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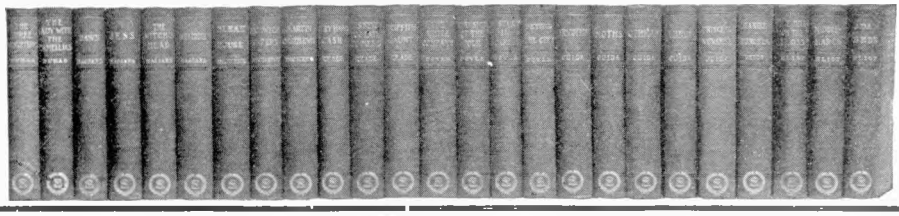

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. I. MARCH, 1904. No. 5.

THE PERIL OF HORACE DUNN

BY W. BERT FOSTER

Author of "Who Was George Bryson?" Etc.

The strange case of a man who through stress of danger fell victim to a remarkable affliction.

(*A Complete Novel.*)

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN UNDER THE PULLMAN.

THE evening express, bound west, made a five-minute stop at the water tank on the outskirts of Everleigh. Everleigh was scarcely a whistling station for the flyer; but this hold-up at the tank was convenient for those inhabitants of the burg who wished to travel on a faster train than the accommodations which stopped at the station.

Dunn swung himself off the step the instant the cars came to a halt, and walked briskly across the roadbed to the gap in the fence which led into the rear premises of the old house where he had been born, had lived all his twenty-two years, and now occupied practically alone.

Streams of yellow light came from the car windows, illuminating his path. When he reached the fence he glanced back at the long train, and the panting engine, which had brought him from Rumford.

He shifted the heavy satchel in his hand, and stooped to pass through the gap. As he did so he observed a figure roll out from under the Pullman coach, which stood opposite.

The figure moved quickly and silently, picking itself up from the ground with agility, and still traveling in a stooping posture, darted into the shadow beyond the streaming lamplight.

"A tramp," muttered Dunn, crawling through the gap. "Somebody's hen-roost will suffer before morning."

He passed quickly through the yard, reached the front door, and was opening it with his key, when the steady *flop, flop* of a ponderous step on the flag sidewalk held his attention.

"Hello, Gibbet!" he called, glancing back into the half darkness of the poorly lighted street.

"Good-evening to you, sir!" was the constable's reply, his burly form coming now into view. "Ye're back again, I see."

"I am indeed, thank goodness!" He had dropped his satchel while he struggled with the refractory lock. "And glad enough to get home. I'm about dead."

"It's no easy job ye have, Master Horace," said the old constable, swinging his stick.

"I had no idea so much would fall to me; nor had Mr. Bingham, I reckon, when he went to the Hot Springs to get rid of his rheumatism."

"Ah-h!" said the policeman, in a growl. "That Bingham! It's few men he'd trust same as he does you, sir. And little enough you are appreciated, I warrant."

Dunn laughed, now having opened the door. "Appreciation is reserved for the next world, Gibbet," he said. "Good-night!"

He was about to shut the door, and the constable had turned to go on, when something spurred the young man to call after him:

"Oh, I say! Gibbet!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Keep your eye peeled for tramps. I just saw one roll out from under the express, and sneak behind the fence back of Jardy's place."

"Huh! Let me get my hands on him!" exclaimed the constable, and started off more briskly.

Dunn went in and closed the door, locking it behind him. He groped his way into the dining-room, in one corner of which stood his desk, and lit a lamp.

Before removing his hat or coat he opened the desk, selected a key from several in a drawer, and unlocked a small, square closet in the wainscoting beside the mantelpiece. In his grandfather's time the family silver had been stored in this cupboard; the silver had departed long since, with most of the other family heirlooms, when the fortunes of the Dunns had taken a decided slump.

Into this closet he threw the heavy satchel with a sigh of satisfaction, and locked the door upon it, returning the key to the drawer in the desk. Then he set about preparing himself a meal at the range in the kitchen, in which a fire was still burning.

He moved about slowly, hesitating now and again in his task as though his mind wandered from it; and once he stood with his hand pressed against his forehead, looking straight ahead of him, and forgetting entirely the sauce pan upon the stove.

"Wake up!" he exclaimed at last. "I believe I'm getting silly. I reckon what I need is a good night's sleep. This business is wearing me out. Confound Bingham, anyway!"

His mind reverted to Everleigh's money lender and banker, and his face clouded once more. He had been in Mr. Bingham's employ for three years now, and the situation was not an enviable one, to say the least.

Everybody hated Bingham. He was hard-fisted and sharp in his business practices. The milk of human kindness seemed to have been long since squeezed out of the banker's nature.

Bingham's harshness was naturally accredited on occasion to young Dunn. When the latter was obliged to press the money lender's clients, the said clients were apt to blame the clerk as well as the master. So Everleigh people did not look upon Horace Dunn with any great degree of favor.

Besides, the Dunns had come down in the world, and with the crash of their fortunes when Horace was a child, they had quite dropped out of "society." The young fellow's mother was already dead when this family catastrophe occurred; indeed, Horace could not remember her, for he was the youngest child.

His father had speculated, and lost everything but the house in which they had all been born.

Horace's sister was then married, and had gone South; he had not heard from her now for six years.

After the crash in their fortunes, the elder son, John, went away, too. There was nothing for him in Everleigh. He had not completed his college course, and had no money with which to continue it.

So he went away, and dropped completely out of sight from the day of his going. A few years thereafter the unsuccessful father died, and Horace had made his way alone ever since.

It was not a particularly joyful life which the young man led. But he was faithful to Bingham's interests, and the

money lender had promised to find him a situation with one of his St. Louis correspondents, when he returned from Hot Springs.

"And I'll be mighty glad to see him back, too, aside from getting that job in the city," muttered Dunn, seating himself at the dining table on which he had laid a cloth and set out his supper.

But then he forgot to eat, sitting with knife and fork in hand, his mind woolgathering again. The food grew cold.

Suddenly he was aroused sharply by a light tapping upon the window pane. The outside blinds were not closed, but the shade was drawn. Dunn glanced swiftly at the window, but of course saw nothing.

His mind was still rather hazy, and for a moment he thought the noise must have been made by the branches of a tree which stood on that side of the house. Then, in a sudden flash of more acute understanding, he remembered that the branches which had once scraped the side of the old dwelling had been pruned in the spring.

Besides, the tapping was repeated. He rose up hastily, and strode to the window. For the moment it did not cross his mind to be afraid.

When he had snapped up the shade, and raised the window sash a trifle, a voice reached his ear—a voice which stayed his hand not alone because of the words uttered, but because of the strained quality in it.

"Wait! Come to the back door, and let me in. I must see you."

"All right," muttered Dunn, and dropping the window he drew the shade, and passed into the kitchen.

Then, having reached the outer door and placed his hand upon the bolt, he hesitated. Who was this man who had called him to the door?

A little shiver went through him. He turned his head and glanced into the dining-room, being able to see the door of the cabinet into which he had locked the heavy satchel.

"I'm a fool!" he muttered, after a moment, shrugging his shoulders. "My nerves are getting the best of me. It's some neighbor, I suppose."

He unbolted the door, and opened it a little way. A rather bulky figure stood there—a man whose face he could not see, and who remained silent, staring at him.

"Well?" queried Horace Dunn.

"You don't know me?" asked the man. A short laugh followed the words, and he took a step nearer.

"Why—er—no!" returned the young fellow.

"You will when you see me better, I reckon," declared his visitor. "You haven't set eyes on me for some time, but you'll know me all right."

"Come in," said the young man, doubtfully.

The guest pushed in at once, and watched Horace shut and bolt the door. Then he preceded him into the dining-room.

There he turned, removed the slouched hat he wore, and faced his host. "Think you know me now?" he asked, with a repetition of the rasping laugh.

Dunn saw a bullet-headed man somewhere between the ages of thirty and forty, his hair cropped rather short, his face smoothly shaven. It was a strangely colorless face, but something in its expression fixed the younger man's attention so that he could not withdraw his gaze.

"See something familiar about me, eh?" said the guest. "You was only a little shaver when I saw you last, but you've got a good memory. You're Horace Dunn, ain't you?"

"Yes," breathed the young fellow. He experienced a tightening about his heart—a nervous apprehension of what was about to happen.

"Thought I couldn't be mistaken. All of the family have the same look. Think you know me now?"

"I think—are you—is it John?" demanded Horace, stammeringly, but without approaching his guest.

"You've hit it, my covey! I'm John!" The laugh rasped out of the man's throat again. "Didn't expect to see me to-night, I'll be bound?"

"No. It has been so long—ten years,

you know. And you have never written."

Horace Dunn felt stunned. He moved to the table, and sat down without thinking to ask his guest to be seated, too.

"Well, you *do* look knocked of a heap," said the other. "Don't know what to make of your brother, eh?"

"It seems so strange," admitted Horace. "And you never wrote——"

"I'll tell you about that all right. Good reason for it," said John Dunn.

"Father is dead," said Horace, slowly.

"I know all about it," grunted the other.

He turned away, and saw the supper spread upon the end of the table. His eyes grew wolfish, and he stepped involuntarily toward the food.

"Wasn't expecting a visitor, was you?" he asked, looking back over his shoulder at the younger man, with a knowing wink.

"I had just made that ready for myself. Are you hungry?"

"M—m!" The visitor rolled his eyes, and dropped into the chair before the untouched food. He was still buttoned to his throat in the long ulster.

"All alone in the house?" he asked, suddenly.

"All alone."

"You're no slouch of a cook," said John, eying the food approvingly, and seizing the knife and fork which Horace had dropped when the tap came upon the window pane.

"There is a woman comes in during the day, but she goes home nights."

"Aren't you eating, yourself?"

"I—I couldn't eat a mouthful," declared the other, hesitatingly. He could not take his eyes off the man's face.

"Kind of knocked you out, coming so sudden upon you, have I?" repeated John Dunn, quite amused.

Horace suddenly awoke to his duties as a host. "You must excuse me, John," he said. "I *am* astonished. Don't sit there in your coat. Take it off, and be comfortable."

The man halted in his mastication of the first mouthful, and dropped the knife and fork. He looked keenly at Horace, then glanced at the window.

"Say!" he said, hoarsely, "can anybody see in past that curtain?"

"Why, no!" returned the other, quite startled.

"Then here goes." He began unbuttoning the long coat which shrouded his figure. Standing up, he held it around him for a moment with one hand, staring with glittering eyes at his *vis-a-vis*.

"You'll understand *now*, young man, why your lovin' brother ain't been to see you recently," he said, and suddenly flung aside the garment, slipping out of it like an eel.

Horace Dunn smothered a cry of amazement, and sprang to his feet to face the man. The latter stood there dressed in a peculiar mixed gray and black suit, the black running in broad stripes about his body. Its effect was hideous.

"Don't like the look of my uniform, eh?" said John, lightly, and dropped into his seat again. "It's what we all wear up yonder," and he nodded in the direction of Rumford, from which the express had brought Horace himself that evening.

The State penitentiary was at Rumford.

"How—how did you get here?" gasped Horace, at last, staring down at the man who had resumed his eating.

"Easy. Got outside in a shoe box. Swiped the driver's coat. Caught the train that just stopped yonder at the water tank. Rode the rods here. Easy way of getting home, eh?" and he grinned.

Horace remembered the figure he had seen crawl from under the Pullman car, and whose presence in the neighborhood he had brought to the attention of Gibbet, the constable.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THREAT OF DURESS.

Horace Dunn was not in the least a romantic individual. But if he had ever thought of his older brother's return, the dream was nothing like this.

He knew the history of the family for generations back. The old woman who kept house for him, and lived with her aged husband several blocks away, had known the family, and worked for them, since her childhood. The young fellow had endured long tales of the elder Dunns.

They had always been honest and respectable, and, until his unfortunate father speculated, very well to do. It was beyond the wildest flights of his fancy to imagine one of them behind the bars of a jail.

He gazed down in horror upon the convict. "Sit down!" at last exclaimed the latter, with some fierceness. "You needn't eat me up. I ain't the first man that's broke from 'stir.'"

"You are the first Dunn who ever had to, I'll be bound!" was the observation fairly forced from Horace's lips.

"I dunno. Anyhow, it can't be helped now," said the other, coolly.

"How—how did it happen?"

"Why, I told you how I got away. And I've a good chance to reach the line, too, now that I've found help and a refuge," and he leered at the younger man.

"I mean how came you to get into that—that place?"

"Oh, I got hard up, and tackled a plant for what there was in it. I made a fumble, and had to tap a guy on the nut in the get-away——"

Horace's blank expression brought the other to his senses. He grunted:

"Oh, you're too innocent! I was robbing a house, and the alarm was given. I knocked a man down. They made it 'assault with intent,' besides burglary, and I got a stretch of three fives—fifteen years."

"Oh, my God!" burst from Horace. He dropped his head upon his hands, and for a moment there was silence in the room. The convict even stopped eating.

"What th'—see here!" he exclaimed, at last. "You're a softy, all right. Brace up! What is it to you?"

"What is it to me that my brother is a convict—a man escaping for his life from prison?"

"Oh, it ain't as bad as that," said the other, carelessly. "Though I'd fight before I'd let 'em pinch me, and take me back to finish that little fifteen—you bet!"

"Think of it! think of it!" groaned Horace. "The name of Dunn has never been smirched by a dishonest member of the family before—*that* I know."

"Rats! Don't turn on the horrors. Why, you're a reg'lar parson. Besides," he added, "nobody knows that a Dunn went to jail, when they took me. The cops even don't know where I come from, or anything about me."

"But they'll know now. It will all come out," groaned Horace.

"How will it?"

"When you are caught——"

"Not much! I won't be caught!" exclaimed John, fiercely.

The younger man raised his head, and looked at him. "Do you expect me to help you escape—to compound a felony, as it were?"

"I know plaguey well you will!" was the declaration. "If you don't, folks certainly *will* know all about me. I'll tell 'em what and who I am. That'll sound nice, won't it?"

Horace fell silent, still staring at his visitor. The shock of this unexpected—ay, undreamed of—catastrophe, seemed to have dulled his senses. He could scarcely think connectedly.

There seemed to be a terrible pressure upon his brain—a feeling that quite benumbed him. His mind wandered from the subject in hand. He found himself thinking of that satchel which he had locked into the old silver vault less than an hour ago.

"You'll find me a mighty easy-goin' man, and reasonable, too, if you behave yourself," declared the escaped convict, after a moment. "I ain't askin' much of you—my own brother, too!

"What I want is a bite to eat—and that I'm getting." He continued to partake of the food while he talked. "Then I want a change of clothes, and a few dollars, enough to get me over the line into British Columbia. I know some people there. The cops won't catch me once I'm in the woods."

"I—I don't know what to say," muttered Horace, his eyes down.

"You'd better say 'Yes'!—that's what," snarled the other. But he quickly dropped his voice to the smoother tone. "Come! 'Tain't much I ask. There's some clothes around the house that'll fit me. I—I left a-plenty."

"You didn't leave many," interposed Horace. "They're up in the attic, such as they are."

"Then let's have 'em."

The man pushed back his chair, having completed his supper. At the moment the old-fashioned knocker on the front door rang a summons through the house. Both started to their feet.

"What's that?" gasped the convict.

Horace was silent, his heart beating like a trip hammer as he listened. The other advanced upon him and clutched his arm.

"What's this—a plant?" His face writhed ferociously. Then he seemed to remember himself, and laughed again, gratingly. "I'm getting nutty, I reckon. It's some neighbor. Go answer; but don't let anybody in."

But Horace still hesitated. "It may be Gibbet," he said, in a low tone.

"Who's he?"

"Don't you remember Gibbet? The constable—policeman. He wears a regular uniform now, and has a beat. Everleigh has grown some. He'll know you."

"Ah—hum!" said the convict, thoughtfully. "I had forgotten him. But he'd know my clothes all right if he didn't recognize *me*. Don't let him in."

"I—I saw you crawl from under the car out there by the tank," blurted out Horace, "and I mentioned it to Gibbet. Thought you were a tramp."

The convict uttered a fierce oath, and his eyes blazed for a second. Then he became quiet.

"It's all right," he said. "Go ahead. There! he's pounding again. I leave it to you to bluff him. But if you don't——"

The threat was not uttered, but the young man knew what he meant. Horace went slowly to the front hall, and was a long time unfastening the door.

His mind moved swiftly enough, however. A thousand thoughts rushed through it. One instant he was tempted to swing the door open, call Gibbet, and denounce the convict hiding there in the dining-room.

Then he thought what that would mean. Despite the horror he had of the man, he was his brother. And the whole world would know it, if Horace gave him up to the authorities.

Perhaps the effect this knowledge would have upon his own personal fortunes impressed the young man more than aught else.

He had served Mr. Bingham with the single end in view, that he should finally obtain a good position in a banking house in the city. To a young fellow in his situation, his character—even the reputation of his family—was his capital. If it became known that John Dunn was a convict, Horace's chance for obtaining the coveted situation in the city bank would be *nil*.

And there would be plenty in Everleigh to seize upon the story and spread it broadcast. Horace Dunn, because of his connection with Bingham, was not, as I have said, beloved by his townspeople.

These facts were keenly alive in his mind as he fumbled at the door. When he finally opened it, Gibbet stood on the porch.

"It's me, sir," said the constable. "I wanted to ask you a question."

"What is it?" asked Horace, striving to speak naturally.

"Are ye sure ye seen a feller drop off the express? We just got news of an escape from the 'jug' at Rumford. The feller come this way, and they think he rode the rods on the express. What sort of a looking man was that tramp?"

"He—he was too far away for me to tell. Had on a long coat, I think."

"That's the feller!" exclaimed Gibbet. "He stole an overcoat from a wagon driver. It would cover his clothes pretty well."

"Can it be possible that was the es-

caped convict?" asked Horace, feeling that he must say something.

"Haven't a doubt of it. And he must be around here somewhere. We'll catch him, like enough. You'd better take care to-night, sir, if you've got much money in the house. This feller's a desperate criminal," and the old officer went away.

Horace came into the house with a white face, and closed and locked the door. When he re-entered the dining-room he saw that John had been just behind the door, listening to all that the constable had said.

Stabbed by this discovery, Horace's eyes involuntarily turned toward the old silver vault. The other's glance followed his, and a smile, grim enough in its outlines, wreathed the convict's lips.

"Well?" he asked.

"I got rid of him," said Horace, apparently not noticing how he had been followed and spied upon. "Now, will you come upstairs and get the clothes?"

He dared not leave his brother alone. That smile and glance had caused the darkest suspicions to spring to life in the younger man's breast.

He led the way upstairs. At the first landing John pointed to a closed door, and laughed grimly once more.

"Can scarce believe I was a kid, and slept in that room."

Horace shuddered, and made no reply. His remembrance of his big brother was that of a sort of demi-god. But the image had been sadly shattered during the last few minutes.

They went on to the attic, and in an old press found the clothing of both the father and son stored away by the careful hands of Margy. John pawed over the garments with some scorn.

"By Jove! I'll be two decades behind the times. But they're better than this uniform, eh?" He finally selected what he needed, both from the piles of underwear and of the outer clothing.

"I'll smell like a drug shop. What's this stuff in the pockets?"

"Moth balls, I suppose," said Horace, wearily. "Margy takes care of the things."

"Well, if I must, I must," grunted John. He picked up the clothing, and descended the stairs, Horace following with the light.

"Don't know what you'll do with these duds," said the convict, when he had discarded his prison apparel and donned the other garments. "You don't want to have 'em found on your hands, you know. It will go hard with you if you do."

Horace nodded. "I'll see to 'em," he said.

He stood around, as though waiting for John's departure. The latter saw this, and it evidently displeased him.

"You are a lot cordial to your brother—I don't think!" he exclaimed. "And not seeing him for ten years, too."

"I hope it will be ten years before I see him again!" declared the younger man. "Are you ready to go?"

"Oh, I'll go when I feel like it," said John, surlily. "You can't hurry me."

"Don't tempt me too far," responded Horace. "I might change my mind even now, and turn you over to Gibbet. It isn't too late."

The convict darted a malevolent look at him. But then, in a moment, he laughed.

"Well, I suppose you're right. I'd better be on my taps. These clothes—old-fashioned as they are—feel a darned sight better than those rags," and he pointed to the heap in the middle of the kitchen floor.

"Now, sonny, your loving brother will depart, just as soon as you find the scads."

"The what?"

"Money," returned John, shortly.

"How much do you want?"

"As much as you can spare," replied the other, coolly. "You ought to be glad to let me have it. I never heard of such a lack of affection in all my life."

"I have no affection for you—not the least!" declared Horace, bluntly. "I am helping you to get away for the sake of keeping a scandal out of the family, that is all.

"And I expect to pay for it. But mind!" he shook a warning finger at the older man. "Mind, if you try any blackmailing game after you get over the

line, I'll turn the matter right over to the police, and let them do what they like with you. This is the last chance you'll have to get anything from me. I hope I shall never see you again."

John Dunn looked as though he intended bursting into a rage, and he was evidently a man of fierce passion. Then he grated out a short laugh.

"Guess you know your biz. You're no such a fool as you look. Well, how much do I get?"

"Twenty-five dollars. Not a cent more. In fact, it is every penny I can spare. I am not rich, as you can guess. I earn fifteen dollars a week, that's all."

"What doing, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"I am clerk for Mr. Bingham," replied Horace, unguardedly.

"Not old Skinflint Bingham?" cried John.

"Yes; that's what some call him."

"And I reckon you've imbibed his ideas," grunted John. "Twenty-five dollars! That's a nice sum to offer a man."

"It's that or nothing!" snapped Horace, looking him straight in the eye.

"I guarantee you've got hundreds—thousands, perhaps," the convict said, gazing searchingly back at the younger man. "I'd bet money, if I had it, that you've got a fortune—*right in that safe!*"

He wheeled swiftly, and pointed at the old silver closet, but kept his eye on Horace. The latter did not wince—did not move an eyelash.

"Will you stop talking balderdash, and answer my question?" he said, sharply. "Will you take twenty-five and clear out? There's a train from the station at eleven-ten."

"Oh, I must if I must," said the other, with an oath.

Horace pulled two ten-dollar bills and a five from his pocket, and tendered them. "Then, there you are. Good-night!"

"You're a fine brother—I don't think!" said John.

"Take your money, and good-night to you!"

The other accepted the notes, tucked them into his pocket, and slouched toward the door. Even his walk betrayed the jail "lock step," and Horace turned sick at the sight. But he was only anxious to get rid of him.

He opened the door, and peered out. The coast seemed clear.

"You've twenty minutes or more before the train goes. Good-night!" he said again.

John Dunn brushed by him, looked threateningly into his face for an instant, and then disappeared into the darkness without a backward glance, or a word.

Horace went in, closing and locking the door again.

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING AWAKENING.

Left alone in the old house the young man relapsed into a dazed state, in the course of which he finally found himself going about the lower rooms and making sure that the window fastenings and the doors were secure. He laughed bitterly when he came to himself.

"The thief has gone. Why should I be afraid now?" he muttered.

The shock he had experienced was no light matter. Horace Dunn had set up the idol of respectability of family, and had worshiped it for years. Now, in a single hour, it had been shattered.

It seemed like a bad dream. How could it be possible that his recent visitor—the coarse, foul-mouthed convict—could be the brother whose memory had always seemed so pleasant to him?

But he would never forget this night. Even if John troubled him no more, he would ever live in dread of the truth becoming known that his brother had been an inmate of the State's prison.

Suppose Mr. Bingham found it out? If the natives of Everleigh should discover it! If his new employers in the city should learn the truth!

This discovery would hang over him, like a sword from a hair, for the rest of his life. When he heard the whistle of the train that was to bear his brother

away from the town, he could almost wish that it would dash into some obstruction, or down some embankment, and crush the life out of that terrible man who had boarded it at the Everleigh station!

This thought horrified him after it had gained body in his mind. He walked the dining-room floor in agony of spirit, his hands clasping his head, which pained him dully.

And, to continue this game of "supposing" which was so fatal to his peace of mind, suppose John Dunn had not left the town on that train, after all? Suppose he still lingered about the house?

Horace knew, as well as he knew anything, that his brother had listened while he talked with Gibbet at the door. And Gibbet had spoken about the possibility of there being money in the house.

His own nervousness had betrayed to the convict where that money was hidden. The man had hinted his suspicions before going away.

So great a hold did this fact take upon his mind that nothing would satisfy him but a reassuring glimpse of the satchel and its precious contents. He found the key, opened the silver safe, and brought out the bag, placing it upon the dining-room table.

With a key which was hung on his watchguard, he unlocked the complicated lock of the leather bag. There, displayed in the lamplight, were packages of bills and bags of heavy coin—a fortune as it had been hoarded by a queer old character in Rumford, whose heirs had now delivered it over to Bingham for investment.

The miser saved the fortune, coin by coin, and note by note. At his death his daughters feared to have the sum any longer in the house. The old man had slept for years in the room with his strong box and with a loaded shotgun beside his bed.

Horace Dunn was called over early that morning to take charge of the money. It had to be counted in the presence of the women, each package marked, and the entire sum receipted for.

But it had been a long day's work. He could not get through before the closing of the banks in Rumford, and he could not get rid of the money until the bank of Everleigh opened at nine the next morning.

And there was twenty thousand dollars, in round numbers, in that bag!

Good reason in that for Horace Dunn's nervousness. But this was only one of the many extra cares which had fallen to him since Bingham went away. The young fellow was nearly at the end of his rope, from a medical point of view.

Only the day before he had hunted up one of his brother's old medical books, and poured over that division given up to nervous disorders. His frequent lapses of memory, and his sleeplessness and depressed moods, had finally impressed him that something serious was threatening.

And remembering this, his mind reverted again to that brother. Could this convict who had just left the house —this criminal whom he feared and loathed—be the same man whom he remembered of having seen pouring over those medical works, years before? John had desired to be a doctor after he finished his college course, and he became—what?

A burglar!

Horace shuddered, crammed the money back into the satchel, locked it, put it in the safe, locked that, and hid the key once more. Then he slowly made ready for bed.

Once again he found himself standing, his palm pressed to his forehead, his thoughts wandering far away, and he aroused with a start. "*What* is the matter with me?" he muttered.

It was nearly midnight when he finally crept into bed in the room off the dining-room. He always slept there when he had money in the house, for, being ordinarily a light sleeper, he believed that nobody could tamper with the silver closet without his hearing them.

Of late he had hardly slept at all, anyway. Hour after hour he had lain abed, and gone over in his mind the transac-

tions of the day, or that which he must do on the morrow, sometimes until second cockcrow.

Now he hoped to sleep; for he was dead tired, as he had informed Gibbet. But the moment his limbs were composed between the sheets, he began to think of the money in the dining-room closet.

"I'd give everything I own—pretty near—if I could have gotten the stuff into some bank to-day. I'll never get caught this way again as long as I live!"

He could see the satchel of money before him whenever he closed his eyes. There it was, stuffed to repletion with the packages and bags.

Suppose John Dunn had seen it? The thought shocked him into wakefulness just as his senses were becoming dulled.

A burglar in the family! A man who lived by robbing other men, and who had been "sent up" for assault with intent to kill, as well as for burglary!

Horace groaned aloud, and rolled, and tossed, and found the bed as uncomfortable as millions of wakeful people have before him.

How do people fall asleep? What is the mystery of it all? One moment we may be thinking rationally of our everyday affairs; the next, fancy has led us by the hand over the borders of her wonderland.

There is little duration of time in a dream. One may experience a lifetime's pain and pleasure in an hour; or ten minutes of agonized nightmare may seem like a year.

Suddenly Horace Dunn knew that he was fighting for consciousness. Something weighed him down—he could not understand what it was.

The fearful pressure upon his brain had returned, and with a gigantic effort of will he finally threw it off, and——

He was not in his bed. The cold night wind blew upon him keenly. He was in the outer air, and in almost pitch darkness.

And what was this he was doing? His hands were dabbling in an icy stream. His cuffs, and the front of his coat, were splashed with water. Frantically—madly indeed—he was striving to wash his hands in the brook!

He sprang up when he learned this, and gazed wildly about. He could see but little. It was yet a long while till sunrise, and he was in an open field where there was no light.

The feeling which possessed him nearly forced a cry of terror from his lips. He felt lost—as though he were in an utterly strange place.

Slowly into his mind, however, there crept the thought that he had come to a familiar spot. There was a small stream running down from the mountain not twenty rods from his home.

Open pastures, dotted here and there with scrub oak, faced the old Dunn house, and through these fields the rill ran. But how had he come here—and why?

He shook himself, and tried his limbs to see if he were really in possession of his physical powers. He must be awake now; yet how had he reached this point?

How had he arisen, donned his clothing, come out of the house, crossed the road, and walked some distance into the open field without having any remembrance of these actions? Gradually he began to better see his surroundings, and was able to face with certainty the street on which he lived, and upon which the lamps were now burned out.

What had he come here for? What had he dreamed that had impressed his mind strongly enough to make him somnambulistic?

For that he had walked in his sleep, a trick he had not performed since he was a very small boy, Dunn was assured.

And why was he striving to wash his hands? Even now he found himself involuntarily rubbing them together as though to cleanse them. What had he been doing while unconscious? What had he striven to remove from his hands?

The mystery appalled him. Shivering, but now having gained his bearings, he stepped back from the rivulet, and walked toward the road. By and

by he came to the fence, and climbed over.

The outlines of his own house were opposite. He went to the front door, It was locked, but he found the key in his pocket. He had surely come out this way, then, and brought the key with him.

He was shivering from the night chill when he entered the house. The rooms seemed cold, and there was no light. Evidently he had arisen, dressed in the dark, and gone out with that certainty of location which is one of the mysterious attributes of the sleepwalker.

He got out of his clothing quickly, and crept into bed again, drawing extra coverings over himself. But not to sleep!

He dared not lose consciousness now. He feared that he might once more lapse into that mental state that had engendered his trip into the pasture. And while he was absent something might happen to that precious bag in the silver vault.

So he lay there, staring at the ceiling, until the gray fingers of dawn traced the pattern of the coming day upon the window panes. It was with immense relief that he finally arose, and began preparations for his breakfast. It was too early for old Margy to come, and as he had eaten no supper the night before, he was hungry.

He saw the convict's clothing in the kitchen, and hid the garments at the bottom of a trunk in his room, the key of which he carried. After the fire was built and the kettle singing, and he had thus disposed of the prison garb of his unfortunate brother, the young man went into the dining-room.

It was rather a cool morning, and he shivered the moment he entered the room. "Surely I did not go to bed leaving a window open anywhere," he muttered.

Then he halted with a gasping cry. The window sash beside his desk was raised!

"Could I have done that when I got up last night? Did I go out that way when I was asleep?" he asked himself.

That seemed impossible, however, as he had found the front door key in his pocket, and unless he went out by that door he never carried the key. The mystery troubled him vastly.

He stood for several moments in deep thought. Then, almost involuntarily, he turned to the desk, opened it, drew out the drawer in which he kept the vault key, and saw that it was in its place.

A sigh burst from his lips. Yet still he hesitated, and glanced toward the safe. The door of the receptable was closed quite as usual.

Slowly he picked up the key, and went toward it. It was a foolish fear, perhaps, that had taken hold upon him; nevertheless, with trembling fingers, he fitted the key to the lock, and flung the door open.

Then a cry of despair and horror was wrung from him. The leather bag, with its precious contents, was gone!

CHAPTER IV.

DEEP WATER.

Dunn struggled back to consciousness slowly, for he had fallen to the floor at the moment of this terrible discovery. He heard somebody fumbling at the back door, and he knew old Margy had come to see if he needed her.

This thought helped him to recover from the shock. He sprang up, and closed the door of the safe quickly and guiltily. In the flash of the passing moment he knew that he must hide this dreadful catastrophe.

He could not rush out and tell Margy he had been robbed. He could not run to the police station in the town and relate the fact. He could not take a living soul into his confidence.

Not then, at least. First he must think, must plan the matter out. He must arrange in his own mind the details of a story so probable and convincing that no doubt might afterward arise in the mind of a single human being. And he must stick to that story, whatever it was, to the end of all time!

In that instant he became a criminal, for he knew he should compound a felony. He must lie about this robbery. The truth, or what he then believed to be the truth, must never be revealed to the world.

He swiftly locked the door of the silver vault, sped across the room to his desk, hid the key, and then approached the outer door. He glanced at his face in the little mirror in the kitchen and composed his features before he dared open the door to the old woman.

And even then he feared that she would notice something in his manner that would arouse her suspicions. But she came in grumblingly, and began to make his breakfast without referring to his looks.

Dunn went back into the dining-room, and sat before his desk. He had closed the window, and now he stared through it unseeingly.

The thoughts which had first flashed through his mind when he recovered his senses took logical form.

How strangely he had been impressed the night before, on hearing the eleven-ten train whistle, that perhaps John Dunn had not taken it from the Everleigh station, after all! Why had he not been warned by that feeling, and remained up to watch all night?

Could it be possible that his own brother had done this? Yet, as he thought of this brother—of what he was, his appearance, his manner, his speech—it did not amaze him.

The suspicions engendered in the convict's mind by the words dropped by Gibbet at the door, had brought the man back to the house after Horace retired. Perhaps when the latter had gone to the door to speak to the constable, his brother had stepped to the window by the desk and unfastened it, fearing that a swift and sudden departure might be necessary. Horace remembered that he had not gone to that window to examine its fastenings after the convict was gone.

Convinced that money was hidden in the old silver closet, the villain had stolen back to the house, raised the window, climbed in, and ransacked the desk until he found the key to the closet.

Horace knew that his father had always kept the key of the closet in the same drawer of the old desk. John had remembered this.

And then the horror of what his brother had done flooded in upon his soul. To rob was bad enough; but to rob *him,* leaving him to face the shame and scandal of it all, seemed the acme of treachery.

"Can the man be really my brother?" he muttered. "Can our mother and father have been the same? It seems impossible!"

"What are you muttering about there, Master Horace?" demanded old Margy. "Come ye, an' ate your breakfast whilst 'tis hot."

"Margy," he said, arising and walking to the table, "what sort of a man was my brother?"

"Huh?" grunted the old woman, staring at him. "How mean ye? You remember him, don't ye?"

"Not as clearly as I might," returned the young man, hiding his face from her.

"He was a goodly figure of a man. A fine man. You'd ought to remember how kind he was to ye. And it was for the sake o' leavin' the more for you that he went away—that I know."

"What's that?" he demanded, sharply.

"Why, he told me the day before he went away from here, that his father wished to mortgage the old house to pay for his college schoolin', an' he'd not hear of it. 'Tis my opinion he left so't your father shouldn't do it. Poor lad!"

Horace shuddered. "How changed! how changed!" he muttered, and moodily ate his breakfast.

Meanwhile, he strove to lay out his future course of action. As far as the matter of Bingham's finding out the loss of the money was concerned, the banker could not possibly learn that, unless he told him, until after the first of the month, when he received the statement of his account with the Everleigh bank.

But mad as he might be, Horace Dunn knew better than to seek to hide the loss of the twenty thousand dollars for such a length of time. Suspicion would point

to him then with a certainty that no explanation could shake.

He must decide quickly what was to be done. Should he go on, lie about the affair, do nothing to point to the real thief, and even endure suspicion himself? Or should he go to the authorities and reveal the entire matter to them —John Dunn's visit, and all?

In this latter case the young man saw clearly that several circumstances would point to his being mixed up in the robbery; and nothing he could say or do in the future would convince certain people—Bingham himself, perhaps—that he was innocent.

In brief, if it became known that the long-absent John Dunn was a criminal, had been confined in the Rumford prison for fifteen years for burglary and assault, had escaped and visited his brother, had been shielded and aided in getting away by Horace himself, and the money had disappeared that same night, what possibility was there of the banker's clerk escaping arrest and examination?

One thing was certain. If the identity of the escaped convict was learned, people would say that "Horace Dunn is no better than his brother." The convict had gone with the fortune; it would be difficult to convince the public that Horace had no hand in it, or would not benefit equally with his brother in the division of the loot.

But, if he hid the truth, if he told nobody of the convict's visit to the house, if he denied all knowledge of how the money had been taken, there might be some hope of his being believed, and in the end the loss of the money might not work to his injury.

This was an awful temptation that assailed the young man. On the one hand was the surety of being misunderstood and misbelieved forever, if he told the truth; on the other was the fact that, by suppressing some of the truth, he stood to be believed in the end.

The money was gone. Of that Horace Dunn was quite convinced.

In the hands of such a man as John Dunn, the twenty thousand dollars would be a means to an end. He would use it to get out of the country, and to remain in hiding. He would never return to Rumford prison.

John was now miles away from the town. There had been three trains in each direction since the eleven-ten which the man evidently had *not* taken. It would be useless for Horace to seek to follow him, and make him give up his prize.

No. He must go on with the usual routine of his day's work. He must wait until the bank opened, and then appear to have just discovered the loss of the bag of money.

The fact that the convict was known to be in the neighborhood—even the conversation between the constable and himself the night before—would tend to establish the reasonableness of the story he would tell.

He arose from the breakfast table after having forced himself to eat quite as much as usual. He even spent some few moments in appearing to read the morning paper which Margy had brought in and laid beside his plate.

He would not go to the closet yet. It was too early. He thought: "What should I have done had matters been all right this morning?"

Why! there was the letter to write to Mr. Kimball about his back interest. Mr. Bingham would be angry if that was not attended to.

He sat down at the desk, seized the pen, and wrote hurriedly the ordinary form of "dun" of which he knew his employer approved. "Skinflint" Bingham believed in bringing delinquents to time with a round turn.

When he had blotted the letter, which covered but one page of a sheet, he reached for an envelope, and was about to fold the epistle to fit the wrapper before addressing it. As he did this, his glance fell carelessly upon the letter, which he had not sought before to read over.

He looked at it, and his hand was stayed in mid-air. He leaned forward, his eyes glued to the sheet of paper, and in an instant he was all of a tremor.

He could not breathe; he felt the veins upon his temples swelling; the

perspiration poured down his face as though it were midsummer.

He could not read his own handwriting.

Strange as this statement may seem, it was an absolute fact. The lines upon the letter sheet might have been Egyptian or Choctaw. They were utterly strange and meaningless to this man, whose hand, under the direction of his brain, had just penned them!

Dunn leaped from his chair. Fortunately old Margy was not in the room, and so there was nobody to behold his horror and amazement. He stared down upon the letter as though it were some poisonous reptile.

Was it possible that he had written those strange-looking characters? Such a jumble of letters he had never seen. Yet, it seemed to be English.

Horace Dunn was acquainted with no foreign tongue. He wrote a very clear, clerkly hand, formed under the tuition of an instructor who believed in the old-fashioned slanting way of writing. But this writing before him slanted the wrong way!

He clasped his hands across his throbbing brow again. What did it mean? Was he going mad? Indeed, had he already gone mad?

He had felt so strangely for the past twelve hours, there was little wonder he should ask himself this question. In fact, for days he seemed to have been upon the verge of some mental, or nervous, collapse.

His lapses of memory, the sleepwalking experience of the previous night, and various smaller matters, impressed his mind now with the suspicion that he was mentally deranged. Yet, was it possible for an insane person to realize his insanity?

"Surely I have written quite as usual. Why, I can repeat every word of that letter," he thought. "But my eyes are wrong. It must be my vision, not my brain.

"Those words certainly are English. The letters are English; but they look turned about Ah!"

He shouted this last word, and seizing the paper, ran into the bedroom. The light from the window fell full upon the mirror, and he held the strange-looking letter before the glass.

The reflection of the sheet faced him, and every word was as clear and as easily read as though it had been properly written. He had unconsciously penned the letter inversely!

He turned the paper around, and stared at it. It was really unreadable. But in the glass every character was plain.

The mystery of the phenomenon confused him utterly. With the strange piece of writing clutched in his hand, he staggered back to the chair before his desk, and sank heavily into it. He seized upon such shreds of intelligence as remained to him, and brought them to bear upon the situation.

He had written quite as rapidly as common, but instead of penning the letter from left to right, he had begun at the right-hand upper corner of the page to address "Dear Mr. Kimball." Then the letter had followed from right to left, with Mr. Bingham's signature, and his own initials under it, at the lower left-hand corner. Such an impression might have been taken by a clean blotter from a heavily inked piece of writing.

In a pitiful state of abject despair he sat there at the desk, gazing at the letter. His head throbbed dully. His mind was a riot of conflicting emotions.

A certain conclusion he could draw from all these peculiar occurrences. He was not mentally balanced. Something had happened to him—what, he did not know. He was not the same Horace Dunn who had stepped down from the evening express the night before and entered this old house.

Could it be possible that all these incidents which seem to have happened since that moment, were hallucinations of his troubled brain? Had his brother not visited him; had his wanderings in the night been merely a dream; had the money not been lost, after all?

Perhaps his eyes had deceived him when he looked into the safe an hour before. The bag of money might still be there!

With this thought, hope leaped eagerly to life. He seized the safe key and crossed the room swiftly, determined to put this suspicion to the test.

CHAPTER V.

IN DEADLY PERIL.

In Horace Dunn's present highly excited state, his overwrought mind was likely to seize upon what would, in saner moments, be most absurd conclusions, to explain this terrifying mystery. Why should he believe his brain at fault when he could apparently think with considerable lucidity, even though such connected thinking was the result of the most painful effort?

It was not improbable, therefore, that he should first believe his vision at fault, rather than his mind.

He tore open the little safe, and stooping, felt about its floor, like a blind man groping for some precious article. Every inch of the floor of the box was felt again and again by his tremulous hands, so that not a penny could have escaped him, let alone a satchel crammed full of coin and notes!

Finally he came back gloomily enough to his desk, and dropped into the chair. But he was careful to lock the vault door.

In spite of his mental agony, he remembered that this thing must be hidden—for the present, at least; and Margy was still about the house.

The old woman kept away from the dining-room, however, and Dunn could think uninterrupted. But it was a mighty effort to bring his rioting thoughts into subjection.

It was not his vision that was at fault. His ocular nerves were apparently all right. He had been foolish to have credited that possibility for an instant.

He could see everything but that letter all right. It was not his eyes which were wrong, but the writing itself. For some unknown and mysterious cause he had penned that epistle to Kimball inversely.

That he had never heard of such a thing—that it seemed utterly impossible and improbable—did not aid in the explanation of the phenomenon. There was the letter, actually written backwards, staring him in the face!

Merely that he had done this thing—an ordinary act of everyday life—in so strange a manner did not impress him so deeply as did the fact that the root of the evil must lay in some terrible disease which had laid hold upon him.

Not alone did this derangement show itself in the inversed writing; his somnambulism of the night before was likewise connected with the trouble, as was also his frequent and momentary lapses of memory.

And then a new thought smote him, and he gripped the arms of his chair to keep himself seated in it. Was it an assured fact that his convict brother, John Dunn, had robbed the silver vault of the bag of money?

Aside from the open window, there was not a trace of the man's entrance. Nothing had been disturbed, nothing was out of place. Now it flashed across Dunn's mind that it was highly improbable that John should remember where their father kept the vault key, or that he should go right to that drawer in the desk and obtain it, returning the key to its place after getting the bag.

Besides, when had the robbery been committed? While he was asleep, while he was out walking the fields unconscious, or while he lay there in the next room, hour after hour, staringly wide awake?

Horace did not believe that he had been long away from the house when he awoke washing his hands in the brook. And although he had not looked at the clock on re-entering the house, he was sure, measuring the time he had later lain awake before daylight, that he must have slept but briefly, previous to taking his nocturnal walk.

If John Dunn had lingered about the house, risking seizure by old Gibbet, or some other officer, with the intention of robbing that closet, he had run a risk which, desperate as he might be, Horace fancied the convict would be far from taking. The matter looked differently to him now.

John Dunn had been sentenced to fifteen years, not many of which had been served, it was likely. He had a fair chance to escape completely from his pursuers. He could not possibly have known of the immense sum of money which had been hidden in that vault. Then, even though he might have suspected the presence of a few hundreds there, would his cupidity have driven him into so risky a play as this burglary?

It was not creditable, taken in the light of Horace's present knowledge. The possibility of John having been the robber was vastly dwarfed now.

For the young man's suspicions had seized upon an entirely different explanation regarding the disappearance of the money. That window may, or may not, have been opened by himself, while he was sleepwalking. He doubted, at least, if it had anything to do with the loss of the satchel.

He started up, and went to the bookcase in the parlor. There was a book by that master of plot and character, Wilkie Collins, which had enthralled him when he read it years before—a story upon which a dozen later writers have founded mystery tales.

He brought "The Moonstone" back to his desk and opened it. There the hero, in a fit of somnambulism, steals and hides the great Indian diamond.

Dunn sat and trembled. He believed the loss of the twenty thousand dollars was explained. He had robbed himself and hidden the money—where?

At this last query he wrung his hands in agony. Not an idea had he of what he had done, nor where he had gone, while he walked in his sleep.

Without doubt he had arisen, removed the bag from the safe, returned the key to the desk, and gone out with the money. Troubled as he had been over the treasure and the possibility that John Dunn might seek to rob him, his hiding of the bag while asleep was not at all strange. Indeed, it was most natural.

For the most part, dreams do not seem to be inspired by the logical reasonings of the brain. In our dreams we do the most absurd things, and consider them the acme of good sense and shrewdness—until we awake and remember them!

In his sleep it had seemed to Dunn safer to hide the twenty thousand dollars somewhere outside the house. At once he had followed out this thought. But where had he hidden it?

Surely, he had not been absent from his bed for any great length of time. It must have been but a few minutes after leaving his room that he awoke to find his hands plunged into the icy brook.

Why had he sought to wash his hands there? What had he been doing to soil them? Digging a place somewhere for the hiding of the precious bag? These questions staggered him.

It was now time for the local bank to be open. He glanced at the clock, and realized that he must decide at once what course to pursue.

Could he run to the police, and tell them this story—that he had walked in his sleep, that his mind was partially unbalanced—and expect them to believe that he had innocently stolen the money, and now knew nothing about it?

The improbabilities of the tale arose before him in a swarm. His acute nervous state made these incongruities seem greater than they really were. To his agonized mind not a living soul in all God's universe would believe it!

What! A man rob himself? And was his mind so vastly worked up with thoughts of robbery, that he should turn robber in his sleep and steal from himself?

At least, Horace Dunn was wise enough to see that in his present excited state of mind he would quickly become confused, and would let something drop about the visit of the convict, which would cause inquiry. And once the truth about that individual was come at by the authorities, no sleepwalking story would save *him* from deadly suspicion.

He was in peril. Not of his life, but of losing his reputation for honesty.

The hope that he might be able to find the spot where the bag had been hidden,

drove him from the house. It was not a thickly settled neighborhood; so, few people noticed his wanderings about the pastures, through which the brook ran.

He found the exact spot where he had washed his hands. There were the prints of his boots in the soft earth on the bank. But he could follow the trail in neither direction.

He looked along the bank of the stream, viewing the shallow depths in the hope that he might have cast the bag into the water. Then he wandered toward the old barn, opposite Jardy's house, and poked into every promising nook thereabout.

Once a house had stood beside the barn; but it had burned down years before, the half-consumed timbers carried away, and nothing of it remained but the broken masonry and the stone-covered cistern at one corner. After kicking over the rubbish remaining in the abandoned cellar, he approached the barn itself.

As he did so he heard a noise inside, and the next moment a figure ran from the back of the old building, to quickly disappear from sight behind a clump of trees, farther up the hillside.

For several minutes Horace Dunn stood and looked in the direction which the stranger had gone. He half believed that it was the figure of his convict brother he had seen; although, having made up his mind that John had gone away on the eleven-ten train the night before, this seemed impossible.

"Why should he be lingering about here, anyway?" he thought. "There is nothing but danger in it for him.

"If he had stolen the money he would long since have escaped with it. If he had nothing to do with the disappearance of that bag, as I firmly believe he had not, then why should he remain in the neighborhood?

"That was some tramp, or ne'er-do-well. It could not have been John Dunn."

He ransacked the barn, however, and in a heap of straw in the loft found a bed of bagging which was still warm. The man he had seen running, not long since had occupied this.

"Gibbet ought to know about it," muttered the young fellow. "But I guess I'll be wise, and keep my mouth shut. It is none of my business."

He finally returned home without having remembered anything of his sleepwalking experience, or finding a trace of the missing satchel. His mental suffering was intense. One moment he determined to run to the police, and tell them all; then he was for sitting down and writing fully to Mr. Bingham, and throwing himself on his mercy.

Mercy! The money lender had never shown such a characteristic; Horace doubted if he knew what the word meant.

Just, Mr. Bingham might be—just from a legal standpoint. But that justice was never tempered by the God-like quality.

Still, he picked up his pen, and drew the paper toward him. Then he threw down the penstock as though it were a viper. Suppose he should again trace the lines backward? He shrank from doing this as though it were a crime.

He paced the room in an agony of mind and spirit. Fortunately, old Margy had gone home now, leaving him alone. He did not appear out all day, for he felt that his trouble had so marked his features that the neighbors would be sure to ask questions.

Twenty thousand dollars lost! He could never repay it—not in a lifetime. And he knew Bingham would not be lenient with him. The money lender had never been lenient with a client in his life.

If he sold the house and land which still belonged to him, Horace Dunn would probably receive for them less than three thousand dollars. Seventeen thousand more to make up. Impossible!

And so, from worry and hunger (for he stopped for no dinner, and had told Margy not to return), before dark the young man was in a terrible mental state. His eyes were bloodshot, his dress disarranged; he was the picture of a mentally unbalanced man.

As it grew dark he ran out and into the pastures again, groping in the gloom

of the coming evening behind every stone, and in every oak clump, on the hillside. He certainly was not accountable for his actions; he had even forgotten that he might be observed and questioned.

Somewhere out here in the open he believed he had hidden the missing bag while asleep. It must be found—it must be found!

He cried these words aloud; but he did not know it at the time. Drawing near the open cellar of the burned house he observed suddenly a figure flitting between it and the barn. To his disturbed mind it was suggested that this stranger was likewise hunting for the treasure—perhaps had found it, and was bearing the bag away!

With a stifled shout he sprang forward, and clutched the man just at the corner of the cellar wall. The fellow had been in a stooping posture, and Horace's attack was quite unexpected.

The young man threw his entire weight upon him, and with a cry of rage and anger the stranger went down under him. They rolled and writhed for a moment or two on the sod.

Then both staggered erect. Neither shrank from the battle. It was too dark now for them to see each other's faces, but they cast themselves savagely into a locked embrace.

His unknown antagonist was much more burly than young Dunn; but the latter was not himself at the moment. Ridden by his agonizing thoughts throughout the day, he had now actually become a madman, and with this had come to him an unnatural strength.

Shouting, gasping, struggling like two giants, they swayed and wrestled at the corner of the wall. Once Horace got a fist free and struck his antagonist with all his strength in the face.

The latter uttered an oath, and sought to return the blow. But now Horace's foot was behind the other's sturdy leg; he pressed him backward; vainly the man struggled to recover his balance, and then——

He fell with a scream of agony, loosing his hold upon the young man altogether. Horace heard something snap, and the sound brought him to himself. The man lay supinely across the stained and moss-grown stone which covered the old cistern.

Up the pasture several men were running, one bearing a lantern. They arrived in a moment, and found young Dunn, with white and agonized face, stooping above his victim.

The fallen man lay motionless—apparently breathless. Blood trickled from between his lips, and ran in a stream down his ghastly cheek.

"Who is it? who is it?" cried Policeman Gibbet, who was the man with the lantern.

But only Horace knew that the deathly face turned up to them was that of the escaped convict, John Dunn!

CHAPTER VI.

THE SWORD FALLS.

They carried the man—the dead man, as Horace believed—down from the hillside. He lay in their arms like a corpse, and in the blackness of that hour the young man hoped—ay, *prayed*—that he was dead.

With his death the danger of the discovery of their relationship would be eliminated. Nobody would suspect that this stranger—even when he was discovered to be the escaped convict—was John Dunn.

He had been sentenced to prison under an assumed name. He had assured Horace that even the police who arrested him did not know his antecedents.

The young man, shocked into a much cooler and more acutely sensible state than he had labored under all day, saw that his own position in the affair was not bad at all. He had been walking in the fields. He had seen this stranger and accosted him. The man had attacked him—Dunn was a little hazy on that point—and in the struggle had fallen across the cistern top and broken his back.

It would be learned that the dead man was the convict who had broken jail at Rumford the afternoon before. Little as his townspeople loved him,

Horace knew that his course would not be criticised. There would be no sympathy wasted upon a tramp, or a convict.

These thoughts rioted in his mind while they bore the body down to the road. "Where'll we take the poor chap?" asked one of the bearers.

Horace was about to suggest the jail as the proper place; Everleigh had no hospital. Then the horror of the thing came upon him, and suddenly, all the ice went out of his blood, and he forgot the part he had decided to play.

This was his brother lying here! He had killed his brother! And like Cain, he had sought to hide the truth from God and men.

He groaned aloud, and began to wring his hands. The men had thought him in a stupor before, and now old Gibbet said:

"Don't you worry, Master Horace. You're not to blame. It was you or him —one o' ye had to get it. This is likely the convict I was tellin' you about last night. Jardy, here, seen him about the old barn to-day, and we was just starting out to hunt for him."

But Horace did not listen. "He can't be dead! he can't be dead!" he murmured. "Bring him across to my house. Don't take him anywhere else. One of you run for Dr. Older. I won't believe he's dead—I won't!"

"Well, we've got to take him somewhere," said Jardy; "it might as well be to Mr. Dunn's. By Jove! he's a vicious-lookin' feller, ain't he?"

They went on with their burden. One man had run down the road for the physician. Horace hurried ahead to unlock the front door.

He lit the lamp in the parlor. There was no fire there, but the paper and wood were already in the stove, and he touched a match to this kindling before the men arrived with the body.

Horace rolled out the broad couch into the center of the room, and Gibbet and Jardy laid the man upon it. The remembrance flashed through Dunn's mind that years ago he had frequently seen his brother lying there, while he digested his studies. The table at which John once read, and his student lamp, were in their old place at the farther end of the long room.

"I must go right out and 'phone to the station," said the old policeman. "The chief will wanter know about this. Mebbe we'd oughtn't to have touched him; but he might be alive yet. Ah! here's the doc."

A carriage stopped before the door, and the physician, caught on the road by the messenger, leaped out, and bustled into the house with his instrument case. Horace stood in dumb despair, and watched the professional man make a rapid examination.

"Ah—ah!" muttered Dr. Older. "Not so bad. A good hard thump on the back of his head. What's this? Oh, a tooth knocked out. That's where you struck him, I reckon, Master Dunn. Good stiff blow."

"Is—is he alive?" gasped the young man.

"Alive? Bless you, yes! Can't kill a fellow like this so easy. He's good for making a lot of trouble yet, my boy—— What's this? A broken arm. Twisted it under him when he fell, I should say. Back's all right. Nothing particularly serious the matter. Hear that!"

The man had groaned. At the sound Horace fell into a chair. He came near fainting for the second time that day.

Then he was not to be a murderer! And with this there rushed in upon him thoughts that set him completely a-tremble. He shook as though he suffered from a physical instead of a mental ague.

John Dunn was alive; he would soon regain his senses. It was already suspected by Gibbet that he was the escaped convict, and John would see that it was through his brother he had fallen into the hands of the authorities again.

Whatever had caused the man to hang about Everleigh—whether he had, after all, stolen the bag of money or not—he would rightly lay his recapture to Horace's door. It was certain, therefore, that he would fulfill his threat.

He would declare himself John Dunn. He would tell all that had happened the

evening before when he came to the house, obtained his present wearing apparel and the money from his brother, and escaped, presumably to leave the States on the outgoing train.

The whole horrid story must become known. His own reputation was gone. He might better have run from it all that day, for now he felt that his arrest was but a few hours away.

He could never make the world believe his story about the missing twenty thousand dollars. He really did not believe that John Dunn had taken that satchel; rather, he was inclined to think the man had hung about in the hope of later robbing the house.

He, Horace, had done away with the twenty thousand dollars; and *what* he had done with it was beyond his wildest imaginings! Arrest, conviction, imprisonment, stared him in the face.

He crept out of the room, leaving the doctor and Jardy working over the injured man. He lit the lamp upon his desk, and sat down there. To his tortured mind there was but one course before him.

He must write a full confession of the matter to Mr. Bingham, and then—well, whether he remained in Everleigh to face the scandal, or ran away to escape it all, remained to be seen. He wrote plainly, page after page, revealing fully to his employer the incidents connected with the visit of his brother to the house, and the disappearance of the money.

Meanwhile, he heard Gibbet come back, and, after a time, the chief of the town police himself arrived with a wagon. The doctor had patched up the injured convict, and they bundled him out, and took him away in the wagon.

Horace wrote on, and just as he came to the completion of the long letter, and signed his name, he heard a step in the front hall. He glanced around. The burly form of Gibbet appeared in the doorway of the dining-room. The old constable's face was very grave, and he said, sternly:

"They want you down to the town-house, Mr. Dunn. The chief wants to see you."

Horace controlled his voice with a mighty effort. "Very well, Gibbet. I'll be with you." He reached for one of the envelopes already stamped with Mr. Bingham's present address, hastily folded the written sheets, and sealed the envelope. Then he arose. "I am ready."

"You'd best lock your doors when you go out," said the officer, clearing his throat.

"Very well, Gibbet."

Dunn was very calm now. The expected had happened. John had confessed his identity, and the beginning of his own affliction had come. There would be no chance for him to run away, after all.

He looked at the fires, blew out the lights, and locked the front door. Gibbet waited for him on the step. The old man swung his club nervously, and had some difficulty in clearing his throat before he spoke again.

"I say, sir," he said, hoarsely, "the express has just stopped at the water tank."

The young man halted, amazed, and stared at him. The policeman's face was wooden, but he added:

"She'll start again in a minute, sir."

A thought flashed through young Dunn's mind. The letter in his hand was all stamped. There was a mail car attached to the express, and he could drop the letter into the slit in the side of the car.

"I'll do that!" he said, aloud. Then he hesitated, and looked again at Gibbet. "Do you mind coming around that way with me, Gibbet?" he asked. "I—I want to drop this letter. It must go quickly."

"Me, sir? You—you might run over alone," stammered the officer. "I—I'll wait for you here."

Horace was off on the instant. The locomotive had already begun to exhaust as he dashed up the railroad embankment. He arrived at the mail car, however, in season to push the bulky letter through the slit. Then he returned more slowly to the front of the house.

When Gibbet saw him, he started back, gasping. "Did—did it start too

quick for you, sir?" he demanded, chokingly.

"Oh, no! I got my letter in," was the response. The policeman mopped his forehead, still staring at the young man. The latter moved closer to him, and said, in a low voice:

"Do your duty if you must, Gibbet. I shall not run. I'll stay and see this thing out—God helping me!"

"You—you know what's the matter, sir?" asked the old man.

"I suspect."

"Well," and he sighed, "I won't arrest you. But you can come down with me, if you will. I'll lose my buttons before I'll take you in a prisoner—and they can make the best of that now!" and he said it viciously.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

A thin, rather weazened-faced man followed the porter down the aisle to the only remaining seat in the drawing-room car. He walked stiffly, as though he suffered some lameness in his limbs, and his features were screwed into anything but a pleasant expression as he slowly sank into the seat.

The man who faced him glanced twice in his direction before speaking. This latter was a rather fine-looking individual, prosperously dressed, with sharp eyes sparkling behind his eyeglasses, and a luxuriant brown beard which gave him a foreign air.

"Troubled with rheumatism, my friend?" he asked the thin man, as the train started on from the junction.

The one addressed looked up rather brusquely from some sheets of rustling paper which he had drawn out of his pocket the moment he sat down. He apparently had half a mind to reply ungraciously to the question; but the speaker was so kindly-looking, that he said:

"Well, I have been. They tried to soak it out o' me at the springs. And I guess they did me some good there. I'd about forgotten the rheumatism, however," and his eyes dropped to the papers in his lap.

"Well, perhaps business affairs do help, on occasion, to make a man forget his physical ailments."

"Huh! Likely that's so. And I reckon there's trouble enough piling up for me back home. I had to cut things short at the springs."

"Let's see, you live——?" The inflection was most insinuating, and the other responded, with scarcely a second thought:

"Everleigh."

"Ah, yes. Small town not far beyond Rumford. This train does not stop there, does it?"

"It stops just at the farther edge of the town for a minute, to water up. I'll drop off there. Otherwise I couldn't get in until after eleven. The connections are bad."

"You are right," said the stranger, smiling. "I should think that eleven at night was an awkward hour to arrive home. But scarcely more so for purposes of business than the time at which this express passes Everleigh." He had been referring to his time-table as he spoke.

"I don't care what hour I get there," declared the rheumatic man, in some heat. "I can't get there too quick. I reckon there'll be the dickens to pay—there always is when I undertake to go away."

The burly man looked sympathetic, and the other warmed toward him.

"I tell you, sir; I'm a banker in a small way. Do a good business for a country town; old clients, you know. Everybody knows me in the county. My name's Bingham."

His *vis-a-vis* bowed, but ventured no name himself. Bingham, who was excited and interested in his own trouble, did not notice this, but went on:

"I've got a clerk that I'd have trusted my hide with. Knew his folks from 'way back. As good a family as there is in the county. Old man lost his fortune speculating, ten or a dozen years ago. He's the only one left now."

"Who?" asked his new friend, quickly.

"My clerk, I mean. The one I'm telling you about. Well. There was a matter of some twenty thousand dollars which fell to some women out Rumford way. They wrote me to come and get it (their father had hoarded it, small sums at a time, for years, and had never trusted a bank—the old fool!), and I turned the matter over to my clerk."

"A good sum that, to trust to the young man."

"Why, I never thought of it that way. I tell you, I'd have trusted my very last cent with him. It seems he went after the money, and was to deposit it yesterday morning in the Everleigh bank.

"Quite as a matter of form I kept tabs on him. Never would have believed him crooked. I wired a question to the women day before yesterday, and they answered that he'd left for Everleigh with the cash—too late to bank, you know.

"So I wired the Everleigh bank in the morning—that was yesterday morning. He hadn't been in. Then I wired again in the afternoon. They denied receiving any deposit. So I telegraphed my young man. What did I get this morning but the confoundedest letter you ever saw! It's from him; I know it is, for the envelope is one of my own, and addressed by my own stamp. I left him some when I went away.

"But the letter!" he rustled the sheets in his lap. "Why, if you can make head or tail of the thing, you'd be a wonder. Whether it's hog Latin or Cree Injun, I'm hanged if I know!"

He passed one of the closely written sheets over to the foreign-looking man. "He's been kind of erratic in his letters lately, I noticed," said Bingham. "But he wrote plain enough English. I was thinking of running home, and giving him a bit of a vacation, himself. But there's something queer about this, I vow!

"Besides, I saw a dispatch this morning in a St. Louis paper about a man of his name being arrested in Everleigh. But they said he was an escaped convict. I tell you, I'm some worried over the whole matter—— Well, what do you see in that letter, sir?"

For the stranger's face had changed its expression suddenly, he had whipped out a small mirror from his pocket, and was holding the peculiarly written sheet before the glass.

"You say this young man has been acting rather erratically of late?" he asked, in an entirely different tone from his former voice of amused curiosity.

"Why—I dunno. He's written funny. Mixed things up a little. Sort of forgetful like, I take it."

"Been under great mental strain—great responsibility?"

"Some, I suppose. My being away——"

"And the responsibility of this twenty thousand dollars you speak of would be no light matter in addition to his regular work, eh? In fact, his nerves would be upon a keen edge—a keen edge."

"Perhaps; but what's become of my money—and what's the matter with that letter?"

"The last part of your query I can answer at once. It is written backward."

"By gracious! I thought some of the words looked like English turned around." The banker grabbed the sheet again, and studied it carefully. "What kind of tommyrot is this, anyway? Writing to me backward!"

"It seems to me a rather interesting case," said the other, thoughtfully.

"Interesting! It's confounded foolishness. I'll make him wish he'd not played such a silly trick on me. How does he suppose I can read backward?"

"Would you like to know the contents of the letter? If so, I think I can aid you with my mirror. Or, hold it up to that glass yonder; you can see for yourself."

Bingham glanced around him, and noted the people near. "Don't care to make it visible to everybody," he said, dropping his voice. "About that twenty thousand dollars, you know. Maybe the fool's said something in this—see here! Draw over and show me how to use the glass. You read it to me, anyway. I haven't my spectacles."

The two men put their heads close to-

gether. The stranger arranged the sheets of the letter, which was written evenly in a running hand from right to left, instead of from left to right, and with the aid of the small pocket mirror read the lines aloud into Bingham's ear. And there was revealed in that letter a story that brought the perspiration to the money lender's brow; but the stranger was unshaken until he came nearly to the end of the epistle.

He had refused to stop to discuss the letter, or to allow Bingham to express his opinion of the writer, or of his veracity, all the way through. It was, of course, Horace Dunn's letter to his chief, and in it the miserable young man had revealed everything about the visit of the convict to his house, the disappearance of the money, the convict's capture, and his own inability to remember where he had hidden the fortune during his sleepwalking experience.

Quite unconsciously the young man had again written inversely; but he had said nothing in his letter regarding the note penned to Kimball in this same manner, nor about his general state of mental health. He urged his employer at the end to return at once, as he expected to be arrested for aiding in John Dunn's escape.

It was at the end that the stranger allowed his own feelings to overcome him. He saw the young man's trembling signature through a mist that forced him to remove and wipe his eyeglasses.

But Bingham was not similarly moved. He was wild. He gritted his teeth. Under his breath he called Horace Dunn about everything he could lay his tongue to.

"The rascally young puppy! Thinks he can pull the wool over *my* eyes? And his brother a convict! I never did like that John Dunn when he was loafing around home and living off his old man!

"I can see their scheme. They've put their heads together, and robbed me of this money—the dirty thieves! I'll send Horace to keep his brother company in Rumford jail—that I will!"

The stranger had recovered himself, and now seemed amused at the money lender's outburst. "How do you explain the two men fighting, then?" he asked.

"Quarreled over the division of the loot, I suppose. Oh, we'll get at it as soon as I take hold."

"Now, do you know, I'm rather inclined to believe a good deal of this letter is quite true, Mr. Bingham?" said the other, calmly.

"What, sir! And I took you for a sensible man." Mr. Bingham said it sadly.

"Well, whether I am sane or not, is still to be proven," laughed the stranger. "But this inverse writing tells me something that it does not to you."

"I should hope so; it told me nothing but foolishness before you explained to me how to read it. And why the fellow ever scrawled such a thing——"

"To my mind, Horace Dunn has no idea that he wrote the letter so," said the other, firmly.

"Pray tell me what it means, then?" demanded Bingham.

"I happen to be interested in mental diseases. Where I come from—Berlin, in Germany—they call me a specialist in such disorders," said the stranger, smiling. "I would like to see this young man who wrote the letter, for purely professional reasons, for I think he is one of the comparatively few persons known to science who have been afflicted by this phase of mental disorder."

"He's afflicted by a disease called 'dishonesty,'" grunted Bingham, unbelievingly.

"We don't call it that."

"No; and you sometimes call sneak-thievery kleptomania. I know you doctors!" declared Bingham; but he said it good-naturedly, for he considered that he had made a fine point.

The German specialist laughed in good-humored appreciation of the banker's remark. "That may be, *mein Herr*," he said. "But we call this disease—if the young man is afflicted as I think—agraphia. The brain centers which control the power of expressing thought in writing are so disturbed that the patient unconsciously writes backward.

"Your own Dr. Simon—Dr. Carleton Simon—has been treating a similar case to this; that of a young lady in fashionable life, who is afflicted with spells of this mental disorder. It is in the same category as aphasia, the disease that robs one of the power of speech, which has of late gained so much attention from scientists.

"Why, look you!" exclaimed the physician, becoming enthusiastic as Bingham became more and more doubtful. "How could a man, without much patient study, learn to write inversely like that? The letter is not unnatural in any part. The first few lines are like copperplate, and at the end he only shows ordinary weariness and some emotion. It would be a marvelous thing if he had done this after long practice."

"But do you mean to tell me that the fellow did it offhand—without knowing what he was about?"

"Without realizing that he was writing backhanded—yes."

"And you take stock in this sleepwalking business, too?"

"Ah—as to that!" The doctor shook his head, and his face clouded. "I do not know. I must see the patient. I do not think that somnambulism would really attend this mental state."

"I—guess—not!" declared Bingham, puffing out his cheeks. He dearly loved to "put a fellow up a stump," as he called it. "I tell you, the whole thing is a fake, doctor."

"It interests me deeply," said the doctor.

"It interests me twenty thousand dollars' worth!" grunted the banker.

"I would like to see the young man."

"You can see him in jail an hour after I land in Everleigh—if they haven't let him run away. I wired the chief of police to hold him."

The foreign doctor thought deeply for some minutes. Finally he said: "Is there a hotel in Everleigh?"

"Well, something they call one. I don't recommend it."

"I'll put up with a good deal for the sake of science," and he laughed. "I'll risk the hotel, and get off with you to see this young man."

"Not much you won't! You'll come to my house. I live alone, but in pretty good style. By 'alone' I mean there are no women around. I can make you more comfortable than they can at the hotel."

"You are very kind," murmured the stranger, glancing at him oddly. "I will get off with you—where do you say? At the water tank?"

And two hours later when the evening express stopped, panting, behind the old Dunn house, two figures dropped off, and, with the money lender hobbling along in the lead, they passed around to the front of the house.

There was a light in the dining-room. When the money lender thundered on the old-fashioned knocker, a slow step came across the floor, and with the opening of the door Horace Dunn himself appeared.

But changed—changed! His face pallid, his cheeks sunken, his eyes like smoldering coals in a countenance drawn with suffering. He was but the ghost of the young man Bingham had left to care for his business, three weeks before.

But the latter paid little attention to Dunn's appearance. He shouldered his way into the house, with a growl.

"What's the matter here, anyway?" he demanded. "What's this confounded foolishness you are undertaking to play off on the public? What does that letter mean, anyway? And where's my twenty thousand dollars?"

"I have been hunting for it all day—all day," murmured Horace. He had followed Bingham weakly into the room. The stranger closed the door, and came last.

"Well?" demanded the banker.

"I have not found it. What I wrote you was true, I fear. I must have hidden it in my sleep. The—the man they captured swears he knows nothing about it. He missed the eleven-ten that night I helped him, and hung around waiting for another train."

"Your brother, you mean?" said Bingham, harshly.

Horace's chin fell upon his breast. "Yes," he whispered.

"A likely story—a likely story!" shouted his employer. "I believe you and that John Dunn hatched this up between you. You know where the money is, all right."

"I wish to God I did!" murmured Horace. He dropped into a chair.

The stranger stepped swiftly forward, and laid a firm hand upon the boy's shoulder.

Horace raised his eyes again.

"You—you have come to arrest me?" he stammered. He thought the heavily bearded man to be the sheriff of the county.

"No, he ain't. But you'd ought to be in jail!" snarled Bingham. "I thought you would be."

"They let me go on my own recognizance until next week," said Horace, wearily. "I—I told them I would not run away."

"I wired Grafton, the chief of police, to hold you."

"I know. But he said he had no authority to. You made no accusation."

"Well!" Suddenly Bingham bethought himself and turned to his companion. "What do you think now about it? Think much of that sleepwalking business?"

The stranger had been looking fixedly into Horace's upturned eye. "I do not think Mr. Dunn is suffering from somnambulism," he said, dryly.

"What did I tell you! And that confounded backward writing, too! All a fake!"

Horace started. "Do you mean—did I write backward again?"

"'Again!'" repeated the physician. quickly. "Have you done it before?"

"I—I don't know what is the matter with me," declared the young man, in much confusion. "I had forgotten about that. Was Mr. Bingham's letter written wrongly?"

"I—should—say—it—was!" returned his employer, in deep disgust. "Had to read it in a looking-glass."

"I—I wrote a note before, that way," admitted Horace.

"Ah—yes!" said the physician, interestedly. "A clear case of agraphia."

"A clear case of robbery, and an attempt to fool the public after it," growled Bingham.

Horace looked dazed, and, to anybody but a madman like Bingham, desperately ill. His employer's harsh speeches seemed scarcely to impress him. The physician looked very grave.

"I'm going down to see Grafton," said Bingham, taking the physician aside, and whispering in his ear. "I don't trust that fellow. He's too slick."

"Grafton is the officer of the police?"

"He's the chief."

"You will demand Mr. Dunn's arrest?"

"That's what I shall do."

"But don't you think that is going to an extreme? I tell you the man is sick. His mental state is such that the shock of arresting him on this charge may quite unbalance his mind."

"Bah!"

"I am making that statement with my professional reputation behind it," said the physician, stiffly.

"Well, I don't propose that he shall get away with my money," declared Bingham. "You say yourself you don't take any stock in the sleepwalking story. I'm not going to be fooled out of twenty thousand dollars," and he smote one hand upon the other emphatically.

CHAPTER VIII.

SCIENCE VS. "JUSTICE."

Horace Dunn sat there in his chair with but a hazy idea of the trend of affairs. Since the convict's capture, and the latter's passionate denouncement of the young man as his own brother in the police office, Horace had done little but search through the fields and along the brookside for the missing bag of money.

Of course, John Dunn had said nothing about the money in his statement to the police. Horace doubted if the man knew anything about it. It was only now being whispered about the town that Horace had either stolen, or lost, a large sum belonging to his employer.

But all this day the young man had

refused to touch food, despite old Margy's pleading; hearing to nothing, thinking of nothing but the disappearance of the twenty thousand dollars.

Old Margy was in the kitchen now, fearing to leave her young master alone; and she was much disturbed by the angry voices from the dining-room, the door of which was closed.

For "Skinflint" Bingham would not hear of the doctor's reasoning. Nothing would satisfy him but the young man's arrest for robbery, and he finally stormed out of the house, loudly announcing that intention.

Left alone with the patient, the German physician went quickly to him and again examined his eyes, feeling the pulse in his limp wrist meanwhile. Horace crouched in his chair, unseeing, unnoticing, and plainly in a state bordering upon complete collapse.

The bearded man stood an instant in thought, looked as though he would ask the patient a question, saw that that would be useless, and turning suddenly at last, walked straight into the front hall. There was a cupboard there; perhaps he had noticed its door ajar when he entered the house.

At least, he opened this now, and the light from the lamp in the hall shone into the closet. There was a shelf filled with bottles, and in a moment he had selected one from the number. They had stood there for years, although old Margy was too careful a housewife to allow dust to collect upon them. The position of the collection of medicine bottles had not been changed, however, since Horace was a child.

Coming quickly back into the dining-room the physician filled a glass half full of water from the carafe, and then dropped some of the colorless fluid from the bottle into it. The pungent-smelling drug turned the water a milky shade, and the physician, stooping over his patient, almost forced this solution between the young man's clinched teeth.

"Drink!" he commanded, and Horace obeyed.

"I—I feel very strange," muttered he. "I—I don't know who you are, sir, but you are very kind to me."

"I am a medical man," returned the other, shortly. "Your case interests me much. But I should feel better if I could consult with your family physician."

"Dr. Older?"

"Ah—yes," said the other, gazing down upon the young man fixedly.

"Do—do you really think I am sick?"

"Your mental state is bad, I tell you frankly. These nervous spells you have had, the peculiarity in your writing, and —you have had lapses of memory?"

"Yes, sir. I—I can't remember where that bag of money went to."

"Never mind that. We won't discuss it now. We'll get you on your pins again first."

"But I know that Mr. Bingham will have me arrested. He's gone for the police now!" and the young man half staggered to his feet, looking wildly about him as though for a means of escape.

The doctor pushed him firmly back into his chair. "Stay right where you are," he said. "You will not be arrested. Not now, at least."

"How can you prevent it?" murmured Horace.

"As your physician I shall forbid your being removed from the house. But I must reach this Dr. Older. The weight of his opinion will help the matter with the authorities, I feel sure. Bingham is not a reasonable man."

"You might send old Margy for the doctor," suggested Horace, struggling to fix his wandering attention upon the matter. It did not seem to his overburdened mind to be a thing which concerned him in the least.

At the suggestion, the strange physician stepped swiftly to the kitchen door, and opened it. Margy was there, waiting for the result of the conclave in the dining-room. She got up slowly, staring at the bearded man with wide-open eyes, as he entered and closed the door behind him.

Horace did not move from his chair, although he heard the old woman cry out. A few moments later the doctor returned.

"I have sent her for Dr. Older," he said. "Now, young man, I must re-

quest you to give your case entirely up to your friends. Think no more about the money. Thinking will not help you."

"But if I could only remember again what I dreamed while I was walking in my sleep."

"We won't discuss that," said the other, dryly.

"Tell me, sir; am I going mad?"

"No danger of it, if you will obey orders."

"But this peculiar feeling—this strange way of writing——"

"As far as the writing in reverse is concerned, the explanation is simple enough. When the first case of agraphia was noticed by the medical fraternity, it was merely considered the weird trick of a tired brain.

"But Dr. Carleton Simon, who has made a study of the disease, attributes the backward writing to the separation of the nerve cells in that portion of the brain controlling written thought. These cells once separated, the thought is not connected, and in your case the malady takes this odd form of writing in reverse.

"This disease, my dear sir, manifests itself after great fatigue or unusual excitement. Your mind has been overfatigued, and the excitement of this —this convict's visit, and the incidents which followed it, threw you into a state in which the overwrought brain played a trick upon your handwriting. With your co-operation we shall soon bring you around; but you must obey orders, and the first is to drop the matter of the lost money from your mind entirely."

Horace was about to say that this seemed an utter impossibility, when Margy returned with Dr. Older. The German specialist took the older practitioner into the parlor, and they were closeted there for some time. Indeed, they did not come out until a knock on the front door proclaimed the coming of other visitors.

Before old Margy or Horace himself could answer this summons, the stranger reached the door, which he opened, and then stood with his burly figure barring entrance to the house. Mr. Bingham, much overheated, and Grafton himself, stood there.

"Now, doctor! now, sir!" exclaimed the excited money lender. "Don't let us have any foolishness. That young man is to be arrested. I demand it. You must not stand in the way of the law."

"He cannot be removed at present," declared the physician, in a low, firm voice. "You wish to persecute, not prosecute, him, Mr. Bingham. He cannot get away. You may surround the house with guards, if you like; but as his physician I declare that to remove him to the jail at this time, threatens his sanity—perhaps his life."

"This is a very peculiar stand you are taking, sir," said Grafton. "Mr. Bingham has sworn out a warrant, and I have come to serve it."

"But, as the young man's physician, I forbid you to do so!"

"Sir, you may be a physician or not; I do not know you," said the chief of the Everleigh police.

The stranger turned back into the house, and spoke to Dr. Older. The latter bustled forward.

"Grafton," he said, seriously, "what my brother practitioner, Dr. Donner, tells me, and from my own observation of the patient, I am convinced that further excitement will endanger his mind. This arrest must not take place.

"I will personally go on his bond, if necessary. As Dr. Donner suggests, you may guard the house; but that warrant must not be served now and the young man dragged off to prison."

"Nonsense!" cried Bingham, stormily.

"You will have to see the magistrate, then," said Grafton, in doubt.

"I will go with you at once, and see the official," said the German specialist, reaching his hat and coat down from the hall rack. "My brother here, will remain with the patient?" he added, questioningly.

"Certainly, certainly!" cried Dr. Older.

"And I'll stay myself, you can believe!" snarled Bingham.

"But outside the house, if you please," said the German, drawing the door to

firmly in the money lender's face. "I cannot afford to have Mr. Dunn disturbed now."

"Don't be a fool, Bingham!" exclaimed the police chief, as the banker commenced to fume again. "You know the boy won't run away. He had a chance when that old idiot, Gibbet, was sent up for him last night. He's not the running kind."

So they left Bingham sitting on the front steps while they went down into the village. The magistrate was still at the town hall, despite the lateness of the hour, and after listening to the circumstances surrounding the case he instructed Grafton to hold back the warrant, but to pacify Bingham by sending up a special man to watch the Dunn house.

"You're very good, doctor, to take so much interest in the boy," the chief of police said to Dr. Donner, as Older had called him.

"Professional interest, sir—professional interest!" declared the physician, rubbing his hands. "Besides, I don't believe the fellow is getting a fair deal from his employer."

"If he was, it would be the first Bingham ever made—according to the general opinion. I haven't lived long in the town, so I don't know the parties well. Always was favorably impressed with Horace Dunn.

"As for this other," and he motioned with his thumb toward the detention cells, as they passed through the office, "I never saw him before. He's a hard case. Can talk as slick as a gentleman if he likes; but he's no greenhorn in his business.

"I reckon he's a well-known 'gun' farther East. I shall send him back to Rumford to-morrow. He's not so badly hurt as he makes out. Only a broken arm."

The physician stopped and looked down at the carpet, thoughtfully.

"Mr. Grafton," he said, "I'd like to see that man."

"Who?"

"This John Dunn. You know what the young fellow says—that he believes he has hidden the satchel of money himself while in a fit of—er—aberration of mind?"

"Bingham says he claims to have walked in his sleep."

"Well, let that pass. The young man thinks he hid the money himself. But it is suggested to me that there must be some connection between the convict's hanging around the place for twenty-four hours after he might have safely escaped, and the disappearance of Bingham's money."

"By George! you're right," declared the chief of police. "I'd been wondering about that, myself. What say if we talk to the fellow?"

"Let me see him alone," the doctor said, quickly. "He may talk more freely to a layman than he would to you."

"Just as you say. I confess I'm interested in the case."

He called the doorkeeper. "Harry, take this gent inside, and let him speak with that fellow from Rumford, if he's awake."

"Oh, he's awake all right," said the doorkeeper.

"I'll wait for you here, sir," said the chief, and sat down at his desk, and lit a cigar.

The physician went with the officer to the door of the cell occupied by the injured John Dunn. The convict sat on the edge of his bed, idly turning the pages of a magazine, his left arm in a sling. He was still dressed in the garments which he had found in the attic press in the Dunn house.

He started up when the doctor spoke to him, and stared into the bearded face sharply.

"Who be you?" he demanded, in no pleasant tone.

"I am the physician who is treating Horace Dunn," was the calm reply. "He is in a very dangerous mental state. The loss of a valuable bag disturbs his mind——"

"Oh, you can talk out straight to me, my covey," said the convict, with a guttural laugh. "I know all about that money, now. They've told me here. There was twenty thousand dollars of it. And he gave me twenty-five—the hunks!"

"The money was not his," said the physician, mildly.

"Well, they say he's got away with it, just the same. Horace takes after his brother, don't he?" and the fellow laughed again.

For fully a minute the other made no reply, but looked steadily at the man inside the cell.

"My friend," he said at last, "it will do you no good to smirch the name of Horace Dunn, or to insinuate that he is dishonest."

"Well, it does me some good to tell the truth about him," growled the man, dropping back into his seat.

The physician ignored this remark.

"Come, tell me," he said, "why did you not go away, when you had the chance, on that eleven-ten train?"

"I told 'em. That's straight. I missed the train. My precious brother's watch must have been slow. Then I went back there to ask him when the next train went. I didn't dare ask anybody else. The cops were on the watch for me."

"Just so," responded his listener. "And then, when you got to the house, you saw Horace Dunn when he removed the bag——"

"Who says so?" snapped the convict. "That's only his story."

"It isn't even his story," was the reply. "He says he walked in his sleep."

John Dunn laughed loudly. "That's a good one! And can he make 'em believe it?"

"Isn't it reasonable?"

The convict looked at him a long time. Then he dropped the lid of his left eye with a look of shrewdness quite impossible to describe.

"I don't know your game, mister, but you can't pump me," he said, shortly. "I'm an oyster from now on," and he turned his back upon his visitor.

The physician went back to the office of the police chief in a reflective mood.

"What did you make of him?" the latter asked.

"He is too wise to speak. But I am sure he had good reason for hanging about in the vicinity of the house for twenty-four hours, instead of going away. He saw Horace leave the house to hide the money, I know."

"And he didn't take it at once?"

"For some reason—no. But he waited to get it the next night, and was captured before doing so. I firmly believe this to be true."

"He'll never tell. He hates the boy, because Horace was the cause of his arrest."

"Quite so. But I believe he can be made to reveal what he knows about the missing money."

"How you going about it? The warden won't hear of anything being promised him. He's got a bad record up at Rumford."

"I'll tell you how he can be made to reveal what we wish to learn," said the physician, sitting close beside the police chief. "The man's cupidity is very strong. That twenty thousand dollars would be a vast temptation to him. If he saw a chance of getting it, he'd risk about everything else."

"Well?"

"Let him escape."

"What's that?" yelled the other, excitedly.

Dr. Donner held him down with one huge hand. "Listen," he whispered. "Let him escape, and he will go at once to the place where he thinks the bag is hidden—if the conditions are right."

"You're mad, doctor!" declared the chief.

But the other sat there, and talked steadily to him for some minutes; and while he talked, the expression in the chief's face changed slowly to one of enthusiastic recognition of a masterly plot.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GREEN STAINS.

Dr. Older had remained with Horace until the German physician's return. The Everleigh medical man was not a little flurried with the honor of being called in consultation by a scientist of such evident parts as this Dr. Donner. Dr. Older was an old-fashioned

country practitioner, and the word "specialist" in his eyes seemed big.

Besides, the stranger's remarks anent Horace Dunn's case interested Older profoundly. He was ready to give his aid in keeping Bingham from setting the dogs of the law too closely after the unfortunate young man.

He had ordered Horace to bed before his brother practitioner returned, and the chief of police having sent up a special constable to watch the house, the banker had gone grumblingly away, forgetting all about his previous invitation to the strange doctor to be his guest while in town.

However, Dr. Donner seemed quite pleased to be left alone with young Dunn. "I shall watch the patient myself until morning, Dr. Older," he declared. "Aside from the fact that his case is extremely interesting to me, there is some possibility, in my opinion, of the remembrance returning to him of his actions during that time when he claims to have been sleepwalking. I shall watch."

And keep the vigil he did, sitting bolt upright in an armchair in the dining-room for the greater part of the night, while the soothing potions given the patient made the latter sleep as quietly as a child.

Outside, the special policeman paced about the house. The slowly dragging hours were marked by the low, resonant gong of the town hall clock. The doctor sometimes started as he heard this sound, and, coming out of his reverie, looked around the long, wainscoted room. The dingy pictures on the wall, the high old desk in the corner at which Horace's father before him had worked, the old-fashioned wax piece under its globe upon the mantel—all seemed to hold some interest for the bearded man.

Sometimes he smiled; again the moisture grew thick upon his eyeglasses; and there were moments when the bearded lips trembled and he shaded his eyes with his hand. Memory seemed to give the strange doctor both sad and joyful company during the long night.

Horace did not arise until the middle of the forenoon; and he seemed to awake to a new life. If the sun had shone the day before, he had not seen it; now he beheld it pouring its wintry rays through his window. Dr. Donner was at the bedside.

"Good! good! my young friend," the German specialist declared. "Your brain is cleared of its cobwebs—eh? There! don't begin to worry again," as a shadow of remembrance clouded young Dunn's face. "By and by, after we have had the breakfast that your old housekeeper has prepared for us, we will begin to unravel the tangle which you have got into."

"Oh, sir! do you believe it can be done?" cried Horace, with hope in his eager voice.

"There is nothing impossible to God and human patience," was the smiling response. "Now come; get into your clothes. I promise you a day quite undisturbed by unpleasant memories."

And he certainly put himself out to remove from the young man's mind any shadow of fear for the future. Dr. Donner was a charming conversationalist, and his absence in Europe for so many years (he acknowledged having been born on this side of the water) made him able to talk of countries and people vastly interesting to Horace Dunn.

Dr. Older called once during the day, and taking his cue from the other physician, talked of anything but Dunn's trouble or illness. Indeed, they succeeded in giving an entirely fresh trend to the young man's thought.

Not until after supper that evening did the German specialist allow the conversation to drift gradually around to Horace's ailment. He allowed him to try writing with the pen again, and the young fellow was delighted to see that he wrote quite the same as usual. But Dr. Donner would not let him use the pen for more than a minute.

Then the medical man calmly discussed Horace's lapses of thought—his spells of forgetfulness—gradually coming around to the occasion when the young man believed he had walked in his sleep. Horace was quite emphatic on this point.

"It must have been somnambulism," he declared. "I remember of having my arm tied to the bedpost when I was a kid, so that the tug would wake me up if I undertook to leave the bed. I think I am right, sir."

"And you believe the satchel of money disappeared at that time?"

"I see no other explanation," said Horace, sadly.

"But, if you hid it yourself, *where* did you hide it? You came to yourself as you washed your hands in the brook. What was on your hands?"

"That is what troubles me."

"Did you look at the clothing you wore that night, Mr. Dunn?" asked the doctor, thoughtfully.

"I haven't had that suit on since, sir."

"Bring it," commanded the specialist.

Horace did so. The doctor examined the cuffs of the coat, and then showed them to his companion. There were several green stains upon them. The knees of the trousers were similarly marked.

"Grass stains!" exclaimed the now excited youth. "I must have been down on my knees, digging a place for the hiding of the bag. I can understand it in no other way."

"Let us not jump at conclusions," was the slow response. "I do not accept your statement that those are ordinary grass stains. By the way, do you know you have similar stains upon the garments you are wearing?"

"No! where?" exclaimed Horace, looking himself over.

"On that elbow. Here, on the skirt of your coat. On the left knee. It appears to me to be mold, or—yes! I have it! It is likely to be moss, such as grows on bowlders or old logs."

"Well, how does that help us? They are pretty nearly the same as grass stains," said Horace, gloomily.

"It narrows the search for the place you wish to find," said the doctor, calmly. "You may have since been where you hid the money three nights ago."

"Do you think so?" cried Horace, excitedly. Then hope died out of his face again. "Oh, no," he said. "I remember where I got *these* stains," pointing to that on the knee of the trousers he wore. "It happened when I was—was struggling with John up yonder by the old house."

"Ah!" exclaimed the doctor, half arising. "Any place thereabout where the bag might have been hidden?"

"I—don't—know," said Horace, slowly.

His face began to color, and his eyes to sparkle.

The doctor watched him closely. "If you were to go through that experience again—if you feared that somebody might get into the house and steal the money—if you were afraid of fire—what would you do? Where would you think of hiding a treasure for a short time?"

Horace got up slowly. "That—that is impossible!" he muttered.

"What is?"

"I—I just thought of something. It is arrant nonsense, I believe," he said, his eyes fixed straight before him. "Something I did once when I was a little fellow. I—I was angry with my brother, and I hid something of his—a microscope of which he thought a lot."

Dr. Donner sprang from his chair, too. It was a moment before he spoke. Then his voice likewise shook.

"Go on! What did you do with it?"

"I'll show you," said Horace, starting immediately for the front door.

He walked like one in a trance. As he passed the hall rack the doctor seized both their hats; but they did not stop for outer wraps.

When Horace opened the door, the doctor saw a shadowy figure standing at the gate. He ran ahead, and spoke in a low voice to the man, who sauntered away, but fell in behind them stealthily as they crossed the road and crawled through the fence.

It was now late in the evening. The neighborhood was completely at rest. The shadowy figure behind them seemed the only other living object in the vicinity.

Without speaking, but breathing heavily as though from suppressed emo-

tion, Horace led on across the field. He approached the ruins of the old house.

Suddenly they heard a scream, and before them, just at the corner of the wall, lights flashed out. A desperate struggle was going on; the sound of men's voices arose on the air, the thud of heavy blows, and guttural curses.

Startled out of his trance-like state, Horace passed a hand across his forehead, and stared dumbly at his companion.

"Come on!" exclaimed the latter, exultingly; "guess you needn't exercise your subconsciousness further, Horace. But, left alone, I believe you would have gone straight to the place."

He locked his arm in the younger man's, and in a moment they arrived within the circle of light cast by a couple of dark lanterns. There was Grafton, four of his men, beside the one who followed Horace and the doctor, and, in their midst, his clothing disarranged, his eyes glaring, stood the convict.

The group were just beside the old cistern, the moss-stained stone cover of which had been thrust aside. Grafton carried something in his hand which brought a shrill cry to Horace's lips.

"There it is! that's it!" he said.

"You bet it is—and stuffed full of money," declared the chief of the Everleigh police, glorying in his capture.

"I followed your advice, doctor, and it worked like a charm. We moved the fellow to another cell, and gave him the chance to escape after dark to-night. I had to wire Rumford that he wasn't fit to travel.

"But he traveled fast enough, all right, when he got out. We were ready for him, though; and just as you said, he made tracks for up here. I make no doubt he hid the money himself, and that young Mr. Dunn had no hand in it."

"That's a lie!" exclaimed the convict. He was panting for breath, but the glance he turned upon Horace was malevolent.

"That young doughface has played me false; but I'll settle his case," he snarled. "He'd go back on his own brother, and try to cheat him out of his share of the swag. I tell you we planned the thing together, and hid the bag in the cistern. I was to hang around for a day, until he could make arrangements for us both to git away. Oh, I'm telling you the truth!"

"It is not so!" gasped Horace.

"You sniveling cad!" exclaimed the convict. "To go back on a brother, too! I caught him trying to get away alone with the money. That was the cause of the fight when I was taken the other night."

"Stop!" commanded the physician, striding before the man. "This has gone far enough. Every word you speak is a lie."

The fellow cowered, but his eyes sparkled angrily.

"You can't bulldoze *me*," he muttered. "I'll make the judge believe it, just the same."

"I'll tell you just how you came to know about the hidden money, and why you hung about here," said the doctor, calmly, keeping his gaze fixed upon the convict's face.

"You have told one truth. You missed the eleven-ten train that night. You came back to inquire of Horace when the next train went. When you reached the house the lights were out.

"You went to the window of the dining-room." The convict started, staring with wide-opened eyes at the speaker. "You had already unfastened the lock of the sash, while in the house. You raised it easily.

"You believed Horace had some money concealed in that old safe; but you were too anxious to get out of the country just then to run many risks. You saw, however, the young man moving about the room in the dark. He was fully dressed.

"He went out by the front door, carrying something in his hand. You trailed him, but probably lost him up here in the fields. But you knew there was something peculiar in his actions. You believed he had hidden something valuable, and your cupidity was aroused.

"You hid in the barn during the day, and saw this old cistern cover from that hiding place. The cistern struck you as

being a probable receptable for the bag you had observed in Horace's hand, and at night you were about to look into the cistern when the boy jumped on you."

The doctor stopped for breath. The convict jerked up his head, with an oath.

"You 'pear to know a lot," he growled. "But I won't admit nothin' of the kind. My brother and me——"

"Stop!" commanded the doctor, still more sternly. "You have repeated that lie for the last time, Paul Dunn."

The convict uttered a cry of amazement, and fell back against his guards.

"You see I know you," said the doctor, slowly. "You are Paul Dunn, not John Dunn. You are the ne'er-do-well son of a cousin of this young man's father," and he pointed to Horace.

"You visited the old house several times when you were a boy. I reckon Horace does not remember you——"

"Who in the infernal are *you?*" shouted the convict, springing forward savagely. "You know too much!"

"No; not too much. Just enough. I happen to be John Dunn myself, and I object very seriously to being considered an escaped convict from the Rumford penitentiary," he said, quietly.

CHAPTER X.

THE CONCLUDING STATEMENT.

It would have been quite impossible for Horace Dunn to have told just what happened immediately following this, to him, utterly unexpected statement of the doctor. He knew that the bravado of the convict melted like ice in a summer sun. The policemen shook his own hands warmly and congratulated him, loudly expressing their wonder to the doctor as well.

"It's like a novel, sir! it's like a novel!" cried Grafton. "To think of your landing in Everleigh just in the nick of time, as you might say!"

But after the police had gone away with the prisoner and the bag of money, for which Grafton gave a receipt to Horace, the older Dunn took his young brother by the arm and led him back to the house. There they sat down and Dr. Dunn explained his reappearance in Everleigh quite fully.

It was not such a wonderful story, after all; but it was mighty interesting to Horace. It was the narrative of a man's plucky fight to the top round of success in his chosen profession within one short decade.

John Dunn had gone away without telling his father his intentions for the very reason that old Margy had once stated. He did not believe it right for the elder Dunn to mortgage the little property remaining to him for his, John's, use in college.

John had already advanced considerably in his medical studies. He fell in with a physician in Chicago who was just starting for Germany, and went as his assistant. His patron appreciated the young man's remarkable ability, and helped him on. He graduated from the German schools and hospitals and was well known already in Berlin.

"This is the first time I could afford to come home," he said to Horace. "There was no need of my writing. I feared, if I did, father would be determined to send me money to help along. I—I did not know the good old man was dead until I talked with Bingham on the train the other day.

"Then, when I read your letter and discovered who you were, I would not reveal myself, believing I could help you more by appearing as a stranger than as your real brother. I was coming to Everleigh, but Bingham did not know it. I appeared to stop here simply to examine you as an interesting case!" and the doctor laughed, while he squeezed the young man's hand in one of his huge palms.

"I was afraid Older would remember me. I read some with him, if you recall. But I pronounced my name as Dutch as possible, and he took the bait and swallowed it, calling me 'Dr. Donner.' Margy was the only person who recognized me, and she, good old soul, has been almost bursting with the information since last evening.

"But I could not for the life of me

imagine who that convict was until I had seen him. I had forgotten all about Paul myself. We—we rather dropped that branch of the family years ago. But the fellow had evidently kept fully in touch with our history."

"I am delighted to have you back, brother," said Horace, with a sigh of satisfaction. "I don't know how I would have felt, however, if Bingham's money had not been found."

"As your physician I command you not to allow your mind to dwell upon that," responded John Dunn, with a smile. "Your mind has been overburdened with that man's business. You have got through with him for all time."

"But he had promised to get me a good situation in St. Louis."

"No use. You can't take it," and the doctor laughed joyfully. "I can't have you so far away from me. We'll shut up the old house; we'll see if we can find Mary and her husband and pay them a visit. Strange how families get separated.

"I have a few hundred marks to spare, and we'll both take a vacation until I return to Germany. Then I shall take you with me. A fellow who unconsciously hides twenty thousand dollars, and writes letters backward, and cuts up similar didos, is not to be trusted alone. You'll be getting into a dime museum next!"

But the doctor's glasses were moist again as he wrung Horace's hand in conclusion.

THE END.

THE TEETH OF THE DRAGON

A STORY OF MODERN POLITICS

BY THEODORE WILLS HAMMOND

"AND that's the gist of the matter, Jack."

The elder Bennett lay back in his chair and looked at his son through a wreath of smoke with troubled eyes. He was a fine-looking man of fifty-odd, with white mustache and imperial, and hair sprinkled with gray. Altogether he quite deserved the enthusiastic eulogy of many of his constituents: "The handsomest mayor Minnetropolis ever elected!"

Jack Bennett, fresh from a year's jaunt over Europe and a goodly patch of Africa after his college graduation, was quite willing to agree with the voting majority of the city. His father was a handsome mayor; but he was plainly a troubled mayor, too, just now.

"It doesn't assist me any at the present time to know that I have practically brought these conditions about, myself. I advocated inviting the Normal Electric Lighting and Power Company to the city, and I am afraid we gave them certain franchises at a price not at all commensurate with what the value of the new traction roads will be.

"But I see now that I was completely gulled. If the Legislature passes this traction bill, the Alton and Minnetropolis Company will be put out of business, and so will every road in the northern part of the State which is now

under steam. This bill will give the Normal Company the right to run their electric trains over the tracks of the old roads without paying a cent for the privilege, or else the old roads will have to transfer the Normal Company's passengers free.

"We have been buncoed, Jack, and your old dad is the biggest 'come-on' of the lot. A few of us, who have our money tied up in these other railroads, will be in the court of bankruptcy before we know it. It is serious. Why, your own money, my boy, is tied up with mine in the A. and M."

Jack nodded, smoking reflectively. "Can't you win the crowd here over?"

The older man shook his head sadly and slowly. "I've put out feelers. To tell you the truth, Jack, somebody has been ladling out money with a shovel. I declare not a penny of it has come to me; I thought the electric company was a good thing for the town, and I believe so yet, if it had not undertaken to drive all competition to the wall.

"They own the council almost to a man—the working majority, I mean. And I believe that every man prominent in our party has had his share. It is an awful thing to say——"

"It's common, I understand," grunted Jack.

"Perhaps. Nevertheless, it is not nice. It makes a fellow sick of politics and wonder if there is such a thing as running the business with clean hands."

The elder Bennett looked gloomy.

"What are you going to do about it?" demanded Jack.

"Well, it seems to me, Jack, as though your old dad was holding down the mayoralty chair of this burg for the last time. I certainly can't see the bread and butter taken out of our mouths merely for the sake of being the candidate of the party for another term.

"The bill surrendering the old companies to the Normal crowd will go up for final reading this evening. I must be there and fight its passage tooth and nail. To-morrow morning our caucuses are held here, and when it is learned that I am fighting what our people have been taught is to be a big improvement, I won't get enough votes to carry away decently."

"Come back, and make the fight on an independent ticket," suggested the younger man, vigorously.

"No, Jack; that won't do. You don't know the town as I do. A nomination by our party this year is a free pass to the mayoralty, and that's all there is about it.

"Judson and the others suspect that I am on the fence, and the instant they hear that I have appeared against the bill at Alton, they'll hand out their knives to the lieutenants, and my vote will be whittled down to an infinitesimal nonentity.

"Whew! That is certainly Cleveland-esque. Do your 'State papers' sparkle with such brilliant statements? You should win out on that, father."

The elder Bennett laughed. "Well, there we are. I've got to catch the noon train. The bill may come up before I get there, otherwise."

"Then you *will* go?"

"It's our living, my boy. I shall have to make up my mind to be knifed at the caucuses, and that my political aspirations are from this time dead. And, as I said before, the fact that I have brought the situation upon myself, does not make it the easier to face."

"Humph!" grunted Jack. "Reminds me of the old story of the Greek hero who sowed the dragons' teeth. When the army of armed and armored soldiers sprang from the earth as the harvest of his sowing, it threatened to swamp *him*."

"That's me, exactly."

"But he got the best of 'em."

"How?" asked the mayor, interested.

"He faced 'em all and made 'em obey his orders. They made a pretty good army, too, if I remember rightly."

"No use," said his father, shaking his head. "These dragons' teeth can't be handled so easily. Well, I'm off. I'm glad you're going to be here, anyway. Chieftain, the president of the council, is sick. My secretary is already in Alton. I'm going to let you try your hand at being mayor, Jack," and he

laughed as he sorted the papers before him.

The young man sat up suddenly, and looked at him. "Going to give me a free hand?"

"Oh, pretty free. There's nothing to do. Send everybody to Kethall whose business you don't understand. Guess there won't be a riot, or a plague, or a famine while I'm gone; and you are excused from presiding at public functions or reviewing any parades. I shall be back to-morrow afternoon at the latest. The bill will be settled one way or the other some time to-night."

"But isn't there any way to conceal the fact that you are fighting the bill until after the delegates are instructed in your favor to-morrow morning?" queried the younger man.

"Well, you tell me how," said his father, in disgust. "There are both telegraph and telephone to Alton. Judson will have his ear glued to the long-distance 'phone, and the moment he hears that I opposed the bill before the House, his orders will go out to the district leaders.

"We can undoubtedly win out with the Legislature, for the bill is not too strongly favored by that body now. And if I had time I could show the people here that it is for their own interests not to give the Normal Company too much power. But I shan't be able to show 'em from the mayor's chair, and that's a sure thing."

But Jack Bennett wasn't so confident of that. He had never taken much interest in politics himself, but he had a vast pride in the fact that his father was the chief executive of a growing city like Minnetropolis.

Left alone in the office when his father hastened to catch the train to the State capital, he racked his brain for some plan by which Judson, the political leader of the city, could be "sidetracked."

"This political game is certainly a fierce proposition," he confided to the sleek tabby who had the run of the mayor's office. "The people don't have a chance to learn the truth about a man, or a movement; they have to take the jolly of a lot of fellows who are out for the money.

"Now, isn't there any way of disseminating the truth of *why* father is bound to oppose this bill before the caucuses to-morrow forenoon?"

Such wild suggestions as buying up the local newspapers and explaining the situation in bold type were all that came to him. But there was not time for that, and a "campaign of education" is necessarily a long one.

"Might be some way of stopping Judson from hearing of father's 'break,'" muttered the young man. "What'll I do? Cut wires—wreck the telephone plant—kidnap Judson for a few hours?"

He laughed, still looking at the purring cat.

"You're a wise-looking old girl," he said. "You might suggest something. You look kind of human, anyway. By Jove! you *do* look like Kethall himself, with your whiskers and all."

Jack threw back his head and laughed. Then he gazed seriously once more at the cat's face. It certainly did look like the chief of police, with his bristling mustache and round, pudgy countenance.

Kethall was little more than a figurehead in Minnetropolis. The mayor governed the police force himself, and Kethall took his orders direct from that executive instead of from a board. And Jack knew Kethall of old, and was well aware that he was devoted to the elder Bennett and his interests.

"I'll try it!" the young man said aloud, after a time, and smote his hand upon the call bell at his elbow.

A messenger came, whom he sent off posthaste for the chief. When the old fellow with the catlike face appeared, and congratulated young Bennett on his return from his travels, and his momentary assumption of power (which the chief seemed to take seriously), Jack got him down beside the table, and talked nineteen to the dozen for half an hour to him.

If old Kethall had any objections or any scruples of conscience against the course of action laid out by young Ben-

nett, he certainly had great admiration for the latter's confidence.

"It's takin' the bull be the horns, me boy," he said.

"Isn't that right?"

"But the bull is ould Judson, an' he may toss ye over the fence."

"We've nothing to lose, and everything to gain. It shan't cost *you* anything, Kethall."

"I'll give you the men when you want 'em," declared the chief of police. "But wirra! when your father comes home there'll be ructions."

"Not if the scheme works," returned Jack, thoughtfully. "Success, rather than charity, covers a multitude of sins."

The idea he wished to carry through, however, certainly was bold and unprecedented. It meant using the powers of the city's chief executive in a way that would be condemned by many if it ever became known. But Jack had laid out the scheme carefully, and Kethall knew his business.

Before mid-afternoon it began to be noised abroad that trouble was feared on the North Side, where several contractors were putting in a vast sewerage system and employing thousands of foreigners on the work. Kethall even went so far as to send police reserves to the stations on the North Side.

But whereas the sending of the reserves was given wide publicity, the withdrawing of an equal number of regular men from the North Side was done quietly enough. The newspapers hinted at trouble in their evening editions, but nobody seemed to know the real facts in the case, and so the newspaper articles were mostly guesses and hearsay.

That "something was doing," however, was quite evident toward midnight, when a plain clothes man went into every Western Union office in the town, and showed his badge to the man in charge, explaining his business in most impressive fashion.

He had been sent to hold up certain messages that might come in during the night, and in each case he sat down near the instruments, and having been selected because he could read Morse by ear, it was not likely that a telegram from Alton would reach Judson or any of the other political leaders until Kethall called off his watchdogs.

In the telephone exchange, through which all long-distance messages must be delivered or sent, there was even greater excitement. A file of policemen appeared at midnight, and took grim possession of the place.

Not a line could be used either in or out of the city, and the few people who had occasion to use the 'phone at night, exhausted themselves trying to call "Central."

Jack Bennett had not allowed the telephone service to be cut off until he learned that his father had already gone onto the floor of the House at Alton to oppose the electric traction bill.

Others in Minnetropolis had followed the proceedings before the Legislature at the reading of the bill, quite as carefully as the mayor's son, and not a few were astonished because of their inability to reach Alton after midnight.

Bennett knew that this could not be kept up long without troublesome inquiry. As soon as business opened in the morning, and a general use of the telephone became necessary, the entire city would be in an uproar.

His one hope was to delay the news of his father's speech until it was too late for Judson to instruct his lieutenants in time to make certain the knifing of the present mayor at the city caucuses.

He knew Judson would smell a rat early, however, and he was bothered to know how to stop the man from communicating with the district leaders and other workers, without continuing the hold-up on the entire city service.

Kethall had told him all he knew about Judson's trusted lieutenants; but the chief did not know everything. The moment Judson was assured of the opposition of the elder Bennett to the traction bill, he would send messages all over town, and warn his men to fight the nomination of the old candidate at every caucus. And the caucuses were called for ten o'clock.

Jack was still worrying over this question when he started for the City Hall early in the morning. He had been away from Minnetropolis so long that few people remembered him, and he was not surprised when Judson and one of his retainers got on the car and sat down without recognizing him.

The morning papers were full of the supposed strike on the North Side; and it was mentioned that for fear the strike leaders would communicate with friends in and about the city, and add to the trouble, a censorship had been established upon the telegraph and telephone lines.

"See here, Judson," said the leader's friend, in Jack's hearing, "that strikes me as a lame-duck story about the row on the North Side. What have they grabbed the telephone and telegraph for? I asked old Kethall last night, and he said it was the mayor's orders."

"Huh?" ejaculated Judson, in surprise. "I hadn't heard of that. I knew my telephone wasn't working. I was talking with a man in Alton when they cut me off. He was reporting something about Bennett's speechifying—important, you know, too."

"Believe me, there is a cat in the meal sack," said the other.

"I'll soon know!" snapped Judson. "Mayor's orders, did the chief say? And they cut me off! You know, I haven't really trusted Bennett since he sounded me on throwing down the bill."

"He'll lose money if it goes through."

"He'll lose his job if it doesn't."

"Do you suppose he arranged to break communication before he left town?"

"Give it up," growled Judson. "He must have, if there's anything in the report. He's left old Kethall alone, excepting for young Bennett, who's just got back from Europe."

"A saphead collegian, eh?"

"I suppose so. Playing at being mayor. But he wouldn't dare——"

"What'll you do if you don't hear from Alton at your office?"

"I'll call up the boys, anyway. They won't dare hold the telephone service—not on me! The boys are to have their ears glued to the 'phones this morning between eight and half past. I'm no greenhorn, Lafiffe. I've been expecting Bennett would kick up rusty."

"You can reach 'em without the 'phone, I suppose?" suggested his friend. "'Twouldn't take long to send around to each district leader——"

"'Sh! it's more than that. Pretty near every man in our party in each district will have to be seen before ten o'clock to switch 'em from Bennett to the dark horse. There's eight or ten lieutenants in each district that are waiting for instructions from me this morning."

"And if you don't hear from Alton?"

"If I don't hear, or I hear unfavorably of Bennett, they'll get their instructions in a hurry. I've got the list right here——"

He slapped the breast of his coat as he spoke. But in an instant he seemed confused, opened the coat itself, and ran his hand inside. "Well, that's an idiotic thing to do!" he exclaimed, loud enough for the interested Jack to hear. "I've gone and left that list at home."

"Too bad."

"Why, I was so careful of it I slept with it under my pillow! Left it there when I got up. My wife'll find it, of course, and she knows better than to destroy papers. I'll send Finnegan up after it as soon as I reach the office. Without the list I couldn't remember half the names of the fellows I'm to instruct, and mighty few of the telephone numbers where they will be waiting."

Jack Bennett leaned back in his seat, and heard nothing more. He thought hard. He knew as well as Judson did, that the farce of holding the messages back for the entire city was played out—or soon would be. At any cost, however, he must keep the political boss from communicating with his lieutenants before the caucus.

Nobody noticed the young man with the flushed face who left the car at the next corner. He wrote a note to Kethall in the drug store, and sent it with dispatch to the chief. The ban

must be raised on both telephone and telegraph; only outside messages to Judson could still be held back by a little finesse on the part of the detectives at the various offices.

Then Jack Bennett caught an uptown car, and got off at Mr. Judson's corner. He knew where the politician lived, but he was sure he would not be recognized by Mrs. Judson. The Bennetts and the Judsons were not exactly in the same social class.

"This is rank sneak thievery!" the young man muttered, as he mounted the steps; but he put on a bold face, and preferred his request. He had been sent for a certain paper which Mr. Judson had left under his pillow. He explained what the paper was like and about the list of names and telephone numbers upon it. No wonder the woman gave it to him without question.

Back to the center of the city he rushed. Kethall was shaken by the magnitude of the undertaking, and was rejoiced to have the ban lifted from the 'phones and telegraph.

News of the proceedings at Alton was coming in slowly, and it was whispered that the traction bill was beaten in the House, and that the mayor of Minnetropolis, who had previously been a strong advocate of the Normal Company, had done much toward beating the bill. The newspapers, deprived of the latest news of the legislative proceedings before going to press, were hastily preparing extra editions to be put on the streets.

But the papers would be too late. Jack Bennett was sure of that. It was Judson and his telephone messages to his many lieutenants that he feared, and the list he had obtained was sent at once to the telephone company with instructions to cover the case.

There was vast excitement throughout the city—much more than was usual even on the day of the caucuses. Jack Bennett sat in the mayor's office, and tried to keep cool while he waited. He thought again of the harvest of the dragons' teeth, and wondered if he had planted a second crop of trouble for his father instead of having saved him.

The hours dragged by. Kethall 'phoned up to him that the caucuses were being held promptly on time. In fact, the old chief of police kept him well informed as to the progress of affairs, and he had just turned away from the telephone after hearing a most favorable report from Kethall, some time later, when the door of the office burst in.

Judson, chewing savagely on a black cigar, entered, and closed the door behind him. He strode up to the young man, and Jack braced himself to meet him.

"You're young Bennett?" asked the political boss, gruffly.

Jack admitted it.

"I understand your father is away, and has left you to look after his routine work?"

"Quite true," replied Jack, blandly.

Judson looked him over. He seemed tempted to burst into vituperation, but he managed to swallow it back for a while, and dropping into a seat he still gazed at the young fellow as he talked.

"I'd like to know if this is your old man's scheme, or *who* it was who put the telephone and telegraph service of Minnetropolis out of business last night?"

"Ahem! we found it necessary to stop communication for a while because of the expected uprising among the workmen on the North Side contracts," Jack said, suavely. "The exigencies of the case——"

"The exigencies nothin'!" cried Judson, banging the table. "That strike rumor was a fake. The men are at work all right. I know. Even the contractors never heard of the threatened trouble. That story may do for the public, but it doesn't go down with me. I want to know who did it—you, or the old man?"

But Jack kept cool.

"I can assure you, Mr. Judson," he said, "that anything that may have been done since the mayor took the noon train for Alton yesterday, was at my instigation alone. *I* am acting mayor."

"You're It all right!"

"As for the telephone system, it seems to be working perfectly now. I

have just heard that ten of the districts have voted for my father as the next mayoralty candidate."

"Yes, and there's only seventeen. You've won out, young man! you've won out!" snarled Judson, mopping his brow, angrily. "I give you credit for it. When I heard how your old man beat 'em at Alton I tried to reach my men, and all I could get out of Central was: 'Line's out of order, sir!' or 'Line's busy just now!' until it was too late to do anything before the caucuses were held.

"And," pursued Judson, red-faced and perspiring, "I'd give a good deal to know who the fellow was who went to my house and got a certain document from my wife. Otherwise, I'll bet this thing wouldn't have gone through so slick. Do you know about that, Bennett?"

But Jack was smoking calmly. He watched a perfect ring sail upward from his cigar.

"Really, Mr. Judson," he drawled, "you're talking about things that never interest me. I know so little about politics——"

Judson snorted, and leaping up made for the door. Then he turned. "You ain't taken the last trick, young man!" he exclaimed. "There's time yet to put up another candidate."

"Not in this burg, Mr. Judson," was the quick response. "This nomination is as good as an election. The party can't afford to split in a presidential year. I know enough about politics for *that*.

"Besides—I rather think there will be time between now and the election to prove to a majority of the people of Minnetropolis that their mayor has been working in Alton for the town's good, after all."

Judson hesitated. Then he came back slowly, and the red cleared from his face, and he regained his composure. He even grinned rather feebly before he spoke again.

"If I heard you right, I believe you said you knew nothing about politics? If we had many such greenhorns in the party I am afraid there would be no use for Hiram Judson. I reckon we can't afford to be enemies, young man."

"Far be it from me, Mr. Judson!" exclaimed Jack, airily. "Never cared for enemies, anyway."

"There's my hand then, young man. I reckon there's good timber in you Bennetts. It might be well for us to keep our eye on you—if your old man should care to drop out of the mayoralty chair at any time, you know."

"Very sweet of you, I'm sure," drawled Jack, shaking hands limply.

When Judson had gone he went to the lavatory and washed his hands.

"Dear me!" he muttered. "Politics? Not—for—me! What did I hear about grave robbing being a nice, gentlemanly profession?"

THE ETERNAL SNARE

BY ARTHUR W. MARCHMONT

Author of "When I Was Czar," "A Dash for a Throne," "By Right of Sword," Etc.

The strange story of a multi-millionaire who becomes involved in a perilous intrigue while endeavoring to Americanize a Turkish province.

(In Four Parts—Part 1.)

CHAPTER I.

THE RESCUE.

"WHAT'S that?"

As Grant jerked out the question in a quick tone of suspicion and pointed ahead into the gloom of the unlighted road, I heard the stealthy tread of rapid footsteps, and caught a glimpse of the shadowy outline of a vanishing figure.

"Probably some palace spy curious about our movements," I said. "Nothing unusual in a land of spies like this. Did he pass us?"

"I don't know. Very likely. I was thinking, and chanced to look up and saw him. Poor devil, he has to earn his living somehow;" and with a shrug of the shoulders he dismissed the matter.

"Plenty of people in Constantinople are curious about you, Cyrus, and when we take to night strolls in unfrequented spots it would be strange if we were not shadowed."

My companion did not respond to the implied invitation of my words, and we walked on in silence.

I had plenty of food for thought. If any other man than Cyrus Dennison Grant, the young American millionaire and my close friend and chief, had conceived the big scheme which had brought us into such intimate companionship in Constantinople, I should have laughed at it as a wild impossibility.

But his wealth, his daring brain, his boundless enterprise and resource, his tireless energy, his dauntless confidence, and, above all, his magnetic personality, had overcome so many apparently insuperable obstacles that we were already far on the road to success, and victory seemed assured.

I was deep in his confidence, and we had been discussing our prospects that lovely April night as we strolled and smoked on an unfrequented road between Pera and the dirty suburb of Kassim Pasha.

But there was one thing he had not told me—why for the last two or three weeks he had taken every opportunity to bring me out on this particular road at about the same time. And the matter puzzled me.

It was barely ten o'clock, and the lights of the European colony behind us shone brightly, throwing up a glare on the low, scudding clouds which the soft south wind from the Sea of Marmora was driving up; while to our left across the Golden Horn lay Stamboul, dark and solemn, in a gloom relieved by scarcely a single light. A sullen contrast typifying, as it seemed always to me, the

sullen protest of Mohammedanism against the encroachment of the nations of the West.

Something of the same thought was in my companion's mind, for when a turn in the road gave us a fuller view of Stamboul, with the intervening water below us, he stopped and stood looking across the great harbor on which the twinkling lights of the shipping showed up against the pall-like shadow beyond.

"Islam sleeping away its strength," he exclaimed, his low, sonorous voice deep with feeling. "Think what it might be, ay, and what it shall be before long."

As he spoke he drew himself to his full height, his great figure towering above me, and his strong, handsome profile duskily outlined in the gloom of the night, while he drew in a deep breath as though drinking in inspiration for his great purpose. "By God, a scheme fit for a conqueror!"

Admiring and almost reverencing the man as I did, his sudden enthusiasm infected me, and together we stood, too full for words, intoxicated with the promise of success and gazing down on what should be the realm of future great triumphs, in which he was to be the chief, and I but a very minor actor.

Knowing his mood, I did not break the silence even when we resumed our walk and turned from the road into a more unfrequented byway. We came soon near the spot at which he usually turned, and our footsteps were slackening, when the stillness of the night was broken by a woman's scream.

"Did you hear that?" asked Grant, in a tone of suppressed excitement. "It's a woman's voice. I have dreaded it."

"It's a row somewhere, that's all," I replied, little dreaming how fateful that night stroll was to prove to us all, and puzzled by his last words. "How do you mean you've dreaded it?"

"Listen," he cried, not heeding my question.

"My dear fellow, we can do nothing, and we'd far better get back home than meddle in a thing of this kind." But my words might have fallen on deaf ears for all their effect upon him.

"Listen," he said again, laying his powerful hand on my shoulder, while he strained every nerve to catch a sound.

The cry was repeated; now louder and more insistent—a cry for help, unmistakably; and as we were expecting it we could locate its direction.

"Come; there's a woman in trouble. Quick," and turning he rushed off at a pace that made it difficult for me to follow him. "I know the way," he called to me over his shoulder; and to my further surprise he made good his words immediately by threading his way readily through some devious paths between dense shrubberies until we came out at the rear of a house of considerable size, of the existence of which I had been ignorant.

Some ugly business was going on inside, and as we reached the house the noise of struggling and of men's voices raised in threatening altercation came to us through an open window. A deep groan followed immediately by the report of a pistol came next, and then shouts and curses in guttural Turkish, and once more the woman's screams and loud cries for help, first in Turkish and then in Greek.

"They are Turks, and some one's life's in danger," I said, hurriedly. My companion had not waited to hear me, however, but with a knowledge of the place that continued to surprise me rushed to a door, opened it, and dashed into the house.

"It's a fool's game," I cried, as a caution. I might as well have called to the wind; and fearing, I knew not what, I followed and laid a detaining hand on his arm as he was opening an inner door.

"Do you realize what you're doing, Cyrus?" I asked. "You are forcing yourself into a matter that may ruin everything. In Heaven's name, be careful and think of the consequences."

"If you're afraid, man, stay outside," he answered, fiercely, in a tone he had never used to me before, while he shook off my hand impatiently. "Do you think I don't know where I am?" and as he

spoke he opened the door and we burst in.

It was a strange scene, indeed, into which we dashed thus unceremoniously. The door opened into a large, long hall, very dimly lighted by two lamps at the far end fixed on pillars at the foot of a broad stairway.

Standing some three steps above the floor was a woman, her face in shadow, her hair streaming over her shoulders, and her dress disordered, confronting three men armed with knives, who were gesticulating and threatening her in loud, angry tones.

We had arrived at the moment of crisis, for even while they menaced her, they were hanging back in fear of the revolver with which she held them at bay. Between them and the stairway two bodies lay on the ground; one, that of a woman; the other, a man, groaning and writhing as if wounded.

As we entered, the woman fired at her assailants and missed them, and the report of the pistol was followed by a great shout of rage from Grant, who cried, as he rushed forward:

"I am here, and will save you. Have no fear."

"The blessed Virgin be thanked!" called the woman in response, in Greek.

Her assailants had been making too much noise to notice our entrance, but faced about on hearing Grant's sonorous voice, and having no stomach for a fight under such altered circumstances and taking fright probably at Grant's big, muscular form, they hesitated a second, and then bolted, like rabbits, through a door close to them. As they scrambled through it the woman fired again, and again missed them; while Grant, seeing she was safe and unhurt, rushed after them and flung himself at the door which they had fastened behind them.

Then I had an opportunity of looking closely at the woman, whom I instantly recognized. She was Haidee Patras, the lovely Greek, one of the most beautiful women in all Constantinople, about whose personality there was a considerable mystery. In a moment I guessed the reasons for Grant's sudden liking for these night strolls.

"You are not hurt?" I asked.

"I am not hurt," she answered, and with a smile of indescribable loveliness and gratitude she moved down into the light and greeted Grant as he approached. "I was only frightened for the moment. You saved me, sir, and I thank you," she said, in English, and coming forward with the carriage of a queen, she laid down her pistol and gave him her hand. He took it, and carried it to his lips, and many things were made plain to me as I watched the faces of both while they stood gazing each into the other's eyes, oblivious, as it seemed, of my presence.

With a half sigh she withdrew her hand, and then sank as if exhausted into a low chair, in which she lay back. Only for an instant, however, and then she sprang up.

"I am forgetting my faithful Lelia, and Koprili; shame to me, when they may have given their lives for me." She bent over the woman who lay so still, while I turned to the man. I found that he was wounded and had lost a great quantity of blood, judging by the pool which lay all about him on the floor, and he moaned and groaned dismally at every touch. With Grant's aid I found the wounds, which did not look so serious as the loss of blood suggested, and when we had bound up the hurts we laid him on one of the divans. In the meanwhile, the woman had recovered consciousness, and with her mistress' help, delicately, tenderly and lovingly given, she succeeded in getting to her feet and staggering up the stairway.

"This is a queer business, Cyrus," I said, when we were alone.

"I wish I could have caught those infernal villains," he replied, glancing angrily at the door by which they had escaped.

"I didn't know you knew the neighborhood so well," I added, a little dryly.

"If I had not there would have been murder done."

"True; the murder of a very lovely woman. But what the deuce does it all mean?"

"A pretty easy story to read, I should think."

"I'm not so sure of that. Matters are generally just what they don't seem to be in this sublime land of craft. We're probably only at the beginning of things. What are you going to do next?"

"I don't know. What we have rescued we must keep safe, I suppose."

"H'm! That means you are going to charge yourself with the safe-keeping of the Greek?"

"Yes, if it's necessary," he answered, with characteristic decisiveness, as though that ended the matter.

"Women are the devil in Turkey," I muttered.

"This woman is no devil, Mervyn," and as he said this he looked me straight in the eyes for an instant.

"Well, I'm with you, if it's necessary," I replied, after a pause. "But for Heaven's sake, let us try to bottom the thing, and see where we're going."

"Do I generally forget that?" There was a suggestion scarcely perceptible, it is true, of defiance in his manner and words; an unwonted intention to keep me outside his real feelings and thoughts; a wish to fence with me.

"We have never before had to take a woman into the reckoning," I persisted.

"And may or may not have to do so now."

"As you will," I returned, with a shrug of the shoulders. "But in any case, I'm with you."

"I know you are, and so have patience."

"If you bottom the thing, yes. But if you don't, I shall. She's coming back."

We caught the sound of her soft draperies on the stairway above, and when she came down I observed that she had taken advantage of the interval to array herself beautifully. She was dressed in a clinging gown of soft silk, her hair was done up, and she wore many jewels.

She was obviously anxious to look at her best, even at a moment of such crisis; and the fact struck me as significant. But her rare beauty of face and witching grace of form needed no rich setting of either costume or jewels. She was the loveliest woman I had ever seen, and I viewed her with quite dispassionate eyes, and she looked glorious and radiant as with her face slightly flushed and eyes aglow with emotion she repeated her thanks to Grant for having rescued her.

She spoke English fluently, and her beautifully modulated voice gave a piquancy to her slight foreign accent, which added to its fascination. She was certainly a woman to turn men's heads, and I could not wonder that Grant was deeply moved by her irresistible charm.

When she turned from him to thank me also, her simple words seemed full of feeling and gratitude, although I did not fail to notice that she placed my services on a very different level from those of my friend. Her rescue had been his work; I was merely a subordinate accessory, and she wished him to see that she understood her chief debt of gratitude was to him.

Grant was strangely agitated. I had never seen him in such a mood. To me he had always been the very type of self-strength and self-reliant confidence; knowing exactly what he meant to do and say, and doing and saying it promptly with clear-cut resolution and calm definiteness; and yet now he was more like a great bashful child, pliant, hesitating, stumbling over his words and for the moment irresolute and tongue-tied. Yet I knew that his purpose was strong within him, and to give him time to recover outward self-possession I took up the *rôle* of questioner.

"You were in great danger, mademoiselle; do you think you are safe now?"

"While you are here, yes; but in future, alas! no," she said, sadly. "My servants have deserted me—except my woman Lelia and my faithful Koprili. Is he much hurt? Ah, it was terrible!" and she sighed, and glanced to where we had laid the man, her lovely face full of tender solicitude.

"He is not seriously hurt, I hope; but he seems to have lost a great deal of blood. We have bound up his wounds. Do you know the reason for such an

attack?" The question seemed to distress her greatly, for she lay back a moment in her chair, and covered her face with her hands.

"The villains shall not go unpunished. I will see to that," exclaimed Grant, finding his voice, impetuously.

At this she uncovered her face, now very pale, and, glancing at him, smiled sadly and shook her head.

"You can do nothing, my friend—I may call you friend, after what you have done for me. But in this you, even you, are powerless. You can do nothing; nay, you must not even attempt to do anything. I have brought you into danger as it is. It is that which grieves me."

"Will you tell us the reasons?" I asked.

"It is better not—far better not. You had best leave me now, at once."

"No," came from Grant, in a strong, decided tone. "That is impossible."

"Spoken as I was sure you would speak—but it must be as I say. If you knew, you would see it as I do."

"Will you tell us?" I asked again.

"It is a long story, and a strange one—but better not."

"You may trust us absolutely," declared Grant, emphatically.

"Do you think I doubt that? Ah, no!" and she put out her hand as if to give it to him, but checked herself and smiled upon him, and then sighed.

"But you are in peril here," said my friend.

"Yes, but for myself I do not fear. It is not that. It may mean so much more—so very much more;" she added the last words despondently. "It is that which troubles."

"Tell me, that I may help. I have influence."

"I should but bring trouble on you, while you may not save me."

"It will save valuable time if you tell us at once," I said.

"It is a long story, but——" she paused, and added, in a low, almost caressing tone as she looked at Grant, "I should so like to tell you," and with just a shade of emphasis on the pronoun. Then with a change as if taking a sudden resolution, she added, earnestly: "I will tell you, and put my life and that of others in your hands." She paused and put her hand to her brow. "I must collect my thoughts. Oh, I wonder what you will think of it?"

And as she sat thinking for a few moments in silence and we waited for her to begin, I looked at Grant, and noted the rapt, intense, expectant look in his shining eyes as he feasted them upon her wondrous beauty. And seeing it I knew that for good or ill the fortunes of the Greek were for the future linked with his.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREEK'S STORY.

The vital significance to us of the beautiful Greek's rescue and of the story which she afterward told us can only be thoroughly appreciated when the reason of our presence in Turkey is understood.

Grant was a man whose ideas were big even for an American, and his practical energy was as tireless as his courage was indomitable. "He could think most easily in millions," he used to say; and although he was only a year or two over thirty he had already been phenomenally successful in piling up wealth.

His father had left him more than a million sterling, and in less than ten years he had handled this sum so deftly in New York that when he came to Constantinople he was worth perhaps ten times as much, while he possessed the absolute confidence of men ready to back him to almost any extent.

His Turkish enterprise was entirely charactertistic of him, and not the least of its attractiveness for him was the fact that it was fraught with interests that touched closely the policy of all Europe. He had first come East for a holiday, and in the course of a hurried scramble through the northeast provinces of Turkey his keen eyes had been quick to observe the vast wealth that lay there undeveloped.

He had instantly conceived a plan to

develop it; and while his friends were busy with schemes to capture the industries of Western Europe he determined to capture those of the East. The project was daringly ambitious, and although commercial in form it involved political issues of such tremendous consequences as to have daunted any man less resolute than himself.

The pith of it was nothing less than the ultimate solution of the Eastern question by the gradual Americanization of part of European Turkey and the Balkan States, commencing, of course, with a comparatively small district, and then extending the sphere of operations.

The district he selected lay on the northeast seaboard, as remote as possible from the capital, and while engaged in the work of industrial development he intended to introduce a system of good government administered by carefully picked Americans and Englishmen, thus enriching the Turkish population of the place, while at the same time giving them the blessing of personal security and just rule.

The difficulties were, of course, enormous, but to him no more than incentives, and in the six months he had been at work he had made remarkable progress. He was a born ruler of men, with a profound insight into human nature; he had poured out money with a prodigal hand in a land where bribery is all-powerful, until more than half the people of influence about the court were in his pay; and his tact, shrewdness, capacity and personal magnetism had succeeded with many of those whom money could not buy.

With the sultan, Abdul Hamid, his success had been extraordinary. Utterly opposite as were their characters, the sultan had been won over completely, and Grant was trusted by him to a degree that was positively remarkable.

He was always welcome at the palace of Yildiz Kiosk, and the ruler who shut himself from his people so rigidly that he was little better than a state prisoner, received Grant almost with effusion. He entered readily into his plans, or so much of them rather as Grant deemed it advisable to disclose, and without demur accorded him concessions which other men would have given half their lives to obtain. Grant handled him most admirably, and Abdul was so fascinated by the prospects of wealth and prosperity which were constantly dangled before him that, in fact, the concessions were in Grant's hands before he was ready to deal with them.

He had, however, hurried forward his preparations, and matters were fast ripening to the moment for action when Grant had begun to show his partiality for those evening walks, the last of which had had such dramatic consequences.

Up to that time I do not believe that any thought for a woman had ever entered his head, but knowing his exceptional pertinacity of purpose and his headstrong will when once fixed on an object, I could not but be apprehensive of the consequences now when I found him so strangely moved by this beautiful Greek, watched the rapturous looks he cast upon her, and saw how this strong nature was swayed by her words and glances.

"Mine is a strange story," she began, in her soft, rich voice. "I am, as you know, a Greek, but as you do not know, the child of martyred parents. My father was Greek, my mother Armenian, and my earliest recollections are of a home all happiness and peace. My father was a merchant and prospered—and prosperity brought on him what prosperity always brings to an Armenian, the curse of the Turks' hate.

"I was but ten years old when that curse began to cloud my life, and before I was fourteen the heel of the oppressor came crushing down upon us. My father was the justest and kindest of men, as my mother was the most loving and gentle, but my father was rich, and the Turks hated him, and they never rested until they had hounded him to death, dogs that they are." Her eyes flashed fire as this burst from her in a spasm of passion. For a moment she paused, and I heard Grant draw his breath quickly as his manner was when moved.

"I will not harry you with details. I

was thirteen when one of the risings came which these beasts of prey instigate as a specious pretext for them to wreak their 'blood lust' on their victims. My father was as innocent of harm as a child unborn, but—they murdered him, and when my mother rushed in a tragic effort to turn their foul purpose, they laughed as they beat out her brains before my very eyes. Oh, God, that fearful memory!"

She paused again, overcome by her emotions, and it was some time before she could control herself sufficiently to continue.

"I was spared, gladly though I would have died with those who were all in all to me, but I was spared—for what? Because they deemed me pretty child enough to be sold into that most infamous of all slavery—the harem of the most illustrious, the sultan, the padishah, the shadow of God, shadow of God!" she repeated with bitter scorn. "Shadow of hell, rather!"

The effect of these words on Grant may be readily imagined.

"Go on," he said, his voice low and resonant with passion, his deep chest heaving with tumultuous emotion.

She read his thoughts instinctively.

"No, I escaped that doom. Two of the devils who had me in charge grudged me to their sublime master, coveting me for themselves, and while they fought for me I escaped from both, and, in the care of an Armenian, I succeeded in leaving the country. I went, where do you think? not to Greece for fear of pursuit, but to America, liberty-loving America, and there succeeded in getting that part of his fortune which my father, having always the fear of violence before him, had stored with some merchant friends.

"With them I lived, drinking in the gospel of freedom and nursing the dreams of revenge. Oh, that wondrous land of modern miracles! You can understand something of what my young soul felt in your noble realm of perfect freedom; how my instincts of righteousness and right developed in the years that followed—my life saddened always by the memory of that awful past. I brooded on the thought how bright and glorious and happy would life have been had this land of bane and sorrow and oppression been free like yours. But my purpose had never faltered, and was strengthened by all I saw."

"Your purpose?" I asked, as she paused.

"My vengeance, if you prefer it so," she cried, turning to me, and speaking vehemently. "Vengeance upon the doers of wrong, and liberty for the wronged and oppressed in this black hell for us Eastern Christians."

Her sudden vehemence silenced me, and after a pause she continued in a tone of suppressed bitterness:

"What could a woman do? you will ask; a woman in a land where women are only better than cattle, because they cost more to feed and clothe and house. But I have done something. I have plotted and schemed and conspired. I have wealth and have used it in a land where every man has his price. I have found others who are sick to death of misrule and tyranny, and to-day it is largely by my work and effort that the goal is in sight, that the reign of the bloodthirsty coward of Yildiz Kiosk is drawing to its close, and that the dawn of liberty is at hand." Her cheeks mantled with a flush of enthusiasm and her eyes shone brightly as she said this.

Neither of us spoke. We might well be silent indeed; for apart from the lovely picture of enthusiasm which this most glorious creature presented and the influence of her glowing words, we had to think of how such a plot as she indicated would influence our plans. Whether Grant had a thought of the kind I cannot say. He sat gazing at her with the same rapt expression of intense and absorbing admiration, but I saw the rocks close ahead and a hundred possible complications suggested themselves in the moments of silence that followed.

"And these men we found here to-night?" I asked, after a while.

"Need you ask? Some one has betrayed me, and these men were sent to do that for which a thousand hands can be hired at any moment on the treach-

erous streets of Stamboul—to murder a Christian. They were palace-hired assassins; and but for your help would have slain me. My servants had been either frightened or decoyed away or kidnaped—what is that in this land of blood?—and when I was unprotected these miscreants burst into my house. Had they succeeded the tale would have been told to-morrow that my servants had risen against me and murdered me for my wealth, and all the police and court officials would have made a fine show of energy in hunting them down and putting them to death for the crime—for they are Christians. As it is——" she stopped abruptly and threw up her white hands.

"As it is?" I repeated.

"They will refuse to believe my story, and make another attempt when success will seem more certain. What is one paltry Christian woman more or less to the murderous devils of Islam?"

"By God, it is infamous!" exclaimed Grant, passionately.

"Your God is my God, and only suffers these things to be that His people shall combine to bring about the change. He has saved me now, by your energy, and He will save me again. I have no fear for myself, and when my work is done, and not till then, He will call me to Himself." She spoke with all the thrilling resignation of a martyr.

"But you cannot stay here. It is not safe," cried Grant.

"Where shall I go? I could turn coward, and fly the country, putting myself under the protection of my patriarch. But whatever I may be, I am no coward. I shall stay."

"But not here," he persisted, emphatically.

"And why not here? Has not God worked a miracle that it should be you who have saved me? I know something of the task you are about here in Pera. I know that you are working in your way for reform and for the development of some of the neglected wealth of the country. I know you have the arch monster's ear and favor. You are working in your way, I in mine, for the same end. Do you think it mere chance that sent you here to-night to save me, and thus brought us two together? The very attempt to murder me has made me the stronger by your friendship. But I am a dangerous friend for any man to have in this land of darkness and evil; and if you will take my counsel, you will leave me, ay, now, at once, and forget we have ever met and that your courage saved me. I am not afraid."

But Grant had been thinking his way to a decision, and having reached it, announced it with characteristic emphasis.

"I shall see this right through," he said, firmly. "Right through. You are right, we are working for the same end by different paths. We'll work together. You will not stay here, but come, at any rate for the present, to us—my sister and aunt will welcome you; and until your plans are better shaped you will stay with them. Meanwhile, this scheme of yours to depose the sultan——"

"How do you know that?" The question came in a quick tone of alarm.

"You have told me now in almost so many words. It shall be looked into; your secret is safe with us, and we'll see what's inside it. And now it's all settled."

"I cannot leave my two faithful servants."

"Then bring them with you. You can't stay here. Mervyn, will you go and hunt up some kind of conveyance—if necessary, a couple of carriages from the White House, while Mlle. Patras gets ready? I've made up my mind. I'll see this thing right through."

And in that prompt and decisive way, he took command, and to my not very great surprise the Greek yielded to him after offering only the smallest and faintest protest.

We all yielded to him, indeed, when he was in one of his commanding moods, for it was useless to attempt to do otherwise. But when she had left us to make her preparations I ventured upon a mild remonstrance.

"She's a very beautiful woman, Cyrus, and she is certainly in a bad strait, but if she's in the thick of a plot to get rid of Abdul Hamid, isn't it a big risk

you're running to shelter her at the White House?"

"And if it is?" he asked, abruptly.

"Well, you have big things on hand and they may be easily jeopardized if the palace gets suspicious."

"Would you have me leave her here to be murdered?" he asked, with a frown.

"I didn't suggest that."

"I'm sure of that, and glad of it, too. You leave this to me, and bring those carriages along, there's a good fellow. I don't freeze to the notion of stopping on here a moment longer than necessary."

I went then and left him sitting at the foot of the stairs, the revolver close to his hand, his arms folded and his face partly in shadow, wearing a stern, set, determined expression, indicative of his new, strong resolve.

CHAPTER III.

ENID GRANT.

I may be pardoned if I say here a word or two about myself and the position of matters at the White House, as Grant had named the building in Pera which served the double purpose of residence and offices.

I had first known the Grants some five or six years before in New York, when I was there with my father, Lord Bulverton, on a somewhat peculiar errand. As a younger son I was never of much account, and from my childhood had been a very rolling stone. I managed to get into trouble and debt at Harrow, so that when a chance offered of shipping me to the East of Europe, where my uncle, my mother's brother, was consul at Adrianople, my family had seized it eagerly, much to my personal delight.

I had one gift, the power of acquiring languages, and Adrianople gave me full scope for it. I learned Turkish thoroughly and could not only speak it fluently, but, what is much rarer with Europeans, I learned to write it well. It takes nine years, we are always told, to learn to write Turkish, but it did not take me so long, and while I was learning it I picked up Greek, Arabic and several other tongues to be heard in that strange, polyglot land.

The East had a great fascination for me, and while helping my uncle in his business I roamed all over Turkey, Greece, the Balkan States and Southern Russia. The wandering life suited me, and it was with genuine regret that in obedience to my father's wishes I went home to England in pursuance of his plans for my settlement in life.

He wished me to marry for money, I discovered, and for a year I bored myself and all about me by going into society—that miserable make-believe of enjoyment—until he carried me off to New York, where his plan came very near achievement.

At the ambassador's I met Miss Grant. I was drawn to her from the first moment, and was soon head over heels in love with her. I knew merely that her name was Grant, Enid Valerie Grant, and I neither asked nor cared whether she was rich or poor. She was bright, clever, and to me fascinating—a startling contrast to all the women I had ever met—and so long as I knew nothing of her wealth, her companionship was just the sweetest thing in life to me.

But it was very different when my father told me she was the sister of Cyrus Dennison Grant, one of the richest and most successful men in the States, and a millionairess in her own right.

"You have been a great many sorts of a fool in your life, Mervyn," he declared, with paternal pithiness, "but you seem to have shown some glimmer of common sense in this, and you have a chance of redeeming your position now with this Grant girl, and you must marry her. I've spoken to the brother, and he's agreeable and says she likes you. So you've nothing to do but propose, and don't waste time about it."

My father meant well, no doubt, but he could not have taken a step more certain to set me against the thing. My relatives declare I am a fool in money matters, and without a scrap of ambition; most of my friends have taken

much the same view, although they have expressed it differently, and the fact is certain that so soon as I knew she was wealthy I became self-conscious and uneasy in her presence and began to loathe myself for that despicable thing—a needy fortune hunter.

To make matters worse, Grant, having no knowledge of women's ways or their hearts, detached his mind for a moment from his colossal business affairs, and spoke bluntly to his sister. The result may be imagined.

My father was anxious to return to London, and kept urging me to get the matter settled. Grant was uncomfortably significant, and Enid herself had so changed that she seemed as ill at ease as I was. Our pleasant comradeship was at an end, and, as ill luck would have it, a very prominent engagement of the kind between an English earl and a well-known millionaire's daughter was announced just then.

By chance Enid told me of it on the very day on which I had intended to ask her to marry me. I was fumbling and stumbling to get to the point, doing it nervously and fatuously, like a fool, I admit, when she reduced me to a sort of pulpy silence by asking with a laugh whether I thought English family or American dollars weighed the heavier in the scales of such an engagement as that of the earl.

I accepted my defeat with a laugh to cover my discomfiture. I did more, indeed. I was so out of conceit with my part in the transaction and so piqued by Enid's refusal that, without saying a word even to my father, I bolted from New York by the next steamer, carrying with me a sick heart, a stinging sense of mortification, a crowd of perplexing doubts as to Enid's real feelings, and a firm resolve to be done for good and all with my father's matrimonial plans on my behalf.

For five years I saw and heard no more of the Grants. I went back to Adrianople, and to my life of wandering there, looking for a fortune which I never found and settling down into content with the small income of some few hundreds a year, which came to me quite unexpectedly on the death of my uncle, the consul.

Then, to my intense surprise, I blundered upon Grant one day in the hills not far from Elbassan at a moment when my arrival must have been profoundly welcome. He had been prospecting with a servant and a couple of guides in the district where he was acquiring his concessions, and his guides, after the manner of the wily Turk, had led him into an ambush, which their friends the brigands had prepared for him. They deserted him there, and he and his servant were making a plucky stand. Things were going very awkwardly for him, when the arrival of my little party turned the tables, and together we drove the rascals off.

As a result of this he asked me to join him in the big scheme; the companionship soon ripened into a deep and warm friendship, and I threw myself heart and soul into his work. My knowledge of the people and country enabled me to help him in many ways, and he in return gave me his entire confidence.

He was alone then in the great house at Pera, and his sister's name was barely mentioned between us, until one day, without a word of warning and as much to his surprise as to my concern, Enid herself arrived, bringing with her an aunt, Mrs. Constantine Wellings.

Our meeting had its embarrassments for me, if not for her, but after a while we established a sort of armed neutrality arrangement, and I am free to confess that, although I was not so foolish as to "go back" on the past, I soon began to feel the old charm of her companionship. I had my own apartments and my own servants, and having much to occupy my time I held aloof so far as practicable and did not forget that I was a poor man and she a very rich girl, and that the past was dead and buried.

How she would view the dramatic introduction of Haidee Patras into the White House was a question which promised to be interesting, and she was not long in giving me an answer and making me acquainted with her opin-

ion. And a very strong, clear-cut opinion it was, too.

On the evening following the Greek's arrival I was passing through the drawing-room when she stopped me.

"I suppose you are as usual too busy to speak to me, Mr. Ormesby," she began, in a decidedly aggressive mood.

"I am rather busy, Miss Grant. You see——"

"That's just what I don't but what I mean to. Why did you bring that Greek woman here, and who is she, anyway?"

"I did not bring her here. Your brother——"

"Well, I just want to speak to you, and I'm going on to the veranda." I followed her and sat down, feeling, it must be confessed, none too delighted at the prospective cross-examination.

"Now, Mr. Ormesby, who is she?"

"She's a very beautiful woman, her name is——"

"Yes, yes; we know her name, and have seen her face, but who is she?"

"For the life of me I can't tell you. I can give you the sketch of her life, but your brother has probably told you that."

"Cyrus has just lost his head—for the first time in his life, and I suppose you know it. But what has she come here for?"

"For shelter in as bad a storm as ever threatened a woman."

"Shelter?" she repeated, with a sniff. "You mean she has shifted the storm center so as to get us all into it."

"Your brother is not exactly the man to go about seeking unnecessary storms."

"Do you mean to tell me you think that woman is here by accident, and not of her own deliberate intention? Please answer me that. You know you can speak straight when you wish."

"I have not formed that opinion."

"Oh, you men, what bats you can be when a woman has a pretty face! Well, now I've suggested it, what do you think?"

"If you had been through last night's business, I don't think you'd dream of making any such suggestion."

"So you're in the toils too, eh?" And she shrugged her shoulders and smiled pityingly. She had a very witching smile when she pleased, but there was no witchery in this one. I made no reply, and in the pause her foot tapped the ground impatiently. "She must have done it cleverly to trap you both. Cyrus I can understand, for he is not himself in this, but you—I should have thought you were different. You know these Easterners, and, being an onlooker, should certainly have caught some sight of the wires."

"I think you are doing her an injustice—to say nothing of me."

"Of course you do; that's what the fly inside the web said about the spider to his friend outside. The whole thing last night was just a web, nothing more, and those white hands of hers have woven it. But I'm outside, thank you, and mean to stay there."

"My dear Miss Grant, you haven't a single fact to go on for such a suggestion."

"Fact, rubbish! What are facts to a woman's instincts about a woman? Do you think I can't read her?" She flashed the words at me quite angrily.

"But you forget; we were present when she was attacked; we saw the men who threatened her; we saw her fire at them, and I myself bound up the wounds of her servant whom they nearly killed—and the blood he had shed——"

"Nearly killed! Why, the man's walking about to-day as well as he ever was in his life, and as for that old hypocrite she calls Lelia—can't any one lie down on the floor and pretend to be dead? Why, a well-trained dog or a donkey can do it, and probably better than she did, if the truth were known. But there were only two men to fool, and there was the glamour of her beauty to cover up any bad acting! I tell you she is here of set purpose and for a definite object—now what is it?"

"But she did not wish to come."

"Oh, Mr. Ormesby, do try and think seriously. Why, she has thrown herself twice right at Cyrus' head!"

"Twice?" I exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes, twice. Oh, don't you know? Then I may be doing you an injustice, as you call it. Her first introduction" —this with a fine play on the word— "was something of the same kind. She was being insulted in one of the streets of Stamboul, and Cyrus chanced to be at hand to help her. Chanced! What a chapter of chances, isn't it?"

"I did not know that," said I, not unimpressed.

"Cyrus told me, and she has taken care to let him see her several times since; until he was seized with the sudden longing for those night strolls of yours—near her house. Do you suppose she did not know what he was doing?" she asked, triumphantly, and then, changing quickly to great earnestness, she added: "I tell you she has set herself to win upon him and to be brought here for some purpose, and what that purpose is some one must find out. Can you? Who is she? What is it she wants? She is a dangerous, treacherous woman, and is here for some dangerous, treacherous purpose. But I tell you more. She shall not stay here. Cyrus is blind for the moment where she is concerned, but at least I thought you would have eyes to see and ears to hear, and I am disappointed."

I had no reply ready and sat for some moments in considerable uneasiness. The suggestion that the whole scene of the previous night was just a carefully rehearsed fraud which had succeeded so far as to delude both Grant and myself was an exceedingly disquieting one. Nobody cares to feel that he has been fooled, and I was naturally unwilling to believe it. If it was true, then the question as to the Greek's motive was one of absolutely vital importance, considering the critical position of affairs. I had had plenty of proofs of Enid's acumen, moreover, and her vehement words and manner impressed me. I never could understand women at any time, and now I was profoundly puzzled.

"What you say is very important, but hadn't we better wait a bit before jumping to conclusions?"

"I shall not wait, I've jumped already," she answered, stoutly. "She shan't stay here."

"I don't know that your brother contemplates her staying here permanently, but she is for the time in considerable danger——"

"Which means you won't help me?" she interrupted.

"I really don't see what to say. She is your brother's guest, and for me to do anything would be extremely invidious. I can only suggest that we allow matters to develop a little."

"Until Cyrus is outwitted and his plans smashed."

"Don't you think he can be trusted to take care of them?"

"Where this woman is concerned?" and she laughed impatiently.

"Yes, where any one is concerned," said I.

"Which shows how little you understand about men in love, and Cyrus in particular. I suppose you can see that he is in love with her?"

"She is a very beautiful woman and very fascinating," I admitted, recalling certain parts of the previous night's scene.

"And perhaps you can carry your imagination a step farther, and think what is likely to be the effect of such a passion upon a nature like his?"

"Yes, I think I can."

"Then exercise it still farther, and tell me what will most probably be the effect upon Cyrus' work if we assume that my view of this Greek woman and not yours is the correct one?"

"It might be, I admit, disastrous, but——"

"Never mind the buts," she broke in, with quite the Grant directness. "On that assumption, don't you think it would be well to satisfy ourselves about her true motives and intentions?"

"I think it is a matter for your brother."

"And I don't—and so I suppose there's no more to be said. In my opinion she's a fraud, and if you won't help me to prove it, I must find some one else. At any rate, she shan't stay here, if I have to insult her and drive her out of the house."

"Put my cushions in the veranda, Lelia. I am weary and will sit there," broke in at that moment from the room behind us the dulcet tones of Haidee Patras, speaking in Greek, and the next instant she came out through the window and gave a start of surprise at seeing us. I would have given a good deal to know how much she had overheard, and I threw a glance of warning at Enid Grant as I rose to offer my chair.

"Ah, I am disturbing you," said the Greek, sweetly.

"Not in the least, mademoiselle," returned Enid, stiffly. I murmured something conventional, and stood while the old woman arranged the cushions, into which her mistress sank with the easy grace that marked all her actions and attitudes.

I felt very awkward and would have fled from the threatening storm had I not feared that an abrupt departure would have led Haidee to draw wrong conclusions as to my conference with Enid. I brought out another chair, therefore, and lighted a cigarette.

"It is a lovely view from here," murmured Haidee.

"We were not admiring the view, mademoiselle, but were speaking of you," replied Enid, with appalling directness.

"Of me?" and the shapely eyebrows were raised as if in surprise.

"Yes, I was asking Mr. Ormesby to tell me all that he knew about you. We Westerners go straight to the point, you know."

"But why not ask me first, then? Monsieur Ormesby has only had the outline of my life, and could tell you little. I will tell you all if you take an interest in my story. It is not a happy one—but it is not yet finished. It is not like the placid lives of your more fortunate compatriots in the land of true liberty, for it began in bloodshed, and will end, where we Eastern women would have it end—in revenge."

"My brother told me you had been in America—how long have you been back in Turkey?"

"Two or three years, in the East that is, as measured by time, but more than half my life, as measured by my work."

"In Constantinople, how long?"

"Most of the time, but broken by visits to other places."

"And have you lived alone all that time?"

"I am always alone. Until yesterday I had no friends here, as you understand friendships in the West."

"And where have you lived?"

"Sometimes here, sometimes there, as the circumstances of my life and work dictated. I have enemies, and could not live as you live in the West, in one abode."

It was excellently answered. A most natural explanation; but I was once more, as Enid had said, an on-looker, and I saw it might be no more than a plausible cover for facts intentionally concealed. Enid's distrust was beginning to infect me.

"In the West," said Enid, very pointedly, "we like more direct answers to direct questions."

"The West does not yet understand the East, Miss Grant; but I should like you to understand me. Your brother has been so kind to me; so brave, so helpful, so generous, so good in offering me a shelter for a few days, that I hope you and I will be friends."

"'For a few days.' Where are you going then?" a note of unquestionable hostility and spoken sharply.

"I go wherever my work calls me. Where that may be I cannot say yet."

"Nor when?" the question came almost like a sneer.

"I am ready to leave at any moment," answered Haidee, placidly, but with a hardening of tone which was the first symptom of antagonism she had shown.

Then the unexpected happened.

"Who talks of leaving?" This from Grant, who had joined us without our hearing his approach.

"Your sister was asking me when I am leaving, and where I am going, Mr. Grant, and I was trying to make her understand how my movements depend on matters I cannot control. You will understand me, however," she added, almost caressingly and with a glance at

his face which made Enid move uneasily in her chair.

"I wish you and Mlle. Patras to be great friends, Enid," said Grant, with quiet, assertive significance and in a tone which told me he had quite gathered the meaning of the scene. His sister held her head erect, and met his look with one quite as resolute and firm as his, and I thought she was going to make some reply which would have set the highly combustible elements in a blaze; but after a pause she got up, and said, merely:

"I am chilled and am going in, Cyrus. I bid you good-evening, Mlle. Patras," and with a very stately bow she swept past us into the room.

Grant followed her, and I heard him say, in a low tone:

"What is the answer to my wish, Enid?"

"I choose my own friends, Cyrus," was the reply, spoken of intention loudly enough to reach us on the veranda. A glance at the Greek's face showed me she had heard and understood, and the curve of the lips, the hardening of the lines of the face and the momentary lowering of the brows told of the fire and anger and mortification the words had kindled. But when Grant returned, himself looking stern and angry, she greeted him with a smile, soft, gentle and loving.

"Your sister is very reserved and hard to know, and I fear she has taken a dislike to me. I am so sorry; but perhaps my instinct was right; I ought not to have come here to sow discord." And she sighed and shook her head sadly.

"My sister is probably returning to America in a few days, mademoiselle," he replied, and I knew how much might lie behind the words. For an instant a light of triumph sprang to her eyes, to be quenched as quickly with one of her ineffable smiles as she glanced in my direction.

Had she forgotten that I was, as Enid had said, an on-looker; and did she fear I had read her expression? Was she no more than a clever actress, and was Enid right in her woman's intuitive judgment? Who could tell? I could not, and the questions baffled me as I sat there smoking in silence and feeling very much in the way, while the two talked together in low tones.

CHAPTER IV.

COUNT STEPHANI OF PRISTINA.

I was very busily engaged during the next few days and saw very little of either Enid or the Greek, but I had daily and almost hourly evidences of the change in Grant. He was not like the same man.

We had reached that point in the development of our scheme when many things had to be decided, all requiring care, foresight and deliberation, and he seemed able to decide nothing.

A dozen different intricate negotiations were in progress at the time of supreme importance in which promptness and dispatch were vital; but they were all hung up, and when I endeavored to get him to consider them he either put me off, or, if we started to discuss them, would break away and lapse into abstracted silence from which I could not rouse him.

One of his most distinctive gifts was his remarkable power of concentration of will and thought upon any matter in hand; the work of the moment was the work of his life, and that had no doubt been the secret of his extraordinary success. But now he could scarcely force himself to think connectedly upon any one part of the great scheme for ten minutes together. And without his directing hand and brain I could of course do nothing.

But if I turned the talk upon Haidee, as I did sometimes by way of experiment, he was all attention instantly; his face would light up and he spoke with all his wonted pith and undivided interest. It seemed to me, therefore, that his love for her had taken the same absorbing hold upon him that his huge business schemes had before she came into his life, and that it monopolized his mind and thoughts.

I was not entirely right, however, in

my conclusions, as events were to prove later on. That he was infatuated by Haidee's beauty was certain, but there was more than mere infatuation to account for his indecision and abstraction. He was most probably tortured by those doubts of success in his love affairs which are the common portion of all lovers—the heritage of pain or pleasure according as we regard them. But the Greek was exerting influence of another kind upon him; and I got an inkling of this in an indirect manner.

Associated with us at the White House were of course a crowd of those adventurers who are always to be found fortune-hunting in Constantinople. Many were spies and go-betweens, some set on us by the palace, others by various of the embassies, and the remainder playing for their own hand only. It was one of my chief tasks to classify the different individuals composing this interesting and interested group, and by means of my own spies to find out all about them, and I had and still have a very significant register of that genus of rascality.

Among them, and perhaps the most picturesque scoundrel of all, was a man who called himself Count Stephani of Pristina. I had found out a good deal about him, and very little of it to his advantage; but he had what was in my eyes the great advantage of frankness.

He had been many things in his time, and among them a brigand. That was, of course, nothing to his discredit in Turkey, where most of the residents in the outlying *vilayets* are farmers or peasants when they have anything to farm and brigands when safe opportunities offer.

Lest this may be doubted it should be remembered that one great pasha and minister, who at one time enjoyed a European reputation, was well known to be in league with many bands of brigands, to give them information which might be of value to them in the way of "business," to share the results of their enterprise, and to secure immunity for those who were clumsy enough to fall into the hands of the police.

My own opinion of Count Stephani was that at this time he was still closely connected with brigands, and that his business in the capital was to watch their interests.

He was a clever, handsome, dashing dare-devil, ready, as he once said to me frankly, either to take office under government or to turn brigand again, and having heard that we were going to develop a district in which he was interested he had at first come to me to offer his services.

That he was able to get hold of excellent information I had had several proofs, for I had made use of him, and it was from him I had had the first hints of the plot to depose the sultan, of which the Greek, Haidee, had spoken so freely.

I was not, therefore, surprised when, some three or four days after her arrival at the White House, he came to me obviously to speak about her, although, like an Easterner, he began by talking for half an hour on different subjects. Then he rose as if to leave me, and said, casually, in Hungarian:

"By the way, Mr. Secretary, your great White House has a new inmate —and a fair one." We always spoke Turkish except when he was excited, and lapsed for a few words into Hungarian, a language which he thought I did not understand.

"Our servants are constantly changing, count," I answered, purposely misunderstanding him. He turned upon me a sidelong glance of smiling cunning.

"Servants are servants, and Greeks are Greeks," he said.

"As you have come to speak about her, hadn't you better sit down again, and say what you want to say?"

"Oh, you Westerners; you think the only way to reach a spot is to go straight to it."

"It's the quicker plan, and you would have saved half an hour if you'd chosen it this morning, and you wouldn't have deceived me any the more." He laughed and threw up his hands as he brought his chair nearer to my table, sat down,

and, leaning forward, asked quickly and earnestly:

"What does her coming mean?"

"It means that we found her in trouble with some scoundrels, and brought her here for safety."

For a moment he did not reply, but stared into my face as if seeking some hidden meaning in my words.

"Do you know who she is?"

"Mlle. Haidee Patras, a very beautiful woman; a Greek, as you say." He waved the reply aside with an impulsive sweep of the hand.

"And what else?"

"Nothing else, count," I said, stolidly.

"You are in an uncommunicative mood this morning, my friend, very uncommunicative."

"Or ignorant, which you please."

"No, friend, not ignorant. You have too many good spies. Those hands and eyes and ears of yours are not muffled and blinded and deafened by ignorance. You know—and do not trust me, Stephani, your friend and well-wisher."

"I trust you as much as I think it necessary."

"By Allah, but you are blunt—blunt, but not ignorant."

"Tell me what you have come to say." He laughed loudly, throwing himself back in his chair to enjoy his merriment to the full.

"You are always the same, you Mr. Secretary, with your straight questions and blunt words. Blunt, but not ignorant. You know, you know well enough."

"I am very busy this morning, count."

"And if I won't speak I am to go, eh? Not ignorant, but yet not knowing everything, Mr. Secretary," and he glanced at me with a look of indescribable cunning.

"Yes, if you won't speak you are to go." His eyes flashed and for a moment he was angry. But it passed instantly. He couldn't afford to be angry with me and knew it.

"And the sweet American, does she like her new sister?"

"I am very busy this morning, Count Stephani," I said again, dryly. He always irritated me by his references to Enid, and they had become unpleasantly frequent of late.

"So I must not even speak of her, friend Secretary; but, at any rate, I may think of her, and the day may come when she may need a friend quick to see, prompt to act, and strong to strike. I may be that friend yet. When a man plunges suddenly into swift, unknown rapids he may be a powerful swimmer and still fail, and those he leaves or leads may lack help."

"Which means?" said I.

"The rapids of intrigue in this country are easier to enter than to leave, and many swimmers are drowned." He spoke with the air of an oracle and a mystic.

"Suppose you put that into plainer terms, count."

"Only the fools speak too plainly in a land where language is a veil and not a vehicle of acts. Your American, rich, strong, powerful and clever as he is, is —in the current which flows quickly to the rapids. The Greek is a very lovely woman, and it is possible his strength and energy may turn a weak to a winning cause."

"It is possible also that I don't understand you," I said, with a smile of unconcern.

"And in that case I don't understand you. But I think I do. I hope he will take the plunge; for I am in it, too, Mr. Secretary, and no man would be a more welcome ally than your American. Just the man of all men to turn the scales."

"Who has told you to come and say this to me?"

"A man you know well, friend, none other than—Count Stephani of Pristina." He laughed lightly, and then quickly closing his eyelids till the black pupils glanced at me through mere slits, he added, earnestly: "But you have rendered me services, and I am not ungrateful. Let me warn you, then. Remember, and let him remember, too, that this is the East and not the West; that here in the East the tree of revolt must be watered with blood," and with that

striking and somewhat enigmatical sentence he left me. He had a weakness for dramatic sentences and exits.

He had succeeded in impressing me more than I had allowed him to see, however, and the longer I thought of his words the less I liked the outlook. It was clear enough that others besides Haidee herself were watching the result of her influence upon Grant, and building hopes upon it.

It was thus possible that Enid's conclusion as to the Greek's rescue having been carefully arranged might be correct, but yet that Haidee's motive might be nothing worse than a desire to use a dramatic incident to weld closer the bonds of his fascination.

Stephani was obviously expecting that she would succeed in getting the influence of the White House thrown into the cause of the political conspiracy, and that those for and with whom Stephani was working hoped great things from such an alliance.

That Grant was infatuated I could not doubt any more than I could fail to perceive the critical consequences to us if we threw in our lot with the revolutionary party.

Such a change meant everything to us. Thus far, Grant's plans had been entirely pacific and commercial, and our preparations had been made on that basis. His aim was first to establish himself firmly in the district of Macedonia over which the concessions had been obtained, to develop its immense natural resources, to colonize it by introducing American and other picked residents, and to build up gradually an autonomous and independent state.

In return for the concessions he was to pay a tribute to the sultan far greater than the revenue at present derived by the Turkish Government, and the tribute was to be increased under certain agreed conditions as the prosperity of the district developed.

He had, as I have before said, won over the sultan to his views, but I knew that in his heart he entirely distrusted Abdul Hamid's good faith, and it was this feeling which I now thought might impel him to the critical step of joining the Young Turkey party in the attempt to depose the sultan.

It is necessary to explain this point to understand the many influences at work in Grant's mind when his infatuation for Haidee Patras began to take effect; and I could not fail to see the probability that she would prevail upon him.

Such a development must, however, be full of danger. Stephani's words kept ringing in my ears—"The tree of revolt must be watered in blood." Whichever party won in the end there must be bloodshed. The sultan, in character timid, vacillating, irresolute and consumed with an overpowering dread of assassination, which kept him a close prisoner in Yildiz Kiosk, was just the tyrant to exact a terrible vengeance upon all concerned in the plot, if it failed. On the other hand, if it succeeded, those who came to power would act as Ottomans had always acted at similar crises and would take the lives of all who had had power before them.

In such a time of violence and tumult, what would be the fortunes and fate of us all? What chance was there that the undertaking, the pith and marrow of its hopes of success being its entirely commercial character, would escape shipwreck? None that I could see, and I had lived long enough in the country to learn much of its undercurrents.

There was, moreover, the certainty of personal hazard and danger for all, and this sent my thoughts to Enid. Stephani's words about her roused my alarm, but my gloomiest fears for her would have been infinitely darker could I have guessed, what I was afterward to learn, the fate already settled for her.

It will be conceived, therefore, in what a mood of distracting doubt, suspense and fear I passed the days while I was waiting for Grant's decision.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE GOLDEN HORN.

The atmospheric conditions at the White House during the week or ten days that followed the rescue of Haidee

Patras were very unsettled. There was a strong depression, indicating that a storm was imminent. The temper of most of us suffered in consequence, and the only one who maintained a consistent serenity was Haidee herself.

Grant and his sister had more than one heated discussion, and my opinion was that Enid acted with very poor judgment. Misled by her strong prejudice against the Greek and her powerful distrust, she put herself in violent opposition to her brother, tried to force her views upon him and, as it were, to talk him into sharing her own suspicions. Surely the feeblest of all courses to adopt.

Like most strong natures, he could not brook opposition on any object touching his personal inclinations. In business matters it is true his mind was always large and receptive enough to consider any opposing point of view, but love is not business, and in his headstrong infatuation for the beautiful Greek he was all passion, enthusiasm and concentrated obstinacy. There is really no other word so applicable, and the result of the discussions was always the same—the two parted in anger with a blunt statement from Grant that if Enid did not like the position she had better go home to America.

"But I won't go—I declare I won't. She shan't drive me from the house," she said to me more than once after an interview of the kind. It seemed in some way to relieve her to come and protest to me. Indeed, in that highly charged atmosphere, I became a sort of lightning conductor, and they all appeared to regard me as a person of safely neutral temperament through whom the electric current could be safely dissipated. "Since you brought her here everything seems changed."

"A good many things are changed," I said, in a soothing tone. "But don't you think that fallacy about my having brought her here is a little thin and unjust to me?"

"She shan't drive me away, anyhow; just or unjust."

"Has she ever shown any desire to do that?"

"Oh, how foolish you are, Mr. Ormesby! But you all are where she is concerned. Of course she has. She's always trying to do it through Cyrus. Are you suddenly blind? But of course you take her side."

"It must be a great relief to you to have some one to blame for all this, and I suppose it doesn't matter whether the blame is merited or not. But why don't you try Lord Angus? He had more to do with her coming here than I had, for he didn't protest and I did."

"Lord Angus Markwell isn't always trying to put me in the wrong by posing as immaculate," she answered, almost angrily.

"It might be a difficult pose, perhaps," I said, quietly.

"You're real horrid, talking in that way against my one disinterested friend in all the world."

Lord Angus Markwell, like myself, was the younger son of a none too wealthy peer, and the object of his presence in Constantinople was as well known as its nature was certainly not to be called disinterested.

He was doing what I had once been supposed to be doing—wooing Enid and her million—and my opinion about him made me cringe and wince sometimes as I reflected that it was just about what other people must at one time have held about me. Moreover, if the truth must be told, I did not like him, and did not care to think that Enid did.

"I am sorry if I offend you, but I would rather have you angry with me for speaking of him than angry with your brother."

"How ridiculous you are! I am not angry with Cyrus. I guess I've no anger to spare from that ex-Greek slave. Ugh, the treacherous creature."

"Has it never occurred to you to try another tack?"

"No, and I don't want to try another tack. What I think I like to say. I think she's treacherous, and I shall say it."

"But do you think that by saying it a thousand times over, or, for that matter, a million, you will convert your brother to the same opinion?"

"Of course I don't."

"Then why go on saying it?"

"Do you mean you'd have me fall upon her and kiss her—ugh!—and say my soul thrilled with delight at the prospect of having such a beautiful, innocent, sweet sister? You make me tired when you talk in this way."

"What does Lord Angus think of her?"

"Mr. Ormesby, you'll make me do something desperate if you go on in this way. I come to you for help and advice in this awful trouble, and you can talk about nothing but Lord Angus Markwell."

"Well, don't you regard Lord Angus and good advice as a happy collocation of ideas?"

She made a gesture of impatience and then looked steadily at me, a smile beginning to show in her bright blue eyes and on her mobile lips.

"Do you?"

"I don't know so much of his lordship as you do."

"I'm very angry with you, although I smile"—and smile she did then, so broadly and brightly that I joined her.

"Lord Angus can do what I could not, you see; his mere name can chase away your anger and make you laugh."

She paused a moment or two, her head averted, and then said:

"Will you be serious and tell me what we are to do?"

"Serious? I am rarely anything but serious just now, but we can do nothing or next to nothing except wait and see what is to happen."

"And it's just this suspense that is so killing," she cried, impetuously, although in truth she little guessed, and I could not tell her, how infinitely serious the suspense was, and how much more grave was the impending crisis than she dreamed. But she left me in better heart and spirits than she had come; and I had thus succeeded in dissipating one more current of electricity.

On the following day my services in the same capacity were again in requisition. It was Friday, the Islam Sabbath, and some one had planned an excursion to the Sweet Waters of Europe. I think it must have been Lord Angus Markwell's suggestion, the tact was significant of his handiwork.

It was Grant himself who caused me to be of the party. He came into my room, as I hoped, for the transaction of some of the host of matters that remained unattended to, but instead of speaking of them he said, abruptly:

"We are going up the Horn this afternoon in the *Stripes,* and probably back to The Home; I wish you would come with us, Mervyn." The *Stripes* was one of our fast steam launches, and The Home was a house on a small island which had been leased for use in connection with our work. It lay in the Sea of Marmora some few miles below Stamboul.

I may mention here that Grant had acquired a much larger island in the north of the Ægean Sea, not far from Thasos. It was sufficiently close to the Macedonian coast to form a sort of base of operations for the new colony.

We had accumulated there a great quantity of stores and arms, the latter, of course, unknown to the Turkish authorities. No one, indeed, except Grant, myself and the man in charge on the spot, an American named Cluffer, knew the nature of the "stores." The nearer island, The Home, was intended to be more a place of temporary refuge should any sudden emergency arise for us to scuttle from the capital. Grant always believed in what he termed "plenty of back doors," and The Home was one of them.

"Don't you think we should be a little wiser if we stopped here and got through some of these?" I asked, lifting a handful of the neglected documents.

"Yes, very likely," he said, "but not to-day. I heard Enid was going up with the aunt and Lord Angus, and so I determined to go, and Mlle. Patras will go as well. It's a family affair."

"It seems to me that Mlle. Patras goes a rather long way and is filling a biggish space, Cyrus," I said, quietly.

"Why, do you think she'll take up too much room on the *Stripes?*" Grant rarely joked even feebly, and was never

flippant, so that such a remark was itself enough to mark the change in him.

"A beautiful face may take much more room in the world than the biggest body," I answered, sententiously.

"True, quite true, Mervyn—and it is a lovely face, isn't it?" he said, with sudden enthusiasm, and after a pause, not quite at ease. "But the fact is I'm a bit flat and hipped and—oh, I'm so d——d anxious I'm not myself."

"I've noticed that, of course." He was standing by the window, staring out, his hands thrust in his pockets, his face pale and wearing a look of great anxiety, while a frown of doubt drew his rather bushy eyebrows over the deep-set, thoughtful eyes.

I was concerned to see how ill and harried he looked, but I reckoned that when a man of his strong mind was being forced or drawn to a decision which his judgment condemned, the tussle must be sure to leave its marks. The view from the window was over the big cemetery, the "little field of the dead," as the Turks called it, away across the Horn to Stamboul. Not a cheerful one for a man in his mood, but I doubt if he saw anything in it.

"I can't think what's come over me," he said, with a deep sigh, breaking the long silence suddenly, and turning to walk up and down the room. "This has all become so distasteful," with a wave of the hand to indicate the neglected work.

"It comes over most of us some time or other, Cyrus."

"What do you mean?" he asked, quickly, almost vehemently.

"That which most men laugh at in others and either revel in or swear at in themselves, and yet think nobody ever really felt before."

"It's torture." The words slipped from him like an unconscious aside.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to marry her," he cried, in his energetic, masterful way.

"And things here?"

"Ah, that's where the squeeze comes."

"You'll have to decide soon—the sooner the better."

"Decide what?" and he wheeled around suddenly and faced me, almost fiercely, as though I had insulted him, his eyes fixed on my face piercingly.

"I think you know what I mean," I answered, meeting his look calmly. "We needn't pretend to one another. If both you and I know what you have to decide, I know perhaps better than you all that it must mean to us all."

"By h——l, do you suppose I don't think of that?" he cried, vehemently. "But what if there's no other way?"

"There is another way—but only one."

"What's that?"

"Pull up the sticks, cut the loss, and get out."

"Are you mad?"

"It may be more than a question of sanity—it may be a matter of life or death."

"Are you against her, too? Are you all in league together?"

"I think things should be settled, one way or the other. Turkey's an infernally dangerous place to go on drifting in."

He laughed, not heartily, or mirthfully, or pleasantly, not even bitterly, but as one who is desperately ill at ease with himself, and is impatient at finding it difficult to blame some one else.

"She seems to have confidence in me, eh?"

"I should never cease to have confidence in you—alone," I said, pointedly.

"Then you are against her. I told you so just now."

"I heard you, but repetition isn't proof, Cyrus."

He uttered an exclamation of irritation with a hasty shake of the head.

"I'll take your advice, anyway. I'll settle it to-day," he said, with another uneasy laugh.

"Will you take my advice as a whole?"

"What's that?"

"If you decide to marry, will you cut this thing?"

"What, and go back on myself, to be the laughingstock of every fool of a busybody?"

"No, only go back on that change in

things which you've been pondering the last few days."

"But what if I think it's the right thing to do?"

"Why, then, I shall pray to have as clever and beautiful an influence on my side when I want to ruin somebody."

"I won't hear any more of this," he retorted, angrily, and went out of the room, showing me that I had rubbed an acid into a smarting wound.

But a minute afterward he came back, and although usually a singularly undemonstrative man he held out his hand, and said, without evident feeling:

"Don't let this come between us, Mervyn; we've kept step so well together so far."

"My dear fellow, nothing can ever come between us," I declared, and I gripped his hand warmly. "Decide as you like, we shall still keep step." That was all that passed, but it was enough to let us understand each other, and with a laugh, this time easier and lighter, he broke off, and said:

"The *Stripes* will be at the Outer Bridge landing stage at two o'clock. You won't forget."

It wasn't probable I should forget, anticipating as I did something of what was likely to occur during the afternoon.

We can scarcely have been called a very jovial party on the *Stripes,* and if the merry people in the hundreds of *caiques* that covered the waters of the Golden Horn that gay afternoon were disposed to envy our party as the smart, powerful, rapid steam launch swept up the winding way, we on our side might well have envied them some of their light spirits.

There is no lovelier spot in the world for a water jaunt than the Golden Horn at that time of the year, where the river narrows into the channels that go twisting and winding and meandering along between the green meadows, dotted with clumps of trees and carpeted here in white patches of snowdrops, there with a golden blaze of jonquils and warmed everywhere with the soft, sweet tone of the violets.

The fleets of *caiques,* surely the most picturesque boats that man ever fashioned, the gondolas of Venice not excepted, carried up a vast crowd of merrymakers and gossip-mongers. Women gayly dressed, no longer, alas! in the Oriental fashion, and wearing the *yashmac* more as a coquettish headdress to set off rather than to conceal the features, filled most of the *caiques,* chattering together in the stern, with ever an eye for the occupants of other boats, while that lingering concession to old-time custom, the *eunuch,* in the prow. A scene of almost typical pleasure making.

But we were taking our pleasure on the *Stripes* much more in English fashion—that is to say, sadly. Grant and Haidee were in the stern, Enid and Lord Angus forward—where his lordship did not appear to be having at all a merry time of it, while Mrs. Wellings and myself, representing propriety and neutrality, were amidships.

Mrs. Wellings was not a cheerful person at the best of times. She had married an Englishman of position, and her years in London society had stiffened her. She had some lingering respect for my prefix of "Honorable," but the respect was largely tinged with contempt of my position as a paid employee at the White House.

"I don't know why you've brought us out like this, Mr. Ormesby," she said, once or twice. It seemed to be an easy habit with every one to lay the responsibility on me for everything they did not like. A tribute to my usefulness, perhaps, but not always welcome.

"We've come out to enjoy ourselves, Mrs. Wellings," I replied, blandly.

"Poof!" she ejaculated. She had a habit of poof-ing. "We might be going to a funeral."

"A love feast, rather," I said, with a glance in each direction.

"Don't talk about it," she cried, impatiently.

"They are doing that probably."

"That's a very indelicate and uncalled-for remark, I think."

"I can't hear them, I'm glad to say." It was one of my innocent recreations to banter Mrs. Wellings.

"I didn't mean what they said, but what you said."

"What did I say? That they were talking about love feasts? Well, don't you think it probable?"

"I don't want to think about it."

"But Lord Angus is in some ways a very desirable *parti,* surely," I remonstrated, with an air of innocence.

"I was speaking of Cyrus and his new folly—as you know perfectly well."

"Well, now, do you know, folly is the last term in the world I should associate with Mlle. Patras."

"I wish you'd get me a paper or a magazine or something to read. When you're in this flippant mood I don't care to talk. But if you'll be serious——"

"My dear madam, we have not come out to be serious. Who could be serious amid such a gay crowd?" But I got her a magazine, and so ended the conversation.

All the rest of us found it easy enough to be serious, judging by looks. Grant was sitting as close to Haidee as he could get, and both his and her looks showed that they were almost painfully in earnest, while Enid's face, whenever her eyes were turned upon her brother, as they were constantly, flashed very ominously. Even placid and self-complacent Lord Angus was not enjoying the fruits of his diplomacy to anything like the extent he had anticipated.

No storm broke out during the run up, and when we landed among the pleasure-seekers, Grant and Haidee went away alone. Mrs. Wellings joined Enid and Lord Angus Markwell, and I was thus left to myself and my own thoughts.

The fine weather had brought out a large, motley crowd, and the people were scattered far and wide among the trees. The ways of a Turkish crowd are always peculiar. The women were of course separated from the men, like sheep from the goats, and strolled or sat about together, whispering incessantly in the low tones characteristic of the East.

Most of them were probably talking dress and scandal, but there were many groups huddled closely together on the grass listening enthralled to the quaint, wily *hodjas,* or fortune tellers, relating their strange, weird fables, weaving love legends crammed with mystery, intrigue and terrors, and telling a thousand lies to work upon the superstition and fears of their hearers. The influence of these *hodjas* is supreme in the superstition-ridden members of the harems.

A long line of smart, well-appointed modern broughams drawn up under the trees, each with its somber-looking *eunuch* on the box, engaged the attention of many inquisitive strollers, for in them were the ladies of the royal harem whom the eccentric etiquette of the court forbids to drive in any but a closed, stuffy carriage. And dotted all over the greensward sat the men keeping severely aloof from their women folk, smoking and taking their pleasure with full Ottoman gravity and self-complaisance.

It formed altogether an odd picture of the strange, unblending blends of East and West, typified aptly in the costumes of both sexes alike; the women arrayed in the smartest gowns of the latest Parisian or Viennese fashion, tempered by the coquettishly worn *yashmac;* the men garbed everywhere in frock coats and baggy trousers, with the everlasting *fez,* that most crudely inappropriate of headgear of the sultan's special choosing.

One was almost tempted to think the Ottomans had started to become Europeans, and had stopped short in the process, keeping the *fez* and the *yashmac* as reminders that even in dress the change was far from complete. And not in dress only, as the world has had many fearsome proofs. And yet there are those who think that the Turk in putting on the second-hand trousers of Europe has become as civilized as the original wearers of them.

I had not come out to moralize, however, and was glad when the time arrived to return. As I stepped on board the launch a glance at Grant's face sufficed to show me something had happened, and I could guess what; a confirmation of the guess lying ready in the light of triumph in the Greek's

bright eyes and the soft, peachy color on her cheeks.

Grant himself was slightly flushed, and looked more like himself than for some days past, wearing much of his accustomed air of conscious strength and reserved masterfulness.

Enid was already on board, for I was the last to arrive, and was sitting near her brother with Lord Angus and Mrs. Wellings. She looked pale, and her resolute expression as she sat biting her under lip and looking away at the people on shore savored of anything but the olive branch of peace.

Grant had a bottle of champagne in his hand, and he smiled and nodded to me.

"A toast, Mervyn," he said, "which we will all drink. The happiest day of my life, my betrothal. We drink to Mlle. Patras, my promised wife."

I put the glass to my lips, as did all but Enid, whose face was now quite white, as she held the wine conspicuously untasted, and stared angrily at the Greek.

"You don't drink, Enid?" asked her brother, his tone gentle, but his brows frowning over his eyes that seemed almost to flash with anger.

She stood up then and met his look with one to the full as firm as his own, and when she spoke, her tone, like his, was low, but strained, and the words clear cut.

"No, Cyrus, I do not drink to your ruin. I would sooner see you dead." Then as if overcome with a suddenly uncontrollable burst of passion she dashed the glass down on the deck, cast one glance of disdain at the Greek, and crossed the gangway to the shore.

Grant was promptness itself in action. His anger was hidden instantly.

"Mervyn, oblige me by seeing my sister back to the White House," he said to me, as though nothing unusual had occurred, and, turning to the man in charge he ordered him to cast off at once and make the run back with all speed. As I hastened after Enid he sat down by Haidee's side, and they began to talk together in low tones.

CHAPTER VI.

GRANT'S DECISION.

Despite my unsought office of lightning conductor, I am not, as will have been seen, a very tactful person, and I neither relished my present mission nor saw any practicable way out of the mess which Enid's outburst had caused.

My usual procedure was to try to turn the anger of whoever had to be appeased either upon myself or upon anybody else who was convenient and safe, and let it vent and exhaust itself in causeless reproaches and vaporings.

But this was far too serious a matter for treatment of that elementary kind, and I therefore resolved to let Enid walk some distance alone, and thus get over the first flush of passion. I calculated that, as she did not know how to get back to Pera, she would welcome my presence a little more warmly when she realized the fix into which her impulsive act of leaving the launch had left her.

Moreover, I wished to think over the problem. I knew perfectly well how Grant would resent the insult to Haidee. He was very fond of Enid; but when a man has to choose between his sister and his sweetheart there is no difficulty in foreseeing what his choice will be.

His determination was no doubt already taken, and that would be that Enid should leave the White House at once. The very openness of the insult would make that inevitable, I felt. Had the thing occurred privately, it might have been possible to smooth it over, but not only the servants and crew on the *Stripes* had seen and heard it all, but probably some of the people in the passing *caiques* and on the shore. Grant would have to be more than human to overlook it.

For the act itself, apart from its unfortunate publicity, there could be but one justification—that Enid was right in her opinion of Haidee and her motives. And of that there was not a tittle of proof. Was she right? Could we get proofs? Could I help her? These were the questions I began to ask my-

self most earnestly and with an increasing fervent zeal in her cause.

Her happiness was very much more to me than I allowed any one about the White House to imagine; and as I watched her now, keeping some fifty yards or so in the rear, I thought I could conceive something of the tumult of feelings that must be raging in her mind.

She walked quickly, with head slightly bent like one plunged in thought, looking neither to right nor left, ignorant, I was sure, of where she was going, just as heedless, probably, seeing nothing and caring for nothing, but just eating out her heart in bitterness, pain and fear for her brother.

When we had walked in this way for about a mile I saw her stop, put her hand to her forehead, and glance about her with an air of one roused suddenly and striving to identify strange surroundings.

I hastened my steps then, and overtook her. Her eyes welcomed me with unmistakable relief, but her first words had reference to the scene on the launch.

"How could you do it, Mr. Ormesby?" she asked, indignantly. I guessed what she meant, but temporized.

"We thought you might have difficulty in finding your way back to Pera, and Cyrus asked me to come after you."

"You know I don't mean that, and if you are here as Cyrus' delegate I do not want your help, thank you."

"I am here as your friend, I hope, Miss Grant."

"Then how could you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Drink that woman's health!" she cried, bitterly.

"Hadn't we better just see about getting back to the White House?"

"Yes, I am going back. I have decided," and she threw her head up, and looked the very type of defiance.

"Of course you are," I assented, as though it were a matter of no question at all. "In point of fact, I let you come this part of the way alone so that you might have time to think a bit. But I'd better see now if I can get hold of a carriage."

"Wait a moment, please. Are you with Cyrus or with me in this?"

"I am with you both."

"No, that's impossible, and you must choose between us."

"Isn't that a little unnecessary at this early stage?"

"Not in my opinion."

"It is in mine, so you must excuse my answering—yet."

"Then I will go back alone, if you please."

"Certainly. It's only a matter of getting two carriages instead of one, or, if we can't get two, of my riding by the driver instead of inside with you."

"Why do you try and trifle with things in this way? You know you don't think it trifling. God help us."

"No, I don't make the mistake of thinking it a trifle. I would willingly give what little I have in the world to have the thing blotted out. But I can always think best in commonplace terms, and there's no use in inflating things. I'll get a carriage."

"Is it far to walk?"

"From here about three and a half miles, but some of the way's nasty."

"I'd rather walk, then."

"Shall I walk with you, or, in the Turkish etiquette style, a few yards behind you?"

"Oh, how can you talk like that at such a time?"

"I can do or say anything to relax the strain of your thoughts. We'll walk together, of course, and equally of course we'll try to see some way out of the tangle. For it is a deuce of a tangle and no mistake," and with that we set off at a smart pace.

For quite twenty minutes not a word more passed between us. I did not see how to handle the matter at all, and Enid's blunt declaration that I must take one side or the other in the quarrel was disconcerting, not so much because I thought it necessary in the sense which she implied, that I must split with one of them, as because I saw that she thought it necessary. If it did really come to a split, I felt that I should side

with her, but that was a step in reserve, and meanwhile, the outline of a plan was beginning to form in my thoughts.

She grew tired of the silence at last, and turning to me, said, with some abruptness:

"Has the enormity of my conduct struck you silent?"

"No, though it was pretty bad."

"Perhaps you're thinking how best to lecture me?"

"No, again; and I don't suppose you'd care very much if I did."

"Then why don't you speak?"

"As I'm only here on your sufferance, I thought it best to hold my tongue. The more you think of things the better. But I'll talk if you like. There's going to be a gorgeous sunset."

"You make me tired with your nonsense."

"There's a good deal to be said for getting tired, sometimes."

"I don't see any kind of point in that."

"There is none. Don't bother to look for it. It's rather a relief now and then to hear and say things that have no point. Some of us rather are apt to be too pointed—quite barby."

"That's a hit at me, isn't it?"

"Yes. You've made a horrible mess of things."

"Thank you. But if you mean that I was to hold my tongue and not show by word or deed that I didn't just hate the notion of that—ugh!—that woman ever being Cyrus' wife, you needn't say any more. I—I loathe her."

"Very well. But if I didn't like my sister's lover it doesn't strike me that I should improve matters much by slapping my sister's face in public."

"We won't speak any more about it, if you please, Mr. Ormesby," she answered, quickening her pace, and getting a step or two in front of me. But I caught up with her quickly.

"And if a friend made me feel my mistake I shouldn't feel I was justifying myself to myself by trying to shut him up."

"A friend, indeed!" with a scornful laugh.

"That's me," I said, with more terseness than grammar. She stopped me, faced me, stamped her foot angrily and opened her lips to retort, but the words were not uttered, and we went on again, and presently she said, with less vehemence:

"I suppose you know how hateful it is to be put in the wrong."

"It's a frequent mishap of mine, unfortunately, but one gets used to it in time. And, after all, it's a splendid tonic, like a good many other bitter things one has to swallow, and it clears the head wonderfully when one wants to think about repairs. And now, by the way, my lecture's over."

"You mean you blame me, then?"

"Unquestionably I do."

"Then you'll be surprised to hear I'm not a bit sorry."

"Pardon me, but you are."

"I am not, Mr. Ormesby."

"Then you will be. No one with your head and your heart and the love you have for Cyrus could help being sorry for cutting him to the heart. He is too good a fellow to have his face rubbed in the mud in public."

"What would you have had me do, then, when he tried to bluff me—in public, as you keep saying with such emphasis?"

"There were fifty things you could have done. Said you weren't well, pretended to drink his toast, spilt it over Lord Angus and called it an accident; drank to Cyrus' happiness—oh, fifty things, and none of them theatrical. Yours was melodrama—and melodrama is such beastly bad form."

"He shouldn't have tried to bluff me."

"Don't blame him. Heaven knows I'm no friend of the Greek woman, and I wish her at the deuce, but if old Cyrus asked me to make him happy by drinking her health I'd drink a bottle or a hogshead for that matter, if I could hold it, to please the best fellow in the world, and the best brother a girl could have, too."

"You'll make me just hate you, or myself, if you go on like this."

"Not a bit of it. You're only just beginning to see that out of all the pos-

sible things you could have done you chose the worst. We all lose our head at times—but the world goes on just the same. We don't hate any one in consequence—and certainly not ourselves."

"I wish I hadn't come."

"It's more to the point to wish to see some way out of the muddle."

"I'm going to Cyrus the moment I reach home to tell him all I think of that woman."

"Like the man who burned his finger tip and then plunged his whole arm into the fire to ease the pain a bit. Very well."

"I think you're just the most unpleasant man I ever knew."

"Unfortunately that's no cure for the mischief."

"I shall not take any advice you may give."

"I'm inclined to differ there, but then I know the advice and you don't."

"It's sure to be something humiliating to me. I know that."

I made no answer, and we walked a little while in silence until the question came for which I was waiting.

"What is the advice?"

"Either to climb down and eat your words——"

"I'd die sooner, with that woman," she burst in, vehemently. "Didn't I say it would be something humiliating?"

"Or make them good," I concluded. "There's no middle course, except perhaps flight. You could go back to New York."

"Run away, and leave him in her clutches? Thank you."

"If you weren't in quite such a hurry I'd put the matter a bit more explicitly."

"I am listening."

"In spasms, yes; but they don't help any one to think clearly. My opinion is this: If you're wrong, or shall I say, if we're wrong, there's nothing humiliating in owning up. But if we're right and can get proofs—if, I say—then we can justify your distrust even if we can't justify your manner of showing it."

"I know I'm right."

"I've no doubt you do; we all do in that sort of mood, but can we get facts and proofs? If you care for my help I'll do what I can, but I'm not a genius, even as a spy. And I make one condition—and it isn't perhaps exactly what you'd call a sweet one, either."

"What is it, anyway?"

"We'll have a square talk with Cyrus. You'll tell him you're sorry——"

"I won't. I won't. How dare you ask such a thing?"

"For having made a fuss in that theatrical way, and publicly insulted the woman he has chosen to be his wife. Then we'll tell him together that we both believe she is not worthy of him, and say frankly we are going to work to prove it, and that there must be a certain interval of neutrality while we prove her either an angel or the other thing."

She heard me out patiently, to my great surprise, and said nothing in reply. The silence had lasted a minute or more, and then I looked at her, and to my consternation saw that her eyes were moist with tears, which she was making a gallant effort to repress. She forced them back, and presently, in a voice that touched me with its softness, she said:

"You would risk a quarrel with him, then, for my—for this?"

"Cyrus and I can't quarrel. He's too great a man not to understand me. I take no risks. There'll be more risks from the Greek."

We were now getting near the White House, and I was anxious to have her assent to the proposal, but she kept silence until the gates were in sight, when she stopped.

"I'll do what you wish, Mr. Ormesby, and I—I think it's real good of you. I—I——"

"Never mind about me. I don't count. But I'm glad you'll do it. It's the only way out," and then we pushed on into the house and said no more.

When I reached my own rooms I was somewhat surprised to find Grant there waiting for me. He looked very much upset, sitting with knitted brows, smoking furiously.

"Hello, Cyrus, back first, then. Didn't go to The Home?" I asked,

lightly, as I threw down my hat and took a cigarette.

"Has Enid come back with you?"

"Come back? Of course she has. Where else in Pera could she go?"

"I shall never forgive that, Mervyn," he said, angrily.

"Never runs into a good many years, my dear fellow, but I told her she'd made a beastly mess of things. Women do, you know, sometimes."

"She'll have to leave here. My future wife shall not be exposed to the chance of such insults."

"It would be impossible, of course, absolutely impossible, but——"

"There are no 'buts,'" he cut in, brusquely.

"There are always 'buts' and 'ifs,' at all events in Turkey, and you see a thing of this sort——"

"Well?" impatiently, as I stopped.

"Confound this cigarette! Filthy thing. I believe I lit it at the wrong end. Always a right and wrong end to a thing, aren't there, even to a Turkish cigarette—or to any damned thing in Turkey?"

"What do you mean by that?" he asked, sharply, with a rapid glance.

"Truth is I don't think I myself quite know—what would be the right end." And I made a gesture of irritation and flung the cigarette away viciously, and lit another.

"Don't let us get off the point, Mervyn. Whose side do you take in this?"

"Oh, that's delicious," I cried, with a laugh. "The family brain seems to run on exact parallel lines. That's precisely the question your sister put to me, and with even greater insistence, and when I told her I took both or neither she said, as I suppose you'd say, that was just impossible. Of course, I laughed at such a thing."

"It is impossible," he declared, emphatically.

"Then I must be content to be regarded as an impossibility, Cyrus. I know you can see a deuced sight farther through a brick wall than I can, but I can read small print quite as far off as you can, and, what's more, I can read it when it's in Turkish characters—and you can't."

"Which means you can see a way out and I can't. Go on."

"In the first place, I told your sister you and I were never likely to quarrel, whatever happened."

"You're working round to it in a big circle, Mervyn."

"Too small a one's apt to make a man giddy."

"I like straight paths. If you're going to say you are against the woman I am going to marry, say it plainly."

"That's all right. But if you want to get to the top of the house you don't need to sit on a gun and be fired up. It's apt to make you forget there's a staircase to come down by—see?"

"I'm in no mood for metaphors, but what's your staircase?"

"That your sister should have time to see that there is no reason for what she did this afternoon. She knows now there was none for how she did it."

"Do you ask me to be a party to a secret inquiry into the conduct of my future wife? Do you want to force the very quarrel between us two you spoke of as impossible just now? Are you mad?"

"I propose no secret inquiry. I should prefer that Mlle. Patras knew everything. If your sister is wrong, she loves you too well not to repent her mistake; but if she's right——"

"Tush, man; I won't even hear of it. I have made up my mind. Enid must leave here, and the matter is closed."

"As you will. But it isn't closed for me."

"Do you mean that, knowing all that must go with it? Please to think."

"Am I the only one of us who needs to think?"

"My mind is made up."

"Then I shan't answer you this afternoon. A cigarette tastes none the sweeter because we jab the burning end in a friend's face, Cyrus."

"To the devil with your cigarettes," he cried, impatiently.

"That's exactly what one would say afterward," I returned, quietly.

"I don't want to hear any more."

"And that's exactly what you can't help doing." I got up as I spoke, and went over and put my hand on his shoulder. "Cyrus, old man, we're not going to quarrel and part over this thing—just because you love a woman and I don't—one of the most beautiful women on earth, and, for all I know to the contrary, as good as she's lovely. We're men, you know, not children, and there are two sides to this thing; one's business and the other's personal. Unfortunately, they've got mixed a bit, but haven't we wit enough between us to disentangle them?"

"I won't hear a word against her."

"Have I said one? Look here. Let's drop it for a time and think of some of these other things. If I'm to cut the painter, there are heaps of things I must explain, either to you or to whoever follows me. And I really must get them in order."

He made no reply for a minute or more, and then said, suddenly:

"I've thrown in my lot with the Young Turkey party."

"Of course you have. I expected that would be the condition of her—of the engagement. That's what I mean by the business side. You've taken some days to think it over—you, who generally take fewer minutes; and yet you jibe when I don't say ditto in a moment because, knowing a thundering lot more about things here and not being in love, I want to see a bit of the road ahead. Hang it, Cyrus, it isn't reasonable, is it?"

"What did you mean that you expected it would be the condition of the engagement?"

"I heard Mlle. Patras that night on the subject of the conspiracy, and, as a matter of fact, Stephani told me how much they counted on getting your help and money and influence. Stephani's in it."

"Damn Stephani."

"There'll be no trouble about that. His whole life has earned it. But it won't help us much. And it's a pretty big thing we're taking on. Of course, you've thought of that?"

"I've thought of scarcely anything else for days."

"Abdul has been fairly good to us so far; doesn't it strike you as rather rough of us to turn against him?"

"You don't understand it. Nothing can save him from this conspiracy. Half the country's in it, and the other half would be glad to see him deposed. Deposed he will be, and, unless something happens, put to death. But I mean that something shall happen and his life be saved. There shall be no bloodshed."

"You think you can stop it?"

"It is my one imperative condition."

"And you think you can prevent it?"

"I know it. I would not join on any other terms."

"And Mlle. Patras agreed and pledged the rest?"

"I am to see Marabukh Pasha to-morrow."

"It should be an interesting interview," I said, dryly. "And in view of it all these other things are mere nothings. We'll have another talk to-morrow; I should like to turn it all over."

"What will you do?" he asked.

"We shall keep step, Cyrus, as you said to-day, but it may be a long, and is sure to be an exciting, if not dangerous, march."

And so in all truth I saw it must be, and I sat far into the night, forgetting all about Enid and the Greek and their quarrel, just face to face with the perilous course that lay ahead for us all, as the result of this mad decision. For some lovers are indeed mad.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHADOW OF GOD.

The disturbing incidents of the day, the rash decision which Grant had announced, the half sleepless and wholly anxious night, and too many strong cigars consumed in my hours of meditation, combined to upset me on the following morning. I had a fit of depression, accompanied by that exceedingly unpleasant presentiment of impending calamity which comes sometimes from a disordered liver, and some-

times, one is tempted to think, from far subtler causes.

I wished the Greek at the bottom of the Ionian Sea and could easily have found it in me to curse the arts and beauty which had cast a spell over Grant great enough to blind him to anything like a true appreciation of the course he meant to take.

Nor were matters improved when a special messenger from the palace came to summon Grant to an audience with the sultan at noon.

Noon was the time we were to have gone to Maraboukh Pasha, and the interview with him was accordingly postponed until the afternoon; and as we drove to Yildiz Kiosk I saw that Grant was not in a much better frame of mind or body than I.

I was always present at these audiences with the illustrious one as *dragoman,* or interpreter, an interpreter being necessary because of the idiotic fallacies of the most extraordinary court in the world. This particular fallacy was that his majesty could speak no language except Turkish or Arabic, whereas, as everybody knows, he is in reality an excellent French scholar.

Neither of us referred to the events of the previous day, and indeed beyond a few speculations as to what the sultan wanted to know we scarcely spoke at all.

I had been, as I have said, a number of years in Turkey, but I had never been admitted to a sight of the sultan until Grant's arrival. I could not, therefore, know much about him, but he impressed me always not only as a man of exceptionally winning and courteous graciousness, but also as gifted with exceptional ability, tempered and oppressed, however, with a never-absent timidity. But for that constitutional fear he would be a great man.

There is a flattering proverb in Islam that "time stands still for the padishah," who therefore never grows old. And to play up to the part it is a cardinal point of his etiquette to dye his hair and beard a deep black. The effect would in the case of any other man be incongruous and rather ludicrous, but there is that in his personality and surroundings which makes against any incongruity.

In other respects—and indeed in that respect, too—he is like many another European old gentleman of sauve manners and dignified bearing. He dresses almost always in the frock coat of modern cut, with his breast ablaze with orders, and as Grant used to say, he is almost as easy of access as the American President himself.

With any guest of distinction or favor—and Grant was one—he was the embodiment of perfect courtesy. He placed him on the sofa beside himself, lighted with his own hands a cigarette and handed it to Grant, took another, and then disposed himself to listen or to speak, as the case might be. Such attendants as were present he waved away out of hearing, and indeed treated Grant with as much suavity as if he had been a fellow sovereign.

The only formality was the use of myself as *dragoman,* but even this was helped out of the way by a suggestion which Grant had made at the first interview, that he and I should speak French and not English, so that his majesty himself should understand every word that passed between us, although etiquette required that he should appear ignorant. Simple thing as it was, I believe it had much to do with winning the sultan's confidence, while it certainly suited his convenience, because it gave him time to consider his reply while I was getting through with the translation.

Grant's opinion of Abdul may be worth mentioning perhaps. He considered him a man the key to whose life was fear. Ability to judge he certainly had between good men and bad, between good policy and bad policy, between right and wrong, but pluck to back his judgment was utterly lacking.

He knew perfectly well when he ought to say yes or no, with all the autocratic power that went with either decision, but courage to say the right thing had not been given him. He would listen to any and every counsel of fear that any one could get a chance of offering, and whoever drew the most

fear-compelling picture had the shadow of God in his pocket. In every word spoken to him, every proposition made and every act and deed suggested his one instinct was to estimate what he had to fear from it.

In the twenty years of his reign this feeling had grown and been nurtured until it had become a ruling passion on which the favorites, parasites and other innumerable court hacks around him could play so as to produce any harmony or discord they pleased. And in that lay the secret of the fearsome acts of horrors, oppression, massacre and foulness which have made some portions of his reign read like a phantasmagoria of blood.

On the occasion of this visit the audience was a very short one. His majesty wished to have an account at first hand of the progress of matters, and he listened attentively while Grant told in French and I translated into Turkish the various steps that had been taken.

"Then if they tell me you are at a standstill they are mistaken?" asked his majesty, and I translated.

"Tell his majesty," said Grant, with a smile of abounding contempt for the talebearers, "that Americans are never at a standstill. I have already spent millions of dollars upon the preparations."

"And when do you leave Pera for the western province?"

"In a sense we have left already," was Grant's reply, "for much of my work here is finished, and already my agents are taking possession, landing stores, organizing arrangements, sending out surveying parties and starting in to work on the spot," and this was the preface to a glowing description of the benefits which his majesty's province would derive from the undertaking.

"You have critics in some of the embassies who are almost enemies. But I trust you, Mr. Grant; you are a man of your word. I trust you, and I shall support you through all, whatever may be said against you."

I could have wished that his majesty had omitted that expression of confidence, for it made me feel uncomfortable, as I thought of the new turn of Grant's plans, and Grant himself did not like it any more than I.

"It made me feel real mean," he said, with a frown when I referred to it.

"Why do you think he took the trouble to send for you to the palace just to say that?" I asked.

"He wanted to know what progress we were making."

"My dear Cyrus, you will never know the East. The very fact that he plunged headlong into the question of the progress and listened so attentively to every word you said and was so profoundly interested, shows that that was not his motive for the audience. He has heard something, and he sent to put you on your honor. Now what can he have heard?"

"I don't think so. No, no; some one's been talking down the plan and me, and he wanted to know the truth. That's all."

"It's more comfortable to think so, I dare say, and I hope you're right. Don't you think his spies can keep him posted as to our progress? It is not that they know too little in that direction I fear, but that they know too much in another, and may have given him a hint. That's the best of this delightful land—it is so consistently not just what you think it is. But what can he have heard, and how, and from whom? Frankly, I don't like it."

"No one knows anything except you and I, and one other." There was a momentary hesitation in speaking of the Greek.

"Plenty know who are inmates of the White House." He shook his head, and frowned irritably.

"Well, I'm not responsible for the plot, and my chief part in it will be to save his life."

With a man who could talk sophistry of this kind in order to quiet his own thoroughly live judgment it was no use to argue, so I made no reply, and for the rest of the drive back gave myself up to my thoughts.

Grant went straight to Haidee, I think, and told her what had passed at Yildiz Kiosk, and he must also have told

her the pith of my interview with him on the preceding day, for when I was sitting in my office waiting for the hour of the interview with Maraboukh Pasha I was not a little surprised to see her enter the room.

"May I come in?" she said, with a smile. "I wish to speak to you, Mr. Ormesby."

"Certainly; why not? Let me get you a chair." And I rose and did so, taking care that her face should be to the light.

"You will think this a strange step of mine?" she asked, as she sat down.

"Pretty women do strange things with impunity, mademoiselle."

"Ah, you do think it strange, then, and stranger, no doubt, that I wish to speak to you of Mr. Grant's sister?"

"I should very much rather you did nothing of the kind," I said, firmly.

"But I want you to help me in making peace between brother and sister." She spoke with the utmost sweetness, and with a little gesture to indicate her pain and regret for what had occurred.

"That I would do very willingly, but unfortunately I have already tried and have failed. Your influence with Grant can, however, succeed, I am sure. Shall I ask him to come here?"

And I rose as if to summon a messenger, but she checked me so quickly that I gathered this was a pretext for the interview and not her real object. I made a little further experiment.

"I think it's awfully sweet of you to take in this way an insult so publicly offered, and to forget what most women would consider a bitter humiliation."

I emphasized the terms "insult" and "humiliation," and, although she controlled her features so far as to smile, her eyes flashed angrily, and her hands clinched. My experiment answered. I know how a Greek forgives an insult.

"Miss Grant dislikes me," she said. "I do not know why. I have done her no harm."

"She does not like your influence with her brother, mademoiselle, and the change in the plans here which you have made."

"And you?" She was not so good an actress as I thought. She was too impulsive, and the eager tone of the flashing question told me very easily that this was the reason for the interview. I saw no cause for misleading her.

"I do not like it either. I believe it will ruin my friend's plans."

"And why?"

"We have kept free from plots and politics so far—the only safe course, in my opinion, for men of business in this country."

"But you do not understand. This Abdul Hamid will break faith with you; you are not safe for an hour in the hands of a man who does to-day the very things he vowed yesterday should never be done, and will exile or execute to-morrow the favorite of to-day."

"We have not found him so, mademoiselle, and hitherto we have acted on our own judgment."

"And now Mr. Grant is acting on mine, you think?"

"Grant commands here," I answered, generally.

"And don't you believe things will be far better under Rechad Effendi as sultan than under Abdul?"

"Grant didn't start this thing in order to play sultan-making."

"But you yourself, you know this wretched country and all the horrors it has endured under Abdul, what do you think?"

"I do not think about it in that way. If I were an Ottoman subject I might be restless and discontented, and were I a Greek or an American with half your wrongs to remember, I might harbor a love for revenge. But I am not; and a policy of vengeance or of revolt won't run smoothly with our plans."

"Then you also dislike my influence with Mr. Grant? I like to know who are with and who against me."

"It's very good of you to have come and to put the question straight to me," I said, equivocally.

"But you have not answered it," she retorted.

"You are a very beautiful woman, Mlle. Patras, and as charming and able as beautiful, and you are going

to be the wife of my closest friend and chief; and I trust I shall never have to do anything which would make you think I am against you in the sense I speak."

"But you are already in opinion against our plans."

"Do not many men work loyally in causes they dislike?"

"Then you are going to work with us? You speak in riddles," she cried, with a gesture of impatience.

"I have been in Turkey some years, and the habit grows on one here."

She got up with another gesture, irritation as well as impatience this time.

"Mr. Grant trusts you so entirely," she exclaimed.

"That is a habit bred more in the West than the East, mademoiselle."

"You will make me regard you as an enemy, Mr. Ormesby," she declared, not quite angry.

"When Grant shares that view, no doubt he'll send me packing," and she seemed to read the words and the look as a kind of challenge.

"I think you had better not see Maraboukh Pasha to-day, if those are your views. If he were to suspect your enmity to the cause the consequences might be very serious for all."

The dominant note in this annoyed me. It was almost as if she had taken over the command and was issuing her orders.

"I was going merely as an interpreter, but if you think you had better cancel Grant's arrangements I, of course, can have no objection." She bit her lip, and saw she had gone too far and was angry with herself for the mistake and with me for having noticed it.

"I came to you as a friend, Mr. Ormesby."

"As peacemaker, mademoiselle," I corrected, with a glance. "And you leave as—what?"

"As an——" she commenced, vehemently, but checked herself with a shrug of disdain: "It is not necessary to say."

"Curiosity even on such a matter is not one of my weaknesses," I answered, with a bow and smile as I opened the door for her.

"Nevertheless, it may interest you to know I read your thoughts sufficiently to know you have labeled me dangerous," and with that parting shot she went away.

It certainly required very little intuition on her part to make that discovery, and the only interesting query was why she should have thought it necessary to warn me by stating it so plainly. Perhaps she was angry and so theatrical. Angry women, even clever ones, often make that mistake.

I had labeled her dangerous—very dangerous, indeed; but it struck me as a very foolish step for her to have come to sound me, or pump me, quite so openly. And when clever women take foolish steps and apparently needless ones, there is sometimes a much deeper reason underneath.

Could there be such a reason here? Was I in any kind of personal danger? Could some one have warned her against me so that she came to test me in order to satisfy that some one? It was possible; but, then, all things are possible in such a business. And then by a trick of ideas Stephani flashed into my thoughts. Was I to look for his hand in this?

CHAPTER VIII.

MARABOUKH PASHA.

Maraboukh Pasha was a man who had had a very varied life, having pushed his way up by clinging to the skirts of greater people, until he had amassed wealth, become powerful, attracted the attention of the sultan, and obtained the command of a province and so became pasha.

His administration of his province had been a scandal even for Turkey, where notoriously the provincial governors are left to their own devices for extorting money out of the unfortunate peasants, farmers and traders. Knowing their term of office is uncertain and may be very brief, the pashas bleed the unfortunate people under them unmercifully to fill their own pockets with the least practicable delay. Maraboukh had proved a past master in the work, until the whole province being in all

but open revolt, he was recalled and a less callous tyrant put in his place.

He took his recall to heart and came back to Stamboul to plot against the government. He had been instrumental in pulling down many men—most of them among those who had helped him in old times, that being his principle of gratitude—but he had never succeeded in lifting himself, and on this he brooded. He saw men promoted who were his inferiors both in capacity and rascality; this rankled until his pique and jealousy drove him to handle the dangerous and inflammable materials of the plot to depose the sultan and put his brother, Rechad Effendi, with whom Maraboukh was believed to have influence, in his place.

How Haidee Patras became associated with him I do not know, but he had apparently persuaded her that he could avenge her wrongs—if the tale she told us were true, and she had any; although it was much more probable that he would make use of her so long as she was useful and sacrifice her when she ceased to be so, as he did every one.

We did not know all these things about him at first. He was a man who knew how to hide his acts behind many veils, and very different representations were made to Grant. When we found out the truth, it was too late, and as I was the head of our secret intelligence department, I must accept the responsibility for the mistake.

I went to the interview with him despite the Greek's intervention, but throughout it I was a mere on-looker, as the conversation was carried on in French. My services as interpreter were thus not required, a fact which was to turn out fortunate.

The pasha lived in a large, square, ugly house in Stamboul, and the interior was, like that of nearly all Mohammedan houses, untidy, ill-kept, dirty and slovenly. The afternoon was wet, and as we drove up through the splashing pools of the vilely-kept roadway the two servants who were stationed as sentinels outside the houses of ministers made us salaams instead of military salutes, and ushered us into a large hall, sloppy with the footmarks of people to the number of a dozen or so who were lounging and squatting there gossiping.

We were escorted to the foot of a broad staircase, where a servant came forward and took our goloshes. Upstairs we were shown into a spacious anteroom, a fine apartment, with large, high windows, but frowsy and dirty to a degree. The curtains to the windows, like the cushions and coverings of divans, were of rich and costly silk, but soiled and begrimed with dirt, the ends all ragged and filthy and squalid.

There we were kept some minutes, and an attendant brought us coffee, which it is ill manners ever to refuse, and I was amused to see that it was served on a cheap, common brass tray, which came from much nearer Birmingham than Benares.

Grant soon grew very impatient at the delay in reaching the pasha's presence, and I could see he shared my belief that we were being kept waiting intentionally in order that we might be more convinced of the pasha's importance.

We were shown in at last, however, and Maraboukh came forward and with the customary elaborate salutations greeted Grant and made little of me.

"I have been kept waiting a long time, your excellency," said Grant in French, haughtily, whereupon the pasha, a short, thick-set, unctuous oily man, spread himself in apologies, and his black, beady, cruel eyes were fixed on his visitor, greedily reading his looks, as he thought what line he had best adopt. In the meantime, I placed myself well in the background. Grant accepted the apologies, and waving his hand to the two men dressed in Oriental costume, who stood like statues on either side of the door:

"Our interview is to be private."

"They are merely mutes, monsieur, deaf and dumb," and he touched his mouth and ears to signify that the tongues of both had been split and the ear drums pierced, after the gentle fashion of the East. They were the pasha's personal guards.

I saw Grant shudder at this confirma-

tion of what I had once told was still the custom in the houses of Ottomans of importance.

"And your attendant?" said the pasha, shooting an inquisitive glance at me.

"He is in my confidence, and is with us. He is my interpreter."

"That is well," was the reply, with a bow and a wave of the hand, dismissing me from consideration. "Well, then, Mlle. Patras has told me that you have decided to throw in your lot with us, monsieur, to my infinite pleasure," said Maraboukh, in his quiet, suave voice. "And that you desire to have guarantees from us as to the future."

I noticed that throughout the interview he dropped all the circuitous, flowery methods of speech which no doubt he would have used in speaking Turkish. He felt instinctively that plain, straightforward language would appeal more directly to an American.

"I have made one condition, your excellency. There must be no violence, and also no bloodshed. The life of his majesty must be inviolate."

"Violence! Bloodshed!" exclaimed Maraboukh, with a gentle laugh of astonishment. "Of what use would either be? What violence need there be? Fifty or perhaps twenty years ago such a condition might have been necessary, but to-day is to-day—and I hope we Ottomans have learned enough from the West to change our government without it."

"Some twenty years ago there was an accident to Abdul Aziz which the world outside read as murder, your excellency," said Grant, bluntly.

"Misread, monsieur; misread entirely."

"Well, there must be no 'accidents' now," and again the pasha spread out his hands and shrugged his broad shoulders in deprecation.

"There shall be no accidents, either, Monsieur Grant. I swear it to you by the beard of the prophet."

"I am glad to hear it, because at the first sign of violence I shall withdraw and throw what influence I have on the other side."

"I should be with you, monsieur, on my honor," declared the old Turk, impressively, as if he were painfully shocked at the bare idea.

"Will you tell me, then, exactly what your plans are?"

"You give me your assurance that you join us, and that every word uttered now is in absolute confidence?"

"I give you my word on both points, subject to the condition I have named."

"Certainly subject to that condition. Well, I need not tell you now the grievances of our people. They are, alas! common knowledge. The country stands on the verge of ruin—of public bankruptcy, indeed. The army is not paid, the officials from top to bottom are not paid; the navy is rotting from mismanagement; the people are ground to the earth by taxation, and Turkey today, alas! is bleeding to death internally, and she has not a friend left in Europe. And what is the cause, except misrule? The reforms which twenty years ago were putting new blood into our veins have been stopped. By whom and why? Our land is one of magnificent natural resources, and these, by peace and good government, could be developed until we should be ten times as strong as in the strongest years of the empire. Who leaves them neglected—nay, prevents their development—and why? There is but one answer to these questions. The cause of all and the curse of all is the present sultan and his madness."

"His madness," echoed Grant, in a tone of surprise.

"It is his madness that spells the hopelessness of his subjects. The secrets of Yildiz Kiosk are well kept, but not so well as to prevent those who have means of gaining information knowing of his fits of madness. His mind, like that of his ill-fated brother, Murad, has given way under the strain of the wild fear of assassination that ever possesses him. All we propose therefore is that, like his brother, he shall be set aside, confined, treated gently, as you know we Easterners always treat the infirm of mind, and that his place shall be taken by Rechad Effendi, a man just,

upright, broad-minded and liberal. And that will be done."

"Your excellency pledges yourself for his personal safety?"

"Absolutely. We do not war with the insane; but we cannot be misruled by them to ruin and national bankruptcy —and that is Turkey's one alternative."

"I can join such a scheme freely," said Grant, in a tone of unmistakable relief. As he spoke my eyes were on the pasha, and his face lighted with satisfaction and triumph. But he lowered his eyes directly and began to finger some papers on his desk.

"Nothing can prevent our success, monsieur," he said, a moment later. "Most of the influential men in the country are on our side, and we have but to pay the army their arrears for every officer and soldier to be with us, too."

"Are you in want of the money for that?"

At the question I saw the pasha start quickly, as though with surprise at some fresh turn of thought it suggested. He paused while his fingers still played absently with the papers before him.

"Is it possible you would have found it?" he asked then, slowly. "I had not thought of you in such a connection, and it is now too late."

"Too late?" echoed Grant, struck as I was by the words, and much more by the curious tone in which they were spoken. If ever the voice of a man had in it a note of intense and overpowering regret, had Maraboukh's then. Yet what cause could he have for such a feeling? I distrusted him so entirely that his every word and look and gesture were objects of suspicion to me.

"I mean merely that our arrangements are made, monsieur, and I fear cannot now be altered." His manner was all that of a man dismayed by some sudden discovery, and the expression of his face as he looked at Grant presented a baffling puzzle. "I had no conception you would join us so wholeheartedly. However, there it is," he added, throwing off the feeling with an evident effort and shrugging his shoulders. "Had I known, the advantage should have been yours. The money will be a mere temporary loan, of course; but to those who find it, great concessions will be made—and I would gladly have seen them in your hands." Whatever his real thoughts were in the matter he had them under control now, and he spoke in his usual tone. "Rechad Effendi himself would, of course, have confirmed them."

"But I thought Rechad Effendi was a close prisoner in the Tcheragan Palace?" asked Grant.

"Our friends are everywhere, monsieur," answered Maraboukh, with a smile and a wide-spreading lifting of the hands. "And we are in close touch with his highness; his very attendants are our men, as indeed are more than half the officials of Yildiz Kiosk itself." And he enlarged at considerable length upon these ramifications of the plot and the certain success awaiting him.

To me he seemed overplaying his part, and I half guessed that he was conscious of having made a slip and was anxious now to cover it and redeem the position.

"In any case, monsieur, you will be a great gainer by the change," he concluded. "As I have said, your present concessions will be confirmed, and in place of the present vacillating, suspicious, treacherous government, you will be dealing with one that is stable, sympathetic and reliable. Should a way open for you to help the government further, of course corresponding returns will be made to you."

"I am taking plenty of risks as it is, your excellency," answered Grant, "and presume that some guarantee of all this will be given me in advance."

"That will be easy, monsieur. Indeed, it is arranged already. Your position and attitude have been considered, of course, and in preparation for this interview I have provided myself with a document from Rechad Effendi, signed by his highness' own hand."

He turned over his papers, selected one, and held it up for Grant to see.

"It is in Turkish, I suppose," said Grant, bending forward as if to read it.

"In Turkish, of course," was the

reply, with a smile. "I have to get a copy made of it."

Then Grant did a shrewd thing. He took hold of one end of the paper, and, leaning forward to look at it, pushed his chair from under him as though it had slipped away, and, clutching at the table to save himself, dragged the document out of the pasha's hand.

"I beg ten thousand pardons for my awkwardness, your excellency," he cried, with well-assumed confusion, as he picked up his chair and sat down. He had the paper now, and made a pretense of examining it. "I do not read Turkish, but I will have this examined." And to my great pleasure and the old Ottoman's obvious dismay he put it in his pocket.

"Your interpreter here could examine it now," said Maraboukh.

"Not to my satisfaction," answered Grant, quietly and firmly. "Your excellency need have no fear, I shall keep it safe, and will see that you have a copy. It means everything—to me, of course."

"I am in your hands, monsieur," said the pasha, with a smile, which did not, however, hide his chagrin.

"There is only one other question I would put to your excellency. If I should desire an interview you could arrange it?"

"It would be difficult. We are surrounded by spies, as perhaps you know. Have you never seen his highness?" The question was asked casually, but the sharp old eyes were very much in earnest.

"Never; but it might be necessary."

"Well, I would do my best to secure you an interview. I think I can;" and there was a clear note of relief in the reply. "His highness knows of you and of your work."

"Then, that's all," said Grant, as he rose. We bowed ourselves out and each took a keen look at the two silent, motionless figures by the door, although I was careful to keep my face turned from them and from the pasha as much as possible.

"What do you think of it all, Mervyn?" asked Grant, as soon as we were in the carriage; and it was easy to tell from his manner that he was in high spirits and had been favorably impressed. "You see your fears about violence were all moonshine."

"I shall say more when I have had a look at that document which you annexed," said I.

"If they mean to go straight, it will be just the making of things," he declared, and for the moment I did not see how to contradict him. So I held my tongue.

When we reached the White House, I proposed that we should at once examine the document which the pasha had handed him, but he declared that Mlle. Patras would be very anxious as to the result of the interview, and that he would come to me the moment he had seen her.

"She will know in an instant whether it is all right," he said, and he did not ask me even to be present at the examination. Knowing his feeling for her I ought not to have been surprised perhaps; but it was the first time since we had been associated together that he had preferred any one's judgment to mine on such a matter; and I admit that I was chagrined.

It seems a strange thing to blame that feeling of unreasonable anger of mine for what happened. I say unreasonable, because a man under the spell of a woman will do anything; but I have often blamed myself bitterly for not having pressed my point, and made it difficult for him to refuse me a sight of the document there and then. So much would have been different.

Instead of doing that, however, I turned away, feeling huffed and hurt; and I changed my clothes and went out and spent the evening with an old friend. I did not return to the White House until late at night, to find myself face to face with a startling development in the grim drama which was now threatening to overwhelm us all.

TO BE CONTINUED.

AFTER THE PAPER WENT TO BED

BY M. J. REYNOLDS

The eerie apparition that came to the editor and the part it played in his ultimate salvation.

BARTON sat alone in the city editor's room, which was a glass case, partitioned off from the center of the barrack-like apartment where the reporters wrote. It was an unholy hour in the morning. Barton had stayed to put the paper to bed.

It was now out, for good or ill, beats or no beats, wending its way through the silent streets of the city, or speeding over the State by the three o'clock morning train.

In a Western city just large enough to support four dailies, two morning and two afternoon, the rivalry in the local department exceeds in keenness and bitterness anything else in the newspaper world. Everybody reads both morning and afternoon papers.

They lie side by side on every office desk and café table.

A good, exclusive story in one is noted and commented on by the entire reading population, including the managing editor and proprietor of the paper which does not have it.

A number of years of this sort of thing, seasoned with late hours and the dominance of a proprietor who was not a gentleman, because, it was popularly supposed, he did not know how to be, had left Barton in the clutches of the common enemy of the profession, insomnia.

Just at this time the extra copy for the anniversary edition was to be read.

The *Leader* was getting out a monstrous special edition to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the settlement of the State.

The copy for it had been piling up for days, and Barton, under the strain of his continuous sleeplessness, found it increasingly difficult to get the stuff out of the way during regular hours.

So, as he could not sleep, anyway, he had been staying nights to read copy for the special after the paper went to bed.

There was a stack of it now, a foot high, in front of him, and he surveyed it with a numb disinclination for work. The figures and statistics with which it abounded swam in his head.

"Well, here goes," he said, finally. He pulled a black bottle out from under his desk, and took a long drink.

For some time Barton had been reading copy on the black bottle. This worried him, for he knew it was working under the whip instead of oats, and that he must sooner or later pay the penalty.

But he did not see anything else that could be done just at that time.

His only brother had had a long and expensive illness, during which Barton had been paying his doctor's bills and supporting his family.

He could not afford a vacation until this drain upon him was removed, and he knew well enough he would not sleep until he had enjoyed a vacation, and a good one, too.

Nevertheless, he never took a pull out of the black bottle without being haunted by moral as well as prudential qualms. Barton had been brought up in a total abstinence household, and he could never get over the notion that there was something a little wrong in

the act of drinking intoxicants *per se*, irrespective of its effects.

It was probably for the reason that his system was not pickled with it that it furnished such a strong and immediate mental stimulus.

Barton could read copy on the black bottle, even when it got into his legs, and made those long members weave incontinently about at the most inopportune moments.

So to-night Barton spurred his tired brain to its task by the customary stimulus.

The city grew silent in a way the metropolis never does. The great presses below had ceased their throb, the muffled clamor that came up from the alley entrance, where the city circulation man nightly handled his gang of paper-route men and boys, died away.

The street car outside stopped, and Barton knew he had a three-mile walk home before it started up again.

The sharp hoof beats from belated cabs grew infrequent. The paper had gone to bed, and the city was asleep.

Barton had worked for an hour and a half, with several resorts to the black bottle. He had attacked the toughest part of the anniversary special copy to-night, the mines. He had thrown out the Cloud County report entire, as "fierce," and had made a note to send a staff man to Cloud City the next day, when, happening to look down, he saw a sight which surprised him.

A white kitten sat on the floor beside him.

He gazed at it in dull astonishment. How did the thing get there? As he looked the apparition suddenly changed its position and stood on its head.

Instantly an element of wild fear entered Barton's befuddled imagination. He knew now that the cat was not real. No cat stood on its head.

"I've got 'em," he muttered, hoarsely. "It's come at last."

He peered uncertainly out into the big office, lit with one flickering jet. It was eerie and forlorn.

Ghosts of old scandals seemed to squeak and gibber in obscure corners. Old divorce suits, dragged unwillingly to the light of day; old family troubles glaringly exposed, seemed to hang heavily in the air. Old love letters, read in court, and gayly furnished for the delectation of the multitude, seemed to whisper their rifled secrets anew.

Murderers who had stalked through the pages of the *Leader* seemed to be stalking through the office without. Suicides seemed to be hanging from the ceiling, as they had hung from glaring headlines in the *Leader*.

Defeated candidates counted over lost campaign expenses with pallid hands, and cursed the *Leader*. Figures from old cartoons, ingeniously designed to wound and humiliate, stepped down from the originals on the walls, and pointed dumb fingers at Barton.

With sick repulsion he realized how much, how much of it all, all that made the *Leader* both famous and notorious, had emanated from his brain.

A sudden, ghastly, accusing company seemed to people the outer office; and inside, the phantom cat still stood on its head.

Barton inspected the darkest corners gingerly.

"Time for snakes to be hanging out there," he whispered. "Thought they always came first. Most appropriate thing in the world, though. Newspaper man. Office cat. Sensational coincidence. Important if true."

As Barton muttered these broken ejaculations, he peered leerily at the cat again.

The thing was now seated on its haunches, with its little paws held up in an absurdly supplicating way, evidently saying its prayers. This settled it. No cat said its prayers.

Nothing real would say its prayers in a newspaper office.

Barton watched the cat, fascinated, and all the time was conscious of grisly presences in the outside office.

"They'll chase in here pretty soon," he muttered. "Bound to get after me. Every bit of filth that ever got into the local is out there. And they all blame it on me."

None of the good things the *Leader*

had done seemed to resurrect. The new post office it had forced from the government; the hospital it had built; the city improvement society it had fostered; the reform movement it had led —all remained coldly aloof. Barton reflected on this with bitter cynicism.

And the white cat was turning somersaults.

When Barton saw this he made up what was serving him at the moment for a mind.

"I've got to get out of this," he said, arising. "The copy can go to hell. The paper can go to hell. The old man can go to hell. I've got to get some sleep, or I'll be seeing white cats all over the ranch. When I see cats in the copy it's time to stop."

He put on his hat and coat, and walked unsteadily out. On the street he looked behind him. The white cat was following him.

This gave Barton a strong shock. He remembered a French story of a man who was observed for years to look behind him at every other step, and when he came to die it was found that he had been seeing a leopard following him all this time.

"But I haven't been taking absinthe," said Barton, pathetically.

"I suppose a snake wriggling along behind me would be worse. Still, this is disturbing—very. Good stuff, too, if the *Star* could only get onto it."

He collided with a lamp-post, and took off his hat.

"Beg your pardon," he said, with intense gravity.

But the idea that the rival paper might get hold of his plight, and make copy out of him had entered into Barton's mentality. He now seemed to see, painted on the dark before him, the first line of a scare head, running across the top of a front page:

"KITTEN PURSUED ME," SAYS BARTON.

And under it, in smaller type:

"A. J. Barton, Employee of a Pawnee Paper, is Followed by Feline Hallucinations."

Fiendish little cats seemed to be dancing and wriggling around the great circus-poster letters of this headline.

So when he heard footsteps approaching Barton started to run. When he did this the white cat gave a light, swift leap, and lit on his shoulder.

In the overwrought condition of Barton's nerves this was enough to send them toppling over the edge. The thing was not content to follow. It was going to attack him.

He gave a hoarse cry, stumbled forward and fell.

When Barton awoke he was in a strange room. It was a very neat, dainty little room, and he could not place it. It seemed to be a woman's room, and Barton could not understand how he got into it.

"One might think I was married, and this were my wife's room," he pondered, uncertainly. "I probably am married, and don't know it. I don't seem to know anything."

His head felt like an aggregation of warm, hasty pudding, through which floated memories of the hideous pipe dreams of the night before.

The horrid phantoms of the local room, he was pleased to note, had vanished.

Apparently they could not penetrate this little pink and white bower. But things were still so cloudy and uncertain that he was not surprised to see Miss Carroll's face gradually outline itself beside his bed.

Miss Carroll did society three days in the week, and local the rest of the time. He thought it strange that she should appear to him rather than any of the rest of the reporters, but set it down to his condition.

As nothing in the world could be more unlikely than that he should be in bed, and that Miss Carroll should be sitting beside him, naturally that was what he imagined.

"She's better than snakes, anyway," he muttered.

Suddenly he saw something that startled him fearfully. The white kitten was sitting in Miss Carroll's lap. He arose

on one arm, and said, in a horrified tone:

"For God's sake, put it down."

Miss Carroll immediately put the kitten down. Then she laughed, and picked it up again.

"I'm so used to doing what you tell me, Mr. Barton," said she, "that I obey instinctively. But, really, it's all right. It's a real cat."

"A real cat?" said Barton, unbelievingly.

"Yes, it was Madame Peperoni's," replied Miss Carroll.

These simple words explained nearly everything to Barton. Madame Peperoni had come to the town with an animal show two weeks before. Falling ill, she had remained behind when the show went on. Miss Carroll had got a special from the woman on her arrival, and had reported her funeral later.

"This was her best trick cat," said Miss Carroll. "I was able to do her some small kindnesses during her illness, and she asked me to take the cat, and give it a good home. I took the kitten to the office yesterday afternoon, but you know you told me when I called you up that I could go directly home after getting that Sunday special, and I entirely forgot the poor cat. I sat up late reading, and I was just going to bed when I happened to think of her. You know our flat is only a few blocks from the office, and I thought I'd just take a run down on the chance that you were staying late, and I could get in and get her."

"But where am I?" interjected Barton.

"Why," said Miss Carroll, readily, "I came up to you just as you fell. I got a policeman, and as neither of us knew exactly where you lived, and we were so near, I just had you brought around home, and papa put you to bed. You've been delirious all night, and told all about the cat. The doctor says you are breaking down from insomnia, and have just escaped something serious."

Barton inspected Miss Carroll narrowly, but she seemed to have no ulterior suspicions.

"But what did the thing stand on its head at me for?" he queried, weakly.

Miss Carroll laughed softly.

"Poor pussy," she said, caressing the white cat's head. "She was starved. She managed to escape from her basket and find you, and was trying all her little arts upon you to soften your hard heart, and make you give her something to eat."

Barton thought solemnly over this.

"Well, I didn't have anything for her," he said at length, "except something in a bottle."

Miss Carroll looked grave.

"The old man has been over," she said, gently. "He happened to just strike Dr. Clenham, and the doctor told him all about your brother, and your insomnia, and everything—and—how you had been working on stimulants to keep going. And he says you are to have a month's vacation with salary, and passes to Los Angeles."

Barton pondered dazedly over this for a while.

"The old man must have been drunk," he said, finally.

Barton went on his trip. A year after he went again. The second time Miss Carroll, who had been put in charge of the home department, went with him.

The trick cat occupies an honored place in their house, sitting up in a chair of her own at the table, with plate and napkin, and partaking of dinner straight through, from soup to coffee and ice cream, with eerie solemnity.

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 Bond 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.—EDITOR.]

II.—THE CASE OF DICKSON'S DIAMONDS.

I.

"NO, Jimmie, the burglar of to-day is not the burglar of a generation or two ago," said Felix Boyd, through a wreath of pipe smoke. "He is not the burly midnight ruffian at mere fancy of whom we shuddered in our trundle beds, the bearded fellow in rough attire and sinister mask, with a kit of tools under his coat and a brace of Smith & Wesson's in his hip pockets, whose chief attribute was brute force, and who cracked with equal complacency a merchant's safe or the merchant's skull."

Jimmie Coleman laughed, knocking the ashes from his cigar, and nodded approvingly.

This central office man was Boyd's very intimate friend and most ardent admirer, probably the latter because he knew much more of Boyd's remarkable talents than any other man, so was best able to appreciate his extraordinary abilities.

He had dropped into Boyd's office in Pine Street half an hour before, merely to enjoy a morning smoke in genial company.

"You are right, Felix," said he. "Things have changed mightily in that respect since we wore a frock and knickerbockers."

"Instead, Jimmie," added Boyd, in ruminating mood, "we have to-day the much more intelligent and dangerous scamp, who forms and executes his designs with exquisite cunning and sagacity, and who employs every modern mechanical device with which to overcome the constantly improving safeguards he encounters. The transition has been gradual, but is very pronounced, and the detective art has undergone a corresponding change."

"That is true, too, Felix."

"The successful sleuth of to-day, Jimmie, besides possessing the dogged persistency and brute courage of old, must be a man of broad intelligence, a keen observer and subtle analyst, and one

* This series of complete detective stories "Below the Dead Line," began last month. The number containing the first story can be secured through any newsdealer or direct from the publishers for ten cents.

capable of discerning remote relations. The detection of obscure bits of evidence, and the art of making correct deductions therefrom, chiefly serve to solve the great criminal mysteries of the present day."

"Time and again, Felix, you have demonstrated that," nodded Coleman. "Witness that bond robbery of Curry, Gale & Fiske last November. By the way, I see that that man Wykoff, whom you suspected of having had a hand in that affair, is again operating on the curb."

Boyd smiled oddly and laid away his pipe.

"Wykoff, as I remarked at that time, was not the master knave in that affair," said he. "Take my word for it, Jimmie, there was another Richmond somewhere in the field. That ingenious robbery was not designed by Paul Wykoff, but by some much more capable and far-reaching knave."

"Do you still think so?"

"I do, indeed," said Boyd, with noticeable gravity. "It is my impression, Jimmie, that something seriously wrong exists down here below the 'Dead Line.'"

"Why do you think so?"

"Don't ask me why; the grounds for my misgivings are still vague and indefinite. Yet I seriously believe that, somewhere in this wealthy locality, where millions change lands with each passing business hour, somewhere in the very heart of our great financial maelstrom, there exists a veritable genius for crime."

"A genius for crime!" echoed Coleman.

"A man whose obscure personality may be only vaguely discerned behind crafty operations executed by others, yet directed by him with all the evil ingenuity and consummate foresight of a master of knavery. I see only vague signs of this at present, Jimmie, now and then cropping out in crimes of new and peculiar originality, all of which point to a masterful and malignant genius hid in the background. As yet I have been unable to get the least definite line upon him; but some day I shall do so. Some day, Jimmie, one of these peculiar crimes will give me a clew to this master knave, who, I believe, lurks about here like a spider in its web, and conspires with and directs a well-organized gang of——"

"Easy!" put in Coleman, lifting his forefinger. "There are steps in the corridor. Some one is coming this way."

A stranger unceremoniously entered. He was about fifty years of age, stoutly built, and his pale face and dilated eyes at once indicated exceeding nervousness and excitement.

"I am looking for Mr. Boyd—Mr. Felix Boyd," he said, quickly, with restless glances at each of his hearers. "Do I find him here?"

Boyd reached for his pipe, at the same time signing the stranger to a chair.

"I am Felix Boyd," said he. "Take a seat, sir."

"In a moment, just a moment," nervously rejoined the stranger, hastening to produce a card. "I am Nathan Dickson, of Maiden Lane, dealer in diamonds, and the American agent for some of the largest diamond merchants of London and Amsterdam. My card, Mr. Boyd."

"Thank you," murmured Boyd, with his keen, gray eyes half hidden under their drooping lids. "And what, pray, can I do for you, Mr. Dickson?"

"I come to you from my bankers, who told me that, if I but mentioned their name, you would readily advise me," Dickson quickly explained, mentioning one of the largest banking houses in Wall Street. "I have been a depositor with them for nearly twenty years, Mr. Boyd, and they advised me to consult you, sir, instead of going to the central office, as I at first was inclined."

These references to the bankers served at once to insure Boyd's interest, for reasons hinted at in an earlier narrative. He laid down his pipe without having lighted it, and again waved his visitor to a chair.

"You do not know me by name, I take it," said Dickson, as he sat down.

"Only since seeing your card," said Boyd. "I observe, however, that you

are a married man, and very near-sighted."

"Dear me! How is that? Do I wear my heart on my sleeve?"

"Hardly that," smiled Boyd. "But a spot has been sponged from your vest this morning, presumably by your wife, since you scarce could have visited your tailor thus early; and I notice the handle of a reading glass protruding slightly from your inside pocket."

That one of these deductions did not affect Dickson very pleasantly was apparent in his increased nervousness, and the sudden trembling of his hands on his knees; yet he laughed a little and cried:

"Oh, yes, quite right; you are quite right, Mr. Boyd. I am very near-sighted, very, when viewing objects close at hand. Yet I do not even require glasses for observing things at a distance."

"That is occasionally the case, I understand."

"I am told so. Yet I believe that very few are as sorely afflicted as I. I can read only with a very powerful glass, as you may see."

And he now displayed his reading glass, a thick lens nearly six inches in diameter, having a silver rim and an ebony handle. Boyd merely glanced at it, then turned to Coleman, who had risen.

"Drop in a little later, Jimmie," said he. "I imagine that Mr. Dickson will not long engage me."

"No, Mr. Boyd, not very long," said Dickson, when they were alone. "I received in my mail this morning a letter which gives me great uneasiness, if not serious alarm. I took it to my bankers for advice, scarce knowing what else to do, and they advised me to consult you. I wish you would examine the letter; here it is, and tell me what you think of it, and how seriously I should regard it. I am tempted to place it in the hands of the police for investigation."

Boyd examined the letter with interest, and was immediately struck with its peculiarities.

It neither was written, nor printed in the ordinary way. Instead, each word had been cut singly from some book or newspaper, evidently with a penknife, and then pasted on a blank sheet of paper.

Plainly the work had been very carefully done, yet it had been found so delicate that the completed lines presented considerable irregularity, with the separate words differently spaced and slanted at various angles. The communication thus conveyed was quite brief, and read as follows:

"NATHAN DICKSON, Maiden Lane: You look out for yourself. Persons I dare not name are about to execute a design against you, the character of which I cannot safely disclose. I am a friend to you, and this is a warning you will not wisely ignore. Heed it. Guard yourself and that most dear to you."

Boyd twice read this curious missive, then looked up at the grave face of his waiting visitor.

"Have you the cover in which this was mailed?" he asked.

"Yes, here it is," bowed Dickson, tendering the envelope.

"Printed with a pen," observed Boyd; "and dropped in one of the street boxes late yesterday afternoon. Evidently the sender designed this method to prevent being traced by his handwriting."

"That is apparent," cried Dickson, nervously. "But what of the letter itself? It has given me a dreadful shock. My nerves are completely unstrung. It is so indefinite, yet in a way so threatening. I don't know whether my life is in danger, or my property, or what. I am all of a tremble from head to foot."

"Which really is very foolish of you," said Boyd, indifferently. "I do not think your life is in any danger, Mr. Dickson. Are you a man of much property?"

"Bradstreet rates me at a hundred thousand, which is rather more than I possess," replied Dickson, more composedly. "I own a modest summer place near Jamaica Bay, where I dwell for about six months of the year, renting a house in town during the winter."

"At present you are where?"

"I am still living in town. I expect to go down to my shore house with my family about the last of this month."

"You do a large business in diamonds?"

"Quite so. As agent for foreign houses; moreover, I carry a valuable stock."

"In part consigned to you, I presume," observed Boyd, raising his brows.

"Yes, certainly."

"Do you consider your quarters in Maiden Lane, and the safe or vault in which you store your goods, perfectly secure against burglars?" inquired Boyd.

"Indeed, yes!" exclaimed Dickson. "I never have felt otherwise."

Boyd smiled, and again glanced at the patchwork letter.

"Who among your friends, Mr. Dickson, is a practical joker?" he asked, a bit dryly.

"Really I recall none."

"Yet this letter is, in my opinion, the work of such a person."

"A joke—a practical joke! Sent only to annoy or alarm me!" exclaimed Dickson, with much eagerness. "Do you really think so, Mr. Boyd! Indeed, I shall feel greatly relieved if that is your opinion. Do you really think so, Mr. Boyd?"

Plainly his relief already was great, and Boyd at once proceeded to further assure him.

"I think, Mr. Dickson," said he, decisively, "that any true friend, so anxious to warn you of serious danger, could easily have found a way to intelligently do so without imperiling himself. The greater your danger, sir, the greater probability of such a step on the part of a friend, who surely would have left you in no such uncertainty as this concerning his meaning."

"I had not thought of it in that light," cried Dickson. "Really, Mr. Boyd, I begin to think you are right."

"To go a step farther," added Boyd; "if knaves contemplate any secret design upon you, certainly no such warning as this would have prefaced the execution of their project. Such a step on their part would be absurd."

"Surely."

"That, Mr. Dickson, is my opinion of this piece of indefinite patchwork."

"You believe it to be a practical joke?"

"Nothing more serious, sir."

"What would you advise me to do about it?"

"Nothing at all," declared Boyd, promptly. "I should give it no further attention. I am convinced that no friend sent it to you; and such a communication from an enemy surely would be unworthy one's serious consideration. If I were you, Mr. Dickson, I should toss the letter into my waste basket, and not give it another thought."

A noteworthy change had come over the dealer in diamonds. His eyes were brighter, his cheeks flushed with satisfaction, and a smile had dispelled the manifest apprehensions with which he had entered Boyd's office.

He now shook the latter warmly by the hand, effusively uttering his thanks, and declaring that his own opinion of the mysterious letter was entirely changed, and that he now should completely disregard it.

When Mr. Dickson was about arising to go, however, Boyd carelessly observed:

"If you will leave the letter with me until afternoon, Mr. Dickson, I will examine it more closely a little later, in case any obscure features of consequence have escaped me. Should I discover any, I will hasten to inform and advise you."

"Certainly," cried Dickson, readily. "I shall be glad to leave it."

"I have your business card," said Boyd. "In case I should wish to reach you at home, which is not very probable, you had better leave me your uptown address. Write it on this blank, if you like. Here is a pencil."

Dickson again drew out his lens, holding it in his left hand while he wrote with the other, and bowing his head nearly to the paper on which he inscribed the desired address.

"There it is, Mr. Boyd," said he, arising. "I am always at home evenings. My wife and children are my chief comfort and delight. Call some evening, if

you will, when not upon business. A thousand thanks for your opinion and advice. My bankers tell me that you invariably are right in such matters. You cannot imagine how much you have relieved me."

Boyd smiled, and shook his proffered hand, bowing him to the office door, where he bade him good-morning.

When Jimmie Coleman entered a little later, he found Boyd at the window still studying the letter; and the latter at once confided to him the occasion of Dickson's visit.

"And what do you really make of this, Felix?" inquired Coleman, curiously examining the letter.

Boyd laughed softly, with an odd gleam in one corner of his eye.

"Make of it, Jimmie?" said he. "Not very much more than I told Dickson. Still, it presents a few curious features. Notice that each word was cut from some book or paper."

"That's very evident."

"Now place the face of the page against the window pane, so that the light strikes through it. You find that you then can decipher the printing on the reverse side of the page from which the word in the letter was carefully cut."

"So I can, for a fact."

"Under the word 'design,' in the letter, you find *Fr 'descant,'* in small italics."

"Yes, it is quite plain."

"Under the word 'execute,' in the letter, you find the two words—'to exert.' Plainly, Jimmie, those two words, as well as the italics noted, formed parts of the definitions of the two words 'descant' and 'exertion,' on the reverse page from which the words 'design' and 'execute' were cut by the sender of this letter."

"Eureka!" cried Coleman. "It's dead open-and-shut, Felix, that the words of this letter were cut from an ordinary dictionary."

"Certainly it is, Jimmie," laughed Boyd; then he added, rather dryly: "Very possibly, Jimmie, I some day shall discover the dictionary from which they were cut."

Yet Mr. Felix Boyd gave the matter very little immediate attention. That afternoon he returned the letter to Dickson at his store in Maiden Lane, stating that he found nothing in it to warrant serious apprehensions, and he left the dealer in diamonds quite assured that his earlier fears were entirely groundless.

Boyd next called upon Dickson's bankers, who stated that the latter was a man of sterling integrity, whose word was as good as his bond, and that his family comprised a wife and seven charming children.

So Boyd let the matter drop, to take its own course, whether up or down, and ten days passed before the crash came. Then, as he was about going out to lunch one day, a policeman came rushing into his Pine Street office, crying excitedly:

"I say, Mr. Boyd! You are wanted down in Maiden Lane at once."

"By whom, Gaffney?" Boyd coolly inquired.

"By Jimmie Coleman, sir! There's the devil to pay in the store of Nathan Dickson, the diamond dealer."

II.

It was but a little after noon, with the sun shining unusually hot from a clear May sky, when Felix Boyd reached Maiden Lane and joined Coleman in front of Dickson's place of business.

The store was a small one, occupying only the ground floor of a narrow brick building, that was wedged in between two much more imposing stone structures, looking much as if it had slipped in between such massive neighbors by some freak or mischance.

The single, broad window was protected with high wooden shutters, and the store door guarded with a stout iron grating, then closed and secured with a padlock. On a card tacked on the shutter of the door was rudely printed

OPEN THURSDAY MORNING.

It being Wednesday, the card and the closed store plainly indicated that Dick-

son had planned to be absent for a day, and had left a notice when he should return.

On the street fronting the store was a crowd of spectators, kept back by several policemen, and Boyd found Coleman and an officer engaged in forcing the iron grating guarding the closed door.

"What's the trouble, Jimmie?" he asked, as he joined him.

The central office man quickly looked up on hearing Boyd's voice.

"Ah, you're here! Good enough!" he exclaimed. "Recalling that letter, I hastened to send for you. I'm told there has been an explosion in here, a devil of a noise, and that Dickson has gone to his summer home for the day. I happened along just after the explosion was heard, and found Gibson, who occupies the upper floors, trying to get in here."

Boyd glanced at a tall, elderly man, who nodded in corroboration of Coleman's explanation. Boyd quickly asked:

"Did Dickson tell you he should be absent to-day, Mr. Gibson?"

"He did, sir, as he was closing up last night. He said he was going to his summer place to-day, to plan for occupying it a little later."

"Does he employ no clerks here, who could have kept the store open?"

"None, sir. He runs his business alone. I greatly fear that a robbery has been committed here. The explosion occurred about ten minutes ago, and was very severe, fairly shaking the upper floors."

Boyd glanced quickly at the window. An inner curtain, drawn below the tops of the window shutters outside, prevented a view of the interior of the store.

"Have you looked out back, Jimmie?" he demanded, quickly.

"Yes, first thing," cried Coleman. "The way is through that alley, and the back window is closed with an iron shutter on hinges, secured inside the shop. There is a round hole in it through which I looked, but the smoke in the store obscured everything. There has been an explosion in there all right, but I saw no signs of thieves in the rear area, which lies a bit lower than the street. I tried to force a small cellar door back there, but it wouldn't give a hair, so I returned to tackle this one. Ah, now we're in!"

The iron grating finally had given way, and fell clanging upon the sidewalk. With an iron bar, Coleman then proceeded to force the lock of the door, an operation quickly accomplished, when he threw open the door and entered the shop.

Boyd quickly followed him, first glancing at one of the policeman, and saying, sharply:

"Stand here, Gaffney! Let no one else enter!"

Though the smoke now was partly dispelled, the shop was in semi-obscurity, and Coleman hastened to raise the curtain. Then a flood of light entered over the front shutters, and revealed the devastation within.

The shop was narrow, but quite deep, with a counter at one side, and a small inclosed office in front. Nearly at the rear was a large safe, partly fixed in the side wall, and fronted by an open space near the rear window.

A glance about the place quickly told what had happened. The heavy door of the safe lay on the floor, and a part of the side nearest the rear window was badly shattered, leaving the interior compartments of the safe almost entirely exposed and easy of access. That they had been robbed of the most of their valuable contents was at once apparent.

Furthermore, indicating the violence of the explosion, the counter was thrown awry, and the glass of the rear window was scattered in fragments over the floor, leaving only the secured iron shutter, through the round aperture in which entered a beam of sunlight from the rear area or yard.

On the broad sill of this window lay a large reading glass, similar to that which Dickson carried on his person; but of Dickson himself, or of the knaves guilty of perpetrating this midday burglary, there was not a sign.

"Whew!" whistled Coleman, the instant his gaze fell upon the scene.

"Here's a mess! A burglary in broad daylight!"

"Burglary, indeed!" exclaimed Boyd. "The crooks have made a clean sweep. This will settle me in Dickson's opinion. That patchwork letter of his had a wicked meaning, after all."

"I should say wicked!" cried Coleman, hurriedly opening the rear shutter, and springing out of the window. "I'll see what I can find out here, Felix."

"Go ahead!" cried Boyd. "I'll examine things in here."

Coleman returned in about five minutes, bearing in his hand a pair of soiled rubbers, with which he scrambled back through the window, remarking, rapidly:

"There are footprints in the soil of the alley, but not at all definite. Yet the crooks must have escaped by that way, and one of them probably wore these rubbers, for I found them under some refuse near the alley exit."

"Very likely," said Boyd, glancing at them. "Burglars frequently wear them to muffle their steps indoors. Size eight, aren't they?"

A flight of stairs from one corner led to a dimly lighted cellar, to which Boyd quickly conducted his companion. At the foot of the stairs he halted, and pointed to a narrow door, the one Coleman vainly had tried to force from outside. Against it was a heavy piece of joist, one end of which was securely blocked several yards from the door.

"Humph!" ejaculated Coleman. "They went that way, and the timber shows how they secured the door after them. It was so adjusted as to fall into place when the door closed, and thus prevent the immediate entrance of any one anxious to learn the cause of the explosion. The delay gave the crooks a chance to get well away. They have done the job all right, covering their tracks well, and already have a long lead on the police. There's no question about that."

Boyd nodded indifferently, and led the way upstairs.

"You had better rush a message up to Dickson's wife, Jimmie," said he. "Here is his city address. Have her, or some of his family, telegraph to Dickson, and bring him here as quickly as possible. He should show up by the middle of the afternoon."

"I'll do so at once," nodded Coleman, hastening to the front door, where he not only started a messenger for Dickson's residence, but also dispatched another to headquarters to report the extraordinary burglary.

When he returned he found Felix Boyd on his knees a few feet from the ruined safe, and between it and the rear window. He was intently engaged in studying, with the help of Dickson's large reading glass, the hard pine boards of the bare floor.

"What have you discovered there?" Coleman demanded, with immediate interest.

"Nothing much," muttered Boyd, glancing up. "Only this smutty mark across the floor, Jimmie. It begins here, and ends at the corner of the safe."

"What do you make of it? What caused it?"

"It was caused by a fine fuse, Jimmie, with which the charge in the safe was exploded. In burning it scorched the floor a little, making this almost imperceptible dark line. At first sight I thought it was a narrow crack only, but this lens belonging to Dickson reveals its true character. Very kind of Dickson to have left a glass so handy."

There was in Boyd's voice an intonation so vaguely odd that it brought a look of perplexity to Coleman's attentive face. He could discern no more than had been pointed out to him, however, and he growled, a little impatiently:

"Well, what of it? What do you mean by that? We know the charge was exploded by some means, and what matters whether a fuse or an electric current was used?"

"It doesn't matter much, Jimmie," returned Boyd, still on his knees. "Yet I thought I would call your attention to the line. Here at this end of it is another feature, too, hardly discernible except with the glass."

"What's that?" inquired Coleman, stooping lower.

"Here are two curved lines, parallel and scarce a quarter-inch apart," said Boyd, with his finger on the spot from which the fuse apparently had started. "They are very faint, almost like partly obliterated pencil marks. Can you see them, Jimmie? Here, take the glass."

"Yes, I can see them now," muttered Coleman, peering through the powerful lens. "But what of them?"

"Nothing of much consequence, I guess," Boyd slowly answered. "They appear to be faint scorches, like the other. It's odd, though, that both curve so regularly. Maybe they were caused by the flame of the match with which this end of the fuse was lighted. As you say, Jimmie, it doesn't matter much how it was done."

While he spoke, Boyd gazed oddly down at Coleman from the corner of his eye, but the latter's attention was upon the floor, which he still studied with the glass.

"I don't make anything of it, Felix," he presently declared, arising to his feet. "I have sent to headquarters for assistance. We must lose no more time before getting the police after these scoundrels."

"Quite right," nodded Boyd, taking the reading glass and replacing it on the sill of the back window. "Since I see nothing more that I can do for you here, Jimmie, I believe I will go and lunch. I was about going when you sent for me."

"Very well. I shall wait here until the chief comes down."

"By Jove! I feel very sorry for Dickson," added Boyd, as he turned to go. "He surely will set me down for a blockhead of the first water. Who would have believed that that infernal letter carried, between its deucedly crooked and patchwork lines, a hint at so audacious a crime as this? Yes, I feel very sorry for Dickson. I must run down here later in the day and try to square myself with him."

With which observation, to which Coleman made no reply, Mr. Felix Boyd passed out into Maiden Lane and departed.

The news of the extraordinary daylight burglary had spread rapidly, and a great gathering of people thronged the street.

Reporters and artists were hurrying to the scene of the crime, and soon the chief from the central office, accompanied by several of his shrewdest subordinates, put in an appearance.

Long before evening the story of the burglary was known throughout the city, and all the powers of the police were being strenuously applied to tracking the burglars.

Late in the afternoon Mr. Felix Boyd again visited the scene, expecting to find Dickson, and express his regrets over what had occurred. Nor was he disappointed, for Dickson had arrived at his store about three o'clock, well-nigh overwhelmed by the disaster befallen him. Boyd found him moaning and in tears, crushed under a despair much too great for expression, and he hastened to excuse as best he could his own obvious blindness.

"Oh, I don't blame you, Mr. Boyd; I don't blame you," Dickson tearfully reiterated, in response to Boyd's expressions of regret. "I'm ruined, utterly ruined, but I don't blame you, sir. No mortal man could have foreseen this from that blind letter. I am a victim of burglars, Mr. Boyd; and I feel sure that I have secret enemies, also, who are striving to undo me. I'm bankrupt utterly ruined, but I don't blame you in the least."

"That's very kind of you, Dickson, I am sure," said Felix Boyd. "How great is your loss?"

"I cannot tell yet, not precisely," groaned Dickson. "Two hundred thousand at least, and probably more. Many of the diamonds were consignments only, and I never can make good for them, never! I am utterly ruined, but I don't blame you, sir. You advised me the best you knew."

"I certainly did, Dickson," said Boyd, sorrowfully. "Were you at your shore house when informed of the burglary?"

"Yes. I went out there alone this morning to arrange for opening the house next week. I received a telegram

from my wife, conveying the dreadful news, and I at once returned. God help me, Mr. Boyd, I'm a broken man from this hour. I never shall recover, never! But I don't blame you, sir; I don't blame you in the least."

III.

"Are you booked for anything special to-night, Jimmie?" inquired Felix Boyd of Coleman, in the afternoon of the second day following the burglary in Maiden Lane.

"Nothing more pressing than Dickson's affair."

"Have the detectives struck any trail worth following?"

"Not as yet. It's an infernally blind case," declared Coleman. "Do you know, Boyd, I begin to believe you are right, in suspecting that some master knave is at work in this locality."

Boyd laughed indifferently, and made no direct reply.

"You can let Dickson's case drop until to-morrow, Jimmie," said he. "I want you to make a night run into the suburbs with me, so meet me at the Thirty-fourth Street ferry at seven o'clock. You'll learn for what a little later. And by the way, Jimmie, you had better come in disguise, and have a gun with you!"

Coleman knew Boyd too well to attempt to hasten any disclosures. He merely signified his assent, and promptly at seven o'clock the two men, both effectively disguised, met at the ferry mentioned.

Still Boyd disclosed nothing. He crossed the river with his companion, boarded a train at the Long Island railway station, and entered into conversation with Coleman until they reached South Woodhaven, some after dark. There they left the train, and Boyd soon was leading the way across the broad strip of country lying along the waters of Jamaica Bay, the salty air from which fanned their flushed faces.

"What the dickens are you after out here?" Coleman finally ventured to demand, with some impatience.

Boyd laughed, and quietly rejoined:

"I am after Dickson's burglars, Jimmie."

"The devil you say!'

"Easy! We are nearing our destination, and must not be seen nor heard. Still, I believe we are well in advance of our quarry, who possibly may not show up at all. Yet I would bet that somebody will put in an appearance, in which case I must know what sort of a trick is to be turned here to-night. Carefully now, and come this way. Yonder is Dickson's place."

They had emerged from a narrow strip of woods, and in the near distance the dark outlines of a commodious wooden dwelling, with a stable somewhat removed, were discernible against the starry sky. The isolated place was shrouded in gloom, and the solitude and silence were broken only by crickets and insects in the long grass, or the occasional cry of some night bird overhead.

Closely followed by Coleman, Boyd skirted a hedge until he arrived at a point back of the stable, to the rear wall of which he cautiously stole and listened. It was as silent as a tomb within, and Boyd next forced open the sliding wooden shutter of a square window, used only for removing refuse.

This gave them easy access to the interior, and Boyd, with a whispered word of caution, led the way in, and closed the shutter. This left them in Egyptian darkness, but Boyd quickly produced an electric pocket lantern, with which he shed a single beam of light across the floor.

"We are here first, Jimmie, and possibly last," he softly remarked. "I don't look for others before the next train comes out, yet we'd best be quiet and cautious. Come this way for a moment, however. There is a contrivance here which I wish to show you. I never saw anything just like it."

"Evidently you've been here before," muttered Coleman, not a little puzzled.

"Only once," replied Boyd. "That was yesterday. Here's the thing I spoke of."

It appeared to be only a barrel,

placed upright on a mound of loose hay, directly under the edge of the overhanging mow just above. Boyd quietly removed the perforated head, however, and flashed a beam of light into the barrel, revealing several startling facts.

There was no lower head in the barrel, which stood squarely on the loose hay, and contained a number of crumpled pages, evidently torn from some book. Precisely in the middle of the barrel, and fixed upright in the loose hay and paper at the bottom, was a partly burned paraffin candle.

"Good God!" muttered Coleman. "What's the meaning of this? Is it a contrivance for firing the barn?"

"Precisely," whispered Felix Boyd. "Clever, isn't it? Had the candle burned low enough to ignite the hay and loose papers, the whole place would speedily have been in a blaze, entirely destroying this incriminating evidence. Note the craftiness of it. The barrel hoods the light, precluding observation from outside, and prevents a draught from extinguishing the candle. Very long candles of this kind can easily be obtained, long enough to burn for twelve hours. How easy for an incendiary to fire a stable in this way, and deny having been near it for a day at least."

"Infernally clever!" muttered Coleman. "The candle is about half burned out. Who can have extinguished it?"

"I did," laughed Boyd. "I happened out here yesterday morning, and found it burning. I have an idea that the would-be incendiary will show up later, to learn why his scheme failed, and to plant a second candle."

"Good heavens, Boyd, whom do you suspect of this?"

"Dickson fears that he has secret enemies, and it may be their work," said Boyd, dryly. "Possibly we shall learn. Have a look at this loose page, Jimmie. What do you make of it?"

"By all the gods, Boyd, it is a leaf from a dictionary!"

"The dictionary from which Dickson's patchwork letter was made," chuckled Boyd. "Quiet, dear fellow! There's no knowing when visitors may arrive. I'll replace this head, and it will be assumed that the candle accidentally expired, possibly being averse to such infamous knavery as arson. That's as we found it. Now to cover, Jimmie, for a long and silent wait."

In the intense gloom of the stable they patiently waited, minute after minute, never speaking, oftentimes scarce breathing, until nearly two hours had passed.

Then their tireless vigil was rewarded, and the supreme cleverness of Mr. Felix Boyd clearly demonstrated. A side door of the stable was quietly opened, and a man bearing a dark lantern cautiously entered.

He listened for several moments, then approached the barrel and examined it. Then he removed the partly burned candle, and got another, fully twenty-four inches long, from a stall near by.

This he adjusted in the barrel, as before, then struck a match and lighted it. As he did so, bending above the open barrel, the two watchers saw that he was a stout fellow, with red hair and beard. Having lighted the candle, he replaced the perforated barrel head, and stole out of the stable by the way he had entered.

Boyd laid a warning hand on Coleman's arm, checking him until the incendiary had closed and locked the door. Then he murmured, softly:

"This way, Jimmie! this way. Carefully—not a sound!"

Moving quickly, yet with the utmost caution, they open a the rear window and reached the ground outside. Then Boyd led the way around the stable, hugging the side wall, and gazed toward Dickson's house. The incendiary, barely discernible in the darkness, was then emerging from a shed near the dwelling, around the corner of which he quickly disappeared.

"After him, Jimmie!" whispered Boyd. "Quietly!"

Both started across the open grounds, but had covered hardly a rod when the night air was rent with such a wild shriek for help that their blood fairly curdled. Then came a pistol shot, in-

stantly followed by another and another.

A muttered oath broke from Boyd, and his face grew hard as flint.

"By God, the game is off!" he fiercely cried, rushing toward the corner of the house, around which the bearded man had disappeared. "This way, Jimmie! Use your gun! Drop any man you lay eyes on!"

His voice rang like a trumpet on the night, and was echoed by startling cries from beyond the dwelling. As Boyd turned the corner of it, three men were fairly flying across the grounds, and already nearing the strip of woods previously mentioned. A fourth man, the one with a red beard, lay prostrate on the earth, shot through the breast and breathing his last.

Boyd followed the three men, firing shot after shot at them as he ran; but the darkness prevented any accuracy, and within half a minute all three had vanished in the woods. Pursuit obviously would have proven only vain, and Boyd dashed back to look after their victim.

He found Coleman raising the stricken man, who was bleeding profusely from a gaping wound in his right breast; and as Boyd kneeled beside him, ghastly enough in the starlight, the dying man drew his final breath, gasping, with a last convulsive effort:

"Wy—wy—wy——"

Then he was gone, with the unfinished phrase or word, perhaps, silenced on his dead lips. Coleman dropped him, a dead weight, upon the ground, and drew from his clinched hand several small cloth packages tied with braid which he was convulsively gripping.

"By all the gods, Felix!" he cried, as he felt their contents. "The stolen diamonds!"

Boyd passed his hand across the dead man's face, sweeping away the red beard and wig with the movement.

"Just as I thought, Jimmie!" he said, coolly. "Behold!"

The dead man was Nathan Dickson, the diamond dealer of Maiden Lane!

IV.

The details of what followed that fateful evening are not essential, and it was not until the next morning that Felix Boyd, seated in his office, disclosed to Coleman the remarkable thread of deductions by which he had accomplished his great work.

"It was a curious case, Jimmie," said he, over his pipe; "and not entirely satisfactory. Yet we recovered the diamonds, and so saved their rightful owners from serious losses."

"I should say so," declared the central office man. "But you beat me, Felix, on my word! I'm blessed if I see how you fathomed it."

"I will tell you how," said Boyd. "From the first I suspected Dickson of some secret game on his own hook, one not involving others. The letter he brought me betrayed him. To begin with, the substance of it lacked the true ring. Then the irregular lines and slanted words indicated that it had been prepared by some one who could not see well; and when I got him to write me his town address, and saw him compelled to hold his reading glass with one hand while he wrote with the other, awkwardly bowing his head nearly to the page, I was convinced that Dickson himself had made up the letter, and had found such paste work decidedly delicate and difficult. Furthermore, that the spot sponged from his vest that morning, at my mention of which he appeared a little disturbed, was neither more nor less than a spot of paste with which he had daubed himself, and subsequently sponged away."

"By Jove! that was clever! But why didn't you call him down at once?"

"Because I wished to discover his little game," smiled Boyd. "It was no funeral of mine, Jimmie, if Dickson wished to write himself such a letter. It certainly indicated some secret design, as did his visit to me upon such a pretext. But it is an old dodge, Jimmie, that of averting suspicion by appearing to confide in the police or a detective. So I decided that I would let

Dickson have what rope he wanted, and so discover to what it led."

"I see now."

"Next came the supposed burglary," continued Boyd. "My investigations in Dickson's store soon convinced me that he alone was the burglar. He held large consignments of diamonds, upon which, if he could invent a plausible robbery, he could subsequently realize."

"Surely! But how did he accomplish it?"

"It was quite plain to me. He employed no help, hence he easily contrived to drill and charge the safe without being observed. Next he planned his day away, and what should occur during his absence, which would free him of subsequent suspicion. Ordinarily, a man could not blow open a safe from which he is miles away. Dickson's chief difficulty lay in firing the fuse at a certain time. Yet he accomplished it in a most original and remarkable way."

"How so?"

"He used his reading glass, Jimmie, which he so placed on the sill of the rear window, that it received the beam of sunlight through the round hole in the iron shutter, and focused the rays at a certain point on the floor. The intense heat at the focal point was sufficient not only to ignite the end of the fuse, but even to slightly scorch the pine floor. The two curved lines which I showed you gave me my clew to the mystery."

"In what way?"

"The sun, as you know, deviates very slightly in its course each day. The day before the trick was to be turned, Dickson experimented with his lens to determine the precise spot on which the sun's rays would focus at a certain time. In so doing, one of the tiny scorched curves was inscribed on the floor, as the intense focal point followed the motion of the sun. Next day, however, the sun was a little higher in the heavens, and the corresponding curved line came parallel, and just the least bit removed from the other; but near enough to fire the fuse Dickson had left for it in his closed store, Jimmie."

"By Jove, Felix, you're a wonder!"

"Not at all," laughed Boyd. "You saw as much as I did, only you did not see through it."

"Plainly not."

"Dickson had so carefully planned all this," continued Boyd; "that the reading glass would fall over upon the sill with any jar, and the explosion was sufficient for that. Further convincing me that my theory was correct, the aperture in the shutter was unusually low, nearly at the sill, a condition necessary for one wishing to look in, the rear yard being considerably below the window. So I put this and that together, Jimmie, and felt sure of my man."

"And then, Felix?"

"Then I required absolute proofs, Jimmie, since theories do not always impress juries," responded Boyd. "The fact that Dickson had gone to his shore house after rifling his safe before exploding it, led me to think that he might conceal the diamonds in that locality. So I slipped down there early next morning, and investigated his stable. I did not find the diamonds, but I found the contrivance for firing the stable."

"I see."

"Dickson evidently intended to give the impression that he had secret foes, who were maliciously persecuting him, and thus arouse public sympathy and that of his foreign consignees. So he planned also to burn his own stable, in such a way as to evade personal suspicion. The candle was burning when I got there, and was still good for several hours before reaching the loose hay. Of course I extinguished it, and at once decided that, when his scheme failed, Dickson would again attempt it. I was not mistaken, for he came promptly to time."

Coleman smiled and nodded.

"But his violent death, and the three men who murdered him?" he cried, inquiringly. "Who were they?"

"Ah, Jimmie, there is where the shoe pinches," said Boyd, gravely. "It now is obvious enough, yet I had not suspected it. Plainly those two crimes did not originate in Dickson's brain. I

have learned that he has lost heavily on the curb, Jimmie, which doubtless drove him to these felonious designs in the hope of keeping above water. But Dickson's brain never conceived those two masterly schemes."

"You believe——"

"I believe, Jimmie, that some master knave about here suggested them to him, and showed him the way, yet craftily kept himself in the background. Dickson did the work, and probably his advisers were promised a part of the profits. It may have become Dickson's design to keep the whole, however, the work being successfully done. Hence he must have taken the diamonds to his shore place on his first visit, probably concealing them in the shed from which we saw him emerge."

"Surely! Surely!"

"That his advisers distrusted and subsequently watched him, plainly appears in that they must have followed him down there last night. He must have removed the diamonds from the shed, intending to carry them back to town. Instead, he was viciously assailed by the men who had shadowed him, who doubtless meant to end him, as they did, and make off with the entire lot of stones. My shouts alarmed them, and drove them to flight, before they could accomplish their object. That we found Dickson clutching the diamonds in his death-grip confirms this theory."

"Indeed, yes! But what do you think he tried to say at the finish? We caught one word, Felix. It sounded like why —or wy!"

"It may have meant—why, the beginning of a question," said Boyd. "Or it possibly may have been—Wy, the first syllable of Wykoff!"

"By all the gods, that's so!" cried Coleman. "Meaning that Wykoff was his assassin. If this theory——"

But Mr. Felix Boyd interrupted him with an impressive head-shake.

"There is nothing in theories alone, Jimmie," said he, firmly. "Proofs, not theories, are what we must have. As I have said before, curious things are cropping out about here, and there's a master knave in the background. I mean to find him some day. Meantime, Jimmie, I must prevent his getting a line on me before I get a line on him. So you take all the credit of solving this Dickson mystery, Jimmie, dear fellow, and let me remain obscurely in the background—like the master knave! For when we come together and lock horns, Jimmie, as we surely shall, it must be on an equal footing, Jimmie. So, you, dear fellow, take all the credit for recovering Dickson's diamonds."

The third story, "The Case of the Stolen Cipher," will appear in the next number.

"SEVEN-NINE-CIPHER"

AN OPERATION IN COPPER

BY CHARLES AGNEW MacLEAN

Author of "The Last of the Cargo," Etc.

I.

THE manager of the new copper smelter at Trail City, Mac Pherson, laid a yellow bill of lading on the deal table with which his office was furnished.

"There ye are, Mr. Chalmers," he said, "the stuff was put aboard the car last night. If they make a shift on our siding the day an' there's no more snow, the *matte* ought to get to New York soon after you do."

Mac Pherson was short, bearded, and apple-cheeked.

Chalmers, the young man he addressed, was his physical antithesis.

He was long and lean and powerful, with grim, dogged lips.

The bitter wind of the northwest had stung his face to a deep red.

There was a livid scar which ran back from his forehead and lost itself in the mat of brown hair that covered his big head.

His eyes were gray blue with a combative, pugnacious sparkle to them, and he carried his head thrust forward a little so that one meeting him for the first time noticed, more than anything else, the prominent line of an unusually square chin.

In spite of all this, however, Chalmers was pleasant enough to look at.

His face was full of possibilities in the way of hard hitting and stubborn fighting, but they were only possibilities, for at present he was genial and smiling.

"Have ye been in the business long?" asked Mac Pherson.

"About six months," said Chalmers. "I started in as a mining broker last fall. I wish you luck with your new mine and smelter. You've done pretty well for your first week's work."

Mac Pherson went to the cupboard and drew out a big demijohn and two small glasses.

"Ye'll have a bit o' drink wi' me to celebrate the occasion," he said.

Chalmers glanced at his long ulster lying on a chair, looked out through the icy window at the white, frozen landscape, and then sat down.

The little cabin which represented the office of the new smelter was warm and snug with a red-hot wood stove in the middle of the floor and a great pile of cut wood in the corner.

Chalmers, who was a chemist, had made an examination of the ore in the newly opened mine which had induced him to sign a contract to handle all the *matte* which the smelter turned out.

It was a good contract for Mac Pherson, for it put his mine and smelter on a paying basis at once; but it was a still better contract for Chalmers, who had signed it with a full knowledge of the state of the copper market in New York.

It was the first big deal he had made, and he felt fully repaid for his journey from New York.

The *matte*, which is crude material for the manufacture of copper, assayed a comfortable number of ounces of

copper to the pound, with a little gold and silver as a side product, and Chalmers' inspection of the mine had made him confident that the vein was good for a long time yet.

Altogether, he had done a pretty good job in making the contract, and he stretched out his long legs before the stove with a sigh of comfort and started to whittle a pipe full from a plug of yellow Canadian tobacco.

"There was another chap up here yesterday after my *matte*," said Mac Pherson. "He offered a good price, too, but I had never heard of him before. I wired to New York to make inquiries about him. Here's the answer I got."

He handed over a telegram from a commercial agency in New York, and then raised his glass to his lips. He set it down untasted and looked wonderingly at Chalmers.

The young man's face had undergone a wonderful change.

All the softness, all the geniality, had vanished from it. His eyes had narrowed and brightened, and his mouth had set into a hard line, grim and menacing.

There was a soft, crunching sound, and Chalmers drew his pipe from his mouth with the vulcanite stem bit almost through.

"Munson," he said, in a low voice, "I know that man. He's just what Bradstreet says he is—insolvent—and, besides that, he's one of the worst scoundrels in the business."

"Ye don't seem to be a friend of his," said Mac Pherson.

"I guess not," said Chalmers. "I worked for him once, and he fired me because I refused to salt a sample for him. Then he tried to do me out of a cargo of pyrites I had an option on. He would have killed me, if he could. What's he doing up here?"

"He just wanted to buy that car of *matte* I sold you," said the Scotchman. "He couldn't pay cash, so I turned him down. He went away in a rage when I told him I was selling the stuff to you. I saw him up at the roundhouse at Trail City when I went there this morning to tell them that I had some cars I wanted pulled out of here."

Chalmers tossed off his drink.

"He's up to some mischief," he said. "I know he wants to do me up any way he can. I'm responsible for his failure a while back, and if I'm any judge, he'd give ten years of his life to do me a bad turn. He's in a pretty poor way. He could make a good profit out of that car of *matte* if he got it. There's a good market for it in certain quarters. He's a man who would stop at nothing."

"Faith, he doesn't look as if he would stop at stealing," said Mac Pherson. "I saw him in the caboose talkin' to the conductor. He's a mean-looking chap, wi' a pale face and a scraggly mustache."

"That's the man," said Chalmers, lighting his pipe again. "I wonder what he's doing here? I needn't worry, though; I've got the stuff all safe, and he can't get it."

"Ye might do worse than to watch him," said the Scotchman. "That conductor, Foley, is as mean a dog as he is; and Munson, or whatever ye call him, is just hand in glove wi' him. They were sittin' in the caboose together like two brothers this morning."

"That makes no difference. He can't do anything now, since I've got the *matte*."

"I dare say; but that conductor, lad, is just the boy to steal a car of *matte* just by way of winding things up."

"Steal a car of *matte?*" Chalmers looked at Mac Pherson with a puzzled face.

Mac Pherson smiled and poured out more whiskey.

"I've been in the railroad business, and I've heard of such a thing as painting out the number of a car and shunting it off on a branch line where another car was due. Then, when the car was found again it was empty, and, of course, nobody knew what had become of the stuff that was in it. It had just disappeared mysteriously."

"Do you think there's any possibility——" Chalmers' eyes finished the question.

"Tuts, no!" said Mac Pherson. "Such things have happened, but they don't happen often. Ye might just take a bit o' a look at the car an' see that it's addressed all right when it gets up to Trail City."

"Do you know the division superintendent on the Canadian Pacific?"

"Tuts, yes. He's an English chap. A fine, decent man, too."

Chalmers arose to his feet and picked up his ulster.

"Will ye no' have a wee drop more?" asked Mac Pherson. The "wee drops" he had taken himself had made his Scotch accent strengthen like a flower which responds to kindly watering.

Chalmers shook his head and knocked the dottle out of his pipe. He took a fresh fill of the yellow tobacco before he buttoned up his ulster and drew on his gloves.

"So long," he said.

Mac Pherson was busy with his fourth drink of whiskey, but he waved his hand to Chalmers in genial farewell.

II.

Chalmers had a room in the Victoria Hotel at Trail City. The hotel was small, built of wood, and Chalmers' room was a very small one.

It had a sheet-iron stove in it, however, that made it pleasantly warm in contrast to the bitter cold outdoors.

Chalmers, unused to the rigors of a winter in the Northwest and fresh from warmer weather in New York, was glad enough to sit by his stove in the evening and smoke his pipe.

His car of *matte*, Number 79, had been shunted up into the yards in Trail City late that afternoon, and was to start on its long journey south early the next morning.

All his work was over in connection with the deal, but as he sat and smoked he did not feel particularly easy in his mind.

The appearance of Munson in Trail City—he had seen the man himself, slouching about the railroad yards—worried him.

Munson's name and face brought unpleasant ideas to his head, and Mac Pherson's words had given him a vague, shadowy suspicion which he might laugh at, but which he could not dismiss from his mind.

He felt that he ought to have been happy and contented after having made a successful contract, but the face of Munson, his enemy, haunted him.

The loss of the car of *matte* would mean the loss of a customer for the material, and a flat failure for his whole plan for making a revenue out of the product of the Trail City smelter.

He bit viciously at the stem of his pipe as he smoked, and finally flung the pipe on the floor and reached for his ulster.

Ten minutes later he was outdoors, crunching the snow under his heavy boots and wincing as the icy wind smote him in the face.

There was no moon, but a deep blue velvet sky with stars which twinkled brighter than Chalmers had ever seen them shine before and a mysterious, silent, white landscape, stretching on every side.

The railroad yards were before him about half a mile away. He walked briskly in that direction, thinking that he would take another look at his car of *matte* to quiet his mind before he turned in for the night.

There were several lines of freight cars and an engine in one corner of the yard.

Chalmers knew where Car 79 had been placed—at the end of a long line of other cars. The yards were deserted, and he walked in the direction of his car.

As he approached it, he heard the crunching of snow on the other side of it. He stepped around the end of the car and looked about him.

Several hundred feet away he could distinguish a tall, high-shouldered figure receding from him.

Before he could take more than a passing glance at it, the shadow cast by another line of cars had swallowed it up.

He turned around and looked at the

car beside him, read its number and made sure that it contained his copper. He glanced at the door, and with a muttered exclamation stepped closer to it.

The waybill which contained specifications of the contents and destination of the car, had been torn off.

Chalmers remembered that he had seen it on the car in the afternoon, and noticed that it was directed properly.

There was certainly no waybill there now.

Chalmers passed his hand over the door, felt the tacks with which the waybill had been attached to the car, and noticed that some pieces of the cardboard were still sticking to it. He thought of the figure he had seen moving away from the car, but it had vanished entirely. Then he looked down at the snow.

It was crusted and hard, but bore the marks of several feet. Chalmers tried to follow one trail which led away from the car, but it took him all his time to see the track at all in the darkness, and he lost it entirely before he had gone far.

He was still trying to distinguish the footprints where they lost themselves in a maze of similar prints at a switch, when the puff and rumble of an approaching locomotive made him start erect.

A locomotive, pushing before it a caboose, was moving along the track on which his car stood. The engine stopped abruptly at a switch with a hiss of steam and grinding of brakes, but the caboose was sent sliding along, finally bumping against his car of *matte*.

They were evidently making up the train which was to leave the yards at 5 A. M., and this was the caboose which was to carry the conductor in charge of the train.

A man stepped out on the snow, his head and shoulders silhouetted in the warm light from the caboose window.

The shoulders were high and angular. Chalmers recognized them at once as belonging to the man he had tried to follow in the darkness a few moments before.

He took a few steps, and the high-shouldered man evidently heard his feet crunching on the snow, for Chalmers could see his head tilted forward, peering into the darkness and listening.

Chalmers came to a standstill, although he could have given no motive for wishing to avoid attention.

The high-shouldered man stood in a listening attitude for a moment, and then moved off along the line of the train of cars.

He halted about twenty feet away from Chalmers opposite Car 79. He was evidently interested in the car as well as Chalmers, for he stood with his hand on the door for a moment looking at it.

Then he turned, and saw Chalmers. Chalmers walked a step nearer, and looked in his face.

It was a face which ordinarily was red and bloated, but at the present moment it was blanched into an ugly, mottled pallor, noticeable even in that dim light.

The high-shouldered man was evidently startled at seeing Chalmers.

He gulped once or twice as though he were trying to swallow something, and then addressed him.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

Chalmers stepped nearer the car before he answered.

"I'm just looking around here," he said, "I've got a car of *matte* that's to go out on the 5 A. M. train, and I wanted to see if it was here," said Chalmers.

The other drew away from him a little.

"A car of copper, eh?" he said; "it must be on the other track. All these are empties."

"Who are you?" asked Chalmers.

"I'm the conductor—Foley's my name."

"You're the conductor, are you? Then you ought to know that this car is full of *matte*. It's the car that my stuff is loaded on."

Foley looked at the car, and scratched his head. He stole a side glance at Chalmers, and caught a

glimpse of his square jaw and deep-set eyes.

"That's so," he said at length; "it is a car of copper."

"Where's the waybill?" asked Chalmers.

"I'll put that on in about ten minutes. I have it up in the caboose. It's a fine night, isn't it? Looks like a little more snow, though."

Foley was making a desperate effort to get off the subject of the car, but Chalmers was pitiless.

"Where's the waybill I saw tacked on there this afternoon?" he asked.

"Must have fallen off," said the conductor. "Good-night." He turned, and walked away toward the caboose.

Chalmers hurried off in the direction of the wooden cabin occupied by Mac Pherson.

Mac Pherson was sitting alone in company with his demijohn and a copy of Burns.

"I won't sit down," said Chalmers. "I want you to go out with me, and introduce me to the superintendent of the division here. I think that man Munson has some plot on hand to get hold of my car. The waybill was torn off it, and I saw Foley, the conductor, hanging about there. He acted mighty suspiciously."

Mac Pherson listened while Chalmers told his story in detail. Then he reached for his hat and coat.

"I may be an old fool for going out on an errand like this," he said, "but I have a feeling that there's something afoot. Brainerd will laugh at me, but I'm going to tell him my suspicions all the same."

When they reached the superintendent's house he had just arisen from the supper table. He handed cigars to Mac Pherson and Chalmers, and asked Mac Pherson what he meant by coming out on such a night.

"It's no me that would have come out had it not been for my friend, Mr. Chalmers, here," said the Scotchman. "We have a sort of a suspeecion that there's a man named Munson hanging about here wanting to steal a car of *matte* that I'm sending down to New York for Mr. Chalmers."

The superintendent took a long puff at his cigar, and stared at them.

"I've met this Munson," he said. "But what are you fellows driving at? Steal a car of *matte!* What are you talking about?"

"Ye've heard yarns about cars being stolen by having the numbers painted out," said Mac Pherson.

"Don't you think that such a thing is possible?" asked Chalmers.

"No, I don't," said Brainerd; "those things don't happen on the Canadian Pacific."

"It seems a mad-like idea," said Mac Pherson, apologetically; "an' maybe I've mysel' to blame for putting it in this young man's head."

"You got that idea out of a whiskey bottle, Mac." The superintendent laughed, and smote Mac Pherson on the back.

"My friend here has some grounds for suspicion," said the Scotchman.

Brainerd stopped laughing, while Chalmers told about his meeting with Foley in the railroad yards.

Then he shook his head with a smile.

"You've discovered a mare's nest, my boy," he said. "Mac, here, has been taking too much out of his demijohn, and having dreams. Only a very desperate man would think of such a thing. He would have to take the conductor into his confidence."

"This man Munson is hand in glove wi' the conductor," said Mac Pherson; "and ye know yersel' that yon Foley's as mean a hound as ever ran a train."

"Nonsense!" said Brainerd; "the whole idea is ridiculous."

"It may seem ridiculous to you," said Chalmers, leaning forward in his chair, "but it wouldn't if you knew this man. Look here," Chalmers pushed back his hair, and showed the scar on his forehead, "Munson gave me that, and he was trying to kill me when he did it. I broke up a scheme of his, and caused his failure. He'd go to jail to do me a bad turn. Listen to me.

"Thirty-five miles south of this there's a smelter owned by a man named Slate,

a relative of his. I know Slate, too, and I know that there's no copper near his place, and that he wants to sell his mine. If he could turn out a car load or so of good copper from the smelter he might sell out to somebody who wasn't very wise about the tricks of the trade. Munson might have worked up a game to steal the car, and send it there. He'd do it for the value of the stuff, but he's got a stronger motive than that. He knows that I want this stuff to fill contracts, and he thinks that he can put me out of business by getting it. He figures that I'm new in the game, and that he can freeze me out without any trouble."

Chalmers did not say that Munson would find it harder than he thought to freeze him out.

His face said it, though, and Brainerd knew it, and looked at the young man with more respect than he had shown him before. He was still unconvinced, however.

"That's all very well," he said, "but nobody could work a scheme like that, and get away with it."

"Isn't it possible to steal a freight car?"

"It's physically possible, I suppose. So is train robbery, for that matter. So is an earthquake. Only a very desperate man would attempt a wild scheme such as you suggest."

"He is a desperate man. He's ruined. His money's gone, and his credit's gone."

Brainerd shook his head impatiently, and knocked the ashes from his cigar.

"What do you want me to do, anyway?" he asked.

"Put a new conductor on that run."

"Impossible," said Brainerd, sharply. "Your suspicions of Foley are all founded on that idea that you have in your head. If you hadn't been thinking of the possibility of the car being stolen, you would have noticed nothing queer in his manner. Let me tell you something else, Mr. Chalmers. This railroad is responsible for the freight it carries. It's a good joke, your idea of putting another conductor there, but really it's nothing more."

Chalmers stared at the superintendent in silence for a moment. Then he arose stiffly to his feet.

"I'm sorry we don't agree," he said. "Good-evening."

He turned abruptly, and started toward the door.

Brainerd watched his figure as he walked away. Then he followed him a step or two.

"Wait a moment, Mr. Chalmers," he said, "I'll tell you what I *will* do."

He told Chalmers, and it took him some time in the telling. It was late that night when Chalmers and Mac Pherson left the superintendent's house.

III.

Five A. M. and bitter cold. Foley, the conductor, tossed off a big cup of black coffee in the caboose, then he buttoned his coat up, pulled his cap down over his eyes, and went out on the track.

The long train of freight cars was made up, and the fireman was building up the fires in the hissing locomotive at the other end. The wind had died down, and it was a beautiful still night, gleaming white below and star-spangled blue above.

There was a new brakeman on this run. Foley saw him walking along the track beside the train.

"You know the right car, I suppose?" he said to him.

The brakeman nodded in silence.

"We'll come to a stop about five miles out," he said; "it isn't quite safe to work the job here. You have the paint down in the engine cab. You're the swing man this trip, and so you are supposed to stay outside on the top of the car, but if you can rig up a coat and cap and tie it to the brake to look like a man it will be all right for you to find a warm bunk up in the engine cab with the other brakeman."

The brakeman nodded again, and swung himself up the iron ladder to the top of the car. The conductor watched him till he reached the top.

Then he turned back to his caboose, and a moment later the long line of freight cars was rumbling out of the yards.

The train swung eastward around a wide curve, and then started south across a gleaming star-lit expanse of country.

The wind whistled about the ears of the "swing" brakeman.

He lowered his head to meet the icy blast, which seemed to have the force and intensity of a stream of water.

In fifteen minutes the escape valve hissed on the locomotive, and the brakes ground hard on its wheels. A moment later the train had bumped and rumbled to a standstill.

The brakeman swung himself to the ground, holding to the rungs of the iron ladder with half-numb fingers. Foley met him, and handed him a pot of white paint and a brush.

"You know what to do," he said, curtly.

The brakeman nodded, and drew off his heavy fur glove. Then he started to work. He progressed slowly, stopping every moment or so to warm his fingers by blowing on them.

The new brakeman was evidently not particularly skillful at lettering, but he took his time at the job, in spite of the cold, and finally completed it.

In the half light no one could have told that the number had been tampered with.

He stepped back, and surveyed it, and then with a satisfied nod of the head tossed his paint and brushes from him into the snow.

When the train started there was a scarecrow, made up of an old mackinaw coat and a fur cap, presiding at the brake.

It was a run of thirty-five miles to the first stop.

This was at a siding called Glenmore, where the Slate copper smelter was located.

The train made rather a slow run of it, and it was just daybreak when the tall chimneys of the smelter came in sight.

At the railroad track at the siding stood Munson and his cousin, Jim Slate.

The sun was just arising over the hills to the east in a blaze of gold and rose color, but Munson was not looking in that direction.

He was looking north along the polished rails, and he bit nervously at his mustache as he heard the distant hoot of the locomotive whistle.

Munson had been waiting for that whistle for over an hour, and he started at a brisk walk along the track as though he intended to meet the oncoming train.

Then it hove in sight, black and distinct against the morning sky, and with its long line of thundering freight cars bent almost to a semicircle at the nearby turn.

Munson seized Slate by the shoulder.

"It's the end car next to the caboose," he said, hoarsely. "Look at it."

The train rattled past them at a decreasing rate of speed. A switchman ran out from the station master's shack. Then the caboose dropped behind, rolling along at a reduced speed. Then the last freight car was dropped. It did not follow the train, but shot to one side on a switch, and a moment later had stopped up on the siding belonging to the Slate Copper Smelter.

Munson cast one glance at the side of the car. To his eye, in the morning light, it was evident that the cipher had been changed, although one glancing casually at the car would have noticed nothing strange about it. It had deceived the station master at Glenmore, anyway.

Munson stopped biting the end of his mustache, and drew in his breath in a deep sigh. His scheme had been a success. He turned and waved his hand to Foley, who was visible beside the caboose.

Then he started on a run for the freight car which he had stolen.

"There it is, Jim!" he cried. "All we have to do is to get it out now. There's forty tons of the best *matte* in Canada."

He stood for a moment looking at the car, his eyes gleaming, his cheeks hot with the flush of triumph.

Slate walked over to the car, and, breaking the seal, pushed open the sliding door at the side. He peered into the dark interior for a moment, and turned a puzzled face to Munson.

"There's nothing here," he said.

Munson laughed, and bounded past him.

"You can't see it," he said; "it's loaded on the ends so that the weight will fall on the trucks. It's heavy stuff."

Then he climbed into the car. For a moment there was silence. Then Slate, standing outside, heard a great gasp, followed by a voice that he scarcely recognized.

It had changed, and run up several keys into a horrible falsetto.

"The car's empty. We're cheated. It's empty——"

Munson broke off in a wild yell, and a moment later leaped from the car door into the snow. After him came a man—a tall man with a grim face, an undershot jaw and a scar on his forehead.

It was Chalmers.

Munson had fallen, and he struggled to his feet. He looked at the man before him, his face the color of ashes.

Chalmers thrust his head a little forward, his hands deep in his pockets, his face stern and merciless.

"I've got you right this time," he said. "You attempted to steal a freight car, and you'll go to jail for it."

"What—how?" Munson was not master of himself, and could scarcely speak at all.

Chalmers looked at him with an angry curl of the lip.

"How?" he said; "because I discovered your plot, and painted in the cipher myself. Now I've got you red-handed."

"You've no evidence against me."

Munson laid his hand on Slate's shoulder, and tried to steady himself.

"I have evidence," said Chalmers. "Foley, the man you hired, confessed the whole game. He's a weak man, and we got it all out of him. He agreed to help me work this plan to catch you when Supt. Brainerd threatened him with jail, and his name on the blacklist of every railroad in America. I went as brakeman in place of the man you had bought over. Foley told us how the game was to be worked. I painted 790 on an empty car. My car is on its way down the main line now."

Munson heard, and understood.

He glanced for a moment at the tall figure before him, then he cast a furtive glance around him.

He saw Foley advancing along the track, and raised his clinched hand in his direction.

"D—n you," he cried. "I'll fix you for this."

"Stop that," said Chalmers; "Mr. Brainerd is here. He's a deputy sheriff, and you're going back to Trail City as his prisoner."

At that moment Brainerd appeared from the other end of the car.

Munson looked at the two men in front of him, and backed away from them, his eyes restless and shifting like the eyes of a caged animal.

Then he sprang forward as though he meant to dash past the two of them.

"Stop," said Chalmers.

His right hand had emerged from his pocket, and there was a revolver in it.

Munson saw it, and stood as if turned to stone.

"Walk before me back to that caboose," said Chalmers; "we will leave your cousin, Slate, behind for the present. We have no proof of anything against him."

Munson heard him, and obeyed.

He walked toward the caboose, cowed and beaten, cringing before the revolver muzzle.

O'Rourke, Gentleman Adventurer

A TALE OF THE EMPIRE OF SAHARA

BY LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

Author of "The Moccasin Lode," "The Squeeze in 'Transit,'" Etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE SPUR OF NECESSITY.

TERENCE O'ROURKE swung his chair about and sat down, facing the open window, upon whose sill he cocked his feet. His pipe was handy, and from it he sought consolation, and found it. In time the smoke eddied about the narrow walls in purple reefs.

By degrees, however, his smile faded. Not always was it possible for O'Rourke to laugh in the teeth of his adversities.

His gaze wandered far out from the open window and over the billowy sea of Parisian roofs that steamed in a bath of May sunshine.

The morning was one clear and brilliant, following on the heels of a day of scourging rain. Paris was happy; her face was washed, she had on a clean pinafore—dashed with the perfume of the spring things that were budding in her gardens. O'Rourke, perhaps alone, was out of tune with the universal spirit of contentment.

Now, good reasons why a man may be out of sorts in a Parisian springtide are few and far between; but they exist.

O'Rourke had brought his with him when he had come to the capital on the edge of the winter, just vanished; and thereafter he ate, slept, moved and had his being in their company, enduring with what patience he might—which was not overmuch, in truth. But now he was especially wistful and uneasy in his actions.

His supply of ready cash was not alarmingly low; it was non-existent—one all-sufficient reason for the disquietude of his soul.

Again, city life irked the man, who was of a nature transient, delaying under one roof no longer than was unavoidable—happiest, indeed, with but the wide sky for his bed canopy, the soft stars for his night lamps.

And, finally, for some months O'Rourke had been kicking the heels of him about the pavements of civilization, devoutly praying for a war of magnitude; but in answer to his prayers no war had been vouchsafed unto him.

The broad world drowsed, sluggish, at peace with its neighbors—save in a corner of Afghanistan, where the British Empire was hurling army corps after army corps at the devoted heads of an insignificant, bewildered tribe of hillmen who had presumed to call their souls their own—knowing no better.

But the tempest in that particular teapot had slight attractions for O'Rourke, sincere seeker after distraction and destruction that he was. He felt rather sorry for the hill tribe, who at the same time were beginning to feel rather more than sorry for themselves, and to wish that they hadn't done so.

The Irishman, however, positively refused to fight with, if he did not care to fight against, England. So there was, in his own disconsolate phrasing, nothing doing at all, at all.

And—the *concierge* insisted upon the payment of that overdue rent. Plainly, something must be contrived, and that quickly.

O'Rourke swore, yawned, stretched widely. He removed his feet from the window sill, and arose.

"I'll do it," he said aloud. "Faith, 'tis like pulling teeth—but I'll do it. I despise the necessity—— *Conspuez* the necessity! *A bas* the necessity!"

At the foot of his bed stood his sole personal property—a small, iron-bound trunk, aged and disreputable to the eye, sown broadcast with the labels of hotels, of railways and of steamships.

O'Rourke went to it with a deep, heartfelt sigh, unlocked it and for a space delved into its tumbled contents, in the end emerging flushed and triumphant from his search, with a watch in his hand—a watch of fine gold, richly chased, studded with gems.

He shook his head, gazing upon it, and sighed deeply.

Long since the timepiece had been presented to O'Rourke by the grateful president of a South American republic, in recognition of the Irish adventurer's services as a captain-general under that republic's flag. It was so inscribed within the case.

Col. O'Rourke treasured it lovingly, as he treasured the portrait of his mother, the love of the land of his nativity, the parting smile of his last sweetheart. He treasured it as he valued his honorable discharge from the Foreign Legion, or the sword he had won in Cuba, or the captain's commission he had once held under the Grecian flag.

But—the rent!

He slammed his hat upon his head, the watch into his pocket, and the door behind him; he was going to call upon his "aunt in Montmartre."

When he returned he was minus the timepiece, but able to reinstate himself in the *concierge's* graces. Indeed, as she signed the receipt, the lady declared that she had always known in her soul that monsieur was an honorable gentleman.

O'Rourke accepted the honeyed words sourly, disgruntled to the extreme. He had a balance of a very few francs; actual hardship was but staved off for several days. Nevertheless, he indulged himself in the luxury of a complete file of the day's papers.

Back in his little room again, he read them all, thoroughly, even with eagerness; read the foreign news first, then the native, the scandal, the advertisements, even the editorials.

He found that England had completed her subjugation of the hill tribes, and incidentally the education of her rawest troops. But on the horizon no war cloud threatened—unless in one spot.

From a meager paragraph, eked out by his knowledge of Central American politics, Col. O'Rourke gleaned a ray of hope; trouble boded on the Isthmus of Panama. But that was very far from Paris.

He dropped his pipe and the last sheet, leaned his elbows on the window sill, and glowered longingly across the roofs to the western sky line.

What his eyes rested upon, he saw not; mentally he was imaging to himself, scenting, even feeling the heat haze that lowers above that narrow ribbon of swamp, rock spined, which lies obdurate between two oceans.

On his businesses of the moment, he had crossed the isthmus several times. He had warred in its vicinity. He knew it very well indeed, and were there to be ructions there, he desired greatly to be in and a part of them; to grip the hilt of a sword, to hold a horse between his thighs, to sweat and swelter, to toil and to suffer, to fight—above all, to fight——!

Clearly the obvious course of action was to go—to stand not on the order of his going, but to go at once.

O'Rourke started from his chair, with some half-formulated notion of proceeding directly to the Gare du Nord, and there taking train for Havre; thence by the French line to New York, thence by coasting steamer to Aspinwall.

The route mapped itself plain to his

imagination; the way was simple, very; there was but one complication. Realizing which O'Rourke sat down again, and cursed bitterly, if fluently.

"The divvle!" he murmured, in disgust. "Now, if I hadn't been so enthusiastic for paying me rent——"

He produced his fortune and contemplated it with a doleful, disgusted glare; five silver francs and a centime or two, glittering bright in the rays of the declining sun.

"Why, sure," he mused, "'tis not enough to buy the dinner for a little bird—and 'tis meself that's no small bird!"

Now, how may a man by taking thought increase five francs one or two or three hundred fold?

At nightfall he gave it up, the problem unsolvable. There seemed to be no way out at all, at all, and O'Rourke was considering himself a much abused person with no friend to call his own the wide world 'round, barring——

"Paz!" he cried, suddenly. "And why did I not think upon Paz before, will ye tell me?"

He sat silent for some time, wrapped in thought.

"Likely am I to go hungry, the night," he admitted at length, gayly; "but I'll dine in style or not at all."

Incontinently, he began to move about the narrow room—how he had grown to hate its mean confines of late!—making ready to go out.

He started by shaving his lean cheeks, indelibly sun darkened, very closely; then wriggled into the one immaculate shirt his wardrobe boasted; brushed with care and donned his evening clothes and an inverness; and completed his adornment with gloves and a pair of shoes of the sleekest—which he had been hoarding all the winter against such an emergency.

And when through he permitted himself an approving inspection in his mirror, and nodded with satisfaction because of the transformation he had brought about in his personal appearance.

"I'll say this for ye, Terence, me lad," he volunteered; "when you're of the mind to take trouble with yourself, 'tis the bowld, dashing creature ye are!"

He chuckled happily at his own conceit as he put out the light and locked the door.

Yet he had no more than indicated the truth; he was not ill favored by nature; a man tall and broad beyond the average, with long, straight limbs well-knit, a face of versatile mobility lit with eyes warm, keen, true; a man bearing himself confidently, with assurance, but without aggressiveness; a man seasoned and—young.

As he passed the *conciergerie,* Madame Therese, the vigilant, observed him and admired, regretting the harsh words she had given the O'Rourke earlier in the day, and resolved to treat the splendid m'sieur with more consideration in the future.

It so happened that Madame Therese was deprived of the opportunity to do so for many days; the turn of affairs presently precluded O'Rourke's return to his little room—not greatly to his dissatisfaction, however.

But O'Rourke himself had no more warning of this than had the *concierge;* he was anticipating an early return, and that did not improve his temper. In the street he turned, and growled at his lodgings, hating them consumedly.

And then—"'Tis damnable!" he declared, with a short laugh. "To think of me, in my fine feathers, that can't even afford the price of a *fiacre!*"

CHAPTER II.

CHEZ PAZ.

The house of Paz fronts upon the Boulevard Rochechouart—which is not the worst street in Paris, morally, but near it—and wears the dismayed, ingenuous expression of a perfectly innocent house which suddenly finds itself rooted in a neighborhood which is—well, *not* perfectly innocent.

In other words, the house managed

by M. Paz is something of a hypocrite among houses.

In sober reality it is not better than it ought to be, or even not so good.

It has a high, pale yellow façade, broken by orderly rows of windows that are always blank and sleepy-looking; never is a light visible from within, and for a very good reason. They are fitted with an ingenious device which allows for ventilation, but does not permit a single ray of light to escape to the street.

Somewhat after eight o'clock in the evening, Col. O'Rourke approached, having walked the width of Paris to reach it.

In previous, more prosperous days he had known the house of Paz rather intimately—too well for his own good, at times. But of late, in his lowly estate, he had neither cared nor dared to pass its portals; which are not for the impecunious.

At present, however, he had a use for it, and was relying both upon his former acquaintance therein and his generally affluent appearance to procure for him admittance to its charmed precincts—something not too easy to a stranger without credentials.

He neared it, I say, and with some trepidation, becoming to a man of emotions who is going to stake his all on a single throw—which was what O'Rourke proposed to do—eying the exterior aspect of the place with a wonder as to what changes might have occurred within, in the few years that he had been absent from its tables.

While yet some distance away he saw the door open with circumspection. For a single second the figure of a departing patron was outlined in the light; then the doors swung to, swiftly, noiselessly.

O'Rourke observed, without great interest, that it was a young man who was leaving so early in the night; a man who stood hesitant at the foot of the steps, glancing up and down the street irresolutely, as one who knows not where to go.

In a moment, however, he had made up his mind and started off toward O'Rourke, walking briskly, but without any spring in his movements, holding his head high, his shoulders back. There was a suggestion of the military in his bearing.

Col. O'Rourke observed the tightly compressed lips, the hopeless, unlit eyes of the man as they passed one another.

"Cleaned out—poor chap!" he sympathized.

Simultaneously the doors open again, briefly; a second man emerged, ran hastily down the steps, and started up the street as though in pursuit of the first.

This man was of an uncommon, distinguished appearance; large and heavily built, yet lithe and active; with a fat-cheeked face, bearded sparsely, with thick lips showing red through the dark hair, a thin chiseled nose set between eyes pouched, yet lively, the whole surmounted by a forehead high and well modeled—a type of Teutonic intellectuality, in short.

He swung past the Irishman hurriedly, intent upon his chase, but favoring him with a searching scrutiny which O'Rourke returned with composure, if not with impudent, interest.

But the evening was yet young, and there was nothing in the encounter to particularly engage his fancy; he dismissed it from his mind, and turned into the house of Paz.

He knocked—the familiar signal of old. A minute passed, a panel in the door slid back, exposing a small grating behind which was the withered face of the *concierge,* with a background of dim, religious light.

"O'Rourke," said the Irishman, languidly, turning his face to the window for identification.

That was scarcely needed. His name was a magic one; the *concierge* knew, and had a welcome for one who had been so liberal in the matter of tips in days gone by. The doors swung wide.

"M'sieur O'Rourke!" murmured the *concierge,* bowing respectfully.

Col. O'Rourke returned the greeting and passed in, with the guilty feeling of a trespasser. He disposed of his inverness and hat, and ascended the stairway, directly, to the second floor.

Here was one huge room, in floor space covering the width and depth of the building, infinitely gorgeous in decoration, shimmering with light, reflected from gold leaf, from polished wood and marble.

Around the walls were chairs and small refreshment tables; the floor was covered with rugs of heavy pile, well-nigh invaluable, the walls with paintings of note and distinction. Beyond reasonable doubt, M. Paz was prosperous, who could provide such a *salle* for the entertainment of his patrons.

But in the center of the room was the main attraction—that lodestone which drew the minds of the initiated with an irresistible fascination, as the magnetic pole holds the needle; an enormous table topped with green cloth whereon was limned a diagram of many numbered spaces and colors.

And in the middle of the table, under the electric chandelier, was a sunken basin of ebony, at whose bottom was a wheel of thirty-seven sections, alternately red and black, each numbered from 0 to 36; the roulette wheel.

O'Rourke slid unostentatiously into a vacant seat at the extreme end of the table. The man at his elbow looked up with passing curiosity, but immediately averted his gaze; otherwise the Irishman attracted no attention.

For a few minutes he sat idle, watching the play, the players, the croupier presiding over the wheel—a figure that fascinated his imagination, a man vulture-like in his frigid impassivity, mathematically marvelous in the swiftness, the unerring accuracy of his mental computations as he paid out the winnings or raked in the losings.

He stood, imperturbable, watching the board with vigilant, tired eyes, his bald head shining like glass under the sagging electric sunburst. From time to time he opened his wicked old mouth, and croaked dismally the winning number and color, whether odd or even. Followed the ring of coin and the monotonous injunction:

"Messieurs, faites vos jeux!"

The *salle* was very still, save for the sound of the spinning ivory ball, the click of the wheel, the cries of the croupier.

To O'Rourke, new from the freshness of the spring air outdoors, the atmosphere was stifling, depressing—hot, fetid, lifeless though charged with the hopes and fears of those absorbed men who clustered around the board, scattering its painted face with coin and bills, hanging breathlessly on the words of the croupier——

He was not yet ready to bet; he had counted on the room being more crowded, forgetting the early hour. He had but one play to make, the lowest the house permitted—five francs.

And it was so insignificant a sum that the man felt some embarrassment about offering it, fearing that it might attract sneering comment. In a crowd it might have passed, especially if he lost; as, in all likelihood, he would.

He summoned an attendant and ordered a cigar—"on the house"—to make time; and while he was waiting, watched the man opposite him, at the farther end of the table.

The latter was young, weary and worried, if his facial expression went for aught; he played feverishly, scattering gold pieces over the cloth—as often as not, probably betting against himself.

His face was flushed, for he had been drinking more than would have been good for his judgment.

O'Rourke fancied he recognized in him the youthful lieutenant of a cavalry troop then quartered near Paris.

Abruptly a man flung into the room, angrily; at the door he paused, collected himself, scanning each player narrowly, then chose a seat near the lieutenant.

"Hello!" thought O'Rourke. "So you're back so soon! I wonder—— Well, none of my business, I suppose."

It was the man with the beard whom he had noticed leaving the gambling house in such apparent haste.

The attendant returned with the cigar; the Irishman lit it leisurely, and sat puffing with an enjoyment heightened by the fact that he had been deprived of cigars for some weeks.

Presently he turned his attention to

the board, and acted a little farce for his own self-satisfaction.

With the air of a man of means, who merely desires to while away an idle hour—win or lose—O'Rourke put his hand in his breast pocket, and produced a small wallet, tolerably plump and opulent-looking—a result due to ingenious stuffing with paper of no value. But that was his personal secret.

He weighed it in his palm, seeming to debate with himself, then returned it. His manner spoke plainly to the observer—were there one—"No, I'll risk but a trifle of change."

Abstractedly he thrust his fingers into his waistcoat pocket and brought out the said change; to his utter surprise it was no more than five silver francs!

But—— Finally he made up his mind to play it.

At that moment the ball rattled, was silent. There was an instant's strained silence. The wheel stopped.

"Vingt-quatre," remarked the dispassionate croupier; *"noir, pair et passe!"*

He poised his rake, overlooking the great board.

The lieutenant arose suddenly, knocking over his chair; he stood swaying for a moment, his fingers beating a nervous tattoo upon the edge of the board; he was pale, his face hollow seeming and hopeless in the strong illumination.

Others looked at him incuriously. He put his hand to his lips, almost apologetically, essayed what might have been a defiant smile, turned, and moved uncertainly toward the staircase, as one gropes his way in darkness—a ruined man.

"Messieurs, faites vos jeux!"

O'Rourke hardly heard the words; he was wondering at the bearded man, who was prompt in following the defeated gamester.

"Like to know what's your game," muttered O'Rourke.

Simultaneously, without actually thinking what he was doing, he placed the five francs on the cloth. When he looked he saw that they stood upon the nearest space, the 36. He pursed his lips, thinking what a pitiful little pile they made.

"Aw, 'tis the fool I am!" he admitted, wishing that he might withdraw. But the ball merely mocked him as the wheel slackened speed, with its *"whrr rup-tup-tup!"*

"A fool——" he began again.

But it seemed that he had won.

"It's not true!" he cried, exultantly incredulous. But he accepted the one hundred and eighty francs without a murmur, cast them recklessly upon the black, and multiplied the sum by two, and by blind luck.

Then, with his heart in his mouth—it was all or nothing with him now—he allowed his winnings to lie upon the black; which again came up, making seven hundred and twenty francs to his credit.

"'Tis outrageous," he insisted. "Will I be making it, now?"

Fifteen hundred francs was the mark he had set himself to win to; that much he needed to carry him to Panama; it must be that or nothing at all. He divided his winnings, reserving half, scattering the remaining half about the numbers with hope high in his heart.

He lost. He played and won again. And again. He reached the mark, passed it, asked himself should he stop now, when the gods were favoring him.

He need not have asked; he could not have stopped; the gambling fever was rioting in his veins. He played on, and on, and on. He won fabulously, with few reverses; lived for a time in a heaven of wealth, upborne by the fluttering golden wings of chance—and awoke as from a dream, to find himself staring at an empty spot on the board before him—the place where temporarily his riches had rested ere they took unto themselves wings and vanished.

Not a single franc remained to him. He had lost.

"Gone?" he muttered, blankly. "Faith, I didn't think——" He became aware that he was being watched indifferently; though in particular the man with the beard was observing him with interest, having for a third time returned.

O'Rourke yawned indifferently, sud-

denly on his mettle; he was not going to let them see that he cared.

"Five francs," he thought, arising; "small price for a night's entertainment. Sure, I got the worth of me money, in excitement."

He looked at the clock; to his amazement the hands indicated two in the morning. Now the room was half deserted, the attendants gaping discreetly behind their hands. A few earnest devotees still clustered about the table, winning or losing in a blaze of febrile haste.

The ball clattered hollowly; the tones of the croupier only were the same:

"Onze! Noir, impair et manque!" and *"Messieurs, faites vos jeux!"*—as though it were an epitaph, as it too often is.

And as he left the room, O'Rourke marked that the bearded man was pushing back his chair and arising.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIACRE.

Col. O'Rourke found the night air soft and balmy, humid but refreshing. He walked with great, limb-stretching strides, throwing back his shoulders and expanding his chest—bathing his lungs, so to speak, with the cleansing atmosphere.

His way led him straight across the city, a walk of no slight distance to his lodgings; but he made a detour to prolong it, to give the exercise an opportunity to clear his brain and steady his nerves—unstrung as they were, from his recent excitement as from the action of an opiate.

It was later than he thought; for he could not immediately believe that time had flown so rapidly in the house of Paz. Only the almost deserted streets in which his footsteps echoed loud and lonely, the quietness that lay upon the city, the repose of the gendarmes on the corners, brought home to him the wee smallness of the hour.

He was not sleepy—anything but that; he was very much awake—and yet he was dreaming, holding a *"post-mortem"* (as he termed it) on his luck and his misfortunes of the night, and planning toward his future; or, rather, he was striving to solve the riddle of his future, drear and uncompromising as it then loomed.

For the present—it came to him as a distinct shock—he was exceedingly hungry, and, through his own folly, without the wherewithal to satisfy that young and healthy appetite.

But he told himself that he, an old campaigner who had known keen deprivation in his time, could stave off starvation by reefing in his belt. "A light stomach makes a light conscience," was the aphorism from which he was seeking consolation when he noticed that he was being followed.

Quick, determined footsteps were sounding in the street behind him.

"Is it possible," he inquired aloud, "that me friend with the Vandyke beard is after me with his nefarious designs, now? I've half a mind to stop and let him interview me."

He glanced over his shoulder; the man behind was passing under a light about a block distant; O'Rourke judged that he was a heavy, bulky man with a beard.

"The same!" he cried, pleased with the strangeness of the affair. "Faith, now, I'll be giving him a run for his money."

He mended his pace, lengthening his stride; but the other was obstinate, not to be shaken off. For some time O'Rourke could tell by the sound that the distance between them was neither increasing nor decreasing; and then he began to puzzle his head about the pursuer's object.

The man had dogged two men, at least, beside O'Rourke himself, from the gambling house; and each had been, or seemed to be, broken in fortune; therefore likely to be more or less desperate, ready to seize upon any chance to recoup.

What had he to offer ruined gamesters, O'Rourke wondered? His in-

quisitiveness made his feet to lag; for he would find out; and he cast about for an excuse to halt altogether, finding it in the half of a cold cigar that he had been chewing upon unconsciously.

He felt in his pocket for a match, and stopped to light it under one of the arches of the Rue de Rivoli.

His man came up rapidly. O'Rourke dallied with the match, pretending an interest in the odd aspect of the almost desolate street, so generally populous.

"Monsieur——"

He jumped, by premeditation, and looked around. The man with the beard stood by his side, breathing heavily. O'Rourke eyed him gravely.

"The top of the morning to ye, sir," he said, courteously; "and what can I have the pleasure of doing for ye, may I ask?"

The other recovered his breath in gasps, begging for time with an uplifted, expressive hand. He bowed ponderously, and O'Rourke made him a graceful leg, his eyes twinkling with amusement; the Irishman was no more than a boy at heart, fun-loving, and resolved to extract what entertainment he might from the Frenchman.

"Monsieur, I have a favor to ask——"

"A thousand, if you will——"

The man was quick witted; he saw that he was being trifled with, and expressed his resentment by the gathering of his heavy brows and a speaking silence. At length, however——

"Monsieur has been unfortunate," he suggested, coldly.

"In what way?" demanded O'Rourke, on his dignity in an instant.

"At roulette," returned the other. "I presume that monsieur is not——" He paused.

"Not what, if you please?"

"Rich, let us say; monsieur feels his losses to-night——"

"He does? And may I ask how monsieur knows so much about me private affairs?"

"I was watching——"

"Spying!"

The other flushed, yet persisted:

"Not precisely. One moment—I will explain——"

"Very well," O'Rourke interrupted, ominously.

"Perhaps you are in need of money? I am——"

He got no further; that was bald impertinence to an O'Rourke, even if to a penniless one; and the destitute adventurer, made thus to realize how desperately he did need money, was not pleased.

"That," he broke in, placidly, "is none of your damned business!"

"What!"

The face of the Frenchman took on a deeper shade of red. He stepped back, but when the Irishman would have passed on, barred the way.

"Will monsieur please to repeat those words?" he requested.

"I will," returned O'Rourke, hotly, and obliged. "Now," he concluded, "you are at liberty to—get—out—of—my—way, sir!"

"But—you have insulted me!"

"Eh?" O'Rourke laughed shortly. "Impossible," he sneered.

"Monsieur! I insist! My card!" He flourished a bit of pasteboard in O'Rourke's face. "For this you shall afford me satisfaction!"

"Angry little one!" jeered O'Rourke, now thoroughly aroused; he seized the card and tore it into a dozen scraps without even looking at it.

"I'll afford you no satisfaction," he drawled, exasperatingly, "but—if you don't remove yourself from my path, my faith! I'll step on you!"

The Frenchman was quivering with rage. He began to draw off his gloves. O'Rourke divined what he purposed. He paled slightly, and his mouth became a hard, straight line as he warned the aggressor.

"Be careful, you whelp! If you strike me I'll——"

The gloves were flicked smartly across his lips, instantly demolishing whatever barriers of self-restraint he had for a check upon his temper. He swore, his eyes blazing, and his arm shot out.

The Frenchman received the impact of the blow upon his cheek, and—subsided.

Col. O'Rourke glanced quickly up and down the street, as he stood over the other's prostrate body. It was very dark, quite still and deserted. Upon a distant corner he made out the figure of a man leaning negligently against the lamp-post; he might be a gendarme, but, so far, his attention had not been attracted to the affair.

O'Rourke's primal impulse was to pass on, and leave his adversary to his fate; but the retaliating blow had cooled his anger by several degrees.

On second thought the Irishman decided to play the good Samaritan—which was egregious folly. His man was sitting up, by then, rubbing ruefully his cheek; O'Rourke gave him a generous hand and assisted him to his feet.

"I trust," he said, "that you are not severely injured——"

"Canaille!" rasped the Frenchman, sullenly dusting his coat, and drove home the epithet with a venomous threat.

Col. O'Rourke laughed at him.

"Aha," he cried, "then you've not had enough? Do I understand that you want another dose of the same?"

The man silently picked up his hat from the gutter, knocked it into shape, and rubbed it against his sleeve in fatuous effort to restore some of its former brilliancy.

"If you are quite through with me," continued the Irishman, "I'll go to the devil my own way, without your interference. And, monsieur, a word in your ear! Attend to your own affairs in the future, if you would avoid——"

The man with the beard cursed audibly, gritted his teeth and clinched his hands; but when he spoke it was coolly enough.

"I am not done with you, *canaille,*" he said. "You will do well, indeed, to go on, for I intend to hand you over to a gendarme."

"The divvle ye say!" O'Rourke found that he was addressing the back of the man, who was making hastily toward the figure under the distant lamp-post. "That looks," he debated, "as if he meant business! Faith, 'tis meself that will take his advice—this once!"

Accordingly he started off in the opposite direction, in leisurely fashion; he was not inclined to believe that the Frenchman would really carry out his threat of arrest.

Nevertheless, he kept his ears open, nor was he greatly surprised when presently, as he debouched into the Place de la Concorde, he heard the sound of two pairs of running feet in the street behind him, mingled with shouts.

"Why, the pup!" he exclaimed, deeply disgusted, and stopped, more than half inclined to face and thrash both the representative of the law and the impertinent civilian.

But he quickly abandoned that thought; it was entirely too fraught with the risk of spending a night in custody—something that he desired not in the least.

The sounds of pursuit were nearing rapidly. The gendarme had caught sight of his figure, and was yelling frantically at him to halt and surrender.

"This won't do, at all, at all," reflected O'Rourke, and himself began to run, cursing his hotheadedness for the predicament into which it had forced him.

A sleepy cabby woke up, startled by the unusual disturbance, and added yelps to those of the policeman and the much-abused Frenchman. Others joined in the chorus. A belated street gamin shrieked with joy, and attached himself to the chase.

The example was followed by others. And Col. O'Rourke began to be very, very regretful for his precipitancy.

He doubled and turned into the Champs Elysées, followed by a growing, howling mob. It seemed to him that men sprang from the earth itself to help run him down; and the sensation was most unpleasant.

He began to sprint madly, his inverness flapping behind him like the wings of some huge, misshapen bird of night. He dug his elbows in his ribs, clinched his teeth, and threw back his head, care-

ful to keep so far as possible in the shadows.

And the mob grew, whooping with interest; from their cries it seemed that they considered O'Rourke an escaping criminal of note.

The Irishman kept himself ever on the alert for some chance of escape, any subterfuge to throw the pursuit off his track; but none appeared.

He realized that he was gaining by sheer fleetness of foot, but not for a moment did he imagine that by swiftness he might distance the mob. For a rabble is always fresh, never tiring; the places of those who drop out, exhausted and breathless, are instantly filled by fresh and willing recruits. And in the end the mob gets at the throat of its quarry—if the running be in the open.

Col. O'Rourke knew this entirely too well for any peace of his own mind; therefore, he grasped avidly at the first chance that presented itself, heedless of its consequences.

A *fiacre* stood, with open door, drawn up at the curb. He could see the driver turning on his perch to discover the cause of the uproar. That was good, O'Rourke considered; the man, then, was wide awake.

He reached the vehicle, jumped upon the step, shouting to the driver the first address which entered his head:

"To the Gare du Nord! At once! With haste!"

Immediately the *fiacre* was in motion; O'Rourke experienced some difficulty in drawing himself in and closing the door because of the rapidity of the pace.

In another moment the horse was leaping forward, furiously, under the sting of the incessant lash.

"Bless the intelligent man!" muttered O'Rourke fervently. He felt that he could have kissed the driver for his instant obedience. But at once he was crushed by a paralyzing thought; how was he to pay the hire of the vehicle?

He cursed his luck, and attempted to seat himself—gasped with astonishment, and incontinently stood up again, bumping his head against the roof.

"Madame!" he cried, astounded, into the obscurity. "I beg——"

The reply was instant and encouraging.

"My pardon is granted, monsieur. Will monsieur be pleased to resume his seat?"

For there was another occupant of the *fiacre*—a woman.

CHAPTER IV.

MADEMOISELLE——?

"The saints," said O'Rourke, devoutly, "preserve me!"

Immediately he was stricken as with a dumbness—fairly stunned. The woman upon whose privacy he had so unceremoniously intruded, composedly and with a pretty grace made a place for him by her side, and he, obedient, but speechless, collapsed into the seat.

It came to him that this must be an exceptionally wonderful manner of woman, who could accept his rude invasion with such unruffled calmness; and he had noted that her voice was not only absolutely unmoved, but most marvelously sweet to harken to.

The *fiacre* whirled on as though the devil himself were at the whip (thought O'Rourke). It rocked from side to side, perilously upon one or two or three wheels—never safely upon four; it sheered about corners, scraping the curbs barely.

Conversation was impossible under such circumstances; O'Rourke recognized the necessity of explanations, but found that he must perforce be silent; and, for that matter, he was rather grateful for the chance to get his breath and collect his scattered wits.

So he abandoned as hopeless the task of framing up some plausible excuse for his conduct, as well as that of accounting for the extreme placidity with which his fair neighbor had welcomed him; and he, in keeping with his character, at once became the more intensely occupied with an attempt to discover the identity of the woman.

But he was baffled in that. The street

lamps, flashing past like telegraph poles by the windows of a moving train, illuminated the interior of the *fiacre* but fitfully.

The woman—the girl, rather, for the youthfulness of her was strikingly apparent—made no effort to break the silence. O'Rourke marveled thereat. Was she accustomed to such nocturnal adventures, that she should take them as a matter of course? or was she strangely lacking that birthright of her sex—the curiosity of the eternal feminine?

She nestled closely in her corner, with her head slightly averted, gazing out through the window. Evidently she was in evening dress, and that of the richest; a light opera cloak of some shimmering fabric wrapped about her in soft folds.

Her arms, gloved in white, extended languidly before her, with her hands—very bewitchingly small, O'Rourke considered them—clasped in her lap. Beneath the edge of the cloak a silken slipper showed, pressing firmly upon the floor as a brace against the sudden lurchings of the *fiacre*—and surely the foot therein was preposterously tiny!

By now the cries of the rabble had died in the distance, and the speed of the vehicle slackened; presently it was bowling over a broad, brightly lighted boulevard at quite a respectable pace; and within the *fiacre* the darkness was less opaque.

The Irishman boldly followed up his inspection; but the woman was not aware of it—or, if she were, disregarded it, or—again—was not ill-pleased. And truly that admiration which glowed within O'Rourke's eyes was not unprovoked.

Against the dark background her profile stood in clear, ivory-like relief, clean cut and distinguished as a cameo—and perilously beautiful; her full lips were parted in the slightest of smiles, her eyes were deep, warm shadows, the massed waves of her hair uncovered, exquisitely coiffured——

"Faith!" sighed the Irishman. "'Tis a great lady she is, and I——" He was conscious of an extreme satisfaction that he was attired properly, as a gentleman; but—"Oh, Lord!" he groaned, in spirit. "What will she be doing with me when she finds me out?"

For it was appealing to him as very delightful—this adventure upon which he had stumbled—even if he had not a single sou to give the driver. That O'Rourke was young has been mentioned; he was also ardent, gallant and quick-witted; and it was to his wits that he was trusting to extricate him gracefully from his predicament.

But—did he honestly desire to be extricated? Not—he answered himself with suspicious instantaneousness—if it was to deprive him of the charming companionship which was his, for the moment; not if it left him hungry for a peep behind the cloak of mystery that shrouded the affair.

He made a closer inventory of the *fiacre;* it was somewhat elegant in appointment—no mere public conveyance that is to be picked up on every corner; which confirmed his suspicions that the girl was of rank and pedigree.

And then he ventured a more timid glance, sideways, to find her eying him with an inscrutable amusement.

"Mademoiselle," he faltered, clumsily, "I—I—faith! if you'll but pardon me again——"

She looked away at once—perhaps to ignore his eyes, which were pleading his cause far more eloquently than were his lips.

"Monsieur," she said, graciously, "is impetuous; but possibly that is no great fault."

"But—but, indeed, I must apologize——"

"Surely that is not necessary, monsieur; it is understood." She paused. "You were long in coming, indeed; I had grown weary with waiting. But since you did arrive, eventually, and in time, all is well—let us hope. As for the delay, that was the fault of Monsieur Chambret—not yours."

O'Rourke stared almost rudely, transfixed with amazement, incapable of understanding a single word. What did she mean, anyway!

"My soul!" he whispered to himself.

"Am I in Paris of to-day—of my day—or is this the Paris of Dumas and of Balzac?"

But he received no direct answer; the girl waited a moment, then, since he did not reply, proceeded, laughing lightly.

"At first, I'll confess, the sudden burst of noise in the street alarmed me, monsieur. And when you appeared at the door, I half fancied you the wrong person—perhaps a criminal fleeing from the gendarmes."

"And what reassured you, mademoiselle?"

"The password, of course; that set all right."

"The password!" he echoed, stupidly.

"Naturally; yes, monsieur!" She elevated her brows in delicious inquiry. "'To the Gare du Nord,' you cried; and by that I knew at once that you were from Monsieur Chambret."

Beauty and mystery combined were befuddling the Irishman sadly; when she ceased, looking to him for a reply, he strove vainly to recall her words.

"Monsieur Chambret?" he iterated, vaguely. Then, to himself, in a flash of comprehension: "The password, 'To the Gare du Nord'!"

"*Mais oui;*" she cried, tapping impatiently the floor with the little slipper. "Chambret—who else? Oh!——"

She sat forward abruptly, her eyes wide with dismay. "You *must* be from Monsieur Chambret? There *cannot* have been any mistake?"

For a second O'Rourke was tempted to try to brazen it out; to lie, to invent, to make her believe him indeed from this M. Chambret. But to his credit be it, the thought was no sooner conceived than abandoned. Somehow, strangely enough, he felt that he might not lie to this woman and retain his self-respect.

Not that alone, but now that he could see more clearly her eyes, he fancied he read mental anguish in their sweet depths—that she had been counting dearly on his being the man she had expected. No—he must be frank with her.

"I fear," he admitted, sadly, "that there *is* a mistake, mademoiselle. In truth, I'm not from your friend; you were right when you fancied me a fugitive—— I was running away to avoid arrest for an offense that was not wholly mine—I had been strongly provoked. I saw the *fiacre,* supposed it empty, of course, jumped in——

"You understand? Believe me, I sincerely regret deceiving you, even unintentionally."

He waited, but she made no answer; she had drawn away from him as far as the *fiacre* would permit, and now sat watching his face with an expression which he failed to fathom.

It was not of anger, he knew instinctively; it was no fear of him, nor yet acute disappointment; if anything, he could have fancied it a subtle speculation, a mental calculation. But as to what?

That was the stumbling-block. He gave it up.

"If I can be of any service in return," he floundered, in desperation. "But I must again humbly sue for pardon, mademoiselle. I will no longer——"

The man's accustomed glibness of tongue seemed to have forsaken him most inopportunely; he saw that it was a thankless task to try to set himself right. What cared she for his protestations, his apologies?

And in such case he could do no more than act—get out of her sight, leave her to her disappointment. He reached toward the trap in the roof, intending to attract the driver's attention and alight.

But it appeared that this was not a night upon which even a headstrong O'Rourke could carry to a successful conclusion any one of his determinations.

As he started up, the girl stirred, and put her hand upon his arm, with a gesture that was almost an appeal.

He halted, looking down.

"One moment, monsieur," she begged. "I—I—perhaps you might be willing to——" She hesitated, torn with doubts of the man, unknown as he was to her.

"To make amends?" he broke in, eagerly. "To be of service to you,

mademoiselle? If I can, command me —to the uttermost——"

"Then——" She sat back again, but half satisfied that she was acting wisely; her eyes narrowed as she scanned him; O'Rourke felt that her gaze pierced him through and through. She frowned in her perplexity—and was thereby the more enchanting.

"Thank you," she concluded, at length. "Possibly—who can tell?—you may serve me as well as he whom I had expected."

"Only too gladly, mademoiselle!" he cried.

She nodded affirmatively, patting her lips with her fan—lost upon the instant in meditation, doubting, yet half convinced of the wiseness of her course.

O'Rourke waited uneasily, afire with impatience, with fear lest she should change her mind. Eventually, she mused aloud—more to herself than to the stranger.

"You are honest, I think, monsieur," said she, softly; "you would not lie to me. Who knows? You might prove the very man we need, and—and, oh, monsieur, our need is great!"

"But try me!" he pleaded, abjectly.

"Thank you, monsieur—I will," she told him, lightening the gravity of her mood with a smile.

And the *fiacre* came to a halt.

CHAPTER V.

MADAME.

"Our destination," mademoiselle indicated, briefly.

O'Rourke, stupefied, got himself somehow out of the *fiacre,* and assisted her to alight; for a moment her gloved hand rested in his palm—warm, soft, fragile. He forgot all else in the thrill of contact.

But immediately it was gone; he found himself bowing reverently over space. He recovered himself and followed the girl, his eyes shining with a new, strange light.

But she, of course, did not see.

The *fiacre* had halted in front of a mansion on a broad boulevard, familiar to the Irishman in a way, and yet nameless to him. Rather than mansion, the building might be termed a palace, so huge, so impressive it bulked in the night.

Seemingly a fête of some sort was in progress within; the windows shone with soft radiance, faint strains of music filtered through the open entrance, at either side of which stood stolid servants in livery, after the English fashion.

From the doors to the curb ran a carpet, under an awning. The girl tripped nonchalantly up the steps, as one knowing well the place, and gave a whispered word or two coldly to a gaping footman who bowed with a respect which struck the Irishman as exaggerated.

They passed through an elaborate vestibule banked with plants, its atmosphere heady with the fragrance of flowers, into a great hallway where other servants relieved monsieur and madame of their wraps.

Before them was an arched doorway, leading to a ballroom, when a flood of sound leaped out to greet them; laughter of women and the heavier voices of men; scraping of fiddles and of feet in time to the music; the swish of skirts, the blare of a French horn.

Mademoiselle had accepted the arm of the Irishman; they moved toward the ballroom, but before entering she turned toward him, speaking confidentially, yet with an assumption of lightness.

"You are to converse with me, monsieur, lightly, if you please, as though we were lifelong friends. I shall chatter—oh, positively!—and you must answer me in kind. It—it is essential, monsieur."

He bowed, attempting an easy smile, which failed utterly; for a regally attired personage at the doorway demanded the honor of announcing the late guests.

And O'Rourke had not the least clew to his mademoiselle's name! He colored, stammered, hating the servant rabidly for what he considered his cold, suspicious eye.

Yet he need not have shown confusion, had he but guessed. He managed to utter his own name—"Col. O'Rourke"—and the servant turned to the ballroom, raising a stentorian voice:

"Madame la Princesse de Grandlieu! Monsieur——"

His own name followed, but was lost to O'Rourke in the thunder of his companion's title. And the chateaux of romance which he had been busy erecting *en Espagne* fell, crashing about his throbbing ears.

A princess! And, if that did not place "mademoiselle" far beyond his reach—he, a mere Irish adventurer!—she was also "madame"—married!

"Monsieur!" the voice of the princess came to his ears through the walls of his reverie; and it was a voice of dismay. "Monsieur, for the love of Heaven do not look so fierce! You—why, you are ruining our play; you must, *must* pay attention to me——"

Thereafter they chatted of inconsequential things, threading their way down the full length of the ballroom, through a maze of dancers, of gleaming shoulders of women, of men clothed more severely; through a gantlet of a thousand pairs of curious eyes, whose searching stares O'Rourke felt keenly and longed to resent.

They were making, he found, for the far end of the ballroom—a wall of glass through which green things peeped. And there, in the conservatory, the princess left the adventurer.

"You will await me here," she told him; "that I may know where to find you when I return. In ten minutes, then, Col. O'Rourke."

She smiled graciously. He was gripping himself strongly that he might answer her with some sort of coherency, blushing for his obvious embarrassment—he had not yet recovered—very boyish looking, young and handsome.

Madame la Princesse turned away, and left him. He swung about, and seated himself on a bench in full view of the room he had just quitted.

For ten minutes he waited, as tranquilly as he might—that is, restless to the extreme, vibrant with curiosity. Then for fifteen minutes or so longer he wriggled on the seat of uncertainty, wondering if he was being played with, made a fool of. A thought struck him like a shot; was she detaining him while sending for the police?

The essential idiocy of that conjecture became evident within a few minutes. The princess was but proving her inborn, womanly method of measuring time; she returned at last—flushed and breathless, more beautiful than he had imagined her, who had not seen her in a good light ere this.

"Come, Col. O'Rourke, if you please."

He was instantly at her side, offering his arm. She seemed to hesitate the fraction of a second, then lightly placed her fingers upon his sleeve, where they rested flower-like. The man looked upon them with his soul in his eyes.

His hand trembled to seize them—already he was far gone. But the manner of Madame la Princesse kept him within bounds; its temperature was perceptibly lower than formerly.

For her part, she was choosing to ignore what he could not suppress—the devotion which her personality had so suddenly inspired in the breast of the young Irishman.

They re-entered the ballroom; now it was half deserted, a facile way open to them across the floor that had been so crowded.

The princess guided him by a pressure upon his arm almost imperceptible across the room, and into a *salon* that was quite deserted.

"It is late," she said, half in explanation, half to keep the man's mind on other matters than herself; "in a quarter of an hour the fête will be a thing of the past, monsieur."

"And the guests all departed on their various ways," he said, to make talk merely.

She answered him with a glance askance.

"Not all," she returned, with a meaning which he failed to grasp.

She stopped before a closed door, handing him the key. He opened in si-

lence, and they passed into a large room and gloomy, fitted elaborately as a library study, its walls lined with shelves of books.

In the center of the room stood a great desk of mahogany, upon which was a drop light with a green shade that flooded the desk itself with light, leaving the rest of the apartment in shadow.

The princess marched with determination to the farther side of the desk and seated herself.

"The door, monsieur," she said, imperiously; "you will lock it."

Wondering, he did her bidding; then stood with his back to it, instinctively in the pose of an orderly awaiting the command of a superior officer—shoulders back, head up, eyes level, feet together, hands at sides.

She noted the attitude, and relented a trifle from her frigid mood.

"That Col. O'Rourke is a soldier is self-evident," she said. "Be seated, monsieur," motioning to a chair on the opposite side of the desk.

Again he obeyed in silence; for, in truth, he feared to trust his tongue.

The woman lowered her lashes, drawing off her gloves slowly as though in deepest meditation. As a matter of fact, she was planning her campaign for the subjugation of this adventurer; at present, he was impossible—too earnest, too willing to serve, too fervent for comfort.

For a time she did not speak. The room was very quiet. If she watched him, O'Rourke was unable to make certain of it; for the upper half of her face was in deep shadow.

Only her arms, bared, showed very white and rounded; O'Rourke might not keep his gaze from them—— But she found a way to bring him to his senses.

Suddenly she leaned forward, and turned the shade of the lamp so that its glare fell full upon the Irishman's face; her gaze became direct, and, resting her elbows upon the table, lacing her fingers and cradling her chin upon the backs of her hands, the girl boldly challenged him.

"Col. O'Rourke," she said, deliberately, at once to the point, "you are to consider that this is a matter of business, purely."

He flushed, drew himself bolt upright.

"Pardon!" he murmured, stiffly.

"Granted, monsieur," she replied, briskly. "And now, before we implicate ourselves, let us become acquainted. You, I already know, I believe."

"Yes, madame?"

"There was a man of whom I have heard, of the name of O'Rourke, who served as a colonel in the Foreign Legion in the Soudan, for a number of years."

"The same, madame," he said—not without a touch of pride in his tones.

"He received the decoration of the Legion of Honor, I believe? For gallantry?"

"They called it such, madame."

He turned aside the lapel of his coat; she nodded, her eyes brightening as she glimpsed the scrap of ribbon and the pendant silver star.

"I begin to think that chance has been very kind to me, Col. O'Rourke," she said, less coolly.

"Possibly, madame."

"You have seen other service, monsieur?"

"Yes——"

"For Cuba Libre, I believe?"

"But the list is a long one," he expostulated, laughingly.

"For so young a man—so gallant a soldier."

"Oh, madame!" he deprecated.

"You are," she changed the subject, "pledged to no cause, monsieur?"

"To yours alone, madame."

She thanked him with a glance—he was amply rewarded. After an instant of hesitation, she proceeded, bluntly:

"You, I presume, know who I am?"

"Madame la Princesse——" he began.

"I do not mean that," she interrupted; "but before my marriage?"

"No——" he dubitated.

This seemed to please her greatly.

"That is good, then—you do not know me, really," she concluded. "You do not even know where you are?"

"No more than in Paris," he laughed.

"Oh, that is good, indeed! Then I may talk freely—although I must ask that you consider every word confidential. I rely upon your honor——"

"Believe me, you may."

"Then—to business."

Heretofore she had been studying his features intently; what character she had read therein must have been reassuring to the girl, for at once she discarded the constraint which she had imposed upon their conversation, and plunged in *medias res.*

"Col. O'Rourke," she began, slowly, choosing each phrase with care, "I have a brother—a very young man; younger even than I. His wealth is great, and he is—very regrettably weak, easily influenced by others.

"He is wild, willful, impatient of restraint, dissipated. His associates are not such as one might wish. But let that pass. You comprehend.

"Some time ago—recently, in fact—he conceived a hare-brained scheme, a mad adventure—I cannot tell you how insane! I believe it fraught with the gravest danger to him, monsieur. I sought to dissuade him, to no effect.

"At the same time I discovered by accident that it would further the interests of certain of his companions to have him out of the way—dead, in fact. I questioned my brother closely; he admitted, in the end, that it was proposed to him—this scheme—by those same persons.

"I made inquiries, secretly, and satisfied myself that not one of my brother's so-called friends was more nor less than a parasite. For years they have been bleeding him systematically, for their own pockets. And now, not content with what they have stolen from him, they want his fortune *in toto.*

"In short, he consorts with sycophants of the most servile, treacherous type.

"To-night, monsieur—this morning, rather—my brother gave this ball as a cover to a conference with his fellows in the scheme. It—it must be unlawful, monsieur, or they would not work so secretly, so cautiously. Even now certain of the guests are assembled in another room of this, my brother's house, conspiring with him.

"To-morrow, possibly—in a few days at the latest—my brother will start upon this—this expedition, let us call it. For my part, I cannot believe that he will return alive. I fear for him—fear greatly.

"But to-day I obtained his consent to something that I have fought for ever since I found that he would not give up his project; he has agreed to take with him one man, whom I am to select, to give him high place in his councils, and—what is more important—to keep his identity as my servant a secret from the other parties interested.

"I had but twelve hours to find the man I needed. He must be a soldier, courageous, loyal, capable of leading men. I knew no such man.

"I consulted with the one being in the world whom I can trust—a family friend of long standing, one Monsieur Chambret. I—I—monsieur, I cannot trust my husband; he is allied with these false friends of my brother!"

O'Rourke started, afire with sympathy; she cautioned him to silence with a gesture.

"One moment. I am not through, if you please.

"Monsieur Chambret was equally at a loss for a suitable man. He did what he could. This evening he came to me, offering a last hope, saying that he knew of a place where men of spirit who were not overly prosperous might be expected to congregate.

"I was to take my carriage, and wait at a certain spot in the Champs Elysées. He was to bring or send the man, should he find him. If the gentleman came alone he would make himself known to me by the password—which you know.

"So—apparently Monsieur Chambret failed in his mission. The rest you know. You came—and now that I know you, Col. O'Rourke, I thank——"

"Madame," cried the Irishman, arising.

She, too, stood up; their eyes met across the table.

"Monsieur," she cried, "I—I love my brother. Will you go with him,

stand by his side, and at his back, guard him against assassination or—worse? Will you—can you bring yourself to do this for me, whom you do not know—for my brother, whom you will dislike?"

"For you, madame!" he cried. "To the ends of the earth, if need be!"

Silently she held out her hand, and gratefully. He bent over it, raising it to his lips——

And there came a knock on the door.

"Quick!" she cried. "The key, monsieur. It is Chambret!"

CHAPTER VI.

M. CHAMBRET.

O'Rourke fumbled in his pocket desperately, with his fingers on that key all the time; but he did not want to give it up; he did not care to see Monsieur Chambret—not just yet.

A dozen pretexts to escape the meeting flashed through his brain in a brief moment, but none of them dared he use.

Meanwhile, the pink palm of his princess was outstretched to receive the key, she was eying him with no great favor because of his dalliance and biting her lip with impatience. In the end O'Rourke had to surrender the key, and all hope of delaying the introduction.

Madame la Princesse, with an audible sigh of relief, swept over to the door. O'Rourke remained, standing, at the side of the desk.

Perhaps it was entirely by accident that his elbow touched the edge of the lamp shade, and replaced it in its former position; perhaps he made the adjustment in his preoccupation; perhaps—not.

At all events, that was what immediately happened, before the princess had time to get that door open; and then the line of the light cut sharply across the lower part of his shirt bosom, as he stood there, leaving the upper portion of his body—his face, in particular—deeply shadowed.

He turned toward the door in uneasy expectancy.

Now it was at last open; the princess stood to one side, her hand on the knob, bowing mockingly and with a laugh.

"Welcome, monsieur!" she cried. "But you are late."

"I was delayed," came the reply.

"But just in time, as it is," added the girl.

The newcomer nodded abstractedly, hesitating at the door, looking from the princess to the man with whom she had been closeted, and back again—as one with the right to an explanation.

The princess was pleased to give it.

"Monsieur Adolph Chambret," she said, ceremoniously, "my new-found friend and our ally in this affair, Monsieur the Col. O'Rourke, Chevalier of the Legion of Honor!"

Both men bowed; O'Rourke deeply, Chambret with a slight assumption of hauteur and without removing a remarkably penetrating gaze from the countenance of the other.

"You see, *I* have succeeded!" continued the princess, triumphantly. "The hour grew late—I judged that you had failed, monsieur."

"You were right," assented Chambret—still eying the Irishman. "I failed lamentably."

He was breathing rapidly as he spoke; his face was red as with unaccustomed exertion, and his clothing—full evening dress—was somewhat disordered and dusty.

He was a man largely framed, and a trifle overweight, carrying himself well, with a suggestion of activity and quickness in his bearing; his face showed intellectuality of a high order—and an uncertain temper; he was bearded, full-cheeked; and one of his cheeks bore the red stamp of a recent blow.

The girl noted, for the first time, his disheveled appearance, and inquired concerning its cause.

"You have had an accident, monsieur?" she asked, solicitously.

"Nothing of moment," he replied, carelessly; "an encounter with a loafer of the streets, who attempted to assault me."

"And—and——?" she demanded.

"It was nothing—nothing, madame,"

he returned with ease. "I was forced to call a gendarme, and give the fellow in charge, to be rid of him. He will spend the night in prison, which may improve his manners," he added.

His veiled meaning escaped O'Rourke, who drew his breath sharply, otherwise showing no emotion at the Frenchman's remarkable account of the affair.

"My faith!" he chuckled to himself. "So I've been arrested, have I? Good! That lets me out. He neither recognizes nor suspects me!"

A clock in the library chimed softly, twice. Upon the sound the princess turned, and looked at the dial.

"Half-past three!" she cried. "So late! Indeed, we are just in time, messieurs.

"I have no time to waste explaining to you, Monsieur Chambret, how remarkably Col. O'Rourke came to me in my need," she continued. "I go at once to my brother and his—council. I will return for you in—say, ten minutes at the most."

She courtesied gayly to the two men, and left the room.

To O'Rourke it seemed as though the study, bereft of her presence, acquired an entirely new and uncomfortable atmosphere. He inspired harshly again—half a sigh, half in expectation of what might follow.

Chambret, bowing reverently at the door as the princess passed out, straightened himself, almost with a jerk, and shut it sharply. He stood for a moment as if lost in thought, then wheeled about, and came down the room deliberately, slowly removing his gloves, his gaze again full upon the face of the Irishman.

As for the latter, he appreciated the fact that it was a ticklish moment for him—an encounter fraught with peril. The only course open to him was to face the man down, to defy him, to rely upon his effrontery—if it so happened that Chambret had recognized him.

He was not long to be left in doubt, if he did honestly doubt.

Chambret approached the table, stood at its edge, not a yard distant from the Irishman, his brow black with rage, his eyes scintillating with hate.

Abruptly he brought his gloves down upon the polished wood with a sharp slap.

"So, *canaille!*" he drawled.

"What?" demanded O'Rourke, audaciously. His manner said plainly enough, "Is it possible? Can I believe my ears? What *does* he mean?"

Chambret quickly swung up the shade of the lamp, nodding in satisfaction as the glare disclosed the lineaments of the Irishman.

"I thought so," he said. "I was not mistaken."

Col. O'Rourke dropped languidly, easily, into the chair, swinging a careless leg over one of its arms.

"Upon my word!" he mused aloud. "What is he driving at now, d'ye think? Is the man mad?"

Chambret's attitude was a puzzle to him. If the man had immediately identified him, why had he not been denounced to the princess at once? Why this delay, this playing to the gallery for melodramatic effect?

"Of course," he admitted, "the man's a Frenchman; 'tis not in the likes of him to miss the chance to show off. But nobody's watching him now save me? What for is he waiting?"

However, he was yet to become acquainted with Monsieur Adolph Chambret.

That gentleman took his full time, carefully mapping out his plan of action behind that high, thinking forehead of his, carefully subduing his anger—or, rather, keeping his finger upon the gauge of it, that it might not get beyond his control.

"You are wondering what I propose to do with you, monsieur?" he queried at length, in a temperate, even tone.

"Faith, I was wondering what I'd have to do to you, to make you keep quiet," amended O'Rourke.

The Frenchman moved impatiently.

"You are presumptuous, monsieur," he said.

"I'm the very divvle of a fellow," admitted O'Rourke, ruefully. "We'll take all the personalities for granted, if you

please, Monsieur Chambret. But as to business——"

"I am inclined to hand you over to the gendarmes."

"You had that same delusion a while ago, I believe. Don't bother with it; it's not so, really."

"And what is to prevent me, may I ask?"

"The answer, monsieur," returned O'Rourke, insolently, "is—Me. Do you connect with that?"

Chambret's eyes blazed; but still he held his temper in leash.

"May I inquire how you elbowed your way in here?"

"'Tis easy enough; I've no objection to telling ye. You called your policeman—I ran. You pursued—I saw the open door of madame's *fiacre,* thought it empty, jumped in, telling the driver to go to the Gare du Nord. He went—bless him!—as though every gendarme in Paris was after him."

"And——"

"And so I became acquainted with madame; she knew me, it seems, knew my record, asked me to join her in this affair. I agreed."

"You know—everything, then, monsieur?"

"Sure I do, my boy. And now, what are ye going to do about it?"

"Nothing," announced Chambret, coolly, seating himself in the chair which the princess had vacated. "Nothing at all."

He directed a level stare at O'Rourke, who sat up and faced him suddenly.

"I'll be damned!" the Irishman prophesied, admiringly. "D'ye mean it?"

"I do, most certainly."

"Why?" gasped O'Rourke, astonished.

"Because we need you, monsieur. More particularly, because madame needs you. My personal feelings can—wait, I presume."

"Upon me word, I'm disposed to apologize to you!"

"You forget that there is no apology for a blow. I shall expect my satisfaction upon your return."

"Faith, you can have it then—or now," O'Rourke fired up. "I'll say this to ye, for your own good: The next time you see that a man's broke, don't throw it in his face. 'Tis worse than a red rag to a bull."

"An error of judgment, perhaps," agreed Chambret, thoughtfully.

"But as for your satisfaction—I'll allow no man to outdo me in generosity, sir; I'm at your service when you please."

Chambret put his hand to his face; upon his cheek the red weal blazed. His brows darkened ominously; and he glanced from O'Rourke to the clock.

"We have time," he debated, "to settle our little affair before the return of madame."

"What d'ye mean, monsieur?" asked O'Rourke, wide-eyed.

"I'll take you at your word," concluded Chambret, arising suddenly. "You shall give me satisfaction now."

"The divvle ye say!"

O'Rourke, too, got upon his feet.

"Precisely. We can fight here as comfortably as anywhere. The room was designed for absolute quiet; the walls are sound proof."

"Faith!" cried the Irishman. "D'ye mean we're to duel with pistols—here?"

"Just so, monsieur."

"But—the weapons?"

Chambret pulled open a drawer of the desk, peered within and took out a revolver.

"Here," he indicated.

"But that's only one!"

"All that will be necessary, monsieur. We will let the cards decide." He took from another drawer a deck of playing cards—new.

"We will deal, monsieur," he continued. "First to me, then to you, card by card. He who receives the ace of spades—— You comprehend?"

"Suicide, d'ye mean?"

"No. The unlucky one of us stands at the farther end of the room; the other stands here with the revolver, counts three, aims and fires instantly. Are you agreeable?"

O'Rourke whistled.

"You've your nerve with you, if you're in earnest," he protested. "Let's

see, this is the proposition: First, we play an innocent game of cards; then one of us commits a murder? Is that it? Well—since you propose it, I'm game. Deal on, monsieur!"

Chambret nodded, stripped the deck, and shuffled with care, O'Rourke watching him narrowly. Finally Chambret was satisfied, took up the deck, drew off the top card.

"One moment, monsieur!" interposed O'Rourke. "There's a man of my race that has said, 'Trust every man, but cut the cards.' Faith, I'm thinking that's good advice."

The Frenchman ground an imprecation between his teeth, and slammed the deck upon the desk; O'Rourke cut them with care.

"Proceed," he said, calmly.

Trembling with anger, Chambret dealt; a card to himself first—the nine of hearts; a card to O'Rourke——

The Irishman found the room swimming about him; he clutched the arms of his chair with a grip of steel, his gaze transfixed upon the card before him; the ace of spades.

He heard Chambret laughing lightly, saw the gleam of his white teeth in the lamplight, staggered to his feet.

"Very well," he heard himself saying. "'Tis the fortune of war. Proceed, monsieur."

He knew that he walked, but as one dreaming, to the far wall of the apartment; he remembers turning and facing Chambret; he recalls folding his arms, holding his head high; but the heart of him was like water.

He waited there what seemed an interminable time, while Chambret, grinning malevolently, tested the revolver, assuring himself that it was properly loaded.

And then his grin faded; O'Rourke saw the weapon slowly swinging at the man's side, heard his voice ringing through the room, reverberating upon his tympanums like the thunders of the day of judgment.

"One——

"Two——"

The arm ceased to sway; in a moment it would arise, Chambret would fire; O'Rourke even heard the beginning of the fatal monosyllable.

"Th——"

He closed his eyes—only to open them immediately as the voice of madame shrilled, following the opening of the door:

"Messieurs!"

Chambret's half-raised arm fell. O'Rourke steadied himself suddenly with a hand against the wall. A dim mist swam before his eyes, seemingly almost palpable. Through it the voices of madame and Chambret came to him with strange, unfamiliar intonations.

"Monsieur Chambret, what is this?"

"A test of markmanship, merely, madame. I am exhibiting my skill to Col. O'Rourke; you will observe he holds a card in his hand."

O'Rourke gritted his teeth, brought himself to a state of thought, wherein he was capable of coherent action. Chambret's concluding words were ringing in his ears; he glanced at his hand, saw that indeed he was holding the fatal ace of spades—which he must have picked up and retained unconsciously.

He glanced at the woman, at Chambret; the latter stood stern and implacable; in his eyes O'Rourke read murder, ruthless.

He divined the other's purpose to turn the farcical situation into a tragedy; but within him the instinct of self-preservation seemed dormant—or bound and helpless, enchained by that thing called "honor."

Mechanically he raised his arm, holding the card in his hand a little to one side.

Chambret again took careful aim. The princess started forward with a cry of protest.

She was too late; Monsieur Chambret had fired!

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE ONE VIRTUE

BY FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK

In which a stress of circumstances brought forth the single virtue shared in common by two very disreputable characters.

IT was in a not undramatic manner that Davy Crockett made his entry into White Pine.

There were six of us, all tolerably respectable but one, discussing the horrible corruption of municipal politics in great cities by the hazy lamplight in McEwen's grocery, when the door was suddenly thrust open, and from the outer darkness emerged a brindled bulldog, big enough, ugly enough and sanguinary-looking enough to have been matched against the most terrible of the bulls of Bashan.

He was, in fact, almost too tall to be pure bred, but he had the wide bow legs, the square head, the hanging jowl of his kind, and the jaws fit to crunch a man's leg. No one followed him in; none of us had even seen him before.

He was dirty and frowzy-looking, evidently a waif and a tramp, and half starved into the bargain, for most of his ribs could be counted through his loose hide.

He looked a regular border ruffian of a dog, and he walked unhesitatingly to the center of the floor, and glared at us sullenly through bloodshot eyes.

Undoubtedly hunger had driven him to seek human society, but his spirit would not permit him to ask alms or to attempt any appeal to our compassion.

This ferocious apparition caused some excitement, not to say alarm, in all but one of our company. That was Silas Chandler, the one who was not respectable.

"Set still, fellows; he won't hurt ye," he muttered, as the rest of us were wondering whether we could reach the side door in safety.

He leaned forward, and spoke to the intruder, using some magic, and holding out an amicable hand.

What the spell was I do not know, but after a few moments' hesitation the stumpy tail vibrated once or twice in a faint and half-ashamed manner, and the great brute came slowly to his tamer, henceforth to be his comrade and master, and thrust the Medusa head against his knee.

Chandler was jubilant. He bought a pound of bologna sausage on the spot, which the dog devoured in three gulps, with a savage show of ivory.

The animal seemed solely designed to inspire terror; a mere fighting machine, as destitute of grace or beauty as an ironclad.

His jaws and throat were battle scarred, and his flank was pitted with what looked like recent shot marks.

It was clear that he was a dog with a strenuous and shady past.

This was no animal to be regarded with approval by the sober and well-regulated community of White Pine; but Chandler himself was not considered much more respectable than the fighting dog.

He was a little, dark man, about thirty-five, who lived alone in a shack three miles down the river, supporting himself by a little slovenly farming and a great deal of expert hunting and trapping.

There was not much game left in the

neighborhood, but all of it was at his mercy.

He could make a bag of partridges where no one else could find a single feather; he knew where the mink made their dens, how the red foxes could be trapped, and where the wild geese would alight from their migratory flights on snowy spring days.

When, at long intervals, a deer sometimes strayed down from the great northern forests, it was usually Chandler who shot it.

Like many small men, he was quick-tempered; when he had money he was apt to drink too much, and to grow quarrelsome in his cups. Under such circumstances he had once stabbed a man.

The wound was slight, and Chandler repented bitterly, but the incident still further blackened his reputation, though in normal seasons he was good-natured and easy-going enough.

He was generally regarded with a contemptuous toleration, and a suspicion that was founded on non-comprehension. In almost every back-country district there is such a character—a reversion to a more primitive type than the shrewd and commercial Yankee—the Natty Bumppo of the neighborhood, the ideal of the schoolboys, wise in the secrets of nature—but in no way respectable.

So these two Bohemians joined forces. Chandler christened the dog Davy Crockett, after his favorite hero, and Davy Crockett transferred all his allegiance unquestioningly to his new master.

By the more well-regulated neighbors the two were regarded with almost equal disapprobation, and this attitude, I am sorry to say, was not wholly without reason. For Chandler's first proceeding was to match his dog against the most renowned fighters of the county, winning what was, for him, Pactolian wealth by the series of victories through which Davy Crockett marched on to glory.

But this gladiatorial period was of necessity a transitory one. In a couple of months there were no more antagonists; the bull's mettle had become known for ten miles about.

So, unwillingly, the victors settled down to a less scarlet existence of gunning and farming at the little shack down the river.

Once or twice a week they came into the village, where the fierce dog, whose reputation as a fighter was spread and exaggerated, made himself generally feared.

He had mauled a tramp rather badly who was raiding Chandler's patch of green corn, and on the strength of this exploit it was rumored that he had slain more than one man. The desperate and aggressive appearance of the brute was corroboration enough for any such tale, and people stepped off the sidewalk to give him way.

When drunk, Chandler occasionally maltreated him cruelly, but it made no difference to the dog's loyalty, and no one ever cared to resent the man's ugliest and drunkest moods while he was backed by Davy Crockett's bloodshot glare.

In fact, this Bohemian sort of life, made up of savage fights, savage debauches, hard outdoor days in wind and frost and snow, and long, lazy days in the sun suited Davy Crockett's inclinations as exactly as it did those of his master, and the two became inseparable.

The farming folk saw them often from afar passing from covert to covert, the red Irish spaniel ranging ahead, then the slight, brown-clad figure balancing the double barrel, and the grim, plodding form of Davy Crockett at the rear.

But as a hunting animal the bull was not a success. It was not in his blood. He could have pinned stags or boars, but New York State is not the habitat of these animals, and he made no figure in the expeditions against rabbits and ruffed grouse.

But he suppressed his jealousy of the spaniel that played a professional part in these excursions, and contented himself with taking his pleasure as a non-combatant.

But when they came to the village they were not particularly welcome.

People were too much afraid of the big bulldog that respected only the one man who was least worthy of it. Moreover, it was now necessary to treat Chandler's person with a certain caution; the dog had absurd ideas of his master's dignity.

It was not always safe to punch him in the chest or to slap his shoulders; as McEwen said, you had to treat him "like as if he was a preacher."

This sort of constraint was doubly resented, because Chandler was the last man to have any right to such deference. From being merely despised he became very actively disliked, and he was not a man to try to return good for evil.

Still, he came to the village store from time to time, and took part in the symposiums therein, till the events of one evening brought the increasing tension to the breaking point.

Chandler had been shooting muskrats on his way in, and had brought his gun to the grocery, where it remained under Davy Crockett's watchful eye.

A loafer picked up the weapon carelessly, and was about to open the breech, when a heavy, menacing growl made him look up.

The bulldog had arisen to his feet, leaning stiffly forward, the hair rising on his back, his lips curled upward, and his little eyes fixed savagely on the daring offender.

The man dropped the gun, startled into panic. It went off as it crashed upon the floor, filling the room with blue smoke, and perforating a keg of cucumber pickles.

Excited by the smoke and racket, the dog jumped, bringing his man to the floor. Chandler seized the animal by the collar and dragged back with all his weight. Davy Crockett came away with a square foot of cloth in his jaws.

The frightened victim scrambled up and fled; the smoke cleared, and we realized what had happened. This was really passing endurance, and McEwen, smarting at the damage to his pickles, told Chandler plainly what we all thought of him and his brute, and suggested that the sooner the animal was put out of the way the better for every one concerned.

In future their visits would not be tolerated at the store, "unless, of course," he added, with a return of the mercantile instinct, "you want to buy something——"

"I reckon I won't," said Chandler, as he picked up his gun and departed to his own place. "Any place that ain't good enough for my dog ain't good enough for me." And from that time the grocery knew him not.

After that, he made the hotel bar his place of resort, and the results were rapidly disastrous. He became even less respectable than before, and the word went around that Si Chandler was going fast to the bad. No one was surprised at this, for everybody had foreseen such an ending of his career.

But, drunk or sober, Davy Crockett stood by his master against a hostile world. Chandler tippled himself into insensibility, and went to sleep in a barroom chair, and the dog watched over him all night and compelled respect for his slumbers.

Some days later he very nearly killed a huge lumberman from the North, who took advantage of Chandler's size to bully him a little. Davy had to be forced off with red-hot pokers, for he was beyond even his master's control.

These episodes, being reported and exaggerated, intensified the evil odor into which the disreputable allies had fallen so deeply. It is a lamentable fact, however, that Chandler made no sort of attempt to whitewash his reputation; the opinions he expressed of White Pine and its people could only be reported by dashes, and he resigned himself to outlawry with a sullen contempt for the village folk who ostracized him.

There was talk of a prosecution against him for keeping a dangerous animal, but a rural community is slow to move in legal affairs, and, besides, no one would care to serve a warrant on this pair of outcasts.

Davy Crockett, however, might be expected to fall in private feud at any time, for he had enemies everywhere.

His peril did not lie in open combat, for most persons would have hesitated about facing the powerful brute even with firearms, but in traps and poison against which no strength is proof.

Chandler was fully conscious of this danger, and he had probably prolonged the animal's life already by swearing to have the blood of any man who should harm his dog.

So for some months they continued to present a defiant front to the world and to survive. During the winter we saw less of them, but as spring returned Chandler came oftener to the village.

He was no less bibulous and offensive than before, and sooner or later he would certainly have come to serious trouble but for the events of one evening about the middle of May.

At nine o'clock that night a young man from one of the farms to the east came in to the village, and said that, as he had walked in along the railway track, he had come upon Chandler lying dead drunk between the rails, with the bulldog standing guard over him. The brute had refused to allow him to approach or to pass, and he had been compelled to make a wide detour across the fields to get past the spot, which was about a mile from the village.

At nine forty-five a train was due, the fast Buffalo and New York express, that did not stop at White Pine except on signal.

Unless signaled to-night it would probably remove both of our disturbers at a single stroke, and a number of us went to the depot, and reported the case.

The agent was unwilling, however, to flag the star train of the road except as a last resort, and proposed that we go down the line and get the man out of danger. There was time enough, though none to spare.

In twenty minutes half a dozen of us had reached the spot where the man was still lying in the darkness, and as we approached the bulldog arose to his feet above the body, and rumbled hoarsely through clinched teeth.

The rescuing party stopped—at a distance.

By the light of the lanterns we had brought we could see the man lying flat on his face between the rails, with the dog standing across his shoulders. And he would not let us come near.

We tried cajolery, but Davy Crockett had known us all for his enemies in time past, and would not be seduced from what he conceived to be the post of duty.

It was a deadlock, and the train might be expected in ten minutes. Several men in the party would have been glad to seize this legitimate opportunity of putting an end to the dog, but no one had firearms or cared to risk a combat with impromptu weapons.

But, in one way or another, we had to get the drunken man off the track. Shouting his name did not awaken him; he was apparently quite insensible.

We hurriedly discussed all sorts of projects for removing the stupid animal. The dog was furiously excited; his eyes and teeth glistened in the yellow lantern rays, and his uninterrupted growl arose at intervals to a jarring, guttural war cry.

He continually threatened a charge which we did not care to provoke, for with natural weapons he was a match for any three of us.

Of course we might have overwhelmed him by sheer weight, but some of us would certainly get badly mauled in the *mêlée,* and we preferred less desperate methods.

Finally a couple of men started for a farmhouse half a mile away to get a rope to lasso the animal, or perhaps a gun. But long before they had time to return we heard the double whistle of the express, faint and far, for White Pine station.

The train would have to be flagged, after all. We sent a signal man around the curve with a lantern wrapped in a red bandana handkerchief, which had been prepared for such an emergency.

Again the whistle sounded, much nearer, for a road crossing, and scarcely a minute later came the long blast for brakes. The headlight burst flamingly into view, and the train slid forward with squealing brakes and came to a

stop, black and hissing, not twenty yards from the point of blockade.

The conductor hurried forward with a couple of brakemen, all primed with strong talk, which they used when the cause of stoppage was made manifest.

"I'll get him out of that!" exclaimed the conductor, drawing his revolver.

The shot flashed, and the dog, howling sharply, rolled over and down the embankment to the ditch, where he lay struggling.

There was not much disposition to sympathize. Three or four men laid hold on Chandler rather roughly, and hauled him from the track. He groaned heavily, and a brakeman suddenly drew away his hand dripping with blood.

"This man ain't drunk. He's been shot," he cried.

There was a hasty gathering of lanterns, and a close inspection showed a jagged hole in the back of the supposed drunkard's coat, surrounded by a wide, blackish stain.

Several passengers, attracted by the shot, had come forward, and one of them had a flask. A spoonful of liquor went down Chandler's throat, and he revived a little. His eyes opened, and then his lips, and every man bent forward to listen.

"Stop the express—wreckers—at the Black Bridge——" he murmured, drowsily.

The conductor exploded an interjection, staring about rather wildly.

"Get the man into the smoker," he said, after a moment. "You fellows all get aboard, too, if you want to. We'll run dead slow down to the bridge and see. Bring along that dog, too, if he isn't dead," he added. "If it turns out that he's kept this train out of a smash he'll have the best dog doctor in the State."

We got Davy Crockett into the smoking car, and laid him beside his master, not without difficulty, for he was still capable of a great deal of self-defense.

We found a doctor aboard the train, and Chandler was brought into a dazed sort of consciousness.

He told us disconnectedly how he had seen the wreckers at work as he came up the track toward the village, how he had been stopped, chased, shot at, but had tried to reach the station in time to stop the express. He did not remember having fallen, and seemed to have no clear idea where he was.

The bridge over the Black River was a mile or so farther, and we crossed it at a snail's pace, with a brakeman on the pilot.

The train stopped suddenly. Ten yards ahead a rail had been torn up and a pile of ties placed across the track.

The embankment was twenty feet high at that point, and, if running at its usual speed, the train would assuredly have piled itself into a tangle of scrap iron on the margin of the river below.

The wreckers had disappeared; no doubt our slow approach had given them the hint.

Both Davy Crockett and his master recovered from their shot wounds under the medical attention which the railroad paid for. It would be pleasant to be able to add that they had both reformed, abandoned Bohemia, become devoted to agriculture and the good roads movement, and become respectable.

But I am afraid this was a height of virtue unattainable—perhaps undesired—by either. They were heroes for a few weeks; that is to say, while they were still incapable of going about, and Chandler was received back into favor at the grocery. He really did lessen his potations, otherwise he was as shiftless and disreputable as ever, with his gunning, and trapping and the slatternly farming that brought an ache to the hearts of his hard-working neighbors to see.

But he remained faithful to his dog, and his dog to him. It was their one virtue.

THE MAN WITH THE THUMB*

A STORY OF MYSTERY

BY GEORGE PARSONS BRADFORD

Author of "The Panama Cipher," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Richard Tarrion, adrift in New York, meets in a cheap restaurant a man whom he facetiously designates as "Gray Eyes." Through this mysterious stranger Tarrion learns of a position which he finally secures. The details of the position are told to him through the medium of a telephone conversation, an interview with a banker and by letter. Tarrion is given a sum of money and is instructed to proceed forthwith to a Kentucky mountain village where he is to search for a man whose photograph is shown him, and on finding him to snap another photograph and also to take an imprint of the man's right thumb. Tarrion does not know his employer or the reason for his queer task, but he goes because he is assured the work is honest and also because the reward promised is large. He has several adventures before reaching his destination, and finally is instrumental in saving the life of a young mountaineer, Lang McComb, by shooting one of his assailants. While resting at a country store a young girl comes in and announces that the friends of the man shot by Tarrion are coming to attack him.

(In Two Parts—Part II.)

CHAPTER IX.

TWO SURPRISES.

BUT it was not Ed Wade—not then. Quake approached the door on tiptoes; he was trembling violently, like a sufferer with ague; and yet I saw that, as he stopped and brought the shotgun around to bear upon the stout oaken panels, the hands that held the weapon became as firm and motionless as if carven from rock.

"Who's that?" he called, shrilly, his voice quavering either with fear or with age. Afterward I knew it was age, not fear. "Who's that? Speak up, and name yo'self, stranger!"

Whoever was without did not comply, however; instead I heard a faint scratching noise, and then three soft raps, with a little pause between each.

At this signal, Quake began to unbar the door with all speed. He also abandoned all precautions, setting the shotgun against the wall ere he began.

I put my revolver back in my breast pocket; and the girl slipped hers within a fold of her skirt.

She moved a little nearer me, and lowered her voice so that Quake might not overhear us.

"Please, please go," she besought me, lifting those great, dark eyes to mine in an appeal that I could not resist. "Don't—don't delay. If you persist in staying you'll—there'll be bloodshed in the whole valley."

"I will go," I promised her. "I'm sorry to be the cause——"

* This story, "The Man With the Thumb," began last month. The number containing the first instalment can be procured through any newsdealer or direct from the publishers for ten cents.

"Of so much trouble," I was going to say, but the words never reached her.

By this time Quake had finished unbarring the door, and now he stepped back, opening it, and there, framed in the blackness of the wilderness night, stood the one man of whom each of us had been thinking.

Lang McComb—the young mountain giant, seeming more tall, now that I saw him erect, than I had thought; and handsome as a youthful Kentuckian only can be handsome; jaunty, careless, self-reliant to the final word.

I saw, from the corner of my eye, the astonishment with which he viewed our group—Beth, his sweetheart, Quake and myself. But my attention was centered on the girl's face; it was with a pang, sharp and distinct, that I saw the swift blood arise to her cheeks—to the very roots of her hair—when her eyes fell upon her lover.

"Beth!" Lang breathed, quickly; and then, without further words, swung on his heel and secured the door.

"What brings you here?" he asked her, an instant later.

I fancied he seemed angry.

"My errand is the same as yours," she said.

"And what do you think mine is?"

She threw back her head, with a laughing sparkle in her eyes.

"Well, Lang," she told him, "I jist didn't reckon you got up out o' bed to come down and buy a chaw o' niggerhead."

"No more I didn't," he laughed with her.

Then he became more serious.

"Is—is Ed Wade," he asked, bringing out the despised name with an obvious effort, "is he waiting fo' ye, Beth?"

"No, Lang; he ain't."

Her manner indicated a temper none too long-suffering, and Quake here interrupted to prevent further hostilities.

Evidently the Wade-Roan engagement was a sore subject on both sides of this strange love affair.

"No, he ain't a-waitin', Lang McComb," cried the old man, furiously; "but he hev found out thet this hyeh stranger's the man who shot Logan, and——"

"And he says he's coming over to burn the store—and Mr. Trent, too," the girl finished.

Lang McComb's face turned a shade or so darker in the lamplight.

"Ed Wade said that," he muttered, as if stating a fact to himself alone. "He *said* that," he repeated, significantly. "Wal, now——"

He smiled ironically, contemptuously. Evidently in Lang McComb's mind at least there was a vast difference between what Ed Wade said he would do and what he would actually accomplish.

"I was fearsome o' so'thing o' the sort," he added. "I couldn't sleep easy for thinkin' about hit. That's why I rid down hyeh, Beth. And ye rid over from Badalia to tell Mr. Trent, did ye? Thank ye, Beth; ye certainly air good to my friends."

His tone implied that he thought her unkind to him.

"Mr. Trent hez thanked me enough," she replied, with a toss of her head. "What air ye goin' to do, Lang?"

"I come over hyeh to ask him to come up to we-all's house," he said. "I jest reckon Ed Wade won't bawther him 'round there, now," he added, confidently.

I thought that, if I were Ed Wade, I should be especially careful not to bother Lang McComb in any place, or at any time. I looked a question at Quake.

His hospitality I had accepted, and I didn't want to hurt his feelings by leaving now; although Lang's plan seemed the best to me, and I was firmly determined not to be scared out of the valley until I had accomplished my errand there.

But the mountain code of courtesy is a strange thing; I had not yet learned it, and would not willingly have offended the old man for worlds.

He divined my thought, and shook his head at me sorrowfully.

"Ye kin go or stay, stranger," he said, "jist as ye're a-mind to. If ye want to stay hyeh, ye're as welcome as flowers in May, but——"

"But I don't want to bring trouble to you," I interposed.

"This hyeh stoah is all I've got in the world," he replied, ambiguously.

"You had better go with Lang, sir," said the girl, pleadingly. "That is, unless you will accept my horse, and leave the valley altogether, as I advise."

"I have an animal of my own, thank you," I began.

"Then ye saddle hit, suh, and come along with me, if ye please," cried Lang. "I tell ye, Beth, I ain't going to have no friend o' mine scared out o' the valley by Ed Wade's gang—'specially sinct he up and saved my life."

Her eyes leaped to mine in unutterable gratitude.

"Do as you think best, then," she said, softly. "You will be safe with—with Lang."

Lang himself solved my hesitant doubts by taking command suddenly.

"Ye wait here, suh," he said. "I'll slip out and saddle yo' hawss, suh."

"I reckon thet's best," agreed old man Quake.

And I fell into line with this plan, which suited me so admirably.

At McComb's, I figured, I would be in perfect safety, and quite at liberty to pursue my investigations concerning the person whose photograph I had come into this peril to get.

There the Wade gang, thirsting after my blood as they professed to, would naturally hesitate to come. I knew from experience, and from what Lang and Quake had hinted at, that the Wade method of warfare was opposed to anything like a direct attack.

They preferred to lie in hiding and shoot their enemies in the back, as they passed through the lonely spots which are only too common on the mountain roads.

Thus private vengeance could be accomplished without being visited with public punishment; and everybody would be happy—including the murdered man, for all we know.

Whereas at Quake's I would be at the mercy of every ruffian in the valley. By the very nature of the place, all the neighborhood had access to it at all hours of the day and ample opportunity to shoot me down.

Therefore it would have suited my purposes up to the handle under any other circumstances; as it was, I could not but see that to remain there would be the height of folly and foolhardiness.

To understand the state of affairs which existed in the Sinful Creek Valley at the time of my arrival there—not so very long ago, either—you must know that, by the peculiar inaccessability of the mountainous regions of Kentucky, civilization has halted there; progress is unknown.

It was settled by people who lived under the wild pioneer code of the days of 1776; and since that time they have changed but slightly, and that for the worse.

Private enmities of slight, personal nature have there developed into feuds which have involved whole communities in actual civil war—on a small scale, of course. And bloodshed is the only honorable way of wiping out an insult.

The law languishes; the mountain sheriff is generally helpless, since not only his sympathies are with the belligerents, but his friends also; so that when he attempts to interfere, or to arrest a murderer, the chances are two to one that he himself will be caught, and either man-handled or held down while the criminal escapes.

In the store, we three waited in silence for the return of Lang with my horse.

What thoughts were passing through the girl's mind, I did not know. She stood with face averted, and paid no further attention to us. But I wondered greatly.

What was it that led her to promise to wed Ed Wade, a man of whom all—even she herself—found no good word to say; while her every word, her every look, her very demeanor in the presence of Lang McComb was an open confession that none but he held her heart?

And why, I marveled, was she, a cultivated woman (at least a woman who spoke pure English and purest French at will), living here in these mountains,

among a rough and lawless people, speaking their rude, uncouth dialect?

Lang returned hurriedly.

"Come along," he said; "I reckon we-all ain't got no time to waste. I heered a hawss loping down the road a while back, and I dunno—but I reckon thar ain't no danger—if we hurry."

Quake held the door ajar, nursing his shotgun jealously. His mind was plainly far from easy.

"Beth!" I heard Lang's voice behind me, infinitely tender.

"Good-by, Lang," she said, steadily.

"Hev ye thought over what I said this evening?" he persisted.

"I have, Lang, and my answer now is the same as then: No."

He bowed his head, and turned away. Quake opened the door. In another moment we two were in the dim night without, under the infinity of eternal, peaceful, twinkling stars.

I turned and thanked the girl and Quake for their kindness. I heard Lang bid them a good-night. There was a sense of desolation in his tone.

"Good-night, Sim," he said. "Bleeged to ye for yo' kindness. And Beth, I —I—good-by."

I thought she leaned toward him, whispering, when, belled loud upon the night air, an angry voice was flung at us from somewhere in the darkness:

"Halt, or I fire!"

CHAPTER X.

BAD MEN FROM BADALIA.

This was our position when this startling interruption rang in our ears:

Sim Quake stood holding open the store door, in the center of a blaze of light from the lamp within.

Beth Roan leaned against the door jamb, a trifle in advance of Quake.

Lang was at my side, somewhat in the shadow, while I stood in the full glare of lamplight—a conspicuous mark for any one in the road.

To this fact—that his immense stature was not immediately visible in the shadow, and so recognizable—and to the presence of the girl, right in the line of fire at Quake and myself, we three men probably owe the mercy that we were not incontinently shot down, without warning.

As it was, we found our lives in instant danger of extinction. Too long had I delayed making up my mind to clear out, and leave Quake in safety.

We could see nothing, neither horse nor man, in the shadow of the woodland before us.

Near at hand the diffused and fading glow from the kerosene lamp brought out shadowy forms of bushes and shrubbery, and outlined the backs of Quake's hounds, who, alarmed by the unusual bustle about the house at this hour of the night, had assembled and now stood, motionless and with bristling coats, but growling fiercely, in a sort of threatening undertone, at the intruders.

We saw, I say, no one; but, following swiftly at the heels of his warning, the invisible man shouted at us:

"Sim Quake, ye git back thar, and shet the door! And you other man, move away! We ain't goin' to harm nuther o' ye, but the ornery cuss that shot Logan this afternoon kin step out, and git paid for hit! Ye kin hear me shouting!"

Except to bring his shotgun to the fore, Quake did not move. Lang clutched quickly at my arm.

"This way," he said to me, in an undertone, and turned to hoarsely whisper to Quake:

"Sim, shet that door. Beth and ye kin hold 'em off ontil I git back with the boys! We'll git on—thar ain't no use your riskin'——"

"Did ye hear me?" came the voice from the road. There was a disturbance out there.

I could plainly hear the ring of hoofs as horses were shifting in their positions; and once or twice I heard a faint, unmistakable *click!* as a gun or revolver was cocked.

But Beth Roan had her own ideas as to the solution of the situation.

She sprang abruptly from the doorway, and dashed in front of us.

"Ed Wade!" she called. "If you shoot at this man, you shoot at me!"

"Beth!" he roared; and we heard him break out in a rage of cursing.

He had not thought to find us forewarned by his promised wife, I suppose. Indeed, I afterward learned that he had thought her, all the time, safe at home and in bed.

"Git 'way from thar, Beth!" he continued. "Git——"

He had no need to say more. With one movement in instant accord, Lang and I stepped forward.

Lang was the quicker, and first to grasp the girl by the arm, and throw her to one side—very roughly, I thought, and without consideration.

But brute strength was something of a necessity in this case, for she fought with him to regain her protecting position before us.

"Trent," I heard Lang say, in a rapid, low whisper, "thar's jist one hope for we-all. You slip to one side, and I'll go t'other, like's if we wuz running for the back lot. But don't ye. Our hawses is out thar, tethered under the big oak in the road. If we kin git to them, we'll be all right. Soon's ye git out o' the light, drap down in the grass and crawl for the road. 'Taint fer. If we stay hyeh, chances are they'll fire the stoah, and kill me and you and Quake. If we go, they'll chase us and leave him to the last."

"All right," I replied, gripping my revolver.

"Don't ye shoot, less'n hit's necessary," he warned me, anxiously. "If you do, they'll fire at the flash."

With this he lifted his voice, and made a remark to Ed Wade which must have made that desperado's blood boil. He also mentioned that he, Lang McComb, was there, and prepared to "learn him su'thing."

Wade bellowed with rage, and Lang laughed.

"Now!" he told me, breathlessly.

I found wings, promptly, and hustled myself out of the light toward the corner of the store. I saw Lang doing the same thing, apparently, only in an opposite direction, and from that time on everything is a sort of hazy recollection to me.

I butted my head against the store, running blindly in the darkness, and warned by that turned and made my way, as best I might, across the clearing to a fence by the woodside. There I dropped in the grass, according to instructions, and prone, wormed my way toward the road.

Meanwhile, things were happening.

The Wade gang had been taken by surprise by the move, evidently, and made the interpretation of it that Lang had predicted they would.

"They're makin' for the wood lot," I heard Ed Wade shout. "Git after 'em!"

Instantly a quartet of horsemen started down the clearing on a dead run, firing at random with revolvers as they urged their horses forward. One passed me, but a second got no more than a few leaps beyond his starting point.

There was a roar, and a hail of buckshot pattered among the leaves in front of me; Quake had fired. I thought his gun had exploded, from the greatness of the sound, but on turning my head I saw him standing coolly in that doorway, calmly reloading. At the same moment the dark figure of the girl outlined itself by his side, and she began to pop away with her revolver.

But the second horseman had received his check from that shot. The horse stopped midway in a bound, it seemed, and I heard it threshing about frantically in a group of laurels. Also the man screamed profanely, and began to pray.

Quake let out a stentorian howl, full of the lust of battle, to his dogs:

"Sic 'em, boys!"

And as the brutes leaped forward toward the horsemen that they could see (how I envied them!) he fired again, both barrels, and another horse screamed.

The intermittent roar of the shotgun, the cracking of rifles and revolvers (for the Wades kept up a useless fire at Lang and myself, apparently for the fun of it; they didn't fire at the house for fear of hitting Beth), the joyous whooping of those dogs and the yells of Quake as he urged them on, made a pande-

monium, through which I crawled, deafened.

After one report of the shotgun I heard Ed Wade's angry cry above the din:

"He's done shot my beast, cuss him!"

And a second later, as I rose at the edge of the road and attempted to cross it unobserved, I collided with a man, who grappled with me. To this day I believe it was Ed Wade, unhorsed. I hope it was, anyway; for, being the less surprised of the two, I brought my revolver butt down on his temple, and kicked him viciously in the midriff at the same time.

He had opened his mouth to give the alarm, but the sound died, a mere rattle in his throat as he sank back; and I glided on toward the oak tree, savagely pleased with myself.

Of the others, the majority were circling around the house by this time, endeavoring to cut off our retreat, and greatly harassed by those blessed hounds of Quake's, who sprang at the horses' throats, snapped at their heels, and made them generally unmanageable; much to our advantage.

Finally I reached the oak and the horses. Lang, by some mysterious means that I have never been able to fathom (for I know that I wasted no time), had reached them before me, and was waiting with one foot in the stirrup on the far side of the animals—that is, with them between him and the house.

"Bully for ye!" he cried, in a low tone. "I wuz jist gittin' anxious for ye. Mount and ride, Trent—ride like hell was bustin' open behind ye!"

I did; as we swept down the road a brutal yell arose from the horsemen, showing that we were discovered, and I got my last glimpse of Quake's for some time.

The old man was still erect in the doorway, reloading the shotgun. I don't believe he had ever felt fear in his life—that is, to have it move him from what he considered his duty.

His duty in this case was to stand by his friends, and, incidentally, to exterminate as many of the Wades as he could by firing at the flames from their weapons; and to this code he was living up nobly.

At first I did not see the girl, but in a moment she came into the light again by his side, and with one purposeful yank at his arm dragged him within and shut the door.

It did not reopen, and within a few more bounds our horses had carried us out of range of the house.

And then it was nip and tuck for our lives. Up to that time the excitement had held me cool, I think; but now as the pursuit settled into its stride behind us, and I heard the hoofs of at least half a dozen horses hammering out the devil's tattoo on the country road—and not so very far in our rear, at that—I was scared stiff.

I dug my knees into my horse's sides, and gave him a free rein, bending low in the saddle to avoid being punctured by a bullet from one of those rifles behind me, which would go off occasionally with a vicious little *spat!* for no other purpose, I think, than to make me remember my sins.

I did; I remember them all, I think, being firmly convinced that each individual slug of lead was especially aimed for my precious ribs.

Curiously enough, after that, I could think of nothing but that man who had fallen under Quake's fire; the curse with which he fell and the strange, incongruous, ranting prayer he put up, thinking, I suppose, that he was dying.

But I guess my specialty isn't deathbed repentance; I couldn't pray—I only hung on the horse, and told him I loved him, and to go on for the love of Moses.

Lang, for his part, kept a superbly indifferent silence. This was a part of his life; he was accustomed to it, as he was to the thought of dying with his boots on, and he spoke first when we had been riding hard for a matter of some ten minutes.

"I calc'late we're losing that outfit," he said, sitting up in his saddle, and glancing over his shoulder.

We were, I think. Lang's horse was a splendid animal, though he held it in-

ferior to the one he had had shot under him at the ford; and my brute, though a vicious one, ill-tempered and conditioned, had speed and bottom, and kept fairly abreast of the other.

At any rate, the night seemed to fly to the rear very swiftly, and the sounds of hard riding and senseless shooting to begin to fade into the distance and become indistinct—all but that of two of the pursuers, that is.

They seemed to be almost, if not equally, as well mounted as we were. When the ruck fell back I could hear their hoofs drawing out of the clamor, and coming steadily on at a pace that neither increased nor lessened their distance from us.

Lang spoke of them.

"They'll drap off 'fore long, Trent," he said, with the glimmer of a relieved amusement in his voice; "they're gittin' a leetle too close to my country for their own comfort."

"Thank Heaven!" I said, fervently—and a little previously.

Precisely as the words left my lips Lang's horse stumbled—we were driving wildly down a hill at the time—upon a loose pebble, slid to its knees and keeled over on its side, throwing Lang.

For him the fall might well have been a nasty one had he been less active. As it was he was on his feet before the animal had fairly struck the ground—on his feet and moved to profound profanity.

He was not scared now; there was a humorous tinge to his words, as if he appreciated some rare joke upon himself.

"Jist my luck!" he grunted, striving vainly to get the prostrate animal on its feet.

I, of course, had promptly reined in to keep him company.

"Jist my doated McComb luck! Hyeh we air within five minutes' ride o' safety, and the fool hawss breaks his dern laig!"

The horse writhed with the pain, and Lang, groaning with sympathy for the beast, put an end to its sufferings with a shot.

"Get up behind me," I suggested, unpleasantly conscious that the following hoofs were drawing uncomfortably near us.

"No," he said. "Ye go on—hit ain't fer. I kin jump into the bresh hyeh, and be home in no time."

Goodness knows why, but I suspected him of a desire to sacrifice himself to save me, and spake accordingly.

"Get up behind," I said, firmly, "or I don't go another step."

Clumpetty-clump, clumpetty-clump! said the hoofs behind us.

"Oh, go on, will ye——"

"I won't. You get up!"

"But," he expostulated, "the blame hawss won't carry two!"

"He'll carry two or none!"

Clumpetty-clump!

"Hurry," I cried, growing frightened again.

"Won't I tell ye!"

Crack!

Our pursuers had rounded a bend, and emerged upon the brow of the hill, some distance above us and about three hundred yards in our rear. One rifle spoke.

"Oh," said Lang, suddenly, "if I hev to——"

I gave him a free stirrup, and he stuck his foot in it. In the rear the rifle cracked again, and the horse jumped and danced across the road, snorting madly.

CHAPTER XI.

BACK TO BACK.

Lang gritted his teeth as he hopped along on one leg, trying to get a purchase by which to swing himself up.

"Drat the beast!" he cried; adding: "That was a shore close shave, stranger. I felt the wind o' hit 'tween me and the hawss."

"I——"

What it was I began to say I don't know. Something gave me pause and made me gasp suddenly—something that seemed to enter beneath my right shoulder blade and dart with lightning-like swiftness up toward my collar bone—something that was like the blade of a

white-hot knife, slipped smoothly into my flesh, searing, burning—an agonizing pain.

I sighed (I remembered hearing the sound indistinctly, as of some one at a distance), and seemed to fall forward for a long time, ever down, down, down, into a black void that presently was no longer black, but filled with writhing, seething flames that lapped and coiled at my slow-descending form.

And eventually I found that I was holding myself in the saddle by a hand that gripped the pommel until it hurt, while the other hand, still holding the reins, was clutching at my throat.

We were moving. I comprehended in some way that Lang had succeeded at last in climbing up behind me, and now, by some marvel of horsemanship, was seated with his back to me, his face to the horse's tail. My feet, I found, were beating madly on the beast's ribs, which distracted him and made him move forward at a halting gallop—the best pace he could muster under the double load.

The sweet, fragrant coolness of the night air was like a soft caress upon my brow; and this, I conceive, was what had brought me out of my pain-racked stupor.

I could not move without agony. My position, as I found it, I managed to hold with some difficulty.

There was sound behind us—sounds of men shouting, and flying reports of rifles; and now and again Lang would clutch at my side for support, raise his arm, and his revolver would speak.

After some time I made out that he was calling to me—had been for goodness knows how long.

"Trent—— Trent—— Revolver—— Trent——"

I subdued my selfish pain with an effort, and tried to understand what he was saying; while the motion of the horse shook and thrilled that bullet wound and made everything seem unreal, illusive and incoherent.

Yet I had sense enough to know that it was real—terribly and most dangerously real.

"What?" I gasped.

"What's the matter with ye?" he demanded, sharply, and *bang!* went that pistol in response to a shot.

"They've shot me," I said, as loudly as I might, "in the chest."

He groaned.

"Hand me yo' gun," he said, "if ye can. By God! Ed Wade'll sweat blood for this night's work, or my name's not Lang McComb!"

The night was again swaying and leaping about me madly, the road—a white glow under the starlight—rising up to and falling away from me with sickening irregularity; and I heard my own groans from a long ways off.

But I finally was able to pass him the gun. He gripped it, and pressed my hand at the same time.

"Hold out as long's ye kin," he said. "Don't be afeerd—I'll pull ye through. And when I yell pull this hyeh beast in if ye kin."

For reply he got a grunt which seemed to answer all purposes. I chewed at my lips, in an effort to retain consciousness, till they bled. He was now reloading his own revolver.

"Don't see why I can't hit neither o' them," he muttered to himself; and then:

"There's that sycamore at last!"

I wondered if my ears were failing me; there was a certain roaring in them through which outside sounds penetrated fairly distinctly, as the thin treble of a child will rise clear above the incessant clamor of heavy seas upon a sandy shore.

I could no longer make out the hoof beats of our pursuers. I hoped they might have given up the chase; we seemed to have come a long way, and should be near the McComb place now if ever.

But no! Again I heard the rattle of those confounded Winchesters and the shrilling of the leaden pellets around our ears. I shivered, and then, all at once, Lang burst out into the most horrible series of screeches I have ever been unfortunate enough to have to listen to.

It startled my senses out of a sort of dreamy lethargy they were slipping into—a sensation of helplessness like that we feel under the influence of a nightmare;

and I remembered that I was to stop the horse.

Pulling in on the reins, I brought him to a willing halt, and felt the absence of Lang's bulk from his haunches. I was fully conscious now—in pain, but clear of eye and brain—and I wanted to see.

My mount helped me in this desire. I fancy he had enjoyed the flight and fight as well as had the pursuers. Anyhow, he veered around now until his head was again toward Roan's, and stood gazing down the road with an expression of great intelligence and interest on his pricked-forward ears.

Lang I saw dismounted—of course—and running back, a spitting revolver in either hand. He was still giving vent to his ear-splitting war whoops between shots, and appeared to be having a bully good time.

A little distance from him I saw two horses at a halt and half turned, so that they presented a broadside, so to speak, to us.

One I thought riderless, but afterwards made out a man clinging helplessly about his neck. The second animal bore a rider, erect, who was just at that moment aiming at Lang with his rifle.

His peril seemed so great, his daring of death so maniacal, that I rose, wounded though I was, in my stirrups, and sent a thin, feeble cry down the road after Lang's retreating figure.

It was an effort wasted. Lang knew what he was about, even if I could not see the method in his madness.

For hardly had my cry spent its slim strength against the hills when it was taken up and echoed and re-echoed from half a dozen throats, and, with a scurry of hoofs and a rattle of pistols, men bore down upon me, and; dividing, swept past to the rescue.

They were the McCombs in force, roused from their beds by Lang's hideous screeching. They were half dressed and wholly mad, riding bareback and ludicrous to the eye—but welcome.

The man with the Winchester paused in surprise. I fancy he had not thought he had ventured so near the McComb home, with his companion. He looked up from his sighting along the barrel, and—I could not see his face, but imagined the chagrined expression—pulled the trigger aimlessly. The shot spent itself in all outdoors.

Nor did he pause to observe its effect. Wheeling both horses, he let out a frightened yell, and lashed them into a dead run on the back route. A few of the McComb contingent pursued, and, like him, vanished promptly into the dark shadows of the wooded road.

The rest gathered about Lang. I heard him talking loudly, pointing, gesticulating in my direction; a breeze sprang up, and carried to my ears angry murmurs from the group.

One man's voice rose clear and threatening:

"Kill every whelp in the litter——"

And then they turned and came toward me. I saw them, sitting tight and gripping the pommel to retain my consciousness.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HAND UPON MY SHOULDER.

For many, many days I seemed to have been blundering hither and thither, weary and aching, in a dense fog. It was everywhere, on all sides of me, enveloping my world in a shroud of blindness, thick, deep, mysterious, impervious to sight, but not to sound.

Through this, I knew not why, I was doomed to wander for always, in some strange, anguished search for I knew not what. I was only sentient to this: that I must go on, on, ever on.

But, gradually, the fog began to lift, and ere long I could see somewhat; and the world stopped its reeling and stood still, with me in the center of it, lying on my back on a rude, clean couch in a small, close, sweet-scented room.

People went in and out, speaking in low tones; one stopped to gaze at me, or to smooth my pillow, and another brought me food in a bowl—some thin gruel, which I lapped at greedily.

And presently I understood.

I was in a room in the McComb

homestead, in the mountains. I knew this, hearing Lang calling cheerily to his dogs outside, beyond the little, open window at the foot of my bed. And a woman came and looked in at me—a woman with kind eyes singularly like Lang's in expression, and with a ripe, round, pink-cheeked face, homely and honest.

She smiled, and went away. I closed my eyes and waited. I was weak and light-headed—felt a good deal as if I did not weigh more than about a pound or a pound and a half, or say two pounds for a limit.

I heard Lang's voice again, and the scrambling of hoofs. He was saying good-by to some one, and explaining that he would be back soon. I felt suddenly ill-used, as if he were deserting me.

But I lay on. At intervals horses passed the house, thumping slowly along the mountain road. One stopped and entered. I hoped it was Lang returning.

It was not—it was better; it was Beth, calling to ask after me.

She came upstairs, after a while, and entered my room, and sat down on a clumsy, old-fashioned chair by the head of my bed.

I thought I had never seen anything so heavenly as her face, so I smiled at her, and was rewarded with a smile that made the blood pulse in my temples.

Yet, always, I knew that it was but a friendly feeling, no more, that brought her to my side.

She sat there, talking in a low, calm tone, telling me the news of the days past. It seemed that I had been unconscious for a matter of over half a week, but that I would be all right with a day or so more of rest.

"Logan?" I asked, thinking of the man whom I had shot down at the ford.

He would live, she said; his wound had been more serious than mine, but he was slowly recovering.

She had pulled Quake back into the house, when she found that we had made good our effort at escape, and the attacking party had all streamed out in pursuit of us, leaving them in safety for a brief time, which they had improved at once.

Quake had saddled his horse and ridden up into the mountains, to wait until things would be quieted down somewhat, and it would be safe for him to return.

She—Beth—had ridden back to—she hesitated here, and at length brought out the word with an effort—to her home.

Meanwhile, the Wade gang, pursuing us, had divided into two parties, as I knew. The ruck had kept doggedly on, in hope of being in at our death; but when the McComb party sallied out, and drove back the two foremost men, they had also gone farther and had chased the remainder of the gang halfway back to Badalia.

Quake's store was therefore saved from burning.

Singularly enough (but justly, I thought), all the casualties, except my own wound, had been on the Wade side of the argument.

Ed Wade himself was nursing a broken head; his horse had been shot, he said, and in falling had thrown him so that his forehead came in contact with a rock.

I thought that I could have given a better and more picturesque and true account of this accident than Ed Wade had seen fit to; but said nothing.

Two others had been wounded among Wade's retainers. So it appeared that we three—Lang, old Quake and I—had repaid amply Ed Wade for the loss of two horses and my bullet wound.

This knowledge made me feel rather happy and contented; the strange combination of adventures I had blundered into since my arrival in the Sinful Creek community, had aroused in me a feeling of intense animosity to the Wade outfit (not unnaturally, perhaps), and quite as distinct a sense of loyalty to the McCombs.

I felt that, having been of service in saving Lang McComb from assassination, I had conferred a signal benefit upon the whole valley; he was the sort of man that humanity there could not afford to do without.

Beth left me after a while, and I turned over, contentedly, to sleep, when I overheard (I could not help it) Lang's mother waylay her in the hall.

"Beth," she said, affectionately, as if she knew well and loved the girl, "air ye comin' back hyeh to-morrow."

There was a pause before I heard the girl's reply.

"I don't think so. No," she added, with sudden decision. "I mustn't—I dassent. Ed would—if he knew——"

Her voice broke here, and she did not finish.

I fancied she was running away, but the old woman detained her; for when they spoke again their voices were more distant.

"Beth, Beth!" said Mrs. McComb, in a tone of gentle reproach. "What for air ye treatin' Lang so? Ain't he good 'nuff for ye, gal? D'ye think that vagabone Ed Wade's as good's my boy?"

"No," responded the girl, brokenly. "You know I don't—he isn't——"

"Then why'n goodness' name don't ye marry Lang, 'stid o'——"

"I can't—I can't! Oh, mother, don't ask me."

"But I will ax ye. I want to know."

"I can't tell you. I've promised, and —oh, I don't love Ed, but I must, I must!"

With this she must have broken suddenly away; for a moment or two afterwards I heard her mount and go kiting down the road. From the pace she lashed her horse into, she must have thought herself in a hurry—or have been wanting to leave behind her disturbing thoughts.

During the following afternoon I was permitted to get up, dress, and take the mountain air from the veranda in front of the house. I found Lang McComb there with a rifle across his knees; he was tilted back in his chair, serenely gazing at the misty purple sky line of the distant Cumberlands.

A second rifle, a repeating Winchester, was leaning against the wall by the chair. Lang explained this armed peace, characteristically.

"I hev sent word to Ed Wade," he said, smiling, "that, if he hankers after shootin' me up any mo', he kin find me hyeh. I ain't gwine to cross the valley on pu'pose to git shot."

We talked for a few moments. One subject was uppermost in my mind, and presently I found a chance to turn the conversation in that direction. I felt my way delicately, but finally managed to give him the substance of what I had heard pass between his mother and the girl. Why would she not marry him?

"Look hyeh, Mr. Trent," said Lang suddenly (hitherto he had been calling me "Trent"), "don't ye worry 'bout Beth marryin' Ed Wade. She only thinks she will. She ain't goin' to, honest! Say, d'ye reckon I'd let her? That hound-pup, Ed Wade! I allow not."

I felt uneasily that I had been rebuked for interfering. I squirmed in my chair for a while, and then, finding that I was considered perfectly cured, now that I was at last up and about, announced my intention of riding down to Quake's, to get my camera and satchel.

Lang gravely permitted me leave of absence, and caught and saddled my horse himself. He advised, however, that I ride in the shade as much as possible; the sun, striking my still convalescent wounds in shoulder and throat, would do them no good.

This was good counsel, I felt; and I improved upon it by riding slowly. The day was exceptionally fine, the air delicious to my city-bred lungs. I loitered along, drinking it in in great chestfuls.

Again I found myself on an erratic, irresponsible road—a continuation, in fact, of the one I had traveled on from Milan to Roan's.

I was content to take the rest of the afternoon—though that was not much —for my ride; but after a while my journey began to seem quite long. I had had no notion that Lang and I had covered so much ground in our break for life, that night.

In time, I became weary, and, coming to a cool, inviting glade in the woods by the roadside, I alighted, tethered my

horse, and sat down at some distance from the highway, with a clump of laurels at my back.

Lighting my pipe, I prepared to puzzle out something that was troubling me more than a little—how I was to find my man—"the man with the thumb"—without wandering too far from safety at McComb's, without falling into the hands of the Wades. And it seemed as if I, by the totally unforseen manner in which I had involved myself in the feud, was faced by a task extremely difficult of accomplishment.

Yet I felt undismayed. Really, I was enjoying myself, and felt that I should win out somehow or other; for Lang had assured me that I was entirely safe if I confined myself to the Roan side of the valley and did not stray over to Badalia. And I had a habit, those days, of believing in myself, in my eventual success.

The afternoon dragged on drowsily, the sun slanting slowly toward the west. Myself, I drowsed, nodding over my problem—thinking for the most part, it may be, of Beth Roan and the beauty of her as I had seen it.

Somehow it seemed queer to me that when I had met the girl but twice, I should find the charm of her appealing so strongly to my imagination. I had but to close my eyes, I found, to see her sweet face hovering before me. So I kept my eyes closed, for the most part.

And yet I was to open them suddenly with a cry, to sit bolt upright, gasping with astonishment. For, in some strange reversion of thought, while my mind was centered upon Beth Roan, it had suddenly struck off at the most direct of tangents and—side by side with the girl's, I saw in my fancy the features of a man.

Now the resemblance between them both was too marked to be passed over. It was striking, as I thought—a natal likeness. And the man was one whom I had never seen. He was none other than he whose photograph had been handed me by Gray Eyes, on the train—so long ago; he whose face I was to carry in my memory, he of whose thumb I was to get an impression.

It was clear to me, abruptly, that I must find Beth Roan. If there were a feeling of pity in her heart for me, I thought, if she held me in any gratitude for saving the life of the man she loved—Lang McComb—then I would be safe in taking her into my confidence, in asking her aid. Surely she would not refuse me.

Having some vague thought of going directly to Badalia to find the girl—for she had said she would not return to McComb's—I was about to rise; had even swung myself up on my knee, when a hand glided out of the bushes behind me and settled firmly upon my shoulder with a grip whose might I was unable to deny, in my enfeebled state.

And, too, without delay, a second large, horny palm closed over my mouth. I was dragged, struggling and terrified, into the cool shadows and seclusion of the forest behind me.

CHAPTER XIII.

I TAKE BIG CHANCES.

"Don't ye whimper, suh! Don't ye do it! Ef ye do, I'll—well——"

A pistol's butt hung in the air above me, threateningly, at which I gazed with an apprehension strangely tempered by the tone of the speaker. It was not unkindly; there was nothing of malice in the tones—rather an humorous appreciation of my fright.

Moreover, the hand which had so lovingly attached itself to my coat collar, and that which had closed so firmly upon my opening lips—opening to let out a screech for help—had not been ungentle. They had had a duty to perform, and that they had done with thoroughness, but with consideration, also.

For my part, I was too weak to make any resistance worth mentioning. I wriggled feebly, it's true, and tried to call out—but to no purpose. I found I was neatly trapped, so lay submissive, but waiting for the chance to draw my revolver. I was convinced that I would stand no show for my life in Ed Wade's

power—— And it's more fun to die fighting than any other way I can imagine. But not yet had it come to that extremity.

"That's bettah, suh," said the voice. "Jes' rest yo'self, an' don't fret. Ed Wade ain't got ye yit. Don't ye remimber me, suh?"

Remember him? I could almost have kissed him, so relieved was I to find that it was Quake.

Still, a glance at his face was enough to assure me that the time was not one for frivolity. He was livid under the action of some strong emotion, and his hands, the moment he released me, began their fitful vibration of nervousness. His eyes wore a worried, anxious gleam which told me that no good boded for him—or possibly, for his friends, the McCombs.

"What's the matter?" I asked at once, unconsciously whispering hoarsely, as one who fears a listener.

"S-sh!" he told me, lifting a warning hand, and cocking his ear to the breeze. Evidently he heard nothing, for presently he seemed less agitated.

"Be ye fr'm Lang's?" he demanded, promptly, disregarding my query.

"Yes——"

"Is thet yo' hawss out thar?"

"Yes, but——"

"Then fo' Gawd's sake, suh," he interrupted, appealingly, "mount and hump yo'self fo' safety. Get back to Lang ez quick ez ye kin, an' tell——"

He paused, again listening.

"Why?" I whispered. "What's the trouble?"

"Trebble enough, suh. Wade's gang be on the wahpath. Mos' likely they-alls comin' this hyehaways now—— S-sh——"

He rose suddenly and slipped through the bushes. I stood up, watching him approach my horse, pat the beast soothingly, grip her nostrils to prevent a neigh, and finally, with infinite stealthy precautions, untether and lead her back into the brush.

He passed me, leading the animal, with a cautioning gesture for silence, and retied her in a spot screened from the roadway. Then he stood at gaze, like a statue, holding the horse's nostrils and watching the road.

Following his example, I saw, after some dragging moments, two men, unknown to me and of rough aspect, ride slowly past us, talking together in low tones. Both carried heavy Winchesters across their saddle bows, and both were keenly scrutinizing each inch of the woodland.

Fortunately they missed us and rode on. Quake waited a length of time that seemed exaggerated to me before he ventured to release the horse's head, and make an explanation.

"Some o' Wade's oufit, suh," he said, briefly. "They-all lit down on me this arternoon. I heerd 'em comin' and scooted. I'm gwine to warn Lang."

"What does it mean?" I demanded.

"Beth Roan tole me, jist afore they come to my stoah, suh. Hit 'pears like Ed Wade went over yon, into Breathitt County, las' week, an' to-day, jist at noon, suh, he comes gallivantin' back with twenty rapscallions fr'm Breathitt. He 'lows ez he's gwine wipe ary sign o' McComb out'r Sinful Crick Valley, suh. They-alls gwine burn Lang out t'-night."

I stood motionless, staring at him, horrified, hardly able to believe my ears. In a moment he went on, smiling slightly.

"Thet is, ef no one don't go an' tell Lang they-alls comin'. I'm gwine to, suh, and Wade's gang'll find a mighty hot welcome at Roan's, suh—ef I know anything about Lang. Ye better leave yo' hawss hyeh, suh, an' come with me to Lang's. What?"

A sudden light had burst upon me; a scheme to outwit Ed Wade.

With "Wade's gang" out for the night, bent on battle, murder and sudden death for all McCombs and all that family's adherents, Badalia, naturally, would be deserted save for the women and children.

Beth Roan, too, would be there—perhaps unwillingly. I knew enough to guess that Ed Wade had some unusually strong hold upon the girl, to compel her to his will as he had; and the matter of the resemblance which had just struck

me so forcibly, completed a chain of reasoning.

"Look here," I said, "is there any one in the valley that looks like Miss Roan, Mr. Quake?"

"No, suh." He shook his head, staring at me as if he thought I had suddenly taken leave of my senses. "Leastways, thar ain't been no one sinst her father died—ol' Maj. Roan."

"But," I persisted, "*is* he dead?"

Again he gave me the answer that I had received from him the night of my entry into the valley: "Some say as he is, suh; I dunno."

"You're not sure?"

He hesitated. "I've heerd some say as his ha'nt hed been seen, suh——"

I proceeded to mystify him still more.

"Who'll be at Badalia to-night?"

"No one, 'cept'n th' women and chillern an' dawgs, suh."

"And Beth Roan?"

"Yes, suh—she tole me she hed to go back, suh. I dunno why."

Rapidly I outlined to him my suspicions, trusting him perhaps recklessly because I knew that he adored the young girl and opposed her marriage with Wade. And the verdict, when I had detailed my scheme, was an enthusiastic old man frantically wringing me by the hand.

"Go on, suh!" he cried. "Go on an' win; Gawd bless ye, suh!"

"There's no danger," I said, more to reassure myself than to him; "even if I'm seen before I find Miss Roan, no one in Badalia knows me. True, I've encountered the Wades twice, but both times it was too dark for them to see me. Personally, I'll be safe enough. And if I win——"

"Ye'll win, suh. Ye sholy will. An' atter this hyeh hez blowed over, ye kin allus call on ol' man Quake. He's with ye, suh. Yo's sholy a man!"

With great caution he got me across the highway without our being discovered by any of Wade's lurking men. Then, finally, he brought me to a narrow footpath.

"Take ye to Badalia, straight," he explained. "Hit ain't been used fo' years, suh; but thet thar path leads from Roan's to Badalia. An', fo' safety's sake, I wouldn't staht ontil dusk."

Then he left me to go on to warn Lang. I waited, impatiently, until nightfall, hearing no sounds but the forest's, seeing nothing save the woodland scenes; no human beings came to observe me. And, at nightfall, I started for the lion's mouth.

I found it a difficult passage that I had to make through the bottom lands of Sinful Creek Valley. In my enfeebled condition, fearful of straining myself, and thereby reopening my wounds, so proceeding cautiously with frequent rests, it was eleven, or after, before I stood in the dusty road which formed the Main Street of Badalia—and its only one.

Along it houses straggled, dark, quiet, deserted, mysterious and unreal in the moon's illusive rays. There were no sounds, the silence seemed ominous. In a few scattered windows only, shone dull yellow glows, to signify that the inmates—the women folk who had been left behind—were awake and watchful.

Keeping in the shadow as much as possible, I cautiously made my way along the roadside, wondering what house I would better enter first, to further my ends. Completely ignorant of the place as I was, I had no notion, now that I was on the scene, as to what my best move should be.

And suddenly it came to me, as I paused almost bewildered, that I was doing a very foolish and futile thing, to no good end.

And even at that same instant my straining ears caught, from across the valley, faint and indistinct, the sharp crack of a rifle. The dogs of Badalia heard it, and at once gave raucous tongue, frenzied.

Frightened, fearing that I would be discovered, I took to my heels, and ran—ran as if every dog in Badalia were snapping at my calves. Perhaps I need not have been so timorous—but I took no chances. Happily, none of Badalia's human inhabitants noticed me; presently I seemed to leave the village behind, and was about to stop and return,

more stealthily than before, if that were possible, when I saw, through the trees ahead, the moonlight shining on the corner of a white house.

A painted house—of all things in this blowsy neighborhood! I reconnoitered quietly, and came to the conclusion that this must be Beth's home.

It was a place more pretentious than anything I had dreamed of finding; three stories in height, a veranda and side porches, glazed windows, the semblance of a neglected lawn in front, and a really and truly stand-up board fence with a gate at the edge of the road!

It seemed, as far as I could determine by close observation, to be deserted. It would be dangerous to enter—but that was what I had come to brave. Finally I decided to risk it, and, with my heart in my mouth, came boldly up the road, opened the gate, and walked to the veranda—to halt terrified when a sluggish, lack-luster voice rose from its shadows.

"Howdy, stranger? What kin I do for ye?"

I looked intently into the darkness; and the speaker suddenly drawing upon a cigar and causing the ash to fall, I made out the glowing butt of it with a dim mass behind which might or might not be a man.

"I'm looking——" I began, slowly, trying to think up a good lie, and then telling it: "I'm looking for Mr. Wade—Mr. Ed Wade. Does he live here?"

A huge figure erected itself from an armchair. It seemed dimly familiar in some way. Also the voice smote my tympanums reminiscently.

"I reckon he does," said the man. "Come in. What do ye want of me?"

I was completely astonished, for the moment speechless.

"Go on," he cried, with gathering impatience. "Tell me yo' business. I'm Ed Wade."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE POLTROON.

He frightened me—positively—by the great bulk of him. The man was a physical giant. Lang McComb was a big man, but Ed Wade was as tall as Lang and twice as broad and deep, it seemed. As for me, he would have made two Dick Tarrions. And yet, for all his flesh and greatness, he was not unwieldy; he handled his body well, carrying himself with a grace that gave one the impression of a man never to be caught napping.

It remained to be determined whether or no he was a giant in intellect as well as in build. It was for me to match my subtlety against his cunning in a game whose stakes were mighty high—for me, at least, whose life was included. And, realizing this, I stood confused at the outset, lacking the straight-sounding answer which his plain, straightforward question demanded.

Casting about for some reply I seized upon the primal thought that was in my mind, and—told the truth!

"My business," I stammered, confusedly, "it's—it's—I wished to see you concerning Maj. Roan!"

"What!" He brought the ejaculation out like the report of a pistol shot. He walked down to the edge of the porch, and stood glowering at me until I felt that I wilted under that penetrating glare. Finally:

"Majah Roan's been dead these two yeahs," he observed, quietly.

"I know it," I agreed, steeling myself. "But he left a daughter, I believe?"

"Yes, suh. What of that?"

Then I began to lie, desperately; for I knew not what else to do.

"My name," I said, "is Richards. I am the son of one of Maj. Roan's old friends—a resident of Lexington. My father recently died leaving me his property; but in his will he directed that all his debts should be paid, and I find in a schedule of them that he owed Maj. Roan several thousand dollars. This naturally belongs to his daughter, and I wish to settle with her."

"Come inside."

Wade made the remark suddenly and sharply, and, after a considering pause, turned on his heel and entered the house. I swallowed my heart and followed, congratulating myself on the ready credence he had given my tale, com-

forting myself with the thought that, should worse come to worst and I be discovered, we were at least man to man —and that there was in the side pocket of my coat the heavy, reassuring weight of a built-for-business forty-four.

He led the way into a dining-room —evidently; a room in the front of the house, at one side of the central hall, somewhat better furnished than my previous experience had led me to expect to find in these mountains.

I found time to wonder at the taste displayed while Wade was lighting a kerosene lantern. He placed it in a bracket, so that the reflector threw a strong light upon me as I sat in the chair which he politely insisted was the easiest in the room. For Wade's part, he remained standing before an open fireplace, hands behind his back, his head pugnaciously forward, two little, sinister, black eyes fixed steadily upon mine.

"Ye say ye come fr'm Lexington?" he inquired, pleasantly. "Right smart of a journey, suh. Did ye come fr'm Nazareth, or Milan ways?"

"From Milan," I lied, more confidently, now that the habit was growing upon me; "I just got in this evening."

"An' ye hed to walk? That's sholy too bad, suh. Lemme mix ye a toddy. Tek off yo' coat, an' mek yo'self comfortable. Why, ye must be worn to a frazzle, walkin' so fer."

"I'm quite comfortable, thank you," I lied again; for I was uneasy now, vaguely alarmed by the mocking something which I fancied I detected in his tone. "I don't much care to drink. After business is over, perhaps—— Is Miss Roan about?"

I was desperately determined to brazen it out. Also, I was scared and confused. There were several things, indeed, which were beyond my comprehension. For one—why was Ed Wade here, when his men were attacking the McCombs?

I fancied something menacing in his attitude toward me, nor was I satisfied with the intangible explanation that in referring to Maj. Roan I touched upon some tender spot. Had Quake proven false to me, warned Wade of my coming? Had I been watched by Wade spies, that afternoon?

Was I in a trap?

"Miss Roan?" he repeated. "Why, yes, suh; I s'pose she oughter be somewhar 'round."

He had turned to a cupboard with his offer of a drink, and had taken from it a bottle of whiskey. This he fondled as he stood, smiling slightly.

"I'd like to see her," I blundered on. "Of course, I want to settle up, and get back as soon as I can."

"*Umm*—yes. I'll call her—— Mought I ask, Mistah Richards, how you knew enough to come to me foh Miss Roan?"

"Why—the storekeeper at Milan told me that—that you might know."

His arm moved swiftly. I saw the missile coming, out of the tail of my eye, and I dodged, but not quickly enough. He had thrown the whiskey bottle at my head—thrown it with exceeding swiftness and unerring aim. Despite my warning I could not evade it. I was struck a heavy, glancing blow on the temple, knocked from the chair, half stunned and just able to see.

Wade laughed aloud, gloatingly.

"Yo' picayune ass!" he cried, scornfully. "What kind of a fool d'ye think I am—to walk into my hands with yo' lies, when I know well enough thar ain't no evenin' train into Milan!"

He considered me, stroking his chin. I lay still, scarce daring to breathe, knowing that my only chance lay in making him believe that I was unconscious; but I watched through half-closed eyes.

"I reckon," he continued, "ye must be this hyeh Mistah Tarrion thet's been raising ructions. Wall, I calculate to settle with ye, Tarrion."

He reached down into the leg of his boot. When his hand came out it held his revolver—but held it a second too late. In that instant I had taken heart, and had drawn and covered him with my hammerless.

"Just drop that gun!" I besought him.

He gaped at me blankly, the trium-

phant sneer fading from his face. His hands opened nervously and his weapon fell to the floor.

I watched him with growing amazement, as he gazed as one fascinated into the muzzle of my gun. His thick, sensual lips were trembling; his face, that had been red-hued, now ashen-green; his eyes were glinting like hard stones struck by fear, throwing off sparks of pure terror; his fingers twitched and the whole frame of him vibrated weakly, as a stricken thing, invertebrate.

The sight of him thus made my gorge rise. It was horrible, monstrous, a pitiful exhibition—and it was the explanation of his absence from the work of the night.

Ed Wade was a coward!

"Don't shoot," he whimpered, weakly. "Please, suh, don't shoot! Aw, fo' Gawd's sake, suh——"

"Oh, shut up!" I snapped, sickened.

But he whined on, abject, cringing, fawning, begging me to have mercy upon him, to spare his worthless carcass —until finally I had to silence him with the threat direct.

At the muzzle of the revolver, I backed him into a corner, as distant as possible from either door of the room. I placed myself over against the outer doorway, facing him, at my ease in a chair. And then, by dint of threats made potent by the weapon I kept trained upon him, I made him answer.

"You called me Tarrion just now," I said. "Now, how did you know that was my name?"

"I—uh—I——" he stammered, unable to keep his eyes from the revolver.

"Did you ever," I continued, "use a telephone?"

"Why, suh! What d'ye mean, suh?"

"I mean this: Did you ever tell anybody, over a telephone wire, that if he came out here, when you 'got through with Mr. Tarrion, he'd wish he'd never been born?' "

I thought the craven's eyes would start from their sockets. But by then I had recognized his voice, was fairly sure of him.

"And then," I continued, gloatingly, "some one interrupted you, and told you not to be too sure? Remember that? I was the fellow who was so rude."

"You, suh?"

Still he stared blankly. But his simulated incomprehension failed to deceive me. I felt that I had put my finger on the button of this mystery. I was putting two and two together.

Now, I was assured, I was come to the end of my search; and, as surely, I felt that the man I had been sent to seek was Maj. Roan, and that Wade knew where the major was.

"Where," I demanded, suddenly, and as fiercely as I could, "is Maj. Roan?"

He gripped his fat fingers together.

"Dead, suh," he whispered, hoarsely.

I raised the revolver.

"Where—is—Maj.—Roan?"

"Oh—suh. Oh, oh, don't, suh! I'll take ye to him, suh! I will, indeed, suh! I promise—— Oh, please, suh——"

"Then he isn't dead?"

"No, suh; indeed he isn't, suh. He's jist pretendin' to be dead, suh!"

"Very well. How long will it take you to get me to him?"

"Ten minutes, suh—not moah, suh!"

"Good!—— Hello!"

The crack of a rifle shot had come to my ears—short, sharp at hand. Others followed it. I rose, uneasily, and walked to the window—careful, however, to keep an eye on Wade.

Before the house the valley lay a well of darkness. But at the farther side—as nearly as I might judge, at the cross-roads where stood Quake's store—a pillar of flame was leaping skywards, tossing aloft great clouds of ruddy smoke, huge constellations of sparks for the night wind to carry Milanwards.

I had forgotten, absorbed in the excitement of my adventure, the work that was doing in Roan's that night. Now, bitterly indignant as this was brought home to me, and I realized what the flames meant, I swore aloud.

"The devil!" I cried.

"What is it, suh?" Wade demanded, eagerly.

"Quake's store is being burned!" I

told him. "The work of your men, you cur!"

He said something exultantly toned, but I did not hear it well. My ears were filled with the thunder of hoofs caused by a body of horsemen dashing up the road from Quake's—and already perilously near Badalia.

Wade's men, I deduced, were returning, having triumphed over the McComb forces, having carried fire and death to Roan's. If this were so, it behooved me to escape. And I dared not leave Wade behind.

I leaned out of the window, striving to judge by my hearing of the nearness of the horsemen.

In that moment Wade was upon my shoulders—like a huge, crafty, cowardly cat that strikes when its prey is unaware of danger.

He got me to the floor. Fortunately, my revolver had dropped out of the window; and, despite my weakness, I managed to keep him too busy to find his own. We fought the round of the room, rolling, biting, scratching—fought like animals, indeed; for Wade was the larger and the stronger, I the more desperate, reading my death warrant in every individual note of the clattering hoofs that neared us.

Abruptly the man jerked himself away, and I was free—free to lie limp and exhausted upon the floor, free to watch him as he ran about the room, terrorized again, seeking an exit which, when found, he feared to take, while from without came the stamping of suddenly halted horses and cries, loud and imperative for:

"Wade! Ed Wade! Come out of that, you——"

One voice I knew. It was McComb's—Lang's. And then I understood that Wade's gang had been defeated, that all was well with me. And I watched the wretched creature curiously as he circled the wall aimlessly, dazedly, like a mouse in a trap.

Feet rang upon the veranda, in the hallway. Wade, screaming, made a desperate dash for the rear doorway. A flash of flame met him at its threshold, and he slumped back heavily to the floor, groaning, pleading, begging for mercy—mortally wounded.

There entered, upon that instant, Beth Roan, Lang McComb, Quake, a dozen of McComb's men, and—of all men—Peter Michaels, "Gray Eyes!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE PRINT OF A THUMB.

Michaels says that when I saw him I yelped just one remark, and slid off into unconsciousness. I expect that that's about right; for, without my knowing it at the time, my wound had been reopened by my struggle with Ed Wade, and the consequent loss of blood had knocked from under me the props of strength.

At any rate, I woke up the next day, back in the little room in the McComb homestead. Michaels himself was sitting by the window. I murmured something and he looked up.

"Howdy, fire eater," he said. "Thought you'd wake up in time to assist at the ceremony, did you?"

"What ceremony?" I said, weakly.

"Marriage ceremony, sir; Miss Elizabeth Roan is to be married to Lang McComb at three this afternoon."

"Say," I pleaded, "tell me all about it, Michaels. If you don't, right now, I'll talk a blue streak, and myself into a fever."

"That's a go," he assented. "After you've had something to eat, it won't do you a bit of harm to have your eyes opened. Fact of the matter is, I think you'd be more likely to shuffle off because of suppressed curiosity than for any other reason. But you have to eat first."

I agreed to that, and Beth and Mrs. McComb came in and fed me—spoon victuals, as if I had been a baby. And then I lay back, and bade Michaels fire away.

"I'm going to begin at the beginning, Tarrion," said he; "way back, twenty years ago, when you and I were tadding around in little Russian blouses, or whatever kids wore in those days; at any rate, long before either of us ever

dreamed that there was such a place as Sinful Creek Valley on the map of the globe.

"Maj. Randolph J. Roan then owned about all this neighborhood. He was a Southerner of the old school—and is now, by the way, but broken. He married in his middle age, and his young wife died at the birth of their only child, Elizabeth.

"From that time on, Maj. Roan seemed demoralized, without backbone or moral conscience. He went down hill like a bowlder down a mountain side. The most of his time he spent in the blue-grass region of this State, risking his money on the ponies—and losing it; risking it on cards and the red-and-black—and losing it; helping to support the numerous distilleries of the country—in a word, going to the demnition kioodles.

"Beth—Elizabeth—Miss Roan, I should say—was left up here in charge of the Wades, old tenants of the Roan's estates. She grew up a half-wild thing of the mountains, for the most part; although it is true that for a time the major put up for her education at one of the convent schools in the blue grass. There she learned the rudiments and a little more. For one thing, I happen to know, she speaks French like a native of Paris—that's convent training for you, Tarrion.

"But the major's money gave out too soon; Beth was taken from the convent and brought back here, a ward of the Wade's again. The major himself returned, and staved off ruin for a while by securing the appointment as postmaster at Milan. But that didn't last long; the salary of a fourth-class post office can't keep a man in expensive cigars and pay gaming debts. The major got awfully hard up.

"That was about four years ago—maybe three. And the devil came and whispered in Maj. Roan's ear—the devil in the shape of a card sharper he had known in Lexington. This man had run down on his luck, and become associated with a gang of New York swindlers, whose specialty was the perpetration of insurance frauds.

"It seemed easy, plausible, feasible—swindling an insurance company. The major, demoralized and needing money the worst way in the world, became an easy victim. At the suggestion of his swindling acquaintance, he went down into Lexington and offered himself to the companies. He was in fairly good health, and found no difficulty in persuading the companies to take the risk on his life to the extent of about two hundred thousand dollars—the premiums for which of course were to be put up, without the companies' knowledge, by the New York swindling syndicate, who were to get one-half of the swag when the trick was finally turned. The other half was to go to the major. In order to make everything seem straight, his daughter, Beth, was named as beneficiary under the various policies.

"But Beth was no party to the swindle; she didn't in the least suspect that the major was carrying any insurance at all.

"Well—the major waited a decent interval after the issuance of the polices—about six months—and then went on a fishing trip, up the mountains. Ed Wade and the gambler accompanied him. When they returned, a week or so later, they bore with them a coffin said to contain the body of Maj. Randolph J. Roan.

"The insurance companies were notified. Their representatives came down here, and had the coffin opened, and the remains identified by several leading citizens—Wade the most prominent, some of his tools testifying also. Miss Roan did not testify; she was prostrated by the shock of her father's death, unable to leave her bed.

"But everything seemed straight, and the policies were about to be paid, when a rumor was noised about the neighborhood—a rumor that the major's ghost had been seen in Badalia. The companies heard of it. Now, it is a mighty tough job to get a skeptical insurance corporation to believe in a specter of one of their policy holders. They decided to investigate, and held up the payment of the policies.

"This is where I come upon the scene, Tarrion. I am, and have been for years, an adjuster for the Occidental Mutual Life, of New York, which had underwritten the major's life to the tune of eighty thousand dollars. I was sent here to investigate and report.

"Wade received me with open arms; but I mistrusted him. Nevertheless, I accepted his hospitality, and remained at his house in Badalia—which used to be Maj. Roan's, by the way—while I was snooping around. From the first, the thing smelled fishy to me. And then, suddenly one night, a gang of mountaineers surrounded the house, denounced me as a revenue inspector on the lookout for illicit stills, and ran me out of the valley in my nightshirt—most embarrassing.

"Another man was sent here—Morrisey, of the North River Tontine Company. Morrisey met Wade—and just evaporated. He's never been heard of since.

"Then things began to look worse than ever. Calhoun, New York manager for the Occidental, called me into conference. He wanted me to come back; I didn't think it would be healthy for me to do so.

"We had quite a long talk. Finally it was decided to send into the valley a man who knew nothing of the precise nature of his business—a man of discretion with a plausible errand, such as bird hunting, who should know no more about his work than that he was to find a certain man. Then, if accused of being in the employ of the insurance concerns, he couldn't even look conscious; he could deny the charge with a clear conscience, for he knew no better.

"Obviously, such a chap would stand a better chance of winning out than any one known to be in the pay of an insurance concern.

"About that time I was running a case to earth on the West Side in New York. I was half disguised as a rowdyish sort of a water-front character, and used to patronize a cheap restaurant on Reade Street, and there, in the mornings, I would frequently meet up with an old school chum of mine—a fellow named Tarrion, who seemed pretty hard up. I fixed on Tarrion for our man, inasmuch as I knew him to be true metal to the backbone.

"That advertisement to which I called your attention, Tarrion, was gotten up especially for your benefit; we got a lot of other answers, but yours was the only one replied to. And that scheme of having you call up was also arranged especially for the purpose of keeping you in the dark, although we fondly fancied that would also serve to keep the New York gang of swindlers from spotting you.

"It failed—in this way: You remember the short, stout man who chased you all over the streets of New York, the morning you received your commission? Well, he was the same chap who called up Mort Wade, brother of Ed, who was in Philadelphia that night, waiting to get news, when you blundered onto their wire in some mysterious fashion——"

"Hold on, Michaels," I interrupted; "this is all very interesting, and I don't want to bother you, but will you be kind enough to explain how you knew about the stout spy, and about my running in on the telephone message?"

"That's simple enough," he went on. "Be quiet and listen.

"We rounded up Mr. Stoutman (whose name is Rickett, by the way), in Cleveland, day before yesterday, in reference to another case entirely. He was the head of the gang, whose operations were widespread, embracing the whole Eastern section of the United States.

"I was instrumental in Rickett's apprehension, and assisted the Cleveland police in putting him through the third degree. When he found that we had him, hard and fast, he decided to turn State's evidence, and try to get a lighter term in the pen. by confessing, and implicating all his pals.

"Among other affairs, he shed a whole lot of light on this episode.

"It seems that—as we had surmised—Ed Wade had helped to hide Maj. Roan in the mountains. After a while he began to cast the eye matrimonial on Beth Roan, with the additional consid-

eration that he, Ed Wade, could use her share of the insurance, two hundred thousand dollars, in his business. He promptly made Roan his personal prisoner, told Beth the gist of the whole affair, and threatened her that, if she refused to marry him, he would kill her father. In such case, the girl had but one duty; to sacrifice herself and her love for Lang McComb to the saving of her parent's life.

"He got his brother, Mort Wade, into the scheme. Of course they were in constant communication with the New York gang—with Rickett. At the proper time they received word that a third insurance inspector was on the verge of coming out, secretly this time. Ed and Mort went to Philadelphia, in order to be near the starting point, and to cripple or exterminate you before you got far on your way.

"Rickett was watching us more closely than we imagined. Calhoun and I were accustomed to hold our confabulations in my boarding house. Rickett, under another name, had the room next to mine, and by the simple expedient of boring a hole through the wall was enabled to keep tabs on us. He found out that you were the bird and immediately telephoned the Wades in Philadelphia. When you interrupted, they didn't know what to make of it; but I, by comparing the time of the calls, and interviewing the operator on duty at central that night, found that the party who had called for 20,010 Chelsea had accidentally been switched onto long distance.

"That meant you, of course.

"Well—Ed Wade left Mort to take the sleeper in Philadelphia, and attend to you. I guess you know what happened to Mort. They found his body a few days later—after you'd thrown him from the train—at the bottom of the ravine. You managed to get yourself into Wade's bad graces on several important counts, you see.

"When Rickett confessed, I lost no time in taking a train down here. I came into the valley by way of Nazareth, rather than from Milan, and I brought with me ten United States deputy sheriffs. We rode direct to McComb's, intending to enlist his services—got there about an hour after you had ridden off yesterday afternoon. By the time we had explained things, old man Quake came into camp, so to speak, with his story of Wade's contemplated revenge and of your scatter-brained expedition into Badalia.

"Lang sent out a hurry call to his allies, and we—McComb and his men and I with my deputy sheriffs—lay in wait for the Wade gang and their men from Breathitt County. Somehow I don't believe that there was ever a more surprised and indignant body of cutthroats on the face of the earth than that murderous deputation. They lit down upon the McComb homestead about eleven last night, and in just about two minutes by the clock they were all in the air. Most of them never knew what hit them. A few got away.

"We chased them down the road, and cornered them in Quake's store. They made a fight for it there, and set fire to the place, but we gathered them all in, and came on over to get Wade.

"We surrounded the house. When I waltzed into the front door, Lang McComb was attending to the rear entrance. Wade tried to get by him, and was mortally wounded. You, Tarrion, cast your eyes up to me with a glad, not to say joyous expression, cried, 'There's your man, Michaels! He knows where Roan is!' and keeled over in a dead faint.

"We pumped Ed Wade. At first I thought he was more scared than hurt, but we forced a confession from him; he told us where we could find Roan, in an abandoned hut a mile or so back in the hills, cursed you with melodramatic fervor, and died.

"Which ends the McComb-Wade feud for all time, by the way.

"Lang went up into the mountains, and got back this morning with Maj. Roan—alive, but downcast. He has perked up a bit by now, and is going to give his daughter away at the wedding this afternoon—the old scoundrel!

"I think that's about all."

"Not quite," said I. "You haven't explained about the thumb print. I don't follow you there."

"That," said Michaels, cheerfully, "is dead easy, my son.

"Maj. Roan, when signing his applications for insurance, was mighty nervous. In some way he managed to smear the ball of his thumb with ink, and left the print of it on the edge of the application to our company, the Occidental.

"Now, you know an insurance company doesn't pay the face of a policy except upon absolute proof of death. But we almost had that. I'm told that the body in the coffin—that of a mountaineer who died just at the right time—resembled Maj. Roan to a remarkable degree.

"The sole thing we could bring forward as positive proof that the major was alive was a second imprint of his thumb, taken from the hand of a living man. We instructed you to get a photograph of him, but that would hardly be legal evidence; supported by the thumb print, however, it would have been absolute, irrefutable.

"But that won't be necessary now. Fraud's proven, anyway. How do you feel, old man? Strong enough to get up and come downstairs for the festivities?"

"I don't know——"

I lay still, looking out of the window. Golden sunlight bathed a view of the valley; the land basked in a shimmer of heat. Without bees droned, horses pawed in the dusty roadside, dogs barked—Beth called aloud to Lang, her voice thrilling with ineffable happiness.

I raised myself upon my elbow, reaching for my clothing.

"Yes," I panted, "I'll be in at—at the wedding. But, Michaels——"

"Well?"

"For God's mercy, get me away from here to-day. I don't think I can stand it—to know that she—— I don't begrudge Lang his good fortune, but——"

I broke down. Michaels put his hand upon my shoulder. When he spoke it was in a tone of infinite compassion.

"Lies the land that way, old man?" he said, softly. "I'm downright sorry, Tarrion."

THE END.

The Wreck That Saved Singleton

BY HUGH A. C. WALKER

The story of an express messenger who found good in an ill wind

FOR a long time he gazed at the big, yellow envelope in his hand, unable to reach a decision. He was not altogether bad, for then he should never have been placed in such a responsible position in the express service; on the other hand, he certainly was not altogether good—not good enough, at least, to be beyond temptation.

But he was sorely in need of money, and the opportunity could hardly have been more favorable.

Had the amount been fifty thousand, instead of five, the very greatness itself would undoubtedly have deterred him from even the contemplation of such an undertaking; but with five thousand the risk was slight—to a man of Singleton's dramatic ability the *rôle* was an easy one.

Within an hour's time his train would be creeping over Crooked Creek in the gathering night; they always slackened speed before reaching the trestle to avoid the possibility of an accident.

Just after the crossing, he would rush into the rear cars, and do his melodramatic stunt: Believing the knock upon his door to be that of the conductor or one of the train crew, he had opened the door without dreaming of danger, when two masked men had sprung inside and covered him with their weapons; he had been taken completely by surprise, and was unable to make any resistance. They had forced him to turn over what cash he was carrying—fortunately, only five thousand dollars—and his revolver; then had jumped from the train just before it reached the trestle and had escaped into the darkness.

It would all sound reasonable enough —such things *had* happened in that part of the country—and, anyhow, who would ever suspect Hartwell Singleton of stealing a few paltry dollars, and then having the audacity to remain quietly at his post?

Back and forth within his heart the battle wavered, between conscience and fear of detection on the one side, and greed for the money on the other. In the end, Singleton's weakness conquered; he slipped the envelope beneath his white overalls into a secret pocket on the inside of his heavy flannel shirt, and went on with his work with perfect unconcern.

Number 7 was almost an hour late, and Buttrick, the new engineer, was holding the throttle open trying to make up the lost time; on and on they tore through the thickening dusk, the cars lunging recklessly from side to side.

Finally, the whistle shrieked out two long, despairing moans, followed by two quick gasps—the signal for the road crossing just a quarter of a mile from Crooked Creek.

Singleton coolly braced himself for his performance. But the train continued its frantic course.

"What's wrong with the fool?" he exclaimed to himself, as without even slackening his wild speed Buttrick dashed on toward the long trestle.

Scarcely had Singleton gotten the words from his lips when he felt his car give a sudden leap forward and downward, and with a resounding crash the whole train plunged headlong through a broken trestle.

The knot of loafers at the little railway station of Delmar, three miles distant, heard the noise, and easily guessed its meaning. At all times greedy for some excitement, they at once started off down the track toward the scene of the disaster.

A few minutes later, a boy came dashing into Delmar on horseback, and soon the horrible news had been spread all over the village. Immediately heroic efforts began to be put forth for the relief of the sufferers; the women threw open their homes and prepared beds, bandages and hot water, while the men flocked to Crooked Creek in vehicles of all kinds.

The spectacle that met their eyes, although seen but dimly by the weak light of the stars and the lantern that had been brought, was ghastly in the extreme.

At the bottom of the ravine lay Number 7, torn into ten thousand splinters —the engine lying helpless on its side moaning and shrieking along with the wounded and dying, the steel rails twisted and bent like so many pieces of wire, the rotten bridge timbers piled up in a shattered heap.

The rescuers divided themselves into groups of two or three and set to work without delay looking for the unfortunate victims.

One of these groups stumbled upon the body of a man, clad in bloody white overalls, lying near a pile of rubbish.

His pallid, boyish face turned toward the sky was drawn with suffering. Upon examination he was found to be still alive, but unconscious; his external injuries consisted of a badly crushed leg, a broken collar bone, and severe bruises on different parts of his body.

After his leg had been bandaged as well as possible by the rough, amateurish hands, he was carried out carefully, placed upon a cot in one of the wagons, and sent on at once to Delmar. The villagers labored all through the night with willing hearts and ready hands.

Within two hours after the accident a relief train arrived, and the work of

removing the *débris* was begun vigorously. From Columbia a special came, bringing several officials of the road and Dixon, the express route agent.

Most of the articles from the express car were found missing—either destroyed or stolen by sneak thieves. The safe, which evidently had been open when the wreck occurred, lay upon its side with the door torn off; the most careful and patient searching failed to give any light as to the whereabouts of the five thousand dollars.

. . . . . .

Late in the afternoon of the day following the disaster, the express route agent, the physician of the road, and several others were seated at Singleton's bedside, watching the sufferer and talking in low tones about the horrors of the night before.

Singleton's clothing had been removed, his injuries treated, and everything done that might possibly help to give him relief; still he remained unconscious.

One of the men, happening to pick up from the floor the wounded boy's flannel shirt, discovered the express envelope in an inside pocket; he tossed it over to the express official, and Dixon was overjoyed at finding that it contained the five thousand dollars, untouched.

"Well, gentlemen," he exclaimed, with subdued enthusiasm, "that's the pluckiest express messenger I've run across yet; I understand the whole business now. He must have dragged himself to the safe after he was crippled up and got this stuff—likely as not it was the exertion that's helped to get him in this fix. Did you ever hear of presence of mind or grit to beat that?"

Just as he finished speaking Singleton groaned with pain, and his eyes slowly opened—consciousness had returned. At first he was struck with wonder at his strange surroundings and his suffering; then in an instant the awful experience of the night before flashed into his mind.

His next thought was of the stolen money; sickening terror filled his soul, and he turned his eyes upon the men beside him in a wild stare of interrogation.

The physician had risen quickly, and was now bending over him asking questions about his injuries; but Singleton did not hear, for in Dixon's hands he beheld the envelope and knew that he was ruined.

The next moment Dixon was standing by him holding his hand, and smiling down upon him with admiration. What could he mean?

"Singleton, old boy, you're the gamest yet; I found the stuff where you hid it—you've saved the company five thousand, and I'll see that you get a promotion such as your sand and coolness of last night deserve. Hurry and get straight, and you'll find a job waiting on you."

Singleton was to have an opportunity for some star acting, after all, and even in his suffering proved equal to the demands. With a queer expression of resignation on his pale face he answered, steadily:

"You are mistaken, Mr. Dixon. I did not try to save that money; I—I meant to steal it. I ought to be in prison, not here."

Dixon glanced at his companions. The admiration in his voice was stronger even than before.

"There's a chap for you," he said. "He's as modest as he is brave. And he would joke with one foot in the grave. Singleton, my boy——"

But the express messenger had mercifully fainted.

THE DERELICT HUNTERS*

BY HENRY HARRISON LEWIS

Author of "A Gunner Aboard the Yankee," Etc.

[NOTE.—A reward of one hundred thousand dollars offered by the little republic of Paraguay for the recovery of an important document of state stolen by an attache at the palace in Asuncion induces three American soldiers of fortune to offer their services. The absconding attache has been traced to a Spanish bark which, after sailing from Montevideo, becomes water-logged and a derelict. The three Americans start in search of the derelict on board the *Octopus*, a small steamer owned by them, and presently discover that another expedition commanded by an old-time enemy has been sent out by Brazil, which also is interested in the document.—THE AUTHOR.]

THE THIRD ADVENTURE—THE LOOT OF THE PRINCESS' YACHT

I.

M'CREA leaned back against the corner of the after-deck house and moodily watched the face of his companion. Against the advice of his partners, Chesley and Gravatt, he had rescued this man from a watery grave, and now Craven was jibing him and opening old sores.

There was an enmity of ten years' growth between Craven and himself. It had commenced when both were officers—soldiers of fortune—in Admiral Mello's fleet at the capture of Rio Janeiro, and had continued without cessation until the present moment.

When the two men had mixed up in this queer derelict-hunting business, and Craven had played a humiliating trick on McCrea, the latter had sworn to kill him on sight.

Yet he had pulled him from the angry maw of the sea at some risk to himself.

He watched the Englishman's face—an evil face it was, lean and grizzled and crime scarred—and then his eyes wandered down to the great, rough hands, lying manacled with steel bracelets in his lap.

Craven was in his power. If he wished he could pick up a belaying pin, and put an end to him then and there. His partners would applaud the deed, and it would be ridding the earth of a bit of useless scum.

"I suppose I ought to do it," he muttered to himself, "but if I did I would be as big a cur as he. I'll give——"

"McCrea," interrupted Craven, with a snarl, "you don't dare knock off these irons, and stand up to me. You are a cad and a white-livered thief."

It was the second insult of the kind. McCrea's face went the color of sea froth. He held his temper, however. Deliberately flecking the ash from his cigarette, he yawned, then called out to a nearby sailor:

"Jackson, just run down to my room and bring up the two Spanish machetes you will find fastened to the bulkhead over the bed. And I say, Jackson, tell Mr. Chesley to have the bo's'n get up a grate bar and a piece of canvas large enough to fit Craven here."

The sailor touched his cap and hurried away.

Craven laughed sneeringly. "A piece of canvas for me," he said. "Well, I'll bet you a hundred quid you'll need the burial ceremony first."

* This series of complete stories began in the January issue. The two back numbers can be procured through any newsdealer or direct from the publishers for twenty cents.

McCrea glanced past the *Octopus'* rail to where a sandy stretch of beach gleamed white in the morning sun. Beyond the beach was a fringe of tropical trees and a conical hill crowned by a clump of lofty palms.

Circling above the palms were several carrion buzzards, their black wings beating the ether with long, indolent strokes as if anything savoring of energy was not worth while in this region of intense heat. A dank odor came from the shore, and there was a strange murmuring sound in the air—the listless, dull voice of the surf as it tumbled against the edge of the little island.

McCrea yawned again, then strode up to the man with the manacled wrists, and snapped a quivering finger in his face.

"That for your bluff, Craven," he exclaimed, contemptuously. "We've got you dead this time, and you know it. It's my professional opinion that you've about reached the end of your tether. When that sailor fetches the machetes we'll have a little run for luck, and then I intend to send you where you'll not have time to play any more tricks. You have been a thorn in my flesh long enough. You—no, just stow your jaw until I finish—you had your laugh when you fooled us with that fake document with the two triangular holes, but I'll have my laugh now. Here comes the weapons."

"Did you fish me from the water for this?" asked Craven, sullenly.

McCrea shook his head, and replied, sharply:

"No, and you know it, you dog. When we rammed the derelict I did not know you were on board of it. And when I saw you struggling in the water I did what you never would do, I lowered a boat and rescued you. This craft was disabled, too, and there was no time to spare on such trash as you. Still, I had you brought aboard, and we've even steamed seven hundred miles to find a nice lonely little island where you could play Robinson Crusoe. Would you do that for me? I guess not. I'd been food for sharks if the case had been reversed."

McCrea took the machetes from the sailor, and slowly felt their edges.

"It's a pity you had to spoil my generous plan by your insults, Craven," he said. "But you are always nosing in where you don't belong. Look at this case of the Paraguayan document. You couldn't keep out of the search, not you. Had to butt in simply because the Brazilian Government, that seems to be as eager as Paraguay to find that queer parchment with the two triangular apertures, offered you a few measly milreis."

"I'll earn the money, too," growled Craven. "I know——" He brought his teeth together with a click and slouched down in his chair. McCrea regarded him curiously.

Two men, one stout, with a round, good-natured face, the other tall and powerfully built, emerged from the companion way hatch and approached them. The stout man called out, cheerfully:

"What's this about machetes, Angel? Jackson tells me you and Craven are going to fight."

"I guess I'll change my mind, Gravatt," replied McCrea, slowly. "Craven here seems to know more about that Spanish derelict's present location than we do. Probably he'll be willing to tell us for a consideration. What say, old chap?"

"I'll tell you nothing," replied the man in the chair, sullenly. "If you intend to give me a whack at you, why don't you do it? I guess you are afraid. You always were a miserable coward."

A line of dull red crept into McCrea's lean, sallow countenance. He turned to the tall man, and said, curtly:

"Chesley, you and Gravatt fix things, will you? Tucuman style, you know. It'll last longer that way, and I want to give this cur a taste of his future abode before I finish him. Quick, now."

"You are foolish, Angel," protested Chesley. "He isn't worth it."

McCrea stamped his foot impatiently. "Will you do as I ask you?"

Chesley strode up to Craven and quickly snapped the irons from his wrists. Then as the man stood up he

deftly fastened his left arm behind his back with the bight of a long rope. Jackson, who was assisting, fastened the other end to a brass belaying pin attached to the after part of the deck house.

Gravatt, obviously excited, performed a like service for McCrea, and presently the two men faced each other. Each grasped a machete in the right hand, and both seemed intensely eager for the fray.

Where the two combatants stood was a clear space extending from the deck house to the stern. The ropes had been so arranged that McCrea and Craven could meet in the center, but if one retreated the other could not follow.

The crew of the *Octopus* scurried aft and formed a deeply interested group in the port gangway. They were a rough lot, stalwart, heavily built men, evidently selected for their prowess, and not overscrupulous in appearance.

"Are you ready?" called out Chesley, gruffly.

McCrea and Craven took a step forward with raised machetes. The bright blades of the Spanish knives gleamed wickedly in the rays of the sun. The half-naked bodies of the two men, bathed in perspiration, glistened in the bright light.

Craven was tall and massively built. His arms were long, and his great hands seemed as powerful as those of a gorilla. He was a man past middle age, but he moved more with the lithe activity of twenty years. McCrea also was tall, but his frame was gaunt and his shoulders stooped. This gave him the appearance of one with a weak chest, and a weak constitution, but there was that in his face and in his quick, catlike actions that belied the evidence.

An observer of "form" would have long hesitated before judging between the two men as they stood facing each other on the after deck of the *Octopus* this hot summer day.

"Git at it," shouted Chesley.

There was a quick forward spring, a clash of steel, and then, with the lightning speed of a panther, McCrea lunged out and clipped a piece of flesh the size of a silver dollar from Craven's shoulder. The next second he was out of reach, with his antagonist tugging violently to follow him.

An outburst of cheers came from the crew.

"First blood for McCrea," said Chesley, grimly. "Now, Angel, get in and finish him off next round."

Craven presented a terrible spectacle. The blood from his wound, flowing freely, had bedaubed his body until it seemed as if he had been gashed in a dozen places. He panted frantically, and cursed in an inarticulate voice. As he strained at his fastening, McCrea leaped forward and the two engaged again.

This bout was longer in duration.

Back and forth, first one side of the deck and then the other, the two men swayed, lunging, cutting, thrusting. Once McCrea slipped and fell to his knees, but he was up again and out of reach before Craven could reach him. The round lasted ten minutes, and then both men retreated, exhausted by their fierce efforts.

Chesley, who thought he could detect a loss of strength on Craven's part, gave them a scant rest.

"I reckon he's winded, Angel," he whispered to McCrea. "Now's your time to polish him off. Remember the trick he played us in the Sargasso Sea, and what he did to you in Rio. You've been fool enough to give him a chance, now settle him. D'ye hear?"

McCrea heard. He did not require further urging. The wrongs recalled by his partner acted upon him like a spur to a restive horse. He fairly leaped into the open space and made such a fierce attack upon Craven, who had advanced at the same time, that the latter was fairly overwhelmed.

Neither man spoke, but their hoarse breathing, their sharp cries, their tramping upon the deck, and the ringing clash of knife against knife created a curious medley of sound. The audience—Chesley, Gravatt and the crew of the *Octopus*—gradually closed in about the combatants until the ring had grown perceptibly smaller. The scorching rays of

the tropical sun beat down upon the strange scene. There was no wind save a gentle eddy that seemed to intensify the heat.

McCrea followed up his slight advantage by forcing Craven almost out of reach, giving him a slashing cut in the leg as he did so; but suddenly Craven, with a swift side spring, managed to take McCrea off his guard. Then the poised machete landed with a smashing thud upon McCrea's head, and he went down like a shot.

As one man, Chesley and Gravatt and the more quick-witted members of the crew sprang forward, but they were a second too late. Lashing frantically at the rope fastening him to the deck house, Craven severed it and sprang over the side.

"Get a gun," roared Chesley. "Shoot him, somebody."

Gravatt and Jackson, the sailor, hastened below, speedily returning each with a Winchester rifle. The rest of the crew, with the exception of two men, who, without orders, had begun to lower one of the small cutters, crowded to the side.

By this time Craven had regained the surface. His left arm was still bound behind his back, but this did not prevent him from striking out lustily for the beach, a bare two hundred yards distant.

Chesley snatched the rifle from Jackson, and, aiming quickly, fired at the fugitive.

"By gad, you've missed," cried Gravatt. "Now just watch me."

Before he could raise the weapon, however, a hand tugged fiercely at his elbow, and McCrea, staggering and faint, gasped:

"Stop it, I say. If you shoot that man you'll answer to me. I'm not through with him yet. Let him go, damn you."

"Angel, man," cried Chesley and Gravatt in a breath, "thank goodness you are all right."

"It was only the flat of the machete," replied McCrea, briefly. "It knocked me down, that's all."

"And are you going to let Craven escape?" asked Gravatt, excitedly.

"Yes. Let him get ashore. He'll stay there right enough until we want him. The island is far out of the usual track of vessels. It's uninhabited, as you know, and Craven will have to hustle to keep alive. It will do him good. Now get up anchor. We'll take a cruise around the island, and see if there's anything in sight."

While Chesley, who was the mate of the *Octopus*, went forward to carry out McCrea's orders, the latter and Gravatt watched Craven laboriously make his way to the beach. He took some time to accomplish the feat, handicapped as he was, but at last he gained the sand, and fell prostrate just beyond the line of surf.

He laid there as if completely exhausted for several minutes, and then staggered erect. He raised his arms and shook both clinched fists at the group on the after deck of the *Octopus*, then he turned and disappeared into the brush.

"Farewell until we meet again," chuckled Gravatt.

McCrea went below without a word, and when he again appeared on deck he was spick and span in a clean suit of white linen. All traces of his recent desperate battle had vanished. By this time the anchor was up, and the trim little steamer under way.

The island was small, probably not more than ten miles in length and half as broad, but the land rose to quite an elevation in the center. Toward the south this ridge extended almost to the water's edge, forming a pronounced bluff.

Steaming at half speed the *Octopus* finally passed this and opened up a little bay. It was merely a slight indentation in the shore, but it held something that caused the crew to gasp with astonishment.

Lying up on the beach with her white broadside turned to the sea, and with the top-hamper in a snarl of wreckage, was a graceful schooner yacht. This was not all. Beyond her, riding at anchor, was a steamer which McCrea and his mates easily recognized as the *Shark*, Craven's vessel. A boat filled with

armed men was pulling away from the stranded yacht.

"What in thunder does it mean?" gasped Chesley. "It looks as if those devils on the *Shark*——"

He was interrupted by a fierce ejaculation from McCrea. The latter was leaning far over the rail of the bridge with his glass leveled at the strange craft.

He suddenly closed the glass with a snap.

"We are just in time," he said, from between his clinched teeth. "Chesley, there's a woman aboard that yacht!"

II.

"Angel" McCrea, as he was familiarly called, was not a ladies' man. He had led a hard life, and had fought in three continents, but deep down in his queer-warped consciousness was a spark of chivalry which had revealed itself on several picturesque occasions.

He had killed a Peruvian *alcalde* for an insult to a native woman, and had pulled the tongue from the mouth of a German, who, in his cups, had voiced his doubts as to McCrea's legitimacy.

And now, when he espied the woman aboard the beached yacht, and realized, as he did beyond any doubt, that the *Shark,* Craven's steamer, was up to mischief, he pledged his soul to thwart their purpose at any cost.

"Chesley," he said, quietly, "go forward, and get the rapid-fire gun ready for business. Tell Gravatt what we are up against, and stand by for further orders."

The tall, broad-shouldered mate hastened forward. Within three minutes a shapeless object, tarpaulin covered, on the forward deck, had resolved itself into a trim, long-barreled, breech-loader, and men were at work nimbly bringing up certain significant ammunition cases.

By now the *Octopus* had steamed into full view of the occupants of the little bay. Her presence caused the men in the *Shark's* boat to cease rowing, and they sat gaping at the newcomer. On board the *Shark* a part of the crew was seen to scamper about the upper deck as if in obedience to some order.

McCrea's attention was riveted on the yacht, however.

"Wonder where her crew is," he muttered to himself. "Not a man in sight anywhere."

He focused his glass upon the fluttering white object on the yacht's quarter-deck, and gave a sigh of surprise. What he saw in the narrow field was the face of a girl of about eighteen. It was a beautiful face with a clear-cut profile, a rounded chin and a wealth of dark hair clustered in waving masses over a broad forehead. The powerful glass held by McCrea revealed this to him, then the girl's head was turned away.

All the latent chivalry in the man's nature came to life.

"If she has been offered an insult or a hair of her pretty head harmed, there will be trouble," he muttered.

He gave a sharp word of command to the man at the wheel, and the *Octopus,* which had slowed down to scarcely more than steerage way, swung in toward the beach. A few minutes later her slender, graceful hull was resting in the water between the *Shark* and the yacht, and only a length away from the latter.

The girl had come to the rail, where she stood with clasped hands and parted lips. Her attitude was one of surprising calmness under the circumstances.

McCrea leaned from the end of the bridge, and removed his cap with a courtly bow.

"Madam," he called out, politely, "can I do anything to help you? You may command my services."

"I am in trouble, and I thank you for offering to assist me, sir," came the reply, clearly. There was not the slightest tremor in the voice. "My yacht has been wrecked, and I have no one on board. The men on the other steamer have robbed me, and I am afraid they will come back."

McCrea gripped the rail in front of him, and gulped down an oath in his throat. It was as he had feared. Surely the *Octopus* had arrived at an opportune moment.

He glanced around at Craven's steamer. There was a group of men hard at work lowering one of the larger boats, and he could catch a glint of steel in the rays of the morning sun. The boat he had seen midway between the *Shark* and the yacht had pulled to the side of the former.

McCrea smiled grimly. He was pleased to see that the *Shark* did not intend to give up without a struggle. He again turned his attention to the solitary tenant of the yacht.

"I would suggest that you go below, madam," he said, quietly. "There may be a little scrimmage. Your safest place will be in——"

"I will stay here, thank you," interrupted the girl. "I am not afraid. I will be sorry to see any fighting, though, and I cannot understand why those men should do as they have done. Surely there are no pirates in these times."

"Not pirates, madam," replied McCrea. "It isn't called piracy, you know, just looting. And looting is another way to spell downright thievery. But may I ask the name of your boat, and how you came to be wrecked and alone on board?"

"It is the *Flosshilde*. We left Bremen five weeks ago, and intended to cruise in the West Indies. Day before yesterday we ran into a storm, and—and ——" there was a catch in the girl's voice which she bravely tried to check, "and a great wave overwhelmed the yacht. My brother and three others were swept overboard. That night the crew abandoned the yacht, thinking that she was sinking."

"And they left you behind?" McCrea's tone was very stern and with an odd tinge of sympathy in it.

The girl bowed her head.

"We must not blame them very much," she said, simply. "There was danger and they sought to save their lives."

"Angel," called out Chesley from forward, at this juncture, "look there near that clump of trees."

He pointed ashore as he spoke. McCrea saw a man step out from the shelter of the brush and start to run rapidly toward the beach. It was Craven. McCrea acted with decision.

"Put a shell over there in front of him, Chesley," he ordered. "It will tell him that he is not wanted in this little affair."

"I'll put it where it'll snuff his candle," muttered the big mate.

With the assistance of one of the men he inserted a long brass shell into the breech of the rapid-firer, swung the muzzle around, took deliberate aim and pulled the trigger.

There was a slight click, but no report. The gun had missed fire.

Chesley swore angrily. It would be necessary to withdraw the cartridge, a rather ticklish operation. Standing at one side he gingerly worked the breech-block lever and finally threw it open. The shell lurked in the aperture, quiet but menacing.

At a sign from the mate one of the men thrust a ramrod into the muzzle of the gun and pushed vigorously, but the shell did not move. Several blows with a hammer on the end of the rod also failed.

Chesley wiped his face, and turned to the bridge.

"It's stuck fast," he bawled. "It'll have to be pried out and that will take time."

"That's rather bad," muttered McCrea, under his breath. "The *Shark's* crew is larger than ours. They have at least six more men, and in a scrap every man counts."

The *Octopus* had not anchored, and was maintaining her position near the yacht simply by turning the engines over slowly. McCrea saw that it would not be good policy to await the attack which he was certain was coming, so he signaled the engine room to go ahead at half speed, and quietly directed the man at the wheel to steer direct for the *Shark*.

"Chesley," he called out to that individual, "get all hands on deck, and arm them with rifles and swords. I intend to run alongside the *Shark*, and probably board her."

He considered a moment, then shouted

down the engine-room tube to Gravatt, who was in charge below:

"Be ready to turn hot water on through the fire hose, and send all your spare men to the deck. We're going to board the *Shark*."

An exclamation of joy came through the tube, and a moment later the fat engineer burst from the hatchway in great excitement. His round face fairly shone. He started toward the bridge, but stopped short on catching sight of the girl on the yacht.

"What the devil——" he spluttered.

"Madam," McCrea was calling out, "again I beg you to go below. There may be bullets flying in a few minutes, and you might get hurt. Won't you please take my advice?"

The girl shook her head.

"I prefer to remain here," she said, simply.

As the *Octopus* slipped away McCrea saw her step to the side, and, leaning against the rail, rest her chin upon her hands. She presented a pathetic spectacle upon the *débris*-strewn deck of the wrecked yacht, and McCrea's rather calloused heart throbbed with sympathy. It was a novel feeling for him, and he relieved his emotion by swearing copiously at the man at the wheel.

Gravatt climbed laboriously to the bridge, and gaped at the scene spread out before him. Things were beginning to move. The *Shark* had succeeded in lowering her second boat, and a puffing of steam at the bow indicated that the anchor was being raised.

"What are they going to do?" asked the stout engineer.

"I don't know, and I don't care," snapped McCrea. "I know what we will do, and that is give them a drubbing they won't forget in a hurry. Now get your fire hose laid out, and station men along the port side. Let them lay below the rail. When I sound one blast on the steam siren, they can jump up and scald any one within reach on the *Shark's* deck."

Gravatt hurried away, evidently delighted at the part he was to play in the coming fracas. In the meantime, Chesley, the big mate, had been working breathlessly at the disabled rapid-fire gun, but it was apparent that his efforts were unsuccessful.

A boat had put out from the *Shark's* quarter, and was being lustily propelled toward the beach, where Craven awaited its coming, wild with impatience and rage, if his actions proved anything.

"You will be late for the ball, old chap," McCrea muttered, grimly.

The *Octopus* was steaming straight toward her opponent during this interval. When she had arrived within easy hailing distance a hoarse voice rang out from the *Shark's* deck forward, where a group of men had collected.

"Ahoy, the *Octopus!*"

"Well?" calmly replied McCrea.

"What are you doing in this bay?"

McCrea could see the speaker, standing a little apart from the group. He knew it was the first mate of the *Shark*, a man named Burke, who was a ruffian of the Craven type.

"I don't see what business it is of yours," retorted McCrea, acidly.

"We'll show you. I'll give you five minutes to get out of here. Now starboard your helm and be quick about it."

"Haven't we as much right here as you?" asked McCrea, with suspicious mildness.

"No," roared Burke. "Starboard your helm, I say. If you come a length nearer I'll——"

The rest of the threat was lost in a most unearthly screech from the steam siren. The *Octopus*, which had gradually increased its speed, swung past the *Shark* at a distance of fifteen yards, and with a swish and a sputtering of mingled water and steam, the former's fire hose came into play.

The boiling liquid struck the group on the *Shark's* forward deck, almost sweeping the astounded men from their feet. Howling with pain and rage they broke for the shelter of the deck house in a mad scramble.

"Give it to them," shouted McCrea; "give them a bath. Throw them a few cakes of soap, too. It will do the dirty ruffians good."

A rifle cracked from the window of the *Shark's* pilot house, and a bullet

whizzed past McCrea's head. Chesley, who had armed himself with a Winchester, let drive at the spot. There was a crash of glass, but the man who had fired the shot kept under cover. The speed of the *Octopus* sent her several hundred yards astern of the other steamer before she could swing around, and when she finally did so, McCrea saw that Burke had rallied his men. There were at least twenty of them, and they presented an ugly appearance as they stood along the railing. Each man held a rifle, and Burke himself was armed with a brace of revolvers which he brandished menacingly.

"Chesley," called out McCrea, to the big mate, "make another attempt to clear the rapid-firer. If you can't fix her up just aim her anyway, and I'll try to bluff that crowd."

Chesley began working with the breech. The rest of the crew, including those who manned the hose, armed themselves and prepared to return the *Shark's* fire. The *Octopus,* now under one bell, slowly neared the other steamer.

"You, Burke," shouted McCrea, through a megaphone, "get your steamboat out of this bay at once. If you are here five minutes after Craven boards you I'll open fire with my six-pounder. You know what that means."

Burke laughed derisively, and some one on deck fired a shot. Before McCrea could give an order there was a deafening report, and the *Shark's* railing forward of the deck house resolved into a shower of splinters.

An exultant cry came from Chesley, and as the smoke drifted away he was seen to insert another shell into the breech of the gun which he had unexpectedly succeeded in repairing at the last moment. A few seconds later the rapid-firer spoke again. The range was so short that the report of the gun and the crash following the impact of the projectile with the steel side of the *Shark* came together.

This time Chesley had aimed just below the pilot house. A gaping hole, with cracks radiating from it, showed the result of his marksmanship. Before he could fire again Burke waved his cap.

"We surrender," he bellowed, sullenly. "If you will let us go we'll get out."

"Right you are," replied McCrea. "I see that Craven is almost alongside. Tell him that I'll give him a chance. If he keeps the *Shark* in this bay ten minutes longer I'll sink her."

In less than the specified time the *Shark's* anchor was hanging at the bow, and she was steaming out to sea. Craven went below immediately after climbing the side, and did not reappear. A half hour later the *Shark* was hull down toward the east.

. . . . . .

McCrea was speaking.

"Chesley, and you, Gravatt," he said, solemnly, "when you quit your wicked careers, if you ever do, and settle down to live like white men, just annex a trim little woman like the Fräulein Hildegarde, who went ashore to-day. She's as good as they make them, and after she was made they lost the model. She is brave, true-hearted and altogether an A 1 article. Look how she acted while we were scrapping with the *Shark,* and how she conducted herself during our run here to Barbados! I tell you, partners, if I was a marrying man I'd——"

"There's a boat coming alongside," interrupted Chesley. "Look at that flag in the bow. It's a German pennant."

"You left the *fräulein* with the German consul, didn't you?" asked Gravatt.

"Perhaps it's a messenger with a note from her," suggested Chesley, with a wink at the fat engineer. "Ah, Angel, it's a sly dog in love you are. Corresponding already."

McCrea maintained a dignified silence. A man came over the side from the small boat, and handed him an official-looking envelope bearing a portentous seal.

As he opened the missive and scanned the contents, Chesley and Gravatt saw him give a start as if with profound amazement, then his face reddened.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said, ex-

plosively. With that he turned on his heel and vanished down the nearby companion way.

Chesley picked up the letter which had fluttered from McCrea's grasp. He glanced at Gravatt. The fat engineer grinned and nodded.

"Capt. McCrea, Steamer *Octopus*," read Chesley. "It gives me great pleasure to request the honor of your presence at dinner to-night at this consulate. I desire to extend my sincere thanks as a representative of his majesty, the emperor, for the inestimable service you have been able to render her Serene Highness the Princess Hildegarde——"

The paper fell from Chesley's nerveless fingers.

"Great Gosh!" he whispered, staring at Gravatt. "Her Serene Highness the Princess Hildegarde—the Princess Hildegarde—the princess—say, Gravatt and I joked with her last night. The princess——"

Gravatt laughed hysterically.

"And McCrea," he gurgled. "He—he—he started to tell us what he would do if he was a marrying man. Oh, Lord!"

The messenger who had brought the invitation stepped up and touched his cap.

"Will there be a reply?" he asked, respectfully.

A shout came up the companion way from the cabin. It was in McCrea's thin, high treble.

"I say you, Chesley," it said, "get up anchor, and be damned quick about it. We leave port at once!"

The fourth adventure, "The Pursuit of the French Savant," will appear in the next issue.

THE PLAY OF THE JAI-ALAI

BY W. BEALL BALDWIN

Author of "The Dynamo Plot," Etc.

In which an American naval officer, backed by Cupid, fights a stirring duel at pelota in the Havana fronton

I.

A CORNER table is always a coign of vantage. This is peculiarly the case at the Café del Iris. I mean one of the corner tables that encroaches so nearly upon the sidewalk, just within the shelter of the outrageous red and yellow awning which adorns the façade of that brilliant place of refreshment on the Prado.

If one is so fortunate as to have secured one of these tables, and if one is sensible enough to turn one's back upon the café's gorgeous display of electric lights, one commands an unrivaled view of the Prado, and can feel reasonably assured that, in the course of time, all of Havana, male and female, will promenade itself past for inspection.

Now, this was the first night of Stanton's shore leave; it was also to be the very first night he had ever spent in Havana; and, furthermore, he had possession of a seat at one of the tables which has been specified as desirable.

Despite all of which the passing show was at liberty to go hang for all the attention that Stanton was disposed to give it. He was very much preoccupied.

The reason was not far to seek. She also had a chair at the same table; her elbow, shining like rare ivory through

a half sleeve of black lace, was not six inches distant from Stanton's white cuff; and her face—she was smiling softly—was averted from him at just the proper angle to reduce the young man to abject adoration of a cameo-like profile.

Stanton says that she was darkly fair, with great brown eyes deep shadowed by soft lashes—eyes that were wells of witchery; that, in short, she was superbly the Andalusian in spite of the fact that her mamma was an American girl, and her papa a prominent Cuban of Spanish descent.

That—her beauty—accounts in part for what happened, as does the fact that she was a fascinating mystery to the American, already. For he had been her slave for a matter of half a day or so, only; having known her just about that long.

In those six hours, more or less, Ensign Charlton Stanton, U. S. N., had done his level best, with credit to himself and to his naval academy training, in an attempt to convey to Señorita Trinidad del Coro the important information that he was desperately in love with her, without saying it right out in meeting in so many words.

Apparently the attempt had been in vain; the señorita accepted his advances calmly, at their face value, and continued to bear herself with the outward seeming of a self-possessed señorita who is mistress of her own heart. She was gracious, but no more.

It passed the understanding of the American. He had been ship-pent for many months, during which time he had found leisure to plan many an audacious campaign, to devise many a beguiling phrase—and here he was at a standstill, baffled and bewildered by a wisp of a Cuban-American girl! And that within seven hours from the moment he had set foot ashore.

He sped a last, desperate shaft at the young woman's imperturbability. His delivery was perfection, his tone finely modulated to the last degree of ardent discretion. And the arrow flew wide of the goal, to all appearance.

Ensign Stanton drew himself up, chagrined, almost offended. For the honor of the United States Navy, in the name of the service, he must not fail to elicit some manner of response from the señorita!

Out of the corner of his eyes he was uneasily conscious that Señor and Señora del Coro were observing the affair entirely without prejudice, vastly amused. They were his very good friends; they liked Charlton exceedingly, having known him for long as the son of a close friend. And just possibly they had not been without curiosity as to how speedily the American would manage to inveigle himself into their daughter's good graces.

Stanton was mystified and even began to doubt the potency of his charms; and—and shore leave is a mighty short time for a man to make love in properly; one should not delay. He set his jaw firmly; he was determined to take advantage of the very first opportunity to press his suit with irresistible fervency.

And the opportunity presently proffered itself.

They had dined early; the evening was as yet young and entrancing as only Cuban evenings can be—balmy with bland, cool breezes from the sea; with a high firmament of black velvet set with blazing jewels. And Havana infested the Prado, according to custom, taking the evening air.

Everybody of importance was showing himself or herself; and in time there was a commotion on the walk near the table of the Del Coro's—a murmur of comment that was approving, almost applause, a craning of necks that was both admiration and adulation.

Even Señorita Trinidad was stirred from her listlessness. She moved in her chair to get a better view of the passing personage, and her eyes shone with a soft light, which the American had failed to kindle in their clear depths.

"Who——?" inquired Stanton of Señor del Coro.

"It's Amado—Señor Herrara!" the girl made answer for her father.

"Amado?" pondered the American to himself. "Herrara? Now where the

deuce have I heard *that* name? Who is he?" he asked Señora del Coro.

But the man himself was approaching the table. Stanton noticed that the crowd surged to either side, respectfully, to permit his passage.

"The most popular player at the *fronton,*" explained Trinidad's mother, in an undertone. "He won an important match last night; to-day he is the idol of Havana. Why, Trinidad is wild about the game!"

"About the game only?" queried Stanton jealousy of his inner self as the newcomer stopped at their table.

The American found himself on his feet, responding to Señor del Coro's introduction, limply shaking the hand of a Basque whose name was known in two continents as the most skillful player of *jai-alai* in the world.

He was a tall man, and graceful—slight, but roundly builded, holding his head proudly as befits a hero of the people. Bold, flashing eyes were his, and his upper lip was shaded with a killing mustache. He affected a modesty which only attracted the more attention and comment. Beyond denial he was handsome, and knew it; he smiled often to show his white teeth.

Stanton he treated with condescension tempered with a coolness which the American intuitively analyzed; Herrara was jealous of his place with the Del Coro's party.

As for Trinidad, she had become suddenly, maddeningly vivacious, and so maintained herself during the Basque's brief pause. Presently, assuring them that he would play at the *fronton* that night, the man took his leave.

Trinidad's demeanor saddened; she sighed wistfully.

"I adore *pelota!*" she affirmed, in response to a remark of Stanton's.

It was on his lips. "And I adore ——" But he chose discretion as the wiser course; besides, he had an idea, which he proceeded to put into immediate execution.

"You will excuse me?" he pleaded, rising. "I've a commission to execute to-night for—for a friend. You won't mind? You are to go to the *fronton* at nine, I believe? I will meet you there. *Adios*—till we meet."

He departed hastily. He had a commission for a friend, surely; for is not every man his own friend, especially in a matter that touches his heart?

Stanton was about to pledge himself to something extremely rash and unwise; and he was glad of it—if, perchance it should win him a smile from the señorita of his dreams.

II.

The American was true to his word; at nine that evening he approached the Del Coro box in Havana's *fronton;* the reception accorded him was cordial enough, but he seemed dissatisfied and nervous. He sat by the side of the Señorita Trinidad, twisting his fingers together, gazing with abstracted curiosity at the scene about him, and listening with a plainly assumed attentiveness to the señorita's explanation of *pelota.*

The *fronton* was a large building, roughly rectangular in shape; precisely one-half, running the full length of the interior, was given over to seats for the devotees of *jai-alai,* or *pelota*—the Spanish national game.

And those seats were crowded with as much of Havana as had been able to squeeze within the doors—a lively crowd, laughing, smoking, chaffing and excitedly making bets with the *corredores,* or betting commissioners of the house.

The place was ablaze with sizzling arc lamps; and these and the numerous spectators managed to manufacture a sort of electric heat—such as that indescribably, stimulating warmth that obtains in, say, a circus tent.

It seemed to annoy the ensign; as the minutes advanced his perturbation became so evident that it aroused and piqued the curiosity of his fair companion. For the first time since they had met she unbent and began to take an active interest in the American—an interest that almost distracted her attention from the game in progress on the *concha.*

That half of the building unoccupied by the audience was the *concha,* or court, on which *pelota* is played, and the *contra-concha,* or margin of safety between the players and the seats. It was a space about two hundred and forty feet in depth, and seventy feet wide; of which width the *contra-concha* took up nearly half—say, thirty-two feet. At one end was a wall about forty feet high and as wide as the *concha,* which wall was the *fronton* proper; at the other end of the court was a similar wall—*la pared de rebote.*

Within this space were the professional players of *pelota*—the lithe, sinewy, dark-skinned Basques, upon whose devoted heads the populace was heaping frenzied plaudits, upon whose skill and fortunes Havana was wagering enormous sums of hard cash. For *pelota* as a sport is not surpassed in Spanish favor even by bullfighting.

There were four of them on the *concha*—active, supremely self-satisfied little men, strutting before the admiring gaze of their audience like so many blooded horses showing their paces; twirling their black mustaches and darting burning glances sidelong at the señoritas in the boxes. Two were in white from head to toe, but two wore light blue shirts; marks which distinguished the sides, the whites from the blues, the blancos from the azuls.

Stanton watched them showing off with a smile of contempt, the señorita at his side—well, quite otherwise, and to the American's disgust. Her eyes were dancing delightedly, her red lips smiling or forming bravos to be softly uttered, her little hands quietly busy applauding.

At the clanging of a gong, the game was on; and if Stanton neglected it to watch the face of Señorita Trinidad, that does not prove that the play was not worthy of his entire attention.

One of the azuls—the smallest of the four—delayed a moment, adjusting his *cesta* securely—a sort of narrow racket of wickerwork, in shape approximately an arc of a large circle, which was strapped firmly to his right hand. This being fixed to his satisfaction, he seized in his left hand a small, lively, hard ball, ran a few paces toward the *fronton,* dropped the ball smartly to the cement flooring and with his *cesta* caught it on the rebound; it smashed out like a bullet from a rifle, smote the *fronton* with a resounding crack and shot back with incredible rapidity toward the rebound wall.

Halfway down the *concha* a blanco leaped high in air, and caught the ball with his *cesta.* Back it went to the *fronton,* more swiftly if possible than before, to be caught on the volley and slammed back by an azul.

The game was on indeed. It was superbly played, fought out to the last gasp by the unfortunate azuls, who were in the end defeated by one point only; the game is for ten points; they had scored nine to their opponents' ten.

And when the blancos were at length victorious, the house rose to them as one man and one woman. Bravos rent the air, shrill whistles pierced the din, feet were stamped, dainty handkerchiefs fluttered, and a hail of coins and favors descended into the *concha* to fall about the heads of the winners.

For minutes the uproar continued; it was only stilled when the management requested to make an announcement. A slim, dapper little man stepped into the *contra-concha,* and held up his hand, begging for silence. This being presently accorded him, he proceeded to unfold his tale.

It seemed that an important match, a duo, was to be played next, between a presumptuous Americano and the undefeated Amado Herrara. The Americano incognito had challenged Señor Herrara; it was a point of honor to the latter to take him down for such impertinence. The match was to be for one hundred dollars a side.

A storm of applause burst forth. The patrons of the sport were delighted. It would be amusing, it would be comical! The idea of an Americano daring to pit himself against the mighty Herrara! Bets were lavishly placed upon the latter, even at the house's prohibitive odds.

Señorita Trinidad turned in her chair.

"Why, who do you suppose he can be?" she inquired, breathlessly, of that place where Stanton had been a moment before.

But now he was gone. Whither, wondered Trinidad, could he have flown so quickly?

But in a moment the house was ringing with cheers; the players of the duo had appeared in the *concha.* An American in the box next that of the Del Coros proceeded to enlighten Señorita Trinidad—an American who stood up on his chair and waved his hat frantically.

"We-oow!" he howled. "Stanton! Wow! That's the boy!"

He then sat down, and explained loudly to his companion:

"That's Stanton, a naval officer. I knew him in Buenos Ayres, where he was stationed for quite a while. He can play *pelota* to make your hair curl—practiced at the *fronton* down there until he could beat the crack players of the city. My money goes on him, I can tell you!"

Trinidad could hardly believe her ears; but she looked and beheld the ensign on the floor of the *concha.* He was posing modestly, deprecating the applause.

And then Señorita Trinidad understood, and, understanding—well, she blushed.

III.

Stanton, coming out of the dressing-room in cotton shirt and trousers and with light sandals on his feet, had a severe attack of stage fright as he entered upon the *concha.* He hung his head, and much wished he hadn't been so confounded hasty—even with the end in view. There were undoubtedly brother officers of his in the audience, and, should they recognize him——!

And that is what they did; and they got upon their feet and lifted up their voices, so that the *fronton* became aware that they recognized him. Also, the red-capped *corredores* became extremely busy recording the bets which the Americanos were placing on their compatriot.

The gong whanged out its preliminary warning.

Stanton fumbled with his *cesta,* longing most consumedly to glance up at the box of the Del Coros. He was wondering if She thought he was making a fool of himself. But he dared not risk a look in Her direction; he felt in his bones that he was going to put up an exhibition of crass clumsiness.

Herrara brought him back to the earth—Herrara, the conqueror, who threw out his chest and curled his lip at the Americano. Stanton observed that look of scornful amusement on his antagonist's face, and he flushed crimson with resentment. It was like a tonic to his lagging spirits; anyway, he'd show Herrara what he was up against!

Again the gong clanged; play was to begin at once.

Herrara had the serve. In the midst of a dead silence he took the ball languidly in his hand, at the same time looking up toward the box wherein sat the queen of beauty at this modern joust.

What he saw there did not please him; the señorita was not feasting her eyes upon his captivating person; to the contrary, her gaze was all for the despised Americano. A swift gust of rage shook the Basque; his hot blood went to his head; even the back of his neck became the color of flame. He seemed to see things through an angry haze—and he forgot the importance of keeping cool.

When he recovered, he tried to calm himself, to no avail; he was too strongly shaken with jealousy to play with tempered judgment—which in part accounts for what followed. Besides, he considered, there would be no need to exert himself greatly; by rights this Americano should prove a facile victim.

Comforted by this thought, Herrara flipped the *pelota* to the floor, and as it bounced sent it to the wall with careless grace and no very great speed.

Crack! the *pelota* rapped back upon the *fronton,* and——

"Carramba!" cried Herrara, taken utterly by surprise. The ball slipped past him despite his frantic leap.

Score one for the Americano! It was chalked up on the blackboard at the *fronton* end of the *contra-concha,* where all bets are recorded together with the score. Herrara bit his lips with vexation. But then, he assured himself, it was no more than a chance shot.

"Ready?" demanded Stanton, clearly, laughing, but cool-headed. It was his serve.

He slapped the ball directly in the middle of the *fronton*—between the two red painted iron bars which mark the service limits. It sailed swiftly back to the rebound wall, bounced off lightly. Herrara was after it with the speed and agility of a panther after its prey, with that panther's surety of killing stroke. He caught the *pelota* on the end of his *cesta,* and shot it back to the *fronton,* where it landed at full speed directly above the lower band, a magnificent return, worthy of the professional.

Stanton was quick, but barely missed it with the extreme tip of his *cesta.* It was no fault of his; he had made a good try. He smiled as the score was chalked up.

One for Herrara!

Again it was the Spaniard's serve. He ran forward with short, swift steps that added force to the momentum with which he hammered the little ball against the *fronton.* Stanton, anticipating the speed of the rebound, was already tiptoeing watchfully backwards toward *la pared de rebote.* This saved him the point. With such force there could be no unerring accuracy of service; Herrara had sacrificed delicacy to might. The *pelota* had glanced from the top of his *cesta* to the lower limit of the *fronton,* and sailed back over the Spaniard's head in a high arc.

Stanton caught it on his *cesta,* almost with his back against the rebound wall. But he got it, and it went back like a shot; and again the surprise of Herrara had lost him the point; for again he missed. And now recognizing the dangerousness of his hitherto despised opponent, he gathered himself together and became one electrified bunch of muscle, ginger and judgment.

Thereafter he was, for a time, irresistible. Point after point went to him, notwithstanding several magnificent plays on Stanton's part. Gradually the score of the professional crept up. From one to two against him, it went to six—to seven—to eight to two in the Spaniard's favor.

For a time Stanton had been lost in the excitement of the game, given up wholly to the joy of the sport, caring little for his score. Now, as he rested for a few seconds after contesting the tenth point and losing it, he looked at the blackboard and his heart went to his mouth. Then, for the first time, he glanced at the box of the Del Coros. Señorita Trinidad was leaning out, rapt with excitement. She caught Stanton's eye, and nodded with a ravishing smile.

That settled it. After that he simply could not consent to lose. Stanton moistened furtively the corners of his lips with his tongue, swung his *cesta* vigilantly by his side and kept his gaze undeviatingly even for the smallest fraction of a second upon that flying ball.

To this day they tell in Havana of the rally of the Americano who played against the great Herrara. It was magnificent, marvelous, it savored of supernatural aid!—if one may believe the accounts of the Cubans.

Again it was Herrara's serve, as the winner of the last contested point. But now he was playing handicapped; for again he had ventured to look for the approbation of his señorita, and in doing so had detected the glance she had given the Americano.

That was bad—very bad for Herrara's game. Indeed, it unnerved him; he could not think steadily of the play; he was gripped with his insane, paralyzing jealousy. He forgot.

But Stanton was upon that *pelota* like a cat upon a mouse. It fairly whizzed back, scraping the Basque's cheek so barely that he dodged and gasped—and lost the point in his agitation.

And now it was the Americano's serve. He displayed a nicety of judgment, delivering the *pelota* with great swiftness, but with equal sureness. Herrara got it, sent it back; Stanton re-

turned it on the volley. It slapped, singing, to the rebound wall, where Herrara just managed to scoop it up and return it slowly. Whereupon Stanton smashed it.

That round lasted three minutes, to the second. Herrara outdid himself; never had he played in such form. He was the master of every professional *pelota* player in the world, and he showed his absolute superiority to them all. But the amateur won it.

Likewise the American won the next point, and that which followed; he got the seventh by slow, careful playing, by taking his time and never failing to estimate the exact requisite force. And he won the eighth by pure generalship, by placing the dancing *pelota* in a different part of the *concha* at every return, which almost exhausted the Spaniard in his desperate dashings from right to left, from the *fronton* to the rebound wall.

The seventeenth round found the score a tie, Stanton calm and determined with his jaw set, and Herrara visibly rattled, on the jump and not knowing exactly what next to expect. He fumbled the ball, eventually, with his *cesta,* and failed to get it above the lower metal band on the *fronton.*

Then he, too, rallied. If the Americano were permitted to win the next point, he would lose the game and get Herrara's one hundred dollars (American) into the bargain. Herrara couldn't afford to lose; the money didn't count so much, but think of his prestige!

He snarled an insult at Stanton, thereby hoping to make the young man lose his head. Stanton merely smiled upon him attentively, waiting in all fairness until Herrara was quite composed and ready, and served.

He had to spring twenty feet in the fraction of a second to catch the Spaniard's vicious return. He made it —just—slipped, and went to his knees; and he was upon them when Herrara slammed in the return. But not for long; in a trice he was up and had made a wonderful run of fully ten yards and a splendid smash at the volleying *pelota.* Herrara was equally vigilant, fighting for his professional reputation as he was. His returns were something terrific in their speed.

The end came when Herrara, for the first time in the game, got in one of his favorite plays, and the most difficult of all to catch with the clumsy *cesta.* He pounded the *pelota* against the *fronton* about one foot from the side wall; on the rebound it scraped that side wall in a fast, gradual curve from the *fronton* almost to *la pared de rebote,* about five feet from which, still hugging the wall jealously, the *pelota* descended to the floor.

In order to get this, Stanton had to turn his baek to the *fronton,* to play by intuition alone—"with the eyes in the back of his head." He tried it bravely, undismayed, unrattled by Herrara's jeering laugh of triumph. His *cesta* caught the *pelota* fairly on its center. He swung his arm back with tremendous force—a long, sure underhand swing; the little ball went to the *fronton* with such velocity as to be almost invisible to the spectators.

Herrara realized too late that it was actually coming back. When he did so, he turned, quick as a cat, but he had no time to calculate where it would land. He heard it slap the *fronton,* saw it coming—coming straight for his head. He attempted to dodge, to ward it off with the *cesta*—much too late. The *pelota* struck him squarely in the eye.

Which is professional disgrace!

Within the superheated *fronton* there burst out a hurricane of cheers for the Americano. Even those who had lost considerable money on Herrara united in the ovation. His brother officers swarmed down over the barriers, howling, and made for him. He stood weakly, fagged out, grinning, dripping with perspiration. A rain of favors was coming toward him; but in it he saw but one thing—a red rose that came from the box of the Del Coros.

He looked, laughing, to meet the eyes of Señorita Trinidad. And then, because he knew that everybody was too excited to see what he did, the American dared to press the rose to his lips ere slipping it in the bosom of his shirt.

WINNERS, KNIGHT ERRANT*

A STORY OF RHODES

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

At a ball given by his mother, Bob Winners, a typical young American of wealth and energy, meets a beautiful woman known as the Princess Mella. With her is Bob's cousin who had married the supposed princess' father, a Greek. A certain captain in the Turkish service, Karusu, appears on the scene, and Madam Dvorolos and the princess leave suddenly for Paris. Madam Dvorolos sends Bob word to follow her, which he does at once He learns in Paris that the two women have gone to Rhodes. Meeting Captain Karusu he accepts that officer's invitation to accompany him on his private yacht to Rhodes. During the voyage Bob is thrown overboard by the captain, but manages to reach a small island, where he is held for ransom by the inhabitants. He is asked to write home for a large sum of money, but having found a revolver, he prepares to resist the demand.

CHAPTER VII.

A VERY DIFFERENT STORY.

WINNERS was hungry, but he ignored the supper brought by his captors. He took a step forward, but a significant motion of Mushed's rifle made him halt.

"You write the letter," said Giarkas. "We'll have no tricks."

"But I am hungry. Let me eat first."

"No. It will not take long to write the letter. Do that, and then eat."

There was nothing else to do, so Bob obeyed. He sat down with the lantern before him on the table, and indited this letter to Tom Blake:

"Dear Old Tom," it ran. "I am in a sort of a hole here in Turkey, or at least an island belonging to that blessed country, and need some money. I bought a large estate, finding the climate particularly salubrious, and good for my failing health. I must have at once twenty thousand pounds. That means, in round figures, ninety-seven thousand dollars. See Palmer, and draw on my account. I inclose authority."

He stopped here, and turned to Giarkas.

"Can you fellows read English?" he asked. "How will you know I am writing what you want?"

"We cannot read English," was the reply, "but we know some one who can. And if you do not write what we want we will kill you."

"That is so," said Mushed.

The lantern was directly in front of Winners, and opposite him stood Giarkas. Mushed was the only one showing a weapon, Giarkas having carried up the tray containing his supper. Mushed grew curious as to the English writing, and bent over to view it, the muzzle of his rifle being allowed to lie across the table.

Winners noticed that it pointed directly toward Giarkas. A glint came in his eyes, but he bent his head, and wrote on a separate paper as follows:

"The Palmer Sand Bank, of New York. Pay to the order of T. Blake, ninety-seven thousand dollars in pennies. Ship by flying machine. Nit."

He attached a signature that was a scrawl, and held it out for Giarkas to

*This story began last month. The number containing the first instalment can be obtained through any newsdealer or direct from the publishers for ten cents.

look at. While Giarkas scanned the thing, Mushed waited for his chance.

Winners, by a sudden movement, reached back of Mushed, and pulled the trigger of his rifle.

With a howl and curse Giarkas fell to the floor. Mushed, amazed, but alert to his own danger, turned to grapple with Winners, but the young athlete had him by the throat.

"You'll hold me for ransom, will you!" said Winners, as he pounded with his fist on Mushed's face. "Hold up a decent American, will you, you confounded Turk! How do you like that? Take another for luck!"

The eyes of the Turk were sticking out from his head, and his color was changing. The iron grasp Winners had on his throat was strangling him. He made peculiar noises as if to try to call the woman below. Giarkas writhed in agony, cursing and howling, but the woman did not hear. Perhaps she thought that anything that could make Giarkas howl was a good thing to keep away from.

Mushed reached and felt feebly for his rifle, but Winners yanked him to another portion of the room, and drove his fist with all his strength time after time against the fellow's skull.

It was a hard head, that of the Turk, but the terrible blows began to tell, and the throttling process was so successful that at last the head drooped, the eyes became vacant, and Mushed was put to sleep.

"Now you lie there," said Winners, throwing the limp and battered man into a corner. "I'll attend to the rest myself."

He gathered up the rifle, and with a grin at the writhing Giarkas, walked out, barring the door behind him. With the lantern in his hand he went down the stairs. A small lamp in a room attracted him, and the sullen face of Mushed's wife woke into an expression of terror as she saw the deadly barrel of the gun she knew so well aimed at her.

"Do not shoot!" she cried. "I thought they shot you! Is Mushed killed?"

"Mushed is pounded to a jelly, and Giarkas has a bullet in his interior department. Now I want something to eat."

He had left his supper in the room above, but the woman soon had some fish and coffee before him. He ate leisurely, keeping, however, his eye on the woman and the rifle near his hand. Having satisfied his hunger, he rose, bowed with a mocking grace, and walked out.

He went to the shore, taking his time about deciding what to do, for he knew that neither Giarkas nor Mushed were to be feared that night.

At the shore he found an old boat, used to reach those larger ones that remained anchored in deeper water. He still carried the lantern, and, shoving the small boat off, he examined two, chose the larger of them, found it dry and seaworthy, clambered in, raised the sail, and calmly started for a cruise to Rhodes, or at least the single light he saw, and which he supposed to be a lighthouse on that island.

The light burned brightly as a beacon for Winners, and as he was no novice in the management of a boat, he steered directly for it. The stars seemed to twinkle and smile at him as he sailed. Fortunately the wind was favoring, and was not strong enough to interfere with the handling of the boat. Winners, as was natural, felt quite well satisfied with himself, and chuckled as he thought of the opportunity Mushed had given him to escape.

Certainly the trip to Rhodes had not turned out quite as he had anticipated. He now had time to reach a conclusion that he had been a fool to trust to Capt. Karusu. But, after all, since he had not been drowned, perhaps it was better to know the man's nature, and prepare to meet him with his own tricks.

He thought of Adria Dvorolos, and Madam de Saye, or Madam Dvorolos, which was her true name, and wondered if they were really at Rhodes. Naturally, that being their home, he felt that Karusu might in that instance have spoken the truth.

The light grew nearer and brighter

hour after hour, and Winners began to make out dimly the outline of the island. The light was far out at the end of a narrow and rugged strip of rocky land, and on this he did not wish to land. He steered to the north, and, having passed the light, was compelled to depend on the stars for guidance.

He made slower progress in this direction; but, soon after rounding a turn in the shore, had left the light where he could no longer see it. Peering toward the shore, where he heard the murmur of the waves as they lapped up against the rocks, he saw what appeared to be an opening in the high and rocky shore line. Toward this he steered.

Suddenly there was a shock, the bow of his boat went upward on a rock, and the smashing of wood in the bottom could be heard. The boat careened, stuck fast, and the water began pouring in.

As Winners felt the water rising about his feet he realized the immediate necessity for action. The boat, weighted with the water, rolled a little more, and began to slide off the rock. Winners knew it would sink.

Gathering his strength, he measured the distance to the shore, and with no thought of the danger of the undertaking, plunged into the sea. He started with the rifle in his hand, but the buffeting of the waves in the rockbound coast soon compelled him to let it go. Without this to hinder him he kept on, making good progress, sometimes in clear water, and sometimes dangerously near to rocks, but always swimming with all his might toward the break in the wall.

It was a long swim, even longer than he had supposed. He became almost exhausted, but kept manfully on, until, just as his breath was coming with pain and difficulty, he felt the rising bottom under his feet. Bracing himself, he stood upright, and waded ashore.

It was a strange, wild place in which he found himself. The rocky coast was so forbidding that a landing place for a boat was almost impossible. He entered a narrow pass and walked perhaps a hundred feet, climbed over rocks, and came out upon a singularly beautiful night scene.

In the light of the stars he could see great gardens of figs and other fruits of the region. The undulating ground seemed strangely fertile for a place with so rude an entrance. Over the treetops he espied the towers of a large house.

"Now, then," said Winners to himself, "the question to be decided is whether or not to ask for shelter at that house. It is long after midnight, and my intrusion might not be relished. These people have not exhibited any great spirit of hospitality, that I know of. I'll wait till morning."

He shook his wet clothes, and walked briskly to and fro to warm his blood.

"Ho, intruder! What are you doing here!" came a sudden demand, and Winners stopped as he saw three men come running toward him.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHANGE OF CAPTORS.

"I'm drying myself," he said. They had spoken in a peculiar sort of English, but Winners had made out enough to understand.

"What do you want here?"

"I don't know."

"You are a spy of the pasha. We will kill you."

"But I am not a spy of the pasha. I don't know the gentleman and don't want to. I am looking for some friends."

"Oh, friends! We'll show you friends. Come with us."

Two ranged themselves alongside, one at his right and the other at his left, and Bob noticed that they were armed with bayoneted rifles. The third got behind him and pricked him in the leg with his bayonet.

"March forward," was the command, and Winners perforce obeyed.

He tried to ask questions, but they had said all they would, and Winners began to study this new problem. He had been accused of being a spy of the pasha, hence these men could not be

the pasha's soldiers. If not, whose were they? He knew that Rhodes was ruled by a pasha, and that no armed forces other than his soldiers were permitted. Who, then, were these soldiers who accused him of being the pasha's spy?

He tried to make out what they were, but the light of the stars was not sufficient to enable him to distinguish their features. They were not tall men, but seemed robust and active.

They turned into a path through an olive grove, and from that they passed through a vineyard. They were approaching the house he had seen, but before they reached it, there was another surprise in store for Winners.

Rows and rows of tents were stretched from the vineyard across a field so broad that he could not see the end of the rows. Here and there armed sentries were pacing their posts. As they reached the first, a countersign was given.

"Pass the word for the officer of the guard!" said the man in charge of the party that had captured Winners. The word was passed, and soon a taller officer was seen approaching. He was a dignified fellow, perhaps so much so that his stride could be called a strut. But as he approached more closely Winners saw that he was not of the same kind as his three captors.

"Who is this?" he asked, in English.

"Excellency, we captured this man near the cut on the coast. We thought he was a spy of the pasha, and arrested him. He denies it."

"Who are you, then?" asked the officer, turning to Winners.

"I am an American citizen, and am thankful to find a man who speaks English as you do. I am not a spy of the pasha."

"Then what the devil are you doing here at this hour? Explain that?"

"Gladly," answered Winners. "I was—but suppose you take me somewheres to get dry. I'm soaked."

"Come with me."

He turned, and Winners, still guarded by the three, followed. The officer took him to a tent, and pulled open a chest. From this he selected some clothing. Throwing the garments toward Winners, he said:

"Take off your wet ones, and put on these. Talk while you do it. Who are you?"

"Permit me to say," said Winners, as he began peeling off his wet clothes, "that I am Robert Winners, of New York. A very short time ago I was the guest of one Capt. Karusu on his yacht."

"Ah! What did we say! A spy!" said one of his three captors.

"Shut up and let him talk," said the officer, who seemed none too choice of language.

"As I said," continued Winners, "I was a guest, but found myself one morning lying half conscious on the shores of an island they call Scartio."

"The captain's island!"

"The people there said it was. They showed marked hospitality. They seemed to be fishermen, and asked me to have breakfast in a house. I had it all right, but then they locked me in, and demanded a heavy ransom."

"That must have been Giarkas, the pirate," said one of the soldiers.

"His name was Giarkas, but I shot him and escaped. I took a boat to come here, but ran on a rock and had to swim. Now you know it all."

"Not quite," answered the officer. "I want to know why you came here. Was it to see the captain?"

"Karusu? It would not displease me to see him in the least, if I was as well armed as he."

"Then you are not friends?"

"There is no overwhelming affection between us."

"But I don't understand. You must have wanted something. Americans do not come here for nothing. Especially now."

"Why especially now? If you want to know exactly, I will tell you. I came to visit my cousin, Madam Dvorolos."

"The devil you did!"

The announcement almost took away the officer's breath. He blurted out his short sentence and then stared. The three soldiers snorted with suppressed laughter.

"I came, as I said, to visit my cousin, Madam Dvorolos."

In the starlight the officer's eyes glared ominously.

"Look here," he said, with ugly emphasis. "If you are lying to me I'll have you hung to a tree."

"Well, find Madam Dvorolos, or Madam de Saye, whatever she is, and then you'll know."

"Find Madam Dvorolos!"

The three soldiers grunted, and the captain smiled.

"Are you serious? Do you really wish me to take you to Madam Dvorolos?"

"I am as serious in asking that as you are in asking my business here. I went to Paris to see her, and not finding her, came here."

"Who told you she was here?"

"Karusu."

"How did he know?"

"I don't know that. He seemed, however, to be well informed concerning her movements."

"Look here. I'm a sort of one-horse American myself. My mother's father was an American, and settled in Turkey, marrying a Greek woman; therefore, my mother was half American, and I learned from her to speak the language. Besides, I've been in England. My mother married a Greek, so the American blood in me is pretty well thinned down. I am inclined to believe you, but can do nothing to-night. I must take you to the guardhouse for the night, but promise you that you will be well cared for. In the morning I will see the colonel, and he can do what he likes."

At command Winners followed him, and was taken to a wooden building that looked new, and incomplete.

"You'll have to stay here till morning. Have a pull?"

The officer handed over a flask of brandy, and Bob, after his tiresome swim, took some of it.

"You won't be harmed any. Just wait till morning. Col. Galapo will settle your matter all right."

With this the officer left, and Winners remained again a prisoner with the guards of the place alert. But he had no thought of trying to escape. He found a cot and lay down, and was soon asleep. This, at least, was better than Mushed's house on Scartio.

CHAPTER IX.

BREAKFAST WITH MADAM.

In the early morning Winners was awakened by a young officer, who was so resplendent in a new, unsoiled uniform that Winners realized that whatever had caused the concentration of troops at that point had also caused the enrollment of new men, or the purchase of new supplies. The officer was not only young, but an intelligent and energetic Greek.

"I am directed to conduct you to the colonel," he said. "Will you have breakfast now or afterwards?"

"I think I'll wait," said Winners. "It is possible that I shall breakfast with Madam Dvorolos."

The young Greek's eyes opened, and he at once became, not the jailor or keeper, but the subservient friend.

"In that case, permit me to accompany you at once to the colonel, who is waiting."

"Madam Dvorolos seems to be something big here," said Winners.

"You must know, since you expect to breakfast with madam."

They walked through a lane of tents where soldiers were preparing their breakfasts. There seemed to Winners to be no lack of food supplies; nor, in fact, of any other. The soldiers were happy, and sang as they worked. The discipline of camp seemed not severe.

In a larger tent a stern officer sat looking at some papers.

"Lieut. Thacko with the prisoner!" said the orderly at the flap.

"Admit them."

The colonel looked up from his papers.

"Well?"

His keen black eyes studied Winners curiously and well.

"I have heard of you," he said, in a

quiet, but harsh, voice. He seemed a man who could move at a moment's notice, and do things without danger of regret.

"I suppose you have," answered Winners. "I seem to be getting into difficulties enough for almost anybody to hear of me."

"You were captured during the night trying to effect an entrance at the rock pass."

"Scarcely. I was arrested after I had effected it."

"Worse. Much worse. What was it you wanted?"

"To reach dry land. My boat struck a rock, and I had to swim."

"But what brought you here?"

"A desire to see my cousin, Madam Dvorolos."

The colonel sprang from his chair, and stood as if transfixed.

"Is Madam Dvorolos your cousin? Why did you not explain that to the officer of the guard?"

"I did; but Madam Dvorolos seems to be so great that no one believed me."

"Is it true that you wish to be conducted to Madam Dvorolos?"

"I wish to see her. I do not know where she is."

The colonel studied a moment.

"Examine the man, and ascertain if he is armed," he said to the young Greek officer.

"You need not do that. I have a revolver. Here it is."

"But examine," said Galapo, taking the proffered revolver.

"I find nothing, excellency," said the officer, having made a complete examination of Winners.

"Conduct him to madam—no. I will do that myself. If his story is true, an apology is quite necessary."

The colonel rose, and arranged his uniform, putting on his sword.

"Be kind enough to accompany me," he said.

He took Bob's arm, and the two, now apparently on equal and friendly footing, left the tent.

They again walked through the lanes of tents, and toward the great castle Winners had first seen.

Guards were everywhere. They saluted the colonel, and he led Winners up a flight of marble steps. The castle was a splendid building, showing signs of age, and bearing inscriptions of ancient origin.

"Is this Madam Dvorolos you are taking me to the owner of this palace?" asked Winners.

"At present. This was a stronghold of the Knights of St. John."

Orderlies came and went with messages from the colonel. One returned that Madam Dvorolos would be glad to receive him.

In a gorgeous room, large enough for an audience chamber, Madam Dvorolos sat, clad in a magnificent morning costume, with a soldier at either side. A table strewn with papers was before her. She glanced up as the colonel led Winners into the room. Her expression was stern, and lacking interest in the man who had desired admittance. But she was beautiful, and her dignity made her grand. And when her eyes lit on Winners she rose from her chair, and an expression of surprise and pleasure illuminated her handsome face.

"Bob!" she cried.

Col. Galapo, as he saw the woman rush to greet Winners, bowed, and seemed at a loss for words.

"And so, after all, you found me," said Madam Dvorolos, as she held Bob's hand in hers.

"I don't think I did," he said, with a laugh. "Your soldiers found me. What am I up against, anyhow?"

"When did you arrive?"

"Last night, by swimming. Was arrested, put in the guardhouse, and now here I am."

A ringing and musical laugh burst from Madam Dvorolos.

"Poor boy. You have suffered ignominy in my service. But you are not injured. Have you breakfasted?"

"No. They offered me breakfast, but I said I would take my breakfast with you."

"Good! I am glad you did that, for breakfast will be ready in a moment. Col. Galapo, I thank you for taking such good care of my friend and cousin. The

fact that he was arrested and placed in the guardhouse, I see rather worries you. Fear nothing, for in doing that you and your soldiers were but obeying my orders. You may retire, and thank those who are so faithful in my service. And remember, that after this, M. Winners at all times represents me, and is to be obeyed accordingly."

"I thank you, madam, and will remember," said the colonel, as he bowed and retired.

"Now tell us all about it," said Madam Dvorolos, leaning her shapely shoulders against the back of her chair and laughing again. "It seems so droll that you should be arrested. I can understand it, of course. But I must learn the details."

At that moment another orderly entered.

"Madam's breakfast is served," he said.

"Make it for four," she said, commandingly.

"It is for four, madam. Col. Galapo so ordered it as he left."

"Oh, that colonel is a jewel," said Madam Dvorolos, as she linked her arm in that of Winners, and led him from the room. "He is certainly a prize among revolutionists. But I notice you wear a sort of uniform. You don't look quite as natty as usual."

"I got this rig from an officer. Mine was soaked with Mediterranean juice."

"Oh, I see. Well, here is breakfast. Now, eat heartily, Bob; for there is much for you to do."

Winners began to wonder if he had chanced to land in a madhouse or fairy land. Servants and orderlies moved about without noise or confusion. Madam sat down at one side of a table, and told Winners to sit at the other.

Immediately there entered through another door a tall, handsome and dignified man. He was like a picture from the old masters. His great, white beard, well trimmed, his massive shoulders, his keen black eyes, all formed a picture that held Winners captive.

"My husband, M. Dvorolos; my cousin, Bob Winners."

M. Dvorolos sat down at one side of the table, and breakfast was served.

"My cousin had a strange experience," said madam, to her husband. "Before we explain anything to him, I wish him to tell us that, more for your diversion than anything else. I see you have had a trying night."

"I have traveled far. The roads are bad, and the pasha's men everywhere. Karusu is back."

"I feared it," said madam, her teeth snapping together.

"But not him."

"No, I fear nothing now."

"Perhaps M. Winners will proceed with his story," said Dvorolos.

"Oh, it isn't so much," said Bob. He then started with his first note at New York, continued with his trip to Paris, and his meeting with Karusu. His tale of his capture on Scartio made madam roar with laughter, but brought a frown to the brow of her husband.

"It is no joking matter," he said, "when travelers are not safe in our kingdom."

Bob immediately came to the conclusion that M. Dvorolos was a harmless lunatic.

"My men are faithful," said madam, "and we must not blame them for obeying orders. Of course it was inconvenient, and, in a way, humiliating. I wonder why Adria has not come."

As if in answer to the question, through the door came Adria, known once as the Princess Mella, and when she saw Bob she bowed coldly, but with extreme courtesy.

"I am pleased to see you again, M. Winners," she said.

Bob felt the chill of her reception, and wondered still more what sort of a game he was up against. The girl was as lovely as ever, and clad as she was, in a habit half national and half Parisian, she was what Bob termed "stunning."

She sat down, and the breakfast proceeded. Adria had but little to say, answering her stepmother in few words. But madam seemed indifferent to all the emotions displayed by others. It was soon patent to Bob that she, and

she alone, swayed the destinies of this family. Before the ball at his mother's house he had never heard of her. And now here she was entertaining him, and giving instructions to a military force. He could not understand it, and waited for her to begin the explanation.

"It is rumored," said Dvorolos, "that the pasha will start troops to-day."

"Let him do so," said madam, defiantly. "We can take care of them. Are you going so soon, Adria?"

"I must be excused. I have much to do," she said, coldly.

"I shall expect you to be with us at noon."

"Without fail. Perhaps my weariness and headache will have worn off by then."

She swept from the room, Dvorolos drank his coffee and rose to go, and madam, offering Winners a perfumed cigar, drew him into a small and cozy room, where he was pushed gently into a rich upholstered seat.

"Now," said Madam Dvorolos, "I will tell you what this is all about."

CHAPTER X.

A GIGANTIC PROJECT.

Madam Dvorolos was certainly a fascinating woman. There was a charm about her that made Winners like her at once.

"Of course, I know that you are surprised at all this," she said. "And some of the surprises will bear explaining. In the first place, you were surprised when your mother told you that I was her cousin. Were you not?"

"Yes, I was surprised—not that you were my mother's cousin, but that I had never seen nor heard of you."

"Explanation number one. Your mother, as you know, is a proud woman. She belongs to the proud half of our family. Formerly, as girls, we were friends. My father was a stern old man, and—well—I ran away, and married the man of my choice. Not M. Dvorolos—this was years ago. My father forbade the mention of my name, and I was almost forgotten. My husband rose in European politics, and I plunged in with him. He died at Vienna. I, having become identified with certain political organizations, remained so, and have had a finger in almost every great movement in Europe.

"My life did not bring me closer to my family, although there was no good reason why we should not all be on the friendliest terms. In Paris I met M. Dvorolos. Adria, his daughter, was attending the school at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, and he visited her there. M. Dvorolos, while a Greek, is a Catholic. He wished his daughter to be well educated. We met several times, and finally he asked me to marry him. I did so, and that ends the story so far as my own poor individuality is concerned."

"I don't see any poor individuality about it," said Bob.

Madam Dvorolos laughed. Her laugh was as rich as music, and infectious. Winners laughed with her.

"You are such a boy!" she said. "But I am glad you like me, because I like you. I am sure I did not make a mistake when I picked you out."

"Oh, then you picked me out. May I ask for what purpose?"

Again the ringing laugh of Madam Dvorolos compelled him to follow suit.

"Oh, for a number of things. You saw soldiers here. Now we get to another explanation. You have noticed, of course, that Adria is a most beautiful girl. I do believe that she is the most perfect specimen of womanhood in the world."

"You are still in the world, you know," said Winners.

"Now! You are not such a boy, after all. But Adria is lovely. M. Dvorolos and I remained in Paris after our marriage, until Adria had completed her education, and then came here. My husband owns large plantations here, and this is our home. Now to plunge deeper into that subject; you know that Rhodes is a Turkish pashalic. That is, Rhodes, together with many smaller islands, is governed by a pasha. The word pasha may mean nothing particular to you,

but to us who know, it stands for unlimited power, cunning and cruelty. The Pasha of Rhodes is almost a king.

The Governor of Rhodes is Mulieman Pasha. His name is almost unknown to the world at large. Here we curse it. He is cruel, cunning, avaricious and absolutely unscrupulous. The number of Mulieman's wives changes with each moon. Nobody knows what becomes of those of whom he tires, but we have a saying here that the sea is deep.

"Mulieman heard of Adria, and made a way to see her. He at once demanded her of M. Dvorolos. Of course, my husband being a Christian, objected strongly to any such alliance. Adria objected herself. Then the pasha grew angry, and raised our taxes. He made another demand for Adria, and was again refused. Our taxes were raised again. He threatened to impoverish us unless Adria became his wife.

"During this time I was carefully studying the condition of the island. Here was a place of about thirty thousand inhabitants, with the finest of climates, excellent soil, and with over twenty thousand Greeks, ruled by the Turks. Most of the Turks were either in the army or navy, or holding office. The Greeks are the tillers of the soil and the merchants, although there are about a thousand Jews.

"I reached a conclusion that the prosperity that should be ours was kept back by the pasha's rule. The ignorance, the cupidity and the cruelty of Turkish rulers is scarcely understood by those in other lands. I at once took up the question of making Rhodes independent. There was no reason why it should remain a Turkish province."

"I am beginning to feel uncomfortable," said Winners.

"You'll get over that. To continue, the first great need was money. Ours was about gone, and the taxes were being constantly increased. I was compelled to raise finances if I wished to incite the Greeks to revolution. I took Adria with me and went to Paris. I was partially successful there, the story of Adria being an argument that made several well-known bankers back my scheme. Then Capt. Karusu, who is the pasha's representative in all his evil schemes, followed us there, and discovered what we were doing. I then went to New York, and changed my name to Madam de Saye, and Adria's to the Princess Mella. I hoped thus to escape detection by Karusu. But that gentleman is very shrewd, and he did discover us. I left New York at once, leaving a note for you to follow when I told you where I was. You went to Paris in response to my personal in the *Herald*. But before you came, I received word that the pasha was increasing his guards, and having sufficient money for a beginning I could not wait for you. I knew you would follow me here—or anywhere I might be."

"How did you know that?"

"Because you fell in love with Adria at sight. This suited my views and ambitions nicely. You are here, and that proves how well I judged you."

"But what part am I to play in this thing? It seems to me you have undertaken a stupendous job. You will have the entire army and navy against you."

"No, we will not. We may have a few warships here, but I hope soon to have as good. You see the troubles in Macedonia, the threatened revolt of Bulgaria, and the troubles on the Black Sea, necessitate keeping the bulk of the army in European Turkey. You must remember that most of these Greeks are ignorant. Many of them are simply mercenaries. I wanted some one in whom I could repose the utmost confidence. I went to that ball at your house merely to make your acquaintance. I spoke to your mother about the project, and at first she objected. But when she saw Adria she said you could choose for yourself."

"I usually do so. But that doesn't explain what my part is to be. Am I supposed to be a soldier, too?"

"Not unless you wish to take a command. My plans are to turn this island into a republic, with my husband as president. He will want educated and courageous men around him, and you, I

thought, should have first choice. More than that, I want you to marry Adria."

"That's all very well. Nothing would please me better. But it occurs to me that perhaps Adria would like to have something to say on that matter. Suppose she does not wish to marry me?"

"You must make her want to marry you. You are big, and strong, and handsome, and rich. Why should she not marry you?"

Winners looked at the ceiling, and thought hard.

"Rather a cold proceeding, sitting here and planning the marriage of a young lady without asking her permission. However, I understand that to be the rule in some countries. But judging from her reception to-day she does not seem to be overwhelmingly in love with me."

"Oh, you must manage that. There is a great future for you in Rhodes. I might tell you another secret—I never thought of you at first. I went to Paris and London to pick out a husband for Adria. But when I saw you I knew at once that you were the man. Now you know my wishes, and you like Adria, the game is in your own hands."

Winners shifted uneasily, and was about to reply. But an orderly came in with a message, and Madam Dvorolos left him alone. As she did not return, he began stirring about. He passed out into a broad hallway, and came face to face with Adria. When she saw him, her lovely face flushed and her eyes blazed with anger.

"Please bear in mind, M. Winners," she said, coldly, "that I hate you."

"Hate me? I hope not. What have I done to merit your dislike?"

"You have purchased me just as you would a horse or piece of land. I will not submit. I will not marry you."

She turned and walked away with a graceful dignity.

Winners softly whistled to himself.

"I'm in for a devil of a row no matter what I do," he said. "I suppose the next thing madam will ask will be for me to fight the pasha. Gosh! Wasn't the beauty mad!"

CHAPTER XI.

AN ERRAND OF DOUBTFUL USEFULNESS.

The choice of action was not left for Winners. He had not been fully informed as to how far the matter had gone, and was, therefore, about an hour after his conversation with Madam Dvorolos and the meeting with Adria, surprised at the sound of martial music.

Col. Galapo, undoubtedly excited and panting, came rushing through the halls. Winners was on his way then to take another look at the camp. But the flushed face of the colonel stopped him.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "I hear music."

"You'll hear more music soon!" gasped the colonel, who seemed to have lost his self-control. "They are coming, and our forces haven't been heard from."

"Why, I thought they were all camped on the estate."

"All we have here. But there are several regiments to come. We tried to keep the matter secret, but these men talked, and now we are to be attacked."

Madam Dvorolos heard the loud talking, and soon joined them.

"Is that a Turkish advance?" she asked, sharply.

"It is, madam," answered the colonel. "And our regiments have not arrived."

"Well, we must defend the castle," she said, promptly. "What have you done?"

"There is nothing to be done! What men I have here will fight, of course. But can we get word to the others?"

"Let me see—the nearest recruiting place is Makry. That is right across the strait on the Asiatic shore. Bandararia is there with at least two thousand men. We must get a messenger off at once."

"Shall I send Lieut. Styrio?"

"Will you go, Bob?" asked madam, turning suddenly to Winners.

"How do I get to the place?"

"Oh, we have boats enough. The colonel will see to that."

"But anybody could do that. I'd pre-

fer to remain, and help defend the place."

"But you might get killed."

"So might you. So might Adria. Now, look here, this thing is nothing but a farce. You can't carry on a successful revolution in Rhodes. You have undertaken a thing that cannot be done. I will stay with you and fight, or go to Makry, just as you prefer. But I make one stipulation."

"Name it."

"If I go to Makry, you and Adria must leave here and find a safe hiding place. Why not come with me to Makry, and return with your troops?"

"Oh, that is nonsense! If I left here there would be no defense. Heavens! I've raised ten millions to carry on this war, and now you want me to abandon it."

"It was a crazy undertaking in the first place. Could your husband not see that?"

"M. Dvorolos!" cried madam, laughing, "why he is a born conspirator. He has started more revolutions than I could tell."

"In Rhodes?"

"No, not many here. But we are wasting time. The Turks will be here, and then you can't get away. Will you go to Makry?"

"If you insist."

"Then go; and if when you return you cannot find us here, look for us in the big caves."

"Where are they?"

"About three miles from here, to the east, on the coast. They are called the Caves of the Seven Charms."

"I heard Adria speak of them in New York. What are their charms?"

"For Heaven's sake, don't stand here asking questions about superstitions of ignorant peasants. Get out of here while you can."

"All right, I'm off. By the way, I must tell you that I met Adria, and she informs me that she hates me. She thinks I have purchased her."

"Nonsense! That will be all right. Now go, and tell Bandararia to hurry."

"Who is he?"

"He is a colonel at Makry, where the forces are gathering to join us here."

"Come—there is no more time," said Col. Galapo.

With considerable misgiving as to the successful outcome of his adventure, and very decided doubts as to his justifiability in taking any part in the ridiculous affair, Winners followed the excited colonel. He found the entire camp on the move, and the castle surrounded with soldiers. Some were marching in at a side entrance, and they seemed to really offer some hope that the Turks could be held back for a time. He was conducted by Galapo to the stables and provided with a horse.

"Ride like the wind along this road," said the colonel. "It is not difficult. It takes you to a place where you will find a small inlet and some fishermen's huts. Ask for George Theopolous. Tell him I sent you, and that you are to be taken to Makry for the madam."

The sudden sound of a rifle startled the colonel, and he rushed away.

"Things are done with little planning," grumbled Winners, as he mounted his horse. "How the devil do I know that this George Populous, or whatever his name is, will not kill me."

But, having promised Madam Dvorolos, something he could not resist doing while she was looking at him, he kicked his horse and started. The road indicated by Galapo was a mere wagon track through the estate. But, after riding out beyond the confines of the estate proper, Bob found it to be a hard, shell road. He beat the horse into a racing speed, and the firing, which had now become continuous, was left gradually behind.

Two hours hard riding brought him to a place where the road ran near the coast, and he saw that the rugged character of the shore was gone, and now sandy beaches permitted an easy landing. And before him, on a little bay, he saw a collection of about a dozen huts. In the bay were several boats.

Dismounting at the village, he became the center of observation. The women came from the huts, and the children shouted to the men who were either in

the boats or mending nets on the shore. The men came in response to the call.

"I want to find George Theopolous," said Winners. "I come from Col. Galapo."

"I am the man you seek," said the taller and heavier of two who stood near him. "What is wanted?"

"I must go to Makry at once."

The fisherman scratched his head for a moment.

"Makry? You are to go to that miserable place? You are not a Turk."

"I'm worse. I'm an ass," said Bob. "Nevertheless, I've got to go."

"Did Madam Dvorolos say so?"

"Yes, I represent her."

"Then I will take you. That is my vessel, the large one out there with two sails."

"That looks safe enough. Can we start at once?"

"Certainly. Come."

Beckoning to four who were standing near listening, Theopolous led the way to the landing where a smaller boat was moored. They got into this, and went out to the lugger. It did not take the fishermen long to get under way, and then Theopolous had time to talk.

"Has the fighting began?" he asked.

"It started just as I came away. I am going for reinforcements."

"To Makry?"

"Yes. I thought from the way Galapo spoke you were in his confidence."

"Oh, as to that, I do his bidding."

Theopolous was rather an intelligent fellow, and his English, while full of faulty grammar and peculiar accent, could be easily understood. But Winners found that none of the others spoke any English at all.

He composed himself for a long sail, and as the lugger gathered headway, studied the shore line of the island he was leaving.

"Where are the Caves of the Seven Charms?" he asked Theopolous.

"Over there where you see the high rocks and hills," said the Greek, pointing to a spot more rugged even than at the place Winners had landed.

"Why is it called that? What are the charms?"

Theopolous shrugged his shoulders.

"It is a legend," he said. "I do not know if any of it is true. But these caves were once called the pasha's caves. They are large chambers in the rocks. In one there is a little lake of sweet water. The charm connected with this cave is that any person bathing in that lake becomes at once very beautiful."

"Now I understand something better than I did," said Winners. "Any other charms?"

"Yes, there are six more. Any one calling upon God, in any of the chambers, through Mahomet his prophet, receives an answer to his prayer. There is a cavern the Mohammedans call the temple."

"You don't believe that legend, do you?"

"I am a Christian," said the Greek.

"Number three?"

"It is said that any person who wishes to destroy an enemy, and not be known in the matter, may go to the temple, invoke the wrath of God upon his enemy, and wherever that enemy is he will be killed by accident."

"Pleasant, indeed," said Winners. "Number four?"

"It is said that any man and woman, meeting in the innermost chamber, at once hate each other, no matter if they had loved before. But in the other chambers it is quite the other way, and they love each other."

"Guess I'll take Adria for a stroll," mused Winners. "Number five?"

"A handful of stones from the inner cavern will turn to rubies and make you rich; but only if you believe in Mahomet."

"Good! I'll try to believe in him if I get there. Six?"

"It is said that no enemy of the pasha who enters the caves is ever seen again."

"Madam Dvorolos evidently does not believe in that," said Winners, remembering that she had told him to search there if the castle was lost.

"And the seventh charm is that any person drinking of a certain spring becomes invincible in battle."

"Good thing for Galapo," said Win-

ners. "Wish I had known that. It would have saved me this job."

CHAPTER XII.

THE RENEWAL OF AN ACQUAINTANCE.

Amidships in the lugger there was a small and gloomy cabin, and in this Winners tried to get some sleep. It was dark when he crawled into the bunk that Theopolous indicated, and, wearied by his varied experiences of the past few days, he soon fell asleep. He slept heavily, and did not feel the lugger begin to pitch and roll. But after about four hours of this sleep he was rudely awakened by being hurled bodily from the bunk.

Gathering himself up and wondering what had happened, he fell against the side of the cabin.

It was very apparent that the lugger was under difficulties. He could hear the wind whistling through the shrouds, and he could feel the pounding of waves against her sides. He rushed from the cabin to see if anything was wrong.

Evidently everything was wrong. He was alone on the vessel. She was rolling and groaning with the roughness of the sea. The forward mast was down and lay across the deck, and this heeled the vessel to that side, but now and then the wind catching the other sail would hurl her over, and the end of the fallen mast would rise from the water.

Not a soul save himself was on board. The only boat was gone.

"Have those Dagoes left me alone to drown?" he asked himself, as he scanned the wave-swept deck. It was evident that that was just what they had done.

It was still dark, and the rain came down in torrents. The wind was seemingly increasing in force, and the angry waves dashed completely over the lugger's decks.

Winners was not a man to become suddenly afraid, but his surprise at the change in the situation for a time deprived him of all power of action. Then, collecting his wits, he tried to steer. Without the broken mast this might have been possible, but the tiller seemed to have little effect on the disabled vessel.

"There's one thing certain," said Winners to himself, "if I don't get down that sail I'll be in the water soon."

He crawled around the vessel, and after searching in all the quarters of the crew he discovered an ax. With this he started in to cut away all the *débris* of the fallen mast, and this gave way. With the loss of this incubus the vessel righted some, but the wind was still too powerful for the remaining sail. He could not, alone, handle it, and so with the utmost effort he managed to get that sail down.

Even now the lugger, at the mercy of the waves, was hurled this way and that.

Then Winners made a discovery. The lugger was leaking badly and sinking.

"No wonder they went," he said, "but why didn't they tell me?"

His anger at the desertion was almost greater than his fear of sinking. He set to work to prepare for the time when he would no longer be able to remain on board. From the cabin he brought some ropes, and with these he fastened together some empty casks. It was a rude and inefficient affair, but it was the best he could do with the conveniences on board. The only thing remaining was to wait.

Waiting for a disaster is no pleasant method of spending time, and Winners began to grow angry with himself for entering into the absurd plan. He had not the slightest idea that Madam Dvorolos would succeed in wresting the control of the island from the Turks. It was a revolution that had no standing among the nations. With the other controversies in which Turkey was engaged he could see no hope of foreign interference with this mad scheme. But —then again there was Adria. Her beautiful face was ever before him, and the winning smiles of Madam Dvorolos held him captive.

Hour after hour he clung to the sinking vessel, and wondered what kept it afloat so long. He had so much time to think that he could have planned a better revolution than Madam Dvorolos. But he cared nothing about revolutions,

save the revolution of the earth, and he wished morning would come. As the dawn appeared, the lugger settled at the bow, where she had sprung a seam, and Winners, launching his improvised life raft, leaped after it. He struggled to get away from the lugger, and managed to do so before she sank. He was alone then on the Mediterranean, or rather in it, with two water casks to keep him from sinking.

Hunger began to assail him, and his courage began to fail. But it was now light, and the hope that some passing vessel would rescue him kept up his strength.

He was in the water perhaps an hour, perhaps more, for he never knew, when he saw the smoke of a small steamer. This gave him renewed strength, and he fought the elements again. The waves were high, and the wind had not subsided, but the rain had ceased. This made little difference to Winners, and he would gladly have exchanged the waves or the wind for the rain. He watched the approaching smoke, and soon the low hull of a Turkish gunboat hove into view.

Now, had the lugger been safe and above water, a Turkish gunboat would have been about the last thing Winners would have cared to see. But now, with his two casks as his only support, even the gunboat of an enemy was welcome.

It was difficult to determine what the gunboat was trying to do. She did not come on in a straight course, but zigzagged this way and that as if searching for something. Winners waved his hand, hoping that the lookout would discover his miserable plight. And, after a time, the gunboat did turn in his direction, and came straight for him.

[TO BE CONCLUDED IN THE NEXT NUMBER.]

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

In the next number will appear the first instalment of a new story by Max Pemberton, whose work as a writer of adventure fiction has won for him an enviable place in literature. The title of the story is "Beatrice of Venice," and it is considered by the critics who have read it to be the culmination of his best efforts. The story is strong in action and has as a scene Venice in the early part of the 19th century, a most stormy period in the romantic history of the "Queen of the Adriatic."

THE MYSTERIOUS TUBE

BY PAUL C. SCHAEFFER

The queer experience of a tenant who heard a voice in the wall of his room

I HIRED the room for the summer, and for two reasons. It was very cool and very cheap, and those two blessings coming into juxtaposition are very hard to get in this great city of New York.

The house was high stooped and old. Once it had been the residence of some man then famous in the burg, but now long since turned to dust, and the abode in which he had once taken such pride, had fallen into the hands of an agent who let it, as the sign read, "for business purposes, and studios."

There were several odd industries carried on in the rooms of the ground floor and first story; above that the house was like a rabbit warren, and all sorts and conditions of people seemed to inhabit the rooms.

Mine was in the basement, right beside the high stoop, with barred windows which the sun kissed for a moment in the morning and then left undisturbed for the rest of the day. No matter how hot and glaring the sun might be, when I stepped into my room there was grateful coolness and shadow.

And this without being damp. Both floor and walls were of small tiles, and there was never a drop of moisture on either. The room had once been the butler's office, I presume, for from it one could see all who came in or went out of the house, not alone by the basement door under the stoop, but by the stoop itself.

And I found my fellow-tenants well worth watching. In the evening I sat at the window, and saw the workmen and girls from the tailor shop, the paper flower manufactory, and the other shops on the lower floors, going home to their evening meal, and the lodgers in the upper stories coming in from their day's work.

The artist and magazine illustrator, whose name was a famous one in a small way, and who occupied the front room on the top floor—that facing the north—came out each day at a certain hour, and wended his way down the street toward the avenue. I could see him a long way because of his tall hat.

Then I learned that the German, who was forever smoking his China pipe on the stoop in the evening, did woodcarving in the little front room on the first floor directly over mine. He slept there, too, on a pallet which stood against the wall during the day.

But the people in whom I became the most interested, and that as soon as I saw them, were the two who occupied the rear rooms on the top floor, dividing that story, indeed, with the artist before mentioned.

These two were a tall, dark-complexioned, lank-haired man, whether young or old I could not make out, and one of the prettiest, daintiest little girls I had ever seen.

I call her little, because of her slight figure and the curls which she shook back from her face most charmingly; but her age must have been quite my own, and I felt pretty old myself. A fellow is likely to feel that way after he has been living alone and depending

upon himself entirely for two long years.

However, she was a most graceful, charming little figure as she tripped down the stoop on her way to the greengrocer's at the corner in the morning, or went out in the evening with the tall man, looking as trim and cool as one could wish.

Once as I was coming in myself, I met her at the foot of the high stoop. She had been shopping (she carried the cutest little market basket), and with the basket and some packages her hands were full. One of the packages slipped from among its fellows, and fell to the walk.

I picked it up for her, and stood in doubt, while she smiled most engagingly at me.

"I don't just see where I shall put this," I said, growing bold. "You look overburdened. May I not relieve you of some of the others and carry them upstairs for you?"

"No, indeed! You're very kind, but I don't need any boy to help *me*," she responded, saucily, and I couldn't really be angry despite this blow to my pride.

So I replaced the parcel, and she ran up the steps and whisked in at the door. Had I been a really bright fellow I know I could have found something else to have said to her.

But after that she bowed to me when we passed, although she gave me no chance to become further acquainted. Her companion, whom the janitor told me once was her brother, never seemed to see me. He walked like a man with his head in the clouds.

Now, these matters took up my attention during perhaps the first week of my sojourn in the tiled room. By that time I had catalogued about all my fellow-tenants, and knew what they did. Excepting the occupants of the top floor back.

One evening I sat in my accustomed chair, after coming in from dinner, my back against the wall and my slippered feet in a very comfortable, if ungraceful, position on the window seat. The noises of the street had died away. Even the street piano, that always came along the block in the evening, and to the music of which the children danced, had gone.

Only a voice now and then, or a shrill peal of laughter, with the slow shuffle of feet as incidental couples wandered by on the walk, and the occasional clang of the street-car bell at the corner, reached my half-dulled senses. It had been a very warm day, and I was almost in a doze.

Suddenly I awoke. I started upright in my seat to listen. Seemingly in my very ear a voice had sounded, and I glanced swiftly out of the window where there was not a soul in sight, and then into the dusky corners of my room, expecting to see, in one place or the other, the speaker.

"You villain!"

The words were spoken over and over again, in a tone betraying horror and seeming astonishment. Now the inflection was lighter, now heavier, the voice itself having that strained quality —that hoarseness, possibly of fear— which made it impossible for me to easily decide the sex of the speaker.

"You villain!"

I started from my chair, and gazed sharply about the room. The words seemed to have been spoken fairly within my apartment; yet there was not a soul there but myself—I could swear to that.

I continued to listen, half expecting a shriek to follow the words, or the sound of a blow. The speaker's tone seemed to imply that, if a woman, she would shriek for assistance the next instant; if a man, he would attack the creature which had brought the accusation to life.

My pen cannot reveal the depth of scorn, horror and shocked astonishment disclosed by those repeated words. Over and over again they were said.

I opened the door into the darkened hall, which ran back to the janitor's living apartments. Not a soul was there; there was not a movement in the shadows under the stairs.

I went back into my room. The voice had ceased. I heard it no more that night, although I sat in my chair until

the small hours, wondering first seriously, then in scornful mood, at the effect the words had upon my nerves.

In the morning as I tidied up my room before going out, I found, behind the chair in which I usually sat at ease, some bits of plaster. I glanced up at the ceiling; there was no break in it.

Then I caught sight of a broken place in the wall, directly behind my chair. I moved the seat out. There was a round hole in one of the gray tiles, and bits of plaster clinging to the edge of this hole proved where that on the floor had come from.

I stooped down, and placed my eye at the aperture. There was nothing to be seen. I thrust in my finger. The hole was the mouth of a metal tube in the wall, and a little further examination assured me that it was a speaking tube.

In leaning back in my chair the back of the seat had struck against the plaster, which had been smoothed over the hole, until, cracked and broken by the contact, the plaster had fallen out altogether.

Quite evidently the speaking tube was closed when the old house had fallen into use as lodgings, and I wondered to what room, or rooms, the tube extended.

But I swear it was not until several hours thereafter that I thought of the mysterious voice which had the evening before disturbed me, and connected it with the open tube. Then did I indeed laugh at my fears, and when I went home at night I told the janitor about the tube, and asked him with which room it connected. I suspected some of my fellow-lodgers of playing a joke upon me.

But the janitor was evidently as surprised as myself to find a tube in the wall. He had known nothing of its existence, and he was aware of no other room in the house that had a similar opening.

He was so much interested, in fact, that he made inquiries and even looked himself during the next two or three days, and finally told me that if the thing really had been a speaking tube, its other end had long since been closed up. There was no sign of an outlet in the rooms over me, nor in any other room in the house.

Nor did I hear the mysterious voice again within that time. I sat night after night, with my chair tipped back beside the tube; but all I heard within the house was now and then a distant door close, or the clatter of rats chasing each other behind the walls.

Then a night came when, as I was about to go to bed, I heard the voice again. The words I could not distinguish this time; but that the sound came from the mysterious tube there could be no doubt.

I fitted my ear to the hole in the wall, straining to distinguish what was said; but all I could catch was an indistinct monologue—not a word was clear.

After that it occurred frequently, the mystery deepening to my mind at every repetition. I spoke about the voices, mind you, to nobody—not even to the janitor. And I knew none of the tenants—not even the girl on the top floor—well enough to take them into my confidence.

As I went in and out, and the German was sitting on the steps with his China pipe, he said, *"Guten morgen,"* or *"Gute nacht,"* in a friendly way. Once he said to me: "Dem rats, dey not ledt me shleep last night. Dey vas trouble you yet, alretty?"

But it wasn't the rats that troubled me. I could hear them race across the ceiling, or behind the tiles, without being disturbed in my mind.

The voice from the tube was a different matter. Sometimes it murmured indistinctly; again it spoke out so that I could catch the very words, which were, on most occasions, exclamatory and accusing.

I think I am pretty sensible, and not at all superstitious; but I began to wonder if this voice I heard proceeded from a tangible being? Did it belong to any living body? If it did, where did the body hide itself, and what did the cries, and accusations, and pleadings wafted to me through that tube mean?

I finally made some inquiries of the agent, and learned of two or three people still living in the neighborhood who

remembered when the old house was occupied by its original owner.

I got at these people and asked them, in apparent curiosity merely, if anything "queer" had happened in the old house. You may laugh if you wish, but this thing had taken a firm grip upon me.

The information I gathered, however, assured me that the first owner of the house and his family had lived a perfectly humdrum existence in it, and that nothing out of the ordinary was ever known to have happened there.

Of course, in broad daylight, I was ashamed of myself for making these inquiries; but at night, when the murmurings from the tube recommenced, the glamour of the mystery held me captive again. Nevertheless, if the house *was* haunted, I did not propose to allow the haunt to drive me out of a comfortable and cheap room for that summer, at least.

One night, as I sat reading beside my student lamp, the mysterious voice from the tube began, and I dropped my book to listen to the uncanny sound. Sometimes I could distinguish entire sentences, usually in the nature of a monologue; but occasionally two voices seemed conversing. But usually, despite the peculiar tone the tube lent the voice, it seemed a female who spoke. The other voice, when it occurred, was an indistinguishable growl.

This night it was only the thin voice I heard, and it continued longer than usual. I could not read, although I tried again and again. On and on the voice went, finally becoming broken as though with tears, then shaking with horror. It seemed to be pleading, then threatening, then cajoling.

It got upon my nerves so that I could not keep still. I arose and walked the floor, my aural senses strained to catch the faintest sound from the mysterious tube.

During the pauses in the ghostly monologue I could hear the rats scurrying behind the wall and over my head. No other sound broke the silence of the old house, for it was late.

Suddenly the voice burst out afresh. It rose to a smothered shriek:

"You villain! you villain!" it cried, distinctly. "Would you do murder?"

And then, on the trail of these awful words, came the dull, muffled report of a pistol. The voice ceased. Not another sound in all that great house shook the silence.

Even the rats seemed to have been frightened away. Not the scratch of a claw came from behind the tiles. I remained, I suppose, for several minutes, as though carved of marble, the cold drops standing upon my forehead, my breath laboring from my lungs.

In springing up I had jostled the shade upon my reading lamp. This shade, acting as a reflector, cast all the power of the argand upon the gray, glistening tiles of the wall at the point where the mysterious tube opened. And my gaze was fixed upon this point, too, as I waited for the voice again.

But the silence continued. Not a whisper came from the hole in the wall. There was something showing upon the tile just below the mouth of the tube which attracted my attention, and, when my legs became able to bear me up without trembling, I stepped across the room to obtain a closer view of the place.

There was a stain upon the tile—a mark that had not been there before.

I went back for the light and brought it close to the mouth of the tube. Then the horror which gripped me froze my clasp upon the lamp, or I should have dropped it.

Trickling out of the tube were several drops of blood, which flowed down upon the tile and stained it crimson!

I crept back to the table at last and set down the lamp. How long I had stood there, gazing fascinated upon the fast drying blood, I could not have told. But never before had my soul been so shaken by fear.

Had something happened in this house which the old neighbors knew nothing about? Could it be possible that uneasy spirits repeated again, and over again, the words they uttered and the deeds they performed while still in life?

Then I called myself all kinds of an

idiot. Whoever heard of real blood flowing from a ghost?

And it was real blood, all right. In the morning, after passing a restless and unsatisfactory night, I convinced myself on that score. Only a few drops had run from the tube; but its nature could not be mistaken.

Before I went out to work I asked the janitor, in quite a casual tone, if he had heard a pistol shot somewhere in the house the previous night. But he disclaimed any knowledge of the shot, and I went away in a frame of mind easily imagined.

My nerves had really received a shock that they did not at once recover from. I was not much good in the store all day long, and even the fact that the senior partner called me into his office late in the afternoon, and told me something which I had been hoping and waiting for during many months, did not raise my spirits appreciably.

"There, Cummerford!" exclaimed the good old gentleman, smiling upon me, "I know you will want to be by yourself the rest of the day. Take the afternoon off. Go somewhere and have a good dinner—on me. Take a friend with you," and he passed me a crisp bank note.

"You'll come in to-morrow as head of your department, with double your present salary. Don't let 'em haze you because you're young. You'll get along. And you should celebrate on that," and he smiled again as he saw me mechanically tuck the bill away in my pocket.

I thanked him, and did as he advised—as far as leaving the store for the day was concerned. But when I got home to my room all the horror of the past night flooded back upon my mind, and I could not stay there.

I hurried into my better garments, and went out again, intent upon following another part of my employer's advice. I would go out for dinner—at some nice restaurant; but I did not know a soul whom I felt like asking to accompany me.

But at the moment I appeared on the street, my fair neighbor from above tripped down the steps. She was alone, and she bowed and smiled upon me, turning her steps toward the avenue, as I did. As we walked together we could do no less than speak.

"You do not often go out in the evening, Mr. Cummerford?" she said, questioningly, and favoring me with an approving glance. "I see you always sitting at your window when I go out with my brother to dine. You and Herr Goldfogle seem most exemplary young men."

"I thought you considered me a boy," I said, though I really don't know how I plucked up the courage to utter the retort.

She laughed, and seemed to like me better. "You do not look so much of a boy with that suit on."

"I am going out to dine to-night," I said, in explanation. "I am to find a nice restaurant, and order a fine dinner. It is a celebration."

"Your birthday?"

"No. The firm I work for has advanced me and doubled my salary. The senior partner told me to celebrate, and he is paying for it!"

"Isn't that nice!"

"But he told me to take a friend with me," I added, with a sudden accession of boldness; "but I know of nobody to ask, unless——"

I lost courage again there, but my silence must have been eloquent. She laughed unfeignedly, and shook her curls at me.

"Is that the best you can do when you wish a girl to dine with you?" she cried. "Now, to punish you, and to see that you sit up and behave, perhaps I will go! My brother could not go out himself to-night."

"Will you really come?" I cried, and I recklessly led her to the nicest place on the avenue, and spent every penny of the senior's bank note upon our dinner.

In the course of which meal we became very well acquainted indeed. At least, she must have learned all about me and my affairs, and I discovered that her name was Josie Lettelle—which

seemed, at the time, a great deal for her to divulge.

"Now I must go back home," she said, when we arose. "I fear my brother will not be pleased when I tell him I have dined out with a young man."

I wanted to ask her something about her brother, for he had appeared to me to be not a very attractive person. I judged that Miss Josie stood in some fear of him. But she was not a girl that one could question.

The dinner had been so pleasant that my spirits were at top notch when I reentered my room. I did not give the tube a thought, nor the blood spot on the wall, until, as I opened my book after getting into a more comfortable costume, there suddenly broke upon my ear the mysterious voice, hoarse and strained as ever:

"You villain! you villain! Would you do murder?"

Then followed a smothered, choking shriek. That was more than I could bear. I flung open the door into the passage, I fear with the intention of running out of the house altogether. But there was the janitor outside his door, too.

"What was that, Mr. Cummerford?" he cried. "Did you hear it? It was in the house somewhere."

"What did you hear?" I gasped, my hand shaking on the knob.

"I thought it was a woman crying out—a reg'lar hair-raisin' sort of a cry. Did you hear it?"

"Yes," I breathed.

"Well, I'm goin' to look into this," exclaimed the unaffrighted and practical man, and he started for the back stairway. I followed him. I swear I could not have remained alone in my room.

We went up flight after flight, and the janitor routed out every tenant who was at home to ask if they had heard the shriek, or knew anything about it. Herr Goldfogle, the woodcarver, denied hearing anything but the rats.

"Ach!" he exclaimed, "but I fix dem, shanitor! I puy me a lot of rat poison, alretty."

The janitor grunted some reply which I did not catch and went on, with me close on his heels. The next floor was empty at that hour; the third-floor tenants denied all knowledge of the cry which had startled us.

"Ain't nobody upstairs but them Lettelles," said the man. "The artist had gone out as usual. I don't believe——"

He stopped. I clutched his arm, all of a tremor. A voice, sounding muffled and very indistinct, reached our straining ears. It was a feminine voice crying for help!

"It's her!" exclaimed the janitor, and I thought there was some disgust, as well as a lack of grammar, in the words.

But I stopped for nothing further. I leaped up the stairs three steps at a time. I thought I recognized Miss Josie's voice, and all the suspicions I had of her brother's character came instantly to the surface. Without waiting to knock I burst in the door.

I was conscious that the janitor was calling after me and chasing me up the last flight; but I did not know why. The voice stopped abruptly as the door sprang open, revealing the Lettelles' living-room.

"Mr. Cummerford!" I heard Josie's voice exclaim, in quite a natural tone. But it was the tall, dark man—her brother—who faced me.

I had time to note that Mr. Lettelle looked greatly astonished as well as somewhat vexed at my sudden entrance. He had a book in his hand, and Josie, whom I saw after a moment sitting before a little dressing table at one side, held another.

I could do nothing but stand there, gasping like an expiring fish, while the janitor bustled up.

"It's all a mistake, sir!" that functionary said to Lettelle. "Mr. Cummerford heard you recitin' clear 'way downstairs, an' neither of us thought what it could be."

Then he grinned, noting my flushing countenance. "I reckon he thought you was really murderin' of the young lady, instead of only play-actin'."

A great light shone in upon my benumbed brain. "I—I really thought

so," I stammered, speaking to her brother, but looking appealingly at Miss Josie. "You see, I've heard the voice so often that it—it has come to worry me. Then its coming so mysteriously through that tube——"

"What tube?" both sister and brother demanded.

"The speaking tube which opens into my room."

"Why, how can you possibly hear us 'way down in your room, Mr. Cummerford?" demanded Josie. "We are at the back of the house, and you are in the front. I usually sit right here before my glass while we rehearse, so as to practice the facial expression as well as the text."

She indicated the chair before the dressing table. I stepped nearer and began tapping the wall paper with my fingers.

Suddenly my index finger poked through the paper. There was a hole in the wall similar to the one in my room, and right beside the mirror.

This opening may have once been filled with plaster, too, but it had disappeared, and nothing but the thin paper had covered the mouth of the tube. Sitting before her mirror, it was not strange that Miss Josie's voice was carried to my room in the basement.

"Quite remarkable! quite remarkable!" declared Mr. Lettelle, in whose deep, resonant tones I recognized the voice of the other "ghostly" speaker that had troubled me.

He didn't appear half such a bad fellow as I thought, when one came to get acquainted with him. The janitor told me, in a confidential whisper which the lodgers on the floor below might have heard, and which seemed to please Mr. Lettelle not a little, that he was "quite a famous actor."

Later my little friend admitted to me that her brother had been a good actor in his day, and now had a good engagement for the fall. She was to play a small part in the same company, and had rehearsed with him all summer.

But on this occasion of my first call at the top floor back apartments, I was anxious only to get away and hide my blushes. For Miss Josie did laugh at me most heartily, and even her solemn brother cracked a smile.

As we descended the stairs, and beheld the phlegmatic Herr Goldfogle on the stoop, the janitor said:

"I guess that Dutch chump *had* better buy rat poison. Know what he did last night? He laid abed and shot at a rat that was gnawing in the wall, and made a big hole in the plastering."

"Shot at a rat?" I exclaimed.

"Yes; that was the pistol shot you thought you heard. He killed the beast, too, it's likely, and it will make a nice mess in the wall."

I had a sudden thought. "Let me see where the bullet struck," I said.

We called in the German, and I viewed the break in the plastering. It was directly over the mouth of the tube in my room. The mystery of the blood drops was explained.

The pistol ball killed the rat, which had perhaps been gnawing the speaking tube. At least, a hole was made in the tube, possibly by the bullet, and through this passage trickled a little of the rat's blood.

"I reckon you'll want that speaking tube choked up with something, won't you, Mr. Cummerford?" asked the janitor.

But I thought not. It seemed sort of companionable after that to sit with my book in my room and listen to Josie and her brother rehearsing their parts in the new play, overhead, for she did not have her end of the speaking tube stopped up, either.

It was rather handy for them to call down and invite me up of an evening, or for me to call up and invite Miss Josie for a car ride, or to go to a roof garden. In fact, we grew so friendly that when the play opened in the fall I had the right-hand box, next the stage; and the handsome bunch of roses that were handed over the footlights to the winsome little ingénue, who took the house by storm at the first performance, had my card attached to it!

A BRUSH WITH THE NATIVES

BY ARNOLD J. WARREN

The long chances taken by a lover to protect the interests of the girl of his choice

"IF poor Mary had the least experience," Laura Bates told her brother, with the wisdom of two seasons "out," "she would see what sort of a man that Baker is. Because he was brought up right here in the neighborhood, and their fathers were friends, she believes he must be all right. I am afraid she doesn't like city men, Arnold —not your kind."

"I guess that's right," responded Arnold, moodily.

Now, when Arnold Bates had first met Mary Hastings, he would have laughed mightily had any one suggested that he could have a rival in the character of the "horsy"-looking Jim Baker, whom he occasionally saw stop at the Hastings' gate, and speak to Mary from the seat of his runabout, while he held in his lean, long-legged pacer.

Somebody told him who Jim was, and Arnold shrugged his shoulders. He could not understand a nice girl liking such a fellow at all; but he failed to take into consideration the fact that Mary had known Jim during his boyhood, they had played together and attended the same school; and Mary Hastings was very faithful in her friendships.

Baker had gone away from Hazardville "to seek his fortune," worked for several years for a brokerage firm, and was now reported to be in business for himself. After one little passage at arms with Mary, Arnold was too wise to ever again speak of Baker; but when he learned quite casually one day that Mary's father, old Dr. Hastings, had left his daughter a very snug fortune, which Jim Baker was now reinvesting, young Bates began to feel an increased interest in Baker's business and financial experience.

Arnold and his mother and sister had only recently moved into their new home next to the modest Hastings' cottage, and the young man had just been admitted to a junior partnership in a well-known Wall Street firm. Mary's vague remarks about stock and investments suggested to Arnold that she was (to use an inelegant expression) being "filled up" by her old friend, Baker, regarding the market.

"Mr. Baker writes me that he expects a great jump in values—especially in some stocks of which I have holdings —within a few days," Mary told Arnold one evening when he was sitting on her porch. "Hazardville is so far from town, I really suppose I should give Jim a power of attorney, so that he could handle my stock without my signature. The market fluctuates so."

Arnold gazed up into her sweet face seriously. She was about as capable of handling matters of this kind as a kitten.

"What stocks, if I may be so bold as to ask?" he inquired.

She named a solid corporation whose price had not fluctuated two points in as many years, and was not likely to do so for two more to come! The old doctor had evidently wisely invested his money for Mary.

"I am a broker myself, Miss Mary," he said; "but I advise you to give no man such a power. You have a great deal of money tied up in stocks now?"

"Everything, excepting this little place," she returned, smiling confidently. "Jim has invested some of it where

the returns are sure to be enormous. I may be as wealthy as some of my neighbors yet."

"Or as poor," muttered Arnold, with clouded brow.

"I should hate to lose what you slangy men call 'a good thing,'" she continued, "just because Jim couldn't get my signature in time."

"I beg of you to think twice of that, Miss Mary," he urged. "Think of the temptation it puts in a broker's way."

"Oh, but Jim is an old friend as well as a broker," she cried, loyally, and he saw her eyes flash in the dusk.

Arnold realized that he was treading on thin crust, so he hastened to say: "That *does* make a difference, Miss Mary.

"By the way," he added, "did Laura tell you I had bought a racer? Fitch is going to send it out for me to try to-morrow. Would you like a spin in it? I expect Laura will be anxious to go."

"I couldn't possibly go to-morrow," Mary said, stiffly. "I expect Mr. Baker out on business."

Arnold left soon after that, and the grinding of his heels on the gravel betrayed his inward feelings. "The fellow's got the girl bewitched, I swear he has!" muttered young Bates, and he paced the country road, smoking thoughtfully, until he reached a determination which, on the following morning, he put into effect.

He went to a man who knew things, and asked: "Who is Jim Baker? What does he do? What's his graft?"

"What Jim Baker? The one of Hazardville, on the Sound? Let's see, that's near where you've built your bungalow."

"That's the man. They think him something of a financial wonder out there. Sort of a Napoleon of Finance. He wears rather a loud tie, much too glossy a hat, and drives a fast horse."

"And some day he'll be driving that same fast horse over the State line—perhaps. He's running pretty near the limit with this scheme he's working now."

"What is it?" queried the anxious Arnold.

"Well, it's one of those things in which the innocent lamb exchanges his good coin for experience which will last him a lifetime. Jim Baker learned his trade with one of the trickiest brokers that ever insulted the Street by his presence. He hasn't missed any chances for learning things—not he! That's all."

But urged further, the man who knew told Arnold Bates several things that made that young man so worried for the safety of Mary Hastings' funds that he went back to his office and telephoned his sister.

"Go over and see Mary, and try to get her to promise not to give Jim Baker any power of attorney, or to let him handle her funds, until she has seen me again," he instructed Laura. "The matter is serious. That fellow would not be surprising those who know, if he left town between days."

"All right, Mr. Jealousy," Laura replied over the wire. "I don't like the man, but I think you are foolishly suspicious. Are you going to bring out the new automobile when you come this afternoon?"

Now, Arnold had well-nigh forgotten the machine he was to try that day. Fitch had promised to have it at the Arraway station at two o'clock.

It was a thirty mile run from that point to Hazardville, and young Bates thought he could tell something about the machine, traveling that distance, and, if it suited him, Laura should have her spin afterward. As Miss Hastings had refused to accompany them, however, the young man had rather lost interest in the new acquisition.

"Hang the auto, anyway!" muttered Arnold.

His mind was just then troubled regarding Mary and Jim Baker. Suppose the fellow should obtain the unsuspicious girl's signature, sell her out, and decamp with the proceeds? What his knowing friend had told him earlier in the day made this look very possible.

And before he left his office to catch a train for Arraway station, a message over the wire from his previous informant increased Arnold's suspicions.

"Our friend has just arranged the sale of about one hundred thousand dollars' worth of B. X. & Y., and Eastern Midland preferred. There will be a flitting."

That was Mary's stock! She had told Arnold about it the night before. It wasn't likely that Jim Baker had that amount of stock of his own to sell. He was counting on getting Mary's signature.

"By Jove! I'll go right to her and put it plain," decided the young man. "I'll tell her the truth about the fellow—even if it does seem like 'throwing mud.' She mustn't lose her money just because of any squeamishness on my part. Hang that auto, anyway!" was the burden of his thought as he left the office.

Still, a thirty mile run across country would not take long, and Fitch's man would be waiting at Arraway. But when he reached the latter place he received a shock that was unexpected.

He was well known there, and had hardly left the train and observed the black automobile with the broad, crimson stripes, standing back of the station with the crowd of curious villagers about it, when the druggist across the square ran out of his store and frantically beckoned to him.

"Your sister's been calling me every few minutes for half an hour, Mr. Bates," he declared. "She's very anxious to speak to you. Hope there's nobody ill at the house."

Arnold stepped quickly into the booth, and called his house number. He knew it was something about Mary Hastings' affairs, even before he heard Laura's voice through the instrument.

"Dear me! is that you at last, Arnold?" she cried. "I've been trying to get you for the longest while. They said at the office you had gone."

"Well, what is it?" demanded Arnold, cutting in.

"It's that horrid Jim Baker. He's been at Mary's. I was there and had just got her to promise to go with us this afternoon to try the new machine, when who should drive up but that villain!"

"Do be quick, Laura!" urged her brother.

"Ain't I?" returned the girl, in injured tone and ungrammatical speech. "You just listen. I wasn't going at all, though I hate that fellow; but I found he wanted to talk business.

"I heard enough to know that she's done just what you said she ought not to do—signed a 'power' of some kind, so that Baker can sell her stock without her signature. I thought if we could get her away in the auto before he came it would be all right; and now——"

"Are you sure?" gasped Arnold.

"Positive. I hope I have ears. And now he's just driven off again. Mary thinks she's going to make a pot of money."

Arnold dropped the receiver without ringing off, and ran out of the store. He didn't pause to reply to the druggist's consoling remarks regarding the supposed illness at the Bates' villa.

But Arnold's haste was not inspired by any well-defined plan of procedure. His only idea was to get to Hazardville in a really hopeless attempt to warn Mary, and stop Jim Baker before he could do any harm with the power of attorney he had obtained from the young girl. He was convinced that the fellow would use that paper without compunction.

When he reached the car he saw that Fitch had sent out Cummings with the machine. Now Cummings was not alone an excellent chauffeur; he was a safe man, and in the instant of his discovery of the chauffeur's identity, Arnold Bates came to a determination.

"Give me that coat and cap!" he commanded, breaking through the ring about the machine. "I'm in a hurry, Cummings. How fast does Fitch say she can go?"

"She can be geared up for seventy miles an hour, Mr. Bates," was the reply.

"You wanter be mighty careful how you travel over our town roads, Mr. Bates," said a pompous little man in the group, whom the young fellow knew to be one of the council. "We've had

too many accidents of late, and we've instructed our police to arrest anybody who speeds over the limit."

"What's the limit?" demanded Arnold, shortly, adjusting the "blinders" Cummings handed him.

"Wal, fifteen mile an hour is the maximum speed outside the villages; eight miles in town."

"And suppose we should break that rule, Mr. Sleeper?" asked Arnold, leaping to the seat. "I'm in a terrible hurry."

"Wal, young man, you'd better——"

The rest of the warning was lost to Arnold. He started the car quickly, the spectators dodged, and they shot easily along the street. Arnold looked back and saw Sleeper steering a course for the drug store.

"He'll telephone ahead for his men to look out for us. We'll have trouble yet," he said to Cummings.

"We can run into the old race course, and work her there at top speed, if you want to try her paces, sir," suggested Cummings. "No need to get into trouble with these natives. They can be very nasty."

"Cummings," said Bates, firmly, "I've got to make the deep gully on the Pike Road in the quickest time that this old machine can travel. I expect to meet somebody there, and I mustn't lose 'em. If we get into trouble, you won't lose anything by it."

The chauffeur grinned. "Oh, sir, if you don't mind a brush with the natives, I'm sure I don't," and he steered quickly around a farm wagon which half blocked the road.

"Then here goes!" exclaimed young Bates, and he "let 'her out" several notches. The big machine fairly leaped ahead. They went past the "Eight Miles an Hour" sign in a cloud of dust that made the auto's passage look like that of a whirlwind.

The big machine was beginning to hum. The cloud of dust settled slowly in their wake, and the click of the motor beat upon their ears with the regularity of clockwork. She gathered speed with every revolution of her wheels.

The black and crimson racer, with her low front like the "plow" of a locomotive, her high back, and the two capped and spectacled figures behind the valves and steering gear, looked not unlike a huge dragon coming down the sunlit road. Chickens squawked and flew to cover; dogs barked, but scurried out of the way; and the country people in their doorways gazed in scowling wonder at the whirring monster as it dashed past.

But Arnold Bates scarcely noted these things. His thoughts were upon a man jogging along toward town behind his easy-going pacer, with a paper in his pocket that would perhaps quite ruin Mary Hastings. He was firmly convinced that Jim Baker meant ill by the girl.

The bogus investment company at the head of which Jim stood was about ready to fall to pieces. As his informant in town had said, "there would soon be a flitting." And Bates was confident that Baker's securing the power of attorney, combined with the report that he had arranged to sell B. X. & Y. and Eastern Midland, meant that the broker was about to accomplish a coup that would leave Mary penniless.

It would be a difficult matter to prove this, however, until the thing itself was accomplished. Mere suspicion would not be sufficient to base an accusation upon. Bates' personal belief that the broker was a scoundrel would not stand for much in court of law, and therefore the young fellow was bent upon a drastic measure.

He reduced the speed of the machine a trifle, and turned so that he could speak to Cummings. "How far can I trust you, old man?" he asked, seriously.

"Why—I guess up to the limit, sir," returned the surprised chauffeur.

"Suppose you should see me flagrantly violate the law, would you stand for it? Keep it to yourself for a few days until I could show you that my crime only made a far more terrible one impossible?"

Cummings looked rather startled for a moment; then he grinned behind his mask. "I'm takin' chances on the law

every time I run one of these machines in a jay town," he said. "Go ahead, Mr. Bates, I'm with you."

"Right, then!" exclaimed Arnold, and once more the machine leaped ahead. "We're going to reach that particular spot on the Pike Road as quick as this thing can get us there. I trust to your driving—and that you'll keep your mouth shut afterward."

Little time had been lost during this dialogue. The auto gathered speed again, and rounding an abrupt turn in the road at a pace that threatened annihilation to any obstruction in its path, they saw the Halfway House just ahead.

Out into the road ran an excited individual who waved them commandingly to halt. The omniscient country policeman was easily recognized.

"How high do you s'pose he'll go when we hit him?" asked Cummings, shouting into Arnold's ear.

"Have a care! You don't know which way he'll run," cried the young man, nervously.

"He won't jump the way I'm going to steer," declared the other.

The constable's face suddenly changed. He saw that the flying car was not slowing down in the least. From an expression of wrathful majesty his countenance changed to one of abject terror.

Arnold heard his shriek as he leaped across the road. But he really would have been too late had not Cummings turned out. The heavy car took a curve halfway up the roadside bank, coming back again upon hard pan with a jounce that made the springs creak. They passed the roadhouse in a whirl of dust.

"How far to the town line, sir?" asked Cummings, between his teeth.

"Five miles yet. That was a near chance. Great Scott! look at that horse!"

Around another turn in the road they suddenly shot into the view of the animal in question, which was tackled to a well-filled democrat wagon. It was too late to stop the charging automobile.

There was a chorus of shrieks, while the poor horse stood stiffly upon its hind legs and pawed the air! The wagon was backed halfway across the road as the maddened animal strove to turn away from the flying monster.

"Full speed!" yelled the chauffeur, as he observed Bates trying to slow down the machine. "It's our only chance, sir!"

Arnold obeyed, and, unchecked, the auto shot down upon the wagon. The road was narrow at best, and the backing vehicle nearly filled it. There was no side hill to run up here; instead, a well-built fence defended the roadway from a drop into a ditch that would have been fatal to the auto.

Arnold bent low and shielded his face. His heart throbbed violently. He expected to see the air in an instant filled with flying splinters.

But the trained eye of the chauffeur saw the proper angle of collision. A twist of Cummings' wrist, and the auto shot by the rear of the lighter vehicle.

The latter was caught slantingly, and was driven around in the roadway, snapping the shafts short off, but not overturning the wagon nor spilling its occupants.

Arnold glanced back, and observed the freed horse tearing up the road with the broken harness and splintered shafts trailing behind it; but he was positive nobody had been seriously hurt.

"Heaven deliver us from another such escape!" gasped the young man.

"That was a near one. But don't reduce the speed. If they stop us now it will be the police station for ours, sir. That cop back there will telephone ahead.

"These jay towns are fairly overrun with police now; they get a percentage of the fines, you know. It pays them better than raising turnips."

"They must not stop us now!" exclaimed Arnold, with excitement.

"I don't think they will unless they build a brick wall across the road," muttered Cummings, grimly.

Conversation lagged. The pace was not conducive to further remarks, anyway. And back in the young fellow's

troubled mind was the insistent thought perhaps, after all, they would not reach that particular point on the Pike Road in time.

"If he once gets to the city, he's lost to me," thought Arnold. "It would be like hunting a needle in a haystack to find him there.

"If this deal of his is really ready for bringing to a head—as I am informed it is—he won't have to wait for the market to open to-morrow. It will be done in the lobby of some hotel this evening, and to-morrow—well, like enough Jim Baker will be a minus quantity and Mary Hastings' fortune will have accompanied him to greener fields and pastures new.

"We've just *got* to catch him, and that's all there is about it!

"Talk about Claude Duval, Sixteen String Jack, and their ilk—they weren't in it with the modern prince of the road," and Arnold chuckled nervously. "The present-day highwayman goes out in an automobile, and——"

His train of thought was snapped. Flashing out of a bit of woods they saw a group of figures not far ahead. A heavy farm wagon stood at one side, and the men were busy tearing down the roadside fence.

Cummings turned a meaning look upon his companion. "They're ready for us, sir!" he exclaimed.

But Arnold made no reply. He saw now that the men were building a hasty barricade across the highway. The warning had gone ahead, and the natives had determined to stop the piratical car at all hazards!

"We're in too great a hurry to stop, sir," cried Cummings, as the young man's grip tightened upon the controller. "We've got to go through that thing—or over it!"

There wasn't a moment for discussion of the point. The great black and crimson machine was traveling like the wind. Cummings squeezed a blast out of the horn that startled the echoes.

The overconfident constables looked up, and observed no intention on the part of the lawbreakers to stop. Some of them ran to the heads of the horses, while the others dropped their burdens of fence rails and scattered to places of safety.

At top speed the auto charged the obstruction. The jolt was scarcely felt by the men in the machine, but the air was full of broken rails for a moment.

One timber struck Arnold Bates across the forehead, knocking his cap into the back of the vehicle, and making his head ring again. It was not until the shouting mob of angry natives was out of sight that the young man realized he had been severely cut.

The blood ran into his eyes, and for the first time Cummings looked at the matter seriously. "Great heavens, sir! That is a bad wound. You must stop, and see a doctor——"

"Stop now!" cried Bates. "Not on your life! Take that handkerchief of mine. That's it. Now tie it tightly about my head. It must do until——"

He did not finish his sentence, but stared ahead with bloodshot eyes as the auto spun along the track.

They reached the top of the hill, and as the machine pitched over the summit and started to coast down the incline, Arnold caught a glimpse of a horse and carriage just starting down the opposite slope toward them.

"We're in time!" breathed the young man, with devout satisfaction.

Just at the foot of this slope a road branched off toward the city, and on that road houses were frequent, and there was no sheltering wood. But in the hollow was a thick patch of forest and no house for a mile or more in either direction.

Once at the foot of the hill Arnold stopped the auto, dead. "We're out of the town, anyway, now; so they can't bother us," he said, with satisfaction.

"What now, sir?" asked Cummings. "Doesn't that cut hurt you? It's bleeding yet. You should see a surgeon."

"In time—in time, Cummings. Something more important now. You will please be dumb and blind. Take my place, and shut off the machine. There! do you hear that carriage coming?"

Cummings nodded.

"I'm going to stop it. No matter

what happens, you sit where you are now and pay no attention." He was in the road himself, and reaching into the tool box secured a shiny wrench which he half hid in the palm of his hand.

"Be ready to get away in a hurry when I give the word," was the young man's final command, walking ahead to meet the approaching carriage.

The pacer pattered down into the gully, and the carriage wheels rolled swiftly over the bridge. In his long dust coat, goggles and the bandage shrouding the upper part of his face, nobody would have recognized Arnold Bates.

When the vehicle came into view, Baker was lolling back comfortably in his seat, smoking the cigar of content. The mare pricked up her ears when she saw the auto standing in the roadway. She was more startled when the shrouded figure beside the path leaped out and caught her bridle.

Baker sat up with an oath. "Shut up, and get down out of that!" commanded the begoggled figure.

There was something so uncompromising in the command, and the thing in the man's hand glinted in the sunlight so suggestively, that Jim Baker complied with alacrity.

"There's two of you," he grumbled. "I'll see about this. If there's any law in this land——"

The other made no reply. He motioned Jim's hands up, and up they went —as high as the broker could reach them.

Then the highwayman went through his pockets with a dispatch which seemed to show much practice in robbing the innocent traveler upon the public road. Everything was dropped into the capacious pockets of the long dust coat.

"Climb back again!" was the command, and Baker failed to notice the tremor in the voice. He was too greatly shaken himself.

With one eye still upon the victim, this modern road agent whipped out a knife and slashed the harness in a dozen places. "Keep your eyes straight ahead!" he commanded.

He beckoned the motionless chauffeur to bring up the machine, and, stepping behind Baker, rapidly examined the various articles he had taken from him.

Selecting several papers he dropped everything else—wallet, watch and chain, rings and all—into the back of the victim's carriage. He was just able to stagger to the side of the automobile, into which Cummings fairly dragged him, and the next moment the machine was off in a cloud of dust, while the erstwhile highway robber was lying back in a dead faint on the seat.

The financial columns of the papers two days later mentioned briefly the toppling of another investment company and the disappearance of its manager, James Baker.

"Funny thing. Baker didn't deliver those securities he agreed to sell before the smash came," Arnold's informant, the "man who knew it all," told him, when that young man got into town again in the guise of rather an interesting-looking invalid. "He couldn't have got away with so much ready cash, after all."

"No, Providence—er—interposed," responded Arnold, calmly, and not long after the facts regarding Baker's defection came out and Bates went over, his head still in a sling, to reassure the tearful Mary Hastings.

When he had explained to her that she had lost comparatively a small sum through her "old friend," after all, and had confessed his own part in the matter, Arnold observed:

"I'm paying a pretty penny in fines for fast driving, and for smashing that wagon. I don't think Baker will have me up for highway robbery; but if he does, will you go my bail, Mary?"

Then seeing that the tears were imminent again, he laughed. "Don't you mind. It's all right. But let me tell you, despite ancient saws to the contrary, new friends are sometimes better than old.

"Forget the whole business, my dear. I'm going to take Laura out in that blessed automobile this afternoon. Will you go, too?"

A CHAT WITH OUR READERS

THE mission of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE is to give pleasant relaxation from the sordid routine of existence. We particularly wish to see it in the hands of the tired man of business, and in the hands of those who feel constrained to seek an hour's relief from the cares of their daily life. We would have you understand that we select our stories with that purpose in view. We will be satisfied when the time comes—we think it will be soon—that our magazine is looked upon in the same spirit as the modern theater is regarded—as a place of entertainment or the source whence comes amusement and diversion and thorough enjoyment. There are magazines of other kinds, publications intended to instruct, and periodicals that try to cover the whole gamut of life. but our mission is more simple. If we have given you entertainment we are repaid.

IN another part of this number you doubtless have found—and have read—the first instalment of Mr. Marchmont's fascinating serial, "The Eternal Snare." It is hardly necessary to say that this is the latest and by far the best story written by this well-known author. It shows to a degree the extreme care in preparation for which Mr. Marchmont is famous. Before writing the story the author lived for several months in and about Constantinople, and made a close personal study of his characters and of the environments. Mr. Marchmont's method of work is characteristic of the man. He does not touch pen to paper before the story is clearly outlined, even to the minor details, in his mind. Then he does his writing at fever heat, permitting nothing to interfere with the work which is to him, for the time being, the one absorbing occupation of every available hour.

NOT long ago a self-confessed admirer of this magazine suggested that we either reproduce a number of Edgar Allen Poe's short stories or run a series after the same style. We are thankful for the suggestion; in fact, we are always grateful for words of advice or suggestions from our readers, but in this particular instance we must firmly, if gently, decline to accede. We greatly admire Poe, and we think his work worthy of a very prominent niche in the halls of fame, but we do not believe the Poesque class of literature is what our readers want. And we will say, further, that the grewsome, the grotesque, the repellent, the blood-creeping tragic, will not find a place in these columns. Life is far too short to be able to spare any part of it for the perusal of gloomy stories.

WHILE we are on this subject we would like to say a word or two to our many contributors. There is nothing like starting fair, nothing like a clear understanding at the beginning. Much postage and heartburning will be spared if the prospective contributor has a clear conception of our needs. We have just told what we do not want. We might add to that the fact that we cannot use poems, special articles or essays of any kind. Available stories must be well written, not too complicated, and, above all, interesting. Just mark that word—interesting. The best plot ever concocted, the best literary "style" ever set upon paper would fail of acceptance if the personal, human interest is missing. And we would say again, and with emphasis, do not send us morbid stories, or ghost stories, or stories dealing with sickly sentimentalities. We are not the official organ of any literary morgue.

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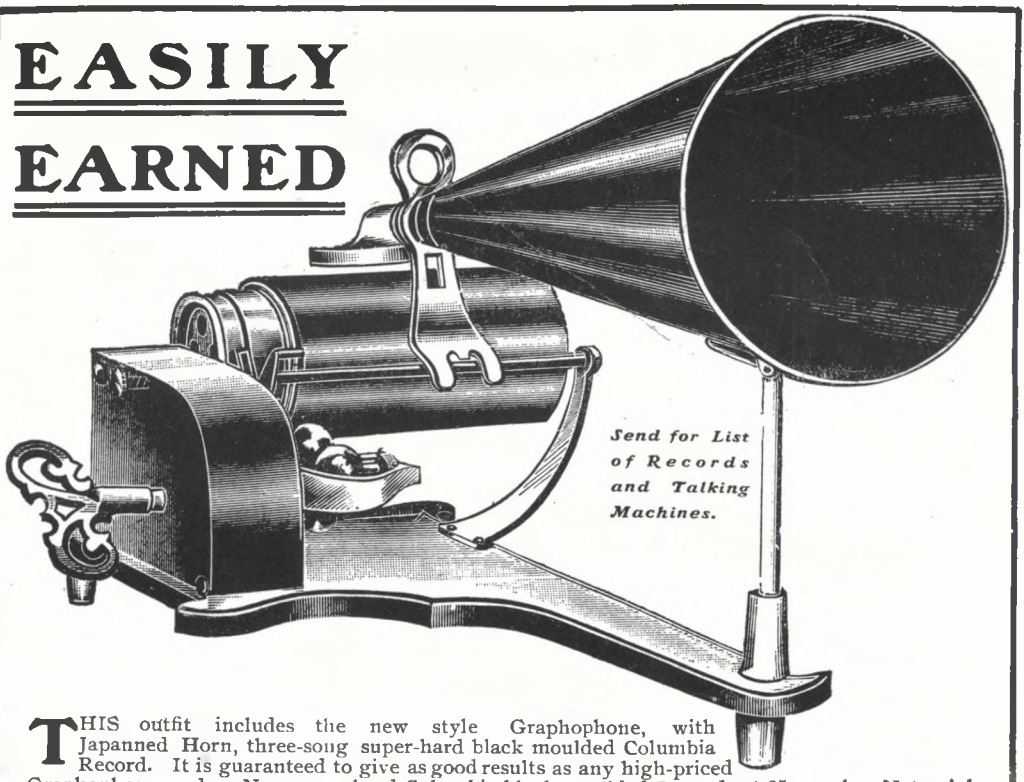

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