The HARMSWORTH

RED

Feb 3

Magazine

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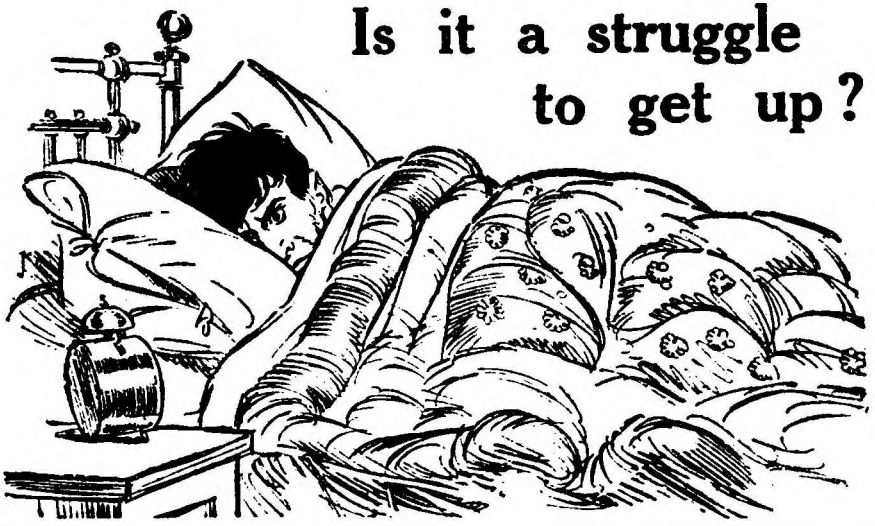
"Red"-and re-read!

Is it a struggle to get up?



Don't you wish you could always wake up fresh and brisk, ready to tumble out of bed jolly and bright-eyed?

Well—you can.

If you wake up feeling lazy and sluggish and sleepy there's a reason for it, and the reason is that **your system is lazy and tired and sluggish.**

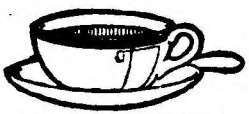
Probably you lead a sedentary life, have to sit a good deal during the day, don't get enough open air and physical exercise. Week-end walks or Saturday golf are not enough, consequently your internal system becomes inactive. Liver and kidneys don't perform their natural functions **actively** enough.

As a result they **let impurities creep** into the blood which would never get there if you were leading an active, open-air life. The presence of these impurities in your blood causes constipation, depression, headache, "fits of the blues," and a general feeling of lassitude. Work is a drudge, your outlook is not so happy as it should be, you feel sleepy after meals and lazy in the mornings.

There's no need to feel like this. There's no need to envy those jolly, cheerful people who are always brimming over with fun and energy. **You** can feel like that, too. Take a pinch of Kruschen Salts in your breakfast cup of tea **every morning.** Just a **pinch** only, as much as will lie on a sixpence, but—it must be **every** morning. You can't taste it. You won't know you are taking **salts**, but you will soon notice the difference. **Kruschen Salts restore the liver and kidneys to healthy activity so that they perform their natural function thoroughly. Impurities are cleansed from the blood. Fresh, clear blood circulates all over the system, bringing new, tingling health to every fibre of the body.** You wake up refreshed by sleep, **cheerful, full of energy, ready to spring out of bed.** All day and every day you **feel** happier, keener physically and mentally.

It is because your system is free from impurities, working actively, you are in the full swing of health—and know it.

Kruschen Salts cost 1/9 a bottle at any chemist's, and one bottle lasts over three months—less than 1d. a day for eager, strenuous health. Get a bottle to-day!



Tasteless in Tea

Put as much in each breakfast cup as will lie on a sixpence.

Kruschen Salts

Good Health for a farthing a day.

The dose of a sixpenceful taken every morning is found in practice just the right amount for a most invigorating daily tonic. The medicinal dose for persons suffering from pains of rheumatism and gout, or habitual constipation, with inactive liver, etc., is that given on the label of the bottle, viz., half to one teaspoonful in a tumbler of hot water before breakfast.

ECONOMY.—It's the little daily dose that does it. A 1/9 bottle of Kruschen Salts lasts 3 months and costs a farthing a day. Get a bottle at your chemist's to-day and start to-morrow.

THE RED MAGAZINE

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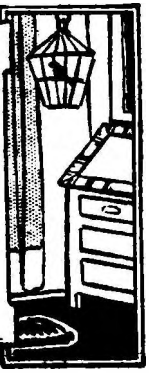
SAMSON AND DELILAH



By FRANCES BROWN

1.

THE boy rolled over on an elbow, plucked a blade of grass and, chewing it ruminatively, allowed a pair of reddish brown eyes to travel slowly over his companion from the crown of her flaming head of hair to a pair of small, naked feet that sank gratefully into the dew-drenched grass of the orchard.

"Garn!" he gibed. "Oo are ye' a-kiddin' of wiv yer lidies, an' yer marble barfs, an' yer scent an' fings!"

"I ain't a-kiddin' of yer, an it's gawspel truth wot I tells yer, so there, Bill Spriggett. Finks yer the only grease-spot on the fice of the earth as knows anyfing, don't yer?" came the scornful retort.

Then something in the cool, critical gaze sent the leap of angry blood to the girl's veins. Her eyes—strange, amber-hued eyes heavily lashed—flashed sparks of venom.

"Blarst yer!" she added vehemently, and shot out a surprising length of pale pink tongue.

Whisking suddenly round, she was preparing for flight, when the boy caught at her flying skirts.

"'Ere, carrots, don't do a bunk yet. Sit down, carn't yer?"

"Sha'n't!" spat out "Carrots," and made frantic efforts to free herself, but the boy only tightened his grip and laughed tauntingly.

"Wot I 'ave I 'old," he said grimly.

"Ye don't 'old *me!*" screamed the girl, and flinging herself forward, plunged vindictive fingers into a thick crop of black hair. "Will yer loose? Will yer leave go, Bill Spriggett?"

She gritted the words between tightly clenched teeth, punctuating them with violent tugs, whilst one bare foot beat a vigorous tattoo on his ribs.

But the boy only laughed the louder.

"Garn, yer might as well 'it me wiv a fevver! *I* don't feel nuthin', not me. Why ye ain't got the strength of a kitten!"

The taunt made the girl see red. Choking with rage, she released her hold, and, stooping swiftly, gripped the boy's wrist and bit quick and deep into the sun-tanned flesh of the forearm.

For just the fraction of a second his fingers relaxed their hold, and the girl, swift to seize the opportunity, leapt clear with all the lithe grace of a panther. From a safe distance she turned, breathless but triumphant, and shot out once more that pink length of tongue.

"Ye limb of Satan!" fumed the boy, squirming under the sudden pain of what he

stigmatised as a low down, woman's trick. "Ye little hell-cat! *I'll* show yer——"

She was at the end of the orchard, skirts flapping against bare ankles, hair streaming wildly behind her, when he suddenly altered his tone. For it occurred to him that he hadn't yet heard all that she had come specially to tell him.

"'Ere, Carrots!" he hallooed; and putting a couple of fingers in his mouth, emitted an ear-piercing whistle.

Something in the quality of the changed voice gave the girl pause. She turned and, hands on hips, looked back at him with haughty disdain.

"Ye ain't finished yer yarn yet, abaht them marble barfs and fings."

She advanced slowly, step by step, and eyed him suspiciously. Now, was this merely a ruse to lure her back so that he could get even with her for those wicked looking teeth marks that had even drawn blood, or——

Quick to sense her attitude, he laughed reassuringly whilst binding a much soiled handkerchief round his wounds.

"I ain't one to bear malice," he said magnanimously, "although it was a cattish trick, so come 'long, Carrots. I won't do nuthin' to yer."

The girl believed him. For had he not already fought one battle on her behalf when a village boy had taunted her about her red hair? Bill Spriggett had fought and vanquished the enemy, although the enemy was the bigger of the two, and afterwards the conqueror had stalked past Delia, head held high, face streaming with gore which he made no effort to hide. She should see what he had done and endured for her! She should witness his honourable scars, was the thought that swelled within him, but when, to his unutterable surprise and disgust, she flung a pair of skinny arms round his neck, and put a soft cheek to his gory one and thanked him for his knight-errantry, he pushed her violently away, and told her to "Garn!" and spat to show his contempt for her and for the whole of womankind.

And Delia, who was to become "Delilah" in years to come, never forgot that. In the inmost recesses of her soul she marked it up against Bill Spriggett, and swore, in the choice vernacular of the gutter child, to get even with him some day.

"Some dye ye'll be dahn on yer bended knees to me, Bill Spriggett!" she stormed. "An' then I'll spurn *yer*, ye blarsted skunk yer!"

"And when 'll that be?" jeered the boy.

"When I'm a fimous dancer!" she retorted; and with a scornful gesture she had turned aside, the sound of his mocking laughter following her and stinging her ears.

That had been a week ago, soon after the two had made acquaintance in a lovely Sussex village nestling at the foot of the Downs. Delia Hobson was one of twelve girls sent down by the "Benevolent Ladies' Holiday Fund" for a fortnight's change, and she, like Bill Spriggett, hailed from Poplar, but why such good fortune should have befallen the lot of the hefty Bill, heaven alone knows, unless it was anxiety on the part of his ragged-school mistress for the moral welfare of a lad for whom she was always predicting a bad end and constantly holding up to the rest of the class as an example *not* to be emulated. All the same, there was a soft spot in her heart for the renegade, with the result that, although possessed of a splendid frame and a marvellous physique, which is surprising considering he was reared in a Poplar slum, Bill Spriggett accompanied eleven sickly looking lads to East Chiltington one glorious day in August, and incidentally made the acquaintance of Delia Hobson.

Which was entirely against the rules. For the "B.L.H.F." girls, and the "B.L.H.F." boys were not supposed to mix except under reliable espionage. But Bill Spriggett and Delia Hobson, whom he dubbed "Carrots" on the spot, although he allowed that privilege to no other boy under penalty of a stand-up fight, regarded rules as made to be broken. Consequently, whenever they *could* meet without discovery, they did so; the boy being drawn by the girl's impudent and facile tongue, and the girl by the fact that, despite his arrogance and seeming indifference towards her sex, the boy had once fought and bled for her.

She advanced another step, looked at him speculatively, and curled her brown toes round the cool blades of grass, deliciously conscious of having broken another rule by discarding her shoes and stockings. She knew by this time that Bill Spriggett was itching to hear the wonderful experience she had begun to relate; but she came slowly, still curling her toes at every step, and adopting a nonchalant air, her amber eyes holding the lad's upturned gaze until she was within a couple of yards of the apple-tree under which he sprawled.

He moved restlessly, under a sudden sense of irritation, for it came to him as it had before, that this child of eight with the eyes of a tigress and a Titian head of hair—only Bill Spriggett didn't put it quite like that—was in some inexplicable and most annoying way, stronger than he.

So he elected the rôle of indifference, for if he *was* dying to hear the tale, he was well aware that she also was dying to relate it. Rolling over on his back, he closed his eyes.

"On no account don't 'urry yerself, Carrots," he said; and composed himself as though for slumber.

The girl stopped as though jerked by a spring.

"My proper nyme, *if* ye please," she demanded haughtily.

"Ow, orl right—Delia then; but, lawks, what a nyme—Delia!"

The hands belonging to the skinny arms closed spasmodically, teeth fastened viciously on the girl's lower lip. A fierce desire to fall on her knees and batter those smirking features swept her. But with a mighty effort she controlled herself.

"I'll not tell yer nuthin' unless yer open them eyes," she gritted.

He opened one of the orbs in question, and noted that she was white as death, her eyes blazing until they looked almost black. He opened two and sat up with a jerk.

"Ow, orl right!" he conceded. "Sit dahn"—with a grandiloquent gesture—"and begin, or we'll git copped afore ye've a chanst."

This last possibility restored her to reason, and panting a little, she sat down opposite the boy, and cuddled her knees.

"I'd best begin the tile orl over agen, but no int'ruptions this time, *if* yer please, Bill Spriggett."

She paused, looked steadily at an apple branch swaying gently over the lad's head, and sucked in her lips reflectively.

She was visualising a scene of yesterday, such as she had never beheld before—except on the pictures—and she was wondering how best to convey a faithful impression of it to her hearer. The sudden sound of laughter from an adjacent hayfield decided her. She must get through her recital without any unnecessary frills *or thrills*, otherwise, as Bill had elegantly expressed it, they might "git copped."

"I told yer," she began breathlessly, and entirely heedless of stops, "as I went orl over Miss Kingston's 'ouse yesterday? Miss Kingston's the lidy as boards me an' my 'leven mites out at Farmer White's, and Miss Kingston's nide is Farmer White's daughter, er wiv the jet black 'air, an' she showed me the 'ouse an' orl its bee-ootiful contenks, jest like yer see in them grand 'ouses on the pictures. There wos called a dining-room, wiv the tible orl set wiv glittering silver an' lots o' little glasses, some red 'uns and some white and some yaller, an' a luverly rose-coloured lamp swingin' over it orl, an' silver candlesticks wiv little rose-coloured frills like dolls' petticoats, an' there was the droring-room and anuther room, wiv nuthin' 'cept books orl round the walls; the droring-room and lots of other rooms were most gorgeous ter be'old, but I'll tell yer about them another time. It's Miss Kingston's own rooms—a *sweet* 'er nide called it—as I wants to tell yer abaht. Naow, first there was wot is called by the torfs, a budder—where Miss Kingston sits and does 'er writin and readin', and sees 'er pals when they calls, orl gold an' black an' purple, wiv most luverly cushions of gorgeous 'ues, an' silk curt'ins an' luverly hornaments and phottygraphs in silver frimes of swell lidies showing their white shoulders an' arms, an' gents in khaki wiv rows o' medals and sich like on their noble breasts, an' a pianner, an' a yaller cat to match the yaller cushions and curtings, and then the flowers!—'eaps an' 'eaps of 'em. They catched yer by the throat just like when

yer go ter Covent Gardin—'ot an' suffocatin' an' sweet like."

She paused for breath, one thin hand pressed to her throat, her eyes shining with the inner vision of that wonderful room, fixed on gently moving branches dappled with sunlight and shadow.

The boy thoughtfully chewed a blade of grass, but there was introspection in the gaze of the reddish-brown eyes fixed on the girl's face. He, too, was visioning the room beautiful, and wild, ambitious imaginings were jostling tumultuously in his breast.

The girl shook back a mane of red hair, and hugged her knees ecstatically.

"Then the bedroom," she went on after a quick, cautionary glance round for possible intruders. "All white an' gold an' shiny—a gold bed—the mide called it brass—wiv silk 'angings an' a silk counterpane wiv gold lice on it, an' lice orl rahnd the pillers—much too good ter put yer 'ead on at night, an' luverly gold things on the dressin'-tible—'air-brushes wiv gold backs, and lots o' little pots wiv gold tops to 'em, an gorgeous scent-bottles an' powder-puffs an' fings, an' a carpet wot yer sunk in jest like moss under yer bare feet"—here she curled her toes once more round the sweet, cool blades of grass and sighed rapturously—"an' Miss Kingston's clo'es was all lide out ready on the bed for when she dressed fer dinner. The torfs 'ave their dinner at night, the mide told me, an' she showed me orl the lingery—that's the French for underclo'es the mide said—as Miss Kingston was goin' ter put on, an' it was all blue silk and smelt luverly, jest like them flowers in Govent Gardin, an' a luverly blue silk frock, jest the colour of Miss Kingston's eyes, all frothy an' frilly an' licy like—o-o-o-h! it were jest like—o-o-o-h! There, I *can't* tell yer! Ye'd 'ave ter see it fer ye'self."

She threw out her hands, palms upwards, and cast up her eyes to express the admiration her tongue lacked the skill to convey; then, after a sufficiently pregnant pause, she dropped her gaze to the boy's face, and went on rapidly.

"But the barf-room—oh!"—with suddenly hushed tones—"yer never saw the like! All luverly marbel, but it weren't white like them marbel-topped tibles at Lock'art's, it were green, jest like"—her eyes wandered round for inspiration, and suddenly lit up—"there!" she cried, pointing an eager finger; "jest like them leaves 'angin' over yer 'ead; an' there was marbel steps leadin' down to the barf, an' a marbel floor and marbel walls, an' there was a fountain same as yer see in 'Fralgar Square, only not so big, playin' inter the barf, an' it smelt somethin' bee-ootiful—not the same kind o' sweet, hot smell as the budder; it were cool, and more like—more like——"

She paused again, searching the landscape for further inspiration.

"A chimist's shop?" suggested the boy eagerly; and, rolling over on his stomach, he cupped his chin in one brown palm, eager eyes intent on her face.

She frowned.

"Well, yes," she admitted reluctantly, annoyed that he should hit upon the simile her own brain had vainly sought. "Y-es, jest like a chimist's shop. Miss White said 'as it was the scented barf salts an o'dy Colone, or somefing as she puts in the water when she 'as a barf, an' there was a great big box wiv a great big powder-puff in, an' the smell o' that there powder was—sker-*ump*-shus!"

Tossing back her head, the girl half closed her eyes, and drew in thin, pinched nostrils, as though she were inhaling once more the delights that—so she confidently assured herself—were to be hers one day.

"When *I'm* grown up," she slowly apostrophised the leafy screen above her head, "I'm goin' ter 'ave everythin' as Miss Kingston 'as—*everythin'*, jest the sime, an' when I 'as a barf I'll walk down marbel steps to it wiv a barf robe rahnd me, sime as 'er, an'——"

A jeering laugh cut across the roseate future already filmed distinctly on a girl's imagination, and, with a cry of fury, Delia Hobson sprang to her feet.

"An' when'll *that* be?" demanded the boy, with a sceptical lowering of the left eyelid.

"'Aven't I told yer a'ready?" she shrilled, throwing caution to the winds. "When I'm

a fimous dancer, yer fat-'eaded chump, yer!"

"Garn!" jibed the boy. "Yer carn't dance, not yer!"

The branches of a tree near by rustled slightly, and, parting, disclosed a dark, virile face, intent with curiosity and interest; but neither boy nor girl noticed. Each was too absorbed—the girl in a passion of fury and scornful contempt, the boy in malicious enjoyment of the emotions he had aroused. For nothing appealed to him more than to "bait" Carrots until her temper had assumed the proportions of a veritable little virago. It relieved the monotony of a place he was beginning to find a trifle dull after his native Poplar.

"Carn't dance, carn't I?" screamed his victim. "I'll show yer!"

Sending a rapid glance round, she espied beneath a neighbouring tree a huge block of wood that had been cut clean and smooth from the trunk of a gigantic oak, and deposited for some reason or other in the orchard.

A second later her bare feet were twinkling through the grass, and, swift as lightning, she sprang upon the miniature platform, and, swinging round, faced, had she but known it, an audience of two.

"I'll show yer!" she panted stormily, and, with two thin hands crossed tight on her little flat chest, she challenged the boy with glowing amber eyes that seemed to bore through to his very soul.

For a moment she stood thus, and the laughter and mockery vanished from his upturned face as writing is wiped from a slate. He was surprised to find himself suddenly curiously eager and impatient for what was to follow.

The girl smiled cryptically—in a way she sensed his attitude—then, releasing a long breath, she flung wide her skinny arms, tossed back her mane of hair, and with little, white, passion-laden face turned upwards, began to sway slowly to and fro, balancing her little, under-nourished body first on one foot and then on the other, until presently she was standing literally on her toes. The arms, meanwhile, were brought into play with as much effect as might have been displayed by a première danseuse of the times. One forgot the thinness and attenuation of them in the inimitable grace of their movements, and, observing the tense, set look of the tragic little face, one wondered where on earth this child product of the gutter and dweller of a Poplar slum had attained to such perfection, not only in the art of dancing, but in the art of interpretation. The whole thing was instinct and alive with the *poetry* of motion.

The poetry of motion.

That phrase just expressed it. The man—owner of the dark, virile face, peering through interlacing branches, recognised it as such, and the boy, too. Only, the latter could not have expressed it so accurately in four words, or in the same language. The girl alone *felt* it in every fibre of her being, and, young as she was, thrilled with exquisite exultation under consciousness of the gift that had descended to her from—heaven knows where!

The boy moved restlessly. There was something uncanny in the exhibition and the look on the girl's face that filled him with dissatisfaction. Once again he was irritably conscious of some subtle strength in her that baffled.

"Garn!" he cried, with a touch of sullenness. "Yer ain't done nuthin' yet ter mike a shout abaht. When *I'm* a man, I'll buy my wife better things 'n Miss Kingston's got. She shall 'ave a reel gold bed, not a brass 'n."

The girl flashed him a look of contempt, and, disdaining any reply, passed from grave to gay with a suddenness that startled him. From the exquisitely slow and graceful, her little feet began to twinkle into a tarantelle that was a living, breathing interpretation of a song of the wild without words. Faster and faster went the bare brown feet, wilder and wilder became the abandon with which she postured her lean body this way and that, the while red hair flew crazily hither and thither, lashing her shoulders and wrapping her round like fiery scorpions. Amber eyes gleamed exultantly over cheeks rose-flushed with excitement, and never left the face of the boy during the whole mad, tempestuous dance.

Under their fixed gaze he stirred again, then, with sudden decision, leapt to his feet and, turning his back, began to walk away with one shoulder lifted high, as though in derision.

The girl stopped as suddenly as she had begun, balanced on one foot, the other in mid-air—her arms extended as though for flight, and sent after his retreating form a shrill, triumphant laugh.

The pose against Nature's setting was admirable, and a vigorous clapping of hands from behind a leafy screen of trees pronounced it as such.

For one bewildered second the girl stood like a startled deer, then with a swift glance towards the unsuspected hiding-place, she leapt from her impromptu platform and sped like a shaft of light from the scene of her triumph.

Ten minutes later Delia Hobson had gained the river's bank, and from the secret receptacle of a hollowed tree-trunk was dragging forth a pair of coarse black stockings and shoes. As she sat down and breathlessly tugged them on she wondered, with a rueful grimace, what special form of punishment would be meted out to her for having broken two of the Society's rules? Would the man with the dark, virile face, of whom she had caught a startled glimpse and recognised as Miles Kingston—Miss Kingston's brother—"split," or would he play the game?

II.

At the age of thirty-five Bill Samson, known to the child Delia as Bill Spriggett, was a big man. Big in stature and physique, his splendid frame and amazing personality attracted attention wherever he went. As soon as he entered a room he became, as it were, the predominant note, creating an atmosphere that women found peculiarly fascinating, and that men who liked him recognised as being the natural gift of one who'd never been known to play a shabby trick in business or let another man down. Even the men who hated him—and they were not few—admitted his uprightness whilst anathematising him for his hard-headedness and strict adherence to principle in business and other matters.

Bill Samson was big, too, in mind and brain, and in his quick grasp of essentials to the ruthless sweeping aside of indifferent details to which smaller men with less temerity than he were wont to cling. In business he was connected with the rubber trade, but the major portion of his vast wealth had accumulated through investments that had turned up trumps every time. It seemed as though he could never go wrong. Whatever he touched turned to gold. Where other men hesitated over hundreds he quoted in thousands, with a resultant turnover that made those other men gasp and wish feverishly that they themselves had been less cautious.

At thirty his name was a household word. At thirty-five he was universally acknowledged as a king of finance, with not a compeer in the whole of the United Kingdom.

He was big, too, in self-belief. And perhaps that contributed chiefly to his amazing success. In his daring he was unprecedented. There was no walking round a short cut for Bill. It was the high hedge or water jump every time, and he rode straight for it with a superb belief that he'd land all right on the other side.

And to the golden results of his achievements he clung with all the tenacity of a limpet clinging to a rock. Yet he was not close-fisted. His worst enemy would never have so maligned him, but he didn't lose his head, and fling away the riches that had come to him so easily. "What I have I hold" was the motto of Bill Samson, as it had been when he'd borne his mother's maiden name of Spriggett in a Poplar slum before revelation of his heritage in the form of a legacy of a thousand pounds—left by a promiscuous father with a proviso that hereafter Bill should bear that father's name—burst dazzlingly upon him.

That promiscuous father of his must, by the bye, have been responsible for the gutter-snipe's splendid health and marvellous physique, formerly so admired by his ragged-school mistress.

But Bill Samson's parentage on either side

has little to do with this story; and beyond adding that his mother—Poplar bred and born—was a chorus-girl in a cheap variety show who passed her child on to a drunken grandmother before he was a year old, and that his father's walk in life was far removed from Poplar, nothing more need be said.

After the coming of the legacy Bill Spriggett died and passed from the ken of Poplar, and as an outcome of that same legacy was born Bill Samson, who became a multi-millionaire. Of course, there were whispers and rumours, as there always will be whenever a man attains to greatness in whatsoever respect, but none of the stories that gained currency about Bill Samson's origin—and some of them were not very wide of the mark—had the power to shut him out from certain houses in Mayfair whose hostesses had the reputation for adhering to a strictly exclusive visiting-list. A duchess of high lineal descent had been known to number him as one of her guests at a memorable dinner party, not because of the wealth that proved the "Open, Sesame!" for him in so many other instances, but because her Grace found him totally different from any other man she had ever met. And the patronage of his fair hostesses troubled him not one whit. He walked in the higher circles of society with as much ease and aplomb as though he were indeed to the manner born; only in the directness of his speech, which sometimes almost amounted to bluntness, was he different from the gilded scions of the aristocracy amongst whom he moved.

As far as women were concerned, he was not interested, although many of the fairest whose names figured prominently in Debrett would not have objected to linking their lives with his. It was the clean uprightness of the man, his splendid physical strength, and winning personality that appealed to their jaded appetites in the midst of a life brimful of the artificialities of a shallow age. He seemed to be *of* them—they all admitted that—and yet as one far apart from all the frivolities and make-believes that went towards filling their days. His very bigness in this respect appealed irresistibly to them, and more than one thought with longing of the fascinations of an untrammelled life, unshackled by convention, that might be spent by the side of one whom they invariably referred to as "Samson."

But Samson would have none of them. Beauty, wealth, high lineage, left him unmoved. He could take a fair hand in his huge clasp and look down into lovely eyes that changed wonderfully at his approach, at lips that invited with their scarlet lure, and his heartbeats quickened not one whit, his pulse remained as steadily normal as ever.

Until the woman came who was to prove the "Delilah" to his "Samson."

And she was spoken of as the greatest dancer of the age, just as he was stated to be the greatest financier, and when Samson caught his first glimpse of her she was standing talking to a Cabinet Minister in a society crush in the gallery of Lord Bennorton's town house.

"Who's that?" he asked abruptly of an elderly dowager, who had buttonholed him on his way to the music-room.

The dowager followed the direction of his gaze, raised her lorgnette, and lifted surprised eyebrows.

"Imagine you not knowing!" she exclaimed. "Why, that," she went on with all the pleasure of one about to impart some interesting information—"that is the most-talked-of woman of the times. She is universally acknowledged to be our première danseuse—in fact, *the* greatest that ever was, *and* her banking account"—here the dowager lifted expressive shoulders and sighed prodigiously—"her banking account, my dear Samson, is said to rival even yours."

Samson laughed.

"What's her name?"

"Delia—Delia Hobson. She looks a girl with that wonderful fragile beauty, doesn't she? But she's thirty. She was discovered, as a child, by Miles Kingston the playwright; he and his sister have made her what she is. She's had dozens of proposals—men go simply mad over her—Miles Kingston among the rest; but she won't look at one of them—not one! It's even said that she refused a duke

the other day, but I can't vouch for the truth of that. However, of *one* thing there is no doubt"—here the dowager lowered her voice portentously—"the *morals* of the fair Delia are beyond reproach."

Delia Hobson—Miles Kingston—the names conveyed nothing to the man at the time, although in the dark recesses of his mind some faint, intangible memory stirred at sight of the eyes uplifted to those of the Cabinet Minister and the Titian head of hair that barely reached his shoulder.

Shortly afterwards he was introduced to her, and for a brief moment the eyes of both met and clung—the man's revealing a slow, wondering admiration, whilst into the woman's leapt a puzzled, inquiring look that made her draw her brows together in a way that was peculiarly fascinating. She was certain that she had seen him before, but—where?

Less than ten minutes later she knew. Although twenty-two years had elapsed since she had last seen him, she had never forgotten Bill Spriggett, and, in talking to the grown man, certain little tricks and gestures of the boy came back to her with irresistible force, flooding her memory with a certain scene in an orchard in which she had played leading part, a scene that was as indelibly filmed on her vivid imagination as though it had been enacted but yesterday. That trick of lifting the left shoulder that her childish mind had wrongly attributed to contempt at her performance, a way of throwing back his head when he laughed a slow raising of the eyebrows over those unforgettable reddish-brown eyes; the strength and beauty of the boy as developed in the man came rushing back, making certainty doubly sure.

But—*why* Samson?

"I know I've never met you before"—his words cut across her racing thoughts—"and yet your face seems vaguely familiar."

He looked at her inquiringly, and a faint, enigmatical smile touched her lips.

"How do you *know* we've never met before?" she asked slowly.

The reply came with forceful bluntness.

"Because if I had it would have been impossible to forget."

The smile reached her eyes.

"My memory is better than yours," she said; and unfurled her fan, "for we *have* met before, Mr. Samson."

"Impossible!"

She shook her head in disagreement, and he looked at her in a puzzled way.

"When was it, and—where?" he demanded.

She leant slightly towards him.

"Twenty-two years ago," she replied, "we met many times—once in an apple orchard at East Chiltington."

She paused, but Samson's face was still a blank, and, seeing it, a little imp of mischief jogged her elbow. They were sitting side by side on a lounge now, and she leant further forward until her breath fanned his cheek.

"Some dye," she said with slow emphasis, "ye'll be dahn on yer bended knees to me, Bill Spriggett, an' then I'll spurn *yer*, ye blarsted skunk, yer!"

The effect was electrical. But even then full realisation did not come to the man. His first feeling was one of intense surprise and bewilderment at the slipping of the beautiful soft voice into an astonishingly correct cockney twang, and for several seconds he stared at her in dumbfounded amazement. Then the name, Bill Spriggett—an apple orchard, East Chiltington—flashed an interpretation of all she meant to convey, and with it a swift mental picture of a pair of thin brown legs and bare feet going through a mad, temptestuous dance to the accompaniment of a boy's jibes and mocking laughter.

"By Jove!" he murmured under his breath. "You don't mean to say that you are—you were—that child?"

III.

It was exactly a year later that Samson faced the fact that he was a ruined man. In the interim the whole of London had been talking of "Samson" and the "Delilah" who had scored off all other women, and succeeded where they had failed.

When the catastrophe came, of course everyone—especially the women—blamed "Delilah" as the chief and outstanding

cause. And in a way they were right. But in another way they were most deplorably wrong and guilty of a gross injustice to the famous dancer.

True, it *was* "Delilah" who had brought about the downfall of Samson, but it was not because the latter had squandered his fortune on her; and the public did not know that whatever presents he pleased to make her—and there had been some of immense value—she had immediately handed over to be sold for the benefit of the Red Cross.

Her reason for accepting and then disposing of them was, she laughingly told Samson, so that a good cause should benefit. And because it made him happy to see her pleased he continued to shower gifts on her. But it was not that that smashed Samson. It was the hopelessness of his passion for "Delilah" that proved his undoing.

He had known the very moment his eyes fell on her in Lord Benmorton's gallery that she was the one and only woman in the world who would be his wife if he ever married, and he had the indiscretion to tell her so once, with the "if" thrown in; so every woman will know what *that* meant to the woman who had grown out of the child Delia.

She did not fly into a passion, as she would have done in those far-off days, but she smiled a quiet, little, inscrutable smile all to herself, and did not show the hurt that lay in her heart at his words, for she wanted to keep Samson chained to her side a little longer, until she had brought him down—metaphorically at any rate—on his knees before her.

And then—well, she hadn't quite decided what to do then. She might be kind to him and she might not. She was uncertain, because she wasn't quite sure of her own heart, or *imagined* she wasn't.

Within a fortnight of their renewal of friendship the man proposed, and the woman rejected him. For "Delilah" knew all about this particular "Samson." She had heard of him before meeting and identifying him with the Bill Spriggett of her childhood; and she knew all about his superb indifference to women, and how not one of them had been able to storm that impregnable heart of his.

Ah, well! Delia Hobson was *not* going to fall like a ripe plum into his mouth at the first time of asking. For Delia Hobson suspected what no one else had even guessed at, that beneath all the man's splendid uprightness and honesty of purpose—and she was fair enough not to deny him these attributes—there existed a selfish strain, relic of the days when he was king in a Poplar slum, ruling over his contemporaries by physical power and by the beauty with which Nature had endowed him.

She very much suspected that the same dogged self-assurance, the same proud arrogance that had lifted him high above and gained him the admiration of his gutter companions then had lifted him with the aid of an indomitable energy and perseverance to the position he held now—that the "what I have I hold" of the Poplar lad was the maxim of the multi-millionaire, who never doubted that he could get anything he wanted, and who *never lost faith in himself.*

It was that that roused Delia's secret ire. *He was so sure of himself.*

And she knew, in the moment of her rejection of his proposal, that he had been just as sure of her. There was more of hurt surprise than pain in the eyes that met hers when she coolly told him that what he asked was impossible. The very calmness, too, with which he accepted her decision secretly enraged her. It was so reminiscent of the boy who had never failed to rouse her to anger by his blatant self-sufficiency; yet secretly, too, the size and strength of the man thrilled her as had the size and strength of the boy who had once fought and bled for her.

But he was not going to make sure of her now any more than then. Which only goes to show that much of the child Delia was to be found in the grown woman. If he wanted her he would have to prove it, not by asking for her with as little show of emotion as he might display in buying a dog or anything else he fancied. No, if he wanted Delia Hobson he would have to show some due appreciation of the prize that dozens of other men had vainly striven for.

It was this determination of "Delilah's"

that was the initial cause of Samson's downfall. For he *did* want her—wanted her badly, and her attitude of luring him on with the one hand whilst holding him sternly aloof with the other maddened him almost beyond endurance, and only served to increase desire for possession.

So, as an antidote for the wounds she inflicted, he plunged wildly into speculation, and, for the first time in all his successful business career, lost.

When she heard about it she smiled, and on meeting condoled with him in such a way that he longed to crush her bodily into his arms and hold her captive until she gave him the answer he craved. Perhaps if he had, he would have won, but he let the psychological moment slip, and held himself rigidly in check. Then he plunged again, with the same result—again and yet again: and as formerly nothing could go wrong with him, now nothing went right.

And Delia only went on smiling that quiet, little, inward smile, looking upon it all as just another hair plucked from the head of a Samson who had such a super-abundance left that one more or less did not matter.

It seemed an eternity to her before he spoke, and when he did it was with a laugh that stung her like a whiplash.

But there she was mistaken, for, maddened at last by her constant denials, he staked all that remained to him—a very considerable fortune—on one last throw. If he lost, and he almost hoped he would, if only to escape the woman's toils, he would go out to British Columbia and build up another fortune out of the soil; if he won, he would be richer than ever, and Delilah would no longer have cause to smile.

She had no idea she was being so cruel, for already the man, in his heart, was on his knees, his very soul shaken and tormented by love for this one woman who denied herself to him.

But how was she to know?

For when, at odd intervals, he continued to propose to her with the same quiet assurance, she regarded his pertinacity simply as the

obstinacy of one determined not to lose his grip on the thing desired. It reminded her irresistibly of that day in the orchard when he had clung so tenaciously to her skirts, and she had been driven to wound him deeply to make him slacken his hold.

He had been too cocksure then, as he was now; but she could use her teeth again, and she would, if necessary. And after she had brought him to a proper state of subjection, she might reveal to him a little of what lay in the heart of "Delilah," but only a little, for he was a man whom to surfeit was to spoil.

But, in making that determination she didn't know the Samson she had to deal with, and she didn't know how near to ruin she had already driven him.

A rumour of the final catastrophe reached her after a dazzling evening of success at the Royalty Empire, where she was carrying out a six weeks' contract that would bring her in a fortune running into five figures.

The news, when it was confirmed, stunned her.

Bill Samson ruined!

In face of such a tragic and stupendous happening her own brilliant successes faded to nothingness. The taste of them that had exhilarated like champagne became as dust and ashes in her mouth. And in the moment when she heard of Samson's downfall it came to her with the suddenness of a blinding flash of lightning that she loved this man more than she loved anything or anybody on the face of God's earth. But, of course, he would ask her again, and she would help him to build up another fortune.

But—supposing he *didn't* ask her? A tiny seed of doubt rankled, creating a curious feeling of depression and uneasiness. It obtruded between her and her art so that her dancing, for the first time, lacked that spontaneity and natural grace and charm that had so endeared her to the public heart.

Her performance was just as perfect, but when day succeeded day and she no longer met Samson at the houses they were both in the habit of frequenting, it became with her purely mechanical. The interpretation of her moods, which invariably aroused wild enthusiasm, was no longer there. It was like listening to a faultless voice belonging to a beautiful, soulless body, to an intricate piece of music played on some instrument whose player lacked the gift of understanding and the sympathetic human touch.

She was brilliantly perfect, but nothing more. And the public noticed it, and whispers began to filter through into smart society journals and the daily papers, as did whispers—most of them untrue—concerning the cause of Samson's downfall. Lying inuendoes, subtly worded, veiled suggestions, artfully wrapped-up phrases about "Samson and Delilah," that look so damning when presented in cold print, met her at every turn, and she was furious, not so much on her own account as on that of the man whom she had so unintentionally driven to ruin, the man whom now she passionately longed to comfort, in much the same way as when she had flung her skinny little arms round his neck twenty-two years ago and been ruthlessly repulsed. All the mother-love in her heart ached and yearned over him now that he was fallen from his greatness.

But a fortnight fled without even a passing glimpse of him. Not that society—a certain section of it at any rate—shunned *him*. He had been too well liked by those who really mattered for that. It was he who shunned society, and when two weeks had dragged out their weary length without a sight of him, Delia took the matter into her own hands.

At the conclusion of her turn one night she left the theatre and, changing into evening-dress, defied convention and Mrs. Grundy and went openly to his rooms.

She had heard definitely that he was setting out for British Columbia in a few days' time and she felt desperate. She would allow no announcement to be made by his man, but walked quietly in on him and noiselessly closed the door.

He was standing with his back towards her looking out of one of the windows facing the Mall. The room was unlighted save for a broad shaft of moonlight that fell athwart the highly polished floor.

She looked at him, at the bigness and

strength and wonder of him, and pride of possession played on her heart-strings with a delicious thrill. He was *hers*. He had never been any other woman's.

Then followed swiftly a keen stab of pity for his loneliness, flooding her whole being with a desire to draw that splendid head on to her bosom and hold it close as one would a little child's. With a quick, indrawn breath she felt for the electric switch. A sharp click and the room was flooded with light.

The man, with a startled ejaculation, swung round.

"You!"

For the merest fraction of a second Delia glimpsed the joy that leapt to his eyes at sight of her, then the face hardened into an impenetrable mask, she saw his jaw set doggedly, his lips compress into a thin, tight line.

The silence that followed was oppressing in its heaviness. As the man looked at her with smouldering eyes the woman was conscious of a hot sense of suffocation. One small hand flew to her throat, where little pulses began to beat and hammer painfully. She advanced a step, small head uplifted, amber-hued eyes fixed on his greying face, white bosom rising and falling with the rapidity of her breathing.

"Well?" she said, and gave vent to a nervous little laugh.

"Well?" he echoed grimly. "Have you come to triumph over me, Delilah? I'm down and out, as I dare say you know."

A sudden rush of warm colour flooded her face from neck to brow. He had never called her "Delilah" before, and the sting of the implication cut deep. He watched her mercilessly until the lovely colour slowly died away, leaving her face beautiful and white with the creamy dead-whiteness of a magnolia bloom.

"To what am I indebted for this most unlooked-for honour?" he went on tritely.

In desperate appeal she looked at him, clutched at the back of a chair for support, and gathered her forces together.

His stony composure and aloofness terrified her, but they should not deter her from her purpose. She had braved criticism in coming to his rooms alone and unattended at nearly midnight, and she would fight tooth and nail to gain her object.

He loved her and she loved him, and the whole world and its opinion could go hang for all she cared!

"I heard," she began at last, and her voice was breathless as though with running—"I heard that—that you are going to British Columbia in a few days?"

His lips opened stiffly.

"Quite right; next Tuesday to be exact. But what about it?"

His tones were ice, and the look in his eyes as he bent them on her roused in her breast a faint sense of impotence, but she forced it down and again rallied her forces.

"This about it," she said slowly, and without removing her gaze. "I am going with you."

Again there fell a silence, whilst Delia held her breath and waited. Her eye was caught by a little pulse beating in his cheek, but beyond that his face was inscrutable as ever. It seemed an eternity to her before he spoke, and when he did it was with a laugh that stung her like a whip-lash.

"Are you?" he said hardly. "I think not."

"Why?"

Her hands tightened their grip on the back of the chair till her knuckles shone white: a tiny fleck of blood showed on her under-lip where her teeth had caught on it at sound of that cruel laugh; in the whiteness of her uplifted face her eyes looked like dark, luminous pools.

But the man refused to help her.

"Why do you want to come with me?" he countered.

He stood like a rock, waiting for her to speak, and she saw it must be all or nothing. His attitude filled her with inward fury, but she acknowledged he had some excuse, and she knew that if she did not seize the psychological moment the last remnant of her woman's courage would soon be drained away, and she would leave Samson's rooms beaten and ashamed.

"I want to come with you," she said

slowly and painfully, "because—because I love you!"

The last words fell from her lips in a gasping whisper, but she saw she had reached him at last—saw it in the sudden start, the quick, indrawn breath, the light that leapt once more to his eyes—and in a flash she recovered her own inimitable pose. Samson still loved her. She would win through yet.

With a quick, impulsive movement she laid one hand on his arm.

"Listen, Bill!" she said, with a touch of imperiousness. "I love you! I think I must *always* have loved you, only—you never asked me that question, did you? You've often asked me to marry you; you've told me of *your* love, but you didn't enquire if I had any to give to you. It seemed sufficient that you wanted me just like you've always wanted everything else that's come so easily to you. You seemed to forget that I had my woman's pride. You took all so very much for granted—or so it appeared to me—and——"

She broke off abruptly, for he had seized her arm and was looking down into her upturned face, his own working under stress of a new-born emotion.

"Good Heaven!" He spoke in a low, hoarse whisper. "You loved me all the time! And do you know what you've done? Do you know what your cruelty has made of me?" In his anguish he crushed her arm in his huge grasp. "You've ruined me! You've stripped me of *everything!* Do you hear? Everything! You drove me demented with your refusals and that maddening smile of yours! I had to do something desperate, and the more I lost the more reckless I became. I thought I'd missed you, and I didn't care, and now—— Oh, my Heaven, to think of it!"

In a sudden access of fury he flung her off.

"Go!" he cried. "Go at once; you never ought to have come! The sight of you hurts me damnably! Go!"

She stood for a moment swaying slightly on her feet, a tiny smile on her lips, but a great surge of joy flooding her heart. She looked down on a purple bruise that was slowly disfiguring the satiny skin of her forearm, and, lifting it to her lips, kissed it slowly and deliberately, once, twice, thrice. Then she raised love-filled eyes to the stricken giant.

"Not *everything*, Bill," she said softly. "You still have *me!*"

From under the light of a rose-shaded electrolier she smiled across at him and caressed her arm.

"And I can't go yet," she went on. "You see"—with a whimsical lifting of the shoulders—"there is my reputation to be considered; so we'd better arrange matters, and then you can see me home, Bill."

From his point of vantage by the window, from which he had not stirred, Samson spoke. He had turned aside, as though from temptation, the left shoulder lifted in the old familiar way.

"It's impossible!" he said hoarsely. "Marriage between us is impossible now!"

She lifted delicately arched brows.

"Why? Don't you want me?"

A muffled ejaculation was the only reply, and a little smile curved the corners of Delia's mouth.

"I'm afraid you'll *have* to marry me!" She looked at a clock, which pointed to the half-hour after midnight. "You'll be able to get out a licence to-morrow—or, rather, this morning—won't you?"

He swung round, his face set and rigid, his hands thrust deep in his trousers-pockets.

"Don't torture me!" he cried. "Don't you see how it is? Why"—with a cynical laugh—"I couldn't even give you a marble bath with steps down to it—now!"

She smiled at the recollection, and:

"There are better things than that in life," she retorted. "I don't want a marble bath, with steps or without, or"—and a little bubble of laughter rose to her lips—"or a gold bed, even! I want just to work with you, Bill, and that's why I'm coming out with you to British Columbia!"

He stared at her dazedly, from the red-gold of the well set-up head to the tiny feet, in dainty silken-hose, his gaze finally resting

on long, lender white hands, clasped loosely before her.

"Work!" he echoed, with a bitter laugh, but with wildly throbbing heart. "*You* work? Why, you *can't*; and I shouldn't let you, if you could!"

Her heart leapt to the possessive note. She laughed triumphantly and, through a veil of long, straight lashes, sent him a swift, alluring glance.

"Is it my money that makes it impossible, Bill?" she asked softly.

He nodded and backed involuntarily when she began to walk slowly towards him.

"As long as I've nothing, I'll never marry a rich woman!" he said doggedly.

She came to a standstill a hand's breadth away, and held his eyes captive with her own, whilst her lips parted in a slow, wonderful, all-embracing smile.

Under it the man moved restlessly, a dull red surging beneath the tan in his cheeks. Under the compelling influence of those amber-hued, heavily lashed eyes and the lure of those beautiful lips he felt himself weakening.

"Do you think, Bill Samson," said Delia—and there was a throb in her voice that shook the man to the very depths of his soul—"do you think that I'd let such a material thing as money come between you and me and spoil our love? Do you think I am going to lose my life's happiness for such a paltry handicap? No! If *that's* to come between us, it shall go, whether you marry me or not. To-morrow—or to-day"—with another swift glance towards the clock—"I shall make away with all that I'm worth and give it to some charity; and I'll bring you just myself, Bill, and nothing more. Refuse me, if you like; it will make no difference. I shall still give my wealth away, and I'll never dance again—never!"

She paused and waited, leaning towards him, her flower-like face upraised, temptation shining out of her wonderful eyes and inviting maddeningly from the scarlet, parted lips; and Samson, standing rigidly erect, his head flung back, struggled to keep a yet tighter hold on himself. For how *could* he let her sacrifice herself and her art in this fashion? It was impossible.

"There's Kingston," he said uncertainly. "He's a good chap, and he loves you."

Miles Kingston was the man with the dark, virile face who, in his early twenties, had watched and applauded and recognised the genius of the child Delia. But the woman Delia laughed the suggestion to scorn.

"Oh, Kingston!" she echoed derisively; then, with sudden, soft passion: "Haven't I made it plain enough yet?" she cried. "Am I to humiliate myself still further? Don't you know that, given the choice, I'd rather go through hell with *you* than heaven with any other living man? Oh, Bill!" Again she laid a hand on his arm, and the fragrance and the nearness of her went to his head like wine. "Bill, *don't* shame me any further! I can't bear it! What more can I say? How can I——"

What more could she say?

Why, nothing! For already she was in Samson's arms, and for a few brief seconds of rapture to speak would have been a physical impossibility, even had she wanted to.

But she didn't.

"I rather think it's going to be a little bit of heaven!" said Samson, some twenty minutes later, when they were speeding in a taxi in the direction of Delia's flat.

And it was.

Five years of a paradise on earth out in British Columbia, and then back again to England and dear old London, where one of the first to stretch out a welcoming hand was the duchess of "high lineal descent," who gave it as her opinion that Samson's marriage to Delilah had made him—*if* such a thing were possible—more charming than ever.

Well, it had certainly eliminated that selfish strain; but, you see, Samson had not only Delilah but someone else to think about now. There was a little Samson, too, and that glorious fact made big Samson recognise more than anything else might have done that he was not the "only grease-spot on the fice of the earth"—no, not by a long chalk!

THE REVELATION OF A HEART

By A. G. GREENWOOD

THOUGH often he felt convinced that Cynthia loved him there was an esoteric hanging-back, a reluctance more than shy, like the shadow of a prejudice or a fear that puzzled and hurt him.

Gerald Pearse was a foundling, lifted from the steps of his foster-parents' general-shop one chill spring night. The Pearses were childless and elderly, and their adoption of Gerald was one of the few unselfish things that interrupted the hard, mercenary, sordid tenor of their grey lives. To Gerald success came in the waves of a rising tide. He, too, bred in the forcing atmosphere of his mean and heartless foster-parents, grew up hard, calculating, egotistical, expending all his energy, both of mind and body, on "the business."

The squalid little shop became a gigantic corner-store. Old John Pearse lived to see "the business" grow into a great limited liability company. Before they died the grim old couple saw Pearse's pink motor-cars delivering goods of every kind in every part of London.

It was commonly thought and usually said that Gerald Pearse had no heart, that he was callous and inhuman, and made allowances for nobody. Most captains of industry earn this character. It is the hall-mark of the successful self-made man.

Politics took Gerald Pearse to Borton Park. There he met Cynthia, Lord Borton's only daughter. Within a month he proposed, and was accepted. Borton, a rich land-owner, was furious. The man—he always alluded to Gerald Pearse as "the man"—was not a "sahib."

But Cynthia persisted, and Gerald, as usual, rode roughshod, and St. Peter's was already decorated.

Pearse sat solitary in his smoking-room on his wedding-eve and pondered miserably on Cynthia's diffidence, more marked as their wedding-day approached, her inexplicable, fleeting embarrassments, the momentary sense of estrangement that chilled him now so often, the sudden bleakness of apprehension, of doubt or of despondency that frequently dimmed her bright eyes.

Whether marriage was going to be the keystone of his successful life, or a disrupting mine, it seemed hard to foretell. Passion had carried him so far unthinkingly. Doubt arrested him. Reflection made him apprehensive. A feeling of subsidence, of draining away, of deflation and of physical chilliness made him restlessly stir.

What mysterious reaction was kindled between Cynthia and himself? What ghost came between them? He shivered in a dread of the future, the unknown, the unknowable, as sudden as it was sincere and intense.

"A woman to see you, sir: gives the name of Lang," said Ferguson, his butler, entering

noiselessly and unperceived. "I said you were 'out,' sir, but she knew otherwise. Impertinate, sir, keeps ringing. I've mentioned the police."

"Show her in," said Pearse, glad of the interruption.

She entered, tiny and grey and drab, in squelching, broken boots (rain fell), in seedy black skirt and cloak and bonnet, each glinting with the sheen of a starling's wing.

Pearse's shrewd eyes appraised her and narrowed in nascent disgust as a sudden welcoming, yearning, hungry, exultant light flickered in hers.

She stood there, dripping, the scent of wet old clothes about her, and said in simple, very low tones:

"I'm your mother."

The possibility of such a claim had never been ignored by Gerald Pearse. Wealth produces relations as a by-product. But to his parents he owed nothing, except the existence they had risked when they deserted him on the Pearse's steps.

"Indeed," he rejoined, in a chilling composure that gratified even himself.

She nodded and caught her breath.

"Go on," he said.

"Oh, but I'm not joking!" she said, misreading his direction. "Don't you believe me? It was me as tied that little locket round your neck with a piece of string, me as put you on the steps. Next morning I came into the shop—I'd seen Mrs. Pearse pick you up and fondle you before I crept away overnight. Mr. Pearse served me, and his missus was nursing you in the little parlour behind. Day after day I saw you. Week after week. Month after month. Year after year—as toddlin' babe, an' schoolboy, then later serving in the shop——"

Mrs. Pearse had always said it was lucky that Gerald had that mole high up in his left armpit, where only a mother would know it.

"My history's common knowledge," he observed, with a hint both of pride and derision in his tones.

Blackmail, or something as nearly villainous, had kept the woman back till his wedding-eve. She guessed that he would pay through the nose to prevent publicity. How the papers would revel in the story! What a weapon it would give to disapproving old Borton!

Scrutinising her face, he believed no word of her tale. She was an impostor—perhaps the first of many.

"You'll find your story difficult to prove," he observed calmly.

"Don't you believe me?" she said in faint rebuke and patient astonishment. "There's the birth-mark high up under your left arm, and the scar on your ankle where your father let fall a drop of molten metal. That never faded, I'm sure."

The scar existed almost imperceptible, almost forgotten.

In sudden dread he stared at her.

"Why have you—delayed?" he demanded.

She sat down abruptly, and said:

"Your father died yesterday."

"Why should you wait for that event?"

He felt no twinge, no softening. If she were his mother, still she left him cold, as she had left him cold forty years before on the Pearses' steps. No sentimental, magical mutation stirred in him, because the woman who had conceived him might be sitting before him.

"Because I left you that night, though it tore me breast, so as he'd never see you. You were born seven months after he first went to prison. The night before he came out I left you on them steps. He never knew you'd lived."

"*First* went to prison," Gerald Pearse repeated.

"He had clipped coins on him. Afterwards he——"

Gerald Pearse listened to the details of his father's career as coiner and "fence," and of his death, yesterday, in prison. She wept as she spoke—Arthur Lang had so much good in him, she declared.

"I've watched you all these years," she went on. "I've been so proud. Oh, how I've longed to speak! You've passed me in the street. I've waited outside Pearses' and seen you drive away in your big car. My boy! The thought nearly choked me. There's a grating now over what was once the shop-steps

I've stood there and prayed for you—night after night."

Abruptly Gerald Pearse lifted the telephone receiver, paused, asked for a number, paused again, then said:

"Mr. Pearse speaking. Is Mr. Hallum in? Good! Ask him to be so good as to call here as soon as he conveniently can on urgent business."

He replaced the received.

"Mr. Hallum is my solicitor," he said. "Before I—take any action in this matter, I wish to consult him. Your proofs don't seem to be adequate——"

She flinched as though he had aimed a blow at her.

"Why should I lie, Arthur?"

"Is that the name you gave me?"

She nodded, fumbled in the folds of her seedy dress, and drew out a very shabby purse.

"Your birth-certificate," she said.

He read "Arthur William Lang," and his heart sank, for that "Why should I lie, Arthur?" had been surprised out of her, shocked out of her, he felt convinced, totally unrehearsed, unprepared, and unpremeditated.

"Don't you believe me?" she asked, wonderingly. "Would any other woman heed all you've done as I have?"

She told him of his school-days, of tumbles, of fights that he had forgotten till she conjured up the scene again, of his clothes, and a treasured purple tie in particular that old John Pearse had given him on his ninth birthday. Looking up at the ceiling with wrapt, wan eyes, she spoke of peg-tops, of model yachts, of hoops, of his first briar pipe, and his first, his fond and foolish love affair with Amy Buxton, the cornchandler's girl.

"She was never good enough for you——"

Abruptly Gerald Pearce lifted the telephone-receiver.

Ferguson interrupted.

"Mr. Hallum, sir."

The solicitor entered. Gerald Pearse greeted him, and plunged succinctly into the object of his summons. Gerald Pearse was convinced. No one—scarcely himself—knew so much of the details of his childhood. And, then, there was the mole and the scar, and that involuntary "Arthur" to corroborate. Besides, as Hallum questioned her and he watched her he read sincerity in sad, dim eyes, in patient, wistful smile, in humbleness, and in a certain conviction patent in her speech and bearing that her story must be believed.

"What did the locket contain?" asked Hallum, after many questions.

Gerald Pearse did not know himself. The locket had been lost a month after his foster parents adopted him.

"A rose wove out of hair—my mother's hair," said Mrs. Lang.

The solicitor glanced at Pearse.

"That's correct," he said. "Mrs. Pearse told me so, I remember, not long before her death."

"I am convinced," said Gerald.

He stood up, moved to the window, held the curtains parted, and stared out over moonlit back gardens. The son of a coiner, a "fence," a felon! This piteous, drab figure—his mother! He thought of Borton, who, he knew, already looked down on him. He thought of Cynthia. It meant, he could not doubt, "good-bye."

"Lady Cynthia must know," he said, abruptly. "It would be unfair to keep this from her, or for me to tell her myself. Will you see her to-night—at once, Hallum? Say that I put myself in her hands. If this story—alters things, tell her that I understand and sympathise."

He controlled himself, but his cheeks were livid.

"In that event ring up the newspapers. Say that the wedding is postponed on account of my illness. D'you mind undertaking this unpleasant task, Hallum?"

"It's my job," said the solicitor, drily, and picked up his hat.

Ten struck as the door closed on his heels.

"May I understand?" asked Mrs. Lang.

"Didn't you—who know so much—know that I was to be married to-morrow?"

She shook her head.

"I was in an' out the infirmary," she said, swiftly. "Lang's been ill these three months. Is—is it that tall young lady with the crown of gold hair, who walks like a queen?"

"Lady Cynthia Girvan," said he, "yes."

"And it's going to—make her change her mind," she said, lips wide and trembling.

Would she make an offer, he wondered. Was her ignorance assumed? Would she ask for assistance and promise to keep her secret? He felt certain that he had read her intentions as she said, quickly:

"Can you stop him by the 'phone there? Can you stop him tellin' her?"

"I don't intend to," he said.

"What will she say?"

"You heard me. I'm not sure. She is in a difficult position."

"Not if she loves you——"

"Even if she loves me," he persisted. "But I won't discuss her."

"You mean *I* mustn't," she said. "D'you think I've waited forty years so as to come back and ruin your life? D'you think I broke my heart deserting you, to come back and distress you?"

She stood up.

"Why, Arthur," she burst out, the dim eyes dimmed more with unshed tears, "d'you think a mother could do that? I thought I'd just come and see you and talk to you and let you know the truth. I thought p'r'aps you'd find me a little cottage and sometimes—seldom, for you're busy and a great man—oh, my dear boy, I'm so proud o' that!—sometimes you'd come and see me. I never asked, I never wished you to call me mother to your friends. Why should I? What claim have I? I never expected you to care. Why should you? You couldn't care. But I thought, being old, I wouldn't be a hindrance to you. 'Phone him, Arthur. Tell him I've gone, that I'll never come back, that you'll never hear of me again—never!"

She came close, and in her eagerness laid

both her veined and rutted hands upon his arms.

"Why, my boy, it's been your happiness I've thought of all along! For that I gave you up, for that I've kept hidden and silent all these years. D'you think I'd ever know a moment's peace if I thought for selfishness of mine I'd come between you and your lass? I'm not that sort, Arthur boy."

How was it that tremulous smile seemed to transmute her faded features? Looking down on her he saw no longer a little drab old woman. There was something majestic, beautiful, magnificent in those tender shining eyes, in trembling lips, in the whole yearning aspect of her face. Somewhere deep in his heart throbbed, as it were, a tiny life, newly conceived. Somewhere, in his brain, cells long immured seemed struggling to be free. He began to tremble, too, looking down at her.

"'Phone him," she said. "It's all been a mistake. I've been selfish an' cruel an' wicked. What's done can't even be begun to be undone. I chose. I can't go back on that. Forgive me. Tell yourself, when I've gone, that I loved you and it blinded me. Don't feel bitter against me, Arthur. I didn't know what I did. Why, I'd not harm a hair of your dear head!"

That fluttering in his heart drove him to lay his hands on hers. Those freed cells were flooding his brain not with recollections—for he had no memories of her—but with unconscious heritages.

As she drew back, he held her fast.

"No—mother," he said.

At the word she broke down utterly. He felt, as her tears dripped on his hands, a sudden surge of tenderness, an urgent call to protect and comfort her. Demands or threats would have hardened him. Her humility and selflessness broke through the ramparts of reserve that had made the world consider him a hard and callous man. She was old and he was her son.

"Henceforward, I look after you," he said.

As he spoke, Hallum opened the door, and Cynthia swept in. The solicitor shut the door. The girl stood by the gleaming book-case, gazing at Gerald Pearse.

He guessed how she must feel. Her environment and heredity must have moulded her. Borton was an arch-Tory. Class distinctions were rigidly upheld at Borton Park. She despised the faded little woman he now held close—his mother. And, suddenly, he felt convinced that it was the mystery of his own birth and the squalor of his upbringing that had produced that fear or prejudice, that reluctance, the memory of which had terrified him earlier in that fatal evening.

"Has Hallum told you?" he asked, gently. He could not blame or reproach, who had been so hard himself. "When she learnt that I was to be married to-morrow, she wanted to leave me. She wants to leave me now—go out of my life as completely as she has blotted herself out of it till now. I have refused, Cynthia. She is—my mother."

His hands moved as though in caress on those protestant, shrinking shoulders.

"You won't try, Cynthia, to dissuade me, I know."

His defiant, grimly sorrowful eyes met hers.

"I came—I made Mr. Hallum bring me—to see how you had decided," the girl said.

Her eyes were shining and her lips wide, and Gerald wondered if she were going to laugh or cry. Very swiftly she came forward and slid a bare arm round Mrs. Lang's shoulders. The old woman glanced nervously up.

"You've found," said Cynthia, "a son and a daughter, dear Gerald's mother."

Shyly she kissed the lined forehead.

There started the first tears for thirty-five years in Gerald Pearse's eyes.

. . . . . .

"I wondered—it used to frighten me so," whispered Cynthia in the cab as Gerald drove her home, "if you had a heart at all! Everyone said you were so hard—inhuman—callous. Nothing seemed to touch you. You despised sentiment so. Sometimes I wondered if you despised—love. But now——"

She wound cool clinging arms around his neck, and there was no dread or hesitation in her happy eyes nor reluctance in her proffered lips

SNAKE IN THE GRASS

BY

JOHN HASLETTE VAHEY

I.

A SINGLE street-lamp threw a circle of yellow light on the wet, glistening pavement of the Rue Rochambeau, which is not the thoroughfare known to most tourists in Paris, but an ugly and narrow little street in the vicinity of the Halles. Its rays discovered the unevenness of the decaying pavement, and showed up a blistering green shutter on a neighbouring house. Beyond that was darkness, except where, here and there, a slat of light shot out from a chink of a dilapidated blind across the racing and turbid flood in the gutters.

It had been raining heavily all day, and the rain only ceased when night fell. The sky was clearing now, but the moon had not climbed high enough to help lighten the gloomy street.

The Hotel of the Two Heads is larger, if a little less squalid, than the other mansarded old houses that line both sides of the Rue Rochambeau. It is a hotel by courtesy, a café in practice, and it is owned by a mouchard or police spy.

Too poor to attract even the cheap tourist, and too well-known among the local fraternity to attract the professional criminal, it has its clients among the raffish artisans, the midinettes who belong to the smaller houses, with a few students from foreign lands who have not lived long enough in Paris to discover the whereabout of the true Bohemia, and still mistake a mediocre midinette for the "Mimi" of "La Bohème."

M. Hypolite Dordan is the host, a lean little man, with the face of an intelligent rat; and his wife is an obese woman with the face of an unintelligent sheep, which conveniently hides the fact that she has wit and pluck for both. It was she, in fact, who insisted that Hypolite should become a mouchard. "One understands," as she put it, in her voice of an asthmatical man, "that two cats do not watch the hole of a mouse."

The host was sitting in the café, smoking a vile Caporal cigarette and reading "L'Intransigeant," on this particular evening. The café was empty; even his wife had left the caisse to attend to some detail of domestic oversight, and the one dirty waiter was tentatively rubbing the top of a stained table, when the rumbling of wheels could be heard from the street, and M. Dordan looked up from his paper.

"It still rains, Jules?" he asked.

"No, m'sieu, it has ceased," said Jules sulkily.

"Does that draw up here by any chance?" said M. Dordan as the sound of wheels stopped opposite the door.

It did. It was a fiacre that arrived at the Hotel of the Two Heads, with a wet and tired horse, and a traveller who wished to put up

at the hotel. M. Dordan learned that, when he answered a knock at the door, which had been shut against the rain. But he was amazed to note also that the traveller was a woman, young, he thought from her step, a woman who wore a raincoat and whose face was largely concealed by a thick, grotesquely patterned veil.

She spoke French with an English accent, she had two boxes, her shoes were well worn, her hat was simple and cheap, the hem of the skirt that peeped below the raincoat was somewhat frayed. A woman who dressed like that, who was English, who would stay in the Rue Rocrambeau, what could she be but a governess out of work?

"I have rooms, naturally," said M. Dordan, with an impudent air. "But they are expensive, and I cannot afford to lose money in these times. Mademoiselle understands that?"

Mademoiselle apparently did. Without words she put her hand inside her raincoat, and showed a roll of notes. Dordan's eyes glittered. He became respectful, apologetic. He called loudly for madame, he sent the waiter scurrying to a bedroom, he himself helped the grumbling driver of the fiacre in with the boxes.

Mademoiselle, it appeared, had been governess with a French family, the head of which had just received some Colonial appointment. She had been paid off, she had no other post in sight. She was in search of cheap rooms, and the driver of the fiacre had recommended the Hotel of the Two Heads. That was natural enough, thought the host, for the driver was a friend of his own. He was content with the explanation meanwhile.

Madame, on the other hand, was not. She helped the girl off with her raincoat, and found her too pretty for her idea of an English gouvernante, all of whom, as one knew, had stuck-out teeth, faces of horses, and washed-out blue eyes. So she gave her a bedroom on the first floor that communicated with another room behind. The lock of that room was of M. Hypolite's own invention. A key stood to either side, and what was locked from inside the room could be unlocked from without.

Mademoiselle Thomson, as she called herself, was apparently satisfied. She had dined already, and was immensely fatigued. She would retire at once. Madame lighted the gas for her, cast a furtive glance at the two trunks, and bade her good-night. Then she went downstairs to consult her husband.

Her ideas were well organised. The Englishwoman had money, and no Englishwoman with money, who had lived for some time in Paris, would trust herself in that quarter, on the recommendation of the driver of a fiacre. Further, she did not look like a governess, who would not be taken on by a family of means if she were not more respectably dressed. It appeared, therefore, that she was lying, and, that being the case, she must have something to hide.

"It might be as well to sound the officials of the Sûreté," she ended. "The flics may know her, or they may want to know her, and you must gain some reputation for zeal with them, or they may take into their heads to want proofs of your activity."

"I denounced old 'Square-Head' last year," said he thoughtfully.

"A mouchard who denounces one a year is of no value, mon vieux. Go to the Sûreté and describe mademoiselle. There may be money in it, and it can do no harm."

Her husband shook his head.

"If it is as you say, there may be money in it without that. At all events, I can do nothing now, for the Little Chap visits me at ten regarding the affair of which you know. No, that does not go. It will be better for you to search the room while she sleeps, and then we shall consider the matter again."

Madame agreed. Stout as she was, and stupid as she looked, there was no one in Paris who understood better how to perform such a task. She had the tread of a cat and the manual deftness of a watchmaker, the strength and ruthlessness of a panther. It was not the first time she had used her talents.

Mademoiselle Thomson, in the meanwhile, had surveyed her room, and opened the door that communicated with a room beyond. Her eyes fell upon the ingenious lock, and she smiled gently. She was undoubtedly pretty,

with fair hair, dark eyes, cheeks whose colour owed nothing to cosmetics. Her dark eyes sparkled again as she examined the lock.

"Invented by a clever fool!" she said to herself gaily. "To be perfect it should not have been possible to unlock from my side, but only to lock, while the other served both turns."

She shut the door and locked it, hung her raincoat where it would obscure the keyhole, and then bent over one of her trunks. She opened it with some difficulty, and took from it a little wooden box, pierced with some small holes in the lid. Diving in again, she produced a metal box of quick-drying enamels, and a brush. She placed a chair under the gaslight, sat down with the bigger box on her knee, and opened it carefully. As she turned back the lid, the head of a small snake lifted in quick anger, and struck at the fingers on the edge of the box. Mademoiselle withdrew her fingers, and deftly caught the snake behind the head with her right hand.

"Gently, Jimmie!" she said, just above her breath, her eyes dancing. "You're not dressed for the part yet."

II.

M. Hypolite had a little snuggery in the cellar of the hotel. A fire glowed there now, and two chairs were placed before it, while a bottle of liqueur brandy and two fine glasses decorated the table behind. A small line of casks still remained against the back wall of the room, reminding one of its former use; but these casks were now empty, and one of them was cunningly hinged, so that it became a practicable, if small, entrance from without.

At ten o'clock precisely, Jean Breuil, alias the Little Chap, joined the host by the fire, and sat to dry his wet clothes. The cask hinged down again, and presented once more its aspect of ingenuous innocence, while Jean, who was even smaller and more rat-like than M. Dordan, exchanged some low-voiced pleasantries with his friend.

"The rain has ceased at last," he said, pouring himself ont a glass of brandy, and tossing it off eagerly. "If you had lain for hours in the wet grass of a park, you would know it."

"It ceased two hours ago," said Hypolite drily; "but not before it brought us a guest, about whom I am in two minds."

Jean shrugged.

"How is that profitable?"

Hypolite explained what his wife thought, but his companion only grew angry.

"What, imbecile? These English may be anything, they may do anything. It means nothing. Our affair on hand is too big for us to muddle by thinking of such a thing. If she has money, it cannot be much. If the Sûreté want her, they can wait until we have done our job. Nom d'un pipe, we might as well turn sneak thieves at once, if we will meddle like that."

"Then we will not meddle, just yet. Lucie will see what she is. As to the other affair—how goes it?"

Jean smacked his lips.

"It goes! This morning the family left for Algeria. They will be away two months. They have left five servants. They are old, save one. The keeper patrols the park at night, but he is a man of routine, and I have discovered his times and rounds. It will be necessary to have a car, fast and silent, which will drop us and return for us. One cannot have it waiting about."

"That will mean a third," said Hypolite, who was avaricious. "Unless you can do the affair alone."

"I cannot," said the other, applying himself to the brandy. "The apartments of the servants are in a wing with a narrow passage to the remainder of the house. One must wait there with a weapon, in case they take the alarm. We must take in Denier."

"No; he is too greedy. We shall have Gauchepin, if we must. He is content with little."

"Be content, mon vieux; *that* we can settle to-morrow. Let me tell you that last night I made a rehearsal. I had already made a drill hole in the shutters of the library. Through it I saw a light, and I discovered that our friend the count plumes himself on his subtlety. He hides the best of his valuables

behind some coal in a scuttle, also something behind books on a shelf. What fools we should have been had we attacked the safe ! "

M. Hypolite grinned.

" Felicitations ! " he said warmly. " You have worked wonders. It shall be to-morrow night for our affair, and I will charge myself with the procuring of a car. I trust that you have not left open that hole in the shutter ? "

Jean laughed.

" But naturally, no. It is plugged, and does not show, and yet it is easily removable at need."

" Bravo ! " said the host enthusiastically. " More brandy, my excellent one ! "

As they sat talking and planning below, madame left the noisy guests in the café to the care of the waiter, and made her preparations for a reconnaissance in the room of her new guest. They were simple but adequate. She put on a pair of rubber-soled shoes, a black overall, that hid her from the neck downwards, and a hanging veil, which she draped over her face. Then she went upstairs, and stood in the room communicating with mademoiselle's, and listened.

Mademoiselle did not snore. A snore is an uneasy thing, and is so easily counterfeited that night-rakers instinctively suspect it. Heavy breathing is almost as bad. But mademoiselle did not breath heavily ; she was only audible to a very keen ear, and madame was content. The raincoat no longer hung over the keyhole ; a glance through it was met by sheer darkness. Madame turned the key in the well-oiled lock, and opened the door without sound.

The dark veil and overall made her one with the blackness that reigned in the room. She advanced noiselessly, her hands in two of the many pockets of her overall. In each pocket was a key, the upper end neatly covered with chamois. Her husband used to say that anything which resisted the six keys of his invention required an explosive, and he was not very far from the truth. Among madame's other simple tools was an electric torch, with an extension, which masked the beam on all sides save one.

The lock of mademoiselle's trunk was of a very primitive pattern. The second key opened it easily. The breathing coming softly and regularly from the bed, madame gently lifted the lid of the trunk, and prepared to bring her useful torch into action, holding it so that the light should fall only on the contents of the box.

She switched it on, then knew that something had gone wrong. A spot of white light had fallen on the wall opposite. She got to her feet with unexpected quickness, and turned. A little laugh from the bed froze the marrow in her bones.

" So that's the game, is it ? "

Madame gasped and grew rigid. Mademoiselle was not visible, but a ray came from the bed, and into the light of the ray there intruded a hand steadily holding an automatic pistol.

" If you have a match, you will light the gas at once," went on the voice, while madame was debating her next move. " But be careful ! "

Madame did not speak yet. There was nothing that she could say with effect, but she was thinking quickly. She crossed to the gas bracket, beam and automatic following her accurately, fumbled in her pocket, and produced matches. The gas flared up, and she turned her head again towards the bed. There was an electric alarm fitted to the wall below the bracket, and she had pressed that, but her sheep's face showed no signs of relief as she faced mademoiselle.

The English girl was sitting up in bed, fully dressed, smiling charmingly :

" Why didn't you tell me ? " she said.

Madame gaped.

" Tell you what, mademoiselle ? "

" But this, by example ! I didn't know you were on this lay. I thought you might blow the gaff if you knew what I was."

The sentence, rendered in the argot of French criminal circles, made madame gape again. She stared for a moment, and then she laughed harshly.

" It is to laugh," she exclaimed. " Fancy me trying to put it across one of the crowd ! And you didn't even tip us the wink ! "

In the cellar below an electric bell had

suddenly shrilled. Jean jumped to his feet, Dordan got up excitedly.

"She's muffed it!" he hissed." Upstairs, quick! Follow me."

The Little Chap plunged a hand in his pocket and produced a small sandbag, Dordan gripped a life-preserver as he led his companion up a back stairway. They cursed under their breath as they ascended, for this might mean exposure and the ruin of their profitable plans.

Gaining the communicating room, they peered through the door opening, their eyes amazed. A trunk lay open in the room, the gas was full on, but madame sat on the edge of the bed, laughing and talking to the English lady, who appeared more amused than perturbed.

As they looked, mademoiselle opened the neck of her blouse and fished up what looked like a necklace of fine pearls.

"I nicked these last night," she said. "Naturally, I had to scoot. One of the flies nearly got me, so I headed here for the downy."

Jean put his hand on Dordan's arm, tugged at his sleeve, and went quickly downstairs again, M. Hypolite following him in a mood of stupefaction. When they were again ensconced in the cellar, his companion burst into a laugh.

"Isn't it épatant!" he said. "The old girl took her for a lamb, one supposes. What a bit of luck for us, though!"

"Luck?" said M. Hypolite. "I do not see it in that light. But not at all. We can't scrag her here."

"Who talks of it?" asked Jean contemptuously. "We wanted a third, and here we have one. These Anglaises have nerve."

"And, of course, she will help us for nix!" said Dordan ironically.

"But yes," agreed Jean simply, "that is it, exactement. If we pull off this coup we can set ourselves up for life, or go elsewhere. It is a very big thing, one understands. We take this girl in, and when we have done the job we make ready for our break, and then you denounce her to the Sûreté. The lady for the Sante, ourselves for South America, mon vieux."

M. Hypolite slapped him violently on the back.

"You have the ideas, that is certain. I should never have thought of it. It is a plan of the utmost magnificence."

"Your old woman will have thought of it," said Jean drily. "See if she is not down here with her in a few minutes."

Monsieur Jean, alias the Little Chap, was the despair of the police agents of Paris. They had assumed for a long time that he was at the bottom of many crimes, but so far they had never been able to connect him with any. Compared with him, M. Hypolite was a child, and knew it. Madame was made of more intelligent material. She appeared in the cellar a few moments later, accompanied by the English girl, who smiled in turn at the two men.

"Good evening, gentlemen," she said gaily. "All those of one trade ought to be good friends, n'est ce pas? Madame and I are already as thick as thieves!"

"That is the right word, mademoiselle," said Jean, looking at her with admiration and drawing up a chair for her. "Honour us by sharing our fire. Mademoiselle arrives opportunely, for we discuss a business that needs one head more than the hotel of our friend M. Hypolite here."

"That's the way to get at it," said madame. "Mademoiselle here has already pinched a string of bubbles, and knows her way about. She has given me the laugh to-night."

"I compliment mademoiselle," said Jean, signing to Dordan to be silent. "Will mademoiselle have a mouthful of brandy and a cigarette while I give her some points?"

"A cigarette, thank you," said Mlle. Thomson, taking one from the case he held out. "As regards your affairs, remember that I don't twist my fingers round trifles. I never see myself getting quodded for stealing little apples."

"Little apples! Parbleu! This is a big fruit," said Jean. "An exotic, I assure you, and very rare."

"Put me next then," said mademoiselle,

whose French now was very colloquial, but had no English accent in it, "I'm on."

Jean laughed. Madame went out and returned with two more chairs. They sat round the fire while Jean, a glass of liqueur brandy in his hand, explained what was wanted, nodded contentedly several times towards the lady, and ended by tossing off the contents of the little glass.

Mademoiselle, it appeared, was willing to join them. Only she could not drive an auto, and she wanted two-ninths of the proceeds of the robbery as her share. Jean agreed that she should come with him for the inside work, while Dordan should drive, but he haggled over the share she demanded. It was never intended that she should touch the money, but it was essential that she should think everything on the square, so eventually he gave way, and mademoiselle became a temporary ally.

All the next day, Mademoiselle Thomson kept close to the house. Indeed, she kept to her room, and did not even see madame again until dark had come once more. Her meals had been left outside her door by the waiter during daylight, but now madame herself brought up a dainty little supper, and chatted confidentially with the English girl while she ate it.

She explained that breakfast would be brought up the following morning, whether mademoiselle returned or no. The waiter was a fool, and it was hoped that he would remain so. He had no idea that any of the inhabitants of the house lived other than honestly. Before she went out her door would be locked from the inside, and she would find exit by the communicating door, which could be locked or opened from either side. At ten o'clock madame herself would come up for her, lead her by the back stairway to the cellar, and so out.

The English girl sat and smoked for a couple of hours, waiting for her hostess's reappearance. When madame returned she found her guest habited in a tight-fitting costume of black, with the sleeves trimmed with black fur, and wearing a little cap which fitted closely to her head. They left the room locked, stole down the rear stairway, and found themselves in the cellar.

"Go out of the gate in the court," said madame, "you find yourself in a little impassé. There is an archway under one of the houses. Penetrate that, and you will find the auto waiting. And now bonne chance!"

The hinged door of the cask was lifted up, mademoiselle crawled through it. It fell behind her. A minute later and she was in the little impassé, and looking for the archway. It was very dark. It did not rain, but the sky was covered with ominous black cloud masses. The archway, when she found it, was as black as a mine. But in the road beyond a motor-car waited drawn up near the kerb. She approached close to it.

"Can you take me far, cocher?" she inquired.

"As far as the heavens," was the reply in a deep voice.

"Let us go, then," said mademoiselle, and stepped into the tonneau.

She had time for reflection as the car went quietly through the streets towards the suburbs. She did not look out of the windows at the brightly lit roadways, but sat back, her brows knitted, wholly given up to thought. As they left the town, and got out into the more open districts beyond, the car quickened pace. It drew up presently outside the gate of what looked like a suburban villa. The gate opened, as the car drew up, and a little man, who wore a top-hat, and a smart black overcoat, buttoned up to the hem, and carried a small hand-bag, opened the door of the car and got in.

"To Passy, M. le Médecin?" demanded the driver, in a voice which could have been heard in the neighbouring gardens.

"But certainly—to Monsieur Brun's," said a voice from within.

The car purred off again. The gentleman in the overcoat took off his top-hat and grinned at mademoiselle.

"This will be a most severe operation for my patient!" he observed sardonically. "I hope I shall be successful with it."

"Between us, m'sieu," said the girl, with a little laugh, "we could fail in nothing."

"I am sure of it," said Jean.

They ran out at last into what was almost open country, and presently they found themselves outside the enceinte of what appeared to be a nobleman's park. The car put them off here. M. Hypolite was to return in an hour and a half precisely. Jean looked at his watch.

He touched mademoiselle on the arm.

"I have a key for a door in the wall here. We shall wait inside until the keeper passes. This is about his time. We shall give him a hundred metres, and then we shall follow his tracks. He follows his nose interminably, like an idiot."

There was an ivy-grown door within a few paces. He opened it very quickly, and they went into the park. He closed and locked it behind them, and they waited in silence under the rim of trees until a footfall passing over the grass told them that the keeper was on patrol. A minute later they set out quietly after him, and followed his path until it brought them within touch of a shrubbery that skirted the rear of a great house they could just see looming up against the blackness of the sky. The keeper went on. They stopped.

Mademoiselle felt lips at her ear:

"Good. He was an excellent guide. Just wait a moment."

Jean took off his hat and placed it on top of the nearest bush. He replaced it with a black skull-cap. He took off his coat, and placed it by the hat. Neither could be seen by the keeper on his rounds. Then he took mademoiselle by the arm and led her on, finally posting her outside the window of the library.

"Wait," he said softly. "There is an easy window à troisième. I know my way up. I will open to you in a minute."

Mademoiselle waited, motionless. Five minutes, ten minutes, then she heard a faint sound. The window was opened gently, a shutter gave back. Without waiting to be prompted, she stepped into a dark room, and was beside Jean. He moved past her, temporarily closed the window, and set the shutter in its place.

"You could have done this by yourself," said the girl in his ear.

He shrugged.

"Precisely. Only our friend is a mouchard—nominally, at least. He knows me. Short of scragging, which might cause trouble, it is better to divide. Comprenez?"

"I see," whispered the girl. "What next?"

"Follow me," he whispered back.

"But where?" she demanded.

Her hands were busy in the dark as she talked to him. She was leaning against a console-table, and from his voice she knew that he was to the left of her. He did not speak again, but touched her arm impatiently.

She started, then followed him. He seemed to know his way perfectly though there was no light, and they found themselves presently in a passage way which led to the sleeping quarters of the servants. He stationed her there.

"Be attentive! Don't shoot unless it is necessary. They have no telephone here. It is in the library. I shall not be long."

Miraculously soft but carrying as his voice was, mademoiselle thought someone must hear them in that big, silent house. But all remained quiet. No one stirred. Beyond the baize door that separated the sleeping quarters of the domestics from the main building, sleep reigned supreme. Even the keeper would not approach again on his rounds for a full half-hour.

Jean went quickly back to the library, walked noiselessly across the magnificent Aubusson carpet, and paused under an electric light switch. He switched on several lights in turn, until he found a trio of small bulbs that were affixed to the wall near the big fireplace. Here their rays fell on a large receptacle for coal, of an antique pattern. He bent before it, and with the utmost care removed half a stone of coal. An electric torch lighted the further recesses, and he repressed a cry of anger. There was nothing behind! The count had apparently not been such a fool as he looked.

Jean bit his lip. When spying previously, he had seen the owner of the mansion hide

something behind some books. He went to the shelves, and took out half a dozen books. Ah, this was better! He found in the space behind them a couple of thin jewel-cases, which contained a necklace of brilliants set in platinum and a magnificent breast-piece of emeralds. He slipped them into a pocket, and displaced further volumes. But this was not so successful, and he gave that up and began to look about the room.

Nothing escaped his eagle eye. Nothing was too commonplace to neglect. The count was evidently a gentleman who prided himself on befooling professional visitors. Still, Jean found nothing more. He bit his lips with irritation as he opened boxes, which only proved to contain cigars, sealing-wax, stamps, and other trifles. He almost stamped with annoyance when he nosed out a secret drawer in a lamp pedestal, and found it empty. Presently he drew up beside a console-table, on which stood a cheap-looking cretonne-covered box. What was that doing there. It was like one of those things in which the women of the bourgeoisie keep their hairpins.

A little cry seemed to be forced from her, as she looked down.

If the count had hid his things where no one but a clever man would think of looking, this was the place. Jean put out his hand, opened the simple catch of the box, and felt within. He gave a sudden cry, and overturned the box, which fell to the floor and collapsed. There were two stinging punctures in the flesh of his thumb, and on the floor a brilliantly coloured little snake writhed and hissed. His eyes grew large with fear and wonder as he looked at it for a few moments, before he set his heel upon it and crushed it.

His cry, which had not reached to the heavily slumbering servants in their distant apartments, came faintly to mademoiselle. She left her post at once, and went swiftly

to the library. She found Jean standing under the electric light, staring with a face of mingled terror and helplessness at the tiny wounds the snake had inflicted.

"What is wrong?" she whispered, going to him.

A look of relief came to his white face. He was a townsman and knew nothing of snakes. But his hand trembled all the same as he raised it and pointed to the crushed body of the little snake.

"I am bitten!" he said rapidly, "I do not know what it is."

"Harmless, perhaps," said the girl, crossing the floor. "I was in India once as—companion—I—— Good heavens!"

A little cry seemed to be forced from her, as she looked down. At that sound the perspiration suddenly stood out in beads on a face that was the colour of putty, and Jean darted to her.

"What! What?"

Her eyes became fixed, staring, her mouth dropped.

"The 'rainbow'!" she stammered. "But this is terrible—*in half an hour*——"

He gave a whimper like a beaten dog.

"But no. It is impossible!"

"In half an hour," she repeated. "I know. I have seen it. What is one to do?"

He began to shudder violently, tried to speak, but could not. He put his thumb to his mouth, and began to suck at the wounds, until the girl pulled violently at his arm.

"No good. The poison is too quick. If we could get a doctor. But it would be too late."

He sank into a chair.

"Ah, comme je souffre!" he moaned, fear paralysing his limbs. "Ciel! I am in an agony. It seizes already upon my heart."

"Get up!" cried the girl. "We must telephone a doctor at once, or would you rather die?"

He essayed to stand up, but could not. He remained in his chair, staring stupidly at his hand.

"I am lost!" he said, the tears in his eyes. "I suffer dreadfully. Already my heart——"

She caught him by the arm.

"Come. You have wasted ten minutes. Courage, my friend."

She pulled at him, and he strove again to rise, straightened himself for a moment, fainted, and lay prone. Mademoiselle looked down at him, and a smile crept over her face. She picked up the collapsed box, and folded it into a flat piece of small size. It was one of those boxes beloved of Japanese conjurers. Then she picked up the crushed snake, and threw it in the fire-place.

"Wonderful what a little suggestion does!" she murmured. "The coquin appears to have felt all the pain he imagined!"

She returned to him quickly, unfastened her blouse, and drew from under it six or seven yards of strong silk cord. Turning him over, she pulled his hands behind him and lashed them together, cut the free ends and bound his ankles. She knew the value of a sharp set of teeth, and provided even for those; fixing one end of the cord about his neck, and the other end to the lashing at the back of his ankles, so that he could not bring his head forward without threatening to strangle himself. The whole operation did not occupy a minute, for every detail had been practised many times before, and when Jean, the "Little Chap," came to again, he opened his eyes on a constrained world.

They met those of the girl, who looked down laughingly.

"M'sieu," she said, "in the future, if you have opportunity, you will be wise to study nature. It will enable you to detect a grass snake next time, even if he is painted!"

Jean swore violently, but she went from him, and there was the click of the switch. The dark descended again. Struggling and swearing, he heard the shutter open, then the window, and then his frenzied curses were wasted on empty air.

Mademoiselle ran rapidly across the park. She had abandoned the automatic with which Jean had provided her, but she had substituted for it Jean's favourite little sand-bag, which was just as effective and made less noise. She shoved it in the pocket in her fur-trimmed sleeve, where she had carried her painted grass-snake and the collapsing-box, and made

her way rapidly to the wall encircling the grounds. Along this she felt her way until she found the gate by which they had entered. Jean had left it unlocked, for convenience in getting away. She was waiting on the road little more than fifteen minutes later.

Standing there she lighted a cigarette, and looked at her wrist-watch, which had a radium-doctored dial. M. Hypolite ought to arrive soon.

The keeper passed on his rounds inside, five minutes afterwards two lamps glowed on the road, and presently the car slowed and stopped opposite.

"Is it all right?" asked M. Hypolite from his seat.

"Oh, m'sieu," said the girl with a gasp. "Softly! They are near."

"Who!"

He leaned towards her hastily.

"These!" said the girl, rapped him smartly on the back of the head with her sand bag, and began to cry: "Au secours! Help! Help!" as he tumbled senseless over the wheel.

She assisted him then clear of the vehicle, so that he toppled into the roadway, and waited by him until she heard someone come tearing across the dead leaves at the other side of the park wall.

"M'sieu! M'sieu!" she cried piteously; and the keeper, bursting out of the ivy-clad door, came to her side.

"What passes here, that you raise the place with your shouts?" he demanded, staring at her.

"It is that," said mademoiselle, pointing to the prone figure. "Seize and hold him, m'sieu. He has been trying to rob your house. Don't wait, but do as I bid you, and I will drive off for the police."

The keeper looked puzzled.

"How do I know?" he said. "I did not see him——"

He was standing by the car lamp. She thrust a card under his nose.

"Imbecile! You can at least read that. Hold him, and don't let him go, on your peril!"

He stared at the card.

"Ah, that makes a difference," he said. "I am a law-abiding fellow. Your people shall know that. Saperlipopette, I shall put him away securely till they come."

"Then hurry!" she said impatiently: and got on to the driving-seat. "I'm off."

And she was off, at an amazing pace for a lady who couldn't drive, before the keeper had got M. Hypolite on his shoulder, and had entered with him through the wall-gate, en route to the lodge where he meant to immure him for the moment.

It was in the small hours that a car, driven at racing speed, drew up outside a telephone office, with a grinding and creaking of brakes, and a girl jumped from it, and routed out the sleepy officials. She wanted to be put through to the Sûreté, and that in double quick time.

It seemed an age before she got through, but it was at most five minutes, and then a grave voice reached her.

"Who speaks?"

"The 'Gouvernante,'" said the girl. "I think it is your voice, Monsieur Pelitte?"

"Ah, it is mademoiselle miss, eh?" said the voice. "What goes?"

"'The Little Chap' does, or ought to. I've roped him at last."

"Made-moi-selle!" the voice was surcharged with amazement.

"But yes," said the girl. "Send at once to the château of M. le Comte Meuron, and you will find him with the swag on him. His pal Dordan you will find with the keeper."

"It is," said the voice, "astonishing! But we will send."

"At once," said mademoiselle as she rang off.

She went back to the car triumphant. A woman, an Englishwoman, she had made a score that all the police agents of Paris would envy her. There was only one fly in the ointment.

"Poor old Jimmy!" she murmured as she took the wheel. "It'll be a long time before I find another grass-snake that will bite on demand!"

"Grey Mother"

By LLOYD ROBERTS

IT was October. The midday sun still breathed hot upon the gold-dipped and blood-stained sprays, and birds and beasts still rustled the fallen leaves for nuts and berries. The clearing of Lonely Camp alone seemed forsaken. Where man has been, loneliness settles down like a grey cloud. Ghostly voices, hollow axe-strokes, haunt the silence, dull the sunlight, sob through wind and rain. And Lonely Camp was the most lonely of all abandoned lumber-camps. Perhaps because it had once been the most populous. It consisted of a whole group of log buildings—stables, granary, bunk-houses, smithy—that clustered hodge-podge near the centre of the clearing. This clearing, the third year of abandonment, was still clear of tree and bush, even of small life—an unhealed wound in the wilderness.

Not a cricket ticked from the stunted grass; not a grasshopper climbed the ragged thistles beneath the sashless windows.

Only a frail white wisp of butterfly floated from the black spruces, rocked aimlessly over the desert, hesitated twice about alighting on a tall mullen stalk, rose to cross the sagging back of the stables, and was suddenly struck down by a lean, yellow shape that shot up from the ridge-pole.

I.

When John Boyce realised that his camp was becoming as over-run with vermin as was the town of Hamlin, he decided to fetch in the home cat. This he did, in spite of hot words and hot tears from his wife and son respectively. To the man Grey Mother was little more than his can of Paris green, but to Maisie and Bobby she was companion and playmate, one of the family, indeed, and to send her into the exile of the camps was a gross betrayal of affection. Now, various other loggers had also decided to sacrifice, not their wife's relatives, but domestic pets, upon the altar of the cause, with the result that no less than seven feline visitors, including Old Tom, a veteran of countless battles, appeared on the scene in the same week.

No matter, there was plenty for all, not only in the way of sport, but also in the way of table refuse, and their rough, warm-hearted hosts made them feel entirely at home.

By spring and quitting time, the cats, as cats will, had increased their little colony by the addition of several litters of kittens. The lumbermen knew well enough that litters would not be tolerated at home, and, as the mothers were still a necessity to their offspring, the men shrugged their shoulders and turned their backs upon them all.

Not Boyce, however. Remembering that he had given Bobby solemn promise to return Grey Mother to him in the spring "just as good as new," he meant to keep his promise in

spite of her having been taken with the prevalent malady. But when the day of departure had arrived there was no Maltese to be found. With maternal acuteness she had noted and correctly interpreted the unwonted confusion, and had hidden herself in the bosom of her secreted family until the last team and teamster had humped away down the trail. Then the cats stepped in and took possession.

Two winters had passed since then. The first had been comparatively mild, with only a week or two of twenty-below weather and a moderate fall of snow. Small game had been plentiful, specially rabbits and woodmice, and, although the procuring of meat meant indefatigable stalking on the part of the seventeen cats, thirteen appeared to sun themselves on the roofs when May had come, and the absentees were due to such enemies as lynx and wolf rather than weather.

During the succeeding spring and summer the colonists had added marvellously to their number and to their food demand. The immediate forest had soon become denuded of small game, furred and feathered, compelling daily deeper inroads into new territory. Not a squirrel nor chipmunk could be induced to approach within half a mile of the dreadful clearing; even the fierce mink and stoat shunned the neighbourhood, and, among the smaller animals, the porcupine alone remained supremely indifferent to the presence of the aliens in their midst.

And so, when the second winter descended upon Lonely Camp affairs very soon became desperate. The young and the maimed were the first to go; gaps appeared in the ranks of the strongest. Snow came early and drifted deep; the cold was intense. For days on end the cats were besieged in the cabins waiting for the gales to abate, or the still, grey billows to form a crust that would bear their weight. Then they would steal out, desperate with hunger, to fling themselves upon anything they should chance to meet. Knowing nothing of pack law, each was solely intent on his own hunting, and in many a swift and bloody battle gave his own life for the prolongation of his enemy's.

Twice the wolves made sudden forays upon the clearing, heading off stray cats from tree or building; picking them off the top rail of the fence; even following them into the cabins, up caulk-pitted stairs to lofts and bins and over straw-heaped bunks. Luckily, there were many convenient rafters and ledges, and the casualties were vastly disproportionate to the excitement. Thus, in one way or another, tragedy haunted Lonely Camp persistently, until by spring there were only twenty-three survivors, including Grey Mother and Old Tom, and these bore pitiful signs of the terrible struggle they had been through.

However, even this experience failed to dampen the ardour of the remnant. The will to live and the will to propagate are inseparable—indeed, are phases of the same instinct. So again appeared the inevitable downy bundles of blind and complaining innocents, with appetites out of all proportion to their bellies. The census doubled over-night, and the torn and scraggy mothers needs must forage swifter and farther than ever, although luckily into a bountiful spring teeming with fresh abundance. Skunks sometimes took advantage of an owner's absence to lighten her day's work, and, indeed, so did certain of the closest relatives. Throughout the summer months life was well in the ascendant, however, and the feline colony waxed fat and kicked.

II.

The dozing cats raised their heads, listening intently. Their ragged ears had caught the sound of footsteps, clumsy, hurried movement that only a human makes. Grey Mother and Old Tom recognised the sound with who knows what stirring of half-forgotten memories and emotions, but to the rest it was strange, and therefore ominous, and the hair on backs and tails rose defiantly. Nearly two-score pair of baleful, yellow eyes stared fixedly toward the northern side of the clearing.

A child stepped into the blazing sunlight, and stood staring about him. His faded jersey pinked against the olive-green background like a patch of firewood. His uncapped hair was brown and matted and upended like

storm-tossed thatch. His round, grimy cheeks were striated with tear rivulets. Presently he lifted his hands appealingly toward the cabins and stumbled forward. A frightened tortoiseshell on a nearby log snarled and spat venomously as he passed. The door of the nearest building hung by one hinge. He pushed it open and, standing on the sill, wailed hoarsely, "Daddy! Daddy!" Then realising he was at the stables, he turned, and ran toward the main cabin. Here the winds had toppled the door on to the floor. He stopped a yard within the entrance to again shout for daddy. There was no response, except that presently his voice came whispering back at him from some far-off hill. The awful silence struck him dumb. He cringed back, mouth open, staring through puffy lids into the shadowy interior. As he began to comprehend the desertion dimly, the cobwebs and the dust, his eyes became focused on a long bench against the opposite wall, where an angular black cat with a bent and bony tail glared rigid with hate. Clutching hungrily at even this straw of comfort he tottered forward, gasping, "Pussy, Pussy!" Pussy's razor-like back bent into an inverted V, the bony tail jerked violently like a pump-handle and, just as the boy's hands were about to fall upon it, the cat shot up to a projection of rusty stove-pipe, whence it broke into a tirade of threats and curses. The child's thin shoulders shook with slow sobs. He fell hopelessly on to the nearest bunk, his legs dangling to the floor, his face buried in the chaff.

Presently he became aware that something was brushing gently but persistently against his calves. Then something sharp pricked his thigh. He raised his head. The face of a big grey cat was thrust close to his own. Its cheekbones ridged its taut hide; its lips were parted in a perpetual grin; one ear was in shreds, while the other stood up in bony prominence. But the boy recognised it at a glance.

"Dear little Grey Mother!" he cried, and scooping it into the bunk, he wrapped both arms about it, soaking its fur with his tears.

The Maltese replied with low, throaty whines, as a cat will do when returning to its kittens, and with much licking of the lad's fingers and cheeks. Fear had lifted, and presently he was asleep.

The cat extricated itself from the encircling arms with scrupulous care, and was gone. The sun slid nearer and nearer to the western side of the clearing, pushing the jagged spruce shadows farther into the open, until they rested heavily across the cabins. The silence was intense. At last the ruddy light found a gaping rent in the dam and, bursting through, flooded the innermost recesses of the bunk-house. It warmed a handleless dipper beneath the bench, turned a rusted tobacco tin to burnished copper, caressed the extravagant beauty of a coloured print upon the wall, and filled the space between door and window with a revolving pillar of golden dust-motes. Finally it found the earth-red hair of the sleeping child, and turned it, too, to copper. Thereupon he awoke.

He clambered down and searched for food. All his eager hands could find were a few matches, bits of candle, broken crockery, and a general assortment of rubbish. For three days now he had gone without anything more substantial than pigeon-berries and hazel-nuts, and his short legs wobbled unsteadily. He sank upon the bench, staring blankly into the painted twilight. He was too weary to cry. A cat began yowling dismally back of the clearing, and he thought of Grey Mother.

"Pussy, pussy, pussy," he began whispering to himself. Pussy appeared in the doorway, her scrawny tail writhing, her eyes distended warily. She came straight to the lad and dropped something at his feet. It was a chipmunk. Bobby understood. He had often seen his father hand over chipmunks to his mother for stew. With trembling eagerness he picked up the little limp body, pulled out his broken-bladed jack-knife, and essayed to skin and clean the carcass. It was a messy job he made of it. Not a hundred feet from the cabin a spring bubbled up in a sunken barrel. He reached for the dipper and hastened for water, followed closely by the cat. Then he threw refuse and chips into the square, sheet-iron stove and applied a match. The flame roared angrily, spewing sparks and smoke

through countless apertures and the open pipe-hole. The upper half of the cabin was blotted out with smoke.

Presently the water in the dipper began to boil. The lad dropped in the meat. Minutes dragged like hours as he watched. Suddenly he could wait no more. With a couple of sticks he removed the tin and forked out the meat. Never had anything tasted quite so good. It was even better than his mother's buckwheat cakes and maple syrup. Indeed, only the head and tail came to Grey Mother.

The sun was now down and the cabin full of shadow. Old Tom stuck his grizzled head in the doorway, stared an instant at the visitor, and slunk in. He was followed by other cats—yellow and white and barred and patched—furtive, vindictive, primordial cats, snarling with fear and hate, and giving the child a wide berth. Only Grey Mother kept close, watching the door. Bobby dropped the last bone and stretched. An owl wailed softly from far away. His heart quickened its beat. He became aware of the gloom, and rising, tip-toed to the entrance. A dull rusty-red still persisted over the blotted forest.

How black and mysterious the forest looked. The Maltese whimpered, and he jumped. The fear that had been his for three terrible nights was getting him again. He caught at the fallen door, and with desperate energy reared it into place. Only after he had braced it with a dozen poles and boards did he feel secure. Then he crawled into the farthest corner of the upper tier of bunks, drew a great heap of straw and fir needles about him, and straightway fell asleep.

That night the wolf-pack chanced to pay another visit to Lonely Camp. It swept into the clearing, swift and noiseless as a cloud-shadow. Not until it was stopped by an unexpected barrier did it give voice to its emotions. Then it dropped on its haunches and howled at the star-pierced sky. The terrible whip-like noise cut into the lad's dream. He sat up, clammy with horror. The cats were rasping and spitting all about him in the dark. A tail brushed his face. He gathered Grey Mother into his arms. The noise stopped as abruptly as it had begun. There was sniffing, scratching, a whine or two—then utter silence. Even the cats were still. The whole world seemed a pair of black ears, listening, listening. The boy cowered with tense muscles, until merciful sleep took him gently in her arms and laid him back upon the straw.

III.

Five bitter days passed, and no one came to Lonely Camp. The temperature dropped a few degrees, putting a skin of ice on the dipper at night and edging the winds until they hurt. To the lad's fearful thought winter was close upon him. He dared not stay; he dared not leave. He stood day long in the doorway watching the mouth of the trail for the slouching figure of his father, while Grey Mother crouched beside him or else went about her hunting. In spite of her hunting he was always hungry, cruelly hungry. He thought hours on end of his mother's gingerbread and sugar cookies and blueberry pie. Boiled meat sickened him. The matches were nearly gone. Must he, then, eat it raw? Why did not Daddy come? Perhaps they were angry because he ran away? Perhaps they had quite forgotten him? Perhaps they did not know which way he went, and were looking all over the world for him, and Daddy was sad and Mummy was crying. He did not want Mummy to cry. He would never run away again. In spite of the terrible forest, he would go to her. He would follow the trail, and Grey Mother would go too. Yes, he would go now. There was a big glass of buttermilk and maybe warm gingerbread waiting for him. He went in and put the matches in his pocket. "Pussy, pussy!" he called, and struck manfully out, and pussy, with a low trill, trotted after. Not until he had gained the edge of the wood did he glance back. Grey Mother was at his heels, a hundred yards behind slunk the disreputable Tom, and behind him again trailed the vanguard of a great company of cats who had refused to be deserted by their leaders. Here was companionship indeed. He trudged on with greater courage. They would all come home with him, of course, and occupy the abandoned stables

back of the woodshed. How pleased Mummy would be, and what glorious batches of fluffy kittens would result!

The trail opened before him like an endless black-green tunnel. The low sun could only reach its floor in spots and splashes, and the fallen leaves were dank with frost. The lad stuck his hands into his little pockets and shivered. He glanced apprehensively from side to side, but seldom behind. His ragged army was behind, guarding his rear. Some held to the open trail, while others foraged continuously among the underbrush, cutting a wide swath in the small life of the wilderness as they moved. Hunting was far more profitable once they had left the clearing well behind. Grey Mother laid two chipmunks at the boy's feet with scarcely an interruption in the journey, so that when weakness forced him to pause he had something with which to renew his strength. He endeavoured to start a fire with damp twigs and wasted three or four matches before he succeeded. Then he found he had but one match left. No matter. He would surely be snug at home before nightfall. He gave one chipmunk to Grey Mother, and skinned and spitted the other on a stick. As he roasted it, Old Tom and his savage offspring hunted and wrangled about him.

But there was no rest for Bobby. As he sat on a hummock, tearing greedily at the half-cooked meat, his mind was clouded with dread. Suppose the night should catch him? He imagined it even now searching for him through the swamps and thickets. He must not delay another instant. Unconscious of his fatigue, he rose and started on, the remains of the chipmunk still clutched in his greasy fingers. The Maltese followed and, as news of his action permeated the forest, so did the whole army of stragglers. Now the old logging-road climbed upward, crossing a ridge of beeches and maples. They billowed above him in clouds of amber and scarlet until the clear autumnal air swam with colour. Their heaped treasures tinkled musically about his knees. An alien hemlock smutched the blazing canvas with sepia. The jagged slit of sky in the high foliage was the intense blue of lapis lazuli. Not a bird-note broke the stillness, not a leaf stirred—just colour—colour! Bobby's faded red sweater made an ugly spot of brown; his tiny, unkempt figure made pathetic contrast with such lavishness of pomp and glory. Surely man was the least of all Nature's children! He trudged slowly by, like some squalid Piper minus his pipe and his apparel, followed reluctantly by a furtive and unlovely host.

For a time there were open glades where the sun crashed through, hinting of man's work. But the lad's hope fell again as the trail dipped toward evergreens, and the colour died out behind him. Instead of fallen leaves his feet trod on woodbine and ground-pine, moss and dried spruce cones, and the stench of muck and rotting lily-pads was in the air. It was growing ominously dark here in the valley. Increasing his pace seemed to have no effect. The shadows continued to rise about him like an incoming tide. Grey Mother trotted awkwardly in order to keep up. He heard a curious rubbing sound behind him, and stopped abruptly. Through the gloom of the trail's bend, a hundred yards back, ran old Tom and a fungus-orange tabby. They also stopped abruptly, and fell to licking at their scrawny ribs. But the boy went on relieved. A whip-poor-will whistled with lonely insistence. Then a stag bounded frantically across the trail, bringing a sharp sob into the boy's throat. Now his ears caught the purr and titter of running water. Running water was a friendly thing. The trail dipped and dipped again, something gleamed softly through the dusk, and he was beside a broad, shallow stream. Night being inevitable, he would stop here. He set about gathering all the loose limbs, slabs of bark, stump refuse and inflammable debris he could find, and piled it close to the water's edge. When his courage could no longer withstand the thickening shadows, he touched his last match to a roll of birch-bark and drove them back among the cedars. Then he lay down in a mossy hollow between the fire and the stream, and prepared to feed the flames throughout the night. But the water talked to him in a kindly, natural way, reassuring him greatly, and Grey Mother

was purring contentedly in his arms, and the heat of the fire was so soft and cuddling and—and—— So he slipped gently off into a dreamless land where not even an echo of grim reality strayed, and left the sparks to finish their dancing and crawl into their holes, the ragged army to bunk for themselves among the branches, and the inscrutable night to crowd in closer and closer to this small atom of humanity and the grey cat.

Suddenly the boy sat up, his ears torn with noise. A bedlam of hisses and screams raged about him in the dark. He blew frantically at a pocket of live coals. A spark or two scattered, touched a fragment of punk, and leapt into tiny flame. From the corner of his eye he caught a shadow sliding away. With both hands he showered leaves and twigs upon the coals. Flames ran out and stabbed sharply at the crushing darkness. Now he saw Grey Mother standing on guard, her tail like a moth-eaten boa, her arched back thorny with up-ended fur. She spat toward the forest with demoniac venom. He threw on more fuel, and suddenly, from the impenetrable caverns of the cedars, there burst that unearthly, whip-like crescendo of a wolf-pack cheated of its prey.

Although the noise stopped almost instantly, and the Maltese fell to smoothing out her coat, the lad continued to feed the fire with lavish hand until the last stick was gone. Then, looking fearfully over his shoulder, he saw a patch of watery grey outlining the saw-edged firs, and knew that the terrible night was over. He stuck both fists into his smoke and tear-blurred eyes and shuddered.

Every protruding boulder seemed to pedestal a cat.

By the time the fire had burnt itself down the sky-patches were a deep salmon, and the water was dabbling the eddies with pink foam-patches. It was numbing cold. He started off awkwardly, as though his legs were stilts, and his followers fell in, far in the rear.

In half a mile the trail jumped the stream. The lad waded out, heard a plaintive mew, and turned to see Grey Mother waiting at the water's lip. As he took her in his arms he

remembered the others. They would not permit of such liberties, that was certain, and yet he would not abandon them to the wolves and winter. So he started down the shore, looking for stepping stones, and, as luck would have it, found the river almost blocked with boulders just around the bend. Here he waded over, and struck back to regain the trail. Presently Old Tom leapt on to the first rock, and stood there, jerking his tail nervously. Then he sprang across a yard of twisted current on to the next stone, and from there went without hesitation until he had gained the far shore. After him came a coal-black animal, snarling with abhorrence, and then a tiger, a tortoise-shell, a dirty grey-white, and so on, until every protruding boulder seemed to pedestal a cat. Two or three half-grown kittens were brushed into the water, and were swept, mewing piteously, through the riffle into quiet pools below. But the lad was far ahead, forging doggedly forward, and thinking only of his mother and a plate of warm gingerbread.

He had not eaten since the afternoon before. His limbs no longer bothered him, nor his stomach either. His head seemed to be floating in a curious way, as though detached from his body. He was not a bit tired now. He could go on indefinitely. Nothing really mattered—except that gingerbread. Thus, when the trail again crossed the river, he mechanically plucked up Grey Mother, but thought not at all of her kith and kin, who congregated irresolutely among the shore alders to wait on fate. A pair of Canada jays followed him a piece with strident raillery. Partridges drummed hollowly all about him. A big buck rabbit sat up beside the trail unnoticed. Nothing mattered, not even the evening shadows. They reached out grotesque shadows; they herded in hollows and thickets to watch him go by. The road snaked on interminably.

Now the sun had its eye to a single aperture in the forest. Now it was gone. The grey, impalpable dust of night drifted over the wilderness. The boy finally paused, and tried to rub the darkness from his eyes. Grey Mother mewed anxiously. Although certain peculiar visions fled the darkness remained. But there stretched a wide clearing on his right. He noticed it for the first time, and, what is more, noticed that beyond the broken fangs of stumps and tangle of wild grape-vine sagged the ruins of a lumber-camp. Instinctively he turned towards it. Half the roof had caved in; doors and sashes were long gone; moss and spider-webs and fireweed cluttered the knock-kneed entrance. But it still breathed of man and his omnipotence, and the lad pushed in, and dropped inertly upon a pile of débris. For the space of a minute the grey cat stood tense and silent beside him, questioning every hole and corner with her huge, glassy eyes. Then she sat down, licked futilely at her matted fur, and stared again. A frosty rind of moon stood in the crooked doorway. An owl barked sharply. The night cold had begun to flatten its clammy belly against the earth, squeezing wisps of mist from every swamp and bog. The boy slept.

IV.

John Boyce had been tramping the wilderness for more than a week like a man demented. Many of the settlers had given up the search for the Boyce kid and gone home. "Drownded, more'n likely," said public opinion. But the father would search until the snows flew and after.

However, he must eat and sleep now and then. His grub had given out, and he was turning homeward for more. His tall, stoop-shouldered figure swung swiftly down the trail. His face, haggard behind bristles, stared straight ahead into the gathering darkness. While his eyes searched forward his visions were of the past. He saw Bobby running to leap into his arms; Bobby asleep in his trundle-bed; Bobby bewailing the departure of the cat, and Bobby in a thousand other poses and places.

Sometimes these visions stabbed sharply at his throat or weakened his knees until they trembled under him. Sometimes his lips mumbled awkwardly over prayers, but more often he cursed as only a lumber-jack can—slowly, monotonously, without malice—an incoherent mutter of backwoods oaths and

obscenities. Far below, on his right, the valley became plugged with mist; while across Smith's clearing, on his right, a young moon was pitching into the spruces. He saw neither mist nor moon as he ploughed forward—only his victims.

Something struck sharply at his ear. He waited, and presently it came again. Only the squeak of a bear cub! With a curse he went on. But the noise continued, drawing closer. Something presently brushed his hand. He started and peered closely. A cat. Suddenly he snatched it up.

"By heavens! It's Grey Mother!" he growled, his shoulders beginning to shake. "You've come home at last. But where's Bobby? Have you seen my Bobby?"

He strode on, and the cat began to struggle. He paid no heed until it scratched him. Then he dropped it, and saw it trot back along the trail, mewing eagerly.

"Got kittens hid somewhere," he muttered. "T' 'ell with it!"

But he could not dismiss the incident so easily. He saw Bobby's tear-stained face that morning in the stable-yard, and heard his own consoling promise: "She'll be returned to yer, sonny, good as new." He had broken his promise, and had been stared at with round, accusing eyes when he sought to excuse himself. Those eyes were accusing him now. So he groaned and followed heavily, his sorrow keened to a desperate pitch by this strange meeting.

In a few minutes he was back to the clearing. The cat jumped widely to a fallen trunk, and disappeared among the tangle of vine and mullens. It reappeared, moving as nimbly as a squirrel towards the deserted camp. He stumbled and cursed his way to the entrance.

"Pussy, pussy!" he called stupidly.

He struck a match, throwing the light from his cupped hands. The frail light wavered a moment along the rotted logs, and went out.

"Hang the cat!"—and he stepped aside to light another match.

A heavy object rustled the dirt to his left. He thought of bears, and stroked the match hurriedly across the seat of his pants. As the flame sprang up, a choking wail burst from the shadows:

"Daddy, daddy, daddy! I want to go home!"

John Boyce dropped the match and sprang forward, and there, in the darkness, he gathered Bobby into his hungry arms and rocked him to and fro as though he were a baby.

A little later a tall woodsman was striding lightly through the starlight towards the settlement. He moved swiftly, in spite of the fact that a husky lad lay in his arms, and a big grey cat clung tenaciously to his right shoulder, and nibbled at his ear.

LIFE

I.

And so we go on—another year,
A little laugh, a silent tear;
A little loss, a little giving,
A lot of love and much forgiving.
What does it matter the fortune won?
Twenty and thirty and forty years on!

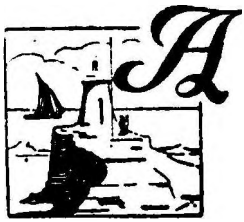
II.

And so we go on—come weal or woe,
We play the game to the end—and go.
A friend or two to hold our hands,
Perchance just one who understands.
That is what matters when life is done—
Forty and fifty and sixty years on!

E. Norman Torry

The Moon and Jeffcot

By E. M. INGLEBY



A HALF-MOON hung low over the city, and Jeffcot, contemplating it from the corner of a quiet side street in Bloomsbury, where it intersected another street, thought of the countryside. He thought of the country, maybe, because it is there that the moon holds its natural sway as the illuminant of night, unchallenged by the impertinence of the man-made lights of cities, which make it an alien, unregarded thing. Also, perhaps, because if one has to be homeless, it is a better place in which to be homeless than the streets of London. Perhaps, too, because the very association of Bloomsbury with lodging-houses rubbed in the fact that he had no lodging, and made him want to get away from it.

Jeffcot himself did not trouble to probe into and analyse the feeling he had, that he would like to get away into the country. He simply had it. On such a night—it was a night early in the wonderful October of '21—a homeless young man might do worse than ensconce himself snug in a farmer's rick, and lie and look up at that moon which hung in the sky like a great mellow cheese, though it really wasn't one, of course, and it would be useless to wish that a piece might drop off and fall at his feet.

He shrugged his shoulders as a commentary on the fact that he had eaten nothing since breakfast, and that his pockets were empty.

He had never been of a particularly thrifty habit—he was young, as I say—and his spell of unemployment had exhausted his funds. That evening he had had to tell his landlady that he was unable to discharge his bill, and —— There are landladies *and* landladies in Bloomsbury, just as in other quarters. The species to which Jeffcot's late landlady belonged is indicated by the fact that she *was* his late landlady, and that his belongings, she had clearly explained, would remain in her custody until he redeemed them by paying his bill.

She had also observed that she did not really care for lodgers with "things against them," thus confirming his suspicion that she was acquainted with the reason for his summary severance from the service of his late employers.

He had no particular animus against her. Landladies had to make a living. And she was certainly right in saying that he was not likely to get another situation without a character. It might be the most sensible thing

to remove himself right away from London. In the country he might stand a chance. Some village shopkeeper would probably be only too glad, without probing into the whys and wherefores of things, to avail himself of the services of a smart young Londoner.

He had, it will be perceived, a touching belief in the inherent superiority of the Londoner over the rustic, and a guileless faith in the Arcadian virtues of the village shopkeeper.

The thing was, which way could he trek? There are 64 points to the compass, and they all pointed to the country. The spin of a coin might assist, but one cannot conveniently spin a coin in its absence. Or he might close his eyes, turn round a few times, open them, and follow the direction of his nose as nearly as circumstances permitted.

It was, it will be seen, despite its recent unkindliness, emphatically a case for Providence to take into consideration, and Providence did. It sent a very fine specimen in the way of motor-cars rolling down the street, and pulled it up just before him.

The door of the closed tonneau opened, and a burly, flashily-dressed man stepped out. The chauffeur put his head round with an unpleasant expression, shifting in his seat to do so, for the flashily-dressed man had alighted on the near side, and it struck Jeffcot that his tone lacked the civility one might expect from one's chauffeur.

"What's wrong?" he demanded. "What d'yer want to stop for?"

"Nothing wrong yet, my boy," retorted the other. "But it's a quarter to ten."

In confirmation, a church clock began to chime the three-quarters; but the chauffeur did not seem impressed by its testimony. He merely growled:

"What about it?"

Jeffcot, as explained, was standing on a corner at the intersection of two streets; on the farther corner stood a public-house. The flashily dressed man indicated it with his thumb.

"They close at ten in the blessed country. I'm going to get a couple of bottles while I think of it."

"You're a fool!" the chauffeur growled. "You'll be landing there blind."

"Sha'n't be the only one blind, then," chuckled the other; and Jeffcot felt his tone to be somehow offensive. "Won't ask you to come and have one. Sha'n't be two minutes."

He was backing away as he spoke, and, turning, collided with Jeffcot, and was visibly annoyed.

"Why the devil don't you look out?" he demanded.

Jeffcot, in the very act of saying "Sorry," changed his mind.

"Ditto," he remarked succinctly.

The flashily-dressed man was more visibly annoyed.

"Look here, young fellow-me-lad, you're asking for a thick ear," he said aggressively.

"Not at all," rejoined Jeffcot, more or less amiably. "Things like that I prefer to give away."

But the affair did not, to his secret relief, develop into a street brawl. The chauffeur intervened.

"You would make a scene, wouldn't you!" he said witheringly. "Have a copper along, wouldn't you! Why don't you cut along and get your blinkin' bottles if you want 'em?"

"Oh, go to —!" retorted the flashily dressed man; but he went.

"Beauty," mused Jeffcot, looking after him as he ambled across the road. "Trod on my corn, too."

By a natural association of ideas the thought of his corn suggested the thought of walking, and the thought of walking reminded him of his quandary. The car was going into the country.

The idea of asking the flashily-dressed man for a lift struck him as mildly ironic but not really helpful, and then *the* idea came to him. In capitals. IDEA! Like that.

He contemplated the car. It was a very fine specimen indeed. A car like that cost money, and a man who had money like that to spend, supposing it belonged to the flashy man, ought to have money enough to spend on his own education to impart manners to

himself. It would certainly serve him right to be taught a lesson. And even if it wasn't his car, as it probably was not——

Well, he needed his lesson in manners.

He glanced across at the public-house. The flashy man was inside, but if he didn't stop to have a drink across the bar he might be out again at any moment. He glanced back at the car. The chauffeur was sitting at the wheel, staring straight ahead. He gave Jeffcot the impression that he was in the sulks.

It was a mad idea, of course—absolutely mad!—but when one had no home, no money, no character, one might as well do something mad as sensible. Especially as there seemed nothing sensible to do.

Probably it wouldn't come off; it was a hundred to one against it.

He directed another glance across the road. Then he stepped quickly to the side of the car, opened the door, rapped out, "Drive on, you sulky devil!" in a tone which he hoped would be passable, and bundled in, all in one movement, so to speak.

And the chauffeur slipped in the clutch, and the car was off.

But Jeffcot's half incredulous "Whew!" at his success changed to sudden dismay. The car was not empty. In the farthest corner of the car sat a girl—a child, no more.

About twelve, he judged her—for it was not actually dark in the car, because of the street lights—and a fragile, flower-like little face, with great, dark eyes, was turned to him apprehensively. Metaphorically kicking himself, he was conscious, even in his confusion, of a feeling of great gentleness, even beyond that which one does feel towards a child.

"I—I'm awfully sorry!" he stammered.

He wondered, as he stammered it, what she could have to do with the flashy man.

The apprehension left her face. He saw relief in it—and wistfulness.

"You speak differently," she said, with a soft, low, liquid little note. "Differently from when you got in. And your voice wasn't like *his* then."

He was standing as he stared at her, crouching because of the roof and his height.

"It was a silly joke. I'll stop the car and get out," he said.

A little hand groped out at him—it groped, that was the thought he had, though there was no uncertainty in it—and caught at his sleeve. There was something inexpressibly appealing in the action. And something in the aspect of the great dark eyes fixed upon him which perplexed and hurt.

"Aren't *you* going to take me to daddy?" she said wistfully. "I'd rather have you stop."

He abandoned the idea of stopping the car and telling the chauffeur to turn back for the flashy man, and sat down beside her. He knew why the look of her eyes hurt him, understood why her hand had seemed to grope. And he knew why he had sensed offensiveness in the flashy man's "Sha'n't be the only one blind, then," understood the vile ribaldry of it. The eyes that were fixed upon him did not see him. The child was blind.

He was suddenly acutely sorry that the incident with the flashy man had not developed into a fracas. At that moment he would have given much to have felt the impact of his fist against that face.

"Who," he asked, "is the man who was with you? He has nothing to do with you really, has he?"

"He was taking me to daddy," she explained. "But you are taking me now, aren't you?"

"Yes," he said decisively; "I'm taking you."

"And you can tell me how he is. Do tell me that he is better. The man said he was hurt."

He held the little hand that caught at him again. Half child, half fairy she seemed to him, and all candour and trust. He realised that he could not tell her the whitest of lies. It must be the truth.

"I don't know," he explained gently. "You won't be frightened, will you? I am your friend. But it was just a sort of joke me getting in; I didn't know you were in the car. But I'm glad I did get in."

"I am glad, too," the child said soberly. "I am not frightened at all. I like the way you

speak. I can tell people by their voices just as well as by seeing them."

She put her hand up and passed delicate, sensitive finger-tips lightly over his face, and he had something of the odd, thrilly feeling that a man has at the unconscious trust of his own babe's touch. And something even beyond that, for there was both trust and conscious comprehension in her touch.

"That is how I *see* people, you know," she explained. "I knew I was right. Daddy says that he would trust my judgment before anyone's. He says he would trust it before his own. Once I had a nurse he thought so nice—but I did not like her. And I was right: she stole things—she stole things that had belonged to mummie."

Jeffcot winced of a sudden.

"I see," he said.

The child looked at him—that was how he felt it, that she *looked* at him, although her eyes were sightless—as though she wondered why he spoke as he did. But she did not put her wonder into words.

"The other man frightened me," she went on. "When I tried to see him—because I thought I might be wrong about his voice, when he was so good to take me to daddy—he said he wouldn't be pawed. And he smoked horrid cigars that made me cough."

Jeffcot glanced out to note that they were going rapidly down Kingsway. He looked at the back of the man who was driving, and smiled grimly to think of the surprise that he would have presently—and at the thought of the surprise the flashy man must have already experienced.

Carnaby suddenly swung a heavy spanner at him, and putting up his hand to ward off the blow, he reeled and pitched backward.

It occurred to him that it was time he acquainted himself with the situation more precisely. It might be all right, of course, but the flashy man was hardly the emissary he would have chosen to shepherd this flower child.

And the chauffeur might be all right.

"Who is the man who is driving?" he asked.

"He is Carnaby. He's only been with daddy a few weeks, but daddy says he drives well."

He supposed Carnaby was all right, and hardly knew whether he was relieved or disap-

pointed. Because if Carnaby was all right, he supposed the other man must be. Perhaps it was just that no one else was available in an emergency. Her father had had an accident, and the child had been sent for hurriedly.

On the other hand, it was odd that there was no woman with her. Her mother, he deduced, from the tense she had used, was dead. But surely there should have been a woman with her.

"You have a governess, I expect?" he queried; and she nodded.

"Miss Wade is my governess. She is very nice, but she doesn't think I ought to tell daddy I don't like people when they have not done anything wrong. That was because I wanted to tell him that I don't like Carnaby."

Her unseeing eyes were raised to his in anxiousness. Her lips quivered.

"I want to get to daddy quick," she said. "He was very badly hurt, that man said. There was no time to look for Miss Wade, because she was sure to have wanted to dress properly and fuss about me being dressed warm. I was in the garden listening to the pheasants in the wood—I think I know what they say—and he said we must hurry. And Carnaby had the car ready—he had telephoned him to have the car ready, he said, but not to Miss Wade, because he thought it better he should break the news to me himself—and we came right away."

Jeffcot said "I see." He did see clearly now—saw that things were not right.

"Where," he asked, "did that man say your father was?"

"He is at his business place: it is in Oxford Street. And London is so big and full of noise. Shall we be there soon?"

The car, having come by way of the Strand, was bowling down Whitehall. It swung into Parliament Street, and the grey pile of the Abbey loomed up in the night, and hard by the Houses of Parliament. High up, the lit face of Big Ben glowed. Before them lay Westminster Bridge spanning the river with its reflected lights and shadows.

The child held up her head, her nostrils dilated.

"There is water," she said. "There must be a river."

"Yes," he said, striving to keep the grimness out of his voice. "Muddy water; it may not be clear sailing."

He placed his hand on her shoulder.

"You won't be afraid," he said. "I shall have to tell Carnaby that he's not going the quickest way. He may be a little touchy. I'm going to open the door and get out on the footboard and tell him; it will be easier to explain."

The car was taking the slope of the bridge as he opened the door and, brushing past her, stepped out. And as he did so a startled cry came from one of two men who stood on the bridge, and an eager, incredulous cry from the child. He heard her crying at Carnaby to stop, but the chauffeur had put on speed, and the car shot ahead. Jeffcot nearly lurched off.

But he hung on, his face grim, and touched the chauffeur on the shoulder; and the latter turned a startled, snarling face at him, and his jaw dropped.

"Pull up!" Jeffcot rapped out. "No nonsense. I'm armed."

He had pulled his pipe out of his pocket as he climbed out on to the footboard, and its muzzle was thrust against Carnaby; and Carnaby's face went white as he jammed on the breaks and brought the car to a standstill.

"Much better," commented Jeffcot. "Now you'll get down and——"

Carnaby suddenly swung a heavy spanner at him, and putting up his hand to ward off the blow, he reeled and pitched backward on his head, in the road.

He did not see the athletic pedestrian who tackled Carnaby and held him as he sprang from his seat. For awhile a very interesting situation ceased to interest him.

. . . . .

When he came round it was to find himself on a couch in a strange room, one of three men the room held. The face of one was vaguely familiar, but he was too dazed to worry about it. He was content to lie there and think of nothing, just to be quiet.

It dawned upon him that they were talking

about him; one of the men was asking him if he felt all right.

"Lucky that devil only struck him a glancing blow," the other was saying.

"Yes, it was the tumble on his head that knocked him out," said the first.

It dawned upon him that the latter was a doctor. The other——

He suddenly sat up. He was vividly conscious. He knew the hard, masterful face of the other man well.

"Mr. Neale!" he said harshly.

"I'm Mr. Neale," answered the man. "I'm much obliged to you for what you've done for my little girl. But you mustn't talk, my boy."

"Your little girl!"

"I'm Rosalie's father."

Jeffcot had only heard him speak a few times, had not often seen him, but he realised that he had never heard his voice sound and never seen him look as he did when he spoke of the child whose name, it seemed, was Rosalie—and to him.

But the hardness in his heart was not abated.

"I'll be going," he said, rising to his feet.

The doctor was persuading him to sit down.

"I'll be going," he repeated.

"Not before I've settled accounts with you, my boy," smiled Mr. Neale.

Jeffcot laughed mirthlessly. It was odd that his adventure should have led to this—his meeting with a father who turned out to be the great Silas Neale of Oxford Street.

Afterwards he heard just how it was, that Silas Neale had gone down to the House to interview a Whip in connection with the suggestion that he should stand for Parliament, and afterwards, taking a stroll with a friend to talk things over, had been surprised to see his own car crossing the bridge. He learnt, too that, as he had surmised, he had been instrumental in foiling a scheme of abduction for ransom.

Jeffcot laughed harshly.

"I'm in your debt, Mr. Neale—for a good deal. For being out of a job over three months, for one thing; for being without a character, for another; for being broke and turned out of my digs for another; oh, for a lot of things! You sacked me for pilfering petty cash and——"

"You didn't steal it?"

"Ask Rosalie if she thinks I would.

"I knew nothing of it at the time, my boy. I was away. But I've given instructions since that nothing of the sort is to occur again without its being referred to me. I don't believe you stole the money."

"You say that just because of what I happened to do to-night."

"I say it because of what I've learned to-day. The man who did take it has been found out in other things and has owned up to that to. A letter has been sent to-night enclosing your wages to date. Now will you come back, my boy?"

And still Jeffcot wavered, unable to wipe the bitterness out of his heart.

Silas Neale put his arm about his shoulder and led him to a window and drew back a curtain. It was a room in a suite high up in one of London's great caravanserais—a suite belonging to the friend with whom he had talked on the bridge. It looked out upon a great prospect of London dimmed and beautiful in the night, decked everywhere with twinkling lights. And over it, sinking, the yellow moon in a clear sky.

"All that," said Silas Neale, a catch in his voice, "my little girl can't see it. She can't see any of the beauty about her. I try to make it up with love and—and friendships. Rosalie wants you for a friend."

Jeffcot was staring at the yellow moon.

"I was going out into the country," he said, whispering

And Silas Neale caught him by the shoulders and swung him about.

"Better, my boy; better than ever," he laughed. "I've an estate—a few thousand acres. My agent's getting an old man; he'll need replacing in a few years. How would you like to learn estate management and take it over when he gives up?"

He laughed again at Jeffcot's bewildered nod.

"Now we'll go and say good-night to Rosalie," he said. "She won't rest until she knows you're all right."

The Duke-Errant

by Ellis Pearson

No. 2. The Lair of the Wolf

A further exploit of Henry, Duke of Joyeuse, extracted from the "History of my lord and master, Henri de Joyeuse, Duc de Joyeuse, Comte du Bouchage, Maréchal de France, Gouverneur de Languedoc, etc., etc., during the years it was my privilege and honour to serve him, 1593–1599," written by his secretary and confidante, François du Broc, a gentleman of Languedoc.

THE sun was two hours past its zenith on a September day when Joyeuse, Du Broc his secretary, and a score troopers in steel and leather, journeying across Languedoc on business connected with the Duke's governorship of that province, rode into the village of Bazan. It was hot travelling that day, the roads were dusty and the flies troublesome, and there was eagerness and expectation on every face, for a village surely meant an inn, and an inn meant wine to wash the grit from dry, parched throats.

There was blue smoke circling from the chimneys and cottage doors were ajar, but as the cavalcade clattered down the long, straggling street there was not a living thing in sight save a stray dog or two, and the birds fluttering about the straw-thatched roofs, and but for the tramp of hoofs not a sound could be heard. Thus it was for two hundred yards or so, then there came to their ears the distant murmur of voices and a sound as of anguished wailing. Joyeuse, startled, looked at Du Broc.

"What's this?" he said.

Du Broc listened a moment.

"I should say—a burial, or something of the kind."

But it was no burial, for presently they turned a bend, and some distance ahead saw a crowd of men and women congregated on a patch of green in front of a little grey church. Silence fell on them as the party approached, and they scattered in evident alarm, and on the ground Joyeuse saw two men who, from their postures, were undoubtedly dead, and a youth with a bloodless face supported by a man and a woman. There were men with blood-stained bandages in the forefront of the

crowd, and there were women and children with tear-stained faces and a priest wringing his hands.

Joyeuse checked his horse, and after scanning them over beckoned the priest forward.

"Good father," he said, "what has been doing here?"

The priest's eyes blazed.

"Murder, murder most foul!" he cried. "I pray God's punishment on the guilty ones."

And looking heavenward his lips moved silently.

"Amen to that," said Joyeuse gravely. "But who has done the killing? And why?"

The priest's words came fast.

"An hour ago, sir stranger, I joined together in marriage Jacqueline Broux and Adrian Martin—he lies there," and he pointed to the white-faced youth supported by the man and woman. "She was a pretty maid—we called her the belle of Bazan—and he is a worthy youth. The whole village turned out to greet them as they left the church, and we were all gathered together here when The Wolf—that is how we call the Baron de Rouillac hereabouts—and his men rode up. They drew rein and watched, and when Jacqueline and Adrian came forward the baron bade them stop. 'A pretty child,' he said, and he looked Jacqueline over so evilly that she was affrighted, and ran back to her father and mother. He swore, then he turned to his men and bade them take her, and he sat and laughed while they rode over my people and killed them. Her father and brother were slain"—he indicated the two dead men—"Adrian is badly hurt, and several men are wounded. They dragged Jacqueline from the sanctuary of my church, and the Baron as he rode away with her cried out: 'You shall have her a week hence, if my men do not claim her.' Ah, God pity her!" he finished, wringing his hands afresh.

Joyeuse's face was white and his eyes blazing by the tale that was told, and there fell from his lips such a string of curses that the priest shrank back in dismay.

"Sir, sir!" he cried in remonstrance, but Joyeuse paid him no heed.

"The devil!" he cried, "the dastard! By all that is holy he shall pay for this! Name of names, that such a thing should happen in my government!"

Then he fell suddenly silent and his troopers nudged each other.

"Mark my word," whispered one to his neighbour, "there'll be something doing after this."

The other agreed.

"The Baron de Rouillac," Joyeuse said, after some moments' thought, turning to Du Broc, "I have surely heard of him before?"

Du Broc nodded.

"In his last report your lordship's steward complained of him bitterly. He sets law and order at naught, and causes more trouble than all the rest of Languedoc. They call him The Wolf because of his cruelty and inhumanity."

Joyeuse's face went grim.

"The Wolf, eh? An animal that needs destroying. We must deal with him." He turned to the priest. "Where does this Baron de Rouillac dwell?"

"The Castle of Rouillac," the priest answered; "it is six leagues away to the west."

"Did he go thither?"

"Yes, half an hour ago."

Joyeuse considered.

"How many men had he?" he questioned.

"Two score," the priest answered; "he never rides with less."

Again Joyeuse considered.

"I want a man to guide me," he said at last. "Is there one here will do so?"

A dozen volunteered, and he picked out one and bade him mount behind a trooper, then he dismounted and bent over the wounded Adrian.

"Be of good heart, my friend," he said. "If it is possible for our men to do it, you shall have your bride before another day has passed."

The lad looked him in the eyes and sobbed.

"Save her, lord," he muttered, "and I will—we will pray for you all our lives."

Joyeuse pressed his shoulder, then he rose and strode to the priest and knelt before him.

"Your blessing, father," he said, and bowed his head as the priest's lips moved.

They rode out of Bazan five minutes later,

harness jingling, long swords swinging, and armour and spears agleam in the sunshine. Through shady lanes, over open downs, through drowsy villages, up and down gentle slopes they sped, till at last, topping a hill, the river Herault came into sight, glimmering silver amidst the green of the meadows. The guide called a halt, and pointed.

"The Castle of Rouillac, lord," he said; and they saw, two leagues ahead, squatting astride a hill whose base the river skirted, a great grey building, gloomy and forbidding, its square towers bold against the blue of the sky.

Joyeuse sat and gazed.

"By my faith," he exclaimed, "a strong place that!"

"A score will not take it, my lord," said Du Broc.

Joyeuse looked at him.

"You were ever a gloomy soul, my friend; we shall see." He gazed again. "If there are watchers on those towers," he said, "they will see us if we ride in a body along this road." And to the guide, "We do not want to be observed; is there another way?"

The man pointed down the hill. Below was flat, wooded country, extending almost to the river.

"The woods are thick," he said, "but they are passable. I can lead you through to the village of Rouillac. From there 'tis barely half a mile to the castle."

"Then lead on," Joyeuse ordered; and at that they rode down the hill, and shortly entering the wood, proceeded slowly in single file.

Close on two hours later the guide again called a halt.

"The village is not more than five minutes' walk away," he informed them, and pointed to the left.

Joyeuse dismounted, and ordered his men to do likewise.

"Is it large or small?" he questioned.

"It was a big place once, lord," the man replied, "but it is a dead place now. Two months agone when I passed through there wasn't a soul in it. Nobody can live in a place within ten miles of The Wolf."

"Oh, by the saints, there shall be a reckoning for all this!" cried Joyeuse, and he stamped to and fro, cursing bitterly. Then he gave orders for the horses to be tethered, and leaving two men in charge the rest made for the village. They found it deserted, a dead place, as the man had said. Cottage roofs were gaping, gardens were wild and overgrown with weeds, and there were untilled lands stretching mile on mile; a smell of decay was in the air.

They traversed the street to its further end, and from there viewed the castle. It was reared a hundred feet above the Herault, and the hill on which it stood was steep and laved on two sides by the river, which there made a turn. From where they stood they could see no entrance, and Joyeuse, ordering the men keep out of sight, with Michel, his captain, made across the fields, taking advantage of every bit of cover in the shape of bush and clump of gorse. They saw the entrance shortly, and Joyeuse looked glum, for the hill was roughly wedge-shaped and the road ran up the point of the wedge and was narrow and steep.

"Lord," he said, "it will need a thousand men to take it."

"Ay," said Michel, "and they would not do it in a day."

"We will look at the other side," said Joyeuse, and they went on. There the hill was not so steep, and Joyeuse looked thoughtful. "That could be climbed," he remarked. Michel nodded. "And if there was one man in the castle," Joyeuse went on, smiling at him.

Michel looked again and considered.

"Yes, there are windows there," he said, "but are they barred?"

Joyeuse stared hard.

"That I cannot see from here," he answered; "but something must be risked. I made a promise to-day, and that promise I will fulfil."

"Your lordship is too rash with your promises," Michel said gruffly.

Joyeuse laughed and clapped him across the shoulders.

"Let us think this out," he said. They stood and gazed some time, then proceeded

back across the fields and were silent till they reached within a hundred yards of the village. Then Joyeuse stopped and spoke at length. Michel, glum and dour, strongly objected to what was proposed, but Joyeuse persisted, and in the end the captain agreed, but:

"This is the maddest thing yet," he said, with a gloomy face.

"It pleases me," Joyeuse chuckled, and with that led the way into the village.

With the rest they passed through the wood to the horses, and there Joyeuse spoke to his men:

"If all goes well there will be work such as you like to do before to-morrow's dawn. You will take your orders from your captain till you see me again. When I have gone he will explain. Now I want a length of cord, twelve yards at least, and fairly strong."

Du Broc gaped at him.

"You are going, my lord! Whither?"

Joyeuse smiled.

"To hunt The Wolf in his lair, my friend," he cried gaily.

Du Broc paled.

"Alone, my lord? 'Tis madness—madness!"

Michel spoke.

"My lord, two should be able to do more than one. If M. du Broc will accompany you——"

Du Broc's eyes appealed; and Joyeuse, on reflection, nodded:

"So be it."

A man handed a length of unravelled picketing rope to Michel, who examined it and passed it to his master.

"It will do," he said, and Joyeuse placed it inside his doublet. Without more ado he mounted, waved a farewell, and with Du Broc following made for the village. In a few minutes they passed through and were on the open road.

As they neared the castle, riding at an easy pace, men appeared in the gateway and pointed, shouting. Others joined them, till there were fully three score gathered there.

"It would seem," Joyeuse remarked, "that they do not have many visitors."

"If all your lordship's steward says is truth," said Du Broc, "they take their guests by force, and make them pay highly for their hospitality."

"Ah, a habit he must be cured of," quoth Joyeuse grimly.

They came to the foot of the hill up which the track to the entrance ran and put their horses at it. It was as much as the beasts could climb, but they accomplished it and rode in amongst the men, who opened out till they were in the entrance then closed in behind them, exchanging winks and grinning. For the most part they were reckless, evil-looking fellows, unkempt, and dressed in finery unfitting to their station.

The two men drew rein, and Joyeuse looked about him with an easy smile.

"This is the Castle of Rouillac, I think?" he said.

A man stood forward.

"That's so, sir," he answered.

"Ah!" Joyeuse dismounted and turned to Du Broc, who sprang from his saddle and joined him. "Our journey's end, my friend," he said, and to the man who had spoken: "Be good enough, my man, to inform M. le Baron—he is at home? Ah, he is. Inform him then, please, that the Duke of Joyeuse waits to see him."

"The Duke of Joyeuse?" The name broke in amazement from a score of throats, and the crowd surged forward, staring in curiosity and wonder. "Heaven, it is, it is!" cried one; "I saw him last year in Cahors!"

Joyeuse turned and smiled.

"You did, my friend," he said.

The man who had first spoken waved them back and bowed in some respect.

"This way, my lord," he said. "I will take you to M. le Baron at once. Make way there—make way!"

He led the way into a courtyard, across it, and to the entrance of the castle proper. Another man gaped at them there.

"To M. le Baron quickly!" Joyeuse's conductor ordered him. "And say that his lordship the Duke of Joyeuse is here. Hurry, hurry!"

The other sped away, and Joyeuse stopped

and looked round. High, battlemented walls enclosed the courtyard and abutted on the main building and on the massive square towers between which the great iron-studded gates were fixed. Two sides were taken up with stables, roomy enough to house three score horses, and above them were harness-rooms and store-rooms. The entrance in which they stood was guarded by a massive iron-reinforced door and portcullis besides.

Joyeuse whistled softly as he took all in.

"By the saints," he cried, "I have seldom seen a stronger place!"

The man grinned.

"There isn't a stronger in all Languedoc, my lord, and few in France," he said. "But if your lordship will follow me now I will conduct you to my master."

He led on, and the two as they followed marked well the way they went. They passed through a great hall which was used as an armoury, for around the walls were racks filled with pikes and spears, with muskets and arquebuses, and on hooks on the walls hung swords and rapiers and daggers, and there were one or two old-fashioned battle-axes. Facing the doorway were two small cannon with shot beside them, and Joyeuse's eyes glistened when he saw them.

From the hall they passed up a winding stairway of many steps, and thence into a corridor, which Joyeuse judged ran east and west of the building. In this they met the man who had gone to announce them.

"M. le Baron awaits your lordship," he said, and returning conducted them to a door at the farther end. He threw it wide and bowed them into the room.

It was large and lofty and had two windows which faced due south. The light therefrom fell full on the face of a man who sat in a chair near by. It was a fleshy face, bare of moustachios and beard, thick-lipped and sensuous. The pale eyes slightly protruded and the whites were tinged with red. The nose was large and curved like an eagle's beak. He was clad in purple velvet and had many jewels on his fingers, and there was a dagger with a gold-chased hilt at his girdle.

He eyed the two men over as they approached him, seeing in Joyeuse a small man with a fair, handsome, and somewhat ascetic face, lithe of figure, dressed in a riding suit of brown doeskin; and in Du Broc one a trifle taller, thin, and slightly bowed. His face passed from one to another, and finally rested on that of Joyeuse. Then he heaved himself from his chair and showed a figure thick-set and abnormally wide.

He spoke, and for so large a man his voice was curiously soft and somewhat husky.

"What, my lord duke, have I to thank for this—this honour?"

Joyeuse scanned him closely, then laughed.

"If you would have the truth, he said, "it is——"

"I cannot think," the soft voice said, "the Duke of Joyeuse would speak anything other."

"Oh, if it would serve me, I might do so," Joyeuse said, grinning, "but since it will not—shall we say that I come to see what manner of man it is so great a part of Languedoc holds in such fear."

The man stared, then smiled.

"Ah, they have told you that! Well, now that you have seen him?"

"I wonder," said Joyeuse, "why they fear him."

De Rouillac scowled at him.

"You do not know me—yet."

"I hope," said Joyeuse, "to know you well before I leave you."

"Doubtless you will," the Wolf said suavely, and he smiled an enigmatic smile.

He resumed his chair and motioned them to others. By his side was a table on which stood a silver jug and a single goblet. The latter he filled from the former and sipped it slowly, watching them over the rim. Presently:

"You have travelled far to-day, my lord?" he questioned.

"Far enough, by the saints," said Joyeuse. "From Nismes."

"Ah, a long journey. You are unwise to be travelling without escort."

The pale eyes searched him.

"Escort?" Joyeuse snapped his fingers.

"What need have I with escort? I am safe in my own province."

De Rouillac nodded.

"I had forgotten that. But, nevertheless, you are unwise. Strange things have befallen travellers—in this part of Languedoc." He paused a moment. "I can scarcely think, my lord," he continued, "that it was merely out of curiosity to see me you made so long a journey."

"No?" Joyeuse laughed. "You judge aright, M. le Baron: there is another reason for my visit, and I will expound it if you will permit me to enjoy your hospitality to the extent of a cup of wine. 'Tis dry work talking."

The Wolf pulled a rope, a bell jangled without, and a serving-man quickly appeared.

"Wine, and extra goblets," his master ordered, and shortly they were brought.

Joyeuse tasted, rolled the wine around his mouth, and tasted again.

"A most delectable liquor," he said. "Beaune wine of the choicest."

De Rouillac stared at him.

"When you have quenched your thirst, my lord," said he, "I would hear your other reason."

"What is your hurry?" returned Joyeuse. "This wine deserves attention. But faith, if I drink too much I might forget what I came to say; we will talk first and drink later." He replaced his goblet on the table with reluctance. "You know, M. le Baron, that I am governor of Languedoc?"

De Rouillac's pale eyes flickered.

"What of it?"

"Merely that," Joyeuse answered, "it is in my power to pass sentence upon and punish any, however great they are or think they are, who offend against the laws of my province. You would do well to remember that."

The baron's face darkened.

"Speak plainly, my lord."

"Be sure I will do that!" said Joyeuse sharply. "There are many charges against you, sir. I am told that you set law and order at naught, that you ravage and rape and kill. that—but the count of your misdeeds is too long for me to remember. If ever a man deserved to die, you are that man."

Du Broc, hitherto silent and watchful, rose and moved nearer his master.

"My lord, I beg of you," he murmured, and looked fearfully at De Rouillac. The latter sat back in his chair, gaping; then a smile spread slowly over his face, and a chuckle sounded in his throat.

"Ho, ho, my lord duke!" he cried huskily. "Do you, then, sentence me to die?"

"Why, I think I could do no better," Joyeuse answered, smiling.

The wolf showed suddenly in De Rouillac's face; his thick lips parted in a snarl, and his eyes gleamed redly. He rose, an ugly, threatening figure.

"Thunder of God! You dare to beard me thus, me, me? Fool! Because you are Duke of Joyeuse and governor of Languedoc you think you can crow over me? Fool! Do you know that I hold you at my mercy? That if I gave the word my men would send you straight to hell, and think nothing of it? Look you!"

He grabbed at the bell-rope and pulled once, twice, thrice. There was a rush of feet in the corridor, the door was thrust open, and a dozen men entered hurriedly, naked weapons in hand.

"Disarm these gentlemen!" De Rouillac ordered.

Joyeuse was suddenly abject, and Du Broc gaped at him in dismay. Submissively they stood while the men took their weapons, and the Wolf looked on and laughed.

"What now, my lord?"

Joyeuse drew a hand across his brows.

"You—you will pay for this," he stammered.

De Rouillac dismissed his men with a gesture, and they went, laughing.

"When you present the bill, my lord," he said, grinning, "and that I think you will not do. Pah!" He gave him a look that showed plainly he despised him.

Joyeuse grabbed his goblet and drank the wine at a gulp.

"My faith," he muttered, "I had not expected this!" He filled again, and quaffed

it. Then he stole a look at De Rouillac. "Excellent wine, M. le Baron," he said, with an ingratiating smile. "I swear I have never tasted better."

The Baron sneered, then turned away, his brow wrinkled deep in thought. Joyeuse considered him a moment, smiled at Du Broc, then rose, and moved to the further window and craned out his head. Below, half hidden by the mist rising from the river, were the meadows on the left on the entrance, which from there he could not see for the tower that flanked it. Thirty feet or so down was the escarpment which he and Michel had decided it was possible to climb. It was, he saw, but it would require considerable effort. He scanned the wall, but it was bare of windows below the one at which he stood, though there were two above and more on his right. He studied the sky. The sun was slowly moving nearer the horizon, painting the clouds gold and crimson with purple shadows. He stood awhile reflecting, then returned to his chair.

"A veritable stronghold, M. le Baron," he said. "It would check an army."

De Rouillac's lips curled back.

"True, my lord." Then he laughed. "If the thought is in your mind to bring an army against it, I would advise you to think again. It would come in vain. Rouillac has withstood many leaguers. But it will not come," he added decisively.

"You seem very sure of that," said Joyeuse.

The Wolf bent forward.

"While I hold you, my lord, I am sure of it."

Du Broc rose, his eyes blazing indignation.

"You would not dare——" he began.

De Rouillac scowled at him.

"To your seat, sir!" he cried, and Du Broc subsided.

Joyeuse pulled at his lip.

"I fear, M. le Baron," he said nervously; "I fear I do not understand you."

"No? Well, you shall." The Wolf sat forward in his chair. "Listen, my lord. You are governor of Languedoc. You have said it is in your power to sentence and punish those who have offended against the laws. Admitted that I have. If you sentence me to die you set a task difficult, if possible, of accomplishment. It is also in your power to pardon. That is easier, and I might promise to mend my ways. My pardon wins your freedom."

Joyeuse rose.

"I protest, sir," he cried querulously. "You take me at a disadvantage. This is an outrage!"

De Rouillac bowed mockingly.

Joyeuse reflected.

"And if I will not grant it?" he asked.

De Rouillac pointed below.

"Down there, my lord, are dungeons where men have rotted."

"Heaven's mercy!" Joyeuse shuddered. "But this is a grave matter. I am told that all Languedoc calls out for your punishment. I must have time to think."

"Oh, you shall have time," De Rouillac returned. "I will give you a week, my lord. During that time you will be—we will say my guest, though beyond the gates you will not go. My men will have instructions as to that."

"Mark you," Joyeuse cried with a show of spirit, "I give no parole."

De Rouillac grinned.

"I ask none," said he. "If you can escape you are at liberty to do so."

There came a loud clash without as he spoke, and Joyeuse started.

"What is that?"

"The outer gates," the Wolf replied. "In a few minutes the inner door will be closed and the portcullis lowered. You will not escape to-night."

There was a knock on the door, and a servant entered and announced that supper was served. De Rouillac pulled at his lip, frowning. Then:

"Tell Mathilde that I shall not need her yet awhile. She will understand." The man bowed and withdrew, and the Wolf turned to Joyeuse. "I had intended entertaining another guest, my lord," he said, his pale face shining; "but it is a pleasure I will defer awhile. Will you do me the honour of supping with me?"

Joyeuse rose eagerly.

"With the best will in the world. I trust," he added, fingering his goblet of wine—"I trust you have no lack of this delectable Beaune?"

De Rouillac eyed him thoughtfully.

"You shall drink your fill of it, my lord."

With that he led the way into the dimly lighted corridor, at the further end of which half a dozen men were waiting. He looked at Joyeuse with a smile, then shrugged his shoulders. "You may go," he called to the men, and they clattered down the stairs.

He threw open a door and bowed them into

The guide called a halt and pointed. "The Castle of Rouillac, lord," he said.

a room lighted by hanging lamps and tapers in sconces on the walls. There were two small, barred windows on the side opposite the door, and, crossing to one, Joyeuse looked out Below was the courtyard, empty now of men-at-arms, and opposite were the towers which guarded the entrance. From them came the sound of men's voices, raised in song and revelry.

He stood awhile, listening, then he turned to a table glittering with silver and glass and heavy with viands.

"I should judge, M. le Baron," he said, "that you have a goodly garrison from the noise they make."

"Five score," De Rouillac answered.

"As many as that? A rascally lot they looked to me when I entered. My faith, I did not feel over comfortable."

The Baron grinned.

"Their looks do not belie them."

"Yet you trust yourself to them?"—Joyeuse's look was admiring.

"So far, my lord, so far. They serve me well if I pay them well. Two score are tried and true, and have served me long. Half of those two score I would trust with my life, and do. They sleep in here, the rest in the towers at the entrance. They are safer there."

"I think you are wise in that," quoth Joyeuse, "and I must admit I feel safer for knowing it." He tasted a morsel and fell to eating, and De Rouillac passed him the wine. "Fill up, my lord," he said; and Joyeuse filled up and emptied the cup and smacked his lips in delight.

After that there was ever a full cup ready to his hand, and very soon he was bubbling with good humour.

"A most admirable capon, M. le Baron," he said presently. "I vow I have never fared so well. And with this wine—by the lord, I think I shall stay the full week with you."

"Pray do not stint it, my lord," De Rouillac returned. "It pleases me that my wine pleases you."

Joyeuse beamed on him.

"I swear, M. le Baron, I find you an excellent fellow. I begin to understand you. They call you—what is it?—ah, the Wolf! But I swear it is a misnomer. They do not know you."

Du Broc looked at him in dismay, and the Baron's eyes gleamed.

"Yes, that is it, my lord, they do not know me. I have, I fear, been sadly maligned. More wine, I beg of you?"

He filled Joyeuse's goblet again.

Joyeuse sipped it appreciatively.

"I begin to think," he said, "I have been misled, that I have been deceived. 'Sdeath, if it is so!"

He smote the table fiercely.

"I can assure you, my lord," the Wolf said softly, "it is so. I have done many wrong things, but what man hasn't? But there is naught you cannot pardon."

Joyeuse looked vinously grave, then he patted De Rouillac's arm.

"I do assure you, my friend," he said solemnly, "that these matters shall be put to rights. We will—ah, we will talk of it when we have finished this wine. 'Tis almost done, alas!"

"One more goblet, my lord," said De Rouillac, pouring it out; "but if you would like more——"

Joyeuse waved his hand.

"Do not tempt me, M. le Baron. I fear if I drank more 'twould get to my head, and we must talk." He stopped and drew a hand across his brow. "Faith, it grows hot in here, my head reels."

He rose and staggered to the window. Not a sound now could be heard save the rattle of chains and the movements of horses in the stables. The place, save in that one room, seemed asleep.

Joyeuse reeled back.

"Pah! The reek of those stables! 'Tis overpowering. Let us to the other room, I beg of you. I—I grow faint in here."

He swayed, and De Rouillac caught him, a curse on his lips. He hesitated, then looked at Du Broc.

"A taper, please. And light the way to the other room. He will be better there."

Swiftly Du Broc led the way down the corridor and into the room where they had first met de Rouillac. The Baron pushed Joyeuse into a chair, then unbolted a shutter and thrust it wide. The cool night air entered, and Joyeuse looked up.

"Ah," he muttered; and, rising, staggered to the window and put out his head.

De Rouillac seated himself and watched, his expression scornful and contemptuous. Du Broc moved nervously, his face pale and troubled. Thus a few minutes passed, then at last Joyeuse turned and laughed.

"Lord, M. le Baron," he said, "your wine is more potent than I thought."

"What matter," De Rouillac answered, "so long as you have enjoyed it?"

Joyeuse laughed.

"There is no doubt of that," said he.

The Baron considered him. Then:

"You feel well enough to talk now, my lord?" he questioned. "The hour is very late."

"To talk?" Joyeuse gaped at him.

"Why, yes, my lord," De Rouillac said softly. "Did you not agree that I have been sadly maligned? Did you not say that you would have the matters we spoke of put to rights?"

Joyeuse stared.

"Did I say that? Well, if I said it——"

He moved forward, staggered, and fell on the Baron's knees, and before De Rouillac could thrust him off, his hand swooped down and drew his dagger, and like a flash he had it at his throat.

"A move," he cried softly, "and I let out your life! Come Du Broc, Du Broc!"

A brief second Du Broc gaped in amazement, then he darted forward. But De Rouillac made no movement to escape. Surprise, utter and complete, held him, and he stared into

Joyeuse's blazing eyes as if he could not believe his own. Joyeuse rose slowly, one hand at his shoulder thrusting him back, the other keeping the dagger at his throat.

"Remember," he said, "a move, or a word above a whisper, and this goes home."

To Du Broc:

"In my doublet, some cord; tie him to his chair, quickly, quickly!"

Three minutes saw it done, and De Rouillac made no move and spoke no word. His pale eyes protruded, and the sweat stood in beads on his brow. Only when the two men stood away from him did he find words:

"Thunder of God!" and he stared at his bound hands in stupefaction.

Joyeuse laughed softly.

"Did I not say, M. le Baron, that I would put those matters to rights? I will, by my faith, but not in the way you thought. You thought me drunk, eh? If you could see under your table you will find more wine there than I drank. And you thought me a craven and a poltroon. Ah, you do not know Joyeuse!"

The Wolf stared at him, speechless, and Joyeuse turned to Du Broc.

"You might have known me, my friend. I had to make him think me harmless. No—say nothing, there is work to do. Listen at the door and see if all is quiet. I heard nothing from the towers."

Du Broc softly crossed the room, and Joyeuse turned again to De Rouillac. The Baron was more himself, and there was a flame of rage in his eyes.

"What think you to gain by this?" he growled.

"Much," Joyeuse answered. "More than you could have thought possible. First I desire speech with a bride you carried off by force from Bazan. Ah, yes"—as De Rouillac's mouth fell wide—"I know of that—a shameful deed! It brought me here. That act has been the cause of your undoing."

"It is a lie!" De Rouillac muttered.

"No," said Joyeuse. "If I mistake not, she was the guest you had intended entertaining to supper had not we arrived. You will summon her here."

"By Heaven, I will not!"

Joyeuse looked at Du Broc, and Du Broc shook his head.

"I heard no sound at all."

"Good," said Joyeuse, then glanced round the room. "That table," and he indicated the one on which stood wine jug and goblets, "place it here, in front of him, so." He moved back. "Now they will not see that he is bound. You will stand there, my friend, facing him, and if he tries to convey a warning you will advise me. I shall be here, so." And he leaned over the back of De Rouillac's chair, the naked dagger in his hand.

"M. le Baron," he went on, "I shall ring now for a servant, and when he appears you will order the girl to be brought you. You understand?"

"By Heaven, I will not!" De Rouillac repeated.

"I think you will," said Joyeuse, and he pulled out the bell-cord.

The bell jangled, and there followed a tense silence broken only by the deep breathing of the three men; then came a scurry of feet along the corridor. A knock came, the door opened, and a man entered, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

"My lord?"

"Now, M. le Baron," whispered Joyeuse, and he pressed the point of the dagger into his neck where skull meets spine.

De Rouillac quivered, and a low growl escaped him. He hesitated, then, as the dagger made itself felt more:

"Bid Mathilde bring me the girl from Bazan," he ordered huskily.

The man grinned and withdrew, and they heard him pass up the corridor. A curse came from De Rouillac.

"You'll pay for this!"

Joyeuse laughed.

"To use your own words," he said, "when you present the bill, and that I think you will not do."

Silence fell again, and presently it was broken by the sound of a scuffle in the corridor, and a shrill voice reached them: "Bite, would you, you hussy? Oh, you'll pay for

these tantrums!" Then the scuffle continued till it reached the door.

A moment, then the door was thrust open, and a woman, big, raw-boned, and coarse of face, entered the room, dragging by the arm one who was little more than a girl. Viciously she swung her round and thrust her forward, then stood, arms akimbo, and glared.

"A nice thing," she shrilled, "to drag a woman from her bed to bring you this hussy. Much good may she do you!"

She glared again, then flung out of the room. The girl, with a low cry of terror, darted after her, but Joyeuse held up his hand.

"Child," he said in a low voice, "you need have no fear."

With her hand on the door she turned, showing a face which, for all the fear in it, for all the tear-stained cheeks and dark ringed eyes, was sweetly fair. She was tall and slim, and dressed in white stuff much torn and crumpled.

She looked at Joyeuse, and there was that in his face which gave her heart, for she moved forward a pace or two. He smiled at her.

"You are Jacqueline Broux, from Bazan?"

She stared at him, speechless.

He spoke again

"They have not harmed you, child?"

"No, no!"

"They will not now," he said; "I am come to take you from this place."

He took her arm and led her to a chair. She sat, and her lips quivered.

"Oh, oh!" she murmured, and fell to weeping. But her tears were tears of thankfulness and joy.

Joyeuse left her and returned to De Rouillac. The latter's lips were parted in a snarl, and there was hate unutterable in his eyes. Awhile they looked at each other, then the baron spoke.

"Well, my lord duke, so much for that. What now? You will find getting into Rouillac was easier than it will be getting out. Ah, you will pay yet, my lord."

Joyeuse laughed.

"Think you that I came unprepared! You will see." And to Du Broc: "See that all is safe, my friend, then secure the door."

A moment he considered, and then:

"You are better gagged, since you can do nothing more for me," he told the baron, and he tore a piece from his doublet, and despite his struggles and curses and threats, thrust it into his mouth and made it secure.

"Watch now, M. le Baron," he said. "You will see why I wanted to come back to this room, the windows of which are unbarred. You told me Rouillac had withstood many leaguers. I do not doubt it. But the besiegers had no ally within. Rouillac will be mine before daybreak."

To the length of cord handed him by his captain he tied a goblet, and passing to the window lowered it till he felt it touch the ground thirty odd feet below. The loose end he tied to a chair, then lighted a taper and so fixed it that it was visible to anyone without. De Rouillac gaped at him in wonder, and Joyeuse grinned. "Watch, M. le Baron," he said, "and you will see that you never thought to see."

He took up the cord and pulled the goblet off the ground, and gently swung it outward so that on its return it struck the wall and gave out a slight ring. So he continued for some minutes, while Du Broc stared in amazement and De Rouillac watched with bulging eyes. At last:

"Ah!" he exclaimed; "come, Du Broc, remove this taper," and when that was done he began to haul in the cord.

He pulled it in, yard by yard, then tied to the cord came a light rope. He motioned Du Broc to give him a hand, and they pulled together. There came a scraping noise on the wall.

"Heaven send no one sleeps below," Joyeuse muttered. "But that must be risked; haul, my friend, haul; let us get it over quickly."

A dozen pulls brought a stout piece of wood a foot or so long into view, securely fastened between two stout ropes, and a foot below it another and still another. Joyeuse exclaimed in delight, and glanced at De Rouillac.

"What think you now, M. le Baron?" he laughed, and The Wolf glared in impotent rage, struggling with all his strength to free himself.

Quickly they secured the ladder, then,

"Out with the lights save one," said Joyeuse, "and let it be shaded." When that was done he bent out of the window. "All's safe," he called, and stood away.

Two minutes brought a man's face into view —Michel, the duke's captain. He sprang into the room.

"My lord," he cried, his black eyes shining, "I thank heaven you are safe."

Joyeuse grinned.

"As you see, my friend. And so is our quarry The Wolf." And he indicated De Rouillac.

Michel surveyed him and smiled grimly.

"My lord," he said, "he looks more like a trussed fowl."

"Ah!" Joyeuse chuckled. "I told him he was mis-named. But to business. There is a garrison of five score, but of those only a score sleep in here, the rest in the entrance towers. That makes our task easier. Where exactly the score sleep I do not know, but we will learn that shortly. We have how many men all told?"

"A full score, including your lordship and M. du Broc."

"Good," said Joyeuse, and looked at De Rouillac. He was ghastly white, his eyes protruded more than was usual, and the sweat was heavy on his brow, for as Joyeuse and Michel had talked he had watched man after man come in at the window, and still they came, till eighteen men had entered. And he saw they were stout men all.

His eyes met Joyeuse's, and Joyeuse laughed.

"No, you never thought to see that, M. le Baron," he said; and to Michel: "A pull on that bellcord will fetch a servant. Have him taken as he enters. He will tell us what we want to know."

Michel gave orders, and two men stood by the door. The bell jangled without, and a minute or two brought the patter of feet in the corridor. The door opened and the servant entered, and the two men seized him and covered his mouth, then brought him forward. His eyes bolted and his face went grey.

"If you put any value on your life," Joyeuse said sternly, "you will do exactly as you are bid. A score men sleep in here; you will lead us to their quarters. Do they sleep in one room?"

The man nodded.

"Yes, below, my lord."

"How many servants are there, men and women?"

"Three men besides myself, and four women."

Joyeuse reflected.

"Is there any way into the castle other than by the door opening into the courtyard?"

"No, my lord."

Joyeuse looked at Michel.

"We will first attend to the men below, then the servants. Two men will remain and guard the baron. Now, silently, men! And you, fellow, lead on! And have a care."

The servant lighted a taper, and with scarce a sound they passed into the corridor, down the stairway, and so into the hall. They paused there, and Joyeuse pointed out to Michel the two small cannon.

"They will come in useful," he said, and Michel nodded. Then Joyeuse took sword and dagger from the wall; Du Broc also.

"Where now?" Joyeuse questioned the servant, and he pointed to a door on the right of the entrance. Beneathit a faint light showed.

Joyeuse listened at it, heard no sound, and opened it slowly. It creaked and creaked again. A man sat up, stared, then as they swiftly entered he let out a yell and snatched a pistol and fired. Instantly pandemonium broke out. Shrieks and curses filled the room as Joyeuse's men stabbed and thrust and slew. De Rouillac's men, unprepared as they were, fought well and bravely. But they fought in vain. By ten minutes had passed more than half were dead and wounded and the rest tied hand and foot. Joyeuse had three men wounded and but one dead.

From without came a chorus of voices, and a furious pounding on the portcullis.

"What in the devil's name is doing in there? Open, open!" Then a face looked into the room through the small barred window that lighted it.

"By heavens!" the man cried loudly. "There are strangers in there, and they've—"

A sword thrust into his face, and he reeled back shrieking. A yell of fury rent the air.

Joyeuse ordered the men into the hall, and there whispered awhile with Michel. Then he went up the stairway with Du Broc and to the window of the room wherein they had supped with De Rouillac.

The courtyard was ablaze with light from a score torches and as many lanterns, and it was thronged with men, many of whom were still half asleep.

Their voices rose loud as they demanded to know what was amiss, but they fell silent when Joyeuse spoke to them from the window.

"Hark you to me! I hold your master prisoner, and your comrades are all either dead or helpless. This place is mine, and I have sufficient men to hold it. Will you throw wide those gates and go in peace? Or will you have me drive you out? The choice is yours." They gaped at him.

"That's the Duke of Joyeuse," cried one, and another: "He says he has sufficient men to hold it! But one man went in with him; what does it mean?"

And, "It's a trick," came from another; "mayhap, he's got the Wolf prisoner, but he has no men to hold the place."

Joyeuse laughed at them.

"What is your choice?"

"Ay, it's a trick," came a chorus. "No, no! We won't open. Let him drive us out if he can."

"That is your choice?" questioned Joyeuse.

"Ay, ay, drive us out, if you can!" they yelled.

And a pistol spoke and a bullet struck the wall by Joyeuse's head.

"So be it," he said grimly, "and so much the worse—for you." And to Du Broc: "Go, my friend, and have the ladder pulled up; it will be safer so."

Du Broc went, and Joyeuse passed swiftly below. "You have all ready?" he asked of his captain, and Michel nodded.

"Loaded with small shot," he answered.

"Then carry on," Joyeuse bade him, and Michel gave his orders.

Half a dozen men with muskets climbed the stairs, and others moved the cannon forward. Swiftly the door was opened, and the portcullis rose on its ropes till the muzzles of the cannon were cleared, then the powder was touched off, and they roared deafeningly, and shrieks of agony rose without as the shot mowed the men down. Down came the portcullis, and back came the cannon; swiftly they were reloaded and hauled to the doorway, and again the portcullis went up, and again they vomited their hail of death.

And now, from above, came the sharp crack of muskets; men fell here and there, and shrieking, cursing, the rest made headlong for the towers. There, as they struggled madly to get in through the narrow doorways, the cannon blasted them again. Soon none remained in the courtyard save dead and dying men.

Joyeuse passed to a window and looked out. By the light of one or two fallen torches which still flared he saw the place was a veritable shambles. Michel joined him and gazed awhile.

"It is scarcely possible to get them out of the towers," he said.

"Then we'll keep them in," said Joyeuse. "If the men can see the doorways have them fire with round-shot till they are choked with masonry. We'll soon have them in their senses."

Soon the cannon spoke again, and muskets flashed from the towers as the portcullis was raised, but they did not harm, and shots from the men at the windows quickly silenced them.

Joyeuse nodded as the round-shot went home.

"We'll soon have them yelling for mercy," he said, and then with a smile: "I think M. de Rouillac would be interested to see this."

He spoke to Du Broc, and Du Broc climbed the stairs. Joyeuse followed him shortly and entered the room where they had supped.

To him there De Rouillac was brought, his gag removed, and his feet untied. Joyeuse surveyed him with a grim smile, then motioned him to a window.

"Behold what you never thought to see, M. le Baron," he said, and De Rouillac looked one

He looked, and the pale eyes gleamed with uncontrollable rage, as he took all in. Curses fell from his lips, and he struggled with might and main to break his bonds.

But he soon saw that which, to him, was worse than that he had already seen. For presently, as the masonry began to crumble around the doorways and they began to fill with debris, there appeared a white cloth from a window in the tower on the right. Then came a voice, "A parley! a parley?"

The shooting ceased and Joyeuse looked out.

"Well?"

A man thrust out his head.

"What terms do you offer us, my lord?"

"No terms," said Joyeuse. "You will surrender unconditionally. You will come out one by one, without arms, and you will stand with your backs to the gates. Every tenth man will carry a torch. Say now, if you agree. If you do not, we will have those towers down on top of you."

"But you will give us our lives?"

"I promise nothing," Joyeuse answered sternly.

A minute or two, then: "We throw ourselves on your mercy, my lord."

"Do you speak for the other tower?"

"Ay, for all," came from there; "better anything than die like rats in a trap."

"Then in five minutes you will begin to come out; first the right tower, and when all are out, the left. Without arms, and each man will have his hands above his head."

He turned to De Rouillac's guards.

"Bring him below," he ordered, and he led the way. In the hall he bade the men load the cannon with small shot and be prepared to fire at a word, and others he instructed to be ready with muskets. Then the portcullis went up, and with Michel and Du Broc he passed into the courtyard.

The sky was already brightening in the east, and taking on a rosy hue. Joyeuse laughed.

"A good night's work," he said. "I do not remember enjoying anything so much. But there is something yet to do," and his face went grim. "Bring forward M. le Baron de Rouillac."

They dragged him forward, and the pale light showed his face livid.

"Stand with him there," Joyeuse ordered, and they stood with him so that his men, as they came out of the towers, saw his shame.

"Before I let you go," Joyeuse called to them, "there is a thing you will witness which may be a lesson to you."

He pointed to a beam that jutted from the store rooms above the stables. "A rope over that," he ordered.

The Baron glared at him.

"May the foul fiend have you!" he cried, and then to his men he yelled: "Curse you, will you let me die like this?"

They neither moved nor spoke, and in some faces there was delight rather than sorrow. Joyeuse's men dragged him to the rope.

And five minutes after that a body dangled from a beam. So passed The Wolf.

. . . . .

Three hours later Joyeuse and his men, one of whom had with him on his horse the girl from Bazan, rode away from Rouillac. Behind them the castle was hidden in a cloud of smoke, which presently turned to flame. Never again would it menace the peace of Languedoc.

Shortly before noon, the party rode into Bazan. Doors opened and the people flocked out, and their acclamations filled the air at sight of the girl. The priest came forward.

"Sir!" he said, gazing breathlessly at Joyeuse.

"The girl is safe, as you see," Joyeuse told him, "and she is unharmed. And the Baron de Rouillac will trouble you no more. Pray for his soul."

The priest crossed himself, and bowed his head, and Joyeuse, dismounting, lifted the girl down.

"Now lead us to the boy," he said.

In a cottage near by they found him, pale and wan. But at sight of the girl, life came to his face and love glowed in his eyes.

"Jacqueline," he cried, and "Adrian," cried the girl—and fell on her knees by the bed.

Quietly Joyeuse stole out.

No. 3. A Knave Unmasked

WHEN A GIRL'S FORTY

An Episode in the Career of Jimmy Lambert

By T. C. WIGNALL

"DID I ever tell you of the occasion when Jimmy Lambert deputised for Cupid?" asked Chick Baker, as he leaned back in his chair and bit the end off one of my cigars.

I shook my head. I was sufficiently intimate with Baker to realise that it was fatal to utter a word when he showed signs of becoming reminiscent. He hated to be answered.

"It's a funny yarn," said Chick, narrowing his eyes to follow a climbing smoke-cloud. "Every time I think of it I get confirmation of the saying that boxing and a sympathetic heart are as wide apart as the poles. Still, I didn't blame Jim. I admired him, if anything, although it was a crazy thing to do. But Jim, as you know, was always chock-full of sympathy."

I bent down and rattled the fire-irons.

"It might easily have put him out of business, though," continued Baker, more to himself than to me. He was smiling, and I was convinced that he was conjuring up a mental vision that was not displeasing. "A boxer has no difficulty in retaining his seat among the tin gods so long as he keeps on winning, but once he goes down to defeat his throne commences to totter. Jim took a chance that nearly stopped my breath. And all to bring happiness to a girl he met by accident. That's what makes the tale so very funny."

I passed the syphon.

"Like to hear about it?" demanded Chick.

I nodded, but without enthusiasm. That was the way to transform Chick into a first-class raconteur.

"Right!" he exclaimed, squaring himself in his seat. "Get your cigar going. Mine's a dud: it's burning down the side. Oh, thanks!"

* * * * *

The thing I'm going to tell you about (said Chick) happened when Jimmy Lambert was beginning to make a really loud noise in the boxing world. He had beaten eight men in succession, and the newspaper fellows were already talking about him as a possible opponent for Harry Masters, the world's champion.

I was in my element, of course. I had found the best man I had handled since Tom Mooney, and what was of even more importance, I had discovered to my great joy that Jim was as easy to train as a child.

You want to be a tutor of boxers to get the full flavour of that statement. Pugilists, in the main, are heart-breakers. If you put the baths out of bounds, it's an absolute certainty that they'll wash themselves six times a day. If you mention to them that

swimming is a fine thing for men undergoing a stiff preparation, they won't even look at a glass of water.

But Jim wasn't like that. When I laid down the law, he obeyed my instructions to the letter. I've known him get up from his meals and return to the gymnasium, so as to do something he'd forgotten. He was as straight as a die, was Jimmy Lambert, and as white as any man I ever encountered.

But at this particular period he was as miserable as an owl. He spent most of his time watching for the postman, or writing letters which he invariably tore into fragments when they were ready for the box. The reason was this. He and his girl, Florence Desmond, were not on speaking terms.

You remember Florence, don't you? That's right, she married Jim after he defeated her brother in a fight for the world's championship. She was a singer, and Jim, after falling in love with her at the Queen's Hall, had the great good luck to meet her on the Ostend boat. Her mother, if you recollect, was Mrs. Radford, the anti-boxing crusader. That was the circumstance that separated them. Florence idolised Jim, but when she got to know that he was one of the men her mother was up against, she dropped him like a broken reed.

That's what Jim was, as a matter of fact. He did not carry his heart on his sleeve, nor did he advertise his sorrows, but I did not need to be told that he was absolutely wallowing in what someone once called the Slough of Despond. The moment his work was done he'd lock himself in his room and eat out his heart. Florence at the time was touring the provinces with a high-class concert-party.

If I had known as much as I know now, I'd have gone to her and said a few words that might have been useful. But I didn't. Jim was as uncommunicative as an oyster, and the one thing he loathed was discussing his own affairs. Why, days went by before he so much as told me that he and Florence had had a little bother. I looked upon it as the usual lover's quarrel, which is my excuse for not interceding. But perhaps I ought to mention, in addition, that it was taking me all my time to keep Colinette Valery off his track. Colinette, if you remember, adored Jim just about as much as he disliked her.

It wasn't until he had put up a very bad show against a Belgian heavy-weight that it dawned on me that the best fighter in England was in danger of going to pieces. Jim had lost interest in his profession, and he was occupying the whole of his time in thinking about the girl he had lost. I could see quite clearly that unless something was done, and done very quickly, Jimmy Lambert was likely to worry himself into a very serious illness.

I went to George K. Gordon, his manager and backer. It was the only thing to do.

"George," I said, "Jim's taking the count."

"What do you mean?" roared Gordon. "There isn't a sparring partner in the world who could knock Jimmy Lambert off his feet."

"I agree," I answered; "but I'm not referring to a sparring partner. The blow has come from his sweetheart."

"What's happened?" cried Gordon. "Has she turned him down?"

"I don't know," I replied. "Jim hasn't taken me into his confidence, but a blind man could see that there's a very distinct rift in the lute. He's pining away."

"My gosh!" muttered Gordon, springing to his feet. "This is terrible! What do you suggest, Chick?"

"There is only one thing for it," I counselled. "It's no good matching him with anyone, for he might blow up. Get him on the pictures, or, better still, put him on the music-halls in a sketch. He needs distraction. If he keeps on worrying and pondering, his brain will burst."

Gordon plunged over to his desk and glanced at the list of theatrical attractions he was running.

"I could place him in the revue that's due at the Royal next week," he remarked, after some consideration. "I'm taking out a playlet that hasn't pleased the critics. He could step in there, and do a sort of training stunt. How's that?"

"Fine," I answered. "It will be a novelty and it might induce Jim to forget his troubles. Will you tell him, or shall I?"

"Leave it to me," said Gordon. "I'll star him at Drury Lane as Hamlet rather than have his fighting abilities interfered with. I'll come out to-night."

Jim displayed no interest when he was informed that he was to appear in "Hiccups," which was the absurd name of Gordon's revue. If he had been told that he was to accompany an expedition to the Antarctic he would have merely wandered to his room and packed his bags. Gordon, as a matter of fact, hadn't properly started to talk when Jim borrowed his fountain pen and proceeded to draft a letter to Florence. That will show you how enthusiastic he was. The only person he could think of in the wide world was his lost love.

He did quite well in the little scene that Gordon had specially arranged for him. It was a dumb-show affair, but Jim displayed traces of histrionic skill that immensely pleased the audiences. In addition to punching the ball, and skipping, and sparring three rounds, he had to engage in a trifle of silent acting with a chorus-girl who had been called upon at the last moment to supply a touch of feminine interest. Almost all she had to do was to give an expert imitation of washing a floor.

I was at the theatre when Gordon beckoned to her to step out of the crowd. She had been with the show from the start, but her place in the chorus was in the second row. She nearly swooned when Gordon lifted his finger; she must have thought he was discharging her.

"You'll play female lead in this act," said George, in much the same way as he would have ordered lunch.

The girl stumbled against the wings. She had gone horribly white. Her teeth were chattering; her fingers were plucking at her throat.

"Do you mean it, Mr. Gordon?" she gasped. "You're not—not joking?"

Gordon glared at her in astonishment. I was looking at her, too. I really thought she was going to drop.

"You'll be the other principal in this sketch with Mr. Lambert," said George. "Not much of a jest about that, is there?"

"Oh, thank God—thank God!" breathed the girl, looking up at the roof. "And will my name be on the programme?"

"No," replied Gordon. "The part isn't big enough. You'll come on with a bucket of water and scrub the floor. When Mr. Lambert looks at you it'll be your job to convey to the audience that you're madly in love with him. It's a bit of dumb-show that will last thirty seconds. That's all."

Do you know, I saw that girl shrivel. I'd heard about people descending from heaven to purgatory, but I never saw it happen until that day. She didn't weep, but she emitted a choking sound that made me shudder. Convinced that she was about to collapse, I moved to her side so as to catch her when she fell.

Then I saw something that made my hardened heart grow very soft. She wasn't a girl at all, although, from a distance, you could have staked your life that she wasn't more than twenty-five. Beneath her make-up there were lines that spoke eloquently of middle age. She was as slim as a rod, and her figure, viewed casually, would have passed muster in a parade of mannequins, but the skin of her hands was parchment-like, her neck was beginning to show hollows, and her face—despite its sweetness, of which there was plenty—was lined, and creased, and very, very worn.

I was astonished. From a distance I had regarded her as a pretty and attractive girl. It was only when I got quite close to her that I noticed the marks that the hurrying years had left behind. Somebody once described age as the chorus girl's Gehenna, didn't he? That's about as true as anything that was ever written. How this woman had contrived to escape the eagle eyes of the agent who had engaged her is more than I can explain, but I suppose she wore a veil and kept at a safe distance. Even Gordon, who was renowned as a spotter, didn't seem to know that he had selected as a temporary principal a lady who was as old as himself.

The act was rehearsed there and then. I sat in the orchestra stalls with Gordon and watched it, and I'm glad to say that I beat him in starting the applause by half-a-minute. Hilda Manners—that was her name—was fine. She hadn't a word to say, but she did things with her face and with her hands and with her eyes—especially her eyes—that were a thousand times better than any speech that could have been written.

"Excellent!" shouted Gordon. "You'll do, Miss Manners. Instead of thirty seconds, we'll give you sixty. Don't forget to crawl after Mr. Lambert when he's leaving the stage. Throw out your arms, turn your face so that the audience will see it, and squeeze out a tear if you can possibly manage it."

"You're satisfied with me, Mr. Gordon?" asked the woman hungrily.

"Quite," answered George, gathering up his papers.

"Then will you put my name on the programme, please?"

"It's impossible!" said Gordon irritably. "The part isn't big enough, as I've already told you, and, besides, the programmes are printed. Don't bother me now. I'll see what I can do some other day."

For the second time I saw Hilda Manners wither. An expression of sheer agony drifted into her face that made me want to leap on to the stage and ask her why in the world she was so tremendously anxious to figure on the programmes. I know that chorus-girls like to see themselves in print, but this craving of Hilda Manners' was not the customary kind at all. It was something stronger, something that resembled an obsession.

I did not notice her again until I was leaving the theatre. Jim, cheerless as ever, was with me. In a passage-way leading to the stage-door I saw Hilda, crouched in a corner. Her head was down on her arms; she was weeping as only a woman can weep when resolution, and pluck, and hope, and strength have all gone by the board.

She didn't know that Jim and I were watching her. Our rubber heels were responsible for that. But I'm dead sure that one good mark was placed against my name that afternoon. It must have been the quality that's called human charity that prompted me—anyway, I caught hold of Jim's arm and pulled him back to the dressing-room.

"Did you see that?" I remarked. "Your partner's going through hell, Jim. I don't know why, but it's up to you to give her a helping hand."

"By gum, I never heard such sobbing in my life," said Jim, under his breath. "I thought I was the only miserable person on earth, but apparently I'm not. I'll do anything you like, Chick."

"Ask her to take tea with you," I suggested. "Let her finish her cry, of course, but as soon as it's over treat her as though she were the leading lady. She's not as young as she looks, son, and there's some terrific reason why she wants to be advertised in this entertainment. Try and find out what it is."

"Perhaps you'd better come with us," said Jim. "I'm not much good at lightening loads. My own is big enough, in all conscience, and if she starts to tell me that she's lost—come on, Chick."

Hilda Manners regarded us with undisguised suspicion when Jim, rather bluntly, invited her to tea. I was prepared for that, and I interrupted to say that what he really meant was that he was desirous of having a little chat with her, so that there would be no possibility of the sketch failing when it was produced. That relieved her, and she accepted the invitation with a little smile that would have been fascinating if it had been less wistful and sad. She had stopped crying, and had even managed, by some miraculous means, to remove all traces of her recent tears, but as she stepped out with Jim—I fell in at their rear—I told myself there was a story behind her display of unhappiness that would melt the heart of a stone.

I was right. Hilda was not a talkative lady, in the ordinary way, and for half an hour she was as silent as a tomb. Then she seemed to divine intuitively that Jim, like herself, was in the depths. That broke down the barriers. It was like opening the gates of a lock.

How Jim didn't burst into tears passes my

comprehension. Hilda wasn't effusive, or gushing, or reeking with sympathy, but she managed to convey, with every spoken word, that her own sad heart went out to him. *She* knew what was the matter with Jim, although he hadn't mentioned Florence in any connection whatsoever. Wonderful, isn't it, how easily some women can walk straight into a fellow's mind?

"Oh! well," said Hilda, as she pulled on her gloves, "it's the way of the world, I suppose. Crosses are made to be borne, but I must admit that there are times when they become very heavy. I wouldn't care if—if"—she turned in her chair and looked straight at me—"he knows!"

I was absolutely taken aback. I hadn't a notion what she was referring to.

"What do I know?" I asked.

"You were near enough to me this afternoon to look into my face," said Hilda, lowly. "I realised what you intended to do, and I was thankful, but—well, you saw for yourself; I could feel it in my bones."

"Oh!" I gurgled, somewhat lamely.

"I'm forty years of age," said Hilda, in a tense little whisper. It was as though she were confessing to a murder.

"By jingo, you amaze me!" exclaimed Jim, gallantly. "You don't look it."

"I'm aware of that," said Hilda. "It's the one gleam of brightness. But do you know what it means? I'm a chorus-girl. If the agents knew that I had long since left the sunny side of life they'd turn me out of their offices. Forty years of age to a woman like me is a tragedy, gentlemen. I can preserve my figure by dieting, but I can't escape these." She raised a finger and touched the lines around her eyes. "One of these days an agent will take me by surprise and get as near to me as Mr. Baker did to-day. Then—but"—she shrugged her shoulders—"it's better not to think of that."

"Have you always been a chorus-girl?" asked Jim.

"Ever since I started to earn my own living," replied Hilda. "I was twenty-two then. You won't believe it, perhaps, but I never played a part in my life. If I had, if my name had been printed on the bills, I'd be married now."

"Really," I ejaculated.

It was a silly comment, but what else was there to say?

"I've been engaged for twelve years," went on Hilda. "It's a big slice out of one's life, isn't it?" She glanced across at Jim. "You probably know my sweetheart, Mr. Lambert. Dan Crawford."

"The boxer?" said Jim.

"Yes," replied Hilda. "I'm afraid he isn't very prominent these days, but that's because he's nearing the sere and yellow, like myself. Dan's thirty-eight. How long do heavyweights last, Mr. Lambert?"

"Oh, up to fifty," lied Jim.

I could have hugged him for that.

"Then there's hope yet," said Hilda. "Twelve years. He stands a very good chance of winning a championship in that time, doesn't he?"

"Excellent," answered Jim.

"I'm so glad I've met you," cried Hilda. "You've made me optimistic again. You see, Mr. Lambert, Dan and I have never had much money—one needs it for a wedding ceremony, doesn't one?—but we came to an arrangement, years and years ago, that if he won a championship, or if I got a part, that we'd chance our luck and get married." Hilda sighed deeply. "We're still waiting," she added.

"Is that why you nearly fainted when Gordon called to you this afternoon?" I demanded.

"Yes," said Hilda. "I thought, for a wonderful moment, that my little hour had come. But hope's very nearly dead so far as I am concerned, Mr. Baker. I'm too old. The only straw in my ocean of desolation is Dan. I'm clinging to it with all my might, but it's very frail and very liable to snap. Dan can't go on for ever. He's taking hideous hammerings now, so as to try and qualify for some Belt contest at the National Sporting Club. You don't know Dan, do you? Oh, he's grand!"

It was then that I noticed Jim move uneasily in his seat. He leaned across the

table after a moment's hesitation, and gnawed at his finger nails.

"Did you mention something about a Belt contest?" he asked.

"I did," replied Hilda. "Dan told me about it the other night. It's for the championship of Great Britain. He's doing his utmost to be selected as one of the boxers, and some friend of his has promised to put up the necessary financial guarantee. Oh! if only you realised what it means to us! Suppose he won? It isn't the belt we want—anyone can have that. It's the money. The purse will be two thousand pounds, I believe. It's the wealth of the universe, Mr. Lambert. On that we could marry and live happily ever afterwards." She laughed shrilly, but without mirth. "I'd give my soul to be married to Dan!" she whispered. "And he wants me still, although I'm forty."

Jimmy Lambert nearly upset the table as he pulled out his watch and glared at it. Then he stumbled to his feet, and excused himself by saying that he had to keep an appointment with Gordon that I'll take my oath he hadn't made. What became of Hilda after she left us is more than I can say. She thanked us very heartily for what she described as our courtesy and kindness, and then, I suppose, she went home and practised scrubbing floors.

Three days later I met Mr. Dan Crawford. He was introduced to me by Lambert—Jim had brought him home to lunch. He was a likeable fellow, and I admired him the more because he was absolutely devoid of affectation and conceit. Boxers, as a rule, have plenty of both. Crawford, however, was the sensible kind of chap I would have welcomed in our camp.

After the meal Jim suggested adjourning to the gymnasium. He showed Dan all the pictures, and our new dummy, and lots of other things; and then, turning his head so that I couldn't possibly see his face, he sprang a wheeze—I won't call it by its proper name—that must have been popular in Noah's time.

"I feel like a bit of exercise, Chick," he spluttered. "Would you mind if Dan and I had a couple of friendly rounds?"

I couldn't answer him. The best I could manage was a mumbling noise that might have meant anything—I had covered my mouth with a towel to smother a laugh. I knew what was at the back of Jimmy Lambert's mind. He wanted to show Dan Crawford all the moves I had taught him.

Once again I was right. They sparred for fifteen minutes, and if at the end of that time Crawford didn't know all there was to be known about Jimmy's defects and limitations, then he was a less observant man than I took him to be. Jim left himself wide open, he called attention to the punches that he invariably relied on, and he went even further by teaching Crawford to land on his chin!

That sort of thing went on for three weeks. Every afternoon, at two o'clock, Dan would roll up and box five or six rounds with Jimmy. Hilda usually accompanied him, and she took up so much of my time that I wasn't able to give the bouts the attention they deserved. If I had only known definitely—but I'll come to that in a moment.

One afternoon—this was about a week later—I entered the gymnasium somewhat unexpectedly. The spectacle that met my gaze almost petrified me. Jim was on the floor, nursing his chin with his left glove. And he was talking.

"Quite good, Dan," I heard him say, "but the punch wasn't straight enough, and you *must* turn your wrist at the moment of impact. We'll try that again. Now, remember, when I feint with my left shoulder, and draw back my right, you are to plunge in and clip me on the jaw with every ounce you've got in you. Don't step inwards until you see the feint. I'll make a clicking noise with my tongue and cheek, if you like, so as to warn you that the instant has arrived. Ready?"

"Sure I'm not hurting you?" asked Dan anxiously.

"Not at all," replied Jim. "I want it to *look* like a real knock-out, man. Now come nearer. That's better. Keep your eyes on my shoulder and wait for the click."

"Hi!" I yelled, coming back to life with a bang. "What's this? Are you practising a bout for exhibition purposes, or what?"

"That's it, Chick," answered Jimmy, with remarkable readiness. "There's quite a number of charity tournaments coming on, and Dan and I are going to give our services. We're learning to go down in turns, so as to make it look like the real thing."

I took him at his word, as you would have done if you had been in my place. But a day or so later I was rather surprised to find that Crawford was getting a lot of space in the sporting Press. He was being heavily boomed as the one man in England who was entitled to figure in a championship contest.

I didn't take much notice of the articles, however, for I knew who had written them. The scribe was Bobby Shepherd, Jimmy's newspaper pal. Bobby had just lost his job on the "Gazette," and was reduced to writing paragraphs for anyone who would pay a penny a line for them. I made many sarcastic references to the stuff he was ladling out to an unsuspecting public, but for once in a while Bobby gave me a smile that would have done credit to the Sphinx. I'm willing to admit that I should have given more attention to that grin. But there, I'm not a suspicious person, as you know.

Jimmy gave up play-acting when "Hiccups" completed its tour of the London halls. It then went into the provinces, and Hilda, of course, returned to her place in the second row of the chorus. With Jim, I journeyed to the station to wish the company bon voyage. It was a bleak morning. There had been snow overnight, and the nip in the air was enough to freeze one's blood. The majority of the girls were swathed to the eyes in furs, but Hilda wasn't. She was attired in a faded blue costume that made me shiver to look at it. I was tempted to offer her my overcoat.

She hadn't much to say for herself until the guard produced his flag. Then she lifted Jim's hand and kissed the tips of his fingers.

"You'll come to the wedding, won't you?" she murmured.

"I will," said Jim. "I've already promised."

"And you, Mr. Baker?" Hilda had taken my hand.

"What wedding?" I asked.

"Mine," said Hilda.

"Put me down for a reserved seat," I answered. "When is it coming off?"

"Shortly," said Hilda. I could have sworn she was sobbing. "I'll let you know in good time."

"When did the miracle happen?" I questioned. "Has Gordon given you a leading part?"

Before Hilda could reply the guard blew his whistle. It was in my mind to ask Jim what it all meant, but somehow I forgot. Later that afternoon, however, I got the beginnings of the wildest notion that ever entered my head. Gordon rang me up to say that Jimmy Lambert and Dan Crawford had been selected to fight for the heavyweight championship of Great Britain. Would I see to it that Jim was put into strict training, and so on, and so forth.

I went straight to Jim. As usual, he was mangling a letter he had just written to Florence.

"Jim," I said, without preliminary, "I want a plain answer to a very ordinary question. You know, I take it, that you and Crawford are to meet for the Belt. H'm, I thought so! Well, let's have the truth. Are you going to lie down to Crawford?"

"No," said Jim, distinctly.

"Then what's the idea?" I demanded. "Why have you been sparring with him for the last five or six weeks? Why have you shown him your best punches? Why have you taught him to land on your jaw? And why has Hilda Manners made preparations for her wedding? Don Quixote is dead, you know. You're not going to make him turn in his grave, are you?"

Jim left his chair and walked to the window.

"Chick," he exclaimed, "I hope we're not going to fall out over this. I want Crawford to win. But I'm not going to make it easy for him on the night of the bout. I shall fight as I've always fought—you're entitled to know that, and it may set your mind at rest. I will not pull back a punch; I will take advantage of every opportunity that is created, and I give you my word of honour that I will

not make openings for Crawford. Does that satisfy you ? "

" Moderately," I remarked. " When you take the ring you'll be Jimmy Lambert ? "

" Yes."

" Yet you want Crawford to win ? "

" I do. There is only one thing in the world I want more. If he beats me, Chick, it will be because he is the better man."

" And because you've shown him how to do it ! " I shouted.

" We won't discuss that," said Jim. " It's beside the point. What shall we give Hilda for a wedding present, Chick ? "

I left the room at a trot. If I had remained, I would have said things that Jimmy Lambert would have remembered for the remainder of his life. That day was one of the most miserable I ever spent. I couldn't make up my mind what to do. I knew it was my obvious duty to tell Gordon all about it, but somehow, I had a feeling that it would be wisest to allow matters to take their own course.

But I'll say this by way of—well, apology, if you like. I believed Jim. He never skated over the truth, and he had told me, quite frankly, that he would fight at his hardest. Honestly, I couldn't see a hope for Crawford. He was seventeen years older than Jim, and in addition, he had about reached the end of his tether as a boxer. He was descending the slope ; Jim was mounting.

Hilda sent three telegrams on the night of the contest—she must have sold her gloves to pay for them. One was to Crawford. All it said was : " Good luck, dear, dear Dan." The second was to Jim. It read : " Who falls for love shall rise a star." I've heard since that she copied that out of a book. The third was to me. It stated : " Wedding fixed for next Saturday. Don't forget."

I'll confess that I was as jumpy as a frog when the fight started. The betting was twenty to one on Lambert. The odds were not excessive, for Jim was fit to battle for his life, while Crawford was drawn, pale, fidgety, and excessively inclined to moisten his dry lips with his tongue. The knowledgeable—the National Sporting Club is full of them—saw at once that his chances of capturing the Belt were practically nil.

The first three rounds can be skipped. They were not important, except that they emphasised the circumstance that if the contest went all the way, Lambert would win by a mile. He scored all the points, but he did not land a really heavy blow, because Crawford was perpetually on the retreat.

In the fourth round, during a clinch, I distinctly saw Jimmy's lips move. That rattled me ; I was convinced that he was saying something encouraging to his opponent.

" Get away from him ! " I hissed. " And fight ! "

He obeyed my orders instantly. Crawford, taken by surprise, floundered after him. His guard was low ; his head was thrown back as though he were struggling to get a deep breath. Like an arrow Jim's right shot out to his jaw.

Dan went down in a hopeless heap. He fell in his own corner ; his head was against the post, his right arm was suspended over the lower rope. Jim, after a second's pause, staggered back and gnawed agitatedly at the thumb of his left glove.

Naturally, I was overjoyed.

" You've got him ! " I whispered.

" Shut up, you idiot ! " muttered Jim savagely.

It was the first time he had ever spoken to me in anger, and the effect on me was the same as if I had been bashed on the head with a hammer. I looked up, and, believe me or not, Jim was like one of those heart-rending pictures you see outside hospitals when appeals for funds are made.

His face was anguished. He had clenched his teeth so tightly that his mouth was hardly visible. If he had been knocked down himself, he could not have looked more tortured.

" Steady yourself, now ! " I cried. " When he gets up, slip in and knock the daylight out of him ! "

Jim gave me a glance that I won't forget if I live to be a hundred. Then, as Crawford crawled to his feet—the time-keeper had mumbled " Eight "—he shuffled inwards

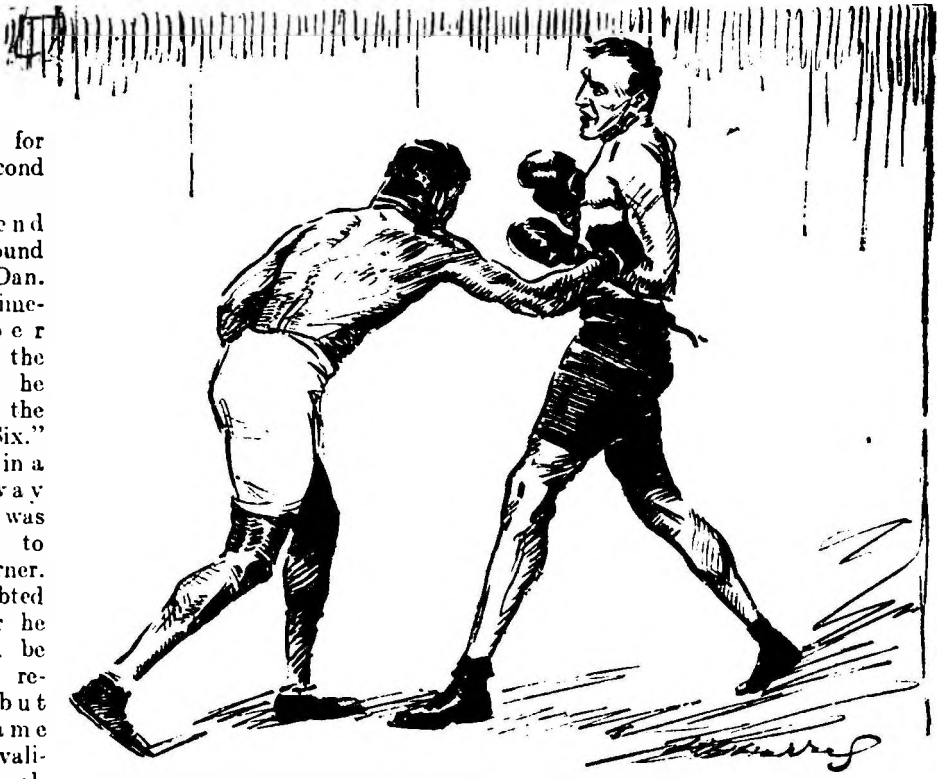
and, to my intense amazement, swung a left hook that again put Crawford on his back.

That was Jim. He had promised me to fight at his best, to take advantage of every opportunity that was offered. It must have cut his heart to ribbons to do so, but he did not falter. He covered his eyes with his gloves when Crawford collapsed for the second time.

The end of the round saved Dan. The timekeeper touched the bell as he intoned the word "Six." He was in a bad way when he was carried to his corner. I doubted whether he would be able to resume, but he came back valiantly, although his knees were trembling and his eyes were glassy. Jim whispered to him as they clashed—I was the only one who noticed it, but I was watching—and, as a consequence, Crawford did little else but retreat in the fifth round.

Jim was still fighting like a tiger. He followed Crawford mercilessly, and he shot out punches that had all his weight behind them; but, as you know, it is not easy to hit an opponent whose sole anxiety is to remain out of distance. Crawford took one punch in the opening minute that shook him severely, but after that he was careful to keep as far away from Jim as he possibly could.

Dan had recovered by the time the eighth round was reached. He had weathered the storm, and, what was more, was fighting magnificently. He was returning blow for blow, he was forcing the pace, and he was introducing to those who had laid the odds an exceedingly uncomfortable feeling.



He was returning blow for blow, he was forcing the pace, and he was introducing to those who had laid the odds an exceedingly uncomfortable feeling.

I was disturbed myself. During my career I had seen many apparently beaten men return like giants refreshed and snatch a victory. I was afraid that Jimmy Lambert was due for his first defeat. He was weakening. His blows had lost their sting, his dancing cleverness had disappeared. All heavyweights suffer bad times during a bout;

they go to pieces without warning. Jimmy was experiencing his in the eighth round.

"Box him!" I whispered, as loudly as I could.

That was as far as I got. I had much more to say, but before the words could leave my mouth Crawford slammed through Jim's guard and brought him to his knees with a beauty to the chin. Jim took a count of nine, and the theatre of the National Sporting Club positively hummed.

I held him in very earnest conversation during the minute's rest, but Jim only grinned. I'm willing to swear that, for the first time during the night, he was as happy as a king.

"Won't Hilda be pleased?" he muttered, as the timekeeper issued the customary warning.

"Forget it!" I snorted. "You can beat him yet!"

"I knew he could do it," interrupted Jim, speaking, so far as I could see, to his right boot. "Jove, I'm glad!"

The ninth round practically reduced me to hysteria. Crawford was all over Jim, and not because Jim was caving in to him, let it be remembered. He was fighting with his back to the wall, of course; for the knock-down had made his head swim. But he was as courageous and as ready to seize on an opening as a man could well be. For fifty seconds he kept Dan away with his left; then a pile-driver to the solar plexus sent him spinning to the ropes. I was right beneath him, with my mouth wide open. I couldn't speak; I was struck dumb.

But this is what I heard. It was a whisper that could not have carried beyond me.

"Straight, Dan," crooned Jim—I use the word advisedly—"and don't forget the turn of the wrist at the moment of impact."

As the last syllable escaped him, he made a clicking noise with his tongue and cheek.

No; I didn't see the punch that gave Dan Crawford the championship. I realised what was coming, and I closed my eyes; but I'm told it was a corker. It not only battered down Jimmy Lambert's guard, but it put him out for eight minutes. The first question he asked when he regained his senses was whether anyone had sent a telegram to Hilda. Can you imagine it?

Well, that's practically the end. All that remains to be said is that Hilda and Dan were married on the following Saturday. Jim was best man, and I—it's doubtful whether I ought to tell you this—I was one of the ushers. My present to Hilda was a case of cutlery and the gloves Jim had worn in the fight. I don't think she was very grateful for the cutlery, but she kissed the gloves and said cooing things to them that I couldn't understand.

Jim gave her a silver tea-service. That was a mistake, in my view. I suggested that *his* gift should be that well-known work by Cervantes, but he wouldn't hear of it.

That's the yarn. Now, throw your mind back and see if you can remember what I said at the beginning. You can't! Well, my remark was that boxing and a sympathetic heart are as wide apart as the Poles. Don't you agree?

. . . . . .

I made no reply until I had handed Chick another cigar. Then:

"My opinion is of no value!" I exclaimed. "But tell me this, Chick. Didn't you know all along that Jimmy Lambert was determined to make life a little sweeter for Hilda Manners?"

"H'm—perhaps I did," said Chick, glaring into the fire.

"Weren't you anxious yourself?"

"Maybe."

"Were you really very unhappy when Jimmy went down to defeat?"

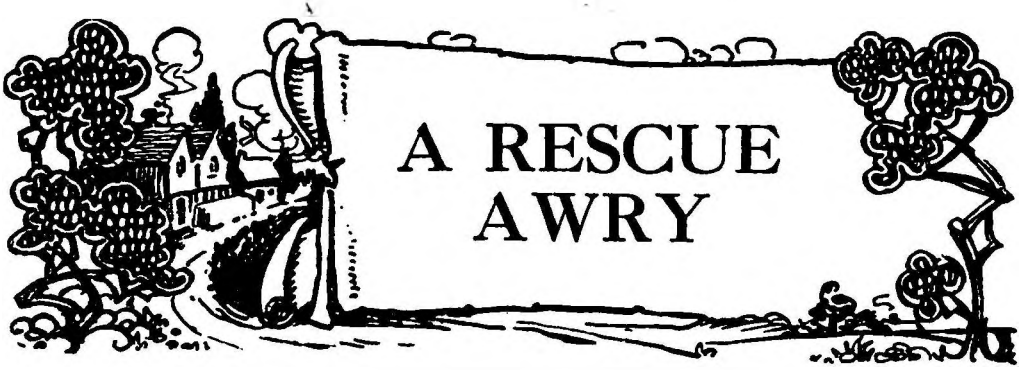
"Blowed if I know! I suppose I was a bit. Natural, wasn't it?"

"Quite. But why didn't you go to Gordon and tell him what was in the wind?"

Chick laughed loudly and slapped his thigh. He was bubbling over.

"Even trainers of boxers have sympathetic hearts," he gurgled. "Besides, once upon a time there was a girl in a circus—but that's a different story. Any more cigars? This is another dud."

I gave him the box.



A RESCUE AWRY

By J. RUSSELL WARREN

PRINGLE stood on the top of the down, the angle of a hedge preventing his figure from being thrown up against the skyline. Fingering his narrow chin, he surveyed the scene before him.

To the eastward the grassy slope ran gently down into a narrow fold, then rose again to a slightly lower crestline, all smooth and rounded and bare. Behind that horizon the sky was already darkening cloudily. He scanned the crest eagerly, but no figure, no sign of movement, broke its clear-cut line.

"They're a long time," said Pringle impatiently.

He turned about and looked towards the west. There the ground fell more steeply. At the bottom of the descent ran a white road, that curved round the shoulder of the hill, crossed a little brook by an arched stone bridge, and vanished amongst the dark pines of a wood. Beyond that, rolling country, brown ploughland, and green pasture was already becoming mysterious in purple shadow as the sun dropped behind flat layers of cloud towards the horizon.

The air was still, with that curious, silent hush that falls upon open country on a windless evening. Through the silence came, from behind the smooth crest, a faint and distant drumming sound. Pringle wheeled again, stared over the hedge at the upland that rose against the eastward sky. Two black dots broke its evenness, rose, becoming larger as they breasted the rise, became recognisable, as they crossed it, as two figures on horseback —a girl riding a chestnut; a man upon a grey.

Without hesitation they cantered, the girl leading slightly, down the slope, checked a trifle at the bottom, breasted the next rise. Hoofs thudded, leather creaked, the panting breath and occasional snorts of the horses came clearly to Pringle's ears as he stood close against the hedge. He was not exactly hidden, but they were not in the least likely to notice him there if he remained still, made no movement to attract their attention. He continued to watch the pair, and noticed, with amused satisfaction, that, although the girl rode with a perfect seat, in evident ease, her companion was obviously far from comfortable.

On the very crest the girl reined in her mount, and turned in her saddle towards her companion. Her attitude and her movements were full of grace.

"Isn't it topping?" she cried enthusiastically.

She waved a hand at the sunset. The crimson ball was touching the skyline now. The hill and valley below were in purple shadow. The sky was a blaze of rose, shading through mauve into a clear blue, dappled with little

fleecy clouds, that caught and reflected the rose tint.

"Top hole!" said Teddy Carruthers; and did his best to put enthusiasm into his voice.

Actually, he found this difficult. He was in a condition of considerable physical discomfort. Unused to riding, he had found ten miles across country, much of it at full gallop, with June Wainwright, something of a test of endurance. Fit as he was, and very proud of his fitness, the equestrian effort had tried muscles he was not in the habit of using. His knees were sore, his thighs ached, with the strain of gripping the saddle hard; he suffered a definite stitch in his side; and the effort of preserving his balance to assist his not very certain grip had tired his brain.

But he was young, and would not admit his fatigue, least of all to the girl. He tried to conceal his relief when she reined in and gave him an opportunity to relax the grip of his knees and regain his attenuated breath.

But June had sharp eyes. She noticed his attitude of grateful relaxation, heard the faint sigh of relief that escaped from him.

"Hallo, Teddy!" she challenged. "Pace too hot for you?"

"Good lord, no!" he retorted. "Keep this up all day."

She smiled quizzically.

"You're game, Teddy. Always the little sportsman. But you're no centaur, are you?" She surveyed him, twinkling. "My dear boy, you're riding a couple of holes too short. No wonder you're uncomfortable. Let me take those leathers down a bit for you."

Before he could protest, she slid out of the saddle, and, slipping her rein over her arm, was at his stirrup. Carruthers flushed. He did not enjoy the situation. When one is young it is mortifying to be taught things of this kind by a girl—especially a girl in whom one takes an interest so particular that other women appear to one as nothing more than perambulating clothes-horses. The young man positively winced as, obedient to her direction, he swung his leg up, and lifted the saddle flap, while she bent, and with deft, capable fingers, altered the position of the buckle, and drew the stirrup leather into place.

Carruthers was obsessed with a desire usual to young men in his frame of mind—a desire to show himself at his best before the girl who had attracted him so powerfully. With some girls this would not have been difficult, for he was reasonably good-looking, strong, and good at most games. Many of his feminine acquaintances gushed over that smashing serve of his at tennis; admired open-mouthed his high diving. Reclining languidly and gracefully among cushions and chocolates in the stern of a skiff, they would watch the rippling muscles of his forearms as he bent to the oars, and coo seraphically: "How strong you are!" whereat Teddy would feel self-satisfaction stealing up his spine, and think himself no end of a fine fellow.

But June Wainwright was not that kind of girl. She was definitely modern, and had not a scrap of sentimentality or gush about her. She could do most of the things that Teddy could, and do some of them better than he. She could race him in a short swim, though she lacked his staying power. She would dive from as high a spring-board as he, with a neat and rigid cleanness that he strove in vain to emulate. Not for her to sit simpering in the stern of a boat while he pulled her about. She took an oar with him, set him a fast, swinging stroke, and called him a muff to his face if he brought the boat clumsily alongside a landing-stage or made S's in his course.

Teddy admired and respected her for all this. He scorned easy victories. To him her spirit and sportswomanship set her above the languishing damsels he knew. He enjoyed intensely the strenuous days they put in together. But her very accomplishments set before him an infinitely high standard to reach before he could expect to impress her in the only way he had, by the only road to a girl's heart that he knew or could follow.

So far he was quite sure he had failed. When he brought off something good—a tricky serve on the tennis court, an exceptionally neat or daring dive, she would say "Good man!" or "Topping!" But the praise was

impersonal, the tribute of a sportswoman to a sportsman. She would have said precisely the same thing, in precisely the same tone, to any other man who achieved a similar feat.

Only once had she seemed to look at and speak to him as he desired to be looked at and spoken to by her. The occasion was trivial—the village cricket-match. He had played for Stoke against the visiting team from Thorpe. Slogging hard at a fast one from Thorpe's demon bowler, he had sprained his wrist. A sprained wrist is not a mortal injury, but if it is bad it seriously cramps a batsman's style. Teddy would have been quite justified in retiring hurt. But Stoke had not a spare man, and June was seated under the elms at the side of the ground, watching intently, eager for Stoke to win. Teddy carried on gamely, though every swipe sent burning pains up his arm to the shoulder.

It was useless, of course. You cannot bat anything to write home about with one wrist useless. Teddy was caught out for a miserable five, and walked back to the group beneath the elms clutching his wrist and feeling, as he put it, "knee high to a grasshopper."

The girl insisted upon examining his wrist and on bathing and bandaging it herself. She was as efficient in first aid as in everything else she handled.

"You *are* a sportsman, Teddy," she said, as she bent over the task. There was something in the tone of her voice, some softness and tenderness in her eyes, that sent the mercury of Teddy's temperamental thermometer soaring to fever heat. It went even higher when he observed that she, later on, greeted Pringle, coming in triumphantly after carrying his bat for a hundred and twenty-three, with a curt and abstracted "Good."

Not that Teddy was jealous of Pringle. He admitted frankly that Pringle had him cold at cricket. But it was the only game the elder man played. He could do nothing else that seemed to Teddy worth while. Nothing but dig into musty books and chip bits off inoffensive rocks with a queer, square-headed little hammer. Teddy, young and worshipping physical strength and prowess as the only thing worth consideration, had a good-humoured contempt for Pringle. The whole point was that if June had not been mightily occupied with other thoughts, she would have had high praise for any man, Pringle or otherwise, who knocked up a score like that and saved the match for Stoke.

So long as Carruthers' wrist was out of action the girl was all breezy sympathy and commiseration. She did not gush, but he discovered that she gave up two or three promising games of golf to come and talk to him. He was so encouraged, so emboldened, that once or twice the words he wanted to blurt out, the words that, lacking the faintest hint of encouragement, stuck, as he put it, to his tongue, very nearly slipped between his teeth. But each time the moment and the opportunity passed. And the mercury went down with a thud when, partnering him in a set of mixed doubles when he was fit again, she called him a "foozling chump" for missing an easy one.

And then came the equestrian business. June was a country-bred girl, used to horses all her life, perfectly at home in the saddle. That anyone should be unable to ride was almost inconceivable to her. But Teddy was a townsman, and had never had an opportunity to cultivate the art of horsemanship. Since he had come to live near Stoke, and had known the Wainwrights, he had contrived to dodge riding. He intended to take a few surreptitious lessons, but so far he seemed, somehow, never to have time.

And to-day, over tea, June had suddenly commanded his company in a canter over to Roundaway Down to see the sunset from the crest. Teddy, too self-conscious to admit he had never ridden a horse in his life, went home to get into breeches and leggings. He returned, she led him to the stables, picked him a horse that she knew was quiet but that looked to Teddy a very doubtful proposition, and led him a ten-mile chase across a quite appreciably stiff bit of country.

Pringle had seen them start. He had been taking tea with the Wainwrights, too. They passed him in the drive, starting up his runabout. He noticed Teddy's obvious insecurity upon his perch, and drove off chuckling to

himself. Apparently his curiosity, or some other emotion, had brought him to the crest of the down to watch them admire the sunset.

Both stirrup-leathers lengthened, the girl rose erect, pushed her hat back from her forehead, tucked under its brim the wisps of hair that had escaped, and remounted. Her brown eyes were warmly bright. She eyed with inarticulate joy the fading colour in the sky, the gathering purple shadows in the valley. Inarticulate because she was a modern girl, with a fear of gush that almost amounted to horror. Her most eloquent word of praise was "topping," and she applied it indiscriminately.

"Let's go on to Thorpe," she said. "And ride back through the woods."

She shook her reins, and the chestnut began to descend the steep slope. Teddy followed, half a length behind. His thoughts were not comfortable ones. He felt that to regain his position in the girl's esteem he must do something to redeem his lack of horsemanship, and the humiliating position in which it had just now put him.

"But what can a poor devil do?" he mused miserably. "I want a chance to shine. But what hopes? If that dashed great brute gets away with her, I can't do anything about it. I'd go after her, of course, hell for leather. But it's ten to one I should fall off before I got a chance to forge up alongside, grasp the flying reins in an iron hand, and bring the maddened animal to a standstill, like fellows do in books."

His own mount stumbled at the moment, and Teddy, riding loose, nearly took a purler over the animal's head.

"Hold his head up," June called back over her shoulder, and Teddy felt a complete fool.

"If she fell into the river," he continued, resuming his mental jeremiad, "I'd go in after her. But she swims every bit as well as I do, at a spurt. She'd probably call me a muff and start saving *me!*"

His sombre young eyes dwelt gloomily upon the winding road to which they were descending, noted its curve over the bridge, and its disappearance into the dark shadows of the wood.

"Now," quoth Teddy morosely, "if a few brigands or footpads or something would try to kidnap her, I'd have a chance. That wood's just the place for a show of that sort. But there aren't any brigands these days. Nothing more desperate than a few imported toughs rendering first aid to the macadam on the Thorpe Road. And if it happened—gee! I'd be off this animal and in among them." He doubled his arm, and eyed complacently the biceps swelling under the sleeve of his coat. "But what's the good? Things like that just don't happen nowadays."

He left off soliloquising while his mount stepped gingerly down from the top of the bank into the sunken road. Then he swerved in beside the girl and they walked on, the horse-hoofs clip-clopping on the hard road metal. Teddy's thoughts returned to his problem.

"But unless something of that kind turns up, unless I get a chance of distinguishing myself, she'll never think anything of me. Unless I can do something to make her think a heap of me, she'll never give me the least bit of encouragement. And unless I get a bit of encouragement I can't speak. I simply can't. I daren't face it."

He almost shuddered. The girl looked at him curiously.

"Bit cold in here," she observed.

They had crossed the bridge and entered the wood. The hoofs trod softly on the strewn pine needles. It was certainly colder in there, and densely dark. The branches rose above them like lofty vaults of a cavern, shutting out what little light remained in the sunset sky.

The whole thing happened with a sort of neat, precise suddenness. Out of the shadows a dark figure appeared, so abruptly that Carruthers' horse shied. If Teddy had still been riding loose he would have been unseated. But he had learnt his lesson. Gripping hard, he quietened the animal down. Sharply, for the incident had discomposed him a trifle, he demanded:

"What do you want?"

The dark figure was almost indistinguishable. It gave merely a vague impression of shambling down-at-heelness. The voice that

came from it was husky and held a faint resentment, as if at the peremptoriness of Carruthers' challenge.

"It's all right, guv'nor. I was only going to ask you for a light. I got a pipe o' baccy and not a match on me. And I ain't had a smoke all day."

An appeal of this kind was irresistible to Teddy Carruthers. He reined in, drew a matchbox from his pocket, and held it out.

The girl rode slowly on, was about twenty yards ahead. The dark figure took the matchbox, held it up before his face, drew a match from it, held it poised to strike, hesitated a moment.

And then the dark wood was suddenly full of noise and violence. Further along the road, abreast of June, dark figures suddenly leaped from the undergrowth. One seized the chestnut's bridle. The startled animal reared, nearly swung the man off his feet. But he held on grimly, and brought the horse down again. Two other men grabbed at the girl, trying to drag her from the saddle.

"Teddy!" she cried sharply.

Raising the light switch she carried, she slashed at the face of the nearest man. He flung up an arm, saving himself, snarled something, and gripped her more savagely. She touched her mount with the spur. The animal plunged, lashed out. But the men were abreast of the girths, clear of the flying hoofs. Then the girl fell sideways out of the saddle, on to her assailants. The three rolled to the ground together.

Carruthers, scarcely seeing, but hearing and divining what was going on, hesitated for a fraction of a second. Wild exultation throbbed in his veins. His chance had come. The opportunity he had longed for, without a trace of hope or faith, had actually arrived. It only remained for him to take advantage of it. An instant's reflection assured him that it was not the faintest use galloping romantically to the rescue. Perched on that high horse, armed with nothing but a light switch, he could do practically nothing. And there was the risk of his riding over June. Clumsily he flung himself from the saddle, and started to run up the road.

He had forgotten the existence of the man to whom he had given the matches. The fellow reminded him of it. He took a flying leap after Teddy, flung a pair of muscular arms about his neck, dragged him backward. But Teddy knew something about this kind of game. He dashed his elbow back forcibly into the pit of the man's stomach. The fellow gave a howl, let go his hold, and staggered back, doubling at the waist. Carruthers paused only to administer a neat upper cut on the point of the conveniently protruding jaw, a jab that sent the fellow collapsing limply by the roadside, and then raced on.

June was upon her feet again, struggling hard. The two men were holding her, with difficulty and in some embarrassment, by the arms. The third man, wrestling with the kicking chestnut, had been drawn a few yards up the road. He let the animal go, and came running back. As Carruthers' black figure loomed up in the darkness, all three turned to face him. They let the girl go. With a whoop of joy Teddy went in.

He caught the first man squarely between the eyes, and sent him flat on his back. The second was still half-holding the girl, his hand upon her shoulder, the arm outstretched. An arm in that position can be broken easily by a sharp blow. Teddy brough his fist down upon the braced elbow. The man gave a scream of pain and tottered back. His jaw set, his lips compressed, but a joyous, fighting light in his blue eyes, Teddy made for the third man.

Then came the thunder of hoofs on the road, the rush of a heavy body upon them. Teddy's grey, maddened by the noises, the violent movements, by hearing the released chestnut galloping away through the wood, came bucketing in pursuit. There was no time, no room to dodge. Teddy, pausing irresolutely, turning his head over his shoulder to see what was happening, was struck squarely by the horses's massive chest, went down under the plunging, iron-shod hoofs. The remaining man of the gang had just time to spring backwards into the undergrowth as the grey thundered past. There was a silence, broken only by the thundering diminuendo of hoofs.

The squawk of a motor-horn sounded. The white brilliance of headlights lit up the dark aisle. The car raced up, stopped with a jarring and grinding of hastily clapped-on brakes. A figure leaped from the driving seat, and came forward into the circle of light. He beheld June standing, panting and rumpled, by the side of the road, two figures

He caught the first man squarely between the eyes and sent him flat on his back.

just shambling painfully away into the undergrowth, and Teddy Carruthers lying still, flat on his back, in the middle of the road.

"Miss Wainwright!" cried the motorist. "What has happened?"

"Is that you, Mr. Pringle?" The girl's voice was crisply calm, but held an undercurrent of anxiety. "Get a light, and see what's happened to Teddy."

Pringle obeyed, brought one of the headlights from the car. The girl bent over the prostrate form. Teddy opened his eyes as the beam of the lamp fell upon them.

"Hallo!" he said. Apprehension flickered across his face. "Are you all right, June? Have they gone?"

"Yes," she answered. "I'm all right. But you, Teddy?"

He grinned feebly.

"My leg's gone phut. Something wrong with it. I don't know what. I went down under the horse."

With a little exclamation she ran her hand down his right leg, that lay in an unnaturally distorted position.

"Broken," she said. She looked over her shoulder at the man who was holding the lamp. "Mr. Pringle, get into your car and tear to Thorpe. Dig out the doctor and tell him Mr. Carruthers has broken his leg, and we'll want something to carry him home on. He'll know."

"I say," Pringle stammered. The hand that held the lamp shook slightly. "Is it as bad as that? I'm awfully sorry. Look here, can't we take him along in the car?"

"No," the girl answered curtly. "You'll turn a simple fracture into a compound one if you try to huddle him up in a seat. He's got to be picked up properly, and laid flat on something. We want splints."

"But——"

She stamped her foot.

"How can you stand there and argue? Do as I tell you. And do it quickly. I'm not going to have him lying in the damp a second longer than can be helped."

Carruthers' voice interposed feebly.

"You can't be left here, June. Those blighters might come back."

"Tchah!" said Miss Wainwright. She sprang to her feet. "You stay here with him then, Mr. Pringle, and I'll go to Thorpe."

She darted to the car, started up, sprang into the driving-seat, took off the brakes, with infinite care and unerring judgment she steered the runabout round the prostrate body in the road. Then, with the clear road before her, she let the engine out. For one moment they heard the rapidly diminishing roar of the car. Then, almost instantly, it seemed, came silence.

Pringle sat down beside the injured man.

"I say, Carruthers, I'm most awfully sorry," he began, with curious awkwardness.

"It's all right," Teddy answered, valiantly cheerful. "It's a dashed lucky thing you turned up, Pringle. I couldn't have done another thing. And though I left my mark on one or two of those blighters, I only put one of them out of action. It would have been all up with June if you hadn't blown in. Were they going to kidnap her, do you think?"

"Probably," said Pringle. "Squire Wainwright's daughter, you know. Hold her to ransom." He was not very coherent. "Lucky I happened to be coming into Thorpe just now. Is it very painful, Carruthers?"

Teddy forced a grin.

"Bit mouldy," he said. "But it's all right. June 'll be in Thorpe and back again before you can say whizz. She'll make that buzz-waggon of yours do things you never dreamed of, if she doesn't send it to everlasting smash. She's a clinker."

Wincing a trifle, he took a case out of his pocket, drew out a cigarette and stuck it between his white lips.

"Got a match, old top?" he asked plaintively. "I left mine with a gentleman who should, by all the rules, be at this moment nursing his solar plexus with one hand and holding his jaw together with the other."

. . . . . .

In an astoundingly short space of time June was back in the car with the doctor from Thorpe. The medico confirmed her diagnosis. A fractured femur. Quite nasty, but not, of course, necessarily dangerous. He set the limb in splints. Soon afterwards a farm-cart arrived, and Teddy was conveyed home, "kept flat," as he put it, "not to be folded or rolled up."

June came to see him next morning. She found him in bed, a cigarette between his lips. His face was pale and there were dark shadows under his eyes. He had not slept all night. But he forced a cheerful grin as the girl came into the room.

The interview commenced in a very modern manner.

"Hallo, old thing," said the girl, "how is it?"

"I'm in rude health, bar the old stalk."

"I didn't bring you any flowers. I didn't know whether you'd care for them. But I've got a clinking book for you. All about hunting and so forth."

Teddy, reflecting that his calamity was directly due to the kind of animal one went hunting on, an animal that, in his ignorance, he regarded with respectful distrust, grinned at her lack of tact. But he thanked her breezily. She stood looking down at him, struggling to find words for the genuine but inarticulate sympathy she felt.

"Poor old badger!" she said. "It is hard lines, but you're mighty cheerful."

"If your face wants to smile, let it; if it don't, make it. That's my motto," quoth Teddy.

But the grin had faded from his face. There was a sadness in his tone that belied the cheeriness of his words. He was really weak and ill, and disposed to let slip things that normally would never have passed his lips.

"It's tough luck, you know," he said, half to himself. He looked up at her, appeal in his clear, ingenuous young eyes. "Do you know, June, I was just longing, as we rode into the wood, for something of the sort to happen."

She stared.

"You were? My goodness, why?"

"I'm a chump. But I wanted a chance to show off in front of you. To do a gallant, romantic rescue, and all that. Win your everlasting gratitude and so forth. And I went and made a mess of it. I started off all right. I guess some of our friends won't win beauty competitions any more. And then that dashed animal butted in, when it wasn't his party at all, and mucked up the whole show. And it was Pringle, lucky bow-wow, who sailed in on his galloping bedstead, saved the situation, and put in a claim to the laurels."

The girl's expression changed, hardened curiously.

"I don't think," she said, "I want to talk about Mr. Pringle."

Teddy stared.

"Not after that?" Incredulity mingled with a certain lofty compassion for Pringle, and satisfaction at the thought that, at any rate, the other man had not won yet. "What's Pringle done?"

June hesitated.

"I don't think I want to tell you."

"I insist. Come, you can't refuse a poor invalid a little thing like that."

She smiled slightly.

"If you were fit, wild tanks wouldn't drag it from me. You'd go and skin and fillet Mr. Pringle. I know you. But as you won't be able to do anything of the sort for months, I don't suppose it matters. Mr. Pringle arranged the whole thing."

"Arranged? What? I say, you'd better see a doctor."

"It's the truth. I suspected it at once. He was standing by the hedge at the top of the down, watching us as we came up. You didn't see him. He didn't think I saw him. But I did, as I was fixing your stirrup-leathers, and wondered what he was doing there. I thought it odd. And when he turned up on the field of battle so very neatly—well, it was just too good to be true. I challenged him with staging the whole business, and he owned up."

"Good lord! The outsider! The——"

Teddy's vocabulary, or that volume of it permissible before a girl, proved inadequate.

"Of course, he didn't mean things to go so far. He didn't mean you to be really hurt. He's writhing in remorse now. And serve him right, though it doesn't do you any good. The man told off to ask you for a match was supposed to hold you so you couldn't interfere. And the others were to make a show of dragging me off. And then Mr. Pringle would arrive and do the rescue act. But you upset their calculations, Teddy. They didn't know what they were tackling. I expect they'll dun Mr. Pringle for double whatever he promised to pay them, as compensation for injuries received." There was frank admiration in her eyes. "It was horrid, but you *are* a fighter, Teddy."

He stirred in the bed, winced as the movement hurt his leg. His eyebrows were puckered in perplexity.

"But why should old Pringle do a fool thing like that?" he asked.

In spite of her indignation, the girl could not repress a whimsical smile.

"He was suffering from your complaint, old thing. He wanted to show off in front of me. He was envious of the way I praised you for your swimming and diving and so-forth, so he staged this little piece to give himself a chance of doing the knight-errant business, with bells on."

"Gee!" said Teddy. His mouth hardened. "You're quite right, June. If I were fit I'd knock his head off. Not for doing this to me, that was bad luck, but for letting those dirty blighters paw you about. It makes me feel sick to think of it."

The girl laid a restraining hand upon his shoulder.

"You mustn't excite yourself, old thing. It's all settled and done with now. I told Mr. Pringle what I thought of him," she smiled grimly. "And I rather think he's off to fresh fields and pastures new. I suggested

the Orkneys as a suitable place for studying geology, and nice and far away from me."

A silence fell. Each of the young people were struggling with something that clamoured to be said, yet was restrained by the embarrassed shyness of modern youth in dealing with a situation that involves sentiment.

"Teddy," the girl said at last, "if you had carried the thing through without coming a crash, if you'd shown up as the complete and successful rescuer, what then?"

"Well," he coloured faintly, "you'd have thought more of me, wouldn't you?"

June shook her head.

"I couldn't think more of you than I do now. You're a sportsman and a fighter and game to the backbone, Teddy old thing."

Another pause fell. Again the girl broke the silence.

"Why," she asked, "did you want me to think so especially much of you?"

Carruthers shook his head.

"I can't tell you, June."

"You must."

After all, he was wretchedly weak physically. He had not the strength to refuse her.

"It's no good, old thing. I've been talking to the doc. He's a sensible lad, and tells a fellow the truth. No beating about the bush or trying to keep the sad news from the patient."

The girl's eyes widened anxiously. Her lips parted in alarm.

"Teddy! You don't mean——"

"Oh, no. I shall walk again all right," he says. "But I shall always be a bit of a crock. I shall never be able to play games to any extent. We shall never have the topping times we've had together any more. You won't be able to admire my prowess and share my exploits, June, because there won't be any."

Indignation and sympathy glowed in her dark eyes.

"Poor old bean! What a beastly shame?" she blurted out uncouthly. "I could murder Mr. Pringle cheerfully." She paused. "But if it hadn't been for that, Teddy, what?"

He shook his head.

"No, June," he pleaded desperately, "I mustn't, I can't. I'm a wretched, miserable old crock for evermore. I shall never again be the kind of fellow for a clinking sportswoman like you."

The girl choked. And then she forgot her modern shyness, her habitual, horrified evasion of anything approaching sentiment. She spoke straight from her naturally simple and affectionate soul.

"Teddy dear," she said, "you don't know anything about women, do you? You don't understand. A girl like me appreciates a man who plays a straight bat and pulls a good oar. She admires a man who's a sportsman and a fighter, and who takes whatever comes to him with a stiff upper lip. But the man she cares for, Teddy"—her voice trembled a little, her lips quivered, the brown eyes that looked down into his were moist—"is the man who needs her, who needs her help and her sympathy and her companionship for the rest of his life. You want somebody to take care of you now, Teddy dear, and"—with an effort she reverted to her old flippancy—"and if you'll ask me *very* nicely, old thing, I'm going to do it."

KEEP ON!

I.

Keep on keeping on
Though you only *hop!*
Better fail than never try,
Better fall than stop.

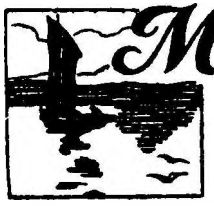
II.

Best of all a smile, my friend,
With a little laughter,
Keep on steadfast to the end—
Who cares what comes after?

E. N. T.

In Rosemary Road

By A. E. ASHFORD



R. TRIMMINGTON TROTTER turned into Rosemary Road with a jaunty swagger. It was a suburban road of small, neat, red-brick houses, each house the replica of every other house, the road itself the replica of Heaven knows how many other suburban roads; but this did not prevent Mr. Trotter from keeping an alert eye on the rove.

He was a gentleman who lived by watching for and seizing upon the right opportunity. Opportunity, he knew, had a knack of presenting itself at unexpected moments, in unexpected places.

It also, as he knew, had a perverse way of absenting itself over inconveniently protracted periods.

A matronly young woman and a fat little boy trundling an iron hoop, the boy ahead, were approaching from the other end of the street. Mr. Trotter automatically took stock of them, but did not interrupt the trend of his cogitations.

"When a man is down to three-ha'pence and a lack of presentable linen," he mused, "it's high time——"

It was at this precise instant that two things occurred. One was Mr. Trotter's perception of what he would have termed a very choice specimen of "pigeon pie," the other was the colliding of the fat little boy's hoop with Mr. Trotter's shin.

He saw in this latter the hand of Providence. Stooping, he gathered up the hoop and shook a finger in jocose reproof.

"Little rapscallion," he chided. "Trying to knock down a grown-up. See Uncle Trimmington make naughty hoop go away and come back," and did so by the simple expedient of imparting a backspin to the hoop as he sent it off. It described a curve through the air, struck the pavement, bounced, wavered, then trundled back to Mr. Trotter's hand.

The fat little boy contemplated him stolidly.

"Do it again," he piped.

Mr. Trotter tweaked his ear playfully, dived a hand into his pocket, and produced his penny and ha'penny between a thumb and forefinger, affecting an ingenuous surprise.

"Tut, tut!" he remarked. "Uncle Trimmington thought he had a loose shilling."

"Oh, but you mustn't," objected the matronly young woman, coming up. "It encourages them to expect things they shouldn't."

Mr. Trotter surrendered the coins and the hoop to the fat little boy, who appeared to forget his desire that the performance with the latter should be repeated in an abstruse mental calculation regarding the former.

He straightened himself and removed his hat with a jaunty flourish.

"Why bring him up against the cold facts of disillusioning experience before he has to face them? Is it not childhood's privilege to roam in a fairyland of expectation?" he demanded. "A delightful little rascal. Yours?

"But of course." He smiled at the absurdity of his question. "One has only to look. His mother's eyes."

"People say that he takes after his father." The matronly young woman smiled back. "I'm afraid he's a clumsy little boy. I hope——"

The fat little boy had solved the abstruse mental problem. He held up the copper coins disparagingly.

"Mummie, the gentleman fort he had a loose shilling," he piped. "You've got change. Give him some."

But it was neither his interruption nor the nature of it—that regrettable precocity in affairs of high finance—which brought about a sudden chilling of the matronly young woman's demeanour. It was the realisation of the shabbiness of Mr. Trotter's clothes, of the exact condition of his head and foot gear, of his lack of presentable linen. Mr. Trotter's first glamour might distract attention from these things, but except in circumstances of favourable lighting, or to a short-sighted person, they were bound to display themselves.

Her tone changed.

"Come, Marmaduke," she said coldly. "Daddy will be wondering where we have got to," and, seizing her offspring's hand, dragged him away, ignoring alike his demands that the gentleman should be supplied with change and the gentleman's elaborate salutation of farewell.

Mr. Trotter felt no resentment—not even when the matronly young woman, irritated as much by her own social faux pas as the fat little boy's protestations, snatched the coins from the latter and disdainfully cast them into the gutter.

He did not himself suffer from snobbishness, but he recognised it in others tolerantly. It was a form of human weakness. If it were not for human weaknesses, where would he, Trimmington Trotter, be?

What passes for thickness of skin is often pure philosophy. And what may appear, so far, to be a meaningless by-play was an example of that genius for staging effects which formed part of Mr. Trotter's equipment for what serious-minded people call the battle of life.

It was simply a little comedy improvised for the delectation of the little, sweet-faced, silver-haired old lady who sat in the ground-floor window of No. 22.

He opened the gate—all the houses had neat little strips of front garden—and jauntily knocked at the door. When it opened he was lost in tender reminiscence. Apparently he was still dwelling upon the incident of the little fat boy.

"You love children, sir," a gentle voice said; and he awoke from his reverie and swept a courtly bow. It was the little, sweet-faced, silver-haired old lady who had opened the door.

She made a frail, dainty picture, and Mr. Trotter approved of her. He liked the ready-provided opening, too. It saved him inventing one.

"I do, madam," he said with emotion. "You saw me talking to that engaging little rascal, I take it. Children! How they twine themselves about one's heart! The touch of their little chubby fingers! The prattle of their innocent voices! And, somehow, they take to me. I don't know why. I wonder how many of the little cherubs call me Uncle Trimmington."

"They take to you because they trust you. When I see a child take to a man I know that that man is to be trusted."

Mr. Trotter assumed an air of modest deprecation, but did not actually controvert the statement. He ventured another.

"You love children, madam," he said. "Children take to you."

She nodded, and a shadow of sadness clouded her face.

"I think they do," she said. "I love all children. Boys——"

Her voice quivered

"The little boy you spoke to—— He—he reminded me——"

"Someone very dear to you," murmured Mr Trotter.

"My—my nephew. I brought him up, you see. Such a dear little boy. He——"

She sighed, and Mr. Trotter respectfully sighed with her.

"Heaven loves little children, too," he murmured.

She clasped her frail, blue-veined hands together tremulously.

"Oh, but Bertie isn't dead!" she cried. "He—I always think of him as a little boy, but he's really a young man. Such a fine, manly young man. Only he's forgotten where he lives. He—I think he's lost his memory. That dreadful war!"

Mr. Trotter grimaced feelingly.

"Missing?" he queried.

"Oh, he came back, but he disappeared suddenly six months ago. It must have been something that happened in the war—something that made him lose his memory."

"To be sure," agreed Mr. Trotter. "It is very possible——"

He wrinkled his brow.

"Bertie," he mused. "Bertie now. That would be short for——"

"Egbert. His name was Egbert Harold."

"Good heavens! Egbert Harold!"

Her face lit up expectantly.

"Egbert Harold Robbins, that was his full name."

Mr. Trotter said "Good heavens!" again.

"Then you," he added, half incredulously, "you are his aunt——"

"His Aunt Cecily. He was my brother's boy. You knew him. Oh, if you could only tell me where he is!"

Her thin, frail hands clutched at his coat; her old eyes were raised to him in hungry longing.

Mr. Trotter's peculiarly observant eye had already observed that she wore no wedding-ring. A maiden aunt.

There were maiden aunts and maiden aunts. This one was of the kind that makes the most succulent and nourishing pigeon pie. His first appraisement had not misled him.

It came to him—to strain a metaphor—and fed out of his hand.

"Miss Robbins," he urged soothingly, "you must be calm. It may be a coincidence. It may have been another Egbert Harold Robbins who used to talk to me of his Aunt Cecily, in the trenches."

"Oh, but I'm sure it was the same! I believe God has sent you to me. You have something to tell me."

"Let us," said Mr. Trotter piously, "trust that this is indeed the hand of Providence, but let us make sure. What regiment was your nephew in?"

"He was in the 5th South Marleyshires."

Mr. Trotter again said "Good heavens!"

"The dear old South Marleyshires!" he added, with a little gulp of proud emotion. "It is the same Bertie Robbins. It was your nephew who carried me back amid a storm of shot and shell and great drifting clouds of poison gas when we went over the top together. He saved my life.

"I shall never forget"—Mr. Trotter's eyes kindled—"I shall never forget how he climbed out of the trenches again, a dauntless smile upon his face, a cigarette between his lips, and turned on the brink of the shattered parapet to wave me a cheery au revoir before he plunged again into that inferno to recapture single-handed the position from which our brave fellows had been hurled back."

He sighed and shook his head.

"It was magnificent if it was not war," he mused. "But he succeeded."

She could not but thrill to the account.

"He never told me about it," she said pridefully. "He was brave, I knew, but so modest."

And then she sighed again.

"But where is he now?" she quavered. "I thought that perhaps——"

Mr. Trotter patted her arm.

"He has been seen," he said, "lately, by another old pal. He saw your nephew on the other side of a crowded street, and called him by name and tried to cross to him. But you know what crowded streets are? A sudden flow of traffic held him back. When he did get across he could see no sign of him.

"You are right," he added thoughtfully. "He must have lost his memory. My friend has an extremely loud voice, and he must have heard him. But his own name conveyed nothing to him. That was why he did not wait."

Then he squared his shoulders.

"He shall be found!" he declared determinedly. "Have no fear, Miss Robbins."

Hope, eagerness, animated her face.

"God did send you!" she quavered. "Oh, come in! Come in!"

She plucked at his coat, drawing him into the little hall, and, following urbanely, he closed the door after him. He followed her into the little sitting-room, and gazed about him with a raptly reminiscent air. It had a prim yet cosy aspect. His quick, roving eyes took it all in at a glance, but rested upon a coloured enlargement of a photograph hung in the place of honour above the mantelpiece.

It depicted a youth of some nineteen or twenty years, who, dressed in khaki, posed in an attitude of rather over-studied ease beside a flat-topped fluted marble shaft, upon which one elbow negligently rested, against the background of an Italian garden, with a glimpse of the Mediterranean in the distance.

As least, that was the effect it conveyed.

Mr. Trotter sighed.

"To the life!" he sighed. "Dear old Bertie Robbins!"

"Such a good likeness," sighed the little old lady.

"Wonderful!" he enthused. "How it all comes back!"

His eyes wandered about the room again.

"That little old Chinese mandarin that nods his head. And the cuckoo clock. And—— Oh, everything. Just as he used to depict it to me!"

The clock showed the time to be half-past four. He sighed sentimentally.

"How often," he recalled, "has dear old Bertie Robbins said, as we munched our bully and biscuit, 'Trimmington, old man, this isn't what I'd be eating if I was at Aunt Cecily's.' Or, 'Old man, if I was at home now I'd be sitting down to tea. Heavens, wouldn't my appetite surprise the dear old lady!'"

"Bertie always had a good appetite," she said. "He used to like high tea. When Agatha gets back we will have one. She is always so cross if I do anything in the house myself."

"Agatha?"

"My old servant; a friend, really. She has been with me so many years. She really rules the house. So faithful. She tyrannises over me."

"Of course!" cried Mr. Trotter, and slapped his knees. "Agatha—dear old faithful Agatha! Agatha, of course!"

But he was really less enthusiastic about the Agatha person than his breeding permitted him to show. Far less. He was not at all sure whether Agatha was the kind of person he could take to his bosom—or whether he was the kind of person she would take to hers. He had read stories about faithful, domineering, crusty old servants.

"Agatha will be back soon after five," the little old lady was saying. "She will set tea then. Tell me more about my poor Bertie. Did—did your friend say how he looked?"

Mr. Trotter bent forward earnestly, and a little regretfully. He had an excellent appetite—but it might be advisable to forgo the old lady's high tea.

"Miss Robbins," he said, "I don't want to harrow your feelings, but doesn't it occur to you that while we sit and wait for your domestic, and while we *talk* about him, your nephew may be wandering about the streets of London homeless and hungry? My friend had the impression that he was down on his luck."

And at this she rose piteously.

"Hungry! Homeless! My Bertie!" she quavered. "Oh, but he must be found quickly!" And at her words Mr. Trotter also rose, a look of resolution upon his face.

"Miss Robbins," he vowed, "I will find him. I will find him if I have to drag every street in London, every court and alley, with a hair-net. It will cost me money—a lot of money. What do I care if I spend my all? It will be for my dear old pal's sake, and for yours. Good-bye! I will go now!"

He held out his hand and she caught at it and stayed him.

"No," she protested. "You must not spend your money."

"But——" he demurred.

"He is my nephew," she insisted tremulously. "Wait a minute and I will get you some—all there is in the house."

"Of course," murmured Mr. Trotter, "if you put it like that——"

She left the room, and he waited with a resigned air. She returned again.

"Here is money," she said, pressing notes into his hand. "Ten pounds. And a little silver. I will get more to-morrow, next week, whenever you want it."

"I will write you out a receipt," he said, but she fluttered her hands agitatedly.

"You must not stop!" she urged. "Go quickly. Every minute lost keeps him away longer."

Mr. Trotter bent forward earnestly, and a little regretfully.

"I will go," he acquiesced. "And yet——"

He was thinking of Agatha as he glanced at the clock, and as he took a swift survey of himself in a mirror. Perhaps, too, he was thinking of the matronly young woman.

"I'm wondering," he explained. "Bertie is sensitive, proud?"

"So sensitive and proud. It is dreadful to think of him wandering about just—just like a tramp, perhaps."

"My own thought. Even though his

memory be gone, he will still have his pride. He will naturally want to look his best. One of his suits, perhaps; suitable linen, boots. The sight of old familiar things may even help him to remember."

She pointed up the stairs eagerly.

"You think of everything," she quavered. "His room is on the right at the top of the stairs. They try me too much. It is all ready for him. You will find whatever you want. And his suitcase to put things in. But do be quick. Oh, please!"

"I will lose no time," rejoined Mr. Trotter earnestly, and followed her directions cheerfully.

He did, it is but fair to admit, lose no time. Nor, judging by the appearance and evident weight of the suitcase he carried as he descended the stairs, had he omitted to pack the least little thing which might assist towards the rehabiliment of the young gentleman whose welfare he had so sincerely at heart.

He smiled kindly at the little old lady.

"Everything," he said with gusto. "I've got—I mean everything will be quite all right."

She was opening the street door for him.

"I hope so! I do so hope it will!" she quavered. "Only bring my boy back and ——"

Mr. Trotter said "Damn!" to himself. The little old lady cried aloud:

"Agatha! Such good news—about Bertie. This gentleman is an old Army friend. They went over the top together and Bertie saved his life. He's going to find him for me."

The tall, gaunt, grim-looking woman—the Agatha person—who was at the door, fixed Mr. Trotter with a gimlet eye. It bored through him; it bored through the suitcase he held.

"I suppose," she remarked, "he's going to bring him back in that?"

Mr. Trotter set the suitcase down regretfully. His premonitions about the Agatha person were, he realised, but too well justified. If only the little old lady's timing had been more exact! He had a feeling that the suitcase would be well sacrificed if he got away without further deprivation.

He wished very much that he had not lingered to put the final touch of artistry to his performance.

"I—I don't understand," the little old lady was quavering.

The Agatha person smiled grimly.

"*He* does," she observed.

"It doesn't matter." Mr. Trotter drew himself up with a dignity he knew to be wasted. "I will fit him up with clothes at my own expense, if necessary."

The Agatha person appraised his own need for refurbishing with a coldly critical eye. She entered and closed the door, setting herself against it as though unaware of his desire to terminate an unpleasant contretemps by leaving.

"*Find* Mr. Egbert and bring him back, and you can fit who you like up with the clothes in that case," she said. "Only you've got to convince me that *you've* done the finding."

"But, Agatha, you don't understand," protested the little old lady. "This gentleman—Mr. Trimmington, I believe, and so devoted to children—is my friend as well as dear Bertie's. He actually wanted to defray all the expense of finding him out of his own pocket; but, of course, I insisted——"

"Pooh!" intervened Mr. Trotter, with an attempt at airiness, but she declined to desist from singing his praises.

"I insisted, of course," she explained, "on his taking what there was in the house to go on with."

"You would," commented the Agatha person; and Mr. Trotter shrugged his shoulders.

"Ten pounds and a little silver. He wanted to give me a receipt for it."

"He can return the money to me. It will save using a stamp."

Mr. Trotter smiled a sickly appreciation of her humour as he produced the notes.

"And the silver," said the Agatha person.

He produced some silver and passed it over.

"I want another half-crown," she observed; and he fumbled in his pocket again

and produced the coin with an indifferent affectation of surprise.

She took it and opened the door, and he passed out. Faded away, as he would have put it had he felt equal to it. He sadly retraced his steps in the direction whence he had come. He did not so much as glance in the other direction, and had he done so he was hardly in the mood to have paid particular attention to the young man who loitered about.

The Agatha person contemplated her mistress coldly.

"Well?" she said.

"But I don't understand. Why were you so rude to that gentleman? After all he's promised to do."

"He hasn't done you," remarked the Agatha person, a little complacently. "And as for finding Mr. Egbert, perhaps I can do all the finding that is necessary."

The little old lady caught her breath. Mr. Trotter's treatment was forgotten.

"You—you know something," she whispered.

"I know he was a fool. I've known it a long time."

"I—I don't understand."

"I'm going to tell you, but you must keep calm. Mr. Egbert did something foolish and suffered for it. I've known, but he didn't want you to. I couldn't think of any tale to concoct that would satisfy you, so I let you think what you did think. But now he's finished his sentence——"

"His—his sentence!"

"He was foolish, I tell you, not wicked. He took some money from the firm to help a friend—a so-called friend—out of a difficulty. The friend swore to return it before the loss could be discovered. But he didn't. It was discovered, and Mr. Egbert owned up, but shielded the other man. The other man has owned up since, and the firm have seen Mr. Egbert—he's only come out to-day—and they've found him a position with another firm, where he won't have it against him."

"But—but why doesn't he come back?"

The Agatha person put an arm about her. Her voice was almost a croon.

"There, there," she said, "don't fret. It's his foolishness. He wants to be sure you'll have him back without being ashamed of him. I know you won't. And he's going to——"

The little old lady was not interested.

"It's all so silly," she sobbed. "I don't want to hear it. I want my boy."

The Agatha person did a thing which at another time the little old lady might have considered extremely unladylike. She inserted a finger in each corner of her mouth and emitted a shrill whistle. The young man who was loitering down the road looked startled; then, remembering how the Agatha person had taught him that very accomplishment, smiled and obeyed its behest.

Mr. Trimmington Trotter, who had ineffectually kept an eye open for the three-ha'pence—vain oblation upon the altar of fortune—thrown away by the matronly young woman, did not hear the whistle. He had left Rosemary Road. But at that precise moment he was aware of another familiar sound.

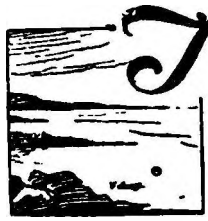
It was the pipe of the fat little boy's voice.

"Mummie, there's the gentleman who fort he had a shilling!"

He glared—there is no other word for it; then, turning abruptly, stalked down a side street.

HER DANDY FILM

By NELLIE TOM-GALLON and CALDER WILSON



THE run from Kilburn to Cricklewood is nothing much for a motor-bicycle; but it was long enough for Jim Hurley to decide, definitely and strongly, that he was a fool.

It began, of course, with the incident of that confounded picture-paper that Marjorie would have every week; but when it came to the girl you were engaged to, and frightfully fond of, declaring that she was "simply potty" on the beastly screen heroes whose portraits were given away, one after the other, by the picture papers, it was absolutely necessary for a fellow to do something to set things right.

Jim Hurley's engagement to Marjorie Bevan had come about so smoothly and nicely that he had probably been spoilt. He had done so much to build up the trade of Bevan's Athletic Stores in the Kilburn High Road, from the very first day he came there, a bright errand-boy, to the present time when he was manager and junior partner in the concern, that old George Bevan had been more than pleased at the idea of his only daughter and his partner making a match of it.

But then the business wouldn't be so good, and Jim wouldn't be such a power in it, if he didn't give the balance of his days to it with the result that Marjorie did not have quite so much of his company as she reckoned to be her due. She didn't complain exactly, but she got into the habit of spending most of her spare time at the picture palace with girl friends. And, seeing nothing in a busy young man behind a counter to worship, she transferred that charming emotion to the strong and silent men of the silver sheet.

Gradually Jim got fed-up with the situation, without knowing in the least how to alter it. Then this blessed morning had come a chance to do something to show Marjorie that he was as good as ever a one of the Jack Pickfords, George Walshes, or Sessue Hayakawas who made her sigh for impossible heights of romance.

The local paper it was that showed Jim a promise of brightness, for in it was an advertisement of an unusual kind:

"Wanted—an exceptionally strong man. Must be young and clean-shaven, and have plenty of courage.—Apply at the Royal Studio, Cricklewood."

Hence the mounting on the motor-bicycle and the rush out to Cricklewood at a very early hour.

But, though it was only nine o'clock when Jim Hurley reached his journey's end, he

found the one-time aeroplane factory which had been turned into film studios bristling with life and language.

By the door were several motor-charabancs, filled, to the joy of the attendant crowd, by a mass of convicts. There seemed to be some delay in their starting, though producer and all his satellites were in attendance, and it proved to be because one of the convicts had sent his dresser to fetch his fur-coat. Jim gaped at him open-mouthed, but was too busy with his own affairs to worry over the queer taste of the rich-and-idle that brought them into clothes and work that they would have cried over if they had been a real part of their life.

Jim showed the advertisement to an important small boy entrenched behind a desk and spectacles, and was presently fetched to the presence of the chief producer, who, judging from the style and furnishing of his office, was a very "chief" person indeed.

The business of Bevan's Athletic Stores had brought Jim Hurley into touch with all forms of bodily development from an early day in his career, and his interest had led him steadily through all sorts of gynasium work to the point where he was about as well trained for a middle-weight as a man could be. But like many another in his class, he did not look big and beefy enough to attract the untrained eye. The chief producer was sceptical.

"Well, my lad, I want somebody who's really strong for this important part in the film I'm doing. I shouldn't think you'd got the strength for what I want. Sorry, but you look too small altogether."

Jim didn't want to lose this chance of an "important part." It was exactly what he needed to get Marjorie Bevan to view him from the right angle. He looked round anxiously for something he could lift to show his powers, but there didn't seem to be any loose furniture available, so very quickly and quite calmly he reached for the chief producer's knees, and in a moment that eminent person was doing an involuntary dry swimming stunt across the shoulder of the man he had said was not strong.

Language best conveyed by exclamation marks was the order of the day for several moments, and then the chief producer had the wisdom to laugh feebly and admit that he could hardly say that Mr. Hurley was not exceptionally strong. He was engaged at the very delightful salary of three pounds for his day's work, and felt himself no longer his own property when he was given a ticket with a description of the greatness of the film company on it, and various entries of costumes, and stray bits to be torn off and given up in exchange for lunch, and the payment he was to get at the end of the day. He noticed that the costume was to be "Gynasium and Clown," and that didn't seem, so far as the last item was concerned, quite the clothing for the "strong, silent hero."

Jim had heard of make-up, and fondly believed that that mysterious process must inevitably beautify everyone. The dresser had rubbed yellow grease-paint all over his face, and then worked patches of red down his cheeks and round his eyes.

These looked rather nice in the looking-glass, and of the effect of red when photographed Jim was happily ignorant. Feeling self-conscious but decidedly happy, he was piloted down "on to the floor," a phrase that puzzled him, but which he found was the description of the great floor space of the studio, with half a dozen different scenes set around it, each with its monster lights massed in front on either side of the camera, whirring under the steady turning hand of the camera-man. Jim spotted a corner of a gymnasium scene in a far corner, and was puzzled at the lowness of the walls. It seemed impossible that all the mechanism of the lamps above it could not be seen when the film was made, but his intelligent speculations were stopped by being directed to go "on the set."

And in two moments he knew that his dreams of becoming a strong silent hero were false. A large beefy man, also in gym. costume, out of which he bulged aggressively, was the hero, and Jim was needed as a clown, whose tricks should relieve the tedium of certain scenes where the hero's feebleness of muscular outfit might have been too obvious.

The hero himself didn't like his part, and

was feeling by no means amiable towards this youngster who, in figure, was so exactly what he would have liked to be himself.

The scene was supposed to be the training quarters of the hero what time he prepared for the "Great Fight," and Jim Hurley was the "necessary relief." He was instructed to do "something funny" on the horizontal bars, and he did some turns and twists on them, for pure love of the feeling of power it gave him, that brought a quick gathering of every workman and secretary and official, of many and nameless variety that battens on a film studio, to stand round and applaud.

The hero turned and said audibly: "This is rather tiring. I thought this man was to do a bit of clowning." And the chief producer, who had been thoroughly enjoying himself, cleared his throat hurriedly and started to set things right.

"Oh, yes. Ha, ha! Very good. But now come down with a crash somehow, will you? Any way that's clumsy and funny will do."

Jim pulled himself up, did a last twist and fling, and apparently missed his bar and came down with a jarring crash on the mat.

"Ah, that's better—looked as if he was quite used to it," the hero drawled; and Jim felt murderous.

Then came the scene of the "Great Fight," and Jim was carefully instructed, in whispers, by the producer, that as Mr. So-and-so did not understand boxing, the bouts must necessarily be slow, and Jim had better pretend to hit.

Jim didn't understand the "slow" idea. till he found himself in the tedious business of having every blow and counter carefully arranged and filmed separately.

For hours they went on with the First Round, and then the Final Round of the "Great Fight," and he couldn't for the life of him imagine what these single blows would look like in a film.

In the First Round he was supposed to knock the hero down, and he did it with the greatest glee; but in the Last Round the hero was supposed to knock him out; and, for once in his life, that beefy person seemed to have found the way to hit, for Jim went flying through the ropes, and wondered if he was the only one of the combatants to have been told to pretend to hit.

By the end of the day, Jim had learned to know what the yell of "lights" from the producer meant, and to be ready to try and keep his eyes steady under the instant glare that followed the call. Also, that when there was another shout of "shoot," there were no weapons in sight, but the rehearsals of a scene were finished, and the camera was beginning to whirr as it recorded the movements of the players.

He was dead tired by the time the day was finished, and he felt, as he ran his motor-bicycle out again from the studio, as if he had been shut away from daylight in a world of artificial light so intense that it seemed to burn through one's flesh; but as he rushed for home he pulled his wits together sufficiently to build up a determination to depart from the straight and narrow way of truth—so far as the account of his day's work was concerned.

Supper in the home of the proprietor of Bevan's Stores was a cheery, and, withal, important function. The shop below was closed for the day, and Marjorie would chatter of the latest "picture" she had seen that afternoon, or Jim would head her off to get in an account of some chance customer who had asked for spiked gym. shoes or golf balls with a spring inside, because they had been told by some practical joker they could get such things.

But on this night of nights for Marjorie, Jim must tell them everything that had happened to him at that most wonderful of places—a film studio. Did he think there was any chance of Marjorie getting a chance to "walk on" in the crowd—would he try and manage it for her?

He assured her hurriedly that the one thing he had found out most surely was that no one good-looking was ever allowed to come into the crowds at the Royal Studios. It was felt that to throw up the beauty of the star contrast was the great thing. Marjorie tossed her head and said the star was a poor thing; and Jim agreed eagerly.

"But, my lad, tell us what you did. What's the film called what you've bin actin' in?"

Old Bevan was leaning back comfortably, pipe in mouth, thumbs in armholes of his waistcoat, and ready to be amused by the young people.

"*Well—it's called 'The Dandy Fighter.'* I saw that on a slate they came and held up just in front of me, just as I was getting really warmed up to the bit I was playing. They photographed that slate every minute nearly."

"A slate with the name on—what on earth for?" said Marjorie.

"Oh—so as to know what the film was about, I suppose," said Jim, to whom the mysteries of those rooms where every bit of film was taken, and cut, and joined, to make the whole that the public saw, were unknown.

"Well—I never. But what did you do, Jim? You're the Dandy Fighter, of course?"

"Me—oh, yes—yes—of course. Oh, I did some nice bits in a gymnasium scene to-day, and I did the fight."

"Oh, that'd be easy for you, my lad, provided the other chap was a middle-weight too," said old Bevan.

"Yes, it was quite easy. I just played with him and did what I liked, really. Of course, you'd never know me when I'm made up. I look so different—dark and big."

Jim was lying carelessly; but his homeward journey of plots and plans had borne fruit, and he believed that the chances of Marjorie seeing the film were small, for the picture palace to which she generally went did not show anything but American pictures. Why shouldn't he snatch from the disappointment of the day the chance of impressing her.

"It's a lovely part, I suppose—and are you going again to-morrow?"

"Yes. I've got to do some sort of hairbreadth escape over a river and a bridge, I believe, but I don't know exactly. I'll tell you all about it to-morrow."

With a heavy heart Jim went off the next day, wondering what fresh humiliation was to be his for the glory of the beefy hero.

The game must be kept up, whatever it was, and Marjorie and her father lied to; but Jim's thoughts were busy the whole time in an agonised endeavour to think of some plan to get his girl married to him, out of hand, before she could by any chance find out what had happened to him.

But there were difficulties in the way of this, for old Bevan did not approve of young marriages, and Marjorie didn't seem keen on settling down yet awhile. And Jim loved her dearly, and believed that she loved him, if he could only drag her out of this cloud of foolishness.

To-day he found a hideous clown's dress put out for him, and again they daubed his face with paint in patches.

In the studio he found another corner of a scene, with indefinite ends, set for the chief producer, but this time it was a circus, and on the tiers of benches that ended so abruptly at either side was a motley crowd of men and women, and, down below them, two horses with a man and a girl on them, were being led backwards and forwards before the "crowd" while the camera whirred busily.

Jim looked about wondering what his stunt for the day was.

He soon found out.

Up above were one or two trapeze bars swinging in the wind from the skylights, and the chief producer was talking to a man in tights and spangled trunks. When he saw Jim he beckoned him.

"Now, Mr. Hurley, here is really a chance to distinguish yourself. This gentleman is a professional acrobat—engaged for your safety, mark you. You will each take one of the swinging bars for your own personal use; *you* will dive from your bar and be caught by him, hanging head downwards. Do you follow me?"

"I think so; dive from my bar and be caught by him—by the wrists I suppose. And then what do I do?"

"Well—there's a net, you see, in case of accidents. He gives you a twist, and throws you back towards your bar, you know; but—you're a clown, you know, and you lose your nerve directly you let go of his hands, and you twist yourself in the air and grab at him again, and then—fall into the net."

"Oh, is that all?" said Jim sarcastically.

"Yes, of course, if you were an acrobat,

you would be able to catch hold of your partner's wrists again, instead of falling; but it can't be expected of you. So long as you do something as funny as your fall yesterday it will be all right. We shall 'pan' the camera, so as to follow your fall into the net; it ought to be awfully good, really."

"As funny as his fall yesterday!" Jim's blood boiled. Never in his life before had he been laughed at, and the average man, the first time he has that happen to him, gets a shock to his self-love that he never quite gets rid of. They should see, Jim decided, whether he was going to be funny or not.

He took his place on his swinging bar with a grim scowl that made his clown's make-up funnier than ever. Down below was the producer, running on with his usual flow of directions, that with most of the artistes seem to take the place of their own thoughts; opposite Jim was the acrobat poised on his bar.

"Now get to it, boys; swing, and then, you, sir, throw yourself through the air, and then do the comedy fall. Come along!"

Jim had once taken the trouble to do some trapeze work to see in what way it differed from his usual gymnasium stunts, so he knew that he was engaged on one of the most difficult tricks that trapeze artistes ever attempt. *But* he knew just the point the chief producer didn't.

He set his bar swinging, and when the acrobat signalled to him, dived straight for the hands stretched out to him. He caught and held, was turned, and took his throw as if to go back to his own bar, still swinging in the air.

But the moment after being thrown free he was apparently seized with fear, did a disjointing twist in mid-air, turned, and clutched again at the acrobat's still extended hands. The secret of the trick was that, when he was thrown back towards his bar, he took a higher angle than he would have done if he had meant to go to it, and so, in turning again, fell to the hands still outstretched below him.

Then revenge was sweet, for as Jim grabbed the acrobat's hands again, instead of falling into the net, he felt the wrath within him surge to the surface, and, in uncontrolled rage, he looked down at the producer who had so humiliated him, and made as ugly a face as he could compass. But he had forgotten the make-up, which turned his grimace into something quite different.

"Excellent, my boy! But why didn't you drop into the net? Much more effective than your mere look of fear. That was excellent, I admit; when you looked down at me you were positively frantic with terror—but I should have liked the drop, all the same."

Jim was speechless. He had done a wonderful trick, and had shown his disdain of the cackling fools around him—and he was told it was funny, and might have been funnier.

In bitterness of soul he departed from the studio, and shook the dust of it from his feet. His eyes and his head ached with the lights. He was sick of the producer, and he loathed, with a deadly loathing, the hero who had strutted and smiled and smoothed immaculate hair while he made love to a really nice girl.

All Jim's risks had been nothing, his hard work worth a few pounds, in comparison with this fool who had only to raise his wonderful eyebrows and look up at the prompt corner, well and safely above the camera, to have every girl in front of the screen believing that he was looking straight into her individual heart.

On one thing Jim Hurley was determined. He would not go near the studio again, do what they might. They could get some other fool to do any more stunts for them; he was through with it.

But there remained the ordeal of the supper table, and Marjorie, pantingly eager to know what he had been doing.

Jim growled and ate busily for a little while, but he had to tell her at last some story or another.

"Well, to-day I was doing a frightfully thrilling thing. You see, the heroine is on one side of——"

"Is she really pretty, close to?!"

"Eh? Oh, no, not a bit. Well, she's on one side of the river, and it was cliffs on either side and the river ever so far below. Then—

well then, I was on the other side from her, and I saw the villain stealing up behind her, so I——"

"But did they build a precipice—no, two precipices, and a river in the studio?"

"Oh, no—no, of course not. We went out on location, as they call it. Somewhere down in Surrey. I didn't notice particularly. Well, when I saw the villain, I seized on a bough of a tree that overhung the river, and I swung out on it as far as I could. Then I let go and jumped, or started to jump, to where the heroine was."

"Started to jump? What on earth do you mean? Either you jumped or you didn't?"

"Well, just as I let go of the bough, the heroine saw the villain, and *she* jumped and landed on the rock where I'd come from. D'you see?"

"It sounds thrilling. But what did you do?"

"Oh, I saw her sailing over me just as I let go of the bough, so I turned round and caught it again, and pulled myself up on the rock beside her. I should think the small boys in the gallery will cheer like mad when they see that, don't you?"

Marjorie looked at Jim narrowly, but she didn't quite know how to voice her suspicions. She only answered with extraordinary meekness.

"'The Dandy Fighter,' it's called, isn't it? I shall look forward to when it's released. It will be simply lovely to see you doing that sort of thing!"

And Jim's heart felt like a piece of iced lead in his bosom.

One thing he had firmly made up his mind to: nothing on earth would induce him to go to the studio at Cricklewood again. But Marjorie knew too much about films to believe that a picture could be finished in two days; she knew it to be a matter of weeks; so, day by day, with only an occasional break, he had to go and spend long, unoccupied days hanging about London, away from Bevan's stores, where he could have been happy in his work. For four weeks this subterfuge had to be carried out, and for nearly every one of those days that made up those weeks he had to invent some new story of hair-raising adventures by flood and field and studio in which he had risked his life. The result was bad for his temper, and that led to disaster.

When he ventured to take up business steadily again, Marjorie was by no means satisfied at the apparent thankfulness with which he did it.

"Jim, aren't you going to ask Mr. Levey to give you another part?" she said one day. "It seems a pity, when you made such a success as 'The Dandy Fighter,' not to follow it up."

"What on earth for?" said Jim sharply.

He was busy at the moment sorting out boxing-gloves, and they brought back too sharply his humiliation in the studio to make him pleasant-tempered.

"Well, I should think you wouldn't want to stop grubbing in a stuffy shop, when you might be having such glorious adventures as you had in that picture," said Marjorie, not unreasonably.

But Jim still had the boxing-gloves under his eyes, and their effect was bad.

"Look here, I'm about fed-up with your pottiness over the film people," he said. "I do believe you've thought more of me since I went in for that nonsense than ever you did while you watched me climb up from errand-boy to my present position as manager."

"Well, why not? What is there in being manager of a pokey affair like this, compared with swimming down the rapids holding a girl above your head at arms' length? I can't think how you can put up with this life, after having such a glorious chance."

"See here, my girl! If you don't like me as your father's partner, I'm not going to be thought bettered by any such monkey tricks as those picture people go in for, and don't you forget it!"

"Well, I don't know that I *do* like you as my father's partner!" said Marjorie, losing her temper in turn. "And if you're content to go on like this, when you might be something that all the girls would be

envying me for marrying, I'm through with the whole thing! Here's your ring! I'll tell father I've changed my mind!"

Jim gasped. He had not expected such a thing as this, but he had been too stupid to see that Marjorie was in an awkward position. She had boasted to her friends of the wonderful things he had been doing "on the pictures," and now she had come to the point of not knowing how to parry kind inquiries as to when Jim was going to do any more acting.

"I'm through with the whole thing. Here's your ring. . . . I'll tell father I've changed my mind."

She took herself away now, and kept out of sight for the rest of the day.

The condition of affairs was intolerable, and old George Bevan blamed his manager for not being able to manage his love affairs in better fashion. This led to a somewhat heated argument between the two, and a week later saw Jim gone, bag and baggage, from the house that had known him so long.

There was no financial disaster for Jim in leaving Bevan's stores, only a heart-ache. He was soon in a position of trust in a big stores near Westbourne Grove, and threw himself heart and soul into the task of putting their athletic department into proper order. But all the ordering of cricket accessories and footballs could not drive Marjorie out of his mind, though the cause of the trouble —"The Dandy Fighter" and its humiliations —had faded away in the passing of three months.

Then, one Saturday afternoon, after the stores were closed, Jim strolled along to Westbourne Park station, determined to take train a little way out of town and walk some of his melancholy off. But by the station he passed a big picture-palace, and, flaring across it in fierce reds and blues was a poster:

"'The Dandy Fighter' Now Showing. Come In and see the Great British Film."

Jim went in and groped his way in the dark to a seat.

He was lucky, for topical pictures were running at the moment, and, as the programme was rather crowded, they were hurrying the show a little, and certain Royal personages, attending a family funeral, came and went to the graveside at the double. But, of course, the camera cannot lie.

Then up went "The Dandy Fighter" on the screen, and after the title came a portrait of the chief producer, smiling and much more tidy than Jim had ever seen him at the studio. Then, after a little more film given up to advertising all the wonderful people who had photographed the picture, and dressed the people in it, and written the story for it—but the latter was evidently a very minor affair as compared with who produced it—at last the story started.

Jim, of course, had seen nothing of the picture except those bits in which he had been concerned, and he found it bad to the very heart of it. So did the audience.

Then, at the first flicker of the familiar corner of a gymnasium, he felt his blood run cold, wondering what was coming.

To the stoutest heart the first sight of themselves on a film is apt to cause a shock, and when Jim saw himself, with hollow cheeks and eyes, come on and look helplessly at the horizontal bars, he made a movement to go. But at that moment a small boy near him laughed, and Jim turned back again to the screen; and then, to his credit be it said, he laughed, too.

At his laugh a girl in the seat next to Jim turned to him with a little cry, and then the iron entered into his soul. For the girl was Marjorie.

Possibly nothing funnier than that really strong man, with the cruel make-up of red cheeks and eye-sockets—which photographed as terrible hollows—has ever been seen on the screen. If the chief producer had been a wise man, he would have had far more of it to save an otherwise hopelessly bad film. But, as it was, the house laughed from the first moment of Jim's entrance to the last moment when he landed with his clever crash on the mattress. Then they applauded and settled down in better humour for the rest of the picture.

Jim had one hope, and one only—that Marjorie might not recognise him in his grotesque make-up, and might still believe his fairy-tale that he was disguised as the big and beefy hero. But it was a very faint hope.

Came the circus scene, and the house held its breath as the clown with the patchy face half-fell, half-swung from his swinging bar and grabbed at the hands of the man in front of him. Then, when he was thrown off and did the clever trick of turning round in the air and apparently throwing himself back again to make a sure, but sufficiently funny, grab at the hands still held out to him, they shrieked with joy.

The chief producer had found some atom of appreciation of the find he had made in his "strong man," for he had seen the grimace that had been made at him when Jim was hanging in the air; and long after, when his victim was suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, the chief producer had had that bit of film enlarged, and made from it a "close-up." In other words, for several seconds he filled practically the whole of the screen with the patchily made-up wrathful face of the clown, drawn into the fiercest of grimaces. Darkened lips were twisted, dotted eyes squinted, shortened nose was screwed up and "rabbiting." Never was such an orgy of face-making, and never did an audience laugh as the people round about Jim laughed at that "close-up."

Sick and giddy with shame, remembering all his tales of great stunts in the room over Bevan's stores, Jim sat through that ordeal. For Marjorie had recognised him. When the clown had done his twist in the air, and seemed about to fall, she had grabbed at his arm and gasped. His last hope was gone.

The beefy hero slobbered and strutted through his part, and Jim gasped over the

effect of the fight in which he had taken part. For every little bit had been joined on to all the other little bits, with the result that it was a most thrilling, dashing fight; and to anyone who knew anything of the noble art, the beefy hero made a very poor showing of it as against Jim.

When it was all over, Jim whispered to Marjorie:

"Are you alone? Have you had enough?"

For he was no coward when he came to his fences, and she quietly got up from her seat and followed him out into the open air.

They stood in the garish lobby, blinking at the recovered daylight; and, to Jim's astonishment, he was not so miserable as he ought to have been. He had lost the girl he loved, but suddenly he knew there was something that warmed and comforted him for all his suffering. It took him a moment to find out what it was; then he knew that the laughter and applause of the audience for his work made a difference to the very soul of commonplace, rather stupid Jim Hurley—but Marjorie?

"Jim," she said, "I only heard to-day the picture was on here, and I came over at once. Oh, but you're splendid!"

Jim gasped. It wasn't possible that she——

"But, Jim, what did you pretend to be that hateful man that played the lover for? He was simply loathsome; but I found you the minute you came on, even hidden in the funny make-up."

"I'm sorry you should have seen anything so hideous. I tried to keep it from you, you know. That's where all the trouble started."

"Hideous? Why, you were simply splendid! *I* know how frightfully difficult the stunts you did were, and to be funny as well—you were simply marvellous!"

Jim had a sensation as if the world were tumbling about his ears, but he was so excited and happy that he managed to stammer out:

"I'll do it again if you want me to, Marjorie. That is, if you promise never to be disgusted."

"No; I don't know that I want you to do it again. It's too dangerous, really. But, Jim, I would like you to come back to Bevan's and——"

It was such a very long pause this time that Jim, slow as he was, simply had to end it.

"And you?" he said, as they walked off over the canal bridge to Paradise.

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pulse beating madly in the creamy column of her throat; then, with a groan, she bent her head to rest it heavily against his shoulder.

"Oh," she moaned, "I have only been thinking of my own part! Tom, he loved you! Can't you make him see that if he won't—oh, if he won't—this will mean death to my very soul?"

"I can try," muttered Tom, and went out.

It seemed years before he returned, to stoop above her a kind and pitying face upon which Jeff's decision was writ as plainly as print upon a book.

"It's no use, I can see it," said she collectedly.

"He says it wouldn't be playing the game," muttered the major. "And, by ——, Billie, from a man's standpoint, he's right, you know."

"Tom, can I—could you get permission for me to see him?"

"I think so," said he; then, with his hands on her shoulders, his wistful eyes bent upon her white face: "Dear girl, think! It will be too late after."

"It is too late now"—with a little smile—"and I wouldn't have it otherwise. Oh, Tom, don't keep me waiting! I can bear anything bravely, save only that."

The major's influence being powerful she had not to face that which she had feared, but was ushered straight into the dreary cell where her man sat, his sun-bronzed hands between his knees, his eyes bent frowningly upon the floor. Once before she had seen that shadow beneath the bronze of his fine face when, having heard of the prisoners in the Tower, he had said: "It must have plumb broken their hearts." Had he foreseen this when he had so spoken? Was his so broken now that the prison shadow lay upon it?"

"Jeff," she whispered—"Jeff!"

With a cry, inarticulate yet awful because of the fear in it, he sprang to his feet and went staggering back against the wall, where he stayed, his hands spread out on either side of his absolutely still yet tense figure, his frowning gaze bent upon her face.

"I didn't know," said he. "He said yu had wrote——"

"I wanted to prepare him," explained the major softly.

"Nothing yu could say, nothing yu could do, could prepare me for this," said Jeff brokenly. "I—I—— Oh, God, major, it ain't fair!"

"Jeff, it wasn't he—it was I! I wouldn't take your answer, dear, I wouldn't. You must let me."

"No," he broke in violently—"no! For if I hadn't the right to desire yu then—and I know I hadn't—what right can I have now?"

"The right," said she steadily, "of my love for you—of your love for me."

"Don't yu come near me," he pleaded. "Don't yu touch me, else I—— *Billie!* Oh, my God!"

Locked in each other's arms, black head against fair one, speechless, motionless, save for those few hard-fetched sobs which so racked Jeff's lithe body, they stood for a space, and then Billie, drawing back, lifted her hand to brush the dark hair out of his eyes. She thought the battle won.

"You're going to let me?" she asked, so pitifully that the gaoler, with a hurried glance at the major, turned swiftly away with dimming eyes.

"Billie honey," said Jeff tenderly, looking yearningly down into her face, "do yu remember once when we was out riding how we came to a quicksand yu thought was a pond, and how yu, being—well, being just crazy and refusing to take any notice of me, rode in and got bogged?"

"Do I remember, when I know you saved my life? Oh, Jeff, what a fool I have been!"

"Do you remember"—kissing her softly—"how yu said, 'After this, I'll leave it to yu'? Honey, I tell yu this is the worst place we ever come to, and I want yu to say now, same as yu said then, 'I'll leave it to yu!'"

"Jeff"—clinging to him—"I can't—I can't!"

"It's enough," he went on softly, "for me to know that yu love me, to know that without being sure of what to-morrow brings yu would still take me to your heart to-day. But, my most precious, what do you suppose I could find to say to the Boss of the Riders——"

"God," interpolated the major softly.

"When He put it to me at the Big Round-up what a low-down sort of game I'd been playing off on yu? I ain't lived straight so long that I can forget how crooked I lived once; but I never done as crooked a thing as this would be, Billie. There's some things a fellow, even if he has been an outlaw, draws the line at—one's cheating at cards, and the other's bluffing a woman—especially the woman he loves. Billie, yu got to say, 'I leave it with yu.'"

"I can't—I can't! Oh, I shall die!"

"No, yu won't, though if I let yu do this thing yu want to do, yu would, for the tongues of them yu know would kill yu."

"Jeff, did you kill him?"—with bated breath.

"Yes. I never pretended I didn't"—steadily.

"Did he—deserve it?"

"If I say that, loving yu as I do, I'd do it again to-morrow—can you believe he did?"

"Yes—— Oh, is it time?"

"Not yet," said the major. "It won't be long now, though."

"Long enough for me," muttered Jeff above her bent head. "Billie, can't yu say it? Not yet? But yu will."

He held her close, his head a little bent, his eyes on the curve of her beloved cheek and chin, and the major turned aside with a stifled curse. At length, wearily yet steadily, her head came up, and, looking Jeff straight in the eyes, she said clearly:

"I'll leave it to you."

"I knew my girl!" cried he triumphantly; then, as they drew apart:

"How's that Bentley fellow?"

"Oh, he's been good—good! Jeff, do you remember saying that night when you rode in, 'He's only an infant'?"

"Yes," said Jeff promptly. "Because I knew some day he was going to grow up."

"You can't believe how much he's grown up this winter."

"Yes, I can," returned he softly, "for I know how I've grown up with only the memory of yu."

"Oh, Jeff—Jeff, where did you learn to say all these lovely things?"

"My heart taught them to me, I guess," he answered simply.

"Time!" warned the major.

They clung close for the moment, and then, putting her aside, he said:

"Nothing matters now I know yu love me. Yu'll be there?"

"To the end." Then, terrified by the significance of the word: "No—no! I didn't mean that!"

"I hope yu did," said he sweetly, "for whenever or wherever that comes I ask nothing better than for yu to be there, and I don't believe we've either of us need to be afraid, seeing that as we belong we're sure to find each other—beyond—whichever way this goes."

"Aren't—aren't you afraid?"

"With yu to love me?"—smiling.

"That was a fool question of mine," said she proudly, "for I know you have never been that!"

"Not until to-night, when yu come in; then I was. Good-night, yu little heart-breaker."

"Shall we walk a little?" asked the major.

The sunset light was upon the land, and at the end of each straight street of the little city the plain burned like a shield of burnished copper, while to the west and north, above a veil of lilac-blue, laced with threads of cloth-of-gold, shone the cold, far glimmer of the snows. A great slice of moon rode low above them, and close to one mighty peak, soaring far above the rest, burned a small yet brilliant star.

In utter silence they walked along, one of Billie's cold little hands resting on the major's arm, his other hand laced above it. And as they passed people turned to look and whisper. The saloons were already lit, and many cow-ponies waited patiently, their reins atrail in the dust, for their owners were now busy within, threshing out the question of the day. As they passed one saloon, known as the Golden Gleam, someone coming out in a great hurry bumped nearly into them.

"I sure am sorry, madam," began the offender, sweeping off his hat.

"Baldy!" cried the girl, and saw his face harden.

"Yes, it's Miss Billie," said the major softly—"Miss Billie come all the way from the east to marry Jeff."

"And he won't let me," said she softly.

"Why, he *couldn't!*" returned Baldy positively. "But yu, Miss Billie—it's the greatest——"

"Oh, can't he swear?" cried Billie, as she stood appalled, watching that vanishing cloud of dust whose heart held Baldy and his pony.

"They all can," commented the major—"even your Jeff."

"*My* Jeff!"—in a thrilled voice. "Oh, doesn't that sound wonderful? Tom, do you think this man you engaged to defend the case is—is competent?"

"I don't know, Billie," he answered wearily. "Sometimes it seems to me as though he's away from here a whole lot. But what's the use of talking like this. He probably holds strings we don't know of which he will pull at the right time; though, of course, the only possible defence in Jeff's case, seeing he pleads guilty to the charge, is 'justifiable homicide.'"

"And even that would mean the—penitentiary—wouldn't it?"—wincing at the dreadful word.

"Not necessarily. Now, little sister, as you're dead tired, I think, dear, perhaps we'd better go in."

"Must we?" said she wistfully.

"I think so." Then, guessing what she feared, and looking fixedly ahead to where the emerald-tinted sky stooped above the far ranges: "I promise you she sha'n't talk."

Sleep never touched Billie's eyes that night, as she lay gazing fixedly into the dark, feeling again the close pressure of Jeff's arms and lips,

hearing again the low, broken murmur of his voice as he stooped above her.

Though she had thought it impossible for the love she had for him to deepen, yet she had to acknowledge to herself as she lay there that, because of his refusal to accept that offer of hers, it burned all the brighter.

"He would sin as a giant sins, and not as a dwarf," Tom had once said of him, and now she realised the major's meaning, for though Jeff's sins had been many they had never been mean. He had, at least, never rustled cattle for his own benefit, never killed for killing's sake; the follies of those early days had been the follies of wild youth, not of sheer badness of heart. And, despite his one known, vile parent, and his sinful upbringing, he had managed to come through it all carrying the clean and simple heart of a little child.

Surely, she thought hopefully, all this would be taken into account when the reckoning came.

It was a very subdued Kitty who greeted her next morning at that breakfast-table where pretence took the part of appetite—a Kitty who looked from one to the other of those two she really loved with wondering, red-rimmed eyes. Yet, warned by the major, she did not touch upon the solemn business ahead, or refer to Jeff, as, had she gone unwarned, she most assuredly would have done. They talked of the ranch, of the coming beef round-up, of the scarcity—thanks to the snows and the wolves—of the calves, of the Morgan horses Tom had lately imported from the east, of the news of the world—of anything and everything save that which lay nearest their hearts. And so it was through the evil days that followed, and Billie, knowing at whose instance this new reserve on Kitty's part had sprung, loved the major the more for it.

"Tom," said Billie one day, "do you know I believe I could give some evidence that might help."

"You, Billie?"

"Yes, listen." Then she told him of that meeting with the man Jeff had called Pete. "Is that the one who has turned state evidence?"

"No; his name is Austin. Help? Yes, I think it might, though I'll bet the other side will try to bring it in as irrelevant."

They did, though not until Billie had said enough to show the utter incorruptability of the man standing so quietly in the dock. She was ruled down, but as she resumed her seat beside the major she sent a bright little message of a smile flashing across to the prisoner—a smile which even the crystal tears lying upon her pale cheeks failed to belie.

The dead man's "friends" were many; but Jeff was not without his friends, for, at the back of the room, Baldy and others of his ilk sat crowded together like love-birds on a perch, occasionally, when their feelings became too deep for them, breathing loud and audible threats as to what was going to happen to the state witness should the case "go ugly" against Jeff And in the front—in the stalls, as it were—some few, but big and influential, stockmen sat with the major and Billie. They knew—none better—the need for might to back right. Jeff's counsel had been very hard to suit over the jury, and, finally, the judge, though not friendly, was at least unbiased.

Baldy, with his headlong partisanship, was like a ray of light in the gloom.

"You're a ——!" he had shouted once, yet had instantly been silenced, not so much by the officers of the court as by Jeff's whimsical look of love and quietly spoken: "Now, don't yu, Baldy."

The days wore on, the weary, weary days, and Billie felt she hated the big, upstanding man who browbeat alike prisoner and witness, lashing them with a tongue limber as a flail, baulking and turning them with a wit keen and ready as a swordsman's point. In her ignorance it seemed to her that Jeff's case was already lost, his soul damned.

"Don't let Jeff see you cry, honey," whispered the major's voice.

"No," she said instantly, and, lifting her eyes to where the prisoner stood, sweat-soaked yet unshaken, sent him—though God alone knows where in her tortured woman's heart she found it—a tremulous, reassuring smile. Grey-shirted, with a gay neckerchief still knotted about the strong brown column of his throat, he stood there through the long hours, with much of gravity yet nothing of fear showing in his handsome face, and only once made the mistake of speaking unbidden—that being when his late companion in sin, the State witness, was making a damning statement.

"That is not so, Austin," he had said, "and yu know it."

Then, being taken to task, he had apologised for the indiscretion, and lapsed again into that grave and watchful silence with which he listened to both sides.

And now, on this golden afternoon, "counsel against" was on his feet, the assurance of ultimate triumph strong in the wonderful, sonorous voice in which he was marshalling up that army of damning facts which the prisoner's friends knew would be so

hard to refute. What possible evidence had they, thought Billie despairingly, to combat this masterly assembly of forces which Fate itself seemed to have summoned up against the man who, standing in the dock, hand folded on hand, was so quietly considering the man below him, the man whose whole overwhelming personality was being remorselessly used to bring him down to death, and yet Jeff's grave eyes showed nothing either of fear or of resentment.

Once, when in one of those brief, guarded interviews that Billie so eagerly snatched at, she had mentioned this, he looked at her in grave surprise.

"Why," he said, "it ain't his fault. There's lots of things a fellow's got to do when he's paid that he don't exactly like; but if he's the right sort of fellow he does them well just because of that. Can't yu see it, Billie?"

"When you explain it I can"—wearily. "But I can't love him for it."

"Why, I don't want yu to," he had answered with a smile.

The major, glancing aside at the colourless little face beside his shoulder, the face that in the last few days had grown so white and worn, uttered an inarticulate little sound of pity, and, dropping his hand over her clenched one, held it strongly in his firm grasp. Beyond that he dared give her no encouragement, for fear—deadly fear—was gnawing at his own heart. What had they to put up against this? Doubt of the lawyer he had himself chosen burned hot within him. Yet, with that innate sense of justice peculiar to the services, which accepts rather than doubts the wisdom of those who lead in the battle, he held his peace, daily growing grimmer and greyer, nightly lying wide awake, praying, like the brave and simple gentleman he was, to that Power which he never doubted could save if it would.

What it would mean to Billie should Jeff's cause be lost he scarcely dared to think. What it would mean to himself he knew, for in Jeff he had found that rarest of combinations—truth with honour, not only in the rôle of employee, but also in that of friend. An understanding beyond words, a trust deeper than ocean depths, a vast respect for each other's ability to endure had grown up between these two men, making speech between them, even in this their dark hour, wholly superfluous.

The hands of the slow-ticking, courthouse clock crept round; the long bars of sunlight lengthened and straightened; and through the wide-opened windows a breath of wind redolent of the sage-brushed plains without stole in and softly ruffled the prisoner's dark hair. Almost involuntarily his nostrils widened, and for the first time there shone in his eagle eyes, turned to the glory of the sun-gilded window, the hopeless, wistful look of the wild creature trapped but not tamed.

Billie, noting it, fiercely closed her teeth on a little sob. Oh, if only that remorseless assembling of deadly details, which fitted as perfectly as the hundred pieces of a jig-saw puzzle, would cease!

The end came at last, the public drifted slowly out, discussing in lowered voices the prisoner's chances, and Billie lay crumpled on her bed, racked by the sobs she had been keeping back all day, bidding the terrified Kitty and the pitying major leave her alone, for there was no need for her "to be brave any more."

"Billie! Poor little girl! There is still to-morrow!" said Tom.

"There is always that"—wearily—"unless God is merciful."

"We do not deem him merciful when the to-morrows are no longer possible for those we love, Billie," he said, a trifle sternly.

"No longer possible? Tom, oh, I'm wicked as well as cowardly! And Jeff! Oh, Tom, God couldn't let it be!"

Still shaken with the aftermath of those terrible sobs, she sat up, sternly wrestling with the hopeless passion of grief consuming her, and presently, putting out an unsteady hand, lightly touched the major's pitying face.

"Poor Tom," she said, "and you are suffering, too."

"God only knows how much, Billie," he groaned.

She sat there, white and shaken, gazing out into the blue dusk with wide and staring eyes for a space, ere, turning, she looked up into his downbent face with entreating eyes.

"Tom," she whispered—"Tom, do you believe the road still goes on?"

"Yes," returned he softly.

After that they left her alone, lying, dressed, upon her bed, staring into the soft summer gloom with the wide, fixed gaze of a sleep-walker. And upon the wall scene after scene of hers and Jeff's love story waxed and waned. Far too spent to be even restless, she lay there as though in a state of coma while the black changed to grey, the grey to opal, the opal to pink-and-gold.

Above the high plains a new day had been born; below her window an imprisoned bird sang in his cage; the stealthy sounds of life from below stairs warned her the day's work had already begun. Two riders, the hoof strokes of their ponies muffled in the dust, went

pacing by, and above the creak of leather and jingle of bit and spur she caught a fragment of conversation:

"It's to-day Jeff's lawyer spreads his cards."

To-day! It was already that. What would the end bring?

"I ask nothing better than for yu to be there," he had said simply.

It was very little; but then he had never asked very much of life, even when he had looked to tread the road with her, and yet she, even while loving, had, like Delilah, betrayed him.

"I don't believe we've either of us need to be afraid of anything, seeing that as we belong we'll sure find each other beyond, whichever way it goes."

To him, in his great love and faith, the road still ran on; it was only she who doubted. A great beam of sunlight came flashing in to dance upon the wall, and Billie, rising to her knees, her clasped hands outstretched, said again, as she had said in the cars:

"You said if we had faith! You *said* it!"

There are more ways of praying than one.

CHAPTER XIV.

"He's going to speak!"

"He don't look like a loser."

"Betcher he ain't," put in Baldy tersely, as the "counsel for" gained his feet. "That's the face of a stayer! Why, I'd back him every time. Hush!"

"I must crave your patience, gentlemen," said he, "for I am about to begin a story which will, I suppose, at first seem wholly irrelevant to the case, yet which, I can assure you, bears more nearly on it than any of the evidence that has gone before.

"Some sixty years ago there was born in a tree-shaded little town in Northern Massachusetts, on the same day and at the same hour, two boys—one up at the Hall, the other down in the old frame-house at the bottom of the paddock, where lived the woman who did the washing for the big folk. She was a hard, embittered, scornful woman, who treated life as an enemy, and therefore perpetually quarrelled with it. Maybe, gentlemen—for God knows how some women are made to suffer!—she had need; but that does not concern the story, only in so far as that with her milk her boy sucked in all the envy, hatred, and malice she nourished against her richer neighbours, and the squire's wife in particular. Yet she had little need, receiving, as she did, benefits of all kinds from those gentle hands, for, beside sharing the play of the squire's son, her own son shared his lessons also. Together they learned Latin, Greek, and Algebra; together they rode along the dusty upland roads; together swam in the deep, still pool above the mill or tramped the green hard-woods seeking birds' nests, and when the Indian summer days came made common camp in the deeper forest, where the fall of the leaf, the babble of the brook, and the stealthy rustling of the game in passing were the only sounds to be heard.

"In those golden days strife must have seemed very, very far away! Yet it came; for, gentlemen, I do not need to tell you that in such friendships there is always one who gives and one who takes, and I think I scarcely need to add that it was the squire's son—honest, bluff, and sweet-natured—who gave, and the laundress's son—sly, secretive, hard, and selfish—who took. And if the one gave royally the other took royally also—that is to say, with little gratitude and no thanks.

"When they were sixteen a girl came to that town—a sweet red damask rose of a girl from the south, and each lad, being equally served, thought himself the favoured swain, until one day (shall I call these boys Don and Dan?) Dan came upon the scene just in time to see Don, the squire's son, kiss her. Recognising how infinitely far—socially, at least—he towered above himself, Dan, in his pain and anger, made a scathing and ribald remark upon the girl's choice. For this Don promptly knocked him down, and, breathing anger, slipped off his coat and stood by ready to renew hostilities when the other should rise, which he did at length, slowly, and with a look on his bruised face and in his eyes which made the girl utter a low exclamation of alarm. He made no effort to accept the other's challenge; instead, still with that pale, set smile upon his face, he lifted his hand, and, touching it lightly to his bloody lips, said clearly and coldly:

"'You think me a coward? Well, think it then—and, in the meantime, I'll owe you this!'

"With that he swung away, with what hatred and malice in his heart God alone knows. But the girl, being wholly woman, sensing, maybe, how some day that debt was to be paid, clung to Don in a panic, bidding him be careful for her sake.

"'Why, sweet,' he laughed, 'it is only one quarrel of many, and we shall only be the better friends for it afterwards.'

"It seemed he was right, for on the morrow an apology was offered and accepted, and, the girl going south again, the old relations between the two boys were apparently resumed. College followed, and then, before the year was out, came the clash and turmoil of the Civil

War. Don, the squire's son, chose openly for the North, but Dan, the laundress's son, chose secretly for the South, influenced perhaps by the red rose blooming there. It made little difference, however, for a year after the Peace of Appomatox Don became engaged to the girl, though her mother, thinking her yet over-young for marriage, dismissed her lover for a year or two; and Dan, who by now had rising interests in the west, induced Don to go there with him until the ban of exile should be raised; while Don's father, seeing in this the possibility of hardening the boy's dreamy, gentle nature, was only too glad to further Dan's scheme and furnish money for the trip.

"'Give him lots of work to do, Dan, and keep him out of mischief,' he urged.

"That, however, was not Dan's plan. At the boarding-house at which they stayed in that rough western mining-camp where Dan's interest lay was a girl, a big, upstanding, hard-riding, handsome, lovable girl of seventeen, over whom Dan had a certain hold. He sent them riding together, climbing the mountain trails, scouring the plains, and at night, when the moon hung high above the snowy peaks, saw to it that they had the verandah to themselves.

"It is not to be supposed that Don forgot his southern rose; but the times were lawless, the girl handsome and ardent, and he young. So those idle days and nights of pleasure led to that which Dan had meant they should lead, though to his now bitterly remorseful friend he turned only a face of sorrow and self-reproach.

"'My fault!' said he. 'No'—at the other's suggestion—'you can't marry her! Good God, man, you're not fool enough to think you were the first? Besides, marriage is not in the curriculum of such as she.'

"Perhaps it was not, though I, gentlemen, prefer to think it was; for as yet the girl, though soiled, was not wholly bad, and I have evidence sufficient to show that she at least loved the man. Anyhow, he that as it may, she—whether under pressure from Dan or from a sense of justice I cannot say—scornfully refused the boy's chivalrous offer, and Don, wholly ignorant of her condition, was rushed east by the friend who, threatening him once with a bloody hand, had said: 'In the meantime I shall owe you—this.'

"Do you think he had forgotten? Do you think the day of reckoning had come? Gentlemen, do you? Not yet! Many a man, with those proofs, would have gone straight to the rose and blighted it. Not so he, though, when on the eve of Don's wedding in the east a son was born to him in the west, you may be sure Dan counted some of that reckoning as paid. A year later there was a second son, this time a bud from the southern rose, born to grow up in sweetness and light; while back in the west, buffeted and beaten, sin-cursed and sin-stained, another soul was reaching out towards the light.

"'A cute little curly-haired kid,' a certain storekeeper told me. 'One it came pretty hard to slap when he took them pesky raisins.' A roguish, smiling little kid, we may take it, gentlemen, dressed in some unknown cowman's cut-downs and the red shirt that gave him his name. A wholly lovable little kid, yet loved by none—for his own mother had died at his birth—save the yellow mongrel for ever at his heels, and the mangy outlaw pony only he could ride.

"'Red Dog,' they called him, those frequenters of his so-called mother's cabin who, using him as jackal, admired even while they jeered at that oddly honest quality in him which never allowed him to lie to or betray a friend. So as the one, now at West Point, grew in grace, the other, beaten, neglected, ill-done by, grew in disgrace; while Dan, biding his time, drew their common father deeper and deeper into the net of certain scandalous speculations.

"The end came when, in a single day, a thousand homes lay desolate, while a thousand people heaped shame upon the wrong man: while in the west Red Dog faced the men who had caught him and judged that he must swing.

"'So I pay my debts,' smiled Dan. 'And remember that this'—striking the little rag of a western newspaper—'and not that'—with a dramatic gesture towards a cabinet photograph of the smiling young West Pointer—'is your first-born, born in sin, raised in sin, to be hanged in sin!'

"Gentlemen," went on the liquid voice, "when this accusation was made *she* was there, his little southern rose, still very young, innocently knitting at some scarlet silk socks for her boy. The news of their financial ruin she had received without turning a hair. 'We can work,' she had said cheerfully. But at this she rose, the scarlet sock falling to her feet, to lie there like a bloodstain. She stretched out her hands to the man she had always loved and trusted. 'It isn't true!' she cried out. Then, as he sat with drooping head: 'Don, look me in the eyes and tell me it isn't true!' But he sat there silent, and presently, with drooping head, she crept by him. He would have gone to her then, but she beat him off with frantic hands. 'Maybe,' she whispered, 'some day I shall find it in my heart to

And then, gentlemen, that quality in him that had always loved fair play rose, and the muzzle of his revolver dropped.

"'I can't!' he said. 'I got to give yu a chance. Stand up! Pick up your gun'—for he had forced him to disarm. 'See that big boulder over there? Yep? Well, turn towards it; that's right. Now I'll face the other way, towards that other, which lies at an equal distance. When I count one, start in walking—it's about thirteen paces, I guess—and mind, when I reach that boulder I'm going to turn and fire. Yu'll do the same, and—well, I guess the rest is Fate's ante. Now! One—two—three—four—five—six—sev——'

"Dan had never played fair. He did not now, and, wheeling, fired; then, seeing the other fall, turned to run, made one step, tossed his hands high, and went down—shot in the back, as such a dog should be shot. He had looked on death, indeed.

"'Seven, it seems,' said the cowman thoughtfully, 'is your unlucky number.' And, refusing him even burial, mounted and rode away.

"The mills of God, gentlemen—the mills of God; for Dan the swindler, Dan the spoiler, Dan the murderer, was the slain judge, and the man in the dock, accused of something the world calls murder, but I only justice, is Red Dog, the son of Don, the half-brother of that straight, clean, simple-hearted gentleman who stands at the foot of the dock with the prisoner's hands upon his hair, the man whose hand helped haul his unknown brother into the light, towards which, in spite of almost insuperable difficulties, he had been struggling!

"Across the years, across half a continent, the call of the blood came, and they stand before you united, hand in hand, brothers indeed! Don's sons! Can you look at them and doubt it? One raised in the light, in all that was sweet and true; one raised in the dark, in sin and filth unspeakable. And yet, not only in body, in expression are they alike, but also in that simple soul and brave, clean heart which go to the making of a gentleman. I have seen, and I know. Hush! Not yet have I finished. The State witness did not lie when he said there was only *one* witness to that dramatic scene, *but he lied when he said it was he!* There was only one witness! He stands there!"

Tall, straight, limber, the man Billie remembered as Pete stood looking grimly down upon the startled court.

"He did not inform. He loved his companion of the trail and the blanket too well for that. But he talked in his cups when Austin was present, and that gentleman, for the sake of a pot of Judas money, betrayed the man who, in his turn, had so often shielded him!"

Jeff's eyes, going to the white, sweat-dappled face of the State witness, showed hard and cold as steel.

"No one knew of it that time, outside official circles, save only Austin and a certain bar-tender who has lately given me the information, which was, perhaps, just as well for the State witness. Red Dog, as you know, almost sacrificed—don't forget how willingly!—his chance for the sake of another outcast—that little Indian babe—and almost, though not quite, lost. He escaped, as you know. His trail was lost; he was forgotten. He had at last found, thanks to the major there, the white way, the light way, for which, unconsciously, his soul had always yearned. He trod it like a man, head up, heart high, rejoicing in its cleanliness. And then one day there came a shadow on it that deepened and darkened from day to day, until at length it blotted out the light entirely—a day when Jeff, noting a shadow where sunlight should have been, forced from behind the rock that hid him the companion in sin he had most dreaded to see, and heard the ultimatum of the old gang.

"By consenting to remain—shall we say, deaf and blind—he might go free to live, to love, to flourish; by seeing and hearing and using his knowledge——" He shrugged. "Well, gentlemen, you know what he stood to lose! There was the sunny, easy way; there was the rough, dark, rocky way. He chose, with full knowledge of what the results would be, the latter way—the way which has, alas, led him here. But again Pete, who this time had threatened, was not the betrayer.

"'For we'd shared bed and salt and blankets—once,' he told me, when, a couple of days ago, he walked into my office, wherein he has lain hid. And, gentlemen, may I ask, when the time of reckoning comes, that you will remember this man? For, safe though he was, he yet left that safety in order to come and testify for the man he still loved, and this in spite of the fact that he, too, is wanted! Greater love hath no man! Ah, I ask you not to forget Who said that! The Man of utter mercy; the Man who forgave even Judas, whose prototype sits there!"—with a passionate finger outstretched towards the shrinking Austin. "Who, for a filthy pot of money and to save his own worthless skin, laid the information that brought Red Dog here! The State witness! Look at him, where he sits condemned utterly by that vile, fear-pale face he turns towards us! The State witness?

God pity the State that must look to such as he for information—liar and blackguard and thief of honour that he is . . . My temper? Yes, gentlemen, I *have* lost my temper. Yet is it not better to lose that rather than a man's life? For that is what the prisoner stands to lose! For to-day, just for to-day, gentlemen of the jury, you hold within you finite hands the infinite power, the God-like power, of giving or withholding life! Not I, not the judge, not the whole of the United States, can bias you. He is yours, to make or to break, to condone or condemn, as you will. . . .

"'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.' Ay, but always by His chosen instrument! Can you doubt but that he stands before you now—a man full of splendid, virile life, of a simple heart and faith, of a great yet gentle strength, of a chivalry so great that it almost passes understanding! Yours, gentlemen—yours, to make or to break, to condone or condemn, as you will!"

His voice sank, then rose again on the hysterical silence of the court.

"Will you dare to judge what God has appointed? Is there a man among you who claims to be without sin—who dares to arise and cast the first stone?"

He leaned forward, his burning eyes fixed upon the half magnetised, quick-breathing jury.

"None?" His voice, though a mere whisper, filled the court. "None! Which is well, for had one so dared, then would I have named him liar, and prayed that God Almighty might cast his soul to everlasting hell!"

It was not profanity, it was merely the inspired end to an inspired speech. And as he dropped, with covered face, white, spent, shaking, the great hushed court broke into tumultuous sound. Before ever the evidence was taken or the judge summed up, it knew, and applauded, the verdict to come.

CHAPTER XV.

"There could be only one verdict," said the major, as he leant down above Billie, where she lay, white and spent, on the sofa to which they had carried her after the verdict had been heard, and Jeff had been given the choice of life and love, and she had at length broken down.

"Hark, Billie—hark at the boys!"

Joyous, whooping, riding at a dead run, regardless as to whether it was street or sidewalk, recklessly discharging those "side-arms" which the town placard politely asked "gentlemen to remove"; roping stray dogs, each other, or any townspeople who might be abroad, they swept past in dust and thunder. Youth, the times, the towns were theirs—when they so chose. It was "their day," and, seeing the popularity of the verdict, every single soul—with the exception of the late judge's friends—conceded they had a right to howl. And howl they did—the major helping them by pealing out hideous war-whoops from the open window every time they swept past.

"Let the ladies stop their ears," chanted Baldy, who led, "for we are about to sing!"

It is not on record whether the ladies obeyed, but, if not, those delicate organs must surely have suffered, for the song, though full of the praises of Jeff, was lurid even from the beginning, and the major shut the window with a bang.

"They ought to know better," apologised he shamefacedly. "Why—*Billie!*"

For Billie, hiding her hot cheeks among the cushions, was shaking with mirth.

"Oh," she cried—"oh, they are shocking! But—but, Tom, aren't they adorable?"

"Well!" marvelled Tom. "And I thought you'd be shocked to a standstill."

"I am! *Tom, who's that?*"

For a step was sounding in the outer room—a light, quick step which brought the colour to her cheeks and the light to her eyes.

"It's Jeff. We had to smuggle him in the back way. They don't know he's out yet."

"And they ain't going to," came the voice she loved. He was there, in the doorway, the shadow for ever gone from his handsome face. "That is—not yet. Their time—and yours"—laying his arm along the major's shoulders—"is yet to come. It's going to be hers and mine now."

"I believe," twinkled the major, "I can find the door without being led."

"Swing your partners," sang Jeff, and, whizzing the major through, turned swiftly, and, shutting the door, put his back against it. He looked at Billie in sudden fear, for she looked so white and still that doubt was born again in his big, brave heart.

"Yu ain't," he said, speaking with difficulty—"yu ain't going to throw me down again, Billie?"

"I couldn't," she whispered. "You stand so high."

In a stride he was at her side and kneeling before her.

"I didn't mean that way," she breathed. "I meant—morally."

Her hands went out, but he caught and held them.

"Not yet," he said. "There's something I got to say first, Billie, and it's this: I never thought until I heard my life put *so*—as that

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E.S.166

lawyer put it—how black it was and how little fit I was to touch a girl like you, who's never even looked on, let alone touched the pitch I've waded in and stand blackened with from foolish head to foot. Billie, when you came to me in prison there, I was weak, I couldn't say 'No' to you, and, beside, I thought it was the end. I couldn't see——"

"It was," interrupted Billie, "the end of all misunderstanding, and you can't even see now that—that I love you."

"How," he asked, looking helplessly down at her brown-gold head—"how am I going to fight yu?"

"Don't you know when I've got you beat?" she laughed sobbingly. "Oh, Jeff—Jeff!"

"That's the second time yu seen me act the baby!" said he presently, with his face still hid. "Yu—yu'll think me—— But it's been a long time, and—and prison"—he drew a long breath—"well, that won't stand thinking of, even now. So yu have me beat, yu little heart-breaker? Why, yu had me that from the very beginning, even before you screamed and clutched."

"You must have thought me a coward, Jeff."

"Did I? That's not for yu to say—and thought!" He laughed suddenly. "Why, it's going to take me a whole lifetime to tell yu just the half of my thoughts of yu!"

At that she kissed him, and, black head against brown-gold one, tanned cheek pressed to white, they held each other close in the silence of utter content.

"Don't tell me wake," he murmured, his eyes closed, "for I've dreamt it so often, and waked to find it only a dream. Billie, yu'll think me foolish, I guess, but, do yu know, I dreamt while I was lying there in that old bunkhouse that yu come to tell me 'good-bye.'"

"It was no dream, Jeff. I did come."

"I wisht I'd known," he said longingly—"I wisht I'd known all this time."

"I must have hurt you so in the past," she said sobbingly. "Oh, Jeff, how can you forgive——?"

He stopped her in his own way, and then:

"Hush!" he said softly. "There's to be no talk of that between yu and me, Billie; I'm only a poor fellow——"

"Wait!" she cried, pushing him from her and leaning back to look at him with starry eyes. "Jeff, listen! If you hadn't a penny or a crust of bread, I'd still be content just to put my hand in yours and say, 'Your road is my road,' and so follow you cheerfully to the end of the trail, wholly and utterly content."

"Then I'm rich," he whispered. Later he added softly: "Love like that is enough to make a fellow so." And, later still, holding her off and looking at her with a little smile, added:

"Yu was a sure enough white rose when I come in, but I guess yu're a pink one now." Then, in the merest breath of a voice, and with mischief in his eyes, sang:

"Oh, where did yu get those bonny, bonny roses,
That bloom on your cheeks and the morning in your eyes?
I got them on the north trail, the road that never closes—
That leads to the Seven Gold Gates of Paradise.

"It's going to be all that and more to yu and me, Billie—all that and more. And, say, we'll finish that song together just a month from to-day."

"Oh!" cried startled Billie. "I couldn't—I wouldn't be ready! I——"

"Was it her said only a moment ago," remarked Jeff feelingly, "that she'd follow if a fellow hadn't a crust? And now she's thinking of dresses and gilguys and grip-sacks!"

"*Jeff!*"

"Well?" Then, melting into sudden tender laughter: "All right, Billie, it's just as yu say."

"Where—where were you thinking we'd go?"

"For our honeymoon? Why, up to Lost Lake. It'll be looking like that shining green stone in our ring by then, Billie, and them blue flowers—gentians, is that what you call them?—will be dotting the edges of the snows like bits of fallen sky, and there'll still be the frost tang in the air morning and night, and the scent of the firs and the wood-smoke, and somewhere out in them mountain meadows a coyote will be calling to his mate. Won't yu, Billie?"

"Perhaps," said she demurely.

"And yu ain't afraid of me now, Billie?"—keenly.

"Afraid? Oh, Jeff, there's no room for that, seeing that perfect love casteth out fear."

"Honey!" he whispered, and caught her so close it was almost pain.

* * * * *

The major afterwards said it was hours before he ventured in, but they both strenuously held out it was only a matter of minutes.

There was no question about the heartiness of the major's congratulations this time, and

HOW TO "GROW" A NEW COMPLEXION.

These are the days of "hustling." In a week we see and do more than our grandmothers did in a year. We are gradually turning nature to be our servant: we use her great forces against herself. We have conquered sea and sky, now our doctors are fighting not only disease, but old age. There is talk of rejuvenating human beings by the injection of animal glands, but as yet only the few can avail themselves of the treatment.

There is, however, one secret of perpetual youth that is in the reach of everyone. Scientists now realise that the only way of keeping the skin young and fresh is to examine nature's methods and to find some way of imitating her.

SCIENTIFIC BEAUTY.

In order to explain the new method of keeping the complexion perpetually youthful, one must understand something of the nature of the skin. A baby's skin is always clear and smooth because the outer layer is always invisibly peeling off, and new layers are forming just as fast underneath, so that the exposed skin is always fresh, unwrinkled, and "new."

For the first few years of our lives this peeling is a purely natural process, but as we grow older we gradually lose the power of throwing off our old soiled outer skins, so that our complexions become lined and yellow, and the new skin has no chance to show itself.

A few years ago a scientific chemist realised that a little-known substance called mercolized wax was *exactly what was needed to* "keep nature up to the mark." It appears that this substance, which is now universally obtainable, gently and painlessly assists nature in throwing off the soiled outer cuticle. The skin is thus perpetually renewed, and a clear, youthful complexion can be preserved to any age. [Advt.]

even Kitty became cordial. Slipping her hand in her sister's, she whispered softly:

"Dear, I *do* understand."

And perhaps she did to a certain extent, though it was not in her limited nature to understand her soldier husband as Billie afterwards came to understand that cowboy lover of hers.

"So it's to be a month from to-day, eh?" said the major, twinkling. "And when will my foreman be returning from his honeymoon?"

"In two weeks' time," came the answer promptly.

"I'll admit you're not greedy," said the major drily. "But say, Jeff, I'll not need you as foreman any longer, for Baldy's been holding that job very efficiently, and will continue to do so at my request." Then, as Jeff's face fell a little, he rose swiftly and, crossing to him, smote him mightily on the back.

"Here's a fellow grieving over promotion!" he cried. "Now, what do you know about that? Why, Jeff-you-old-son-of-a-gun, you'll not need that job any more. Who ever heard of one's ranch-partner acting as foreman? Tell me that, will you?"

"I'll tell yu——" began Jeff passionately; then, swinging wide, went over to the window and stood looking out.

"I can't," said he presently, "tell yu anything that's going to meet this, Tom."

"You've told it," returned the major promptly. "Turn around, you old coyote, and face the music. Billie, go fetch him! You're not married, and he won't dare to say 'no' to you—yet! That's better. Now, what I was going to say to you-two was this—as Kitty and I are going to live in the east, we'll have to turn the management of the ranch over to you. You won't mind, Billie?"

"Mind" cried Billie—"mind! But, Tom, you—how can you bear—— *Oh, Tom!*"

"No, don't you worry about me," interrupted the major lightly. "I shall be all right. We're going to take a farm, and"—with a glance at Kitty—"as things are I think perhaps it will be wiser for us to—to be where we can obtain adequate doctors and nurses when—whenever the need may arise."

Billie, a trifle at sea as to his meaning, glanced uncertainly from the major's shining face to where Kitty sat, with a faintly mysterious smile on her lips and in her eyes; then, catching Jeff's merry eye, she coloured hotly, and ran over to her sister.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh, I am so glad!"

"So am I," said Tom happily.

"Well," said Jeff, with that rare delicacy of his which seemed to meet all occasions. "I guess, Tom, that yu an me had better go out and do something with them boys."

"Telegram for you, Jeff!" saluted the hotel clerk, as the two men went jingling across the vestibule.

"For me?" said Jeff. "Why, suffering cats, who'd be sending *me* one of them little yellow things?"

"Don't know; but it's here."

He read it slowly, then gripped the paper hard in his hand and passed out into the sunset glory of the street.

"It's from *him*," said he to the major. "Gosh! I always thought he'd grow up, but I never thought how much."

"Him?" queried the major.

"That Bentley fellow. Read it."

The message was simple.

"Be good to her," it ran; and then: "I'm almost as glad as if it were myself."

"That's a whole lot to say," mused Jeff, "and I don't believe in his place I'd be able to say it. Say, you can't always tell a horse by the colour of his skin, can yu? And I used to think I towered above him! Why, I'm nothing but a little dwarf alongside him, for if I was losing I wouldn't be able to say even 'almost.' Oh, hell! Seems like there ain't any happiness to be found in this little old world without hurting some poor guy or other!"

"Yes," agreed the major quietly, his eyes bent on the far ranges showing violet-blue against an emerald sky. Somewhere beneath their shadow lay the ranch he loved and had relinquished. "Yes, there's always a hurt in every joy. Here are the boys!"

A rapturous tide of life, engulfing them, swept them away like chips on a torrent; while Billie, standing before her glass, a smile on her lips, a light in her eyes, found herself humming a song.

"Jeff's song!" she whispered. "*My* Jeff's! The one he said we should finish together a month from to-day!"

And the promise was kept, far, far out—

"On the Road that never closes,
With the night fires lit and the tent-pegs down."

THE END

A SERIAL STORY

By NATHAN CLOVER

CHAPTER XIII.

"BILLIE!" cried Kitty, springing to her and clasping her. And the major, rising from where he had been sitting gazing sadly out into the street with the vacant gaze peculiar to those whose thoughts are wholly indrawn, came to his feet with a start that overset his chair. He looked thin and worn and old; and Billie, going forward to meet him, felt a sudden stab at her heart. Was it as bad as that?

"Tom," she faltered.

"What," asked he, looking at her curiously—"what have you come for?"

"To marry him"—quietly. "It's the only thing to do."

"*Billie!*" shrieked her sister. "Are you mad?"

"I was. Now I'm sane! Tom, can't you see?"

"Yes," he said, setting her fingers to his lips. "God bless you, Billie!"

"It's the only reparation I can make—now."

"It's a great one, little sister."

"Not too great"—proudly.

"No; and yet—Billie——"

"Yes?"

"I don't believe he'll let you do it."

"He *must!*"

"You think you know him, and yet you can talk like that!" cried the major.

For a second she stood gazing at him with wide, starry eyes, her soft lips straight and hard, her finely cut nostrils working, a little

"Yu wouldn't kill me in cold blood," he pleaded.

forgive you; but don't—for God's sake don't offer to touch me again until then!'

"They found him at dawn stretched on the floor, his hand just touching that scarlet sock. He had shot himself.

"A week later she followed, dead of what we may well call a broken heart. . . . Even after the young West Pointer had sold and disbursed his father's estate there were yet many claims unpaid; but they have, I believe, been made good since. A great reckoning paid? Ay, yet even so all did not go as Dan had meant it should, for Dan's elder son did not hang; he escaped to later help pay that which his unknown father had left as a bad debt.

"There is, gentlemen, in the west, a mighty split in the mountains known as Dead Horse Canyon. It lies in a lone and quarrelsome spot, where the frontiers of the sheep and cattle men meet and clash. There is not a tree upon it; it has for sole decoration those huge red and yellow boulders flung there by some playful giant's hand. There is good hunting, good water, promise in the quartz outcrop even of good gold, and all summer long a camp had lain there, while a certain man hunted and fished and looked for gold, and a pretty young half-breed girl, daughter of the guide, had kept house for him to her sorrow. And now the camp and the girl's hopes were being struck together, for the guide laid dead of something the man of substance feared and was fleeing from.

"'And I?'" cried the girl.

"'You,' he said, 'can follow.'

"'You *will* marry me?'

"'Sure,' he muttered; but the shifty eyes in the foxy face belied him, and with a sharp cry the girl sprang at him.

"'You shall,' she cried—'you shall! You promised, and you owe it me!'

"And then the man unwisely lost his temper and struck her, whereat, her French blood aflame, she sprang away, and, dashing over to the camp, seized the blanket shrouding the dead, and, running back, cast it over her lover.

"'Die, then!' she taunted. 'Die of the small-pox you so dread!'

"Frantic with fear, mad with rage, he sprang upon her, forcing her to her knees on the very verge of the canyon.

"'No,' she cried out—'no! For you have loved me!'

"Whether he did it with intention who shall say? But he released her suddenly, and, falling backwards, she went whirling down to those black and awful depths below, just as a lean, lithe boy of nineteen, in a cow-puncher's dress, finished the race he had begun with time a minute before, and leapt in on the scene.

"'Turn on yore legs, yu pole-cat,' he cried, 'and look on death!'

"The man was afraid of it, deadly afraid, yet slyness, mingling with his terror, spoke:

"'Yu wouldn't kill me in cold blood,' he pleaded.

"'Cold! Hell ain't hotter than mine is now! Kill yu in cold blood? That's how I expect to be killed some day, yet yu don't hear me making a song about it! Down on your knees, and, if yu believe in a God, pray, for, by —— I'm going to send yu to meet Him right now!'

"But it was to man, not God, that Dan, the craven, prayed for mercy.

"'It's a card I don't know,' scorned the boy.

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