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# The Popular Magazine


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"By Command of the Commodore," a complete novel by Cyrus Townsend Brady, in this number.

VOL. IV. NO. 3

# The Popular Magazine

## CONTENTS FOR JULY, 1905



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# THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. IV. JULY, 1905. No. 3.

# By Command of the Commodore

### A STORY OF THE AMERICAN NAVY

By Cyrus Townsend Brady

*Author of "The Two Captains," "A Little Traitor to the South," Etc.*

**This is the seventh of "The Popular Magazine's" series of complete novels based upon the various industries and fields of endeavor which have played a part in the upbuilding and development of our country. Dr. Brady's hero, a lieutenant in the United States Navy, is on sick leave in India when news reaches him that war with Spain has been declared, and his herculean efforts to reach his post of duty in time, his active participation in the stirring events of that glorious first of May when Dewey won his victory, and the perilous adventure by which he won his wife, a Spanish girl, immediately after the surrender, form the theme of a very stirring narrative. Previous stories of this series have treated of journalism, cotton, oil, gold-mining, finance and wheat. The army, railroading, cattle-raising, steel, etc., are among the other phases of American business and governmental life to be exploited hereafter.**

(*A Complete Story*)

## CHAPTER I.

### FROM DARJEELING TO CALCUTTA.

GRIFFITH LAUGHTON was a lieutenant in the United States Navy. He was distinguished by the possession, in his own right, of a fortune of several millions of dollars; which, under the judicious and discriminating handling of his elder brother—one of the leading financiers of the United States—was increasing at a rate which he was unable to keep down by the most generous and profuse expenditure.

That he was probably the richest man in the navy was not his sole claim to distinction. It stands to reason that a man with as much money as Laughton would not, under any circumstances, subject himself to the discipline, restraints and hardships of the naval service unless he loved it. A man who loves the naval service, if his ability be in accord with his affection—and this was entirely so in Laughton's case—can find abundant opportunity for efficient

Of this series the following stories have been published: "The Ruling of the Fourth Estate," a newspaper story (January); "The Yield," a story of cotton (February); "Captains of Piracy," a story of oil (March); "The Mainspring," a story of gold-mining (April); "The Test," a story of modern finance (May), and "The Blucher of Wheat" (June). The back numbers can be secured through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

—sometimes even brilliant — service, even in peace.

Whatever Laughton had had opportunity to do he had done thoroughly and well. He was highly thought of by the department and the officers of high rank in the service, and he was as popular among his brother officers and shipmates as if, like most of them, he had not a dollar beyond his pay with which to bless himself.

A man with as much money as Laughton could have acquired a certain kind of popularity among a certain set in the service, but he was both modest in his tastes and tactful in his methods. While a-cruising no one could have told from his demeanor, or from any outward and visible sign, that he possessed any advantage in the way of finance over any of his brother officers.

On leave of absence it was different. On those rare occasions he considered himself at full liberty to indulge himself to the best of his desires, and with those of his comrades who were fortunate enough to be his guests he freely and generously shared all that he had.

Some rather arduous duty in an unhealthy station in the Indian Ocean had brought about a severe attack of wasting fever. As soon as possible he had been detached from his ship and given a long leave of absence to recuperate. It had not been deemed wise for him to attempt to go home. He had, therefore, hurried north from Calcutta into the mountains about Darjeeling. He had been accompanied by an old sailor, whose term of enlistment had just expired, and who had taken advantage, at Laughton's suggestion, of the three months' leeway allowed him before reenlistment, in order that he might not forfeit his service privileges.

Master Matthew Clumpblock occupied the threefold position of servitor, mentor and friend. The friendship between the lieutenant and the old boatswain's mate had begun when the youngster had been admitted to the Naval Academy, many years before. It had increased as Laughton had grown to man's estate. Clumpblock had been boatswain's mate on the old *Santee*, at the Naval Academy, and a humble instructor in knot-and-splice seamanship there.

While Laughton did not attempt to use his great influence for his own benefit—but rather prided himself in his secret heart on taking things just as they came to him, like any other officer—he was not at all averse to helping a shipmate or assisting a friend to a good billet. Consequently, at the old sailor's urgent request, he had managed to secure the detail of Clumpblock to such ships as he himself had cruised in.

In Laughton's weakened state it was thought well that some one should accompany him to the mountains, and Clumpblock, whose fidelity and devotion could not be questioned, would serve admirably, especially as no officer could then be spared, and as the ship was expecting orders for home in a few weeks. In case she left before his leave expired, Laughton could come home by the most convenient route at his pleasure, fetching Matthew Clumpblock with him, of course.

In the salubrious air and rugged surroundings of the foothills of the Himalayas Laughton had speedily recovered his health. After a short sojourn at Darjeeling he had concluded to devote the remaining period of his leave of absence to exploration, mountain climbing, hunting—whatever came to hand in the Himalayas. A party had been organized, and the young man and his faithful factotum had lost touch with civilization for two months and a half —an easy thing to do in that wild and desert land.

The evening of the eleventh of April found the two explorers once more at Darjeeling. There, for the first time since he left the ship, Laughton got in touch with current events through a Calcutta paper. It was not so much what he read, for, of course, the news was by this time two months old, and so no longer definitely described in the paper, but what he inferred from the telegraphic statements and the editorial comments, which awakened his curiosity to the breaking point and filled him with grief, anxiety and enthusiasm, for

on that day he got the first news that he had received of the blowing up of the *Maine*. It was the day the President of the United States transmitted to Congress the report of the commission which ascribed that catastrophe to outside causes and made war practically certain.

Laughton read the news with a feeling of horror, increased by the fact that some of his classmates were officers on the *Maine*, as well as many acquaintances, and he had not the slightest idea whether they were living or dead.

There was no way for him to learn anything further in Darjeeling. He had intended to remain there a few days to attend to the packing and shipment of various things he had purchased or shot, but the news was too important for a moment's delay.

Looking at his watch, he discovered that he had just time to catch the Darjeeling and Himalaya night express for Calcutta. He had ordered his mail sent to the English Club there, and he expected to be enlightened as to the true state of affairs when he reached that destination.

Giving hasty directions to an agent to attend to the business of packing and shipping his collection to New York, throwing a change of linen into his bag and fairly dragging the bewildered Clumpblock in his wake, Laughton just managed to make the train.

"I suppose, worthy Matthew," he began, as the express left the station, "that you are somewhat at a loss to know the meaning of this summary change in our plans?"

"I ain't never been hustled so much sence the Rebellion, sir, w'en I was on the *Mississippi*," began Master Clumpblock, in a somewhat aggrieved manner. "'Tain't good fer an old man to git him shakin' a leg so suddint an' unprepared like, no way."

"My faithful friend, my valued mentor," continued Laughton, with the badinage he frequently used while talking to the quaint old boatswain's mate, "when I tell you the news you'll be blaming me for not hiring a special train to get us to Calcutta."

"Wot news, sir?"

"The battleship *Maine* was blown up in Havana harbor on the fifteenth of February last."

"My God!" exclaimed the other. "Who done it?"

"The Spaniards."

"Hev we licked 'em yit?"

"War has not yet been declared."

"If they'd git sum of your hustle on, Mr. Laughton, 'twould be a damn' fine thing, beggin' yer pardon, sir," said the old man, sententiously.

"That's all right. It will come soon enough. They have had an investigation, and have decided that the Spaniards did it."

"Who else could hev done it?"

"It might have occurred from internal causes, carelessness or——"

"Not on an American battleship, sir!" protested Clumpblock, vigorously.

"Right you are! But still we had to settle that to the satisfaction of the world, and we have done it. The President has asked authority to put a stop to the state of affairs in Cuba, and if we don't bear a hand the fighting will be over before we get back."

"You done right to hustle me, Mr. Laughton," said the old man, eagerly. "I wonder if we couldn't get the skipper of this 'ere cruiser to clap on some extry canvas an' claw another knot or two out of her?"

"I think not. We'll be in Calcutta before morning, bright and early, and we couldn't do anything by reaching shore in the night time, else I should have had a special train."

"Wot are we goin' to do, then, sir, I make bold to ax you?"

"I can't tell until we get to Calcutta. Unless there are orders for me, I'm going to report to the nearest American squadron."

"Ef I was you, sir," interrupted the old man, shrewdly, "I'd report to the one that was likeliest to git in the scrimmage."

"I shall do that, my sapient friend."

"Lord, sir!" protested Clumpblock, uneasily, "I wish't you wouldn't keep a-callin' me them names, w'ich I never

understands 'em, but I knows you mean 'em kindly, sir."

"I do, indeed, Master Matthew. If I translated them to you you would be so cocky there wouldn't be any living with you," laughed Laughton.

Clumpblock — whose original name had long since been forgotten, and who looked not unlike the round, fat little pulley block after which the sailors had named him from a fancied resemblance thereto—was a seaman of a very old school. If he had told his real age he would have been on the retired list in some Sailors' Snug Harbor long since. He must have been over seventy years of age at the very least. He had been a seaman since his childhood, and was one of the old, deep-sea frigate kind, more accustomed to masts and sails than to funnels and ventilators. Never thoroughly at ease on an iron ship, he was, nevertheless, so useful a man in a crew that he was always sure of a welcome from any captain. He had been sixty-one—so he declared, with due solemnity—in his successive enlistments for the last nine years, and those who knew him agreed that he would never grow older till he died.

He was greatly different from the smart, bright young bluejacket of the present. In voice and manner and appearance he harked back almost to the Benbow school. For that reason he was a never-ending joy to Laughton. He had fought in the Mexican War, he had been with Perry on the expedition that had opened Japan, he had done good service in the Civil War, he had been shipwrecked on the *Hatteras* and had been on the *Trenton* when she was lost in Apia Harbor, Samoa. There was no part of the world that he had not visited, no waters in which he had not sailed. He was a living epitome of the naval history of the country for nearly the last three-quarters of a century.

The silence which had fallen between the lieutenant and the old man—for Laughton was thinking as to future plans—was at last broken by the old sailor.

"I'd like a chance to lick them Spaniards," he said, reflectively. "I was mixed up once with 'em, an' ef it hadn't been fer an accident we'd jest nacherly torn 'em to pieces."

"Where was that?" asked Laughton.

He knew the story well enough, but he didn't mind hearing it again to keep his thoughts from running away with him.

"Well, sir," began old Clumpblock, after carefully shifting his quid from starboard to port, by way of preparation, "you know, arter the Civil War ended an' we was paid off an' discharged, I turned up at the end of a marchant cruise or two in Jamaicy in the fall of 1873. There was a small British steam sloop-o'-war in the harbor of Kingston called the *Niobe*. I'd been shipmates with some Americans in her crew, an' I was aboard her havin' a leetle wisit one day in November. Everything was ca'm an' peaceful like. Ha'f her crew was on shore liberty w'en I seen the cap'n's gig a-comin' off from the shore like all possessed. He was a young feller, suthin' like our own Cushin'. He didn't keer fer nothin' ner nobody. He come a-dashin' alongside, an' he hadn't no more'n sot foot on deck before he give orders to git under way.

"'Ain't you goin' to wait fer the rest of our people?' the first luff ventured to remonstrate.

"'Wait fer nothin'!' sez the cap'n, awful short like. 'We've got enough on board to take keer on 'em.'

"Before I knowed it that ship was under way, an' I was goin' in her! I didn' keer much about that. I had no bizness now'ere's else. I didn't know w'ere she was a-goin' or wot was goin' to happen, but from the cap'n's manner there seemed to be suthin' in the wind, an' he meant bizness, too, anybody could see that. So I guessed we'd hev some fun, anyway. W'en the crew was mustered, soon's we got to sea, I lined up with the rest. The cap'n made a speech. He said a lot of Americans an' English had been seized on the steamer *Virginius* by them bloody Spaniards. That they was taken to Santiager harbor, an' some of 'em had been shot, an' he was

goin' to put a stop to the hull thing. He guessed we was game to help him out, er words to that effect. Was we game? You bet we was!

"I don't love them Britishers as a rule, but I liked 'em then. They cheered like mad, an' went bloomin' round the deck with their bloody oaths as to wot they was goin' to do 'til I could hev hugged 'em. In course, the cap'n soon knowed I was aboard, an' he sent fer me, an' he sez, pleasant like:

"'I understand that you are an old man-o'-war's man.'

"'I am, yer honor,' sez I. 'I fit all through the Civil War.'

"'Well,' sez he, 'we're awful short-handed. Will you take a gun?'

"'Will I?' sez I. 'I jest think I will, sir,' I sez.

"With that he gives me one of his Brooke rifles, with a short crew, in course, but what they lost in numbers they made up in willin'ness an' stren'th. Well, sir, to make a long story short, we made a record-breakin' run from Kingston to Santiager. We went in through that narrer mouth with colors flyin', drums beatin', ports open, guns cast loose, men at quarters, an' everybody jest dancin' on tiptoes fer a fight.

"I ain't rarely never been so happy in all my life as I was on that day. If the old Stars an' Stripes had been floatin' over my head instead of that red flag of them Britishers—but they done well enough on that 'casion, I'm sure, an' there warn't no American ships handy.

"We didn't salute no forts an' we didn't take off our hats to nobody. We rounded to within a cable's length of a nasty little Spanish gunboat called the *Tornader* an' her prize, the *Virginius,* an' the anchor wasn't more'n down afore the cap'n's boat was in the water. He was a lord er suthin', Sir Lambton Lorraine, they called him, an' he was a cocky young feller. He landed at that town an' demanded them prisoners. Some of 'em had been shot, but the rest of 'em was waitin' execution. The Spaniards tried to put him off, but he jest wouldn't argy with them. He jest sez:

"'Gimme them men, an' give 'em to me damn' quick, or I'll blow yer hull town into kingdom come, to say nothin' of yer little one-horse gunboat there.'"

"Would he have done it, Matthew?" asked Laughton, as the old man stopped for breath.

"Would he? He'd a-went at 'em as he said in half a minute. There wasn't no delay about him or them, nuther. They give up the men to onct, an' w'ile we was mighty glad to git 'em back, yet we was all sorry we didn't have no chance to cut loose at the town an' the gunboat. We had them Spaniards skeered sick. Arter it was all over, the English cap'n he wanted me to stay on his ship. He said he'd make me chief boatswain's mate, but I sez no, I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't sarve under no flag but the United States, but if I ever did sarve under any other flag, I would give him the fust ch'ice. He couldn't hev done better if he'd a-been an American officer hisself.

"There was a midshipman on that ship that I took a mighty likin' to an' him to me. His name was Chester. I reckon some day I'll run acrost him ef he ain't dead, an' he ain't likely to be. Oh, I tell you, we was disapp'inted not to git a w'ack at them Greasers, but p'raps we'll git a few shots at 'em now."

"That's a pretty good yarn, Matthew," said the lieutenant, gravely, "and if the Spaniards hadn't given up I have no doubt Lorraine would have made mincemeat out of them. Not but what they would have given him a fight, all right."

"Oh, I guess they're brave enough on a pinch," said the old sailor. "I've been 'most everyw'eres, an' I've seed all sorts of men, an' I ain't been now'eres w'ere men can't fight w'en they wants to, an' even if they don't want to fight they kin fight w'en you wake 'em up to it. But the harder they fight the better we'll be pleased, an' the more satisfaction we'll have lickin' 'em."

"You're right. The Spaniards have not been very successful in war lately, but, do you know, they once lorded it over everybody?"

"I guess we'll do that now," said the old man.

"Yes, but not without fighting. The men are as courageous as they are proud."

"Glad of it, sir, sez I."

"And the women! By Jove! Matthew, the Spanish girls are as beautiful as the men are fearless."

"I ain't got no quarrel with wimmen folks, Mr. Laughton. They're all right an' necessary in their place, an' 'most any of 'em is beautiful to a young man; an' even me, as old as I be, I feel some warmin' of my heart w'en I sees a trim-lookin' female, no matter w'ere she hails from."

"'As gallant as a sailor,'" laughed Laughton.

He was in a communicative mood, and he knew that he could depend absolutely upon the discretion of his humble comrade. Old sailors may be divided either into the garrulous or the reticent order. Matthew Clumpblock was very talkative on occasions, but you could depend upon his silence if you once made it clear to him that he was not to speak of a subject.

The intercourse which subsisted between the two friends throughout their long acquaintance, which had especially deepened and developed during Clumpblock's careful nursing and attention to his sick young commander during the last few months, rendered Laughton communicative; especially as the seclusion and privacy of the car that the young man had reserved were favorable to confidences.

"I don't mind telling you, Matthew," he said at last—and he was really anxious to talk about it to some one—"that I am engaged to a Spanish girl."

"Good Lord, sir, you don't say so!"

"You just heard me say so. But don't you repeat it!"

"Trust me fer that, sir!"

"Her name is Inez de Sostoa. Her mother was a German, her father a Spanish grandee."

"I hope his grandeeness won't git in the range of our guns," returned Clumpblock, grimly.

"I hope not," assented the young lieutenant, fervently. "I don't know what effect this war will have on the relations between me and Señorita de Sostoa."

"The only fightin' that a woman allows to come 'twixt her an' the man she keers for," said Matthew, sententiously, "is the kind she makes herself. It'll be all right, I guess. The war'll soon be over an' she'll hev more respect fer us Americans in common with every other Spaniard w'en we're done with 'em. I'll dance at yer weddin' yet, sir."

"Well, if it ever comes off, and you still want to dance, I'll see that there's a place and a time for it," laughed Laughton.

"W'ere did ye fall in with the young leddy, sir?"

"It was while I was naval *attaché* to our ambassador at Madrid, two years ago."

"Lord, hev you been a-waitin' fer two years to git spliced?"

"Yes, upon the insistence of her father. She was only eighteen, and he thought her too young. So I agreed to wait."

"W'ere are they now, ef I may make bold to ax, sir?"

"When I last heard from her, just before I left Darjeeling, some three months ago, they were starting for Manila. Don Manuel de Sostoa is an officer in the Spanish navy; a captain I think."

"Now, wouldn't it be kind o' curious like," said Matthew, reflectively, after having digested this information, "ef——"

"If what?"

"Oh, nuthin', sir."

"It would," said Laughton, having divined the thoughts of the old sailor. "I only hope he won't be in the way when we turn loose our batteries down there."

"Do you think our ships'll be ordered that way?"

"I'm sure of it," said Laughton. "We have no port on the Asiatic side of the Pacific, the neutrality laws will not allow us to use any foreign port as a base. We'll have to strike for Manila. It would never do to go back to 'Frisco

and leave our Pacific commerce at the mercy of Spanish cruisers."

"I guess you're right, sir," assented Clumpblock.

"I know I am. I wonder if Dewey's squadron has been increased."

"I know Commodore Dewey, sir."

"Is there anybody on earth you don't know, Matthew?"

"Not many on the water, sir. I sarved with Dewey on the *Mississippi*. He'll git arter them Spaniard's if he's got nothin' but a cockboat to command."

"And you and I are going to get in the fight with him, if there is only that little cockboat."

"Good!" said the old sailor, heartily.

"Now as we have a busy day to-morrow, we'd better turn in and get what rest we can."

"Accordin' to orders, sir," answered Clumpblock, respectfully, and the two began their preparations for the night.

## CHAPTER II.

### LAUGHTON CAN'T BUY A SHIP.

It was broad daylight when the night express train rolled into the station at Calcutta. Accident to a local "goods train" somewhere up on the line had delayed the express a couple of hours, much to the disgust of Laughton and the sailor, and they did not reach the station until long after the scheduled time of arrival.

The delay was most unfortunate. It couldn't be helped, however, and the two strove to make the best of it. The instant the train drew up along the platform the eager Americans rushed for a carriage. Picking out the speediest looking horse, Laughton threw the native coachman a gold piece, and bade him drive at top speed to the English Club.

The carriage tore down the Esplanade, past the government buildings, in through the park, until it drew up before the door of the club of which Laughton had been made a member before he had left for Darjeeling.

Their progress had been occidental in its rate of speed. Bidding the coachman wait—for by rare good luck the young man had stumbled upon a really good horse and cab—Laughton dashed into the club and, without warning, burst upon the gaze of the astonished clerk with an imperious demand for his mail. The American's impetuosity was communicated to that functionary, and the latter found himself handing out letters, papers, parcels, etc., at a quicker speed than he had ever exhibited in his life before.

The first things to attract Laughton's attention were the telegrams. There were half a dozen of them. He tore them open at random in rapid succession. The first one happened to be from his brother, and this is the way the message ran:

War is imminent. Have had you ordered to join Dewey's squadron at Hongkong.

Laughton crushed it into a ball, threw it up in the air and laughed like a boy. The *attachés* and servants of the club stared at him in unfeigned surprise. Had this American gone crazy? Some of the guests who had come in early for the sake of looking over the European papers undisturbed, gazed at him in blank amazement. His enthusiasm was a thing their British phlegm could hardly comprehend.

The next telegram he read sobered him.

*Mi querido*, pray God there may be no war, for the first shot fired at Spain loses you your Inez.

"Pshaw!" said Laughton to himself as he thrust this message in his pocket. "I'll make that all right."

He glanced over the next telegram.

Report Commodore Dewey, Hongkong, immediately for duty in squadron. Acknowledge receipt.

This important document was signed by the secretary of the navy.

The next dispatch was from an officer with whom he had made several cruises.

Have applied for you for my ship. Hurry!
E. P. Wood.

"Tanglefoot Wood!" laughed Laughton. "Good!"

The fifth telegram was from a classmate on the United States cruiser *Boston*, at Hongkong, and was couched in this characteristic language:

For God's sake, old man, get a move on you or you will be left!

Laughton knew what that meant. Leaving his other mail neglected for the moment, he turned to the clerk at the desk.

"When does the Rangoon steamer sail?"

"Sailed yesterday morning, sir."

"When will there be another one?"

"Not for five days."

"Has the P. and O. boat for Colombo gone?"

"Left last night, sir."

"I want to get to Singapore and then to Hongkong without delay. What's the quickest way?"

"Wait for the next P. and O. boat for Colombo. She ought to beat the next Rangoon steamer connection to Singapore by two days at least."

"When does the next P. and O. boat leave?"

"Day after to-morrow, sir."

"Two days wasted! Can't risk it! Clumpblock!"

"Ay, ay, sir," promptly answered the old sailor, who had stood quietly by, although almost consumed with curiosity and eagerness while his officer read the telegrams.

"Take that cab outside and go down to the river. Take a look at all the shipping there. I want a boat to get us to Colombo fast enough to overhaul the P. and O. boat that left yesterday. We must catch that steamer at Colombo."

"Werry good, sir, but 'spose there ain't no boats goin' out?"

"I know there's no boat going, but charter one; if you can't do that, buy one. But don't get a tub! We want the swiftest keel in the harbor. Something that can go and a skipper that'll make her go."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You know a swift boat when you see one?"

"I do, sir."

"Don't depend upon anyone else. Use your own judgment. I'll trust to your decision. Look over the steamers and inform yourself thoroughly. Be back just as quick as you can. Tell that Hindoo to kill his horse, if necessary. I'll get him another if he does. I'll be ready to start the minute you're back. You'll find me here."

"Ay, ay, sir."

Clumpblock turned and left the room after a sea scrape and a knuckle to his forehead, as if the buying of a ship were an everyday occurrence.

Sorting his letters from the other parcels in his mail, and leaving the latter in the care of the clerk, Laughton drove to the bank where his credit had been previously established to an unlimited degree, made some necessary financial arrangements, stopped at the cable company's office and sent off a batch of telegrams, rushed back to the club, took a bath, changed his clothes, repacked his traveling case from trunks that he had left at Calcutta when he had gone north, overhauled his uniform, sword and sea kit, and had just finished a hurried breakfast, when the old boatswain's mate reported to him again.

"What luck?" he cried.

"Bad, sir. There ain't nothin' but tubs in the harbor. Lord, if we'd the old *Constellation* here, she'd make fourteen knots on a wind an'——"

"Stow that! You say there are no steamers?"

"None to charter or to buy, sir. At least, none that'd sarve our purpose."

"Isn't there anything at all in the river?"

"There's one likely lookin' boat, sir."

"What is she?"

"A private yacht, sir."

"Good! That'll do better than anything. What's her name?"

"The *Sea Lark*, sir. She looks like a hummer, an' I axed sum of her people if she'd go, an' they say she could reel off twenty knots an hour, an' if she'd half try could make twenty-two. I reckon she's a good sixteen-knot boat all right. All British sailors is liars, more'n less, an' some Americans. So far's I've been able to see——"

"The *Sea Lark*, you say," interrupted Laughton, cutting short this flood of comment and philosophy. "She'll serve our purpose. Wait here."

He rushed toward the desk, startling the clerk out of his equanimity again.

"There's a yacht, the *Sea Lark*, in the river."

"Yes, sir."

"Who owns her?"

"Sir John Holland, sir."

"Where is he to be found? Is he a member of the club?"

"That's him coming in the door, sir."

Without another word the young American left the desk and stepped swiftly across the room, where a stout, middle-aged, red-faced, impressive looking Britisher was walking toward one of the reading tables.

"I beg your pardon," began Laughton, abruptly, "are you Sir John Holland?"

"I am, sir."

"The owner of the *Sea Lark?*"

"The same, sir."

"What can you get out of her?"

"Out of her?"

"What's her best speed, I mean?"

"Really, you know," began the Britisher, greatly surprised at the unceremonious manner in which he had been accosted, "this is most extraordinary, you know. I fail to see what concern——"

"Great heavens!" exclaimed the American. "It's a matter of life or death! Please answer my question."

"Twenty knots under favorable circumstances, and I suppose she's good for eighteen any time. Now, sir, will you please explain yourself?"

"Excuse me again. I want to charter her to take me to Colombo."

"God bless my soul!"

"Name your own figures!"

"Damn it, sir, I'm not running a ferryboat! She's not for hire, and I'd like to know what you mean, young man!"

"Will you sell her, then?"

"Sell her!"

"I'll give you three hundred thousand dollars spot cash for her."

"Three—hundred—thousand——"

"Yes, sixty thousand pounds, you know."

Sir John sank down in his chair and gazed feebly at this most eccentric person.

"Well, what do you say?" continued Laughton, impatiently. "It's a plain offer."

The bewildered Englishman came to the conclusion that his interlocutor was crazy, and thought he would better soothe him judiciously.

"My dear sir," he began, gently, after he had, in a measure, recovered himself, "the boat is not for sale. She's a private yacht, a pleasure boat, don't you know, and while I would like very much to accommodate you and all that —er——"

"Look here, Sir John, no doubt you think I'm insane," broke in Laughton, impetuously, "but I mean all I say. If I can't charter your boat, I'd like to buy her."

"You are not mad, then?"

"Certainly not!"

"Well, then, you're cursed insulting!"

"Hold on!"

"What do you mean by coming to me, a perfect stranger, with such an absurd, preposterous proposition?" stormed the Englishman, growing redder of face than before, if possible.

"I beg your pardon," said Laughton, sensible of the other's rising choler, of which his angry, red face and bristling manner gave ample evidence, "I should have begun at the other end. Allow me to introduce myself. I'm a member of this club."

"Humph!" snorted his antagonist; "they seem to be very catholic in their requirements for membership in this club."

"Quite so, or you wouldn't be here!" retorted the American, tartly.

This was a facer, and before Sir John could cudgel his brains to make adequate reply, Laughton continued:

"My name is Griffith Laughton. My check is good for any amount at the Calcutta bank. I am an officer in the American navy."

"Oh!" exclaimed Sir John, somewhat mollified. "Why didn't you say that before?"

"I don't know. Didn't think of it, I guess. I'm ordered to join Commodore Dewey's fleet at Hongkong. I have been telegraphed for by my brother officers and others telling me to hurry or I'll get left. War is imminent, and I have no doubt that our ships will strike for Manila at once. I want to be in them when they go."

"I see," said the Britisher, slowly recovering his good nature. "Where have you been for the past two months?"

"Up in the Himalayas, mountain climbing, hunting, shooting. I never heard a word, not even of the blowing up of the *Maine*, until last night at Darjeeling. Came down on the midnight express. Got these telegrams this morning. Found the Rangoon boat gone and the P. and O. boat also gone. No boats for two or three days. If I can get a fast steamer to take me down to Colombo, I can overhaul the P. and O. boat that left yesterday, and save two days to Hongkong. I sent my man down to the river to see what I could buy or charter, and there's nothing suitable there but the *Sea Lark*, your yacht. Now, will you sell her?"

"No, by gad!"

"Oh, Sir John, if it's a question of money——"

"It isn't."

"It's too bad," said Laughton, dejectedly. "I have the chance of my life, and must miss it! All is lost!"

"No, it isn't," said Sir John.

"What do you mean?"

"I won't sell my boat, I won't rent her; but, dash me, sir, I'll take you down to Colombo myself. I'd like nothing better. I have nothing particular to keep me here for a few days, and if I can help you out—I was in the Royal Navy myself when I was younger—you can command me."

"Sir John!"

"I mean it. Blood's thicker than water, don't you know, and I'd like to see these Spaniards get a good licking. For one thing, it would worry the Germans and the French and the other nations of Europe."

"How can I ever——"

"Don't say a word about it! You'd do as much for me, I'm sure."

"You bet your life I would!" exclaimed Laughton, impetuously. "Nevertheless, this is the finest thing I have ever heard of."

"I'm jolly glad to do it, you know. When will you be ready?"

"I'm ready now."

"Right you are! The quicker we get away, the better."

"My trunk will be down at the dock in half an hour."

"I'll join you there," said Sir John. "I have a few little matters to attend to, but they shan't take long."

"Are you provisioned and coaled?"

"I always keep my boat ready. A yacht, sir, is like a gun—no use unless it's loaded, you know. At least, that's what your Buffalo Bill, whom I met last year at London, told me one day."

"Sir John," said Laughton, "this is most handsome of you, and I shall inform my government of your action."

"It's nothing at all," protested the Britisher. "I wouldn't bother about that."

"I shall, though. By the way, I have a bluejacket with me. Have you room for him?"

"I could take a whole ship's company, and I wish you had them with you," said Sir John, heartily.

## CHAPTER III.

### FROM CALCUTTA TO HONGKONG.

Half an hour later the two friends met at the docks. Although he had no doubt in the matter, Sir John had inquired at the bank regarding Laughton, and had satisfied himself as to the young man's claims. Convinced that the madcap American's assertions were genuine—they had been so stupendous as to be hardly credible—Sir John was cordiality itself. Without more ado, he led the way to the wharf, where the *Sea Lark's* launch awaited them.

In a few moments they were on board. The lieutenant's boxes were stowed below, Matthew was sent forward to enjoy the hospitality of the men, Sir John and Laughton repaired to the bridge, the anchor was weighed, the engines started, and in a brief time they were slipping through the muddy waters of the Hooghly, rapidly leaving Calcutta behind.

The distance from Calcutta to Colombo by the steamship route is nearly thirteen hundred miles. The ordinary mail steamers require between five and six days under the most favorable circumstances to make the trip. Sir John's boat was as good as his word. If she did not attain a twenty-knot speed, she approximated it very closely. Sir John pushed her for all she was worth, and on the evening of the third day after she left Calcutta the *Sea Lark* dropped anchor at Colombo.

The P. and O. steamer, which had had over a day's start of her, did not get in for sixteen hours after the yacht. By great good luck, Laughton succeeded in catching a belated Messageries Maratimes boat, east bound from Marseilles, which was just upon the eve of departure for Singapore. He therefore saved at least a day, which would have been lost if he had been compelled to wait for the connecting P. and O. boat, which, by the way, had not yet arrived at Colombo from Aden.

With a feeling of the most unfeigned gratitude for the splendid service the Englishman had rendered him, he bade Sir John good-by. The young lieutenant and the elderly British capitalist had become warm friends on the voyage.

"Would you really, you know, have bought the *Sea Lark* if I had been willing to part with her?" asked Sir John, on one occasion during their voyage.

"Bought her! I should say so! I'd have bought anything on earth to get to Hongkong a day quicker, and I'd have paid you anything you asked for her, too," answered Laughton, emphatically. "You see what you have lost."

"No, not seriously, old chap?"

"Upon my word of honor! I'll buy her now if you say the word. As a recompense for all your kindness."

Sir John stared at him open-mouthed.

"Money's no object to me," continued Laughton, "in a crisis like this. What I want is to get there."

"That's what all you ripping Americans want, isn't it?"

"I guess it is," laughed the lieutenant.

"Well, you'll get there, all right, if war comes, and I hardly see how it can be avoided. I should like to see the game you play."

"Why don't you come down to Manila, then?"

"I intend to do so," answered Sir John; "but, unfortunately, I have some business matters of importance to attend to in Calcutta. I shall look in upon you in the Philippines, though, in the course of next month, probably—if you're there."

"We'll be there, all right," said Laughton, with great emphasis.

"I don't doubt it, my boy."

"And when you do come, Sir John, I'll warrant there'll be such a welcome for you from the American fleet that you won't know how to stand straight after we get through with you!"

As they parted, Laughton did not fail to remind his new friend of his promise, and received another expression of Sir John Holland's determination.

The most popular man on the *Marseilles* was Laughton. Although the sympathies of the French officers of the ship were plainly with the Spanish in the impending quarrel, yet Laughton's gayety, his cheerfulness, his engaging personality, won their hearts. When he backed the influence he had acquired with liberal *douceurs* to officers and engineers, with promises of bonuses for every hour gained, he was not surprised when the *Marseilles* reached Singapore in six days and a half instead of seven.

The vessel would be required to lay at least a day and a half at Singapore, discharging and receiving freight. Telegraphic dispatches received at that place from his brother, whom he wired to keep him apprised of the state of affairs at every point where he could be reached by cable, advised him that war

was imminent, and that if he wanted to get on Dewey's fleet before it sailed, he must spare no expense to avoid delay.

The old *Mombassa* of the Peninsular and Oriental Navigation Company's line and a North German Lloyd steamer were both loading for Hongkong at Singapore. The North German Lloyd was the speedier ship, so report had it, but the *Mombassa* was a British ship, and Laughton counted on enlisting the sympathies of her captain and getting him to drive her, while he knew instinctively that, as the Germans were open and avowed partisans of Spain, he would get no favors on the Lloyd's steamer.

Laughton had been in Singapore on several occasions on different cruises, and had a large credit there. Indeed, his brother, foreseeing the possible necessity, had arranged by cable to have the lieutenant's drafts honored to any amount. The young American used his funds as if he possessed the pocket of Fortunatus.

The *Mombassa* was not exactly under charter to the American officer, but, with his guarantee against loss of freight charges, she actually sailed before her appointed time of departure, leaving half of her prospective cargo—the charges upon which Laughton had to make good—lying on the wharf to await the arrival of the next steamer!

The story of Laughton's mad race from Calcutta had leaked out among the passengers via Clumpblock and the forecastle. Sir John Holland's assistance had committed England to his side, anyway. The whole ship entered into the desperate dash of the young American. With British fondness for betting, they wagered on the declaration of war, its date, the day of the arrival of the *Mombassa,* whether they would find Dewey's ships in the harbor, whether Laughton would reach them there or anywhere in time to get into the fighting, and so on. It was ever so much more exciting than making pools on the day's run, although that was more interesting than usual, owing to the hurry.

Laughton took the American end of all the bets. He was confident that war would be declared before they reached the port, but thought that the *Mombassa* would get into Hongkong in time for him to join the fleet. He arranged with those with whom he wagered that the bets were to be paid to the orders of the respective bettors at the English Club at Hongkong, as soon as possible after the events decided them; for, as he pointed out to the others, it would probably be touch and go with him, and if he could manage to get to the American fleet, he would scarcely have time for anything else.

In wagering on the American side, Laughton, adroitly enough, was betting on the *Mombassa,* for his arrival depended upon her; and he was careful not to involve any of her officers so that there would be loss to them in case she got into Hongkong ahead of time. On the contrary, he tipped everybody who would accept a gift, and, consequently, the old *Mombassa* was never so rushed since her trial trip.

On the morning of the twenty-sixth of April, they made out Victoria Peak, towering above Hongkong Island. All the passengers on the ship were soon on deck, and, as everybody had become intensely interested in the question of war, Captain Chiswick, the commander of the steamer, signaled the shore by the international code for information.

The answer came back via the fluttering flags:

War declared yesterday.

The message was received with mad cheers from passengers and crew.

"Ask where the American squadron is, captain," urged Laughton, eagerly.

The reply came:

Account neutrality laws, Americans ordered leave port yesterday.

"You'll be too late, Mr. Laughton," the captain said, sympathetically, as the message was read.

"I suppose so, gentlemen," Laughton said, fighting against his disappointment and, turning to the passengers with whom he had made bets on that point; "you will win on this count, but I suppose there are boats to be chartered or bought in Hongkong, captain?"

"Plenty of them, I take it," said Captain Chiswick.

"Well, if that's the case, I'll overhaul our squadron. Our boats will be headed for Manila, and, if I know the commodore, he won't push his ships so as to save coal."

"They're signaling again, sir," interrupted an officer on the bridge, touching Captain Chiswick and attracting his attention to the shore.

"What!" exclaimed the captain, fixing his glance on the signal station.

"There, sir."

"What do you make out of it now?" asked Captain Chiswick.

"American ship *McCulloch* just leaving harbor," answered the signal officer.

"Thank God!" cried Laughton, jubilantly. "I shall be in time!"

Meanwhile, the captain swept the channel before him. His glance passed the British squadron, which was anchored near the naval station. There, beyond them, just leaving her anchorage before the city, his skilled eye presently made out a small, lead-colored ship. She was headed seaward. Volumes of black smoke tumbling out of her funnels told him that she was coming fast.

He fixed his glass steadily upon her, and stared long and carefully. It was evident to Laughton and to everybody else that he was not looking idly.

"For Heaven's sake, what do you see?" cried the lieutenant, impatiently, at last, unable to bear the suspense any longer.

"Wait a bit, Mr. Laughton. Keep cool, sir. I'm only trying to settle her flag."

"Yes."

"The Stars and Stripes!" He took the glass from his eyes and turned around, smiling broadly. "Yon's your ship, sir."

Laughton seized the glass, focused it, fixed it upon the approaching vessel.

"It's the *McCulloch*, one of our revenue cutters."

"We're just too late for her," said the captain.

"Too late? Not much!"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you know the way the *McCulloch* will have to pass?"

"Down the channel to port yonder," said the captain, pointing.

"Rush the *Mombassa* over there. We must stop her!"

"Stop an American war ship at such a time as this!"

"Now, captain, for Heaven's sake, don't argue! Do what you can."

"But my owners?"

"Damn your owners! I mean, bless your owners! I'll make it all right with them, and it will be the best piece of work for yourself you ever did in your life. I wish that you would signal the *McCulloch* that you must speak with her. Tell her that you are in distress. Hoist the ensign Union down."

"But I am not in distress," protested the captain.

"I am," said Laughton. "I must get on that ship if I go overboard and they have to pick me up!"

"I like your pluck, young man," said Captain Chiswick, "and I don't mind putting in a few licks for you." He turned and gave the necessary orders.

The *Mombassa*, to the astonishment of those watching her from the shore, suddenly deviated from her course and placed herself squarely across the course of the *McCulloch*. A few moments afterward, long sets of signals fluttered from the masts of the big P. and O. liner.

On came the *McCulloch*. Captain Hodgson was driving her for all she was worth. He had a message to deliver to a certain old officer and two thousand men not far away, who were waiting for it with an eagerness beyond belief. He did not wish to stop for anything on the sea, but there was something so unusual and so extraordinary about the movements of the big liner that his attention was perforce attracted toward her.

There she lay, tossing, in the gentle swell, right in a fair way, so that he would have to make a broad turn to pass her. He could see, before he read the signals, that she had hoisted her ensign Union down, and he argued, therefore, that she must be in distress. No true

seamen ever passed a distress signal at sea. There are too many dire possibilities to think of neglecting it.

It was too bad, but he felt that he would have to stop, if only for a question. The breeze was faint, and did not lift the signal flags on the *Mombassa* until he got close aboard. When they were read, the whole matter was explained.

American officer on board. Please take him with you.

There was a man wigwag signaling from the starboard bridge of the *Mombassa,* too. Quick eyes on the revenue cutter noted what his signals read:

I am Lieutenant Laughton of the United States Navy, ordered to join Dewey. For God's sake, don't leave me!

The appeal was more than Captain Hodgson could stand. As it happened, he knew who Laughton was. He had chanced to hear about him from idle wardroom talk while the squadron lay at Hongkong preparing for war, as to whether Laughton would get there in time. His sailor's heart was touched. The *McCulloch* stopped, and a boat was called away. Before it could be lowered, however, a boat from the *Mombassa* dropped into the water and started for the revenue cutter.

Captain Chiswick had had the boat made ready betimes, in the hope that the *McCulloch* would heed his signals. As Laughton and old Matthew Clumpblock dropped down the battens to the boat, the English sailors forward, the officers on the bridge, the passengers on the promenade decks instinctively manned the side and cheered again and again. They had lost their money, but, like true sportsmen, they rejoiced that Laughton would be able to join his fleet.

After a largess that made their mouths open and their eyes stare, the sturdy British oarsmen in the *Mombassa's* boat put their passengers alongside the revenue cutter. Their trunks were passed on board, and in another minute both vessels gathered way. The *Mombassa* dipped her flag in salute to the gallant little steamer flying the Stars and Stripes.

Laughton's desperate dash from Calcutta was successful, for Captain Hodgson informed him that he was bound to Mirs Bay, twenty miles from Hongkong, whither Dewey had assembled his fleet, and that he bore a dispatch of the greatest importance for the commanding officer.

Laughton would be in time for the fighting!

## CHAPTER IV.

### WHAT HAPPENED AT MIRS BAY.

The thirty miles between Hongkong and Mirs Bay were soon passed. Hodgson drove the *McCulloch* northward like one possessed. Dewey might, and probably would, take his own time in the cruise to Manila, but it was Hodgson's business to get the important dispatch he was carrying into the commodore's hands as soon as possible.*

The eight handsome ships swung lightly at their anchors in the open roadstead. No longer the dazzling white cruisers or traders of peaceful days, they were all painted a dull lead color. Unlike the Indians, who make themselves as gay as possible on the eve of battle, the paint of the ships was so chosen as to render them as inconspicuous and as hard to see as they could manage. Even the gleaming barrels of the great eight, six and five-inch guns of the main batteries were painted the same dull hue. The weather was warm. Officers and men were in white duck, which was less conspicuous than the ordinary blue. The only spots of color visible were in the ensigns that rippled in the gentle breeze from the flagstaffs aft.

Laughton loved his flag. He had a naval officer's reverence for it, and that respect which years of training had made a part of his life, to the full; but, above all that was official and perfunctory, he cherished it. It stood, to him, for home and friends, for that dear land

*The official reports say that the dispatch was received and answered at Hongkong on the twenty-fifth, but for the sake of this story I have felt warranted in this small variation from the records.

to which he returned after every cruise in foreign ports with a new sense of its supreme desirability among the countries of the world as a home for humanity. It stood, to him, for the people he loved, the friends dear to him in their adoption tried. He had but one tie alien to that land, and her he hoped to bring there some day and teach her to love it as he did himself.

But the flag stood for more than a place of sweet associations to Laughton. It stood for a great past, a strong present and a brilliant future. His country was the home of an idea in action. It was the home, above all other places on the globe, of human liberty.

Patriotic to the core, Laughton was familiar with every detail of his country's history. Indeed, in that history his forebears had borne no mean part. From 1776 to 1898 they had been at the service of their native land, and well had they answered the demands she had made upon them. To call the roll of the past was to bring up associations personal to his family; while in times of peace their varied talents had shone in statesmanship, diplomacy, trade and commerce.

It was these last that had laid the foundation of that great fortune, the usufruct of which he now enjoyed. The flag stood, to him, for the successful achievement, against every conceivable attack upon it, of that great idea of human liberty at which older and unwise nations had mocked.

So much for the past. In the present it stood, to him, for the great nation unafraid, which had said to one near its borders, where the passions of centuries had culminated in a series of atrocious and frightful reprisals upon a feeble people seeking liberty—doubtless influenced thereto by the example of the United States: "These butcheries must cease! If you cannot govern these people—and it is evident that you cannot—you must let them go free, and we propose to see that you do it."

It stood for that nation which alone among the nations of the world in the whole course of human history had dared to do a thing like that. He was glad and proud that he had been permitted—or was about to be permitted—to bear a humble part in the bringing about of that new lesson of disinterested courage to the wondering nations of the world.

The people with whom he had come in contact in his mad dash from Calcutta, who had heard of the recklessness with which he had offered to buy a ship, who had marked his determination to stop at no expense whatsoever to get to the fleet in time, would have understood him better if they could have read these thoughts. Laughton would have given up his fortune cheerfully for the chance of action, and it was no mere love of an ardent sailor to get into a fight. Oh, he would have enjoyed that well enough, but back of it was the feeling that his country called him, and at every sacrifice, at every hazard; all that was best in the young man responded eagerly to the appeal.

And in the flag's recallment of the past, its declaration of the present prophesied the future. For Laughton foresaw the speedy success of the American arms; he saw the magnanimous treatment of the vanquished; he saw kindly assistance cheerfully given to struggling people whose liberty the United States was assuring. He saw a world watching and listening. He saw a people greater, freer, more powerful than any nation had ever been. He saw his country a bright and shining light among the nations of the earth, a menace to evildoers, a safeguard to the weak and feeble, an inspiration to ambition for liberty; a nation standing like a tower four-square with righteousness to every wind that blew—not a Lord Protector, but a brother to the world. Long live the United States!

These things the ardent young sailor saw in the Stars and Stripes. He thanked God and took courage that he was alive and able that day; and, as he was a very human fellow, in spite of, or, perhaps, because of, his dreams, another thought presently found lodgment amid these great conceptions. Dark eyes and raven hair, and a voice thrilling with passion! God, the United

States and one woman! A happy man was Lieutenant Griffith Laughton, of the navy of the United States, on that sunny, spring morning.

As the *McCulloch* swept down the line toward the ship from which fluttered the blue pennant of the commodore, destined to be the last of the great bearers of that now—sadly be it said—forgotten title, Captain Hodgson had flung from the masthead of his vessel a string of signals. The commodore and his staff knew, therefore, that the gallant little revenue cutter bore an important message, and that that message was from the United States. Everybody else in the squadron knew it, too.

What could it be? Two thousand hearts throbbed with high anticipation. Those whose duties permitted crowded to the rails as the *McCulloch* raced by, and stared at her with an eager intensity, as if thereby they hoped to discover the message by reading the bearer's mind.

The anchor chain had scarcely ceased rattling through the hawsepipe when the *McCulloch's* boat shoved off, and Captain Hodgson himself, with Laughton beside him in the stern sheets, with the faithful Clumpblock curled up in the bows, made his way to the flagship. Exactly as if he had been a captain in the navy, with the same honors—for he had earned and was to maintain a position among that band of brothers by his ability and zeal—Hodgson was received on the deck of the *Olympia.*

Several of the captains happened to be on the flagship then. A man slightly under the middle size, with a bronzed face and a white mustache, a man so spotlessly, so radiantly, neat, not to say dapper, that the fact struck even the most careless, stood on the decks in a group of other officers—the immaculate Dewey. Behind him was the stout, burly form of Coghlan, of the *Raleigh,* a quizzical, humorous look on his bronzed face. On the other side was Walker, of the *Concord,* gaunt, somewhat hollow-eyed, with a drooping mustache, looking more like a philosopher than a sea captain, but, as the event will show, able to hold his own in any company. Nearer to Dewey than any was a distinguished-looking man with short side whiskers. This was Lamberton, his chief of staff, and with him were some of the juniors of the staff. Gridley, flag captain, already stricken with a mortal illness, but refusing to leave his ship, was elsewhere, busied with the duties of his station. Wildes and Dyer, good men and good captains of the *Boston* and *Baltimore,* happened to be on their own ships.

There was but one other of the brave captains of the squadron in the little group that confronted Captain Hodgson. This was another small, slender man, with his mouth hidden by a long, brown mustache and short, thick, brown beard. There was a general air of listlessness, not to say *blasé* indifference, about him which was belied on occasion by the flash of his keen, sharp eye. He stood as if nothing very much mattered, as if he didn't care what happened, but nevertheless nothing that transpired escaped him. Where all did so well in the future battle that it were almost invidious to particularize, it will perhaps suffice to say that he was destined to win not the least distinction of Dewey's captains.

This was Edward P. Wood, of the *Petrel,* the smallest and weakest unit of the squadron, looking like a toy beside the big, splendid *Olympia.*

As Hodgson stepped aboard, he touched his cap in salute, which Dewey and the officer of the watch acknowledged, and then advanced toward the commodore, followed closely by Laughton, and at his heels the faithful Matthew.

"Good-morning, Hodgson," said Dewey, politely.

"Good-morning, commodore. This dispatch came this morning."

He handed a sealed envelope to his commander. Without a word—Dewey was a man of few words in an emergency—the commodore tore it open. Everybody imagined that he knew the tenor of that dispatch, yet there was a most breathless silence among the little group as the commodore glanced over it. The excitement had been communi-

cated to the sailors of the ship. Petty duties were suspended for the moment, hands that had been busy with work dropped it to the deck, and all within sight of the little group stared eagerly at them.

The dispatch had been translated, and the commodore had no difficulty in mastering the contents. He read it slowly, too. When he finished, he lifted his head, closed his lips with that snap characteristic of him, and then with his eyes dancing, said, quietly:

"Thank the Lord!"

The officers crowded around him; for a moment distinctions of rank were in abeyance. The commodore looked from one eager face to the other and smiled.

"At last," he said, "I have a chance. We'll wipe them off the Pacific Ocean!"

One of the officers violently shook hands with his nearest neighbor. All of them were beaming.

"Perhaps you would like to hear it, gentlemen?" asked the commodore.

Would they like to hear it! In his clear voice he read:

> War has commenced between the United States and Spain. Proceed at once to Philippine Islands. Commence operations at once, particularly against the Spanish fleet. You must capture vessels or destroy them. Use utmost endeavors. LONG.

It was a message that perhaps devoted them to destruction, yet as they heard it they broke into laughter and jest. No schoolboy given his vacation could have been more exuberant. There was no cheering. There had been no official announcement of the fact yet; the men forward had no absolute knowledge of it, but a thrill of assurance went through the ship, and had not naval discipline been so strong they would have broken out into loud acclaim. As it was, the spirit of jubilation was there.

The tension of the moment gone, the men of the crew returned to their tasks with a zeal and determination that they might have exercised had the fate of the ship in the forthcoming war depended upon them.

In time of action a man will coil a rope or polish a gun sight with the same care with which he will adorn himself for his wedding, and the duty which in peace would be considered a bore becomes a joy. The excitement, the intensity, having abated somewhat, Dewey turned toward Laughton. The young lieutenant had waited patiently, exchanging friendly nods and greetings meanwhile with the officers whom he knew, until his turn arrived.

"Well, sir?" began the commodore.

"I have the honor to report for duty, sir."

"Good! I'm glad to welcome you. Where did you come from?"

"From Calcutta, sir. I only received my orders on the eleventh."

"What!"

"Yes, sir. I had been up in the mountains beyond Darjeeling, on a three-months' sick leave, shooting and hunting, and it was only by chance I came down to Calcutta."

"Didn't you know?"

"No, sir; I only heard at Darjeeling."

"Humph!" said Dewey. "Did I understand you to say that you left Calcutta on the eleventh?"

"Yes, sir."

"But how was it possible for you to get to Hongkong by the twenty-sixth?"

"Well, sir, I had a great deal of good luck. An Englishman with a steam yacht helped me out, and it wasn't difficult."

"You must tell me all about it at the first opportunity," said Dewey, smiling. He knew Laughton's reputation, and he scented an interesting story. "Meanwhile, I congratulate you on having reached us in time. You did well. I should like to assign you on my staff. You speak Spanish, don't you?"

"Like a native, sir."

"And you have interests in Spain, haven't you?" continued the older man, with pleasant raillery.

"They are all in Manila now, sir."

"Of course."

"You don't understand me, sir. I mean the young lady is there, and——"

"Well, you may have a chance to see her."

"I hope so, sir."

"When we get down there I shall use

you on the *Olympia,* but we are too crowded now, and——"

"Excuse me, commodore," drawled the commander of the *Petrel.* "I can take Laughton. In fact, I asked for him."

"Very good. You may go there, Laughton."

"I beg your pardon, sir," faltered Laughton, who had not known before that Wood had so small a gunboat, "but will—will the *Petrel*—she's so little——"

"Do you mean will she get in the line of battle?"

"God bless me!" spluttered Wood, with a most astonishing amount of energy, fairly taking the words out of the commodore's mouth, "you don't know that ship, youngster. Not get into the line of battle, indeed!"

"She's my main dependence," said Dewey, with a laugh.

"The only battleship in the squadron," cried Wood. "Not get in line of battle!"

"My dear Wood, I should be lost without her," said the commodore, laying his hand on the other man's shoulder.

"Then I'll go gladly," said Laughton, smiling in turn. "I suppose that my man yonder may come with me?"

"Certainly," answered Dewey, and then he spoke to the old sailor.

"Good-morning, Master Clumpblock."

"Good-mornin', yer honor," began the boatswain's mate, who had stood quietly by, but with his eyes and ears open during the little interview. "I hopes I sees yer honor well?" he continued, in his old-fashioned way.

"Well and happy," returned the commodore.

"I takes it that we're goin' to hev some tall fightin', you an' me, like we had w'en we was on the old *Mississippi,* sir?"

"Yes; but this time with better luck, I hope."

"I ain't afeered of that with you in command, sir, an' these young officers an' me to keep the sailormen busy. We'll do the job up proper."

"Certain to," laughed Dewey. "I'd like to keep you here, but——"

"I'm 'tached to Mr. Laughton this cruise, yer honor."

"Wood, have you room for him?"

"Room for him!" snorted the commander of the *Petrel.* "He's worth a whole ship's company. Stow your dunnage in the gig, Matthew."

"And harkee, Master Matthew," said Dewey, pleasantly, but with a touch of the imperative again, "you have heard all that has transpired aft here, but no publishing the news to the fleet until I give you word!"

"Oh, no, sir; not me, sir. I've got my jaw tackle belayed until you sez the word."

"Oh, Gridley," said Dewey, to his flag captain, as the latter approached him, "you have heard the dispatch?"

"Captain Lamberton has just told me of it, sir."

"Very good. As soon as Consul-General Williams, of Manila, reaches us, which certainly can't be later than to-morrow, we'll get under way for the Philippines. Meanwhile, I shall prepare orders for the squadron. Mr. Morgan," he said, to the officer of the watch, "will you send Mr. Brumby"—his flag lieutenant—"to me at once?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Good-afternoon, gentlemen."

"Good-afternoon, commodore."

"Laughton," said Wood, as the two sat down in the stern sheets of the *Petrel's* gig, "I'm glad to have you, but I don't know whether I'll forgive you for saying what you did about our not getting into the fighting line."

"Captain, I know your spirit, but sometimes the spirit is willing but the commodore is not."

"If you had thought but a moment," laughed Wood, in his quiet, noiseless way, "you would have known that the *Petrel,* drawing less water than any ship in the squadron, would be certain to get in nearest the enemy. Besides, I expect to give as good an account with our old five-inch guns as anybody in the command."

"I know you will, sir, and I will help

you all I can," returned the lieutenant, with becoming zeal.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE MIDNIGHT DASH THROUGH THE BOCA GRANDE.

Six o'clock in the evening of the thirtieth of April. The great ships lie idly in the gently tossing sea. It bids fair to be a close night. Above the horizon off to starboard rise the headlands of Cape Bolinao, and the island stretching north and south as far as the eye can see is Luzon.

The ships, stripped to a gantline for the fighting, have been waiting while the *Boston* and the *Concord*, supported by the *Baltimore*, have thoroughly examined Subig Bay, the best place on the island for a dash at the American fleet. They have returned and reported nothing there.

The Spanish fleet is in Manila Bay undoubtedly. Signals from the *Olympia* have called the captains aboard the flag. Something is in the wind, of course. What else can it be but attack? No other course is possible. How and when it is to be delivered are secrets as yet locked in the bosom of the commodore. But the others in the fleet will soon know.

Now he is telling his captains. Now a little group of boats around the *Olympia* is separating. Brawny oarsmen are sending the gigs of the commanding officers sweeping through the quiet waters. There is a scurrying on decks, for each captain must be received at the gangway with the honors of his rank.

On board the *Petrel* the officer of the watch, with the side boys and Matthew Clumpblock, boatswain's mate, trilling at his pipe, welcome Captain Wood. All the other officers are on deck, and as Wood steps on his own ship, he touches his cap to the colors—custom invariable and beautiful in the naval service—and turns toward them.

"Well, gentlemen," he says, in that quiet, indifferent voice of his, which the sparkle in his eye belies, "we're going in now. Mr. Hughes," he continued, turning to his executive officer, "muster the crew. Tell them so. Yes, let them cheer if they wish," he answered, in response to a question from his executive officer. "Indeed, nobody could stop them."

Shrill notes from the silver calls of the boatswain's mates ring out over the deck. Hoarse words of direction follow in quick sequence. There is a pattering of many feet, a momentary buzz of conversation. The men are mustered in long, orderly ranks. Then follows silence, broken only by the soft lapping of the waves licking the steel sides as the little gunboat rolls slightly in the uneasy sea. A few words, and the crew learns the good tidings.

"Shipmates!" roars out one dashing sailor. He gets no further. From stem to stern the *Petrel* rings with cheers. Faintly across the water, in the quiet evening, come similar sounds from the other ships. The men of the squadron have the news. Thus they have welcomed it. A band plays on the *Olympia*, "The Star-Spangled Banner" floats on the air. Here and there a voice takes it up. Others join in. They sing like the Vikings of old on the eve of victory!

So the commodore will attempt the entrance to the Bay of Manila. He has heard, as have they all, gloomy tales of a channel strewn with mines, of batteries of Krupp guns, far superior to the eight-inchers of the flagship and the *Baltimore*, on Corregidor Island, about a mile from the northern promontory that marks the entrance to the bay; of similar war monsters on El Fraile, half a mile from the other side; of torpedo boats, and so on.

Well, these things have to be faced. The fleet is going in. Behind that horror of hidden destruction, past those guns that sweep the channel, lies the Spanish fleet. Destroy or capture—these were the words. Fifteen miles up the bay they lie, and it is necessary to run the gantlet at the Boca Grande in order that Dewey can hurl his ships upon them. Not recklessly, not indifferently, but quietly, with a full consciousness of possible danger, with the calm-

ness of a brave man confronting the inevitable, he will lead his fleet into the harbor.

The commodore learned lessons of war in a great school. He often recalls a great commander who taught him the art of fighting—and no one could better give the lesson than that brave old admiral who, wresting victory from rout in the crisis of a great action, hurled his own ship across another deadly infernal line with the graphic remark: "Damn the torpedoes! Go ahead!"

Great and splendid has been the history of the American navy. Whenever it has been called upon it has responded with a courage, a precision, a completeness and a success which make it the most honorable service of the nation.

The traditions of the past stood by George Dewey on the bridge of the *Olympia* that night. From the Valhalla of heroes I doubt not that Paul Jones, John Barry, Stephen Decatur, James Lawrence, Thomas MacDonough, David Farragut, David Porter, looked down with prescient eye on every officer and his men in that hour, and, although calmly confident of the result, thrilled with the knowledge that the old flag was once more upon the sea, with men clustered about the guns on the decks beneath it, waiting to show that this country, with its thousand leagues of coast, does well in its emergency to depend upon the sailor.

Something of this flashed across the mind of Laughton as he followed his commanding officer to the bridge while the ships in succession got under way. The *Olympia,* small enough beside the huge steel battleships scouting along the shores of Cuba looking for Cervera, but huge beside the rest of the fleet, and fairly gigantic compared to the little *Petrel,* steamed out slowly to the head of the line. After her, and four hundred yards distant, exemplifying the traditions of the stout "old Maryland line," came the *Baltimore,* then the *Raleigh*—singular that a ship bearing the name of him who was at once gay courtier, gallant captain and bold sailor, should, nearly three hundred years after his death, be about to engage in combat upon seas the very existence of which he did not even dream of.

Then in the center of the line—being as Laughton facetiously remarked to his captain, the strongest ship in the fleet—the little *Petrel.* After her the *Concord,* and bringing up the rear of the string of fighters, the *Boston.* One ship named from the far northwest; two from the home of the sturdy sailors of the epoch of the great 1812 captains and their men, New England; two from the Southland, and one, the very spirit of wind and wave and tempest, the stormy *Petrel.*

Following the fighters came the *McCulloch,* snappy little bull-terrier, her men burning with envy because the three-inch guns she carried were not of twice the caliber; and the transports *Zafiro* and *Nanshan,* laden with coal; the young ensigns who commanded them disgusted beyond measure, although these were their first commands, at the unkind fate which kept them from the breeches and sights of guns they loved on the fighting line.

Every ship had been prepared for action almost since leaving Hongkong. Nothing that any captain could do had been left undone. Although there probably has never been afloat a better drilled squadron in a more thorough state of preparation than that under Dewey, yet drills, quarters and exercises had been kept up intermittently on the short voyage from Mirs Bay. There was nothing to be done now but the actual fighting.

There was a moon that night, but the sky was filled with heavy clouds, drifting across its face from time to time and throwing the deep shadows over the sea. It would set early in the morning, and the commodore had so timed their advance that when they arrived at the mouth of the bay it would be quite dark, and the chances of their being observed as they ran the passage would be correspondingly fewer.

Past headland after headland the fleet ran along the coast to the southward. Presently the two bluff points of land that marked the entrance to the bay rose in view. As they progressed fur-

ther southward, Corregidor Island, towering some six hundred feet above the skyline and crowned with its battery of heavy guns, was visible as a dim mass against the darkening sky. The black bulk of the island could be seen against the faint light of the growing stars, for the moon was setting.

Making a wide detour to run in through the southernmost channel, the Boca Grande, the fleet headed straight for the mouth of the bay. Not a side light was visible on any ship. Even chart rooms were securely screened. Every light which might betray the presence of a vessel to the Spaniards, who presumably were keeping good watch from the adjacent islands, was carefully concealed. Aft a single electric light, hooded and sheltered so that it was only visible to the ship next astern, discovered to each following vessel the position of the ship next ahead.

It was eleven-thirty in the evening when the squadron turned northward and headed straight for the mouth. The men had been called to quarters long since. On most of the ships the hammocks had not been piped down and the men had slept on deck at their guns. Wood and Laughton, on the bridge of the *Petrel,* walked softly.

"It's a mystery to me," said the lieutenant, "how these men can sleep. Here we are going into battle. If I know the commodore he will take us in at close quarters. Some of the ships will surely be hit. Many a man will lose the number of his mess to-morrow. Yet they sleep as peacefully as if it was any ordinary day that was about to break."

"Yes," answered Wood, quietly, "it is singular. I feel no inclination to sleep myself," he added, simply.

"Nor I. I couldn't sleep to save my life."

"Yet I am conscious of no special apprehension."

"Nor am I," answered Laughton. "It isn't that. It is the sense of responsibility. These men depend on you. They have confidence in you. In less degree, they depend upon us and have confidence in us. You have the chief responsibility, but we share——"

"Yes," interrupted the captain, "that is it." His languid manner and indifferent method of speaking had disappeared. One could not say that it had given way to energy, but he spoke a little more sharply. "It is so. When I was a reefer I used to think there was nothing so fine as being a captain, having my own ship, being my own boss, but now the responsibility is greater than the joy.

"Ay, sir, but think of the honor and glory!"

"Yes, I'll think of that to-morrow," said the captain. "To-night I am thinking of the men."

He turned from Laughton, stepped over to the starboard side of the bridge and peered intently into the night. He thought he could distinguish a black blur to starboard. El Fraile—the Monk—was about a mile away. Could that indistinct spot be the island with its deadly Krupps?

Then he leaned over the bridge rail and looked across the ship to port. Although it was perhaps three miles away, the huge bulk of Corregidor—the Mayor—was plainly visible. Ahead he could see the stern light of the *Raleigh,* aft not a thing, although he knew the *Concord* was there. It was black as midnight on the water now. They were winning through and nothing had happened yet. Would anything happen?

Left to himself, Laughton was staring intently at the men below him. They interested him more than the islands. Not all of them were asleep or had been asleep. Many had been restless, nervous, unstrung, but all of them he knew instinctively would be ready to give the finest service that men could offer when the hour was struck and the demand was made. Presently Captain Wood turned and came back amidships.

"We're almost there," he said, in his usual lazy voice; "nothing exciting about this. Quite a tame—affair."

"Look!" said Laughton, pointing aft. "There, again!"

Something was happening on the *McCulloch.* A jet of flame burst through the blackness of the night from her

smokestack like the flower-pot firework the small boy delights in. Soot in her stack or careless stoking, or light, powdery coal — whatever it was — had flashed through the midnight like a great torch. In a few minutes after the first display it was repeated.

Everybody on the *Petrel*, and, indeed, throughout the squadron, knew of it at once. The men were awakened by one of those subtle waves of thought transference, and without question rose and stood by their guns. The half-asleep squadron was alert in a moment.

"If they don't see that they must be blind or dead," said Wood. "Ah, there it goes!"

A rocket zigzagged slowly into the air from El Fraile. An answering signal was repeated from Corregidor. Lights were seen on shore. Still nothing happened for a few moments. The Spanish garrisons evidently were completely unsuspecting. Their officers probably had difficulty getting the men to the guns and getting the guns cast loose. If they did not hurry up they would be too late, the American squadron would be past them.

No bells had been struck on the ships throughout the passage, no one knew the time.

"What o'clock?" asked Wood of Laughton. "Has eight bells gone?"

"It's fifteen minutes after," said the lieutenant, fishing out his watch and stepping forward to where a faint light came from the chart room.

"The first of May," said Wood, quietly.

From the decks below a reckless voice whispered in a tone quite audible on the bridge:

"'Wake and call me early, for I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother, I'm to be Queen o' the May.'"

"S-sh!" cried another voice, authoritatively. There was an instant silence, broken only by a few snickers among the men.

Wood smiled under his mustache. Laughton chuckled audibly under his breath as he completed the quotation softly:

"'To-morrow'll be the happiest time of all the glad New Year; the maddest, merriest day' for somebody."

What was that? A flash of light from the black mass to starboard crashed through the blackness of the night, sounding like a thunderbolt. The scream—once heard never to be forgotten—of a shell whirling through the air just ahead of the *Petrel*. A splash in the water. Then silence again!

"At last!" said Wood, coolly. "Stand by your guns!"

Everything was ready, of course. They waited, the men at the big six-inch guns forward and aft, for their captain's word. Suddenly there was an angry scream from the *Raleigh*. She had returned the fire with one of her five-inch guns. The *Concord* took up the war song with her main battery. The *Boston* sent a heavy shell hurtling through the air. The guns on El Fraile roared out again and again. The *McCulloch*, whose mishap had discovered the passage of the fleet, cut loose with her small battery. Above the deeper diapason of the great guns they heard the rattle and crash of the three-inch barkers of the revenue cutter.

"Shall I fire, sir?" asked Hughes, the first lieutenant.

"Not yet," answered Wood, quietly. "It doesn't seem worth while. We'll get all we want later. Besides, we're almost out of range."

The disappointment of officers and men was very evident.

"Look at that!" continued Wood, as a shot from the *Concord* was seen to burst squarely over the place indicated by the flashes of the guns of the Spanish battery. "That'll quiet them, I guess."

There was no further firing from El Fraile after that, and there had been none at all from Corregidor. The gunners on that point afterward said that they could see absolutely nothing at which to take aim. And the American ships were now well past the batteries. Everyone held his breath for a space, watching for some upheaval of the deep beneath the keels, but none came.

No submarine mines exploded, no

mines rose out of the darkness and tore through the thin sides of the ships. No bold and reckless sailor with torpedo boat or destroyer attempted to bar the passage.

The firing, however, had awakened the bay. Signals were made, lights flashed along the shore toward Cavite and Manila, but the fleet steaming steadily ahead was not molested further.

"Well, that was easy," said Wood to Hughes and Laughton; "it's seventeen miles up the bay. At this rate we won't be engaged until morning. I don't think the commodore will attack in the dark, probably at daybreak. Let the men lie down at their guns again if they want to. They'll need all the rest they can get."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the executive officer, turning away.

"Didn't you say you had a friend in Manila, youngster?"

"The girl I am engaged to marry," answered Laughton, simply.

"You don't say so!"

"Too bad, isn't it?" said the young man.

"Oh, well," drawled Wood, "you can have your fighting now with great guns before your marriage. It will tend to make things more peaceable afterward maybe."

"I don't know whether there will be an afterward," said Laughton, quietly.

The matter had given him great discontent when he had reflected upon it, and the nearer he approached Manila the more difficult his position seemed to be.

"If the young lady cares," said Wood, "this will make no difference in the end, and if she does not——"

"I'm sure that she does," answered Laughton, warmly.

"It'll be all right, then," returned his young captain.

"I hope so, sir."

"You may be sure of it."

"Thank you. I think I'll go below for a little while, sir, if you have no objections."

"Go, by all means. Perhaps you can get a little sleep."

"I shan't try," answered Laughton. "I have some—things—to do. But I'll join you on the bridge in a short time."

"Take your time," said Wood; "there will be nothing doing for at least three hours, I take it."

Forward on the forecastle the crews of the three-pounders and the two forward six-inchers of Plunkett's division were enjoying the quiet hours in accordance with their several tastes. Some of the old fellows had sought such comfortable nooks on the decks as they could find, and had disposed themselves to slumber. Some were pacing restlessly up and down, the fever in their blood keeping them from sleep. A little group of the young men—jolly, reckless, dare-devil young dogs—was clustered around Clumpblock.

"Fight?" he said in answer to a question. "You don't know how that man'll fight!"

"He's so infernally clean, not to say dandy," said a youngster. "I've never seen him when he wasn't spick and span. Doesn't look as if he could bear to soil his hands or clothes with gunpowder or smoke or——"

"You can't allus tell about that," said another veteran seaman. "I was at New London onct, aboard one of them practice cruisers, the old *Constellation*, it was, an' Jack Soley—you remember Black Jack Soley, Matthew?"

"Black Jack Soley?" said Clumpblock, who knew every officer in the navy—every one above the rank of lieutenant, that is. "In course I does. An' a devil he was to fight, too!"

"Well, he was a-goin' to a ball at one of them big hotels ashore, you know, one night, an' he was dyked out in full rig, white gloves, spiked coat an' all that sort of thing, lookin' as fine as a peacock. We had a big quarter gunner on ship 'bout a fathom high an' weighin' some two hundred off, all muscle and sinoo. He come off in a shore boat just drunk enough to be ugly. Leftenant Soley was 'bout to go on shore. We didn't have no marines aboard, an' I was on watch at the gangway. The master-at-arms come along arter a while, but afore he got hold of the man the quarter gunner began to curse

Soley. I've heerd some swearers in the old navy, but this one beat every one I ever come across.

"Soley he stood it fer about half a minute. He was a leetle man, 'bout half the size of t'other feller. The fust thing we knowed he sprung on him like a tiger. I leaped forrad to help him, an' he sez to me: 'Don't you interfere,' most short like. Then he tuk that quarter gunner by the neck or some way 'bout the throat, whirled him around, ran him forrad, an' when he come to the fore hatch he chucked him down unceremonious! Then he sez to the master-at-arms, who was standin' quite astonished like: 'Take some of your men down there an' put that man in the brig.' He'd split his clean white gloves an' soiled 'em, too, for the quarter gunner was dirty as well as drunk, an' all he said as he come aft to the midshipman of the watch was: 'Mr. Bracy, will you kindly step below an' git me another pair of gloves from my cabin?'"

"An' you think the commodore is that kind of a man?" asked another.

"I was with the commodore," said Matthew, breaking in and taking the answer to that question upon himself, "on the old *Mississippi.*"

"River er boat?"

"Both on 'em. Old Cap'n M'lanct'n Smith had command of the big side-wheel steamer *Mississippi.* She was off Port Hudson. We was tryin' to run the batteries there, follerin' the lead of flag officer—that's wot they called him then—Farragut, an' we run aground right under the lee of the Johnny batteries. We had been fightin' like hell, but from w'ere we was we couldn't bring a single gun to bear, an' they was a-pumpin' lead into us 'bout one shot a second. You'd ought to 'a' seen the commodore—w'ich he was our fust luff at that time! He was the coolest man on the ship. There wasn't no panic nor no confusion. He was jest as ca'm as he'll be to-morrer, I wenture to say, an' jest as clean an' neat an' tidy then as he is now."

"What did he do, mate?"

"Set fire to the ship an' blowed her up, arter we found we couldn't git her off ag'in. Got out our boats an' got away. Oh, I knows young Dewey, all right! You youngsters needn't be afeerd. You'll git your belly full of fightin' to-morrer er my name ain't Clumpblock."

Back in the wardroom some of the officers were writing letters. Forward in the forecastle careless men were spinning yarns, each in his way thinking of the morrow, while the little fleet slowly forged through the still waters of the silent bay.

## CHAPTER VI.

### GETTING UP AN APPETITE FOR BREAKFAST.

At half after four o'clock in the morning the mess cooks were routed out, and coffee was prepared and served to everyone on the ships. Day was already beginning to break, and by the time the men had had their coffee and the mess gear had been piped down the dawn was upon them.

They had stopped well up in the bay, opposite the town of Manila, which lay seven miles off to starboard, to the east, that is. About the same distance to the southeastward of the fleet was the naval station at Cavite.

A slight, greenish mist hung over the waters in that direction, completely obscuring them. The lookouts searching the bay, as it was illuminated by the first rays of the rising sun, could see nothing in that quarter, yet there was no doubt in anybody's mind that the Spanish fleet was there.

In such a position their offensive force as well as their defensive powers would be greatly increased by the heavy batteries of the naval arsenal at Cavite, especially the guns on Sangley Point, which jutted out like the barb of a fish-hook between the naval anchorage and the bay.

Bugle calls shrilled over the decks through the calm air of the morning, and shortly after two bells in the morning watch the ships got under way. The *Olympia* led, followed by the *Balti-*

*more,* the *Raleigh,* the *Petrel* and the *Concord,* with the stout old *Boston* bringing up the rear. The *McCulloch,* too small for the battle line, was stationed with the transports to protect them from possible attack, and also to be in readiness to dart into the fighting in case any of the American ships were disabled, to pull her out of the line or do what she could.

With a port helm the vessels swung in a great arc to starboard, and then turned to the southward. As the light grew stronger the mist was dispelled, and they saw ahead of them, anchored in a long line, extending from Sangley Point to the opposite shore across the bight of the fishhook, the Spanish fleet.

Neither individually nor collectively were the Spanish ships a match for those of Dewey's squadron, but backed and supported by the heavy shore batteries at Cavite, the aggregate was a heavy overmatch for the American ships. There were Krupp guns on Sangley Point of vastly greater range and penetration than anything in Dewey's command. The approaching battle, therefore, was very far from being an equal one, for the odds were greatly in favor of the Spaniards. And one gun on shore is usually counted as worth three on a ship.

Although every American of the eighteen hundred in the squadron confidently expected victory, no one dreamed of immunity, and everyone, from the commodore to the smallest powder boy, expected to pay a heavy price for it. Yet no one manifested any particular emotion. The approach of the Spanish ships was not half so exciting or so nerve-racking as had been the silent dash through the Boca Grande, past the forts, the night before. The officers and men went about their preparations in a quiet, businesslike manner, as if they were about to engage in ordinary target practice.

An overwhelming proportion of Dewey's crews were full-blooded Americans, and they exhibited in this action the customary coolness of the nation. Here and there a man was frightened, perhaps. Some of the bravest soldiers admit fear in their early battles, and the majority of these men had never been under fire before, but the steady demands of the routine work of preparation settled their nerves, and with calm confidence they waited the signal to begin.

At five-thirty-five in the morning the *Olympia,* belching out great clouds of smoke from her funnels—it was terrifically hot in the engine rooms, the temperature ranging from one hundred and sixteen degrees up, and nobody contributed more to the ensuing battle than the engine-room force, by the way—swung in parallel to the Spanish line at a distance of about five thousand yards.

Dewey stood with his staff on the bridge. Captain Gridley, much against his will, was sent to the conning tower. He was stationed there lest some well-placed shot striking the bridge should deprive the *Olympia* at the same moment of commodore and captain.

In the turrets below him the men were carefully training and sighting the big eight-inch guns. The commodore could well understand their impatience. His thoughts went back to those days of '61-'65, when as a young man he had heard the roar of great guns, marked the scream of shell, recognized the cry of the wounded. Save for a few old veterans like Clumpblock, he was alone in his experience. He lingered to give the order, not so much from reluctance to begin the game as from unwillingness to waste precious shots before he had reached a position where he could deliver the fire of his ships with the deadliest possible effect.

Meantime the enemy was busy. Spurts of flames and clouds of smoke came from the Spanish ships. Now deeper roars from the Spanish sixes and four-point sevens indicated that the batteries on Sangley Point had been scaled. Over from the north, from the batteries along the Luneta in front of the city, flashes of light and clouds of smoke told that they were recklessly contributing their quota to the action.

The Spanish guns were badly aimed, shots fell short, shells carried over. The water was whipped into foam here and

there and thrown up into great jets, but no shot went home on any American ship. Yet there was nothing so far to disconcert the Spanish!

Steadily on came the gray-clad squadron, bright battle flags fluttering in the breeze of the morning from every masthead, gaff-end, jack-staff. Silent and grim they swung nearer and nearer. Now the forward guns bore fairly and squarely. The commodore turned and spoke a word, quiet and business-like, as methodical a word as all the orders that had been given on that cruise. One of those simple phrases that stick in the mind like, "I have not yet begun to fight;" and "Don't give up the ship;" "Don't give her up, Logan;" "Damn the torpedoes! Go ahead!" "Don't cheer, men, the poor fellows are dying"—the immortal shibboleths of the American navy.

The commodore bent toward the conning tower.

"You may fire when you are ready, Gridley," he said.

Instantly Gridley pressed an electric button, signals rang out. A tremendous blast of flame and smoke leaped from the long, lean muzzles of the great eight-inch guns in the forward turret. The ship quivered and rocked from the concussion. The huge bolts of steel hurtled through the air toward the Spanish fleet. Into the smoke of her own discharge rushed the great ship.

Now the five-inch guns of the broadside bore. In rapid succession, with detonating crashes, they all opened fire.

The commodore glanced back. Astern of him came the *Baltimore*. Hard on her heels the *Raleigh*. His captains were keeping their distance beautifully. There was no excitement, no rush, no crowding, no confusion.

In an instant the *Baltimore's* side was a sheet of flame. With a crash like a thunderclap her big eights and sixes let go. The detonation had scarcely died away before the *Raleigh* cut loose with her six-inchers and her terrible fives.

The fleet was edging nearer the Spaniards with every turn of the screw. Some of the smaller guns of the secondary batteries joined in the deadly cannonade. A roar like the blast of a small volcano came up from the still sea, as the *Petrel*, gallant little boat, came dashing along, opening fire with her two six-inch guns.

It seemed a shame, from one point of view, to put that baby ship in the line, but there she was, blazing away as bravely as any of them. Laughton had one of the six-inch guns, and he thought, as he ran his eye over the telescopic sights, training them on a big white ship that bore the flag of the Spanish admiral, that if he could have achieved it in no other way he would cheerfully have given up the whole of his fortune to be just where he was.

He was ready, and the instant Captain Wood gave the order from the bridge to commence firing, the bolt of his war monster was speeding.

From the top above the bridge the navigator called out a moment after:

"Shot from the after six-inch gun struck the Spanish flagship."

The men cheered frantically, their cries being drowned by the other of the great pair of rifles, Plunkett's. They were too far away for the three-pounders to do anything yet, and the crews of the secondary battery on the little vessel had nothing to do but look on or lend a hand elsewhere when occasion demanded.

After the *Petrel* came the *Concord*; then, bringing up the rear, the *Boston*, both hammering away with might and main upon the Spanish ships. As they swept on, the batteries on Sangley Point received their quota of the terrible storm of shot and shell. Beyond the point Dewey led his fleet. Then he turned to starboard again, and once more passed along the Spanish line. This time he was much nearer to the Spanish fleet.

All but the smaller guns of the secondary batteries were now in range, and the din of battle was something terrific. The men had stripped off their shirts and were fighting as the men of old had fought in days gone by, naked to their waists. The heat was almost unbearable. The service of the guns was rapid and accurate, but the complicated mechanism was constantly giving trou-

ble. Gas checks didn't work, electric primers failed to ignite.

Not only must there be skilled gunnery, but constant repairs, substitution of one part for another—replacing things that were broken or otherwise useless. The men sweated and toiled dreadfully as the vessels steamed along the line, everyone animated with a desire to get in as many shots as possible.

What was happening on the Spanish fleet? What was happening on the ships of his own command? No one could tell now. So far as the commodore could see, his own ships kept their line and presented no outward appearance of damage. The fire from the Spanish fleet seemed to be as rapid, if as inaccurate, as ever, but whether any of the shells that screamed through the air had injured any of his ships the commodore could not tell.

The Spanish fleet had been attacking without moving. Now a great white ship darted out from the line of her consorts toward the Americans. Every gun on the *Olympia* and the *Baltimore* and the forward guns of the *Raleigh* were concentrated upon her as, with magnificent courage, she steamed directly toward the American fleet, each ship pouring a tempest of destruction on the enemy.

No cruiser, however built, protected, armed or manned, could survive a fire of that kind. Her sides torn to pieces, her guns dismounted, her men killed, blazing with fire, presently the riddled Spanish ship turned about from her wild dash to struggle back to her anchorage.

A shell from one of the forward eight-inch guns of the *Olympia* struck her squarely in the stern, tore through her, raking her to her stem and exploded forward. The proud ship was a complete ruin. The Americans were near enough to see a small boat taking an officer from her to another ship.

As the head of the squadron had swept on, the *Petrel* had come within range. They had a clear view of what was happening. The Spanish admiral, like Perry, with a heroism that cannot be too greatly admired, was transferring his flag to another ship. Instantly from out the Spanish line two small vessels came dashing toward the Americans.

"Torpedoes!" was the cry throughout the fleet.

The secondary batteries accounted for them at once, for one of them blew up and the other turned tail and fled.

The ships had drawn past the Spanish line now. Once more the *Olympia* turned, and once more passed along the Spanish fleet. This time the distance was decreased until the American ships were less than one thousand yards away. Again did the devoted Spanish ships endure the terrific storm of shot and shell. Again were the gunners swept from the guns at the embrasures at Sangley Point.

It was seven-thirty-five when the *Olympia* passed down on the third round. They had been fighting three hours. This time, instead of turning and doubling back upon the Spanish line, the flagship headed out into the bay with signals flying. The admiral was ordering his fleet out of action, that the men might have breakfast!

## CHAPTER VII.

### "TANGLEFOOT WOOD."

"To hell with breakfast!" panted one of the petty officers as he heard the news. "Let's finish 'em up while we're about it!"

Such was the sentiment of the men, but the commodore, realizing that he was six thousand miles from his base of supplies, from all possible re-enforcements, and convinced that he had put an effectual quietus upon the Spanish fleet, had withdrawn to take account of the damages his ships might have received, and see what quantity of shot and shell had been expended.

In that course he followed the practice of the 1812 captains, who used to beat the British antagonists into pulp, then go off a safe distance, repair their own damages and then came back and receive the surrender.

Reports came from the different ships

that, save in a few trifling instances, they had sustained no damages whatever; none were killed, none were wounded, every ship was as fit and ready for action as she had ever been. So much for the Americans. What about the Spaniards?

There out of range, but still in sight, they could see clouds of smoke rising above what had been the Spanish fleet. The enemy's ships had suffered severely, how severely no one could tell. There would be time enough to investigate their condition later. Meanwhile, since the fleet had drawn off and there were no damages to be repaired and the report of the expenditure of ammunition to the diminishing point was not confirmed, it would be just as well to send the men to breakfast and give them a little rest.

A little after eleven the ships once more got under way. This time the *Baltimore* is accorded the honor of the lead. The *Olympia* follows, then the *Concord*, next the *Petrel*, then the *Raleigh*, and last the *Boston*. The terrible rumble and grumble and roar begin once more. This time the ships sheer close in shore until there is but a few feet of water beneath their keels. The Spanish fire is greatly weakened, but it still keeps up. With desperate gallantry they fight their guns, the ships sinking beneath them, blazing over their heads. Vessel after vessel is dismasted and knocked into ruins. Then the fleet turns its attention to the shore batteries.

Closer and closer they get. It is dangerous for them to go further lest they run aground. The *Concord*, a smaller vessel than the others, is nearer than any. Signals are made for the *Petrel*, which draws less water than any of the others, to go in and finish up the Spanish fleet.

Wood, who throughout the whole action has been languidly reclining on a deck chair on the bridge near the engine-room telegraph, smoking a cigar, as if he had no great amount of interest in the battle of the day, suddenly wakes up to the opportunity that is his. Detaching himself from the fleet, he rounds Sangley Point and heads for the remains of the Spanish ships in the bay.

Every gun, including the one-pounders, the thirty-seven millimeters and the Gatlings, is now in action. Some of the smaller Spanish ships, protected by location and the hulks of their larger consorts, have yet fight in them.

These the *Petrel* engages single-handed and alone. Wood has the chance now. He has had little to do heretofore except follow his leader and fight his guns. Now he is free. Back and forth, in and out, draws the little vessel.

The guns on the Spanish ships that bear are trained upon the *Petrel*. The shore batteries pay her particular attention. Her men have fought hard before, it is nothing to their efforts now. Ship after ship is finally put out of action by her furious fire. She is practically alone in the fighting now, for the greater ships outside have nothing left at which to fire.

Every Spanish flag is down at last save one, and that flies from a single ship. Presently that, too, is struck. The only boat left serviceable is called away. Not that the Spanish fleet has destroyed her boats, but the blasting concussions from her own guns have so shattered them as to make them unseaworthy. With a heavily armed boat crew Laughton tumbles over the side, ready to seize the surrendered Spanish ship. A cutlass swings at his hip. He feels as if he were going to take part in one of the old hand-to-hand engagements when seamanship, personal courage and prowess counted for as much as scientific gun fighting—and he relishes the thought. But it is not to be.

As the whaleboat shoots toward the Spanish ships, in defiance of every law of war and honor, she suddenly reopens her fire. Laughton and his men, who are quite in mood to tackle a battleship with their naked fists, are recalled and the battery of the *Petrel* finally and effectually settles that Spanish ship.

It is afternoon now. There is not a single Spanish flag flying. Of that Spanish fleet not a single keel is afloat. Battered and shattered, ripped and torn,

seamed and scarred, they have all sunk; broken masts, torn funnels, riven superstructures, gaping cannon, here and there show above the water. The guns of the fort at Cavite are silenced, while flags flutter above the ramparts.

The *Petrel* is master of the situation. Her men gather up half a dozen tugs, steam launches and small craft, which alone have survived the dreadful deluge of the American fire. Wood takes them in tow and steams defiantly out of the harbor. As the *Petrel* passes the *Olympia,* the commodore is on the bridge. The men on the great cruiser break into tremendous cheers as the baby battleship, her prizes in tow, swings down the line to her place in the squadron.

Men have long spoken of Lord Howe's great battle on the first of June, so splendid an achievement that it is referred to in naval history as "The glorious first—of June." Henceforth they add another day to that calendar of achievements and speak of "The glorious first of May."

And of all the ships which fought that day none did more than the *Petrel,* the "Baby Battleship" of the American navy.

Laughton recalled to the wardroom that night how, when Wood was instructor in chemistry at the Naval Academy, while he was a cadet, with others assembled below, that the nickname of "Tanglefoot Wood" was given him.

Be it stated that every officer who is lucky enough to win the affections and the respect of the cadets must have a nickname, by the way. Wood had a curious habit of twisting his legs around a chair upon which he sat. So much so that the cadets used to say that if his attention were suddenly attracted he would break a leg before he could respond—either his own or that of the chair!

The appellation had been appropriate enough then, but after the exploits of this afternoon, and the way he had handled his ship, the dashing gallantry with which he had gone in alone to smash up the remains of the Spanish fleet, this name seemed even more apposite. He had so tangled up the Spanish that none of them got away. The toast of the night and long after was:

"Here's to Tanglefoot Wood and his baby battleship!"

Barring the *Olympia,* the cocky Petrels thought they could tackle anything in the squadron.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE COMMODORE GETS A DOUBLE SURPRISE.

The next day Dewey sent Lamberton, his chief of staff, on board the *Petrel.* Once more the baby battleship steamed into the harbor of Cavite. Lamberton, accompanied by Laughton, whose perfect knowledge of Spanish made him a most valuable aide, landed and demanded the immediate surrender of the arsenal.

The flag had been struck the day before, but Dewey had not cared to take possession then. Lamberton observed before he landed that the fort was still full of soldiers, a number of whom were massed on the landing place. Wood had stopped his ship within five hundred yards of the shore, and every gun was trained on the Spanish works.

"If I'm not back within an hour, Wood," said Lamberton, coolly, as he took his place in the boat, "open fire without further orders."

As the Americans landed they were met by Laughton's former friend, Captain de Sostoa, of the Spanish navy, who was in command of the place. The Spaniard gave no sign of recognition, nor did the young American manifest any. Conversation at first was purely formal, and was conducted through the medium of Laughton.

"May I ask," began Lamberton, "why your men"—said men had closed around the Americans with threatening gestures—"are in arms after you have surrendered the place?"

"Pardon, your excellency," returned De Sostoa, quickly, "there was no surrender."

"You hoisted a white flag last night, did you not?"

"They did, sir," whispered Laughton to his superior, before he translated the question. "I saw it myself."

De Sostoa, who understood English quite well, fixed a malevolent glance upon the young lieutenant. However, he felt it was impossible to deny the fact.

"Yes, señor," he replied, reluctantly enough, "we did, but not as a token of surrender."

"What then, sir?"

"As a flag of truce, during which we might remove our women and children to a place of safety."

At these astonishing words the young American started. De Sostoa looked at him coldly.

"Ask him why he didn't take his women and children to a place of safety before," said Lamberton, bluntly. "A fort is no place for such in time of war."

"You Americans," returned the Spaniard, suavely, "came to visit us at so early an hour that we had no time. If you had only been gallant enough to have begun the engagement at a less unreasonable time we could have arranged it."

"Sir," said Lamberton, decisively, "you fired the first shots. You began the engagement. That showed you were ready for fighting. At least that you thought so."

De Sostoa began to argue the point, but Lamberton cut him short finally with these words:

"I consider that you surrendered, and you must yield now, anyway."

Further argument by De Sostoa resulted in an ultimatum from the American, that if the Spaniards did not lay down their arms immediately, the engagement would be reopened. The minutes were flying. The Spaniards were talking.

Lamberton and Laughton realized presently that if they were not out of the fort at the time appointed, nothing on earth would keep Wood from opening fire. He was a man who believed in obeying orders exactly, and he would certainly do so in this instance.

De Sostoa continued to haggle and protest, but the American cut him short so peremptorily that the Spanish commander, who did not wish such another battering as he had received yesterday, agreed to surrender the fort provided proper terms were given him.

Dewey had previously given Lamberton full and explicit instructions as to what to do, which Laughton then and there took down at his dictation:

> Without further delay, all Spanish officers and men must be withdrawn and no buildings or stores must be injured. As Commodore Dewey does not wish further hostility with the Spanish naval forces, the Spanish officers will be paroled and the forces at the arsenal will deliver up their small arms.

It lacked now but five minutes of the appointed hour when the *Petrel* was to open fire. De Sostoa asked that these liberal terms be written down in Spanish, pledging himself to accede to them. Lamberton consented. Laughton volunteered to remain ashore for the purpose of drawing up the necessary papers if Lamberton would go back to the *Petrel* and stop her fire.

The American lieutenant was escorted to a room in the commandant's quarters in the arsenal, while Lamberton and his other aide went back to the gunboat. They reached there just in time, for as the launch darted alongside the gunners of the *Petrel* had begun the final training of the guns preparatory to opening fire. It was a close shave for the Spaniards, and incidentally a close shave also for Lamberton and his companions.

The chief of staff explained to Captain Wood that further time had been granted the Spaniards, and that hostilities were not to commence just then—a piece of information that visibly disappointed the crew of the gunboat.

At half after twelve the white flag was flung out again. Lamberton went ashore with another armed boat crew and found the fort absolutely deserted. There wasn't a Spanish soldier about, and what was worse, Laughton himself had disappeared. A hasty search throughout the arsenal revealed no trace of him. The Spanish soldiers had departed without a word.

The town, however, was soon filled with natives, who began an indiscriminate pillage until they were stopped by Lamberton and his men. So soon as he could get order restored, and a small garrison installed, Lamberton returned posthaste to the *Petrel* and reported the loss of Laughton. Then he hurried back to the flagship and communicated the same startling intelligence to the commodore.

Laughton was immensely popular on the *Petrel,* and a regular howl of rage went up from the men. If Wood had been left to himself, and had followed the feelings of his crew, he would have taken the *Petrel* down opposite Manila and opened fire on the town, to get back his lieutenant.

The commodore was a very angry man. Without further delay he sent for a signal officer and, in obedience to his commands fluttering from the *Olympia's* mastheads, the fleet once more got under way and once again cleared for action. Nobody save the men on the *Petrel* and the commodore's personal staff knew the meaning of the present maneuver. As the squadron, led by the flagship, steadily steamed up toward Manila, everybody believed that the commodore intended to open fire upon the town.

The youngsters on the ships, careless, rather rejoiced in the opportunity for some more fighting, but the commanders of the cruisers and the higher officers wondered gravely what had entered the mind of the commodore. They could hardly believe it possible that he intended to bombard the city without giving time for the women and children and non-combatants, such as foreign residents, to get to places of safety.

True, he might only intend to attack the forts, but how he could do this without at the same time bringing the town under fire they could not see. Technically speaking, he had every right to attack those forts without regard to the consequences to the town which they covered, for they had opened fire upon him as he had passed down the line the day before, and had thereby rendered themselves liable to punishment.

The city was filled with alarm at the rapid approach of the American ships. Everybody knew now what these American ships were good for. There were no illusions now remaining in the minds of the most confident Spaniards as to their complete and absolute helplessness before the American guns. The authorities had been sluggish before. They acted promptly now. A steam launch, carrying a white flag at the fore and the British ensign aft, darted from the wharves toward the flagship. The way of the *Olympia* was checked, and the fleet halted in obedience to signals, while the launch came alongside the flagship.

In the launch was Mr. Rawson Waller, the British consul at Manila. Fully expecting that Dewey intended to shell the town, he had come off in a great hurry to ask him for time to remove the foreign residents. He was conducted to the quarter-deck and received by the commodore. After congratulating him upon the marvelous victory of the day before, the consul proffered his request.

"Mr. Waller," said the commodore, shortly, "this morning I sent an officer ashore to the arsenal at Cavite under a flag of truce, to demand the surrender of that fort—rather to take possession, since it was surrendered on Sunday. Although the Spaniards hoisted the white flag while under the batteries of my fleet on that day, the place was filled with soldiers on Monday, and Captain Lamberton here, with whom I make you acquainted"—the two gentlemen bowed—"had difficulty in inducing the Spaniards to give possession. They only did so under threat of further bombardment.

"With Captain Lamberton and acting as interpreter, was Lieutenant Laughton, of the *Petrel,* whom I have attached to my personal staff. The *Petrel* was instructed to open fire within an hour from the departure of Captain Lamberton if he did not return. The Spaniards asked for more time to complete their preparations. Articles of

surrender were to be drawn up and signed. Captain Lamberton returned to the *Petrel* just in time to prevent her opening fire.

"Lieutenant Laughton remained at the arsenal to assist in the preparation of the papers. At twelve o'clock, when a force was landed to take possession of the place, it was found that the Spaniards, contrary to all the rules of war, had decamped. I should not care so much for that, but they took my lieutenant with them, for he was not in the fort. There was absolutely no trace of him, although a most careful search was made.

"Now, sir"—the commodore's voice rose slightly, his eyes flashed—"Mr. Laughton was under the protection of a flag. Furthermore, he was in a post which belonged to us. The garrison, having surrendered, were my prisoners. Certainly they were at my mercy. He has either been murdered or taken away. If he has been taken away he must be in Manila. I require that he be returned to me within one hour after you leave here. If harm has come to him"—the commodore shut his lips and locked his jaws with that tight snap that he had when he meant business clear through—"well, it will be the costliest outrage ever committed by a Spanish official. One for which I shall exact retribution to the last drop. I had purposed bringing the city under my guns and sending a messenger ashore to carry this word to you, but since you are here, perhaps you will do it for me."

Mr. Waller bowed in acquiescence.

"As to your request," continued Dewey, "the inhabitants have just one hour to get out of the way. Unless I get my lieutenant back, I shall open fire on the forts. The conduct of the Spanish officers is an affront to civilization, an outrage to humanity and an insult to the American flag! I had been disposed to deal leniently and kindly with our enemies, but this is another matter."

"Commodore Dewey, no one can more heartily agree with you than I in denouncing this outrage," answered Mr. Waller, promptly. "I will carry your message to the governor general myself gladly, and if your lieutenant is alive—and I pray God he is—I pledge myself to bring him back immediately."

"This is not all, sir," continued Dewey. "When he returns, he must be accompanied by the persons who are responsible for this treachery. They must be placed in my hands."

"These are hard conditions."

"I have no other. Permit me to suggest that you make the best possible speed."

"Nothing shall delay me," said Mr. Waller, turning away.

Somehow or other the news leaked out. The story of the commodore's prompt action, his stern ultimatum, spread through the ship. The Olympias and the Petrels were dancing with joy, while the other crews wondered.

Not for long, however, for the commodore signaled the captains to come aboard and fully informed them of the situation and of his intention. These officers in turn spread the news quietly through their own crews. The whole squadron had heard the story of Laughton's thrilling dash from Calcutta to join the fleet, and there was probably no officer in the squadron so popular as he, even with those who had never seen him or known of him before. They were to rescue him, and if that might not be, to avenge him.

Every man who could do so in this fleet drifting idly along the city front scanned the wharves. Watchers everywhere kept time on the English consul. The minutes passed slowly by.

Finally, when the hour was almost up, Consul Waller's launch was seen leaving the shore and heading for the flagship. It was soon alongside the *Olympia*. Waller was met at the gangway by the commodore.

"Have you got him, sir?"

"I have, sir," answered the consul.

There was a gravity about his look and demeanor which instantly apprised the commodore that something was seriously wrong.

"Is he dead, sir?"

"No, sir, but I regret to say that he is seriously wounded."

"How and by whom?"

"He was stabbed in the back by a Spanish soldier."

"Is that soldier with you?" asked Dewey with deadly quiet. The ship was so still that his voice was distinctly audible to the greater number of officers and men. There wasn't a breath of noise fore and aft the decks.

"No, sir," answered Waller. "He blew out his brains half an hour ago."

"Those who are responsible for him? Are they here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who are they?"

"Captain Don Manuel de Sostoa, of the Spanish navy, commandant at Cavite."

"Very good," returned the commodore, "we must first get Laughton aboard. I suppose he can't walk?"

"He is quite helpless on a cot, Commodore Dewey."

"Captain Gridley," said Dewey, "will you have a whip rigged and sling him on board in his cot?"

"Yes, sir," answered Gridley, promptly giving the necessary orders.

In a few moments the whip was rigged, the cot in which Laughton had been lying in the consul's launch was attached to it, and it was slowly and carefully lifted into the air and skillfully swung aboard the flagship. As the cot touched the deck, Commodore Dewey took off his cap, and in a moment every head on the ship was bared.

"How do you feel, Laughton?" asked the commodore, bending over him.

"I'm all right, sir," answered the young man, cheerfully, if somewhat feebly.

"I promise you adequate treatment of those who have brought you to this. Meanwhile, I turn you over to the surgeon. See that he is taken into my spare cabin instead of the sick bay, Dr. Price," continued the commodore.

The next instant he turned toward the side again. Up the battens came a small, white-haired, white-mustached old sailor, the gold lacings on his sleeve and collar and cap indicating that he was a captain in the Spanish navy. Following him, and assisted in her precarious climb by another Spanish officer, came a young woman.

"Who are you, sir?" asked Commodore Dewey, shortly acknowledging the first officer's salute.

"Captain Don Manuel de Sostoa, of the Spanish navy, lately commandant at Cavite."

"This lady?" continued Dewey.

"I am the wife of Lieutenant Griffith Laughton, at your service," answered Doña Inez, in excellent English.

## CHAPTER IX.

### HOW LAUGHTON WON HIS WIFE.

After Captain Lamberton left him at the arsenal, Laughton was promptly escorted to the house of the commandant. Paper and pens and ink were placed at his disposal, and he set to work to reduce the articles of capitulation to writing for permanent use, making copies both in English and in Spanish. The task was neither difficult nor long, and he soon finished his work.

It would be some time, he knew, before Lamberton returned, and he wondered what he should do with himself during the interval. What Captain de Sostoa had said about the non-combatants not having left the post had quickened his mind with hope that the woman he loved might still be in the fort.

Now that the excitement of the fight was over and the duty allotted to him performed so easily, he found himself dwelling with more and more intensity upon Doña Inez. It had been some time since he had seen her, and perhaps in the interim he had not been so devoted a lover as he should have been if he had been able to be with her constantly.

His conscience suddenly smote him. The thought that at that very moment she might be within the next room, as it were; that but for this war, instead of cold looks, he would have been welcomed with open arms by her father—and these would not have been the only arms open to him—stimulated him to action. Really, until that moment he had not realized how much he had loved

her. He must see her, and that without delay.

In his growing agitation he rose from the table and examined the room. Like all Spanish houses in the tropics, the quarters of the commandant were built around a *patio*. He stepped to a window. Outside he could hear the hurried bustle of moving troops. Inside, as he stared across the mass of flowers and growing plants, he saw a figure emerge from the gallery and walk slowly toward the fountain.

It was Inez. A year had elapsed since he had seen her. He recognized with a quick thrill of pride and affection that she had grown more beautiful than ever. He had not known before, he said to himself, how charming she really was. Yielding to an irresistible impulse, he opened one of the long windows and stepped out on the gallery, intending to go to her. He found his way barred by her father.

"Have you completed the draft of the articles, señor?" asked the captain.

"I have, sir."

"Where are they?"

"On the table in your office. I——"

"We will return there, if you please," returned the Spaniard.

Don Manuel de Sostoa made his way through the long window which served as a door, almost carrying the lieutenant back by force. With a lingering glance toward the figure in the *patio*, Laughton felt compelled to join the commandant of the place at the table.

The captain was in no hurry. He examined the articles carefully, and compared the two copies—he both read and spoke English exceedingly well—and finally affixed his signature to them.

"You will, señor," he said, in his coldest and most formal manner, as he concluded, "kindly remain in these quarters until the arrival of your officers to take possession."

"But Doña Inez——" began the young man, impulsively. "Your daughter——"

"Do not presume to mention her name, sir!"

"I must, I shall! I am engaged to her."

"The engagement was broken by the atrocious conduct of your countrymen in beginning war against Spain."

"It was not and shall not be broken! I love Doña Inez——"

"Have a care, sir! I told you not to mention her name!" said the captain, hotly.

"I will mention it whenever and wherever I please. You promised her to me. We plighted our troth in the most solemn way in accordance with the customs of your land. I intend to claim her as my wife——"

"And I say to you that I would rather see her dead than the wife of an American—an American pig!" added the Spaniard, using the title, in his wrath, which was frequently applied to Americans by his nation during the war.

"How dare you, a prisoner, apply such a term to me?" cried the quick-tempered Laughton, furious at this insult.

"Until your officers take possession I am in command here," retorted the Spaniard haughtily, but with a growing resentment. "This is my arsenal. I say what I please, sir. And I forbid you to——"

"You surrendered yesterday. You hoisted a white flag."

"I have explained. That was a flag of truce."

"Men of honor do not hoist flags of truce when they are under fire. You surrendered yesterday, to-day you take advantage of our forbearance."

"That is untrue! An abusive, an outrageous falsehood!" cried the little Spaniard, trembling with indignation.

He was humiliated beyond expression by the loss of the fleet, the enforced surrender of the arsenal and the other circumstances of the preceding two days, and now he had completely lost his self-control. He wanted somebody upon whom to wreak his anger and vent his wrath, and it was Laughton's luck to be in the way.

"It is the truth," said Laughton, now thoroughly angry in his turn. "But whether it is or not, it has nothing to do with Doña Inez."

"You would have it!" cried the Spaniard, now utterly beside himself with passion. "You are a gentleman, by rank at least, and wear a sword. No man has ever lived after giving me a lie."

He whipped out his sword as he spoke and fell on guard, menacing the lieutenant.

"I am here under a flag of truce!" protested Laughton.

"Would you shelter yourself by that fact?" sneered De Sostoa. In his anger, that important fact made no impression upon him. There was some method in his madness, too. He knew that his daughter loved this American, and that if he could engage him in a duel and kill him that he would be well out of the way. With his own weapon he threatened Laughton viciously, forgetful of the sacrednes of his person as an envoy.

"I shelter myself behind nothing," retorted Laughton, quickly, stung by the taunting tone of the other.

"Defend yourself, then, or by St. Jago, I'll run you through where you stand!" shouted De Sostoa.

"Don't you see I can't fight with you?" persisted the lieutenant. "You are the father of my affianced wife."

"Damnation!" cried the Spaniard. "That again!"

He made a fierce lunge toward the young man, which the latter avoided only by a leap backward. He saw that the older man was in such a state of mind that he would certainly kill him unless prevented. For half a moment he had an idea of throwing himself upon the Spaniard and trying to disarm him, but instantly recognized the impossibility of that. His own sword was out in a second. There was nothing else to do. As if they had been two men of the Middle Ages, he was soon parrying frightful lunges for his life.

Laughton was one of the best fencers in the navy, but he was hard put to it for a space to protect himself. He had not the slightest desire to take the mad Spaniard's life. He was playing for an opening by which he could disarm him. He knew that in his cooler moments the Spanish captain would bitterly repent his conduct. His gross breach of military usage and courtesy in failing to hold inviolate the person of an envoy would dawn upon him presently, but for a while the American had a hard time.

After some fierce sword play, however, he got his chance. De Sostoa was already well along in the fifties, and the fire and fury with which he had made his attack soon wearied him. In the twinkling of an eye, so soon as opportunity was presented, Laughton whirled the sword out of his hand. It crashed upon the stone floor of the room.

"Strike!" said the little captain, dramatically, thrusting out his breast toward the American. At that instant a wild scream rang through the place. It came from Inez, who entered at that instant.

"He will be killed, he will be killed!"

Laughton started to lower his weapon. He had no intention whatever of injuring the captain. The next moment something like a red-hot iron struck him in the back and he collapsed senseless on the floor.

When he came to himself he was lying in a room totally unfamiliar to him. Figures were moving about, and he dimly discerned, as his eyes grew accustomed to the semi-darkness, that a woman was kneeling by his bedside. There was something strangely familiar about the white, tear-stained face. He endeavored to fix his wavering attention upon her, and finally it dawned upon him that she was the woman he loved.

"Doña Inez," he said, feebly, at last.

"Oh, thank God and the blessed saints," cried the woman, "that you live! You will live for me!"

"For you," he faltered, "I could do anything. Won't you kiss me?"

Instantly she bent nearer to him and pressed his lips with her own. With a long sigh of contentment, he closed his eyes.

"Griffith!" she cried, in great alarm.

"It's all right, dear, that kiss would waken the dead. What happened?"

"Señor," said a deeper voice from the foot of the bed, "behold an old man broken and shamed. I tender you my

humble apologies. I place myself in your hands for whatever disposition you may choose to make of me."

"I remember now," began Laughton, after he had partaken of some wonderfully strengthening draught, administered to him by a Sister of Charity, "but surely you didn't——"

"No, no! You had me defenseless before you and spared me," continued the Spaniard.

"How was I wounded, then?"

"You were stabbed in the back."

"By whom?"

"One of my old sailors, peering through the window, thought my life was in danger and sprang upon you."

"Well, that was very prompt of him, wasn't it?"

"Do not speak of the wretch!" cried Don Manuel, sternly.

"Oh," said the young American, nonchalantly, "don't be too hard on him. He wasn't to blame."

"Possibly not, but he has, nevertheless, paid the penalty for his action, for he committed suicide when he found out his—mistake."

"That's too bad," said Laughton. "After all, it was all your fault."

"I acknowledge it, and am here to make whatever reparation lies in my power."

"Will you give me your daughter to wife?"

"If she is willing," said the Spaniard, resignedly.

"Are you willing, Doña Inez?"

"I am glad," replied the girl; "but do you care for me now that——"

"More than ever," answered Laughton, with more energy than he had hitherto shown.

"It shall be as you wish, then," said the girl, lifting his hand from the coverlid and kissing it tenderly.

"I wouldn't waste kisses there," said her lover.

"Wait!" returned the girl, blushing vividly. "And after——"

He closed his eyes. The strain was too much. They watched him, Doña Inez especially, breathlessly. Presently he spoke again.

"Where am I?"

"In Manila."

"In Manila?"

"Yes. We evacuated the fort and brought you with us, in an ambulance. The surgeon said it was best. My daughter was almost frantic," said the Spaniard.

"You brought me here?" Laughton's lips puckered into a low whistle. "How long have I been here?" he went on.

"About half an hour, I think. You were insensible, and then—well, not quite yourself for some time, señor."

"Well, you'd better get me away quick," the American said, promptly.

"It is impossible!" interrupted one of the Sisters of Charity. "The doctor says you can't be moved."

"Do you know what will happen?" continued the young man, forcibly, for all his weakness. "If I don't get back on that flagship the commodore will blow the whole town into kingdom come."

"But we will explain."

"You'll have to be mighty lively about it, then. The commodore is very hasty sometimes. I'm inclined to believe this will be one of the times when he will be in a hurry."

"You think that unless I deliver myself to him or make some satisfactory arrangements, he will destroy the city?"

"Yes, you can't trifle with him, you know."

"I will go myself. I will explain. I will surrender myself to his vengeance," said the little Spaniard, in a dramatic manner.

"Señor Griffith," cried Doña Inez, imploringly, "you will not allow my father——"

"Wait," said Laughton, "let me think."

A little silence fell upon the group. It was broken by the arrival of an officer from the governor. Hard upon his heels came that functionary himself. Don Manuel had taken Laughton to a suit of rooms he occupied in a handsome house adjacent to the governor's palace.

"That cursed American," began Don Basilio, the governor, "says that we

have an officer of his in this town, and if he isn't returned he will destroy the whole city."

"Bully for him!" chuckled Laughton, in spite of his weakness.

"Your excellency," began Don Manuel, moving aside and indicating Laughton, "the officer is here."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the governor, in great surprise. "How came he to be in this position?"

"He was ashore at Cavite preparing the articles of surrender. One of my men stabbed him. When we evacuated I brought him here."

"The American commodore further demands that all concerned in his detention shall be returned to him. It is a demand I cannot entertain for a moment."

"Pardon me, your excellency," said Don Manuel, swiftly, "the fault is entirely mine. We were engaged in altercation. My man thought I was in danger."

"Where is the man?"

"Your excellency, he is dead. I will yield myself to the pleasure of the American commodore to save the town."

"There is no help for it, I suppose?"

"Griffith, Griffith!" cried Doña Inez. "Can you not do something? You Americans can always do as you wish."

"I can," answered the young man, promptly, "and I will. Don Manuel, you freely give your consent to a marriage between your daughter and myself?"

"I do."

"Well, then, fetch some one, and have the knot tied immediately."

"You would be married here, now, at once, señor?"

"At once. The quicker the better," returned the young man. "I am sure the commodore will not wish to visit his displeasure on my father-in-law."

"I see," said Don Manuel.

"But," protested the governor, "you are over hasty and——"

"It won't take long to get spliced, and the rest is easy," interrupted Laughton.

"Is not the archbishop in his palace, your excellency?" asked the commandant.

"I think so."

"I suggest that he be sent for at once, the emergency explained to him, and the ceremony performed here."

"This is very irregular," protested the governor, dispatching one of the aides for the archbishop of Manila.

When the archbishop arrived he objected also, on account of the irregularity of the whole affair, but when it was explained to him he made no further comment. He had the power of dispensation himself. The matter was soon arranged, and before her father, the governor, the Sisters of Charity, Doña Inez de Sostoa and Griffith Laughton were made man and wife.

The physician, who had returned for another look at his patient, strenuously opposed his removal, but the young lieutenant declared that he felt so refreshed by his marriage that he could very well stand the fatigues and strains of the journey to the *Olympia*. In order that the town might be spared, and that the commodore might be put in possession of the facts with the least possible delay, he insisted upon being removed without further delay.

A detachment of soldiers carried him through the streets of Manila on a litter. They put him on the English consul's boat, and, accompanied by Doña Inez, his wife, and Don Manuel, with an aide, they started for the flagship.

## CHAPTER X.

### LAUGHTON CHEERFULLY PAYS THE PRICE.

To say that Commodore Dewey was astonished is to put it mildly. He stared at Doña Inez for a few moments in utter bewilderment. He could face any number of Spanish guns in any possible military contingency without flinching, but this startling remark took him completely unaware.

In a short time, however, he recovered his composure and bowed to the young lady, marking as he did so her rare beauty. He courteously motioned

her and her father and the young Spaniard to precede him to his cabin. Thither he invited Gridley, his flag captain; Lamberton, his chief of staff, and Mr. Waller, the English consul.

The door of the stateroom in which Laughton had been placed was open. He could both see and hear all that transpired, and he could be seen of the others.

Without a word Doña Inez stepped through the door and stood by the berth on which her husband lay. Now that all was over, he felt much better. The doctor had examined his wound and pronounced it serious but not fatal, and his vigorous young body gave him every chance for a speedy recovery.

Commodore Dewey motioned the Spaniard to a seat, the others took their places on the transoms or chairs as convenient, and the commodore himself sat down at the table and began to make inquiries.

"May I ask the meaning of the most extraordinary statement I heard a moment since from that lady?"

"It is susceptible of but one interpretation, señor," returned the Spaniard, courteously. "My daughter and your officer were married half an hour ago in my house in Manila by his grace, the archbishop of Manila."

"Umph!" said Dewey. "How came he to be in your house?"

"I took him there after he was wounded."

"How came he to be wounded?"

"One of my men stabbed him in the back."

"Why did he do that?"

"He saw me disarmed, helpless, before Señor Laughton's blade. He thought my life in danger, and he struck Señor Laughton."

"He saw you disarmed and helpless before my officer's sword!"

"Yes, señor."

"What were you doing?"

"Fighting."

"Do you mean to say that Mr. Laughton attacked you? That while under the protection of a flag of truce——"

"Pardon, señor, the fault was mine, I attacked him."

"But why?"

"We had a difference of opinion concerning his future relationship to my family. He had been affianced to my daughter, and I wished, naturally, to break it off. One word led to another. I was feeling badly over the events of the last few days, the surrender—I must confess I lost my temper and turned upon him. I forced him to unsheath his weapon and defend himself."

"I never meant to harm him, I never intended to do so, commodore," interrupted Laughton. "I was about to lower my point when——"

"The rest you know," continued the Spaniard, with a shrug of his shoulder.

"You will allow me, señor?" said Commodore Dewey, sternly. "You have done grievously wrong."

"I know that, Señor Commodore, and I have come to place myself unreservedly in your hands to make what reparation I can."

"But the man who struck the blow?"

"Dead, señor."

"I understand that he killed himself?"

"He did when he realized his mistake."

"But this marriage, sir?"

"Well, you see, commodore," broke in Laughton, "that was my proposition. I rather suspected that you would be inclined to make somebody suffer—er—for my—er—detention, and I used certainty of punishment to whoever got me into this scrape to induce Don Manuel to take me for a son-in-law. The governor of Manila received your message. He prevailed upon the archbishop to do the splicing, and here we are, sir."

"Yes, but who now is to suffer for this most extraordinary proceeding?" asked Dewey, smiling.

"So far as I can see, commodore," returned the young officer, "nobody does. In the first place, now that I am married, it's only a family affair. In the second place, at the expense of a trifling little scratch, I have gained a wife."

"And I lose," said Don Manuel, "my daughter."

"Pardon me," said Dewey, smiling,

"I don't think you have lost, either, for you have gained one of the finest young officers in the American navy as a son-in-law."

"I hadn't thought of it that way," said Don Manuel, rather dryly.

"Gentlemen," said the commodore, looking about him, "if Mr. Laughton is satisfied—and he appears to be—I do not see that any further action is necessary on my part. What do you think, Captain Gridley?"

"I agree with you entirely, commodore."

"What do you say, Laughton?" asked the commodore.

"If it is left to me," said the young man, "I give Don Manuel his freedom in exchange for my wife."

"You hear, Don Manuel, the decision of your son-in-law?"

"I acquiesce in everything, of course," said the Spanish captain, concealing his discomfiture very well, all things being considered.

He had really given up his daughter for nothing, apparently, but now that it was done he might as well accede gracefully.

"Mr. Waller," said Commodore Dewey, turning to the consul, who had been an interested spectator of the little comedy, "will you give Don Manuel passage back to Manila in your launch?"

"With pleasure. Don Manuel, will you honor me?"

"My daughter, I presume, goes with me?" asked the commandant.

"As to that," said Dewey, "that is out of my province. What do you say, Doña Inez?"

It was a hard position for a young girl to be placed in. She stepped to the side of her lover and husband and then looked at her father. The one held out his hands to her, the other stared at her beseechingly. She hesitated, turned and bent over Laughton.

"That shall be," she said, softly, "as my husband pleases."

"My wife stays with me," returned Laughton, triumphantly. "You have your answer, Don Manuel."

The Spaniard shrugged his shoulders, kissed his daughter and stalked out of the cabin. At a sign from the commodore the others followed after.

"I will give you a message for the governor in a moment," said the commodore, as Mr. Waller left the cabin. "I will join you on deck."

He turned and went over to the young officer.

"That was a fortunate escape for you, young man," he said, kindly. "This is no place for a wounded man. You have done your part splendidly, nobly. Now you must go back to the United States with your wife. And thus ends what might have been a most serious adventure. You are lucky to have escaped so well."

"Lucky to have won my wife so easily, you mean, commodore," returned the young American; "she's worth a thousand stabs."

"Yes, of course," laughed Dewey, and then he sighed, saluted Señora Laughton and left the two alone in the cabin.

"Are you happy, dearest?" asked Laughton, in a whisper, as his wife bent over his berth and rested her soft cheek against his forehead.

"But for your illness the happiest girl in the world," she replied, with shining eyes, kissing him passionately.

"And that's nothing," answered the young man, thrilling to her caress. "I would cheerfully allow myself to be cut to pieces for you!"

They went to Hongkong on a honeymoon in Sir John Holland's yacht a few days later. The gallant Britisher had made all possible speed to settle his affairs in Calcutta and go to Manila in time to see the battle, but in vain. To him the privilege of another cruise with his madcap friend, Laughton, and his charming wife, however, was some alleviation to his disappointment.

And if there was a yarn, above all others, that old Matthew Clumpblock, now finally retired, and an inmate of Laughton's household, loved to spin, it was the story of their race from Darjeeling to join the squadron, and of the fighting of the "Baby Battleship" on that glorious first of May.

# A Bucolic Confidence Game

By George Edwin Hunt

*Author of "The Capitulation of Captain Gethro," Etc.*

**The guileless rustic may be what is slangily termed an "easy mark" when he comes to the city, but it is not always safe to look on him in that light on his native heath. This is exemplified by Mr. Hunt's very humorous story**

LONESOME LINTHICUM and I were sitting in the stein room at the club with cold things in long glasses on the table before us. Lonesome showed symptoms of mental disturbance, but as he said nothing I awaited developments. We had long since passed the stage of friendship where conversation is the hall-mark of sociability, and had reached the comfortable intimacy of occasional silent comradeship that marks two kindred souls.

In the defenseless days of his babyhood, Linthicum's parents had played it low down on him and christened him Orbison Orville, but except for his banker, his lawyer and myself he had succeeded in keeping this secret.

To the world at large he was known as Colonel Linthicum, a title he disclaimed and which his service as marshal of Paradise, Arizona, for a term or two, scarce warranted.

To his intimates he was "Lonesome," a nickname given him by cowpunching friends after he had ridden many miles from a remote ranch to attend the funeral of an utter stranger and given as an excuse that he was lonesome. But that is not the story of this time.

Linthicum's ways are as an open book to me. When his keen gray eyes sparkle and the corners of his straight, firm lips twitch it is an odds-on bet that a story is imminent. And it finally came, as follows:

"These comedy talks about farmers buying gold bricks, signing thousand-dollar notes instead of four-dollar orders for banana seed, and otherwise demeaning themselves in an unseemly and paretic manner are a frost with me forevermore. Those tales are funny to read, but they don't eventuate; they may be art, but I'm blamed if they are realism.

"In a long and variegated career covering forty-two years I have butted into 'most every chance to get buncoed that presents itself, including short cards at Three-Fingered Pete's in Paradise and a church fair in Milwaukee. I've been bumped in all the approved and some unusual ways.

"I have taken life insurance in mutual benefit societies of which I am the sole survivor, bought 'limited, unexpurgated editions printed for private circulation' at four times the book-store price, subscribed to World's Fair hotels, played against a crooked roulette wheel, backed a bum theatrical company, and otherwise shown a trusting and confiding nature, but it remained for a son of the soil—a long, lean shucker of red-and-white ears, with billygoat whiskers and a merry disposition—to humiliate me and lacerate my finer feelings in a way that makes me lose confidence in human nature.

"Do I look like a prattling infant that you can bunco with castor oil wrapped up in milk? Is there anything in my appearance that would lead you to believe I am mentally on roller skates, or that my thought generator is composed of Battle Creek products instead of brains? I know I'm good-natured, but

is that any excuse for a total stranger, an attenuated potato digger with corns on his hands, treating me like a stepson?"

"Elucidate," I remarked. "Why this sudden passion for self-analysis? You seem heated and somewhat sore in spots. In what way did the merry agriculturist impose on your sunny disposition and all that sort of thing? You talk like you had been buying wormy apples."

"I'll tell you. Yesterday afternoon I took Jimmy Jordan and the two Willis girls up to Mariettaville in my touring car and we came back last night. You know Jimmy has a severe hunch that Mamie Willis could pour his breakfast coffee better than any woman he ever met, and they can't get up any argument about it because she agrees with him. They are going to get married as soon as Jimmy's pa gives his consent.

"Well, with them in the tonneau, Kate Willis and I on the front seat had to talk something fierce not to make our presence embarrassingly felt. In fact, it seemed so absolutely blamed necessary for me to keep Kate's attention violently concentrated, so she wouldn't get lonesome and envious at the other people's lurid and intemperate language, I didn't take much notice of the trail or things might have been different. Did you ever hear Jimmy and Mamie when they cuddle up close and cut loose on the orange-blossom talk? Their language certainly has more calorie in it than a ton of coal.

"I would stand to lose a reasonable bet that the back of my neck registered one hundred and six degrees Fahrenheit just from its proximity. Oh, their heat units run something amazing when they really get to going good. They sure have all ready letter writers sewed up in a sack.

"Well, we left Mariettaville about eight o'clock, and the inside of a cow would look like the electricity building at the fair compared with that night. Kate was in a hurry to get home so she could go to bed early, so she could get up early, so she could go to bed early, so she could get up early, et cetera, et cetera, in order to catch a seven o'clock train for Cleveland some morning next week, and I was hitting it up in pretty fair shape.

"Pretty soon I saw a horse and buggy coming our way. That new acetylene lamp of mine throws a light like a post-office investigation. The horse was walking on his hind feet principally and seemed unstrung and feverish, so I slowed down and ran the car through the ditch and up alongside the fence, where I stopped it.

"A fellow about two men high and a half a man broad, with Uncle Sam whiskers and an affable disposition, uncoiled himself from the buggy and grasped the reins near the bit with his lily white hand. Then he and the horse did a minuet that was worth every cent it cost. There seemed to be something or other fretting that horse, and he certainly had that long gentleman going sincerely.

"Every once in a while the colt would do a *pas seul*, as we often said in *Paree*, and the long legs of that bucolic party would crack like an Eskimo's whip. I never saw anybody enter into anything with more abandon and enthusiasm than that pair did.

"Finally I stopped my motor and the horse seemed more contented. He showed a disposition to listen to reason, and the attenuated party was powerful willing to meet him halfway.

"After considerable coaxing on the part of the long-legged pirate, the horse came down the road, his ears looking like quotation marks and him snorting something grievous. After that pastoral confidence man had personally conducted him past the car I asked whether we were on the right road for home.

"As previously explained, I had been so busy throwing side lights on my lovely character for Kate's benefit, I might have been headed for heaven or up in a barrel for all I knew about it. The jovial criminal directed me in accents mild to take the first turn to the left.

"Then I had to get down and crank

that blooming motor. The what-you-may-call-it or something had interfered with the dew-day or whatever it is, when we stopped, and I had to go over the whole machine, hitting things with a monkey wrench and looking wise before I gave the proper part a jolt and we got away.

"I took the turn to the left, not because I wanted a turn that was left particularly, but to oblige my agricultural friend with the St. Vitus horse. I noticed the road seemed to have a considerable leaning to the left quite frequent, but Jimmy and Mame had reached the 'dovey is oo' stage and I had to talk considerable celeritous to Kate to keep her distracted and comfortable.

"I tried to pay some attention to the road, but I couldn't do it and do justice to the girl, so I just said to the road: 'You're on my mind. Get off,' and let it go at that.

"Pretty soon we met another horse and buggy. This animal was also acting fractious and peevish, so I ran through the ditch, up against the fence and shut off the motor as before. There was a familiar look about the fishing pole that went to the horse's head and asked him for the next dance, which took place then and there, but I didn't suspect anything, knowing that the first party had been passed a mile back.

"Well, after a lot of coy reluctance on the part of that colt, his driver led him by, and I had to hammer that motor with two wrenches and some bad language for fifteen minutes before we got away.

"To cut it short, in the next ten miles we met that bunco steerer ten times, and me all unsuspecting like. Every time we met I would jolt Jimmy and Mame out of their comatose condition by running through the ditch and up to the fence, would stop the motor and wait for the parade to pass, and would peril my immortal soul by cussing the engine and my rugged constitution by doing it silently, before I could get it going again."

"But how did he work it, and what was it all for?" I asked, bewildered.

"That's what I'm coming to," responded Lonesome. "That's what makes me say what I do about con games and the hilarious bucolic. I found out about it to-day.

"In some sections the simple rustic shoots at passing automobiles, or throws rocks and makes faces at the drivers. This, I am led to believe, must not be taken as indicating any personal prejudice against the party in the machine, but merely as a general and vigorous protest against the habit. They don't mean any harm by it. It's just their playful way.

"But the farmers up Mariettaville way are enlightened and guileful. They have decided the auto has come to stay, and have concluded the thing to do is to get their stock accustomed to them as soon as possible.

"So they have built a mile of road that runs around like a pup after his tail, and whenever they find a decent and obliging pelican like me, they steer him onto this road and all bring out their young horses for automobile practice.

"I got that fretful colt pretty well broke last night.

"I understand if there hadn't been a Republican primary in that section we would have thought we were at the Horse Show as long as we would have stood for it. My thin party is the only Democrat there, and I am told he was sore as a boil because his hired man wasn't home. He had another colt he wanted to break, and he said he never met a more accommodating gent.

"So no more simple farmer stories for me. I'll bet if that consumptive-looking party that trifled with my urbane disposition last night was to hit Broadway and meet up with Hungry Joe, there would be things doing in the bunco line that are not in the funny papers.

"Not for that fellow the gilded brick! Not for him the elusive panel and the brown paper money! Ne-*ver!* He'd probably come home with each whisker done up in a dollar bill and his pockets full of candy. Let's liquor."

And we did.

# THE PRIVATE WAR

## Being the Truth About Gordon Traill: His Personal Statement

Edited by Louis Joseph Vance

*Author of "'Terence O'Rourke, Gentleman Adventurer,'" "The Test," Etc.*

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

**Anthony Sevrance, an English barrister, writes to his friend, Gordon Traill, of New York, beseeching him to come to England and claim the hand of the young and beautiful widow of Sir Henry Venables-Herbert, who, as Miss Julia Leigh, of Richmond, was Traill's old sweetheart. Sevrance adds that if he delays it may be too late, as Captain Kurd von Holzborn, a German naval attache, is paying ardent court to her. Traill goes to London at once, arriving just as a dense fog has settled over the city. He takes a cab to go to his hotel, but the driver loses his way in the fog and sets him down at a private mansion. As the American approaches the entrance he passes three men, one supported by the others. When Traill discovers that the cabman has made a mistake he returns to the cab and jumps in, just as it is starting off. To his surprise, it is occupied by two men, one of whom seems to be in a drunken stupor. Traill turns to get out, but the sober stranger displays a revolver and bids him sit still. The American springs on him and after a furious struggle secures the revolver, whereupon his antagonist jumps from the cab and disappears in the fog. Traill then turns his attention to the other occupant, and, to his horror finds that the man has been stabbed. His first impulse is to flee, but before he can do so, the cabby gets down, discovers the dead man, and runs off down the street, shouting "Murder!"**

### CHAPTER II.

#### HAPCHANCE.

ERE the sound of it had died in the distance I heard a sudden racket of window sashes. Mentally I pictured the alarmed householders of the district, roused from slumber by that dread alarm, rushing to the windows in night garments to look out and see for themselves whatever the fog might be disposed to reveal. I heard, too, cries—queries and replies bandied back and forth, upon all sides:

"Hello! What's that?"

"'Murder,' Hi 'eard him sye!"

"'Oo?"

"'Ow the devil do I know? There 'e is again!"

And loud above it all the frantic cries of that outraged cabby:

"Murder!"

In two seconds the racket was indescribable, the street in an uproar. Sharp and clear through it all I heard the shrill call of a police whistle.

That settled the case for me. I was for flight—following the example of my cabby. I started out from the coupé with a rush, stumbling in my haste. And so, before I could throw myself out, I was stopped by a hollow groan behind me—infinitely dismal, electrifying, in a way plaintive.

The man was not dead, then, after all! It was like a dash of cold water in my face, that knowledge. I hesitated an instant, in two minds as to my duty—whether it was to myself or to my fellow in suffering; whether to fly or to remain, and be of what service I might.

And then, as I stood irresolute, the full horror of my predicament came upon me. With a startling clarity of

This story began in the June number, which can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents.

imagination, I saw myself and my plight.

I was hatless, to begin with. Some time during that struggle my headgear had disappeared. I remember thanking Heaven that it was unmarked with my initials—scant identification. My collar was torn from my neck, my clothing disarranged—and only the light could tell to what degree it was stained with blood.

As for my hands, I knew that they bore the traces of blood; and I pictured myself, in this condition, rushing through the streets of a vast, and to me wholly unknown, metropolis, seeking a refuge which in reality did not exist for me, predestined to blunder into the arms of the police, and to be locked up as a suspicious character.

I stood in my shoes, then, without friends, without home, without money save for a pound or two—my letters of credit being in my luggage. And I knew very well that, were I apprehended by the police, I would be inevitably connected with this affair of the coupé—which was like to turn out a murder, after all, despite the evidence of my ears, which, reasoning from the man's continued groanings, assured me that the spark of life was not yet extinct within him.

In the fog, where was I to go? Dared I risk entering a hotel, however mean, in my condition—presuming that I should chance to find one?

What—figure to yourself my perplexity—was I to do?

And in this extremity, bewildered as I was, it appeared to me that there was nothing for it but to stick to the sole thing in all that fog-bound land that I was sure of—the coupé. And even to-day, when I come to consider it in the light of calm and dispassionate judgment, I can see no better course then open to me to follow.

Mad or not, then, I determined to climb on the box and drive away. I got out and closed the door very quietly, finding, to my relief, that the lock was not broken, after all, and that, therefore, it would not be liable to rattle unduly with the motion of the vehicle.

Turning to climb upon the box, I came face to face with a misty shape. I heard a voice—fortunately not loud: "'Ello! 'Ere's a *cab!*" And an instant later a man was resolved out of the shadow and precipitated himself violently upon me, shouting some words, which I don't recall, as he grabbed for my arms.

There was nothing else for it. The danger was real and instant. I put my fist square on the point of his chin, and the whole of my weight back of the blow.

He went out without a sound—transfigured weirdly, in a way, from an active human enemy into a passive, crumpled, shapeless heap at my feet—that might have been almost anything at all.

I did not stop to ascertain the extent of his injuries, you may be sure. My purpose was only the stronger within me, and, to be frank, I do not recall coherently the events of the next hour or so.

I know, as one pieces together a troubling dream in the cold light of day, that I jumped upon the box, grabbed the reins, and, finding the whip without delay, brought the lash down smartly on the horse's back. There followed an astonished clatter of hoofs, which continued for some little time, during which we drew away, by degrees, from the uproar in the street.

Probably we turned many corners. I am sure I made no effort to guide the animal. How could I? After a bit the noise became faint—later it died away altogether. I was alone with my wounded or dead man, with the horse and the coupé, again creeping at a funeral pace through the heart of midnight London, delving more deeply into the mysterious heart of that confounded fog.

I sat upon the box, for a space, in a daze, a lethargy, dog-weary and heart-sick, dead even to considerations for my own safety. How long this continued, I cannot tell. When next I had occasion to took at my watch the hands marked three in the morning. But much took place in the interval.

At all events, after a long, long ride,

during which the chill of the night air had time to penetrate to the very marrow of my bones, I seemed to waken suddenly; and I drew in upon the reins. The horse stopped.

About us a dead quietness reigned. Heaven only knew where we were, but I had a fancy that we had come into one of the more respectable residence quarters of the city. A bell boomed somewhere—a heavy, resonant, brazen shudder of sound—a single stroke. Whether it was one of the clock, or a half hour, I neither knew nor cared.

I was pondering what was to happen in the end of the chapter. Very well I knew that I could not go on like that for the rest of time. I chuckled in grim mirthlessness, conceiving myself the spectral hero of a modern version of the *Flying Dutchman*—a gaunt, ghostly figure of a cab driver, doomed to thread the streets of London on such nights as that, driving a phantom horse between the shafts of a rotten and moldering coupé—perhaps drawing in now and again to take in a fare who would find himself in company with a clattering skeleton upon the cushions.

But, fancy aside, the fog was bound to lift, discovery to come sooner or later. I was but postponing the inevitable by continuing. I sat and took thought with myself for a long time.

There seemed to be but one hope for me—to alight and knock at the first door, and, if he who answered showed any signs of human sympathy at all, to unfold my tale of woe and beg for shelter. It was a desperate chance, thus to throw myself upon the mercy of a hapchance Englishman, but I could conceive nothing better. The worst he could do would be to hand me over to the police—a fate which was to be my certain portion in any other event, no matter what I chose to do.

With that thought in my head, I was promptly down off the box, stretching my cramped legs on a sidewalk slippery with moisture.

For a space I was at a loss, undecided, as I might well have been. What way was I to turn? Should I let fate decide—strike directly across the sidewalk and knuckle a summons on the first door I discovered?

It was as good a course as any. Moreover, if I did that, I would stand some show of finding my way back to that coupé, to which I clung unreasonably, as to an ark of refuge. Within the compass of that night's experience, there was nothing in all London but that cab, the man within, myself, the endless streets—and fog. For the nonce, that infernal vehicle was home to me—absurdly enough, I admit. I didn't want to lose it ere another permanent object was supplied in its place.

For this reason I turned my back upon the carriage and struck straight away into the obscurity, walking tentatively, exploring the atmosphere before me with eager fingers.

An age seemed to pass before I encountered aught. And then, without warning, I found myself stumbling upon cobbles. For the moment I thought that I had strayed back into the street, and was dismayed; when my left hand encountered a wall of brick, clammy and damp to the touch.

That reassured me. I felt my way along very carefully, not losing touch with that wall. Abruptly there came a turning—my arm went out into vacancy. I felt back gingerly to the wall, discovered a corner, and paused to take my breath. The fog was about me, of a density unimaginable. My hand before my face was not an evident thing.

I found myself panting—with anxiety, I suppose; and a great fatigue was dragging me down. I waited several minutes, I suppose, trying to guess the nature of my whereabouts; I had a hazy impression that I had come down a short, covered alleyway.

Abruptly a startling thing happened—startling, that is, to me, in my overexcited state of mind.

A parallelogram of illumination appeared against the gloom at some distance—perhaps thirty feet away, squarely ahead of me, and twenty feet or so above the ground. I fixed my eyes upon it hungrily, conceiving that I had come into a courtyard, that the light was from a window on the further side.

In a moment the glow was shadowed indistinctly by a moving form. I heard the creaking of weights and a slam as a window sash was thrown open. And then it seemed that a man was leaning out into the night. I heard him yawn.

"*Eh-yah!*" he said, sleepily. "A black, damnable fog, Jack!"—apparently addressing some one in the room behind him.

The reply, were there any, was lost to me.

"And beastly late," commented the voice again. "Thanks be that I have not to be out. I think I'll go——"

He withdrew his head, I deduced, and shut the window. A slam cut short his words, and at once the light began to vanish by degrees, as though a hand within the room were pulling down the shade.

But before it disappeared entirely, I was making toward it—treading rough cobbles again. In a moment I had fallen over a doorstep and barked both shins painfully. I was up instantly, however, and had my hand on the knob of a door.

It turned without resistance. I stepped into a dark, close hallway, moved forward and planted a foot on a step.

Above me a door opened, flooding the upper landing with light, by which I made out a steep flight of stairs ahead of me. There were voices—drowsy, drawling, befitting the lateness of the hour:

"Well, good-night, Jack."

"'Night, old chap."

"See you in the morning."

"Sure-ly. 'Night."

"I'll leave the door open to light you upstairs."

"Thanks—awfully, old man."

Steps ascended the upper flight. The door remained open. I shut the outer door and stamped up the stairs. The footsteps above me ceased, but the door continued ajar. When I had gained the landing I made out the figure of a man standing in the doorway, holding in one hand a lamp, staring at me.

"Why, Murchison," said a familiar voice, "I thought I heard you come in an hour ago! Chamberlain has just gone up, you know, and I thought——"

The man paused, thunderstruck. Well he might have been, considering the unholy apparition I must have presented. He stood, eyes wide, mouth open, a picture of stupefaction, while I advanced.

As for myself, I was half mad with delight. Chance, that had played with me so mercilessly that night, had turned about and favored me at last.

I stepped forward, with both hands outstretched—and, I could not but notice, trembling with agitation.

"Sevrance!" I cried. "Tony, my friend, don't you know me?"

## CHAPTER III.

### DE NETZE.

Sevrance turned, without a word, and retreated into the room, his back to me, until he reached the table, upon which he deposited the lamp, standing to one side, himself, to watch me as I entered.

I have always held him the coolest man of my acquaintance. At the moment, I confess, I found his conduct exasperatingly frigid. He glanced me up and down, keenly, his sharp, gray eyes losing not a point in my dishevelled appearance.

"Sevrance!" I said, piteously, pausing within the door, dismayed by this sort of a reception, so entirely different from that which I had anticipated from the moment my eyes had caught sight of his face.

He was sucking a short, black pipe. He nodded shortly, removing this from between his teeth long enough to say: "Good-evening," distantly; adding: "Come in, shut the door, and sit down."

I obeyed mutely, very unhappy, not in the least understanding this lack of cordiality on his part. When I had slumped ungracefully into the most comfortable chair that I ever rested in, he spoke again.

"Drunk?" he inquired, lifting his fine eyebrows.

"Sevrance!" I half arose, indignantly.

"Don't be angry," he placated me. "I was of two minds whether or not to offer you a drink. It's at your elbow, if you care for it, you know."

I turned and saw a couple of bottles, soda and glasses. It appealed to me that never in a misspent life had I desired a drink so ardently. I buried my nose in six inches of whisky and soda —and sighed with regret that it was gone so soon. Nevertheless, I was conscious of an immediate sensation of renewed strength.

"Sevrance——" I began again, finding myself under the scrutiny of those two indifferent eyes.

"Your pardon," he interrupted, brusquely. "You're making free with my name and hospitality, and you seem to be acquainted with me personally, sir. But you will allow that I am not to be blamed for wondering who the devil you may happen to be, sir. When a man, all a-mess with what seems to be blood and mud, staggers into my study in the dead of night and offers no——"

"Sevrance!" I parroted again, protestingly. At the time it seemed to be the only word that I was able to utter.

He waved a deprecating hand. "You've said that before, you know," he commented, mildly.

"Traill," I managed to get out. "Traill. Don't you know me?"

His eyes expressed blank incredulity. He came closer, stared without excusing himself.

"I confess," he admitted at length, "that I have a very dear friend, resident in the city of New York, whom you seem to resemble. But to the best of my knowledge, my dear sir, Mr. Gordon Traill is still in the States——"

"But I'm not, man! Can't you see——"

"My dear fellow," he interrupted, an amused twinkle in his eyes, deeper amusement in his voice, "if you will step into the bathroom and glance at yourself in the glass, before washing your face—an operation of which it is sadly in need—you will see my excuse for not recognizing you—always allowing that you're really Traill."

He drew aside a curtain over a doorway, and I, beginning to comprehend, walked past him into the lavatory. Sevrance himself turned up the gas for me. I glared at a haggard mask that confronted me in the mirror above the washstand—the veriest caricature of my physiognomy that I can imagine—a wan, sunken-eyed face, spattered with dried blood, smeared with smut and grime, wonderfully pale beneath the dirt.

"Good Lord!" I said. "I *don't* blame you, Tony."

"Can you, honestly?"

He laughed and left me to myself. I splashed for a full five minutes, and felt like a new man when I finally emerged.

"Now," I said, falling in with his humor, "if you'll lend me a collar, sir, and a whisk broom, I'll remove the remainder of my disguise."

Sevrance shook his head and my hand.

"You shouldn't, Gordon," he chuckled. "It was complete and—clever, you know. It was great, as you say in the States. How the deuce did you think of it, now?"

"I'll tell you," I returned, "at a price"—nodding toward the tray.

"I'm willing to pay double for your story," he agreed. "When did you arrive? Why didn't you cable, advising me of your coming? And what under high heaven *have* you been up to?"

He stooped over the bottles, facing me. You must know him—a very tall, slimly builded figure of a man, at that moment in immaculate evening attire. To my way of thinking, he is one of the finest men in the world, and of the best to look upon.

His features are of an ascetic cast, clean shaven always. His forehead is broad, high, very white; for that matter, there is little color in his complexion—he is naturally pale. His nose is slightly aquiline and very slender; his mouth thin of lip, firm, sympathetic; his chin square. But his eyes one sees first of all, and remembers forever after —eyes of a good size, very bright, alert —gray—with humor lurking in their depths. He carries himself sedately, with a certain detached dignity.

There is the man whom I saw standing before me as I sat and retailed my marvelous adventure — Anthony Sevrance, barrister-at-law, gentleman—than whom no man ever rejoiced in a friend more brave and loyal.

He heard me out with not a comment other than the dancing play of expression in his eyes. His features, as generally, remained impassive—they are of a judicial mold. In the end he unbent.

"Seriously," he assured me, "I was never more glad to lay eyes on a living man—and that though I didn't know you, Gordon."

"Do you wonder?" I said, disconsolately.

"Not a bit—but you are back in the nick of time. Our lady is engaged to the German."

I stood up, gripping the table. My voice sounded far away to me. "Is it true?" I heard myself say.

He took my hand, compassionately.

"Quite," said he. "But—they're not married yet." And, his gaze meeting mine, he smiled, adding: "Moreover, I venture to prophesy that they are not to be—now."

Presently the blood began to flow back to my heart. I knew that he spoke the truth—that there was hope. I knew that I should never abandon the hope of winning my Heart's Desire until the very end of all things.

And, oddly, my mind went back to less material matters.

"That," I said, "is for the morrow. At present, I have a duty."

"What is that?" he inquired.

"To do what I can for the fellow in the cab."

"Oh, the deuce! I'd forgotten him. Like as not he's beyond aid."

"We'll have to see—that's plain humanity. Do you mind if I bring him in here?"

"What else will you do? Take him to—the Carleton?"

We shared the laugh. "Come," he added. "I'll go with you. Oh, but you'd never find your way back, if I didn't. Moreover, you don't suppose that you alone can carry the fellow up here, do you?"

But, of course, my remonstrance had been merely perfunctory. As far as I myself was concerned, I felt bound to see the adventure through to the finale; but with regard to Sevrance, though I needed sorely his assistance, I had shrunk for a minute or so from dragging him into the sordid tragedy. However, I was well enough content to find him so eager to aid me.

We went out again, bareheaded, into the night and the fog. Fresh from the warmth of Sevrance's chambers, I shivered in the chill of the early morning air. It was very cold, dank and penetrating.

Sevrance led the way, I tagging him closely. But he seemed to know the place as intimately as the palm of his hand. In no time at all, it seemed, we were down the covered passageway—I had been right in that conjecture—and out in the street. Almost immediately we came upon the coupé, standing in approximately the same place and condition wherein I had left it.

Sevrance opened the door himself, lighting a match and peering in. Then he stepped inside and bent over, with his ear to the man's breast.

"You are right," he said, presently, in a guarded tone. "Your—friend is stabbed; but he's alive and like to live for many a long day—if he manages to shake off the effects of the drug."

"Drug!" I cried.

"Drug," he iterated. "The man is not drunk—although it would seem that he had been drinking. For that matter so have I, this night—a glass or two of champagne." He turned back the lid of the man's eye, holding a match close to the eyeball. "A powerful opiate," he announced. "The wound is merely a superficial matter. Your interference probably saved him. Odd—great heavens!"

"What's the trouble?" I demanded, alarmed.

He blew out the match instantly.

"Here, give me a hand with the fellow," he replied. "No words. We want to be quick about this. I'll explain later."

He shifted the sleeper's feet toward

me, and I got them in a firm grasp. With some trouble we managed to lift him from the carriage. The swaying of it relieved me of an embarrassment. Hardly had Sevrance put both feet upon the ground than the horse seemed to wake up, as if it, like its owner, had been snatching a brief, alcoholic nap.

Incontinently it started off of ~~its~~ own accord. Sevrance, his arms clasped around the body of the unconscious man, turned and gazed after the vanishing coupé. Before I could really comprehend what was taking place, it was swallowed up by the fog.

I found the sensation unusual. It was as though a fragment of my nightmare had detached itself, moved out of the picture. I felt as though the events of the evening had been untrue, in the nature of a hallucination. Only the weight of the man whose lower limbs I was embracing convinced me that I did not dream—only he remained to prove the reality of my adventure.

As for Sevrance, he gave the coupé an ironic bow.

"Do you know," he said, softly, and at first I fancied he was speaking to me, though it developed that he was addressing my friend, the horse—"do you know, I consider that uncommon handsome of you. You have solved the dilemma quite neatly and reasonably. Good-night—and many thanks."

If you have not carried an unconscious man in your arms, you have little understanding of what a task lay before us. He was like putty, limp and invertebrate; he seemed to weigh a ton. Neither Sevrance nor myself is to be counted a weakling; yet we had our hands full, I can assure you. When at length we had deposited the body on a couch in Sevrance's study, we were both quite blown.

Sevranee at once knelt by the man's side, despite his fatigue. For myself, I collapsed completely in a chair, and sat puffing and blowing like a healthy porpoise. And I found it irritating in the extreme to have to wait until my wind came back to me in order to put the question that was burning my tongue. But finally:

"Sevrance," said I, "who is he?"

Sevrance stood up, taking off his coat and rolling back his cuffs. There was a queer look in his eyes.

"An acquaintance of mine," he replied. "A Russian—by the name of De Netze. The moving thing about it all is this: that I saw him not fifteen minutes before you met him, at the very house, I believe, from which you saw him carried; and he was then as sober as you are or I at this minute."

"Then—what——"

"Gordon, I don't know," he returned, seriously. "Frankly, I have heard it said that M. de Netze was a secret agent of the Russian Government, and this would seem to confirm the statement. It is rank with the stench of Nihilism—this outrage. At least, it is so to my mind."

I bent closer, to get my first good look at the fellow. He lay at length—a short but slender man, that I recognized instantly for him whom the others had supported from the house. I knew him by his thickish red lips, by his high, pallid brows, by the neatly trimmed Vandyck beard, brown but streaked with silver gray.

"That is the same man," I affirmed.

"You're sure?" He seemed to wish to doubt my identification.

"Certain," I replied. "Why? Whose was the house?"

Sevrance smiled inscrutably.

"You'll be surprised."

I made an impatient movement.

"It was Lady Herbert's house," he informed me.

I stared blankly.

"Julia's?" I gasped, incredulous.

"Exactly; she received to-night. Monsieur de Netze, a close friend of Captain von Holzborn, your rival, happened to be an invited guest."

"But what do you make of it?"

He lifted his brows. "Apparently Lady Herbert's guests were, at least in part, of a certain quality. Many of Von Holzborn's friends would naturally be present, you understand. I myself noted a fair sprinkling of foreigners.

"De Netze!" He smiled whimsically. "This will drive him to despair. He

must have been taken from the house in a state of apparent intoxication, such as you describe. The disgrace of it will madden the man; he is very punctilious, very careful, reserved and quiet—as I know him. No—he'll not be pleased, when he wakes in the morning."

"I could understand that he might be a bit fretful," I remarked. "If you drug me and stick a knife into me, I shall show evidences of irritation."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PRUSSIAN.

After a while I found myself nodding drowsily, and caught myself up sharply at the very moment when my head seemed to be drooping inevitably forward to a resting place on the table by my side.

Sevrance, who had been attending to the wounded Russian, seemed to turn at the same moment. I noted an amused gleam in his eyes.

"You take the couch," he said, authoritatively; "De Netze must have my bed, of course."

"And you?" I inquired, sleepily.

"Oh, a rug before the fire will do for me," he returned, airily. "Come, to bed with you."

"No," I protested; "I shall be well satisfied with the rug, myself."

"You won't get it."

Sevrance came over to me. I had risen to my feet. With a firm hand he piloted me toward a divan in one corner of the room; I was too unutterably weary to resist. I remember fairly falling over upon my back and lying there, enveloped in a delicious consciousness of my coming rest.

"Now, you sleep," I heard Sevrance say, his words sounding as though they came from a great distance.

"Yes," I agreed, meekly. Sevrance seemed to fade out of the room. My eyes closed. I sank slowly into a placid gulf of slumber. But I was not yet done with that wretched Russian; the thought of him, a nagging care for his welfare, buzzed within my head. I sat up, suddenly—so suddenly that Sevrance, his notice attracted by the movement, turned, startled almost out of his stolidity.

"What about the doctor?" I demanded.

"Doctor? What doctor?"

I pointed. "For him."

"He doesn't need one; I know enough to render first aid to the injured, and a little more."

"But——"

"Lie down, you ass. Don't you understand that, under the circumstances, the man may well wish to be left alone—not to have this adventure noised abroad? Didn't I tell you that he was a Russian secret agent? If he wants a physician when he recovers consciousness after a night of rest he shall have one."

At that point my consciousness guttered and went out like a candle that has burned down to the socket.

I awoke late in the afternoon of the following day, physically rested, mentally clear.

Sevrance was out of the room. I sat up on the side of the couch, yawning, digging my fists into my eyes, feeling uncommonly bedraggled, like a man who has misspent a night. There was a bad taste in my mouth, too. I longed for a bath and a change of linen.

At first, in the semi-darkness of the study—that infernal fog still held, and the prospect from the windows was one of a dun-hued nothingness, horribly depressing—I did not at once become conscious of another's presence. But, in a few moments, as I rose and made for the buffet against the opposite wall, whereon I saw a silver water pitcher invitingly bedewed, a voice greeted me.

"Monsieur Traill, I believe?"

It was a thin, clear voice, impressing me somehow as a blade of a sword, metallically flawless and pliable. The intonation was low, discreet, courteous. I turned with a gesture of astonishment—the wounded Russian had dropped completely out of my mind during that twelve hours' complete oblivion.

Now I saw him in the flesh, and the memory of him came back with a rush. He sat near the center table in a large

armchair, propped up by pillows, from which his face, ghastly pallid from his recent loss of blood, stared out like a death mask set with two black and hard eyes, as brilliant and as expressionless as black diamonds.

"Monsieur de Netze?" I inquired.

"Him whom you rescued," he replied, with a little movement of that white face. "I have my gratitude to express to my benefactor," he continued, painfully precise.

"No gratitude at all necessary," I stammered. Thanks always confuse me. "We were both in the same box, and I hit upon this refuge by sheer good luck. In conscience, Sevrance and I did what we could for you."

"You were very kind—very," he insisted. He extended, slowly, a slim hand, white and delicate as a woman's, seemingly as fragile as a bit of porcelain. I clasped it diffidently, fearful of hurting it, and was amazed by the strength and vigor of the fellow's grasp; it was as hearty as the warm handshake of a man in the prime of his life and health; the thin, tapering fingers fairly sank into my flesh. De Netze recognized my emotion.

"You are surprised," he stated, with a paradoxical weakness of voice. "But I have much reserve force. It takes more than a taste of opium—or whatever it was—and a scratch of a knife to—put me out, do you say?" He smiled wanly. "But, on the other hand," he continued, "I have you to thank that I am alive."

I looked away, uneasily. "It was nothing—nothing," I persisted. "You would have done as much——"

"No."

"What?" I stared, rudely.

He repeated the monosyllable with incorrigible decision: "No."

"I beg your pardon," said I, knowing not what else to say.

"I would have cared for my precious skin, first of all—my invaluable person," he continued, placidly. "Monsieur Sevrance tells me that he believes me a secret agent of the Russian Government—eh? Possibly he mentioned as much to you?"

"Why—yes," I allowed, wondering.

"It is so. I ask you not to violate the confidence, monsieur."

"Surely not."

"Of course—it was merely a formal request, in order that you might thoroughly understand the necessity. You can, knowing it, conceive that my services are of some value to his majesty the czar. Otherwise——" He put his hand significantly to his breast where the knife wound was.

"I understand," I murmured—not very sympathetically, I fear.

"For which reason I would consider my continued existence more important than the mere preservation of an unknown man's life, you understand. That is why I say that, in a predicament similar to that in which you found yourself last night, I should have left you to your fate without a qualm of conscience. I trust that you comprehend the delicacy of my position? Believe me, I am sincerely grateful——"

It is an unusual sensation to be thanked by a man who in the same breath tells you that your life would be nothing to him in a case like that wherein you saved his own. I found nothing to say. I merely nodded.

"You do not understand," he stated with conviction, his bright eyes steadfast on my own. "No matter; at any other time—when my services are not so essential to my master, you may command me to the uttermost. I even trust that you will find occasion to do so."

I bowed my appreciation. For a second or two there was a silence. Then, suddenly, "Monsieur Sevrance," he told me, "is out arranging for my removal to another place, where you will not be exposed to the danger that attends upon my every step and movement."

"Is it as bad as that?" I said, interestedly.

"You saw for yourself," he returned the obvious answer. Before I could turn the trend of the conversation he had commanded me. "Talking wearies me a trifle," he said. "Monsieur Sevrance has been kind enough to give me a digest of your adventure last night.

May I ask you to enlarge upon it, with more particularity?"

"Oh, assuredly, you may." I sat down, found a cigarette, and, somewhat comforted by it, delivered myself of a *résumé* of the affair.

De Netze listened with a strained attentiveness, never once removing those bead-like, black and glittering eyes from my own. When I had concluded he put a pertinent question or two: As to the appearance of his companions? Would I remember the man's voice if I heard it again? Could I explain the circumstance of my detention in the coupé, and why I had not been pistoled at my first change from a passive to an active participant in the affair?

To the first two questions I had sufficiently vague answers to make—I had taken no particular note of the appearance of the men, and retained but a transient impression of the face of my antagonist in the cab. Possibly I might, or might not, know him by his voice, if I should hear it within a short time. Memories fade quickly. I would be afraid to trust to my own.

As to my detention, I had a loose theory that, perhaps, I had not been forcibly ejected because the fellow feared that I might raise an alarm. In the beginning, he had plainly thought me his companion. Afterward, the above hypothesis applied; or he may have purposed to slip suddenly from the vehicle and leave me alone with the circumstantial evidence of the wounded or dead man to identify me with the affair.

He may have contemplated an incontinent butchery of the pair of us, the better to be rid of all witnesses—something which my unexpected assault may have forestalled. As for the revolver, I had it in my pocket.

"Here it is," I concluded, producing the weapon.

De Netze examined it curiously. "Ah, yes," he nodded. "Now I begin to understand. You observe." He swung his arm out, with remarkable quickness, and pulled the trigger.

The hammer snapped sharply; there was no explosion. "Very fortunately for you, perhaps," he said, gravely, "one of the cartridges is jammed in the cylinder. It wouldn't work. Ah, yes—very fortunate, I should say."

"I wonder what became of the knife," I speculated. "He would have stuck me with it if he had had it, I'm convinced, before he made his escape."

"He didn't have it, monsieur," affirmed De Netze.

"How do you know?"

"I was stabbed before you entered the coupé, in all likelihood. Do you remember passing anyone as you descended the stairs of Lady Herbert's?"

"It seems to me that I do," I assented, doubtfully. When I came to think of it, there was, in fact, a faint and indistinct memory of a figure which had passed me, but to which I had given no heed. But I would not have sworn to the fact.

"That is it," he was positive. "My friends"—his smile, as he said this, was indescribably evil and malevolent—"were somewhat thoughtless in their haste. One had left something in the house. He returned to get it. That is how you became involved. It was very clear."

"You should have no difficulty," I advanced, "in determining their identity."

"I have no doubts as to them at all," he took me up.

"You know them?"

"Almost to a certainty."

"Then, I suppose, you will at once lodge information with the police."

But he lifted up one fine and transparent hand with a slight, negative gesture.

"To the contrary," he said.

"You will not——?"

"Seek revenge, Monsieur Traill? But yes, and in my own way—in my own good time. This is not an affair for your brutal and blunt English police, nor for the edification of the British newspaper constituency. On the other hand, I promise you that those gentlemen will meet with an appropriate fate without the news of the matter reaching the police courts."

He stared contemplatively at the ceiling for a while.

"They will be in France by now," he delivered an expert opinion at length. "In France—yes." He nodded with assurance. "That is, unless they are sure of my complete annihilation and of your remaining quiet—which is not conceivable, under the circumstances."

I was about to press him for an account of his disaster when the door was thrown unceremoniously open and three men came into the room. Sevrance's greeting was prompt.

"Well, Gordon! Up and fresh, I see."

"And ravenous," I amended.

"Monsieur de Netze," he continued, "you see I have been successful, in spite of the fog."

"I am deeply sensible of your kindness," said the Russian, ceremoniously. "But, for the fog, is it not your native element?" he added, with a smile. And then I heard him say: "Good-morning, captain. Fritz, good-morning."

Sevrance turned to the man who had first entered the room. There was a twinkle in his eyes as he introduced us:

"Captain von Holzborn, permit me—Mr. Traill, of New York—Captain von Holzborn, of the German Embassy."

You will understand a certain inevitable confusion to which I was a prey because of this totally unexpected meeting with the man. Already I had formed an opinion of him, based upon a thoroughly unwarranted mental conception of the fellow. I was now to revise this impression in every detail.

The grip that he gave my fingers was cool and unenthusiastic, but firm. He stood for a brief moment, facing me squarely, looking directly into my eyes while he gave them the conventional pressure. I saw a man to be feared, admired, hated, but one never to be regarded with indifference. A certain assertiveness of spirit, not wholly pleasant, seemed in a way to shoulder his personality upon your imagination; you did not quickly forget him, even though you had met him but once—or so I have been assured by others who knew the man but slightly.

I have often wondered what high place in the councils of his nation he might not have filled had not the threads of our two lives, even then weaving on the loom of destiny, have become so inextricably inter-entangled in the days to come.

One thing I regard as certain and undeniable—he was worthy of the highest place capable of achievement. He was a wonderful scoundrel, a rogue of the highest order of intelligence, a devil of infinite ambitions, a man of splendid abilities—when his due is rendered unto him.

But—I hate his memory.

Let me, then, show to you, not as I saw the fellow at that moment, wherein I perceived but a fugitive impression of him, but as he was, as I was to know him, in his proper person.

He stood within an inch or two of six feet—a height added to by his habit of the military bearing, which became him very well. He was broad and square-set at the shoulders, heavily built throughout, but slender and lean at the loins.

By habit he kept both feet upon the ground, bearing his weight equally upon both. His chin was always well up, his neck rigid by training; he faced the world so, squarely—with a trace of an unaccountable defiance in his manner.

He was dark skinned and his hair and brows were black and heavy. His countenance impressed you with an expression of frank immobility; you would have thought, seeing it but once, that it was open and candid; it was, in fact, a mask, as inscrutable as his eyes.

The latter were black and hard and absolutely without luster; I have seen the light glint off from them, but never a glitter within their depths, whatever his emotion; they were impressively opaque and as impassive as a blank wall. They said: "You shall see not one half an inch beyond us. You shall receive not the least inkling of what goes on in the man behind us." They spoke the truth. Their one failing was an indescribable one, in a way

—they had a trick of looking swiftly away from you, apparently. At least, whenever you met them squarely, you always were conscious of an effect as though they had glanced aside just the moment gone—but you never caught them at it, for all your cunning.

Aside from this, he had a square and solid chin with a deep cleft; a mouth firm and straight of lip but rather attractive in its suggestion of human sympathy; his nose was not too large, not too straight; his ears set well back against his head. He wore a short and heavy mustache.

His voice was deep, rich, carefully modulated, as capable of expressing every human emotion as a Strad—to strain a simile. As a rule he spoke quickly, without a trace of accent when he used English—not so purely in French, but as fluently—and wasted few words. He was as alert as an American; as imperturbable as an Englishman; as engaging as a Frenchman—when he chose; as determined as a German—all in one man.

As for the other, whom De Netze had called "Fritz," he was Von Holzborn's valet, I discovered—a spare and active man of medium stature, trained in the German army; with an eager but pinched face, and a mouth like a steel trap. He never volunteered a word—never spoke until addressed.

Von Holzborn gave me a civil word of greeting. "I have heard your name before, Mr. Traill," he added.

"From Sevrance?" I said, for the moment forgetting our position as rivals—of which, to be sure, Von Holzborn was not yet apprised.

"No—although Mr. Sevrance has spoken of you. Your name is not infrequently upon the lips of my fiancée—Lady Herbert."

"We are old friends," I said, as simply as I could. "I am glad that she has not forgotten me."

I know not in what manner I managed to betray myself, but, for an instant, I was aware that his hard, cold eyes were boring into my own, like twin gimlets. And then he turned brusquely away, addressing De Netze.

"You are able to move?" he asked, abruptly.

De Netze turned up the palms of his hands expressively.

"I must," he said, laconically.

"We will wait until dusk," Von Holzborn stated.

"But the fog——" De Netze began to argue.

Von Holzborn interrupted, in a tone of authority: "Be advised. I have made all arrangements. It is best."

I fancied that De Netze resented his attitude; he asserted himself oddly.

"You shall not lose because of your courtesy," he said.

The Prussian nodded shortly.

"I have all the details through Mr. Sevrance," he remarked a moment later. "Have you anything to add?"

"Nothing of interest to you. But still—you may as well be put upon your guard. I was drinking with Sept at the buffet, I remember. We had two glasses of champagne. He inquired if I had the information safely, and I told him yes. By accident some one brushed rather heavily against me, and put his elbow in my ribs; an envelope—a personal note of no importance—crackled in my pocket."

De Netze paused for breath. Sevrance silently handed him a wineglass of port, for which he rendered thanks, and which he sipped from time to time during the remainder of his stay.

"Sept," he continued, "raised his eyebrows significantly. 'There, in your pocket?' he asked. I told him no, carelessly. A moment later we drained our glasses. I did not see him make any movement, but I recall that, for an instant, my attention was attracted to the further room.

"Almost instantly I was conscious of an overpowering faintness. I mentioned this, and Sept offered his arm. I forget what he said. Almost at once, while we were walking toward the door, I lost consciousness, remembering nothing until I wakened in Mr. Sevrance's bed."

He paused. The Prussian made no comment other than by a brief nod of his head.

"I fancied Sept trustworthy, too," De Netze added.

Von Holzborn nodded again. "You must have been all right, as to appearances, until you reached the open air," he said, deliberately. "No word to the contrary has reached me. Von Beller was with Sept, but left you at the carriage door, and returned. I do not think——"

"You will have him—watched," said De Netze as the other paused.

Von Holzborn bent forward with a murmured word of apology to Sevrance and myself, and began to confer in a low tone with the Russian. Sevrance led me to the buffet, offering me port and crackers.

"We will dine at the club in an hour and a half," he said. "I'm sorry—there's nothing else here—but this will stay your stomach while you wash and dress. I've sent to the Carleton for your luggage, but I suppose I shall have to lend you a suit of my own evening clothes. Can you struggle along with them?"

"I'll endure even that humiliation," I said, munching a Dent's, "for the sake of food. Man, I'm famished!"

Presently he led me into his dressing room and laid out a change of linen and a suit of evening clothes. "You can manage?" he asked. "Because of this business — fearing complications, you understand—I gave my man a holiday."

He sat on the edge of the bed and puffed at a cigarette, smiling faintly.

"I can't say that I'm in love with either De Netze or Von Holzborn," he remarked, quietly; "but, when they're thrown upon my mercy in this way, why, I feel as if bound to do my best for them."

"Of course," I assented.

I stepped into the bathroom, stripped and floundered for ten minutes in a tub of cold water. When I came out, feeling like a new man, I made shift to fit myself into Sevrance's evening clothes. We are much of a size, fortunately, and I managed fairly well. Sevrance has a nice taste in the matter of clothing, and when he looked me over with a critical eye and pronounced that I would do, I felt more comfortable; moreover, the dinner hour was appreciably nearer.

De Netze and the Prussian were still confabulating when we returned to the study; the man Fritz was standing by the door, in precisely the same spot where he had halted upon entering the room, mute and stiff as any ramrod. Von Holzborn immediately terminated his talk, however, and rose from the chair which he had drawn to the Russian's side.

Sevrance put a match to the wick of the lamp on the study table; it was already time; already the mist without was a dirty slate color; night would be upon us in a twinkling.

"We shall start now," said the German. "I have to thank you very heartily for your kindness — and your thoughtfulness."

By which I understood him to mean Sevrance's care to avoid attracting attention.

"Oh, that is nothing," my friend parried, as embarrassed as an Englishman always is when you try to tell him that he has behaved like a white man.

De Netze, to my infinite surprise, rose without assistance. "And I, also——" he began.

"Not another word!" Sevrance protested, hastily. "Come, let's get along."

"You don't purpose to come with us?" said the Russian.

"Why not?" Sevrance looked up sharply. "Traill and I are going to dine. We fancied you might be willing to give us a place in your carriage and set us down at the Heathen."

"You are perfectly welcome," Von Holzborn put in, with a short laugh.

"That is," he amended, "if you are willing to chance the risk."

"Risk? How's that?" I inquired.

The Prussian gave me a glimpse of those opaque eyes. "There's danger," he said, curtly.

"To be frank with you," added the Russian, "Monsieur von Holzborn is known for my very good friend. We fear that his lodgings may have been watched——"

"In this beastly fog!" Sevrance protested.

"Even so. If your carriage was noticed and followed, it is barely possible that we may be attacked before we reach a safe place."

I heard Sevrance express a terse opinion, beneath his breath—"Rot!" was what he said—and I confess that my views resembled his own; for the life of me I could not have imagined how a cab could have been tracked through a fog as dense as that.

Aloud, "So much the more reason why you should travel well guarded, then," said Sevrance. "Traill and I will be glad enough to bear you company—as far as the Heathen Club, at least."

"On your own heads," commented Von Holzborn, shrugging his shoulders.

Accordingly, we decided to accompany them, with the more reason since, as Sevrance pointed out, it would be the devil of a deal of trouble to come upon another cab that night. For my part, I was in no mind to let any fanciful danger whatsoever stand between me and my food. I would have dared the whole Russian army for a good dinner.

And so, with a slight delay for preparation, we set out. Fritz, I have reason to remember, went ahead—silently, confidently. De Netze and his German friend followed, the Russian leaning heavily upon the other's arm. I followed, with Sevrance bringing up the rear—he having been the last to leave, of course, on account of locking his door.

I waited for him at the foot of the stairs, quite assured that I needed his guidance before the blank blackness of the fog-bound courtyard. De Netze and Von Holzborn had struck out boldly, without waiting; nor did we come up with them until we were clear of the covered alleyway and had blundered into a waiting hack—a vehicle which, I have neglected to state, Von Holzborn had kept waiting all afternoon. I understand that it was his private turnout, driven by his own coachman.

We found the three in an excited group by the door of the carriage. At the first instance neither Sevrance nor myself gathered the cause of their perturbation; the whole affair is still somewhat vague and formless to me; the fog robs everything of definite outlines—even one's memories.

I heard the sound of Von Holzborn's voice, pitched in an angry undertone, before we encountered the trio. A second later they loomed blackly before us. De Netze was seemingly attempting to pacify the Prussian, who was interrogating the coachman, I gathered. I heard him say:

"Blockhead!" furiously.

"The man was not to blame, *mon ami,*" interposed the Russian.

Von Holzborn turned upon his man, Fritz. By this time we were near enough to make out that the fellow was standing stolidly to one side, holding his right forearm with his left hand and staring off into the obscurity.

"How did it happen?" Von Holzborn demanded.

The valet stiffened, dropped his hand to his side. "I followed your instructions, Herr Captain," he said, respectfully. "Entering the carriage, sir, I fell against some other person, who attempted to stab me."

He added something—two or three phrases—in guttural German, doggedly.

"And so," he concluded, "the fellow got away. Ernest"—he nodded toward the coachman's box—"will tell you as much. I haf my best done, Herr Captain. It iss not my fault."

"Oh, that's palpable," De Netze affirmed, decidedly.

"What's this?" Sevrance put in.

The Russian explained, calmly. There had been an assassin waiting in the carriage; their precaution in sending Fritz on ahead had saved the Russian's life, for the second time.

"You see," he concluded, "we were not mistaken. They are watching me like cats a mouse."

I saw him slip something into Fritz's palm; Von Holzborn's back was

turned. The valet saluted with his hurt arm.

"A mere scratch," he assured me, in answer to a question; and climbed upon the box with the coachman, being so ordered by his master.

## CHAPTER V.

### HEART'S DESIRE.

We piled in, all together, De Netze seating himself in the rear and shrinking back into the corner. Von Holzborn and I had the front seat. For the most part, the ride was endured quietly. None of us spoke overmuch. I was thinking; Von Holzborn sullen, dragging at his mustache; Sevrance the only unsubdued spirit in the party; De Netze, I dare say, was unhappy as to his state of mind. I know I should have been, in his predicament.

Only once he spoke, and then he addressed the Prussian.

"This means that I leave the country," he advanced, tentatively.

"Oh, at once," agreed Von Holzborn.

Sevrance spoke up, cheerfully.

"Almost," he said, "you make me wish myself a conspirator. I'd give a deal for your share of this excitement."

"You're welcome to mine, sir," the Prussian told him.

"And mine," echoed De Netze.

"Unfortunately," complained my friend, "I'm only an English barrister, doomed to die in my bed, with my boots off." He sighed as if he found the prospect an unwelcome one. "Ah, me," he cried, "to think that I can never hope to be dynamited!"

De Netze laughed. The Prussian turned to me, trying to be gracious.

"I shall trust to improve our acquaintance under more favoring circumstances," he said.

I delivered myself of a commonplace echo of his civility, but I didn't mean it in the least; it was a polite lie. I fancied that he was conscious of the attitude of hostility which I had mentally assumed toward him; even in the darkness I seemed to feel the blank and impenetrable stare of his black eyes.

"As an old friend of Lady Herbert's," he continued, "I shall feel certain of seeing you."

"Surely," I acquiesced.

From there on the conversation languished. You may wonder that I did not attempt to question him, to discover something more than I knew—which was naught—concerning the strange affair in which I had become so strangely involved and the end of which was apparently so near. But I instinctively recognized the steadfast reserve wherein the two foreigners—I can never bring myself to consider Sevrance a foreigner, by the way—seemed intimate and of the same mind.

The carriage rolled on steadily enough, considering the difficulty of seeing the way; Von Holzborn's coachman seemed fairly to smell it out. I coveted his knowledge of the city. There were delays, of course, but within the hour the coupé drew up at a curb, and Fritz, jumping down from the box as spry as if he had no wound at all, opened the door and announced the Heathen Club. There were formalities between the four of us inside—courteous farewells—and then Sevrance and I piled out.

I have never eaten such a meal in all my life as I put away that night; you can conceive of its bulk, considering that I had not broken my fast since noon of the previous day. I ate monstrously, but in the end was satisfied. Sevrance and I lingered over cigars and liqueurs for an hour or two, he somewhat silent and uncommunicative, I rather torpid, if the truth must out.

In the end, however, I roused. I had slept practically a round of the clock, had dined tremendously, and was beginning to feel fit as a fiddle. My mind inevitably reverted to the two men from whom we had just parted.

"There," said I, "goes Romance," thinking of the cab and its occupants whirling off into the fog, with the fear of death in their hearts.

"Rather," argued Sevrance, looking up from his cigar, "here begins Romance."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean, dear fellow, that the game's afoot—and no more."

"Why——" I drawled blankly.

"Oh, faith!" he said, impatiently. "You don't mean to tell me that you think yourself rid of Von Holzborn, simply because you have arrived in London?"

"No-o-o."

"For you're not. You lingered in the States overlong, Gordon. Now," he laughed, "your true love's betrothed to another. Your task assumes the proportion of a cutting out expedition, eh? You have Von Holzborn to dispose of and, frankly, I'm not at all sure that you'll find him complaisant."

He leaned back in his chair, playing with an empty wineglass. "I know the man, you see," he mused, aloud. "He's big and strong and purposeful. He's bent on marrying our little lady, and he's rather like to have his way, you know—barring a flaw in her affection for him. He's on his uppers, financially, I happen to know, and that will make him only the more determined."

"I don't fear him," said I, with a confidence that belied my state of mind concerning the man. I did fear him—horribly, now that I knew him—not physically, you understand, but as a chap of infinite address and charm. From the little I had seen of him I could understand that he was of the sort that possesses a powerful fascination for the heart of a woman.

"That may be," admitted Sevrance. "On the other hand, you've to consider that he doesn't fear you—nor even regard you as a factor, as yet."

I was not so sure of that, however.

"That's your strongest weapon against him so far," Sevrance went on. "You had best make your hay while he's occupied with more pressing matters. This De Netze affair is like to occupy his mind and person for a day or two, I imagine."

"By the way," I put in the question that had been worrying me the day through, "how does he, naval *attaché* to the German legation, happen to be mixed up in a Russian conspiracy?"

"He hasn't said," Sevrance stated, dryly. "I'm sure I can't imagine, and in honor I'm bound not to try to find out."

I sulked under this gentle reproof—a condition from which Sevrance found an effectual means to rouse me. He glanced at his watch.

"Half after nine," he announced; "it's time we were off, if we're to accomplish anything this night."

"What do you mean?" I wanted to know.

He produced an envelope from his pocket and held it up for my inspection. "I've stalls for the opera," said he; "I knew you were a lover of fine music—and Calvé sings to-night. 'Carmen,' you know."

I gulped down my disappointment.

"Hang the opera!" I told him. "What the dickens——"

"Tush, the angry child!" he laughed. "Do you suppose that I, your humble but faithful servant, would trifle with your young affections? To the contrary. Come—let's be off."

"Sevrance——!" I cried.

"I'll lay you a guinea that we find old friends there," he offered.

"Done," said I, at last comprehending. "And I hope I lose."

"So do I, Gordon," he assured me, with great solemnity.

If you know London, you know—as I then did not—that the famous Heathen Club is but a step from Covent Garden. For all that, Sevrance must needs call a cab; I may mention that never have I seen him take a step in the street when a cab would have served his purpose. We were in front of the garden in a jiffy, and in the theater without delay, arriving late as we did.

The curtain was just going up on the second act as we squirmed into our stalls, to the impassive indignation of a row of English folk who found it necessary to arise and give us way. I sank into my seat with a sigh of relief; I know not what it is that always makes me feel like a pickpocket when I am obliged to disturb seat holders in a theater.

And, to evade the hostile stares of those outraged Britishers, whose toes

I had so severely trodden, I promptly hid my face in my program. For this reason, together with what followed, I remember nothing at all of the music or action of Bizet's masterpiece as produced in Covent Garden, London, upon that second night of my stay in the city. For all I of my certain knowledge could say to the contrary, a songless farce might have been the production. For, hardly had I begun to recover my self-respect, than Sevrance quietly called my attention to that which had drawn me across the Atlantic, my Heart's Desire.

"There," he indicated, with a discreet nod.

I hardly dared look. "Where?" I whispered; and was wretchedly conscious not only that my whisper betrayed my inward agitation, but that a wave of blood had swept into my face. I'm sure it must have blazed like a danger signal.

Sevrance regarded me with a sardonic eye. "Are you choking?" he inquired, unmoved.

I managed to call him a brute. He compressed his lips, meekly.

"True," he sighed, sentimentally. "Ah, true! Moonstruck calf!" he added, with a vindictive snarl.

I was about to threaten him with grievous bodily hurt, when he abruptly had mercy upon me and stopped short, fastening his attention upon the stage.

Presently I mustered up my courage, and looked.

She sat the width of the house from us, unconscious of our existence; for which I was profoundly grateful at the time. It afforded me that opportunity for which I had longed; and I was at liberty to stare, unnoticed, to the full of my desire.

The box she occupied was the second or third back from the proscenium arch, in the first tier; she seemed to me a jewel in its rich setting; the glare from the footlights struck back and seemed to envelop her in an aureole of radiance—quite befitting, to my mind.

Her profile was presented toward me, as she sat, one rounded arm resting on the rail and motionless. She was leaning back in her chair, languidly, following the opera with absorbed attention; she was all in black—a gown that shimmered with jet—in wonderful contrast to the immaculate pallor of her arms and shoulders, to the clear and brilliant tones of her complexion and the beauty of her hair, which was the hue of ripe corn silk, or of fine gold.

I remember breathing with difficulty. The change which four short years had wrought was marvelous. What Sevrance had suggested was true; she had left America a girl, beautiful but undeveloped. As such I had remembered and loved her all these years.

And now she was transformed into a woman's full stature and estate; I have heard her called the most bewitchingly pretty woman in the world, and so she seemed that night, though the term "pretty" is most inadequate, to my way of thinking. She is much more than that.

The dignity and grace of developed womanhood were hers, and something more—something of her pride and of the indomitable courage of her heart was suggested in her high and spirited carriage, bodied forth in sweet resolution of her chin—that never drooped even in fatigue; in the unfathomable depths of her unfaltering eyes—that never fell before any man's; in the rare and perfect contour of her forehead—broad and thoughtful beneath the shimmer of gold, and of a fine whiteness.

So I sat and gazed throughout the length of that all-too-short act. When the curtain fell, I drew a long and deep breath; the moment to which I had been looking forward for two years was near at hand; I confidently purposed to visit her in that box during the intermission.

But, as Sevrance and I rose and fought our way out, I happened again to glance upward. She had turned and was looking straight toward us.

Our eyes met, and I stopped dead in the aisle. Vaguely I was aware that Sevrance was tugging at my arm and counseling me not to be an abandoned

fool, warning me that everyone was remarking my emotion.

As I looked, I caught the flash of welcome in her eyes—an incredulous light of surprise and—I prided myself—pleasure. She nodded, and I knew that she had not forgotten me.

At that instant—all of this happened more swiftly than I can tell it—I saw a man enter the box. The light fell full upon his dark, immobile features; and I knew Von Holzborn. He was, of course, in full evening dress, and I put my teeth together, realizing the magnitude of my undertaking, since I proposed to win the woman's heart from this man of splendid gifts. He was far too good-looking for my peace of mind.

Von Holzborn bent forward, his lips moving. Julia turned, with a quickly repressed start of surprise. Almost immediately she rose, gathering up her wrap, which the Prussian at once took from her. Another occupant of the box, whom I had scarcely noticed, also arose; there was an air of an unexpected departure about the party.

Sevrance hurried me up the aisle. In the promenade he was for taking me to task for making an exhibition of myself, but I cut him off with a hurried explanation, the gist of which was that Lady Herbert was leaving, and that I had had no word with her.

It was almost a hopeless undertaking, and possibly not conceived in the best of taste—to get that word with her. As it turned out, I was denied it. I saw her descending the grand staircase in company with her fiancé and the elder woman, and again she smiled and bowed.

Sevrance and I were cut off by a stream of people who were surging out into the lobby. As soon as it was possible we pushed through and gained the sidewalk, where I had insanely hoped we would find them awaiting us. But we were just in time to hear the slam of their carriage door and to see the vehicle disappear into the fog. I broke down and indulged in profanity. Sevrance stood aside and mocked me.

"What do you expect?" demanded he. That the world will be ordered to your heart's desire? Be calm, young un, and keep your head."

"Tony," I cried, "what does it mean?"

"What does what mean?" he asked.

His humor cooled me a trifle. "Their sudden departure," I explained. "That was Von Holzborn's doing. Do you think he suspects——?"

"How the deuce should I know, Gordon? He's quite capable of thinking for himself, of putting two and two together—and one can't just say how much Lady Herbert may have told him."

I grunted disconsolately.

"There's plenty of time," he comforted me. "Very likely they had a late engagement—a reception or a dance. Besides, what wonderful fascinations you must believe you possess—that Von Holzborn should become so promptly jealous of you!"

"Oh, go to the devil!"

"In my own good time," he returned, resentlessly. "I'm in no haste. For my part, I would prefer to eat a grilled bone than to be the source thereof, just now. What do you say? Feeling peckish, eh?"

"No," said I, sullenly.

"Moreover," he continued, in a tone of calm and logical argument, "it grows evident that you do not know the spirit of your ladylove. It's hardly supposable that she would permit the Prussian to order her around. Come on over to the club."

But in my heart I knew that he was wrong—that, if not my own appearance on the scene, then something of greater moment was to be held accountable for that sudden and evidently unexpected departure from the theater.

Over this thought, thoroughly convinced of its truth, I gloomed for the rest of the evening; Sevrance exerted himself in vain to rouse me. Nor did I find any relief—save in sleep—until the following morning, when Sevrance, looking over his mail at the breakfast table, tossed me a square, white envelope, addressed to me in his care, in a

hand that I knew only too well. Von Holzborn, it seems, had furnished her with my address.

It was such a letter as I might have expected—a note, all too brief, charming and tersely pertinent:

DEAR MR. TRAIL: I am so sorry I missed speaking to you last night, and I am all anxiety to have a good, long talk with you. Won't you come to tea this afternoon? Mrs. Morchester and I will be at home only to you and Mr. Sevrance.

Faithfully,
JULIA VENABLES-HERBERT.

I looked up to find Sevrance's eye upon me.

"Who is Mrs. Morchester?" I inquired, with deceptive nonchalance.

"Lady Herbert's companion," he returned; "you saw them together last night."

"We are asked to call this afternoon—for tea," I told him.

"Now will you believe me?" he asked.

"I'm not satisfied—I won't be till I see her face to face."

Somehow I worried through that interminable day. The fog had lifted and we had a clear and brilliant sky, when, at length, we set forth—a propitious sign, Sevrance assured me. I tried to believe it, but the truth is that a presentiment of disappointment kept me company all that day. I could not rid my mind of the sinister impression caused by Von Holzborn—who, I had to admit, in all likelihood was innocent enough.

A cab whirled us to that house from which De Netze had staggered with the support of his would-be assassins—the house of my beloved, that I had so nearly entered the night before the last. Sevrance and I together mounted the steps, and confronted the gorgeous flunky from whose glare I had fled so precipitately.

To this day I believe the fellow recognized me and took a low-lived joy in the business. He received our cards with a supercilious air, which would have been worth a fabulous salary per annum to a head waiter back in little old New York.

"Lady 'Erbert," he said, heavily, staring fixedly and disapprovingly at me with his fishy eyes, "is not at 'ome."

"Mrs. Morchester, then?" Sevrance suggested.

"Mrs. Morchester is halso hout," he informed us, ponderously.

In my disappointment and chagrin I asked, thoughtlessly:

"She will return when?"

"Hit is himpossible to say, sir," he said, stiffly, looking straight through me, "when Lady 'Erbert will return. She 'as left the town, sir."

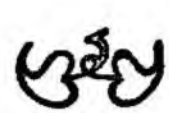
Sevrance attempted to comfort me throughout that gloomy homeward ride.

"It is inexplicable," he admitted, "just now. But wait. There will be an explanation."

I shook my head. "I shan't hear until it is too late," I prophesied. "Von Holzborn suspects. This is his hand."

"Twaddle!" declared Sevrance. But he failed to convince me.

TO BE CONTINUED.



# "THE LURE OF THE DIM TRAILS"

*One of the important features of the August "Popular Magazine" will be a fine, complete novel having for its theme the important and picturesque industry of cattle-raising. The story is entitled "The Lure of the Dim Trails," and the author is B. M. Bower, who wrote "Chip, of the Flying U" and other fascinating tales of ranch life which have appeared in this magazine during the past year.*

# A DIVIDED MISSION

By Walter E. Grogan

*Author of "The Dregs of Wrath," "The King's Scepter," Etc.*

**This is a spirited tale of England in the olden days when Cavalier and Roundhead struggled for supremacy. The writer, Mr. Walter E. Grogan, is an English author whose work is eliciting much favorable criticism on both sides of the Atlantic**

"WE are in a sore strait," said Sir George Godrington. "The rebels will win through our walls if help come not soon."

Ten days had the Parliamentarians circled the castle. At first the old man laughed at their efforts. The castle was strong, he had sixty men stout of heart and loyal, if not to the king, at least to him. These crop-headed knaves bearding him were but a means of jest and some matter of satisfaction, for the more who came within reach of his muskets the more would the earth be rid of.

On the third day, Colonel Jonas Hampder had arrived with reënforcements to push the siege mightily.

"I have been the king's man all my life," said Sir George, when he heard the news. "I am old now, but I still have my strength. My eldest son died for his majesty at Edgehill. It was such a death as a man may well covet, and I am content." Lady Godrington, standing by him, shivered a little for the memory of her first born, but smiled also. "I have given much for the king—but I have more to give. I have my life—it is his majesty's. I have the life of another son, Percy—it is his majesty's."

Master Percy Godrington, blue-eyed, straight of limb, with a chestnut love lock curling upon his shoulder, smiled proudly and played with the hilt of his sword.

"I hold this place for my liege lord, the king," continued the old man. "See that no man speak of surrender, for I swear by God and his majesty that the first craven dies at my hands! Until there is no life within its walls it is the king's. To your posts, men!"

Master Percy Godrington carried himself bravely in the front of all, but his heart was heavy within him and his sleep troubled, for his love pricked him, and the pricking of love is grievous. Mistress Alison Hartnoll was at Hartnoll Grange with her old mother and some few servants, and Hartnoll Grange was but three miles away, open to these very varlets of rebels.

Besides this, Colonel Jonas Hampder, a lawless man, had once been enamored of Mistress Alison, and had sworn that she should be his, and he was a man to make use of any opportunity for the furtherance of his own ends. What those ends might be caused Master Percy to writhe in impotent anger. "She has flouted me!" the colonel had said. "I offered her love and marriage, and she flouted me! The love is dead, but the memory of the insult stings!"

"We are in a sore strait," said Sir George, on the tenth day. "I would that the king knew of our trouble, for he would send help. He lies but thirty miles away."

At these words the heart of Master Percy Godrington leaped with the coming of a high resolve.

"Give me leave, sir, and I will carry tidings to the king!" he cried.

Sir George was wistful, and his wife was more than sorrowful. But she spoke no word to sway her husband's decision, for in the dark days of the war gentle ladies grew strong.

"We are hemmed in. Who rides out from our walls rides with a sorry chance of seeing many morrows."

"If I stay we shall—we must—fall. If I go I have a chance of winning through. A chance! I *will* win through! My mare, Alison, carries me well, my arm is strong. I know the way. Think, sir, the king has need of our treasure. It will be a handsome thing to give these rebels the slip and bring some of the king's men at their backs!"

"Go," said Sir George. "I will give all to the king's cause."

That night was black with the drizzle of rain. So thick was it that the fires of the Parliamentarians were blurred. Master Percy saddled and bridled his mare with his own hands, singing softly the while. Beside him Lady Godrington held a lantern. Presently he stooped and cloaked the mare's hoofs in rags.

"I must not publish my going," he said, smiling at his mother, who smiled back bravely, although her heart was sore.

He thrust pistols into his holsters, and pulled on a cloak. In the courtyard it was very dark. He could not even see the face of his mother, for which she was thankful. He sprang into the saddle, gathering up the reins, and fumbled with the skirts of his cloak so that they might not hamper the hilt of his sword.

"It may be that I shall need to find it in a hurry," he said, with a soft laugh. He rode toward the gate. The muffled pad of the hoofs on the stones made a ghostlike sound. At the gate his mother caught at his hand and kissed it. Afterward he found that his hand was warmly wet. Then he was gritting his teeth, for he held his mother very dear.

"God have thee in His keeping," his mother said. Her voice was almost steady, but she was glad that the night hid her tears.

Sir George spoke to him well-nigh harshly, straining to cover the weakness that was unmanning him.

"Thirty miles, Percy. See that you go fast once on the hither side of these rebels. And if mischance give you to them——"

"I shall have said my last words."

The old man nodded. Surrender was not for a Godrington.

When the horseman was free of the castle walls he went cautiously. The castle was set on a hill. In front, at its foot, a thick wood screened the landscape. On the left side, the way he went, it sloped to a river. Beyond was Hartnoll Grange, three miles away, in a cleared meadowland. The three miles lay away from the king's army. Yet he faced his mare in its direction, and went slowly down in the blackness, the rain sweeping idly about him at the fancy of the wind.

When he had first purposed going this venture, he had thought of Mistress Alison. That thought had taken fire when, near the dropping of the sun, he had seen, from the castle walls, Colonel Hampder ride forth in the direction of Hartnoll Grange, with two men at his back. Then he had prayed for a dark night.

The Parliament men held the castle very tightly circled. From below Percy could hear the idle chatter of the camp, and now and then rough psalm tunes came through the thickness of the mist. Slowly he slid down with loose rein, for in such a night the mare could look to her footing better than he. He had taken notice that the sentinels were placed close to the river bank, for a few hanging trees gave them cover. Here, indeed, the watch was less strict, for the river was broad and somewhat swollen, and it was not to be expected that a man would choose that way of escape. Besides, the king's army was on the hither side, and a man putting his life at hazard would go the nearest way to safety.

The rain had softened the ground so that the scramble down the green slope was passing quiet. Once Percy's sword clanked against his spur at a more than sudden swerve of the mare. Thirty yards beneath him was the sentinel. Percy reined in his mare quickly, and both stood motionless.

"Who be there?" came a hoarse challenge through the mist. "I'd a-sworn there was a noise! The air is choked wi' noises. The Lord be praised, these vainglorious men will soon be given over to our hands, and we will whip 'em wi' scorpions!"

The sentinel peered vainly into the mist, listening intently. Then, satisfied that the noise he had heard was one of the night, he paced slowly away. Percy waited until his footsteps sounded faint, then rode silently down to the river. The wind began to grow. The hanging trees groaned, the river ran with a noisy brawl.

"Come, Alison, lass, 'tis an ill turn to give you, but we must e'en chance our lives with the river to-night."

The mare pulled up at the bank, her four hoofs close together and her head held high. Godrington could feel her quiver with fright. Here was a ford he knew, but the waters were swollen, and it well might happen that the branches were whirling down on its turbulent breast. Pressure of knee, coaxing, soft words spoken into the ears turned back, a shake of the reins, and the mare had taken the water. Godrington looked hurriedly behind. Footsteps were coming nearer, the sentinel was returning. The splash was audible, and to his quickened fancy he thought the footsteps hurried.

"Come, for her sake, my beauty!" he whispered, bending low in his saddle. The river brawled loudly. Here and there in the night the ragged water gleamed white. The mare breasted it bravely. The water grew over her fetlocks, up her legs, reached her knees, tearing madly at her. It was cold now to the feet, up the jack boots it crept—the mare floundered, struggled, lost her footing, found it, scrambled, snorting now and then, but still moving onward. The water was at the saddle flaps, at the holsters. A branch whirled by, tossing black arms in the creamy foam.

"For her sake, my own! Bravely done, my gallant Alison!"

The water fell away, the bank grew closer. The mare gathered her legs under her and struggled with a triumphant rush up the opposite slope, and the river swept on behind them with a gurgle of rage.

A short canter, with the blood running riot, over rough ground, the wind playing a mad dance to the drifting mist, and then Percy reined to a more sober trot, and shortly afterward, as blurred lights showed among trees, to a cautious walk.

Hartnoll Grange spurted lights in many windows. Now and then came rough bursts of laughter; Godrington, as he heard them, ground his teeth. Then he slipped from the back of the mare, and, drawing the bridle over his arm, led her cautiously forward. A white splash of light guided him to the dining hall. Near it was a clump of shrubs. In its shelter he left his mare with a caress, knowing she would wait for him patiently.

"He is here! I would swear to that laugh in a thousand!" It rang out brutally, triumphantly, coarsely. A soft voice spoke. Again the laugh, echoed now by others. Then the noise of a scuffle, and a shrill cry.

"Help! Oh, God, help!" It was Mistress Alison's voice. All thoughts of prudence fled on the wings of the air. The young Cavalier climbed up to the window and thrust against the diamond-paned casement, falling into the room with the crashing glass and twisted lead.

Godrington leaped to his feet, cut and bruised as he was, and whipped out his sword.

On a chair, pushed back from the table, on which stood several bottles, sat Colonel Jonas Hampder, flushed, heavy, dark of visage. His close-cropped black hair was silvered at the temples, his handsome face lined and marked with dead passions. Before him, in the rough hold of two rebel soldiers, was Mistress

Alison. She was a tall girl, with clustering curls of gold, delicate features, and a slim, graceful figure. Her eyes were blazing with scorn, but some dawning fear dilated the pupils. Her white dress was smirched here and there with the touch of the men's hands.

Godrington rapped out a loud oath at the picture before him.

"Release that lady, knaves!" he shouted.

The two men, startled at his sudden appearance, let go their hold, and stood staring at him for a moment.

Colonel Hampder turned livid and jumped up, pulling a pistol from his sash.

"Godrington!" he cried. "You have come in good time to witness a pretty play. My lady here is cruel to me, swears she will have none of my love. She is passing pretty in this virago mood, but I am about to tame her into a more compliant grace." He covered the Cavalier with his pistol as he spoke. "Hold her, fools!" he cried, suddenly, seeing his men agape.

Mistress Alison ran to Godrington's side.

"Percy! You have come! Oh, thank God—thank God!"

"Move, Godrington, and you are a dead man, and that would be a vast pity, for I would have you a spectator of my play." Colonel Hampder looked smilingly over the barrel of his pointed pistol.

"So you rebels make war on women! Craven hounds! You have snarled at our doors and we have whipped you off. Now you show teeth to a woman!"

Mistress Alison clung to her lover with all her strength, crying over and over again: "Thank God! Thank God!"

"Put the wench away, Godrington, or I am like to do her a mischief with this pistol, and I would not spoil her beauty. Take her away, men! Cowards, are ye feared of a young turkey cock? He cannot harm you, for I have him. Godrington," he added, as the Cavalier made a movement, "and you move I fire, and God knows the wench may be hit!"

The two men approached cautiously, stung to action by their colonel. Godrington cursed his folly in leaving his pistols holstered. Then he made a rapid resolve. As the nearest soldier stretched out a hand toward Mistress Alison, lying in his arms, he swung her backward so that she fell, and then sprang upon the man, shielding himself with the fellow's body. Colonel Hampder fired. Godrington felt the man sob and sink forward. He let him fall, and sprang over his body, thrusting his sword through the side of the other man.

The room was now all blurred with the smoke. Another report rang out as Colonel Hampder discharged a second pistol, but the curling drift of the smoke spoiled his aim, and the bullet sped wide of Godrington's heart, breaking the bone of his left arm.

A moment afterward the two men had crossed swords. Mistress Alison stumbled to her feet, a little dazed at the suddenness of the whole matter and her own fall. At the ring of steel upon steel she started. For a moment it was as though she would have cried out, but suddenly she drew herself up with new courage.

The pain of his wound was as fire running up into his brain, but the young man pressed upon the Roundhead, giving thrust for thrust. It was a blind fight, the smoke now clearing had got into their eyes, making them smart cruelly. Once the sword of the Roundhead ran past the Cavalier's parry and stung deeply in his breast. Godrington turned sharply, slipped by the engaged sword, and thrust his blade home. The hilt rang against the man's breast, and the steel stood out between his shoulders. The colonel caught at the air, gasped and fell forward.

There was dead silence for a minute or two. The Cavalier clutched at the table for support, for the room swam in his eyes. The colonel's body lay huddled against an overturned chair. The two soldiers were lying across each other. Mistress Alison stood with staring eyes gazing at the swaying figure of her lover.

"He is dead?" she asked, in a shuddering whisper. "To-night has been terrible! He—oh, it was horrible!" She pressed her white hands to her eyes. "Mother is ill—upstairs. He is dead?"

"Dead!" answered Godrington. His breath came gaspingly. Outside the wind mourned fitfully. An overturned bottle made a long trail of red upon the floor. "Dead, quite dead. I was—was in time. You—you should go away, Alison. This—this is no place for a woman."

"You are quite sure, Percy?—quite sure? He—oh, their eyes are staring—staring at me!" She hid her face again.

The young Cavalier, growing paler and weaker every moment, with the room dancing in his eyes, sank slowly, painfully, to his knees. Then he caught at a cloth roughly, dragging over the bottles. Laboriously he crawled toward the two dead soldiers and flung the cloth over their faces. Dragging himself by one hand, he came to the colonel's side. At the back of the fallen chair was the dead man's cloak. He plucked at it feebly and pulled it over the dead body.

"It is done, Alison," he said.

She uncovered her face and sighed. The sight of her lover lying prone, with a blooded cloak and a limp arm, quickened her suddenly. The faintness which had assailed her passed.

"Percy, you are wounded! Oh, my love, you have come to this for me!"

"My arm and my breast. The arm is broken."

She flew to his side and bent over him.

"I have some skill in these matters," she said. "Bandages!" She pulled off a kerchief hurriedly and tore it into strips. Then with his dropped sword she slit up the sleeve of his doublet, and stanched the bleeding arm. That finished she bared his breast and stopped the flow of blood there.

Eased a little, Godrington recalled his wandering senses.

"What have I done?" he cried. "My father is sore beset at Godrington, and I was to summon aid from the king. There is store of gold there for the king's use, and it is like to fall into the hands of the rebels. Like to!—it must, for I have failed, and given my father to a bloody death!"

"You have done what you could," she said.

"I have failed!" he answered. His anguish fevered him. He tried to rise, but fell back with closed eyes, groaning.

"To summon aid from the king?"

"Ay—and I have failed."

"His majesty lies at——"

"Stepplington—a small matter of thirty miles. But far enough, I doubt not, to a man crippled as I."

"He would send relief?"

"Most assuredly."

"How many men are there in front of Godrington?"

"Four hundred—not more, I swear."

"You have failed for my sake, Percy. I will succeed for yours."

"You, Alison?"

"Come, dear heart, there is small peril."

"You are a woman. God knows these days are hard upon women."

"I will be a man for the nonce. It is for you, Percy."

"Not for me. For the king."

"You are my king, dear heart." She caught at the sword again, and severed with it some length of her golden curls, to be in keeping with a youth's locks. "There is an old suit of my brother's which I have worn before in a girlish prank. I will wear it again in sober earnest. You have not failed, dear heart, you shall not fail! Come, I will send old Jasper to you. He is cunning in the curing of wounds. I warrant me he is hiding at the noise of those rebels—those rebels!" She looked at the covered heaps lumbering the floor, and shuddered. Then she turned away swiftly and left him.

In a quarter of an hour she was back, to find old Jasper tending her lover.

"I've made shift to set the bone with my rude skill," said the old man. "He will do passing well—but he's swooned now. Gad's life, mistress, but you make a dashing Cavalier!"

Mistress Alison was transformed into

as pretty a Cavalier as ever set a wench's heart a-sighing. The laced shirt, the knee breeches, the jack boots, plumed beaver—were all as a man of fashion might seemly wear. She moved to the side of her unconscious lover, and leaning over kissed him.

"I would I had a cloak," she said. "Come, Jasper, his sword. God send I have no occasion for it!"

The old man buckled on the sword with trembling fingers.

"Take his cloak, mistress. I will find another to keep the chill off him." He flung Godrington's cloak over her shoulders. "Keep it close around you, fair mistress, for there may be prying eyes abroad. Alack! that my limbs are too old to take me on the journey!"

"You would need a stout heart to carry you as well as limbs," she said.

"Three to one, sweet mistress, and I an old man," he protested. "God's sake, now for a horse!"

"A horse! Percy came not here afoot. I dare swear his mare waits for him. Come, Jasper, there will be a matter of stirrup lengths to see to."

Two days later, when Master Percy Godrington had got somewhat the better of his hurts and lay in the autumnal sunlight at the front of Hartnoll Grange, old Jasper came to him.

"The king's men—the king's men be a-coming! Heaven be praised, the sweet mistress has succeeded!"

"God would not let her fail," said Godrington, gravely.

Presently the king's horsemen, riding stoutly, five hundred of them, with prisoners in their midst, swung up the gentle slope, and in front rode an old man with a young Cavalier, cloaked, by his side.

"Percy Godrington!" cried Sir Veril Fane, colonel in his majesty's army. "I am as glad to see you as though I had won handsomely at dice! This young popinjay said you were in a bad way. A brave heart, Godrington, but as coy as a wench, and most quaint in manner. My life, but he will wear a cloak in shine as in wet. It is a matter of an oath, he swears!"

"Alison, my fair, brave mistress!" cried Percy, trying to rise.

"Stay, dear heart," answered Mistress Alison, slipping from her saddle. "I have done all. Sir George and Lady Godrington are safe! Your mission did not fail!"

Sir Veril stared upon the two in utter amazement, and then broke into a loud laugh.

"Gad's life!" he cried, "the young popinjay is a wench!"

"My well beloved mistress, Sir Veril," answered Master Percy Godrington, proudly, "Mistress Alison Hartnoll. I was like to fail in my mission, and she has saved my honor and the lives of those very dear to me. I loved her well before; now I will hold her dearer for the ride she went for my sake."

"And for his majesty the king," added Sir Veril.

# AYESHA

## OR, THE RETURN OF "SHE"

By H. Rider Haggard

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### CHAPTER XXI.

THE PROPHECY OF ATENE.

ON the day following this strange experience of the iron that was turned to gold some great service was held in the sanctuary, as we understood, "to consecrate the war." We did not attend it, but that night we ate together as usual. Ayesha was moody at the meal—that is, she varied from sullenness to laughter.

"Know you," she said, "that to-day I was an oracle, and those fools of the mountain sent their medicine men to ask of the Hesea how the battle would go, and which of them would be slain, and which gain honor. And I—I could not tell them, but juggled with my words, so that they might take them as they would. How the battle will go I know well, for I shall direct it, but the future—ah! that I cannot read better than thou canst, my Holly, and that is ill indeed. For me the past and all the present lie bathed in light reflected from that black wall—the future."

Then she fell to brooding, and, looking up at length with an air of entreaty, said to Leo:

"Wilt thou not hear my prayer and bide where thou art for some few days, or even go a-hunting? Do so, and I will stay with thee, and send Holly and Oros to command the tribes in this petty fray."

"I will not," answered Leo, trembling with indignation, for this plan of hers that I should be sent out to war, while he bided in safety in a temple, moved him, a man brave to rashness, who, although he disapproved of it in theory, loved fighting for its own sake, also, to absolute rage.

"I say, Ayesha, that I will not," he repeated; "moreover, that if thou leavest me here I will find my way down the mountain alone, and join the battle."

"Then come," she answered, "and on thine own head be it. Nay, not on thine beloved—on mine, on mine."

After this, by some strange reaction, she became like a merry girl, laughing more than I have ever seen her do, and telling us many tales of the far, far past, but none that were sad or tragic. It was very strange to sit and listen to her while she spoke of people, one or two of them known as names in history, and many others who never have been heard of, that had trod this earth and with whom she was familiar over two thousand years ago. Yet she told us anecdotes of their loves and hates, their strength or weaknesses, all of them touched with some tinge of humorous satire, or illustrating the comic vanity of human aims and aspirations.

At length her talk took a deeper and more personal note. She spoke of her



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searchings after truth; of how, aching for wisdom, she had explored the religions of her day and refused them one by one; of how she had preached in Jerusalem and been stoned by the Doctors of the Law. Of how, also, she had wandered back to Arabia and, being rejected by her own people as a reformer, had traveled on to Egypt, and at the court of the Pharaoh of that time met a famous magician, half charlatan and half seer, who, because she was far-seeing, "clairvoyante," we should call it, instructed her in his art so well that soon she became his master.

Then, as though she were unwilling to reveal too much, suddenly Ayesha's history passed from Egypt to Kôr. She spoke to Leo of his arrival there, a wanderer who was named Kallikrates, hunted by savages and accompanied by the Egyptian Amenartas, whom she appeared to have known and hated in her own country, and of how she entertained them. Yes, she even told of a supper that the three of them had eaten together on the evening before they started to discover the Place of Life, and of an evil prophecy that this royal Amenartas had made as to the issue of their journey.

"Ay," Ayesha said, "it was such a silent night as this, and such a meal as this we ate, and Leo, not so greatly changed, save that he was beardless then and younger, was at my side. Where thou sittest, Holly, sat the royal Amenartas, a very fair woman; yes, even more beautiful than I before I dipped me in the Essence, foresighted also, though not so learned as I had grown. From the first we hated each other, and more than ever now, when she guessed how I had learned to look upon thee, her lover, Leo; for her husband thou never wast, who didst flee too fast for marriage. She knew, also, that the struggle between us which had begun of old and afar, was for centuries and generations, and that until the end should declare itself neither of us could harm the other, who both had sinned to win thee, that wast appointed by fate to be the lodestone of our souls. Then Amenartas spoke and said:

"'Lo! to my sight, Kallikrates, the wine in thy cup is turned to blood, and that knife in thy hand, O daughter of Yarâb'—for so she named me—'drips red blood. Ay, and this place is a sepulcher, and thou, O Kallikrates, sleepest here, nor can she, thy murderess, kiss back the breath of life into those cold lips of thine.'

"So indeed it came about as was ordained," added Ayesha, reflectively, "for I slew thee in yonder Place of Life; yes, in my madness I slew thee because thou wouldst not or couldst not understand the change that had come over me, and shrankest from my loveliness like a blind bat from the splendor of flame, hiding thy face in the tresses of her dusky hair—why, what is it now, thou Oros? Can I never be rid of thee for an hour?"

"O Hes, a writing from the Khania Atene," the priest said, with his deprecating bow.

"Break the seal and read," she answered, carelessly. "Perchance she has repented of her folly and makes submission."

So he read:

To the Hesea of the college on the mountain, known as Ayesha upon earth, and in the household of the Over-world whence she has been permitted to wander, as "Star-that-hath-fallen"——

"A pretty sounding name, forsooth," broke in Ayesha; "ah! but, Atene, set stars rise again—even from the under world. Read on, thou Oros."

Greetings, O Ayesha. Thou who art very old hast gathered much wisdom in the passing of the centuries, and with other powers, that of making thyself seem fair in the eyes of men blinded by thine arts. Yet one thing thou lackest that I have—vision of those happenings which are not yet. Know, O Ayesha, that I and my uncle, the great seer, have searched the heavenly books to learn what is written there of the issue of this war.

This is written: For me, death, whereat I rejoice. For thee, a spear cast by thine own hand. For the land of Kaloon, blood and ruin bred of thee!

ATENE,
Khania of Kaloon.

Ayesha listened in silence, but her lips did not tremble, nor her cheek pale. To Oros she said, proudly:

"Say to the messenger of Atene that I have received her message, and ere long will answer it, face to face with her in her palace of Kaloon. Go, priest, and disturb me no more."

When Oros had departed she turned to us and said:

"That tale of mine of long ago was well fitted to this hour, for as Amenartas prophesied of ill, so does Atene prophesy of ill, and Amenartas and Atene are one. Well, let the spear fall, if fall it must, and I will not flinch from it who know that I shall surely triumph at the last. Perhaps the Khania does but think to frighten me with a cunning lie, but if she has read aright, then be sure, beloved, that it is still well with us, since none can escape their destiny, nor can our bond of union which was fashioned with the universe that bears us ever be undone.

"I tell thee, Leo, that out of the confusions of our lives and deaths order shall yet be born. Behind the mask of cruelty shine mercy's tender eyes; and the wrongs of this rough and twisted world are but hot, blinding sparks, which stream from the all-righting sword of pure, eternal justice. The heavy lives we see and know are only links in a golden chain that shall draw us safe to the haven of our rest; steep and painful steps are they whereby we climb to the allotted palace of our joy. Henceforth I fear no more, and fight no more against that which must befall. For I say we are but winged seeds blown down the gales of fate and change to the appointed garden where we shall grow, filling its blest air with the immortal fragrance of our bloom.

"Leave me now, Leo, and sleep a while, for we ride at dawn."

It was midday on the morrow when we moved down the mountain side with the army of the tribes, fierce and savage-looking men. The scouts were out before us, then came the great body of their cavalry mounted on wiry horses, while to right and left and behind, the foot soldiers marched in regiments, each under the command of its own chief.

Ayesha, veiled now—for she would not show her beauty to these wild folk—rode in the midst of the horsemen on a white mare of matchless speed and shape. With her went Leo and myself, Leo on the Khan's black horse, and I on another not unlike it, though thicker built. About us were a bodyguard of armed priests and a regiment of chosen soldiers, among them those hunters that Leo had saved from Ayesha's wrath, and who were now attached to his person.

We were merry, all of us, for in the crisp air of late autumn, flooded with sunlight, the fears and forebodings that had haunted us in those gloomy, fire-lit caves were forgotten. Moreover, the tramp of thousands of armed men and the excitement of coming battle thrilled our nerves.

Not for many a day had I seen Leo look so vigorous and happy. Of late he had grown somewhat thin and pale, probably from causes that I have suggested, but now his cheeks were red and his eyes shone bright again. Ayesha also seemed joyous, for the moods of this strange woman were as fickle as those of nature's self, and varied as a landscape varies under the sunshine or the shadow. Now she was noon and now dark night; now dawn, now evening, and now thoughts came and went in the blue depths of her eyes like vapors wafted across the summer sky, and in the press of them her sweet face changed and shimmered as broken water shimmers beneath the beaming stars.

"Too long," she said, with a little thrilling laugh, "have I been shut in the bowels of somber mountains, companied only by mutes and savages or by melancholy, chanting priests, and now I am glad to look upon the world again. How beautiful are the snows above, and the brown slopes below, and the broad plains beyond, that roll away to those bordering hills! How glorious is the sun, eternal as myself; how sweet the keen air of heaven.

"Believe me, Leo, more than twenty centuries have gone by since I was seated on a steed, and yet thou seest I

have not forgot my horsemanship, though this beast cannot match those arabs that I rode in the wide deserts of Arabia. Oh! I remember how, at my father's side, I galloped down to war against the marauding Bedouins, and how, with my own hand, I speared their chieftain and made him cry for mercy. One day I will tell thee of that father of mine, for I was his darling, and, though we have been long apart, I hold his memory dear, and look forward to our meeting.

"Look, yonder is the mouth of that gorge where lived the cat-worshiping sorcerer, who would have murdered both of you because thou, Leo, didst throw his familiar to the fire. It is strange, but several of the tribes of this mountain, and of the lands behind it, make cats their gods, or divine by means of them. I think that the first Rassen, the general of Alexander, must have brought the practice here from Egypt. Of this Macedonian Alexander I could tell thee much, for he was almost a contemporary of mine, and when I last was born, the world still rang with the fame of his great deeds.

"It was Rassen who on the mountain supplanted the primeval fire worship whereof the flaming pillars which light its sanctuary remain as monuments, by that of Hes, or Isis, or, rather, blended the two in one. Doubtless among the priests in his army were some of Pasht or Sekket, the cat-headed, and these brought with them their secret cult, that to-day has dwindled down to the vulgar divinations of savage sorcerers. Indeed, I remember dimly that it was so, for I was the first Hesea of this temple, and journeyed hither with that same general, Rassen."

Now both Leo and I looked at her wonderingly, and I could see that she was watching us through her veil. As usual, however, it was I whom she reproved, since Leo might think and do what he willed and still escape her anger.

"Thou, Holly," she said, quickly, "who art ever of a caviling and suspicious mind, remembering what I said but now, believest that I lie to thee."

I protested that I was only reflecting upon an apparent variation between two statements.

"Play not with words," she answered; "in thy heart thou didst write me down a liar, and I take that ill. Know, foolish man, that when I said that the Macedonian Alexander lived before me, I meant before this present life of mine. In the existence that preceded it, though I outlasted him by thirty years, we were born in the same summer, and I knew him well, for I was the oracle whom he consulted most upon his wars, and to my wisdom he owed his victories. Afterward we quarreled, and I left him and pushed forward with Rassen. From that day the bright star of Alexander began to wane."

At this Leo made a sound that resembled a whistle. In a very agony of apprehension, beating back the criticisms and certain recollections of the strange tale of the old abbot, Kou-en, which would rise within me, I asked quickly:

"And dost thou, Ayesha, remember well all that befell thee in this former life?"

"Nay, not well," she answered, meditatively, "only the greater facts, and those I have, for the most part, recovered by the study of secret things which thou callest vision or magic. For instance, my Holly, I recall that thou wast living in that life. Indeed, I seem to see an ugly philosopher clad in a dirty robe and filled both with wine and the learning of others, who disputed with Alexander till he grew wroth with him and caused him to be banished, or drowned—I forget which."

"I suppose that I was not called Diogenes?" I asked, tartly, suspecting, perhaps not without cause, that Ayesha was amusing herself by fooling me.

"No," she replied, gravely, "I do not think that was thy name. The Diogenes thou speakest of was a much more famous man, one of real, if crabbed, wisdom; moreover, he did not indulge in wine. I am mindful of very little of that life, however; not of more, indeed, than are many of the followers of the

prophet Buddha, whose doctrines I have studied and of whom thou, Holly, hast spoken to me so much. Maybe we did not meet while it endured. Still, I recollect that the Valley of Bones, where I found thee, my Leo, was the place where a great battle was fought between the fire priests, with their vassals, the tribes of the mountain, and the army of Rassen, aided by the people of Kaloon. For between these and the mountain, in old days, as now, there was enmity, since in this present war history does but rewrite itself."

"So thou thyself wast our guide," said Leo, looking at her sharply.

"Ay, Leo, who else? though it is not wonderful that thou didst not know me beneath those deathly wrappings. I was minded to wait and receive thee in the sanctuary, yet when I learned that, at length, both of you had escaped Atene and drew near, I could restrain myself no more, but came forth thus hideously disguised. Yes, I was with you even at the river's bank, and, though you saw me not, there sheltered you from harm.

"Leo, I yearned to look upon thee and to be certain that thy heart had not changed, although until the allotted time thou mightest not hear my voice or see my face who wert doomed to undergo that sore trial of thy faith. Of Holly, also, I desired to learn whether his wisdom could pierce through my disguise, and how near he stood to truth. It was for this reason that I suffered him to see me draw the lock from the satchel on thy breast and to hear me wail over thee yonder in the pest house. Well, he did not guess so ill, but thou, thou knewest me—in thy sleep—knewest me as I am, and not as I seemed to be, yes," she added, softly, "and didst say certain sweet words, which I remember well."

"Then beneath that shroud was thine own face," asked Leo again, for he was very curious on this point—"the same lovely face I see to-day?"

"Mayhap—as thou wilt," she answered, coldly; "also it is the spirit that matters, not the outward seeming, though men in their blindness think otherwise. Perchance my face is but as thy heart fashions it, or as my will presents it to the sight and fancy of its beholders. But hark! The scouts have touched."

As Ayesha spoke a sound of distant shouting was borne upon the wind, and presently we saw a fringe of horseman falling back slowly upon our foremost line. It was only to report, however, that the skirmishers of Atene were in full retreat. Indeed, a prisoner whom they brought with them, on being questioned by the priests, confessed at once that the Khania had no mind to meet us upon the holy mountain. She proposed to give battle on the river's further bank, having for a defense its waters which we must ford, a decision that showed good military judgment.

So it happened that on this day there was no fighting.

All that afternoon we descended the slopes of the mountain, more swiftly by far than we had climbed them after our long flight from the city of Kaloon. Before sunset we came to our prepared camping ground, a wide and sloping plain that ended at the crest of the Valley of Dead Bones, where in past days we had met our mysterious guide. This, however, we did not reach through the secret mountain tunnel along which she had led us, the shortest way by miles, as Ayesha told us now, since it was unsuited to the passage of an army.

Bending to the left, we circled round a number of unclimbable koppies, beneath which that tunnel passed, and so, at length, arrived upon the brow of the dark ravine where we could sleep safe from attack by night.

Here a tent was pitched for Ayesha, but, as it was the only one, Leo and I, with our guard, bivouacked among some rocks at a distance of a few hundred yards. When she found that this must be so, Ayesha was very angry, and spoke bitter words to the chief who had charge of the food and baggage, although, he, poor man, knew nothing of tents.

Also she blamed Oros, who replied meekly that he had thought us captains accustomed to war and its hardships.

But most of all, she was very angry with herself, who had forgotten this detail, and until Leo stopped her with a laugh of vexation, went on to suggest that we should sleep in the tent, since she had no fear of the rigors of the mountain cold.

The end of it was that we supped together outside, or, rather, Leo and I supped, for, as there were guards around us, Ayesha did not even lift her veil.

That evening Ayesha was disturbed and ill at ease, as though new fears, which she could not overcome, assailed her. At length she seemed to conquer them by some effort of her will, and announced that she was minded to sleep and thus refresh her soul; the only part of her, I think, which ever needed rest. Her last words to us were:

"Sleep you also, sleep sound, but be not astonished, my Leo, if I send to summon both of you during the night, since in my slumbers I may find new counsels and need to speak of them to thee ere we break camp at dawn."

Thus we parted, but ah! little did we guess how and where the three of us would meet again.

We were weary, and soon fell fast asleep beside our camp fire, for, knowing that the whole army guarded us, we had no fear. I remember watching the bright stars which shone in the immense vault above me until they paled in the pure light of the risen moon, now somewhat past her full, and hearing Leo mutter drowsily from beneath his fur rug that Ayesha was quite right, and that it was pleasant to be in the open air again, as he was tired of caves.

After that I knew no more until I was awakened by the challenge of a sentry in the distance; then, after a pause, a second challenge from the officer of our own guard. Another pause, and a priest stood bowing before us, the flickering light from the fire playing upon his shaven head and face, which I seemed to recognize.

"I"—and he gave a name that was familiar to me, but which I forget—"am sent, my lords, by Oros, who commands me to say that the Hesea would speak with you both and at once."

Now Leo sat up yawning, and asked what was the matter. I told him, whereon he said he wished that Ayesha could have waited till daylight, then added:

"Well, there is no help for it. Come on, Horace," and he rose to follow the messenger.

The priest bowed again and said:

"The commands of the Hesea are that my lords should bring their weapons and their guard."

"What," grumbled Leo, "to protect us for a walk of a hundred yards through the heart of an army?"

"The Hesea," explained the man, "has left her tent; she is in the gorge yonder, studying the line of advance."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"I do not know it," he replied. "Oros told me so, that is all, and therefore the Hesea bade my lords bring their guard, for she is alone."

"Is she mad," ejaculated Leo, "to wander about in such a place at midnight? Well, it is like her."

I, too, thought it was like her, who did nothing that others would have done, and yet I hesitated. Then I remembered that Ayesha had said she might send for us; also I was sure that if any trick had been intended we should not have been warned to bring an escort. So we called the guard—there were twelve of them—took our spears and swords and started.

We were challenged by both the first and second lines of sentries, and I noticed that as we gave them the password, the last picket, who, of course, recognized us, looked astonished. Still, if they had doubts they did not dare to express them. So we went on.

Now we began to descend the sides of the ravine by a very steep path, with which the priest, our guide, seemed to be curiously familiar, for he went down it as though it were the stairway of his own house.

"A strange place to take us to at

night," said Leo, doubtfully, when we were near the bottom, and the chief of the bodyguard, that great, red-bearded hunter who had mixed up in the matter of the snow leopard, also muttered some words of remonstrance. While I was trying to catch what he said, of a sudden something white walked into the patch of moonlight at the foot of the ravine, and we saw that it was the veiled figure of Ayesha herself. The chief saw her, also, and said, contentedly:

"Hes! Hes!"

"Look at her," grumbled Leo, "strolling about in that haunted hole as though it were Hyde Park;" and on he went at a run.

The figure turned and beckoned to us to follow her as she glided forward, picking her way through the skeletons which were scattered about upon the lava bed of the cleft. Thus she went on into the shadow of the opposing cliff that the moonlight did not reach. Here in the wet season a stream trickled down a path which it had cut through the rock in the course of centuries, and the grit that it had brought with it was spread about the lava floor of the ravine, so that many of the bones were almost completely buried in the sand.

These, I noticed, as we stepped into the shadow, were more numerous than usual just here, for on all sides I saw the white crowns of skulls, or the projecting ends of ribs and thigh bones. Doubtless, I thought to myself, that streamway made a road to the plain above, and in some past battle the fighting around it was very fierce and the slaughter great.

Here Ayesha had halted and was engaged in the contemplation of this bowlder-strewn path, as though she meditated making use of it that day. Now we drew near to her, and the priest who guided us fell back with our guard, leaving us to go forward alone, since they dared not approach the Hesea unbidden. Leo was somewhat in advance of me, seven or eight yards, perhaps, and I heard him say:

"Why dost thou venture into such places at night, Ayesha, unless, indeed, it is not possible for any harm to come to thee?"

She made no answer, only turned and opened her arms wide, then let them fall to her side again. While I wondered what this signal of hers might mean, from the shadows about us came a strange, rustling sound.

I looked, and lo! everywhere the skeletons were rising from their sandy beds. I saw their white skulls, their gleaming arm and leg bones, their hollow ribs. The long-slain army had come to life again, and look! in their hands were the ghosts of spears.

Of course I knew at once that this was but another manifestation of Ayesha's magic powers, which some whim of hers had drawn us from our beds to witness. Yet I confess that I felt frightened. Even the boldest of men, however free from superstition, might be excused should their nerve fail them, if, when standing in a churchyard at midnight, suddenly on every side they saw the dead arising from their graves. Also our surroundings were wilder and more eerie than those of any civilized burying place.

"What new devilment of thine is this?" cried Leo, in a scared and angry voice. But Ayesha made no answer.

I heard a noise behind me and looked round. The skeletons were springing upon our bodyguard, who, for their part, poor men, paralyzed with terror, had thrown down their weapons and fallen, some of them, to their knees. Now the ghosts began to stab at them with their phantom spears, and I saw that beneath the blows they rolled over. The veiled figure above me pointed with her hand at Leo and said:

"Seize him, but I charge you, harm him not."

I knew the voice; *it was that of Atene!*

Then too late I understood the trap into which we had fallen.

"Treachery!" I began to cry, and before the word was out of my lips, a particularly able-bodied skeleton silenced me with a violent blow upon the head. But though I could not speak, my senses still stayed with me

for a little. I saw Leo fighting furiously with a number of men who strove to pull him down, so furiously, indeed, that his frightful efforts caused the blood to gush out of his mouth from some burst vessel in the lungs.

Then sight and hearing failed me, and, thinking that this was death, I fell, and remembered no more.

Why I was not killed outright I do not know, unless in their hurry the disguised soldiers thought me already dead, or perhaps that my life was to be spared also. At least, beyond the knock upon the head, I received no injury.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE LOOSING OF THE POWERS.

When I came to myself again it was daylight. I saw the calm, gentle face of Oros bending over me as he poured some strong fluid down my throat that seemed to shoot through all my body, and melt a curtain in my mind. I saw also that beside him stood Ayesha.

"Speak, man, speak," she said, in a terrible voice. "What has chanced here? Thou livest, then where is my lord? Where hast thou hid my lord? Tell me—or die."

It was the vision that I saw when my senses left me in the snow of the avalanche, fulfilled to the last detail!

"Atene has taken him," I answered.

"Atene has taken him and thou art left alive?"

"Do not be wroth with me," I answered; "it is no fault of mine. Little wonder we were deceived after thou hadst said that thou mightest summon us ere dawn."

Then as briefly as I could I told the story.

She listened, went to where our murdered guards lay with unstained spears, and looked at them.

"Well for these that they are dead," she exclaimed. "Now, Holly, thou seest what is the fruit of mercy. The men whose lives I gave my lord have failed him at his need."

Then she passed forward to the spot where Leo was captured. Here lay a broken sword—Leo's—that had been the Khan Rassen's, and two dead men. Both of these were clothed in some tight-fitting black garments, having their heads and faces whitened with chalk, and upon their vests a rude imitation of a human skeleton, also daubed in chalk.

"A trick fit to frighten fools with," she said, contemptuously. "But, oh! that Atene should have dared to play the part of Ayesha, that she should have dared!" and she clinched her little hand. "See, surprised and overwhelmed, yet he fought well. Say! was he hurt, Holly? It comes upon me—no, tell me that I see amiss."

"Not much, I think," I answered, doubtfully; "a little blood was running from his mouth, no more. Look, there go the stains of it upon that rock."

"For every drop I'll take a hundred lives. By myself I swear it," Ayesha muttered, with a groan. Then she cried, in a ringing voice:

"Back and to horse, for I have deeds to do this day. Nay, hide thou here, Holly; we go a shorter path while the army skirts the gorge. Oros, give him food and drink, and bathe that hurt upon his head. It is but a bruise, for his hood and hair are thick."

So while Oros rubbed some stinging lotion on my scalp, I ate and drank as best I could, till my brain ceased to swim, for the blow, though heavy, had not fractured the bone. When I was ready they brought the horses to us, and, mounting them, slowly we scrambled up the steep bed of the water course.

"See," Ayesha said, pointing to tracks and hoofprints on the plain at its head, "there was a chariot awaiting him, and harnessed to it were four swift horses. Atene's scheme was clever and well laid, and I, grown oversure and careless, slept through it all!"

On this plain the army of the tribes that had broken camp before the dawn was already gathering fast; indeed, the cavalry, if I may call them so, were assembled there to the number of about five thousand men, each of whom had a led horse. Ayesha summoned the

chiefs and captains, and addressed them.

"Servants of Hes," she said, "the stranger lord, my betrothed and guest, has been tricked by a false priest, and, falling into a cunning snare, captured as a hostage. It is necessary that I follow him fast, before harm comes to him. We move down to attack the army of the Khania beyond the river. When its passage is forced I pass on with the horsemen, for I must sleep in the city of Kaloon to-night. What sayest thou, Oros? That a second and greater army defends its walls? Man, I know it, and if there is need, that army I will destroy. Nay, stare not at me. Already they are as dead. Horsemen, you accompany me.

"Captains of the tribes, you follow, and woe be to that man who hangs back in the hour of battle, for death and eternal shame shall be his portion, but wealth and honor to those who bear them bravely. Yes, I tell you, theirs shall be the fair land of Kaloon. You have your orders for the passing of yonder river. I, with the horsemen, take the central ford. Let the wings advance."

The chiefs answered with a cheer, for they were fierce men, whose ancestors had loved war for generations. Moreover, mad as seemed the enterprise, they trusted in their oracle, the Hesea, and, like all hill people, were easily fired by the promise of rich plunder.

An hour's steady march down the slopes brought the army to the edge of the marsh lands. These, as it chanced, proved no obstacle to our progress, for in that season of great drought they were quite dry, and for the same reason the shrunken river was not so impassable a defense as I feared that it would be. Still, because of its rocky bottom and steep, opposing banks, it looked formidable enough, while on the crests of those banks, in squadrons and companies of horse and foot, were gathered the regiments of Atene.

While the wings of footmen deployed to right and left, the cavalry halted in the marshes and let their horses fill themselves with the long grass, now a little browned by frost, that grew on this boggy soil, and afterward drink some water.

All this time Ayesha stood silent, for she also had dismounted, that the mare she rode and her two led horses might graze with the others. Indeed, she spoke but once, saying:

"Thou thinkest this adventure mad, my Holly? Say, art afraid?"

"Not with thee for captain," I answered. "Still, that second army——"

"Shall melt before me like mist before the gale," she replied, in a low and thrilling voice. "Holly, I tell thee thou shalt see things such as no man upon the earth has ever seen. Remember my words when I *loose the powers* and thou followest the rent veil of Ayesha through the smitten squadrons of Kaloon. Only—what if Atene should dare to murder him? Oh, if she should dare!"

"Be comforted," I replied, wondering what she might mean by this loosing of the powers. "I think that she loves him too well."

"I bless thee for the words, Holly, yet—I know he will refuse her, and then her hate for me and her jealous rage may overcome her love for him. Should this be so, what will avail my vengeance? Eat and drink again, Holly—nay, I touch no food until I sit in the palace of Kaloon—and look well to girth and bridle, for thou ridest far and on a wild errand. Mount thee on Leo's horse, which is swift and sure; if it dies the guards will bring thee others."

I obeyed her as best I could, and once more bathed my head in a pool, and with the help of Oros tied a rag soaked in the liniment on the bruise, after which I felt sound enough. Indeed, the mad excitement of those minutes of waiting, and some foreshadowing of the terrible wonders that were about to befall, made me forget my hurts.

Now, Ayesha was standing staring upward, so that, although I could not see her veiled face, I guessed that her eyes must be fixed on the sky above the mountain top. I was certain, also, that she was concentrating her fearful will

upon an unknown object, for her whole frame quivered like a reed shaken in the wind.

It was a very strange morning—cold and clear, yet curiously still, and with a heaviness in the air such as precedes a great fall of snow, although for much snow the season was yet too early. Once or twice, too, in that utter calm, I thought that I felt everything shudder; not the ordinary trembling of earthquake, however, for the shuddering seemed to be of the atmosphere quite as much as of the land. It was as though all nature around us were a living creature which is very much afraid.

Following Ayesha's earnest gaze, I perceived that thick, smoky clouds were gathering one by one in the clear sky above the peak, and that they were edged, each of them, with a fiery rim. Watching these fantastic and ominous clouds, I ventured to say to her that it looked as though the weather would change—not a very original remark, but one which the circumstances suggested.

"Ay," she answered, "ere night the weather will be wilder even than my heart. No longer shall they cry for water in Kaloon! Mount, Holly, mount! The advance begins!" and unaided she sprang to the saddle of the mare that Oros brought her.

Then, in the midst of the five thousand horsemen, we moved down upon the ford. As we reached its brink I noted that the two divisions of tribesmen were already entering the stream half a mile to the right and left of us. Of what befell them I can tell nothing from observation, although I learned later that they forced it after great slaughter on both sides.

In front of us was gathered the main body of the Khania's army, massed by regiments upon the further bank, while hundreds of picked men stood up to their middles in the water, waiting to spear or hamstring our horses as we advanced.

Now, uttering their wild, whistling cry, our leading companies dashed into the river, leaving us upon the bank, and soon were engaged hotly with the footmen in midstream. While this fray went on, Oros came to Ayesha and told her a spy had reported that Leo, bound in a two-wheeled carriage and accompanied by Atene, Simbri and a guard, had passed through the enemy's camp at night, galloping furiously toward Kaloon.

"Spare thy words, I know it," she answered, and he fell back behind her.

Our squadrons gained the bank, having destroyed most of the men in the water, but as they set foot upon it the enemy charged them and drove them back with loss. Thrice they returned to the attack, and thrice were repulsed in this fashion. At length Ayesha grew impatient.

"They need a leader, and I will give them one," she said. "Come with me, my Holly," and, followed by the main body of the horsemen, she rode a little way into the river, and there waited until the shattered troops had fallen back upon us. Oros whispered to me:

"It is madness; the Hesea will be slain."

"Thinkest thou so?" I answered. "More like that we shall be slain," a saying at which he smiled a little more than usual, and shrugged his shoulders, since for all his soft ways, Oros was a brave man. Also I believe that he spoke to try me, knowing that his mistress would take no harm.

Ayesha held up her hand, in which there was no weapon, and waved it forward. A great cheer answered that signal to advance, and in the midst of it this frail, white-robed woman spoke to her horse, so that it plunged deep into the water.

Two minutes later, and spears and arrows were flying about us so thickly that they seemed to darken the sky. I saw men and horses fall to right and left, but nothing touched me or the white robes that floated a yard or two ahead. Five minutes and we were gaining the further bank, and there the worst fight began.

It was fierce indeed, yet never an inch did the white robes give back, and where they went men would follow

them or fall. We were up the bank, and the enemy was packed about us, but through them we passed slowly, like a boat through an adverse sea that buffets but cannot stay it. Yes, further and further, till at last the lines ahead grew thin as the living wedge of horsemen forced its path between them—grew thin, broke and vanished.

We had passed through the heart of the host, and leaving the tribesmen who followed to deal with its flying fragments, rode on half a mile or so and mustered. Many were dead and more were hurt, but the command was issued that all sore-wounded men should fall out and give their horses to replace those that had been killed.

This was done, and presently we moved on, three thousand of us now, not more, heading for Kaloon. The trot grew to a canter, and the canter to a gallop, as we rushed forward across that endless plain, till at midday, or a little after—for this route was far shorter than that taken by Leo and myself in our devious flight from Rassen and his death hounds—we dimly saw the city of Kaloon set upon its hill.

Now a halt was ordered, for here was a reservoir in which was still some water, whereof the horses drank, while the men ate of the food they carried with them; dried meat and barley meal. Here, too, more spies met us, who said that the great army of Atene was posted guarding the city bridges, and that to attack it with our little force would mean destruction. But Ayesha took no heed of their words; indeed, she scarcely seemed to hear them. Only she ordered that all wearied horses should be abandoned and fresh ones mounted.

Forward again for hour after hour in perfect silence save for the thunder of our horses' hoofs. No word spoke Ayesha, nor did her wild escort speak, only from time to time they looked over their shoulders and pointed with their red spears at the red sky behind.

I looked also, nor shall I forget its aspect. The dreadful, fire-edged clouds had grown and gathered so that beneath their shadows the plain lay almost black. They marched above us like an army in the heavens, while from time to time vaporous points shot forward, thin, like swords, or massed like charging horse.

Under them a vast stillness reigned. It was as though the earth lay dead beneath their pall.

Kaloon, lit in a lurid light, grew nearer. The pickets of the foe flew homeward before us, shaking their javelins, and their mocking laughter reached us in hollow echoes. Now we saw the vast array, posted rank on rank with silken banners drooping in that stirless air, flanked and screened by glittering regiments of horse.

An embassy approached us, and at the signal of Ayesha's uplifted arm we halted. It was headed by a lord of the court, whose face I knew. He pulled rein and spoke boldly.

"Listen, Hes, to the words of Atene, Ere now the stranger lord, thy darling, is prisoner in her palace. Advance, and we destroy thee and thy little band; but if by any miracle thou shouldst conquer, then he dies. Get thee gone to thy mountain fastness and the Khania gives thee peace, and thy people their lives. What answer to the words of the Khania?"

Ayesha whispered to Oros, who called aloud:

"There is no answer. Go, if ye love life, for death draws near to you."

So they went fast as their swift steeds would carry them, but for a little while Ayesha still sat lost in thought.

Presently she turned, and through her thin veil I saw that her face was white and terrible, and that the eyes in it glowed like those of a lioness at night. She said to me—hissing the words between her clinched teeth:

"Holly, prepare thyself to look into the mouth of hell. I desired to spare them if I could, I swear it, but my heart bids me be bold, to put off human pity, and use all my secret might if I would see Leo living. Holly, I tell thee they are about *to murder him!*"

Then she cried aloud: "Fear noth-

ing, captains. Ye are but few, yet with you goes the strength of ten thousand thousand. Now follow the Hesea, and whate'er ye meet, be not dismayed. Repeat it to the soldiers, that fearing nothing they follow the Hesea through yonder host and across the bridge and into the city of Kaloon."

So the chiefs rode hither and thither, crying out her words, and the savage tribesmen answered:

"Ay, we who followed through the water, will follow across the plain. Onward, Hes, for darkness swallows us."

Now some orders were given, and the companies fell into a formation that resembled a great wedge, Ayesha herself being its very point and apex, for though Oros and I rode on either side of her, spur as we would, our horses' heads never passed her saddle bow. In front of that dark mass she shone a single spot of white—one snowy feather on a black torrent's breast.

A screaming bugle note—and, like giant arms, from the shelter of some groves of trees, curved horns of cavalry shot out to surround us, while the broad bosom of the opposing army, shimmering with spears, rolled forward as a wave rolls crowned with sunlit foam, and behind it, line upon line, uncountable, lay a surging sea of men.

Our end was near. We were lost, or so it seemed.

Ayesha tore off her veil and held it on high, flowing from her like a pennon, and lo! upon her brow blazed that wide and mystic diadem of light which once only I had seen before.

Denser and denser grew the rushing clouds above; brighter and brighter gleamed the unearthly star of light beneath. Louder and louder beat the sound of the falling hoofs of ten thousand horses. From the mountain peak behind us went up sudden sheets of flame; it spouted fire as a whale spouts foam.

The scene was dreadful. In front, the towers of Kaloon lurid in a monstrous sunset. Above, a gloom as of an eclipse. Around, the darkling, sunburnt plain. On it Atene's advancing army, and our rushing wedge of horsemen destined, it would appear, to inevitable doom.

Ayesha let fall her rein. She tossed her arms, waving the torn, white veil as though it were a signal cast to heaven.

Instantly from the churning jaws of the unholy night above belched a blaze of answering flame, that also wavered like a rent and shaken veil in the grasp of a black hand of cloud.

Then did Ayesha roll the thunder of her might upon the children of Kaloon. Then she called, and the terror came, such as men had never seen and perchance never more will see. Awful bursts of wind tore past us, lifting the very stones and soil before them, and with the wind went hail and level, hissing rain, made visible by the arrows of perpetual lightnings that leaped downward from the sky and upward from the earth.

It was as she had warned me. It was as though hell had broken loose upon the world, yet through that hell we rushed on unharmed. For always these furies passed before us. No arrow flew, no javelin was stained. The jagged hail was a herald of our coming; the levens that smote and stabbed were our sword and spear, while ever the hurricane roared and screamed with a million separate voices which blended to one yell of sound, hideous and indescribable.

As for the hosts about us, they melted and were gone.

Now the darkness was dense, like to that of thickest night; yet in the fierce flares of the lightnings I saw them run this way and that, and amid the volleying, elemental voices I heard their shouts of horror and of agony. I saw horses and riders roll confused upon the ground; like storm-drifted leaves I saw their footmen piled in high and whirling heaps, while the brands of heaven struck and struck them till they sank together and grew still.

I saw the groves of trees bend, shrivel up and vanish. I saw the high walls of Kaloon blown in and flee away, while the houses within the walls took fire, to go out beneath the torrents of the driv-

ing rain, and again take fire. I saw blackness sweep over us with great wings, and when I looked, lo! those wide wings were flame—floods of pulsing flame that flew upon the tormented air.

Blackness, utter blackness; turmoil, doom, dismay! Beneath me the laboring horse; at my side the steady crest of light which sat on Ayesha's brow, and through the tumult a clear, exultant voice that sang:

"I promised thee wild weather! Now, Holly, dost thou believe that I can loose the prisoned powers of the world?"

Lo! all was past and gone, and above us shone the quiet evening sky, and before us lay the empty bridge, and beyond it the flaming city of Kaloon. But the armies of Atene, where were they? Go, ask of those great cairns that hide their bones. Go, ask it of her widowed land.

Yet of our wild company of horsemen not one was lost. After us they galloped trembling, white-lipped, like men who face to face had fought and conquered death, but triumphant—ah, triumphant!

On the high head of the bridge Ayesha wheeled her horse, and so for one proud moment stood to welcome them. At the sight of her glorious, star-crowned countenance, which now her tribes beheld for the first time and the last, there went up such a shout as men have seldom heard.

*"The goddess!"* that shout thundered. "Worship the goddess!"

Then she turned her horse's head again, and they followed on through the long, straight street of the burning city up to the palace on its crest.

As the sun set we sped beneath its gateway. Silence in the courtyard, silence everywhere, save for the distant roar of fire and the scared howlings of the death hounds in their kennel.

Ayesha sprang from her horse, and, waving back all save Oros and myself, swept through the open doors into the halls beyond.

They were empty, every one—all were fled or dead. Yet she never paused or doubted, but so swiftly that we scarce could follow her, flitted up the wide stone stair that led to the topmost tower. Up, still up, until we reached the chamber where had dwelt Simbri the Shaman, that same chamber whence he was wont to watch his stars, in which Atene had threatened us with death.

Its door was shut and barred; still, at Ayesha's coming, yes, before the mere breath of her presence, the iron bolts snapped like twigs, the locks flew back, and inward burst that massive portal.

Now we were within the lamp-lit chamber, and this is what we saw. Seated in a chair, pale-faced, bound, yet proud and defiant looking, was Leo. Over him, a dagger in his withered hand—yes, about to strike, in the very act—stood the old Shaman, and on the floor, hard by, gazing upward with wide-set eyes, dead and still majestic in her death, lay Atene, Khania of Kaloon.

Ayesha waved her arm and the knife fell from Simbri's hand, clattering on the marble, while in an instant he who had held it was smitten to stillness, and became like a man turned to stone.

She stooped, lifted the dagger, and with a swift stroke severed Leo's bonds; then, as though overcome at last, sank on to a bench in silence. Leo rose, looking about him bewildered, and said in the strained voice of one who is weak with much suffering:

"But just in time, Ayesha. Another second, and that murderous dog"—and he pointed to the Shaman—"well, it was in time. But how went the battle, and how camest thou here through that awful hurricane? And, oh, Horace, thank Heaven they did not kill you, after all!"

"The battle went ill for some," Ayesha answered, "and I came not through the hurricane, but on its wings. Tell me now, what has befallen thee since we parted?"

"Trapped, overpowered, bound, brought here, told that I must write to thee and stop thy advance, or die—

refused, of course, and then——" and he glanced at the dead body on the floor.

"And then?" repeated Ayesha.

"Then that fearful tempest, which seemed to drive me mad. Oh! if thou couldst have heard the wind howling round these battlements, tearing off their stones as though they were dry leaves; if thou hadst seen the lightnings falling thick and fast as rain——"

"They were my messengers. I sent them to save thee," said Ayesha, simply.

Leo stared at her, making no comment, but after a pause, as though he were thinking the matter over, he went on:

"Atene said as much, but I did not believe her. I thought the end of the world had come, that was all. Well, she returned just now more mad even than I was, and told me that her people were destroyed and that she could not fight against the strength of hell, but that she could send me thither, and took a knife to kill me.

"I said: 'Kill on,' for I knew that wherever I went thou wouldst follow, and I was sick with the loss of blood from some hurt I had in that struggle, and weary of it all. So I shut my eyes waiting for the stroke, but instead I felt her lips pressed upon my forehead, and heard her say:

"'Nay, I will not do it. Fare thee well; fulfill thou thine own destiny, as I fulfill mine. For this cast the dice have fallen against me; elsewhere it may be otherwise. I go to load them if I may.'

"I opened my eyes and looked. There Atene stood, a glass in her hand—see, it lies beside her.

"'Defeated, yet I win,' she cried, 'for I do but pass before thee to prepare the path that thou shalt tread, and to make ready thy place in the under world. Till we meet again I pledge thee, for I am destroyed. Ayesha's horsemen are in my streets, and, clothed in lightnings at their head, rides Ayesha's avenging self.'

"So she drank, and fell dead—but now. Look, her breast still quivers. Afterward, that old man would have murdered me, for, being roped, I could not resist him, but the door burst in and thou camest. Spare him, he is of her blood, and he loved her."

Then Leo sank back into the chair where we had discovered him bound, and seemed to fall into a kind of torpor, for of a sudden he grew to look like an old man.

"Thou art sick," said Ayesha, anxiously. "Oros, thy medicine, the draught I bade thee bring! Be swift, I say."

The priest bowed, and from some pocket in his ample robe produced a phial, which he opened and gave to Leo, saying:

"Drink, my lord; this stuff will give thee back thy health, for it is strong."

"The stronger the better," answered Leo, rousing himself, and with something like his old, cheerful laugh. "I am thirsty who have touched nothing since last night, and have fought hard and been carried far, yes—and lived through that hellish storm."

Then he took the draught and emptied it.

There must have been virtue in that potion; at least, the change which it produced in him was wonderful. Within a minute his eyes grew bright again, and the color returned into his cheeks.

"Thy medicines are very good, as I have learned of old," he said to Ayesha; "but the best of all of them is to see thee safe and victorious before me, and to know that I, who looked for death, yet live to greet thee, my beloved. There is food," and he pointed to a board upon which were meats, "say, may I eat of them, for I starve?"

"Ay," she answered, softly, "eat, and, my Holly, eat thou also."

So we fell to; yes, we fell to and ate even in the presence of that dead woman who looked so royal in her death; of the old magician who stood there powerless, like a man petrified, and of Ayesha, the wondrous being that could destroy an army with the fearful weapons which were servant to her will.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

# Powell's Peculiar Projectiles

By Oscar Hatch Hawley

**In dealing with contumacious South American states, their great sister republic occasionally finds it necessary to employ what might be described as strong-arm diplomacy, such as Mr. Hawley tells about. In this instance, however, such diplomacy would hardly have proved effective had it not been for the ready wit of a young naval officer**

(*A Complete Story*)

## CHAPTER I.

### STRONG-ARM DIPLOMACY EXPLAINED.

HEN Ensign Powell was ordered on shore duty at the port of Dahmo, he was the envy of all the other officers on the cruiser *Tallapoosa*. They knew that the assignment was coming, and each one had hoped to be selected, for life on shipboard got to be very monotonous during a long cruise, and the *Tallapoosa* was just back from a three months' voyage. But if Powell was glad the choice had fallen on him, he gave no demonstration of great and hilarious joy by way of showing his approval. Of course, he was happy in the thought that he would be able to stretch his legs for a few weeks, but about the rest of it he "didn't know."

Dahmo was the chief port of the Republic of Boroguaya—the city where all business with incoming and outgoing ships was transacted—and, as the foreign commerce was considerable, the collector of the port handled a great deal of money. Ensign Powell had been given the office of temporary collector of the port, not because the government of Boroguaya desired it, but because a great sister republic had concluded that such a course was necessary. The country was a hotbed of revolution and insurrection, changes of government took place overnight, and the president of to-day might be the refugee of to-morrow.

Every time a new government was proclaimed, all the debts of the old government were repudiated and the creditors were left to whistle for their money. But at last, in one of the general upheavals, Boroguaya overstepped herself. She repudiated a debt to one of the chief moguls of the great sister republic, which caused immediate happenings not at all in line with tradition or sentiment. The great sister republic gave quick notice that the debt must be settled, and in the course of time Boroguaya replied that the settlement would be made at an early date. The great sister republic then asked for an explicit indication of the date when the debt would be paid, and Boroguaya replied that it would be when the robins nested again—or words to that effect.

The great sister republic took the matter seriously rather than humorously, and concluded that, as there were no robins to nest in Boroguaya, there would be no nesting time. This looked to the solons of the great sister republic like a clear indication that Boroguaya had no intention of settling the debt, and so it was decided to give the little mushroom republic a much-needed lesson in the true art of strong-arm diplomacy.

They had been quibbling over the matter for six months—which they now considered half a year too long—and so concluded to take quick action, collect the debt before Boroguaya could recov-

er her breath, and then get away with the money while the Boroguayans were trying to figure out how it had happened.

In accordance with this resolve, full instructions had been given to Commander Crampton of the *Tallapoosa,* and he had been sent out to make the collection.

Commander Crampton did not take the officers of the *Tallapoosa* entirely into his confidence with regard to the nature of the trip. He told them that it was a semi-diplomatic mission, and that one of them would have several weeks duty on shore when the destination was reached. And that was the reason the commander had sent for Ensign Powell when the ship came to anchor in the very shallow and open harbor at Dahmo.

"Mr. Powell," said the commander, when the ensign appeared, "I have concluded to detail you for the shore duty. You don't mind, I suppose?"

"I feel highly honored, sir," responded the ensign.

"I'm glad of that. I feared you might not care for the duty, as it is liable to be rather unpleasant."

"What is the nature of the duty, sir?"

"The collection of some claims amounting to two hundred and eighty thousand dollars. It is a nasty business, and I don't half like it, but orders are orders, and we have nothing to do but carry them out."

"Collect by force of arms?" asked the astonished ensign.

"That is the very thing we must avoid. As a matter of fact, between you and me, Mr. Powell, I do not mind saying that our course is entirely irregular; we haven't a warrant for it either in international law or precedent, but we must bluff it through."

"How is it to be done?"

"We are going to seize the custom house and pocket all the receipts until the amount of the claims has been collected. That will take a month, probably, and during that time we must commit no hostile act, such as would give them cause to complain to other powers that we were overstepping our authority. For that reason the seizure must be peaceful. You cannot carry arms with you, and you cannot have a guard of armed marines, for that would be such a glaring violation of international law that we would get ourselves in serious trouble. But the cruiser in the harbor will have the effect desired, I believe.

"Here is a letter to President Riotos, which you are to deliver as soon as you land. The letter is an example of diplomatic English that should serve as a model in the schools and colleges, for, while it is couched in the most polished language, and contains no word that could possibly offend, every line is filled with dynamite, which cannot fail to be observed by the blindest mortal on earth. Listen to this:

> It is with a heart full of sympathy that the great sister republic learns of the many internal troubles now hampering the work of your splendid administration, and it is such a clear case of inability on your part to do more than recommend the payments suggested that assistance will be given you. An officer of this government has been detailed for that purpose. He will act in civil capacity, taking charge of the custom house, and administering the office with the vigor characteristic of his kind. The cruiser *Tallapoosa* will bring him to your port and will remain in the harbor until he has finished his duties, when it will fetch him away. In the meantime the *Tallapoosa* will probably have an influence for peace with your countrymen, as they will be less likely to riots and disorders when a war ship is near.

"That is what you might call letting President Riotos down very easily. You understand that as soon as you have paid your respects to the president, you are to go t the custom house and take up your residence there."

"Live there?"

"Certainly. You will find very comfortable quarters there, and it is absolutely necessary that you never leave the place until your work is finished."

"I see." Any hope Ensign Powell may have had that he was to live at a hotel vanished. He saw at once that the duty was to be nothing in the shape of a lark, and that his nose would be on the grindstone most of the time, which is the particular reason that he made no sign of great joy at having been chosen for the task.

"You see, the principal thing is to get the money," continued Commander Crampton. "You walk into the custom house as if you owned the place, and you will not have any difficulty. At the same time, do not make enemies of the people. Treat them with courtesy, and be amiable all of the time, but don't let any of the cash get away from you."

"Will you send for the money taken every day?"

"No, I think it will be policy not to take any of it out of the custom house until you have the whole amount on hand. There are good, strong safes in the custom house, and if you leave it there, no one will know very much about what is going on. But if we begin to take it away every day or two, it will be sure to cause an uprising, and then we might not get any of it. As I said, we cannot use force. The *Tallapoosa* is only a bluff. We would not dare to open fire on the port unless the mob threatened your life, and I have serious doubts about the advisability of doing it even in that case. I think if you get into any trouble, we will have to land marines with blank cartridges in their rifles. The noise would have as good an effect as the steel, and then we would not have any death claims to settle. I have often noticed that the report of a gun seemed to have a greater effect on these Latin-Americans than the sting of the bullet."

"When am I to begin my duty?" asked Powell.

"At once. Pack your bag, order out the launch, and get ashore as soon as possible."

"Very well, sir."

Ensign Powell touched his cap and was gone. It was not a pleasant duty on which he had been detailed, there would be so much office work about it, and office work was a thing he particularly abhorred. Still, there were many unpleasant things one had to do in the line of duty, and so he could not find fault. He would make the best of it. Besides, it was bound to be rather interesting—this meeting with new people, this wielding of the velvet grip within the mailed fist.

Yes, he believed that, after all, he might like it—unless there should be trouble. It was not at all likely that there would be trouble, but he would have felt far better, when he came to think of it, if he had been allowed to carry his side arms. Still, there was the *Tallapoosa,* and she would probably keep the populace from making any demonstration against him.

He resolved that he would acquit himself in a manner to reflect credit on the country which he represented; that he would make friends of the Boroguayans so that they would not feel greatly humiliated by his seizure of the customs.

And he also resolved not to trust anyone in the whole republic. His experience with Latin-Americans was not great, but he thought from what he had read he knew their character. So, while he made friends with them, he would not trust them, and he would be ever on his guard against any possible treachery on the part of those with whom he came in contact.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE PLAN PLEASES PRESIDENT RIOTOS.

"Ah, I am so very glad to see you," said President Riotos, in excellent English, after he had read the letter which Powell presented to him. "And I am also very glad to receive this letter, which relieves my mind of a great worry."

"That is good news, indeed," returned Powell. "Then I may hope for your friendly interest in my welfare?"

"Most assuredly," acquiesced the president, heartily. "I hope your stay at the custom house will be thoroughly enjoyable, and I will do my best to make the time pass pleasantly for you. You have my very best wishes in the undertaking in hand, and I feel sure you will bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion—one that will cement the already strong bonds of friendship between Boroguaya and the great sister republic."

"And now, your excellency, having finished business at the palace, I will bid

you good-day and take up my duties at the custom house."

"By all means," assented the president. "Wait a moment and I will have you taken down to the house in my state conveyance."

Powell declined the carriage, saying that as he had been on shipboard so long, he preferred the walk, and then, taking leave of President Riotos, set off in the direction of the custom house.

"Truly, I am the most fortunate man living," exclaimed President Riotos to his secretary of war, Ramon, a few minutes after Powell had taken his departure.

"Your excellency has ever been a favorite of the gods," said Ramon, humbly. "What is the new manifestation of their favor?"

"The answer to my most earnest prayer. For many months I have been greatly troubled as to the future, but now all is clear to me. The great sister republic has been moved by a kind Providence to come to my assistance, and now the way is as clear as day."

"Pardon, your excellency, but I do not exactly see the point."

"Very simple, Ramon," replied the president, testily. "You are aware of the fact that all of our living ex-presidents have their homes in gay Paris."

"Two of them are there, I believe."

"The number is significant of the perils of this high office. I greatly admire the wisdom of their course, and it is my purpose to profit by their example."

"You mean that you contemplate a European trip, with the possibility of taking up your residence abroad?" asked the astonished Ramon.

"Precisely. The disgruntled Morales is getting a strong following in the interior, and I fear it will not be long before we have another revolution on our hands."

"But we can crush that as we have several other uprisings which have threatened your peace of mind."

"We can, perhaps, but we will not. It is too trying on the nerves, and I greatly desire to get some enjoyment out of life, so I have long been considering ways and means of accomplishing the desired end. The treasury, as you well know, has been in a sad state of depletion since the beginning of my term in this exalted office. The public debt has grown beyond all bounds. The high rate of taxes has caused much groaning among the people. And so it is that I have not been able to get a sufficient amount of the needful on hand with which to bring off my *coup*. For one has need of money in Paris."

"And still, your excellency, if you will pardon the dense stupidity on the part of your humble servant, permit me to say that I am yet in the dark. I do not see how——"

"You were ever a fool, Ramon, with inability to see beyond the end of your nose—which is not of heroic proportions," interrupted President Riotos.

"Yes, your excellency."

"But you are a good fellow and I will enlighten you, for I have need of your services in bringing my plan to a successful conclusion. The great sister republic has installed an agent in the custom house for the purpose of collecting certain claims held by citizens of that country. A very diplomatic letter has been sent to me in regard to it. It is a bluff, and no one knows that better than I, but I will let them think they are to have their own way.

"If we desired to throw the agent out we could do so, and they would be powerless to help it, for they dare not use force in the collection of this claim. So the agent is in the custom house without a guard, without a weapon of any kind, and the only protection he has is the ship in the harbor, which is only more bluff, for it dare not fire on the port. But the bluff will be as useful to us as to them, for our peaceful citizens will see that we are powerless to help ourselves, that if we do not allow the agent to take the customs receipts, the ship will fire on the city and destroy it.

"Now, it will require about three or four weeks for the collection of sufficient money to meet the claims, and at the end of that time it will be transferred to the ship. But here is where our great plan must come in. We will cultivate the acquaintance of the agent,

who seems to be a very youthful and trusting person, and so we will be able to know from time to time about how much money he has on hand.

"When he is about ready to leave the place, there will be an unfortunate uprising of the people. They will mob the custom house and sack the building. Perhaps the agent will be handled harshly. That will be too bad, for he seems to be such a very agreeable young man. When the mob has finished, you will see to it that the safes are emptied of their gold, and bring it here, where we will hide it.

"Then we will express deep regret to the great sister republic; will let them see how heartily we sympathize with them, and will make such promises of good intentions as will satisfy them of our inability to control the mob. Then there will be another revolution, and you and I will prevail upon the great sister republic to take us to a place of safety. We will escape while our brave soldiers are blocking the entrance to the city, and we will carry with us many things—including the gold, which you will rescue from the custom house, and which the great sister republic is going to be so kind as to collect for us. Is it not very easy, Ramon?"

"But the ship," said the secretary of war—"will that not protect the custom house?"

"Have I not already told you that they dare not fire on the port? It would disturb the peace of nations, and they are not anxious for any disturbance of that kind just at this time. They could do nothing more than land a few marines, but before that could be accomplished, the work of the mob would have been done—if they are well primed for it."

"Master, your mind is without limit in its resources," said Ramon, humbly. "When will it please your excellency to have the mob attack the custom house?"

"Probably in about three weeks. Almost any time after two weeks have passed. It must be done at night, and the darker the night the better. If there should chance to be a storm, that would make an ideal night. But we will know when it is time to act. In the meantime, prepare a few trusty citizens as leaders for the mob."

"Your excellency, it is done."

President Riotos stepped to the sideboard, and deftly prepared his favorite beverage of "rhum," limes, cracked ice and soda water. He sipped it slowly with the air of a connoisseur, and when the glass was empty, rang for a servant. Writing rapidly on a little pad, he scribbled a note, which he handed to the servant, saying at the same time:

"Take that to Señor Powell at the custom house, and tell him it is with the compliments of President Riotos."

Ramon raised his eyebrows, by way of denoting his astonishment, and to show that he did not fully comprehend what the president had done.

"A little present to the new collector of the port," explained President Riotos. "If he has a suspicion that we are not thoroughly in sympathy with him, this will help to allay his fears."

"And what was it?"

"An order for soda water, 'rhum' and limes. We must teach him to imbibe our favorite beverage while he is with us. When once he has tasted the mixture, he will be our friend for life."

"Do not be too sure of that, your excellency; he may think the stuff is poisoned, and refuse to drink any of it."

"So he might. That is exactly what I should expect him to do. But when we visit him at the custom house, and partake of his hospitality, we will show him that we are not afraid of our own beverages, which will make him ashamed of himself for having even suspected us. Then he will be more apt to give us his confidence, and we will be better able to know the precise moment to strike."

"Master, you are truly a marvel of intellect. I can almost see the streets of gay Paris now."

## CHAPTER III.

### THE ATTACK ON THE CUSTOM HOUSE.

Life at the custom house moved with humdrum monotony. Powell had found no difficulty in taking possession of the

place, for the government official seemed thoroughly exhausted from his labors and resigned books, papers and all the paraphernalia of the office with a sigh of relief.

Powell found the house to be a long, low building, built around an open court, like most houses in the tropics. The front of the building faced a wide street, that skirted the whole water front, while the rear looked out over the wharfs. In front were the offices, and in the rear the living rooms, while on either side were sleeping apartments.

He had two servants from the ship, and these he posted on guard every night, as their day duties did not amount to a great deal. Every day or two he received a visit from some of the officers, and not infrequently President Riotos or Secretary Ramon dropped in for a visit.

Powell had received the present from the president, and had occasionally tried it—when Riotos or Ramon were calling on him. But for himself he did not care for it, and the great case of soda-water siphons lay gathering cobwebs in the cellar.

The third week of his stay at the port had come and gone without an event to excite more than casual interest. He had collected nearly enough money to satisfy the claims, and was getting worried with the large amount on hand. Now he was more worried than usual, because President Riotos, that amiable gentleman, had suggested that if Powell would say the word, he could have a guard of Boroguayan soldiers around the place. This was pretty good evidence that the president knew of the great amount of money on hand, and it worried Powell not a little to think that anyone besides himself was giving a thought to the money.

He wished the president had not said anything about it. He wished the whole business was off his mind, and he again on shipboard doing a sailor's duty. To be sure, he had had no trouble thus far, but since the president had mentioned the matter of a guard, he felt that he was not safe at all, and that he was likely to be attacked at any time. The president had almost said as much, but he had refused the guard, for that would be not alone a sign of weakness, but an indication to the people that there was something valuable to guard in the custom house.

And so, after thinking it over, he sent word to Commander Crampton, and asked that what money he had on hand be transferred to the ship. The commander replied that he would have it attended to the very next day, and that if there was any danger, to keep a strict watch all night. If a mob should attack the place in the night, a detail of marines would be landed from the ship, and so Powell need have no fear. If he could hold out half an hour or so, he would have assistance in plenty.

Powell did not have an idea that he was in danger, but he took greater precautions than ever in locking up that night. Since he had been in the custom house he knew that the place was constantly watched from the ship. In the daytime the watch never took his eyes from the long, low building, and in the night time the ship's searchlight played on it constantly. It was impossible for a mob to attack the place without running in full view of the ship, and then it would be but a short time when the marines would land and come to the rescue.

All this looked very well in theory, and under ordinary circumstances it might have worked out exactly as planned. But it is a well-known fact that between theory and practice there is a long step, and one that occasionally upsets "the best-laid plans of mice and men." So it was in this case. The elements had not been taken into consideration, and neither Commander Crampton nor Powell was prepared for the storm which broke over the city in all its tropical fury shortly after nine o'clock.

The rain came down in torrents, the wind shrieked around the house with the force of a mighty gale, the one-story structure shook and rocked as if on the billows of the ocean. When Powell thought of the ocean he remembered the ship, and realized at once that

she could not weather the storm in that open harbor. She would drag her anchors and soon be fast on the rocks, or else she would drift on one of the numerous reefs near the harbor entrance.

He was not taken by surprise, therefore, when the searchlight suddenly left the building, and the next moment was blotted from view. The *Tallapoosa* was steaming for the open ocean, where she could ride out the storm.

There would be no sleep for him that night. He must be awake and on his guard. Perhaps there was no danger, but it was just the night for an attack. With the ship gone from the harbor, he would be unprotected, and, if left alone, the house would not stand before a determined mob any great length of time.

It was not probable that he would have to fight for his life—but supposing he did have to? What weapons did he have with which to defend himself? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Not a weapon of any kind in the house unless, perchance, he could call those heavy iron bars in the cellar weapons.

He sat thus and thought for hours, he did not know how long, but he was suddenly startled to hear the wind give a last, long sigh and die away, while the rain ceased almost as quickly as it had come. He went to the window and looked out. The moon was shining brightly high in the heavens, the streets were deserted, the city was asleep. His fears had been groundless, and his heart gave a great throb of joy as he realized that all was well.

He was about to turn away from the window, when he thought he saw the crouching figure of a man in the deep shadow of the nearest building. That was possibly a hundred yards away, across the wide street at the water front, and in one of the lateral streets running away from the wharfs. He looked again, and for a moment could make out nothing, then he saw a man running across the street, followed by another, and another, until the shadow was filled with moving figures.

Could it be that a mob, taking advantage of the storm and the absence of the ship, was preparing to descend on the custom house? It seemed likely, but he wanted to know for sure, and he concluded to run across and see for himself what was going on.

But even as he thought of that he realized that it would not be safe to leave the custom house. But, at least, he could step outside where he could get a better view.

He unbarred the door, and, leaving it open, stepped out into the bright light. Almost instantly he heard the crack of a rifle, and the next instant the sharp ping of a bullet as it cut the air close to his head. Then he jumped back into the house, knowing that his worst fears were realized.

He had no more than closed and barred the door when a howling mob left the shadow and began thronging across the square. Their savage yells, punctuated with rifle shots, gave him an indication of their mood, and he knew that within a few minutes the door would be battered in and he taken prisoner, if not killed, while the safe would be emptied of its contents.

Now was the time he needed a few of the country's soldiers, and he wondered where they might all be, when such a disturbance was taking place. How foolish of him not to have allowed the president to station a guard about the place. One had been needed for a long time, but his pride had kept him from making the request.

But he had no time to think of errors now. If he was to do anything at all in defense of the place, he must get to work. Perhaps, after all, the situation was not so desperate. He might be able to stand off the mob with an iron bar for an hour, and by that time the ship ought to be in the harbor.

He had seen several heavy iron bars in the cellar. He would fetch one, and with that stand by the door when the mob began hammering it down.

Hurriedly he lit a candle, and, shielding it with his hand, ran down the stairs into the cellar. As he did so, in his excitement, he failed to see where he was going, and, stumbling over a box, fell sprawling on the floor. The can-

dle dropped from his hand as he fell, and, groping for it, he again came in contact with the box over which he had fallen.

"Great guns and small pistols!" he ejaculated, passing his hands over the box and feeling its contents. "Why didn't I think of it before? They may find some difficulty in storming the place, after all."

## CHAPTER IV.

### SOME PECULIAR PROJECTILES.

The mob was within a hundred feet of the building, and coming like mad, when a terrific report came from the ground directly in front of them, and the next instant flying bits of metal cut into their flesh or went singing past their heads.

"Crash!" came another report, almost immediately, and again the hail of stinging missiles.

Taken by surprise, and not knowing what they were running into, they turned and fled with greater speed than they had advanced. Their departure was hastened by another explosion in their rear, and that was followed up by still another as they ran panic-stricken away from the custom house.

"I fear your excellency must have been mistaken with regard to the matter of weapons," suggested the bland secretary of war, who, in company with the president, was watching the progress of the mob. "From the sound of that explosion, I am inclined to believe our genial young friend in the custom house is equipped with siege guns."

"Bah!" disgustedly exclaimed the president. "It is not possible. Did you hear any report, the discharge of a gun?"

"No, that is very true, but I heard the explosions plainly enough, and I guess our brave citizens did also, from the way they run."

"The explosions sounded like dynamite. Perhaps he smuggled some of that stuff into the place."

"That is equally impossible, your excellency. I have had every package brought to the custom house carefully inspected, and nothing in the nature of explosives has been taken there. Besides, I am assured by my trustworthy José, the chief clerk, that there is not a weapon of any kind in the place. José is very careful, and has taken particular pains to know everything that has gone on in the custom house since our young friend from the North took charge of the receipts."

"Ah! I have it!" The president was not joyous, but he seemed greatly excited by some new idea.

"And what may it be, your excellency?"

"Those explosive bombs came from the ship," said the president, with suppressed excitement. "Now that we have been fired on without cause, we have the right to demand satisfaction at the hands of our great sister republic."

"Truly spoken, your excellency. It must be, as you say, that those explosions came from the ship, for they can fire great distances, and we could never hear the report of the guns."

"Then order out the troops at once; do not delay an instant. We will march on the custom house and take that place as a first demonstration of our displeasure. And"—*sotto voce*—"we will also capture the beloved coin of the realm, the gold that will give us many days of peace in happy Paris."

Within half an hour a company of sleepy soldiers had been brought down to the edge of the square. They were given orders to advance on the custom house.

"You will lead them, of course, my brave Ramon," suggested the president.

"It would give me only great happiness to do so, your excellency, but I must not forget that my first duty is to your own person. It would be unseemly and cowardly of me to leave you alone at this perilous time."

"I had forgotten that revolutionists are on every side," said the president, with a touch of sadness in his voice. And then, with vigor: "Well, do not let them waste time. The harbor is safe again, and the ship will be inside before

long, then we may have to deal with marines."

Secretary of war Ramon hurried to the captain of the company and gave his orders:

"The custom house must be taken. Break into it, no matter how you get in, but get inside, and then take that young Northerner prisoner. Tie his body to the top of the tallest post in the court, and then summon me by firing your pistol three times in succession. There are many valuable papers there, and President Riotos has need of them. I alone know where they are kept, and so I must needs come to take them away."

The captain saluted, and, turning to his company, gave an order. Instantly they rushed into the open and made for the custom house, a hundred yards away. They had not advanced a dozen yards when they were thrown into a panic by a great crash directly in front of them. But they did not halt, they only hesitated an instant, and then again started forward, shouting as they ran.

"Bang! boom!" came two heavy reports right in their midst, and half a dozen men fell screaming to the ground.

Instantly the company was thrown into a great state of demoralization, and would have beaten a precipitate retreat only for the captain, who rallied them with curses, threats and kicks. But before they could again make an advance, two more missiles came hurtling among them, and the explosions following left more men *hors de combat.*

Now it was impossible to do anything with the men. They fled helterskelter, without stopping to pick up the wounded, who were lying groaning and writhing on the hard pavement.

"Back there, you dogs!" shouted Ramon, rushing from the house, where he and the president were watching operations. "How dare you retreat when imperative orders have been given to take that house?"

The men did not move, and the captain of the company explained that it was impossible to face those terrible explosions that came from the sky.

"From the sky, you hound!" The secretary of war was very angry. "Do you, then, believe the spirits are after you? Order your men back and take that house, or you shall be shot as an example of the proper treatment of cowards."

"Wait, I have a plan," said the president, coming up at that moment. "It is, as he says, hard to attack an unseen foe, especially in the face of such a demonstration."

"Any plan your excellency may suggest is sure to meet with success," murmured Ramon, humbly.

"This plan will be successful, I have no doubt," answered the president. "Divide the company into two parties, and let them attack at the same time from two directions."

"The simplicity of it is as astounding as the orginality," said Ramon, bowing low.

The orders were given, and two small bodies of soldiers, each under the leadership of a lieutenant, marched away in different directions. It was planned to wait half an hour before making a new demonstration. By that time the two companies would be stationed in their appointed places. Then Ramon was to fire a pistol, when they would advance on the run.

The shot rang out loud and clear, and, in the stillness of the early morning hours, sounded like the report of a rifle. Instantly the troops leaped into the bright moonlight that made the street almost as light as day, and, shouting at the top of their lungs, ran as fast as they could toward the custom house.

Surely it seemed as if this ruse would be successful. No crash was heard until they were nearly halfway to the building. Then an explosion rent the air in front of one company, and then, after a moment, in front of another company, and so on, until four explosions had taken place.

Some of the men were wounded, but they did not stop. Urged on by the shouts and imprecations of President Riotos and Secretary Ramon, who had left the shelter of the shadow, and were now coming along cautiously some dis-

tance in the rear, the troops pressed forward, and, at the word of command, opened fire on the building. Other explosions followed in rapid succession, but there was no stop until they reached the building.

Then, as they began hammering on the doors at the front and back, they suddenly found themselves being cut to pieces with frightful explosions right among them. They could not stand that for long, and in less than a minute from the time they arrived at the building, they were running away again, followed by explosion after explosion, that sent them terror-stricken into the shadows.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE ARRIVAL OF THE MARINES.

One explosion took place in front of the men as they ran. It was in the vicinity of the president and secretary, and hurried their departure in a great degree—for such brave men. Their flight was, in fact, about the least dignified thing either of them had been guilty of in several years.

"Extraordinary, most extraordinary," ejaculated President Riotos, pausing to catch his breath, after having run something like half a mile up the main street.

"More than extraordinary, your excellency," suggested Secretary Ramon, "because those bombs never came from the ship. Did you notice the peculiar odor of that one which struck near us?"

"It did not seem to smell like other bombs we have had bursting about our heads, as, for instance, in our last, glorious revolution, when I led the army of righteousness against the oppressor."

The president felt great pride in the fact that a cannon had actually been fired in the last revolution, and that he had heard the explosion of the shell as it struck the earth a mile or so away. He never failed, in recounting his experiences, to tell of his narrow escape from death on that day.

"It is my opinion that we have tried to do this trick with too small a force," suggested Secretary Ramon, after he had recovered his breath. "We should have taken a regiment or a division."

"Well, it matters not what we should have taken; the point is that we are in for it, and must take that house at all costs now." President Riotos was not going to abandon the project which he had so carefully nursed for three weeks.

"I will order out a regiment at once," said Ramon, "and if you think it wise, I will have a few pieces of artillery brought down and trained on the place. That would soon open the way."

"Too late for artillery and too late for the army. We must go back to the mob. Let the fire alarm be sounded, and when the people are in the street, have it noised about that the collector of the port has shot down some of our brave people in cold blood. That will bring about the desired results."

"But are those men really dead?"

"That makes not the slightest difference. They are lying there, and so must be badly wounded, if nothing more; the sight of them will be sufficient provocation for the mob to charge the custom house and tear it down. We don't care what they do to the house; all we want is a look at that safe."

"Do you think there is time before the arrival of the ship?"

"Not, my dear Ramon, if we stand and discuss the proposition all night." The president grew sarcastic.

"Pardon, master, it is done," said Ramon, humbly, and was gone.

The clanging bell in the cathedral soon had the populace on the streets. They were running hither and thither, asking where the fire was, how it had started, what the damage would be, and the hundred other questions that occurred to them. But through the soldiers it gradually became known that there was no fire, except the fire of rifles, and the people—men, women and children—surged toward the custom house.

When they came within sight of the place, and saw the half dozen helpless forms lying there in the moonlight, a howl of rage rent the air, and the next moment they were streaming across the

open space, yelling and screaming and crying for vengeance.

"Crash! crash!" Two explosions in quick succession caused a momentary panic among them, but they did not stop. Then came a hail of metal, and men went to the earth groaning and crying with pain. More explosions followed, but still the mob pressed forward. Nothing could stay that mass of humanity, and in a few minutes they had reached the custom house and were battering at the doors and windows.

Just as the first ones of the mob reached the house, the whole scene was suddenly made as light as day, and the people, startled at the sudden brightness, stopped a moment and gazed, fear-stricken, at the great flaming eye of light that stood out in the harbor, moving over the surface of the water with incredible swiftness.

"The war ship, the war ship!" they screamed, and began fleeing for the town. But they did not run far. Seeing no explosions followed their retreat, and that the great light played steadily on the building, they took courage and returned to the attack.

This time they were not hampered in their work. The interior of the building was quiet, and it seemed almost as if it was deserted. But some of those who attempted to scale the sides of the house, and reached the eaves on the shoulders of their comrades, found that it was very far from being deserted. They dropped back to the ground nursing crushed hands or broken heads, for they were smitten swiftly and mercilessly the minute they gained a finger hold on the roof.

The door of the custom house seemed about to collapse, when a crash of musketry on the mountain side a mile away turned their attention in that direction. Volley after volley came from the hills, and before they could return to the work in hand, some one in the mob shouted: "The revolutionists! Long live Morales! Death to Riotos!"

The cry was taken up, and soon the city was ringing with it. People came pouring in from all sides, some crying and wringing their hands, some shouting the name Morales, some indifferent and apparently unconcerned.

Now that the revolution was on, the mob became more demonstrative than ever. Not alone would they wreck the custom house and carry away great sacks of loot, but they would pillage the city as they did whenever a revolution gave them the opportunity.

They returned to the attack with a fury that could not be withstood, and in a few moments the heavy door began cracking and breaking, giving inch by inch, until there was a space large enough to admit a man's body.

The first one who tried to pass through was felled with a blow from behind the door. Half a dozen others followed, to meet the same fate, but the opening was growing wider all the time.

At last it gave way with a crash, and as it did so, another crash of a far different kind split the air only a few feet away. It was the volley firing of trained troops, and this time so close at hand they could smell the powder. Panic seized those who had entered, and they fought with those behind, who were trying to get in. Assuredly this heavy firing outside was not that of the revolutionists. Who, then, could it be?

The question was answered by the mob, who now began scattering in a wild scramble for the shelter of the buildings around the square. "The marines!" they cried, as they ran. "The marines!" And in less than a minute the street was as empty as it had been four hours previous, when Powell had stepped out and heard the first shot of the night.

## CHAPTER VI.

### HOW THE TRICK WAS DONE.

The timely arrival of the marines put a stop to the rioting in the immediate vicinity of the custom house, and when they entered they found Ensign Powell as calm and collected as if he had been at a card party instead of the point of attack in a riot. Commander Crampton was present in person, and he advanced with outstretched hand.

"You seem to have been rather busy, Mr. Powell, in our short absence," said the commander, heartily.

"Oh, I have managed to keep awake," was the smiling response, as the ensign wiped his face, which glistened with perspiration.

"From the noises of the city I am thinking that our stay here has about reached its limit. Are you ready to depart?"

"In a minute, sir."

Powell opened the safes, and, dumping their contents in a big box, had it nailed up, and then gave it in charge of four marines.

"There," he exclaimed, "I believe that finishes my work here, and I think there is enough in that box to satisfy all claims. Now we can return to the ship, and, as another revolution is in progress, the quicker we get away the better it will be for us."

As the order was given, and the march for the boats taken up, Powell pointed to another box and said:

"Fetch that, too, boys. We may need some of my ammunition yet before we get away from the treachery of my dear friend, President Riotos—only I guess, from the shouts I heard, that he is no longer the popular idol, but by this time is hiking it for the tall timber."

"President Riotos treacherous and deposed?" exclaimed Commander Crampton in well-feigned astonishment. "I hope you have had no hand in the affair."

"No, I haven't yet," returned Ensign Powell, with a wicked look in his eye, "but I would like to get just one good shot at his excellency."

"One shot at him?" the surprise was genuine this time. "What quarrel have you with Riotos?"

"Only this—I am positive that he and Ramon—that putty-faced secretary of war—cooked up this whole affair for my benefit. I am not just positive what they expected to gain by it, but I have my suspicions that they were after this money, and if you hadn't arrived just about the time you did, they would have got it, too, and my scalp along with it."

"But how can you be so sure they were behind the mob?"

"Because, in the first place, it was a mob, and in the next place, it was the soldiers, and when the soldiers were rushing the custom house, Riotos and Ramon were so injudicious as to come out into the light and make themselves conspicuous in the moonlight. I was on the roof, using my engine of war, and I had no difficulty in seeing their faces and in hearing their shouts of encouragement to the attacking troops."

"Your engine of war?" asked Commander Crampton, in astonishment of uncomprehension.

"Yes, my engine of war. It was an inspiration, and saved the day. I built it on——"

Just then two men were seen running for the landing. The boats were about to push off, but at a word from the commander they waited.

"Some refugees, I suppose, who want our government to harbor them until the revolution is over," commented Commander Crampton.

"Yes, and they are refugees whom I think you will not care to harbor unless it is for the purpose of stringing them up to the yardarm," said Powell. "Those men are Riotos and Ramon, to whom we owe all our trouble. Watch them turn when I fire this at them." He reached for the box which he had indicated as containing his ammunition.

"Señor Powell!" screamed the panting Riotos, as he ran. "Wait for us, wait for us! We must escape or we die!"

"I'm sorry that I will not be able to remain for your funeral," returned Powell, as, with a mighty heave, he threw something in their direction.

The missile struck a dozen feet in front of the men, and exploded with a crash that shook the atmosphere for yards around. The fleeing men let out a yell of terror that could have been heard halfway across the town, then they turned and ran, as though pursued by the imp of darkness.

"You see," explained Powell, turning to Commander Crampton, "I happened to remember, just in the nick of time,

what you said about these chaps being afraid of noise, and so I used noise in my campaign of defense."

"I can readily understand the noise," returned the commander, "but I would be glad if you would tell me what it is manufactured of, for it is certainly a most magnificent production of the article."

"Just this," and Powell picked up a soda-water siphon, the last one that remained in the box. "You see, this is what we might call a just retribution; for these weapons of defense were furnished by our kind friend, the ex-president, whom you have just had the pleasure of seeing in a sprinting exhibition across the street. When I first arrived at the custom house, he wanted to show his love and friendship and esteem, so he sent me a case of soda siphons, a few bottles of the vilest liquor I ever tasted, and a lot of limes. I used the limes for lemonade, and let the soda and 'rhum' gather whiskers in the cellar. When the mob started for the custom house, I made for the cellar to get an iron bar, for the purpose of defense, and stumbled over that case of soda-water siphons that my good friend Riotos had sent me. I once saw a soda siphon dropped in a café and knew what the explosion sounded like, and when I stumbled over those bottles your remark about noise being worse than bullets came to me at once. So I dragged the case up to the roof of the custom house and there, with the aid of a pine plank shoved in a crack, improvised an old Roman war engine—a catapult—with which I hurled my peculiar projectiles with unerring accuracy.

"I tell you it was great to see the people scatter when one of those soda-water siphons struck among them. The flying glass cut them up a little, I guess, and one or two of them may have been knocked out temporarily by the metal heads. It was great fun at first, and I almost laughed out loud as I saw the people run. I was in the shadow of the only chimney on the building, and so, although I could see them, they could not see me. That is one of the advantages of moonlight over sunlight.

"When my soda-water ammunition got scarce, I filled a few empty bottles with nails and pegged away with them. In striking the ground they scattered nails good and hard and kept the people guessing, so it helped out a lot. But, at last, when the big mob came along, I saw it was useless to fire away any more soda water, and that is how I came to have these two bottles left."

"I thought I was making no mistake in selecting you for temporary collector of the port of Dahmo," commented Commander Crampton, as they pulled alongside the *Tallapoosa*.

# LICENSED EAVESDROPPING

I SAW them meet behind some stately palms—
  Saw on his bosom rest her lovely head;
I saw him clasp her in his manly arms;
  I even heard the loving words they said.

I watched them kiss, all ignorant that I
  Could so behold them in their green retreat.
No shame I felt to thus have played the spy.
  You see, I'd paid two dollars for my seat.

ROBERT T. HARDY, JR.

# Norroy, Diplomatic Agent

By George Bronson-Howard

*Author of "The Ruling of the Fourth Estate," Etc.*

## THE EAGLE'S EYRIE

**This is the fourth of a series of complete stories dealing with the adventures of "Yorke Norroy," secret agent for the Department of State. In this story Mr. Bronson-Howard describes how a certain European power plotted against the peace and well being of a South American state, only to be checkmated by Yorke Norroy.**

(*A Complete Story*)

### CHAPTER I.

THE INDISCRETION OF THE LIBERATOR.

WHEN the envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary of the United States to Saxonia received the cryptic message which was handed him by one of the legation servants, he was in good spirits, and he thought well of the world; the fact being that he had just dined, and dined well. He opened the envelope with slight interest, but when he saw that it was in the secret code of the State Department, he thrust it in his pocket and left his guests in the smoking room.

He ascended to his library and puzzled out the first few words. The lines on his face, relaxed by the comfortable after-dinner feeling, came back, creasing his countenance into many folds until it resembled nothing so much as crumbly parchment, fulvous with age.

"Good heavens!" The words came involuntarily and expressed many things. He touched a button near by with a shaking hand.

"A brandy and soda, Wilhelm," he said, when a servant appeared. "And you will tell Herr Manley to come up —as soon as he can——"

The door closed, and the envoy extraordinary rested his head on his hands, staring before him with unseeing eyes. A vigorous knock on the door recalled him to the smaller things of life.

"Well?" he demanded, irritably.

Manley, the secretary of legation, a very young man with a preternaturally keen expression of face, entered.

"I think you sent for me," he half questioned, half asserted.

"Yes—I did," confirmed the envoy extraordinary. "I did, Manley, I did send——" He was composing himself now and the fingers that tendered the paper to Manley did not tremble. "That is from Grossmark. You know who he is. Our spy at the Saxonian foreign office——"

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The preceding stories of this series, "How Norroy Created a New Republic," "A Tilt With the Muscovite" and "The Isle of St. Anthony," were published in the April, May and June issues, which can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

"Yes, I know," interrupted Manley. "I know. It's in crypt, I see. Important?"

The envoy frowned. "You—translate," he said, slowly. "I have—translated—but I want you——"

The secretary heaved a sigh, remembering the pretty women in the drawing room. "Oh, very well," he returned, half sulkily. "Very well."

He took down the secret-code book and a blank sheet of paper. "Shall I translate as I make it out?" he wished to know.

The envoy nodded; and the secretary read, laboriously:

Jorge Emilio de Legaspi,

"Hello! our South American friend at it again," he interpolated, with alertness, then continued:

Has been enticed over the Saxonian border by the Baroness Aufsberg. He arrived at her castle, the Eagle's Eyrie, this morning, crossing the Austrian border by way of Hohejuch.

Manley whistled abruptly.

"Don't do that," commanded the envoy extraordinary. "Don't!" His tone was almost querulous. "Don't!" he reiterated.

"Oh, very well," responded the secretary. The seriousness of the affair began to dawn on him. "But, excuse me, Mr. Frothingham, this looks pretty bad, doesn't it? De Legaspi will surely be elected president of Andevia in three months—surely——"

"Not surely if he is now at Eagle's Eyrie," said Frothingham, grimly. "Very far from surely—very far from it——"

"Quite so," meditated Manley. "Quite so." Ideas came thick and fast then. "That means," he continued, rapidly prophesying—"that means that Saxonia will get her South American foothold after all, doesn't it? If De Legaspi were elected president of Andevia, he would follow the same tactics as old Fortuno—in fact, he's Fortuno's choice, I believe, isn't he?" As Manley questioned, Frothingham nodded gravely. "And, therefore, it will be bad—rather bad—for the United States if De Legaspi isn't elected——"

"It will mean that Mentiroso, already bought by Saxonia, will deed over a certain tract of land to her in payment of Andevia's debts—and that tract will be the very tract to menace the neutrality of the canal. Rather than allow Saxonia to have it, there will be——"

"War," broke in Manley. As the baleful prescience was put into words, the two men eyed one another half apprehensively. "War!" repeated Manley, as though doubting. "War!" he said again, this time with no doubt.

"In other words," Frothingham said, now master of himself, "if De Legaspi is held in Eagle's Eyrie until he can be taken prisoner by the government of Saxonia, trouble between Saxonia and the United States, trouble of the gravest kind, will surely occur." He paused for a moment, regarding Manley. Then, with impatience in his voice: "But you haven't finished the message. There's worse to come—much worse to come, and——"

Manley turned to the crypt again:

The baroness had evidently cast some manner of charm over De Legaspi. He is no doubt in love with her. He left Austria secretly, passing over the mountains in the guise of a hunter and posing as Señor Catorro, of Madrid. He has a passport reading in that name. The baroness is a tool of the government, and set on this task deliberately. Unfortunately, I have only now discovered the fact. On De Legaspi's arrival, she notified Schreyer, who has telegraphed De Legaspi's description to every border guard in Saxonia. De Legaspi cannot return to Austria without being arrested. The government knows this and seems to be in no hurry to arrest him; but a file of soldiers from Schmucken, the nearest town to Eagle's Eyrie, forty miles away, will march in that direction to-morrow, while Otto von Roeder, secret agent, leaves for Eagle's Eyrie to-night, reaching there perhaps in two days, as the railroad does not extend to within twenty miles or more of the castle, and some hard mountain climbing must be done to reach it. More later if more can be obtained.

The writer had evidently ceased abruptly in his writing, for the recital of Manley came to a sudden stop. After several moments' silence, Manley spoke.

"I don't see what we can do, Mr.

Frothingham," he said, with an attempt at calm. "We are bound hand and foot. The only thing that we should do is to cable the entire affair directly to the secretary at Washington, and ask his advice. He is fertile in his ideas and——"

"Yes," responded the envoy, but without hope. "That should be done—we must do that——"

"Now, of course?" said the legation secretary, supererogatively. The envoy nodded, drawing some telegraph blanks toward him.

Several hours later a message, sent at urgent rates, found the secretary of state at one of the dinners of the Washington season, and talking with apparent enjoyment to a pretty debutante. Soon after receiving the message, he excused himself and slipped away unobtrusively.

Reading the cablegram, he gave vent to occasional exclamations betokening a perturbed mind. But at the conclusion of the dispatch, he half smiled.

"Yorke Norroy," he murmured. "Just the kind of affair in which the fertile scamp excels. And he is in Saxonia now—in Dresig, in fact. His address"—a moment's search in a private memorandum book and he found the required information—" 'Herr Anton von Obermuller, 178 Lebmistrasse, Dresig.' Not a stone's throw from the embassy." The secretary ruminated, his finger making imaginary characters on the cloth-topped table. "Of course, he doesn't know about this. He's on quite a different mission. But——"

Rapidly the secretary wrote two cablegrams, both in secret code. One was addressed to Herr Anton von Obermuller, the other to Frothingham, American embassy.

The first directed the recipient to go instantly to the address of the second, confer with the Hon. Mr. Frothingham, and then *dct*. The second informed the envoy extraordinary that, in the guise of Anton von Obermuller, he would find a secret agent of the Department of State who could be depended upon to solve the problem, if solvable; Mr. Frothingham was to furnish the Herr von Obermuller with all the information in his possession.

It was near eleven o'clock when the envoy extraordinary had explained the situation to Yorke Norroy, who sat in the embassy library looking very little like the Yorke Norroy known to the society circles of Washington, New York and London. In appearance, the man who sat there resembled a German savant of much learning and a slight disregard for the conventionalities of dress. A bushy beard of a tawny color stood out from his face, and his mustache was short-clipped and upturned. His hair was rather long and his scarf loosely knotted. Frothingham knew Yorke Norroy, man of fashion, quite well; but he failed to connect the soft-mannered exquisite with this Teuton of the Teutons.

On hearing the first general outline of the story, Norroy had said briefly: "This Grossmark knows that Von Roeder is to leave. Send a message to him immediately and find out *when*." Norroy was speaking in his native tongue with a broad New York twang.

When the message had been dispatched to the spy of the foreign office, Norroy listened gravely to all that Frothingham had to say. Together they consulted maps and planned the route to be taken in order to reach the Eagle's Eyrie.

Within the hour, an answer had arrived from Grossmark:

Von Roeder goes by the midnight express going to Vienna. He will leave it at Kron, the nearest point to the Aufsberg castle. Kron is a village, not a railroad station. It is only by orders that the express is to stop there.

"Good," commented Yorke Norroy. "It is now less than twenty-five minutes to twelve. I have no time to waste, Mr. Frothingham. I will say good-night to you——"

"But what are you going to do?" asked the envoy.

"Events sometimes shape themselves," returned the secret agent, with the faint suspicion of a smile. "I do

not know exactly. But I shall be on the express which stops at Kron—with Herr von Roeder. Good-night, Mr. Frothingham."

He made his way out of the house rapidly. To go to his own rooms, to pack a few clothes and a few disguises, took him but little time; and at three minutes to twelve o'clock he passed through the gates of the railway station and swung aboard the Vienna express.

## CHAPTER II.

### AT THE SIGN OF THE GOLDEN BOAR.

By four o'clock of the afternoon of the following day, the mountains showed in the distance, seemingly firmer figments of mist rising out of the cold blue haze in the distance. As the train dragged itself forward, unwillingly, they became more distinct, roseate tipped in the rays of the setting sun.

The darkness shrouded the land in its mantle before their proximity became more visualized, and Norroy reopened the novel which he had been trying to read all day, and perused a few pages of it in the dim lamplight of the *wagon-lit*. But soon it dropped into his lap unheeded and he lighted a cigarette, gazing speculatively into the darkness outside.

He had sat thus for perhaps an hour when the sharp whistle which indicates a near stoppage of the train came to his ears. He looked at his watch. It was nearly seven o'clock. Evidently the whistle indicated that Kron was near. He stopped a passing guard and inquired.

"We stop there but for a moment, to allow a single passenger to disembark. He is on official business. No, herr, it is not customary to stop here. Ah, yes, you are to leave, too. It is fortunate for you, then, else you would have been taken twenty miles further to Hohejuch—which is on the frontier——"

Norroy put the novel into his bag along with several little toilet articles he had taken from it. He snapped the lock and drew on the long ulster, pulling his cloth traveling cap over his eyes. There was a quiver and a shake and the train settled itself down to a crawl, then stopped.

"Kron, herr," came the voice of the guard. Norroy picked up his bag and descended from the train. At the same time, another man, very similarly garbed, stepped from another carriage. The shout of "All off" rang out, and the train began to move again, slowly. Norroy looked around him.

He stood on a little declivity along which ran the railroad tracks. Below, in a miniature valley, lights gleamed, and from the black sides of the mountains other tiny specks of fire glinted occasionally.

He noticed that the other man was moving toward him. Presently, he stopped within a few paces. "Can you direct me to an inn?" he asked. "An inn, a hotel, any sort of place where shelter for the night may be obtained?"

"I have just left the train myself," replied Norroy. "I do not know of any such place. Perhaps we had best hunt together."

They were speaking in German. Norroy had adopted the heavy, pompous manner which is seemingly a part of the make-up of a scientific German. "I am a geologist," he added, slowly. "Of the Royal College of Mines. It was lucky for you that you were on the train with me. I had the royal permit for the train to stop at Kron. It is not a regular station——"

"That is a coincidence," put in the other. "For such a permit I myself had. I am connected with the government also. My name is Von Roeder."

"Obermuller is mine. Professor Anton von Obermuller," said Norroy, with dignity.

The two men shook hands solemnly. "And now to find an inn," said Norroy. "It seems to be that we had better hunt for one where we see those lights twinkle."

They moved off, down the little slope, and, finding a hard-beaten path, stuck to it. They passed the one-storied huts of many peasants in which a single light cast a few rays from cracks and

crevices. A man came from the other direction. Norroy stopped him.

"Can you direct us to an inn?" he asked. The peasant, unaccustomed to the sound of the voices of the nobility, shrank back. It was some moments before he could respond coherently, babbling as he did in a queer patois which partook of Slav, Magyar and Teuton, all rolled into one.

"I will show you, *freiherrs,*" he said, in a final intelligible effort.

He started back the way he had come, cutting away from the lights and rounding the slope of a hill, where a house, larger than those they had before seen, stood out with lights in all of its three stories.

Norroy tossed the peasant a florin and stepped up to the double-barred door of the inn; but the man, in an ecstasy of gratefulness, was before him, knocking loudly and calling out in a shrill tone that two of the great ones of the earth had arrived. As he shouted, the bars were taken down from the inside and the doors flung open. Their guide, with many bows, withdrew, and the two government men stepped within the lighted space.

It might have been the seventeenth century for all the material change that had occurred in this old roadhouse. The ceiling was low and heavily raftered, while from it hung hams, legs of mutton and other meats in the slow process of dry-curing. Several hogsheads and barrels, fitted with taps, stood in one corner, and bottles, cobwebby and dusty, were arranged on shelves near the fireplace. The furniture was rough and cut from undressed wood—a number of heavy tables, and straight-backed, straight-seated chairs.

A bright blaze from the fireplace showed huge burning logs, casting a cheerful, subdued glow over the quaint old place, while several lanterns, hung from the rafters, sputtered smokily, but added little to the light.

In one corner at a table sat four or five mountaineers in their rude attire, who had ceased guzzling their beer to stare in open-eyed astonishment at the newcomers. The landlord himself, a small, spare man with piggish eyes, was nearly tied in a double knot, so low was he endeavoring to make his bow.

"Welcome, *freiherrs,*" he murmured, obsequiously. "Welcome. Ah! that I should have such a humble place in which to make the *freiherrs* welcome—ah——"

"Come, come, my good man!" cut in Norroy. "That is not to the point. It is cold without. Therefore, close your door. We have just left the train, journeying from Dresig, and we are hungry. Prepare us some of your food—your best. And wine—your best—you understand?"

"It shall be so, *freiherrs,*" bowed the landlord again. He pulled them a table to the fireplace and two chairs, assisting them to remove their coats and outer wrappings, and taking their hand baggage. His demeanor altered considerably, however, when he approached the mountaineers in the corner.

"You cannot remain here now," he said, with much loftiness. "The *freiherrs* cannot be troubled by the sight of the base born. Come again to-morrow night, good fellows, but to-night—you see it is impossible you should stay."

The mountaineers did not protest. The days of the feudal system were almost present in that remote region, and they knew nothing save that they must obey the will of those born to higher things than they. So the mountaineers quitted the room quietly, leaving Norroy and Von Roeder alone before the great blaze.

"A quaint old place," commented Norroy, as the two sat drinking from the huge stone mugs which the landlord had brought them. "That is all we wish to drink now, landlord. Prepare the food. We are hungry."

The landlord bowed again and made off. "Yes," repeated Norroy. "A quaint old place. I shall enjoy the atmosphere of mediæval times while unearthing the traces of the neolithic age. I shall no doubt make this my headquarters——"

Von Roeder had been eying the supposed Obermuller keenly; and was now satisfied from Norroy's make-up and

general appearance that there was no doubt that he was exactly what he had represented himself to be.

"Yes," he agreed, without enthusiasm. "But while the atmosphere may be what you may like, it is rather hard to do without one's bath—and kindred comforts which go with effete civilization."

"True, true," answered Norroy. "True. But the atmosphere——"

"And, after all, it is a mere mock atmosphere," interrupted Von Roeder, anxious to rid himself of the thoughts that had come. "A cross between civilization and semi-barbarism. There is nothing save the shell. If one were sure that it were necessary to be on his guard for his life; if one felt that a duel was imminent on the slightest provocation—something of the shoddy melodrama of old which to-day's novelists call romance—then perhaps the atmosphere might appeal——"

Norroy's eyes twinkled for the moment. "Then you have no fear of any such circumstances? I was not so sure. They told me in Dresig that this place was more or less lawless. That it had no laws save those propounded by the master of Eagle's Eyrie."

"Mistress," corrected Von Roeder. "The Baroness Aufsberg is the last of her line."

"Well, mistress, then. Is there not something of romance in that?—a woman living in a castle overlooking the valley, who rules with the high justice and the low; whose turret windows look out on both Saxonia and Austria. The Lady of the Marches—how is that? It sounds like a title from our romancists, does it not?"

But the spirit of romance had evidently not come to Von Roeder. "*Ach!*" he remarked, with some contempt. "What is she? She rules no one. She is like some obscure justice, that is all. She dare not sentence a man to death or imprisonment for life; nothing serious can be tried before her. No, herr professor, I see no romance in the judgment of a few sheep stealers and cattle thieves."

Norroy offered his cigarette case and the men lighted cigarettes. Out of the tail of his eye, Norroy watched Von Roeder. It was perfectly evident that this astute gentleman was not to be pumped through indirection. But there was something still that Norroy felt that he must learn before proceeding, and his next spoken words were a bait to catch the unwary.

"Our bags!" he ejaculated, suddenly. "Where has that old scoundrel taken them? I have in mine many valuable things——"

He broke off short and cast a look at Von Roeder; the secret agent of Saxonia was fumbling in his coat pocket. Evidently what he found there reassured him, for his composure returned.

"No fear, I dare say," said Von Roeder. "He'll hardly——" He looked around. "Ah! there they are!" He pointed to a seat built on one side of the fireplace on which rested the effects of the two men.

"Ah, yes!" agreed Norroy. "Quite so. Thank you, Herr von Roeder." But had the Saxonian secret agent known the exact thing for which Norroy was thanking him, his self-satisfied smile would have fled from his face.

It was an old and often-proved theory of Norroy that in the event of sudden danger a person's hands will go instinctively to the part of the person on which is hidden the most valuable article in his possession. At that time, Norroy was perfectly sure that the most valuable article in Von Roeder's possession was the warrant for the arrest of De Legaspi. And Von Roeder had felt within his upper coat pocket!

"I dare say I shall meet this Baroness Aufsberg," continued Norroy, after a few moments spent in introspection. "I shall, no doubt, be forced to present myself to her with my papers before I shall be allowed to roam about her territory, undisturbed. You do not chance to know her, do you, Herr von Roeder?"

"No," returned Von Roeder. "I am to make her acquaintance to-morrow." He spoke cautiously and laboriously, as though not quite sure of himself. "I am a government surveyor," he ex-

plained, with clumsy mendacity. "I am to make surveys for the new—railroad."

Norroy nodded gravely. "I understand. Then we shall no doubt journey there together to-morrow. Is it far from here?"

"A matter of four hours' journey, I have been told. One makes it on horseback. But I am starting very early in the morning, herr professor. At dawn, in fact. Perhaps you do not care to rise at that hour——"

"No," agreed Norroy. "No, that is too early for me, Herr von Roeder. Then you will no doubt be there when I arrive. However, we shall see one another again, I have no doubt." Norroy raised the tankard and filled the mugs again with the frothy beer. "Ah! see," he exclaimed, suddenly. "Is not that a curious play of the lights on yonder wall?"

He pointed to a place back of Von Roeder. The secret agent turned instinctively. At the same moment, Norroy's hand shot over the secret agent's mug of beer and a thin line of white powder trickled from an opened paper into the beer mug. Norroy quickly withdrew the hand as Von Roeder faced him again.

"Yes—it is almost realistic," agreed the secret agent. "If you talk to me long, professor, you will have me romantic also. Well, here's to romance!"

He raised his mug and drained it. Then set it down, tasting with a wry face.

"That is bad beer," he affirmed. "Very bad beer. Do you not think so, herr professor?"

"It has a queer, bitter taste," agreed the American. "Yes, that is true." He offered Von Roeder another cigarette. "But we cannot expect better in such a place."

Von Roeder refused the cigarette. "No," he said, resting his head on one hand. "I do not care for another now. I do not care for another—now——" He put up the other hand and his head sank between the two palms.

Norroy flicked an ash from his cigarette and looked into the glowing fire. The light striking his face on the off side gave it a peculiarly saturnine look. Von Roeder's eyes, heavy with slumber desire, caught the effect.

"You look like——" Norroy turned to him with a smile; but the effect was only intensified, the face contorted into grimness. "You look like," repeated Von Roeder again, "a Faustus devil, professor—a Faustus devil——"

Norroy puffed the cigarette tranquilly. "That is hardly complimentary to me, Herr von Roeder," he said. "I did not know that I possessed any physical attributes entitling me to your description——"

"A Faustus devil—a Faustus devil!" repeated Von Roeder. His eyes were closed now and he was mumbling inconsequential things—mere jumbles of words that had no connected meaning. "Baroness Aufsberg — Mephistopheles, avaunt!—so Schreyer—and—Marguerite——" Suddenly he began to hum the "Soldiers' Song" from Gounod's greatest opera. "Ha, ha, ha, haha, haha, haha," he crooned. Norroy lighted another cigarette on the butt of the one he held in his hand.

Von Roeder had ceased humming. He opened his eyes with an effort—a fight of will against the soporific influence of the drug. "So, herr professor, you don't like—Faustus devil?" he inquired, with a pugnacious intonation. "Well, you are—Faustus devil. Geologist? Liar! liar! liar!" He rose to his feet as he almost shouted the words and his hand went to his coat pocket. But the coherency, wrested from the deadened faculties, now paid the penalty, and the man collapsed in the chair, limply.

Norroy took the cigarette from his mouth and held it between the thin fingers of his left hand. His right went in the direction of Von Roeder's coat and into the pocket, from which the American drew out a blue envelope with the water-mark of the Saxonia foreign office upon it. He examined it cursorily, and his indefinitely colored eyes lighted up for a moment, then became as immutable as ever.

He put the cigarette between his lips

again and both hands made a minute search of the Saxonian's pockets. Several other papers came to view, one of which Norroy retained—a passport. He replaced the others and sat back in his chair as the sound of approaching footsteps warned him of the near presence of some one.

It was the landlord who entered with the food, smoking hot. He placed the various platters on the table, and a boy following him set several bottles of wine on the floor beside Norroy. The American looked up without seeming interest.

"Oh, landlord!" he said. "My friend has fallen asleep. He is very weary and I do not wish to awaken him. Send in several of your servants and have them put him to bed. It does not matter with regard to his share of the food. Here!" He tossed the man a five-mark coin.

"Ah! your excellency, your excellency," bowed the landlord, overcome. The cost of the food was hardly half a mark. He retired from the room and called for his sons, two burly lads, who, propping the limp Saxonian between them, carried him out of the room. Norroy, meanwhile, was eating of the fare which had been set before him.

"Landlord!" he said, imperatively. The man drew closer and listened attentively. It was well to listen to this open-handed *freiherr*.

"I journey to the Aufsberg castle to-night—the Eagle's Eyrie, you understand?" He paused for a moment.

"To-night?" queried the landlord, incredulously. "To-night, *freiherr?*"

"To-night," affirmed Norroy, with decision. "And you must find me a guide and a horse. The journey is hardly more than four hours, I believe."

"Four, *freiherr*, four?" The landlord smiled. "The distance is close upon twenty miles. And it is over a rough road, *freiherr*. Six hours, perhaps seven, it may even be eight——"

Norroy's look was impatient. "That is as it is," he rejoined. "I journey there to-night. I must have a guide and a horse. The guide also must have a horse. Find the horses and the man, and you shall have another five marks, landlord."

The landlord's smile was broad and comprehensive. "It shall be as the *freiherr* says," he agreed, subserviently. "My son, Karl, my eldest born, shall be your guide. The horses he will secure. All shall be ready when the *freiherr* says."

"In half an hour, then," returned Norroy. "Meanwhile I will eat of your most excellent fare, landlord."

A little later, the American pushed back the plates from him, and looked at the chair in which Von Roeder had sat a little time before.

"No romance, eh?" His smile was cold. "No fear of robbery—nothing of the sort, eh?" Again he smiled, less frigidly. He was tolerably well pleased with the night's work. "And that powder is always good for a sleep of forty-eight hours—forty-eight hours." Norroy ruminated. "Much may happen in forty-eight hours. Much!" He took the paper from the blue envelope and unfolded it. "His imperial majesty's commission—Señor Catorro — anarchist—held by the Baroness von Aufsberg —do hereby relegate to our trustworthy servant, Otto von Roeder, authority to——"

Norroy broke off from his perusal of the document. "These Saxonians will never learn," he announced to the flames. "They will never learn that it is unsafe to give papers of this sort. I have never held a written commission. No fear of the secretary doing that." He gazed at the blue paper speculatively, then thrust it back into its envelope.

"The soldiers leave Schmucken tomorrow at eight in the morning." He was referring to his notebook in which were inscribed many cabalistic-like characters. "Leaving Schmucken at eight." He referred again to some figures and trigonometrical designs. "They will arrive at Aufsberg about eleven."

He replaced the notebook in his pocket. "While I leave Kron at"—he consulted his watch—"eight-thirty, arriving at Aufsberg at least by dawn——"

He smiled contentedly and lighted another cigarette. "So Von Roeder thinks there is no romance left." His smile became almost a laugh. "Perhaps he's right. I have no doubt he'll see little romance in the affair. And yet it doesn't differ greatly from what our swashbuckling ancestors went through, according to history. Ah—well!" He stretched himself, yawned and arose. "The powder is good for forty-eight hours—forty-eight——"

He opened his traveling bag and drew out a pair of riding breeches and leather puttees. Standing in the shadow of the fireplace, he drew off his trousers and tossed them on a settle, after which he drew on the brown breeches, buttoned them down the legs and buckled on the puttees.

"Landlord!" he called. He folded the trousers and placed them in the bag, which he locked.

"Yes, *freiherr*," answered the landlord, appearing at the head of the stairs. "Karl is near to being ready. It will be but little time before he joins you."

Norroy transferred a revolver from his coat pocket to his breeches, and toyed with a short riding crop.

"No romance!" he laughed again.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE BETRAYAL.

"There, *freiherr*," said the boy Karl. "There is Castle Aufsberg. They call it the Eagle's Eyrie hereabouts," he added, explanatorily.

The dawn had come hours before. The sun was shining brilliantly upon the mountain peaks, converting their snowy crests into veritable similitudes of molten silver. A mile or two in the distance, just visible upon the turning of the path, a mass of whitish-gray stone stood out upon a spur of the mountain like a picture of the olden time. It was all there; no detail was missing; the towers, turrets, battlements, moat, drawbridge and all; and the huge pile of masonry stood out aggressively, as though menacing those who approached.

Norroy glanced at his watch. It was nearly nine o'clock. For close upon twelve hours, through cold, wind and sleet, these two had ridden. Norroy was chilled to the bone, and his ulster soaked with the drizzle of overnight. Their horses limped painfully.

"Well, we must push on, Karl," he said, subduing his weariness. "When we get there, we shall have all the rest that we need; and warmth also." He shivered in the cold rush of wind. "We must put the horses to it. Come, boy!"

It was necessary to lay the whips over the heads of the beasts before they could be urged to pull their tired limbs over the rocky road. They moved forward slowly.

Close upon an hour later, they rode across the drawbridge, which was down, and into the courtyard of the old castle. A liveried retainer came forward to hold their horses.

"You will see that this youth has food and a change of clothes," said Norroy to the groom. "Take him into the servants' quarters."

"It shall be done," said a second man, who had just come up. He also was in livery which, albeit somewhat frayed, had once been expensive. Norroy surmised, quite rightly, that he was the major-domo.

"The Herr Otto von Roeder to see the baroness," he said, curtly.

The major-domo bowed. "If the *freiherr* will follow me," he said, with respect.

Norroy walked wearily across the paved courtyard and up the great stone steps of the main entrance, the doors of which were thrown open with great promptitude at a sharp knock from the major-domo. The American passed into a stone hall, arched loftily, and followed the major-domo along its gloomy length to a second flight of stairs, broad, and of oak, ornamented with balustrades carved quaintly, a stone figure holding aloft a torch appearing in regular intervals on either side. The magnitude of the castle appalled him for the moment.

But the room into which he was ushered might have been one in the city

residence of any European of moderate wealth. It was grotesquely tapestried and wainscoted, it is true, but the little tables here and there holding vases of flowers, books and trifling ornaments, made Norroy more at ease. Here were signs of recent occupancy in the opened volumes and the half-finished needlework. The oriel windows were not even stained and the sun came brightly through them.

"Madame's private reception room," the major-domo informed him. "I will now call madame."

Observing a hand mirror on one of the tables, Norroy drew out his pocket-handkerchief and began to remove from his countenance the traces of the wind and weather of the night. He threw off his ulster and smoothed his hair. His stock collar was fortunately of a neutral shade and did not show the dirt; this he rearranged to his satisfaction and thrust the pin more securely in place.

A few moments later, he heard the unmistakable *frou-frou* of skirts in the hallway, and, picking up a book, pretended to be immersed in its contents.

"Herr von Roeder!"

Norroy placed the book on a nearby table, rose and bowed to a rather comely woman in gray who had just entered. There was something alluring, he admitted, about the soft, yellow hair, something appealing about the mouth, and the blue eyes looked as though they might, at will, become soft and melting. But as she spoke, they were as hard and cold as Norroy's own.

"Madame?" he half questioned.

"I understood that you were to come, Herr von Roeder. Won't you sit down?" She motioned him to a chair near which she stood and he followed her action.

"You come at a strange hour," she pursued. "I understood the message from Count Schreyer to read that you would not arrive until late this afternoon. That was the reason the soldiers were ordered from Schmucken."

He nodded. "I have traveled all night," he replied. "I saw no need of chopping the journey. Yes, it was rather a useless thing to send the soldiers—although precautionary. But I rather fancy, baroness, that I shall be able to manage without the aid of the military. Or even of your household."

Her lip curved petulantly. "Perhaps you underestimate your man, Herr von Roeder," she said. "I can assure you he is not easy to handle. That is why I asked for the soldiers. I thought they would be needed on the journey between here and Kron. After you have reached the train, all will be simple enough."

Norroy nodded again. "May I smoke? Thank you." He lighted a cigarette. "I presume that De Legaspi is here now—in the castle——"

"We breakfasted together—an hour ago," she returned. "And he has gone off to gather snow flowers. He knows how much I care for flowers—and he——" She suddenly realized what she was saying, and noted the sneer on Norroy's lip.

"You must care greatly for him, madame," he said, mockingly. She flushed. "But my orders are to be quick. I cannot even stop here to change my clothes——" He pulled the blue envelope from his pocket. "There is my commission, baroness."

She glanced at it carelessly, then handed it back. "Oh, yes, I knew of that. But you do not ask me how I managed to get this man across the border."

Norroy's lip curled slightly. "No, I do not," he returned. "I have been a secret agent for some time, baroness, and I know the use that women are in the profession—especially so when they are beautiful as you are. But we waste time. If you will oblige me, please ring for a servant and have him bring this De Legaspi here."

The look which the woman vouchsafed Norroy was hardly one which would have encouraged a lover, for Norroy's tone was taunting and full of bitter courtesy. She realized that in this man's estimation she stood very low indeed, and that her rank did not save her in the slightest with him. Repressing the impulsive reply that sprang

to her lips, she arose and touched the button. Norroy looked at his watch. It was nearing eleven o'clock. The soldiers were due to arrive by that time.

Norroy picked up the book which he had been perusing and allowed his eyes to wander over the printed pages, turning leaf after leaf and apparently absorbed, but really not reading a word. The baroness followed his example and they sat silent for the better part of half an hour, at the end of which time a servant knocked.

"The Herr Legaspi has returned, madame," he said, bowing very low. "He is in the hall and waiting——"

"Tell him to come here," she said, curtly.

The servant retired, and a moment later a man of some thirty-seven or eight years, with glossy black hair tinged with gray and the oval, olive-skinned face of one of the Latin races, entered. He was rather a good-looking man, Norroy thought, and, looking at the firm jaw, he wondered that he could have been so easily made the fool.

He came in almost impetuously. "Elsa," he began, coming forward with hands outstretched. Then he noted Norroy and stopped. The men inspected one another coldly, and Norroy's right hand, which he held behind his back, trembled slightly.

"Señor Emilio de Legaspi?" queried Norroy.

The South American bowed.

The hand behind the back came into view holding a small Remington. "You are my prisoner, señor," said Norroy. "I am an agent of the Saxonian foreign office. You might have been well aware of your danger in crossing Saxonia's border."

He kept his eyes steadily on the Andevian. De Legaspi was stunned. He tried to smile. Then he turned to the baroness, who stood, hard and cold, looking toward the window.

"You — Elsa — you will——" She gazed at him impassively, and the man read in her eyes what he was afraid to believe. "You—you—Elsa—ah, God!"

For a moment he stood with bowed head; then he looked again toward Norroy. The Remington still covered him squarely.

"Will you give me your parole not to attempt escape?" queried Norroy. "Otherwise, I shall be forced to handcuff you—which I do not care to do."

The Andevian looked around for a moment, hopelessly. "You know that this is an outrage, señor," he commented, compressing his lips in his endeavor to show no emotion. "You know that Saxonia can be made to answer for this."

"Quite true, señor," returned Norroy. "But no one knows that you came over the mountains from Austria. You came disguised. You came with a false passport. News does not leak out of Saxonia prisons, señor."

The man understood and gave vent to a low, hoarse cry. "A prisoner—for life—that is what you mean. My parole! My parole! No, I shall give you no parole—no——" He had darted for the door, but Norroy, ever-watchful, caught his hands, dropping the revolver as he did so. The next moment the Andevian's wrists were encircled by a steel ring which Norroy had snapped upon him.

The American stepped back and picked up the revolver, which he replaced in his pocket. "I am sorry to do this, señor," he said, courteously. "But I have no choice."

But the Andevian was not paying attention. He was looking at the woman. "Elsa!" he said, slowly. "Elsa! I never before knew how black a woman's heart could be. God forgive me, I never knew."

From the woman there came not a sign. She had seated herself and was gazing out of a nearby window, her face set in hard lines, and the beauty gone out of it with the ashen hue that overspread it.

For a moment there was silence; then came a knock on the door.

"Enter," commanded the baroness.

A servant obeyed the command. "Soldiers have arrived from Schmucken, madame," he said. "Their captain wishes to have an audience."

"Show him in," said the baroness, dully.

The servant disappeared, to come into sight again, announcing: "Lieutenant Albrecht von Moser."

The young soldier strode forward, his cap in his hand, clicking his heels together and bowing at the sight of the baroness.

"You know why I have come, baroness," he said. "I have orders to arrest a certain man named Catorro, who is said to be here."

"That, lieutenant," smiled Norroy, stepping forward, "is not possible."

The lieutenant eyed him suspiciously; then arrogantly. One glance at Norroy, in his disguise, was enough to show the lieutenant that he belonged to neither the nobility nor military. Therefore, being of the military, Lieutenant von Moser had the right to be condescending.

"What do you mean, my good fellow?" he wished to know.

Norroy laughed shortly. "I mean that he has already surrendered to me; and, as your superior, I am entitled to a salute, sir. I am Captain Otto von Roeder, lieutenant, and Catorro, or Legaspi, is my prisoner. Salute, sir."

"Where is your commission? I don't know you. I can't take your word, you know." The lieutenant was visibly disquieted.

Norroy handed him the paper. Von Moser glanced at it. Then, clicking his heels together, he gave the document back to Norroy, and brought his hand to the side of his head in grave salute.

"Quite so, captain," he said. "I apologize. Have you any need for me or for my men?"

"None whatever," replied Norroy. "There is the prisoner." He pointed to the manacled Legaspi. "You see, I am quite able to manage him. You and your men may return to Schmucken, lieutenant."

## CHAPTER IV.

### OVER THE MOUNTAINS TO AUSTRIA.

A short while after the soldiers disappeared over the slope of the mountains, returning to their post at Schmucken, a little cavalcade, composed of Yorke Norroy, Emilio de Legaspi, and Karl, the landlord's son, struck off the main road toward Kron, toward which they had apparently started when they left the Castle of Aufsberg.

"Karl, boy," said Norroy, in German, "we are not going back to Kron. We must cut off here and make our way toward the Saxonian frontier. We are going into Austria, you understand."

The boy did not question nor did he seem surprised. It was his duty to obey. "I know a road, *freiherr*. It is past the frontier guard at Erckberg. There is no other way save by Hohejuch, which is longer."

"By Erckberg, then," said Norroy, briefly, and he fell back abreast with Legaspi, who was finding some trouble in holding the bridle reins with his manacled hands. Norroy leaned over the saddle, fitted a tiny key in the lock, and unsnapped the manacles.

"No, no," he disclaimed. "I don't ask you for your parole. I only ask you not to be a fool again, Señor de Legaspi. You are a free man."

"What—what?" stammered the Andevian. "Jesting again, señor?"

Norroy drew a revolver from his pocket and handed it to the Andevian. "You may judge from that whether I jest or not. It is loaded. Oh! I can understand, señor, that it is strange to you; but it can be no stranger than your conduct has been to me. I am an agent of the government of the United States, señor; sent to pull you out of the trap which you managed to dig for yourself. You have been a fool!"

"I do not understand," gasped the Andevian. "I do not understand."

As briefly as the incidents made it possible, Yorke Norroy narrated the tale. At its conclusion, he interrupted the Andevian instantly upon that gentleman beginning fervid protestations of undying gratitude.

"Rather let us say, Señor de Legaspi, that one who is to be the chief executive of Andevia had best preserve his wits to such an extent as to fall into no

more traps of the sort set by pretty women. I have pulled you out of this one, at the expense of the United States, for I have been forced to leave undiscovered certain matters which called me to Dresig."

The Andevian twisted his thin fingers together. "Ah, señor, how can I ever atone?"

"By never making another blunder of the sort," replied Norroy. "Pretty women are everywhere used by nations as diplomatic tools, and the prettier and the more fascinating they are the more dangerous. You can atone by not letting another make a fool of you. Also, you will do well to remember that the United States kept you from lifelong imprisonment in a Saxonian fort; that you can remember when you come to be president of Andevia."

"But you, señor?" cried the Andevian, earnestly. "How can I ever repay you?"

"The United States pays me for this work," cut in Norroy, coldly. "But we are not yet out of the woods, Señor Legaspi. Karl, halt the horse, and remain where you are for a moment or so. Do not look behind you."

Obediently, the young Saxonian pulled in his horse and sat motionless in the saddle. From the dispatch bag, which he carried slung over his shoulder, Norroy pulled a wig of brown hair, and a mustache of the same variety. Leaning over in his saddle, he adjusted these to the face of Legaspi. With a steady hand, he applied a camel's-hair brush to the eyebrows and lashes of the Andevian, and, with different dyes and paints, taken from various compartments of the bag, so altered that gentleman's countenance that in it Legaspi saw no traces of himself when shown the hand mirror.

"And here," concluded Norroy, after replacing the various articles in the bag, "is the pass of one Anton von Obermuller, which you will present when questioned by the officials on the frontier."

"But for yourself, señor?"

"I have the passport of one Otto von Roeder," said Norroy, with a smile.

"On government business, lieutenant," said Norroy, with a portentous frown, when the file of soldiers closed around him at the mountain pass of Erckberg. A few paces away lay Austria, and between it and the three stood the soldiers. Norroy handed them his passport.

"Ah! Otto von Roeder—Captain von Roeder, is it not?" The lieutenant drew back and saluted. "My name is Durer. We have heard much of the famous Otto von Roeder here, captain. And the other gentleman?"

"My *confrère*, Herr von Obermuller," explained Norroy. Legaspi handed them the pass silently. He was afraid to speak in his faulty German, and Norroy had bidden him not to do so.

"Quite right—quite right," agreed the lieutenant. "And so you go to Austria, gentlemen? I wish you a very pleasant journey." He drew back, and saluted again. The soldiers raised their carbines, and Norroy, Legaspi and the boy, Karl, passed over the frontier and into Austria, where Legaspi was beyond the reach of Saxonian law.

When the guards had been left far behind, Norroy turned abruptly to Legaspi. "I'll tell you of something you may do," he said, and there was a tinge of kindliness in his voice. "This boy Karl here has been your means of salvation. Had it not been for him, I could never have threaded the mountain passes. Had it not been for his silence at the frontier, we should both have been imprisoned. Now, as you know, this boy can never return to his own country. So take him with you, Legaspi; take him with you to Andevia, and give him a position of trust—but give him an education first. You will do this? Thank you!"

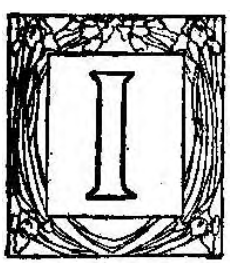
And so a man of affairs was made from a peasant lad; a man whom they say will one day rule Andevia. But that is prophecy with which we have nothing to do.

Norroy returned to Washington some three weeks later, just in time to act as master of ceremonies in the fourth cotillion of the season.

# A NIGHT ON POLICE

By Charles K. Moser

**The haps and mishaps of a night in a great city, as viewed by certain members of the newspaper profession. The little girl who was lost, the lover who "butted in," and the judge with a kind heart, who contrived to set all things straight for them**



F ever a city may be said to have a heart from which radiate all the strongest vital forces which give it life and endow it with individuality, San Francisco has its heart in its Hall of Justice. A huge, grim, unlovely building, its exterior is eminently fitting and suggestive of the work it does in the world; from the impassable and impregnable city prison, overlooking the town from its highest floor, to the rifle range and sinister armory in its basement, the Hall of Justice is packed with the punitive and retributive machinery of the municipal state. Within its walls are the police headquarters, the central station, the detective bureau, the penal records, the police courts and the criminal departments of the superior courts, the morgue and—the one spot where the secret underground wires of San Francisco's puppets and politics come to the surface, for manipulation.

Other cities have such institutions, but they play not so vital a part. The Hall of Justice stands upon the exact spot where the fringes of San Francisco's cosmopolitan communities and her opposite social circles overlap each other. In front of it Chinatown crawls like a filthy worm halfway up the slope of Nob Hill; the respectability of upper Kearny Street has halted at its left wall, and garish Barbary Coast, with its sordid dens and vicious life, has dared not flaunt its brazen sin beyond its stern right wing.

In the rear the water front stretches away to the bay, and the Latin Quarter tumbles headlong down ragged Telegraph Hill, seeking to push its nose into the business of the hall by shouldering the water front to one side. Justice may claim the ugly building as her abode, but she is not always to be found at home; it is the paradise of the politician, the horror of the criminal, the scorn of the righteous citizen.

But though crime is its cause and tragedy its commonest effect, there have been occasions when comedy and joy of life have come out of its forbidding walls. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" It is written that the answer has been yea. And sooner or later every activity in the life of the city reaches, in some form, the Hall of Justice; for which reason the big newspapers keep their picked men there day and night to gather together the things that have occurred, and let the public know them. Of some of these men and their ways, is this story.

The big clock in the tower above the prison was striking midnight when McDavitt wrote the last line of his copy and tossed the packet to the waiting office boy with a growling injunction to "hurry along with that stuff, kid, or the old man'll be bucking like a bay bronco with a cockleburr under his cinch."

The other men had already sent up their copy for the fore part of the night, and now they were lounging about the slovenly room set apart for the reporters, in characteristic attitudes. Bellews, of the *Monarch*—baptized with

water and the spirit as Howard, but rechristened with good fellowship as "Fat," by his brother knights of the pencil and pot—snoozed on the battered leather sofa near the telephone booth; his cherubic countenance, with its pink-and-white skin and a pair of steel-rimmed goggles astride his pudgy nose, was the exact facsimile of the half-droll, half-grotesque countenance of a Chinese doll.

Johnny O'Dea, of the *Clarion,* sat with his chair tilted against the wall, his short legs on the long, oaken table and his knees on a level with his chin. Johnny was never known to sit in any other manner; a big, black cigar, about half as long as himself, shoved for a goodly portion of its length into a corner of his mouth, a volume of detective stories in his hands and an inevitable yellow flower in his buttonhole made up the remaining details of his never varying portrait.

He and Fat Bellews were as methodical as a pair of old maids. With Tom McDavitt, of the *Journal,* and Brannigan, of the *Record,* they composed the night force of newspaper men on duty at the hall.

As McDavitt finished his growl to the office boy, the door opened and Evan Osgood, one of the day reporters, entered. It was his day off duty, but in obedience to a habit he could not break, he had wandered back on his beat to chat with the workers there. A police reporter is seldom happy away from the scene of his daily labors; he is like the discarded old fire horse, who pricks his ears and prances when the alarms sound, then runs away with the huckster's cart to the scene of the fire.

"How!" said Osgood, pleasantly, as he dropped into a chair. "What you sending up to-night, Mac? Anything big?"

"Three splits and a two head," answered Tom McDavitt, as if in disgust with himself. "There's an alcoholic victim, of former political fame, at the morgue, a light-fingered lady with petty tendencies upstairs, and a despondent gent with a taste for illuminating gas at the harbor hospital; they are the splits, and then there's a girl with the matron upstairs whose weeping for a lover she thinks she's lost. I made a two head out of her just to make the old man think I was working. She's not worth a stick. Says she's a country girl come to the city to meet her Johnnie, but he never showed up, and now her money's gone. Boo! hoo! hoo! and all the rest of it. She's a sly hussy that the cops picked up while she was 'taking the air,' and she's 'stalling,' to keep from being charged as a vagrant. Not worth setting up."

"Where's Brannigan?"

"Prowling around outside, trying to locate a yarn, I guess. If there's one lying loose anywhere he's sure to pick it up. Never saw such a fellow; keeps us humping all the time to watch him. But he hasn't had a scoop for a week now. There's nothing going on except these lazy cops' salaries."

McDavitt sauntered around the room impatiently, crunching his strong, yellow teeth nervously against the stem of his short pipe. For the five hundredth time, probably, he gazed sneeringly at the rough pencil sketches which decorated the walls, cartoons of men who at present and in times past had sat nightly at the long, oaken table and ground out stories of crime and misery for the eager-reading public.

As always, he stopped and glowered at the sketch of himself; it offended him every night of his life, and every night he heaped abuse upon it. The wide mouth, the broad, blunt nose, the long, ungainly legs, the aggressive swagger of the shoulders angered him, not the less because they were done to the life. As McDavitt glowered this time, his irritation all at once boiled over; he suddenly spat upon the sketch once, twice—then smeared it over with his hand. Osgood laughed.

"Turbulent Tommy is in his usual sweet temper to-night," he said. The others never heeded him.

"I'm tired of that thing. The mirror is all I can stand," answered Tom, sourly. He pulled his wide, slouch hat down over his eyes and sent a torrent of tobacco clouds into the close little

room. At the moment Brannigan entered the room, and, quietly approaching the table, settled himself in a chair, picked up a magazine and began to read. McDavitt's shrewd eyes narrowed to blue points of light as he studied Brannigan; he was suspicious of trouble when the other fellow was quiet. In himself it was a sure sign of "something under cover."

"What's doing?" he asked, bluntly.

"Nothing," said Brannigan. "I've been all over the job, and under it, too; there isn't a line anywhere."

Fat Bellews, who had roused from his somnolence long enough to turn a sleepy gaze on Brannigan, now rolled over and went to snoring again. Johnny O'Dea resumed the perusal of Gaboriau, and even McDavitt muttered a satisfied grunt. Whatever might be said of his actions, Brannigan's frankly spoken word was above suspicion. The police job was not a newspaper man's "love feast," but, on the contrary, was covered in the "cutthroat" fashion—which is to say, every man worked for himself and for the blood of his rival.

Brannigan was the best man at the hall, but he had earned his record for scoops by hard, keen work, not by fakes nor lies to the men associated with him. So when he reported that there was nothing doing, the others believed, and lost interest, and McDavitt resumed his habitual rôle of grand chief of the Knockers' Club.

"Little Dell still up there wailing over her lost lambie?" he asked Brannigan.

"Yes, she's sniveling some, and won't talk much, but I got enough of her yarn to make me believe in her and feel sorry for the poor child."

"Oh, of course. Our dear Brannigan is a compassionate beast, who is ever melting with sympathy over the erring ones—particularly beauty's erring ones. We grant she's pretty, we do. No doubt she's a dear little thing, an unspotted lily, and she weeps so touchingly, too. Tell us her sorrowful tale, good Brannigan; let us weep, believe and feel so sorry with you."

"Mac, you're knocking on the wrong door, as usual. Sergeant Donovan found her walking along Pacific Street and looking as if she were ready to go anywhere or do anything or nothing. Well, as Pacific Street is not the fashionable promenade for nice young girls, the sergeant offered himself as her escort—to the patrol wagon. Of course she cried, and she's been crying ever since so much that she can't talk coherently. But the desk sergeant upstairs has been petting and pumping her ever since they brought her in. She came down from the country to meet a man who was going to marry her, but she missed him, somehow, and she has no money or friends here. She is hungry, she says, but she can't eat. Her name is Della Dunphy, and she is an orphan sixteen years of age; for the last ten years she's been bound out to an old woman who keeps a boarding house for loggers back up in the mountains, near Colfax. I guess she's had a pretty tough time of it, for she says the dear old lady used to beat her with a harness strap as regularly as they washed the supper dishes. But about a month ago some country bumpkin up there made eyes at her, and she found a way to make eyes back; they decided to run away and get married, since she was only sixteen, and they feared the old woman would chew 'em both into mince meat if she got wind of it. So a week ago Bumpkin came down here to get him a new suit, a license and things fixed generally, I suppose, and she was to sneak on the train and follow him a few days later, when he should send for her——"

"What's his name?" asked Fat, from the depths of his semi-doze on the sofa.

"Couldn't drag it out of her with a steam tug and a five-inch tow line. Some childish idea that it might get him into trouble, I guess. Anyway, he sent her the railroad fare and directions how to meet him at the ferry building, and three days ago she gave the old woman the slip. But when she reached here Bumpkin wasn't at the ferry; she waited nearly all day for him, then walked all around the water front hunting him. But he wasn't there. She only had sixty cents, and she's lived

and lodged on that for three days, feasting sumptuously on bologna sausage and peanuts. To-night she was flat broke, with no feed since morning. So there was nothing to do but walk the streets in the hopes of stumbling across her lover. You see, she still has faith in him and was sure she'd find him until Donovan ran her in. Now she thinks the end of the world is come.

"That's what she says, Mac, and it's simple enough to be true. Besides, she looks the part to me. I'm going to make a human-interest yarn out of her."

"How touching!" sneered McDavitt, pretending to wipe tears from his eyes with a disreputable handkerchief. "It's simple enough to show what a cunning, little hussy she is. She knows how to keep out of the House of Correction, all right. Her appearance? Fudge! She doesn't look any more country-like than any other of these dowdy little pocket pickers who are learning their trade. But they can't vag her, with no evidence and that yarn; if some fleeced sucker doesn't come in and make a roar, or the cops can't show her up as an old hand, they'll have to pass her over to the Boys and Girls' Aid—or else back to the old woman and the harness strap, at Colfax, admitting the truth of her tale for the sake of peace."

"She won't go back there," said Brannigan. "She's afraid the old woman will kill her with the butt end of a teamster's whip. Says she'll throw herself from the train if they try to send her back. I believe she would. But I guess they'll send her out to the B. & G. in the morning. The matron's been trying to get her to go to bed for the last hour, but she won't; just sits on the bench in the corridor and cries."

"Oh, well, let her cry," Tom replied, stretching his huge mouth and long, lean limbs in a tremendous yawn. He wandered aimlessly around the room for a few minutes and then suddenly came to attention behind the table.

"Fat!" he roared, in the voice of the bull of Bashan on a rampage.

"Well?" Bellews lazily drawled, without taking the trouble to open his eyes.

"Shake you for the crowd," said McDavitt, drawing a set of miniature dice from his pocket. Johnny O'Dea's book fell with a clatter into the drawer at his elbow, both his hat and his feet came from the table as if with a single movement, and took their proper places, while Johnny whistled a gay tune. Osgood, who had taken little apparent interest in the sad fortunes of Della Dunphy, now found new life in his limbs; with great gusto he fell to singing the Stein Song, not more than three-quarters of a tone off key. Brannigan buttoned up his coat and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. The time for speech had passed; this was the time to get into action, and every man felt it his duty, so to speak, to stand up bravely before the bar and down the demon rum. Fat alone, considering the even chances of his playing host, displayed a lamentable discourtesy by the sluggard way in which he arose from the couch. McDavitt placed the dice in a match box and blew his breath three times upon them for good luck.

"Two flops poker," he called, rolling the bits of ivory out on the table. The game was soon over; as usual McDavitt lost.

"God never did give both brains *and* luck to any one man," was his only comment.

As they filed out of the room, Brannigan changed his mind. "I'd better not get started to-night, boys. Feel too much like making a night of it."

They did not urge him, and Brannigan stayed in the hall, away from temptation, while the gang went over to sample the red medicine at McMonnigle Brothers.

A light shining out of a window up in the third story attracted Johnny's attention as the reporters crossed narrow Merchant Street on their way to McMonnigles'.

"There's old Judge Clabonis still in his chambers, burning the midnight oil. I don't believe he ever sleeps. Wonder what makes him work so hard?"

"The unspeakable no'countness of his fellow judges, my son," answered McDavitt. "They loaf in chambers during the day and devote their nights to the

cultivation of their social graces. Clabonis must do their work and his also; which means pouring over codes, cases and statutes sometimes till dawn. But the others! For a dime I can spot the whereabouts of all three at the present moment without a miss: Logan is hobnobbing with certain tenderloin acquaintances, Schlitz is holding the watch at Con Shaughnessy's cockfight, and Quinlan has just drunk the tenth toast to himself at the beer bottlers' banquet. Do I win?"

"You have the goods," Osgood answered as they passed through the swinging doors of McMonnigles'.

McDavitt noted, with surprise, that the usual crowd of hangers-on about the place was missing. "Wonder of wonders," he murmured, "am I to have no uninvited guests for once?"

He spoke too soon. Hardly had the newspaper men lined up against the bar and poured out their refreshments when the door swung open again, and Soapy Sam appeared in their midst. Soapy Sam was a well-known citizen of lower Kearny Street; he could assimilate more kicks upon the outer man to acquire a drink of whisky for the inner man than any other of his species in the quarter. But a kicking, subsequently unsoothed by the liquid salve, had been known, at times, to cause Soapy to retaliate with a knife. He had well-settled ideas of what was due to his dignity. The man who bought him a drink could separate his coat from his hide in chunks and become his friend thereby, to be fought for, to be held up to the other lodgers in the Hotel de Hobo as a "gent of de sure-'nough quality."

He derived the adjectival part of his name from the circumstance that upon one occasion a party of gay spirits in a convivial mood had actually ducked him in a tub of soapsuds. Sam objected to this abrupt introduction to total strangers, he declined to notice them by wiping them off, and so they stuck to his carcass nearly as long as the appellation they supplied it. But as he appeared in the saloon the sudden change in the atmosphere distinctly gave the lie to his name.

"Good-evenin', gents," he exclaimed, cheerily, advancing toward the bar with guileless assurance. "It's a cold night outside for old bones, ain't it? Mine's whisky," with a nod to the bartender. At a look of assent from McDavitt, the bartender served him his poison, and Soapy drank the glass of goodfellowship with the newspaper men.

"T'anks, awfully. Dat's de right stuff, all right, all right," he said, when the crooked elbows had straightened once more, and he started sauntering toward the door.

"Don't be in a hurry, Soapy," McDavitt called, pleasantly. "Have another. It's up to me to treat the house to-night. You can stand another."

Soapy eyed the reporter suspiciously. What meant this unusual generosity? The customary kicks were overdue now, and he had best be going before they arrived. But the bartender was already setting out the bottles, and the dignified representative of the great unwashed could not resist their mellow gleam.

"I think I'll have an absinthe highball this time, Pete," McDavitt said to their cupbearer, as he, at the same time, gave Johnny O'Dea a furtive nudge. Then he moved close up to Soapy's left side, while Johnny innocently closed in on the unconscious guest's right, searching his pockets all the while for a match—to light his cigar. McDavitt poured out his drink, then coolly held the bottle of liqueur over the happy Sam's hat brim and poured a gentle stream of it down that gentleman's musty back.

"Here's how!" cried Tom, lifting his glass with the others; Johnny O'Dea, having lighted his cigar, applied the burning match to the tail of Soapy's coat. The next instant lower Kearny Street's well-known citizen was dancing the fire dance in the middle of the floor, while streams of greenish-blue flames leaped gleefully over his coat, his tousled hair and the thing which served him for a hat.

The reporters danced around their victim in a very delirium of delight as he pawed with both hands at the frolicking flames and howled out volleys of oaths in his fright. As they well knew,

the absinthe evaporated so rapidly that his garments had no time to become ignited before the blaze vanished; poor Soapy did not know this, and, naturally, he felt anything but cheerful under the caressing of the flames. He was so interested in himself for the moment that, like the merrymakers, he never noticed another man enter the saloon until a sudden rough voice cried out:

"That's a mean trick, ye blamed dudes, an' I'll not stan' for it!"

A man was coming toward the group, a young fellow, with sandy hair and stooping, heavy shoulders; something about his rolling walk and long, sagging arms made him look like a deckhand, but the rest of him was plainly of rural delivery. A blue diagonal suit with creases still in the trousers encased his awkward frame, a soft, black hat, country style, covered his head, and new congress shoes displayed themselves two inches below the bottoms of his pants. But the shoes groaned under a burden of dust, the hat sat his forehead in an attitude of despair, and a large, yellow chrysanthemum pressed its wilted petals against his buttonhole, as though it were tired of life. A smell of tar and salt water came from his clothes, and there were the marks of fresh rope burns on his hands.

The practiced eye of McDavitt, taking in all these details at a glance, noted something in his face apart from them all; it was the look of one who, having lost the homeward trail, has searched in vain to find it until he has abandoned hope and thrown himself on the breast of the wilderness, careless of death. It was this, perhaps, that made Tom say less brutally than was his wont:

"Well, Reuben, is this your woodpile?"

The newcomer advanced aggressively, with both fists clinched. Evidently he was looking for trouble. "I don't let nobody pick on a pore old man what can't p'rtect himself, even if he ain't nothin' but a bum," he said, as he squared off at McDavitt. "I seen ye, an' I'm goin' to punch yer head."

Though brawls in such places were strictly tabooed by the powers that be in newspaperdom, McDavitt would undoubtedly have vigorously defended himself had it not been for the noble, forgiving nature of Soapy Sam. Soapy had just had two full drinks at his expense; the subsequent fire dance was, therefore, a mere minor detail. Besides, this stranger had called him a bum—there was a sharp smack and Soapy's right fist landed neatly on the stranger's chin.

"Dis fer you, Mr. Buttinsky, from de hay," he ejaculated, as he followed the right with a ripping left uppercut to the sea-smelling countryman's eyetooth, and the oddly matched pair were at it hammer and tongs.

It was doubtless a noble combat, even after Pete took a hand with the bung-starter, but the reporters filed solemnly out without awaiting further developments; having started the fracas, policy dictated letting the others finish it alone. Fights were commoner than kind words in that portion of the city. They proceeded, without comment even, back toward the Hall of Justice, until they met a patrolman strolling along, idly swinging his nightstick.

"Little row in Mac's joint, O'Leary," said Turbulent Thomas, after the customary "What's doing?" had been exchanged. "Better jug that fresh fieldhand in there for a few hours; he smells salty enough, too, but I think he lacks repose. He ought to give it a trial in our rest-cure sanitarium."

The patrolman quickened his steps toward the increasing sounds of combat, and the reporters went on their way toward the hall. The light from Judge Clabonis' window still shone faintly out into the murky shadows over the narrow street.

"That fool judge'll die of overwork some o' these fine nights," commented Fat Bellews, who was never likely to meet such a fate himself, "and then he'll get a hearse load of flowers, a funeral oration and six feet of real estate. The other three will say he was a good fellow, and then he'll be forgotten. Why doesn't he take it easy?"

"You should give him lessons, Fat. Come on, let's go around the job."

McDavitt went to the morgue first, and then made the rounds of the central station, the upstairs office and the fire marshal's headquarters; Bellews called up Broadway jail, the harbor hospital and police station over the telephone, while Johnny O'Dea sneaked off on a flying visit to one of his "leaks," or news sources in Chinatown. Osgood went for a chat and a cigar with the chief's clerk.

It was purely by chance that the three men on duty met some minutes later in the elevator which carried them all up to the prison. Neither of them had uncovered an item worth more than a single head. It was not a "live" night. They furtively pumped each other as the car sped upward with them, and, on being assured of the dearth of real news, the three swapped notes as in the good old love feast days when every man "stood in with the gang."

Brass keys clanked harshly against the iron-barred door as the elevator reached the landing, and the news gatherers stepped into the wide corridor, their footsteps ringing on the cement floor with an ominous hardness which in itself seemed to assert that justice, shorn of every softening virtue, was indeed at home there.

At the far end of the corridor, under the glare of a multitude of electric lights, stood the booking desk with a grim sergeant of police and his pitiless book behind it. Before it two stalwart policemen were struggling roughly with an intoxicated woman; her screams and curses filled the prison with the echoes of sin that has sunken far below the sense of shame. They were only trying to search her before locking her up for the night, in one of the row of cells behind a solid gray wall which divided the corridor and arose halfway to the ceiling, but the woman did not care; she was only a rabid, inflamed beast, and the liquor in her bade her fight.

"What's going on, Barney?" Bellews, who was a favorite with the grizzled turnkey, inquired of him.

"Divil a thing, sorr, but ould Katie fightin' dhrunk ag'in. Shure, she's th' muther of the Ould Boy himsilf, is Katie, wid thot Barbary Coast booze in her. Misther Brannigan's still chewin' th' r-rag wid thot little counthry gir-rl, an' th' mathron's been thryin' to git her t' bed, but, bedad, she won't do ut. An' thot's all, sorr."

On a bench near the booking desk Brannigan and the matron sat, the girl from the country between them. She was still weeping, but softly, as though the spasm of tears had all but spent its own strength and hers, too. A plain, childish face, swollen, red eyes and a row of freckles across her upturned nose—there was nothing about her to charm either the eye or the understanding. The dowdy dress and the cheap, tawdry hat, with its bedraggled feather, might have garbed any girl of several classes; if she were good, she was stupidly good, and if she were bad, she was artlessly bad—and this verdict was written all over her.

McDavitt approached her, while the other two watched the stubborn capitulation of Katie and glanced at the record of the night's arrests. The gentleness with which the matron and Brannigan were trying to soothe the country girl irritated Turbulent Tom. He swelled up with all the airs of a negro minstrel on parade.

"Why the dickens don't you stop that blubbering and go to bed?" he roared at the girl. "Nobody's going to hurt you, you aren't arrested for anything. Quit it, and try to have some sense. You wait till they get you out to the B. & G.; they'll trice you up by the thumbs if——"

The girl burst out with another spasm of sobs at McDavitt's harsh words, but she said nothing. Brannigan, however, turned on him with a look of indignation.

"Mac, mind your own business, and let the child alone. Have some sense yourself; can't you see how she feels? I think Mrs. Lake and myself can manage her without your able asistance."

Tom's angry response was drowned in the rattle of bars and jangle of levers as the prison door was again opened to let in a load of passengers from the elevator. Soapy Sam, with a beautifully

colored eye, emerged first; O'Leary's long arm propelling him with a solid grip at the back of Soapy's neck. Following O'Leary with the meekness of a lamb half slaughtered, came what was left of a man who had once looked like a deckhand at a country picnic; now he more nearly resembled the ensemble of a hamburger steak and a dishrag. Soapy, the nightstick and the bung-starter had pasted their notices of attachment all over him. O'Leary conducted his charges before the grim sergeant.

"Oi hod to play hell wid me tickler on this sthrappin' yooth afore he'd accept me eshcort," said the patrolman, with a grin, "but Oi think if ye'd but whishtle now he'd dance on his hoind legs loike a bear, bedad." He winked at McDavitt.

"What's your name?" asked the sergeant, sharply, glaring at the battered youth, and spreading himself over the ugly book preparatory to writing in it.

"Joe Hinson," the man answered, sullenly.

There came a glad cry from the bench at the man's first tone; the country girl sprang from her seat. "Oh, Joey, Joey! You've found me!"

Two bounds carried her to where the boy met her. At her cry he had broken from O'Leary as though the patrolman were a straw man, and rushed toward her. "Delly, little girl!" he called out to her, and with tears wetting both their faces, the lovers fell into each other's arms.

The strangeness of this thing that had occurred and its suddenness robbed the spectators for a moment of the power to move or speak. McDavitt recovered first.

"Well, I'll be—fudged." It was the first time he had ever been known to make a concession to the presence of women in his language. Bellews turned his back on the couple, and calmly spouted a column of cigar smoke heavenward as he remarked to little O'Dea: "Lovely night outside, eh?"

But Patrolman O'Leary's zeal was loveproof. When his slow wits had started working again, and he saw his prisoner the captive of another, to whom he clung closer than a brother ever does, O'Leary could scarcely contain himself. With his valiant club upraised, he rushed at the pair.

"Here, here, ye scamp. I'll b-r-reak ye——"

"Leave 'em alone a bit, Mike," said Brannigan, stopping the patrolman's rush with his hand. Then turning to the sergeant, who was gazing at them as if spellbound: "Give them a little chance, won't you, serg?"

The sergeant stared all the harder. "Here, you," he called, gruffly, to the lovers, "go over to that bench there and sit down." There was a queer little quaver in the gruff voice that made Brannigan smile; he knew what made it. But the sergeant turned his back, and, going over to his book, glared from it to the grinning Soapy as though, like an unfastidious ogre, he would devour the odoriferous Sam with a single snap of his jaws.

"What's your name?"

"Sam Underhill—as if yer didn't know."

"Sam Underfoot — meanin' dirt, would suit you better," growled the sergeant. "What's the charge, officer?"

"Distoorbin' th' peace, an' disor-r-derly conduct. Char-rge an ar-r-rist by Pathrolman Michael O'Leary, sorr."

"Sit down over there, Sam, till I'm ready to book your pardner; you two fellows like each other so much 'twould be a shame to separate you, but if I hear any rowin' to-night I'll douse you both with a tub o' water." And the sergeant, satisfied with the effect of his threat on Soapy, began pottering around his little inclosure behind the desk, searching for an excuse to allow the reunited lovers more time.

Meanwhile Della and the dilapidated Joey sat in the corner hugging each other and explaining things to their mutual satisfaction; the reporters hovered like birds of prey near enough to catch all the words they let fall. The explanation of the man's failure to meet his sweetheart was simple enough—a common experience in the water-front

life of San Francisco; common enough, perhaps, in any seaboard city.

Joey had been shanghaied. The day before he was to meet Della he had attired himself in all the magnificence of his new wedding clothes and sauntered forth to behold the sights of the city. His wanderings led him finally down to where the great ships lay beside the wharves loading and unloading the cargoes of many lands. The raw-appearing but husky youth attracted the attention of the captain of a lumber schooner, who was shorthanded with his crew. With the assistance of a few glasses of beer and some salt-savored jokes, it took him but a little while to win Joe's confidence; there were the usual knockout drops in the bottom of the glass, and the country youth awakened to find himself tossing and pitching in the schooner's fo'castle. They were already out to sea, and skirting the coasts toward the northern forests.

"An' I guess I'd a never seen you no more, Della, if she hadn't sprung a leak when we was off Cape Mendocino, an' the capting had to put back here for repa'rin'. God Almighty just sent that storm, what strained her timbers till th' water busted through, to help you an' me. We got back yeste'day evenin' an' I was tryin' to find you ever sence, 'cause I knowed you was here somewheres, an' didn't have no money. But to-night there was a—a girl as I kinder got to talkin' to, sorter, on th' street, an' I ast her if she'd seen you, an' I told her what you looked like, an' she said she knowed you, an' you was a slingin' beer—that's what she said—down to some place on Jackson Street. Then I just give up, an' didn't keer what happened. I didn't want to see you nor nobody no more."

"Oh, Joey, Joey!" wailed the girl, afresh, as she hid her face in the lapels of his coat. "You ain't goin' to leave me now, are you? I'm so afeard in the city. Take me away from here, Joey, right now, please. You mustn't, *mustn't* leave me."

Joe, thus appealed to, looked helplessly at the group of newspaper men for sympathy and aid; he did not know what to do himself. McDavitt frowned and turned away to hide the gentleness which, in spite of himself, was creeping over his sarcastic face. Even Brannigan shifted awkwardly, and the other reporters began busily to search the big book for a story they knew was not there. Joe was left to face the music.

"Well, you see, Della, I can't take you 'zactly now, that is, *right* now—leastways not 'fore mornin'. You see, I—I—I reckon I kinder got in a little trouble, like," and the simple fellow passed a caressing hand over the bruises which Della had hardly noticed in the delight of having gotten her sweetheart back again. He passed his hand gingerly from his broken nose down to the torn lips, behind which a bloody hole gaped where an eyetooth had once stood. "I got this, an' the p'lice has got me to fix; I got more'n 'nough money to bail us out to-night, but you best stay here till——"

"No, no, Joey, I just can't. Please, please don't leave me. I haven't done nothin' wrong—take me with you."

"Why—you see—Della, we *cain't*. It ain't right. We—we—oh, we ain't married, an'—ner—nothin'," and the poor lover lost his speech completely in the hapless tangle of his predicament. But Della understood; her face went scarlet, and she tore herself from Joe's arms with a sudden recollection of maidenly reserve. Then she broke into a fit of weeping for which there is no solace.

It was too much for Turbulent Thomas. He started abruptly to leave the prison, but suddenly an idea seemed to strike him; he rushed back to Brannigan, seized that cool youth and dragged him into a clinch aside. There he stood talking excitedly for several seconds; Brannigan seemed dubious, and shook his head repeatedly, but McDavitt was doggedly persistent with his proposition.

"I tell you it can be done," he exclaimed, vehemently, at last. "You talk to the sergeant, hand it to him strong. I'll pull the judge out of his chambers by his hair, if he's still there." McDavitt rushed to a window and looked down. He came back hurriedly. "His

light's still there; go to work on the serg, and I'll drag old Clabonis up." The next minute he was ringing with all his might for the elevator, and Brannigan had the grim desk sergeant in a corner, "handing it to him strong."

Judge Clabonis had finally decided to go home for the night, and was just in the act of closing a ponderous volume, which lay, with half a dozen others, on his untidy desk, when the violent bursting open of his door caused him to turn toward it; McDavitt was upon him, his tousled, sandy hair fairly standing on end with energy and enthusiasm.

"Come on, judge, you're wanted upstairs!" he cried, seizing his honor by the arm and rushing him for the door with such speed that the august magistrate had not time to reach for his hat. They were halfway to the elevator before Clabonis collected his scattered senses.

"Hold on, man, hold on! What's going on? Who wants me? Where?"

"Up in the prison. Man and woman —little girl, I mean. Hurry up!"

"Well, but——"

"Come on, you—upstairs, quick!" addressing the last word to old Beech, the elevator man, as he literally threw the judge into the cage. Then, as they shot upward, McDavitt tried to explain the situation, but out of his hurried, incoherent words, Clabonis could only understand that there was a marriage somewhere, that something could be done, and that he—Clabonis—had got to do it or everlastingly gain the enmity of all good newspaper men who loved him now with their lives.

When the car stopped, they hurried down to the booking desk, where Brannigan and the veteran keeper of the peacebreakers were having a war of words.

"No, sirree, I can't let him go; I tell you there's a charge against him. Disturbing the peace and——"

"Who's made any charge against him?" asked Brannigan, turning to everyone present and looking at each with well-feigned surprise.

"Oi char-rge him, sorr," and O'Leary swelled out.

"Oh, *you* do. And what do you know about it? Did you see him start any row? Can you swear that he was **not** defending himself from a vicious assault? How comes it that you assume——"

"Well, thin, sorr, it wor Misther McDavitt thot says to arrist——"

"Who, me?" broke in Tom. "You're crazy, Mike, I did no such thing."

"Oi thought it wor yez. Well, thin, it wor Misther O'Dea thot tould me to jug——"

"Mike, you've been drinking again on duty," calmly interposed little Johnny. "I told you the last time, when I caught you in Jerry's——"

"Whisht! Whisht!" said O'Leary, softly, and winking frantically at the little reporter while he watched the expression on the sergeant's face. O'Dea caught his speech up, but withheld it provisionally. O'Leary was plainly all undone, but professional zeal made him try one more effort.

"Onnyhow, thin, it shure wor Soapy. He wor down——"

"Yer're a liar by t' clock, Micky O'Leary. I was lickin' d' stuffin' outer him. I ain't got no kick comin'," and Soapy Sam impudently mingled with the others around the desk, unabashed by the fact that a cell surely awaited him for thirty days. But O'Leary subsided. He had made his last stand.

Though unwilling enough, the sergeant was thus silenced and persuaded to acquiesce in McDavitt's scheme. Brannigan explained to the judge, who took a deep interest until told what he was expected to do. Then his face fell.

"I can't marry them here, boys. They must have a license, in the first place, and, besides, I don't know what the old woman might do. I'm sorry, boys."

It was like a dash of cold water in the faces of the eager men, and they stood around for a moment looking foolish. Over in their corner the lovers still sat, conscious that all this stir was somehow connected with them, but paying not enough attention to gather its meaning. Suddenly McDavitt strode over to them as belligerent as a butcher with a meat ax.

"Say," he fired at the man. "You lobster salad, haven't you got a license?"

"Sure. That is, I guess so—I did have one, onct." The country youth put his hand inside his coat and drew forth a soiled paper; it smelled strongly of bilge water and tarpaulin, tobacco stains smudged its crumpled edges, but still it looked like a marriage license, very much distressed.

McDavitt jerked the paper from his hand and spread it open. The big seal of the clerk "in and for the City and County of San Francisco, State of California," loomed up at the bottom of the document in all its gold-leaf splendor. Tom rushed over to Clabonis and waved the license under his honor's nose.

"Now, judge, play the game; you've got to deliver the goods. To hades with the old woman; what can she do when it's over! Here, you lovesick kids, come here and tie up."

Turbulent Tom McDavitt was not to be denied. Like the prisonkeeper, the judge could not resist the catching infection of his enthusiasm. He lined the blushing pair up before the sergeant's desk. McDavitt persuaded Mrs. Lake to be matron of honor, and she stood beside the still tearful little bride. The gawky groom wanted McDavitt to act as best man, but when he intimated his wishes, Tom blushed furiously.

"No, you idiot," he shouted. "I'm no sweetling." But he caught Cupid Bellews and shoved him up beside the groom. "It's more in your line, Fat. Your cherubic face'll lend sanctity to the scene."

Just when all was ready and the judge was clearing his throat for the first words of the simple ceremony, the bride sprang a mild sensation—and a moment's consternation. Which is supposed to be woman-like.

"Oh, Joey, ain't you got no ring? It won't seem like real marryin' without th' ring."

Poor Joey hadn't "got no ring." He crimsoned to his ears, tried to stammer something, failed and studiously observed the antics of a fly trying to walk a crack in the cement floor. The judge looked inquiringly at the pair, and all things came to an embarrassed halt.

But Soapy Sam came shambling forward from his place at O'Leary's side in the rear; he tugged desperately at something on his finger for a moment, then laid a very dirty hand over the limp fingers of the groom.

"Take dis, kid. It's me last token of respectability. I done use it meself once, but I ain't got no use for it now." As Sam walked solemnly back to the patrolman, Joe held up to view a plain gold band ring.

Then the judge tied the knot.

It was all over before even the bridal couple could realize the solemnity and the strangeness of their wedding. While ribald songs from drunken lips came to them from beyond the corridor wall, while the rattle of keys and the clanging of iron-barred doors made a harsh accompaniment to his low voice, the judge uttered the simple words which made the orphaned girl and her country lover one flesh and one blood, for all time.

The clamorings of crime and the jangle of the chains of bondage were the pealing of their wedding bells, but to these ignorant, honest children of the wood and field they were not discordant. The sweetness in their own souls mellowed all other sounds into a simple unison with their joy.

When it was over, the newspaper men and the matron congratulated the couple, the judge pocketed his fee with a tired smile, and the grim sergeant went back to his pitiless book. He, too, seemed weary.

"Clear out, now," he called to the bride and groom. "I don't want to see either of you here again. O'Leary, put that hobo in his cell without any blanket. There's been too much nonsense goin' on here to-night. What do you think the chief'll have to say in the mornin'?"

"Send him up to me," called the judge, as he followed Della and her Joey into the elevator. "Good-night, boys."

McDavitt looked at his watch. "Fat," he said, wearily, to his chum, "it's three o'clock. Time you were ringing off. Let's go get a drink."

# THE IMBECILE

By Andrew Comstock McKenzie

## CHAPTER XXI.

### RAPID RUNNING WATER.

THREE months made a change in the general appearance of the Hacienda of the Bleeding Heart. Both *casa* and huts now gleamed with the white of fresh lime among the green of increased planting. Individual gardens grew about the homes of the peons, and there were new huts with yellow thatches. The adobe walls of a little chapel had arisen, with a stout wooden cross above it, and with century-plant stalks laid in rafters ready for the roofing of barley straw.

A log bridge spanned the creek, while the entrance to the hollow had been cleared of loose bowlders. A mound-like kiln, for burning bricks, had been built, and the sides of the old mill were rising. The rusted machinery had been taken apart and now lay ready for repairs under the directions of the American engineer. The muck of the corral had disappeared, and milk cows stood there in fresh straw, munching bundles of alfalfa.

"It is wonderful, dear," declared Delicia, as they came down from the mountains after a tramp to find shrubbery to transplant to the *patio*. "You must have had a great estate back in your own land, you manage so wisely."

"Well, I had a flat on West Thirty-second Street," he observed. "But the only thing that grew in it was wild oats."

"We like the mountains better than the flat, don't we?" she said, proud of her growing knowledge of English. "We can be alone in the mountains; just you and I, Felipe. That will always be the best."

"But we'll have to take a flyer to New York and show you off to the governor, you know. We'll make a pile here, and then look New York over a bit."

"Is it not a place of many people?" she asked, a little timidly. "Larger than Quito?"

"It is said to be, dear, though it is not generally admitted in Quito."

"And the governor? That is your father, is it not, *querido?* Is he governor of a great province?"

"Well, no. But he's boss of a ward."

She studied this deeply, then abandoned it for a more important subject.

"Will he like me, Felipe? Will he be angry with you because of me?"

"Like you? Well, rather. He'll be angry because he did not see you first. He may fight me for you. We'll get you some ripping gowns. You'll kill them dead when you are dressed right. You'll make the old gentleman revise his opinion of me when he sees how I've won out."

She became vaguely uneasy. "Some gowns?" she asked. "You do not like my dresses?"

"They are all right here, Delicia," he hastened to explain. "They're fine for the Andes, and I shall always like you best when you wear them. But they cut them a wee bit differently for wear at the Waldorf. We'll fit you up in a jiffy when we strike shops. You'll like shopping when you get into it. All women like shopping."

"Let us send to Quito for pretty cloth.

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This serial began in the March number. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

No, you must not go, not yet, dearest. The *padre* will know ladies who will buy for us. Then you shall show me how to make gowns like they wear in this town of Waldorf. But let us wait a long time before we go to New York. There might be some one there. Tell me, Felipe, was there ever another girl?"

"Bunches of them," Phil answered, coolly. Delieia's face flushed and her eyes began to gleam. "The girls wouldn't leave me alone for a moment. They nearly had me a dozen times. If they knew about you, black gowns would be very popular in New York."

He glanced at her, smilingly, and saw tears gathering in her eyes. So he caught her in a great hug and laughed gayly.

"I never so much as looked at another girl," he lied. "You've got to teach me to make love from the very beginning."

"You do it very well, señor," she said, suspiciously. "Like this and this."

"I'm learning. Don't let up on me a minute; this is the critical period. I tell you what, sweetheart, that was a good idea about sending to Quito for stuff. They have some good French fabrics there—silks and lawns and linens. I'll make sketches to show you how the proper gowns look."

He took out his notebook and sketched with a draftsman's skill.

"Let's get right down to the foundation of things. There's corsets, for instance. You'll wear them, though you don't need them. Venus looks like a schoolmarm beside you, *querida*. They are things like this."

She squeezed his hand and watched with absorbing interest while he sketched.

"Felipe!" she demanded, with sudden severity, as the sketches grew, "how do you know so much about such things?"

"Saw them often in shop windows," he explained, but she drew away from him resolutely and sat down with her back toward him. He winked at the mountains and sighed loudly. She did not turn her head, so he sighed still more heavily and scrunched up the sketch with a great crackling of paper. Though she kept her face from him, he heard a little giggle.

"Don't do that, Felipe," she said. "I want the sketch. There are no shop windows here."

He slid down the slope to her, turned her head around with his hands and kissed her. She squirmed herself into a comfortable position against his shoulder.

"Felipe," she asked, after a few minutes of silence, "must we go away from here? Everything seems so sure here."

"You'll like it in New York," he insisted. "Besides, I really must show you off. When you've compared things a bit, you'll realize that this is no place for white folks. We Americans come down here simply because we need the money, and if we get it, we go back to God's country on the next boat."

"Money is very important?"

"It certainly is," he replied. "Gold is the most comfortable of metals."

"Have you much of gold?" she asked, naïvely.

"No, I haven't much," he admitted, flushing a trifle. "Of course, a chap arrives in New York with a good bit coming to him, because he can't spend money in a construction camp; but it doesn't last him long up there. By and by, I'll get to be an expert in railroad construction. I'll sit in an office in New York and charge thousands of dollars for roasting engineers who have been doing just what I have been doing here. We'll get along all right. I suppose my father is pretty well fixed. Oh, we'll not starve."

"Starve!" she said, much startled. "Does anyone ever starve?"

"Sometimes. But there ought to be a good deal of money made out of this very place when the railroad gets to Quito. Flour is worth twenty-five sucres a barrel down on the west coast, and we can raise two big crops of wheat a year up here, with no worry about labor, since we have our peons.

That's why I am fixing up the old mill. The stones are all right, and I can rig a wheel in no time. The irrigating ditch which brings water from the mountains used to be used as a mill race, also. It's stone lined and can be easily cleaned out. See it, curving out that gulch 'way up the mountain? They built things solidly in this country. The water's been racing down that ditch for a couple of centuries, I fancy."

"Felipe," she said, starting up and staring at the faint line of the ditch on the mountain above the hacienda, "I learned something about that ditch when I was little and lived here with my father before we went north to be killed and left me with the bad old priest in Machingui. How I hate that priest! He made me marry Pedro."

"Well, what do you know?" drawled Phil, ignoring her reference to Pedro. He wanted them both to forget Pedro. "You must not know anything which I don't know."

Anger died out of her face and excitement grew in it as her eyes followed the course of the old ditch.

"Felipe," she said, in sudden entreaty, "would it make you love me more if we were rich? Would it make any difference with our love if we went out into this world of which you talk so eagerly? If you had much gold, would you care for me less?"

"You are everything to me," he replied, with gentle gravity. "If I take you into the world, it is because we shall be happier there than here. You are but a child in your understanding of what lies beyond these mountains. There are new happinesses waiting for you, and I am eager to enjoy your delight in them. When I talk of wanting wealth it is because gold will open the doors of many pleasures to you. I know this world already, so that I am sure it will not make me waver in my love for you. It is to you the great change will come, yet I do not doubt your love."

She pushed him away from her, that she might look searchingly into his face.

"Forgive me, Felipe. I know that you will love me because I love you so strongly. It is only if I do not love you enough that I shall lose you, and I am not afraid. It was selfish of me to want to keep you from your real life. You shall have gold—all the gold you want. The ditch from the mountain is full of golden dirt. My father told me that loose gold was heaped in all the places where the stones of the ditch were broken. He took some of it north with him and gave me heavy pebbles of it. I have them yet somewhere. Some day he meant to collect all the gold, so he told no one but me."

Phil jumped up, blazing with excitement. "Good God!" he cried. His eyes wandered along the great length of the ditch, slanting down the mountain so that the water must run as fiercely as in a flume. "That's a natural sluice box. The water has been tearing through that stone-lined ditch for generations. Every rainy season sluiced the gulch into it. I have always believed there was placer gold around here. The old Incas got all their immense stores of gold by placer mining, just as the Indians do now over in the Oriente. These mountains have never been prospected. The fools don't know gold from gravel. Come on, dear old Delicia. I'm going to see about this."

He caught her by the hand and raced with her down the slope. She ran gracefully beside him, her face illumined with the joy of giving him happiness.

"Who-o-op!" he yelled. "We'll eat 'em alive in New York. We'll tear Paris wide open and put Monte Carlo on the hog!"

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE GREAT CLEAN-UP.

It was the next noon when Phil and Delicia, temporarily exhausted by their climb, sat beside the great ditch a hundred or two yards from where it tapped the river in a gulch that made

a niche near the summit of a mountain.

At the point where they clung to the mountain side, the walls of the ditch had been built up of stone, covered by sun-dried mud, so that they could not look into the water, though they could hear it racing within its channel.

The bubbling of water at this point told Phil that the canal had here been somewhat obstructed, probably by stones rolling into it, so that nature had made a riffle of her own for trapping the gold dust which might have swirled in that swift current. The roar of a considerable cataract falling into the gulch from which the ditch started told of powerful hydraulics which had been washing gold for a century or two unnoticed, if gold was there at all.

"Here's as good a spot as any, dearest," he said, nervously. "If there's any gold in this flume, it will be caught in the riffle I hear beyond that wall."

The girl smiled confidently.

"Say, Delicia, suppose, just to back your play, you feel behind those stones. The water is only a foot or two deep, and it runs too fast for anything to live in it. There are no snakes in these mountains, anyway. There won't be even any mud."

"*Pequero!*" she cried, waving her finger at him mockingly. "Timid child!"

"I *am* scared, by thunder!" he admitted. "I'm afraid I may wake up and find I've dreamed that you told me about the ditch."

"Lift me up, then."

He easily lifted her so that she could bend far over the wall of the canal. She promptly plunged in both arms.

"Hold me still higher," she urged. "*Dios!* this water is cold! You'll have to rub my arms for me."

He raised her, and she plunged deeper till the water boiled around her shoulders and jumped to kiss her lips.

"Shut your eyes and put me down."

She gave a wiggle of excitement as Phil obeyed her in silence, placing her feet carefully and shutting his eyes tight.

"Now—look!"

His eyes flew open to see her standing saucily before him holding with both dripping little hands a heap of dull, dark pebbles and reddish sand.

"Delicia, it is gold," he said, solemnly. "It certainly is gold. Let me feel of it."

"Very good, señor; and now does Delicia speak the truth?"

He looked at her oddly. "Do you know that you are a tremendously rich girl?" His voice was rather curt.

"I know that this stuff is heavy, and I am cold, and you are very unkind, Felipe."

With a gesture of impatience she opened her hands and let the nuggets fall in the gravel.

"My big, stupid husband," she said, half crying. "I shall hate the gold if it makes you like this."

Then Phil awoke from his amazement—to understand. He did the proper thing promptly and fervently.

"I am clean knocked out, disdainful lady," he murmured. "It is a bit of a facer to see you throwing away gold nuggets. I must have a look in that ditch for myself."

He climbed up, let himself into the icy water and scrambled about with both hands. He was whistling when he jumped down.

"Fortune has tagged me at last," he remarked. "I'm certainly it. There's a bucketful of nuggets and dust in that riffle alone. It has been collecting all along this ditch for years. We'll shut the water off to-morrow and have a little the biggest clean-up in history. I'll play banker for you; for it's all yours, Delicia. I'm fated to be the husband of 'that rich Spanish girl.'"

"Not at all," she interrupted, stamping her foot. "You shame me in saying such things. It is all yours. Does it make you much happier, *querido?*"

"It will make us a lot more comfortable, anyway. See here, we can—— Oh, I can't explain it to you because you haven't any idea of what it means. But I'll show you by and by.

"Let's go back to the house and plan

things." He scooped up the loose gravel where Delicia had dropped the nuggets and tossed it back in the running water. "It's been safe here so long that it can well stay a little longer. You must set the women to work making little bags out of cabulla fiber, like the saddlebags you made for me. They are tough enough to stand any strain. We'll put a couple of sacks into each of the flat brandy kegs and smuggle them down on mules. That's a common enough sight on the *carraterra.* There's going to be the devil to pay if the government finds out about this gold. I tell you what," he added, blazing with excitement, "I'll let Sam Adams in on this deal and get him to charter me one of the tramps which bring redwood ties from 'Frisco. We can smuggle the gold on board at the company's docks in Duran. We'll get Allison, the company's lawyer, to look up your titles to this place and make good any flaws; besides, I'll file mining claims. This hacienda is worth a good many millions of dollars."

"You mean that we must go away from here at once?" she asked, soberly. "Perhaps—perhaps somewhere else you'll——"

He was walking with his arm resting lightly on her shoulder, and now he patted her cheek consolingly. "You just wait," he declared. "I'll show you what for. You'll be the happiest and most envied of women." But she sighed.

They found three Indians in the *patio,* transplanting flowering bushes, orchids and scarlet-blossomed cactus which they had gathered from where Phil and Delicia had found them in their search of the ravines. Delicia ran over to them with little cries of satisfaction and with words of praise, at which the peons grinned sheepishly. Apparently she had forgotten all about the gold.

"It's no use my telling this in New York," he said, shaking his head to himself. "They are just going to think me a liar. Flowers don't make the women up home forget gold. Flowers make them speculate on the bank account of the chap who sends the orchids." His eyes followed Delicia lovingly. "I've certainly got to be good to her. She knocked all the props from under when she let herself care for me. She has nothing to fall back on, and I haven't, either," he added, after a moment's thought. "If she isn't happy traveling, we'll surely come back here, no matter how rich we are. Guess I'd better wet my luck according to rules and regulations." He strolled into his room.

"They must be watered every morning and every evening." Delicia fluttered over her new treasures, giving orders to the peons. "But why have you planted something in that dark corner?"

She walked swiftly from the sunlight into a shadowy corner under the thatch, but she started back with a cry of fright.

The idiot squatted before a bush which he had plucked up by the roots and had stood in an angle of the *patio* walls. The bush had waxen blossoms of white, small pods and a sickening odor. Muttering incoherently, he waved her back, dancing with grotesque steps before the bush.

"My flower! My flower! Diablo's flower. Leave it alone," he screamed. He knelt and spread his arms before the bush.

"Holy Mother!" gasped the girl. "The *floripondio!*" She leaned against the wall and began to tremble violently.

" 'Tis only the fool, *patrona!*" called one of the men, meekly. "He shall not harm you. Benita is sick, and the idiot got away to join us in the mountains where we were digging the plants. He is a snarling dog, but he does not bite. Will you have him well whipped?"

"Felipe!" she cried, her voice full of fright. "Come to me, Felipe."

Brian jumped out of the doorway to his room and was raging among the peons in a second.

"Who of you dogs has dared?" he roared. They shrank from him, whining that it was the idiot, Diablo.

"Felipe!" she called again. Then he

saw her in the shadow and strode over to her with outstretched arms.

"Sweetheart! Dearest! Don't cry. What has frightened you so?"

She clung to him, sobbing hysterically.

At the sound of the master's anger the idiot hid behind his bush. Phil's back was to the bush, and he did not at first notice the uncanny little beast whose eyes gleamed from the bush like those of a snake waiting to strike.

Slowly the idiot worked one claw-like hand through the branches, his skinny fingers clutching the haft of a knife. But Delicia, as if instinctively warned of danger to Felipe, looked up from where she had been hiding her wet face on Phil's shoulder and saw the evil thing.

"*Jesu!*" she shrieked, and pulled Phil away from the bush. "Manuel, Ramón! Kill me this viper!" The peons ran to her.

Phil wheeled about and saw the skinny fingers, the bony arm and the heavy knife. So this was it? This child of hell had planned to kill Delicia? He saw red. His boot crashed into the bush, and the knife clattered against a post.

"You'd sting, would you, you lizard?" he roared.

In spite of the idiot's clawing and biting, Phil gathered him in by the back of the neck and shook him as a hound worries a rabbit. Out into the sunlight he tossed the idiot, a good twenty feet at a throw, and would have rushed after him had not Delicia clung to his arm.

"Pitch that little devil out of the *patio*, some of you," Phil shouted. "And if I catch him in here again, I'll cut up the whole lot of you into shoestrings. You hear, sons of burros, children of stupid fathers?"

They all fled before his wrath, and he turned to comfort Delicia. She shivered, even in his embrace.

"Take me away from here, Felipe." she whispered. "Let us go a great ways quickly, and not come back for many, many years."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A PRIEST OF THE CHURCH.

The *padre* plodded down the Machingui trail after a month of missionary travel, and his tired face lighted as he saw the white hacienda far below him.

"My children," he said, and smiled happily. "Here is 'home.' The good God has been kind to me in my old age."

As he came lower, he wondered why the fields were deserted; save for old women, sitting in the sun, and children playing before the doors of huts, there was no one in the hollow. On looking closer, he saw that a peon was astride the ridgepole of the new chapel, finishing the thatch.

"She would not have my church neglected, no matter how important was other work," he thought, and was well pleased. "But where are the laborers? Surely, no evil can have come nigh this house!"

He rode anxiously until he had passed up the river through the gap and had come into the hollow of the Bleeding Heart. He called sharply to the peon on the chapel roof:

"Where is thy master and the people?" The man turned a sullen face, but crossed himself quickly when he saw the *padre*.

"They are all in the mountain, *Excellentisimo*. All are scraping the old ditch which brings water to the fields. It is an order of the *patrón*. He is there, and the *patróna*. It is some madness about heavy dirt. Every day they go, it being ordered." He slid off the low roof and took the *padre's* mule. "In one hour they return," he added, glancing at the lengthening shadows on the peak. The priest shook his head with a puzzled air.

"I wait in the hacienda," he said, placidly. "Remember, my son, thine is obedience, not foolish talk. Dost thou not find him a good master?"

"A good one, but strange. Never have I seen a *caballero* like him. He will work with his own hands. God grant that I never make him angry."

The priest entered the *patio* and tried the door to Brian's room where the whisky was kept. Much to his surprise, the *cura* found the door locked.

"Now what is going on here?" he exclaimed. He went to the room which Delicia had set apart for him, laid down his poncho and saddlebags, and returned to wait in the doorway of the *patio*, where he could see the course of the irrigating ditch up on the mountain.

By and by he saw a procession pick its way out of the mouth of a high gulch in which the ditch began. From the color of new earth, the *cura* could see that a trail had been recently dug along the course of the ancient sluice.

He saw the gay colors of Delicia's *bayeta* skirt fluttering and the tallness of the man who tramped behind her. The priest's grave face brightened at the sight of these two figures. A line of peons plodded behind the *patrón*. Some of them carried hoes and shovels, while others marched stiffly, two by two, as if chained together.

It puzzled the *padre*. He was growing old, and his eyes failed to see that these Indians carried long poles on which small boxes rested. The procession came down slowly and disappeared in a *quebrada*.

"What can that boy be up to now?" he asked, with a smile of anticipation. "Nothing wrong, since Delicia is with him. Perhaps he plans to erect the mill again and is cleaning the old race. These Americans!"

As he watched for them to reappear on the slope, he reproached himself a bit for his eagerness. "La! la! la! A priest of the Church wistful for the love of children. Three villages more I should have visited, yet loneliness for these children sends me back with my work undone. Father Juan, take care lest you fail of salvation."

They were to top the slope now, and the *cura* could hear Brian's rollicking song:

Ha! Ha! Ha!
What a funny old man you are!

while, breaking into the song, came the rippling laughter of Delicia. The *padre* got up and held out his hands to them. "Christ was happy once," he told himself. "It was at a wedding of two young people, for whom He made wine."

Delicia was the first to see the *padre* standing in his black cassock against the whitewashed wall of the *casa*.

"Look, Felipe! The *padre!*"

She fairly flew down the slope, but Phil, pounding after her, soon caught her, slipped his arm around her as she ran and swept her down the hill to the *padre*, laughing and breathless.

The *cura* extended one slim hand for Brian's clasp, while with the other he patted affectionately the shoulder of the girl, who clung to him and bade him welcome in gasps which protested at Phil's strength.

"A big boy and a romping girl," laughed the *cura*. "Penance for you both! The marriage estate should be more sedate. Has all gone well with you, daughter?" He saw the radiant look she gave Brian. "I needn't ask," he nodded.

"You tell him, dear," she coaxed.

Brian grinned broadly. "Has all gone well, *padre?* Has——" He looked back and saw that the peons had nearly reached them, so he finished his sentence by waving his hand at the heavy little boxes.

"Now, in the name of the most holy Sacrament, what have you there, Brian?" asked the puzzled priest.

Brian shrugged his shoulders in exaggerated unconcern. "Four little old boxes of gold. A mere trifle of five or six hundred thousand dollars to-day. Delicia has been cashing in on her forefathers. It is a million or two she had cluttering up the ditches. We needed the water for a mill, so I've been chucking out her nuggets."

"It isn't mine, *padre*," she interrupted. "It's all his. And he's just as excited over it as he can be."

The *cura* hurried to a box and scooped up a heavy handful of coarse gold. His serenity had gone, and his face was excited when he turned to stare at them questioningly. No man, not even an old priest, feels virgin gold

trickling through his fingers without being stirred from placidity.

"*Por Dios!*" he exclaimed. "*Dios!*"

But Brian had grown used to the feel of nuggets and merely laughed at the *padre's* excitement. Delicia, however, was troubled as she watched the strange look growing in the *padre's* face and noted the trembling of his lips. She went to the *cura* as he stood with both shaking hands clutching gold and, slipping her arm through his, drew him a little from the ore boxes.

"*Padre,*" she said, "it shall make both Felipe and you happier. It is clean gold—good gold. It gives you power to help your poor people. I have already planned that. There is so much of it! There is plenty for all of us. Your chapel shall become a church. Felipe and I shall send you the finest of altars and pictures and images. Your church shall be the richest and the most beautiful, so that pilgrimages shall be made to it."

Brian, too, came to the *cura* and put his arm around the bent old shoulders. "Certainly, dear old chap. You can have a cathedral if you want it, a great church. 'Santa Delicia' we'll call it. We'll make you the Bishop of Imbaburu yet. You shall go with us to London and Paris and Rome for adornments, and shall see again the friends of your student days."

At the touch of their hands the priest cast down the wet, cold nuggets. Shame came upon him, and he hid his face in his hands.

"Forgive me, God!" they heard him whisper. "I have sinned in my heart."

Some of the peons crossed themselves, others knelt as they saw he was praying.

"Oh, come, *padre,*" remonstrated Phil. "You are tired with your long ride. Come into the *casa* and rest. We'll tell you all about it. I don't wonder it rattled you. You should have seen me when I first made the strike! Delicia is the only one with real nerves. She doesn't care a centavo for a ton of the stuff."

"Father," urged Delicia, soothingly, "let us go and see the chapel. It is almost finished; for I would not let Felipe take all the men from it, even to get his precious gold. As for this heavy dirt—it is only dirt, after all."

The priest drew himself up with dignity. He raised his hands and prayed fervently, beseeching God to make good an evil thing. Brian shrugged his shoulders, but Delicia prayed in her heart. She asked that all things, riches and poverty, happiness and sorrow, might work together to make Felipe love her more.

A child came timidly to them from one of the huts and bobbed down before the priest. He saw her at his feet when he opened his eyes.

"Well, littlest one?" he asked, gently.

She said, brave in her temporary importance:

"The old woman, Benita, hearing your voice, bids me hurry to you because she is fast dying."

"I will go to her," Delicia cried. "I did not know she was so ill."

But the *cura* forbade her. "I must go alone, Delicia. She has need of the offices of Mother Church. Rather, run you to my room and fetch the silver box in my saddlebags."

He turned from the gold and hurried after the child, serenity in his face once more.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### ANSWERING A FOOL.

Brian sat whistling in his room, Delicia helping him weigh that day's gold by candlelight. It was late, but Father Juan had not yet returned from his ministrations to the dying woman at the hut.

Brian had made himself rude scales in which he used his revolver for a weight. He was a fastidious man about his "guns," as are most men who wear a revolver for something else besides bravado; so he knew that, each time the nuggets tipped up the revolver, he had weighed about three pounds of treasure.

"Monotony, *querida,*" he remarked, "is the bane of existence. For all the

fun there is in it I might just as well be weighing nails."

Delicia said, absent-mindedly: "Yes, we need nails very much."

She was filling stout little bags as Phil weighed the dust and nuggets, but he saw that her mind was far from her work.

"There's nothing you can do for Benita," he said, kindly. "She is about a hundred years old and had to go some time, you know."

Then Delicia astonished him by saying, in a hard voice: "Yes, it is well that she dies. God rest her soul." She murmured a prayer for the dead. "God rest her soul—and mine, also."

Brian looked at her with concern. "Delicia, why don't you go to bed? You are fagged with our tramp up the mountains. The *padre* will be in shortly, and he'll help me finish sacking this. If there's anything to tell you about the old woman, I'll wake you."

She came wearily to him, fear being in her eyes.

"Felipe! Husband!" she whispered. Brian jumped up and put his arms about her as if in protection from something which had frightened her.

"What is it, Delicia?"

"Oh, it's nothing. You know I love you, don't you?—that whatever I do, I do from loving you?"

"Of course," he replied, cheerily. "Now run to bed. What you need is a good sleep."

He went with her to the door and kissed her. For a while he stood in the *patio*, gazing up at the sparkling belt of the Milky Way, which is seen most gorgeously in the tropical Andes.

"Pretty bit of ceiling decoration," he observed. Then he sought the Southern Cross and sighed. "I wish you were the Great Dipper, full of cocktails." He went back to his gold scales, closing the door behind him.

The *padre* came wearily up the slope toward the *casa*, dragging the cowering figure of the idiot. Now and then the imbecile's limp figure stiffened and hung back. At this, the priest shook him savagely.

"The curse of the Moor upon you!" he said, his voice breaking. "Have you not already made trouble enough? If I were a man, instead of a priest, I'd pitch you into the canyon and go cheerfully to hell for it."

The idiot fawned on the *cura* and shambled faster. When they had come into the *patio*, the *padre* thrust the idiot down into a corner.

"Sit there till you're summoned." The imbecile squatted on his heels and began to gabble to himself, at which the *cura* kicked him. As the priest came to the closed door, he heard Brian whistling. He listened long.

"He is alone," the *padre* muttered, but he hesitated to go in. Twice he walked softly past the door, then made the sign of the cross and entered.

"Hello, *padre!*" Phil said, cheerily. "There are cigarettes, and you know where the bottle is. Rotten stuff, but it bites that tired feeling, and you look as if one would do you a lot of good. I'll be through taking stock of hardware in a moment and will join you. How's the old woman?"

"Benita is dead." He moved into the shadows and sat down on a bench. "Where is Delicia?"

"She is feeling seedy and has gone to bed. Look here, *padre*, I'm afraid Delicia is not well."

The *padre* made no answer, but got up and dropped the heavy bar which Brian had put on his door since he had found gold.

"Son——" he began.

Brian glanced up keenly. "You take a big drink, old fellow," he said, and poured the *padre* a full glass.

The priest gulped it down, but he was still white and wan and stern. Brian watched him with narrowed eyelids. They used to say on the line that Phil Brian could smell a fight while it was a week off.

"You may fire when you're ready," said the big American, coolly.

"Did you ever hear of the *floripondio*, Mr. Brian?" asked the priest.

"I did not. I'm no bally botanist. Why?"

"The *floripondio* is a shrub that

grows in the recesses of these mountains. It is—it has——"

He stammered, jumped up and walked nervously. As he passed Phil's table he picked up the revolver and opened it as if in idle curiosity. The shells fell to the floor.

"Pretty good gun," remarked Brian. "You ought to carry one. What about this *floripondio?*"

"The *floripondio* bears a pod which contains poisonous seeds. When these seeds are given to an animal, it goes mad and usually dies in delirium. Sometimes it does not kill. It does worse. It is kin to the *stramonium,* which the old priest of Apollo at Delphi used in order to induce religious frenzy. I have known——"

"Well?"

"I have known of several cases in these very mountains," the *cura* plunged on, "where women have given *floripondio* to husbands whom they hated. There was a woman in Machingui years ago who did this, and her husband, losing his mind, became a slave to the lover she afterward took."

Brian jumped up with an ugly oath. The priest raised a trembling hand.

"What in thunder are you driving at? Let's have it," Brian roared.

"The *floripondio* was given to Don Pedro Guzman," the priest made faint answer. The big American reached out, caught the priest by the arm and drew him over to the light.

"I'd hate to kill you. But just you tell me that Delicia poisoned her first husband!"

The priest stood uncomplaining in Phil's grip.

"God forbid I should tell such a vile untruth," he said, very gently. "Benita poisoned Don Pedro. He had killed her son."

Phil relaxed his grip and sat down heavily. "That was a body blow, *padre,*" he said, and poured himself a stiff drink. "I thought you meant Delicia. So that was the delirium which sent Pedro raving over the cliff? I had thought it was drink. It's a nasty mess. Deuce take such a land, anyway! As soon as I can smuggle this gold-down country, I'm going to take Delicia away for good."

The *padre* moistened his lips with his tongue. Delicia had hung a long crucifix on the wall of Phil's room, and the priest held out an appealing hand to the figure of the bleeding Christ.

Words formed themselves to tell Brian of his love for Delicia and for him; of how they were to him the core of his heart, the children of his old age. It would be a small thing for him to sacrifice even his soul for them. But other words blurted themselves out.

"Don Pedro is not dead!"

Brian stared, his face stiffening into a mask of horror.

"You—lie!" he said, thickly.

"Diablo, the idiot, is Don Pedro Guzman, husband of Delicia. Oh, forgive me, but it's so!"

The horror grew in Phil's face.

"What a damned insult!" he said, brokenly. "And I thought you loved her!"

The priest winced and turned piteously to the Christ on the wall. As if gaining fresh resolution from the crucifix, he stepped to the door and threw it wide open.

"Come here, you!" he called.

From the darkness of the *patio* a gibbering arose, a silly snicker, a burst of idiotic laughter.

"Answer that, Philip," said the priest. "Don Pedro Guzman is speaking to you."

"I will," shouted Brian. He snatched his revolver from the table and rushed to the door. But the priest stood in his way with forbidding arms.

"Get out of my way! I'm not one of your peons, scared of the Church!" But Phil hesitated to deal roughly with the old man.

"Stop, my son!" the *cura* commanded, with sudden authority. "Will the murder of a helpless idiot sanctify your love in the years to come?"

Phil made an impatient movement with the revolver. "It is not loaded," added the priest.

"I'll kill him with my bare hands," Phil said, hoarsely, and hurled the re-

volver out the doorway toward the cackling laugh. Then the idiot became silent.

"Philip! Oh, Philip!" pleaded the *padre,* and the infinite tenderness in his voice set Brian's heart to trembling. He walked to his chair, threw himself down and buried his face in his arm among the sacks of gold.

"Delicia!" he moaned. "Delicia!"

His shoulders heaved, and he drew long breaths. There came the rush of bare little feet, and Delicia's arms were around him.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### A DEAL IN FUTURES.

As if she had realized that she had to fight squarely against civilization, Delicia had dressed herself with the barbaric splendor of the "St. Felipe Day" when Brian had first loved her.

Her costume now had none of the shadings of Brian's sketches of New York gowns. She wore her *bayeta* of dark blue and cardinal; her fine white linen and laces; her chained bracelets and armlets of beaten gold; and the blazing emerald in its crude setting. But there were no red flowers in her hair.

Instead she wore defiantly a waxen blossom of the *floripondio,* which gave forth a sickly odor. Her face, too, was savage in its beauty as she glared at the sad-eyed priest while she shielded Phil with arms that were tender even in her wrath.

"You are a bad man, Father Juan," she cried. "A meddlesome, wicked man, bringing evil to one who has been your strong friend. I hate all priests."

"Delicia! Delicia! Don't!" implored Brian. Manlike, he felt the injustice to another man, even while he was being loved splendidly.

The girl made no answer to him, save in the strength of her young arms, but she still blazed up at the old man in black.

"What is that idiot-devil doing at the master's door? Has Felipe not forbidden it?" she demanded, imperiously.

At the mention of the idiot the horror of poisoned husbands grew upon the gentleman from New York. He lifted his haggard face and braced his shoulders, forcing her arms from him.

"It is you who must tell me what the idiot is doing at our door," he said, very gently.

The girl's arms fell like lead, the chains swinging together with the softness of gold. So it was not to be enough that she loved him mightily? She was to be judged! She arose and stood proudly before the two men.

"Because I loved you"—the defense came before the charge—"I made the stumbling block in your path to me as dust under your feet. Whoever that thing out there may have been, he is now your slave. Because I love you."

"Before God, Delicia, did you poison your husband?" Brian asked, solemnly.

"She did not. I have it from Benita. It was the Indian woman, whose son he had beaten to death," broke in the priest.

The girl made a defiant gesture. "I wear the *floripondio.* I wear the flower that brought my lord back to me. I am not ashamed."

"But Benita gave Don Pedro the poison unknown to you," insisted the priest, gazing not at her but at Brian.

"It was a long time ago that her son died," declared the girl. "She did not use the *floripondio* until she knew I longed for Felipe."

"And Don Pedro would have killed Delicia," went on the *cura.* "Benita told me." Brian sat as still as stone, and Delicia, looking at him, stood still more erect. "He would also have killed you, Brian," the *cura* added. At this, the girl smiled disdainfully.

"Such as he kill Felipe?" she asked, in fine incredulity. "Listen, Felipe!" she declared. "What the *padre* says of Benita is true. But of what importance? Hear the truth. Because that snake coiled in your path, he was changed into the lowest, the most helpless, the least important. When I prayed for his death, Benita heard me. When I learned what she had done, I was glad, thinking he would die. When

he did not die, I drove him forth with a whip, hoping he would wander over a cliff. And when he would not fall, I took comfort in his loathsome looks and his idiocy, since you, returning, would not know him for Pedro."

Her voice, clear and defiant, broke into an agony of pleading. She extended her arms to the gray-faced young man. "Felipe! Sweetheart! Dearest! What is to be my punishment for loving you thus?"

All that he had heard became as nothing to Brian. He saw only Delicia. He heard only the agony in her voice. He felt only her love. Young blood answered young blood. He came swiftly to her, taking her to him in his strength.

"This and this and this, by God!" he cried, kissing her. The girl, clinging to him, began to sob violently.

For a space no one spoke. Then the priest said solemnly: "Philip Brian, you must go away in the morning."

"Oh, don't bother me!" retorted Brian. The girl's eyes began to gleam again through her tears.

"Because you love her, you must go away from her," repeated the *cura*. "You must go away to save your love."

Neither of them paid any attention to him. So he went to the door and called softly. The idiot crept in, drooling and snapping his fingers. He sprawled at the priest's feet.

"Look, Mr. Brian!" called the priest, harshly. "Look at the husband of the woman in your arms!"

Brian stared sullenly, but Delicia sprang from him. Snatching up Brian's quirt, she struck the idiot across the face. Sobbing and slobbering, the fool ran on all fours under the table.

The priest crossed himself, but Brian gently took the whip from Delicia.

At his touch she went limp and permitted him to draw her down to a bench beside him. Her eyes wandered to the crucifix and rested there.

Brian sat beside her, grim, but with his arm still about her. When the *padre* saw that Delicia had fixed her gaze on the image of Christ in agony, he spoke to her:

"As He suffered through love and was patient, Delicia, so must you. Felipe must go away from you for a while, because staying will become shame to him. He is a man of another people, and not even your love can make him forget what is now huddled under the table. Even if he takes you away, he will not forget. If you bear him children, his children shall have to conceal shame. Your love will come to be something which he will have to endure bravely. You would have him love you more, but he will love you less. The memory of the idiot will eat his heart out. You are a woman, and love is sufficient; but he is a man, born and bred among those who scorn the lovers of other men's wives and who do not find justification in mere loving. Would you bring shame upon Felipe?"

In his heavy heart Brian repeated the priest's words and knew they were true. But he said: "Don't listen to him, Delicia."

"Felipe will always love me," she said, bravely.

"With a stained love. Is it such a poor thing that you will smirch it rather than wait?" demanded the priest.

The girl had leaned forward and was searching Brian's face. Suddenly she gave a piteous cry.

"No! no! Help me, father, to send him away!" She left Brian and came to the priest.

"Do you think I am cur enough to run away and leave Delicia with that thing?" Brian said, roughly. He jumped up to come to Delicia; but the priest raised his hand, forbidding him.

"As God is my judge, Philip Brian, I will watch over Delicia. I will never leave her. In whatever part of the world you wait, you may be sure I am here. I am an old man, a priest of the Church. Surely you may trust me. You are both my children, dear to me. When that broken man is dead, I will send for you, but you must leave Ecuador for a while. Young blood runs fast. A mountain range is soon passed, but the sea is wide. You must go."

"Must I go, Delicia?"

The girl came to him at once, stronger than he.

"Yes, dear heart," she said, softly. "You will go, but you will come back to me. I shall love you enough, and you will surely return. Perhaps the good God will be satisfied with your going and will not keep you long from me."

Brian got a grip on himself. The fighting instinct rose within him.

"Excuse me, old chap, if I've cut up a bit rough," he said. "I'm hard hit. We've got it to do, that's all."

The priest had fallen to his knees before the Christ and was praying with tears streaming down his face.

"It must be nearly morning now," continued Phil, quietly. "The candles are sputtering."

He started toward the door, but, as he passed the table, the idiot snarled at him. Brian stooped and jerked the idiot into the light.

"Let's have a look at you, and see how long you are likely to live! You look as if you had been dug up once already, you skeleton of an ape; but I suppose you'll live years yet, just to spite me."

The imbecile rolled over on his back and spat up at Brian. Then, as Phil opened the door, he darted into the *patio* and disappeared.

The quick dawn of the equator had begun. The mountains were growing out of the black like figures on an overexposed negative in a developing fluid. Delicia came to him and crept into his arms. Together they watched the light grow on the peaks. The stars faded rapidly, and the sky cleared of duskiness. So sorrow came in the morning.

"I'll saddle Enginero, dearest," he said, with a heavy sigh. She would not let him go, but, quivering, she raised her lips to his.

So he stayed an hour longer, but only an hour.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

# A PROFITABLE HOAX

AN amusing story is told of the ingenious scheme resorted to by a company of actors in Berlin, not long ago, in order to get together a big audience for a certain benefit performance.

Some days before the eventful evening there appeared in all the Berlin papers an advertisement to the following effect:

"A gentleman who has a niece and ward possessing a disposable property of fifteen thousand thalers, together with a mercantile establishment, desires to find a man who would be able to manage the business and become the husband of the young lady. The possession of property or other qualification is no object. Apply ——."

Hundreds upon hundreds of letters poured in in reply to this advertisement. On the morning of the benefit day each person who had sent a reply received the following note:

"The most important point is, of course, that you should like one another. I and my niece will visit the —— Theater this evening, and you can just drop in upon us in Box No. 1."

As a matter of course the theater was crammed. All the best paying places in the house were filled in the evening with a public mostly male, attired in a style seldom seen even at the Royal Opera itself. Glasses were leveled on all sides in the direction of No. 1 box, and eyes were strained to catch the first glimpse of the niece when she should appear in company with her uncle; but uncle and niece came not, and the disconsolate lovers—of a fortune—were left to clear up the mystery as best they might.

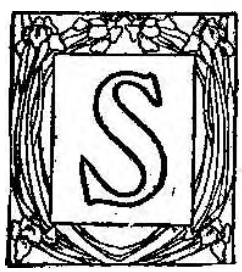
# Romances of the Race Course

By Charles Steinfort Pearson

[NOTE.—The host of readers who found enjoyment in the "Romances of the Race Course" which appeared in THE POPULAR MAGAZINE during 1904 will be glad to learn that we have arranged with the author, Mr. Charles Steinfort Pearson, for an entirely new series of stories along the same lines. "The Missing Jockey" is the second of the new series.—THE EDITOR.]

## II.—THE MISSING JOCKEY

*(A Complete Story)*



OMETHING out of the ordinary was on the tapis for the race track "regulars."

It was just after the sixth and last race had been decided and the last straggler had vanished from the grand stand.

After the line of fortunate winners on the final race had filed up to the cashiers in the betting ring and been paid from the japanned tin boxes, each of the "bookies," in turn, jumped off his stool. Instead of making a wild dash, as usual, for automobile, outside the grounds, or hansom cab, or even electric car—the resort of "pikers"—the layers one by one hastened up to the paddock.

On ordinary occasions the track inclosure at this hour would have presented a wholly deserted appearance. The racers themselves having been returned to their stalls, at adjoining stables, or another race course near by, the officials and others would have left for the day. As it was now, nearly as many of the racing fraternity were on hand as would go to make up a fair-sized crowd on a rainy day.

The newspaper men wore expectant looks. Even the trained, unemotional countenances of the "regulars" showed expectation. They would not have been lingering there at that hour even for pleasure. Possibly the prospect of seeing a stiff six-round go between two stable followers might have detained some of them, not all.

As the "regulars" passed into the paddock from the entrance on the lawn, unchallenged by gatekeeper, they gathered in little knots, chatting together, "kidding" one another—doing everything but offering confidences—in the manner which seems peculiarly characteristic of the men who make a business of racing.

"Nothing doing yet," volunteered a tall, lanky chap, with a white, wide-brimmed hat, stamping him as a product of the "free and boundless" West.

"I didn't think the news came straight, anyway," continued the tall fellow, disgustedly. "I never take any stock in this free information business. Pshaw! It's me for town."

He did not start, but picked up a splinter from the ground, pulled out a knife and whittled it, meditatively.

His companion, to whom he had spoken—a short, dried-up man, smooth-faced and heavily wrinkled—simply puckered up his mouth and looked keenly up the track to where some

The first story of this series, "The Form Player," was published in the June number, which can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents.

stables were located on a little knoll of ground back of the homestretch.

Bending forward eagerly, he seemed to be scanning something at the stables.

"If I don't mistake, they're bringing the mare out now," he remarked, slowly, half to himself, half to the other. "I'll tell in a minute."

Unslinging his glasses, he adjusted them carefully on a moving object half a mile away.

"That's her all right," he stated, positively, lowering the glasses.

"I guess that tip was the goods. Here comes 'Gyp,' and her jock is coming along, too. They mean business, I guess."

The tall fellow gave a grunt of approval, and trained his glasses on the horse which was being led rapidly down the track in the direction of the paddock.

By the time the big, black mare—colored stable man at her head, a heavy-set, serious-faced man of about fifty and a young man of half that age walking alongside—had reached the paddock it was alive with excitement. All eyes were centered on the sleek-coated black mare.

She was Gyp, the idol of the race-going crowds of her time; the racing marvel of her sex. Gyp, the five-year-old mare, owned by Louis Legard Branscomb, who was as proud of his jet thoroughbred as most men are of their beautiful wives. The mare was practically unbeaten; not only champion of her sex, but the conqueror of some of the highest class stake horses of the entire country.

"The Black Amazon of the Turf," "Prima Donna of the Paddock," were some of the terms by which she was known. No truer, gamer-hearted thoroughbred ever had looked through a bridle than this same Gyp—a massively built animal for a race horse, as regarded her quarters and broad chest. She had clean-cut legs, wonderful, humanlike eyes, set on either side of a wide forehead, and nostrils always a-quiver with life and vigor. She was a turf wonder, truly.

Gyp was on the eve of adding another laurel leaf to her crown; of shattering a turf tradition—if such a thing were possible. Her admirers believed it so.

It was the latter part of May, and the first of the year's mile and a quarter classic events was to take place at another track three days later—the "Boulevard Handicap" it was called. Worth many thousands of dollars to the winner, besides the honor of capturing it, in its many years of existence no mare or filly had come within striking distance of it, although many had made attempt. In racing lore, a thoroughbred of the gentler sex is a "filly" until she is five years old, after which she is denominated a mare.

Owing to the fact that Gyp was what is known as a "late horse," one which takes a lot of hard training to be made ready to race, she never had started in the "Boulevard"—the earliest race. Her trainer and owner had decided to try and get her "fit" for it this season. It had been an open winter, which had added greatly to the success of the experiment.

Judging from the expressions of admiration of the horsemen crowded around the mare to examine into her condition, and the many flattering words spoken to her owner, Branscomb, who had come into the paddock from his automobile, outside, Gyp was already a winner.

For some minutes the racing people surged about the horse.

"I guess we might as well have the trial now, Richard," said Branscomb to the trainer. The owner was about forty years of age, with smooth-shaven, heavy-jawed face, which bespoke no trifling. Richard Hearn was quiet-faced, serious and businesslike in his demeanor—an ideal trainer.

What had drawn the race people there at this time was the report, now verified, that Gyp was to be given a public trial for the handicap. Branscomb had ridiculed the idea of having the mare "tried out" in secret, for he knew such a thing was well-nigh impossible. Perhaps pride in his horse actuated him in thus taking everybody

into his confidence. Something else, too, made him careless regarding the "fitness" of his horse becoming public property.

Hearn, who had busied himself about the racer for a few minutes, testing every strap and leather, stood back from her a few paces.

"All ready, Cupid," he said.

"Cupid" Palisser, the celebrated jockey attached to the Branscomb stable, and the only one who could ride the self-willed mare to the best advantage, owing to her fondness for him, was a chubby-faced young man, whose size was that of a boy of twelve or fourteen. He had crisp, curly hair, blue eyes, and the appearance of a cherub, despite his twenty-five or twenty-six years—which had gained for him the title of "Cupid."

He was lifted into the saddle by the trainer. He wore a sweater under his everyday jacket and golf cap.

"The weight she carries is the same assigned to her in the handicap, gentlemen," said Branscomb, as the horse and jockey moved away.

The horsemen rushed to obtain positions of vantage in the grand stand and on the lawn by the judges' stand. The trainer followed the horse up the track.

Scores of "stop" watches clicked as a handkerchief fell and the mare sprang into her stride.

So intent were the watchers on the marvelous action of the racing wonder as she skimmed around the track with the lightness of a big, black bird, swooping down to earth every three or four yards, that many of the timers forgot to "catch" the first quarter. Those who did could not believe it. Past the half, the three-quarters, she skimmed, going easier than at the start.

At the mile, the men holding the watches looked from them into each other's faces in amazement.

When the mare had passed the judges' stand and the finish, heads were bent together over timepieces, there was a murmur of consultation, ending with a combined yell of pleasure and astonishment.

Gyp had broken a record for the distance.

With one accord they rushed again to the paddock to look her over and see how she had stood the final workout. They found her not distressed in the least and actually nuzzling the hand of the jockey who had ridden her, coaxing him to play.

Like all prima donnas, whether of operatic or turf performances, Gyp was intensely whimsical and very positive in her likes and dislikes. One of her likes was Palisser. With any other rider on her back, even at exercise, she would sulk and become fractious. On more than one occasion the mare had started to "savage" the boy who had tried to ride her. For two years Palisser had been in Branscomb's employ, and since Gyp's turf supremacy had been established no other jockey had ridden her. Once, when the jockey had been incapacitated just before a big race which it was believed she could win easily, the mare had been "scratched" from the race. Gyp's fondness for Cupid had dated from their first acquaintance.

As the horsemen considered the trial and the appearance of the mare, they were of the opinion that the race was at her mercy.

"That is, if Cupid rides her," the same little dried-up man muttered, in a corner of the paddock. The tall fellow with the Western get-up, to whom the remark was addressed, grinned and nodded.

"That's it. 'Play or pay,' eh?"

Consulting together in low tones, they left the paddock.

"I guess we'll take the mare back now, Mr. Branscomb," said Hearn.

Just at this time, while the attention of both trainer and owner was distracted, Tom, Palisser's colored valet, stepped up to the jockey and said:

"A lady wants to see you outside, Mr. Cupid."

"All right; tell her I'll be with her in a moment," he said, hurrying to change to his good clothes.

It was to be supposed, of course, it was Cora Hearn, daughter of the

trainer, the girl to whom he was engaged. She was just nineteen—a dainty, laughing, winsome creature, with dark hair and deep violet eyes and a strikingly fair complexion. She was like a doll in appearance, being as undersized as Palisser, but as perfectly proportioned. She was devoted to the jockey, and he as much to her, apparently.

Their wedding had been set for three days later, the very evening of the day when the handicap was to be decided. So confident were all hands that the mare would win that the wedding event was to be a sort of sequel to the victory.

Branscomb was pleased that his jockey should wed the daughter of his trainer. Hearn was intensely gratified at the prospect. Palisser some time before had been ruled off, along with his employer, for an undoubted "pulling" of a horse ridden by the jockey. Hearn had employed Palisser on occasions when his employer did not need his services, and felt that the boy had been so dominated by his manager that he had simply been led astray. Hearn knew the great amount of native ability the boy possessed, which, directed in proper channels, would make him a leading jockey. At the time of his downfall Palisser had been very popular with the public.

As much as anything else, his consent to follow his employer's suggestion had been secured by a woman, two or three years older than himself, much to be seen at the race course. Palisser had imagined himself in love with her. She had encouraged the idea. She had seemed to love him.

After Palisser's ruling off, Hearn had persuaded Branscomb, who possessed great influence, to work for the boy's reinstatement. His license had been granted at Branscomb's request, and he had entered that owner's employ. One of the stipulations Hearn demanded was that he should refuse to have any further friendship with Madge Raymond, his former sweetheart.

Palisser had lived up to his promises, and, as Hearn had hoped, away from the former evil influences he had developed into the premier jockey of the day, worthy of every trust.

"I guess he's all right if Gyp takes to him, Richard," the mare's owner had remarked to the trainer, laughingly, a short while after Gyp had evinced her fondness.

Then Cora and the jockey, whose full name was James Worthington Palisser, had "taken" to one another, the engagement following.

While Gyp's owner, Branscomb, was a sportsman, he also was a shrewd speculator. This being the case, he had invested several thousand dollars in the "winter books" on the chances of his horse to win the Boulevard Handicap.

A word of explanation is necessary in regard to these. The entries for a racing fixture at any big track, if the event is to take place in the latter part of May or June, close in January. Owners must specify what horses will appear in the race; of course, having the privilege of withdrawing them before the race. Immediately after the entries have closed, with the nominations of fifty or sixty horses, the official handicapper gets to work and assigns the weights.

When they have been announced, odds are offered in the winter books by men who lay that kind of "prices," on this or that horse. As probably not more than one-fifth or one-sixth of the whole number of horses entered will really start, of course long odds are offered; as in case of a horse failing to start no money is returned. As the play is supposed to be pretty well divided among the different horses the bookmakers can afford to give long odds on each.

As soon as circulars had been sent out by a Western concern Branscomb went to work quietly, through agents, and bet thousands on Gyp. At first he got fifteen to one, then finally the odds were cut to ten. At the close he stood to win, not a small fortune in the event of Gyp winning, but a large one. It seemed as if she would win. One bookmaker stood to lose enough to clean him out of all he had.

Next morning after the trial Brans-

comb was at the track where the mare was quartered and which was to be the scene of her first big race of the season. She was quartered in one of the finest appointed stables. It was fitted up with a room for the star jockey of the establishment, and Palisser already had established some of his material therein.

"Where's Cupid?" inquired the owner, a little anxiously, of Hearn, after he had inspected the mare fully to his satisfaction. Now that he had found her all right, the jockey was the next point in consideration.

"I haven't seen him this morning, sir," was Hearn's reply.

"I guess he'll be around after a bit. Probably he went to town last night to make all arrangements about the wedding. He's all right, I'll vouch. I'll ask Cora where he is."

Cora had not seen him. Hearn and his motherless daughter lived in a cottage not far from the track.

Branscomb returned to town.

Later in the day he appeared again at the track, expecting to find the jockey there. Palisser had not turned up.

"Where in the devil can he be?" thundered Branscomb. "He ought to have sense enough to know he should stay about the stable at this critical time. Gyp will get restless."

Cora already had shown signs of weeping, but Hearn did not think it worth while to inform the owner of that. It was only her happiness at stake. Branscomb had a large amount of money.

Hearn was worried to the point of informing the police. He wondered if the young fellow, under the excitement of the approaching racing and matrimonial events, had "fallen by the wayside." Secretly he sent Tom to look for him in the different places where the jockeys and other horse people were wont to be found. Tom reported late that night that he could not find his master anywhere.

"You are keeping something back from me, you black rascal," threatened Hearn, looking at him keenly.

Tom hung his head and strove to make denial.

Hearn had him by the throat in a minute.

"Out with it!" he yelled.

"Ah done heard he wuz in de Racers' Retreat restaurant in Brooklyn las' night wid a lady," admitted the valet.

Tom was true blue. He would not tell of having delivered the message to Palisser.

Inquiry at the café elicited no information as to the appearance there of the jockey and his companion. The waiter who had told Tom of his seeing the couple there was off; and so Hearn was beaten in that direction. A stable boy thought, though he was not certain, that he had seen Palisser in a hansom cab with a female at the other end of Brooklyn Bridge, the evening before.

Finally, Hearn informed the police, for he was confident that the boy was not absent of his own volition. They had slim clews to work on. Hearn went to bed, but spent a restless night. Poor Cora! The girl was silent, after he had answered her one question: that her husband to be had not been found.

The day before the race—the next day—the papers came out with big headlines, announcing the disappearance. In view of the interest attached to the race it was an important "story." Picking up a daily sheet, Hearn read the heading:

JOCKEY MISSING

*HANDICAP FAVORITE*
*MAY BE SCRATCHED*

Cupid Palisser, Only Rider Who Could Properly Pilot Great Race Mare Gyp, Mysteriously Disappears

STABLE PEOPLE WORRY OVER LOSS OF BETS

Hearn read all the facts, so far as they had been gleaned, that the jockey was about to be married, and that, owing to the disposition of the race mare, she would submit to no one else to ride her. Everybody was well aware of that idiosyncrasy of the horse.

It was hinted that perhaps a former love affair had a part in Palisser's absence.

Evidently Branscomb had taken that view of the matter. When he reached the stable he was white with rage and disappointment.

"That crooked little imp has given us the double cross," he shouted, shaking the newspaper in Hearn's face.

"Did you read that?" he added, hoarsely, pointing with accusing finger at the suggestion that the jockey had gone back on his employer and jilted his fiancée.

Hearn nodded.

"Well, that's my view of it," thundered Branscomb, excitedly. "That's the solution of the matter. I'm sorry for your daughter, but I'm sorry for myself, too. My only regret is that we ever tied up with a crooked chap like that. Once crooked, always crooked, is my motto. You persuaded me into that business, Hearn," he bellowed. "And here I stand to lose thousands just because no one else can ride the mare!"

The trainer could only bow his head to meet the storm.

"Can't we try Finnegan on Gyp?" demanded the owner. Finnegan was the most promising 'prentice boy in the stable.

"No use, Mr. Branscomb," declared the trainer. "She won't stand for him."

The mare was brought out, however, and the boy given the mount on her.

Instantly Gyp put back her ears and started to buck-jumping. Finnegan was glad to dismount. Branscomb began reviling Gyp for a sulky brute, and Palisser for a traitor.

It was about noon when Branscomb, who had ceased condemning the trainer for recommending Palisser, made the suggestion that they should look into the jockey's quarters to see if they could find anything which would give an inkling as to his whereabouts.

The first thing that met their eyes was a letter, lying on the floor, as though it had been dropped carelessly by some one in a hurry.

Branscomb picked it up with an exclamation and ran his eyes over it. It was in a woman's handwriting. Hearn read it over the other's shoulder. It was as follows:

DEAR CUPID: You know I never have ceased to care for you, and I would go to the end of the world with you. How could I know that you simply were playing a part with old Hearn and the girl? I supposed that you had forgotten all about poor little me—never cared to see me again.

Your letter, making the proposition to me to marry you and accompany you to Europe, was such a surprise, a joyful one, that I could scarcely believe it. You don't know, dearest, how I have suffered the past year or so.

Of course you know what my answer is already. I would go to perdition with you, if necessary. It will take me but a short time to get my few things together, to sail with you on the *Mariana* Wednesday. Will see you at the time and place you suggest.

Until then, dearest, MADGE.

Hearn sank into a seat with a groan, "Poor Cora," he muttered, and covered his face with his hands. Branscomb swore a streak for fully five minutes without stopping for breath.

"The double-faced, contemptible, sneaking little cur!" he roared. "This is Wednesday, and the *Mariana* sailed this morning. We'll see if they did get away on it," he said.

A hasty trip to the liner's pier disclosed the fact that a woman answering the description of Miss Raymond had been there, and, furthermore, it was found that such a woman had engaged passage for two. Of course, they had sailed under an assumed name. Palisser probably had smuggled himself aboard in some manner without being seen, as he was well known.

That settled it. Branscomb's one hope was that Gyp might experience such a change in her nature as to allow Finnegan to ride her, though he was not oversanguine. Hearn realized that his hardest task was to tell Cora the truth.

To his surprise, she showed no sign of hysterics, and after the news had been told her, was quite silent for a little. Then not seeming to be speaking to her father as much as to herself, with her face suddenly turned very white, and averted, she said:

"I cannot believe it, I cannot believe it of him. I know Cupid well, and I do

not believe he would have left me in this manner."

That was all. After a sob or two, she had started about her daily tasks in her accustomed gentle way. Hearn, noticing her white, strained face and vacant gaze, and knowing her frailty, was fearful of the consequences.

Of course the evening papers had got hold of the fact of the letter. "Jockey" and "Jilt" and "Gay Deceiver," "Mourned Equally by Maid and Race Mare," caught the eye in big, black type on the front sheets of the "yellows."

Contrary to expectations, Gyp appeared in excellent humor, and even allowed Finnegan to give her light exercise. Next morning, the day of the Boulevard Handicap, Hearn made all arrangements, just as if Palisser were there and would ride the mare. It was reported from the stable that Finnegan would ride.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, and Hearn had just arrived at the track, when he was told that some one wished to see him on "most important business." The message was brought by the porter of a hotel and café near the track entrance.

"You'll find the party in the back room," the man said.

Hearn hurried over to the place and passed through the bar into the back room. A woman seated in a far corner rose nervously as he entered, and started forward. She was heavily veiled.

"Are you the one who wished to see me?" he asked.

The woman nodded. He could not recognize her through the covering. She seemed greatly agitated.

As the trainer watched her closely, with a sudden gesture she threw aside the veil and disclosed the features of Madge Raymond. Her face was pale, and her eyes looked red and swollen.

"You! I thought—I thought you had gone with——"

Hearn was so surprised he could simply stare at her and gasp.

"I know," she sobbed. "I intended you to think so. My God! Get me some brandy." She sank down almost in a faint.

The trainer dashed out into the bar and ordered a "pony" of cognac, which the woman drank with a gulp. It seemed to revive her instantly. She put her hand on his arm.

"There is no time to lose, Mr. Hearn," she exclaimed. "Cupid is not on the ocean, as you supposed. He is in vacant Stable No. 5, at the Ravenwood Park track, kept a prisoner until after the Boulevard is run."

In a torrent of words she told the story of the abduction and her part in it.

She had been approached by the representatives of men who stood to lose much money in the event of Gyp winning, to lure Palisser on. Partly out of revenge, partly because she still loved him and hoped to be able to win him away from the other girl, she had consented. If everything went well, she and the jockey, on the payment of a large sum, were to sail on the *Mariana* together. At any rate, tickets had been engaged, and in the event of Cupid's failing to accept the terms, she was to sail anyway, and the boy was to be held until after the running of the race.

It had been a comparatively easy matter to make an appointment with Palisser "to talk over old times," and "wish him happiness" in his coming married life.

Cupid had been persuaded, out of simple pity for her, to take her to dinner and ride home with her afterward, "to be with me for the last time."

Her home was near the Ravenwood Park course, a long way from the Long Island tracks. The jockey had been overpowered there and the terms submitted to him. Cupid had rejected them absolutely, reproached the woman for her treachery and fought hard to escape.

It had been necessary to tie him hand and foot and gag him, to take him to his place of confinement. The race course was practically deserted, and the jockey was closely guarded by a couple of hired thugs. The letter that had been found

had never been seen by the jockey, but had purposely been placed where it was.

"And how did it come that you didn't sail yesterday, as you expected?" demanded Hearn, sternly, at the end of her recital.

At first she would not reply.

"It was because I—I loved him too much to carry out the whole program," she replied, hesitatingly, then burst into tears. "I thought revenge on Cupid would be sweet, and I went to the pier, expecting to sail. I just couldn't go away. All night I worried, and this morning I resolved to make a clean breast of it. I'm not as bad as I seem. I hated to let anybody else have him."

Hearn glanced at his watch.

"Well, there isn't much time left," he said, grimly. "It's a question now whether we can get clear up to Westchester and back with him before the race."

The woman clutched him by the arm.

"For God's sake don't take police or detectives," she implored. "Not more than one or two of you must go there at once, and you must be careful. Why, if they should suspect that a rescue was planned, they would kill or cripple him for life."

Leaving the sobbing woman, Hearn rushed off to find Branscomb. The owner was notified of the state of affairs in a few words; he appealed to the stewards to hold the race as long as they could consistently, and the foreman was placed in charge of the mare.

In Branscomb's fast automobile, driven by the daring French chauffeur, they started. The whole plot, as revealed by the woman, was unfolded to Branscomb as they sped along.

Branscomb's jaw shut with a snap.

"Give us a fair chance and we'll beat those rascals yet," he said, savagely. "I wish it would be possible to get at the instigators, but what can we prove? The female villain will disappear, it will simply be regarded as an act of revenge on her part, and the men back of it all will escape. The idea of any other motive being present will be pooh-poohed. I know the whitewashing in racing matters too well."

Caution was necessary, Hearn explained, but Branscomb was so angry that he was for throwing it to the winds and sailing right in.

When they reached the lonely race track grounds, after a heart-stirring ride of an hour, they left the chauffeur in the auto and slipped inside, so that they would enter Stable No. 5, which was somewhat remote from the rest, by a roundabout way. Hearn knew the location thoroughly.

Dodging carefully in the rear of the other buildings, they slipped to the back of the stable without being discovered. Voices, subdued but plainly voices, could be heard inside. Hearn and Branscomb, the latter's fingers working to get at the men, waited breathlessly at the back for a little, then together sprang around the corner of the stable and sprinted down the exercise shed to where a door was open.

Palisser's captors evidently were not expecting visitors just then. Certainly they did not think the owner and the trainer would be anywhere but at the track. They were caught napping.

Just inside the room a burly fellow, who had stepped in the doorway at the sound of the running feet, was met by a clean left-hander from Branscomb, which staggered him backward in the room. Recovering himself, with a yell, he aroused another big chap, seated in a chair, who nearly fell off it, in his surprise.

"By —— it's all day with us," he shouted, and jumped for a blackjack hanging on the wall.

Branscomb had the first man by the throat before he had recovered himself, and was choking the life out of him, with the strength of a giant given him by his rage and excitement. Backward and forward they struggled until, by an almost superhuman effort, the owner hurled the fellow outside flat on his back, where he lay still for a moment, then picked himself up and took to his heels.

During this time, Hearn had been struggling with the other.

"Where are you, Cupid?" he called, breathlessly, in the interval of fighting.

"Is it you, Mr. Hearn? I'm in here—the next compartment, a door has been cut between," the boy called, and appeared in the entrance.

The trainer sprang toward him. Seeing this, the other big fellow sprang at the boy with uplifted club and the snarling words:

"You may have found him all right, but when I am through with him he can't ride a rocking horse this day, ye mind."

Before Branscomb could intervene, Hearn had seized the fellow by the coat, and, despite his struggles to reach the jockey, who had remained on the spot, as if fascinated, he could not break away from the trainer. As Branscomb started to take a hand in the game, the ruffian raised the club and with the yell:

"Take it yourself, then!" he brought the weapon down on Hearn's skull. The blow was a crushing one.

The trainer dropped to the ground without a quiver and lay like a dead man.

A red stream trickled slowly over his white face.

With an oath, the assailant sprang past Branscomb and disappeared.

Cupid, his face almost as white as Hearn's, stepped out and knelt down by the trainer.

Branscomb took out a handkerchief and began to try to stop the flow of blood. Hearn showed no sign of life.

"I'm afraid he's done for, poor old chap," muttered the owner. "That blow was enough to crush the skull of a horse. Here, Cupid, we've got to get him out of this," he said to the jockey. Then he directed the boy, who was looking ill and weak, to go for the chauffeur.

Not until they had lifted the inanimate form of the trainer into the machine and were headed for a nearby hospital did the jockey ask piteously:

"What time is it, Mr. Branscomb? They told me it was long after four o'clock, the race had been run without Gyp, and Grand Vizier was the winner. One of 'em just came back from outside."

"It was a lie, Cupid," spat out Branscomb, viciously. "There's a chance to get the best of those fellows yet.

"When we get Richard fixed up, I want you to take Emil and the auto and ride as fast as the thing will go. I'm going to stay with Richard. You may be able to reach there in time."

After Hearn had been lifted out, the motor started off at a terrific rate. The trainer was placed in a private room, still unconscious and breathing heavily. The surgeons, as yet, were not sure whether he had sustained a fracture of the skull or was suffering from concussion of the brain. His condition was grave.

As the trainer lay on the bed he seemed to be in a doze. An oddly pathetic figure he appeared, head swathed in bandages thickly, face only a shade darker than the white linen.

A few minutes later the attending physician came into the chamber.

"Do you fear the outcome—you do not expect the case to result fatally, I trust, doctor?" asked Branscomb, in a low voice. "If you wish to have a specialist called in, I'm willing to do anything. He and I are very close to one another, you know."

"Everything has been done that could be," was the reply. "Much depends now on how that race results. If the mare would win, and the patient could be assured of the fact, the effect would be most beneficial. You see, he has been greatly worried, from what you have said. Of course, under the circumstances, more worry would hinder his recovery."

Branscomb watched the face of the trainer intently for some minutes. Then he glanced at his watch and paced restlessly up and down the chamber.

He realized that if Palisser had reached the paddock in time, only a short while would elapse before he should receive a telephone message to that effect.

The suspense was agonizing.

It was getting well along toward four o'clock, the hour at which the handicap was to be run.

The trainer appeared to be growing

very restless, and began muttering to himself.

"There they go!" he called out, faintly. Branscomb caught the words.

He lay quite still for a moment, as if he were standing watching a race. The physician entered, and Branscomb and he exchanged glances.

Then Hearn muttered:

"Good, old girl! I thought you'd be in the lead in the next few jumps, if you didn't get off any too well. That's right, Cupid—let her have her head."

Silence for a few seconds. Again he began:

"Where are you now, Cupid? I don't see you at all. Here, you fellows," he called out, roughly, "get out of my way there. You ain't in my way? Well, maybe not. I can't see the horses any longer," he continued, in a distressed tone. "Everything's black, some way. I can't make out one jockey's colors from another. I guess there must be something wrong with my glasses."

Then he appeared to go off into a doze.

But a short while before an automobile, swiftly driven, had dashed up behind the crowded paddock of a race course many miles away from the hospital. Scarcely had its speed been checked when little Palisser had leaped to the ground, and sped inside the gate and past the throngs of horsemen.

"No, sonny, the handicap ain't been run yet—they're just getting ready for it now," was the answer of an old fellow to whom the jockey had spoken, and who at first had not looked at him.

"Well, I swan, if it ain't Cupid," came in a moment the excited remark.

Instantly the boy's presence was known, and he was surrounded by a crowd of curious horsemen, through whom he literally fought his way to the judges' stand.

As the men surged about the stand overlooking the track, and the occupants of the grand stand became now keenly alive to the fact that something out of the ordinary had transpired, the slight figure of the jockey was seen ascending the steps to where the stewards were awaiting him.

Hat in hand before them, Palisser plunged into his story.

When he had ceased speaking, the watchers below saw the stewards hold consultation together, as the boy still stood at his attitude of attention before them. Two or three questions were put to him.

Another moment and Cupid, the look of anxiety gone from his face, was descending the steps at racing speed.

Now it was the man at the number board across the track who was the center of attention. In response to signals from the judges' stand, he had hauled down the numbers and was placing a No. 1 at the top, and alongside a board with the name "Palisser."

A murmur from the crowd—a humming sound, which quickly grew into a storm of cheering.

Gyp, the idol of the racing public, whom especially it wished to see "spreadeagle" her field in her characteristic fashion, was to be allowed to have a try for the grand prize after all. Without Gyp in the race it would have been similar to a grand opera performance with the prima donna indisposed and her place taken by an understudy.

No word as yet at the hospital up in the Bronx. In the sick chamber, Branscomb, still pacing up and down like a caged lion, his nerves strained to the utmost tension, gave a violent start as the door opened. The physician stood on the threshold and beckoned.

"A telephone message for you, Mr. Branscomb," he whispered. "I hope it's good news."

The owner hurried downstairs to the office and the desk telephone.

Slapping the receiver to his ear, "Hello, hello," he called, hoarsely.

A wait—during which his hands were itching to hurl the exasperating instrument out the window.

A long series of frantic "hellos" without response.

Finally a woman's voice:

"Hello, is this —— Hospital? Well, why don't you answer? Somebody wishes to speak to Mr. Branscomb. To Mr. Branscomb. Oh, can't you hear?

This is he himself? Oh, all right. Go ahead, Long Island——"

"Is this you, boss?"

Branscomb recognized the husky voice of Silcott, the foreman.

"Yes, yes, go ahead, Silcott."

"Cupid's here, all right—just got here—stewards had scratched Gyp—had scratched Gyp, I say—she wouldn't let Finnegan go near her—wait a minute—Cupid's going to ride her—say, she nearly ate him up—what's that?—yes, I'll phone you when the race is over."

That was sufficient. Branscomb put up the receiver with a sharp click.

"It looks as if we would win yet," he exclaimed, jubilantly.

He returned to the sick chamber.

At the track, just after Palisser had descended the steps from the judges' stand, in some mysterious manner—for the stewards at a race course are not supposed to recognize betting—it was communicated to the "ring" that fifteen minutes would be allowed to make a new "book"—in other words, have new odds on the handicap with the "Amazon" in.

Sore and troubled were the hearts of the "bookies" as they clutched their slates to figure out the odds while the frantic players surged beneath them, crazy to back the popular choice at any price. And that was even money.

"Humph! These fool players think it's all over but the shouting for the mare," said a prominent layer, as he took a big bet on Gyp. At the same time he ran his chalk through the name of the racer. No more money against the favorite for him.

Cupid had hurried to the paddock, where the foreman was waiting for him in the stall where the black mare was holding a levee with ears pricked forward and an occasional kick against the side of the stall, to show her excess of joy at seeing the jockey again. One who did not understand her would have thought Palisser was her bitterest enemy, as she received him with bared teeth and ears back. That was the Amazon's way of showing affection.

While the jockey patted the great racer's neck for a few brief moments, the foreman had slipped out of the place and sent the telephone message. In the meantime, Tom, the valet, was arranging the proper weight, or as near it as he could guess, in the lead pads, with the whip, spurs and saddle itself in readiness.

It was next to impossible to keep the crowd out of the stall—the throng of eager trainers, plungers, turf writers and casual racegoers—so the paddock judge detailed a track policeman at the entrance, with orders not to allow anybody to intrude. To the hundreds of questions hurled at him above the stall partition, Cupid paid no attention. He was engaged in winning the forgiveness of the mare, and wondering if Cora would believe him guiltless.

Presently the paddock judge came up, watch in hand.

"Slip into your colors as quick as you can, Palisser. The clerk is ready to weigh you in," the official said.

Silcott returned. Only one word did Cupid whisper in his ear. That one was "kidnaped."

"I thought so," declared the foreman, with a low whistle.

Slipping under his arm and past the guardian at the door, the boy darted into the jockeys' room, and in a jiffy emerged in his emerald set of colors, booted and spurred and equipped for the scales.

The circumstances were so extraordinary, the crowd so clamorous for the race, that the other horses were outside their stalls, riders ready to mount, when Cupid was given the leg up on Gyp by the foreman.

"No need to tell you how to ride her," Silcott said, at the moment he took his hand from the bridle, and the little rider settled into the saddle, grasping the reins in his fingers in the old familiar fashion.

So they filed out onto the track.

A low murmur of applause swelled into a roar. Tumultuous cheering burst from the throats of the expectant race goers, handclapping resounded from all parts of the grand stand, the lawn, the club house.

Now they had reached the barrier,

had turned around, the webbing had been lowered, and the ten racers were facing the starter.

That official got them off in almost perfect alignment. As the yellow flag fell, in the hands of the starting judge, no one could have told which was in the lead.

A roar of applause from the multitude, in appreciation of the magnificent start.

In front of the grand stand it was the light-weighted Grand Vizier in the lead, a half length ahead of the black mare; a neck behind the honest old race horse, Trust, struggled, and the others close up.

What horse trained to the minute for such a grand prize could have failed to keep up with the rest, after a distance covered of but a quarter of a mile? No yelling or shouting then. The veriest tyro in racing present was saving breath and comments for a couple of minutes further on.

Around the paddock turn into the backstretch they had turned, the glaring, flashing colors of the jockeys contrasting strongly with the dull green of the infield and the red yellow of the track.

"There goes the favorite!"

The clarion-like tones of a golden-haired woman in the grand stand, who, from her appearance, that evening might herself be holding the attention of an enraptured audience, told the story of the race at the three-quarters.

"Gyp's forging to the front, and Palisser is riding her for the finish," screamed the possessor of the sunny tresses.

"The 'Amazon's' jock will have to keep her going this day to beat that Grand Vizier. Oh, Lord, I'm afraid he'll beat the favorite," she cried, hysterically.

Nobody noticed her. The eyes of everybody were riveted on the blue and white which fluttered on the back of the sleek chestnut with the blazed face, which now had drawn fully a length away from the black mare carrying the all-green.

Possibly some one was aware of the fact that the third horse, now fully two lengths behind the leaders, and falling further back at every stride, carried a jockey whose jacket and cap were red with blue sash and white sleeves. Certainly no one bothered to count further back than third.

Grand Vizier, Gyp a length behind, Trust third, was the order at the mile.

Bookmakers, who had seen probably more than twenty thousand races in their careers on the turf, were beginning to feel sore at themselves because they had not taken everything offered on the favorite, and offered better than even money. They were trying to make "side bets" with one another of a thousand to five hundred that the mare would not win, with no takers.

Past the mile the leaders had swept in their cyclonic fashion. As the other jockeys realized that there was yet a chance to capture third money from the tired Trust, there was a sudden awakening. Whips flashed in the sunlight.

At some one point in a big race, possibly the same spot from the finish in each particular one, the crowd begins to announce, all unconsciously, the beginning of the end.

Such was the case in this.

At first a peculiar humming sound, crescendo, punctuated by short, ear-piercing, staccato yelps of pleasure or disappointment.

Here they came down the stretch!

It was still believed, or hoped, by some of the backers of Gyp, that Grand Vizier would "crack"—would not be able to maintain such a wonderful speed as he had set, notwithstanding his light impost, to the very end of the race.

As he swept along with never a falter, his red side unridged as yet by lash of whip, it seemed he could keep the pace for another mile.

Silcott, the foreman, sobbing silently to himself, lifting his glasses from his bedewed eyes and telling himself brokenly: "She's beat, she's beat. How can I tell Mr. Branscomb?" was startled by a yell like the braying of a hundred siren whistles in concert.

The finish was near, but Gyp had not yet been vanquished.

For a moment it seemed to the watchers that Palisser leaned forward and appeared to mutter something to himself, or his horse, or his guardian saint.

To whomsoever the petition was addressed, it seemed to admit of fulfillment.

Leaning over the grand-stand rail, regardless of the danger of a tumble headlong below, the yellow-haired woman was bidding fair to crack an expensive voice by a series of cries, whoops and implorings which were calculated to win pity from the stoniest heart:

"Come on, Gyp! Come on, Gyp! You've got him, you've got him! Keep her straight, Cupid! Why don't you use your whip? Hi! hi! hi!"

Her cries were but the counterpart of thousands, as the mare, ears tight against her head, jockey crouched forward on her withers, lifting and settling as the mare took her stride, drew up to Grand Vizier.

That thoroughbred, contrary to expectations and the fear of the "bookies," was running as gamely as ever.

But no race horse on the turf that day could have stalled off the burst of speed, the gigantic overwhelming, impetuous whirlwind rush of the mare. First she moved up even with the leader. She was ahead one moment, then behind, as her rival landed his forefeet.

It was, "Grand Vizier wins!" "Gyp wins!" "The mare!" "The chestnut!" the last few yards.

In dingdong, seesaw fashion, first the nose of one in front, then the other.

In the final stride of the black mare, at the very instant when the finish was reached, its impetus carried her nose just an appreciable distance in front of the chestnut.

His face as white as chalk, shiny with perspiration, Silcott threw his hat in the air, and gave a whoop of joy. Heedless of his headgear, returned to earth, he took the back fence at a bound, and connected himself with a telephone.

At the other end of the wire Branscomb danced and raged like a madman.

"What's that, what's that?" he was calling, distractedly. "I can't hear a thing for that yelling sound. What is all that infernal noise about? Is this Silcott?—you say that's the cheering for Gyp? *Gyp won? Hooray! Oh, hooray!*"

An hour and a half later two others besides Branscomb stood at Hearn's bedside. One of them, a little girl, who was smiling through her tears, had one arm around her father's neck, the other on Cupid's shoulder.

The trainer, fully conscious, his recovery only a matter of a short while, the physicians said, was listening to the jockey's account of how he had ridden the black mare to victory.

Branscomb's bets were all paid in full. At the wedding, which occurred a week after the race, postponed on account of Hearn's illness, his present to the young couple was a certified check for five thousand dollars.

# THE CROWNING VICTORY

By H. G. Wells

*Author of "The Food of the Gods," "When the Sleeper Wakes," Etc.*

## CHAPTER XXX.

### A WITHDRAWAL.

ON Tuesday Lewisham returned from Vigours' at five—at half-past six he would go on to his science class at Walham Green—and discovered Mrs. Chaffery and Ethel in tears. He was fagged and rather anxious for some tea, but the news they had for him drove tea out of his head altogether.

"He's gone," said Ethel.

"Who's gone? What! Not Chaffery?"

Mrs. Chaffery, with a keen eye to Lewisham's behavior, nodded tearfully over an experienced handkerchief.

Lewisham grasped the essentials of the situation forthwith, and trembled on the brink of an expletive. Ethel handed him a letter.

For a moment Lewisham held this in his hand asking questions. Mrs. Chaffery had come upon it in the case of her eight-day clock, when the time to wind it came round. Chaffery, it seemed, had not been home since Saturday night. The letter was an open one addressed to Lewisham, a long, rambling would-be clever letter, oddly inferior in style to Chaffery's conversation. It had been written some hours before Chaffery's last visit; his talk then had been perhaps a sort of codicil.

Lewisham read as follows:

The inordinate stupidity of that man Lagune is driving me out of the country. It has been at last a definite stumbling block—even a legal stumbling block, I fear. I am off. I skedaddle. I break ties. I shall miss our long, refreshing chats—you had found me out and I could open my mind. I am sorry to part from Ethel also, but thank Heaven she has you to look to! And indeed they both have you to look to, though the "both" may be a new light to you.

Lewisham growled, went from page 1 to page 3—conscious of their both looking to him now—even intensely—and discovered Chaffery in a practical vein.

There is but little light and portable property in that house in Clapham that has escaped my lamentable improvidence, but there are one or two things; the iron-bound chest, the bureau with a broken hinge, and the large air pump, distinctly pawnable if only you can contrive to get them to a pawnshop. You have more will power than I—I never could get the confounded things downstairs. That iron-bound box was originally mine, before I married your mother-in-law, so that I am not altogether regardless of your welfare and the necessity of giving some equivalent. Don't judge me too harshly.

Lewisham turned over sharply without finishing that page. The letter continued:

My life at Clapham has irked me for some time, and to tell you the truth, the spectacle of your vigorous young happiness—you are having a very good time, you know, fighting the world—reminded me of the passing years. To be frank in self-criticism, there is more than a touch of the new woman about me, and I feel I have still to live my own life. What a beautiful phrase that is—to live one's own life!—redolent of honest scorn for moral plagiarism. No *Imitatio Christi* in that. I long to see more of men and cities. I begin late, I know, to live my own life, bald as I am and gray-whiskered; but better late than never. Why should the educated girl have the monopoly of the game? And after all, the whiskers will dye.

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**This story began in the February issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.**

There are things—I touch upon them lightly—that will presently astonish Lagune. I marvel at that man, grubbing hungry for marvels amidst the almost incredibly marvelous. What can be the nature of a man who gapes after Poltergeists with the miracle of his own silly existence—inconsequent, reasonless, unfathomably weird—nearer to him than breathing and closer than hands and feet. What is *he* for, that he should wonder at Poltergeists? I am astonished these by no means flimsy psychic phenomena do not turn upon their investigators, and that a Research Society of eminent illusions and hallucinations does not pursue Lagune with skeptical inquiries. Take his house—expose the alleged man of Chelsea! *A priori* they might argue that a thing so vain, so unmeaning, so strongly beset by cackle, could only be the diseased imagining of some hysterical phantom. Do *you* believe that such a thing as Lagune exists? I must own to the gravest doubts. But happily his banker is of a more credulous type than I. Of all that Lagune will tell you soon enough.

Lewisham read no more. "I suppose he thought himself clever when he wrote that rot," said Lewisham, bitterly, throwing the sheets forcibly athwart the table. "The simple fact is, he's stolen, or forged, or something—and bolted."

There was a pause. "What will become of mother?" said Ethel.

Lewisham looked at mother and thought for a moment. Then he glanced at Ethel.

"We're all in the same boat," said Lewisham.

"I don't want to give any trouble to a single human being," said Mrs. Chaffery.

"I think you might get a man his tea, Ethel," said Lewisham, sitting down suddenly, "anyhow." He drummed on the table with his fingers. "I have to get to Walham Green by a quarter to seven.

"We're all in the same boat," he repeated, after an interval, and continued drumming. He was chiefly occupied by the curious fact that they were all in the same boat. What an extraordinary faculty he had for acquiring responsibility! He looked up suddenly and caught Mrs. Chaffery's tearful eye directed to Ethel and full of distressful interrogation, and his perplexity was suddenly changed to pity. "It's all right, mother," he said. "I'm not going to be unreasonable. I'll stand by you."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Chaffery. "As if I didn't know!" and Ethel came and kissed him.

He seemed in imminent danger of universal embraces.

"I wish you'd let me have my tea," he said. And while he had his tea he asked Mrs. Chaffery questions, and tried to get the new situation into focus.

But even at ten o'clock, when he was returning hot and jaded from Walham Green, he was still trying to get the situation into focus. There were vague ends and blank walls of interrogation in the matter that perplexed him.

He knew that his supper would be only the prelude to an interminable "talking over," and, indeed, he did not get to bed until nearly two. By that time a course of action was already agreed upon. Mrs. Chaffery was tied to the house in Clapham by a long lease, and thither they must go. The ground floor and first floor were let unfurnished, and the rent of these practically paid the rent of the house. The Chafferys occupied basement and second floor.

There was a bedroom on the second floor, formerly let to the first floor tenants, that he and Ethel could occupy, and in this an old toilet table could be put for such studies as were to be prosecuted at home. Ethel could have her typewriter in the subterranean breakfast room.

Mrs. Chaffery and Ethel must do the catering and the bulk of the housework, and as soon as possible; since letting lodgings would not square with Lewisham's professional pride, they must get rid of the lease that bound them, and take some smaller and more suburban residence. If they did that without leaving any address it might save their feelings from any return of the prodigal Chaffery.

Mrs. Chaffery's frequent and pathetic acknowledgments of Lewisham's goodness only partly relieved his disposition to a philosophical bitterness. And the practical issues were complicated by excursions upon the subject of Chaf-

fery, what he might have done, and where he might have gone, and whether by any chance he might not return.

When at last Mrs. Chaffery, after a violent and tearful kissing and blessing of them both—they were "good, dear children," she said—had departed, Mr. and Mrs. Lewisham returned into their sitting room. Mrs. Lewisham's little face was enthusiastic. "You're a trump," she said, extending the willing arms that were his reward. "I know," she said, "I know, and all to-night I have been loving you. Dear! dear! dear!"

The next day Lewisham was too full of engagements to communicate with Lagune, but the following morning he called and found the psychic investigator busy with the proofs of "Hesperus." He welcomed the young man cordially, nevertheless, conceiving him charged with the questions that had been promised long ago—it was evident he knew nothing of Lewisham's marriage. Lewisham stated his case with some bluntness.

"He was last here on Saturday," said Lagune. "You have always been inclined to suspicion about him. Have you any grounds?"

"You'd better read this," said Lewisham, repressing a grim smile, and he handed Lagune Chaffery's letter.

He glanced at the little man ever and again to see if he had come to the personal portion, and for the rest of the time occupied himself with an envious inventory of the writing appointments about him. No doubt the boy with the big ears had had the same sort of thing.

When Lagune came to the question of his real identity, he blew out his cheeks in the most astonishing way, but made no other sign.

"Dear, dear!" he said at last. "My bankers!"

He looked at Lewisham with the exaggerated mildness of his spectacled eye. "What do you think it means?" he asked. "Has he gone mad? We have been conducting some experiments involving — considerable mental strain. He and I and a lady. Hypnotic——"

"I should look at my check book if I were you."

Lagune produced some keys and got out his check book. He turned over the counterfoils. "There's nothing wrong here," he said, and handed the book to Lewisham.

"Um," said Lewisham. "I suppose this—— I say, is *this* right?"

He handed back the book to Lagune, open at the blank counterfoil of a check that had been removed. Lagune stared and passed his hand over his forehead in a confused way. "I can't see this," he said.

Lewisham had never heard of post hypnotic suggestion, and he stood incredulous. "You can't see that?" he said. "What nonsense!"

"I can't see it," repeated Lagune.

For some seconds Lewisham could not get away from stupid repetitions of his inquiry. Then he hit upon a collateral proof. "But, look here! Can you see *this* counterfoil?"

"Plainly," said Lagune.

"Can you read the number?"

"Five thousand two hundred and seventy-nine."

"Well, and this?"

"Five thousand two hundred and eighty-one."

"Well — where's five thousand two hundred and eighty?"

Lagune began to look uncomfortable. "Surely," he said, "he has not—— Will you read it out—the check, the counterfoil, I mean, that I am unable to see."

"It's blank," said Lewisham, with an irresistible grin.

"Surely," said Lagune, and the discomfort of his expression deepened. "Do you mind if I call in a servant to confirm——?"

Lewisham did not mind, and the same girl who had admitted him to the *séance* appeared. When she had given her evidence she went again. As she left the room by the door behind Lagune, her eyes met Lewisham's, and she lifted her eyebrows, depressed her mouth and glanced at Lagune with a meaning expression.

"I'm afraid," said Lagune, "that I have been shabbily treated. Mr. Chaffery is a man of indisputable powers—indisputable powers; but I am afraid—I am very much afraid he has abused the conditions of the experiment. All this—and his insults—touch me rather nearly."

He paused. Lewisham rose. "Do you mind if you come again?" asked Lagune, with gentle politeness.

Lewisham was surprised to find himself sorry.

"He was a man of extraordinary gifts," said Lagune. "I had come to rely upon him. My cash balance has been rather heavy lately. How he came to know of that I am unable to say. Without supposing, that is, that he had very remarkable gifts."

When Lewisham saw Lagune again he learnt the particulars of Chaffery's misdeed, and the additional fact that the "lady" had also disappeared. "That's a good job," he remarked, selfishly. "There's no chance of *his* coming back."

He spent a moment trying to imagine the "lady"; he realized more vividly than he had ever done before the narrow range of his experience, the bounds of his imagination. These people also—with gray hair and truncated honor—had their emotions! Even it may be glowing! He came back to facts. Chaffery had induced Lagune, when hynotized, to sign a blank check as an "autograph."

"The strange thing is," explained Lagune, "it's doubtful if he's legally accountable. The law is so peculiar about hypnotism, and I certainly signed the check, you know."

The little man, in spite of his losses, was now almost cheerful again on account of a curious side issue. "You may say it is coincidence," he said, "you may call it a fluke, but I prefer to look for some other interpretation. Consider this. The amount of my balance is a secret between me and my bankers. He never had it from *me,* for I did not know it—I hadn't looked at my passbook for months. But he drew it all in one check, within seventeen and sixpence of the total. And the total was over five hundred pounds!"

He seemed quite bright again as he culminated.

"Within seventeen and sixpence," he said. "Now how do you account for that, eh? Give me a materialistic explanation that will explain away all that. You can't. Neither can I."

"I think I can," said Lewisham.

"Well—what is it?"

Lewisham nodded toward a little drawer of the bureau. "Don't you think—perhaps"—a little ripple of laughter passed across his mind—"he had a skeleton key?"

Lagune's face lingered amusingly in Lewisham's mind as he returned to Clapham. But after a time that amusement passed away. He declined upon the extraordinary fact that Chaffery was his father-in-law, Mrs. Chaffery his mother-in-law, that these two and Ethel constituted his family, his clan, and that grimy, graceless house up the Clapham hillside was to be his home.

Home! His connection with these things as a point of worldly departure was as inexorable now as though he had been born to it. And a year ago, except for a fading reminiscence of Ethel, none of these people had existed for him. The ways of destiny! The happenings of the last few months, foreshortened in perspective, seemed to have almost a pantomimic rapidity. The thing took him suddenly as being laughable; and he laughed.

His laugh marked an epoch. Never before had Lewisham laughed at any fix in which he had found himself. The enormous seriousness of adolescence was coming to an end; the days of his growing were numbered. It was a laugh of infinite admissions.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### IN BATTERSEA PARK.

Now, although Lewisham had promised to bring things to a conclusion with Miss Heydinger, he did nothing in the matter for five weeks; he merely left that crucial letter of hers unan-

swered. In that time their removal from Madam Gadow's into the gaunt house at Clapham was accomplished—not without polyglot controversy—and the young couple settled themselves into the little room on the second floor even as they had arranged. And there it was that suddenly the world was changed — was astonishingly transfigured—by a whisper.

It was a whisper between sobs and tears, with Ethel's arms about him and Ethel's hair streaming down so that it hid her face from him. And he, too, had whispered, dismayed, perhaps, a little, and yet feeling a strange pride, a strange, novel emotion, feeling altogether different from the things he had fancied he might feel when this thing that he had dreaded should come. Suddenly he perceived finality, the advent of the solution, the reconciliation of the conflict that had been waged so long. Hesitations were at an end;—he took his line.

Next day he wrote a note, and two mornings later he started for his mathematical duffers an hour before it was absolutely necessary, and, instead of going directly to Vigours', went over the bridge to Battersea Park. There waiting for him by a seat where once they had met before, he found Miss Heydinger pacing. They walked up and down side by side, speaking for a little while about indifferent topics, and then they came upon a pause.

"You have something to tell me?" said Miss Heydinger, abruptly.

Lewisham changed color a little. "Oh, yes," he said; "the fact is——" He affected ease. "Did I ever tell you I was married?"

"*Married?*"

"Yes."

"Married!"

"Yes," a little testily.

For a moment neither spoke. Lewisham stood without dignity staring at the dahlias of the London County Council, and Miss Heydinger stood regarding him.

"And that is what you have to tell me?"

Mr. Lewisham turned and met her eyes. "Yes!" he said. "That is what I have to tell you."

Pause. "Do you mind if I sit down?" asked Miss Heydinger, in an indifferent tone.

"There is a seat yonder," said Lewisham, "under the tree."

They walked to the seat in silence.

"Now," said Miss Heydinger, quietly. "Tell me whom you have married."

Lewisham answered sketchily. She asked him another question and another. He felt stupid, and answered with a halting truthfulness.

"I might have known," she said. "I might have known. Only I would not know. Tell me some more. Tell me about her."

Lewisham did. The whole thing was abominably disagreeable to him, but it had to be done, he had promised Ethel it should be done. Presently Miss Heydinger knew the main outline of his story, knew all his story except the emotion that made it credible.

"And you were married—before the second examination?" she repeated.

"Yes," said Lewisham.

"But why did you not tell me of this before?" asked Miss Heydinger.

"I don't know," said Lewisham. "I wanted to—that day, in Kensington Gardens. But I didn't. I suppose I ought to have done so."

"I think you ought to have done so."

"Yes, I suppose I ought. But I didn't. Somehow—it has been hard. I didn't know what you would say. The thing seemed so rash, you know, and all that."

He paused blankly.

"I suppose you had to do it," said Miss Heydinger, presently, with her eyes on his profile.

Lewisham began the second and more difficult part of his explanation. "There's been a difficulty," he said, "all the way along—I mean—about you, that is. It's a little difficult—— The fact is, my wife, you know—— She looks at things differently from what we do."

"We?"

"Yes—it's odd, of course. But she has seen your letters——"

"You didn't show her——?"

"No. But, I mean, she knows you write to me, and she knows you write about socialism and literature and—things we have in common—things she hasn't."

"You mean to say she doesn't understand these things?"

"She's not thought about them. I suppose there's a sort of difference in education——"

"And she objects?"

"No," said Lewisham, lying promptly. "She doesn't *object*."

"Well?" said Miss Heydinger, and her face was white.

"She feels that—— She feels—she does not say, of course, but I know she feels that it is something she ought to share. I know—how she cares for me. And it shames her—it reminds her—— Don't you see how it hurts her?"

"Yes. I see. So that even that little——" Miss Heydinger's breath seemed to catch, and she was abruptly silent.

She spoke at last with an effort. "That it hurts *me*," she said, and grimaced and stopped again.

"No," said Lewisham, "that is not it." He hesitated.

"I *knew* this would hurt you."

"You love her. You can sacrifice——"

"No. It is not that. But there is a difference. Hurting *her*—she would not understand. But you—somehow it seems a natural thing for me to come to you. I seem to look to you—— For her I am always making allowances."

"You love her."

"I wonder if it *is* that makes the difference. Things are so complex. Love means anything—or nothing. I know you better than I do her, you know me better than she will ever do. I could tell you things I could not tell her. I could put all myself before you—almost—and know you would understand—— Only——"

"You love her."

"Yes," said Lewisham, lamely, and pulling at his mustache. "I suppose—that must be it."

For a space neither spoke. Then Miss Heydinger said *"Oh!"* with extraordinary emphasis.

"To think of this end to it all! That all your promise—what is it she gives that I could not have given?

"Even now! Why should I give up that much of you that is mine? If she could take it—— But she cannot take it. If I let you go—you will do nothing. All this ambition, all these interests will dwindle and die, and she will not mind. She will not understand. She will think that she still has you. Why should she covet what she cannot possess? Why should she be given the thing that is mine—to throw aside?"

She did not look at Lewisham, but before her, her face a white misery.

"In a way—I had come to think of you as something belonging to me—I shall—still."

"There is one thing," said Lewisham, after a pause; "it is a thing that has come to me once or twice lately. Don't you think that, perhaps, you over-estimate the things I might have done? I know we've talked of great things to do. But I've been struggling for half a year and more to get the sort of living almost anyone seems able to get. It has taken me all my time. One can't help thinking, after that, perhaps the world is a stiffer sort of affair."

"No," she said, decisively. "You could have done great things.

"Even now," she said, "you may do great things—— If only I might see you sometimes, write to you sometimes—— You are so capable and—weak. You must have somebody—— That is your weakness. You fail in your belief. You must have support and belief—unstinted support and belief. Why could I not be that to you? It is all I want to be. At least—all I want to be now. Why need she know? It robs her of nothing. I want nothing—she has. But I know of my own strength, too, I can do nothing. I know that with you—it is only knowing hurts her. Why should she know?"

Mr. Lewisham looked at her doubtfully. That phantom greatness of his, it was that lit her eyes. In that instant, at least, he had no doubts of the possibility of his career. But he knew that in some way the secret of his greatness and this admiration went together. Conceivably they were one and indivisible. Why, indeed, need Ethel know? His imagination ran over the things that might be done, the things that might happen, and touched swiftly upon complication, confusion, discovery.

"The thing is, I must simplify my life. I shall do nothing unless I simplify my life. Only people who are well off can be—complex. It is one thing or the other——"

He hesitated, and suddenly had a vision of Ethel weeping as once he had seen her weep, with the light on the tears in her eyes.

"No," he said, almost brutally. "No. It's like this—— I can't do anything underhand. I mean—— I'm not so amazingly honest—now. But I've not that sort of mind. She would find me out. It would do no good, and she would find me out. My life's too complex. I can't manage it and go straight. I—you've overrated me. And besides—— Things have happened. Something——" He hesitated, and then snatched at his resolve. "I've got to simplify—and that's the plain fact of the case. I'm sorry, but it is so."

Miss Heydinger made no answer. Her silence astonished him. For nearly twenty seconds, perhaps, they sat without speaking. With a quick motion she stood up, and at once he stood up before her. Her face was flushed, her eyes downcast.

"Good-by," she said suddenly, in a low tone and held out her hand.

"But——" said Lewisham, and stopped. Miss Heydinger's color left her.

"Good-by," she said, looking him suddenly in the eyes and smiling awry. "There is no more to say, is there? Good-by."

He took her hand. "I hope I didn't——"

"Good-by," she said, impatiently, and suddenly disengaged her hand and turned away from him. He made a step after her.

"Miss Heydinger," he said, but she did not stop. "Miss Heydinger." He realized that she did not want to answer him again.

He remained motionless, watching her retreating figure. An extraordinary sense of loss came into his mind, a vague impulse to pursue her and pour out vague, passionate protestations.

Not once did she look back. She was already remote when he began hurrying after her. Once he was in motion, he quickened his pace and gained upon her. He was within thirty yards of her as she drew near the gates.

His pace slackened. Suddenly he was afraid she might look back. She passed out of the gates, out of his sight. He stopped, looking where she had disappeared. He sighed and took the pathway to his left that led back to the bridge and Vigours.

Halfway across the bridge came another crisis of indecision. He stopped, hesitating. An impertinent thought obtruded. He looked at his watch, and saw that he must hurry if he would catch the train for Earl's Court and Vigours. He said Vigours might go to the devil.

But in the end he caught his train.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE CROWNING VICTORY.

That night, about seven, Ethel came into their room with a waste-paper basket she had bought for him, and found him sitting at the little toilet table at which he was to "write." The outlook was, for a London outlook, spacious, down a long slope of roofs toward the Junction, a huge sky of blue passing upward to the darkling zenith and downward into a hazy bristling mystery of roofs and chimneys, from which emerged signal lights and steam puffs, gliding chains of lit window carriages and the vague vistas of streets. She showed him the basket,

and put it beside him, and then her eye caught the yellow document in his hand. "What is that you have there?"

He held it out to her. "I found it—lining my yellow box. I had it at Whortley."

She took it, and perceived a chronological scheme. It was headed "*Schema,*" there were memoranda in the margin, and all the dates had been altered by a hasty hand.

"Hasn't it got yellow?" she said.

That seemed to him the wrong thing for her to say. He stared at the document with a sudden accession of sympathy. There was an interval. He became aware of her hand upon his shoulder, that she was bending over him. "Dear," she whispered, with a strange change in the quality of her voice. He knew she was seeking to say something that was difficult to say.

"Yes?" he said, presently.

"You are not grieving?"

"What about?"

"*This.*"

"No!"

"You are not—you are not even sorry?" she said.

"No—not even sorry."

"I can't understand that. It's so much——"

"I'm glad," he proclaimed. "*Glad.*"

"But—the trouble—the expense—everything—and your work?"

"Yes," he said, "that's just it."

She looked at him doubtfully. He glanced up at her, and she questioned his eyes. He put his arm about her, and presently and almost absent-mindedly she obeyed his pressure and bent down and kissed him.

"It settles things," he said, holding her. "It joins us. Don't you see? Before—but now it's different. It's something we have between us. It's something that—it's the link we needed. It will hold us together, cement us together. It will be our life. This will be my work now. The other——"

He faced a truth. "It was just—vanity!"

There was still a shade of doubt in her face, a wistfulness.

Presently she spoke.

"Dear," she said.

"Yes?"

She knitted her brows. "No!" she said. "I can't say it."

In the interval she came into a sitting position on his knees.

He kissed her hand, but her face remained grave, and she looked out upon the twilight. "I know I'm stupid," she said. "The things I say aren't the things I feel."

He waited for her to say more.

"It's no good," she said.

He felt the onus of expression lay on him. He, too, found it a little difficult to put into words. "I think I understand," he said, and wrestled with the impalpable. The pause seemed long, and yet not altogether vacant. She lapsed abruptly into the prosaic. She started from him.

"If I don't go down, mother will get supper."

At the door she stopped and turned a twilight face to him. For a moment they scrutinized one another. To her he was no more than a dim outline. Impulsively he held out his arms.

Then at the sound of a movement downstairs she freed herself and hurried out. He heard her call: "Mother! You're not to lay supper. You're to rest."

He listened to her footsteps until the kitchen had swallowed them up. Then he turned his eyes to the Schema again, and for a moment it seemed but a little thing.

He picked it up in both hands and looked at it as if it was the writing of another man, and, indeed, it was the writing of another man. "Pamphlets in the Liberal Interest," he read, and smiled.

Presently a train of thought carried him off. His attitude relaxed a little, the Schema became for a time a mere symbol, a point of departure, and he stared out of the window at the darkling night. For a long time he sat pursuing thoughts that were half emotions, emotions that took upon themselves the shape and substance of ideas.

The deepening current stirred at last among the roots of speech.

"Yes, it was vanity," he said. "A boy's vanity. For me—anyhow. I'm too two-sided. Two-sided? Commonplace!

"Dreams like mine—abilities like mine. Yes—any man! And yet—the things I meant to do!"

His thoughts went to his socialism, to his red-hot ambition of world mending. He marveled at the vistas he had discovered since those days.

"Not for us—— Not for us.

"We must perish in the wilderness. Some day. Somewhen. But not for us.

"Come to think, it is all the Child. The future is the Child. The Future. What are we—any of us—but servants or traitors to that?

"Natural Selection—it follows—this way is happiness—must be. There can be no other."

He sighed. "To last a lifetime, that is.

"And yet—it is almost as if life had played me a trick—promised so much and—given so little!

"No! One must not look at it in that way! That will not do! That will *not* do.

"Career! In itself it is a career—the most important career in the world. Father! Why should I want more?

"And — Ethel! No wonder she seemed shallow. She has been shallow. No wonder she was restless. Unfulfilled—what had she to do? She was drudge, she was toy——

"Yes. This is life. This alone is life! For this we were made and born. All these other things—all other things—they are only a sort of play.

"Play!"

His eyes came back to the Schema. His hands shifted to the opposite corner, and he hesitated. The vision of that arranged career, that ordered sequence of work and successes, distinctions and yet further distinctions, rose brightly from the symbol. Then he compressed his lips and tore the yellow sheet in half, tearing very deliberately. He doubled the halves and tore again, doubled again very carefully and neatly until the Schema was torn into numberless little pieces. With it he seemed to be tearing his past self.

"Play," he whispered, after a long silence.

"It is the end of adolescence," he said; "the end of empty dreams."

He became very still, his hands resting on the table, his eyes staring out of the blue oblong of the window. The dwindling light gathered itself together and became a star.

He found he was still holding the torn fragments. He stretched out his hand and dropped them into that new waste-paper basket Ethel had bought for him.

Two pieces fell outside the basket. He stooped, picked them up and put them carefully with their fellows.

THE END.

# THREE CRIES

"GIVE me to-morrow!" cried Hope, buoyantly.
"Give me to-day!" cried Joy, with perfumed hair.
But sadly backward gazing, 'midst the three,
"Oh, give me yesterday!" cried pale Despair.

EDWIN L. SABIN.

# BELOW THE DEAD LINE

By Scott Campbell

[NOTE.—When Inspector Byrnes commanded the New York Police Force he found it necessary to issue an order calling for the instant arrest of every crook found day or night in that part of the metropolis lying south of Fulton Street. This stringent order quickly gained for the district the title "Below the Dead Line," at least in police circles. As the lower part of the city contains Wall and Broad Streets and Maiden Lane, where the great diamond houses are located, various efforts were made by the "under world" to evade the order. For several years a number of crooks, headed by an unknown but extremely clever criminal, succeeded in operating in the district despite the police, and it is to chronicle their doings and their ultimate capture that Mr. Scott Campbell has written this interesting series of stories. Each story will be complete in itself.—THE EDITOR.]

## XVIII.—THE CASE OF THE EPSOM BURGLARY

*(A Complete Story)*

"AHA! I knew I could depend upon you, Felix!" cried Coleman, with outstretched hand. "It wouldn't have been like you to disappoint your old running mate. On my word, I'm glad you're here, for I am quite at sea, old chap; all at sixes and sevens."

The midday train had just hauled into the railway station at—Epsom will serve for a name, since the publication of the real locality and the facts about to be set forth might reflect unfavorably, even at this late day, upon an institution and people worthily high in public esteem.

Though somewhat out of his beaten path below the dead line, the part played by Mr. Felix Boyd in the case here presented too strikingly exemplifies his rare acumen and peculiar methods to be omitted from any record of his remarkable work.

In so far as Felix Boyd figured in it, the case began with a telegram, received that morning from his friend, the Central Office man, which had resulted in Boyd's arrival at Epsom about noon on a certain bright day in the month of May. He smiled at Coleman's cordial greeting, drawing up his tall, lithe figure and shaking the train dust from his garments, meantime remarking, genially:

"I'm always at your command, Jimmie. Very glad to take the run out here, too, and get a sniff of the country air. Your wire gave me no inkling of the business, however. What's the nature of this case, which I infer quite baffles you, and how do you happen to be on it?"

"On it because Griggs, the county sheriff, is a cousin of mine, and asked my aid. He wired me down here yesterday morning, and to-day, finding my investigations as unprofitable as those of the sheriff, I resolved to appeal to you."

"Ah, that explains. I wondered at your being so far from home."

"Come out this way. I have a trap back of the station, and during the half-mile drive before us, I will tell you what I know about the case. Here we are. Tumble in and I'll handle the ribbons."

This series began in the February, 1904, issue. The back numbers can be secured through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents each.

"A deucedly stylish rig, Jimmie," laughed Boyd, as he complied.

"It belongs to Dr. Gillespie Dane, head of the Vandyke Academy out here," replied Coleman, as he mounted to the seat and gathered in the reins. "He loaned me the hitch to bring you up, Felix, when informed that I expected you on this train. He had heard of you, too, and appeared glad to have you investigate the affair. Says he feels sure that you'll find some reliable clew to the robbers."

"A case of robbery, eh?" smiled Boyd. "Suppose you loosen up, Jimmie, and give me some of the points."

This Coleman proceeded to do, meantime driving more slowly through the attractive country town, that time might be had for his disclosures.

"To begin with, Felix," said he, "the people round about here, both in Epsom and the nearer outlying districts, have been victims to a long series of midnight robberies, covering nearly a year. The identity of the thieves is not known, nor has any clew to them been obtained, despite the fact that about thirty dwellings have been entered and robbed of money and jewelry since September last. Griggs thinks that the work is that of a professional gang, having a hiding place about here, yet of which he can get no trace. Suspicious looking strangers have been watched, also every tramp and vagabond who came this way, but nothing has come of it. The people are terrorized, Griggs is at his wits' end, and that's about the size of the general situation. As a last resort, Griggs wired me down here to investigate a wholesale burglary committed night before last, and, after giving an entire day to it, I find myself up against the bricks as hard as he was, so I thought I would send for you. That, Felix, is the beginning, and the occasion of my being here."

"I see," murmured Boyd, thoughtfully. "Do I understand, Jimmie, that these burglaries were confined to dwelling houses?"

"So I am told."

"And that only money and jewelry were stolen?"

"Chiefly those. Yet in several cases solid silver, in the shape of spoons, forks and the like, have been taken."

"Because of being easily carried and disposed of, I should say. Do you know when the first of these robberies was committed?"

"Last September."

"Have they since occurred at regular intervals, or otherwise?"

"Otherwise, I'm informed. Three breaks were made on successive nights, however."

"Do you know what proportion of them is confined to Epsom?"

"I cannot say definitely," replied Coleman. "Yet I know that there have been more than twenty houses burglarized here in town, so you can form some estimate."

"Near enough," nodded Boyd, with curious indifference. "Now, Jimmie, what was the affair of two nights ago?"

"A wholesale robbery at the Vandyke Academy, which is, as you know, one of the best in the country. Its tuition fees are high, and all of its patrons are young men, ranging from eighteen to twenty years of age, and of wealthy families, a fact which probably led to this robbery. It doubtless was assumed that the students would have a considerable supply of money and valuables, and it now appears that intelligent discrimination was made. Of the entire school, numbering over a hundred, the ten students whose private rooms were entered and robbed of money, rings and watches, were those most liberally provided with such valuables."

"Ten rooms were entered, eh?"

"Twelve," cried Coleman, bluntly. "That of Professor Clyde, one of the faculty, and the office and chambers of Dr. Dane, the head of the academy, were both entered. Clyde lost a valuable watch and something like two hundred dollars, while Dr. Dane's losses were even greater."

"A wholesale job, indeed," remarked Boyd. "Strange that none of the victims was disturbed by the thieves. What do they say about it?"

"All say that they slept soundly and

heard nothing. One in particular, a nervous young chap named Vincent, declares that he had the best night's rest that he has enjoyed for weeks. Ordinarily he is troubled with insomnia, yet night before last he slept, he says, like a brick."

"Very good of him under the circumstances," laughed Boyd, a bit oddly. "Have you discovered how the thieves got in?"

"Not definitely," replied Coleman. "The dormitory and private rooms of the students occupy a long wing of the building in which Dr. Dane's family and his assistant teachers reside, and in which the office and reception room are located. On the ground-floor rooms some of the windows were left partly open, the night being warm, and very likely the thieves took advantage of it."

"Quite likely," admitted Boyd. "Is yonder the academy?"

"Yes. We shall find Dr. Dane and Griggs awaiting us. The wooden building fronting west is the doctor's residence, and the long wing making out to the south is occupied by the students. The brick building to the north is the school proper, and the low one beyond is a gymnasium. Ah, there is Griggs now."

The half-mile drive had brought them to an attractive outskirt of the town, where the extensive grounds and buildings of the Vandyke Academy were located, upon a rise of land that greatly added to the general beauty and pretentious appearance of the noted preparatory school. The immediate approach was through a long avenue of handsome elms adorning the gentle acclivity, and Boyd surveyed with more than cursory interest the scene of the recent bold burglary.

A groom from the stable came to relieve Coleman of the team, and Sheriff Griggs, a black-eyed little man of fifty, came down from the house veranda to greet the couple.

"I'm glad you're here, Mr. Boyd; mighty glad," he growled, brusquely, after introductions. "I'll be mighty glad, too, if you can make anything of this rascally business, in which case you'll do more'n I can. I've been after the scurvy curs for nigh a year now, and I'm worse off the scent than when I started—mighty worse off, to tell the gospel truth."

Boyd laughed lightly, and replied as soon as the voluble county sheriff gave him a chance.

"Possibly your efforts may be rewarded sooner than you anticipate, Mr. Griggs," said he, pleasantly. "Sometimes, you know, we men of the detective profession light upon our quarry when least expected."

The Central Office man smiled covertly, but Griggs fell to vigorously rubbing his horny hands and appeared immensely flattered.

"So we do, so we do, Mr. Boyd," he cried, dwelling heartily upon the pronoun. "I'm mighty sure that between us, Mr. Boyd, we shall yet round up the mangy dogs infesting this locality. If we cannot do it between us, Mr. Boyd, I'll be mightily mistaken and away off my—hey! here's Dr. Dane, sir. Right this way, doctor, and shake hands with Mr. Felix Boyd, of New York City."

Dr. Gillespie Dane was an attractive, gray man of nearly seventy, with all the polish of a gentleman and scholar—which appeared all the more marked from contrast with the law's mighty right arm in that particular county. Yet Griggs, too, was all right, in his own peculiar way.

"I'm very glad that you could find time to favor us with your experience and advice, Mr. Boyd," said Dr. Dane, with quiet fervor. "I am much upset by what has occurred here, which, in a way, may reflect upon my care and management. Detective Coleman was very kind to ask you to come down here."

"I shall do what I can for you, Dr. Dane," said Boyd, quietly. "Yet I can give you no assurance that I shall accomplish anything. I should like as soon as convenient to visit the several rooms entered by the burglars, and to meet the various persons who were robbed."

"But you first will take lunch, sure-

ly," cried Dr. Dane, leading the way into the house. "Come, Griggs, you are included. This is our lunch hour, Mr. Boyd, and the students now are at the table."

"I should rather like to see them," observed Boyd.

"Indeed! That can easily be arranged, then, for, though my family dining room is separated, I often sit at the table with my assistant teachers in the main hall. You there will meet Mr. Clyde, our professor of chemistry and physics, whose room was entered and his watch and money stolen. Feel perfectly at home, Mr. Boyd. The lavatory is yonder, and always desirable after a train ride. I shall keep you waiting only briefly."

Such was the case upon which Mr. Felix Boyd had entered. The gist of it could have been imparted to him with a breath—a stupendous series of robberies, to the perpetrators of which no man had been able to find the slightest clew.

Some ten minutes later the three visitors, Griggs with his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets, entered the great dining room in which the students and teachers were gathered at the numerous tables, and there were given seats at that occupied by the several school professors, to whom Boyd was introduced.

The scene was an animated one, yet the invariable good order, the attractions of the great room, the neatness and dispatch of the numerous servants, all indicated the excellent taste and executive ability of Dr. Dane. At the table assigned the faculty, Boyd was given a seat next to Dr. Dane and directly opposite Professor Clyde, and naturally the recent crime soon became the chief topic of conversation.

"I hope to accomplish something for you, at least enough to put our good friend Griggs on the track of these rascals," Boyd listlessly observed, in response to an appeal from Professor Clyde. "I am told that your loss was considerable."

The professor, a prepossessing, athletic man of forty, smiled dubiously and shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Considerable cash, Mr. Boyd, and a watch I particularly value," said he, with an agreeable, sonorous voice. "It was a cherished heirloom, and I would gladly pay thrice its intrinsic value to have it returned."

"Possibly we shall be able to recover it," drawled Boyd, with a lassitude for which Coleman could not account. "Yet such crafty burglars are hard to catch. The work appears to me to be that of a well organized gang of professional crooks, with headquarters in this locality."

"That's just my idea," cried Griggs, as roundly as a mouth well filled with mashed potato would permit. "I've said so time and time again."

"I shall remain here long enough to attempt to run them down."

"I hope you'll stop at my house during your stay, Mr. Boyd. Coleman is with me, and you, too, will be welcome —mighty welcome, sir."

"Thank you, sheriff," smiled Boyd, with drooping lids. "I must have a room at the hotel or inn, however. I may engage in night sallies after these robbers, which I shall prefer to do secretly and alone. Besides, what better place than an inn for picking up chance clews?"

"That's true, sir. Yet I'd have been mighty glad to have you at my house, Mr. Boyd."

"By the way, Dr. Dane, can you tell me when the last burglary occurred before the one committed here?"

"Just ten days ago, Mr. Boyd," was the ready reply. "The victim was Mr. Jeptha Curry, one of our selectmen. I recall the day, for he and his wife dined with me that evening, and his house was entered the same night."

"Much taken?" queried Boyd, indifferently.

"I cannot say just what amount."

"As I said a while ago, I wish to visit the several rooms entered and talk with the occupants."

"Mine is open to you at any time, Mr. Boyd," interposed Clyde, readily.

"You may begin your investigation immediately after lunch," said Dr. Dane.

"The students will have finished in about a quarter hour."

"As I already am done, I think I'll go down to the—— How are you, Griggs—nearly through?" inquired Boyd, with curious indecision. "If the doctor would loan us his trap once more, I'd like to have you take me down to the hotel before I start in on this work. I wish to select a room just suited to my needs, one of so easy access that I shall not attract attention going or coming. We might drive down during the present delay."

Griggs, despite that he still was hungry, already had dropped his knife and fork and was out of his chair.

"Sure we can, Mr. Boyd, and I'll be mighty glad to take you," he cried. "No need of the doctor's trap, either, for my own team is hitched in the stable shed. Come on, sir. I'll whisk you down to the inn in no time, and back in less. Mighty glad to do it."

Boyd rose to his feet, still with that odd air of deliberation.

"Under the circumstances, gentlemen, I'm sure you'll excuse me," said he. "We shall meet again presently. See you later, Jimmie."

With which, while the replies of several were made, Boyd bowed himself from the table and accompanied Griggs from the dining room and out to the stable shed.

"A curious fellow, Mr. Coleman, your friend Boyd," observed Dr. Dane, with a smile.

"If he has discovered any clew, Coleman, or formed any theory as to these burglaries, it certainly does not appear on the surface," supplemented Professor Clyde, in a way plainly evincing that he was losing faith in Boyd's acumen and ability.

"I doubt if he has yet discovered anything or formed any theory," Coleman dubiously rejoined.

It was an apt reply on the part of the Central Office man. He was too familiar with Felix Boyd and his methods to believe for a moment that the latter had withdrawn merely to visit the local hotel. That Boyd already was engaged in some sort of a secret move Coleman had not a doubt, and in making the reply noted he had aimed to make it well in accord with the late air and attitude of his artful and sagacious associate. In so thinking and doing, moreover, the Central Office man had hit the nail squarely on the head.

Yet Felix Boyd, accompanied by the talkative sheriff, rode first to the town hostelry, which consisted of a huge old inn, with numerous outbuildings, and glorified in the ancient name of the Epsom Arms. Just why the word Arms had been applied to an inn, Boyd could not determine.

At the Epsom Arms, however, he selected a side room on the second floor, easily reached by a back stairway, as well as the main one in front. Of this room Boyd took away the key, and presently was again seated with Sheriff Griggs in the latter's rattling road wagon.

"Now, sheriff, how far is it to the house of Mr. Curry, the selectman who was robbed?" he inquired.

"Only a short piece up yonder road," said Griggs. "The mare can do it in five minutes."

"Have her do it in three, Mr. Griggs," said Boyd, dryly. "That will suit me better. I merely want a look at Curry's house."

Griggs wondered mightily, but complied without question.

"That's enough, sheriff," said Boyd, the moment the house was pointed out to him. "Now, back again, lively, to the main street. I presume you have a national bank here, or one at which I can get my check cashed?"

"Bank! You bet! A mighty good bank, too—solid as Gibraltar," vouchsafed Griggs, with worthy pride.

"I have not quite as much cash by me as I would like."

"Say, let me loan you some! Just say the word, Mr. Boyd, and I'll be mighty glad to do it."

"Very good of you, Griggs; but I think I'll cash a check. Your voucher for me will satisfy the bank, I'm sure."

"Well, I guess! There 'tis now, Mr. Boyd—finest building in town. She cost nigh twelve thousand——"

"We'll lose no time, Griggs," interposed Boyd, springing down to the sidewalk.

Having been introduced and vouched for in the bank, Boyd wrote his check for three hundred dollars, and requested that the money be given him in fives and tens. As he strapped the considerable bundle with a couple of rubber bands, then deposited it in a long, leather pocketbook in his breast pocket, Griggs regarded him with a curious grin, and ventured to observe:

"I guess it's mighty lucky you came to the bank instead of to me, Mr. Boyd. Better not let the crooks about here get wise to that bunch of long green, or they'll be after you next."

An odd light gleamed for a moment in the depths of Boyd's keen gray eyes. He took the sheriff's arm, in friendly fashion, as they returned to the team, replying pointedly:

"A very good reason, Griggs, why you should make no mention whatever of my call at the bank. Bear that in mind, will you?"

"Will I? You bet I will!"

"Nor of our turn about Curry's house?"

"I'm dumb—dumb as any dead oyster, Mr. Boyd," declared Griggs, with very convincing fervor. "I'd have less brains than a clam, a mighty sight less, if I opened my eating machine about any of your doings. I'm as close as a cocoanut, I am, when there's any reason to be. That's me, Mr. Boyd."

"Good enough, Griggs. You're a man after my own heart." laughed Felix Boyd. "Now in with you, and back to the academy—lively!"

## II.

It was two o'clock when Boyd again entered the academy, where he found Dr. Dane, Coleman and Professor Clyde awaiting him, and the four at once proceeded to the former's sleeping room.

"My wife and daughters occupy two front chambers," said Dr. Dane, as they ascended the stairs. "My wife is an invalid, and I have an adjoining rear room. This is it. Come in, gentlemen."

Felix Boyd, behind the others, had halted briefly in the hall. His attention was drawn to a small, black spot on the polished oak floor, the only blemish visible on the gleaming light woodwork, and one which a housemaid ordinarily would have seen and removed in cleaning the hall, despite that the spot was barely the size of a silver dime. Boyd promptly decided that the blemish had come there since the hall was cleaned, and he stooped quickly to examine it with the tip of his finger, the episode escaping the notice of his companions.

"Humph! A spot of tar!" he said to himself as he arose. "Yet there are no concrete walks about here. There may, however, be a tarred roof."

"This is my room, Mr. Boyd," repeated Dr. Dane, as Boyd entered.

"Ah, yes," said he, glancing over the well-furnished room. "Do you sleep with your windows open?"

"One of them, that furthest from the bed."

"Was your wife's room entered?"

"I think not. Nothing has been missed."

"And that of your daughters?"

"Some jewelry and a sum of money were taken from their room."

Boyd glanced at the window mentioned and looked out. Three feet below was the flat roof of a shed, covered with tar and gravel. An examination of the stone coping outside the window revealed a small black smooch on the gray stone, and Boyd, without offering any explanation, sprang out upon the roof of the shed.

There he examined the outer edge of it, the ground below and a vine-grown trellis, reaching nearly to his feet; and next he intently studied the gravel roof in a line toward the window, and particularly one noticeable patch of tar, the surface of which gleamed fresh and bright in the afternoon sunlight.

"What do you find, Felix?" asked Coleman, carelessly, when Boyd returned to the chamber.

"The crooks entered by this window," replied Boyd, readily.

"Do you really think so?" demanded

Dr. Dane. "How on earth do you arrive at that conclusion?"

"One of them trod in a clot of soft tar out there," said Boyd. "Note the smooch left on this stone as he came over it! His foot slipped slightly, thus defacing the stone, and he steadied himself by clutching at this lace drapery, as you may infer from the fact that it is torn from one of the rod pins up there. Your exemplary housekeeper would speedily have seen and repaired that, Dr. Dane, so it is safe to say it was very recently torn. Also on your hall floor you will see a small stain of tar, plainly indicating that the burglars went in that direction."

Dr. Dane's eyes were opening wider, and Professor Clyde, who had been an interested observer of Boyd's movements, now remarked, admiringly:

"Those are keen and clever deductions, Mr. Boyd. I beg to congratulate you."

"They amount to nothing, professor, nor serve us in the least," smiled Boyd, a bit dubiously. "We already knew that the thieves entered the house. Just how they got in is not very material. I now am convinced, however, that they were experienced crooks."

"So it appears to me," rejoined Clyde.

"That is all I want here, doctor," said Boyd. "With your permission, professor, I will merely glance into your room and note its location."

"Certainly, certainly, Mr. Boyd," cried Clyde, cordially. "Come this way. It is across the hall."

As the party approached the room Boyd turned to Coleman and said, quite indifferently:

"You might go with Dr. Dane, Jimmie, and have him get together the several students whom I have to question. It will expedite matters a little, and I will glance into their rooms after having questioned them."

"I will call them up into the hall of the wing," put in Dr. Dane, readily.

"Capital," nodded Boyd. "I presently will rejoin you there. Professor Clyde will show me the way."

Clyde bowed agreeably, and Boyd followed him into the room, while Dr. Dane and the Central Office man departed. It was similar to the one they had left, and Boyd at once went to look from the window.

"No chance for an entrance here, professor," he remarked. "The windows are much too high. The location is on the north side, I take it."

"Yes, Mr. Boyd. I prefer this side, there being less sun," Clyde affably rejoined.

"You're like me in that respect," laughed Boyd, lightly. "Too much sun gives me a headache. I'm not overstrong in my upper story. I think, by the way, that I'll jot in my notebook the points mentioned, lest they pass from my mind. Ah, pardon me!"

In drawing forth his leather pocketbook, to take from it a small notebook and pencil, Boyd nearly dropped his prepared bundle of bank notes, and in catching it collided slightly with Professor Clyde. The episode passed in an instant, however, having been enacted with a naturalness precluding the slightest suspicion, and Clyde remarked, laughing lightly, as Boyd thrust the package back into his pocket:

"You carry quite a wad of money, Mr. Boyd."

Boyd joined in the laugh, while he glanced at the point of his pencil.

"More than I like to carry," said he. "I had intended to pay several official accounts with it to-day, but Detective Coleman's telegram reached me after leaving my office, my boy overtaking me with it, and I had only time to catch the first Epsom train. I may use your desk, professor?"

"Certainly, Mr. Boyd," cried Clyde, heartily. "Pen and ink are there, if you wish to use them."

"Thank you, professor. My pencil will answer."

For a matter of five minutes Boyd scribbled earnestly in his notebook, then arose, looked over what he had written, and then again glanced curiously about the room. Yet he appeared to have no eyes at all for a closed door opposite the one he had entered.

"I think that's all, professor," said he. "By the way, was the property

stolen from you under lock and key at the time?"

"It was in the upper drawer of my dressing-stand yonder," said Clyde. "Very carelessly, however, I habitually leave the key in the lock. I had no apprehension of a robbery here."

"Naturally not," murmured Boyd; "naturally not, professor. Well, we'll see what the students have to say."

"This way, Mr. Boyd. I'll take you into the wing."

One observing Mr. Felix Boyd would have said that he was as helplessly in the dark as Griggs himself. For upward of two hours he talked with the half-score of students with whom he was brought in contact, but he elicited from none any point that appeared to serve his purpose. Both Dr. Dane and Professor Clyde finally became weary of listening to his interminable repetition of questions and went about their business for a time.

Then Boyd ended this branch of his investigation by entering the room of a student named Vincent, son of a Boston banker, a frail, nervous youth, who had been confined to his bed under a reaction from his excitement over the burglary.

"Improving, are you?" remarked Boyd, as he arose to go, after a brief talk, apparently having learned nothing.

"Oh, yes," smiled Vincent, from his pillow. "I shall be up to-morrow, providing I get a good night's sleep."

"Don't you generally sleep well?" Boyd lingered to inquire.

"Very rarely, sir. I seldom close my eyes until after midnight."

"How about the night of the robbery?"

"Oh, I slept like a top that night," laughed Vincent.

"Any particular reason, think you?"

"None that I know of, sir."

"How about the previous night? Perhaps you were unusually wakeful, which induced a better rest the night following."

"I don't think so, sir," demurred Vincent. "I was about as usual during the nights previous to the robbery."

"Well," and Boyd smiled paternally, "I leave my hearty wish that you may now rapidly improve."

Then he bowed himself from the room, and rejoined Dr. Dane and Coleman in the academy office, obviously as perplexed a man as ever stood in leather.

"I'm going to look about the grounds for a spell, Jimmie," said he, after declaring the futility of his work thus far. "Possibly I may light upon some footprints or other evidence that will shed at least one ray through the prevailing darkness. Come with me, Jimmie, if you like."

Coleman took the hint and they went out together, while Dr. Dane glanced at Professor Clyde, who had entered, and hopelessly shook his head.

"Not making much headway, is he?" inquired Clyde.

"None at all, that I can see," rejoined Dr. Dane.

Boyd did not unbosom himself to Coleman, and the latter asked no questions. They wandered out to the stable together, then through the grounds, and back around the house, Boyd constantly studying the earth and the various walks; and at the end of nearly an hour he lighted, apparently by accident, upon an open bulkhead door giving ingress to the house cellar.

"Let's slip down there for a moment, Jimmie," said he.

Coleman complied, yet he could make neither head nor tail to his companion's indolent movements. Once well into the cellar, however, Boyd muttered:

"Sit down on these stairs, Jimmie, and keep an eye upon that door. I'll return in a minute."

He did not wait for an answer. He went up the stairs with the speed and quietude of a startled cat, and was absent several minutes. When he returned, the perspiration was standing in drops on his brow and neck, and his eyes had an unusual glitter. Yet he asked carelessly:

"Where's Griggs, Jimmie?"

"He's out in the stable, waiting for me to go home with him," growled Coleman, a bit impatiently. "It's nearly six o'clock."

"That so? I had no idea 'twas so late. I'm going to remain here and dine with Dr. Dane, then go down to the inn for the night. By the way, Jimmie, there's something I may want you to do for me."

"What's that, Felix?"

"If I want it done I'll contrive to send you a message at Griggs' house. Wait there for it until midnight. If you hear from me, Jimmie, you and Griggs repair at once to my room in the inn and conceal yourselves in the wardrobe closet, leaving the door ajar. I'll leave the room door unlocked. Make absolutely sure that you are not seen or heard, from start to finish. Once in the closet, Jimmie, remain quiet and wait developments. If you see me enter the room pay no attention to me until I require it. I'll give you the word. Do you understand?"

"Surely," cried Coleman, with eyes lighting. "But what the devil is all this for?"

"I hope to show you, Jimmie," replied Boyd, evasively. "Now be off with Griggs, and don't take him needlessly into your confidence."

Boyd easily contrived to remain at the academy to dinner, also to sit at the same table as when at lunch. Yet his air and appearance were entirely those of a man much disappointed and not a little chagrined. When Professor Clyde across the table asked about his investigations, moreover, Boyd wearily admitted, with affected frankness:

"I've discovered nothing very promising, professor. The case is quite as baffling as my friend Coleman intimated when I arrived here. I shall remain a few days, however, and look a little further. To-night I'm going to see what I can discover in other localities."

"At the inn?" queried Clyde.

"In part," nodded Boyd. "Possibly I can get a clew from some chance remark. By the way, Dr. Dane, were there any doubtful persons seen about your grounds during the day or evening of the robbery?"

"None of whom I have been informed, Mr. Boyd."

"I heard Hunter say something to that effect," put in Clyde. "When he left here that evening to go to the inn he saw two men hanging about the street gate."

"Ah, is that so?" cried Boyd.

"Hunter is my head waiter," explained Dr. Dane. "He is married, however, and lives at the inn. I'll call him here and you can question him."

"Do so, please," said Boyd, with reawakened interest. "This may give me some thread to start with."

A few minutes later Mr. Hunter, a tall, sallow, shifty-eyed man of thirty-odd, appeared at Boyd's chair. In reply to the latter's questions, he said, frankly enough:

"I did see two men—yes, sir. They were talking at the park gate."

"Can you describe them?"

"Well, sir, in a general way."

"That may serve, Mr. Hunter," suggested Boyd, with his empty teacup absently poised between his thumb and finger.

"Well, sir, one was short and dark, about fifty years old, and wore a heavy beard. The other—well, sir, he might have been the former's son, by his looks."

"Have you seen them since?"

"I have not, sir."

"Should you happen to, and can contrive to inform me before they depart. I wish you would send me word," said Boyd, deliberately. "I am at the inn, Mr. Hunter, and can be readily reached."

"I will do so, sir, if I see them."

"Thank you very much, Hunter." bowed Boyd, smiling in approval. "That's all, my man. Stay—you might have my cup refilled, if you'll be so good. Your tea, doctor, is very reviving."

As the waiter accepted the cup and saucer, Boyd, from one corner under his drooping lids, indulged in a swift glance across the table.

Professor Clyde was wiping the handle of his knife with his napkin.

At ten o'clock that evening Jimmie Coleman received the message mentioned by Mr. Felix Boyd.

Dusk was settling over the town and

landscape when Boyd left the Vandyke Academy and started for the Epsom Arms. Upon arriving at the inn, he purchased at the bar a pint of old brandy, and slipped the flask into his pocket. Then he went up to his room, lighted his oil lamp, and left it burning on the mantel.

About nine o'clock, while seated in the inn office, he saw Hunter entering the house with his wife, and he contrived to meet the couple in the hall.

"Not seen either of those men since, have you?" he inquired, affably.

"No, sir, I haven't," laughed Hunter. "When I do, Mr. Boyd, I'll make sure to inform you."

"Good enough," nodded Boyd. "By the way, where does Curry live, whose house was entered?"

"On Parker Road, sir. Anybody outside can direct you."

"Thanks. I think I'll have a look at his place."

The last was from over his shoulder, as Boyd sauntered out of the inn.

At ten o'clock, about the time Coleman received Boyd's message, which had been sent by a lad, Boyd was engaged in Parker Road, now studying Curry's house from one side, now from the other, and occasionally entering the grounds to obtain a different point of view.

His steps had become unsteady. His hat was awry on his head. He stumbled occasionally, as if near falling, and twice he sat for some minutes on a low stone wall, as if a bit dazed by over-indulgence in liquor—or some other cause.

These symptoms increased during his return to the inn. His walk at times became a reel. Thrice he appeared to have lost his way, and once he accosted a bearded stranger and asked to be directed. His voice was as unsteady as his legs, and his enunciation quite incoherent. Yet his brandy flask was then but partly emptied.

Upon reaching the inn he stumbled up the stairs, felt his way along the hall wall, and with obvious difficulty located his room. Then he entered, dropped his hat upon the floor, laid his coat on the seat of a chair, took another drink from his flask, and then threw himself, partly dressed, upon his bed.

His fat pocketbook, however, he had transferred to an inner pocket of his vest, which he still wore.

It then was after eleven o'clock.

Not a sound came from the deep closet in one corner.

Midnight came and the situation in the room remained the same. The voices of people outside and below had ceased, and the inn was shrouded in darkness—save alone the room in which Felix Boyd lay, like a man stupefied, half-dressed on his bed.

The clock on a distant church struck one.

Less than a minute later two men, both heavily bearded, stole into Boyd's room and quietly closed the door. There could be but one interpretation of their hushed words and rapid, yet silent movements.

"He's dead to the world," whispered one. "You must have loaded him."

"No," muttered the other. "About the same as usual."

"He'll not come round before morning. Too far gone to lock his door, even, or extinguish his lamp. He'd no business to remain up so late."

"It'll be the later before he sleeps it off."

"Look sharp, now! Keep an ear at that hall door."

"So I am."

"I'll relieve him of the stuff."

The latter speaker then stole to the coat in the chair—and found the pocket empty.

Then he crept to the side of the bed, bending over Felix Boyd, who was breathing deep and hard, and with stealthy fingers began to unbutton the latter's vest.

Then from Felix Boyd there came a move as quick as a lightning flash, and the sharp, metallic click of locking handcuffs was drowned by his quick, ringing shouts.

"Now, Jimmie! Nail the man at the hall door! I've got this one!"

Coleman scarcely needed the command. Before the first word fairly was

uttered both he and Griggs were out of the closet, revolvers in hand, and were leaping like wolves upon the man at the door.

There was a struggle by both scoundrels, a brief one only, however, for the men who had secured them were men who knew their business. In half a minute the trick was turned, when Griggs, fairly gasping with amazement, impulsively cried:

"Good God! what's the meaning of all this, Mr. Boyd?"

Mr. Felix Boyd, still gripping the manacles on the wrists of the man he had forced to his knees on the floor, quickly whipped off the beard from the miscreant's ghastly, horrified face, at the same time crying curtly:

"Meaning of it, Griggs? Merely that I have to present you with the robbers you've been seeking—Professor Raymond Clyde, of the Vandyke Academy, and John Hunter, the head waiter! Take them, Griggs, with my compliments! Look sharp about it, too, for I can keep my eyes open but damned few minutes longer! My brandy flask has been empty half an hour!"

Mr. Felix Boyd laughed lightly, reclining indolently upon the cushions in the smoker's compartment of the parlor car, while the train of the following morning whirled him back to New York.

"Let Griggs wonder, Jimmie," said he, in reply to a remark from his companion. "It's his privilege to wonder how we men of the profession accomplish our tasks. It may add to his favorable opinion of me if he never lights upon the truth."

Coleman smiled through the veil of smoke from his cigar.

"To tell the truth, Felix," he replied, dryly, "I'm somewhat in the dark myself. I'm blessed if I quite fathom how you got at it."

"It was by no means difficult," said Boyd, thoughtfully. "You gave me a very good foundation for my theory as we rode up from the station. To begin with, Jimmie, the work of professional burglars is very rarely confined to dwelling houses and the removal of only money and jewelry. When stores and safes are ignored it is an indication of novices. Nor would any gang of regular housebreakers have entered a place like the Vandyke Academy and have gone through no less than twelve rooms. The plunder to have been secured would not have warranted the risks embraced. So I at once decided that the work was not that of any professional gang."

"And then, Felix?"

"I then looked for others," smiled Boyd. "The robberies began in September, Jimmie, as did also the term at the academy. In a way, it was a significant fact. So also was the fact that all of the victimized students, even one afflicted with habitual insomnia, slept soundly on the night of the burglary."

"Oh, ho! I see! Pointing to the probability that they had all been drugged."

"Precisely," nodded Boyd. "Assuming that, Jimmie, the question at once arose, who had done the drugging? Presumably some one located in the academy, eh?"

"Naturally."

"Brief consideration led me to distrust one man, the most natural one—the professor of chemistry. Who would be better able to have prepared some drug for the purpose? Ah! but he, too, had been robbed, say you? We had only his own word for that, Jimmie. If guilty, it would have been merely a clever ruse to avert suspicion, that of declaring that he, too, had been victimized by the thieves. Jimmie, I decided that Professor Clyde was the man I chiefly wanted, and that drugs had been used. I was convinced that the latter was correct, moreover, when informed that Curry had dined at the academy the evening on which his house had been entered."

"A convincing deduction, surely."

"Then it became obvious that Clyde must have had help in order to distribute and administer the drug," continued Boyd. "At first I thought of the academy cook; but my lunch in the dining room showed me that the cook had no

opportunity to send out drugged food or drink to any definite parties. Naturally, then, I turned to the table help, and the looks of the head waiter warranted my immediate distrust."

"He is rather a shifty-looking dog, for a fact."

"While at lunch," proceeded Boyd, "I framed up a ruse to trap my men, which I resolved to attempt doing, instead of trying to dig up a lot of uncertain evidence against them. I inferred, rightly, I since have learned, that Clyde was making the most of the closing term to lay in what plunder he could. He has been operating with Hunter throughout the winter. Some of their robberies have been ordinarily conducted. In others a pill dropped into a cup of tea, or a dash of powder upon some food, both of which ingredients have been provided Hunter by Clyde, have helped in their work in those cases in which their victims dined at the academy."

"I see," nodded Coleman. "They are two bad eggs, and will be well out of the way."

"So I planned to induce them to drug and rob me, Jimmie, to cover which design my demeanor and remarks were constantly calculated. You know about my going down to the bank for money, and all that?"

"Yes. Griggs informed me this morning."

"After returning I permitted Clyde to witness most of my investigations, and, incidentally, displayed my wad of money. He was completely blinded by my confidence in him and my apparent perplexity. From the cellar, however, I discovered that a rear stairway led up to a door of Clyde's room, plainly showing how he was able to leave secretly the academy at night."

"Quite so, Felix."

"At dinner, by a peculiarly lucky stroke, I succeeded in having a brief talk with Hunter at my table, and, incidentally, asked him to refill my cup with tea. I wanted to learn what Clyde's move would be. As Hunter took my cup, I caught Clyde significantly wiping his knife with his napkin, and I saw that Hunter started slightly. Plainly enough, it was a signal."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Coleman, loudly. "You then knew that you were marked to be drugged."

"Exactly," smiled Boyd. "But I received my cup of fresh tea, and drank the dose like a little man. It required considerable brandy, however, to stimulate me sufficiently to fight off the effects of the drug till after midnight. I kept on my feet most of the evening and pretended to make a study about Curry's house, knowing well that Hunter would be dogging me most of the time. But I fooled him well with my pretended drowsiness and unsteady gait. It was easy for him to quietly admit Clyde to the inn after midnight and bring him up to my room. Plainly enough, the rascals had no suspicion of me, and looked to turn a laugh on me, as well as get my money. A fat story it would have made, that of a New York detective done by a brace of rural crooks!"

Coleman laughed deeply, shaken with amusement.

"So it would, Felix, for a fact," said he. "It was a curious case and cleverly solved."

"That was about the size of the case, Jimmie," added Boyd, relapsing to his cigar.

"You turned the trick well, Felix—deucedly well."

"Quite well, Jimmie," drawled Felix Boyd, modestly. "Or, as Griggs would say—mighty well! mighty well!"

(*The next story in this series will be "The Case of the Broad Street Hold-Up."*)

# The Confessions of a Hotel Manager

By Louis Tracy

*Author of "The Pillar of Light," "The Wings of the Morning," Etc.*

[NOTE.—The great modern hostelry, with its small army of servants and its hundreds of guests, most of whom are virtually unknown to the management, is sometimes the scene of strange happenings, though the public seldom hears of them, for such notoriety is not desired by the proprietor. This series of stories by Mr. Louis Tracy, an English author whose work is well and favorably known on both sides of the Atlantic, is based on events which have actually occurred, though, for obvious reasons, it has been found necessary to conceal the identity of both people and places.—THE EDITOR.]

## II.—THE UNEARTHING OF A CONSPIRACY

(*A Complete Story*)

MR. BOHN, the manager, not long after I went to the Park Lane Hotel, fell ill.

The doctor prescribed complete rest and change of scene.

Mr. Bohn was really very nice to me when the directors asked if I could run the hotel in his absence. He said he would "leave Mr. White in charge with the greatest confidence."

So, see me, as the French say, installed in the place of power, and Mr. Bohn speeding from London to the Riviera at Christmas.

Of course, there was a flaw in the ruby. In what phase of our past lives has success ever been devoid of some little drawback?

My days, my nights, were devoted to the hotel. Pass an evening in Annie Webster's company, I dared not.

Once I dashed out to visit my bootmaker. I was absent half an hour. When I returned, I found Mrs. Newport O. Rich on the point of leaving the house forever, because a careless servant had brought her a morsel of stale cheese.

I smoothed her over. I said I was sorry she was going, because I hoped to avail myself of her remarkable taste in color schemes when the spring renovations were undertaken.

She yielded. No American woman could resist the glory of bringing her friends to dine in the restaurant, and saying:

"This is *my* idea. They wanted to make the place bizarre in white and gold, but I pointed out that electric lights are cold enough as it is, and most women require a dash of pink in the walls to help their toilet."

And toilet, *bien entendu,* means more than clothes.

Annie came to tea with me one afternoon, Lady Boxley, her employer, having sent her out unexpectedly.

In her neat gray walking costume, black picture hat and black suède gloves, she looked as great a lady as any of the *grandes dames* in the hotel.

We were enjoying our second cup, in a corner of the foyer, when I heard a commotion at the main entrance.

A railway omnibus drove up, piled high on the roof and crammed to the door with strong, wooden, iron-clamped boxes.

This series began in the June number, which can be secured through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents.

From the interior barricade an elderly man emerged. He had U. S. A. written all over him, but not in the elegant, self-possessed outlines of the stylish Americans who usually patronized our hotel.

This man reminded me of Uncle Sam as he is depicted in *Judge* and *Puck*.

It would not have surprised me were he attired in a blue coat powdered with gold stars and trousers of red and white stripes.

"Say," he inquired, in a loud, hearty voice, addressing the hall porter, "whar's the boss? Which of these halls of light is the booreau?"

"What a dear!" whispered Annie, as I rose to learn his wishes.

"I guess this is the Park Lane Hotel?" he began.

I assured him that it was.

"You're kinder shy of sayin' so outside," he said.

I pointed out affably that there were gold letters ten feet high on the roof to announce the fact.

"That's all right for people who happen along in air ships, but I kem in a 'bus," he laughed.

I admit that the retort ruffled me somewhat, as I could feel that Annie was smiling, but I contented myself with civilly asking what accommodation he required.

He tapped my chest admiringly.

"That's the way ter talk," he said. "What blamed business of mine is it where you advertise yourself, anyhow? Now, my young friend"—and he tapped me again—"the size of my own room is of no account. I've bin sleepin' in a bunk fer eight nights, in a Pullman fer five nights before that, an' in an adobe hut fer so long that it's no matter. *The* thing is to find a suite fer my baggage. Just size 'em up, will yer?"

I sized them up, and found there were nineteen huge boxes and one small portmanteau.

I noticed that the porters were experiencing extraordinary difficulty in lowering the packages from the roof of the omnibus and in carrying any of them into the hotel.

Moreover, the two 'bus horses were white with foam, yet they had only traveled from Euston.

"They seem to be very heavy," I said, "but, so far as mere space is concerned, if you wish all of them to be taken to your rooms, there is an excellent suite at liberty on the second floor. Of course, we can give you a smaller and less expensive suite if you care to send the majority of your trunks to the basement."

"Jehosh!" he roared, "you hit the bull's-eye every time. Now, that's just it. I do want all of 'em located under my eye. They're chock full of gold ore, my buck. Wuth ten thousand dollars a box, if they're wuth a cent."

He bellowed forth this surprising information in a manner that led me to suspect him of being either a swindler or a lunatic.

Several people strolled into the foyer from one or other of the public rooms, and took a deep, if polite, interest in the stranger and his packages.

I was at a loss how to act for the best.

Framed on the wall was a notice setting forth that, according to act of Parliament, the hotel would not be responsible for valuables belonging to guests, unless the said valuables were lodged in the safe provided by the management for that and other purposes.

But it would need a considerable section of the Chancery Lane Safe Deposit to house this man's "valuables."

He seemed to appreciate my difficulty, and tapped my shirt front again. Its stiffness appeared to fascinate him.

"Don't you be skeered by the sight of so much bullion," he said. "I want you ter git me two of those old boys with peaked caps an' rows of medals across their lungs, to mount guard outside my balliwick in the daytime. At night I'll keep everything snug myself. If a fly gets giddy an' buzzes round, I'll hear him, an' I kin empty this through a keyhole at ten yards."

He suddenly flourished a huge revolver under my nose. A couple of ladies, seated near, rose hastily and sought the security of the drawing room.

I thought it best to humor this

strange visitor, and arranged for the speedy transference of himself and his belongings to Suite 8K.

I took care that he should know the tariff, which was stiff, and resolved not to permit his account to run a day beyond the following Monday.

But Mr. Phœbus P. Prince carried too many guns for me, without reckoning his six-shooter.

When a couple of *commissionaires* came in response to my telephoned message, I took them upstairs and introduced them to their employer.

His orders were pithy and to the point.

"If I'm at home," he said, "bring everybody right in. If I'm out, not a livin' soul must enter."

One of the men mentioned terms.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Mr. Prince, "I was nearly forgettin'."

He produced a bundle of greenbacks.

"You'll find a thousand dollars in that wad, Mr. White," he said, handing me the lot. "That should see you through for a week or two. Arrange with the boys here what's right an' proper. I'll do the tippin' myself."

From that hour, the Park Lane Hotel might have been the private mansion of Phœbus P. Prince, judging by the manner in which he used it.

The money-seeking brigade swarmed around him. He had not been in the place a day before he made the acquaintance of a dozen of the top-hatted and frock-coated gentry, who regarded its American bar as their happy hunting ground.

To each and all he told the same story.

"I've struck it rich," he explained. "I ranched out on a small location near Gulch City, Colorado, fer thirty years, splittin' logs in fine weather an' mindin' stock in bad. Then I found my mine, Plug Reef, San Juan County, Colorado. This is the biggest high-grade proposition ever heard of—pockets every few feet an' minin' all the time through twenty-ounce ore. Every blamed claim in four squar' miles b'longs ter me. I located the lot. None of yer jumpin' tricks fer this gray-headed infant. I own that bit of earth. But I'm an old man. I want a rest. I don't want to spend the rest of my life in diggin' fer millions. I'm sellin' the whole caboodle. My price is two hundred thousand pounds—cash down. I have a sack load of reports upstairs, an' ore to burn. Now, mister, just bring along yer friends an' look into things, an' I'll give you a commission big enough to make yer mouth water."

You can imagine the sensation he created.

The Christmas holidays in no way impaired the activity of those who saw a golden harvest in the flotation of the Plug Mine.

Not only men, but women, fluttered into the hotel by dozens daily. Many of them, to be near the great man constantly, took up their quarters in the hotel.

Since the house opened it had never been so full at that season of the year. My first essay at independent management was in a fair way toward being crowned with unhoped-for success.

But I was not happy.

Frankly, I regarded Mr. P. P. Prince as a rank impostor. The idea grew on me with such increasing force, that at last I sent for Mr. Brent and poured my doubts into his sympathetic ear.

"It sounds very like a gigantic confidence trick," he said, when I had told him all I have written, and more. "Does Mr. Prince ever submit any of his wonderful ore to analysis?"

"Oh, yes. He gives pieces to anyone who pretends to be able to help him. I know of three cases in which they have secured certificates from Messrs. Crunch and Smelt, which bear out Mr. Prince's statement to the letter."

"Has he met any really sound financial people?"

"I think so. I hear the names of most of his callers—make it my business to do so, in fact, and many of them come from firms of good standing."

"You do not believe that anything definite has been done?"

"No. Mr. Prince was grumbling this morning at the slowness of our business men. If the Steel Trust had not cleared

out all the available money from New York, he said, he would just slip back there and carry through the deal in a day."

"Have you any idea how much ore he has in his rooms?"

"At least four tons."

"Does he allow people to choose samples for themselves?"

"No. He selects a few lumps casually from one or two cases which are open. He carries small bits in his waistcoat pocket. He gave me one. He says it is worth ten pounds. Here it is."

I produced from my desk a lump of dark-colored, heavy stone, about the size of a hen's egg.

Mr. Brent examined it carefully. He evidently knew something about ore, as he said, instantly:

"This is genuine enough. Mr. Prince has not exaggerated its value. What do you wish me to do, Mr. White?"

"I don't know," I ruefully admitted. "It is outrageous to admit that a sound financial scheme is capable of being carried through in such an extraordinary manner. Of course, it may be all right, and I dare not suggest any alternative. But if this proves to be a colossal swindle, how very unpleasant it will be for the hotel, and for me."

Mr. Brent turned and looked out of the window. He remained silent for quite a minute.

"It seems to me," he said, at last, "that this is a matter wherein your American friend ought to encounter a little of his own native bluff. Can I see him?"

I learned that the owner of the Plug Mine was in his suite, and disengaged, so I took Mr. Brent upstairs, and introduced him as a gentleman in whose knowledge of affairs I had the fullest confidence.

Mr. Prince was delighted.

He tapped my waistcoat heartily.

"I cottoned on ter you straight away," he cried, "an' any gentleman you bring along gits my complete respect, Mr. White."

I bowed. The compliment had a keener edge than the speaker dreamed of.

Mr. Brent was very quiet and business-like. He ascertained that the other was still open to "do a deal," and began to question him.

Mr. Prince was candor itself.

Maps, plans, reports, blue prints and analytical certificates were showered on us. The barrister examined them critically.

"You must have expended a good deal of money on the preliminary investigation of your mine?" he said.

"Gee whizz, Mr. Brent, the dollars flew round like doughnuts."

"How much? Say ten thousand?"

Mr. Prince made a mental calculation.

"Double that," he said. "My friend, Mr. White, here, is no slouch when it comes to figurin' on a bill. An' those engineerin' gentlemen! Gosh! Every time they open their mouths they swallow fifty dollars."

"I suppose, then, that some one helped to finance you when your mine was discovered, as you were a struggling farmer before that lucky event occurred?"

"Guess again," chirruped Mr. Prince. "No, sir. Nary a help. I just dug the stuff outer my reef, made concentrates in a rough sort of way, an' sent the product to the smelter. Ore like this is as good as gold bricks. There are three P.'s in my name. I used ter say they meant Prince, Poverty an' Privation, but now I know they represent Prince, Plug an' Pelf."

I smiled. This was the kind of talk with which our auriferous lodger entertained people. How it tickled the ears of those who were itching to finger that big commission!

Mr. Brent, too, smiled, and I was glad.

There was trouble brewing for the bouncer from Colorado. The barrister began:

"I suppose you have learned already, Mr. Prince, that no one in London, no syndicate of any real financial status, will pay you so much money in hard cash on the mere security of a few documents and samples of ore?"

"There's bin a lot of talk," admitted

the American, "but I can't say that the certified check is in my bank yet."

"Very well. I will make you an offer. Subject to certain reasonable stipulations, some friends of mine will guarantee to purchase your property for a preliminary payment of twenty thousand pounds down, and the balance of a hundred thousand pounds in bimonthly payments of twenty thousand pounds. The remaining hundred thousand will take the form of mortgage bonds at four per cent."

Mr. Prince chewed a green cigar thoughtfully.

"That sounds all right so far," he commented.

"The stipulations are, first, that the whole of the ore, which is, I understand, in your possession in this hotel, be submitted to analysis after examination."

Mr. Brent paused, but the other man said not a word.

"The second," continued the barrister, slowly, "is this. The first payment shall become due a month from date. If the inquiries made by us meanwhile do not bear out the statements you have put forward, we will forfeit two thousand pounds and refund to you the value of the gold extracted from your ore."

"Why do you name two thousand pounds?" asked the American, quickly.

"Because it is half the amount you stand to lose, on your own showing, if the affair falls through."

Mr. Prince sucked in another inch of cigar.

"Kin you satisfy some lawyer-folk that your friends are able to carry the load?" he demanded.

For some reason, I thought that Mr. Brent was rather taken aback by this question, but he instantly replied in the affirmative.

"An' it'll figure in the bond that the buyers won't be at liberty to throw me down if all I've said pans out accordin' to assay?"

"Yes."

"There won't be any legal jokers in the contract—none of your 'heads I win tails you lose' clauses?"

"No."

The old man stood up and leaned over the table. He stretched out his hand.

"It's a deal," he said.

Mr. Brent also rose.

"Who are your solicitors?" he asked.

"Hain't got any yet. I reckon I'll just skate round an' dig 'em out. Gimme your address an' you'll hear from 'em."

Mr. Brent shook hands with him. Very much amazed by the turn taken by events, I was about to accompany him.

"Say, Mr. White," cried P. P. P. "What d' you want outer this?"

Mr. Brent turned at the door.

"I venture to suggest that you give Mr. White a commission note of two per cent. for the introduction, the commission to be payable on the entire amount, as and when received."

"Right you are," exclaimed Mr. Prince. "Just get that dockyment rigged out an I'll stick my name on it."

"What does it all mean?" I asked the barrister, as we descended in the lift.

"Don't you understand?" he said.

"How can I? To my mind, it seems as if you had undertaken to buy the mine at his own valuation."

"That is exactly what I have done. Your elderly friend is telling the truth. I believed every word he uttered. Now, I have the pleasant task on my shoulders of forming the necessary syndicate. Really, Mr. White, you got me into this thing very neatly."

"Mr. Brent," I gasped, "are you in earnest? Am I to receive two per cent. on two hundred thousand pounds?"

"Four thousand pounds, spread over a year. That is the position. The next time you ask me to unearth a conspiracy to plunder anybody, I will be shy of you. Here am I, plunged into the higher finance up to the neck, all on your account. No, I can't listen to any explanations. I must buttonhole at least two millionaires before dinner. Good-by."

He raced away.

Somehow I managed to perform my duties decently during the next three weeks.

Mr. Brent and Mr. Prince met frequently, and dined together occasional-

ly in the company of men whom I knew to be important personages in the city.

Often I looked in secret at my commission note, and wondered if it could be true.

Shall I ever forget the day when Mr. Prince sent for me and handed me a check for four hundred pounds?

"They've anté'd up the first little lot," he said, calmly, "an' now I'll cable for Mrs. Prince and the girls. Sakes, how they'll enjoy life!"

I had not told Annie a word about the business, thinking it was best to wait until certainty was achieved.

Now I could contain my news no longer.

I staggered into a cab and drove to Lady Boxley's.

By great good luck I found Miss Webster alone in the morning room.

Forgetting all things, save my great good fortune, I clasped her in my arms and kissed her.

She was too surprised to resist. Indeed, I believe she gave me a return squeeze, until she suddenly remembered that we were not even engaged.

Then there would assuredly have been a row if I didn't pour out my story as volubly and clearly as I was capable of.

When I ended, her eyes were shining.

"I suppose what you really mean is that you want to marry me?" she said.

"I ought to have asked you, I admit," I cried.

She placed her hands on my shoulders.

"You have asked me silently a good many times, John," she murmured.

"And did you reply?"

"Yes. You are a dear fellow. I would have married you, John, without your flourishing of checks before my eyes. But I was quite determined not to become a useless burden at the beginning of your career. I am so glad of your good fortune, for both our sakes. And it is pleasing to know that I liked your American the first moment I set eyes on him."

Which shows how much more adept than I at reading character Annie was.

I had tried to fling fortune away, when she literally bounced in the front door.

I was taken by the scruff of the neck, so to speak, and my feet were planted firmly far beyond the first rung of the ladder.

But the end was not yet. There are several gray hairs in my head which I will account for in due course.

# A VICTIM OF CHANCE

IN one of the suburbs of a certain big Eastern city there is a lady who is famous for her swagger afternoon receptions. But, although these entertainments are given on the most lavish scale, the tremendous amount of ceremony attaching to each function renders it so slow and boring that few would accept the invitation if they could refuse without offending their wealthy hostess. A good story is told about one of these afternoon "At Homes," which thoroughly illustrates their character.

A young man came in, and made his way to the hostess, greeting her and apologizing for his lateness.

"I'm so delighted to see you, Mr. Blank," said the hostess. "It's so good of you to come. And all the way from the city, too. But where is your brother?"

"Oh, he asked me to tell you how sorry he was that he could not come. You see, we are so busy just now that it was impossible for both of us to get away, so we tossed up to see which of us should come."

"How nice! What a capital idea. And you won?"

"No," said the young man absently; "I lost."

# THE APE AND THE DIAMOND

By Richard Marsh

*Author of "The Whistle of Fate," "The House of Mystery," Etc.*

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Samuel Hookham, a miserly London capitalist, comes into possession of a magnificent diamond on the death of his brother Matthew, from whom he has been estranged for years. With the gem is a letter stating that the stone is known as the Devil's Diamond, that it has the peculiar property of bringing bad luck to its owner, and that it is impossible to sell it, though it may be given away. Hookham scoffs at the idea at first, but misfortunes come to him thick and fast, and when he tries to find a purchaser for the gem the dealer to whom he takes it has his hand severely burned through the stone's suddenly becoming scorching hot. All Hookham's efforts to sell it are frustrated through the diamond's pranks, and he cannot bring himself to give away a stone that is worth twenty thousand pounds. Finally Monsieur and Madame Nurvetchky, the proprietors of an amusement resort, hear of the remarkable gem and persuade Hookham to allow them to exhibit it. The diamond more than fulfills their expectations, and Madame Nurvetchky suffers some severe burns as a result of her offer to purchase the stone during the performance. They then invite anyone who cares to do so to come upon the stage and test the diamond for himself, whereupon Mr. Percy Leicester, a wealthy young Englishman who has made an especial study of conjurers' tricks, comes forward.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE DEVIL'S DIAMOND IS ALMOST TOO SUCCESSFUL.

PERCY LEICESTER was a tall man, sparely built, yet possessing a breadth of chest which denoted strength. He carried himself with a slight stoop. His face was clean-shaven, and his large brown eyes were fixed deeply in his head.

He had a trick of fixing his glance on anything which caught his attention, which is found in short-sighted people, though he was not short-sighted, and which made the object stared at wonder if by any possibility this man could blink.

"M. Nurvetchky"—his voice was another peculiarity: he habitually spoke with almost feminine gentleness, and yet so clearly that his words traveled further than the utterances of more uproarious speakers—"do we understand you to say that what we have just now seen owed nothing to your connivance?"

"Certainly."

"That it is not a trick?"

"If it is a trick we are not the performers. The diamond has acted on its own initiative."

"Will you allow me to come on the stage?"

"With the greatest of pleasure. We shall be glad to have you. So keen an inquirer as yourself cannot fail to arrive at a correct conclusion."

M. Nurvetchky's tone was a little dry. As Mr. Leicester was about to accept this invitation, Colonel Dewsnap rose from his seat and caught him by the arm.

"I think if I were you"—he stroked his mustache and paused—"I'd leave this thing alone."

"Colonel, you come with me."

That was Mr. Leicester's answer. The colonel laughed—a little oddly.

"I don't mind if I do."

One after the other they ascended

This story began in the May issue, which can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price, ten cents.

the steps which led to the little gangway and moved toward the stage. Willy Panton seemed to object to being left behind; he was quite ready to cut a figure on any stage.

"Can't I come, too?"

"I think," said Mr. Leicester, "that perhaps you'd better not."

"Let me out! I ain't going to stay here! I ain't going to have my goose cooked, not for no one."

It was Mr. Truelove in the gallery. M. Nurvetchky addressed the committee of inspection.

"Well, gentlemen, what is it you would wish to examine first?"

Mr. Leicester replied:

"Perhaps you will let us examine this table."

He picked up the red cloth-covered table, which only weighed a pound or two, and examined it with the minutest care. He rapped the legs, he sounded the top, he searched for signs of any of the appliances of the modern conjurer. The colonel seemed to think the proceeding superfluous.

"I don't think you will find the secret there."

Finally Mr. Leicester seemed to think so, too. He took the table to the back of the stage. Kneeling down, he began to examine the carpet foot by foot.

His attitude appeared to strike the audience as ridiculous—there were, so to say, almost audible smiles. But Mr. Leicester persevered.

When he had gone all over the carpet, almost inch by inch, he rose and looked up overhead. Then with equal care he moved all round the stage and examined the walls. He even opened the door by which the performers entered, and peeped off.

Apparently satisfied with the result of his proceedings, he advanced to M. Nurvetchky.

"Now, sir, with your permission, I will examine the diamond."

All this time the diamond had lain on the floor where it had been dropped by Madame Nurvetchky. Unhesitatingly he stooped and picked it up. It showed none of the signs of aversion to him which it had evinced to the lady.

"I suppose, M. Nurvetchky, you have no microscope of any kind handy?"

"I have a jeweler's glass."

M. Nurvetchky took one from his pocket and handed it to the speaker. Mr. Leicester fitted it into his eye. With its aid he long and carefully peered into the inner mysteries of the diamond. After he had peered for quite a minute, he came to the front of the stage. He spoke to Mr. Schwabe.

"I think you said you were a diamond merchant?"

"I am. Here is my card."

Mr. Schwabe took a cardcase from his pocket and passed a card up to Mr. Leicester.

"Thank you. I think, too, you said that you had already examined this diamond. You are sure—you will excuse my putting it in that way—but you are quite sure that this is the one that you examined?"

"I am quite sure."

"May I ask if you have noticed any peculiarity in the formation of the stone?"

"If you mean, has it a flaw, it has none. It is one of the most perfect stones, if not the most perfect stone, I ever saw. It is perfect so far as appearances go."

"May I trouble you to explain what you mean by 'so far as appearances go'?"

"It *is* a perfect stone. What I mean, you will possibly discover for yourself before you have concluded your experiments—if you intend to try any."

As he said this Mr. Schwabe smiled.

"I suppose there is no doubt that it is a diamond?"

"None whatever. As I have said, it would be cheap at twenty thousand pounds, if it were possible to buy it."

And Mr. Schwabe smiled again.

"I am obliged to you." Mr. Leicester turned to M. Nurvetchky. "I suppose, M. Nurvetchky, that the wonderful things this stone has done in the hands of others it will be equally ready to do in mine?"

"As to that I cannot inform you. You had better try."

"How shall I proceed to try?"

"Suppose you address yourself to the owner of the stone? I can only repeat my assurance that I myself know nothing of the matter, one way or the other."

As Mr. Leicester was turning toward Mr. Hookham, Madame Nurvetchky touched him on the arm.

"I do not think, my friend, you know what ground it is on which you are venturing. You see this, and this, and this." She touched the scars on her neck and bosom, and her poor burnt hair. "That stone, which is now so cool to you, has done all this, as you saw with your own eyes. And see, it has burnt me here as well." She held out her hand and showed him the mark of a scar. "You absolve us from all blame, you take upon yourself all risk in this that you are about to do?"

"I absolve you from all blame. I must dree my weird, madame."

"Mr. Hookham, let me present to you Mr. Leicester, a famous gentleman."

It was a curious place for an introduction. Mr. Leicester bowed. Mr. Hookham merely looked at him askance. Mr. Leicester held out the diamond.

"I understand that this diamond, sir, is yours?"

"Yes, sir, it is mine."

"You claim for it magic powers?"

"I? I claim for it nothing."

Madame Nurvetchky interposed.

"If you want to produce some manifestations—I think that I may call them so—offer to buy it."

"Take care!"

The words were boomed through the hall with the tumult of a deafening crash of thunder. It was impossible that any human pair of lungs could make that noise. As for a ventriloquist, the notion was ridiculous. It almost cracked the drums of people's ears.

The audience started, sprang from their seats, turned pale, and stared at each other in amazement. The sound died away like a *diminuendo* boom in the distance. It was literally some seconds before they could hear each other speak.

And when at last something approaching silence had returned, it was the colonel's voice that was heard.

"That's the third time of asking. Now look out for ructions."

The colonel smiled, but he was the only person in the building who seemed inclined to do so. One or two bolder spirits ventured on the ghost of a smile. But the prevailing expression of people's countenances seemed to be distinctly doubtful, as though they did not know what to make of it at all.

"Mr. Leicester, don't you think you had better act upon the warning, and take care?"

"Madame Nurvetchky, I have heard that sort of thing done before, though I will do you the justice to admit that I have not heard it done quite so well."

The lady smiled. She favored him with one of her sweeping courtesies.

"Mr. Leicester, the risk is yours."

"As you say, madame, the risk is mine."

"Yes; and I wonder what percentage an insurance office would want, to take it?"

This was from the colonel. Mr. Leicester proceeded to address the owner of the stone.

"I understand that if I wish your diamond to do any more of those wonderful things we have already seen, I must offer to buy it. I am afraid that so valuable a stone is beyond the range of my limited means; but, at the same time, I shall be happy—I shall be happy"—he paused—"I shall be happy"—he paused again—"I shall be happy——"

There was a convulsive twitching of the muscles of his face. His lips were tightly closed. Then he raised his hand and flung the diamond from him to the floor.

"I wonder how they managed to do that?"

His voice, as he asked the question, was still gentle and courteous. He stood, with his arm stretched out in front of him, gazing at the open palm. Madame Nurvetchky moved to him.

"Has it burned you? I warned you! It seems resolved to leave a brand on

everyone that touches it. Oh, your poor hand!"

She bent over Mr. Leicester's palm and smoothed it softly with her own.

"Supposing you show it to the audience," suggested M. Nurvetchky, as sleepy and as bored as before, but drier than ever. "Let them have the satisfaction of seeing that you are really burned."

Mr. Leicester showed his hand to the people.

"It has burned me in the palm."

The people, craning forward in their seats, could see that it was disfigured by an ugly scar.

"Mr. Leicester," observed M. Nurvetchky, "will shortly explain to you how it was done."

"If you will take my advice, sir," said the clerical gentleman at the back, "you will come off the stage. They will work you a mischief if you do not take care."

"Mischief! I hope they'll remember that my name's Truelove, if they want to make arrangements for your burial."

From which remark it appeared that Mr. Truelove had not yet retired from the gallery. Mr. Leicester seemed to pay no attention to either speaker. Turning slowly round, he advanced to where the diamond had found a resting place upon the carpet.

"As I was saying, Mr. Hookham, I shall be happy"—he stooped to pick up the stone. There was a report as though the stone had gone off pop. It was perhaps the suddenness of the thing which induced him to withdraw his hand. "I shall be happy——" He again advanced his hand. There was another report. Possibly more prepared for these little pleasing carryings-on, he did not flinch, but the stone did. As he was about to grasp it, it gave a little spring and was beyond the reach of his hand. "I shall be happy——" Again he made a snatch at it—again there was a report—and again the stone had hopped away.

Then a curious performance took place—which was not down in the program. Mr. Leicester went after the stone, and the stone eluded him. Pop, hop, went the stone, and snatch, dash went Mr. Leicester.

The singular chase continued all round the stage. Mr. Leicester's perseverance was unbounded. He had evidently made up his mind to get hold of the stone, and meant to know the reason why if he failed in doing so.

It was funny to look at him, the tall, carefully dressed man, stooping and grabbing at the popping, hopping piece of crystal—so funny that the people laughed. But his perseverance was destined to be rewarded.

Suddenly the diamond ceased its remarkable antics. In an instant, Mr. Leicester had it in his hand.

"I have it," he said, with quiet triumph. "Now, Mr. Hookham, as I was about to remark, I shall be happy——"

It seemed that he was fated not to declare his happiness. He had got so far when a ring of flame sprang up around him like one of those haloes which we see in old pictures encircling the heads of saints. It in no place touched his body, but it girded him roundabout as with a belt of flame. He paused to look at it, with a curiosity which might be called excusable.

"I wonder how that's done?" he said, in that quiet, contemplative voice of his.

"Perhaps you will be able to offer an explanation as you go on;" thus M. Nurvetchky, with ever-increasing dryness, as it seemed.

Keeping his eyes on the thin, circular red line, Mr. Leicester continued addressing Mr. Hookham.

"As I was observing, sir, I shall be happy"—pause, instant appearance of a second belt of flame, about halfway up his body—"I shall be happy"—another pause, and the third belt appeared, about the region of his knees.

"Let me entreat you, sir, to pause. That old man means to work you mischief."

The clerical gentleman had risen in his seat and was pointing at Mr. Hookham. Mr. Hookham's attitude did seem singular. He was bent almost double, his hands were knitted together

in a convulsive clasp, his eyes seemed starting from his head. He would not have made a bad picture of a man engaged in the act of cursing his enemy. His looks seemed to strike Mr. Leicester.

"Would you work me a mischief?" he asked.

The old man started as though the words had roused him from a fit of intense pre-occupation.

"I? Work you a mischief? I?" The old man looked round the hall with frightened eyes—it gave one quite an uncomfortable feeling to see his face, it was so white and drawn and haunted. He turned to Mr. Leicester: "Give me the stone!"

"Why?"

"Give me the stone!"

"Not I. The experiments are proceeding admirably. As M. Nurvetchky remarked, if I go on I shall doubtless be able to explain exactly how it's done. As I was observing, Mr. Hookham, I shall be happy——"

The three belts all at once united and became a continuous sheet of flame. Mr. Leicester was standing in a circle of flame some three feet deep—shaped something like a barrel with both the ends knocked out.

"I protest!" cried the clerical gentleman, who had remained erect upon his feet. "I protest against this exhibition going on!"

"Why do you protest?" inquired M. Nurvetchky.

"That old man means mischief!"

The clerical gentleman brought down his hand with a bang on the back of the seat in front of him, with so forcible a bang that the young lady who occupied it sprang up with a little scream. Possibly, in his growing excitement, he mistook it for the railing of his pulpit.

"Leicester," murmured the colonel, "I think you'd better come away."

"I have warned Mr. Leicester that the risk is his;" this from Madame Nurvetchky, with one of those eloquent gestures of hers, which were at the same time so full of grace.

Mr. Leicester looked first at the clerical gentleman, then at the colonel, then at Mr. Hookham, who had again assumed one of his peculiar attitudes, and at the lady last of all.

"Yes," he said, "the risk is mine." He glanced down at the flame which circled him. "I have been continually interrupted in the observation that I was about to make to you, Mr. Hookham, to the effect that I shall be happy——"

The flame began to gyrate. Slowly at first, then with ever-increasing velocity. As it went whirling round, it threw out sparks, as a gigantic catherine wheel might throw out a great rain of fire.

"Leicester," cried the colonel, on whom some of the sparks had fallen, "come out of it."

"My dear Dewsnap, you are surely not afraid! Consider how great a portion of my life I have spent in looking for something which might be honestly called remarkable. At last it seems that I have stumbled upon something, by the merest chance—one always stumbles upon the most important discoveries by chance—which may be said to answer that description. You would not have me give up my search just at that moment when I am within measurable distance of success?"

Mr. Leicester's tones were quietly pleasant. But it seemed as though the people were beginning to be restless in their seats.

"As I was observing, Mr. Hookham," continued Mr. Leicester, "I shall be happy——"

A faint, white smoke began to accompany the sparks which were issuing from the revolving sheet of flame—a faint, white smoke of peculiar pungence. It stole from the stage into the hall. It mounted to the gallery. People began to cough. They began to see each other through a haze. The clerical gentleman turned to a lady who accompanied him.

"Hester, come away. That old man means mischief; look at him now!" And indeed Mr. Hookham was staring with a strange intensity at Mr. Leicester and the revolving flame. "At least, we will not stay to see it done."

He began to push past the people as though he intended to effect an immediate exit from the hall. His example was contagious. Other people showed signs of going too. There were symptoms of something like a panic.

Mr. Leicester, who seemed quite at his ease in the curious position he occupied, appealed to their common sense.

"What are you running from? A conjurer's trick? Don't be so foolish. Sit down, and see it out."

The appeal, which was distinctly audible, even in the gathering confusion, had the result of quieting the people, at least for the moment. Others remained standing where they were. Even the clerical gentleman paused in his flight.

"As I was observing, Mr. Hookham, I shall be happy"—the smoke suddenly increased in volume—"I shall be happy"—so dense had the smoke become that it obscured the persons on the stage, but through it issued, audible to every creature in the hall, the clear, well-bred tones of Mr. Leicester's voice: "I shall be happy to buy your diamond."

There was silence, just for an instant. People looked at each other's faces, so much, that is to say, as they could see of them, for the smoke in the hall, as on the stage, began to be thick and suffocating.

Then a scream rang out—the scream of a human being.

They could not see for the smoke who it was that screamed, but they guessed that it was Mr. Leicester, though the acute, agonizing scream, which made their blood run cold and their hearts cease beating, was pitched in a different key to the soft, easy tones to which they had just been listening. Then there was silence again.

Then a curious noise began. It came from the stage. It was like the yelping of some strange beast. Yelp! yelp! yelp! Each separate yelp made them shiver in their shoes, and wish they had been anywhere but in the Sphinx's Cave that afternoon.

It seemed, from the sound, as though some wild animal had appeared upon the stage. It seemed as though it were tearing something to pieces. It seemed as though it were in an ecstasy of rage, and, in its fury, was yelp, yelp, yelping!

How long it lasted, that uncomfortable visitation from the unseen visitor—if it *was* a visitation, and there *was* a visitor—no one in the hall would have been prepared to say. It seemed to those there that it lasted hours. Possibly it only lasted seconds.

Just as speedily as it came, it went away. All was still.

## CHAPTER VII.

### "MURDER!"

The hall was filled with a dense and suffocating smoke, which penetrated into every nook and cranny, as though the place was on fire. But there were no signs of flame.

And in the intense silence which followed the cessation of that remarkable noise which had proceeded from the stage the smoke began to disappear. Nobody seemed to notice where it went, but it did go, and by degrees the air was as clear again as though it had not been.

And as the smoke passed away, the people were revealed, in the clear brilliance of the electric light, all standing up, and with white, frightened faces turned toward the stage.

Something very curious seemed to have happened there. The table and two of the chairs were overturned, and on the third chair sat—if such an attitude can be spoken of as sitting—Mr. Samuel Hookham.

He had every appearance of having been engaged in some desperate struggle. His coat was torn all down the back, one of the sleeves seemed to be attached only by a few loose threads to the shoulder, his shirt was ripped open at the neck, his waistcoat was unbuttoned, and there was a great scratch all down one side of his face.

He lay, rather than sat, on his chair, which was balanced on its two hind legs. His head, with the blood streaming from the open wound—or scratch—on his right cheek, rested on his

chest, and his arms dangled loosely at his sides. On the whole, he did not present at all a creditable picture.

But his was not the only singular figure to be seen upon that little stage, which, for once in a way, might truly claim to have been the scene of an entertainment of mystery and imagination, a scene which had lost none of its piquancy through having been an unrehearsed effect.

There was a figure there, the figure of a man, which appealed even more strongly to the imagination than Mr. Hookham's, it lay so very still—right in the center, full length upon the carpet, with his face turned toward the ground. It was the figure of Mr. Percy Leicester.

Still in silence the people continued to stare. Why did he not get up? And why did he lie on his face there, so very still?

In the front stood Colonel Dewsnap, staring down upon his friend. At the back was Madame Nurvetchky, her fists clinched so tightly that one fancied that her finger nails must be piercing the flesh of her hands. On the right stood her husband, his tall, lean figure drawn straight up, peering through his sleepy-looking, half-closed eyelids at the man who lay upon the ground.

Suddenly a voice rang out, and so intense and strained had the silence become that the people started at the sound of it.

"Mr. Leicester!" It was Willy Panton. It is possible that he would have allowed that he had had what he called his "five bobs' worth" by now—his "five bobs' worth" and perhaps a trifle over. No answer. He called again: "Mr. Leicester!"

Still silence. Then M. Nurvetchky made a move.

"Mr. Leicester!"

He stooped over the recumbent figure. Then the colonel came to his side. Kneeling down, he touched his friend on the arm.

"Leicester!" Then, as the people watched him, scarcely seeming to breathe, he turned him over on his back. "By God! he's dead!"

The words came from him with unconscious profanity—in the army there are still gentlemen who swear, and he was one of them. As the colonel uttered that great oath, exclaiming that his friend was dead, a sound went through the hall like a sob. It is possible that some of the women fainted. It is certain that some of them began to cry. Madame Nurvetchky had been a true prophet when she had foretold that the new addition to the program would make a big sensation.

"Are you sure that he is dead?" asked M. Nurvetchky.

"Quite sure." The hand with which the colonel smoothed his mustache seemed to tremble. "I know death when I see it. Good God, what an awful thing! To think that his love for hankey-pankey should have brought him to such an end as this!"

Even as he was speaking, some one in the audience mounted the gangway and came striding on to the stage. It was the clerical gentleman. He seemed half beside himself with excitement. His voice was rendered hoarse by the force of his emotion.

"There has been murder done. That man has killed him!" He pointed an accusatory finger at Mr. Hookham. "But you have shared in the deed!" He turned on M. Nurvetchky. "And that painted woman!" Then he turned on M. Nurvetchky's wife. "Let the police be sent for! As I live I will see justice done!"

M. Nurvetchky straightened himself very quietly, and looked at him. "Are you a madman, sir?"

"You scoundrel, to dare to ask me such a question, with your victim's soul still fluttering at the gates of God! Is there a man here who, having witnessed such a deed, can refuse to call on the avenger of blood?"

His language, if his meaning was a little confused, was sufficiently violent. It was not difficult to believe that he would produce an effect upon a revival platform—of a certain class. His passionate appeal was answered by the rubicund gentleman, whose rubicund appearance, by the way, was considerably

modified. Indeed, he seemed exceedingly ill at ease.

"I—I think I saw the old gentleman attacking him. Indeed, I—I'm sure I did. As a matter of fact, I'm prepared to take my oath that I did."

"There is at least one man who dares to speak out and do the right. Is there but one? Oh, my friends, look upon this man, whom we all saw but a moment back instinct with the breath of life, and who now lies branded with the brand of Cain." In his excitement the clerical gentleman misplaced "the brand of Cain," but that was but an oversight. "There is the livid mark about his neck where the life was torn from him by murderous hands. And there is the man who did the deed"—pointing to Mr. Hookham, who seemed gradually waking to the fact that he *was* being pointed at. "You see how his victim fought for his life—the blood upon his cheeks—his clothes torn all to fragments! And here are his accomplices!"—turning on M. and Madame Nurvetchky—"the conjurer and his painted wife! But every moment wasted is an added crime. Why are the police not here!"

"Do I understand you seriously to assert that I, or any person here, has had a hand in this man's death?"

As he put this question, M. Nurvetchky's air of sleepiness and of boredom seemed temporarily to have disappeared.

"Do not speak to me, you villain! A minister of the Word can hold no converse with such as you. Send for the police!"

But the clerical gentleman was not to have his own way entirely—and a very interesting way it promised to be—with every prospect of the interest increasing as he went on. The colonel interposed, with some asperity:

"I think you must be of a sanguine temperament, sir, and see double. I was on the stage, sir, and I saw nothing of any crime."

"You say that? And was not this dead man your friend?"

"Well, sir, and what the devil has that to do with it if he was?"

"You swear! With your gray hairs! In the presence of the dead? Oh, you are all the same! Send for the police!"

This summary method of putting him out of court did not seem to exactly please the colonel—perhaps the allusion to his gray hairs, for there was not a younger man of sixty-three in town, touched him, too. He looked as though he was about to use some very strong language indeed. But Madame Nurvetchky took him by the hand.

"The man is mad," she said. "But do not let us contend in the presence of the dead."

The lady's opinion of the clerical gentleman's madness was not shared by the audience, or not by all of them, at any rate. The rubicund gentleman in particular was very clear upon the point.

"I was not upon the stage, and I saw a crime, as I am prepared to depose on oath in any court in England!"

And there were cries of "Send for the police!" some of them very ugly cries. But ugly or not, they were unnecessary, since it appeared that somebody had sent for the police already. For presently two members of the force appeared, followed at short intervals by others, so that soon it seemed as though all the people in the hall had been taken into custody. The two first comers went stamping on to the stage with the orthodox policeman's stamp, as though they were shod with lead.

"What is the matter here?" inquired policeman number one.

"Matter! Crime! Black crime! Murder is the matter here."

The policeman did not seem to be so much impressed by the clerical gentleman's melodramatic manner as he ought to have been. Policeman number two knelt down by the recumbent figure on the stage.

"He is dead. How came he by his death?" he asked.

"That man killed him."

The clerical gentleman pointed to Mr. Hookham. Mr. Hookham, apparently fairly roused at last, staggered to his feet.

"It is false! It is a lie!" he gasped.

"And this man and woman were his accomplices," continued the clerical gentleman, turning to M. and Madame Nurvetchky, heedless of Mr. Hookham's denial.

"That also is false," said M. Nurvetchky, quietly.

"It is not false, it is the truth—I am prepared to swear to it in any court in England."

This from the rubicund gentleman in the auditorium.

"You hear? There is one witness' testimony. If it is necessary you should insist upon the testimony of every person here."

"Do you charge this man with murder?"

The policeman pointed to Mr. Hookham.

"I do."

"And this man and woman, too?"

The policeman pointed to M. Nurvetchky and his wife.

"I charge that man and woman with being his accomplices."

At this point an inspector, who had been standing at the door observing the scene, unnoticed by those upon the stage, came up the gangway.

"You are my prisoner." He spoke to Mr. Hookham. "And you, sir, and madame, too." This to M. and Madame Nurvetchky. "If you will give me your words that you will go quietly to the station, I will see that you are treated with all possible courtesy."

M. Nurvetchky slipped his wife's arm through his. He faced the inspector with a smile.

"For my wife and for myself, I give you my word that we will go as quietly as you please. The man is a madman. His charge is a preposterous one."

"As to that I know nothing. I can only hope, for your own sake, that what you say is true. What is that you've picked up there?"

The question was addressed to Mr. Hookham.

"My diamond."

"Give it to me."

Mr. Hookham gave it to him, with something almost approaching a grim smile about his lips.

"It was that which killed that man, not I."

"This?" The inspector looked at the diamond, then at Mr. Hookham, then at the diamond again.

Colonel Dewsnap advanced with his cardcase in his hand.

"My name is Colonel Dewsnap; there is my card, inspector. The dead man, Mr. Percy Leicester, was my friend. But though he was my friend, I believe that what Mr. Hookham says is true—that diamond killed him, not the hand of any living man."

The inspector, with the diamond in one hand and the card in the other, looked the colonel steadily in the face.

"I don't understand you. The diamond killed the man? How did it do that?"

"It is some cursed magic stone, endowed with all the powers of hell."

The inspector smiled.

"I see. It's like that? Well, Colonel Dewsnap, you will have an opportunity to say what you have to say elsewhere."

Then Mr. Schwabe advanced.

"Inspector, here is my card. My name is Schwabe. I am a diamond merchant. I can indorse what Colonel Dewsnap has said—it was the diamond killed the man."

"But I don't understand you. How do you allege that it did that?"

"It strangled him."

"Strangled him?—this stone?"

"I am not actually prepared to swear that it strangled him."

"No, I should imagine you were not."

"But by whatever means that man has met his death, it was through the agency of that stone."

"Well, gentlemen, you will be afforded an opportunity to give your evidence elsewhere. In the meantime, I must see that the prisoners are removed."

The inspector turned to give instructions to the constables. As he was engaged in doing so, Mr. Hookham spoke to him.

"I think you had better give me that diamond."

"I think differently. It will be quite safe with me."

"It is for your own sake I make the suggestion, not mine."

"I am obliged by your solicitude, but I can take care of myself. I have no fear of its strangling me."

The inspector said this in the well-known official way which is intended to infer that the last possible word on the subject has once and for all been said. He possibly intended, too, a mild joke by his allusion to strangulation. But no sooner were the words out of his mouth than he gave vent to an ejaculation which was very like an oath, sprang right off his feet, raised his arm and flung the diamond with violence to the ground. Then he swung round on his heels and glared at the amazed bystanders with a very furious countenance.

"Who did that?" he demanded, not by any means in an official tone of voice.

An innocent constable, who stood just behind him, meeting the full fury of his eye, took the question as being specially addressed to him. He almost choked himself in his anxiety to make a prompt reply.

"Did what, sir? Never moved a finger, sir!"

The inspector stretched out his arm in front of him and stared at the open palm—stared as though he could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Well—I'm——" He was certainly going to say "damned," but his sense of official propriety came to his rescue in the very nick of time, and he said "hanged" instead.

Seeing the inspector continuing to gaze so intently at his hand, one or two of the constables crowded round him, and even Colonel Dewsnap and Mr. Schwabe joined in the stare. It was undoubtedly most annoying. There, in letters an inch in length—the inspector had a good broad hand—was branded, right in the center of the palm, with exasperating distinctness, the one word:

"Fool!"

Mr. Schwabe, when he saw it, smiled; but the inspector did not seem to be at all in a humorous frame of mind.

"Burned you, has it? You should have acted on Mr. Hookham's, suggestion, and made him responsible for the safe custody of the stone. I wouldn't touch it for a thousand pounds."

"But it must have been red hot."

"That's nothing, my good sir. If you care to try a few more experiments with the stone you will soon come to understand how it killed that man. He tried experiments with it, till he tried one too many."

Mr. Schwabe pointed at the figure, which lay in significant silence at their feet. The inspector turned to Mr. Hookham.

"Pick up that thing!"

Mr. Hookham picked up the "thing"—by which term the still irate inspector alluded to the diamond.

"Is it still hot?"

"It is quite cool to me. But perhaps you would like to feel it for yourself?"

Mr. Hookham, in whom the stress of circumstances seemed to have roused some faint glimmerings of humor, though of a grimly uncomfortable kind, held out the stone for his examination. The inspector glared. He kept giving sidelong glances at his hand—on which the word "Fool," in its aggressive plainness, must have smarted in more senses than one.

"Mind, I hold you responsible for the safe custody of that stone, if it is a stone!"—here the inspector positively snarled—"and shall require you to produce it for purposes of evidence in this case whenever required."

Mr. Hookham said nothing; but he slipped the diamond into his waistcoat pocket.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MR. FAIRLIGHT.

Mr. Hookham dined in his cell. A cell in a well-ordered police station is not such an utterly comfortless apartment as some people—principally those without experience, for experience is the great teacher—may perhaps imagine. True, it has one drawback. It is not, to put it very mildly indeed, overstocked with furniture. But if one

can content oneself with a board to sit down upon and a board for a bed—and what avail all the teachings of philosophy if one cannot, just for once in a way?—one might go further and fare worse.

Mr. Hookham, who was by no means habituated to luxurious living and eating and sleeping in his chambers in Mitre Court, was quite at his ease. He made a hearty meal, and seemed to enjoy it, too. He had fasted for so long that one might have thought his appetite had gone forever; but recent events had brought it back again. It seemed as if he had made up his mind to put away at one and the same time, on the principle of "better late than never," all the food that was overdue.

He gave a lavish order to the constable, which that constable lavishly interpreted; yet he did full justice to that constable's interpretation. If that constable—since constables are but mortal—thought that there would be any pickings left for himself out of such a feast, he was woefully mistaken.

After Mr. Hookham had dined, he had a visitor.

This visitor was a slightly built gentleman, clothed in gorgeous attire. He wore patent leather shoes; light gray trousers, faultlessly cut, as the tailors say, well "arched" over the instep—a frock coat, whose perfect fit *almost* conveyed a suspicion of stays; a beautiful red necktie, and the most elegant lavender kid gloves. And he wore an eyeglass, which was adjusted in its place; and there was such a jet-black eye behind it, which was a perfect match to the other eye on the other side of his nose. And that nose was a prominent feature; it was Semitic.

In fact, the whole gentleman was Semitic, though there was something about him which seemed to announce that he intended to assure you, by his mere appearance, that he was nothing of the kind. This gorgeous being was ushered in in quite an unceremonious way. The door was flung open; the policeman's voice was heard announcing:

"Some un to see you!"

The resplendent vision appeared, and the door was banged. The visitor did not remove his hat—it was a beautiful top hat, looking as though he had just taken it out of a shop before he came through that door. Mr. Hookham, who was not expecting a visitor, looked up at him.

"Mr. Hookham? I have just had an interview with your friend, Mr. Schwabe. I am Frank Fairlight."

Mr. Hookham knew who his visitor was without this announcement of the name. He had had a great deal to do with the law courts in his time, not as a practicing barrister, but on his own account, and he knew that there was no more famous solicitor living than Mr. Frank Fairlight. In criminal matters many folks believed, not without a show of reason, that his support meant victory.

As Mr. Hookham eyed this famous man, he told himself that, since Mr. Schwabe had sent him, he hoped that Mr. Schwabe would pay him, too. But he did not utter his thoughts aloud, which was, perhaps, as well.

"You are in rather an awkward position, Mr. Hookham. I understand that there are some curious features in your case, which is perhaps the reason why I am so promptly here. I like to handle curious cases. I knew Mr. Percy Leicester very well."

Mr. Fairlight put his gloved hands behind his back, and beamed down on Mr. Hookham. It was said that there were even magistrates who liked to have him beam on them. His was not a beaming manner as a rule.

"You are charged with murder. I suppose they will word it so as to make it actual murder. I suppose we may take it for granted that you are not——"

"I am not guilty."

Although Mr. Fairlight said that they might take it for granted, there was a certain amount of inquiry in his eye.

"Tell me all about it."

Since Mr. Hookham occupied the only article of furniture which might be classified under the heading "chairs," Mr. Fairlight sat down on the board

which was to serve as a bed, and which was raised some three feet from the ground. Mr. Hookham's plates and dishes were at one end, and Mr. Fairlight was at the other; yet he seemed as much at his ease as though he were seated in one of those glorious drawing rooms with whose splendors his appearance would have harmonized so well.

"I understand that this afternoon you assisted at M. and Madame Nurvetchky's entertainment—on whom, by the way, I am shortly about to pay a call. I am told that you and they are neighbors. By the way, Mr. Schwabe tells me something about a diamond of yours, a diamond which has—shall we say—some little peculiarities?"

"Well?"

Although Mr. Fairlight had requested Mr. Hookham to tell him all about it, it was evident that he himself would have to set the ball a-rolling. Mr. Hookham seemed to be in a taciturn frame of mind.

"He tells me that Mr. Percy Leicester, whose craze for that sort of thing was notorious, came on to the stage to examine your diamond, and that in the course of his examination he was killed? The question is, who killed him? Did you?"

"No."

"I see you look as though you had received rough handling. Did you struggle with Mr. Leicester?"

"I never touched him."

"Did Mr. Leicester struggle with you?"

"Nor did he touch me."

"Did you struggle with the police?"

"Not such a fool!"

"I suppose there is nothing so foolish as to struggle with the police. Then how do you account for the state that you are in? I suppose you are aware that your clothing is all torn, and that your face is all covered with blood?"

"I will tell you about it—all that there is to tell—in a minute or two."

Mr. Hookham got up from his stool and began to pace the cemented floor of his cell. Mr. Fairlight watched him. Mr. Hookham, as he was then seen by the keen-eyed lawyer—with his wonderful experience—had not a presentable appearance. He was dirty, ragged and covered with blood. He had a hangdog look. There were hardness and cruelty about his eyes and his mouth.

Although he did not look a coward as far as he was himself concerned—there was too much doggedness about him for that—he did look as though he were the sort of man who would not hesitate to take a fair or unfair advantage of either friend or foe. Mr. Fairlight decided that at his best his client was not, as the great doctor would have said—Mr. Fairlight had heard of Boswell—a "clubable" man.

"You say," said Mr. Hookham, speaking as he continued his promenade, "that Mr. Schwabe told you about the diamond?"

"He did; that is, he told me something about *a* diamond."

"Did he tell you how it came to me, and about my brother Matthew's letter?"

"I believe he did say something about a letter."

"M. Nurvetchky has it. You must get it from him."

"I will make a note of it."

Mr. Fairlight did make a note of it, in a notebook which he took from the inner pocket of his coat. Mr. Hookham paused and looked at him. As the lawyer met his client's eyes he was conscious, for the first time, of what curious eyes they were—eyes which then, at any rate, looked as though they would stick at nothing.

"This charge is absurd upon the face of it. It needs, it can need, no argument—you must be aware of that. I am a man of property, of standing, of reputation, of character. I can prove it by the testimony of a thousand mouths. Is it conceivable that I should kill, on a public stage, a man I never saw, or heard of, in my life before—why?"

"There have been motiveless crimes."

"But not such a motiveless crime as that would be. No sensible man would listen to such trash."

"Not in the face of evidence?"

"What evidence?"

"I understand that there are already two men who have offered to swear that they saw you do it. By to-morrow, out of such an audience as filled the Sphinx's Cave—I hear that it was crowded—there may be two hundred."

As Mr. Fairlight said this, Mr. Hookham scowled at him and resumed his promenade. In spite of what Mr. Schwabe had told him, the lawyer began to wonder if his client were not guilty. When men descended to special pleading he always had his doubts.

"I tell you frankly, Mr. Hookham—frankness is rather a fault of mine—that if you have said all that there is to be said, you are now standing within measurable distance of the gallows. Here is a man killed—I suppose there is no doubt that he is killed—and we shall have to give some idea as to how it is that he was killed—or they will give their idea, which may turn out unfortunate for you."

"It was the diamond did it."

"The diamond! Come, Mr. Hookham, you don't expect me to go into court and say: 'Your worship, here's a man been murdered, foully murdered, and my client's diamond murdered him.' I've done some bold things, but I hardly think that I could bring myself to manage that. Where is this diamond of which I've heard? I suppose the police have got it?"

"No, they haven't."

As Mr. Hookham said this, something like a sour smile darkened—rather than lightened—his blood-grimed features.

"No? Who has?"

"I have."

Mr. Fairlight whistled, very softly, and doubtless quite in a professional way, but still he whistled.

"Did you hide it when they searched you?"

"Not I."

"Do you mean to say that they let you keep it?"

"I do. I think they rather thought that I was obliging them by doing so."

Mr. Fairlight eyed his client very intently.

"Let me look at it." Mr. Hookham produced it from his waistcoat pocket. "Mr. Schwabe tells me that it would be cheap at twenty thousand pounds."

"So Mr. Schwabe tells me, too."

"I suppose it's all right? I may touch it? I dare say it is not so very dreadful, after all."

"What am I to say to you? I tell you it has killed a man, and you ask me if it's so very dreadful, after all."

"Tell me quite frankly how it is you say it killed him."

"Hasn't Mr. Schwabe told you?"

"Never mind what Mr. Schwabe told me; you tell me, too."

Then Mr. Hookham told his story, and on the whole he told it well. He told it very slowly, seeming to ponder before each word, so that each one, when it came, seemed to carry weight. And he told it doggedly. When a man is in earnest—and Mr. Hookham was unmistakably in earnest—there is something about doggedness which is impressive, especially when the tale which the man happens to be telling is a difficult one to, let us put it, satisfactorily digest.

"This man Leicester—they say his name is Leicester, though I never saw or heard of him in my life before—came on to the stage to see if this stone was not part and parcel of a conjurer's trick. When first he came on to the stage it shouted out: 'Take care!'"

"What shouted out 'Take care'?"

"The stone."

Mr. Hookham glared at the lawyer as though he defied his contradiction.

"Go on."

"He thought it was a trick, and he went on to try if he could find it out. Then the stone burned his hand. Then it sprang on to the floor, and when he tried to pick it up it eluded him."

"Do you mean to tell me that the stone did all this without the connivance of your friends, M. and Madame Nurvetchky?"

"They are not friends of mine. I never saw them before this morning; Mr. Schwabe will tell you that I met the woman in his office. But let me tell my story first, and I will answer your questions afterward. At last he

picked it up, he wouldn't be warned. Then one circle of fire sprang up round him, then a second, then a third. Then the three united, and became a continuous flame. Then the flame began to revolve, and a dense smoke came from it, and so filled the whole place that you couldn't see your hand before your eyes. When those men who were in the body of the building tell you that they saw what was passing on the stage they tell a lie. I doubt if they could have seen what was passing a foot in front of them. If that smoke had not gone as quickly as it came, not one of us would have come out alive. 'Leicester was standing where you are, I was standing here."

Mr. Hookham took up his position about three feet from the lawyer.

"When the smoke grew dense, a noise began like the yelping of some wild beast. I saw something appear in front of Leicester. Something—it felt like a hand covered with hair—scratched my cheek, and caught me by the throat. I suppose I must have struggled, for when the smoke had gone, and I came to, I was as you see me now. But the man was dead."

There was silence when Mr. Hookham ceased. The lawyer had heard some remarkable stories in his time, but scarcely one quite so remarkable as this. He kept his keen eyes fixed on the narrator. But Mr. Hookham never flinched.

"You are aware that you have told me a very curious story?"

"I have told you so curious a story that I find it difficult to believe in its truth myself. If it were not that the man *is* dead, I should say that I had had a nightmare."

"Have you ever been subject to illusions?"

"What do you mean?"

"Would you, for example, be willing to undergo an examination by a specialist?"

"A specialist? You think I am mad? I thought you were a better judge of men than that. There is not a saner man in England than I am—the proof of which is that all that I have gone through during the last four-and-twenty hours has failed to drive me mad."

"Mr. Hookham, it is my duty to tell you that if your life depends upon my, or upon any man, being able to convince an English jury of the truth of the tale which you have just now told me, you are doomed to die."

"I don't believe it. Throw up the case, and I will convince the magistrate to-morrow."

"You will find it a difficult matter. You failed to convince those people this afternoon, else how comes it that you now stand charged with murder?"

"Mr. Fairlight, you have not been retained by me, though I am quite prepared to avail myself of your services if you choose to continue them—I know their value. But should you prefer to withdraw, I am quite prepared to act as my own advocate."

As Mr. Fairlight hesitated, glancing from the stone to Mr. Hookham and from Mr. Hookham back to the stone, a young man appeared, standing close to his side. He was quite an ordinary looking young man, seemingly about twenty-six or seven. He had curly brown hair and clean-shaven cheeks, and was dressed in the usual costume of everyday life—he was a commonplace, middle-class sort of young man.

Yet Mr. Hookham and Mr. Fairlight stared at him as though their eyes would start from their sockets—as though they had never seen such a sight in their lives before.

The young man laid his hand lightly on the lawyer's shoulder—which was rather a familiarity, in the case of so famous an individual from so young a man—and spoke to him.

"Carry the case through." He paused. "You will astonish them to-morrow." He paused again. Then he quoted, or rather misquoted, the "divine William," which, under the circumstances, was perhaps a singular thing to do: "'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in *man's* philosophy.'"

Then, while they continued to stare at him, possibly expecting him to speak again—which was a flattering attention

upon their part, always remembering the youth of the stranger—the young man vanished.

His disappearance was surprisingly sudden—so sudden that, as if unable to believe the evidence of their own eyes, they continued staring at nothing in a way which, to an onlooker, if there had been one, would have seemed ludicrous. Then their eyes met, and they gasped. Then the lawyer asked a question.

"Who was that?"

"I don't know."

"Where did he come from?"

"God knows."

It was perhaps because the name of God sounded strangely from such lips as Mr. Hookham's, or perhaps because the accidental mention of that great name at such a moment—for it was doubtless accidental—led their thoughts into strange channels, that both men shuddered. For they did shudder, as though a sudden cold wind had gone right through them.

Then Mr. Fairlight went to the door, and twisted a handle, which set a bell ringing. A constable appeared.

"Did you just now let anybody into this cell?"

"Let anybody into this cell? No—except you."

"Did you see anybody just now come out?"

"Nobody did come out. The door has never been unlocked since I unlocked it for you; the key has never left my belt. Are you getting at me, sir?"

"That will do."

The constable went, doubtless wondering inwardly. But he was too wise to ask unnecessary questions of Mr. Fairlight, the great criminal lawyer. Perhaps that gentleman might have the handling of him one day.

When the constable had gone, Mr. Fairlight sat down on the only stool the cell contained — subsided on it, would perhaps be the correcter term. He seemed so overwhelmed.

"Well, I'm——"

Then he gave utterance to the word which that inspector had checked in time.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE CASE IS OPENED.

When the case of the "Sphinx's Cave Mystery"—as the papers had already christened it—came on for hearing, the court was crowded. Not that it requires a large number of people to fill a London police court; some of them, when they contain the prisoner, the magistrate, and the counsel, the reporters, and the officials, have about as much as they can manage; but as many as could squeeze in squeezed in, and a crowd hung about outside.

The charge sheet was "light" that day, so that when about a dozen "drunks" had been disposed of, and one or two of the more pressing of the applicants who apply to the magistrate for advice on every matter beneath the sun, and the prisoners in the "Mystery" case were brought into the dock, the hour was still an early one.

There was at first some slight hesitation as to where they should be placed, but finally they were ushered into the ordinary position occupied by prisoners —the dock. A chair was provided for the lady. The gentlemen elected to stand.

It was at once apparent that M. and Madame Nurvetchky had managed to obtain a change of apparel. They were not doomed to figure in a police court in evening dress. The elaborate shirt front and splendid clawhammer of the gentleman had disappeared, and, instead, he was attired in the usual costume in which the English gentleman—apparently preferentially — elects to walk Pall Mall at noon.

M. Nurvetchky was so very tall, and so very thin, that the long frock coat, tightly buttoned across his chest, had rather a funereal aspect, there seemed to be so much of it. He had, too, rather a peculiar face. A long, thin nose, hooked like a bird's—like the American eagle's, for example—high, prominent cheek bones, hollow cheeks, high, narrow forehead, and a mustache which was so profuse and straggling as to conceal almost the whole lower portion of his face.

His eyes were large, unnaturally large, seeming to stretch right across his face. Yet it was with difficulty that one made out their color, since they were continually shaded by the eyelids—indeed, M. Nurvetchky seemed to be always on the point of falling fast asleep.

But if the gentleman was—well, not beautiful, his wife was just the sort of woman to take the heart of the British juryman by storm. It is not for a mere mortal to describe her costume—how she ever got into it in a cell at a police station is one of the seven wonders of the world, but her—we *must* fly to our French dictionary—her *tout ensemble* was entrancing. And her bonnet! Oh, ye gods—of the Parisian bonnet shops!

As she bowed to the constable who handed her a chair, and as she sat down upon the chair itself, everybody felt that here was a veritable great lady, of —certainly not of the old school.

She glanced round the court with her beautiful blue eyes, and nodded her dainty head to Mr. Schwabe and to Colonel Dewsnap, and even to Willy Panton—who had managed to find his way into court, possibly with the intention of working out the remainder of his "five bobs' worth"—and to Mr. Fairlight.

She glanced at the magistrate, and for a moment it was doubtful whether she was not about to nod to him. But she refrained, and smiled, revealing such a pair of rosy lips and such a set of teeth!

Mr. Hookham presented a very different figure. He had had a wash and brush-up—possibly a shave—but *he* had not made a change of costume. His shirt and collar were still torn open at the neck, a fact which he made no attempt to conceal by turning up the collar of his coat. His coat was itself a ruin; the sleeve still dangled by a loose thread or two.

Although the blood had disappeared, the scratch upon his face was unpleasantly conspicuous—a very ugly scratch it seemed. Altogether, Mr. Hookham did not present the spectacle of a well-dressed man.

Yet there was something about him which seemed to suggest that he was completely at his ease—that what was coming had no terrors for him.

He stood with one hand resting on the rail in front of him, his head jerked forward, with a gesture which seemed habitual, and he gazed, from under his rugged eyebrows, from one person to another, until his glance rested on the magistrate with a look of almost savage scorn.

Soon after he had taken up his position in the dock, Mr. Fairlight stood up and whispered to him. The onlookers perhaps thought that some important communication was taking place between the lawyer and his client, but what Mr. Fairlight said was this:

"Don't glare at the man like that—he'll think you want to kill him, too."

Then Mr. Hookham glared at his lawyer instead.

"What case is this?" asked the magistrate, when the prisoners had settled in their places.

One may guess that the magistrate knew very well what case it was—for magistrates *do* read the papers—but still he asked the question. In these matters magistrates and judges do feign such seraphic innocence.

A superintendent of police—Superintendent Bray—rose up in the body of the court.

"Your worship, this is a case of murder. The prisoner, Samuel Hookham, is charged with the murder of Percy Leicester. The prisoners, Stefan Nurvetchky and Nina Nurvetchky, his wife, are charged with being accomplices before the fact."

The usual preliminaries were gone through, and the superintendent went on.

"Your worship, the affair only happened late yesterday afternoon, and we have not yet been able to communicate with the treasury. I only propose, on this occasion, to offer sufficient evidence to justify a remand."

"Which I shall strenuously oppose. What do you call sufficient evidence, I should like to know? There is not the slightest foundation for the charge. If

the police had troubled themselves to make a few inquiries, it would never have been made."

This burst of eloquence was from Mr. Fairlight. The habit of making little impromptu speeches—when he ought not to—was one of his eccentricities. Magistrates, as a rule, found it better to allow him considerable latitude—he was really irrepressible when they tried to put him down—and Mr. Mansell in particular, the magistrate of the day, was a very old and, in these matters, a very long-suffering man.

"Whom do you appear for, Mr. Fairlight?" he asked, in his mildest way.

"I appear for Mr. Hookham. And I hope, sir, that you will insist upon the superintendent offering some very sufficient evidence, indeed, before you allow my client to continue in the false position in which a blunder of the police has placed him."

Mr. Mansell turned to the superintendent with rather a severe air. He knew from experience that Mr. Fairlight really never did use that sort of language unless he had something very strong to go upon.

"What do you say?"

"I will at once call evidence, your worship. Call Inspector James Robins!"

The inspector, who had effected the arrest at the Sphinx's Cave, appeared in the witness-box. After he had been sworn:

"What do you know about this?" asked the superintendent.

Then the inspector started off in the usual stereotyped, cut-and-dried policeman's way. When he had said his say, Mr. Fairlight rose.

"Inspector, hold out your hand."

The inspector held it out.

"Not that one, the other. You know very well what I mean."

The inspector held out the other.

"What is that upon the palm?"

"A word."

"What word?"

"'Fool.'"

The inspector said this in rather a dissatisfied tone of voice. Some of the people laughed. Several of them craned their necks to look at the inspector's hand.

"What does he say he has upon his hand?" the magistrate asked.

"What do you say you have upon your hand, inspector?"

"The word 'fool,' your worship."

"The word 'fool'? What does he mean? Come here and let me see."

The inspector went up to the bench. The magistrate, who was a very short-sighted old gentleman, put his spectacled old eyes very close to the inspector's hand. That "active and intelligent" officer did not seem to be quite at his ease. A good many people in the court were on the titter.

"Dear me! how did that come there?"

"If you will allow me, that is the question I am about to put."

"Certainly. Has this anything to do with the case, Mr. Fairlight?"

"A very great deal, as I will soon show you. Inspector, how does the word 'fool' come to be upon your hand?"

"That is what I should like you to tell me."

"Don't speak to me like that, sir. Answer my question. As an inspector of police—you are dressed like an inspector of police—I suppose you have some faint notion of your duty as a witness. How does the word 'fool' come to be upon your hand?"

"I believe that the prisoner, Hookham, played me a trick."

"Oh, you believe that my client, *Mr.* Hookham"—emphasis on the "Mr."—"played you a trick. Perhaps you will tell me the grounds for the faith that is in you."

"I don't understand you."

"Oh, you don't understand me, don't you? I ask you on what grounds you state that the gentleman whom I have the honor to represent played you a trick?"

"Well, when I took him into custody, I saw him pick up something from the ground——"

"Stop one moment. What did you see him pick up from the ground?"

"I believe it was a diamond."

"You believe? Don't you know it was a diamond?"

"I was told it was. I don't know much about diamonds myself."

"Oh, you don't know much about diamonds! Go on."

"I asked him to give it to me. He did so. Directly I got it into my hand, I found that it was red hot. I threw it down. When I looked at my hand, to see if the thing had burned me, I found the word 'fool' branded on the palm."

"Weren't you surprised?"

"I was very much surprised indeed. I was more than surprised."

There was "laughter" in court. The magistrate mildly interposed.

"Is all this material to the case, Mr. Fairlight?"

"It is absolutely vital. Perhaps after that statement, Mr. Mansell, you will allow me to conduct my own case, at my own risk, in my own way. There is a man's life at stake."

Mr. Mansell meekly bowed his head.

"In all this, inspector, where did the trick come in?"

"I believe the whole thing was a trick."

"Say plainly what you mean. Do you mean that Mr. Hookham branded that word upon your hand himself?"

"No; he couldn't have done it. He never touched me."

"Do you mean to say, then, that the diamond acted as a brand?"

"I do. It must have done so."

"Be careful, inspector. You are on your oath. The diamond is in existence, and can be produced in evidence. Will you swear that the letters 'f, double o, l' were on that diamond so that it might act as a brand?"

"They must have been."

"Attend to my question. Will you or will you not swear that those letters, or any letters, were on the diamond so that it might act as a brand?"

"I say they must have been, else how could they have branded me?"

"Confine yourself to answering my question. Will you swear they were?"

The inspector hesitated.

"No."

"You can go down. Don't leave the court. I may probably want you again."

The superintendent rose.

"Call William Lloyd Skene."

## CHAPTER X.

### A WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION.

"William Lloyd Skene" turned out to be the clerical gentleman of the Sphinx's Cave. He entered the witness-box as though he were fully conscious of the importance of the occasion—a little too conscious, perhaps.

Mr. Fairlight watched him with his eagle eye—or eyeglassed eye, which was the same thing. Mr. Skene belonged to the florid order of men; he was big and bulky, with large black whiskers, a red face, and jet-black hair, which was parted down the middle; he was clad in shining apparel, the gloss on his "superfine blacks" suggesting that he, at least, received, if he was not "worthy" of, his "hire." He brought his hat with him—a glossy "topper"—and seemed to experience a certain amount of difficulty in knowing what to do with it. He finally consigned it, with great urbanity, to the usher who bore the book, who immediately rubbed the nap the wrong way by bringing it into contact with his gown.

His bearing, in taking the oath, was, if we may so describe it, one of proud humility; he peeped over the edge of the book at the magistrate in front of him; then he put his hands behind his back, and thrust his chest well forward, in the village infant school style.

Then the superintendent began:

"Your name is William Lloyd Skene?"

"It is."

"What are you?"

"I am pastor of the Primitive Methodist Chapel, in Shorrolds Road, Turnham Green. I am also a revival preacher."

"Where were you yesterday afternoon?"

"I was at the Sphinx's Cave."

"Tell the court what you saw there."

Mr. Skene put his hands, which were

large and plump and white, on the rail in front of him, and began to sway his body gently to and fro, doubtless in the way he was wont to do when he commenced his sermons.

"I went to the Sphinx's Cave yesterday afternoon, accompanied by my wife, who is here in court——"

"Then she had better get out of court. I must ask you, sir, to order that all the witnesses for the prosecution do attend outside."

Mr. Mansell ordered as Mr. Fairlight suggested, and the discomfited witnesses went out in a crowd.

"Go on," said the superintendent.

But the witness' plumes were a little ruffled.

"As I was saying, I went to the Sphinx's Cave yesterday afternoon, accompanied by my wife——"

"Has he learnt it by heart?" inquired Mr. Fairlight in a stage aside.

"No, sir, I have not learnt it by heart. I must ask you to allow me to continue."

"*I* allow you to continue! What do you mean by addressing me, sir?"

"I heard you make a remark."

"You will hear me make a good many remarks before you leave that box."

"I think the witness may continue," meekly murmured Mr. Mansell.

The witness continued.

"To see an entertainment of magic and mystery—of conjuring, in short. There was an item on the program—I have the program in my pocket."

"Let me look at it," said the magistrate. The program was handed up, and the old gentleman spent a couple of minutes in deciphering its contents. "Is this the program?"

"That is the program; but the item to which I am about to allude is not in the program."

"Not in it! Then what did you give me this thing for?—wasting time!"

"I was about to explain. The item to which I allude is referred to on a printed slip, which was inclosed in the program. I have it in my pocket also. With your permission I will read it aloud."

"Give it to me. I'll read it for you." The magistrate did read it, with some difficulty, and in a somewhat inaudible tone of voice.

"'Important notice: In the course of this afternoon's entertainment, M. and Madame——' What's the name?"

"Nurvetchky."

"Never saw such a name in my life! —'will introduce the Devil's Diamond!' What's this rubbish?"

"I was about to explain——"

The magistrate addressed the superintendent with sudden ire.

"How long are you going to let your witness go driveling on? Make him keep to the point! We're not here to fool with programs!"

"I believe that you will find, your worship, that what the witness is referring to does bear upon the case."

"Oh, does it? Then why doesn't he go on?"

The witness went on.

"I was about—perhaps your worship will allow me to tell the story in my own way?"

"Tell what story your own way, sir?"

"The circumstances were rather peculiar. To make the matter quite clear to the comprehension of the court, it will be necessary——"

The magistrate interrupted the witness in a way to which the reverend gentleman was evidently unaccustomed —it disconcerted him so much. Mr. Mansell threw himself back in his seat and extended his arms on either side of him.

"*Is* the man making a speech? Superintendent Bray, if this man is your witness, why don't you examine him?"

The superintendent acted on the magistrate's suggestion.

"Will you tell the court what happened during that portion of the entertainment to which you are alluding?"

"The curtain drew up." The witness paused. His visage was distinctly soured. "The curtain drew up."

"Well, the curtain drew up! Come, we're getting on! I suppose, if we wait long enough, the curtain will draw down again."

Laughter in the court. The magistrate was a famous wit and humorist.

"The curtain drew up," repeated the witness, taking firm hold, with both his hands, of the rail in front of him.

"How many times, Superintendent Bray, are we to be told that the curtain drew up?"

"What happened when the curtain drew up?" asked the superintendent.

"The three prisoners were on the stage."

"What did they do?"

"They performed some tricks with a diamond."

"Then what took place?"

"M. Nurvetchky asked people from the audience to come upon the stage to see if they could find out how the tricks were done."

"Did anybody go on the stage?"

"Yes, two persons — Mr. Percy Leicester and a gentleman whom I have since been told was a Colonel Dewsnap."

The superintendent interpolated a remark or two.

"Perhaps, your worship, I should have previously explained that the murdered man, Mr. Percy Leicester, was well known as a gentleman who spared no pains in exposing the pretensions of so-called spiritualists."

"Were there any such pretensions set up here?"

"Mr. Skene, tell the magistrate what was stated from the stage upon the subject."

"M. Nurvetchky claimed for the diamond certain mysterious powers, and in effect alleged that the tricks were not tricks at all, but had a supernatural origin."

"I see, and then he asked some of the audience to come up and inquire into the truth of his allegations?"

"That is so: but, although M. Nurvetchky invited them, I perceived that Hookham, who was stated to be the owner of the stone, resented their coming very much."

"So much," said the superintendent, taking up the strain, "that you thought it necessary to warn Mr. Leicester?"

"So much that I, seated in my seat, called out to Mr. Leicester that if he was not careful, the man would do him a mischief. I called out twice."

"Did Mr. Leicester hear you?"

"Certainly. Everybody in the hall heard me. I shouted."

"Did Mr. Leicester persist in trying to find out how the tricks were done?"

"He did. He was determined to expose the fraud. I never saw greater determination. It was that which irritated Hookham."

"What happened then?"

"The stage was filled with a thick smoke."

"How was that?"

"It was a trick. All at once Hookham rose from his seat, sprang at Mr. Leicester, and caught him by the throat."

"Do you mean to say that this took place right in front of you without you offering the slightest interference?" This from the magistrate.

"I should have stated that when I called out for the second time, and saw that Mr. Leicester paid no attention to my warning, I rose from my seat and prepared to leave the hall, with my wife. I cried out that I, for one, would no longer countenance with my presence so scandalous an exhibition. Other people rose at the same time I did. When Hookham actually attacked Mr. Leicester, Mrs. Skene and myself were on the very point of leaving the hall— we were at the door."

"But there were other people there. Do you mean to say that they saw a man being murdered before their eyes and that no one moved a hand?"

"The whole thing occupied only a second or two. There was a great smoke and a great confusion. Before people were able to realize what was happening the whole thing was over, and the smoke had cleared away."

"What happened when the smoke had cleared away?"

"Mr. Leicester was lying on the floor. Hookham was on a chair, his clothes all torn, and the blood running from an open wound on his cheek. Mr. Leicester was lying on his face. Colonel Dewsnap turned him on his back; he cried out that he was dead. I went on

to the stage and denounced the murderer."

"Let me understand you." The magistrate, who appeared to have taken the conduct of the examination entirely out of the superintendent's hands, settled his spectacles on his nose and eyed the witness with his most inquisitorial glance. "Who was on the stage besides Hookham and Leicester?"

"There were M. and Madame Nurvetchky, and there was Colonel Dewsnap."

"Well, and did they stand quietly looking on while this man was being murdered?"

"I don't know what they did. My whole attention was engaged by Hookham."

"But they must have seen what was taking place?"

"Certainly."

"And could have interfered if they had chosen to?"

"I should say so—certainly."

"You say they were on the stage—how large is the stage?"

"It is a very small stage. Both the Nurvetchkys and Colonel Dewsnap were standing within five or six feet of the actual spot on which the murder took place."

"And yet they never interfered to save this man?"

"There was no interference offered of any kind."

"Would there have been time to save him if they had interfered?"

"I should say so. If they had caught hold of Hookham, as they certainly might have done, Mr. Leicester might be living now."

The magistrate leaned back in his seat and thrust his hands into his trousers pockets. His air seemed to say that he, at any rate, had done his part. The superintendent asked a few questions.

"You saw Hookham seize Leicester by the throat?"

"I did."

"You have no doubt of that?"

"Not the slightest."

"The smoke was not too thick to prevent you seeing?"

"It was not."

"Did he seize him with much violence?"

"With great violence. I never saw such violence. As I have said, in his passion he screamed like some wild beast."

"Judging from his manner, what should you say was Hookham's object in attacking Leicester?"

As he asked this question, Superintendent Bray glanced at Mr. Fairlight from the corners of his eyes, as though he dared his challenge. But that gentleman, as though unconscious of the superintendent's glance, sat motionless, his eyeglassed eye fixed on the witness.

"He meant to murder him."

Sensation in the court.

"You have no doubt of that in your own mind?"

"Not the slightest."

The superintendent sat down, and Mr. Fairlight rose.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MR. FAIRLIGHT BEGINS HIS CROSS-EXAMINATION.

There are several ways of rising. One may spring from one's seat with a bound, as when one sits on a pin; or one may rise ponderously, as when one weighs twenty stone; or one may rise doubtfully, as when a man has to make a speech and feels that he would rather —much rather—not; or one may rise pompously, as when he who rises is impressed by the belief that among God's creatures he is the first, and better than that; or one may rise *nastily*, as when a man, being a man of much coolness, great resolution, and having a boundless disregard for human life, holding a revolver, loaded, in his hand, has every intention of distributing its contents into at least one object before he again sits down.

Mr. Fairlight rose like that; and, having risen, stood motionless for some moments, fixing Mr. Skene with his eyeglassed and un-eyeglassed eyes, very much as the supposititious gentleman

alluded to might have pointed his shooting-iron at his victim's head.

The witness did his best to meet the lawyer's gaze, but the attempt was not entirely successful. In his demeanor there was a suspicion of bluster; in the lawyer's there was not. *His* bearing was quite cool, even uncomfortably passionless.

Then Mr. Fairlight began; and though his questions could not be described as fraught with courteous suggestions, the tone in which they were put was courtesy itself—too courteous, in fact, to be nice.

"Can you give me a definition of perjury?"

"I can."

"Do so."

"To swear falsely."

"Are you aware that the man who commits perjury commits a criminal offense?"

"I am."

"And that the offense is not lessened by the man having attempted to falsely swear away a fellow creature's life?"

Mr. Skene was silent.

"Do you hear my question?"

"I do. If you are suggesting that I have committed perjury you are prostituting an advocate's privilege by suggesting what is false."

Slight applause in court, which, as the newspapers say, was "immediately suppressed."

Mr. Fairlight paid no heed to the retort; but he never moved his eyes from the witness' face.

"Your name is William Lloyd Skene?"

"It is."

"You are a clergyman?"

"I am. I am minister of the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Shorrolds Road, Turnham Green."

"Do you teach your congregation to weigh their words, and examine their hearts, before they bear witness against their neighbor?"

"To the best of my ability I do."

"You say that Mr. Hookham took part in the performance at the Sphinx's Cave?"

"I do."

"Would it surprise you to learn that that was his first appearance upon any stage?"

"I know nothing at all about it."

"Did he strike you as being a good performer?"

"If it was he who worked the tricks, most decidedly."

"Worked what tricks?"

"The tricks with the diamond."

"I understood you to say just now, in answer to the magistrate, that it was he who worked the tricks."

"I suspect that it was. He was stated to be the owner of the stone. If it was not he, who did then?"

"You ask me for information. Is that because you have none upon that particular point?"

"I say that I suspect, strongly suspect, that it was he."

"Will you swear that it was he?"

"I will swear this—I will swear that he either worked the tricks himself, or was in association with whoever did work them."

"You swear that it was by his connivance the tricks were worked?"

"I do."

"You swear that solemnly? It is fitter, Mr. Skene, that I should warn you here that this is a matter on which we are prepared to offer testimony."

"I swear that I believe it was by his connivance the tricks were done."

"Do you swear that you *know* it was?"

"Certainly not. Beyond all doubt the tricks were very cleverly performed. They baffled Mr. Leicester, who, I understand, was an authority upon these matters. I am not a conjurer."

"Do you say that Mr. Hookham is a conjurer?"

"I know nothing about it."

"But let me understand you. You say that the tricks were very cleverly performed. Could they have been performed by anybody but a conjurer?"

"I should say not."

"Would it surprise you to learn that Mr. Hookham not only never saw a conjurer's entertainment in his life before, but never even witnessed a conjurer's trick—that he is entirely igno-

rant of the elements of the conjurer's art?"

"It would surprise me very much indeed."

"If I were to tell you that Mr. Hookham is engaged in commercial pursuits, that he is known to, and respected by, multitudes of persons in every rank of life, that he is a man of great wealth, and possessed of large independent means, would that surprise you, too?"

"I know nothing about it. I can only speak of what I know."

"But that is exactly what you have not been speaking of. Are you aware of the importance of what you have admitted?"

"Admitted! What do you mean?"

"You know, Mr. Skene, that in your evidence in chief you built up an ingenious little theory. You told us that when Mr. Leicester and Colonel Dewsnap—you probably recognize Colonel Dewsnap on my left here—came onto the stage, Mr. Hookham resented their coming because he feared that they would find out how the tricks were done. Now you tell us that you are not even prepared to swear that Mr. Hookham himself knew how they were done. Whence his resentment?"

"I say I swear I suspect he did them himself!"

"You suspect! Do you, a clergyman, on your oath, in a court of justice, attempt to swear a man's life away upon suspicion? I ask you, will you swear that Mr. Hookham knew how the tricks were done?—answer me yes or no!"

"I say——"

"Will you swear? Yes or no?"

"I will not swear."

"Then whence the resentment?"

"I have already explained——"

"Mr. Skene, do you know what you are doing? Look into your heart and see if it is not so. You are trying to swear a man's life away on what you suspect, not on what you know. You have already told us that you decline to swear that Mr. Hookham knew how the tricks were done; and let me tell you, sir, that you were wise in so declining. Now tell us what caused you to suppose that he resented those gentlemen coming onto the stage?"

"I judged he did by his manner, and the way in which he looked at them, especially at Mr. Leicester."

"By his manner, and the way in which he looked at them? Were those the only signs of his resentment?"

"He killed Mr. Leicester."

"But you have told us that he showed signs of his resentment before he killed Mr. Leicester."

"A man may express resentment by his bearing."

"Enough to lead you to suppose that he meditated murder? What a master of his bearing that man must be!" The witness was silent. "About these tricks with the diamond, what were they?"

The magistrate interrupted.

"By the way, where is this diamond? We have heard a great deal about it."

The expression on Mr. Fairlight's countenance was childlike and bland.

"No doubt in the possession of the police."

The superintendent contradicted him.

"The diamond is in the possession of the prisoner, Hookham." Mr. Fairlight started—most effectively.

"In the possession of Mr. Hookham! What do you mean?"

"What I say."

"How comes it in his possession?" inquired the magistrate.

"I understand that it was never taken from him."

"Never taken from him!"—still the magistrate. "How was that? Couldn't it be found?"

"On that point, your worship, I propose to call the inspector, who searched the prisoner, a little later on."

"Who was the inspector who searched the prisoner?"—this time Mr. Fairlight.

"Inspector Clifford—he's in the court now—there he is."

The superintendent pointed to the inspector, who occupied a position at the back of the court.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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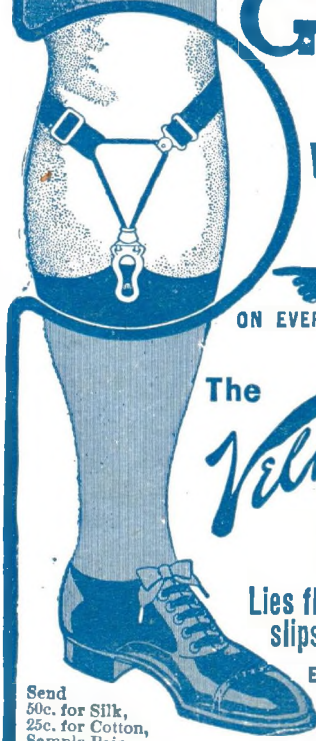

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