock; lights went out in every barrack, and sentinels began their challenging. Beginning at nine-thirty with their marches, the trumpeters took up nearly fifteen minutes, from the first notes at tattoo to the last of the assembly. Men had, therefore, only fifteen minutes in which to disrobe and get into bed before the ten-o'clock call. It was a silly custom, long since abandoned; but from it grew another that persisted in some of our frontier stations. The officer of the day was required to inspect his guard at tattoo, and, by personal count, to verify the presence of the prisoners—both the mild offenders who turned out with the guard, and those confined in the cells or the cellroom. And so it happened that he was often at the guardhouse after taps had sounded and the challenging had begun.

On this particular evening, lantern in hand, he was in the corridor, the sergeant with him, and saying a word or two of comfort to Corporal Ward, even as the sweet, sad notes of the beautiful old call were floating with the night wind down the romantic valley.

The men had moved a cot in, late that afternoon; and the sad-hearted young fellow had stretched himself thereon, alone in his bewilderment and distress. Twice or thrice, comrade corporals on guard duty had come with a murmured word of cheer, a canteen of ice-water, surreptitious pipes of "navy plug," or suggestion of easily smuggled beer or spirits; but poor Ward only shook his head. The water and the whispered cheer he accepted gratefully. The smoke he declined, knowing that it would be against orders in the new building which had risen upon the site of the old. The third material comfort he had never learned to use or abuse; Ward was a total abstainer.

At the clank of the sabre, telling that it was the officer of the day, Ward had risen quickly to his feet, half executing the salute before remembering that it was denied to prisoners.

It was Scanlan's merciful captain who began with: "I am more than sorry to see you here, my lad——" when there was sudden clatter of hoofs outside, the challenge of the sentry on number one, the answer: "Friend with the countersign," the quick response: "Halt—dismount!" and the call for the corporal of the guard. Then, as officer and sergeant looked at each other in surprise, there came quick, soldierly footsteps through the dim hallway, a soldierly form through the open door, and Captain Darrell stood before them.

The sergeant looked appealingly at the officer of the day. The latter, youngest of the captains, and for long years earlier Darrell's own first lieutenant, turned upon him, paling and flushing in sudden alternation, and, for a moment, too much shocked to speak.

"Good evening, Conway," said Darrell quietly. "I'm glad to find you here."

"But, Captain Darrell," began the other, as soon as he could find words, "surely you know! Oh, I *can't* tell you here. Come outside with me."

"In a moment, Conway. I have come to have a word with your prisoner."

"What! Is it possible you weren't informed? My orders are not to permit it."

"You don't mean that Colonel Riggs gave such orders to you?" exclaimed Darrell, in amazement.

"'Under no circumstances can the prisoner be permitted to speak with Captain Darrell until I give further orders,' were his exact words."

"When?"

"At eight o'clock this evening."

For fully ten seconds, Darrell stood staring into the young captain's face; then, speechless, he turned and left the building. He left his horse in charge of the guard, and, forgetful of the orderly whom he had sent on with the letters, and whom he had instructed to await him at the post office, strode wrathfully over to the quarters of the commanding officer.

There, smoking his pet old pipe, and conferring with the post surgeon, sat Riggs. He knew the step before he saw the man. Instinct told him that something uncanny had happened; but even that fell utterly short of preparing him for what he read in the captain's almost ashen face. Never before had he or Maddox seen Darrell's lips blue, twitching, and tremulous.

"Colonel Riggs," Darrell broke forth, "you have subjected me to an indignity which, in over a quarter of a century of service, I have——"

"Stop right there, Captain Darrell!" interposed Riggs, springing to his feet, his hand uplifted. "I see what has happened. You have been to the guardhouse, and have been refused admittance. Not a word, sir, till I finish! I am saving you from yourself—from words for which you would later be ashamed. I never dreamed of your going there to-night after my prohibition of to-day; so I have been trying, this evening, to think how I could most gently tell you in the morning what must now spoil your rest to-night. The order is not my doing; it came straight from your stanchest friend—the general commanding the department!"

V.

There was trouble in the mountains, just as Follansbee had predicted; and double trouble for Colonel Riggs, as Follansbee had promised. Neither posse had succeeded in its mission.

That from McKinney ran foul of a force of "rustlers"—double their numbers, and in strong position. The sheriff essayed an attack, lost his hat, his horse, and his head—not to mention two men, sorely wounded—before coming fairly within range. He ordered retreat, and led it.

The posse from Sibley found nothing but traces of the fight and the trails of the fighters. One trail led back toward McKinney, the other away down to the Deje Agie. Rescuers and rescued had circled round Sibley as far east as the Cheetish range, and, taking their chances among the Cheyennes—with the ghost-dancing craze already at the full—were headed for the Yellowstone and the Bad Lands.

Follansbee came back, sore-hearted, and blamed it all on Riggs. "If you'd let me have a troop in the first place, as I asked, we'd 'a' bagged the whole gang. It's the second time you've let 'em get away from us, and I know what the chief'll be saying."

Riggs knew what the general was saying—knew only too well. The wire had been repaired, and Riggs was getting it hot and heavy. There was trouble for him at headquarters. There was trouble for him at the fort. Three of his best captains were at odds with him. The board of officers had reported, and every one knew that it had found nothing whatever against Corporal Ward—nothing tangible against the others.

In running to answer the urgent call of the sentry at the corral, Ward had acted as guard regulations required. His absence at the start of the fire was fully accounted for; but, with Ward, it was simply a case of not proven. What was a mercy to Scanlan was a misery to him. The murder of poor Stein had removed the one witness, probably, who could have cleared Ward and convicted the others.

The board could only report. The post commander could only recommend. Only the general commanding, at far-distant headquarters, was empowered to act.

Meantime, the lad remained in his prison; and, to add to the general gloom of the garrison, it was presently announced that Captain Darrell had taken to his bed, threatened with brain fever.

The general at Omaha had directed that the conclusions of the board should

be sent to him by telegraph. For Riggs' recommendation he had not asked, and the report had gone—a matter of some two hundred words. By telegraph, one day later, came the announcement: "General Rand leaves at once for Fort Sibley. Have transportation and escort meet him at the Piney."

It was nearly a week's journey by rail to Cheyenne—escort wagon, or ambulance, from Cheyenne to Fetterman, on the North Platte, and thence via Fort McKinney to Sibley. The garrison could only watch and wait.

But they were not without excitement. Shea had resumed duty, had marched on as corporal of the guard, and found himself once more under the same roof with Scanlan, awaiting trial for his attack on a noncommissioned officer. Every man seemed to know that something would come of it, especially Scanlan; for the great bully gave a sickly grin, and held out a faltering hand when the corporal threw open the door and strode straightway toward him. Then up went Scanlan's brawny arm, as though to ward off an expected blow.

"None of that, Scanlan! I can't hit a prisoner," said Shea. "It's talk you've got to take this time, but it's straight talk. You well know why I called you a liar. You said you could prove—you know what—about Corporal Ward. Do you take it back, here and now—or do I take it to him, in the next room, and to Captain Darrell, to-night?"

"You wouldn't take a thing like that to a man wid brain fever?" began Scanlan.

"To the colonel, then!"

"Faith, he knows it as well as I."

"Then it's time he made you prove your words, or take it back, wid a coat o' tar and feathers. Which'll it be, Scanlan?"

"How can I prove me words, when the man that knows—an' told me—is gone, God knows where—worse pounded than ever *you* were, Shea, though you deserved worse than you got. Go tell, an' be damned t' ye! 'Twill be no news, I'm thinkin'."

Then, on a sudden, pale and wild-eyed, Corporal Ward stood at the door. "What is it this man has said of me?"

"Lord, Shea! See what you've done!" cried Scanlan. "There'll be shootin' next!"

"There will, Scanlan—and you'll get it in the gullet."

But here the sergeant of the guard came running in, with a brace of men at his heels.

Order was restored, for the time; but the tale went out forthwith, and it was known to all Sibley within another day. What on earth had Scanlan been saying about Ward that could possibly involve Captain Darrell? That was the question that flew from lip to lip.

The colonel was keeping bachelor's hall, his family being far in the East; and not until after guard mounting, the next morning, did he hear of the incident.

"See to it," he said to the new officer of the day, "that Scanlan is closely guarded, and that hereafter neither Corporal Shea nor Ward gets anywhere near him. Doctor Maddox, how is Captain Darrell this morning?"

"You will have to ask Doctor Jayne, sir. The captain declines to see me," answered Maddox moodily.

It would seem that the whole commissioned list was at cross purposes; and Riggs, who really loved his regiment and was proud of his officers and men, and almost pathetically craved their respect and regard, was growing more fretful with every hour.

At four p. m., just as the trumpets were sounding the stable call, and the men in white frocks were swarming in front of their barracks, there came a horseman over from town, telegram in hand. Sibley had no office of its own—that would have cost the price of half a mile of wire, poles, insulators, et cetera, the rent of an instrument, and the extra-duty pay of a soldier operator, and would have diminished the office revenue of the telegraph company at the cow town; so Sibley had to suffer.

Riggs was at the band stables, with his adjutant, when the messenger found him. He tore open the dispatch, up-

lifted his eyebrows, whistled, and turned away.

Lieutenant Carson, as luck would have it, was officer of the day. As such, he did not have to be at the stables; but Riggs knew where to find him. It must be owned that the officers of the Sixteenth were far more attentive to stables than to sermons. Carson was chatting with Captain Watson as the colonel came suddenly into the shaded gangway, his features working, his adjutant close pursuing.

"Mr. Carson," he said brusquely, "Corporal Ward will be released at once, and restored to duty. Mr. Adjutant," he continued, "when the escort goes to meet the general, see that Corporal Ward goes with it; and if anybody wishes to see me between this and taps, by gad—I'm—I'm not at home!"

Whereat, he turned on his heel, strode out into the sunshine, whirled fiercely on the following orderly, and bade him go to his quarters until sent for. Then he marched straightway up the ramp, and swiftly across the parade, ignoring the shout of the sentry on number one and the presented arms of the guard; turned in at his gate, and slammed it behind him; entered his doorway; banged and bolted the door, and was lost to Sibley for the rest of the night.

The adjutant picked up the yellow-brown paper which the colonel had flung to the floor. Briefly, it read:

COMMANDING OFFICER, FORT SIBLEY: Department commander directs immediate release Corporal Ward—restored duty. Acknowledge receipt Fetterman.

STRYKER, Aid-de-camp.

Obviously, the general was not letting the grass grow under his feet. He had already reached Cheyenne, and was by this time plashing through the Lodge Pole, en route to Hunton's on the Chug. To-morrow, late, he would be due at Fetterman; the next day at the old cantonment on the dry fork of the Powder. Another day would bring him to Fort McKinney. One more stage, and he would be camped at the Piney, where escort and teams would change. Then it were wise to pick horses and men for the duty, and send them forth with the morrow.

Together, the adjutant and the officer of the day hurried away to the guardhouse. "Never mind the guard," was the word. It was a prisoner that was wanted.

The loungers about the porch had risen to attention; the sentry had resumed his walk; voices within had been suddenly stilled.

All eyes were upon Ward when he came forth into the sunshine. Still a prisoner, debarred from the exchange of military courtesies, he could only stand, and await, in mute patience, his superiors' pleasure. The fine young face was sad and pallid; the indignity of his imprisonment had told heavily upon him.

"Corporal Ward," said Carson, in a voice intentionally loud and audible, "I am glad to tell you that General Rand, by telegraph, has ordered your restoration to duty."

The light leaped to the boy's face, the fire of hope to his eyes. "Does that mean that I am exonerated?" he asked eagerly.

Carson knew that it did not, necessarily; but who would have wished to say it?

"It means that, in the opinion of the general we swear by, you are an innocent man," was the sturdy answer. To which—disloyalty, perhaps—the adjutant murmured: "Amen!"

Tears were welling in Ward's blue eyes. For a moment, he stood irresolute; then he managed to ask: "Could I have that in writing, sir, to—to send to my mother?"

He carried the writing away with him when, early in the morning of the second day, with the escort and a lightened heart, he rode away southeastward.

But the end was not yet. No word had come from the command sent forth to scour the valleys of the Rosebud, Tongue, and Powder Rivers, in hopes of running down the renegades. Riggs had not waited for orders, this time—not even for Follansbee. Well know-

ing how General Rand would take the escape of those worthies, he had dispatched an entire troop, with two half-breed scouts and trailers, on the very day when the original posse returned discomfited. Follansbee had taken a night to rest in; and when, on the following day, he came to call for aid and escort, Riggs had said briefly: "Gone long hours ago. Follow it." So, too, had he been able to wire, in response to telegraphic orders, to send sufficient force. Yet not without disquiet did he await the coming of his chief, even though making every preparation to entertain him hospitably.

It had been a long, hot day. Even the Big Horn breeze seemed to be charged with caloric. It was nearly nightfall when the little column was sighted, trotting briskly into view over a distant divide, with a dust cloud climbing from its heels. It was dusk when the general alighted, and tattoo when he reappeared, refreshed and in cool, clean raiment after his bath. Then had come an appetizing supper, with three or four senior officers as guests, and, finally, cigars and coffee on the veranda; and then, at last, had come the explosion, the bolt from an overcharged and menacing sky.

All through supper, Riggs had been ceremoniously hospitable. Official differences, personal grievances, professional "shop" were tabooed at table; but now he could hardly contain himself. The surgeon and his assistant had called to pay their respects. The gentle chaplain had joined them, and the chief was courtesy itself to all.

"Tell me about poor Darrell," he said presently, turning confidently to Maddox.

"Why—er—Darrell's getting on reasonably, I believe. Jayne is attending him."

"But you considered him seriously affected, a fortnight ago."

"I, general? He seemed to be perfectly well."

For a moment, there was an odd silence. The faces of the general and his aid were a study.

"Why, Riggs," said the chief, turning upon the colonel, "your letter quoted Major Maddox as your authority."

"What letter, sir?"

"Your letter requesting immediate instructions as to Captain Darrell—in the case of young Corporal Ward."

"I have written no such letter, general." In his excitement, Colonel Riggs was arising from his chair, tremulous.

"You have the letter, Stryker," said the general.

Without a word, the aid-de-camp vanished, returning presently with a lamp from the parlor table and an official paper, which he silently handed to his chief.

"Here it is," said the latter, opening and holding it forth.

Taking the closely written sheet in his shaking hands, in the midst of dense, impressive silence, Riggs bent over the document, the light falling full upon it. His lips moved rapidly as he read. His eyes dilated. Bewilderment, amazement, indignation, wrath—one after another swiftly shone in his twitching face. Then, rising to his full height, he lifted the paper on high and, with almost dramatic rage, cried aloud:

"Why, every word of this damnable thing is a forgery—an infamous, damnable forgery—and only one man on earth could have done it!"

VI.

For an hour thereafter, there was coming and going of officers and men to and from the colonel's quarters. Morris and Shea had been summoned. Ward, weary though he was after the long, dusty ride at a trot, had been aroused from bed to hear, in return for the facts that he gave, something that kept him from thinking of sleep for hours. Scanlan had been brought over, in charge of two sentries, and then back to the cellroom, a dazed and desperate man.

At reveille, in furious attempt to break guard, he had hurled himself upon a corporal in the corridor, had been knocked senseless with the butt of a carbine, and later placed in double

irons. Admitting, when confronted by Shea and Sergeant Morris, that he had told them Ward had no right to that name—no right to any name, in fact, unless it was Darrell—Scanlan swore that he got the story straight from a former comrade, who hailed from Philadelphia. It was Shea's contemptuous flouting of the tale that had aroused the big Irishman's enmity; and later events had led on to the fracas.

But worse charges were in against Scanlan, now. The belief had gained ground, among the men, that he had told Kerry, and others, that Stein had made up his mind to give the adjutant the facts about the fire and the aided escape of the prisoners. Stein had dimly seen three forms start away from the building and down the slope to the valley, just a moment before the shout of fire. Stein had spoken of it, later, to his friend, the sentry on number one, who had begged him to say nothing, as they must have been spirited out of the doorway while he was "talking with one of G Troop's fellers," about the shooting. Scanlan had threatened Stein, and the peaceable German had complained of him to certain of his friends.

It looked as though Kerry had been driven to desertion, and the shooting of Stein, by Scanlan's machinations; and the colonel was hot against him. Scanlan was a man more feared than liked in the Sixteenth. He had come to it from the Twenty-second, a rival regiment, in which he had served one enlistment while Riggs was its lieutenant-colonel. Riggs knew him well, and had been by no means pleased to find him a sergeant in his new command.

"Bad as he was," said Riggs to the general, "there was a bigger rascal in the regiment—Scanlan's chum, Sergeant Roberts, who deserted down in Texas, after forging his captain's name, raising money and hell for nearly a year before being found out. He forged the colonel's name to an application for his own discharge—forged three checks, and got away with the proceeds—and we've never set eyes on him from that day to this. But Roberts is the man who forged my signature to that letter to you, and brought all this trouble on Ward; and Roberts has been working this neighborhood within the month gone by."

It was soon after guard mounting, that very morning, that General Rand, with his aid-de-camp, Colonel Riggs, his adjutant, and a single amanuensis, sat in the colonel's quarters, preparing dispatches to be sent at once to every garrison in the department of the Platte, and to the commanders of adjacent departments. There had been a "leak" somewhere in the adjutant's office. Riggs knew not whom to suspect, but he called for a reliable man.

"Corporal Ward is the best penman," suggested his staff officer; and Corporal Ward it was who sat there silently, writing from the colonel's dictation.

"The man is a fluent talker, of fine education; must be now somewhere about forty-five years of age, five feet eight inches tall, burly, strong, heavily built. He has bluish-gray eyes, with a slight cast in the left, florid complexion, good teeth, and reddish-brown hair; but the marks by which he can be surely identified are the purple scar across the back of his right hand—— What's the matter, Ward?"

The pen had slipped from the young soldier's trembling fingers. He bowed his face upon the forearm, and suddenly great sobs shook his frame.

The adjutant sprang from his seat. "I think I understand this, sir," he whispered to Riggs, as he took the lad by the arm and led him to an inner room.

That very night, as fate would have it, came the expected. For weeks, the ghost dancers at the reservations to the north had been holding high carnival. Settlers had long since taken alarm; but it takes time to disturb the equanimity of the bureau of Indian affairs.

"The Cheyennes are out in force," read the dispatch. "Two ranches burned. Several herders killed. A dozen families are corralled at Walker's, beyond the Lazy Eight. For God's sake, come quick!"

And, within the hour, the first squadron was leading into line; and Captain Darrell, from a sick bed, was lifted into saddle at the head of his troop.

It was three days later that the next news came. The Indians scattered as the squadron appeared, and fled before its impetuous charge. But, though the women and children of the beleaguered families were found unharmed, three of their defenders had been picked off, one by one, and there were many wounded.

"We are bringing them in on travois," wrote Major Maddox. "Two of them have been at the post before—prisoners in the guardhouse. One of these, severely wounded, has been recognized as a deserter from the Twenty-second Cavalry. He will probably never be arraigned before an earthly tribunal."

"That's Roberts," said the colonel; and Roberts it was.

Ten days he lingered, suffering greatly, begging the surgeons to save him; and then, finding the end approaching, he poured out to the chaplain his wretched story, imploring the forgiveness of two men whom he had bitterly wronged.

He was an expert accountant at twenty-two, prosperous and well content, until he fell deeply in love with a beautiful blue-eyed girl in Trenton, and, for the first time, found himself rebuffed. The neighbors twitted him on his failure.

Clara Ward's heart had gone to a soldier, was the explanation; but the soldier was not yet out of West Point. There was no engagement. It was a boy and girl affair, said her parents, who would not even let her write. As soon as Cadet Frank Darrell became Lieutenant Frank, he was coming to her. He had her picture, and she his promise; but he never came.

He went at once to the West, and letters from other sources told her of his betrothal to a girl at his home. Robert Marsden was there at her side, assiduous, devoted, and prosperous—her father's choice—and, within another year, they were wed.

Within three years came trouble—speculations, peculations, dissipations. Marsden lost two fine positions, one after the other—lost the respect of his wife—learned that her love for Darrell had been deeper than he thought. Three children were born to them before Marsden lost his third situation and their pretty home.

The mother's health failed, and her heart was crushed when her baby girl died. Two years more, and her first-born, Randall, was all that was left to her. She was supporting herself and him by teaching. Marsden appeared only when utterly without money, to beg or bully it out of her.

Then, one day, there came a letter in the handwriting which she had not seen since Darrell's cadet days; and her heart leaped at sight of it. He had heard of her troubles; he was near; he begged that he might see her, and she besought him not to come. He sent her aid, and she returned it.

Later, one day, when Randall was barely ten years old, the father appeared, drunk and wild. He had struck her many a time; but this time—the details are best forgotten. Terrified, she shrieked until suddenly throttled; and Randall, splitting wood in the yard, came rushing in, hatchet in hand. The drunken father threw up one hand in time to save his skull, and neighbors rushed in only just in time to save the boy.

After that, he fled. Later, on several grounds, the courts freed her from all but the dastardly letters which he occasionally wrote. She returned to her father's roof, resumed her maiden name, and at last was living in peace and comfort.

Randall's one ambition had ever been to be a soldier; but no cadetship could be had. Her father's death and will left her independent. It was hard to do, but she could not long oppose his darling wish, and signed her consent to her boy's enlistment as a candidate for commission. Of Darrell, she never told him. Of her former husband, she never spoke; but his letters breathed malignant hate and jealousy.

It was, indeed, a strange freak of

fate that brought father and son into close contact on the distant frontier—the boy on guard over his sire. Reckless, desperate, and defiant—a deserter, a forger, a triple-turned criminal—"Roberts" had been saved from starving by the cowboys, had prowled about with the Lazy Eight, drinking and gambling. There he had seen his boy, had heard his name, and, with Scanlan's aid, had traced his antecedents.

Then, malignantly, he had striven to mar the boy's career. He was still, when sober, an expert penman. He had been adjutant's clerk for a year in the Twenty-second. It was easy.

Then had come his drunken affray with the sheepmen; then the desperate plight of the party—two of them perfectly "square" young fellows, who were the victims of his folly.

There was only one way to save them. Scanlan planned it, and "the boys," cow and soldier, took hold with a will. The culprits were freed, the fight and the fire were started to cover the escape.

No one was the wiser until Stein heard of the plot to fasten the affair on Ward. Then he threatened to tell what he knew. Therefore, Kerry and the wretched "Roberts" planned his death; and now, thanks to the Cheyenne raid, both Kerry and Roberts were prisoners—the latter on the verge of the grave. The mystery was ended. He had confessed everything.

It was he who wrote the brief missive from Clara's father, telling of her preference, and theirs, for another suitor—some of which was true, and all of which, to the young soldier, was entirely credible. No line of love had passed between him and the girl who had made this lasting impress. He had known her for only a few weeks, as one of the charming visitors to the academy. He had written her father about the first of June, asking, as was the old-fashioned way, parental sanction of his suit. The father had shown it to Marsden, and had weakly signed the misleading reply.

It was Marsden who had contrived the letters from the West to be shown to the heartsick girl. It was Marsden who wrote the colonel's letter to department headquarters, claiming to be satisfied of Ward's guilt, of his relationship to Darrell, and of the probability of Ward's confessing everything—even the names of his associates—save for one thing, Darrell's adverse influence.

The letter closed with the request that telegraphic authority be sent directing Ward's confinement and utter seclusion; and though the general marveled, he had sent the order, and instantly followed in person. That letter bore every evidence of having been prepared in the office of the post adjutant, and signed by Colonel Riggs. Even the red-ink references to the "letters-sent book" were there, though no such letter ever showed upon the records.

Then Riggs had received two letters, accusing Ward and hinting at Darrell's disloyalty to the colonel—because of love and his yearning for a son whom he dared not own. One letter bore the signature of a former "striker" of Riggs, who had left the army and invested his savings in sheep. The other was anonymous, but most adroit. With no hope whatever of benefit to himself, the wrecked and wretched man had simply striven to ruin those dear to the woman who had divorced him.

One night, when the soft, cool breeze of the Big Horn swept gently through the bare apartment, a solemn little group was gathered about the narrow bed, whereon, thin, wasted, weak, and helpless—"down and out"—all that was left of Robert Marsden lay, hovering, for the moment, on the shore of the silent river. Jayne was there, and the old chaplain, and a nurse; and, kneeling by the bedside, clasping in his own hands, strong and young, the clammy, nerveless hand—naught, now, but bone, and skin, and awful scar—Randall, his firstborn, who for ten long years had never even thought of or called him father.

In the doorway, with downcast face, stood Darrell, whom Marsden had begged to see—who until now had held aloof.

The dying man had lapsed into stupor. Once or twice, he muttered a name—her name. Once or twice, he babbled feeble, broken words; but at last he partly opened his eyes, looked long into those of the kneeling soldier; and then, slowly, the light of recognition dawned, grew, and burned for a little moment. The pallid lips whispered: "Son." The muscles of the fine young face, so close at hand, twitched and trembled with emotion overpowering, unutterable; and tears gushed from the deep blue eyes. Bending low, Randall pressed his lips upon the death-dewed forehead. "Father," was the murmured answer; and then all heads were bowed.

There is a simple stone, with the name of Robert Marsden, in the cemetery at old Sibley. Few folk go there, now, and none are laid away; for the fort is long since given over to thriving settlers, and its buildings turned into stores, stables, and sheepfolds. Yet the grave seems to be never neglected; and the ranch people tell yet of the day when the regiment marched out, two years after Marsden's death, and of a sweet-faced woman, with blue eyes, soft and tender, who came on the arm of a sturdy soldier in the dress of a major of cavalry—and with them a slender young officer, well known to all the range as one of the keenest shots and riders—"one of the best in the service," say the men of his troop, "if he *is* the nattiest, trimmest, daintiest dude among all the lieutenants."

AN UP-TO-DATE VERSION

THIS is the house that Jack thought he was going to build.

This is the agent who represented the owner in the matter of erecting the house that Jack thought he was going to build.

This is the architect who undertook to control the edifice at the instance of the agent who represented the owner in the matter of erecting the house that Jack thought he was going to build.

This is the master builder who took the job off the hands of the architect who undertook to construct the edifice at the instance of the agent who represented the owner in the matter of erecting the house that Jack thought he was going to build.

This is the contractor who agreed to put up the whole structure for the master builder who took the job off the hands of the architect who undertook to construct the edifice at the instance of the agent who represented the owner in the matter of erecting the house that Jack thought he was going to build.

This is the sub-contractor who arranged to do the work for the contractor who agreed to put up the whole structure for the master builder who took the job off the hands of the architect who undertook to construct the edifice at the instance of the agent who represented the owner in the matter of erecting the house that Jack thought he was going to build.

This is the bricklayer who was hired by the foreman who was under the superintendent who was accountable to the sub-contractor who arranged to do the work for the contractor who agreed to put up the whole structure for the master builder who took the job off the hands of the architect who undertook to construct the edifice at the instance of the agent who represented the owner in the matter of erecting the house that Jack foolishly thought he was going to build.

Queen Caroline's Bracelet

By J. Kenilworth Egerton

Author of "Underground Diplomacy," "Omertà," Etc.

If you followed the fortunes of Winthrop Clifford in that great story, "Omertà," you will be fascinated with this tale of mystery, in which Clifford is transported to Italy and risks his life many times in an effort to get at the heart of the Camorra—that organization of criminals which exists in defiance of the law. Some of the secrets he lays bare seem almost incredible to Americans, but a keen student in the underworld of Naples sees more remarkable things than you find in the most fantastic novels. It is a gripping story.

INTRODUCTION.

THE happenings of to-day are the history of to-morrow; and the twentieth century is filling that history at such a tremendous rate that only the student and investigator have time to consider a period so remote as that of the Napoleonic wars.

It is less than two years ago that the writer drove through Trafalgar Square, London, in a hansom cab, whose value then was approximately a hundred pounds. To-day the cab could be bought for the price of junk; for the "taxi-auto," which was so recently a toy, has consigned it to the scrap heap, and sent the legion of cab drivers to join London's great army of unemployed.

Beside me in that now obsolete vehicle sat an old friend, a valued foreign correspondent of one of the great London dailies. He was driving with me to the station from which I was to depart on a curious mission at the behest of the publishers of this magazine—no less than a study of the two great Italian secret societies and their relation to the Mano Nero, in which editorial opinion foresaw a mine of interesting literary material.

Correspondents form a privileged class; their intimates comprise all sorts and conditions of men, and the necessity for the gathering of news and weighing its value excuses many sins of omission and commission. If they told all they discover, wars would be more frequent, many a fair reputation would be shattered, and many an iridescent bubble prematurely pricked. Fortunately, they are, as a rule, discreet, and talk freely only among themselves, and in the jargon of their profession.

"You can thank that Johnny up there if you get a Camorra knife between your ribs while you are pursuing your investigations," said my companion, to whom I was already indebted for a dozen letters of introduction to people who could put me in the way of obtaining the information I was after. Two years ago, air ships were not so common as they are now; but he was pointing skyward.

"I only see Lord Nelson," I answered, glancing to the top of the tall column from which the bronze effigy of England's naval hero looks out over the London which he did so much to keep inviolate.

"You guessed correctly," answered

the correspondent dryly. "It's a far cry from the hero of Trafalgar to your Black Hand outrages in New York; but there is a connection, just the same. You'll find it before you get to the bottom of things."

Could any statement, on the very face of it, seem more absurd? I smiled incredulously as I looked at him.

"I've given you several tips which should be helpful, and introductions which will enable you to get pretty well to the inside of things," he continued. "Naturally, you don't believe the statement which I have just made; but wait until you have learned to know Naples as well as I do, then take a glance back over its history, and tell me if I'm not right. You won't have to dig very far before you strike the root of the evil of to-day; but the real, ultimate roots are buried in the history which Nelson had so large a share in making—and underneath all is, of course, a woman."

Fate and circumstances have made it impossible for me to acknowledge my indebtedness for his introductions, or the truth of his assertion. Just a few days ago, he died on the firing line, while reporting the progress of the last revolution in Constantinople. His picture is in the last *Graphic,* which lies on the desk beside me; and to it I make that acknowledgment, for smiling at me from the wall is another picture —a print which I picked up for a trifle in a junk shop in a Naples slum, the face of the woman whom he foretold I should find back of so much of the deviltry of the present day.

It is the colored reproduction of a Romney portrait—the likeness of a marvelously beautiful woman in the character of Ariadne. She has been dead for nearly a century; but it was her beautiful, slender hands which helped materially in laying the foundations upon which the Mano Nero is builded. Volumes have been written about her; she has had her champions and her detractors. In the essential points of her early history they all agree; and, summarized as a modern police official would put it down, it would read something like this:

AMY LYON, alias EMMA HART. The daughter of a respectable Welsh blacksmith. Came to London as a nursemaid, at the age of seventeen. Forsook that calling, and was under the protection of several prominent men. Had one child—a boy. Sent to the Continent by the Honorable Charles Greville, who wished to placate his wealthy uncle, Sir William Hamilton, British ambassador to the court of the two Sicilies, she revenged herself upon the fickle nephew by marrying the wealthy uncle. She became the bosom friend and confidante of Caroline, Queen of Naples, and acted the part of jackal to her tiger. She was personally the willing tool of oppression, and through her charm and coquetry induced Horatio, Lord Nelson, to break his plighted word to those who had surrendered to him in all good faith, and to become the hangman of the vilest of the Bourbons.

To-day a Bourbon, a blood relation of that Caroline, rules in Spain. She was the sister of that Marie Antoinette whose caprices did so much to precipitate the French Revolution. She was, therefore, of the royal house which still reigns in Austria—connected by ties of blood with the Emperor Franz Joseph. None realizes better the meaning of *noblesse oblige* than the House of Savoy; therefore, the private papers of Queen Caroline are not to be found to-day in the public archives of Italy—and to any one who delves in the records of the Neapolitan Bourbons which are still available, the reason is self-evident.

Ample records of her reign exist, however; but these papers are also inaccessible, unless one has the good fortune to gain the confidence of certain Neapolitans whose real power—even to-day—is greater, in the former kingdom of the two Sicilies, than that which is wielded by His Gracious Majesty King Victor Emmanuel III, its titular ruler. The introductions of my friend put me in the way of gaining that confidence. Hence this story.

I.

The beggar was importunate, and her whine betrayed the professional. The miserable, sore-eyed, rickety baby, clasped in her arms, was held so as to display as many as possible of the manifold physical ills with which it was af-

flicted. On the narrow sidewalk of the Toledo, it was impossible to avoid a closer physical contact than was pleasant with her filthy rags, without resorting to violence or paying tribute.

Ralston, entirely unacquainted with Neapolitan customs, was about to ransom himself from her unwelcome attentions with a coin, when he was dissuaded by a word of caution from his companion.

"Don't give up, unless you wish to be branded as an easy mark by every panhandler in Naples," said the latter, in the English of New York.

As suddenly as if she had been threatened with a blow, or frightened by an apparition, the woman shrank back, and hastily sought the obscurity of a dark alleyway, to watch for an easier victim.

"By Jove, Clifford, that's a relief!" exclaimed Ralston, as he let the coin fall to the bottom of his pocket. "How in the deuce did you do it? I've been chipping out coppers ever since I landed, and each one that I bought off seemed to chivy a whole bunch on me."

His companion laughed, and shrugged his shoulders. "The Toledo is hardly a suitable place for a demonstration," he said.

Ralston breathed a sigh of relief as another beggar, who blocked their way —a man with a horribly distorted leg —abruptly ceased his whining chant, dropped his outstretched hand, and hobbled to the gutter to avoid them, as it they had the plague. Clifford had not even looked at him; but in some mysterious way he had checked his importunities.

"It's like the conjurer's trick of making an omelette in a silk hat—the easiest thing in the world, when you know how," continued Clifford, after they had taken places at a marble-topped table in the Café Fortunio. "Our compatriots usually scream themselves hoarse in their unavailing efforts to shake off the horde of persistent beggars who refuse to take no for an answer; an Italian really accomplishes his purpose with a simple twist of the wrist—like this!"

He put out his right hand, the forefinger extended, the others loosely clasped, and turned it gently from side to side, much as one would admonish a small child to be good.

"There you are—the symbol of 'nothing doing' in the Neapolitan sign language. That is all that is necessary, and worth a full vocabulary of profanity which they do not understand," he explained. "In appearance you are obviously a foreigner, Ralston, and, therefore, legitimate prey. Pay no attention when they accost you; but hand 'em that little package, and you will save your pennies and your patience."

"Great Scott! Trenton warned me that my ignorance of the dialect would be a handicap; but, if I've got to learn a sign language, too, I'll throw up the case!" exclaimed Ralston ruefully.

Clifford laughed, and pointed to a corner of the café, where an Italian was talking into a telephone receiver and gesticulating as energetically as though the person at the other end of the wire were facing him in the flesh.

"My dear fellow, one is as necessary as the other. English is the only language which can be spoken with the hands in the pockets. A Neapolitan can convey his meaning more clearly with his hands than with his tongue—which is, perhaps, one reason why a stroke of a knife so often answers for speech. Also, by that same token, it may explain your presence in Naples at this unusual season for American visitors." There was a note of interrogation in his concluding remark.

Ralston nodded, and sipped his black coffee. "Perhaps. Anyway, there's a knife stroke in it—several of 'em, in fact. I suppose that Trenton has written to you about me; I've been retained as one of the counsel for Giacomo Cirillo, who is at present in the Tombs, awaiting trial on an indictment for murder in the first degree. I'm over here to try and hunt up evidence which will prove his innocence."

"And Trenton, the district attorney, whose duty it is to convict him if he is guilty, sends you to me for assist-

ance! Isn't that rather an unusual proceeding?"

Ralston smiled, and nodded assent. "It would be—for any one else than Trenton," he answered. "He's one of the few officials who doesn't care a hoot for public opinion, when he believes it to be wrong. Likewise, he is a big enough man to recognize the difference between persecution and prosecution—probably because he puts his own judgment of the value of evidence higher than the public clamor of the yellow press.

"This Cirillo case is one in point. If the man is brought to trial, there is not the slightest doubt of his conviction. Trenton has absolutely convincing evidence against him. A great part of that evidence has been ferreted out by reporters, and published in advance. The public is incensed at the continual Black Hand outrages which go unpunished; and the newspapers are clamoring for a speedy trial, and demanding that a stern example be made of this man. Public opinion demands that his case should be railroaded through—just as they killed the assassin of McKinley—with all of the public form and none of the actual protection which our criminal procedure is supposed to throw about an accused person. So far as that goes, the evidence against Cirillo, barring the one fact that he wasn't taken red-handed, is about as complete as it was against Czolgoscz, with none of the extenuating circumstances of madness."

"What's the answer?" asked Clifford.

Ralston hesitated for a moment, looking at him inquiringly. "Mine would be that Trenton is too big a man to send a poor devil to the chair to satisfy public clamor," he said slowly. "Perhaps his political opponents—who have every reason to know that he is a shrewd politician, as well as a good lawyer—would guess that he is preparing to pull off a grand-stand play, to let the newspapers try the case in advance and convict the accused man; then step into the limelight himself, and give a dramatic demonstration that a trained prosecuting officer knows more about his business than an editor—by sending up the man who is really guilty. What's yours?"

The question came as abruptly as a blow, and Clifford parried it with a shrug of his shoulders. "I need more data before hazarding one," he said. "I've heard of the Cirillo case, but nothing of your side of it."

"There isn't much to our side—except Cirillo's personal denial of guilt, and our belief in his innocence," admitted Ralston ruefully. "Enough evidence of fact has been accumulated to convict him; but no one has been able to assign a motive. If he did kill the man, it was a cold-blooded, unprovoked murder—absolutely without apparent motive. Such a crime would be so foreign to the man's whole previous record that it seems preposterous, on the face of it.

"Just the same, we are utterly powerless to break the complete chain of circumstantial evidence against him. I have only a suspicion of why Trenton advised me to come to you. He gave me no explanation—said he couldn't, but that he was giving me the most valuable tip he knew. And I believed strongly enough in his fairness to take it, pack my grip, and cross the briny to sunny Italy."

"Let me see if I have the essential facts clearly; you can set me right if I am wrong," answered Clifford, so quickly that Ralston realized that he was anxious to avoid the latter topic which he had suggested.

"Cirillo, as I understand it, is a Neapolitan who went to America some fifteen years ago. He was a man of great shrewdness and some education, and became at first a labor *padrone* and steamship agent, supplying the contracting companies with gangs of unskilled laborers from among his countrymen. Later, he opened a private bank; and that, unlike so many similar concerns which have been operated to fleece the ignorant emigrants, has the reputation of having always been run on the square. Cirillo prospered, and became one of the solid men of the

Italian colony in New York. He married, and has several children; and his married life is supposed to have been a singularly happy one. He contributed generously to the Italian charities in New York; and, probably, since his business prospered without interference, he also paid tribute to the blackmailers of the Mano Nero. That's essentially correct, is it not?"

"Everything except the last assumption, which may or may not be; for you know what clams the Italians become when the Black Hand is mentioned," assented Ralston. "Up to three months ago, he was as much respected as any foreigner in New York."

"In fact, up to the time that the body of a man was found in his private office, his skin neatly perforated with a stiletto in several places," suggested Clifford, and Ralston nodded. "As I understand it, Cirillo absolutely denied knowledge of the murdered man, living or dead; he could not enlighten the police as to how or why the body happened to be in his private office. He acknowledged that he had worked there until eleven o'clock at night, but claimed that he was entirely alone. He stated that he had locked the place, on leaving, and that everything was in perfect order. When the employees opened up, in the morning, they found the body; and the coroner's physicians assert that the man had been dead for several hours."

"They claim to be able to fix the time so closely that the man must have been killed during the period in which Cirillo states positively that he was absolutely alone in the office," corrected Ralston.

"Confirmatory, but not absolutely convincing evidence; for it is a matter of expert opinion, and experts often disagree," assented Clifford. "However, in the course of a few days, other evidence was dug up, which threw serious doubt upon the accuracy of Cirillo's statements that he had never seen the man in the life, and knew nothing of the manner of his death.

"The body was identified as that of an Italian named Hispali, who had been in New York about ten days. It was asserted that he had smuggled in a very valuable collection of jewels, of which he was anxious to dispose; and to that end he had sought the advice of several of the wealthier members of the Italian colony. None of them was in a position to help him to a customer; but at least two of them have acknowledged that they advised him to go to the banker, Cirillo, who would advance him money, of which he claimed to be urgently in need, upon the security of a portion of the jewels.

"To one of these men, an Italian restaurant proprietor, Hispali stated that he had visited Cirillo in his office at night by appointment, and that the banker had, in fact, made such an advance—a very considerable one—upon a diamond-and-ruby bracelet. To another, Lanza, a wholesale importer of macaroni, he made the same statement, and added that he was to visit the office again that evening, when he expected to dispose of the entire collection to a customer whom Cirillo had found for him. The following morning, his body was found in Cirillo's office; but there was no trace of the jewels, which must have been worth a couple of hundred thousand dollars, nor was any considerable amount of money found on the body."

"About twelve dollars, and absolutely not a scrap of paper which would serve to identify him," said Ralston.

"No trace of those jewels has been discovered since," continued Clifford, "with the single exception of the diamond-and-ruby bracelet, which was found in the possession of Cirillo's wife. She frankly acknowledged that her husband had given it to her, as a present, three days before—which date agrees with the one on which Hispali stated to the restaurant keeper that he had pledged it with Cirillo.

"No weapon was discovered on the scene of the crime; but an antique stiletto, which Cirillo habitually used as a letter opener, was absent from his desk, and, two days later, it was found when the manhole opposite the banking office was being cleaned. It was

blood-stained, and the measurements of the wounds showed that it might well have been the weapon used to inflict them.

"Cirillo denied any knowledge of how it came there. He acknowledged that he had bought the bracelet in his office on the same night that Hispali stated he had sold it; but he maintained that he had bought it from another man—an Italian who is entirely mythical, so far as any one else has been able to discover."

"I've tried vainly to locate him, myself," assented Ralston. "Cirillo gave me his name, and a full description of him. He claims that the man has visited him perhaps twenty times in the past year, always at night, by appointment, and on perfectly legitimate business—usually to deposit considerable sums of cash with him, for transmission to Italy. His books absolutely confirm those statements, and the records of those transactions are all there. Cirillo tells me that those confidential transactions were not at all infrequent; that many Italian business men preferred to transact their business with him secretly, in order that the blackmailers might not suspect the extent of their gains, and levy in proportion. It was, in reality, a sort of dodging of illegitimate taxation; and his private books bear out his statement.

"Unfortunately for his contention, we can identify all the others—whose testimony is not of the least value in this case—save the one man whose evidence might be of value. He has apparently vanished into thin air. Except for Cirillo's unsupported statement, he is as intangible as 'the man higher up.' Still, Cirillo insists that it was this man from whom he obtained the bracelet, that he had no reason to suspect anything crooked in its origin, and that he paid for it what he considered to be a fair price. Of the other jewels, he disclaims all knowledge, asserting that they were never submitted to him, and that he would not have touched them, in any case.

"Of course, if we disbelieve that statement, and admit that Hispali did, in fact, carry them there, at night, for his inspection, it suggests a possible motive for the crime. Cirillo might have done away with him, for the purpose of robbery; but, then, we should have to admit that the man is inconceivably stupid and clumsy—which he isn't—and that a man who is conducting a legitimate and prosperous business, which has made him wealthy, would commit murder to obtain possession of property which would be a white elephant on his hands. I have entire confidence in Cirillo's innocence; but it would help a whole lot to make others believe in it, if we could produce this mysterious Italian, who figures in Cirillo's memory, and on his books, as Ignazio Conforti."

"Yes; so far as I have been able to judge from what I have heard, the whole case hinges on that. Produce the apparently mythical Conforti, and you break the chain of evidence against Cirillo; but you don't altogether destroy it. There's more of it, I believe—and even more damaging."

"Yes, there's plenty—all in the way of confirming the things which Cirillo absolutely denies," admitted Ralston. "The janitor of the building identifies the body as that of a man whom he had admitted twice to Cirillo's offices when the latter was there alone in the evening, in spite of the accused man's denial that he ever saw him before. There is other evidence of that description—a great deal of it."

Clifford nodded, and drew a paper from his pocket. "You can tell me about it at another time, if you like. I'm more interested in this, just now." He handed over the paper, which contained three unmounted photographs of a bracelet, taken in different positions. "That's the bracelet which Cirillo gave to his wife, is it not?"

Ralston glanced at the photographs, and then suspiciously at his questioner. "Yes, those pictures seem to have been taken from the real thing," he said. "See here, Clifford—you had better put me wise as to how we stand, before I go any farther. My first duty is to my client."

Clifford returned the pictures to his pocket, and glanced carelessly about the café. "You have taken a good deal on faith already, including a journey across the ocean," he said dryly. "This is hardly the place to enter into explanations; but I appreciate your point of view. There are about a hundred men in this café, Ralston. It's a perfectly safe bet that half a dozen of them could tell you exactly the whereabouts of the man for whom you are looking—whose name, by the way, it is as well not to mention."

There was a sharp note of warning in Clifford's voice with the last suggestion; for Ralston had half started from his chair.

"In fact, it would be better not to mention *any* names," he continued, in a low voice; and, although Ralston did not notice it, Clifford watched furtively a couple of men who had just entered and taken places at a neighboring table. "Naples has a queer history, and queerer customs; if you have time, I shall be pleased to show you about."

Three or four waiters hurried obsequiously to the newcomers; one polished the marble table energetically, another brought an armful of the evening papers, and the head waiter himself attended, smilingly, for their orders.

One of them was a man of about thirty years of age, with jet-black hair, brushed so smoothly that it had the sheen of a raven's wing; eyes as black, with an expression of discontent under the heavy brows; a clear, olive skin; a straight, well-formed nose; and, underneath a small, carefully trimmed mustache, full lips of a vivid red. It was a type common enough in Naples, where the strong admixture of Spanish blood has given a tinge of coloring entirely distinct from the other portions of Italy; but the expression suggested a temperament different from that of the ordinary run of his townspeople—the merriest, lightest-hearted citizens of the kingdom. The smile which parted the red lips, to disclose white, even teeth, was half a sneer; the corners of the mouth extended into straight, cruel lines. There was nothing of appreciation in his eyes as he looked at the waiter, who was doing his best to serve him; for those eyes seemed to look on all mankind with hatred.

His companion wore the street costume of a priest; but never did the brim of a broad shovel hat, even in Southern Italy, shade a less ascetic face. It was heavy jowled, with thick, sensuous lips; a bulbous nose, whose tint hinted of the wine flask; eyes surrounded with the puffiness of the glutton; and a thick neck, from which a great roll of fat almost obscured the small, roundabout collar. The stuff from which his cassock was made was of the finest, however; the buckles of the broad, low shoes were of solid silver, and the hose above them of silk. The coarse hands were carefully kept, unusually strong in appearance for those of a man who did no manual labor; and the broad shoulders, in spite of the fat, indicated a great muscular strength. Stripped of his cassock, he would have looked the prize fighter and bully out of training; in it, his whole appearance belied his dress. Indeed, nothing in his expression confirmed it. There was a certain craftiness in his eyes, but not the craft of the religious fanatic; and every line and fold of his face spoke of self-indulgence.

Clifford had suddenly relapsed into silence; and Ralston, instinctively conscious that it was not without reason, sipped his coffee, and contented himself with watching the crowd which strolled through the Galleria Umberto in front of their table.

It was the dead season in Naples—midsummer, when the foreigners, who are so much in evidence at other times, flit through it hurriedly, fleeing from its noise, its smells, and the ever-present fear of pestilence and plague which hovers over it in the heated term. Society, too, had taken refuge on the islands, or on the neighboring Sorrentine Peninsula, for the summer; and it was a typically lower and middle-class

Neapolitan crowd which passed before them.

In it were dozens of young fellows of the type of their new table neighbor —those young men who, apparently, never have other occupation than to haunt the *gallerias* and cafés, and discuss, interminably, with a tremendous amount of gesticulation, Italian politics. Clumsy peasant boys, in the slovenly, unattractive uniforms of the Italian infantry, gaped at the shop windows and the showily dressed women; transported into a new world by the exigencies of military service. Priests and hawkers, officers and sailors, ragged children and whining beggars —all sought refuge from the heat of the streets, and the distraction of the café orchestras, which the *galleria* afforded.

It was interesting, but not attractive; for squalor rubbed shoulders intimately with luxury, and the vicious element was too plainly in evidence to be ignored.

To Clifford, who had spent a large portion of his boyhood in Naples, and knew it as he did his pocket, it was an old story; and, knowing it, he was more interested in observing the couple at the adjoining table than the shifting crowd which passed before them.

It was just because he knew the people so well that the newcomers had attracted his notice; for the attention which they had received, on their entrance, had suggested an importance which nothing in their dress or bearing justified. About the priest, save for the fineness of the material of his cassock, there was nothing to indicate high rank in his calling; and only the ill-tempered expression of his companion made him anything but commonplace.

Nevertheless, Clifford noticed that many people in the passing crowd betrayed recognition, without making it openly manifest, and evidently watched furtively for a sign that a greeting would be returned.

To half a dozen the priest nodded casually, and his salutation was acknowledged with the greatest outward show of respect by those whom he honored; but to one and all the younger man gave a glance of sullen discontent. He fidgeted uneasily, looked at his watch a dozen times, and more than once muttered a malediction—which should have shocked the sensibilities of his companion, but which, apparently, fell upon deaf ears.

Clifford had shifted his chair, so that he could watch them, without making his scrutiny apparent; but they seemed to be entirely oblivious of the other guests in the café, and watched the entrance to the *galleria* from the Toledo.

The faces of both suddenly betrayed that the person for whom they were watching had entered; but it was Ralston who gave the first audible welcome, and, with a hearty "Hello, there!" arose from his chair, and held out his hand. His greeting was as cordially, if less demonstratively, returned by a tall, dignified Italian, who smiled and extended his hand as he advanced to their table; and only Clifford noticed the almost imperceptible sign of caution which he made to the couple who had so impatiently awaited him, and who now gave not the slightest sign of recognition.

"I hardly expected to run across you so soon," said Ralston, smiling, as he shook hands with him. "Let me make you acquainted with an American friend of mine, Mr. Clifford. Clifford, this is Mr. Alinari, who crossed on the steamer with me."

"I am very pleased to make Mr. Clifford's acquaintance, and to renew ours so soon," said the Italian, in English, with only the slightest trace of accent. "I am already homesick for your country, gentlemen—and I have been in my own less than twelve hours."

"You were long there?" queried Clifford, as he moved his chair, to make place for Alinari—and moved it so that he could even more advantageously watch the priest and his companion. Alinari sat down, his back to the adjoining table.

"Less than a month, this time, I am sorry to say," he answered. "Long

enough to hear of you, though, Mr. Clifford, I believe."

Clifford laughed incredulously. "I didn't know that I was so famous," he said.

Alinari shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps I am indiscreet in mentioning it; but it was in connection with a case in which several of my countrymen were involved," he said, half-apologetically. "Matone was electrocuted, the day before we sailed, for the murder of Orazo Colombo."

"It might have been indiscretion on your part if that execution had not convincingly demonstrated my innocence," answered Clifford; and he was conscious that the mention of those names had not been without effect upon the men at the other table. "Circumstantial evidence is a dangerous thing, and it looked like a pretty strong case against me—for a while."

Alinari's eyes twinkled as he looked at him. "There are other things more dangerous, Mr. Clifford," he said. "I should advise you to warn your friend, here, for example, of the dangers of Naples, which isn't a particularly healthy place for foreigners in summer—especially after dark. Even you, well acquainted as you are with its climate, people, language, and customs, can't afford to take too many chances."

"I try not to," answered Clifford indifferently. "I cannot conceive of any one better qualified to judge of a certain class of danger which exists here than yourself, Mr. Alinari."

The Italian smiled, and sipped the vermuth which he had ordered.

"Unfortunately, I am not at liberty to disclose all I know; but a word to the wise is sufficient," he answered; and there was earnestness in his tone, in spite of the smile which accompanied the remark. "I have already warned Mr. Ralston that he would find Northern Italy pleasanter in summer." There was just a little suggestion of emphasis on the "warned." "I hope, unless you are driven away, that I shall see you again in Naples. Mr. Ralston helped to initiate me into the mysteries of your great American game of poker while we were crossing, and I should like to become more expert."

"I don't believe that we shall be driven away," replied Clifford quickly. "We must be moving on now, though. Are you going our way, which is to the Villa Nazionale?"

Alinari shook his head, and looked at his watch. "Unfortunately, I have an engagement in five minutes at the Pilsen," he said. "Here is my card. I shall always be at your service, if you care to look me up."

Clifford pocketed it, and arose from the table.

A minute later, Ralston attempted to check him, on the Toledo. "You've lost your bearings, old chap," he said. "This isn't the way to the Villa Nazionale."

"I know it; but I'm trying to get my real bearings, and just now I think I'll find 'em by watching the entrance to the Pilsen," answered Clifford dryly, disregarding the remonstrance, as he hurried on. He turned into a shop, from which he could see the door and terrace of the restaurant, and leisurely selected postal cards from the stock displayed. Presently, he saw Alinari enter the Pilsen; but he could not refrain from a triumphant glance at Ralston as they saw that Alinari was accompanied by the priest and the man who had occupied the adjoining table at the Fortunio, and that they were in earnest conversation, which spoke of long acquaintance.

"Did Alinari happen to mention his business to you?" he demanded, when they left the shop.

"Yes, he told me that he was a lawyer," answered Ralston. "What in the deuce are you up to, with all this gumshoe work, Clifford?"

His companion smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "I'm giving you another demonstration of the efficacy of the sign language," he answered grimly. "Alinari probably did not confide to you that he is the best-known criminal lawyer in Naples, and commonly reputed to be the legal adviser of the Camorra. I happen to know that, and I saw him make a sign to that ill-as-

sorted couple. What I'm up to is to try to make out the connection, and the possible bearing on it of his flying trip to New York. If I succeed, I may be able to justify Trenton's tip in sending you to me for assistance. I'm also beginning to think that it might be wise for you to accept his advice about the delights of Northern Italy."

"Rats!" exclaimed Ralston contemptuously. "I'm here for business, not pleasure."

"And it'll be business of a very unhealthy character, if your efforts seem liable to be crowned with success," answered Clifford.

But Ralston answered his prediction with a laugh.

II.

"Ralston, how much of the nature of your mission did you confide to this man Alinari during your voyage?" asked Clifford, across the dinner table.

"Not a word about it!" protested Ralston vigorously. "He spoke to me about the Cirillo case, I remember, and I believe that he knows I am interested in it professionally; but he knows nothing of the real nature of my business over here."

"I'll take your assurance that you told him nothing; but I'm not so sure of his ignorance," said Clifford dryly. "You never met him, or came across his trail, in New York?"

"I never even heard of him until I met him in the smoking room of the *Albanian*," answered Ralston. "See here, Clifford—you are mysterious enough for a mediæval conspirator. This is plain twentieth century, and all this dagger-and-dark-lantern atmosphere doesn't fit."

Clifford smiled, a little grimly, as he took the photographs of the bracelet from his pocket. "My dear fellow, you are not in New York, but in a city which had traditions before America was discovered," he said. "I'm not manufacturing conspiracy; but, by a strange coincidence, this bracelet may connect a commonplace murder in New York with one of the worst of the mediæval variety. You have read the inscription engraved on the inside of the bracelet which Cirillo gave to his wife?"

Ralston nodded. "It conveyed nothing to me, or to Cirillo," he replied. "The bracelet was admittedly old, but of no added value because of its antiquity; and the date suggested only that it had formed a part of some wealthy woman's jewel chest."

Clifford took a pencil, and, after studying the photograph for a moment, wrote a line on the edge of the menu card.

"Here is a fair translation of the inscription," he said; and Ralston read:

To my faithful Emma, from her loving M. C. 1799.

"Well!" he said interrogatively, a puzzled expression on his face.

Clifford took another paper from his pocket, and spread it out for Ralston's inspection. "This is a literal copy, so you will excuse the orthography," he said. "They weren't finnicky about that in seventeen ninety-nine."

Ralston took the paper, and read it aloud:

"The queen is not come. She sent me as her deputy; for I am very popular, speak the Neapolitan language, and am considered, with Sir William, the friend of the people. Before lieving, she bestowed on me another proof of her royal favor—a luvely bracelet, set with rubies and diamants. I had privately seen all of the loyal party; and having the head of the Lazerony an old frend, he came on the night of our arrival, and told me he had ninety thousand Lazeronis ready at the holding up of his finger, with many arms. Lord Nelson, to whom I enterpreted, got a large supply of arms for the rest; and they were deposited with this man."

"Well?" said Ralston again, when he had finished reading. "What in the deuce has this jumble got to do with our troubles? It reads like ancient history, to me."

"It is fairly ancient. That letter was written on July nineteenth, seventeen ninety-nine, to the Honorable Charles Greville, by Emma, Lady Hamilton, wife of the British ambassador. Perhaps it has no connection with your case; but, to my mind, there is not the slightest doubt that the 'luvely

bracelet' referred to is the identical one which your unfortunate client presented to his wife."

"But, confound it, what is the use of wasting time over its origin more than a hundred years ago!" expostulated Ralston impatiently. "It might have passed through a hundred hands since then; and it is only its history for the past year which can have any bearing on our case."

Clifford laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "My dear fellow, the answer to that is also the answer to something else which has puzzled you—the reason why Trenton advised you to come to me," he said. "Let me disabuse your mind of one suspicion; I haven't the slightest official connection with either the police or the district attorney's office. But I am carrying on an investigation which interests them both—the study of the American Black Hand Society, as it is known locally. In spite of Cirillo's silence, you must have suspected that he has had more or less connection with it—either as a victim or as an agent."

"Possibly as a victim; I believe that practically every Italian in America pays tribute to it."

"Which is probably a fair assumption," assented Clifford. "That is why Trenton sent me photographs of the bracelet, and a full transcript of the evidence against Cirillo. He thought it might be of use to me in my investigations."

"And that investigation has proceeded far enough to promise help to me in finding my missing link—Conforti?" demanded Ralston. "If it has, I'll acknowledge that you had sufficient reason for throwing up a most promising career in New York to come over here. It seemed suicidal, to me."

"Perhaps it was; for I haven't advanced very far," acknowledged Clifford grimly. "I haven't got very far; only as far as the date of that letter, to be exact—the year seventeen ninety-nine."

"Great Scott! You can't expect me to take back a lot of evidence over a hundred years old, to get my client out of the Tombs!" exclaimed Ralston derisively. "You'll get mildewed over here, Clifford."

"No, I don't expect to send you home with a lot of historical documents to submit to an American jury," answered Clifford quietly, unperturbed by his companion's ridicule. "I do expect, though, to find in those documents a hint which may put you in the way of digging up live evidence. I'll tell you just one little thing which may restore your confidence. Your client, Cirillo, is a direct descendant of that Domenico Cirillo, who was hanged by the Bourbons in seventeen ninety-nine, after refusing to buy his pardon from Lady Hamilton at the expense of his honor and—— 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.'"

"You'll have to give me more than that," said Ralston, grinning. "It won't do my client any good to tell an American jury that his great-grandfather was hanged."

"No, perhaps not. But, as I said, Naples had its traditions before American juries were invented," retorted Clifford dryly. "I'll give you just one more little item. The *capo-lazzaroni* of whom Lady Hamilton speaks in that letter as her friend—and all her friends were her tools—corresponded to the head of the Neapolitan Camorra of today. He furnished most of the evidence upon which Cirillo was hanged—and his name was the very unusual one of Hispali!"

Ralston gave a little start of surprise, and looked at him sharply. "Clifford, that is a little bit uncanny," he said. "Every Italian who has spoken of the man who was found dead in Cirillo's office, has asserted that the name must necessarily be a false one—for the very obvious reason that such a combination of letters would be impossible in the Italian language."

Clifford nodded. "Without egotism, I can say that I probably know more about the Italian language than any of your informants; for I speak most of its dialects," he assented. "I entirely agree with them; the name is an impossible one. But, still, it was applied

to your murdered man; and, a hundred years ago, was borne by this precious friend of Lady Hamilton's—the chief of all the associated vagabonds and criminals of Naples. I can see a significance in that, Ralston—just as I can see a significance in the reappearance, after more than a hundred years, of the bracelet which was a sign of the royal favor bestowed upon an adventuress for services for which the common hangman would have blushed. It is possible that your client is ignorant of his own history, or of the history of his ancestors; but, just so surely as the rascals whom we designate as the Black Hand are the legitimate descendants of Hispali's followers, the explanation of the murder of his namesake is to be found back in some of the plots and counterplots in which Lady Hamilton played so large a part."

"Can you trace either one or the other?" asked Ralston incredulously.

Clifford lighted a cigarette, and leaned across the table. "The development of the Black Hand, yes—absolutely," he said earnestly. "It is admitted that its members are Italians—mostly Neapolitans and Sicilians. It comes as straight from that troubled year of seventeen hundred and ninety-nine as any more honorable pedigree. I don't wish to bore you with history which you think antiquated and irrelevant; but, if we are to combat a disease successfully, we must study its etiology and pathology; and the Mano Nero is the most malignant pestilence which threatens the United States today. Perhaps you are not interested in it, in the abstract; but in your professional practice you have come across a concrete case—one in which, unless I am very much mistaken, it will be absolutely necessary for you to go to the roots."

"I'm prepared to dig as far as necessary; that's what I've come over here for. But it might simplify matters, and spare me labor, if you related first the results of your excavations," said Ralston, a touch of incredulity still present in his tone.

Clifford looked at his watch before answering. "You've been in Naples, now, nearly twelve hours. You have seen the Villa Nazionale, its fashionable playground; the Toledo, its principal business thoroughfare; the Galleria Umberto, which is the heart of the middle-class life," he said sarcastically. "You are about as well qualified to judge of this mysterious city as is the Englishman to write a book on America, after a two weeks' trip, which includes Niagara Falls and the Chicago packing houses. I can't tell you my story in cold blood; you have got to have something of a background for it—local color, to make it convincing. We'll make a little excursion, before I begin; and I'll show you a few things which you won't find described in Baedeker."

"Slumming?" said Ralston interrogatively, as Clifford paid the dinner check.

"You might call it that, unless you have a stronger word," he assented. "Nowhere outside the Orient is there anything just like it, and globe trotters don't often see it."

Ralston watched him curiously as he placed his watch in an inner pocket, and stowed his other valuables securely—an example which he followed, at Clifford's suggestion, as they descended the restaurant stairs. After that, it took but a short half hour to transport themselves to another land in everything which appealed to the senses of sight, smell, and hearing. It was in the centre of the broad Piazza del Mercato that Clifford dismissed the cab; and they stood in the moonlight, facing the ancient church and castle of Carmine.

"Speaking of local color, we are standing on the exact spot where the gallows tree grew and bore fruit," said Clifford. "The great-grandfather of your client was marched out from that castle—which is now the filthiest and most infamous prison in Italy, just as it was then—and neatly turned off by Maestro Donato, the hangman, who, for the edification of the crowd, executed some particularly amusing antics on his victim's shoulders after he had pushed him from the ladder. He met

with great applause from the rabble, in spite of the fact that Domenico Cirillo, who was a skillful physician, had spent his life and a large part of his personal fortune in reforming the hospitals of the city. You might make a mental note of the fact that the rabble, at that moment, was led by Hispali, *capo-lazzaroni*, and friend of Emma, Lady Hamilton."

"And the connection with to-day?" asked Ralston, shuddering at the grisly picture which Clifford had conjured up, and which seemed quite in setting with the horrible prison that confronted them.

Clifford shrugged his shoulders as they walked away. "Only that the dozens of executions which took place here, in that fatal year for Naples, made the Black Hand of to-day possible in New York," he replied. "The best life of the kingdom was strangled there by Maestro Donato's rope; the evidence which hanged them was supplied by the followers of Hispali. It was then that the Neapolitan vagabonds learned the value of organization—the large and easy revenue which might be derived from blackmail, when once their victims knew that resistance meant death.

"Those who were brave enough to resist the demands were denounced and hounded by the *lazzaroni* as Jacobins; and that accusation, when Nelson's guns had brought Ferdinand and Caroline back from exile, meant a farcical trial before a carefully selected court, and immediate execution by the Bourbon hangman. It was a lesson easily learned; it has only been necessary to vary methods to meet new conditions. Hispali boasted to Lady Hamilton that ninety thousand men stood ready to obey him. That was probably an exaggeration; but there is not the slightest doubt that, in the city and province of Naples, to-day, not less than eighty thousand obey the commands of his successor—the *capo* of the Neapolitan Camorra."

"Isn't that a large order, Clifford?" asked Ralston incredulously. "It would be the population of a fair-sized town."

"Ten per cent. of the population of this one—and in half an hour we can walk around the territory inhabited by half of them," replied Clifford. "Look there!" He pointed to a dark corner of the piazza, where the pavement was covered with huddled figures—men, women, and children mixed indiscriminately, sleeping on the bare pavement, pillowing their heads upon each other's bodies.

"That isn't entirely necessary," he continued. "Half of those youngsters are truants from fairly comfortable homes, learning the lessons of vice from voluntary association with the vicious. It is estimated that thirty thousand people pass the nights, roofless, in the streets of Naples. I take it that there could not be a better recruiting ground for the Low Camorra. I spent the night in this particular apartment of *'La Belle Etoile'* a week ago; so I speak advisedly."

"Great Scott, you deserve a medal if you stuck it out!" exclaimed Ralston, shrinking back from contact with the filthy rags of one of the vagabonds, who had arisen, and was departing upon his own particular business of the night. "Wow, but it's whiffy!"

"It was all in the day's—or, rather, the night's—work," replied Clifford indifferently. "I was in character—a recently discharged prisoner from the Ponza Islands. It wasn't uninteresting, and I'll tell you about it later; but there is enough for you to see for yourself, now."

They had turned from the piazza, which was practically deserted by all save the sleepers, into one of the narrow streets leading north; and in an instant they were in the busiest part of Neapolitan life—the crowded portion of the old city, practically unchanged in appearance, customs, or manners by two centuries. Sleeping through the heat of the day, the people swarmed to the narrow streets in the night; flaring torches replaced the light of the sun for the workmen, who moved their tools and materials from the dark shops to the sidewalks. The night, too, was oppressively hot; and

dozens of bronze-skinned men strode about, as nude as the dirty children who played and chased each other in the gutters; while the slatternly, bare-headed women made slight concession to modesty in the amount of their clothing.

Plenty of hard-working people there were—artisans, bare to the waist, and sweating over their strange trades in the light of the flaring torches; hawkers, carrying tremendous loads of their wares on their heads; pavement restaurant keepers crying the virtues of their fried fish, macaroni, *minestra,* or beans. But to the stranger there was little chance to distinguish the individual in the swarm.

Ralston was half sickened by the smells, deafened by the cries and chatter, confused by the flaring lights and the kaleidoscopic changes of the crowd; but, above all, he was stunned by the realization that this was no mob drawn together for a special occasion—that what he saw was the everyday life of the people. It was inconceivable that human beings could live so herded in; that the dismal old buildings could shelter the crowds who swarmed in and out of their gloomy entrances, like ants from a populous hill, and the still greater crowds on the street. Those of the people who were not practically nude were shabbily dressed, or in rags; but there was a picturesqueness of bright colors in their squalor, and the dirty faces were merry, though many a one showed the pinch of hunger.

In the confusion and jostling, there was no chance for conversation. Clifford led the way in silence, taking many crooked turnings, passing through streets which were distinguished from their fellows only by the different trades which they sheltered. In one, the sidewalks for blocks were occupied by the makers of lamps; in another, hundreds labored to produce the gaudy trappings for the small Neapolitan horses; a third was devoted to straw plaiters, whose deft fingers wove the gayly colored straws into intricate designs for mats, baskets, and screens. Ironworkers, shoemakers, tailors, and dozens of other craftsmen had each their separate quarter; but in each of them men, women, and children, with no definite occupation, swarmed and jostled each other.

It was a relief to Ralston when Clifford finally led the way into the comparative quiet of a café near the old Capuana gate.

"Gee whiz, Mulberry Bend on a busy day would be a haven of rest and quiet compared to that!" he exclaimed. "Don't those people ever sleep?"

"Not when there's a chance to make a *soldo,*" answered Clifford, after ordering a bottle of Vesuvio from the slovenly, evil-faced waiter. "You saw only the best of it—the life of the street. Go into any of the buildings, and you will find kennels, where families huddle together indiscriminately when the cold drives them to shelter —both sexes and all ages in a room; with no possibility, even if they desired it, for privacy or decency. That's the part of Neapolitan life which the tourist doesn't see, except in the few hundreds of ragged specimens who wander to the better quarters to prey upon his charity, or to profit by his carelessness.

"The life as you saw it to-night is the life of two hundred years ago. For countless generations those people have known nothing better; in the frequent times of pestilence or revolution, it has been infinitely worse. Like all people steeped in poverty and degradation, they are wonderfully prolific; and recruits are never wanting for the Low Camorra."

Ralston looked with disgust at the two heavy glasses which the waiter had placed on the table, and at the turbid wine which he poured into them from a long-necked *fiasco.*

"I'll take your word for it; but let's get away from here and back to cleanliness," he said. "I can't drink this stuff."

"It isn't necessary, so long as we pay for it," answered Clifford reassuringly. "Take it easy. I am just as anxious to get out as you are; but we must wait our opportunity."

Ralston looked at him in evident astonishment, and received in return a warning wink.

"Don't get excited about it, but—we have been trailed for the last half hour," continued Clifford quietly. "Those two chaps, who followed us in here and joined the *tocca* players at the long table, have been right at our heels. It may mean nothing at all; but we shall be safer if we wait until a brace of *carabinieri* stroll past, before going out."

"Clifford, you've been mussing about in old conspiracies until you've got 'em on the brain!" said Ralston jeeringly. "We can take care of ourselves."

Clifford shook his head, and glanced carelessly toward the *tocca* players, who were disputing noisily among themselves.

"It isn't a question of conspiracy—except the ordinary one of thieves," he said. "They're after our pocketbooks; but they are not particular about a little thing like murder to get them. I know what I'm talking about, Ralston; and an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. There are probably half a dozen waiting for us outside, and I don't want a mix-up with them. Just look over that crowd at the long table. It is a bad lot, and the others would be worse. The game they are playing is prohibited by the police; because it usually ends in a row and a stabbing, and——"

He was interrupted by a cry of rage from one of the players, who jumped from his chair and struck at the man across the table from him. Almost instantly, all were on their feet; and the waiters, evidently accustomed to such emergencies, hastily removed the glasses and bottles from the table.

For just a moment there was absolute silence; then, with a chorus of maledictions and angry cries, the players went at each other, every man knife in hand. The table and chairs were overturned as they swayed back and forth and fell over each other, and the waiters, having removed the breakable property, huddled in a corner, making no effort to separate the combatants. Clifford's instinct was to escape in the confusion; but just as he called to Ralston to follow, the proprietor of the café jumped past them and locked the door; and at the same instant the electric light was switched off, leaving them in total darkness.

"Look out for your valuables, Ralston! Get your back against the wall, and slug any one who comes near you!" he exclaimed warningly. "I believe it's a plant!"

"Here I am," answered Ralston, as their elbows touched in the darkness. "I've got that wine bottle, and it's as good as a night stick. This is a nice little picnic that you invited—— Great Scott, the beggars have got me!"

Clifford lost touch with him in the darkness; and, then, as a crash of glass and a flashing lantern announced that the door had been broken in, Ralston lurched heavily against him, and, before he could catch him, fell to the floor at his feet.

When the light was switched on, not a single one of the *tocca* players was in evidence. Before the entrance of the *carabinieri,* who had forced the front door, they had slipped out through an exit at the back, to be lost in the crowded Mercato quarter; and only Ralston, lying in a pool of red on the tiled floor, remained as an evidence of the fierce knife play. The waiters still huddled in the corner; and the proprietor looked in sullen silence on his wrecked chairs and on the invading officers, from whom he knew he must expect a lot of trouble.

Clifford, disregarding everything else, knelt beside Ralston, and made a hasty examination. The hilt of a knife stuck out from his breast; but Clifford gave a sigh of relief when it clattered to the floor as he tore open his coat.

Ralston, whose face was deathly white, opened his eyes and gave an exclamation of pain. "What in blazes is the matter?" he asked, trying to sit up.

"That's just what I'm trying to find out, old chap," said Clifford soothingly. "This isn't your blood that you're wallowing in; but that rare old Vesuvio, which you refused to drink. Just

the same, you've had a knife stuck into you; and I want to see what the damage is." The *carabinieri* captain bent over to assist him; and, baring Ralston's chest, they found the wound—a long, clean cut along a rib, painful enough, but superficial.

"A scratch—nothing serious, but a fortunate escape," he said to Clifford, and turned to the examination of the stiletto. Luckily for Ralston, its point had first encountered the heavy leather pocket case which he carried in his breast pocket, and the viciousness of the blow was attested by the fact that it had transfixed cleanly the four folds of leather and the thick packet of papers which it contained. The force of that blow, and the pain from the cut of the deflected point, had caused him to faint; but he recovered his scattered senses as a couple of the officers raised him to a chair.

"Mr. Clifford, I must have an explanation of this," said the captain, after assuring himself that his men had secured the proprietor and waiters.

"As you know my name, I take it for granted that you know enough about me to believe that I am guiltless of any wrongdoing," answered Clifford.

"It's my business to know the names of all foreigners who make a prolonged stay in Naples," answered the captain curtly. "Also, to know something about the business which keeps them here; and I shall have to inquire more closely into yours. You gentlemen will have to come with me; I'll have that wound attended to, and talk this over with you, at my quarters." He gave a sharp order to his men, which resulted in the waiters and the proprietor being securely shackled together and marched out; and a few minutes later, Clifford and he assisted Ralston into a cab.

The street in front of the café, which had been densely crowded when they entered, half an hour before, was absolutely deserted; and Ralston grinned at Clifford, after looking about.

"I don't think it was necessary to wait for the police," he said. "We should have been safer in the street."

"Neapolitans don't wait for the police when there is a row," answered Clifford gravely. "They hunt their holes in a hurry. I wasn't mistaken in that, old chap; but I was in something else. It wasn't our valuables they were after; but you have had notice to quit, and way back behind that knife stroke was the slender hand of Emma, Lady Hamilton."

"Foiled by a pigskin letter case!" exclaimed Ralston derisively; but the captain turned and looked at Clifford with a new interest in his eyes.

III.

"Mr. Clifford, I don't believe that it is necessary for me to ask the nature of your business in Naples," said the *carabinieri* officer, after he had dressed the cut on Ralston's chest. "I am Captain Farloni, and I dare say that business has made you acquainted with my name."

"And with your achievements, also," replied Clifford courteously. "Are we your prisoners, captain?"

The officer smiled and shook his head. "Only until you have satisfied my curiosity—not so long, if you prefer to keep your own counsel. But I think you would be wise to confide in me," he said. "I brought you here for your own safety; for you were in very bad company."

"You know them?" asked Clifford eagerly.

"I know that it was reported to me that two Americans were wandering about the Mercato quarter, and that they were being followed by two men whom I know very well," replied Farloni. "That is how I happened to be on hand, with so many of my men. I hurried them out as soon as I received that report. I could arrest both within an hour."

"Will you?"

"Shall I, Mr. Clifford?" The two men looked at each other, with twinkling eyes. "I have no desire to spoil sport, nor do I care to be held responsible for an international tragedy."

They had spoken in Italian, and Clif-

ford turned to Ralston, and spoke in English.

"Captain Farloni is asking if he shall butt in and arrest the man who handed you that little souvenir as a welcome to Naples," he said. "Before you answer, let me tell you that the captain is the most feared and worst hated officer in Italy—by the Camorra. I dare say that he has half a dozen scars which are worse than the one you will carry as a result of their delicate attentions—and more of the secrets of the society stored away in his memory than any man who is not a member of it."

"I hava been stab' on six occasion. Since eleven month' I am condemn' to die," acknowledged the captain placidly. "They wait until I am died before they acquit the sixty Camorrist' who are in the prison of the Carmine."

Ralston's expression betrayed blank astonishment, and Clifford laughed.

"Perhaps you had better hear the history of that," he explained. "Your hotel proprietor would laugh if you even suggested that such a thing as the Camorra existed. So did every one else, two years ago, when a particularly atrocious double murder occurred here, and there was a rumor that it was a Camorra affair. Every one, that is, but Captain Farloni, who said nothing, but set quietly to work. Then, a year after the murder, he drafted a lot of extra men to Naples, and, within two hours, made more than sixty arrests.

"The news spread quickly that he had accumulated definite proofs that Gennaro Cuoculo and his wife had been executed by the Camorra for betraying its secrets; and dozens of prominent Neapolitans disappeared suddenly. He had bagged his sixty; but before he could bring down the higher game, the telegraph wires from Rome were busy, and the arrests suddenly ceased.

"I have heard it rumored that the captain received a gentle hint from headquarters—one of the kind that is conveyed with a club—to the effect that his activities were causing serious inconvenience to men whom the government did not wish annoyed. He has been wise enough, since, to keep very quiet; and the trial of his prisoners is put off from month to month, on one pretext and another. It may or may not be significant; but, without the testimony of Captain Farloni, they would all be acquitted out of hand—and six attempts have been made to render him incapable of giving that testimony."

The officer was studying the hilt of his sword, and made no comment. Ralston looked from one to the other, and read a discreet acknowledgment in his silence.

"I'm getting more credulous, Clifford," he said. "I take it that you believe this attempt to do me up is a Camorra matter; but I can't see why they should have it in for me."

"If I have your permission to tell Farloni your business, perhaps he can suggest a connection," answered Clifford.

Ralston nodded. "Fire away; I'm curious to find out, myself," he acknowledged.

In Italian, Clifford rapidly sketched the outline of the case which had brought Ralston to Naples, and their mutual experiences since his arrival.

Farloni listened attentively, his fingers playing with his sword knot. When the recital was finished, he turned to Ralston, and looked at him, for a moment, without speaking.

"What do you make of it?" demanded the American, irritable from pain, and uneasy under the scrutiny.

"Early this evening, six Neapolitans met at supper," answered Farloni, smiling. "I have observed that, when those six eat together, something startling usually happens in Naples very soon afterward. You were fortunate in carrying such a heavy letter case in your pocket."

"Captain, was Alinari one of that number?" asked Clifford quickly.

Farloni shook his head. "Alinari is a lawyer—an honorable one, so far as we know," he answered. "His clients are criminals, and criminal practice in Italy is peculiar; but I have reason to believe that he observes the ethics of

the profession. He is a shrewd man, and I have no doubt that his previous experience enabled him to forecast about what would happen. His advice to Mr. Ralston about going to Northern Italy was entirely sincere; he knew that his life would be in danger here. On the other hand, if I should order the arrest of the man who attempted to kill him, I am sure that Alinari would appear to defend him, and employ every subterfuge which the code permits to have his client turned loose to finish his task. He is entirely within his rights, and, fortunately, is not hampered by orders from superiors in doing his duty."

"Captain Farloni, do I understand that you, as a police officer, know that half a dozen men in Naples habitually conspire to commit crimes, and that you hesitate to arrest them and bring them to justice?" asked Ralston incredulously. "What possible safety can there be for any one—for me, for example—in Naples, if such a condition exists?"

"You would do well to follow Alinari's advice, if you are considering your personal safety," answered Farloni frankly. "I am able to guarantee it, if you will follow my directions; but it will leave you very little liberty of action—certainly not enough to accomplish what you came for. Here is the condition, in a nutshell. The Camorra is too shrewd to kill the goose which lays golden eggs. It is no part of its policy to scare away travelers by emulating the brutalities of *Fra Diavolo* and the old brigands of the hills. It robs them when opportunity offers; it blackmails them unmercifully when it can find a handle; but it does not resort to physical violence and murder.

"Your case is different; you do not come here as a tourist, but on a mission which is virtually a declaration of war against the Camorra; for I have not the slightest doubt that your client's predicament is due to a Camorra conspiracy. I will acknowledge this—their swift action in taking up your challenge and condemning you to death is an admission of fear. They do not kill for the pleasure of killing."

"Then, by Jingo, I must be on the right track!" exclaimed Ralston, forgetting his pain, and jumping to his feet. "I shan't bother you to protect me; I reckon I can take care of myself, if I have to wear chain armor to do it; but I'll dig up Conforti, and get poor Cirillo out of limbo."

Farloni smiled approvingly. "That is the right spirit; but perhaps your methods might be improved upon," he said. "Mr. Ralston, this condemnation is no joke; it is grim earnest. But condemnation and execution are not always synonymous. I am one of six men whom I know to have been formally condemned, and who still live."

"That's encouraging," grunted Ralston. "I have a grumbling reminder in my side that their intentions are serious; if it were not for that, I should be tempted to believe that I was involved in some fantastic dream. Captain, are you quite sure that we are all awake—that we shan't open our eyes and find that we have stumbled upon the road to yesterday, and wandered about in the Naples of a hundred years ago?"

Farloni shrugged his shoulders. "I can be frank with you, gentlemen; you will not betray me," he answered. "Go to the ministry in Rome, and ask for information about the Neapolitan Camorra. They will tell you that no such thing exists, that it died with the abolishment of the system which gave it birth—in other words, with the expulsion of the Bourbons. Perhaps the man who gives you that information may be sincere in his belief; there is an equal chance that he owes his position to the power of the organization which he asserts is mythical.

"The Bourbons had a fine system. When their tyranny and extravagance had irritated the decent members of the community to the point of rebellion, they turned loose on them the dregs from the slums, even the brigands from the hills—permitting them to pay themselves by plunder. It worked; but, like most systems, it had

a fatal flaw in it. It was repeated so often that there were practically no decent people left in the kingdom; they had been driven into exile, murdered by the mob, or executed by the king's hangman. Even then, the vagabonds found that there was virtue in organization; it assured an equal distribution of the spoils.

"When Garibaldi drove their royal patrons out, and brought about the unification of Italy, they were not willing to forego their privileges. The absolute power of the king was gone; it rested nominally in the people, and the Neapolitans were quick to see that it was to their advantage to have their friends in office. They perfected the old organization which they had found so profitable, and ran it on different lines.

"The time was gone when the mob could pour out from the Mercato quarter, and, with shouts of 'Live the king!' plunder the palaces of those who had protested against oppression, and drag their victims to be butchered under the windows of the royal palace. Now, they do their work quietly, collect their tribute regularly, and, at election, see that members who will guard their interests are sent to Rome.

"That is why my hands are tied, gentlemen. Restore capital punishment, give us a tribunal which will administer swift and impartial justice, and give the *carabinieri* free hands; and in three months, the Camorra would be wiped out of existence. Incidentally, there would be several high positions vacant, and a dozen manufacturers of stilettos would go into bankruptcy."

"You know the details of their organization?" suggested Clifford. "Is there anything in it which would be of assistance to us in this Black Hand matter?"

Farloni hesitated for a moment. "Mr. Clifford, the Black Hand and the Neapolitan Camorra are one and the same thing," he said slowly. "Don't misunderstand me; not every case of extortion or murder in New York is Camorra work. You have the Sicilian Mafia to deal with, too; and that is quite another matter. The Neapolitan society is the more dangerous, because it is better organized. That organization is so perfect that I have no doubt of its extension to Buenos Aires, Tunis, Marseilles, and New York—in short, to every place to which Neapolitans emigrate in any considerable numbers.

"In New York, it is only a shade less strong, in the Italian colony, than it is in Naples itself; and the tribute which it pays to the parent society here is something enormous. They have imported the system, the peculiar crimes, and the mercilessness which characterize the Camorra here; and with them the traditions and the old-time feuds of the Bourbon rule. Your police are at a disadvantage in dealing with the transplanted Camorra; they are ignorant of the language; they have no sympathy with, or understanding of, the mode of thought of the people; and, above all, they are ignorant of the history which has made the Neapolitans what they are."

"We've sent a fair number of 'em to the chair, and the Neapolitan dialect is pretty common in our prisons, just the same," said Ralston, irritated by the assumption of superiority which he thought he detected in the Italian's comments.

Farloni smiled and shrugged his shoulders, which did not tend to lessen Ralston's irritation.

"I am quite willing to admit that; in fact, Cirillo's case is one in point, and a fair illustration," he said. "There is every chance that he will occupy the electric chair—not because he is guilty, but because your police are ignorant of Neapolitan history, and do not appreciate that they are being made a cat's-paw by the Camorra. Probably ninety-five per cent. of the Italians who have been convicted in New York deserved all they got; but at least half of them have been punished for crimes which they did not commit. Not the least important department of the Camorra is that which devotes itself to manufacturing evidence—either in favor of its members who have had the

misfortune to fall into the hands of the law, or against those whom the society wishes to discipline.

"Exactly the same condition exists here; but we have the advantage of knowing our people. There are eight thousand prisoners awaiting trial in the prisons of Naples alone; many of them have been imprisoned for years; and it is safe to say that ninety per cent. of the testimony which will be offered in their defense will be flat perjury. Mr. Ralston, I could give you the names of a dozen Italians in New York, each and every one of them with a clean record, and looked up to as honest men, who know your missing witness, Conforti, well."

Ralston gave an exclamation of triumph. "By Jove, that's something like business!" he said. "With that information, I can locate him; and the rest will be easy."

Farloni laughed, and shook his head. "You have a proverb in English about the difficulty of making a horse drink," he said. "All that I have told you pertains to the business you have in hand. It is not alone in manufacturing false evidence that the Camorra excels; it is equally resourceful in suppressing truths which it does not want known. I can give you those names; but you cannot force their owners to speak; for you would have heard from them before now, if they had not been ordered to keep silent."

"I'll thank you for the names, just the same," answered Ralston obstinately. "New York isn't Naples, and they will talk, fast enough; for I can guarantee them protection."

"Then I have the most unusual privilege of conversing with omnipotence," said Farloni sarcastically. "You will remember that I offered the same guarantee to you—with conditions. I did not state that those conditions implied your confinement to the *carabinieri* barracks, during your stay in Naples. My dear Mr. Ralston, by a very lucky accident, you escaped death tonight; and it is probably less than six hours since sentence was passed upon you. Are you a married man?"

"No; I have only myself to look out for," answered Ralston, beginning to be impressed with Farloni's earnestness.

"That's a significant answer," he said. "Most of the men of whom I speak are married and have families. Camorra vengeance is subtle and far-reaching. Two weeks since, a young boy, not more than sixteen years old, was brutally murdered in one of the suburbs of Naples. So far as we could discover, the crime was entirely purposeless. The boy was popular with his fellows; the insignificant sum of money which he carried was undisturbed. We have discovered no trace of the assassins; but I have learned that his father, in Buenos Aires, not only resisted an attempt at extortion, but denounced the would-be blackmailers to the Argentine police. No, Mr. Ralston; I do not believe that even you can guarantee effective protection to the men whom you would induce to betray the Camorra."

Ralston made a gesture of helplessness. "As you acknowledge that the man is not a myth, there must be some way of getting at him," he protested. "You know him, captain, do you not?"

"No; but I know of him," replied Farloni. "He is the man whose duty it is to transmit the American tribute to Naples. That was Black Hand money which Giacomo Cirillo handled for him with such secrecy."

Ralston turned to Clifford, with a smile of derision on his lips. "See here, old man, we're beginning to get at the milk in the cocoanut!" he exclaimed. "This is getting right down to the history of our own times; and if you can induce Captain Farloni to put what he knows in legal shape for me, I don't think we need bother about your musty conspiracies of Lady Hamilton in the year seventeen ninety-nine!"

Clifford grinned, and took the photographs of the bracelet from his pocket. "Captain, there was one detail I forgot to mention when I sketched our case for you," he said, disregarding Ralston's jeering. "Reading the inscription on the inside of the

bracelet which Cirillo claims to have purchased from this mysterious man, Conforti, recalled a passage in one of Lady Hamilton's letters to her former lover, Greville. I looked the matter up, and I am convinced that it is the identical bracelet which was presented to her by Queen Maria Carolina."

The officer took the photographs, and examined them carefully. "Your identification is entirely correct, Mr. Clifford," he said gravely. "There is no question about it; that is the original bracelet, and it was stolen from Lady Hamilton's great-grandson, together with several other articles of jewelry which had been inherited from her."

"Where?" asked Clifford eagerly.

"Here in Naples," answered Farloni. "Mind you, the descent is not acknowledged. The young man, if he sported an escutcheon, would have to bear the bar sinister. The great-grandfather was born in London. His mother was Emma Hart, who afterward became Lady Hamilton; his father was Count Salipi, secretary of embassy from the two Sicilies to the court of St. James."

Clifford sat down at the captain's desk, and busied himself with pencil and paper, without speaking.

"Getting back on your hobbyhorse, Clifford?" asked Ralston, grinning.

Again Clifford disregarded him. "What names does this young man bear, captain?" he asked.

"For two or three generations they have assumed that of their great-grandfather, without the title—Salipi," answered Farloni.

Clifford puzzled over what he had written. "There's one letter missing—the 'H,'" he said.

Farloni smiled, in quick comprehension. "Yes, it was put in for the sake of euphony, I believe. The son of Lady Hamilton, when he came to Naples, was known under the impossible name of Hispali. The relationship to either the father or the mother was never openly acknowledged. I stumbled across the whole family history in my investigations, following the theft of the jewels."

"How long ago was that, captain?" asked Ralston.

The officer made a rapid mental calculation. "It was during the Easter *fiestas;* that would be about four months," he answered. "This is the first trace we have had of the missing jewels; and I suspect that the others, which still remain unaccounted for, completed the collection."

"Captain, have the Salipis been prominent in Naples?" asked Clifford. "If my memory serves me correctly, the original Hispali played no inconspicuous part in its history."

Farloni looked at him curiously. "Your memory is a good servant, Mr. Clifford," he answered. "The present representative of the family is not of much account; his father and grandfather were inconspicuous, but nevertheless powerful. They were reputed to be chiefs of the Camorra."

Clifford's eyes were sparkling as he turned to Ralston. "You have photographs of your people?" he asked quickly.

Ralston tossed him the letter case which had saved his life, and he took from it the photograph of the murdered man.

"Do you recognize this, captain?" he said, as he held it up.

"It's Salipi," answered Farloni, after a hasty glance; and Clifford smiled grimly as he returned the case to Ralston.

"I'll answer your question now, old chap," he said. "I have mounted my hobby again, and I'll ride it back over a hundred years of history, until I find your missing link in some forgotten conspiracy of Emma, Lady Hamilton."

IV.

Ralston's wound, trivial as it had seemed at first, kept him in his hotel for the better part of a week. No mention of the affair appeared in the local papers, and no further arrests in connection with it were made. The café proprietor was fined for permitting a prohibited game to be played in his place; but no graver charge was

made against him, although there was little doubt that he was an accessory to the attack made upon one of his guests.

Ralston chafed under the enforced activity; but the wound had been painful, the surgeon's orders were imperative, and he was forced to obedience. His humor was not improved when Clifford seriously suggested that he should return to New York as soon as he was able to travel.

"There's no question about your being a marked man, and I think your usefulness here is over," said Clifford. "Farloni agrees with me that you would accomplish more in New York."

"I shouldn't have to do much there to improve on my score here," admitted Ralston ruefully. "They put me out of business before I got fairly started."

Clifford's expression gave a qualified assent. "In practical results, you haven't accomplished much; that's a fact. But their prompt attack upon you betrays the weakness of their hand," he said. "I ran across Alinari this morning. He made no reference to your mishap, but he repeated his advice."

"If he was simply repeating a message from his two friends, I should feel half inclined to profit by it," answered Ralston. "Did he tell you who they were?"

"Farloni had saved him the trouble, if you mean the couple whom we saw in the Fortunio. The ill-tempered individual is Ernesto Lupocino. The priest was Don Alessandro Vittelo, his spiritual adviser."

"They looked as if their pictures should be in the rogue's gallery. I'm not surprised that Farloni knows them," assented Ralston.

"Just the same, they haven't an official police record; that is what makes them formidable. Farloni asserts positively that they belong to that mysterious six who make things happen in Naples. It's rather a distinguished company; one of them is a deputy, another, one of the principal officers of the customs service, the fifth bears a high title of nobility, and the sixth is one of the examining magistrates."

"Are you stringing me, Clifford?" asked Ralston suspiciously.

Clifford laughed, and shook his head. "Incredible as it may seem, that is the absolute truth," he replied. "Farloni asserts that the policy and discipline of the Camorra, including its foreign ramifications, are absolutely controlled by those six men, each of whom has his own special department. Lupocino, for instance, attends to little matters like yours, after the decision has been reached by the council of six."

Ralston grinned incredulously. "That's where Farloni is off," he said. "That wasn't the man who stabbed me; he wasn't in the restaurant."

An exasperating twinkle came to Clifford's eyes. "My dear fellow, I've told you twice who was responsible for that; it is Lady Hamilton," he answered. "Lupocino is simply one link in the long chain which extends back to her. It wasn't a member of the Camorra who gave you that blow."

"Clifford, the doctor man has prescribed absolute rest and freedom from excitement for me; and you're getting me considerable het up with your confounded mysteries!" protested the wounded man, half angrily, as he straightened up on his couch. "Give it to me straight, can't you?"

Clifford grinned, and motioned to him to lie down. "You've brought the New York atmosphere and point of view with you, and you'll have to shed 'em both before you can understand the situation here," he retorted. "Out in the pretty village of Portici, five miles from Naples, there is an old *contadino,* who is reputed to have acquired considerable wealth in the peaceful pursuit of bee-keeping. Common report says that he keeps that wealth, in shining gold pieces, secreted in his house."

"Well, what in thunder has that got to do with our troubles?" demanded Ralston irritably.

"Nothing much; but it is an illustration of methods," answered Clifford. "When I spent the night on the Piazza

del Mercato, last week, I was told all about him by a very entertaining vagabond who lay next to me on the stones. He suggested that I should join him and a couple of his acquaintances, and pay a visit to the old *contadino's* house. We were to investigate the truth of the rumor by torturing the old boy until he disclosed the hiding place of his money, or died under the grilling. If we didn't get the money, we should at least have proved our willingness, and placed ourselves in the way of admittance to the humbler ranks of the Camorra—which requires a certain proof of personal bravery and depravity before initiation. My friend, who was addressed familiarly by his companions as 'Left Paw,' expatiated at considerable length on the advantages of membership, and was very keen about it. I told him I would think it over."

"Come on, Clifford—what's the answer?" exclaimed Ralston. "I don't suppose you are talking to hear your own voice."

"No. But, by a strange chance, I'm afraid I've lost my opportunity; for I believe Left Paw has found another occasion to acquire merit," answered Clifford calmly. "He is one of the couple who followed us, that night; and it was his hand which drove that knife through your letter case—his left, by the way. That's where he gets his pseudonym."

"You got this information from Farloni, also?" asked Ralston.

Clifford took the precaution of examining the outer room before he answered.

"Farloni has given me a whole lot of information; but I have this from Left Paw's own lips," he answered, in a low voice. "See here, Ralston; my experience on the Piazza del Mercato was not my first excursion into the Neapolitan underworld. I've taken advantage of my knowledge of the dialect—a speech which I acquired as a boy, and which no adult, not even an Italian, can ever master perfectly—to mix with the people as one of themselves. A few visits to the dialect theatres in the Strada Forio gave me a smattering of criminal's jargon, and the matter of disguise is simplicity itself.

"My study of the Camorra has not been entirely academic, although I realize the necessity of going to the root of it; but that I could not do as Winthrop Clifford. It is one Pasquale Cherubini, lately released from penal servitude on the Ponza Islands, who has investigated the recruiting ground of the Camorra. Winthrop Clifford—with a large acquaintance among the better class of Italians, and, from early sympathy and intimacy, getting nearer to what they really think than is possible for most foreigners—has been able to learn much about the High Camorra, that portion which busies itself with politics.

"Pasquale Cherubini, eating macaroni with his fingers at street stalls, yawning through the long nights with outcasts on the Piazza or at Santa Lucia, or playing *tocca,* with his knife handily stuck to the under side of the table, has kept his ears open for information in an atmosphere which accepts the Camorra as readily and as much as a matter of course as Tammany is accepted on the Bowery.

"When you get down to that class, they speak of it openly among themselves; but they would be mute as oysters before a foreigner, or laugh at his suggestion that such a thing existed. I believe I have touched both ends of it, Ralston; and, while I'm a long way from knowing all there is to know, I have learned enough to lead me to second Alinari's warning to you. If you take my tip, you'll sail back to New York."

"Not without more reason than you've given me. They've missed me once, with all the chances in their favor; and I'll risk it, now that I'm on my guard," answered Ralston obstinately. "All your investigating hasn't put me any nearer to finding this man Conforti; and that's what I'm here for."

"No, I haven't found Conforti," admitted Clifford, grinning. "I spent a

good part of last evening with my friend Left Paw, however; and he gave me a lot of information which will interest you. One item is that he is still on the job. His employers appreciate that his intentions were good, that he failed to get you by an accident; and they have instructed him to try again. He has put it right up to me, Ralston.

"Unless I am to forfeit the confidence of himself and his fellows, I must accept the very advantageous offer which he has made me, and help to do you up, the first time you venture outside. There's nothing would please me more than to be initiated into the Camorra; but I don't want to buy the privilege by delivering your scalp. I'd prefer to commit some crime which isn't quite so personal, to pay my footing."

"Clifford, you are not serious in this!" exclaimed Ralston irritably. "You are not going to join those rascals."

"I am, if I have the opportunity, and if I don't have to show my eligibility by committing murder," answered Clifford quietly. "See here, Ralston; the Camorra numbers eighty thousand members in the province of Naples. A very large proportion of that membership is composed of criminals, many of them murderers; and from that down the gamut of crime—counterfeiting, kidnapping, blackmailing, thieving. The prisons and penal colonies of Italy are kept comfortably filled; but, all told, there are fewer than four hundred Camorristi serving time or awaiting trial."

"I don't see what particular bearing that has on my case," answered Ralston.

Clifford signified his impatience with a gesture which would have done credit to a Neapolitan. "I'm afraid that it may sound egotistical, if I explain the real bearing," he said. "I became interested in this thing entirely by accident, but once I got into it, I realized that my education had given me peculiar advantages for pursuing it. When even such a cursory investigation as I have made shows me the perfection of the organization, which practically guarantees to its members immunity from punishment by the law, I appreciate what a grave menace it is to America. Only two cities in the world have a greater Italian population than New York, where there are more than a half million. In our State's prisons there are, to-day, just one hundred and sixty-seven Italians serving time for felonies. Say that half of them are Camorristi, and the other half criminals who have acted independently. It should furnish us with considerable food for thought."

"It's provided me with more than that," said Ralston, smiling ruefully, as he looked at his bandaged chest. "I can't draw a deep breath without being reminded of the Camorra."

"That knife thrust is the first answer to an attack upon it—at least, the first answer which has been given to an American," continued Clifford quickly. "It's time we woke up over there, Ralston. When an organization of criminals becomes so powerful that it can carry on business in defiance of our laws—and the absolute immunity of more than ninety-nine per cent. of its members from punishment indicates that it is that powerful—we should begin to take notice. It isn't going to be easy to knock it out. Its revenues are worth fighting for."

"Judging from the amount of Conforti's business with Cirillo, they must be enormous," admitted Ralston. "That brings me back to the original proposition, though. It's my business to locate Conforti, not to fight the Camorra as an institution. That's why I can't go back to New York, to tell Trenton that all I have accomplished is to get a slash in the ribs and establish the fact that Hispali, the murdered man, is a great-grandson of the man who helped to hang my client's great-grandfather. I want to get some sort of a line on Conforti, before I leave."

Clifford smoked his cigarette in silence, for a few minutes, before answering.

"I appreciate your point of view," he

said finally. "You are convinced that Cirillo is absolutely innocent, and that his imprisonment is an unmerited hardship. I'll agree with you as to his technical innocence, and also that the Tombs isn't a pleasant place of residence; but it is entirely his own fault that he remains there. Ralston, if your client should tell you all he knows, you could have him free inside of twenty-four hours."

Ralston looked at him in amazement. "Great Scott! Do you mean to say that he is staying there from choice?" he exclaimed incredulously. "It hardly stands to reason that he would foot the bills for my expense and fees over here, and willfully conceal from me the information which he ostensibly sends me to dig up."

"He's not staying there entirely from choice; he appreciates the necessity for it," replied Clifford confidently. "If he purchased his freedom by telling you all he knows, he might enjoy it for a few hours. As it stands now, there is a remote chance that he may eventually be convicted and sentenced to death. If he betrays the truth to you, he would be killed on sight; and it's more than probable that his family would share in his punishment.

"That's where the power of the Camorra comes in, Ralston; that's why the Italians in New York fear it more than they do our laws. Our administration is necessarily slow; a man who has money enough to employ clever counsel can beat it, in the majority of cases, delay retribution, in the others, and be assured that his sins will not be visited upon his family. The Camorra never delays; its methods and means of discipline are unlimited, and it employs them with no light hand.

"After looking at the face of Lupocino, would you expect mercy; or do you believe that Don Alessandro would be more scrupulous than his predecessors in the Inquisition?"

Ralston shook his head hopelessly. "I shouldn't give either of 'em a recommendation on his face; but that doesn't prove anything," he answered. "Are you giving me theory, or fact?"

"Fact, I believe; but it's founded on theory," answered Clifford quickly. "Up to a certain point, Cirillo was frank with you; his story of his relations with Conforti is, probably, essentially true, although I doubt his ignorance of the origin of the funds which he transmitted. I have just made an important discovery, however; the description which he gave to you, and to Trenton, of this man Conforti is entirely misleading and false. Farloni knows all about the man, and he tells me that Cirillo's description of him is so radically different from a true one that it must have been given with the intention of throwing you off the track. Can you recall the exact circumstances of his giving it to you?"

"Yes, by Jingo, I can—and I believe you're right!" exclaimed Ralston, after a minute's reflection. "At our first interview after his arrest, he gave me his name, and told me where I could find him. I hustled right over to the address; but nobody at the place would admit knowledge of such a man, and I remember that one of them asked me to describe him and I was unable to do it. I didn't see Cirillo until the next day to get that description; and now that you have suggested something crooked in it, I recollect that he was very much confused when he gave it to me, and contradicted himself several times. I thought it was a natural confusion, at the time; for it isn't easy to draw a word picture of a man, unless he has some peculiarity."

"Exactly! And if Cirillo had not been flimflamming you, he would have found no difficulty!" exclaimed Clifford triumphantly. "Conforti possesses several marked peculiarities, for an Italian. He has light red hair, gray eyes, and several of his teeth have been capped with gold. This description which Cirillo gave you would have fitted half the business men of Naples; but it was not drawn from Conforti. Some one had got at your client and thrown a scare into him, Ralston; and the best thing you can do is to get back and shake him down for the truth."

"Is that your principal reason for advising me to go back?" asked Ralston suspiciously.

Clifford laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "Yes, but I won't deny that I have fortifying ones," he said. "See here, Ralston—you were on the right track, over there. If Trenton hadn't advised you to come over here, I believe you would have run down evidence to clear Cirillo. It isn't for fear of what you may accomplish here that the Camorra wishes to put you out of the way; but it's less risky to dispose of you on their own ground, where there is no capital punishment, than to kill you in New York, where there is always the possibility that an attack on Americans may cause the history of New Orleans to be repeated.

"That's one other reason why I want you to go home—they'll get you here. Another, almost as strong, is that you impair my usefulness if you remain; for I can't forfeit the confidence which I have worked so hard to obtain, by refusing the invitation of my friend Left Paw to help do you up. There's a steamer to-morrow. Tell me that you'll take it, and I'll look him up to-night and agree to help him. That will be an evidence of good faith, and when he calls upon me to deliver the goods you'll be safe on blue water."

There was a curious expression on Ralston's face as he listened to the argument; and when it was finished, he remained for a long time silent.

Clifford waited impatiently. "Well, how about it?" he demanded.

"I've been doing a heap of thinking," answered Ralston slowly. "I believe that you are right; they'll get me, if I stay here. But I don't want you to believe that that would influence my decision. You have given me enough reasons to induce me to go back home; and I shall go, if you can assure me of one thing. Is your disguise so perfect, when you associate with your friend Left Paw, that there is no chance that he has penetrated it—that the Camorra is simply letting you make a monkey of yourself?"

Clifford gave a sigh of relief, and smiled. "Then you'll go," he said confidently. "My dear fellow, I don't believe that there is any disguise which cannot be penetrated by sharp eyes; and, practically, I do not assume one. There is no wig and grease paint about it; it is a question of identity, and I'm possessed of two of them. It is difficult to explain; but when I put on the clothes of the Neapolitan vagabond, I am one. I ran wild in the streets here when I was a boy; there isn't an expression or a gesture which I do not understand, and which I do not use as naturally as any *lazzaroni* of Santa Lucia. I have no facility for disguise or impersonation; if I tried to make myself up for a German tourist or a Yankee farmer, a baby in arms would detect the counterfeit; but when Winthrop Clifford drops out of sight here, he ceases to exist, for the moment, and is reincarnated in Pasquale Cherubini."

"I'll take your word for it; but don't be too much carried away by your impersonation." answered Ralston, grinning. "You'll have to help me on board, and I don't care for your assistance in the rôle of Cherubini."

Clifford laughed, and put out his hand. "I must play the part to-night; but first I'll clinch things by taking your passage for you. It's the *Rutanic*, and she stops only at Gibraltar," he said. "I'm glad that you've listened to reason."

He left Ralston, with the intention of going at once to the steamship office in the Piazza Municipio. Had he followed out that intention, he might have spared himself many an anxious hour and have prevented a tragedy; but, passing through the Galleria Vittoria, he saw Don Alessandro and Ernesto Lupocino sitting at a café table—apparently listening to the orchestral concert from the balcony, but again watching the entrance with ill-concealed impatience, as if they awaited some one who was tardy at the rendezvous.

They had not seen Clifford, who came in at the smaller rear entrance; and he stepped quickly into the shelter of a shop, from which he could watch them without being seen. He had de-

termined to meet that couple personally; and, suspecting that it was Alinari for whom they were waiting, he intended to show himself when they were together, and, if possible, to force an introduction.

As he watched them, he was conscious of the same attitude toward them, on the part of the passing crowd and the café waiters and guests, which he had noticed on the first day, when he had seen them at the Fortunio. The waiters fell over each other in their eagerness to serve them; and passers-by, catching sight of them, watched furtively for the honor of recognition.

Lupocino's temper was evidently more evil than on the previous occasion, however; and the snarling smile which he occasionally bestowed had nothing of good-will or cordiality in it. Don Alessandro's face betrayed less of ill temper, but quite as much of cruelty and selfishness. The small, crafty eyes between the puffy lids watched every detail of the life which passed before them; but it was so evidently greed which animated them that his face was repulsive.

Clifford could have struck him for the leer of cupidity which he cast toward a couple of richly dressed American girls, who were hurrying to the tourist office at the end of the galleria, and in doing it he would not have felt that he was offering indignity to the cloth; for never did a priest's face and manner so plainly belie the sacred calling. He made a note of it for his account against him at their final settling.

His patience was sorely taxed before his curiosity as to the man whom they were expecting was satisfied; and the identity of the newcomer presented to him a new puzzle. It was not Alinari who joined them, but the surgeon whom Captain Farloni had recommended him to employ to care for Ralston's wound; and in spite of the fact that he had been vouched for by a captain of *carabinieri,* his manner left no doubt in Clifford's mind that he was on terms of close intimacy with the Camorra leaders.

Their heads were close together as they discussed with each other over the little round table, and that discussion was a serious and long one—so long that, when they finally separated and Clifford left his post of observation, he found that he was too late to engage Ralston's homeward passage before the office should reopen in the morning.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE ISSUE OF JANUARY 10TH.

THAT TIRED FEELING

CLOCKS and watches, as nearly every one is aware, often act in a way that is simply inexplicable. They stop without warning, or lose or gain several minutes, without any apparent reason. When they get these cantankerous fits, even the watchmaker can do nothing with them.

In such cases, people are often surprised to find that the clock or watch which they had given up in despair has started ticking and is going right ahead, as regularly and merrily as if it had never caused its owner the slightest trouble. The reason for this is that the machinery has had a rest.

Watches have their own peculiarities. A watch that will go all right when worn by one person will not go at all when in the vest pocket of another.

Experts account for this by the theory of magnetism, the magnetic influence of the body in some persons being much stronger than in others. In some cases it is sufficiently powerful to act upon the delicate steel mainspring and stop the movements of the watch. Whatever may be the explanation, the fact is well known to watchmakers.

Bunkered

By Edgar Beecher Bronson

Author of "Reminiscenses of a Ranchman," "Circus Day at Mancos," Etc.

Readers of Mr. Bronson's splendid story of the old West, "Circus Day at Mancos," which appeared in the issue of November 25th, will be convinced, after reading this narrative, that his skill in writing is not confined to tales of cowboy life. There is about this story a grim quality which reminds one forcibly of Edgar Allan Poe at his best.

IT seems it must have been somewhere about the year B. C. 4000 since we lost sight of the tall peaks of the architectural topography of Manhattan Island and yet the log of the *Black Prince* makes it no more than twenty days. Not that our day-to-day time has been dragging, for it has done nothing of the sort.

All my life long, I have dreamed of indulging in the joy of a really long voyage; and now, at last, I've got it. New York to Cape Town, South Africa—six thousand nine hundred miles, thirty days' straightaway run, and thence another twenty-four days' sail to Mombassa—on a seven-thousand-ton cargo boat, deliberate and stately rather than fast of pace, but otherwise trim, well-groomed, and well-found as a liner, with an official mess that numbers as fine a set of fellows as ever trod a bridge, and a captain who, when not busy hunting up a stray planet to check his latitude, puts in his spare time hunting kindly things to do for his two passengers—for there are only two of us, the doctor and myself. He signed on the ship's articles as surgeon, I as purser.

Fancy it! Thirty days' clear respite from the daily papers, the telephone, the subway crowds, and the constant wear and tear on one's muscular system in reaching for change, large and small! Thirty days free of the daily struggle, either for place on the ladder of ambition, or for the privilege to stay on earth and stand about and watch the others mount—the struggle that saps metropolitan nerves and squeezes the humanities out of metropolitan life, until its hearts are arid, barren, and cruel as those of the cave men! Thirty days' repose, practically alone amid one of nature's greatest solitudes, awed by her silences, uplifted by the majesty of her mighty forces, with naught to do but humble one's self before the consciousness of his own littleness and unfitness, and to study how to right the wrongs he has done.

Indeed, a voyage like this makes it certain that one will come actually to know oneself so intimately that, unless well convinced that he will enjoy the acquaintance, he had best stay at home. Of my personal experience, in this particular, I beg to be excused from writing.

Lonesome out here? Far from it. Behind, to be sure, are those so near and dear that one would gladly give all the remaining years allotted to him for one blessed half hour with them. Otherwise, time literally flies aboard the *Black Prince*—the days slip by at puz-

zling speed. Roughly speaking, I should say that the meals consume about half one's waking hours; for we are fed five times a day, and fed so well that one cannot get his own consent to dodge any of them.

Indeed, I've only one complaint to make of this ship. She is a "water wagon" in a double sense; which makes it awkward for a man who never could drink comfortably alone. With every man of the mess a teetotaler, one is now and then obsessed at certain definite hours with a consuming longing for communion with some dear soul, of thirsty memory, who can be trusted to take his "straight." Of course, I don't mean to imply that this mess cannot be trusted, for you can rely on it implicitly every time—to take tea. You can trust it with any mortal or material thing except your pet brew of tea, if you have one, which, luckily, I haven't.

The fact is that about everything aboard this ship is distressingly suggestive to a faithful knight of the tankard; for he is surrounded with "ports" that won't flow, and giant "funnels" that might easily carry spirits enough to comfortably wet the whistles of an army division—but don't—until he is tempted, in sheer desperation, to take a "pull" at the "main brace."

But lonesome out here? Never—with the sympathetic Atlantic winds roaring you a grim dirge in your moments of melancholy contemplation of the inverted "Dipper," when gentle breezes are not softly singing, through the rigging, notes of soothing cadence; with lethal ocean billows ever leaping up the sides of the ship, foaming with the joy of what they would do to you if they once got you in their embrace!

Now and then the elements themselves sit in and take a hand in our game—sometimes a hand which we could very well do without, as twice lately.

The first instance happened early last week. On Tuesday tropical weather hit us and drove us into pajamas—a cloudless sky, blazing sun, high humidity; while we plowed our way across long, slow-rolling, unrippled swells, that looked so much like a vast, gently heaving sea of petroleum that, had John D. Standardoil been with us, he would have suffered a probably fatal attack of heart disease, if prevented from stopping right there and planning a pipe line.

Throughout the day, close about the ship, clouds of flying fish skimmed the sea, and great schools of porpoises leaped from it and raced us—as if, even to them, their native element had become hateful; as if, sensing something ominous and fearsome abroad, they sought shelter from it in our company. One slender little, opal-hued, diaphanous-winged bird fish came aboard and, before he was picked up, had the happy life grilled out of him on our scorching iron deck—hot, almost, as boiler plates. Poor little chap! He had found us anything but sanctuary for him; but perhaps he lived long enough to signal the fact to his mates, for no others boarded us.

And yet, for one other opal-hued wanderer we have been sanctuary; for, when we were about one hundred and fifty miles out of New York, a highly bred carrier pigeon, bearing on his leg a metal tag marked "32," hovered about us for a time, finally alighted on our rail, and then fluttered to the deck, when offered a pan of water—and drank and drank until it seemed best to stop him. By the kindness and ingenuity of Chief Engineer Tucker, he now occupies a tiny house with a wonderful mansard roof, from which he issues, every afternoon, for an aërial constitutional—giving us a fright, occasionally, with a flight far over sea, but always returning safely enough to his new diggings.

On that Tuesday morning the sun rose, fiery red, out of the steaming Guinea jungles to the east of us; across its lower half two narrow black bars sinister. It looked as though it had blood in its eye; while the still, heavy brooding air felt to be ominous of evil, harboring devilment of some sort.

All the mess were cross-grained, silent, or irritable, raw-edged—for the

first time; for a better lot of fellows one could not ask to ship with. Nor, throughout the day, did weather conditions or tempers improve.

All day long the sky was heavily overcast with dense, low-hanging, dark-gray clouds, which, while wholly obscuring the sun, seemed to focus its rays upon us like a vast burning glass —to an extent which made it expedient for the two pajama-clad passengers to keep well within the shelter of the bridge deck awning.

Toward sunset a dense, black wall of cloud settled upon the western horizon, close aft of us. But suddenly, just at the moment when the sun must have been descending below the horizon to the south of it, the black wall of cloud slowly parted, and the opening so made widened until it became an enormous oval, reaching from the horizon halfway to the zenith, framing a scene of astounding beauty and grandeur—range after range of cloud crests that looked like mountain folds rising one above another, with the appearance of vast intervening space between the ranges.

But, whether or not ominous of our own future, we were permitted no more than a brief glimpse of it; for presently the pall of black cloud fell like a vast drop curtain, and shut it from our sight.

Then night came down upon us—black, starless, forbidding; although, in the absence of any fall of the barometer, nothing more than a downpour of rain was anticipated.

But shortly after I had gone to sleep, at one fifty-five a. m., suddenly something in the nature of a tropical tornado flew up and struck us good and hard. I was awakened by a tremendous crash on the bridge deck above my cabin, a heeling over that nearly dumped me out of my berth, and what seemed like a solid spout of water pouring in through my open weather porthole—with the wind howling a devil's death song through the rigging, and an uninterrupted smash—bang! aloft my head.

Throwing on a rain coat over my pajamas, I went outside, and up the ladder leading to the bridge deck. As I raised head and shoulders above the deck level, a wall of hot, wind-borne rain struck me—rain so hot it felt almost scalding, and almost swept me off the ladder.

I got to the upper deck just in time to see Captain Thomas get a crack on the head from a fragment of flying spar of the wreckage from the upper bridge—luckily a glancing blow, that did no more damage than to leave him groggy for a moment.

For the next fifteen minutes I was busy hugging a bridge stanchion, dodging flying wreckage, and trying to breathe; for, driven by the violence of the wind, the rain came horizontally in such suffocatingly hot, dense masses as nearly to stifle one.

It was the watch of Second Mate Isitt. Afterward he told me that, a few minutes before the storm broke, he saw a particularly dense black cloud coming upon us out of the southeast, where it had apparently been lying in ambush for us behind the northernmost headland of the Gulf of Guinea—an ambush so successful that even the barometer failed to detect it; for, when Mate Isitt ran to the chart room, he found that the instrument showed no fall.

But scarcely was he back on the bridge before the approaching cloud flashed into a solid mass of sheet lightning, that covered the ship like a fiery canopy; and, instantly thereafter, a wall of wind and rain hit the ship, heeled her over to the rail, swung her head at right angles to her course, ripped the heavy canvas awning of the upper bridge to tatters, bent and tore loose from their sockets the thick iron stanchions supporting it, made kindling wood of its heavy spars, and strewed the bridge and forward deck with a pounding tangle of wreckage. How the mate and helmsman, who were directly beneath it, escaped injury, is a mystery.

In twenty minutes the riot of wind and water had swept past us out to sea, in search of easier game, leaving

behind it a dead calm above, but mountainous seas beneath—seas that played ball with us for the rest of the night. Heaven help any windjammer it may have struck; for, if caught as completely unwarned as were we, with all sails set, she and all her crew are likely now to be still slowly settling through the dense, darksome depths of the two thousand five hundred fathoms—fifteen thousand feet—which the chart showed thereabouts, and weeping wives and anxious underwriters will long be scanning the news columns that report all sea goings and comings—all except arrivals in the port of sunken ships.

The second fall which the elements have essayed to take out of us remains, as yet, undecided. The fact is, I am now writing over a young volcano, which we are all hoping will not grow much older.

Two nights ago, I was awakened, half suffocated, to find my cabin full of strong sulphurous fumes; but, fancying them brought in through my open portholes from the smokestack by a shift aft of the wind, I paid no further attention to them. But when, the next morning, as usual, I turned out on deck to see the sun rise, a commotion aft attracted my attention.

Looking, I saw the first mate, chief engineer, and a party of sailors—all so begrimed with sweat and coal dust that one could scarcely pick officers from seamen—rapidly ripping off the cover of one of the midship hatches, while others were flying about, connecting up the deck fire hose. This did not look a bit good to me, and when, an instant later, off came the hatch and out poured thick volumes of smoke, I failed to observe that it looked any better.

Directly the hatch was removed, the men thrust the hose through it and began deluging the burning bunker with water—for, luckily, it is *only* a bunker fire, fortunately in a lower and comparatively small bunker.

The fire had been discovered early on the previous day, and for nearly twenty-four hours officers and seamen had already been fighting it from below, without any mention of its existence to their two passengers—fighting, by tireless shoveling, to reach its seat. And now they were on deck, attacking it from above, only because the heat and fumes below had become so overpowering that they could no longer work there. But, after an hour's ventilation through the hatch and a continuous downpour of water, the first mate again led his men below.

And so, with the usual watches divided into two-hour relays, the fight has gone wearily but persistently on, until now—on the evening of the fourth day—the men are wan and haggard because of the killing heat and foul air. In the engine room, in these latitudes, the thermometer ranges from rarely under one hundred and eight degrees up to one hundred and thirty; and one has to stay down there only an hour, as I often have, until he is streaming with sweat, as from the unholiest heat of a Turkish bath. And as the burning bunker immediately adjoins the other end of the boiler room, to the heat of its own smouldering mass is added that of the fire boxes, until the temperature is, probably, close to one hundred and forty degrees.

So long as the fire is confined to the bunker where it started we are in no particular danger; but if it reaches the bunker immediately above, it will have a free run to the after hold, where several thousand packages of case oil are stored; while in the open waist above the oil are a score or more of big tanks of gasoline, and on the poop, immediately aft of the gasoline, a lot of dynamite, and several thousand detonating caps! Thus, if the fire ever gets aft, things are apt to happen a trifle quicker than they can be dodged.

Indeed, as soon as the captain learned that his two passengers were aware that the ship was on fire, he immediately had the boats stripped of their lashings, fully provisioned, their tackle cleared for instant lowering, and he frankly admitted that the moment the fire might reach the bunker next above that within which it had, so far, been confined, we must take to the boats—as, in such event, it could not be more than five

minutes before the ship would be blown into kindling wood.

To denizens of terra firma, the mere thought of being aboard a ship on fire in midocean—we are now five hundred miles from the little British island of Ascension, and one thousand and eighty off the Congo coast—is nothing short of appalling. But here, with us, in actual experience, it is taken by the officers of the ship as such a simple matter of course—in so far as they show or will admit other than by the making ready of the boats—that we are even denied the privilege of a mild thrill of excitement.

So, in the meantime, there is nothing for the doctor and myself to do but to sit about and guess whether it is to be a boost from the explosives, a simple grill, a descent to Davy Jones, athirst and hungering in an open boat on the tossing South Atlantic, a successful run of the ship to the nearest land, or—victory over the fire! I wonder which it will be.

While neither the doctor nor I are novices at golf, this is one "bunker" which we are making so little headway in getting out of that both now seem likely to quiet "down" to it, rather than either to the other.

If the worst comes to the worst, I intend to do for these pages what no one, in these last three weeks, has done for me—commit them to a bottle, if I can find one aboard this ship—which is by no means certain; indeed, so uncertain that I think I had better start hunting one right now.

After nearly twenty-four hours' search I've got it—a craft to bear these sheets, wide of hatch, generously broad and deep of hull, but destitute of aught of the stimulating aroma which I had hoped might cheer them on their voyage more than I have been cheered on mine; for the best I am able to do for them is —a jam bottle!

I wonder when the little derelict, tiny and inconspicuous as a "Portuguese man of war" may be picked up—when the sheets which it bears may reach my publisher, to whom it is consigned. Perhaps not for years—a score, two score—perhaps not until he himself, whom a few weeks ago I left in the lusty vigor of early manhood, is gathered to his fathers; perhaps not, therefore, until the writer has no publisher left, and is himself no longer remembered.

The burning bunker is now a glowing furnace, the men worked down to mere shadows. Plainly, the fire is getting the best of them, and—what is even more discouraging—there is little more fight left in them. First Mate Watson, who, almost without rest, has led the fight below since it started, says that another half hour will——

THE ORIGIN OF ARTIFICIAL FLOWERS

THE first artificial flowers can be traced back to the mediæval ages. Fashion has often been responsible for inventions, and this was the case with the manufacture of artificial flowers; for their invention was due to a caprice of fashion.

In Italy, during festival time, it was decreed that flowers should be worn in and out of their season, and that their colors should be retained. Many plans for solving this problem were brought forward, and at last some one hit upon the idea of making them of various materials which would resemble the real flowers. Later, in the middle ages, the artificial so far superseded the natural that both men and women decked their heads with imitation flowers of cambric, glass, paper, wax, and metal.

The most beautiful artificial blossoms are made in Paris, and their making is one of the chief industries of that city.

Cat Island

By W. B. M. Ferguson

Author of "Garrison's Finish," "The New Moonstone," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

"Lisping Jimmie" Blunt, detective, unjustly dismissed from the Central Office force, is engaged for special work by Gabriel Fubbins, the manufacturer of a much advertised safety razor, and several times a millionaire. Mr. Fubbins' niece, Betty Penhryn, the owner of Cat Island, thinks that Blunt is imposing on her uncle; but the latter is deaf to her remarks, and takes Blunt to Fubbins' Plantation, on Friendship Bay, where Cat Island lies in the offing. This island is supposed to be the repository of buried treasure, the whereabouts of which was known only to Betty's father, Professor Penhryn, who committed suicide after declaring that his life was in danger from some persons who would steal the treasure. Fubbins explains that the work is a search for the hidden treasure, the key to the secret lying in the utterances of a gray parrot, formerly the property of Professor Penhryn. Blunt examines Cat Island. While he is there, Browne and Twining—the former an assistant in a detective agency, the latter a sharper—arrive, led by Pete Lazarre, a half-breed who knows the ground. Blunt escorts them off the island at the point of his revolver, but agrees to meet them the next day. Leaving Abelard Johnson, a negro servant, on guard, Blunt goes to Plymouth, where the two conspirators try to induce him to join them by bribes and threats. On his return, he finds that Lazarre has attempted to land, and, when driven away by Johnson, has wounded him. Blunt decides to mount guard himself. He unearths an envelope from a marked hiding place, and gives it into Betty's keeping. It contains the treasure, which is really a formula for cheapening the manufacture of steel. He learns that Fubbins has already been approached by the conspirators, who demand $200,000 for the formula. Blunt advises Fubbins to dicker with them, but not to come to any conclusion; meanwhile, he goes to New Haven and, informing his father, Professor Sharp, who is Fubbins' partner, of the unlawful holding of the Penhryn formula by Fubbins, induces him to dissolve partnership. Browne and Twining, at their interview with Lazarre the next morning, knock him unconscious, open the box, and find it empty. Lazarre thinks they have stolen the papers, and vows to get even. When Blunt returns, he finds Browne being entertained by Miss Penhryn. He warns her that she must have nothing to do with him, and learns that Browne has been telling her of Blunt's past. He tells her the true reason for his dismissal from the Central Office force; but she disbelieves him, and declines to have anything more to do with him. Mr. Fubbins returns, and Blunt makes him confess to Betty the theft of the original formula. She finds that the buried copy, which Blunt had earlier entrusted to her, has been stolen by Browne during his visit. Abelard tells of Browne being assaulted by Twining, who has disappeared. Blunt, in the disguise of a butler, gets a place in the house of Mr. Hemingway, Fubbins' rival in the safety-razor business, who was responsible for Blunt's dismissal from the detective force. He overhears talk between Hemingway and Twining, who has gone to see Hemingway about selling the formula. While watching Hemingway, whom he suspects of intending to steal the formula from Twining, he captures his college friend, Ted Pringle, who has attempted to burglarize Hemingway's house. For the sake of old times he gives him another chance. When Blunt goes upstairs, he finds Hemingway in Twining's room, and that gentleman dead in bed, with a hunting knife through his heart. The formula has been stolen. Blunt gives Hemingway the choice of telling the truth about the matter which caused Blunt's dismissal or being arrested as the murderer of Twining. Hemingway agrees to go to the police commissioner.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ETERNAL TRIANGLE.

ONE of Mr. Gabriel Fubbins' adamantine principles was that of thoroughly scanning the morning paper before eating breakfast. For him, as an intellectual giant, world power, patron of the arts and of literature, this operation was rendered necessary, although it frequently conflicted with the housewifely principles of his sister. Not only must Mr. Fubbins read the paper, despite the fact that the coffee was growing cold, but it must be *the* paper of papers; no other would do. It was his proud boast that for twenty years he had been a subscriber to a certain New York daily, and he thereby permitted it to be inferred that his loyalty had been directly responsible for the said daily's longevity and ever-increasing circulation; for, with Gabriel Fub-

This story began in the issue of October 25th. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, fifteen cents each.

bins as a patron, no institution or venture could possibly perish. Wherever Mr. Fubbins strayed, the paper, like Mary's little lamb, was sure to follow; and thus, on this particular morning, two days subsequent to the Twining murder, the Fubbins' breakfast, despite Miss Phœbe's earnest injunctions, was threatened with annihilation.

"For mercy's sake," she was now saying, for at least the twentieth time, "that is the third cup of coffee I have poured for you. Do lay that stupid paper aside. Nothing is worth the sacrifice of food or sleep, as I have often told you. Besides, it is not polite. I am afraid Miss Pringle considers you a very indifferent host."

"Phœbe," said her brother, momentarily emerging from the paper, "I beg of you not to suggest ideas of which people have no thought. Miss Pringle doesn't think anything of the kind."

"Quite right," said that lady.

"Quite wrong," said Miss Betty. "You know you're fibbing, Bess. And you know very well that my uncle is the most extraordinarily peculiar host you have ever met."

"Ladies," said Mr. Fubbins, "I beg of you to withhold your arraignment until I have explained my supposed indifference. I am greatly exercised; I am greatly excited; I am greatly astounded. I have the most amazing news for you. There has been a murder in New York, and Mr. Albert Twining—our Mr. Twining—has been the victim. Think of it—the man with whom we dined only the other day! We are in the presence of a great calamity, as it were."

"Mercy me—mercy me!" exclaimed Miss Phœbe, raising her hands. "The poor man! And he had such small feet. The poor man!"

"And you knew him?" cried Miss Pringle.

"Not intimately," replied Betty, "and he was not one for whom we particularly cared——"

"Hush, my dear!" piously admonished her aunt. "Death changes all that. Nothing but good of the dead, my dear."

"Not so far as I'm concerned," replied her niece. "It's nonsense to speak of the dead as if they had been angels, when you know very well they haven't been, and won't be. Please read the full account, uncle."

Mr. Fubbins complied, reciting in an impressive Institutional voice, while his audience neglected their breakfast—while even the warm charms of the coffee urn ceased to allure Miss Phœbe.

"'Up to a late hour last night,'" finished Mr. Fubbins, "'there have been no new developments. It is understood, however, that light may shortly be shed upon the case; for the burglar theory has been discounted by the detective in charge of the case—James Blunt, an account of whose reinstatement will be found elsewhere in our columns—who evinces entire assurance of solving the mystery—an assurance quite compatible with his past brilliant successes in the same field.'"

"Why, that's the name of *our* Mr. Blunt!" exclaimed Miss Phœbe, with childlike delight. "Do see if it is the same, Gabriel. I have quite an interest in that young man——"

"Phœbe, I beg of you not to interrupt," remonstrated her brother. "Of course, it is our Mr. Blunt. Here is even an editorial on the news item in question. Before I proceed, I wish to say that never in my life have I read anything which has occasioned me so much undiluted pleasure—so much satisfaction, burning joy, and hallowed emotion——"

"Uncle, we will listen to your commentary afterward," interrupted Betty, with an unexpected exhibition of her old temper. "If you can't read decently, without all this prefatory rubbish, I'll read it myself."

"Please begin," added Miss Pringle, nervously clasping her hands.

Thus thoroughly admonished, the Institution cleared his throat, and read aloud the editorial.

It was a replica of the account Blunt had given to Miss Penhryn, a clear and succinct marshaling of the facts relative to his dismissal and reinstatement. In conclusion, it said:

Upon Mr. Hemingway's confession, the police commissioner instituted a rigid investigation, at which the woman, Kitty Grey, was present. She corroborated the statement, explaining that Blunt and she had been childhood friends, and that, in attempting to save her, he had offered to return the money to its owner—Mr. Hemingway. Thus, in striving to perform an act of charity, he had fallen a victim to circumstances and an unprincipled gentleman.

The result of Mr. Hemingway's long-delayed act of justice is that James Blunt has been reinstated as a detective of the first class, with nine months' back pay; but this, we point out, will not compensate him for the slur cast upon a record which has been refreshingly clean and able. We, and the press in general, are glad to give the widest publicity possible to the fact of his exoneration and reinstatement.

We are loath to believe that all civic purifiers are of the Hemingway stamp, and we are the last to suggest that we are not in need of municipal and social reform. We would earnestly advise the ex-secretary of the Armstrong Committee to cultivate a little moral backbone, and to be entirely assured of the fact that his own garden is free from weeds before he publicly undertakes to uproot those rank growths which unhappily beset his neighbors.

Moreover, we respectfully suggest that a reputation which must be protected at all hazards is not worth protecting or even owning. So far as Mr. Hemingway is concerned, the one small redeeming action in the whole unsavory affair is his tardy act of justice. Otherwise, he had displayed an elaborate lack of common, everyday principle of which a Boss Tweed, much less a large-calibred civic reformer, would feel heartily ashamed.

"Mercy me!" exclaimed Miss Phœbe. "If that don't beat all! I told you from the first, Gabriel, that Mr. Blunt was a remarkable young man, with a delightful secret history. I did, indeed. And to think of him being spoken so nicely about by *your* paper, Gabriel. That——"

"Phœbe, you told me nothing from the first. I never gave you the opportunity," said Fubbins majestically. "There was no need to tell me. Mr. Blunt and I have always understood each other—always. This is a most auspicious occasion—the most auspicious I have ever known—and, by your leave, ladies, I will adjourn and drink Mr. Blunt's health in private, in solemn state——"

"But the coffee, Gabriel," expostulated his sister. "The coffee, my dear!"

"Blow the coffee, my dear!" exclaimed the Institution. "Phœbe," he added earnestly, "I feel swelling within me the desire to become thoroughly and gloriously drunk——"

"For shame, Gabriel—for shame! You forget your guest——"

"The guest," excitedly interrupted Bessie, "entirely understands her host's swelling desire, and, were she a man, would heartily assist in its consummation."

"Bacchus and the health of a friend—first, last, and always. *Vive* the Bacchus! *Vive* the Blunt!" shouted Fubbins. "'Here's to good old Yale—drink her down, drink her down,'" he bellowed, thumping the coffee urn on the table, and generally conducting himself as though he were leading the cheering squad at a baseball game. "'Here's to good old Yale——'"

"Uncle, I'm ashamed of you! You're acting like—like a fat lunatic," wrathfully exclaimed his niece, taking him by the shoulders and pushing him from the room, while he dramatically waved the newspaper and, despite his hurried retreat, managed to execute several fancy steps of some brilliance.

The door slammed, and three women eyed one another as the Fubbins tread echoed through the house, to the accompaniment of the stentorian assurance that good old Yale was both hearty and hale, and that she would be drunk down with the utmost thoroughness, pleasure, and dispatch.

"Oh, these men!" piously exclaimed Miss Phœbe. "Just look at my clean, new tablecloth where that urn has left its mark all over it. I should think he would have the thoughfulness to put a newspaper on the table if he wants to thump it. My brother is a most extraordinary person at times," apologetically addressing Miss Pringle. "If he likes a person very much, he thinks it his bounden duty to keep on drinking toasts until his eyes positively pop out of his head. I hope he won't overindulge——"

"Oh, he won't," irritably exclaimed Betty. "He promised the other day he never would again, and you know

he keeps his promises. Besides—well, he has a vast capacity, and a positive genius for not showing the effects. Don't pester him, auntie——"

"Pester him—me?" exclaimed Miss Phœbe, aghast. "You know very little of your uncle or me, my dear, if you think he would ever pay the slightest attention to me."

"And now, sit down and eat your breakfast. Sis M'randy will bring in hot muffins and coffee——"

"I don't want any breakfast," announced Betty. "I can't eat a bite."

"Neither can I," agreed Bessie.

"Well, I can, and several bites," said Miss Phœbe practically. "Neither bad nor good news should interfere with the workings of a healthy appetite, as I've often told you."

"I do believe, auntie," exclaimed Betty, with a vexatious laugh, "that good food and sleep is all you will demand in heaven——"

"That and your society, my dear," cheerfully agreed her aunt.

"You're absolutely the most forgiving and good-natured human being I've ever met," grumbled Betty, kissing her. "It is impossible to quarrel with you, and I feel as if I must fight with somebody this morning."

"Why, my dear? On the contrary, I agree with my brother that to-day should be one of great rejoicing. It is a great satisfaction to know that we all have been loyal to Mr. Blunt, that we never for a moment doubted his honor."

"Yes," agreed Betty, looking out of the window, "it is a great satisfaction. A great satisfaction, indeed. You, Bess," she added, turning, with almost a challenge in voice and eyes, "must own the greatest satisfaction of all."

"I do," said Bessie simply.

Sis M'randy entered with the recharged coffee urn, the muffins, and the morning mail, which was always late. "Jes' one letter, an' fo' yo', Miss Pringle, ma'am," she announced.

Impulsively, Betty turned and watched her friend as she opened the letter.

"This is from mother," hurriedly exclaimed Bessie, at length, a vivid flush dyeing neck and cheek. "The—the best news in the world, Betty! The best news possible. Ted has returned, and is with them in Portland. Father and he have made it up, and Ted is cramming for the fall exams. He is to take his degree and enter father's office—— Oh, it's too good to be true! I don't know what to say or think. And mother ends by saying: 'For our happiness, dear, we are entirely indebted to Ted's old chum—James Sharp. I have much to tell you which I cannot commit to paper; much which, however hard it will be, we must set right before the world. Mere justice and the family honor demands it. I know you will be brave, dear' "—Bessie's voice faltered—" 'brave, dear, brave——' "

"Don't—please," cried Betty. "It is private, Bess. It is your affair."

"Not only mine, but the world's," said the other, in a curious, far-away voice, as her eyes traveled to the bottom of the page. "I can read between the lines." She had become quite white.

Miss Phœbe, cup and muffins in hand, had stolen noiselessly from the room. "I do not understand," whispered Betty. "Bess, dear, I can see that you have had bad news——"

"And good news," added the other, looking straight before her, a strange exultation mingling with the pain in her eyes. "And good news," she repeated, half to herself. "Mother is correct. It must be set right before the world—and you are part of the world, Betty. Let me continue: 'You must be brave, dear,' " she read, in a firm voice, " 'and crush down any promptings of false pride or chronic resentment. We must stand together in this matter; we must show, and in a practical manner, that no price is too great for a woman to pay for the sake of a loved one. Ted is doing his best to undo the past; and what he now needs is support, not censure. I know with what pride you have regarded the family name and honor, but I also know how you will act in this matter. Ted

is with us again, and, after all, that is everything. James Sharp attempted to save us from this disgrace; but concealing and shouldering another's fault is only a needless sacrifice, for a fault or crime that is not openly confessed and expiated, merely breeds another. Come to me, for we need you. Undoubtedly, James sacrificed himself for ——' That is all," said Bessie, rather hastily, carefully folding the letter and placing it in her pocket. "That means, Betty," she added, with forced composure, "that my brother is the man for whose sake Mr. Sharp was expelled. It means that my brother was the thief. I—I must go now and pack my things. They—they need me."

"I—I am sorry—sorry!" whispered Betty, in a strained voice, turning to the window and clinching her hands. "But—but"—she turned and confronted the other, eyes and face on fire—"but—oh, Bess, think of the good news! Think of the good news, and what it means——"

"Yes," said Bessie, looking away, "it means that my brother is at last trying to play the man. It means that no longer must we lie awake, wondering where he is, fearful that he is cold, hungry, lonely——"

"I know—I know all that," said Betty hurriedly. "But I mean—the other."

"What—other?" asked Bessie, raising her eyes, a flush slowly crimsoning her cheek.

"You know what other," cried Betty. "Please don't try to hide it. Please don't try to spare me. Don't I know it? Didn't I know it from the first? Why didn't you finish the letter? Why didn't you say: 'He loves me. He loves me, and I love him. He has done all this for my sake, and all else is as nothing besides. My pride has been shattered, but my heart has been made whole.' Why don't you say all this? Why don't you glory in it? You stand there, so meek and calm, secure in your happiness, while I—while every fibre in my being is crying out, mad with hunger and jealousy—craving what you accept so placidly——"

"Betty—Betty—hush! You don't know what you're saying——"

"I don't? Then I don't know that I am living. Then I don't know the meaning of love! Oh, I know I shouldn't talk this way. I know I should hide it, and smile, and pretend that I don't care—that I never cared. But I can't—I can't, Bess. It's not in me. I'm not like you; I'm not like any one else. I'm primitive, and savage, and all that's horrible; and when I love, I love; and when I hate, I hate. I'm not feminine; I can't pretend. I've choked down so much during the past month that I'm sick—sick——"

"You—you mustn't talk like that, Betty."

"Why? Why? You knew, from the moment you looked into my eyes that night, that I loved him; and I knew that you loved him. Why should there be deception between us? If—if I must smile and pretend, I'll end by hating you, Bess—and keep me from that!

"Why should I not say I love him? Unmaidenly? Indelicate? Why, I've told it to the birds and the flowers, the sea and the sky, over and over again. I've whispered it to his old pipe, to his books, to all the dear things that are his. I have kissed where his hand has rested; I have treasured the old dear nothings he has thrown away. It has crooned me to sleep, and sung to me all the day long. It has been my morning hymn, my evening prayer. And you ask me not to say it, when it is part of me—when it is my life and all I ever hope to be—when I have humiliated and derided him and watched him suffer, because I was mad with jealousy, because I was famished for the word he would not say. That was the tigress in me. And yet I must not say it! Oh, Bess, Bess, it is too late. Yours is the glory of the conquered, but mine—the anguish of the scorned!" She stood, white-lipped and trembling, refusing to take refuge in tears.

Bessie had closed her eyes; her hands clinched tightly. "I understand," she said slowly. "You are right; there need be no deception between us. I

do love Mr. Sharp. I have always loved him—ever since I can remember. And I acknowledge that I hope and pray that what he has done has been done for my sake. I am older than you, Betty—much older. Our natures are not the same. Do not think that, because I do not openly glory in it, it has not been given me to feel to the utmost——"

"I know," said Betty colorlessly, pressing hands to eyes, as though awaking from a dream. "I shouldn't have said anything. I know you have self-control and all that I lack. I know that yours is the prior claim; but I will not grant that yours is the better, the greater love. That is impossible. And I do not regret what I have said. Surely, you will not grudge it. You will be saying it a lifetime, and to him——"

"Let us say no more on the subject," interrupted Bessie, greatly distressed. "I am sorry that this has come between us——"

"It has not come between us. Why should it? We have nothing to conceal from each other. I—I seem to have awakened from a horrible nightmare. In it I thought only of myself—of my own happiness, not his. Now I have learned renunciation, without embitterment. Look at me, Bess. I am no longer a child. You have nothing to fear."

"It—it is only fair," began Bessie hesitatingly, "to tell you that there never was an understanding between Mr. Sharp and me. We were close friends—nothing more. I base all my hopes on the sacrifice which he has made. Perhaps I am wrong."

"Somehow I—I do not think so. Kiss me, dear."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TAKING OF LAZARRE.

His coup successfully executed, Blunt, armed with extradition papers and a warrant for the arrest of Peter Lazarre, left for Maine the same day. He was morally certain that the French-Canadian, secure in the knowledge that the police would not suspect him of the Twining murder, would return to his old haunts, especially as one chamber of his double-barreled mission had proved empty; for, though he had glutted his vengeance, he had not secured the formula. Mr. Hemingway had been correct in stating that, prior to his advent, Mr. Twining had been robbed; and it would have occasioned him much speculation had he known that Blunt, and not the murderer, was the thief.

On leaving Fubbins' Plantation to track Lazarre, Jimmie made a visit to Mr. Browne his first object. As he had conjectured, Lazarre, on learning of Twining's absence, had at once called upon Browne, the latter gladly giving an authentic account of his indisposition; partly owing to fear of the one-eyed giant, and partly to the happy desire of placing such a bloodhound on Twining's trail. "It is M'sieu' Twinin' an' not you for whom I have ze great hatred," Lazarre had said. "Ze *faquin*—ze *mouchard!* He mos' kill me, an' I wait. Ver' good. But if I find, M'sieu' Browne, that you are lying, fooling a poor, ignoran' man, an' it is that M'sieu' Twinin' have not go off with the papers—well, ver' good. I wait. I see you again."

All this Browne had freely told Jimmie, and he had further confessed that he was greatly in fear of Lazarre; that he devoutly hoped the latter would convince himself that Twining possessed the papers. Otherwise, he felt sure that the French-Canadian, suspecting that he had tricked him, would return and exact reparation. In fact, the incidents of the past few days, and the knowledge that he was absolutely at Lazarre's mercy, had unnerved the resilient J. Todd. Solitude, suffering, and wholesome fear had sweated from his system much that was kickable.

Blunt, bearing in mind his prospective robbery, had advised Browne to leave, as speedily as possible, for parts unknown. "It is very likely," he explained, "that Lazarre might not find the papers; and, though you have been my consistent enemy and trouble mak-

er, still I don't exactly want to see you murdered; for I agree with you that violence is Mr. Lazarre's happiest form of recreation. In short, if I were you, I'd clear out—and pretty quick, too."

At this, Mr. Browne broke into a profuse sweat; and if mortal terror can expiate the sins of omission and commission, the fleshy young man, during the succeeding twenty-four hours, squared his account with the recording angel.

Blunt had no difficulty in tracking Lazarre to New York, and, in fact, shadowed him to the Hemingway "bachelor's hall." Owing to Twining's doubling tactics, his trailers had arrived in town almost at his heels.

Every detective will, privately, if not publicly, acknowledge that he relies upon chance quite as much as upon legitimate endeavor. No matter how astute a man may be, if his "luck" is not running right, he can accomplish but little. Blunt had long been down on his luck; but now it seemed as though he were due for a prolonged and dazzling smile from the goddess.

Estimating how best to rob Twining of the papers, he struck up an acquaintance, in a neighboring saloon, with a servant whom he had seen emerge from the Hemingway house, and who now proved to be the butler. Blunt quickly and accurately estimated the other's failings, and, without compunction, took advantage of them. He had served a long and faithful apprenticeship to the art of manipulating back-stairs aristocracy, and he had played the butler or second man on more than one occasion.

Blunt was morally certain that Lazarre would pay Twining a visit that same night, but he committed an error as to the time. Familiar with the methods of the professional housebreaker, whose working hours are always from two to four in the morning —the time when one's sleep is soundest and most normal—he had, from habit, instinctively prepared for the advent of Mr. Lazarre during that period. In the meantime, while host and guest were dining, Jimmie had abstracted the formula from Twining's portmanteau; the owner, in changing his clothes, having taken the precaution to transfer the papers from his pocket to the safer sanctuary.

Thinking he had matters well in hand, Blunt had retired to his room at eleven o'clock, judging that neither Mr. Hemingway nor Lazarre would put in an appearance until the hour of two. As it developed, he had been correct regarding the former; but the latter had refused to abide by any professional etiquette regulating an early morning call. While Blunt, in his room, far off in the servants' quarters, snatched a few hours of much-needed rest—while Hemingway dozed and indulged in cat naps preparatory to the hour when he considered the house asleep—Lazarre had outmanœuvred the somnambulistic corner policeman, entered the house via the butler's pantry window, and gone silently to Mr. Twining's room, the location of which he had accurately learned, and there, in the solemn stillness of the night, had settled the score incurred by the poker.

When, subsequently, Blunt had assumed his vigil in the upper corridor and heard the noise emanating from the dining room, it was Lazarre whom he confidently expected to discover and frustrate.

It can thus be understood why Blunt armed himself with extradition papers on the governor of Maine; for he was convinced that Lazarre, failing to find the formula, would believe that he had been tricked by Browne, and that, as he had warned the other, he would immediately return to exact reparation. Thus, even while Mr. Fubbins was drinking in solemn state the health of Mr. James Blunt Sharp, the owner of that antonymous name was but a few miles away, in Plymouth, searching for a clue as to the whereabouts of Mr. Lazarre—searching and eventually finding.

The local authorities had been telegraphed to arrest Lazarre as a suspicious character on sight; but they had been dilatory and not overastute, although, according to the sheriff, it had not been his fault. as the message had

arrived too late. The utmost extent of his knowledge was that Lazarre had visited the Spruce Tree Inn and inquired for Mr. Browne. Learning that that young gentleman had vanished, omitting to leave an address, the other had scowled, but offered no comment. Subsequently, he had been seen, by more or less veracious witnesses, standing out to sea in his yawl, and on reliable authority it was further stated that, to one or two cronies who ventured to question his destination, Lazarre had replied: "To hell." This polite and perhaps veracious answer had been given on the evening preceding Blunt's arrival in Plymouth, and since then nothing had been seen or heard of the French-Canadian.

Jimmie at once jumped to the conclusion that his quarry had sought Cat Island, either as an asylum, or in the forlorn hope that his partners had secreted the papers there. The truth of this could be verified or discounted in short order; and Blunt, engaging a rowboat, put out from the northern horn of Friendship Bay.

Evening had now arrived, and in its wake a storm was slowly piling up in the east. The sea had fallen flat and oily; and, but for the distant growling of the thunder—sounding like an ill-trained mob off-stage—a curiously intense silence reigned.

It was a lonely, dangerous quest; and Jimmie caught himself more than once half wishing that the sheriff had accompanied him. But the "local authority" was not the man for an emergency, and would have proved more of a hindrance than a help. Besides, Blunt desired to play out the hand alone; for it was his first regular assignment in months, and he took a peculiar pride in the task.

There were no visible signs of the yawl, and Jimmie, after prospecting among the darker shadows inshore, landed on the northern point of the island. Far off on his right, he could see the flickering lamps of Fubbins' Plantation; these, and fitful displays of forked lightning, were the sole high lights of a monochrome in black.

The hitherto concentrated essence of humidity which had smothered like an eiderdown was now somewhat dissipated by a slow, clammy, east wind; while fugitive raindrops—skirmishers of the storm legion—pattered on the dry leaves and underbrush. As Blunt carefully felt his way to the summit of the hill, the great and uncanny silence of the sleeping woods arose, a thing sensate, and enfolded him. As he progressed slowly and painstakingly, he had ample time to review his position—to question the wisdom of the undertaking. No great woodsman even under the most favorable conditions, he was proposing to track down an expert in the craft; to brave, as it were, an animal in its own lair—a desperate, cornered animal, which would expect no mercy and offer none. True, the advantage of surprise lay with the hunter—and upon this he had counted—but it was equally true that the noise he was now making would not only obviate surprise but serve to put Lazarre upon his guard. Creep as carefully and softly as he might, a twig would snap and the leaves rustle, each an accusing voice crying aloud his mission. Then, when at length he had no longer the lights of Fubbins' Plantation to steer by, Blunt lost all sense of location. Complete darkness swept down upon him.

A haphazard step forward, and he went crashing over a fallen log, slippery with parasitic growths. He lay there, afraid to breathe. The warm, dank smell of mother earth assailed his nostrils; slimy creepers strove to encompass him in their octopus-like embrace; and a garter snake slowly wriggled its uncannily cold little self across his extended hand, for he was too intent upon listening to heed its presence.

Presently he arose, and immediately became aware of a dim light at some distance ahead; for his fall had given him a new alignment. The wind now came stealing through the trees, and at its call the sleeping woods awoke. Silence gave place to a strange, weird diapason of sound. Ever and anon

the sky opened, and night became a blue, bewildering day, while the swiftly advancing thunder, from a sullen bass, had changed to a venomous high falsetto.

Secure in this pandemonium, Blunt, without further hesitation, bore down upon the distant light, which he now saw filtered from the half-open door of the shack. Making a detour to the east, he crept up and peered through the single window. The interior was empty, the meagre light from the single lamp casting weird, uncouth shadows on walls and ceiling.

As he looked, Blunt slowly became aware that he was not alone. He had seen nothing, heard nothing; and yet that mysterious sixth sense had telegraphed to his brain the alarming fact that something, human or animal, was watching him; was near him; was very close; was, in fact, at his back; was——

"Lazarre!" he cried, wheeling sharply, his right hand in his coat pocket. Then he started back in sheer horror, with the fear of eyes suddenly looking into eyes; for the giant French-Canadian's pale, sweaty face had brushed his own.

Lazarre stepped back, and folded bare arms across his chest. He wore trousers, moccasins, and shirt; the latter was open at the throat.

Blunt, rather big-eyed and short of breath, had eased himself against the shack; his nerves, at high tension, had snapped with the sudden shock; he had been badly frightened, but, now that he was face to face with sensate danger, his "sand" was returning.

"So it's you, *m'sieu'*," said Lazarre significantly. "Somehow it is that I thought so. You ver' poor woodsman. You mak' noise lak bull moose breaking for water. I step behin' tree. Hey? It is that you lak to make visit to poor, ignoran' man? Hey? It is that you lak my hospitality?"

"It is," said Jimmie, in his curt professional voice, "that I arrest you for the murder of Mr. Twining. I have the warrant with me, if you're particular about such details. And there's a gun in this pocket, with its sore end on you. Better come along quietly."

The other's solitary eye closed until it became a mere venomous slit. Without warning—with incredible rapidity, accuracy, and grace—Lazarre's right hand swept up; and, as the knife came hurtling through the air straight for his throat, Jimmie instinctively dodged, and fired again and again through his coat pocket.

He missed cleanly, and the next instant Lazarre had flung himself upon him. Jimmie felt the bite of steel twice in shoulder and arm; felt his throat caught, his head whirled against the clapboards of the shack. The crashing of the storm took on an added meaning, sounding in his ears like the roaring of countless cataracts. Twice, many times, he struck out blindly with fist and knee, employing all the desperate tactics of the underworld; but he was a plaything in the hands of the demoniac giant.

If he could only keep him off—that was his one thought. Slowly, slowly, he was bent over the other's knee, until, at length, he hung, a mere skinful of aching bones. Then again came the bite of steel. Curiously enough, his last conscious thoughts were of a person foreign to the scene. And this one name he kept calling—repeating over and over.

"Listen!" cried Betty sharply.

Mr. Fubbins started and looked up from his book—one of the classics, which, as a matter of duty, he dozed over every night. "What is it, my dear?" he inquired mildly.

"I—I thought I heard a shot—over there." She was staring before her, wide-eyed and intent. "On the island."

Fubbins threw up his hands. "Pooh, my dear! There you go again. Do be reasonable. What could you hear on a night like this, and at such a distance?"

"I don't care," she said restlessly. "I don't care. I'm sure I heard it." She arose and stood by the window, staring down on the black and troubled waters of the bay.

"It's merely the thunder," asserted her uncle, resuming his reading. "You know very well no one is on the island. Your nerves are in a bad way; too much coffee and late hours——"

"Gabriel, you know very well that you drink more coffee—and other things—and keep more villainous hours than all of us put together," said Miss Phœbe mildly, but firmly. "My dear," she added, to her niece, "don't you think it is time for bed?"

The girl shook her head, her eyes still on the bay. "I—I couldn't sleep, auntie. I don't know what's the matter, but I've felt so depressed, so strangely, all evening. I have felt as if something terrible were going to happen. As—as if something were wrong."

"Pooh, my dear—pooh!" vigorously exclaimed her uncle.

"Pooh yourself, Gabriel!" retorted Miss Phœbe, with unexpected spirit. "People can feel things——"

"Phœbe," majestically exclaimed her brother, "I'm surprised at you. Do I infer that you desire to support such psychic nonsense? I reaffirm that Betty is merely a victim of late hours and coffee and the electric atmosphere and——"

"Listen!" tensely commanded Betty. "Don't you hear it? Don't you hear him call?"

Fubbins arose hastily, and as hastily sat down again. "What on earth's the matter with you, Betty? You have me all gooseflesh. Pooh, my dear. Hear who call?"

"Don't you hear it? I heard him. I heard him," whispered the girl. "I heard him as plainly as I heard you! I knew he was in danger. I knew it. I felt it——"

"Betty——"

"Let me past—I must go!" she cried furiously. "Let me past——"

"Betty, you are surely not mad enough——"

But she had swept uncle and aunt aside, and raced headlong for the servants' quarters. Into the kitchen she stormed and dragged the all-too-willing Abelard from the clutches of his sensate "conscience."

"Oh, Abelard, if you love me, come—come!" she cried. "To the island—to the shack! Get your gun—anything—but, if you love me, only hurry!"

Without comment of any kind, Mr. Johnson blithely skipped up, and the two went racing, hand in hand, like mad children, down through the pelting rain to the boathouse.

"Good Lor'—good Lor'!" exclaimed the astounded Sis M'randy. "But dat chile suttinly am stark, ravin' crazy. Nuffin' on her haid; nuffin' on her po' body; an' nuffin' in her mind, Ah'll bet. An' my fool man done gone wif her, jes' as Ah was a-makin' gran' addressments to dat po' lost soul of his'n. Jes' lak him."

Without wasting time on senseless questions, Abelard, in the boathouse, crammed a handful of cartridges into his pocket, and threw into the *Fubbins' Pride* the rifle and two tarpaulins, which latter served to protect his mistress against the downpour. Then the engine was started, and, with Betty herself at the wheel, the motor boat shot out into the bay, Mr. Johnson placidly chewing tobacco and loading his "automotatic."

The sea had swollen like a boil, until the bay appeared as though covered from shore to shore with gigantic accordion plaits, and great splashes of foaming water came tumbling over the bow as the *Fubbins' Pride* rammed her black snout into the heaving seas.

As they swung in toward the natural jetty on the southernmost point of the island, a large, indefinite, unfamiliar shape loomed out of the greater blackness of the night; and it was solely by the utmost promptitude and expert daring that Betty avoided a collision.

"A beached yawl!" she cried. "Whose——"

"S-s-s-t, missy!" whispered Abelard. "Dere am some one a-comin'. Please fo' to get ready to frow d' search light."

The motor boat nuzzled against the eastern side of the jetty and waited. Presently, the crackling of trodden un-

derbrush became audible, and a noise as of some one cautiously feeling his way through the impenetrable darkness. Then his steps were heard on the sandy jetty; and at the same moment a great, dazzling arrow of light shot seemingly from the water, and pinned Lazarre on its implacable barb.

He started back, and threw up his hands, partly through sheer fright and astonishment, partly to shade his eyes from the cruel, blinding glare. In that acetylene glow, white as day, every detail of his appearance was mercilessly picked out—his blood-stained, tattered shirt; his disfigured face and unkempt hair, matted with the sweat of violence.

"Where is Mr. Blunt?" cried the girl sharply.

"It is——"

"You've killed him!"

Lazarre turned at the accusation, as though to avoid the barb of light; but it followed his every shift of position, and Mr. Johnson, raising the rifle, added:

"Stan' yo', Lazarre, or, as suah as Ah'm a backslidin' Baptist, Ah'll blow d' immortal soul out'n yo'."

"Take the rope and bind him. Give me the rifle," commanded the girl.

"If you move," she added colorlessly, to Lazarre, "I'll kill you. Don't think you are dealing with a frightened woman."

But either Lazarre did think so, or he considered his chances of escape excellent. As Abelard, rope in hand, stepped ashore, and thus, for a moment, came between the girl and the French-Canadian, the latter ducked swiftly, and made a desperate sprint up the narrow spit of land.

But the girl had been as quick; for, swinging wide of Abelard's bandy little legs, she snapped rifle to shoulder and, aiming down the narrow path of light, turned loose the magazine. Five shots sounded almost as one; then came silence, drifting smoke, and the acrid bite of powder.

Where the jetty joined the shore, and the shaft from the carbide search light widened and lost vigor, Lazarre, presenting a rear view, could be seen kneeling, forehead on the ground, like a disciple of Allah paying his devotions to the sun. As they watched, he swayed rhythmically, and then slowly tumbled over on his side; his right hand went up, then came to earth, the fingers motionless and outstretched.

However great the provocation or the justice of one's cause, the knowledge that one has snuffed out the life of a fellow human being is not an experience to be sought after. Betty's feelings can, therefore, be more fittingly realized than expressed, when Abelard, after a brief survey of the apparently lifeless form, assured her that Lazarre would live to hear pronounced an official judgment of his career.

"Though it suttinly am a fac'," he added, scratching his hammer-like head, "dat de gemmen am po'fully shot up. Dey every one hit him, missy—spreadin' as if dey wus buckshot. Yes'm. Yo' suttinly fattened yo' battin' av'rage, dat time."

"Unship the search light, and come with me to the shack," she said, biting the quiver from her lip.

Through the woods and up the hill they made their way swiftly, Mr. Johnson, lamp in arms, looking like a diminutive Sir Galahad with a gigantic and luminous Holy Grail. By the shack they found Blunt, to all appearances lifeless; and, before the eyes of her servant, the girl knelt and took Jimmie's head in her lap.

Even as the white man had once carried the black man down that same hill, so now were positions reversed. At the jetty they found Mr. Fubbins awaiting their return, he having pursued in the double-ender.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CRYPTOGRAM.

It was a matter of days before the confused nightmare through which Blunt was passing began to assume definite shape and form. High up on the frieze of the room, he busied himself with watching an endless chain of

pictures, which unceasingly marched, countermarched, moved, and varied, as though thrown by a versatile biograph. Upon it were portrayed countless events in his life; faces of those whom he had known came and went—Twining, Lazarre, Browne, Fubbins, Bessie, and Ted Pringle; lastly, his father and Betty. The latter seemed to be more real, substantial than the others.

But when the long delirium had finally passed, and Jimmie, after a protracted, hard-fought battle, at length looked out of untroubled, unclouded eyes, it was his father, sitting beside the bedside, whom he saw first. Professor Sharp's scant hair was a little whiter, his face a little graver, his mouth a little sweeter, a little more tolerant than of yore. In silence, and with a curious deferential hesitation, he put out his hand; and into it the black sheep quickly placed his own—a poor enough hand, now; for the long fever had left nothing but a meagre apology of skin and bone.

"James," said his father gravely, "you have had a very close call—very close——"

"Was Lazarre caught?" quickly interrupted the other, striving to arise.

"Now, now, James! You are not well enough to discuss the past——"

"Ignorance is keeping me back, father. Please tell me about everything. I've tried to ask the question so many times, but I couldn't get my mind off the pictures——"

"What pictures, James?"

"The pictures on the frieze, up there. They have almost gone, now—at least, they don't change so rapidly——"

"Oh!" said the professor. "I think your mind requires to be recharged. Well, they caught Lazarre, thanks to Miss Penhryn, and he is now awaiting trial." He recounted the happenings of that eventful night. "I suppose you know that that was two weeks ago yesterday," he finished. "Mr. Fubbins wired me; for it looked as if we had lost you, James. I say 'we' advisedly, for the family here regard you as a member. I must affirm that, although I heartily disapprove of Mr. Fubbins' action in that formula matter, still I cannot but like the man—very much so, indeed. Can you understand this, James?"

"I can," smiled James. "I don't think that our affections are solely based on their object's adherence to the moral or ethical code. Besides, has Mr. Fubbins' fault been so enormous?"

"There is some truth in your observation, James," replied his father reflectively. "We like, or we don't like, whether it be scamp or angel. Mr. Fubbins and his family have been very good to you; you couldn't have received more consistent and loving attention, were you their own son. I assure you that Miss Penhryn never left your bedside. We were positively compelled to employ brute force in making her take the sadly needed respite." Jimmie's eyes again turned to the frieze. "As for that other matter—I mean, in reference to the Pringles," added the professor, flushing despite his sixty years, "the boy is doing well. As for your part in the affair, James, I confess freely that——"

"That I would have tried a saint," added the other, his hand closing on that of his father. "That episode is ended. It is enough that Ted is going straight, and that you and I——"

"Yes, James—that you and I——" echoed the professor. And each understood that the sentence required no period.

"I think," said Jimmie drowsily, "that I can sleep now. The pictures are gone—all but one; and that one—that one I like to look at—wish to keep."

Another week, and Jimmie was able to pay his first visit to the library. There he found Mr. Fubbins and Professor Sharp. It was evening; the windows were open, and the homing sun cast its ruddy reflection on the distant sea and sky. It being another "auspicious occasion," Mr. Fubbins promptly produced decanter and glasses, and proposed: "A good stiff drink, gentlemen, all around, in honor of Mr. James' remarkable recovery—remark-

able, like everything he puts his hand to."

"Such as my 'arrest' of Lazarre," replied Jimmie. "Taking it by and large —whatever that may mean—I think that was the stupidest performance of which I have been guilty, thus far."

"And solving that cryptogram was another stupid performance, eh?" beamed the Institution, rubbing his hands. "Most stupid, I dare say. Oh, yes, we all know *you* are stupid, Mr. James. That was a feat any one could have accomplished, eh? Oh, yes, I dare say so. There is no occasion to be proud of such an intellectual achievement as *that*. Of course not—of course not!"

"I am curious to know the solution," added Professor Sharp. "Mr. Fubbins has recounted the history of the parrot——"

"Wait—I beg you to wait," interrupted the Institution. "This is a most auspicious occasion, and before Mr. James relieves our consuming inquisitiveness I propose that, in honor of the occasion, we have another drink all around." This being satisfactorily accomplished, Jimmie proceeded to narrate his story.

"There is really very little to tell," he began; "for the whole thing was surprisingly simple, and, like all simple things, appeared remarkably abstruse at first glance. You, for instance, could have solved it yourself, Mr. Fubbins; for you were on the right track. In the first place, to obviate the possibility of any mistake, I made a careful note of all the parrot's utterances, although I had previously made up my mind as to what particular sentence contained the cryptogram. A study of these led me back to my first inference, namely, that sentence: 'When, O Catiline, do you mean to cease abusing our patience? Seek and ye shall find. Nineteen and the answer.' These two sentences—for the first is not two, but one—were repeated more often than any other; to be exact, in the ratio of three to one. Moreover, they of themselves suggested that they held the key. Not only, as you pointed out, Mr. Fubbins, did they contain the name of the island; but they bade one seek and find, and, again, they suggested that there was an answer. These two sentences I therefore retained, and discarded all the others——"

"So did I," interrupted Fubbins; "but I couldn't make head or tail of them."

"Well, obviously the most puzzling word in the entire twenty was the word 'nineteen,'" continued Jimmie. "Nineteen what? I asked myself time and again. It followed as a corollary that, if one found the cabalistic nineteen, the answer would be forthcoming. I confess that, in endeavoring to give that word a definite meaning, identity, and relationship, I found the most difficult snag in the entire problem. In fact, that single word, 'nineteen,' gives the key to the problem.

"I proceeded to study that first sentence—'When, O Catiline, do you mean to cease abusing our patience?'—as intently as possible. I studied it word by word, letter by letter. I began to notice that in many ways it was a remarkable sentence. For instance, it contains but eleven words; yet nineteen different letters out of the entire alphabet's twenty-six are represented. Not only that, but nine of these letters appear consecutively——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Professor Sharp. "I begin to see your point, James. I catch the significance. Those nineteen different letters spell the answer."

"They do," said Jimmie; "that is, providing they are arranged in their order of precedence. For instance, as I stated, we meet with nine different letters before there comes a repetition. These letters are w-h-e-n-o-c-a-t-i—the second 'i' in the word Catiline causing the first repetition." With pencil and paper, he quickly demonstrated his explanation. "The next different letter," he continued, "which we meet with is 'l' in the word Catiline. Then comes 'd' in 'do'; 'y' and 'u' in 'you'; 'm' in 'mean'; 's' in 'cease'; 'b' in 'abusing'; 'g' in 'abusing'; 'r' in 'our'; and 'p' in 'patience.' You notice, there is no repetition. Our nineteen different letters

placed in order of precedence, are, therefore, w-h-e-n-o-c-a-t-i-l-d-y-u-m-s-b-g-r-p. Now, does this not immediately suggest the answer?"

"No," said Fubbins stoutly, "it does not. It spells nothing. A mere jumble of letters."

"Then I'll space it for you, and add the other sentence," added Jimmie, rapidly setting down the following:

When o— Cat I—l——d y—u m——s B—g R—p, seek and ye shall find. Nineteen and the answer.

"Is it necessary to fill in the missing letters?" he asked. "Doesn't it read plainly: "When on Cat Island you miss Big Rip, seek, and ye shall find?"

"By jimbineddy, it does!" exclaimed the Institution, slapping his thigh.

"But to what does 'Big Rip' refer?" demanded the professor.

"Why, that's the name of the big spruce on top of the hill," replied Fubbins excitedly. "Every one around here knew its name. We chopped her down and put up the wireless pole in her place."

"Ignorance of that local information stumped me for a time," explained Jimmie; "but I suspected that 'Big Rip' referred either to rock or tree. One night, Miss Penhryn, in speaking of the wireless project, gave me the clue. Our sentence now reads: 'When on Cat Island you miss Big Rip, seek and ye shall find.' The following sentence: 'Nineteen and the answer,' we now discard, it being but the key and having served our purpose."

"Missing Big Rip, I infer, means when one can no longer see it," said Professor Sharp.

"But, hang it, you can see it all over," expostulated Fubbins. "You can see it, no matter where you stand on the island."

"No, you can't," denied Jimmie. "There is one place—and only one—on the island where the tree could no longer be seen. This particular spot is near the natural jetty where you have been accustomed to land, Mr. Fubbins. I experimented faithfully. You may remember that opposite to this natural jetty lies a little ridge, neck-high, from which projects a huge ledge of rock. If you stand in a certain position—I mean quite normally—this rock obliterates one's view of the hill; step a foot to either side, and you immediately see Big Rip—or, rather, where Big Rip once stood. As I said, on all the island there is but one spot from which the top of the hill cannot be seen. You can experiment with the wireless pole in lieu of the old spruce tree, and prove this for yourself. In that exact spot I found the papers."

"Well, well!" exclaimed the professor. "A remarkable cryptogram—remarkable in many ways. And a remarkable solution, James."

"It was out of the ordinary," admitted Jimmie, "and I wasted much time in applying the various set rules. The geographical peculiarities of the island lent themselves admirably to the employment of Cicero's famous sentence. Professor Penhryn deserves any credit that is due. He conceived the cryptogram."

"Ah, my late noted relative, sir, was a remarkable man," sighed the Institution. "But you, Mr. James, I consider quite as remarkable. A noble intelligence, sir. Gentlemen, will you do me the honor of filling your glasses and drinking to this most auspicious occasion?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PICTURE ON THE FRIEZE.

She arose from the boathouse steps as he approached. "I am glad to see that you are at last able to be up and out," she greeted. "If you are to remain here, you must sit right there —— No, on this grass mat. The wood is damp."

He obeyed her command, and, after a moment's hesitation, she seated herself on the succeeding step. The air was warm and drowsy, distant Cat Island looming out of the blue evening haze in the well-remembered brooding, crouching manner.

"They say," he mused, at length,

"that memory is greatly a matter of smell; but I always remember places by their sunsets. I shall always remember this place as it appears now—the warm silence, the dying sun—leaving 'the earth to darkness and to me.'"

"Darkness," she echoed, cradling her knee. "That is true. I suppose you will be leaving us now. I—I mean that naturally you must."

"Yes, naturally, I must," he agreed, without enthusiasm. "But I hope I may return. That is, I have been made so very much at home that I should be glad if this were one of the houses which I could visit. I mean, I—er—I like your uncle and aunt so much—— You wouldn't mind if I occasionally came here—just to see how you all were, you know?"

"No—no, I wouldn't mind," she said, pressing her hands very tightly together. "We—we would be very glad to see you at any time—that is, my uncle and aunt, of course."

"Yes. But you?" he asked.

"Me? Why, what have I to do with it?"

"Everything."

She glanced quickly at his face, and as quickly turned away. "Yes. Yes, of course," she agreed. "Naturally, I have everything to do with it. In the past I had everything to do with everything, but I think I have since learned to be less self-assertive—less domineering. I *think* I have, for I am not sure. Revamping one's nature is a slow and difficult process. Naturally, you would not care to visit here if I persisted in acting toward you as I have. From me, I am afraid, you have received nothing but unkind words and thoughts—and, no doubt, actions."

"I don't think you understand me," he said. "Perhaps you don't wish to do so."

"I understand you perfectly."

"Oh!" he said, rather quietly.

"I have to ask your pardon for much," she began, after a long silence. "I think I shall have done nothing, from the cradle to the grave, but ask people's pardon. To you I have said many things which I did not mean. I never really believed you guilty of the many sins with which I charged you. I do not say this now because you have been exonerated. You must know this—at least, I wish you to know it; to understand that, when I gave you my hand, when I asked for your friendship, I was sincere. But perhaps you won't believe me."

"I have always believed you."

"Ah, but I don't wish you to have always believed me," she replied. "For I have said so much that I did not mean——"

"And I have meant so much that I did not say," he interrupted. "And you have done so much which I hope you did mean. To you I owe my life and reputation. But for you, I should now be lying out there on that island; but for you, Lazarre would now be free."

"I did no more than any one would have done," she said. "Miss Pringle would have done the same, and more. She has been loyal to you from the first, while I—while I——" She stopped, broodingly resting chin on hands.

"Will you tell me," he said, "why you came to the island that night? Was it accident?"

"Perhaps. I heard you call. That is all," she replied simply. "Of course, it was mere imagination—and yet I heard your voice so distinctly. I cannot explain it. I felt that I must go."

"You heard me call your name?"

"Yes—my name. How did you know?"

"Because it was not imagination. I did call your name, over and over. My last conscious thought was of you. Then came my nightmare, and all the phantasmagoria of delirium. On the frieze in my rooms there appeared many pictures—faces of those whom I had known, scenes in which I had participated. But one picture, one face remained supreme; and that one I wish to keep. That was your face, Betty. Perhaps you wonder why I have the

courage to say all this; to march straight on, without first feeling my way; to tell you that I love you; to ask you to be my wife. But my courage and assurance is not native; for I am taking advantage of the picture which remained on the frieze after all the others had vanished. That picture was of you and me; we were on the island; I was lying by the shack, and a storm was tearing through the woods. You knelt; your arms were about me, and you were whispering over and over—something, Betty—something which means everything to me. Tell me that it was not delirium; tell me that it was true—that the picture on the frieze will not fade and vanish like the others, but that it will grow clearer, brighter, more enduring and——"

"Don't!" she whispered. "It is not possible. How can it endure, when I alone have mixed the colors, when I alone have painted it? You are kind, you are generous; but I do not wish that. You think, perhaps, that you owe me a debt which you are willing to pay with your happiness. That picture I have painted over and over to myself, and when at last there came an opportunity for its realization—even in poor, one-sided make-believe—I welcomed the opportunity. I thought you past hearing or caring, or I would never have said it. You see, I acknowledge freely that I said it. I cannot deny it, or charge it to delirium. But still, knowing it as you do, I cannot——"

"But did you mean it?" he demanded. "Did you mean it? And what is this nonsense about paying a debt with my happiness? And Miss Pringle doesn't come into the matter at all. Bess and I were never more than friends; it was never her, but it has always been you. You have always been frank, Betty. Tell me now, if that picture is to endure——"

"Tell me," she returned, "what if Bessie were more than a friend? What if she loved you as only a true woman can?"

"But that's nonsense——"

"Answer me as frankly as I will you."

"I would consider myself honored among men," he said gravely.

"And nothing more?"

"Nothing more."

"Are you sure—quite, quite sure?"

"Quite sure. But all this has nothing to do with my question——"

"It has everything to do with it. For now—now, dear, the picture will endure."

THE END.

WHY CATS RUN AFTER MICE

THE traditional antipathy of cat and mouse has hitherto been regarded as a matter of pure instinct; but a recent study by an acute and expert observer demonstrates pretty clearly that pussy has no instinctive impulse to kill and eat mice, nor the mouse any instinctive fear of cats.

A mouse may smell the nose of an inexperienced cat, or even perch happily on its back. So long as it does not run away, it is quite safe. The instinct of the kitten is to chase any small moving object, such as a ball, a spool, a tail, or a mouse. Pussy is not interested in the mouse, but in the motion.

If one day the kitten is rough, she may accidentally discover that there is meat inside the capture.

Cats specialize their hunting, some catching mice, some squirrels, and some birds; and it seems in each case to depend on accidents of discovery.

Thus, a good mouser is not necessarily a cat with a strong instinct for catching mice, but one with a strong habit of doing so.

What the Cards Knew

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "The Car Ahead," "Mrs. Sweeny's Suitor," Etc.

Belle Sweeny, the race-track gambler's widow, believes that she knows how to tell fortunes with cards. The Boarder has his doubts, but subsequent events tend to make him a convert. A Christmas story

CHRISTMAS was near, and Mrs. Sweeny was low in her mind. There were presents to be purchased—many of them—yet the pocketbook only yawned emptily. And the good woman fretted the days away, deeply steeped in gloom because of her inability to "come back" at her friends, as she put it. For long periods at a time, she stood at her windows, viewing the passing traffic in snow-covered Central Park West.

Bundle-laden motor cars hinted at Yule cheer. Slow-moving trucks, bearing covered pianos, told her of surprises planned in prosperous abodes. Now and then, a man, dragging after him a Christmas tree, apprised her of coming gladness somewhere. All the world seemed to be instilled with the spirit of the season, and Mrs. Sweeny bethought herself of her state of financial depression, and was very unhappy.

"Christmas is a happy time," she told the Boarder, "for the storekeepers and them fellers that sells toys you wind up, on the sidewalks. They're the only ones that gets any real cheer-up sentiment out of it—except, maybe, the children. There's a lot back of all this bundle business you see. It means that most of us people is chucking a bluff. We're blowing our money, to keep up a front, and make people think we're rolling in ten-dollar bills, and that most of 'em stick to us. But the real facts is that here's a great big town, full of folks stalling off the landlord, and the grocery man, and everybody else we owe money to, so we can four-flush to our fr'en's.

"Now, here's me! I give Mrs. Gold Dollar Cohen a cheap card, and she says: 'Ain't Belle Sweeny the piker, though!' I give her a five-dollar umbrell', and she says: 'My gee, where did Belle Sweeny get the money?' Bein' a widow lady, it don't do me no good to have such a line of talk goin'. If Christmas is a merry time, it's like the merry times my Danny usta have—there alwus was a mornin' after."

"Why don't you make some doilies, or whatever it is that women give each other—hand-made stuff, you know?" suggested the Boarder, looking up from his writing.

"Oh, dear me, ain't you the innocent thing, though!" exclaimed Mrs. Sweeny. "Suppose I done that, what's the answer? All the ladies in my set would come to me, smilin' so hard they'd crack the make-up on their faces, and tell me how glad they was to get them lovely things. Then, behind my back, they'd say: 'Ain't she got a nerve! Here I give her a bottle of puffume that cost—I ain't sayin' how much—and her comin' back at me with six cents' worth of sewin' silk in a nickel's worth of towelin'.' No, sir! Mister, I buy my presents, so people can see I spent real money for 'em. I've heard all about folks likin' to be remembered just for the spirit of the thing, but I ain't never seen none that was like that. Everybody is looking for the

price tag; and if it ain't there, with at least a dollar mark on it, your telephone don't ring as often as it usta."

"Isn't that a pessimistic view to take of the happy Christmas time?" asked the Boarder.

"Well," said Mrs. Sweeny, "I just wish you could see the insides of about seven million homes when the bundles is opened. That's all I got to say. If that idee of mine is pessimistic, then a pessimist is somebody that can't kid himself into what every one wants him to believe, though it ain't so. Say, what would you think if your rich aunt gives you a fifteen-cent paper cutter this year, instead of that typewriter you're wantin' so bad? What would you think, 'specially since you've hinted?"

"Hum!" coughed the Boarder. "We all have our disappointments——"

The front-door bell buzzed startlingly, and Mrs. Sweeny assumed an attitude of listening. Like the woman who inspects all sides of a letter before opening it, she must make a mystery wherever possible.

"Now, who can that be?" she queried, pushing a stray lock back of her ears. In another moment, she had quite decided that the way to find out was to open the door. The Boarder settled down to his writing, as she made her way along the hall to the entrance.

A tall, dark man was outside. When Mrs. Sweeny's gaze rested on him, her thoughts instantly reverted to the cards, as her friends, Mrs. Gold Dollar Cohen, had read them a week ago. The cards had plainly indicated that a tall, dark man was somewhere around; also, there was a long journey—and a blonde woman, who was to be under constant suspicion of mysterious plottings. So, when the man from the deck put in an appearance, Mrs. Sweeny drew in her breath quickly, and felt herself growing weak. One can meet unexpected fate with some degree of composure; but when one is anticipating blonde women, and long journeys, and tall, dark men, their materialization is not to be taken lightly.

"Mornin'," said Mrs. Sweeny, even before the gentleman spoke.

"You are Mrs. Belle Sweeny?" he asked. "You are a sister of Mrs. Tom Skidmore, *née* Thompson?"

"I sure am," assented Mrs. Sweeny. "If you're a fr'en' of hers, come right in, though we ain't spoke for five years. We're as lovin' as most sisters is that ain't got no use for each other. What did you say your name was?"

"Riddle," he said, "E. J. Riddle, attorney at law, of——"

"You don't say!" she cried, in surprise. "You ain't old Jake Riddle's boy, that was studying law before I was married, back home in West Baden, and everybody said he'd do better on a milk route?"

The tall, dark man grinned as he followed Mrs. Sweeny into her parlor. "Jake Riddle was my father," he declared, seating himself; "but he's dead now—and so is your Uncle Pete, by the way. He died last Sunday, leaving the farm to you and your Sister Emma. She and her husband have been living on it, you know, taking care of Pete."

"She never wrote me a word about him goin' and dyin'!" exclaimed Mrs. Sweeny.

The lawyer's squinty little eyes twinkled slyly as he proceeded to cultivate the crop of discord he had discovered.

"Perhaps she is not anxious to have the estate settled," he intimated. "She and her husband have been making a good thing out of that farm, so I have heard."

"I s'pose her and him would steal it, if they could," said Mrs. Sweeny vindictively.

"I don't like to read motives into people," objected Riddle virtuously, "but I will say that it is always best to look out for one's interests. I realized that you might stand in need of legal representation in this matter; and, as I had some business in New York, I resolved to kill two birds with one stone, and offer you my services. The will is clear enough. You can easily obtain your rights under it, but Emma and her husband may make you some trouble. Now, as I shall be on the

ground, I can probably be of much use to you."

"I s'pose my share would be three pickets off the front fence, after I had paid your bill," hazarded Mrs. Sweeny.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Lawyer Riddle. "I see you have a hard opinion of the law, Mrs. Sweeny."

"Well," she explained, "my poor dead Danny went to law once; and, after he was through, he told me to be kind to the plain crooks, like burglars and hold-up men, but to keep the chain on the door if I seen a lawyer comin'. He said corporation lawyers was all right, because they only stole from the rich; but the others didn't recognize no dead line—they'll lean up against wet paint, so's they can take somethin' home that don't belong to 'em. So, you see, Mister Riddle, I got my suspicions; though, after all, there's a chance that maybe you ain't quite as crooked as that, comin' from a small town, like you do."

Riddle fidgeted, and cleared his throat, as though to defend himself; but Mrs. Sweeny had suddenly bethought herself of a great many more words that demanded utterance.

"That farm is worth about five thousand dollars," she said reflectively, "but there's a two thousand dollar mortgage on it, ain't there?"

"Yes," replied Riddle.

"Then that leaves three thousand to split up between Em and me—fifteen hundred for me. Whee!" Mrs. Sweeny stopped talking, and seemed to wrestle with the idea of sudden riches. For a moment, she rocked violently back and forth, and tapped nervously with her fingers on the arm of her chair. Then she said:

"I ain't saw that much money since Danny quit trimming the sports at the track—he was a bookmaker, you know," she added proudly.

"I can get it for you," suggested the lawyer.

"Em is a blonde," she murmured reminiscently, ignoring Riddle's offer. "And Mrs. Gold Dollar Cohen saw by the cards that a blonde lady had a piece of lead pipe planted in a sock for me. Gee, ain't them cards the knowing things! There was a long journey, too; and I s'pose that means me for a trip to West Baden, Indiana."

Riddle stared in a startled way, and planted firmly on the floor the foot that had been teetering across his knee. He caught his hat in a firmer grip, for the woman appeared to be flighty, and he was beginning to reason that a hasty retreat might soon be expedient.

"You can leave your address here," advised Mrs. Sweeny, after taking thought; "and if I need you on my pay roll, I'll let you know. It costs about fifty dollars for the round trip between here and West Baden, including meals and berth; and something seems to tell me that lawyers don't blow that much without getting it, and a whole lot more, back. You see, I got something to think about, Mister Riddle. If I am a heiress to a bunch like fifteen hundred, I want it in dollars, not cents. Lawyers is lawyers, you know, and I think I'd better be careful. I guess you understand how I look at it; so don't let me keep you from that other business you come on. Maybe the party you're goin' to see has a relative that's a lawyer, and likes 'em better than I do."

"Oh, I have plenty of time. My other client can wait," Riddle assured her.

"Well, then, go out and see Grant's Tomb and the Statue of Liberty, like all the country folks does. Some time I mean to see 'em, myself. I'm afraid to let you stay here, because I don't want to get talked into nothin'. I ain't goin' to sign no papers; I've seen enough ladies on the stage get bunkoed for doing it. This here thing can wait till after you're gone, and I can get a chance to think."

She arose invitingly; and Riddle, perceiving that his business venture was an item to set down in the profit-and-loss column, accepted her suggestion, and departed. His visions of involving the estate in endless and profitable litigation were shattered; but he consoled himself with the thought that many more people would depart this

life, if given time, and then there would be other opportunities to despoil heirs. So, he sauntered into the city's busy places, to discover, if possible, the advanced methods of sin employed by the clever metropolitan attorneys.

After her visitor had left, Mrs. Sweeny went into her parlor, and sat long before the big crayon portrait of her deceased husband, deep in study. She felt that she must adjust herself to new and gorgeous circumstances; and it could not be done in the snap of the finger. That seat before Danny's likeness always imparted to her poise of mind after unusual events. It was as if she were confiding to the big, strong fellow her joys and her sorrows. And five minutes at the shrine always made her feel better, though she remained much longer this time. The happenings of the morning had been sensational enough, to be sure; yet she had a premonition of other things to come trailing along in Mr. Riddle's wake. The story of the cards was not yet worked out.

"There's that long journey," she soliloquized. "Maybe, though, it's only over to Hoboken, or to the Bronx Zoo. I guess I'll tell the Boarder about Mr. Riddle, and Uncle Pete, and Em, and all the rest of it, and find out what he thinks." Whereupon, she tapped at the door of knowledge.

Once in the cheery little study, she rambled through her tale, with a brevity unusual to her, concluding with the premise:

"Now, it looks to me like a certain party was goin' to make good on the Christmas-present proposition."

"If a settlement is made in time, you can," the Boarder said.

"I s'pose one of them banks out there would lend me money on the property, if I explained to them that I have to make a hurry touch," she speculated. "Well, anyway, I'm glad Mister Riddle dropped round. It feels good to be a heiress—I can almost feel myself hoppin' out of a taxicab, and hurlin' scornful looks at them poor shoppin' ladies that has to walk. And, mister, won't it be lovely to be just like a millionaire, who never worries when the agent comes round for his flat rent! I won't be poor no more till I get the bunch spent—and it ought to last three or four months, anyway, hadn't it? Just think of the dresses I can buy, and the swell feeds! I wisht to goodness that Danny was here to watch me let all that money run away and play."

"Why not put it in the bank?" cautioned the Boarder.

"Not me!" cried Mrs. Sweeny. "I had some money in a bank, once, and it wasn't any fun. All there is to that is some figures in a book. You can't have a lot of green stuff jumping out of your purse every time you open it, if your money is in a bank. No, sir, I want the feel of real money. Here I've been—for so long I can't tell you—scrimpin' and savin', and all the time just dyin' to grab a handful of bills and throw 'em around. Why, when Danny was living, I had so much money that the house got overrun with the microbes that lives in it, and I had to buy two dollars' worth of bug powder to get the place fit to live in again. Ever since then, I've been so broke that the little children stop me on the street and give me their pennies. And now I'm rich again. Maybe I ain't wise; but I tell you, mister, I'm goin' to dress up flashier than the band on a cheap cigar. I'm goin' to make the folks think I've wrecked a bank and have too much pull to go to jail. Oh, it will be me for the high life!"

She paused for his condemnation of her loose financial notions, but he had nothing to say. So she continued:

"This is a big thing for me, mister—this bunch of money. Why, there's been nights when I just tossed around, schemin' and hopin' for a soft spot like this to cut loose in. My life ain't been happy since Danny died; it's been a hard pull to try to make both ends meet, and them hatin' each other so. But that wasn't the worst of it, mister. Most women ain't got no soul above clothes, and I'm no exception. Sometimes I've figgered that I'd have them clothes, if I had to break the baby's bank to get 'em; and the only

thing that kept me from doing a real low-down thing like that was that there wasn't no baby. I've seen the times when dresses other women had on almost broke my heart. You're a man, and you can't feel them things like a woman can; you don't know what it means. Why, I'd quit talkin' for a week for a pretty tailor-made front; and there ain't no telling what I'd do for a imported gown. And Mrs. Gold Dollar Cohen, and all the rest of us women, is just like that. If you don't believe it, look at all the pretty girls you see with fat, bald-headed husban's. There's a reason. Dress, and fixin's—and love! Huh! Love is a also-ran. Most women, now'days, don't fall in love with a man; they fall in dress and fixin's with him!"

"Your views are extreme," criticised the Boarder.

"Maybe—maybe," she retorted; "but you'll find that, even in the country, it's the storekeeper, and the postmaster, and the harness-shop man, that's married. Most of the bums is single. And they wouldn't have a chance to be, if they had anything.

"But I ain't goin' to argue with you. I'm feelin' too good. My gee, ain't I a heiress? Ain't I goin' to have all them things I've wanted so long? Ain't I a charge account for a little while, once more? What am I sittin' here dopin' out folks' motives for? It don't make any difference to me why they get married, or if they get married at all, because I'm goin' to be glued to a bankroll without promisin' to keep house for nobody. It's a better way, mister; you don't have to put up with no man's cussedness. If all us ladies could be staked to room and board that way, life would be a real nice thing to have around. Why, I feel just like getting up and hollerin'!

"Listen! I'm goin' to hold up my head this Christmas in the present-givin' line—and a couple of hours ago that would have made me the happiest woman on the street. But this Mrs. Fortune is lettin' go of her money like a chorus girl engaged to a Wall Street broker. I can send my presents, and laugh out loud on rent day, and decorate my shape till I look like I could pay taxicab fare. I don't buy dog meat at the butcher shop no more, and pretend it's for my dog. No, sir! And this Christmas the ladies won't say that Belle Sweeny is a piker Sandy Claus—a cheap skate that leaves stuff for you that the installment man is likely to come around and collect on. For a while, mister, I'm the Belle Sweeny of the old days; I'm Belle Sweeny, the rich lady——"

There was a short buzz from the doorbell.

"That's the postman," said Mrs. Sweeny, hurrying from the room. "I know his ring."

In a moment, she was back with a letter. She tore it open in the presence of the Boarder; but, after a hurried glance through it, she murmured a hasty "Excuse me," and retired to her own part of the flat. And it was a full half hour before she returned, with a depressed, troubled look on her face.

"I s'pose I'm bothering you awful to-day," she apologized.

"No," the Boarder assured her; "my work is nearly done."

"Well——" She hesitated.

"What is it?" he asked.

She handed him the letter which she had just received. "Read it," she said.

The Boarder unfolded the letter. It was written in the cramped, painstaking style of one unaccustomed to the frequent use of a pen; and the Boarder could look behind the composition and discern the many destroyed drafts that had culminated in it. He read:

DEAR SISTER BELLE: This is to let you know that I and Tom is well, and hope you are the same. There has been sad news here, being that Uncle Pete died the fourth at one-fifteen a. m., on Sunday morning, of heart trouble. He died peaceable—which is a comfort to know, everybody says. He left the farm to me and you, and of course I s'pose it will be sold now. We got it paying pretty well last four years, and we was aiming to buy the Thomas piece next to us with what we saved, if Uncle Pete had not died for a year or two.

We hoped he might last that long and give us a chance to save what old man Thomas wants as down payment. He wants $65 dol-

lars an acre for the 150 acres, one-fourth down and rest in notes. I and Tom won't be ready to pay that much for a year, anyway, taking what we got in the bank and my share of Uncle Pete's property. This thing come so unexpected we don't know what to do. I guess maybe we was aiming too high. We can get a little place, but we was clean set on the Thomas piece.

Uncle Pete's will was got up O. K., and there won't be no trouble. There's some papers will be sent you, Tom says, and when you sign them everything will be O. K. Silas Griggs wants the place, and has offered to take the mortgage and pay us $3,250 dollars cash. So, if you want to sell right off, there ain't anything in the way.

Hoping you are well, and we are the same, I am your loving sister, EM.

The Boarder raised his eyes from the letter to Mrs. Sweeny's face. There were lines in her brow, and her hands were nervously clasping and unclasping.

"Well?" she interrogated sharply.

"They seem to be in an unfortunate position," observed the Boarder. "It appears that they might have bought a ten-thousand-dollar property, if your uncle had lived a year or two longer. As it is, they haven't enough to make the payment and take possession; so they'll have to look to lesser things."

"They've been set on that Thomas place for a long time," Mrs. Sweeny said.

"They are, indeed, unfortunate," repeated the Boarder.

"They?" she cried.

"Yes. Doesn't it appear that way to you?" he asked.

"Well, how about me?" she retorted.

The Boarder regarded her questioningly.

"Say!" she exclaimed, going off at a tangent. "Wasn't that Riddle man the limit? Think of the nerve of him, comin' around here and tryin' to get up a fight between me and Em. And there was Em, all the time, just crazy to see me get what was coming to me—or, maybe, you wouldn't call it crazy. But she was a game lady, all right."

"She evidently intends to be square," commented the Boarder.

"Well, ain't *I* goin' to be?" she inquired calmly. "Did you ever know me to be anything but square, mister? My Danny usta say that I was the squarest lady in New York—and Danny's dead, but that don't make no difference."

She swept out of the room with her nose in the air; and the Boarder saw no more of her until he was leaving the house for his lonely dinner at the restaurant. He had almost reached the door, when her voice came faintly from the dining room:

"Would you come in here a minute, mister," it said.

He found her at the table, the top of which was liberally covered with scribbled note paper.

"I been writing to Em," she explained; "and, bein' that I don't write every day, like you do, I might have made some mistakes in my spellin'—though I was the best in my class, except one boy, at school. Would you look over this, and see if it's all right?" She handed him a letter, first removing a black-lined guide sheet from between the pages.

He took it, and read:

DEAR SISTER EM: I got your letter to-day, and am glad you are all well, and I am the same. Ain't it too bad about Uncle Pete? I always loved him, though you might say I really didn't know him; and of course everybody knows he worked his wife to death. If I was you, I wouldn't worry none about selling the farm just now. I don't need the money, as I have been lucky in the stock market lately and things are going good with me. I think you and Tom better stay right there till you get straightened out. Don't do nothing on my account now, but just let things go as they lay. Wishing you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year, and that you and Tom get the Thomas place all right, also that you are well, and I am the same, I am your loving sister, BELLE.

"Does it read all right?" anxiously asked Mrs. Sweeny, as the Boarder finished reading.

"I consider it a very fine piece of work," he said approvingly.

"Well, then, would you drop it in the box for me when you go out?" she requested. "You see, Mrs. Gold Dollar Cohen's classy present and them new clothes is pretty strong on me yet, and I ain't quite sure of myself." She

was so artlessly frank about her possible shortcomings that the Boarder refrained from comment, accepting her statement and the letter as perfectly natural incidents of the day's routine.

The next day, Mrs. Sweeny failed to drop in to chat with him, according to her morning custom; and he did not investigate her absence. He was well aware that her generosity toward her sister had cost her much, and he suspected that she would prefer solitude in which to contemplate the ashes of the hopes that were almost realities yesterday. And, later in the week, when she made her appearance, she seemed to be wanting in her usual effervescence, though she bravely tried to laugh in the face of her disappointment.

"I'm thinkin' of makin' some Christmas things," she told him. "I guess I could get one of the janitor's old gum boots, and tie pretty bows of green tissue papers on the loops. It would make a nice umbrell' stand, and I know Mrs. Gold Dollar Cohen would go crazy over it."

The Boarder stared.

"I've been reading up on them home-made things," she continued. "All it takes is a public dump, and some ingenuity, to fit out all the people you know with beautiful presents. You can make lovely inkstands out of old baked-bean cans; and if you cut out a piece of a celluloid collar, it makes a grand bookmark, and don't take much postage. It's safe to send book marks to folks that never reads nothing but the newspapers, because they'll never look at 'em close. Oh, I'll get along, mister—I'll get along. But I ain't sayin' where I'll get to."

"You seem to get along—always," mused the Boarder.

"In a way," agreed Mrs. Sweeny. "But, honust, mister, I do wish I could give all them women in my set somethin', so they could have the pleasure of takin' the things back and changin' them."

That was the last he heard on the subject until the day before Christmas. Mrs. Sweeny had visited, and had talked, but she seemed anxious to avoid all reference to the conditions that were making life almost unbearable to her. So, she rattled on about everything under the sun save presents; and she was commenting on matters that had nothing at all to do with them, that morning, when she was interrupted by the postman's ring.

While she was gone from the room, the Boarder waited impatiently for her return. He, like everybody else, was expecting something at every delivery, and he was anxious to learn what was in store for him.

There was a wait of five minutes, then ten. The Boarder had about concluded that he had been skipped, this trip, and that Mrs. Sweeny had returned to her housework, when she burst into the room, her face prettily pink with excitement. In her outstretched hand she waved a check. An opened letter was thrown violently on the Boarder's desk.

"Read it!" cried Mrs. Sweeny. "Read it!"

He spread it out before him, and this is what he made out of the cramped, careful chirography of Sister Em:

MY DEAR SISTER BELLE: I and Tom was real pleased with what you said in your last letter, and Tom he says that me and you is making a big mistake in staying on the outs the way we been doing, and he says we better make up. Now that it's Christmas time, maybe it would be a good idea; but that's only the way I look at it, and maybe you ain't willing to. Tom says to tell you we'll stay here a spell and pay you rent, and he has wrote a check for $100 dollars as payment in advance, and to bind the bargain, and to kind of hold things till we can get together and arrange a real arrangement. I have put the check in this letter. Of course you don't need to take this arrangement if it ain't satisfactory. Let us know if it ain't. Tom says for me to have you come and visit us, and I say so, too. He says the country air will do you good, and plain vittles will tone you up, after eating quail on toast and ice cream all the time, like you city folks do. A merry Christmas and a happy New Year, as you wished in your last. Hoping you are well, and we are the same, I am your loving sister,

EM.

The Boarder laughed happily. "That is splendid!" he exclaimed.

"Oh!" she cried. "Set them words of yours on the window sill, where they'll get some fresh air in 'em and sound healthy. 'Splendid' is what you say about every new grillroom that's opened; and this thing that Em's did ain't no common sort of thing like that. It's big—it's the goods! Do you get that, mister—the goods! It's the best ever, all lit up with a million red, white, and blue lights—that's how it looks to me. Oh, oh, oh! I just wish you could go along and watch me scatter this check! Gee, I hate to think of all the trading stamps I'll fetch home to-night. First, though, I'll send a telegraph to Em, saying I'm for that make-up thing.. Then—but let me go, mister. Let me go and get Mrs. Gold Dollar Cohen's umbrell', before something happens to upset all this good luck." She paused, and looked hard at the Boarder.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I was to meet with a tall, dark man, wasn't I?" she quizzed.

"Yes," he agreed.

"And a blonde woman in the cards was to be suspicioned?"

"I believe it ran like that."

"Well, that wasn't bad guessing, considering everything, was it?"

The Boarder coincided with her.

"I'm goin' on a long journey, mister," she declared solemnly. "I'm goin' to save enough out of this check to visit Em—and I'll trust to luck to get back. I'm goin' to get acquainted with her all over again, and never have no more fights with her."

"That is a good idea," said the Boarder.

"Ain't you got no more to say about it than that?" she demanded.

"What more should I say?" he wanted to know.

"You don't never see the point of nothin'," she cried impatiently. "It alwus gets past you. Now, see how the combination of the tall, dark man and the blonde lady and the long journey has worked out. Honust, mister, ain't them cards the knowingest things!"

THE ABSCONDING MOON

ONE result of our opening up communication with the moon, if we ever do so, will be an immediate fall in the price of incandescent gas mantles. Thorium is the main ingredient in these articles, and the spectroscope tells us that thorium exists in enormous quantities on the surface of that satellite.

It used to be almost equally common with us; but when, some one hundred and fifty million years ago, the moon pettishly parted company with the earth, it bore most of the volatile stuff away with it into space.

Another even rarer element—helium, to wit—has been lost to us mainly on account of the earth's revolution. It is so exceedingly light that it has been gradually but surely whisked off into outer nothingness, just as water is driven off from a rapidly twirled mop.

Indeed, it was for a long time supposed that we had in this way presented to the moon and the stars our whole available stock of helium; but latterly it has been found to exist in exceedingly minute quantities in pitchblende, the strange substance out of which radium is extracted.

VEGETABLE SHOES

THE ridiculous extent to which a fad can be carried is illustrated in the announcement that a London bootmaker has patented a shoe made expressly for vegetarians, and in response to their demands. It is intended solely for that class of people who refuse to eat or wear anything that is not of vegetable production.

Shore, of the Shameen

By Lester Griswold

Author of "Guy and Ghost," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

James Shore, an American ex-soldier, comes to Canton in search of employment. Shortly after landing in the European quarter, he interferes with a customs officer, who is beating a Chinese boatman. The officer insults a young girl who tries to stop him. Shore thrashes him, and is thanked by Ah-Let, the boatman, and by the young Scotch girl, Miss Maisie Kerr, who is the niece of Lammouch, a rich tea merchant. The next day, Shore presents his lettters of recommendation, and gets a place as watcher in the British customs service. He discovers that the inspector over him is Malken, the man whom he has thrashed. Malken makes things unpleasant for Shore. The harbor master, Croftonleigh, however, takes a liking to him; and Shore also makes a friend of a fellow watcher, a young Englishman, Heron by name, with whom he bunks. Ah-Let discovers a plot to smuggle out rice, in which Malken is implicated, and comes to Shore with the story. Shore exposes Malken's treachery, but Malken escapes. Shore is made an inspector, and given a special detail to stop opium smuggling. Croftonleigh, who is about to retire, promises Shore his place if he succeeds. Shore chooses Heron and Ah-Let for his assistants.

CHAPTER VI.

SAND AND SUGAR.

ALTHOUGH Shore had said nothing to Croftonleigh about his suspicions, he had a fairly definite idea as to the best way to begin his campaign against the opium smugglers. Shore was not the man to lay suspicion at the door of any one until he had fairly good proof that the same was justified. Naturally, he had taken considerable interest in the opium deal long before the harbor master had spoken to him of it; and his eyes had been open for the chance to suspect some one of participation in it. The man in this case was one named Hunnewell.

No one seemed to know anything about this Hunnewell, although he was supposed to have some sort of interest in the tea trade. He came regularly to the Shameen once a week, and put up at the hotel. He seldom stayed more than a day, and then returned. He was a man with a face that one instinctively distrusted; he had eyes that seemed half closed most of the time—narrow, foxlike eyes—and his mouth was perpetually wreathed in a smile that came very near to being a sneer. He was quite unobtrusive, however, and went out of his way, even, to make himself popular with those who frequented the hotel; and, as he seemed well supplied with money, his ends were easily achieved in this direction by the buying of unlimited drinks for the men who lounged in the hotel barroom.

Shore had noted him once or twice, with the air of a great mastiff looking on a snake. But he had not thought of his business until, one day, while across the river, he saw him deep in conversation with Kae-Ling, a nephew of Kae-Hong, who, since the rice-smuggling affair, had mysteriously disappeared, leaving his business in his nephew's hands. This had set Shore to thinking about Hunnewell; and when the opium affair was handed over to him, the Southerner decided that Hunnewell might not bear strict investigation.

By the terms of his agreement with Croftonleigh, he was free to pursue his work in any manner he chose; and so, next day, Shore turned over the *Tao-tai*

to Heron, with instructions to go on night duty with the craft; while he, by the aid of a wig, mustache, and side-whiskers, transformed himself into a staid and solid John Bull, and took passage on the *Kai-Ping* to Hongkong, after having previously learned that Hunnewell was making his return trip on that boat. Shore was not sure that Hunnewell remembered him, but he thought it best to take no chances.

The *Kai-Ping* left that night, and would arrive in Victoria Harbor* the following morning by six o'clock. Shore left orders to be awakened at five; and he was on deck, smoking an after-breakfast cigarette, when Hunnewell, bag in hand, came out and went over the gangplank. Shore picked up his own bag and followed Hunnewell. The suspect got into a rickshaw and told the coolie to go to the Desbrosses Road. Shore got into another rickshaw and directed the boy, in Chinese, to follow the first one.

The little two-wheeled vehicles rattled on the stones, as the strong-limbed, leather-lunged coolies trotted along at the speed of the average horse. Hunnewell did not look back, for it was no particularly striking thing for rickshaws to go along the Desbrosses Road; in fact, there were about two hundred of them jostling one another in either direction.

The little carts bowled along in the crisp, cold morning air. The shops were just opening, and the people beginning to be astir. They passed a detachment of red-jacketed Tommies swinging swagger-sticks. Burly Sikh policemen stood at the corners, directing the traffic by the swing of their clubs in different directions, with quite the confidence of the London "bobby," but a good deal more convincing argument—for they were six feet six, the most of them, and could stop a horse by standing in his way.

Occasionally a barrow, pushed by a coolie, and loaded down with Chinese women sitting on either side, added a curious note. The street was a jumble of drays, smart victorias, rickshaws, palanquins, and bullock carts.

On one corner arose a huge department store, where one might get the latest fashions from New York, London, and Paris. On another a gaily gilted vertical signboard swung in the wind, with arabesques of Chinese ideographs proclaiming that the shopman sold a most superior brand of rice paper. A confectionery and ice-cream parlor was side by side with the store of a dealer in gods—brass, clay, bamboo, or ivory, just as the preference and the purse of the purchaser might be. An American music store, with plate-glass windows advertising the latest song hits and the scores of the last musical comedies, had for a neighbor a Chinese silversmith, whose oddly enticing wares were displayed with such cunning as to cause many to discard the family silver for that of Oriental design.

It was a street to delight the soul of a woman or an artist; to the one it offered vast opportunities to buy, and to the other striking contrasts for character work.

The rickshaw carrying Hunnewell suddenly swung off into an infrequented lane, which was marked "Wherry," and which evidently led to one of the docks. Shore's heart leaped high when they passed into it, for it was lined on either side by old frame houses and small Chinese shops—it had evidently been part of the early Victoria settlement. But his hopes were soon dashed to the ground, for the rickshaw turned into another wide street and then toiled half a block uphill.

Hunnewell got out and went into a two-story brick house, which was, quite evidently, a commonplace residence. The rickshaw man, having been paid, rattled off.

Shore got out and dismissed his rickshaw man, also; but he lingered in the vicinity of the house. There was a small hotel opposite it; and into this went Shore, and sat down by the window, keeping his eye on the place which Hunnewell had entered. He consumed a cigar and two cigarettes, and was

*Victoria is the city. Hongkong, the island.

just beginning to wonder whether he had cut off too wide a swath for himself, when Hunnewell made an exit from the house and started down toward King's Road.

The customs' man was out of the hotel and after him without the slightest delay. Hunnewell walked slowly, a cigar between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand, from which he took short, meditative puffs; he was swinging a malacca cane in his right hand. His bowler hat was cocked just a little on one side; and he walked rakishly, elbowing Chinese out of his way with a certain masterful resolution that aroused no animosity in the oblique-eyed sons of Confucius.

He cut into King's Road, and stopped several times—once before a store that sold sporting goods, to look at some firearms lavishly displayed; and another time to gaze into a window of Young's Department Store, where a particularly flashy lot of neckties was arrayed. Occasionally he whistled. He seemed quite at ease.

Suddenly he disappeared into a building. Shore was on his heels, and noted the place. It was a three-story affair, and over the door was a sign in great gilt letters:

COMPANIA REAL.

Manila. *Hongkong.* *Cebu.*
Bombay. *Lisbon.* *Calcutta.*

On the bulletin board was a list of the various ships operated by the company, and their dates of sailing from different Philippine and Indian ports. The *Loonchow* was among them.

For some little time Shore could only stare at the sign, hardly daring to believe that things had turned out so happily for him. So his suspicions were coming near to being verified! This was the most unscrupulous firm in the Orient, the very firm to which the *Loonchow* belonged, and which had, no doubt, engineered the silver-sand-rice deal, although, of course, nothing was proven against them. That Hunnewell was connected with this firm spoke no good for Hunnewell. It was quite evident that he must be watched, and watched closely.

He did not know whether Hunnewell had noticed him on shipboard or after, but he judged that it was now desirable to take risks and pose as himself; so, standing within the doorway, he removed the beard and mustache from his face, and crammed them into a pocket. He still retained the wig, however. Now, had Hunnewell noticed him keeping surveillance, there was not so much chance of detection, for when Shore had removed his overcoat and flung it over his arm, he was quite a different person from the passenger on the *Kai-Ping*.

The customs' inspector went into a little tea shop over the way; and, with a pot of tea and some dry toast before him, he watched the offices of the Compania Real over a copy of the *South China Daily News,* which he had bought at a stand near by. His diligence in this matter had to wait long for its reward, as several hours passed, during which he consumed another pot of tea and was driven frantic by the idea of drinking a third. Twelve o'clock had boomed from the Trinity Church tower when Hunnewell sallied out. He was accompanied by two other men.

Shore paid his score, and kept them well in sight until the King Edward Hotel was reached. He had not been able to see their faces, but there was something oddly familiar about one of them. They went within the Edward, and Shore followed them. Passing into the dining room, they seated themselves at a window overlooking the street. Their backs were still to Shore, but their faces were reflected in the mirror opposite. When Shore saw the reflection, standing by the door and looking in, he started back, and nearly lost his balance.

One of the men was a sallow, saffron-looking fellow, with small, waxed mustache and goatee. He was dressed rather flashily, but with a certain indefinable dandified neatness; and was evidently a Eurasian—Portuguese-Chino, Shore was inclined to believe. The customs' man decided that he was one of the numerous Da Silva brothers, who were

supposed to own the Compania Real. He had passed Shore's inspection without much interest.

It was the face of the other man which had caused Shore to step back; for there was no mistaking those heavy jowls, that low forehead, those insufficient lips. It was Malken—Malken, whose arrest was particularly desired by the customs service at Canton, and for whom rewards had been offered. He must be carrying things off with a bold face, when he lunched publicly in one of the most prominent places in the metropolis of the East.

It was indeed a morning of glad surprise. Link by link, a chain of evidence was being forged. Shore, his heart beating high, took a seat in a dark corner of the dining room and ordered some quail on cress, which he dallied with and finally consumed, keeping his eye on the three, who were making a rather elaborate repast.

Finally they arose. Shore paid his check and hurried into the lavatory, where, sheltered behind a screen door, he put on the mustache. It would not do to be seen and recognized by Malken. He came out of the place just in time to see the three making their way to the street. They did not take rickshaws, although the boys in front of the caravansary were loud in their advice that they should do so. The Eurasian lifted his walking stick threateningly to them, and they fell back.

The trio turned out of the main street down toward the Chinese shipping quarter, Shore following them. His heart was beating rapidly, for a slip now meant the ruin of all his plans. He was certainly close to what he wished to find out. Everything pointed to the Compania Real as the people who were instrumental in landing the opium.

It was so obvious that Shore wondered that it had not occurred to him as a certainty. He fitted the bits of evidence together—Hunnewell's mysterious appearances and disappearances; his *chin-chin* with Kae-Hong's nephew; and now the appearance of Malken, branded through the customs service as a traitor and an abettor of smugglers.

They passed the shops of ship chandlers, sailmakers, riggers, and others of the maritime supply craft; and came upon the water front. They had not gone far when they went within a narrow, dirty-smelling office, over which was the Chinese ideographic sign, and also the English equivalent:

HUNG-LO.

Junks for hire. Sampan contractor. Colliers. General cargadore. Coaling done.

Again Shore took up a waiting position, screened from sight within a ship chandler's shop. Presently the three men came out, accompanied by a wizened Chinese in dirty blue robes. He led the way to the jetty, and waved his hand to a large-sized junk of some hundred and fifty tons, which flew a blue ensign, on which was inscribed Hung-Lo's name in English and Chinese. It was a well-built vessel, and nearly new. The men went aboard.

Presently they came off, and the wizened Chinese bade them good-by and went into his office, nodding and smiling to himself. Shore followed the men again. This time they took rickshaws, and before long had traversed nearly the whole length of the water front and landed in front of the Compania Real's dock.

Shore wisely went past the dock, and, dismissing his rickshaw half a block from it, retraced his footsteps and came out on the planking, with the air of a curious sightseer. He went to the office, noting as he did so that the three men were seated on jutting-up piles, their heads together.

There was a Portuguese clerk in charge of the office, who, on Shore's requesting a ticket, informed him that he must buy that at the company's office on the King's Road. Shore asked when the next boat left for Bombay. The clerk told him that a boat had left two days before.

"One come in this day, sar," the Portuguese added. "Him come from Bombay—him late—come maybe later—go away four, five, six day—you take him?"

Shore said he thought he would. "Very cheap fare, sar," supplemented the Portuguese insinuatingly. Shore thanked him.

He got into a rickshaw again, and took his way back to Hung-Lo's. He entered the office and asked for the "master," whereupon, after a little shuffling among the Chinese clerks, old Hung-Lo came out of the next room, rubbing his hands, chuckling senilely, and making genuflections to Shore.

The customs' man went straight to the point. "I want to hire a junk of about a hundred and fifty tons—have got?"

"Can do," exclaimed Hung-Lo, with alacrity. "Can do—have got—mlaster come this way, take look—see."

He rolled out of the office with an unsteady, sidelong gait, and Shore followed him to the jetty. The Chinese pointed out the very junk which Shore had intended he should; and, upon Shore nodding his approval, they climbed aboard.

The customs' man made a comprehensive search of the vessel, and found it hard and sound in every respect. An idea came to him, and he spoke to Hung-Lo in Chinese.

"Perhaps I want to hide something—put away so no can find people hunt—can do?"

Again the senile chuckle. "Can do—have got." And they descended into the hold of the vessel. It was quite dark and dirty, and Shore kept his hand on his revolver. The Chinese fumbled about and lighted a lantern; and, after some little time, indicated a piece of the flooring, which he struck heavily with his foot. The wood revolved, and showed an aperture ten by twelve feet. It was a false bottom, and ran the entire length of the hold. Beneath this could be stowed enough opium for a king's ransom, almost. Shore grasped the lantern and lowered himself into the aperture. It was fully six feet deep, for Shore could stand quite erect within it.

"Good?" queried the Chinese.

"Very good," replied Shore. The aperture was closed, and they regained the deck again.

"When you want?" asked the Chinese.

Shore had been calculating the probable outcome of things. The ship from Bombay would, in all likelihood, come in to-day. The opium would be transferred from her to the hold of the junk that night, and the next night it would be sent upriver. If he slipped on this, he would lose the information he sought. So he ventured.

"To-morrow night," he said.

To his joy, the face of the Chinese clouded. "No can do to-mollow night. Gentlemen—three-piecee gentlemen—they come to-day catchee junk for to-mollow night. Can do any other night."

"Friday maybe do," said Shore, not wishing to let suspicion rest upon him. "I'm not sure, but I'll see my partner and let you know Friday morning. Can do?"

The Chinese wagged his head. Shore got to the jetty and into his rickshaw. He was whirled away in the direction of the hotel, where he had left his bag earlier in the day. He arrived there, secured it, and went to the Hotel America, where he was tolerably sure that none of the Compania Real crowd would be likely to see him.

His first task, after having obtained a room with a bath from the German proprietor of the so-called American Hotel, was to spend half an hour in writing two telegrams to Canton.

One was to Croftonleigh, and read:

Detail Heron bring *Tao-tai*, Hongkong, by six o'clock to-morrow night. Imperative. Chance consummation my work. Bring launch off Pacific Mail dock. Writing.

The other was to Heron:

Prepare launch for journey, Hongkong. Deal out sand and sugar plentifully. Croftonleigh will order you to reach Victoria Pacific Mail dock by six. Don't fail; most important. Writing.

He explained more explicitly in the letters which he wrote that night and registered to Canton. They would go aboard the six-o'clock boat, and would arrive in Canton next morning.

Meanwhile, it might be well to state that the "sand and sugar" in Shore's

telegram to Heron meant "revolvers and ammunition" by prearranged code.

CHAPTER VII.

THE JUNK.

It seemed as though luck were playing the game straight into Shore's hands. The whole thing was absurdly simple when one reduced it down to motives and effects. It was quite evident that the Compania Real cared to take no chances in using a vessel that belonged to their own company for smuggling purposes; not that they cared anything about the loss of a vessel seized, but they could not afford to have their complicity in this business discovered. Shore wondered that the Compania Real had not fallen under suspicion before; but, like most things that are too obvious, they had escaped attention.

He ate his dinner at the hotel, surrounded by newly arrived people. A Pacific Mail liner from San Francisco had just deposited a load of schoolteachers and clerks for the Philippine service, who were to transship for Manila; and Shore was rather amused at the glowing pictures they were painting to themselves of life in Manila on twelve hundred a year. Most of the people were of the civil service, and had been appointed from small country towns, where twelve hundred meant affluence. Shore smiled grimly at their visions, for he knew how soon they would be dissipated.

He dallied longer with his meal, listening to their chatter, and arose from the table when the hour hand of the clock was close to eight. He strolled out on the terrace of the hotel, smoking his after-dinner cigar, and looked over the city, down and uphill. Below, the steel blue of the electric lights came in winks and flashes; out in the bay, the lights of merchantmen and men-of-war shone fitfully; while on the crest of the great hill, two thousand feet above the water, shone very dimly the lights of the Peak Hotel.

The evening air was chilly, and Shore went within to fetch his overcoat. Muffled in it, he descended the many stone steps that led to Wyndham Street, and took his way toward the dock of the Compania Real. His residence in Hongkong before he came to Canton had given him an accurate knowledge of the city; and, besides, he had rather a striking bump of locality. Rickshaw men clamored before him, but he found the air bracing, and decided to walk.

It was necessary that he should confirm his suspicions with regard to the steamer arriving from Bombay; and when he reached the dock he was glad to note that the black hulk of an ocean-going craft, here and there an occasional light shining from portholes, was ranged alongside the dock, and coolies were busily engaged in working out the cargo. Shore did not linger at the dock, but took his way onward to Hung-Lo's jetty. All was dark there, and Shore walked on to a second jetty, near by, and took a seat on an upstanding pile.

It was quite as easy to meditate here as elsewhere, and at the same time to keep a watch upon the doings of the conspirators. Shore had much food for thought. He was on the eve of a stroke that would make for him name, fame, and fortune, and give him the right to ask Maisie Kerr what he had so long kept to himself. Her face came to him out of the blue haze of night, framed in the light of the stars; and Shore did not dismiss the vision or warn himself against dreaming, for the accomplishment of his end was very near, now.

This thing meant all in all to him; it meant a position in the world that would command respect, a salary adequate for the comforts of life, and the sweetest girl in the world to share it with him. He smoked cigarette after cigarette in his imaginings, and out of the blue smoke trickling upward came many dreams.

He watched and waited for some hours before any sign of life on Hung-Lo's jetty became apparent. The first intimation he had of the work to be done was the sound of horses straining under a heavy load, and the sharp

crack of a driver's whip. Then several drays pulled up before the jetty, and a number of coolies, who had been running alongside, took up their places in a long line stretching from the street clear over and onto the junk. A European was directing their movements.

The work began. Something was tossed out by the first coolie, who stood in the wagon, to the nearest man of the line, who tossed it on, turning to catch the second something from the man in the wagon. The coolies heaved the merchandise along, chanting a low-pitched "Aie-aie" all the while. Their eyes, trained to the darkness, saw the things that the average man does not see.

The loading of Hung-Lo's junk lasted for something like an hour. Shore had discontinued his smoking, and was seated behind the pile, from which point of vantage he might hear and see, but be invisible to any one save those on the water side. Presently there came the noise of the drays moving away. Lights that had gleamed aboard the junk were extinguished. Men's voices grew fainter in the distance. After awhile all was silence, save for the single man pacing the deck of the junk —a watchman, by all accounts.

Shore waited until this man disappeared below the deck, and then took himself off swiftly and with caution, glancing around in the darkness and keeping his right hand on his revolver, which lay loosely in the pocket of his overcoat. He made his way onward, ever glancing to the rear and to both sides of him; once a figure bobbed up in the darkness, but it was only a peaceable Chinese watchman. Shore regained the lighted King's Road, and breathed out a sigh of relief.

It was quite evident that there was nothing more to be done that night, so he took himself off to bed, and slept quite soundly and peacefully. He was up at eight and ate breakfast, after which he took a brisk walk about the town, and bought some haberdashery, stopping in a tailor's also, and ordering a civilian's suit of gray.

He took a trip down to the jetty again, and found the junk still there. Once more he interviewed Hung-Lo with regard to hiring the junk for Friday night.

"When does she get back? I want to load to-morrow afternoon," he said.

Old Hung-Lo calculated. "She leave here—nine o'clock night——" he said, as furrows of thoughts appeared on his wrinkled old countenance. "I guess, maybe," he said, after a while, "she get back noon Fliday—all light?"

Shore said it was; and then began to chaffer as to the price of hiring it. It appeared that old Hung-Lo did not risk his junk for smuggling purposes without getting an enormous return for it. The price he asked for its use was beyond all reason, except for one indulging in something illegal. Shore tried to beat him down, in order to convince him of his earnestness, but the old Chinese stuck firmly to a high figure, and would not be moved from it. Shore, having finally agreed to show up Friday morning with the money, took his departure, glorying in the fact that he had discovered the time for the junk to sail. Nine o'clock that night!

He had nothing more to do, now, except to wait for Heron to come with the *Tao-tai;* and he knew enough of Heron to be quite sure that he would be on time. He had received answers to his telegrams of the night before from both Croftonleigh and Heron, stating that the *Tao-tai* would be in by six o'clock; and when he reached the Pacific Mail dock at that hour, he was not surprised to see the trim electric launch come in a few moments later. He boarded her, and saw the welcome faces of Heron and Ah-Let.

The launch carried a supplemented crew, for two of the customs' watchers had been taken aboard by advice of Croftonleigh, who wanted no chances to be taken. 'Arry 'Arper was one of them, for the little cockney was known to be a dead shot with the revolver; the other man was a former master-at-arms in the United States Navy, and possessed a fist like a ball of iron. Shore collected the three white men and Ah-Let; and, barring them in the little cab-

in, he outlined just what had happened, and how much he had discovered.

Heron, on his part, submitted that each of the Chinese crew—six in all, without counting the engineer, who was a Scotchman—had been provided with the *parangs** and seven-chambered revolvers. As the Chinese in question all knew how to use their revolvers, they were capable of making a formidable attack. Heron unbuckled his blouse and showed a brace of revolvers in holsters. Harper and the master-at-arms, Sandys by name, were likewise armed; and Sandys nodded with grim significance toward a hand spike on a bracket.

"For close quarters, gimme that," he said. "I've been on many a ship where I seen mutiny put down with one of them things. Does more harm than a dinky gun." The others looked at Sandys' knotted hands, and were inclined to believe him.

"How's the searchlight?" was one of the questions that Shore put to Heron; and the Devonshire man switched on the current, and sent a triangular flare of white light for fully two miles across Hongkong Bay.

Shore shut it off.

"It's just what I asked Croftonleigh to give us," he said gratefully. "Now, Heron, we'll change the position of those lights we're carrying, and haul down the customs' ensign. We don't want any one to know there's a customs' boat in the bay."

The desired changes were made; and finally the electric craft shot out, keeping along the shore half a mile out, until they were abreast of the jetty of Hung-Lo. Having achieved their position, Shore ordered that the boat's lights be covered with oilskins, and a sharp watch kept out lest they should be run down by some craft to whom they would be invisible. Directions having been given, and Harry Harper, who had eyes like a cat and could see even in foggy weather, left on the little bridge with a pair of binoculars, the other three went below and played poker for an hour or more.

*Short swords.

It was a little after eight when the tube connecting with the bridge blew violently. Shore sent Ah-Let, who was squatting near the table, "topside," to find out the trouble. Ah-Let came tumbling back with the information that Harper had seen the junk move out of the jetty and upstream.

There was no time to lose, now. Quickly Shore took the tube communicating with the engineer, and directed him to start the dynamos. Immediately the whirring of the machinery began to shake the little craft; and the three Anglo-Saxons tumbled up the ladder to the deck.

"Gorblimey—there she goes!" shrilled 'Arry 'Arper, at the top of his voice. He was dancing in excitement. "See 'er go—my stars!"

Shore took the binoculars from his hand; but his eyes were not yet accustomed to the darkness, and he saw nothing.

"She ain't a-carryin' lights—not 'er," Harper informed him. "No bally fear! Doan't you see 'er?"

"No, I don't," said Shore. "You'd better take the wheel, Harry, and shape her course. Or I'll steer, if you'll stand by and direct me."

"Right-o. I've got to 'ave me glawsses. Now, east by nor'east—right-o—keep 'er there."

The machinery once started, the little launch glided through the water without sound, save for the rippling of the water as her sharp bow sent up clouds of spume. "Keep a bright eye for any craft in the way. It's a bad night to be traveling without lights."

"Trust me," said 'Arry 'Arper.

Shore, his eyes on the darkness ahead of him, spoke to Heron. "Pass the word to the men to look alive, and be ready for what's to come—and pass the word to McDougall to keep the engines down to their lowest rate of speed. We mustn't catch up with the junk and pass her. We've got to keep well behind. It's lucky for us there's a brisk wind and she's making good time."

Seen through the eyes of Harry Harper, the junk was indeed making splendid time. The wind was well to the

northeast, and filled her great lateen sails to bulging. She careened ahead under it like some huge bird of prey, veering always a little to one side or the other, and never for a moment keeping an erect position. With the dynamos well under control, the launch was able to keep in her wake without trouble.

It was a cloudy night, with no moon, and only an occasional star glimmering here and there out of masses of black clouds. Had it not been for the nighthawk vision of Harper, they might several times have collided with other craft coming down the river. Once a big steamer from Canton loomed up upon them suddenly on the starboard bow, and the man on the bridge yelled execrations, and demanded to know the name of the craft that violated the rules of the river by carrying no lights. They maintained a discreet silence, and swept out of earshot.

The cruise was monotonous. Hours passed. When they expected to see the gray light of the morning, they found it was only twelve o'clock. But the expectation of what was to come kept both white men and Chinese on the alert, and drove the desire for sleep away.

They had won pretty well up the Pearl River by three o'clock in the morning; and now the junk showed some signs of changing her course. Heron, old to the river, told Shore that at this point there was a sheltered cove and a fishing settlement. The junk veered in its course. Presently, it shot off at right angles, and disappeared altogether from view.

"Looks like trouble's beginning," said Shore. He reached down and buckled his high boots a trifle more tightly, and loosened his revolver with his left hand.

Slowly, Heron, who now had the wheel, veered about and brought the craft on a point with the opening of the graphite rocks within which the junk had disappeared. Then power was shut off, and they drifted gently toward the cove.

Nothing could be done until the smugglers tried to land their cargo; for any one who chose might travel up and down the Pearl River with a cargo of opium, so long as they did not try to land it on Chinese soil. But every one was quite sure that the landing would begin in a very short while, and they had no wish to scare the smugglers before the latter began their work.

Ah-Let had gone to his compatriots in the crew, and was giving Shore's instructions in low gutturals. Sandys gripped his handspike. Harry Harper held binoculars in one hand and gun in the other. Heron had the wheel, but his revolvers hung loose in their holsters.

Shore was perhaps the least excited of any, in appearance. He gave his orders in quiet tones, and it seemed that he was not particularly interested in the affair. But his heart was beating so rapidly that he was afraid his companions heard it. All was staked on this single throw of the dice; position, Maisie—all!

"Low speed," he directed McDougall, when they had hung almost motionless in the stream for fully a quarter of an hour. "Low speed."

The dynamos whirred again, and the little boat went forward. They passed within the cove; the great rock walls towered above them as they slipped through the narrow channel. Now they were within the little bay. Out of the distance came the low chant of coolies handling cargo.

"There!" said Harper, in a low, tense whisper. "There she blows—blawst me!"

They all saw the craft dimly, now, for long exposure to the black night had sharpened their sight. They could see better because of the faint flare of some torches stuck upright on the sandy beach. The junk was grounded on the sand, and coolies were hustling her cargo off as rapidly as it could be done.

"Now, Heron," directed Shore; "quick—run her alongside." He gripped the speaking tube to the engine room. "Full speed."

The launch gave a great heave forward. "Grappling hooks, quick!" he

said to Ah-Let, who passed the word to the Chinese. "Stand ready to board her!"

It was but a matter of moments, now. "Low speed," shouted Shore down the tube. The vessel slacked. "Off altogether." As he spoke, the launch grated against the sides of the junk. Her motion ceased. The hooks, attached to heavy hawsers, were flung upward by the experienced sailors, and caught the rail of the junk.

"Now—follow me!"

Shore caught one of the hawsers and gripped the rail. He had one leg over it in a twinkling, and landed on the deck. The next second he backed to the rail, and his revolver spoke out. A Chinese who was rushing at him, an iron pin in hand, dropped, and the iron clattered to the boards.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NIGHT ATTACK.

It was quite evident that the crew on board were intending to take no chances as to the identity of the attackers. They were engaged in a hazardous deal, which meant much money if they won, and a term of imprisonment, at the least, if they lost. It might mean much more, for Chinese law is drastic in dealing with offenders. No doubt, by asserting their nationality, foreigners might escape death; but there was no chance for the Chinese crew. They knew quite well that their heads would fall under the executioner's sword.

They seemed to be prepared for just such an emergency as this one; and all came rushing toward the rail over which the attacking party was scrambling. Harper was the second man over the rail, and Sandys was close on his heels.

"Steady on, there," shouted Shore. "Keep close."

"Right-o," sang out Harry Harper.

They did not have time to observe the coming of the rest of the crew, for in a minute they were in the middle of such a mêlée as would have formed the substance of a horrible nightmare. Coolies, naked to the waist and pouring sweat from their labors, rushed upon them, knives, belaying pins, marline spikes, and other weapons in hand. A knife gleamed close to Shore, and he fired again. The next moment his wrist was gripped, and he felt the hot breath of a coolie in his nostrils. He drew back his fist, and struck the man below the ear. His grasp loosened, and the coolie drew back, the knife in his other hand and murder in his eyes. Shore kicked him viciously on the kneecap, and he went down.

There was one European who was urging the crew on; and when the noise resolved itself into sections, Shore made out the voice, with a great thrill. Here was Malken, now. Here was the chance to see that he did no further smuggling, and to repay the humiliations Shore had suffered at his hands. He began to try to force his way through the throng to Malken's side.

By this time his crew had won to the deck, and one of them lay stretched out, a knife clean through his bosom. The other five were briskly alive to their peril, and were fighting their compatriots in good Chinese style. Sandys, scorning to use his revolver, swung the heavy handspike about, and the heads of the Chinese cracked before it like so many rotten gourds.

Shore noted the effect of Sandys' strength upon the men; and, with a sudden resolve, shoved his revolver into his holster, and grabbed up a marline spike which some one had dropped. His strength was fully as great as that of Sandys, and he knew it. In a moment he was at the side of the ex-navy man; and the two swung their spikes in unison.

It was the deciding point of the fight. The Chinese, appalled by the spectacle of two demons wielding these terrible weapons, retreated. Firearms or knives they did not fear, because they inflicted clean wounds, and the dead one went to Gautama whole and beautiful in body. But these fearful weapons that crushed a man's head out of all recognizance were much to be feared, for heavenly salvation might be denied the one who fell by them.

The customs' people were closing in on the smugglers from all sides. There was hardly a chance in the world for them, if they stayed to fight. With one accord, the coolies cried out for flight; but Malken's voice rang above the din, yelling in Chinese:

"Dogs! Cowards! Children of hogs! Sons of diseased grandfathers!" and other choice Chinese insults.

Heedless of his protestations, they fled, diving over the rail and into the water. The deck was almost free of them, now. Quickly Shore advanced on Malken, but the ex-customs' inspector waited for no such meeting. With great celerity, he disappeared down the ladder into the hold.

Shore caught up a lantern and dived down after him. The light fell on the cargo and the various articles used in unloading. But there was no Malken. Shore flashed the lantern about in the dark corners, but there was no one to be seen.

Heron and Sandys came down after him, with weapons ready to hand. Shore threw open the trap and descended into the hold. Still, there was no one to be seen. But a cargo vent-door gave him the clue. Malken had thrown it open and escaped into the water.

"Well," said Shore, a little later, as they gathered about the deck, "he's gotten away again. It's hopeless to try to lay fingers on him. The main thing is that we have the opium, and that we know whose opium it is. I think that by to-morrow the Compania Real will suspend operations in Hongkong."

There remained only the assigning of a crew to navigate the junk up to Canton. Six men were necessary, and, as one of their Chinese was dead, Shore assigned the little cockney to help with the work. Heron he put in charge, while Sandys and Ah-Let remained on the launch with him.

The thing to do was to make haste immediately for Canton, and get into communication with Croftonleigh; after which, the telegraph wire would be utilized to request the chief of Hongkong police to issue immediately warrants for the arrest of the three Portuguese Da Silvas, Hunnewell, and Malken. It would be quite evident that Malken would not be there; but if the telegrams were sent before Malken could get the alarm into Hongkong, the other parties to the crime would be in the hands of the law.

So, leaving the majority of his men on the junk, Shore gave instructions to the engineer to put on full speed and make way to the Shameen. Sandys took the wheel, while Shore stood on the lookout. The lights of the launch had been uncovered, however, and the danger was not what it had been when they traveled without lights.

The boat sped up the bay, Shore's pulses beating vigorously, his cheeks flushing with pleasure. For he had won out, after all, and obtained the evidence he needed. He was on a fair way to all that he had hoped for, now. Fortune had most certainly been good for him.

And presently the faint lights of the Bund came in sight, and speed was slackened. Shore called down the tube to be ready to lie to off the French concession, for Croftonleigh's house was almost on a level with the landing steps there. The Bund was growing more distinct, as the sky began to be shot with the streaks of gray that precede the dawn.

"You'll take charge of the boat, Sandys," said Shore. "And Ah-Let will stay with you. Take her down off the watch-tower, and wait there for me. We may have use for her in an hour or so."

The launch slacked down, and presently rocked off the landing steps. Shore stepped off and to the Bund, and the launch backed off again. Had Shore looked behind him, he would have seen another figure drop quietly into the water from the off side, and float without noise until the launch was well out of earshot. Then the man, with a few lusty strokes, gained the shore, and slipped off his sodden shoes. Tossing them into the water, he followed Shore stealthily.

When Malken had seen that his chance was gone on the junk, he had slipped below into the hold, let himself

out of the cargo slide, and quietly clambered on board the customs' launch. Concealed under a tarpaulin, he had journeyed all the way with Shore, and with a murderous hate in his heart. He knew that this man had succeeded in every way where he had lost; and he also knew that the one person for whom he had any affection was bound up in his victorious rival.

Malken's end in the Orient had come. He knew he had no chance, now, but escape. Over there in the offing lay one of the Compania Real's Philippine boats, sailing with the tide next morning. He might get aboard her with the captain's aid, and get away safely to the Philippines; but before he did so, he would settle accounts with this man who had done so much to worst him in his plans.

For Malken knew quite well that the knell of the opium trade had been sounded, and his rope run. During the years that he had held office in the customs, he had been actively engaged in passing smuggled goods. When he was in charge, opium was brought in boldly, and labeled anything they chose. Malken had amassed a small fortune in gratuities from the companies and individuals with whom he worked hand and glove. He had something like ten thousand pounds—and, had he dissipated less, would have had double that sum—deposited to his credit in the Insular Bank at Manila. Once there, under another name, he might go to the United States, Europe—anywhere but China—and be an independently wealthy man on a small scale.

He was perfectly safe. No one had seen him leave the launch. They were not looking for him in Canton; they supposed him to be down the river. Few would imagine such an audacious act as escaping on an enemy's boat. Malken might have made his way to the Philippine steamer without being questioned.

But he could not think of Shore escaping. That was the bitter pill; and so he threw the future to the wind, and followed the man he hated. His revolver and cartridges were wet, and he had no other weapon. So he must leap on Shore from behind, and get possession of his revolver. The rest would be easy—and then American soil for him.

At the Lammouch house Shore stopped for a moment and kissed his hand upward; it was a lapse into sentiment such as came but seldom to Shore. This night, however, one might excuse him. He had won the girl he loved, he believed, and the right to ask her to be his wife.

"Maisie, Maisie, dear," he murmured.

Malken heard, and his teeth showed evilly from between his insufficient lips. With a sudden snarl, he was on Shore's back, and one hand caught for the revolver, while the other gripped the customs' man's neck.

It was a grip such as few men can cope with. Shore had no idea of the identity of his assailant, but he knew him immediately for a man of giant strength. The left arm had closed about his neck in such a way that Shore gasped for breath and his knees weakened. He tugged, threw out his chest, and gave a tremendous shake, as a dog might endeavor to dislodge a cat. But his movement gave the game to Malken, for the butt of the revolver came into Malken's hand, and he pulled out the weapon.

Shore lost no time in realizing his danger. He grabbed at the arm holding the revolver, but not before Malken got his finger to the trigger. The next second, the weapon exploded, with a crash that awoke the echoes of the night and reverberated through the trees. Shore felt a quick, stinging pain in his arm, and he knew that he had been shot.

Fortunately, it was his left arm. His right arm was still uninjured. He clutched the smoking weapon, and held it high in air. His arm burned and pained as though it were being gouged with a red-hot poker. His teeth bit into his lips. He wanted to cry out in pain.

Malken's fist shot out and caught him heavily on the cheek bone. Shore felt numbed, and his teeth ached from the

shock, but he hung to the revolver desperately. He tried giving a quick turn, but Malken was equal to that. His right hand also held the revolver with a grim grip; and his left hand, uninjured, was free. Again and again it came into contact with Shore's cheek, until Shore was sure his jaw bone had been smashed to a pulp. Between the pain of the blows and the broken, seared arm, Shore was in an agony that comes to men but seldom.

"Let go, you fool!" breathed Malken. "I won't hurt you if you do. Let go!"

"You liar!" shouted back Shore. "You liar! You'd shoot as soon as I let go."

Malken gave the weapon another pull. Shore still gripped it, but his grasp was weakening. He felt that he must scream with the pain.

Malken came to determination. He discontinued his blows, seized the weapon with both hands, and put all his strength to the task of wrenching it away; his knees bent in his effort.

Slowly Shore began to give way under the grip. He was going. He was to lose all he had fought for, after all; for he knew full well that this man would not spare him when the revolver was free. He would die as surely as he now lived.

A final wrench, and the thing was done. Shore staggered back against the iron railings, one arm loosely hanging, his face set and stern. Slowly Malken raised the revolver.

His beady eyes glittered; his yellow teeth showed in a grin under his short lips. He seemed somewhat concerned about getting the right sight on the weapon. Several times he looked up and down the sight, and it did not suit him. The moments were agony for Shore.

Shoot, and be done with it," he said sullenly.

"I'm taking aim," said Malken, and raised the revolver again. "Got anything to say before you go, Shore?"

"No—not to you."

Malken squinted down the sight. There was an instant report as he did so; and Shore heard it, and wondered that it was so easy to die. To his surprise, Malken toppled, and the revolver fell from his limp fingers. Shore watched him as he lurched back and then forward, caught himself, threw out both his hands to save himself, and fell flat on his face.

Shore was wondering dimly how it all had happened. He knew somehow that he ought to be dead, and a drowsiness overcame him. What puzzled him was that he had felt no new pain.

As he leaned heavily against the railings, he heard a sob, and a soft hand clutched his. "Are you hurt?" came in a little, almost babyish cry. "Oh, dear, are you hurt?"

"Maisie!" he gasped. "Maisie!" In spite of his pain, he turned and faced her. She stood within the garden of the house, clad in a white dressing gown thrown over a lacy nightrobe. Her bare feet were in little Chinese shoes. In one hand she held a revolver.

"Maisie, Maisie," he said dully. "Maisie—my dearest—my dearest—you saved my life, didn't you—dearest?"

Things got dull around him, and he clutched at the railings. He missed them, and tumbled down all in a heap. The girl was at his side, kneeling, holding up his head.

"Jim! Jim!" she wailed. "Jim!" Then: "He's dead. Jim's dead!"

And the night echoes gave back her wail.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRIAL.

What happened after was somewhat hazy to Shore. He recollected nothing whatever, after seeing the girl, until he opened his eyes in a shaded room, an hour or so later. Had he not had so much responsibility weighting him down, it is possible that he would not have recovered consciousness for some time; but the things he had yet to do were too plain to be forgotten, even in the grip of death.

There was a surgeon, his sleeves rolled up, and his hand holding a

sponge, bending over him. On one side of the bed the girl knelt, her eyes big with terror, tear stains on her face. Croftonleigh stood near by, looking set and stern.

Shore saw him through the haze. "Mr. Croftonleigh," he muttered. "Take down—names—Heron will tell rest—take down names—wire Hongkong immediately—the Compania Real people—the Da Silvas—order their arrest before they can get away—and Hunnewell—ah—ah!" He gritted his teeth, for the pain in his arm was greater than he imagined pain might be.

Maisie's soft hand caught his. "Jim, Jim!" she wept. "Are—you—hurt—badly? Does it pain? Jim! Does it pain so much?"

He tried to smile bravely. "No, dear—no——" His fingers lay limply in hers, and his eyes sought Croftonleigh's again. "Wire—quick!" he said, and caught his breath in a quick spasm of agony. "Maisie!" he murmured, and fainted quietly away again.

Days passed before he became conscious once more. The surgeon removed the bullet from his arm; and when he returned early in the morning, he found that Shore had gone off his head with fever. The fight for life began then and there; and Maisie wore herself down to a shadow, hovering over Jim day and night, while the surgeon came four or five times a day to make sure that his patient had no relapses.

And in the meantime, the customs' authorities were working overtime, carrying out the work that Shore had so nearly finished. Before eight o'clock that morning, a captain of police and a squad of Sikhs arrested the three Da Silva brothers in Hongkong, along with Hunnewell. Then the offices and books of the Compania Real were searched and inspected, and a record of black smuggling such as had never before been disclosed was brought to view. Numerous arrests followed those of Da Silva; arrests in Manila, Cebu, and Bombay, not to mention the Chinese merchants of Canton who handled the smuggled opium—chief among whom was the nephew of Kae-Hong, who was following closely in his rascally uncle's footsteps.

So, before Shore was well and about again, there were taken to Canton many men who had formed the opium ring, and who were brought on by the police authorities of the various cities in which they were arrested. The whole thing had worked marvelously, and like clockwork. The Compania Real, so called, was no more or less than a big smuggling concern, with offices in different countries, each of which suffered by their presence there.

Malken, however, the chiefest of the lot, in Shore's estimate, was beyond the reach of the law. The bullet from Maisie's revolver had bored its way cleanly through his temple, and death had been instantaneous. They buried him in the municipal lot of the Shameen, and thought it better to mark his grave with no headstone.

Shore was convalescent when the big trial came off; and was ready to give his evidence, which was backed up by Heron, Sandys, Harper, and Ah-Let. With this and the books and papers before the court, the sentence was not hard to determine. The men were tried by what is known in China as a mixed tribunal; which was composed of American, English, Portuguese, and Chinese judges—each foreigner an official of one of the consulates at either Canton or Hongkong, the Chinese judges appointed by the viceroy. This method of sentencing foreigners had been agreed upon between China and the Powers some years before, and gave a fair trial for all.

There was no partiality shown on account of nationality. Each man on trial was found guilty to a greater or less degree, and, in the case of the minor offenders, fined heavily; where the larger criminals were concerned, no fine was instituted at all, but terms of imprisonment ranging anywhere from ten to two years were imposed. When the court broke up, the opium smugglers of Kwangtung were a thing of the past.

After the trial, Shore and Maisie sat on the Bund. They were formally engaged, now, and life was very sweet for them both. The events of the past were crowding in upon them; and each was asking the other to supply the gaps. Shore had been curious as to how Maisie had saved him. She did not remember very distinctly herself. She had heard the shot, she said—the one that had mangled Shore's arm—and pulled the blind up from her window. Recognizing Shore and Malken, she had seized upon her revolver—a present from her uncle—and hurried downstairs. She opened the front door just as Malken was preparing to fire, and in her anxiety risked all on the one shot. That was all.

They were married shortly after, these two, and sick leave was granted Shore, which he intended to utilize by a honeymoon trip to Japan. He stayed long enough to see Heron promoted to his former position, and Harper and Sandys advanced a grade. Ah-Let, too, came in for a promotion.

Heron was best man at the wedding, to which the customs men turned out in full force, resuscitating frock coats and silk tiles long out of date. Lammouch gave his niece away, and seemed to have, for the occasion, brightened up into something like affability. He was a wise man, and knew that Maisie was her own mistress now, and might do as she liked; so he accepted the inevitable, as a wise man should.

It was after the wedding, and at the farewell dinner at the customs house, that Croftonleigh sprang the surprise upon the men of the "maritime." Dinner was over; all were preparing to go, waiting simply for the last toast to bride and groom. The harbor master arose, cup in hand.

"Ladies and gentleman," he said, "that we all wish Mr. and Mrs. Shore health, prosperity, and wealth, is a thing so evident that it might be left unsaid. If you will forgive the personal note for a moment, I will tell you something which most of you know. I resign as harbor master a month from date, when Mr. Shore returns from Japan; and at that time I shall have the pleasure of presenting to you a new harbor master——" He paused.

"Let us drink his health." The guests looked puzzled. Croftonleigh raised his glass. "I give you the health of the new harbor-master—Mr. James Shore."

When the dramatic silence had passed, there was much applause, clapping of hands, and proposals for cheers, which were given with a will. Shore looked at the faces around him, most of them shining with friendly envy, and felt good to be alive; but when he looked down to the girl at his side, he saw in her eyes something which was worth the looks of all the rest of them.

For she loved him, and was proud of him, you see—this Maisie of his, who was all in all to him.

THE END.

HOW THE "SLIPPERY PILL" IS MADE

OF the large number of persons who play billiards, there are probably few who know much about the cues and balls which they use.

The balls are made of Zanzibar ivory, this variety being softer, more durable, and less liable to crack or chip than the other kind, which is known as Bombay ivory. The greatest care is exercised in the selection of the ivory, and the slightest imperfection in a turned ball will cause its rejection. They are made two and three-thirty-seconds inches in diameter, to allow for turning down, in case of shrinkage, to two and one-sixteenth inches, which is the regulation size.

In the process of making them, they are turned rough, somewhat larger than the size required, and then stored away for a year and a half, or more, to season the ivory, and to permit of any shrinkage or loss of weight that may occur. They are then turned down to the proper size, and finished to be ready for use.

A Tamer of Wild Ones

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Big Medicine," "Andy, the Liar," Etc.

"Broncho-busting" is one of the chief recreations of the cowboy, and in the West a man's worth is largely estimated by his ability to stick upon a bucking cayuse. No great athletic meet in the East is more keenly discussed than are the frequent riding contests among the cattlemen. Every reader of the Happy Family stories knows that Andy Green was a champion rider; so this narrative of his encounter with a "bad actor" will be eagerly welcomed

WHEN the days grow crisp at each end and languorous in the middle; when a haze ripples the skyline into a waving ribbon of faded blue; when the winds and the grasses stop and listen for the first onrush of winter—then it is that the rangeland takes on a certain intoxicating unreality, and range-wild blood leaps with the desire to do something—anything, so it is different, and irresponsible, and not measured by precedent or prudence.

In days like that, one grows venturesome, and ignores difficulties and limitations with a fine disregard, a mental snapping of fingers. On a day like that, the Happy Family, riding together out of Dry Lake with the latest news in mind and speech, urged Andy Green, tamer of wild ones, to enter the rough-riding contest exploited as one of the features of the Northern Montana Fair to be held at Great Falls in two weeks.

Pink could not enter, because a horse had fallen with him and hurt his leg, so that he was picking the gentlest in his string for daily riding. Weary would not, because he had promised his Little Schoolma'am to take care of himself and not take any useless risks; even the temptation of a five-hundred dollar purse and the championship belt could not persuade him that a rough-riding contest is perfectly safe and without the ban. And Irish, the only other "tamer," was away at Chinook. So Andy, impelled by his leaping blood, and urged by the loyal Family, consented and said "he'd try it a whirl, anyway."

They had only ridden four or five miles when the decision was reached, and they straightway turned back and raced into Dry Lake again, so that Andy might write the letter that clinched matters. Then, whooping with the sheer exhilaration of living and being able to ride and whoop unhindered, they galloped back to camp and let the news spread. In a week, all Chouteau County knew that Andy Green would ride for the purse and belt, and nearly all Chouteau County backed him with what money it could command. Those who knew Andy Green, and had seen him ride, made haste to find some one who did not know him, and whose faith in another contestant was strong, and to bet all they could lay hands upon.

For Andy was one of those mild-mannered men whose genius runs to riding horses which object violently to being ridden—one of those lucky fellows who never seem to get their necks broken, however much they may jeopardize them. Moreover, he was that rare genius who can make a "pretty ride," where other broncho fighters resemble nothing so much as a scarecrow

in a high wind. Andy not only could ride—he could ride gracefully. And the reason for that not many knew.

Andy, in the years before he wandered to the range, had danced, in spangled tights, upon the broad rump of a big gray horse that galloped around a sawdust ring with a regularity of movement that suggested a machine, the while a sober-clothed man in the centre cracked a whip and yelped commands. Andy had jumped through blazing hoops and over sagging bunting while he rode—and he was mightily ashamed of the fact. Also—though it does not particularly matter—he had, later in the performance, gone hurtling around the big tent in the garb of an ancient Roman, driving four deep-chested bays abreast.

As has been explained, he never boasted of his circus experience, though his days in spangled tights probably had much to do with his inimitable grace in the saddle. The Happy Family felt, to a man, that Andy would win the purse and add honor to the Flying U in the winning; and they were enthusiastic over the prospect, and willing to bet all they had on the outcome.

The Happy Family, together with the aliens who swelled the crew to round-up size, were foregathered at the largest Flying U corral, watching a bunch of newly bought horses circle, with much snorting and kicking up of dust, inside the fence. It was the interval between beef and calf round-ups, and the witchery of Indian summer held the rangeland in thrall.

Andy, sizing up the bunch and the brands, lighted upon a rangy blue roan which he knew—or thought he knew—and his eyes brightened with desire. If he could get that roan in his string, he told himself, he could go to sleep in the saddle on night guard. An easier horse to ride he never had seen. It was like sitting in grandma's pet rocking-chair when that roan loosened his muscles for a long, tireless gallop over the prairie sod. And as a stayer Andy had never known his equal. It was not his turn to choose, however, and he held his breath, lest the rope of another settle over the slaty-black ears ahead of him.

Cal Emmett roped a plump little black, and led him out, grinning satisfaction; from the white saddle-marks back of the withers, he knew him for a "broke" horse, and he certainly was pretty to look at. Andy gave the animal but a fleeting glance.

Happy Jack spread his loop and climbed down from the fence, almost at Andy's elbow. It was his turn to choose. "I betche that there blue roan over there is a good one," he remarked. "I'm going to tackle him."

Andy took his cigarette from between his lips. "Yuh better hobble your stirrups, then," he discouraged artfully. "I know that roan a heap better than you do."

"Aw, gwan!" Nevertheless, Happy hesitated. "He's got a kind eye in his head; yuh can always go by a horse's eye."

"Can yuh?" Andy smiled indifferently. "Go after him, then. And I tell yuh, Happy—if yuh ride that blue roan for five successive minutes, I'll give yuh fifty dollars. I knew that hoss down on the Musselshell; he's got a record from here to Dry Lake, and back." It was a bluff, pure and simple, born of his covetousness; but it had the desired effect—or nearly so.

Happy fumbled his rope, and eyed the roan. "Aw, I betche you're just lying," he hazarded bluntly; but, like many another, when he did strike the truth, he failed to recognize it. "I betche——"

"All right, rope him out and climb on, if yuh don't believe me." Andy's tone was tinged with injury. "There's fifty dollars—yes, by gosh, I'll give yuh a *hundred* dollars if yuh ride him for five minutes straight."

A conversation of that character, carried on near the top of two full-lunged voices, never fails, in the rangeland, to bring an audience of every male human within hearing. All other conversations and interests were imme-

diately suspended, and a dozen men trotted up to see what it was all about.

Andy remained roosting on the top rail, his rope coiled loosely and dangling from one arm, while he smoked imperturbably. "Oh, Happy was going to rope out a sure-enough bad one for his night hoss; and out uh the goodness uh my heart, I put him wise to what he was going up against," he explained carelessly. "He acts like he has some thoughts uh doubting my word; so I just offered him a hundred dollars to ride him—that blue roan over there, next that crooked post.

"Get a reserve seat right in front of the grand stand where all the big acts take place," he sang out suddenly, in the regulation circus tone. "Get a seat right in front where Happy Jack the Wild Man rides the bucking broncho! Go on, Happy. Don't keep the audience waiting. Aren't yuh going to earn that hundred dollars?"

Happy Jack turned half a shade redder than was natural. "Aw, gwan! I never said I was going to do no bronco-busting ack. But I betche yuh never seen that roan before he was unloaded in Dry Lake."

"What'll yuh bet I don't know that hoss from a yearling colt?" Andy challenged.

Happy Jack walked away, without replying, and cast his loop sullenly over the first horse he came to—which was *not* the roan.

Chip, coming up to hear the last of it, turned and looked long at the horse in question—a mild-mannered horse, standing by a crooked corral post and flicking his ears at the flies. "Do you know that roan?" he asked Andy, in the tone which brings truthful answer.

Andy had one good point; he never lied except in an irresponsible mood of pure deviltry. He never had lied seriously, for instance, to an employer.

"Sure, I know that hoss," he answered truthfully.

"Did you ever ride him?"

"No," Andy admitted, still truthfully. "I never rode him myself, but I worked right with a Lazy Six rep that had him in his string, down at the U up-and-down, two years ago. I know the hoss, all right; but I did lie when I told Happy I knowed him from a colt. I spread it on a little bit thick, there." He smiled engagingly down at Chip.

"And he's a bad one, is he?" Chip queried over his shoulder, just as he was about to walk away.

"Well," Andy evaded, still clinging to the truth, "he ain't a hoss I'd like to see Happy Jack go up against. I ain't saying, though, that he can't be *rode*. I don't say that about *any* hoss."

"Is he any worse than Glory, when Glory is feeling peevish?" Weary asked, when Chip was gone, and while the men still lingered.

Andy, glancing to make sure that Chip was out of hearing, threw away his cigarette, and yielded to temptation. "Glory?" he snorted, with a fine contempt. "Why, Glory's a lamb beside that blue roan! Why, that hoss throwed Buckskin Jimmy clean out of a corral! Did yuh ever see Buckskin Jimmy ride? Well, say, yuh missed a pretty sight, then; Jimmy's a sure-enough rider. About the only animal he ever failed to connect with for keeps is that same cow-backed hoss yuh see over there. Happy says he's got a kind eye in his head——" Andy stopped, and laughed till they all laughed with him. "By gosh, Happy ought to step up on him, once, and see how *kind* he is!" He laughed again, until Happy, across the corral, saddling the horse he had chosen, muttered profanely at the derision which he knew was pointed at himself.

"Why, I've seen that hoss——" Andy Green, once fairly started in the fascinating path of romance, invented details for the pure joy of creation. If he had written some of the tales he told, and had sold the writing for many dollars, he would have been famous. Since he did not write them for profit, but told them for fun, instead, he earned merely the reputation of being a great liar. A significant mark of his genius lay in the fact that his stories never failed to convince; not until afterward did his audience doubt.

That is why the blue roan was not

chosen in any of the strings, but was always left circling in the corral after a loop had settled. That is why the Flying U boys looked at him askance, as they passed him by.

That is, also, why a certain Mr. Coleman, sent by the board of directors to rake Northern Montana for bad horses, looked with favor upon the blue roan, when he came to the Flying U ranch and heard the tale of his exploits as interpreted—or, rather, created—by one Andy Green.

"We've got to have him," he declared enthusiastically. "If he's as bad as all that, he'll be the star performer at the contest, and make that five-hundred-dollar plum a hard one to pick. Some of these gay boys have entered with the erroneous idea that that same plum is hanging loose, and all they've got to do is lean up against the tree and it'll drop in their mouths. We've got to have that roan. I'll pay you a good price for him, Whitmore, if you won't let him go any other way. We've got a reporter up there that can do him up brown in a special, and people will come in bunches to see a horse with that kind of a pedigree. Is it Green, here, that knows the horse and what he'll do? You're sure of him, are you, Green?"

Andy took time to roll a cigarette. He had not expected any such development as this, and he needed to think of the best way out. All he had wanted or intended, at first, was to discourage Happy Jack from claiming the blue roan; he wanted him in his own string. Afterward, when they had pestered him about the roan's record, he admitted to himself that he had, maybe, overshot the mark and told it a bit too scary—and too convincingly. Under the spell of fancy, he had done more than make the roan unpopular as a round-up horse; he had made him a celebrity in the way of outlaw horses. And they wanted him in the rough-riding contest! Andy, perhaps, had never before been placed in just such a position.

"Are you sure of what the horse will do?" Mr. Coleman repeated, seeing that Andy was hesitating.

Andy licked his cigarette, twisted an end, and leaned backward while he felt for a match. From the look of his face, you never could have told how very uncomfortable he felt. "Naw," he drawled. "I ain't never sure of what *any* hoss will do. I've had too much dealings with 'em for any uh that brand uh foolishness." He lighted the cigarette as if that were the only matter in which he took any real interest; but he was thinking fast.

Mr. Coleman looked nonplused. "But I thought—you said——"

"What I said," Andy retorted evenly, "hit the blue roan two years ago; maybe he's reformed since then. I dunno. Nobody's rode him, here." He could not resist a sidelong glance at Happy Jack. "There was some talk of it, but it never come to a head."

"Yuh offered me a hundred dollars to——" Happy Jack began accusingly.

"And yuh never made no move to earn it, that I know of. By gosh, yuh all seem to think I ought to mind-read that hoss! I ain't seen him for two years. Maybe so, he's a real wolf yet; maybe so, he's a sheep." He threw out his hands, to point the end of the argument—so far as he was concerned—and walked away, before they could betray him into deeper deceit.

It did seem to him rather hard that, because he had wanted the roan badly enough to—er—exercise a little diplomacy to get him, they should keep harping on the subject like that. And to have Coleman making medicine to get the roan into that contest, was, to say the least, sickening. Andy's private belief was that a twelve-year-old girl could go round up the milk cows on that horse. He had never known him to make a crooked move; and he had ridden beside him all one summer, and had seen him in all places, and under all conditions. He was a dandy cow horse, and dead gentle; all this talk made him tired. Andy had forgotten that he himself started the talk.

Coleman went often to the corral, when the horses were in, and looked at the blue roan. Later, he rode on to other ranches where he had heard there

were bad horses, and left the roan for further consideration. Andy breathed more freely, and put his mind to the coming contest and the things he meant to do with the purse and belt—and with the other contestants.

"That Diamond G twister is going t' ride," Happy Jack announced, one day, when he came from town. "Some uh the boys was in town, and they said so. He can ride, too. I betche Andy don't have no picnic gitting the purse away from *that* feller. And Coleman's got that sorrel outlaw uh the HS. I betche Andy'll have to pull leather on that one." This was, of course, treason pure and simple; but Happy Jack's prophecies were never taken seriously.

Andy simply grinned at him. "Put your money on the Diamond G twister," he advised calmly. "I know him—he's a good rider, too. His name's Billy Roberts. Uh course, I aim to beat him to it; but Happy never does like to have a sure thing. He wants something to hang his jaw down over. Put your money on Billy and watch it fade away, Happy."

"Aw, gwan! I betche that there sorrel——"

" I rode that there sorrel once, and combed his forelock with both spurs alternate," Andy lied boldly. "He's pickings. Take him back, and bring me a real hoss."

Happy Jack wavered. "Well, I betche yuh don't pull down that money," he predicted vaguely. "I betche yuh git throwed, or something. It don't do to be too blame sure uh nothing."

Whereat Andy laughed derisively, and went away whistling. "I wish I was as sure uh living till I was a thousand years old, and able to ride nine months out uh every year of 'em," he called back to Happy. Then he took up the tune where he had left off.

For the days were still crisp at both ends and languorous in the middle, and wind and grasses hushed and listened for the coming of winter. And because of these things, and his youth, and his health, the heart of Andy Green was light in his chest.

It was but three days to the opening of the fair when Coleman, returning from his diligent combing of the range for bad horses, clattered, with his gleanings and three or four men to help drive them, down the grade to the Flying U. And in the Flying U coulée, just across the creek from the corrals, still rested the round-up tents, for a space. For the shipping was over early, and work was not urgent. And Chip and the Old Man, in their enthusiasm for the rough-riding contest and their own man, had decided to take the wagons and crew entire to Great Falls, and camp throughout the four days of the fair. The boys all wanted to go, anyway, as did everybody else; so that nothing could be done until it was over. It was a novel idea, and it tickled the humor of the Happy Family.

The "rough bunch," as the bad horses were called, was corralled; and the men made merry with the round-up crew. Diamond G men they were, loudly proclaiming their faith in Billy Roberts, and offering bets already against Andy, who listened, undisturbed, and had very little to say. The Happy Family had faith in him, and that was enough. If everybody, he told them, believed that he would win, where would be the fun of riding and showing them?

It was after their early supper that Coleman came down to camp on the heels of Chip and the Old Man. Straightway he sought out Andy, like a man who has something on his mind. Though Andy did not in the least know what it was, he recognized the indefinable symptons, and braced himself mentally; he half suspected that it was something about that blue roan again, and he was getting a little bit tired of the blue roan—enough so that, though he had chosen him for his string, he had not yet put saddle to his back, but waited until the round-up started out once more, when he would ride him in turn.

It was the blue roan, without doubt. Coleman came to a stop directly in front of Andy, and, as directly, came to the point.

"Look here, Green," he began. "I'm

shy on horses for that contest, and Whitmore and Bennett say I can have that roan you've got in your string. If he's as bad as you claim, I sure must have him. But you seem to have some doubts of what he'll do, and I'd like to see him ridden, once. Your shingle is out as a broncho peeler. Will you ride him this evening, so I can size him up for that contest?"

Andy glanced up under his eyebrows, and then sidelong at the crowd. Every man within hearing was paying strict attention, and was eyeing him expectantly; for broncho fighting is a spectacle that never palls.

"Well, I can ride him, if yuh say so," Andy made cautious answer; "but I won't gamble he's a bad hoss *now*—that is, bad enough to take to the Falls. Yuh don't want to expect——"

"Oh, I don't expect anything—only I want to see him ridden once. Come on! No time like the present. If he's bad, you'll have to ride him at the fair, anyhow; and a little practice won't hurt you. And if he isn't, I want to know it for sure."

"It's a go with me," Andy said indifferently, though he secretly felt much relief. The roan would go off like a pet dog, and he could pretend to be somewhat surprised, and declare that he had reformed. Bad horses do reform, sometimes, as Andy and every other man in the lot knew. Then there would be no more foolish speculation about the cayuse; and Andy could keep him, in peace, and have a mighty good cow pony, as he had schemed.

He smoked a cigarette while Chip had the horses corralled, and then led the way willingly, with twenty-five men following expectantly at his heels. Unlike Andy, they fully expected an impromptu exhibition of fancy riding. Not all of them had seen Andy atop a bad horse; and the Diamond G men, in particular, were eager to witness a sample of his skill.

The blue roan submitted to the rope, and there was nothing spectacular in the saddling. Andy kept his cigarette between his lips, and smiled to himself when he saw the saddle bunch hazed out of the gate, and the big corral left empty of every animal save the blue roan—as was customary when a man tackled a horse with the record which he had given the poor beast. Also, the sight of twenty-five men, roosting high, their boot heels hooked under a corral rail to steady them, their faces writ large with expectancy, amused him inwardly. He pictured the disappointment when the roan trotted around the corral once or twice at his bidding, and smiled again.

"If you can't top him, Green, we'll send for Billy Roberts. *He'll* take off the rough edge, and gentle him down for yuh," taunted a Diamond G man.

"Don't get excited till the show starts," Andy advised, holding the cigarette in his fingers while he emptied his lungs of smoke. Just to make a pretense of caution, he shook the saddle tentatively by the horn, and wished that the roan would make a little show of resistance, instead of standing there lilke an old cow—lacking only the cud, as Andy complained to himself, to make the resemblance complete. The roan did lay back an ear when Andy, the cigarette again in his lips, put his toe in the stirrup.

"Go after it, you weather-beaten old sawbuck!" Andy yelled, just to make the play strong, before he was fairly in the saddle.

Then it was that the Happy Family—heart, and soul, and pocket all for Andy Green and his wonderful skill in the saddle; with many dollars backing their belief in him, and with voices ever ready to sing his praises; with the golden light of early sunset all about them, and the tang of coming night frost in the air—received a shock which made them turn fairly white under their tan.

"Mamma mine!" breathed Weary, in a horrified half whisper.

And Slim, goggle-eyed beside him, blurted: "Well, *by golly!*" in a voice that carried across the corral.

For Andy Green, tamer of wild ones, broncho twister with a fame that not the boundary of Chouteau County held, nor yet the counties beyond—Andy Green, erstwhile "André de Gréno,

champion bareback rider of the Western Hemisphere," who had jumped through blazing hoops and over sagging bunting, turned handsprings, and done other public-drawing feats—was prosaically, unequivocally "piled" at the fifth jump!

That he landed lightly on his feet, with the cigarette still between his lips, the roosting twenty-five quite overlooked. They saw only the first wicked jump, where Andy, riding loosely and unguardedly, went up on the blue withers. The second, third, and fourth jumps were not far enough apart to be seen and judged separately; as well may one hope to decide whether a whirling wheel has straight or crooked spokes. The fifth jump, however, was a masterpiece of rapid-fire contortion; and it was important, because it left Andy on the ground, gazing, with an extremely hurt expression, at the uninterrupted convolutions of the "dandy little cow hoss."

The blue roan never stopped so much as to look back. He was busy—exceedingly busy. He was one of those perverted brutes which buck and bawl and so keep themselves wrought up to a high pitch—literally and figuratively. He set himself seriously to throw Andy's saddle over his head; and he was not a horse which easily accepts defeat. Andy walked around in the middle of the corral quite aimlessly, and watched the roan contort. He could not understand in the least; and his amazement overshadowed, for the moment, the fact that he had been thrown—and that in public, and before men of the Diamond G.

Then it was that the men of the Diamond G yelled shrill words of ironical sympathy. Then it was that the Happy Family looked at one another in shamed silence, and to the taunts of the Diamond G's made no reply. It had never occurred to them that such a thing could happen. Had they not seen Andy ride, easily and often? Had they not heard from Pink how Andy had performed that difficult feat at the Rocking R—the feat of throwing his horse in the middle of a jump? They waited until the roan—leaving the big corral looking, in the fast deepening twilight, like a fresh-plowed field—stopped dejectedly and stood with his nose against the closed gate. Then they climbed slowly down from the top rail of the corral, still silent with the silence which is more eloquent than speech in any known language.

Over by the gate, Andy was yanking savagely at the latigo; and he, also, had never a word to say. He was still wondering how it had happened. He looked the roan over critically, and shook his head against the riddle; for he had known him a quiet, dependable, all-round good horse, with no bad traits, and an easy-going disposition that fretted at nothing. A high-strung, nervous beast might, from rough usage and abuse, go "bad"; but the blue roan—they had called him Pardner—had never shown the slightest symptoms of nerves. Andy knew horses as he knew himself. That a horse like Pardner should, in two years, become an evil-tempered past master in such devilish pitching as that, was past belief.

"I guess he'll do, all right," spoke Coleman, at his elbow. "I've seen horses pitch, and I will say that he's got some specialties that are worth exhibiting." Then, as a polite way of letting Andy down easy, he added: "I don't wonder you couldn't connect."

"Connect—hell!" It was Andy's first realization of what his failure meant—to the others. He left off wondering about the roan, and faced the fact that he had been thrown, fair and square—and that before an audience of twenty-five pairs of eyes which had seen rough riding before.

"I reckon Billy Roberts will have to work on that cayuse a while," jeered a Diamond G man, coming over to them. "He'll gentle him down so that anybody—*even Green*—can ride him!"

Andy faced him hotly, opened his mouth for sharp reply, and closed it. He had been "piled." Nothing that he could say might alter that fact, nor explanations lighten the disgrace. He turned and went out of the gate, carrying his saddle and bridle with him.

"Aw—and you was goin' t' ride in that contest!" wailed Happy Jack recriminatingly. "And I've got forty dollars up on yuh!"

"Shut up!" snapped Pink, heartbroken but loyal to the last. "Yuh going to blat around and let them Diamond G's give yuh the laugh? Hunt up something you can use for a backbone till they get out uh camp, for Heaven's sake! Andy's our man. If anybody goes rubbing it in where I can hear, he'll get his face punched."

"Say, I guess we ain't let down on our faces, or anything!" sighed Cal Emmett, coming up to them. "I thought Andy could ride! Gee whiz, but it was fierce! Why, Happy could make a better ride than that!"

"By golly, I want t' have a talk with that there broncho tamer," Slim behind them. "I got money on him. Is he going t' ride for that purse? 'Cause, if he is, I ain't going a foot."

These, and other remarks of a like nature, made up the clamor that surged in the ears of Andy as he went, alone, up to the deserted bunkhouse, where he need not hear what they were saying. He knew, deep in his heart, that he could ride that horse. He had been thrown because of his own unpardonable carelessness—a carelessness which he could not well explain to the others. He himself had given the roan an evil reputation—a reputation that, so far as he knew, was libel pure and simple. To explain, now that he was thrown—simply because he never dreamed that the horse would pitch, and so was taken unaware—would be simply to insult their intelligence. He was not supposed, after mounting a horse like that, to be taken unaware. He might, of course, say that he had lied all along—but he had no intention of making any confession like that. Even if he did, they would not believe him. Altogether, it was a very unhappy young man who slammed his spurs into a far corner and viciously kicked a box, over which he had stumbled in the dusk.

"Trying to bust the furniture?" It was the voice of the Old Man at the door.

"By gosh, it seems I can't bust broncbs no more," said Andy ruefully.

The Old Man chuckled, came inside, sought the box Andy had kicked, and sat down upon it. Through the open door came the jumble of many voices upraised in fruitless argument, and with it the chill of frost. The Old Man fumbled for his pipe, filled it, and scratched a match sharply on the box. In the flare of it, Andy watched his kind old face, with its fringe of grayish hair and its deeply graven lines of whimsical humor.

"Doggone them boys! They ain't got the stayin' qualities I give 'em credit for having," he remarked, holding up the match, and looking across at Andy, humped disconsolately in the shadows. "Them Diamond G men has just about got 'em on the run, right now. They're offering ten-to-one bets, and my outfit sidestepping all offers."

Andy merely grunted.

"Say," asked the Old Man suddenly. "Didn't yuh kinda mistake that blue roan for his twin brother, Pardner? This here cayuse is called the Shyster. I tried t' get hold of t'other one; but, doggone 'em, they wouldn't loosen up. Pardner wasn't for sale at no price, but they talked me into buying the Shyster; they claimed he's just about as good a horse, once he's tamed down some—and I thought, seein' I've got some real tamers on my pay roll, I'd take a chance on him. I thought yuh knew the horse—the way yuh read up his pedigree—till I seen yuh mount him. Why, doggone it, yuh straddled him like yuh was just climbing a fence! Maybe yuh know your own business best—but didn't yuh kinda mistake him for Pardner?"

Andy got up, went to the door, and stood looking down the dusk-muffled hill to the white blotch which was the camp. He listened to the jumble of voices, still upraised in fruitless argument, and turned to the Old Man.

"By gosh, that accounts for it," he said ambiguously. "I reckon I'll try that hoss another whirl—in Great Falls."

A Lie and Its Antidote

By Max Marcin

Showing how the trusted agent of a gigantic organization had cause to waver between love and duty, when a veiled messenger brought him word from the country which mourned him as an exile

AS he stood surveying the welcoming neighbors grouped about him, Israel Tilwek experienced the rare thrill of a homage that flowed from simple hearts, flushed with love and gratitude. He remained motionless, with moistened eyes, while the beaming faces, upturned to his, sent the vibrant currents of their artless welcome coursing through his frame. Unconsciously, the mantle of reserve, that had clothed him through all the ten years during which he had lived among them, dropped from his shoulders; and, in a responsive fervor of acknowledgment, he seized them all, one after another, in his arms, and pressed them against his breast.

"I have been sick—very sick!" he gasped. "But I'm better now. And I'm glad to be back—glad to take up my work."

He turned abruptly, and passed into the dark, narrow hallway. But his way was retarded by shadowy figures lined in the gloomy passageway. Outstretched arms barred his progress; and it was not until he had grasped each friendly hand that he was able to clear the stone-flagged yard, and enter the rear tenement, on the ground floor of which he lived.

He stopped for a moment before the door of his apartment, struggling to regain his composure. In the faint glow spread by the gas jet, he gave the appearance of a happy blending of the gladiator and the patriarch. His head was massive, with an unruffled forehead rising like a bold promontory. Two large eyes, set like balls of chilled steel in thick arches of eyebrows, alternated a soft, dreamy radiance and a sharp, piercing lustre, penetrating as a lightning flash. A long gray beard dropped in unbroken lines to his chest, and, added to the disordered mane of white hair, gave him the venerable appearance of an ancient prophet. A full, round mouth, about which hovered perpetually a pleasant smile of toleration, counterbalanced somewhat the severe lines of the face, and yet invested it with a masterful self-possession born only of experience and reflection.

Tilwek's bearing was a rare mixture of vigor and repose, crowning, as with a halo of grandeur, a life of noble endeavor. In stature he was a little more than the average height; but his erect carriage and impressive breadth of shoulders made him seem taller. A painter, inspired to portray a triumphant Moses watching the Children of Israel finally enter their Promised Land, would have seized on him avidly as the model for the pictorial representation.

Almost from the beginning of his stay among them, he aroused in his neighbors a strange awe, as though he were some superior being dropped into their midst. They recalled the day when he arrived with his meagre belongings. He was dressed in the *halat* and *jarmulka*—the long-skirted coat and peaked cap of the Russian Pole. Yet it was plain that his lowly attire was a disguise. He spoke hardly a

word of Yiddish; though Russian, French, German, Italian, and Spanish fell with equal facility from his lips. And his English was polished—almost without trace of foreign accent.

He announced himself a teacher, and opened a little *cheder,* where he taught elementary Hebrew to students drawn from the teeming Jewish population of the East Side. Parents, at first, were somewhat diffident about sending their offspring to this man of mystery; but as they got to know him better, they reposed in him a trust almost childlike in its simplicity.

Know him better! As the confidant of their troubles, as the helpful friend in need, as the guardian of their children's faith—yes. As to the mystery of his own life—no. The probe of the most curious had been unable to penetrate his mask of reserve.

The solitude of his life was broken by occasional visitors, who came invariably after nightfall, and left before daybreak. One of these nocturnal callers had been recognized as Jarmolensky, biggest of the Russian bankers and philanthropists. What business could possibly have brought the millionaire banker to the abode of the poor teacher, was one of the inexplicable puzzles on which the neighbors bent their mental energies in vain.

Then there was the incident of Tilwek's illness. When he was suddenly seized, a horde of solicitous housewives fought for the privilege of ministering to him. But they were swept aside by a doctor from uptown, who peremptorily ordered the removal of the patient. And he was taken away, not in an ambulance, but in a private carriage driven by a liveried coachman.

When Tilwek left, a young man of determined mien and impenetrable silence came to take his place. In the weeks that had passed since the teacher's illness, this young man had remained in the apartment, a faithful guardian of whatever it contained. What called for such exceptional vigil, was another of the disturbing secrets of Tilwek's life.

But the neighbors loved him for his kindly nature, for the courage which he had restored to drooping hearts, for his scholarly attainments, and for the rigid faith which he maintained. So, they welcomed him home in a spirit of rejoicing, and asked no questions.

Tilwek entered his apartment without knocking. The silent caretaker, perceiving the tall figure outlined in the doorway, bounded from his chair, as though released by a spring. "Thank Heaven!" he murmured.

"It has been a tiresome vigil, Mandel?"

"But a glorious ending to see you back," came the fervent response.

With linked arms, they walked into the little bedroom, and lit the gas. The pale light revealed in yellowish outline the three objects that constituted the entire furnishings of the room. A bed occupied most of the space, and near its head stood an old wooden chair. Close to the wall, parallel with the bed, was a large trunk. From the bottom projected, on all four sides, iron bolts, fluted down the middle, and pierced by screws driven tightly into the floor. The trunk was further fastened by strong bars attached to the wall. Three large padlocks, of a strange pattern, effectually guarded the contents.

Tilwek and Mandel regarded each other inquiringly—the one from the edge of the bed, the other from the trunk.

"I paid out eleven thousand five hundred dollars," said Mandel, breaking the silence.

"Through Jarmolensky?"

"Yes."

"Good," commended Tilwek. His brow knitted in thought, while his eyes seemed to penetrate the narrow confines of the room and to search for something in the dim distance. "You have the reports?" he asked finally.

"They're in the trunk," replied Mandel.

To prevent any grating noises from being heard by the neighbors, they poured drops of oil into the locks before inserting the keys. When the padlocks had been removed and the cover

lifted, it was seen that the interior of the trunk was divided, by steel plates, into compartments. From one of these Mandel took a bundle of papers, and handed them to his companion. The latter scanned them carefully, and then returned them to the trunk. The cover was dropped noiselessly, the padlocks clicked shut, and then the two men adjourned to the outer room.

"You have done well," said Tilwek.

The young man's face was lit with a happy glow. His set features relaxed into an expression half expectant, half timorous. "Then you are really pleased?" he asked.

"I am satisfied," the teacher responded slowly. "I see at last a possible successor."

Mandel bent forward eagerly. "But you are not ready to lay down the work?"

"Not quite. But one can never tell when the final call will come—when the prison gates of life will click behind one. And before I go, I want to see—to see—him."

"But you cannot go back! There is a price on your head."

The old man looked fixedly before him, calm, majestic.

"Mandel," he said, "you are still young; you have still to get your proper poise—your balance. But you have enthusiasm, you have courage, and you have intelligence. If it should befall you to step into my shoes, you will be sorely tempted, at times, to cast aside my teachings, and to counsel violence. You will be tempted to leave the Jewish Bund, and to ally yourself with those crazy elements called anarchy and nihilism. But you must not waver; you must not give way. The bomb and the pistol avenge no wrongs—they bring on more suffering. They have set our cause back a hundred years. We have only one tenet—education. And the money that will be entrusted to you must go for only two purposes—education and relief."

"I am strong enough to resist the temptation of violence," Mandel replied. "As your pupil, I could not feel otherwise."

"Very well," continued Tilwek. "As professor of languages in the University of Warsaw, I gave the university the best there was in me. As treasurer of the Bund, I have remained faithful to my trust."

"No one questions that," the young man interjected hastily.

"What the people of Russia need is enlightenment, not bombs. I have been hounded, tracked by spies, vilified, and denounced—because I have dared to preach freedom. I have been close to death—I could almost feel its shadow—within the last two months. I am old; and the years that are left to me are few, at best. So, I am going back to face the destiny in store for me. I will not go secretly—they will know I am coming. They will arrest me and, perhaps, execute me. But they may"—his voice broke with a hard sob—"they may send me where he is—to end my existence in misery by his side."

"You mustn't, doctor," Mandel retorted vehemently. "Why sacrifice two lives? Why sacrifice yours for the sake of another, already sacrificed?"

"Because I am a father," Tilwek answered softly. As though to check any onrush of emotion, he burst forth: "We are doing a great work; we must not give up. I will continue to do my share, to the end. But I must go back courageously, to face the inevitable."

"And when do you intend to start?"

"I don't know. But it will be soon."

Mandel came close to the old teacher—so close that his warm breath spread itself on the other's cheek.

"To let you go means too much for the cause," he whispered. "You must not do it. I have a plan—perhaps it will prove successful. I have been thinking about it for some time. While you were away, I studied the maps. I have formed a mental picture of all the roads—of all the surrounding country. I will go there in disguise, and—perhaps I can help him to escape."

"I don't doubt you have the courage," Tilwek answered, with emotion. "But you haven't the money. It might be done; but it would take ten thousand

dollars, at least. Without bribery, he could never get away."

"Doctor," Mandel said, "you are entitled to something at the hands of the Bund. The treasury is full. It is in your possession. It is a just expense, to save him to the cause."

The old man shook his head negatively. "It is too much like selfishness to spend the money for my sake."

"But when I get to Warsaw, I'll put it to a vote," Mandel suggested. "There is no doubt the committee will sanction it."

Tilwek's eyes reflected the longing of his heart, but his attitude remained unyielding. "No," he murmured.

"Give me an opportunity to put all before you," urged Mandel. "I have it all planned out. The papers are at home, but I'll get them." He closed the door softly, and passed into the darkness of the yard.

Tilwek remained in his seat, his mind filled with vague reflections. An invisible force seemed to urge him to the land of his birth—to the land where the honors and emoluments of a life's work were torn from him overnight. He felt a strange presentiment; but what it was he could not make out. A melancholy dejection possessed him, and he felt a queer sensation of draining vitality.

"If I do it, it will have to be at once," he murmured.

He revolved the problem in his mind; but the fatal insight into men and events which he had acquired, showed him how slim would be his chance of success.

"Perhaps Mandel's plan is better, after all," he reflected. "But I cannot let him sacrifice himself."

He remained for some time in a state of painful doubt, torn by conflicting impulses. His preoccupied mind made him deaf to the knocking on the door, and he did not know of the approach of a visitor, until the door was opened and he became conscious of the shadow of a woman's form on the floor. He looked up suddenly, and found her standing timorously in the doorway.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

The swish of silk sounded pleasantly as she came forward. She was dressed entirely in black, her face heavily veiled, her hands covered by long gloves.

Tilwek arose, and bowed her to a seat. As she lifted her veil and revealed her features, his eyes slowly bulged forward, until they seemed to overhang their sockets.

"You!" he muttered angrily. "How did you find me?"

"We traced you, a month ago, to this place," she replied; "but when I inquired for you, they said you were ill. The house was kept constantly under guard, and I was informed of your return. You see, I am perfectly frank with you." The forced lightness of her tone did not escape Tilwek.

"Then, will you be frank enough to tell me the real motive of your visit?" he returned.

She lowered one of her gloves, revealing a graceful white forearm. From beneath the palm of the glove she took a letter, and held it between her fingers.

"I brought you a letter from your son," she said.

He shot at her a glance of suspicion, and drew within his customary reserve.

She arched her brows, and smiled wistfully. "You doubt me?" she flashed.

"I have good cause to doubt you," he returned.

She peeled the gloves off her hands, and buried her chin in her palms. The shimmer of jewels invested her flesh with a dazzling radiance. The letter fluttered to the floor, and she bent down to pick it up. Her movements were slow and deliberate, as if to tempt the old teacher into springing forward and seizing it. But he remained impassive in his seat.

"Here it is," she said, placing the missive on the table.

He tore it open, and read the contents. A wave of red mounted his face; a violent tremor shook his frame.

"It is his writing!" he gasped. "There can be no doubt of it." His countenance contorted into an expression of

mingled grief, pain, and bitterness. "And you bring me this!" he rasped. "They sent you—all the way from Russia—to bring me this?"

"You seem agitated," she interjected.

"Agitated! Do you know the contents of this letter?"

She nodded assent.

"They're torturing him because he's my son!" he continued. "Because he's my son! What crime has he committed? What crime have I committed?"

"I didn't come to discuss that," she answered.

"No!" The glint of steel flashed from his eyes. "No, you didn't! They made him write of his suffering, so that it would pierce my heart. And they sent you as their devilish messenger. They did right. I know of no one so thoroughly capable of fulfilling an infernal mission as you. You have——"

"You are getting complimentary," she interrupted.

"Complimentary!" He laughed, in bitter irony. "You began your career of treachery with a lie, and I see by your jewels that your life has been a lie ever since. It was your treachery, your lies, that sent him to Siberia; and now you come to torture and rack me with your baneful errand."

"I didn't come to torture you," she said softly.

"Then what did you come for?"

"I came to restore your son."

His mouth curved into a disdainful smile. "That's the reason you are accompanied by a retinue of spies to watch this house," he sneered.

"Nevertheless, I came to restore your son," she persisted.

"And what's the price?" Tilwek asked.

"For a prize such as we are willing to hand over," she said, "the price must, naturally, be a big one."

"Well, what do you want?" he asked anxiously.

"The names of the committee," she drawled.

"You are jesting?" he shot back.

"No—I am in earnest."

"And, if I gave them to you," he asked, "what assurance have I that my son will be released?"

"We do not demand payment in advance," she retorted. "We ask only your verbal promise. Not until your son is here—right in your own home—need you pay."

"My promise is all you ask?"

"That is all. But we are ready to offer more than your son."

He looked at her inquiringly, a quivering excitement in his aspect.

"We are willing to restore you to your post in the university," she informed him.

"I will not profane my lips by mentioning your name in addressing you," he declared. "But if there is one person in all the world who honestly believes that I would betray my brethren at any price, then I have lived in vain."

"The sufferings of your son mean nothing to you?" she insinuated.

The teacher's lips twitched at the intimation of what was in store for the son in case of refusal. "The cause for which we are fighting stands above everything," he retorted.

"Above money?" she hinted.

All the pent-up emotion that had been struggling for an outlet poured forth in an outburst of wrath. "You sold yourself for money!" he cried. "You betrayed your comrades for gold! You committed perjury—for money! You sold your soul to eternal hell—for money! You"—his voice dropped to a sharp hiss—"you sent your lover to prison—for money."

She was on her feet, pale and trembling, a wild exasperation on her countenance.

"That's a lie!" she almost screamed. "A vile, black, damnable lie! Yes, I betrayed him. I had him sent to Siberia. But it wasn't money! No, no, no—I tell you it wasn't money! I said the other woman wouldn't get him. I swore it. And she didn't!"

"The other woman?" he echoed. "There was no other woman."

She looked at him searchingly, as if trying to read his mind. "Prove it—prove it!" she demanded.

Tilwek entered the little bedroom,

and opened the trunk. He returned with a letter, grown yellow with age.

"When you testified against him, what did you think your life was worth?" he asked, with deliberation. "Did you think you would live another day? The murderous fury you aroused brought forth a dozen volunteers to silence forever your lying lips. All my peaceful counseling could not have stayed the assassin's hand. When the comrades whom you betrayed cursed you—when the very men whom you served despised you—when the very stomach of hell revolted at your perfidy, there was one voice lifted in your behalf, one man's hand extended to save you. It was the man you betrayed. On the day he was convicted, he smuggled a note to me—I'll read it."

The old teacher held the note beneath the light from the single gas jet in the room, and read:

"The man who slays her, slays me. I love her—she is my life. She, too, is a victim—some one has poisoned her mind. Her repentance will carry more terror to her soul than death."

"Was I the dupe of falsehood?" she blurted. Without waiting for a reply, she tore the note from Tilwek's hand, and examined it closely. Then she dropped on her knees, as though her feet had been cut from under her.

"Ah, God!" she exclaimed. "Can You, in Your divine mercy, forgive me?"

Tilwek helped her to her feet. "It is taught us in the Talmud," he said, "that a sinner's repentance shall be measured by his acts."

Her face set in grim determination. "A lie sent him away," she said. "A lie shall bring him back."

One by one, she took the rings from her fingers, and laid them on the table. Her nervous hands almost tore the gold necklace and diamond pendant from her throat.

"Throughout these years," she snarled, "I have served falsehood. I have been well paid. The devil has plenty of gold with which to keep his hirelings in good humor. I will not return his ammunition to him. I will give it to the cause, that it may now serve truth."

"You always were a good actress," commented Tilwek dryly.

She was about to reply, when the door opened and Mandel burst into the room. His step was elastic; a glow of deep satisfaction irradiated his features.

"I have——" He stopped short when he saw a woman's form in the ill-lighted room. She turned toward him, and, at sight of her face, he recoiled.

"Anna Marowitch!" Each syllable of the name was uttered in tones of cutting contempt. His glance fell on the jewels, and he turned, with a sneer. "The snake extends her golden fangs," he remarked.

"But they are harmless," jeered Tilwek. "She has offered more than gold. She has offered to restore my son at the cheap price of treachery. Why, they even want to throw my old position into the bargain. They only ask me to reveal the names of the committee."

"Your son will be restored, and without treachery," announced Mandel, fingering the roll of paper under his arm.

The lines of the woman's face contracted into an expression of agony.

They watched her breathlessly, as her fingers groped at her neck. From beneath the waist she drew a folded paper.

"My instructions were," she said, "to send this when I received your promise of betrayal. It is a cipher dispatch, saying that my mission has been successful. On its receipt, your son will be immediately released."

"So my son's liberty is contained in that!" Tilwek sneered. "Tell them the price will never be paid. I reject their offer in my son's behalf."

She put on her gloves, adjusted her veil, and slipped the dispatch into her coat pocket. Slowly she turned toward Mandel, and extended her hand.

"Come, Mandel," she implored. "Give me your arm. You shall watch me send it. My repentance shall be measured by my acts."

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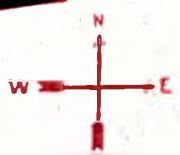

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