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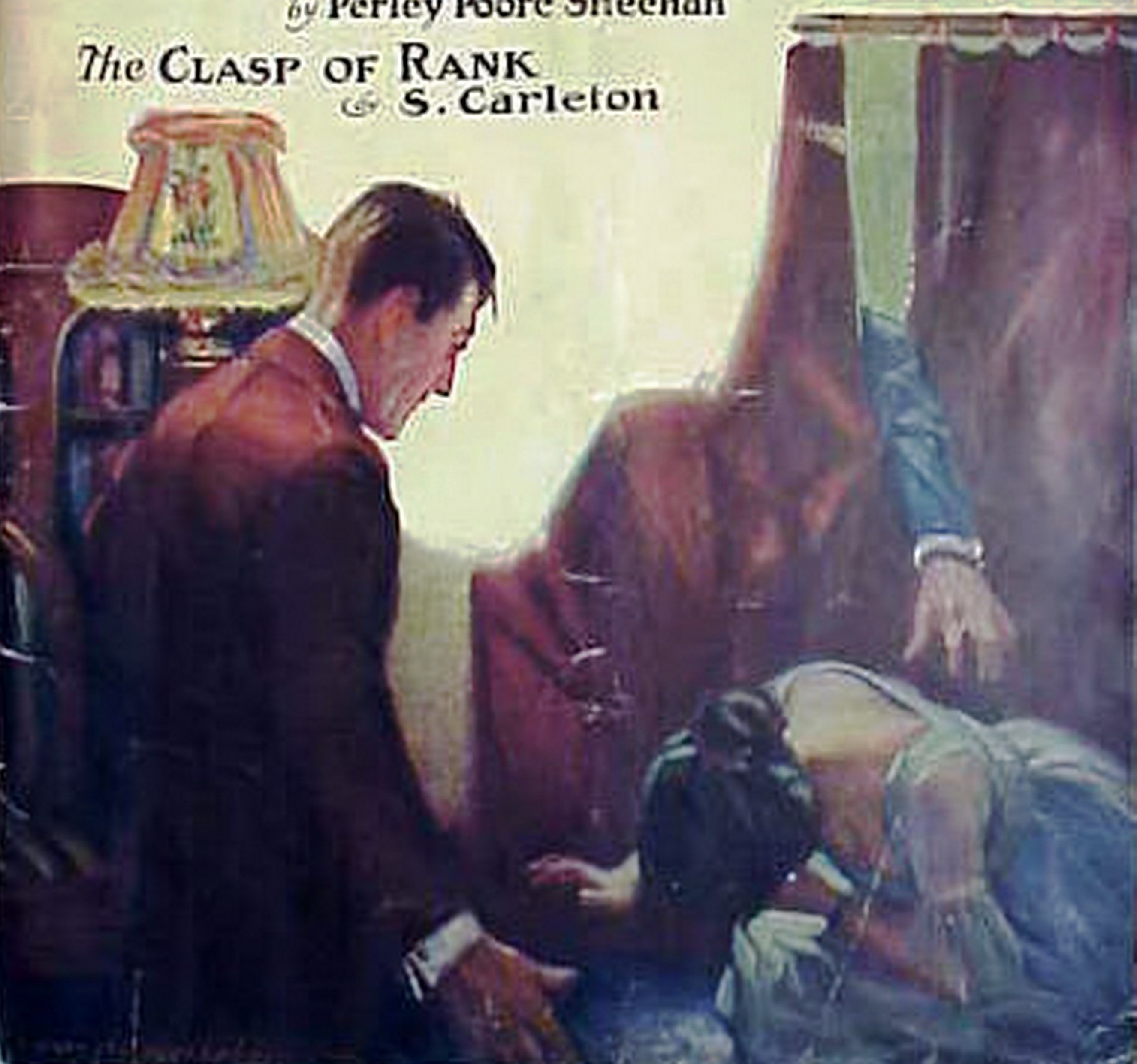
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APRIL 1, 1919

COURAGE by Andrew Soutar

The HANK OF YARN
by Perley Poore Sheehan

The CLASP OF RANK
by S. Carleton



THE THRILL BOOK

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The Hank of Yarn

By
Perley Poore Sheehan

WHAT had happened? He had a queer sensation of unreality, of change—something that took his breath away, made him solemn, frightened him a little. He came up over the edge of the hollow and stood there gazing, swallowing, trying to get a grip on himself.

This was Peddler's Hollow, from which he had just emerged. It was a narrow dip in the mountain road, perpetually dark, bushed heavily on either side with laurel and overhung with trees. It was here that the peddler had been murdered twenty or thirty years ago, and ever since then the place had had the reputation of being haunted. Was it haunted? He had always been among those who would have scoffed at such a question, and yet here he was asking the question himself.

It seemed to him that he had seen the peddler's ghost—had seen the peddler's body lying there in the middle of the road at the bottom of the hollow. It almost seemed as if he could still hear a ghostly echo—as of the shot that had killed the victim.

"It can't be," said Winder to himself. "All that happened twenty or thirty years ago."

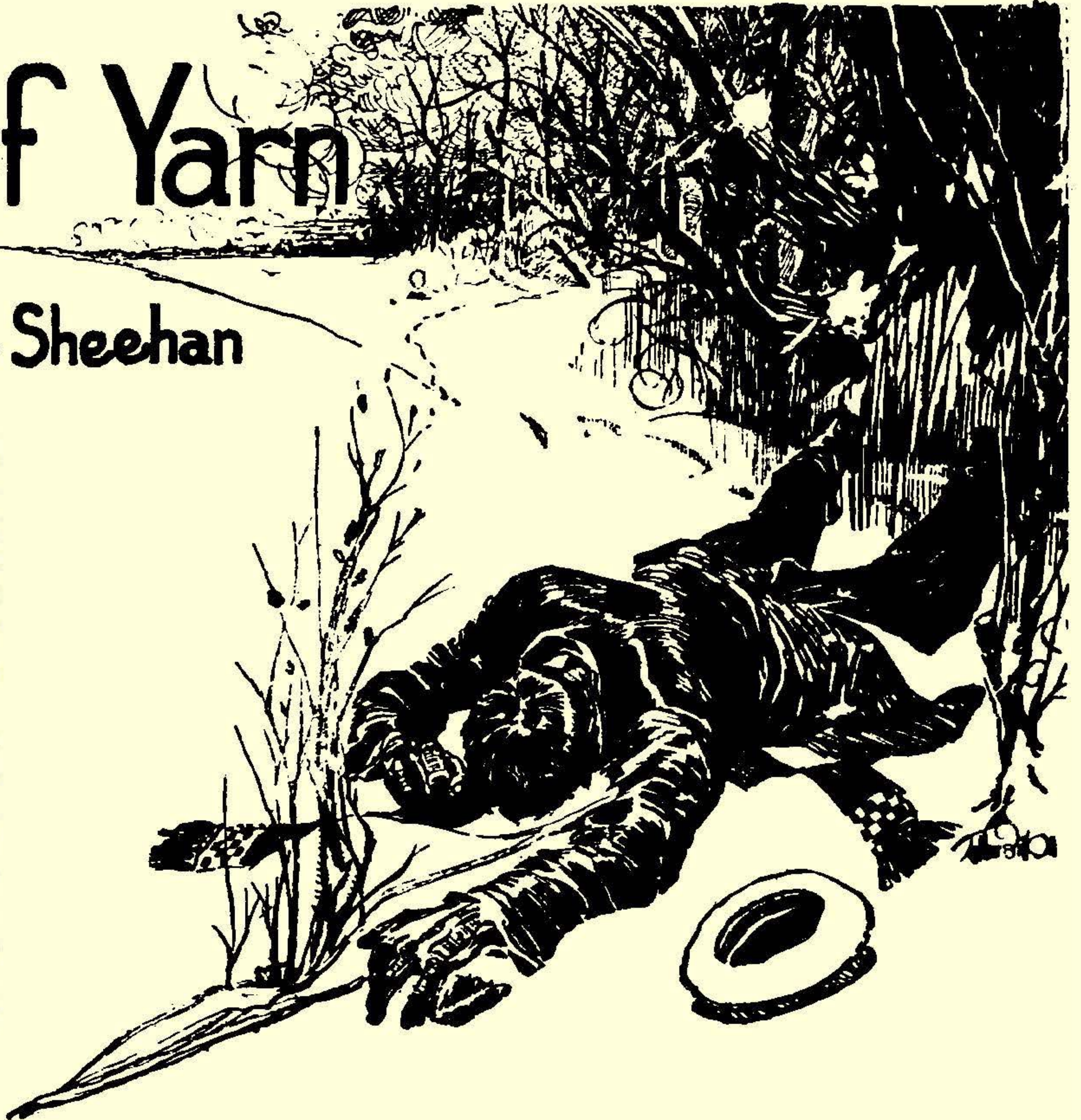
But he was still shaken, still unconvinced.

"I ain't drunk," he said. "It ain't the liquor I've took."

He stood there in the moonlight and reflected. And he wished that he could look back of him, but somehow he didn't dare.

He had been down at the Crossroads all that evening drinking whisky with the Logan boys, and he had taken more than was good for him, as he knew. But, no; this was no mere vagary of a drunken mind. He was never more sober in his life than he was right now, and he knew it. He had been sobered instantly and all of a sudden. The something that had just happened; that was what had sobered him.

He felt as if he had never had a drink in his life. There was no taste of liquor in his throat.



His head was as clear as a bell. He felt strong and steady. He felt somehow rejuvenated—vigorous and clean—felt as he hadn't felt for years, not since he was a boy.

His composure was gradually coming back, but the sense of wonder, if anything, grew stronger; also that preliminary gust of solemnity and awe.

He didn't turn, but he peered about him.

He had a sort of impression that something had happened to the night as well. The night no longer seemed so cold, nor yet so stormy as it had been, nor somber and dim.

There was no wind, and the sky was clear. The moon shone brightly. It struck him that the moon was brighter than he had ever seen it before. And yet, even so, he could see all the stars. They sparkled in the frosty air. They looked at him like a million eyes. And Winder thrust up his hands toward them with a gesture of appeal. And that had never been in the nature of him, either; not before this reeling and shocking change.

"My God!" he muttered.

The earth also looked different to him. It was a change that he couldn't explain any more than he could explain that change in himself and the sky,

but there it was—a fresh fall of snow as yet unspotted; not a track—not even a rabbit's; nor his own, for the matter of that, because—he remembered it now—he hadn't taken this road on his way to the Crossroads after supper. Instead, he had taken that short cut through the woods—his habitual path so long as there was any daylight, but a bad road after dark. Now that he thought of it, the path through the woods wasn't the most desirable route in the world anyway for a man with enemies, especially with such enemies as the Logan clan. They were a bad lot. They had threatened more than once to shoot him. And yet, this very night, he had been drinking with them again.

Now that he thought of it, there had even been some sort of a fresh quarrel with them. "Lord forgive them," he said, "and me!" He started on.

It was almost as if he had never seen this road before, although he had been traveling it back and forth ever since he could remember. He had never seen it look so bright and clean.

Right away ahead of him it ran, by a gentle slope, up and around the shoulder of the mountain to where his cabin lay. It hurt his conscience a little when he remembered how often he had cursed this road, in season and out, but especially when there was snow on the ground, as there was to-night, hiding the ruts and the niggerheads, the roots, and the mud holes.

But he didn't curse it now. He felt a creeping affection for it. The road looked good to him. The snow couldn't have been more than an inch or so in depth, and yet the road was also as if transformed, like himself and everything else.

It lay in the full flare of the moonlight and the starlight, for here there were no woods on either side of it, and yet it looked like a road that no one had ever traveled before. The moon was just over the bend of it, so that it looked like a road to the moon.

He'd seen it in a picture—a road like that—with white angels going up and down it. He paused again. He was swept with a fine shudder. There for a moment or two it had seemed to him that he was seeing such a spirit procession now.

He fought off the feeling. He was like a man who had been asleep, and, having had bad dreams, had now wakened into some other sort of a dream.

He wished he would meet some one. He wished that he were home. He wished that he hadn't left his cabin at all. He was filled with an immense regret. And what was this thing that had happened to him? That was the question he kept asking himself. No answer.

The world was like a church. It was like a church filled with ghosts. It was as if he could hear the silence filled with a thousand muted voices, some of which he could recognize and some of which were strange.

"Hallelujah!" they were singing.

And he could hear his mother's voice—she who had been dead these five years—joining in with her little old cracked soprano.

He kept on hearing things like that all the time that he was moving along toward home, especially when he passed the cemetery where most of his folks had been buried for a century or so. For, at one

time, his people had owned pretty much this whole part of the State. And what had they done with it? Spoiled it! Impoverished it! Given it a bad reputation! Just as he was doing with what was left! Making whisky and then drinking it! Keeping the jailers busy! Until they died with their boots on! His own career!

For the first time in his life he was getting a correct view of himself. And he knew that also.

He kept on up to his cabin, and never noticed once that the road was steep and rough. For that matter, he was like a man walking on air; he was so strong and light on his feet. But he noticed what the cabin looked like. Nothing had been done to it hardly since his grandfather had built it more than fifty years ago. The old chimney falling down! Shingles missing from the roof! Sagging sills! Doorstep rotted half away!

He wished he had fixed these things.

There was a light in the window, so he guessed that they were sitting up for him—his invalid sister and his wife; or that little Henry was sick, as little Henry usually was.

But when Winder came up to the window of the cabin and peeked in, he saw that there was a visitor there. The light was dim—just the flicker thrown out by the smoky flame in the fireplace. It was sufficient though. Winder recognized the caller. "Old Doc Summerville," Winder identified him. And he wished that the old man was elsewhere; but there was nothing for it except to go in.

Summerville was a native "yarb" doctor and preacher, who, besides having a local reputation for second sight, was known to speak his mind freely on all occasions. "I'm in for a call-down," said Winder, and he knew that he was in no mood to talk back.

There was only one room in the cabin. It was like a thousand mountain homes thereabouts—that one large room with the fireplace at one end of it and two beds occupying the corners at the other end, a loft overhead, reached by a ladder and an open scuttle, to serve as extra sleeping quarters. And it was in the loft that Winder slept.

Winder had an idea that he might get to the loft now without being discovered. He had come through the door so quietly that those in front of the fireplace hadn't turned. It was evident that they hadn't heard him. Only Winder's old hound, Buck, had lifted his muzzle from his paws and stared. Not even Buck, though, made any sound.

Winder took a step in the direction of the ladder. Then he stopped. He could feel that his mouth was open and that he was swallowing again, just like the time when he had come up over the rim of Peddler's Hollow back there. And now, as then, he felt the creep of the same sort of wonderment and fright, of solemnity and strangeness.

Little Henry, it appeared, had already been put to bed. And now there he was, sitting up in one of the corner beds and looking at Winder as if Winder were something or somebody he had never seen before. The child didn't speak. The child didn't smile. He just stared and stared—and he always had been a little pale and hollow-eyed.

Winder felt his heart give a lurch.

It was as if now, for the first time, he was recognizing just how much this son meant to him. He made one of those awkward, playful gestures of his with which, on rare occasions, he was wont to make the little fellow laugh. But little Henry didn't laugh now—merely kept on staring, white and still. "He don't recognize me," said Winder to himself.

And at that he would have spoken aloud. But just then he was struck by a remark dropped by his wife. "I don't know what we'd do if anything did happen to Henry," she said. "He's all we've got."

"And he has got a good heart," said Henry's sister.

The old doctor spoke up: "Now, I ain't saying that anything did happen to Henry. I'm merely saying that the feeling came to me while I was going home about an hour ago that Henry needed me. Where do you reckon he is?"

"All I know," said Mrs. Winder, "is that he started out on an errand for me right after supper and that he ought to be back by this time. He went down to the Crossroads."

"And I suppose he's there yet, drinking whisky with those Logan boys."

"No, it ain't that," Henry's sister spoke up.

"Why not?"

"Because he promised not to."

"Maybe he's got in a fight or something," said the doctor. "Some men need a good crack on the head to make them brace up. And those Logan boys are pizin snakes—like their pop was before them—and they ought to be exterminated, just like he was."

"Henry ain't like that," said Mrs. Winder. "His heart's all right. I was just talking to-night about me wanting to knit little Henry a jacket, so pa speaks right up and offers to go down to the Crossroads and get me a hank of yarn."

While they were still talking like that, Winder's old hound got up from where he'd been lying in front of the fireplace. He came over to where Winder stood. Winder put out his hand. But Buck sort of kept his distance and merely stared as little Henry had continued to do. Buck must have recognized him, though. Buck slowly wagged his tail.

"They're waiting for me to bring back that yarn," said Winder to himself, "and I've forgotten all about it."

Maybe it wasn't too late yet. He turned, and, almost before he knew it, was outside once more, determined to go back to the Crossroads and get the yarn.

"I wonder what ails Buck," said Henry's sister, after he was gone.

"He looks like he's worried about something," the old doctor said.

"I reckon he may have smelled a fox or something," said Mrs. Winder. And she came over and opened the door for Buck.

With a whine, Buck bounded forth.

"Or he may have scented a ghost," said the yarb doctor. "Hounds are given to trailing spirits at this phase of the moon."

"I wish Henry would come," said Mrs. Winder. And she went over to the bed to see that little Henry was covered up all right. The child was apparently asleep again.

And, out on the mountainside, Winder was making his way back toward the Crossroads as fast as

his legs would carry him. He had taken the short cut down through the woods, for he was not only in a hurry, but he had lost all fear of getting himself ambushed by the Logans. After what he had been through, and all those queer experiences of his, he wasn't afraid of any one. The only thing in the world he feared now was to come back home and confess what he had done.

He was going fast, but he hadn't gone very far before Buck caught up with him. "Go back!" Winder called.

But the hound paid no attention to him.

"Go back, I tell you!"

Buck merely kept his nose to the ground, zigzagging, wagging his tail, as if he were trailing something. There was no snow on the ground here because of the trees, and it was darker than it was in the open. Then suddenly Buck disappeared off to the left. "That was where I left the path to see if there was anything in my possum trap," said Winder.

And he knew, with a little thrill, that this was his own trail that the hound was following—the trail Winder had left when going this way to the Crossroads earlier in the evening.

"Or maybe some one had been following me," said Winder. "I remember now that Jimmy Logan came sneaking into the store just about five minutes after I myself got there, and that he and his brothers whispered to each other when they thought that I wasn't noticing."

And yet he wasn't sure. He couldn't quite figure it out.

He could see that the old hound was getting more anxious and nervous all the time—now turning to look up at Winder, now staring off into the bushes, whimpering again, and once he howled. Winder called, but the hound wouldn't answer, and that wasn't like old Buck, either.

"And its' my trail he's following all right," said Winder.

For, at one place on that previous trip of his, he had stepped out onto a rock to one side of the path at a place where he could look down to see if the signal light was burning at the old moonshine still; and Buck had run out onto the rock also and sniffed the place where Winder had stood, and then Buck had looked over the edge of the rock just as if he didn't know that there was a hundred-foot drop.

In spite of all this, though, Winder traveled fast and saw nothing else to trouble him until he came out into the clearing where old man Cummings had his store at the Crossroads. And then he saw that he was too late. The store had been closed up for the night.

He remembered now. He stood there in the silence and the moonlight at the edge of the clearing and called himself names. All this came from not having kept his promise. All the details of the carousal came back to him, and then that old man Cummings, the proprietor, had closed up early so that he could go off to visit a sick relative beyond the divide. In the moonlight Henry could see the old man's tracks—there where he had come out of the back door of the store and gone over to the stable where the mule was kept—old man's footprints going into the stable,

mule's hoofmarks coming out, as if the devil had been up to one of his dirty tricks in there.

No use to think of the yarn this night. Too late! And it made Henry swear at himself.

"Lord, have pity on my soul!"

But he was not going to take that path through the woods again—not after the way the hound had been acting—so he started around for the front of the building, in the direction of the road he'd taken when he started off for home before.

He came around in front of the store, and the new snow was heavily trodden there. He could see his own footprints, and recognize them, too, for Henry was as good as any trailer in the county, and he picked out the footprints of the different Logan boys. It brought it all back to him—how they'd all left the place together, when old man Cummings closed up, and then there had been some sort of a scuffle—there were the signs of that, too—and he recollected how it was Jimmy Logan who had settled the trouble and given him one last drink out of the bottle before starting him off alone.

There went the footprints of the Logans off in one direction; there went his own in another.

But what had happened to Buck, the hound, this time?

Winder held his breath and listened. At first, everything as still as the end of the world, and the world frozen dead like the moon. No wind. Even the trees standing there in the moonlight as if they also held their breath and listened.

Then there it was again.

That was Buck, and he was howling, away off ahead along the road somewhere, howling softly and with a sort of a choke at the beginning of each howl, which is the real mourning note for the whole dog tribe, whether the dog be hound or wolf.

Peddler's Hollow!

They called it that because a peddler had come through these hills one day with a pack on his back and money in his pocket. And early next morning some one found the peddler sprawled in the road at the bottom of the hollow with a bullet through his head, and his pack rifled, and his pockets empty.

An ugly crime, and no one ever punished for it; although, right after that, old man Logan—the father of these boys—had money when he had none before. They buried the peddler, and old man Logan disappeared, and ever after that they had called the sharp dip in the road by that same name which it bears to-day.

Now, it was from right on there ahead, only a quarter of a mile or so, there where Peddler's Hollow lay, that the hound was howling—and the hound with a reputation for trailing ghosts.

Henry thought of the old murder, and the connection of the Logans with it. He thought of the queer way Buck had acted all along the path through the woods. He had to take his choice. It was either the path through the woods again, or this road he had followed when he started out for home before. The woods were dark. The road was bright. Any-way, he chose the road.

As clearly as if it had been broad daylight, he saw that trail he himself had left there not more than an hour ago. The fall of snow had been so light that

the black earth showed through like ink stains on white paper at every step. No snow had fallen since. There had been no wind. When he looked ahead of him he could see the tracks meandering on and on as far as he could see the road itself.

A record it was that no man could have been proud of—those spraddling, crazy lurches from one side of the road to the other. And this, he told himself, was what he had thus far been doing all his life—smearing up with black splotches what might otherwise have remained snow white and clean.

Buck howled again. It was the quaver of a howl, still from over there in the direction of Peddler's Hollow. He had seen something over there, found something. What could it be?

And just when he was asking himself the question, Winder saw that the hound was coming back—still howling, still whimpering.

"Buck! What is it, Buck?"

And this time the dog paid attention. He came loping up to where Winder stood. He crouched there. Ears back, he looked up into Winder's face and bayed.

As plainly as a dog could say it, Buck was saying: "What have you done? What have you done?"

"What have I done?" Winder demanded of himself.

But the hound bounded away for a dozen yards. Then he stopped and looked back and whimpered. It was as if he were speaking again. "Come on," he seemed to say. "Maybe it won't be too late, anyway. Only hurry! Hurry!"

Whatever the reason, Winder began to run.

Peddler's Hollow was a mere gully in the road, five or six feet deep and not more than a dozen yards in width. And all the time that Winder was running, something kept telling him that here was where the trouble lay, that Buck had not been mistaken—nor had he—and that it was something in the Hollow that had dismayed the dog like that. The hollow, moreover, was heavily bushed on each side with laurel and hickory—a ghostly place even in broad daylight—and no place anywhere better designed for ambush.

Winder thought of the Logan boys. He recalled all the details of their long enmity for him—an enmity no less deadly in that it had been disguised at times as it had been this night under the lure of an alcoholic friendship.

But, somehow or other, all fear of the Logan boys had gone out of Winder. It was of himself that he was afraid. It was as if the moonlight and the starlight and all the oddness and solemnity of this night, and the things he had seen and heard had revealed himself to himself. It was of his old self that he was afraid—the creature who had made those ugly tracks in the road he had been following:

So he was telling himself even when he had come right up to the brim of the hollow and stood there faltering.

Buck was already down into the hollow. Winder could see the hound down there. At first, though, that was all he could see. After the dazzling moonlight on the snow the shadows of the laurel and the hickory lay heavy. Still he could see that Buck was active, that Buck really had found something down there and that Buck was whimpering and moaning.

"Somebody's dropped a blanket from a wagon," said Winder.

But his own mind told him that this could not be the case. No one had driven a wagon this way.

And also he was remembering that time, years ago, when he was nothing but a boy, when he had come to this place with the crowd from the Crossroads to look at the grisly spectacle of the murdered peddler before the coroner should arrive.

Was this a mere memory or an illusion?

He advanced a step or two. He peered into the woods to the left and right of him. He listened. Darkness! Silence! He dared to look again at the thing in the road.

Winder could see it for himself, all right, but at first he couldn't believe his eyes. The thing in the road that Buck had found was the body of a man.

It lay there sprawling—right there where the peddler's body had lain, and in the same way, and the old hat the thing had worn was knocked to one side, and from its head there came a little stream of blood.

The peddler? It couldn't be the peddler!

He knew where the peddler had been buried. He had been to the funeral himself.

But who could it be? That was what gave him the creeps. His own footprints were the only ones that went down into the place. Had he shot some one down there himself on his first trip through the hollow and then forgot about it?

He remembered that queer change that had come over himself and over the sky and the earth just as he was coming up out of the hollow when he passed this way before.

He raised his eyes and looked across the hollow to that other place where he had stood. He looked and looked, and into the very soul of him there came a feeling that he knew was to remain with him for the remainder of eternity. Yep! It would be there when Gabriel blew his trumpet and Henry Winder went marching with the rest of the dead up to the Judgment Seat.

For, there where he had stood on the farther side of the hollow, there wasn't the trace of a footprint. Nothing! Nothing but untrodden snow. Not a spot. Not a rabbit track. And the road stretched away like that, on up around the mountain as far as he could see—there where he had passed—or some part of him had passed—and left no trail. No wind. No more snow had fallen. Moonlight and starlight flooding down. No chance for a mistake. Something which was himself, but which left no footprints, was what had come out of the hollow and gone on its way and left this thing in the road down there.

He turned and looked back of him. Only one set of footprints there—drunken footprints—the ones he had just been following—the ones he had made when he was first leaving the Crossroads—and the Logans were heading through the woods to lay in wait for him here and shoot him down as their pa, at this same place, had shot the peddler down.

He could see it all.

But Buck was calling to him, whimpering, crying like a child, coaxing him to come on down into the hollow.

Too late? Not too late yet, perhaps. It rested with himself. It rested with that part of him that

was still alive and free to move around, the part of him that had gone home and heard what the doctor and the women folks had to say and had then followed Buck on the back trail to the Crossroads and on to here.

So he went on down into the bottom of the hollow and looked at the thing that was lying there.

It was still alive. The Logans had fired a trifle high. Not very much. The wound was serious. An hour or so more here in the snow, without attention, and that would be the end of it except for one more mound in the lot on the hill.

And Henry looked at the thing and tried to make up his mind. He knew that this thing was full of bad whisky and pain. He knew that it was wet and cold, and that it needed a bath and other attentions. The clothing on it was old and soiled. It wore no socks, and its boots were full of holes. It had always been lazy and vicious and ready to fight, and unmindful of others so long as its own appetites were taken care of. It was ugly to look at—a mean weight to carry, a rebellious thing to manage.

Should he leave it?

Or should he take it back?

He knew that he was free to do either.

Once before some such thing had happened to him when old man Cumming's mule had kicked him on the head. Then also some part of him had been set free to roam around, just as it had befallen him now. And he recalled all the times that since then he had wished the kick had killed him—times when this better, cleaner, wiser part of him had wished to God it had never come back to this other part of him that was now lying here in the road.

Buck looked up at him imploringly and whined again.

"After all," said Henry—that spiritual part of him which was standing up to that physical part of him which was lying down; "after all, I might make something out of you worth while, if you only gave me the chance. But I know you. You won't give me the chance."

Buck continued to plead. But Henry's real or living self continued to address the thing in the road.

"I know you'd say that without you the cabin will never be fixed and that my women folks will pine away and that my poor little sickly son will grow up fatherless. All these are good arguments. And I might come back to you if I could only be sure that you wouldn't abuse me any more. But you're altogether bad. You never listen to my promptings."

He stopped. He had seen something that stuck out of the pocket of the snow-draggled and ragged old coat the recumbent figure wore.

The thing he had seen was a hank of yarn.

Presently, had there been any one there to see, it would have been noticed that the body of Henry Winder, lying there in the bottom of the hollow, showed signs of returning life.

Buck was there, though, and it was as if the old hound understood. Buck gave a yelp of joy. He paused just long enough to lick his master's face. Then he had bounded away. It was Buck who returned to the cabin and notified the people there, in his own unmistakable way, that they were needed and that he would show them where.

So, without any great delay, the women and the doctor hurried down the road toward Peddler's Hollow. They found Winder where he still lay, there where Buck had left him, and the doctor bound up Winder's wound and washed his blood away with snow. By and by Winder was able to stand, then to walk; and, with his arms about the doctor and his weeping

wife, they trudged up out of the hollow on their way back toward home.

But at the rim of the hollow Winder paused and lifted his face. It was the place of his vision. There he made a promise to the entity inside of himself—and he knew that it was a covenant he would keep: "Hereafter you rule and I'll obey."

Captain George Guynemer

The Greatest Ace of the Great War

By Harold Hersey

YOU were a shepherd of the skies, who knew
 The unseen valleys of the air like one
 That lived his life among the hills, and through
 The dusty pathways of the clouds you spun
 Upon your shining wings, a knight that flew
 Against the golden empire of the sun.

O Shepherd of the skies, upon your flight,
 The heartbeat of the engine in your ears,
 You knew the depths and wonder of the night,
 The throbbing silence as the dawn appears,
 When climbing to some strange and splendid height
 You challenged like a god the mighty spheres.

Beneath you was that spectacle of hell,
 But 'round you were the snow-white clouds, the strong
 Swift piling of them when the thunder fell,
 The after glory as you soared along,
 The earth great ages distant, and its spell
 A muffled echo of remembered song.

Far, far below you at a single glance
 Wild flocks of birds were; underneath them spread
 The silent cities, and above, perchance,
 The drone of flyers that before you fled
 Then everywhere the frozen fields of France,
 Slopes where the battle raged, the dead.

A knight that sallied forth all unafraid
 Upon those shining wings, his lance at rest,
 Armed for the swift attack, the sudden raid,
 The tourney with an uninvited guest,
 Who met the enemy where none might aid,
 A lonely knight upon a splendid quest.

Shall they tell of the end? Perhaps they, too,
 Fell in the gust of death when it was done.
 O Shepherd of the skies, what can we do
 When all these battles have been lost and won
 For those fair knights on shining wings who flew
 Against the golden empire of the sun?

Courage +

By Andrew Soutar

IF, when you have read this story of Ranelagh Deene, you should be tempted, as I am afraid you will, to ask who was Cæsar Diavine, I beg of you to cast about in your own hearts that you may find the answer there.

Ranelagh Deene was a young man who insisted on telling himself that he had the brains but not the opportunities. He lived in the village of Meadowcroft, where he kept a small grocery store. Very early in life he had taken to himself a wife—Clarissa, the daughter of the village postmaster. In villages, as in greater communities, there are "marriages of the season," and this was one. Clarissa was a very beautiful girl, and with many natural gifts. Ranelagh Deene was ambitious, and his friends never begrudged him the promise of a big future. It was a very small grocery store, and the population of the village being in hundreds, it was possible for him to calculate almost accurately what would be his financial position twelve months ahead. Had he been possessed of capital, he might have struck out for himself in the town, but he had no moneyed friends, and no security to offer to any one else who might be in a position to advance capital.

There is nothing so pathetic as young ambition chained to a rock. Ranelagh Deene told himself that if only the opportunity came he would show the world something of which it would be proud.

The opportunity came.

On an afternoon in November a motor car drove through the village and stopped at the door of Deene's grocery store. A tall man with an impressive personality stepped out, and for a few minutes contemplated the signboard over the store. A group of children, who were playing on the other side of the street, came across the road, with the natural inquisitiveness of children. First, they admired the car. The chauffeur appeared not to have seen them. He remained seated at the wheel, his face almost completely hidden by the motor wraps. Then the children moved between the tall man on the pavement and the shop window. They looked up into his face, and as



he looked down at them they shrank away, and in a little while disappeared from the street.

The tall man entered the shop. Clarissa called to her husband who was behind the frosted glass of the cashier's desk. "Rann, dear," she whispered; then, as the children had done, crept away.

Ranelagh came forward and said: "Yes, sir; what can I do for you?"

The stranger tilted his silk hat, and meditatively fingered his long, thin chin.

"I'm afraid that I'm not a very profitable customer," he said in a voice that was not at all unpleasant; indeed, there was something ingratiating about it, and his eyes, or, rather, the sparkle in them, added eloquence to his tongue. "To tell you the truth, the name on your signboard interested me—Ranelagh Deene! I wonder if you are related in any way to Samson Deene?"

Ranelagh smiled, and there was some bitterness in the turn of his lips.

"You refer to Samson Deene, the financier—the great financier? Come, do I look as though I were related to such a man?"

"I am sorry if I have provoked you," said the stranger. "It was not my intention. Only I happen to know Mr. Samson Deene very well, and I heard him say that he had some relatives in this part of the country."

Ranelagh was still smiling bitterly. "Samson Deene," he said, "must be worth—what?"

"Probably half a million dollars," said the stranger, "not more."

"Half a million!" Ranelagh laughed. "And yet I've heard them say that he hasn't the brains of a laborer. How do these men get on?"

"By using other men's brains," said the stranger. "That's genius. I hope I'm not interrupting your business?"

"No," said Ranelagh quickly. "It's early-closing day. I was just going to put the shutters up."

"Do," said the stranger, "and if you will permit me I will remain here until you have finished. I'm tired; motoring does tire one."

"I have never been in a motor car," said Ranelagh, "so I can't deny or confirm." He went out to put up the shutters. When he came back he found the stranger sitting on the tall, cane-bottomed chair against the counter. He was humming to himself, and there was a great deal of fascination in the voice.

"I suppose you know," he said, "that Samson Deene commenced life in such a business as this? But he was too ambitious to remain long."

Ranelagh accepted that as an affront.

"Perhaps he hadn't the responsibilities that I have," he said. "Besides, I had to start on my own savings." He half turned as he said that, and a fierce light came into his eyes as he pounded his left palm with his right fist. "Some men have the luck!" he said. "They stop at nothing; they just fight their way through to a fortune without considering the feelings of any one else. Somehow I admire that class of man. Half a million! By heavens, I believe I would kill a man for that!"

The stranger laughed. "Do you know," he said casually, "that's one of the commonest phrases of to-day? And yet I don't believe that one man in a million would."

"Would—what?"

"Why, deliberately take a human life for the sake of adding to his fortune."

"It's done every day," said Ranelagh. "Don't you read the newspapers?"

"You're thinking of criminals," said the stranger; "low-bred men, illiterate men, men whose brains are abnormal—madmen. We were talking about men like Samson Deene, clear-witted, shrewd, a man on whose word thousands of financiers depend day after day. He wouldn't—"

"Sometimes," said Ranelagh, walking to and fro, "I wish the opportunity would come."

"Aren't you happy here?"

"I suppose I ought to be. I'm married to a good woman who lends me every assistance in this little business; I'm respected in the village; but—"

"But what?"

"Is this village to be my grave? Is there no world outside this village?"

"Ah! You're ambitious," said the stranger; "and I do admire ambition."

"And there's something else besides ambition," said Ranelagh. "I'm not the fool you may take me for. I know what you're thinking; you're pitying me."

"No, my friend; on the contrary, I was pitying—Samson Deene."

"I don't suppose he would thank you for it," said Ranelagh. "It's greater scope that I want."

"I should have said that you were just the kind of man to make a way for himself."

Again Ranelagh laughed that bitter laugh.

"Think so? Look here, Mr.—"

"My name is Cæsar Diavine. I don't suppose you've ever heard of me, although I am always moving about this country of yours."

"I was going to say," Ranelagh went on in a lower tone of voice, at the same time casting a glance in the direction of the little back parlor wherein Clarissa was hiding herself, "I'll tell you how I started and how we stand. Although I don't know why I should tell you, a perfect stranger."

Cæsar Diavine was resting an elbow on the counter, and he turned his hand very slowly in Ranelagh's direction. "I trust," he said, "that we shall know more of each other, for you interest me, and I am frequently in a position to lend a hand to the man who cares to take it."

"Thank you," said Ranelagh. "I was going to tell you that I opened this little grocery store with five hundred dollars. It had taken me seven years to save that amount. I commenced when I was at school, saving the coppers I received for selling newspapers out of school hours. Five hundred dollars represented my capital, and I've worked steadily from seven in the morning till seven at night, and sometimes later, for five years."

"And to-day," broke in the stranger; "how do you stand to-day?"

"I've neither lost nor gained. Five hundred dollars is all I have, outside my stock."

"Come, that's not bad," said Cæsar Diavine. "You've paid your way, and you still have your five hundred."

"And my ambition," said Ranelagh, somewhat angrily, and as though he would condemn himself. "Why, there's a man in this village—a coal merchant—who can hardly write his own name. To my knowledge, he's never done a single act that made him of any value to the village or to the world for that matter. He's mean, illiterate, always on the lookout for the chance to grab a margin. I knew that man when he lived in a two-roomed cottage. To-day he has the finest house in Meadowcroft. It stands yonder, on the crest of the hill; you can see it if you step to the doorway. Mudgill his name is."

"Ah!" said Cæsar Diavine. "He may be a man with a gift for using other men's brains. That reminds me, the coal market isn't in a very flourishing state, is it?"

"No," said Ranelagh, anxious to show the stranger that he studied other markets than his own. "It hasn't been so low in a decade. And it's going lower, or I'm a Dutchman."

Cæsar Diavine smiled quietly as he said: "You are wrong, Mr. Deene. Coal has been my study—among other things—for years and years, and compared with you I am an old man. Let me tell you this, by way of a challenge, and when I call this way again you may remind me of it, and if the laugh is on your side—well, you may laugh. Coal is down to three-seventy-five to-day. It may drop some more to-morrow, but"—and here Diavine rose and struck a most dramatic attitude that would have impressed a more sophisticated man than Ranelagh Deene—"within three days coal will be selling at eleven dollars a ton." With that he fixed his hat more firmly on his head, held out his hand in a most friendly way, and said: "Mr. Deene, I am glad to have met you. I know we shall meet again. There is my address, if ever you happen to be in town—61 Drinsmore Gardens. Never hesitate to call. I am very simple in my tastes, and maybe I shall be able to introduce you to some friends with influence."

"I don't know that I want influence," said Ranelagh, not discourteously. "I only want the chance."

"Of course," said Diavine, "and yet, do you know, you startled me just now when you said that for half a million you would— Ah, we'll forget it. Good-by, Mr. Deene."

Ranelagh didn't go to the door to see him off, and he didn't hear the car move away. He was standing behind the counter, with his eyes staring hard at the shelves in front of him, his mouth agape, when Clarissa touched him on the arm. He said to her quite sharply: "Don't talk to me now, Clarissa, dear. I'm thinking."

She went back to the parlor. The door was still open, although the shutters were up, and Ranelagh was staring in a vacant way, when another form filled the doorway.

"Ah, Deene! I'm in luck again. I was afraid you'd be shut. I suppose you can't let me have a barrel of oil? They've run out completely at the house." It was John Mudgill, the coal merchant, and his appearance at that moment had the strange effect of paling Deene's cheeks.

"Certainly, Mr. Mudgill," he said. "Will you be seated while I book the order?" Then, in a suspiciously anxious voice: "How's business with you?"

Mudgill struck the counter a blow with his big red fist. "Rotten!" he said laconically. "Down to three-seventy-five, and I heard on the exchange this morning that it was likely to touch three dollars and a half. And in my yard I have four thousand tons of it, for which I gave four dollars myself at the pit-head! That's the sort of luck I get."

Ranelagh left him a minute to close the sitting-room door, and to endeavor to steady his nerves. He was shaking, just like a woman who has gazed on a ghost. When he went back he said to Mudgill: "I don't think the situation's as bad as all that. The coal market has been my study, Mr. Mudgill, for a long time—a kind of hobby outside my own business."

Mudgill said with a laugh: "You're happy, Deene. Keep happy; keep out of coal. I've got four thousand tons there, as I said just now, for which I gave four dollars at the pithead. If you were a man with money, I'd sell you the lot at three-seventy-five, just to cut my losses."

It might have been Deene's fancy or the result of excitement of the brain, but a face seemed to be looking from the shelves—the face of Cæsar Diavine. Ranelagh tried to lean carelessly over the counter, but he had to adopt an erect attitude before saying: "I've done very well, Mr. Mudgill, during the last three or four years. I've never speculated much, but I'm not afraid to speculate now. Tell you what I'll do—I'll buy an option on those four thousand tons. For how much?"

"Good for you, Deene!" said Mudgill eagerly. "You shall have the four thousand tons of coal at three-seventy-five, and I'll take two hundred and fifty dollars for the option. Give you six weeks' option?"

"Come down to the bank," said Ranelagh, "and I'll fix it up with you now."

It was all done within an hour. The gray-haired bank manager, Mr. Pascoe, who had been in the village almost as long as Deene, shook his head warningly, but there was something in Ranelagh's brain that kept on saying, "Eleven dollars! Eleven dollars!"

The deal was clinched, and Ranelagh Deene went back to the shop. Clarissa wanted to talk to him, but his nerves were all jumping, and he was thankful when she went to the little cottage piano and played some simple ballads.

II.

TWO days later the miners in Scotland and the north of England went on strike, and there was every indication that it would be a long strike. Coal jumped two and a half dollars. At midday it was seven dollars, and on the following day it had reached ten. And on the fourth day it stood at eleven! Ranelagh Deene made a profit of twenty-nine thousand dollars and more!

Now, mark the transition of Ranelagh Deene. The little grocer's store in the village of Meadowcroft was emptied. A spark of sentiment in his nature prompted him to retain the lease, and he didn't wish to see, or hear of, any one standing behind the furrowed counter or sitting in the little back parlor where he and sweet Clarissa had spent so many wonderful hours.

His first visit to Drinsmore Gardens was crowded with dramatic happenings. Clarissa accompanied him, and never had she looked so beautiful, so dignified, so much like the wife of a man who *felt* that the world was waiting to be conquered. He had written to Cæsar Diavine that he wished to call and pay his respects; the response was an invitation to dinner.

"No doubt," he said to Clarissa, "he will have other guests, so we must be on our guard against—against what we might term the simplicities of the village."

A sallow-faced serving man had led them through a hall that was draped with scarlet velvet, the color being strangely toned down by the deep blue light of the electric globes. In the reception room the hangings were of purple, the whole of the walls being covered. There were no chairs; indeed, there was no furniture, save a worm-eaten oaken sideboard on which reposed a grinning skull and a stuffed toad constrictor who rested on the top of the skull and whose eyes were apparently of emeralds. There were piles of gorgeous skin rugs, and the sallow-faced servant waved Deene and his wife to them with an

imperious gesture. Clarissa was expressing herself on the eccentricity of the great when the velvet hangings parted and Cæsar Diavine appeared in the opening. Clarissa cried out in fear; Ranelagh sprang to his feet, ready to apologize for any word that might have been overheard. Diavine looked much younger than when he paid his visit to the shop; and the evening clothes were different from any that Ranelagh had seen. The lower garment was tight fitting from the ankles upward; there was no opening in the coat, but a huge ruby gleamed from a spot where the ends of the collar met. And his hair was darker—or seemed to be—and his deep-seated eyes had greater compelling power.

Diavine had heard of Ranelagh's success, and received his profuse thanks with a courtly bow. "We shall be only four at dinner," he said apologetically; "but Mrs. Deene will find Mr. Samson Deene a most charming companion." He paid no attention to the half-suppressed exclamation of Ranelagh, to whom the name of Samson Deene was something to be revered.

Diavine conducted them to another room, where Clarissa was able to prepare herself for dinner. She didn't want Ranelagh to leave her, but she hadn't the courage, in the presence of Diavine, to tell him so. When she returned to the first room she found the great Samson Deene, fat of cheek, yet handsome in spite of it, deep in conversation with her husband. She was introduced. Samson Deene was more than courteous; his eyes were still on her face long after he resumed his conversation with Ranelagh. Clarissa was wearing a new gown that night—one of sea-green color that seemed to stir like a billow in the moonlight, and when she moved made a soft, sibilant sound like a wave breaking gently on a pebbled beach. Samson Deene fascinated her as she did him. He took her in to dinner, at the request of the host, and after dinner it was to his desires that she appealed when she was asked to sit at the piano and play.

That night Ranelagh listened to Cæsar Diavine in the attitude of one who finds himself in a strange world and is grateful for a friendly voice. Diavine took him to his study, where the atmosphere was pregnant with a heavy, sensuous perfume, and drove from his mind the fallacy that Samson Deene was an exceptional man. Diavine showed him how he might achieve much greater things than Samson Deene had ever attempted.

"I have taken a great fancy to you," he said, resting his hand on Ranelagh's shoulder. "I would that I were a young man again so that I might join forces with you. But I am getting old, and surely I have wealth enough. Look!" He opened a desk and lifted out a blue envelope that had been carelessly flung in. "The information in that envelope would make a comfortable fortune for any man of average ambition. I am acquainted with a member of the city council; he serves on the improvements committee, and he left this report behind him the other night."

Ranelagh asked the question with his eyes. Diavine went on: "Recommendations of the committee, on which the council is pretty sure to act. Old property that must be bought so that streets may be widened. If the owners of that property knew all that is con-

tained in that report they would treble the price of their property when asked to sell."

Clarissa was playing an accompaniment to a love song that Samson Deene was singing when the other two rejoined them. Clarissa's cheeks were flushed; her eyes were lit up by a fire that Ranelagh had never before seen. But Ranelagh's mind was too full of a resolve that shamed him to take much notice of his wife. Cæsar Diavine amused his guests by sleight-of-hand tricks, tales of Eastern romance, and conjectures on the hereafter. He spun a coin in the air, waited as it spun, and laughed when Clarissa screamed because the coin split into a thousand golden butterflies that flitted about the room and disappeared as suddenly as they had come. He took the diamond-studded snake bracelet from her wrist—it was Ranelagh's gift—spoke to it, made sundry passes in the air as conjurers do at a party, and—the head of the snake *moved*.

While Diavine was playing a serenade of his own composing, Ranelagh Deene slipped out of the room and made his way to the study. Stealthily he took the blue envelope from the desk, gleaned the information he desired, and was back in the drawing-room almost before the others had noted his absence.

The name of Ranelagh Deene was quoted, a week later, in every newspaper in London as that of the man who, with extraordinary foresight, had anticipated the intentions of the city council, bought up for the proverbial song a street or two of dilapidated house property, and sold the site to the authorities for a small fortune.

III.

WITHIN two years after leaving the grocery store in Meadowcroft, Ranelagh Deene was worth nearly a quarter of a million dollars, and his relations with Cæsar Diavine were so intimate that the two men were seldom seen singly. Diavine regarded his protégé as a genius; Ranelagh looked on Diavine as one specially gifted by the gods. Ranelagh was now interested in a hundred different concerns, and, which is more, his was an active interest. Society began to talk about him, and when he successfully manipulated the Western Iron Combine society insisted on coming in contact with him. How splendidly Clarissa rose with the rising tide of success! Ranelagh's enemies said of him that his many schemes were the fruits of his wife's brains. He never took the trouble to contradict them. Somewhere on the south coast he took over a mansion of the Tudor period, but left entertaining to Clarissa. She had her own cars and horses, concerned herself with the drama, was a liberal patroness of music and the arts in general. There were occasions when nearly a hundred guests gathered at Beechtree Park, and of all those people Clarissa was the fairest. Only seldom did Ranelagh allow himself a vacation; then he went abroad in the company of Cæsar Diavine, and always he associated business with pleasure. It was while in New York that he bought the patent rights of an improved incandescent mantle that added a hundred thousand to his fortune; he engineered a loan to a small near-Eastern state, and—and there was only one thing he seemed unable to conquer, and that was the indomitable spirit of Samson Deene. **Be-**

tween these two men there was a fierce rivalry that provided the basis of many a dinner-table discussion.

"Heard of Samson Deene's latest coup?"

"Wait till Ranelagh Deene has planned his counter-move. Then talk."

And so on. Strangely enough the two men were frequently in each other's company, as friends. Clarissa openly avowed herself an admirer of Samson's acumen; besides, he was musical.

Then society, finding its palate jaded, began to weave a scandal around the pair. Ranelagh heard whispers, but told Cæsar Diavine that he was too big to let his thoughts dwell on such whispers; besides, he loved Clarissa with the intensity with which she loved him.

At Drinsmore Gardens! Cæsar Diavine was as excited as Ranelagh. They were alone in the house; the very servants had been dismissed by Diavine with a threatening flash of the eye and a pass with the right hand, held fanwise, palm downward.

"You've touched the million, Ranelagh?" He was leaning across the table, his long thin chin almost touching it. "One move—the right move—and you make it five. More! You crush Samson Deene."

Ranelagh had refused wine at dinner, knowing the value that night of clarity of thought, and yet his face was flushed to the color of the hangings on the wall in that scarlet room. He had torn open his collar; the perspiration on the backs of his hands glittered in the light of the electric globe above his head; they were held out in front of him, resting on the table.

"It's too big a gamble," he said, with a sharp hiss. "If I won—five millions."

"And Samson Deene beggared."

"If I lost—ruin!"

"Strong men never count the risks."

Ranelagh raised his hand and held it like a shield before his eyes. "Don't look at me like that, Diavine," he entreated. "There's something diabolical in your expression to-night. No! I apologize for that."

"Hus-s-sh!" whispered Diavine. "I know you are jumpy, to-night. And it is a big proposition—the cornering of the iron market."

"I should have to realize every holding I've got, and then borrow."

"I know a score of banks who would scream for the chance of coming to your aid."

"If I lost——" His face was dehumanized.

"Why talk like that?"

"It would be ruin for me—and Clarissa. And I live for her—just her. She has been so splendid."

"Five millions! Think for a moment. Here is this special information. A new government program of armaments. It might mean ten millions." Diavine turned to the right; a bronze statue of a nymph holding a chalice was seeming to smile encouragingly in the red, shaded light; he lifted the chalice from the bronze hand and offered it to Ranelagh. "Moisten your lips," he said persuasively. Ranelagh drank thirstily, deeply.

"Yes," he said determinedly, as he put down the chalice; "I'll risk it."

Cæsar Diavine helped him. The loans were advanced. He dared not tell Clarissa everything, but, being a shrewd woman in spite of her changed en-

vironment, she divined most of it. She tried to talk him out of his plans, but now he was in a stronger grip than love. Avarice possessed him. The blood in his veins ran more swiftly; his nerves were quivering strings of red-hot wire.

"Five millions, maybe ten, Clarissa." He went about his work like a swiftly moving automaton, his brain held together by stimulants.

The newspapers heard of the greatest gamble in history. Ranelagh Deene was shadowed wherever he went by press photographers.

And all the while Samson Deene was piecing together his ingenious net.

IV.

CLARISSA was at Beechtree Park; Ranelagh in his town house. Samson Deene was newly returned from abroad. It was Saturday night. Ranelagh had not tasted food all day, for his brain was inflamed by a thousand wild suspicions. He was aware that no man could set out to risk a million on a throw without the eyes of a thousand enemy spies being focused upon him.

Things were moving with dramatic rapidity. Inside information was to the effect that the government's intentions were to be made known on the following Wednesday morning.

Ten o'clock! The telephone bell broke in discordantly. Ranelagh snatched the receiver.

"Morton speaking. That you, Mr. Deene?" Morton was his principal agent.

"Yes—quick! What's wrong?"

"My God! Watch the tape!"

"Damn the tape! Tell me!"

"I daren't!" It was the wail of a terrified man.

"Tell me—you idiot!"

"Government program's leaked out."

"Well—well? Quick, Morton—for the love of God—what is it?"

"Partial disarmament. And the American market has dropped to the bottom."

"H——!"

Ranelagh flung the receiver from him and leaped, hatless, through the hall and into the street. A taxicab was droning along. He sprang on the footboard and shouted at the driver:

"Sixty-one Drinsmore Gardens. Drive like fury!"

Cæsar Diavine lurched into the scarlet room whither Ranelagh had been shown by a gnomelike footman.

"Beaten!" he gasped, and there was a wicked, taunting smile in his eyes as he stared at Ranelagh.

"Nearly. Diavine, you've heard the news?"

"Just a minute ago."

"It's true—eh?"

"Absolutely."

Ranelagh tried to steady himself. Diavine reached for the chalice with its brain-burning nectar.

"I'm not beaten—quite."

"You are. And by a cleverer man."

"Name. Name. Diavine!"

"Samson Deene; he has just left me."

"Beaten! How?"

"It was Samson who organized the loans to you!"

"Liar! Traitor!"

"Don't raise your hand. You fool!" Cæsar Diavine had stretched himself to the full. His eyes were blaz-

ing; he towered above Ranelagh. "He has just left me," he repeated. "He is going abroad on Tuesday, and——"

"Go on!"

"He is calling in the loans. He has fixed Monday night—midnight—as the last moment."

"I couldn't do it even if I wished. A week—a month, and I could recover, at a loss; but Monday night!"

"He means to crush you. 'Pay that thou owest' by Monday midnight or go down—down to the very bottom."

"The short interest on those loans would ruin me completely."

"'Pay that thou owest.'"

"Curse you, don't—don't look as though you were pleased."

"The world will laugh. I'm only preparing you."

"The laugh will kill me."

"And your wife."

"There's no way out of it—no way of compelling Samson Deene to hold his hand for a while?"

"Only one way, Ranelagh. *If anything* should happen to prevent Samson Deene——"

"Stop! For God's sake, stop! What are you urging me to do?"

Cæsar Diavine shrugged his shoulders. "How the world will laugh!" he mused. "It will point scornfully at the *once* great Ranelagh Deene, who was beaten by a cleverer man. It will smile as it passes Beechtree Park, empty and forsaken. But if anything happened to Samson Deene!"

Ranelagh stepped back in awe from the sinister figure. "Take a human life!" he said in a deep, hollow whisper. "No. God help me! No."

"Misery for Clarissa, your wife, unless she is stronger than you. What are marriage bonds, after all?"

"Diavine, you're inflaming me! Have a little pity."

Diavine poured him out another stimulant. "All right," he said softly. "I have nothing more to say. Poor Ranelagh! Poor Clarissa! Samson Deene has gone down to his place at Berkham. Do you know Berkham Court? A delightful old-world mansion, isn't it? Wonder what he's thinking about."

Ranelagh gulped the wine that remained in the chalice. "Good night," he said shortly, and the next moment the front door clashed.

Cæsar Diavine smiled.

"So easy," he laughed. "So very easy."

V.

THROUGHOUT the night Ranelagh Deene was locked in his room. There was a pile of telegrams on the table. Clarissa had wired: "I want to help you—come." He remained in the room all next day, subsisting only on stimulants. At nine o'clock in the evening he took a revolver from a desk, examined it carefully, and placed it in his pocket. At ten o'clock he was in the grounds at Berkham Court. He had telegraphed to Samson Deene: "I must see you; important." In the grounds there wasn't a soul to be seen, and although the hall door was slightly open there didn't appear to be a servant in the house. There were no lights, although outside everything was in darkness. He passed in, and called out. No

one answered him. He went from room to room, commencing at the very top of the house. The same deathly stillness was on everything.

Then came one of those inexplicable moods in a man who sets out to commit some crime in cold blood. He was conscious of a feeling of faintness, conscious, too, of relief because Samson Deene wasn't there. He opened the door of the library and went in. On the table was a small oil reading lamp, and with extraordinary calm he lit it, then sat with his elbows resting on the table and his hands pressing his temples.

"Diavine was wrong," he muttered; "to take a human life isn't possible to a man with courage. Nothing shall tempt me."

He waited there an hour. No one came, and the longer he waited the stronger became his resolution boldly to face anything that the future might hold for him.

He rose and walked about the room. On the mantel shelf there was a photograph of Samson Deene as a boy. He had no difficulty in recognizing the features. The boy was standing at the knee of a sweet-faced woman of thirty-five, and at the bottom of the photograph was written: "The greatest friend I have ever possessed—my beautiful mother."

Ranelagh went to the window, opened it, took the revolver from his pocket, and hurled it into the darkness. He returned to the table. And just then there was a movement in the grounds. He went back to the window and looked out. Some one was coming toward the house. It was very dark, but he knew the gait of the man. It was Samson Deene, and by his side was a youth carrying a bag of golf clubs. In the drive, Deene dismissed the boy, who went away. Then, as though he had forgotten something, he followed after the boy. Ranelagh waited another half hour. Deene didn't return. Still that strange silence, until there came to his ears a voice—a very faint voice. Some one was coming down the stairs—somewhere.

Picking up the lamp, he went out of the library, across the hall, and into the drawing-room. A door opened on the other side of the room, and an awful cry from his very heart escaped him. For into the room had come, stumbling, falling on her knees, his own wife, Clarissa!

He held the lamp above his head, so that the light fell full on her upturned face. She was wearing a light, flimsy gown; her hair was disordered. He looked down at her, and something—or somebody—was whispering in his ear: "Diavine was right; there is a moment in a man's life when——"

Clarissa spoke: "Rann! You!" He felt in his pocket for the revolver that wasn't there. But his fingers were strong. He took one step toward her. In his face there was a blankness that meant the cutting off of the mind from everything save the duty which he believed he owed to himself.

But at that moment another form appeared in the curtained doorway through which she had come. He didn't look up, but he was conscious of a red glow suffusing the floor where she, Clarissa, was kneeling; and he knew, too, that the Thing in the doorway was smiling exultingly. It was Cæsar Diavine. He saw without looking two long arms reach for the curtains. There was a rustle, and then a rattling of

rings as the curtains were brought together and the opening closed. Ranelagh was left alone with his wife. Again she spoke.

"Rann, believe me! I came to plead for you."

"Hush!" he said in that strange, unnatural whisper.

"I came to dinner, Rann, to plead for you, because I know what's happened."

He placed the lamp on the table. Once more the house was in dead silence. He went slowly on his knees and felt for her hands. A courage that was greater than all the contumely of a thoughtless world was coming to him.

"Clarissa, answer me slowly. Think carefully before you answer. Do you believe in a God?"

"Yes, Rann."

"Do you believe in the strength of love?"

"Yes, Rann."

"Do you know that I shall be ruined when the clock strikes twelve? I shall be penniless. Does that matter to you?"

"Not if you are the same, Rann."

"You could give up everything—all the luxuries—and go back to the starting point?"

"With you, Rann—willingly."

"The world will sneer at me, Clarissa, and at you."

"The world matters nothing, Rann, so long as you are by my side."

A moment or two of silence. The lamp went out. He whispered to her: "Come nearer, Clarissa, and hold your hands—so," and he clasped them for her. A long silence. Then he raised her to her feet. Silently they stole out of the house. He placed his overcoat over her shoulders and walked along in evening dress as though the wind meant nothing to him.

Suddenly he stopped and held her hand tightly, and listened. Through the darkness came the booming of a clock. Twelve—midnight. He stretched himself like a boy in the playing fields.

"Now for the work," he said, "the honest work."

VI.

THEY went down to the village of Meadowcroft together the next day. In the little thoroughfare where he had spent so many years of his life there was a deep, restful quiet. The shop was still empty, the windows covered with dust. They looked through the window, and could see the sun flooding the little back parlor.

"I haven't a penny in the world, Clarrisa," he said, "but somehow I never felt so happy in all my life."

They walked on a little, and came to the bank at the corner of the street. The gray-haired man inside saw them, and came to the door. It was Mr. Pascoe, the bank manager.

"My dear Mr. Ranelagh Deene," he said, "it's like a breath of fresh air to a stifling man to see you again! You're paying a visit to the old village? Good! You little know how proud we are of you!"

Ranelagh Deene, with a smile, put his hands on the old man's shoulders.

"I suppose you haven't read the newspapers," he said, and when Mr. Pascoe shook his head he went on: "Ranelagh Deene, the millionaire, is dead. I have come back to the village because I'm poor—poorer than you can imagine."

Whereat Mr. Pascoe laughed, believing it to be a jest. And, thinking to add to that jest, he said:

"You're not poor, Mr. Deene, for you never closed your account with us."

"My account with you?" said Ranelagh. "What does it amount to?"

"Five hundred dollars—the old five hundred."

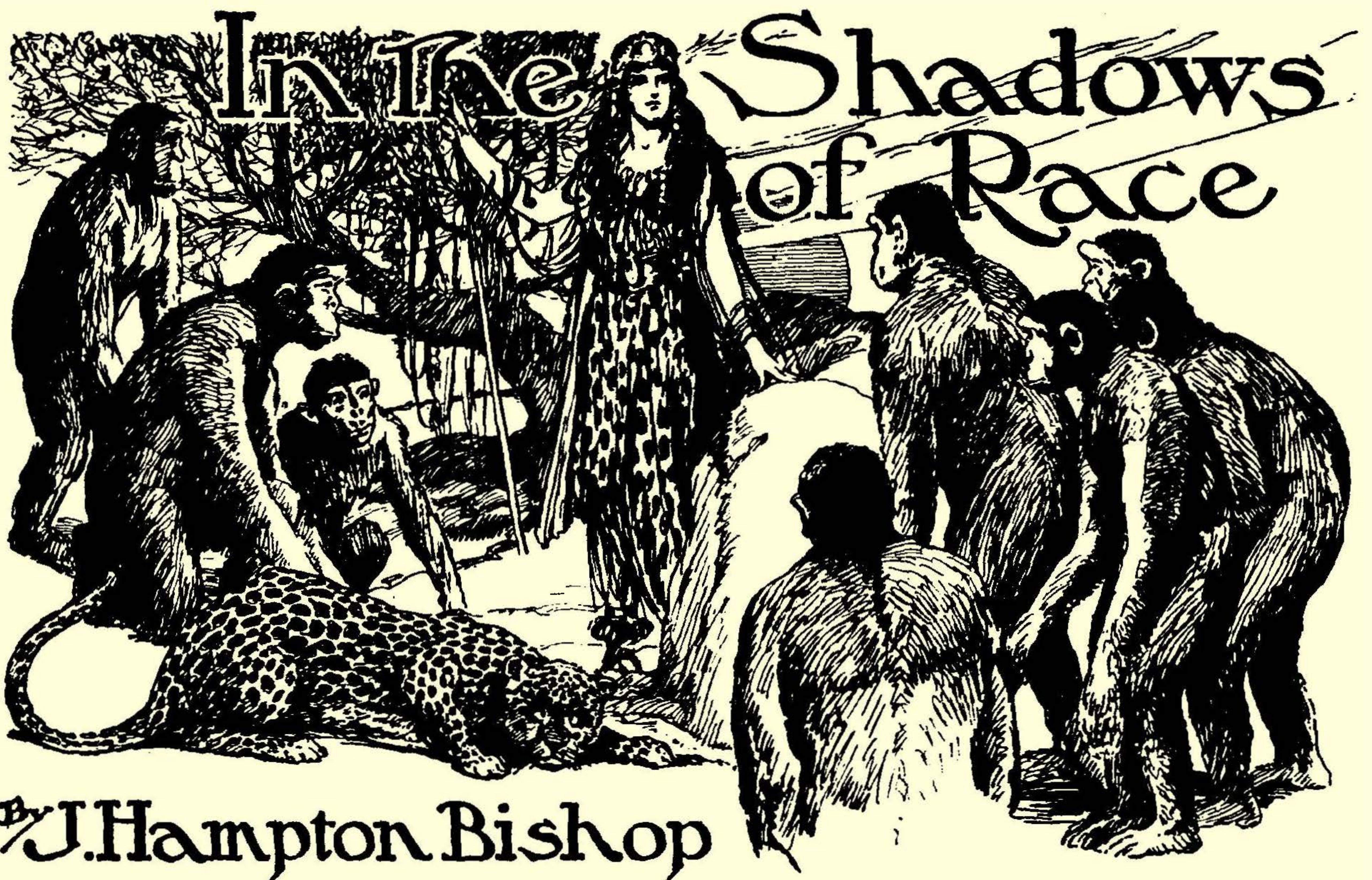
Ranelagh gripped him by the hand, and he said: "Mr. Pascoe, smile, if you will, but I want that five hundred. We—my Clarissa and I—are going to reopen the old shop. We're starting again. Now let the world laugh!"

Flowerlight

By Philip Kennedy

I SHOULD have torn my music from you,
Struck every silent string
And swept you gladly from your feet
So that I might sing.

But a fortress taken is not always won . . .
Or a kingdom in an hour . . .
Come! Let us go singing out of the desert
Delirious with power.



By J. Hampton Bishop

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Whiting and McLaughlin, two explorers, go deeper and deeper into the tropic jungles, seeking to find out why McLaughlin's father has never returned. A curious notebook has excited their curiosity. They see a strange procession, at the head of which is a litter bearing a large leopard, a monstrosity, and a lovely woman. This disappears in the jungle. That night the two explorers go over the cryptic notebook together. McLaughlin stays up alone by the fire. Suddenly out of the bushes appears a Dahomey woman, who asks him to go with her to *Iluko*, Goddess of Fire, the woman he had seen that day. Whiting follows him and finds him living among a race of huge gorillas whose slaves are savages. They are ruled by *Iluko*—a white woman, in love with McLaughlin. Whiting tries to argue with his friend, but only makes him angry. It is evident the man loves *Iluko*. Grave dangers surround them, and Whiting resolves upon saving McLaughlin at all cost.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE VERGE OF COLLAPSE.

WHITING arose the next morning possessed of an overpowering obsession of impending calamity. His inability to talk to McLaughlin the night before, and the lack of any definite line of action which he might pursue, together with his disturbed sleep, had attacked an otherwise already negative amount of personal reliance, so that the morning's reprehensible forecast was a last straw to his enthusiasm.

He dressed slowly, with an expression of calm despair, and walked from his quarters straight in the face of *Iluko* herself, and her attitude promised a definite fulfillment of all his apprehensions. She was dressed in a regalia indicative of some formal function, and had evidently been frustrated in something that to her was a momentous occasion.

The sheeny mass of dark hair, high piled and shot through with scattered porcupine quills and small ornaments of gold, overshadowed a face that was fierce and threatening. Her dark eyes glowed with compelling intensity as she faced him.

Behind her were a score of slaves, equipped for battle with gold-tipped, slender spears glistening in the strong light of early morning. To the rear, half crouched, were as many gorillas, their bristles erect as those of an angry pack of dogs, their enormous canine teeth showing in half snarls as they gave vent to queer, suppressed mumblings, accented by inarticulate exclamations wondrously human in sound.

Whiting was more than impressed. He sensed the extraordinary, even as he registered their threatening propensities. He felt a keen delight that something tangible offered itself for combat. He took a step forward, but *Iluko* held up a detaining hand impressively: "My Quaase, what have you done with him?" she demanded sharply.

Whiting stepped back instinctively, while his face showed his astonishment. "Mack? Is he gone? Where is he?"

Now, the world-wide language of face can be read the world over, be the language of tongue ever so imperfect, and Whiting's amazement could not be discredited. She knew he was speaking the truth. For a moment she turned to her henchmen with almost a gesture of dismay, but Whiting strode forward and grasped her by the arm. A terrible thought had come to him. "What do you mean?" he asked harshly. "Where is Mack? Where is he, I say? No crooked business now. Out with it! What did that devil dance mean last night? Tell me."

Unknowingly his nails sank deep into the flesh of her upper arm, but she seemed unmindful of any pain. Instead she flung herself free of him and turned her face, distorted with frenzy, on her waiting slaves. "Carion of the vulture and the jackal, why do you stand there?" she screamed. "Helpless fools that you are. Find him. Go! Search for him and fail not, else your worthless bodies shall become food for the wandering souls rejected by the Great Father."

It was Whiting's turn to read the language of the face, and he did so with a queer blending of relief and uneasiness as to McLaughlin's whereabouts. He stood quite still and watched the slaves, one at a time, fall prostrate, face to earth, before their angry queen, then arise and slink away hurriedly one after the other.

When the last one had gone she turned to the gorillas and hissed at them—short, spasmodic interjections, to which they responded by wonderful facial contortions expressive of an extended range of comprehension; and their ferocious aspect gave way to a wary, indefinable something indicative of great animal instinct and cunning.

Whiting, watching all this, put his hands in his pockets and mentally whistled. He wished—oh, how he wished that McLaughlin might witness this! She was caught with the goods on. She understood the language of these nature freaks, and they unquestionably understood her! The thing, of course, was incredible, but here was actual proof. He found himself wondering what she would do next.

As if in answer to his thought, he saw Alabie approaching in great haste. She walked up to Iluko and began to talk without the usual courtesy. In the singsong rhythm of words, Whiting caught an occasional lucid sequence of thought whose interpretation was as baffling to him as the entire thing appeared to be to Iluko.

McLaughlin had been stolen—carried away—and by the old gorilla who had been a mother to the white child!

Iluko's face was a dead white. Her eyes were most unpleasant to see. Her lips writhed back from a row of teeth whose appearance expressed a reality that would be difficult to forget.

"But, no," she disputed angrily, "is not Barzah at rest? How, then, can she have stolen him?"

Alabie shook her head. "No rest since this long time. She has stolen the son of the White Moon god."

Whiting noticed a fiendish gleam of pleasure pass across the hideous old face, and recalled a forgotten rumor of Alabie's jealousy of the old beast. At the same time many things came back to him forcefully. The marked regard Barzah had shown McLaughlin. He had wondered at the old beast's attitude many times. What could be the answer? He felt that his reason was on the verge of collapse.

Then Iluko, in her increasing wrath, recalled him to himself. She was almost regal. The prerogative accompanying constant homage blazoned itself in every line of her erect figure. She looked at Alabie with withering scorn. "Go to your house!" she admonished shortly. And if your lips have spoken lies, prepare your soul for its great change. Of a

sweetness it would be to me to thus have it so. Be-gone!"

She turned suddenly on the waiting beasts, striking her breast resounding blows with her clenched fists in imitation of the brutes themselves and screaming vituperations and execrations apparently on the heads of the gods themselves. Her fury raged in compelling abandonment, and became in itself a terrible work of art, so that Whiting, in the face of a momentous calamity, found time to wonder at it.

The foremost of the gorillas, as if in complete comprehension, stood erect and simulated her actions until the scene passed the boundary of anything positive or real and became a fantasy—a product of a distorted imagination. And then the following gorillas, too, stood erect, and the entire party turned and started, as if by some compelling instinct, toward the rim of the heavy forest.

Whiting watched them go; there really seemed to be nothing else to do, not being able to stop them, but he experienced a deep touch of regret. He at least had hoped for something definite; he disliked being so completely ignored. True, he was a little vague as to the exact nature of his desire, but most anything was more desirable than being a helpless pawn on the game board and therefore useless, except as the player cared to push him about. He resented it. He would have gone also; done something other than what had been left him, but he didn't know where to begin.

The day passed and night was coming on. Whiting, in defiance of his belief as to the futility of such a thing, had made the rounds. He had exhausted each tiniest clew that had occurred to him, and, as he expected, found nothing. There remained but two facts: the absence of Barzah and the disappearance of McLaughlin. The evidence of one only corroborated the actuality of the other, and both remained—the harbingers of whatever terrors the imagination became capable of.

The slaves had returned long since, and were sitting around in little scattered bunches of hopeless misery. Too well they had failed, and too well they knew the consequences. Resentment or objections formed no smallest portion of their simple minds, and Whiting longed that a transfusion of his own growing belligerency were at all possible against such time as the fulfillment of the impending disaster.

He sat down wearily and leaned his tired body against the ivory pillars of a connecting pergola. He had eaten nothing all day, and had been on his feet since early morning, and this, together with the nervous strain, was beginning to tell.

He sat perfectly still and endeavored, without being able to accomplish it, to avoid reviewing the situation. It was useless, besides being more than familiar to him. If there were one single phase that had escaped his inventory, it must have been beyond the boundary of his imagination, and this he knew. He also knew that for the last time he had created an atom from which might be erected a full-blown anthology of that beautiful blossom called hope. A sudden, definite understanding that this was, indeed, the end came over him. He would never get out. He wouldn't even bother to try. Months inland and alone without porters or provisions proved the uselessness of such

an undertaking, aside from the more than probable fact that he wouldn't be allowed to go, if he should try. No, he never again would know other than the insipid companionship of a slave or that of the burlesque imitation—his lower brother, the ape.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE MOUNTING FLAMES.

DARKNESS came suddenly. A great splash of shifting night cloud merged into a murky, bell-like shadow which enfolded the universe and shut out the rosy flush which precedes the dusk. The breezes had disappeared, and the air was heavy with the sultry, enervating consistency of a tropic night.

Through the density of the night and very near him, a dark, weazen face cleft the shadows, and following it the stealthy body of old Alabie. With finger to lip, she squatted to his level. Then she spoke: "Iluko, the Goddess of Fire, it is that she mates with your brother, the son of the White Moon god, and to please the Great Father a sacrifice is to be made—one that is—what you say—big? Of a bigness for She, the daughter of the Sun."

Whiting sprang to his feet. "Mack? Where did they find him?"

But Alabie was wondrously agile. She, too, was on her feet clutching his arm with her clawlike hand. "Fool!" she hissed under her breath. "Listen! Tonight it is that you shall be that sacrifice—that so big sacrifice that even the Sun Father will be so pleased that he will smile on the son of the White Moon god who mates with his daughter."

Whiting grew suddenly weak. A faintness groped with searching fingers along the avenues of his reason. He staggered a step toward her. "What's that? What do you mean?"

Alabie's eyes flashed and burned. "I am cursed of the Great Spirit already, because that I have, in my love for you, told you his secrets, and now it is that he would have you for a sacrifice, and I warn you. Go! Go quickly!"

Whiting wiped his face and tried a short laugh as he looked at her. *Love* him! He just couldn't believe it. Besides, the old fool might be lying. The thing was preposterous. If true, where was Mack? He harked back to his first question: "Where did they find McLaughlin, and where is Barzah?"

The fiendish smile which Alabie showed him was the finished product of savage hatred. She raised her arms and lowered them impressively, as if that explained everything. Then: "Barzah? She ran; but, yes, quickly, through the big trees around the swamp, and your brother was of a great heaviness, so that she fell and rolled into the deep swamp water. The big jaws of the Water god found her; found her quick, and colored the swamp water red—a most beautiful red, so that——"

"And McLaughlin? For God's sake——"

But McLaughlin's own voice answered him, filled with a rising anger, as he addressed some one out there in the darkness. "Keep your damned animals back!" he cried harshly. "I'll kill the first one that touches Dunk."

Alabie smothered a purely feminine little shriek. "You would die then—or is it to come with me?"

She dragged on his arm. "Quick! They smell you even now. It is that I fool them."

From her girdle she snatched a folded bit of soft bark. Quickly she opened it and took out a handful of a white powder, sprinkling it upon the ground. The odor arising from it was Iluko's own odor, only now so strong that it arose in sickening, intense drafts, almost stifling. She pushed him before her with compelling force and sifted the powder as they walked.

Back there McLaughlin was arguing, threatening, pleading in turns, and his words were plain to Whiting. What might those devils do to him if left alone? He wouldn't desert and leave him there; he wouldn't. He jerked loose from the old woman and started back on the run. His gun was in his quarters; if he could just reach it—— But he couldn't.

McLaughlin was standing with his back to the door, attired only in the torn and ragged sleeping garments of the night before, and was facing them, empty-handed, with only the superior power of a stronger will over that of a lower.

Before him stood Iluko, proud, imperious, with flashing eyes at the unwonted temerity disputing her desires. At her feet crouched the taut, tense body of her leopard cat, while behind her, crowding closer every moment, were her slaves and gorillas. To them McLaughlin was a menace—a foolish obstacle—who dared to thwart the power of their sovereign queen and should be dealt with accordingly.

Whiting stepped into the circle of light from their glowing fire brands, and almost precipitated a headlong rush. He stepped quickly to the side of McLaughlin with nearly an air of bravado, and for a moment McLaughlin lost his wonderful self-possession.

"Dunk, for God's sake," he panted, "get out quick! These crazy beasts would kill you. I may not be able to hold 'em off."

Whiting never would forget that moment so long as life should last. Wide stretches of inky blackness, with a circle of nodding fire points breaking through, and beneath them in the flickering gusts of their yellow light—faces—faces shiny black, with gleaming whites of eyes and rows of glistening teeth; faces each set in its frame of shaggy dark hair—animal faces—yet dreadfully human in their awful significance; and last *the* face, savage, brutal, but withal beautiful, with a wild, predominate beauty that was completely beyond all understanding.

He turned to McLaughlin with a dazed, helpless look. The shock of the thing had dulled the terror of it. "We'll see it through together, Mack," he said softly, "and if this is the end, man, I'm game!"

McLaughlin turned on Iluko, and his words came sharp as the sudden thrust of a well-sent rapier: "Back! Back with them, or I, too, shall die!"

At his words a sudden, inexplicable change came over Iluko. Gone were the proud haughtiness and the disdainful flash of eye. She looked at McLaughlin, and her face melted into a soft, enticing smile as alluring as the wiles of a feminine Satan. She stepped close to him, looking him squarely in the eye. McLaughlin stood as if turned to stone, completely under the spell; then he leaped away from her, his face a ghastly white. "Woman, what would you?" he screamed.

She stood facing him. When she spoke her voice was low and tense: "You mate with the Goddess of Fire to-night, and there must be a sacrifice—a great sacrifice—that my Father would smile on me. Would you, then, anger him, and for such as he?"

She turned to Dekona, who stood in front of the crouching gorillas. She motioned him back and spoke authoritatively: "Begone with them to the scene of the sacrifice; we follow at once." And as Dekona turned to obey she cautioned him quietly: "Close guard, and see to it that you are in place when I arrive."

Then, as they were swallowed up in the darkness, she addressed one word to the slaves, and the next instant Whiting and McLaughlin were the center of a lunging, struggling mass of straining bodies and flying legs and arms.

Whiting felled the nearest one and leaped upon the prostrate body as he used his fists on the next one. His arms became terrible flails, on the ends of which were balls of fists that seemed to be more than accurate in their efficiency. But he was close pressed. Within the moment he knew the unequal struggle could have but one ending, and that very uncomfortable for himself. He would make it as difficult as possible. With a sudden low crouch he lunged sideways with terrific force, knocking the legs from under the natives he struck. Then, with an upward, bounding motion, he cleared the bunch of them and landed on his feet beyond their reach.

From the tail of his eye, as he leaped, he saw McLaughlin go down under a bevy of black bodies, and heard Iluko scream a command that he be not hurt. With this injunction he ran. How he ran! No such solicitous behest could possibly be expected for himself; therefore he ran with a complete abandonment—a wild, headlong passion of flight leading anywhere and inspired by the quite primitive instinct that speaks only of self. The fear of the hunted came over him and conquered—conquered his self-possession and his will—and left him a flying fugitive devoid of destination or of purpose.

In the heavy darkness, and after what seemed hours, he came up suddenly with frightful force against the solid trunk of a tree. The impact sent him sprawling, where he lay flat, his breath coming in wheezing gasps, and the pounding of his heart jarring his whole body.

He did not attempt to arise, but lay quite still, enduring the pain of reaction, and gradually a semblance of self-possession returned to him. He reviewed his recent encounter, and realized utterly the futility of his flight. Even now he didn't have the remotest idea as to any direction; and, even so, any one he would choose was fraught with dangers—grave dangers—beyond any conception.

He turned presently with a tired motion and rested his cheek against the cool face of the earth, closing his eyes. Of what use to go farther or longer rebel? There could be but one ultimate result, regardless of what he might do, and the thought of that result and what it might surely portend for himself no longer held the power of affecting him one way or the other. He nestled his body closer to the earth and smiled whimsically as he knew this. A blissful feeling of quietude and repose stole over him, lulled him, and

offered with treacherous mien a lethargy for which his tired body was yearning.

His complete acquiescence toward this desire he knew to be a weakness, even as he complied with it, yet desolation and terror fail of their purpose when once they have overreached themselves, and such now was the case. It was as though a misty, intangible curtain was hung before all from which he had been fleeing and inclosed him in a peaceful, blissful spot in which only was found such memories as could but strengthen his overwhelming desire for peace.

He laughed softly, and stretched his body out to its full length in a perfect abandonment of luxury. The earth was a downy cushion and her lap the cradle of the gods. "Egad, who could find fault with such a couch!"

But even then his fate was upon him; in fact, had borne him straight into the path of Iluko and her savage knights, where, in his state of semicomatose it but remained for them to fall upon him suddenly and completely overpower him.

As he was jerked to a standing posture, he saw far in the rear McLaughlin, white of face and haggard-eyed, being urged along, an unwilling guest, to the gruesome festivities whose import was the illogical effect of his own greatness and honor.

To Whiting this suddenly appeared the climax of all ludicrous situations, and he laughed aloud, a boyish, ringing laugh which stung McLaughlin into a perfect frenzy of action. With what seemed one bound he reached Whiting's side. His lips were drawn thin and were the color of ancient parchment. When he spoke his voice was thin and dry and cracked as that of the very old. He had lived a life within a day, and it was almost more than he could bear.

"Dunk—Dunk—what have I done to you?" he cried pitifully.

A change came over Whiting. Under the light of the glowing torches he stood erect—a figure of virile manhood defying the world, and than which Nature has offered nothing more wonderful. In his glance shone a sublime courage, a perfect mastership, and a compassionate understanding of much that was very difficult to understand. He was on the borderland of the Unknown, and its reflection was the creation of a wonderful patience and a forbearance for his friend that was more than human.

"Your hand, Mack, old boy," he said softly, "and I'm your friend; you know that. Friend, Mack, you understand, and that's all that matters."

McLaughlin grasped the outstretched hand and turned his head away. He tried to speak, but no words came, and the muscles of his face twitched pitifully. Whiting put a hand upon his shoulder. "Buck up—buck up—old man; get a keen edge on that wit of yours— Who knows?"

But things were hopeless, indeed. The slaves were close-pressed around them, not to be again so easily deceived, and as if by common impulse urged the party forward. Iluko took the lead, very indignant and haughty, and attended closely by the great, spotted leopard cat.

At a bend in the path Dekona stood before them, expectant, arrogant, while in the uneven light the dark figures of the hairy men were seen in a squatting semi-

circle around a carefully piled heap of bamboo and dry brush at the base of a much charred tree.

From behind and quite suddenly came a long-drawn, falsetto wail with its terminating whoop, and on the instant another, and another, until the air was rent with the savage screams and the terrific pound of the native drum. Torches bobbed their points of light in time to the swaying bodies, who twisted and turned and writhed this way and that and back again within the circle made ready for them.

For a long moment Whiting stood and looked on impersonally with a peculiar, detached air, as if the proceedings were something apart from anything in which he might be at all interested; and in that moment old Alabie stepped from the outer shadows directly in front of Iluko with a poised spear above her head. For a fraction of a second it hung there, deadly and menacing, while the face below it twitched and jerked and showed no slightest hint of reason; then, dextrously, with a cunning movement, the glistening point flashed downward, but a long, sinuous body, gorgeously coated, met the arm that held it, and Alabie fell with the flesh lacerated and torn away until her naked heart lay quivering beneath the great claw of the panther cat.

Whiting waited to see no more. With a lightning movement he snatched the nearest spear and ran it through the slave who held it, and treated the next nearest in the same manner. With incredible swiftness he dashed here and there, dealing death or worse at every blow.

Many of the slaves dropped their torches in abject bewilderment or to attack him, and one of the burning brands fell upon the awaiting bier. The flames shot up through the dry tinder and lighted the world. Every bush and twig stood out—apart—in the fierce glow from the mounting flames.

Whiting felt an exultant, fierce joy at this—at the frustration of their plans, if only for a little while—and he redoubled his energies. With each thrust of the deadly point and its withdrawal he experienced a sensation wholly beyond his comprehension. It was sweet with the primal lust for blood—to kill and kill and kill— He became a live hurricane of fury, hurling himself upon them time and again with movements so inconceivably rapid as to make a repulse next to impossible.

And through it all he somehow saw and heard everything. He saw Iluko, with one flat-footed spring, land on a wide, overhanging limb, where she stood erect, with the panther crouched at her feet, watching the conflict. He saw the light of the dancing flames shine full upon the gleaming white of her skin, and throw her body in a bold relief, and he heard her scream to Dekona to protect McLaughlin. He saw the repulsive beast men rise erect and drum with hairy fists upon their great chests. He heard them roar and scream, as once before he had heard them, and he saw their beast faces with protruding jaws and yellow fangs snarling a challenge to all before them. He saw McLaughlin snatched up in the powerful arms of one of them as if he were an infant and borne away in the darkness, and before him he saw the powerful figure of Dekona himself, equipped for a horrible conflict.

His eye appraised the native as he gathered his

forces for what he knew to be his last stand; took him in to the last detail, and quite unconsciously paid him tribute. He was in his entirety the dominant force of Brute—Brute with all the primordial propensities of the brute creation, and by right of this force was demanding subservience from a thing less obviously fortunate.

Whiting breathed deeply, and his teeth went together with a click. Every muscle in his body knotted in preparation for a final plunge. A second he stood so—a slim, boyish figure courageous and unafraid—the center of a scene more weird than any fabled horror of history; then came a chorus of barking rifles, the whine of leaden bullets, and an exultant scream of triumph wrenched the word climax from the situation and added another chapter.

In the bedlam which followed Whiting saw vaguely the face of Yuema, the faces of the different porters from the deserted camp, and the blue gleam of rifle barrels. Then for a moment the shrill scream of Iluko rose above the tumult as she stood straight and haughty—a savage sovereign of a more savage tribe—and he raised his eyes to her. He saw her suddenly stoop and clasp the leopard's head between her hands, and that powerful beast quivered from head to foot. The next instant his body flashed downward, and the struggle that had been only a battle became a raging hell from which there was no escaping. He would reach a porter and get a gun in his hand. With a gun, now—

Before him was again Dekona, flanked on either side by a snarling ape. He stooped to dodge, but a long, hairy arm met him and he shot backward. In mid-air something struck his head. A blinding flash of piercing lightning shot him through and through, and he fell and fell and fell into a soft oblivion.

CHAPTER XI.

WHO KNOWS? WHO DARES?

SPRING! A spring evening in a country where the wonderful transformation is but a merging from an already delightful existence into a fairyland where bird and bee and bush and breeze flaunt their superiority and pronounce it from the summit of their very excellence; spring in a country where Nature herself, in her gifts to a waiting world, pauses in her journeyings and drops her heart, warm and pulsating, and there leaves it—leaves it to take root and grow—a pleasure everlasting for all mankind; and spring in an elysium where even the gods of cold and heat are tempered and softened and held in abeyance that no conflicting element might disturb the reigning peace of—man.

And this is spring in Virginia; Virginia, especially to her native sons; Virginia in her pristine loveliness of early spring. A tall man in white flannels and leaning heavily on a cane bared his head and acknowledged it. His eyes wandered thoughtfully over his surroundings, where great clusters of blossoms, pink and white, with soft, faint touches of early green, gave promises of a later harvest of nectarines. He inhaled a deep, deep breath slowly, as if already tasting their vivid sweetness, then turned his face reluctantly toward a distant fleck of white showing dimly through the darkening trees which he knew to be the house.

On either side of him, as he walked along, a green satin lawn stretched off lazily under a maze of trees and disappeared. He wished very much to follow along after it—it seemed so entirely everything for which his soul longed—yet he walked on, limping painfully at every step and leaning heavier on his friendly cane.

Why he had chosen to walk he wasn't quite able to understand. Perhaps that he might, in a way, defer the actual arrival now that the time had come, or that he felt somehow that night would make a more fitting setting for his mission. Perhaps; he couldn't tell, and really it was of no consequence, now that he had arrived.

In answer to his ring an aged negro in livery opened the door and ushered him into a mammoth hall, where he stood a moment as if undecided as to his next move. The old negro stood attentively waiting, a hint of curiosity showing in the kind old eyes; but he did not attempt to interrupt the silence.

Then the man made a movement as if to reach for a card, but paused as if he had changed his mind and spoke slowly as if, measuring his words: "My business is important, and—your master—will understand; if you—will be so kind?"

The negro disappeared through a side door and returned shortly, motioning him to follow. Through a side hall that was more of a reception room than a hall they passed, and on through an aperture inclosed in glass, then a door was swung open and the servant stepped back that he might enter.

The room into which he stepped was deep and permeated with the soft, harmonious shadows and tints of a picture in Alco Gravure; due to the heavy paneling in fumed oak and the numerous tapestries and the shaded lights, casting deep shadows. It was a restful room, and from its cloistered depths a man—an old man—rose and came toward him.

Something vaguely familiar in the turn of the head, the set of the shoulders, drew an exclamation of pain from the watching man, and he leaned heavily against the door as lacking the strength to stand. Then a voice, soft and slurringly intonated with the fiber that is thoroughly Southern, was speaking to him, and it was full of a great sympathy: "You are ill. Ah, take this chair—please. Now a drop of Burgundy, perhaps?"

But the globe of crimson light stood on the table beside his chair, and he sat on dumbly, nor offered to touch it or raise it to his lips. Presently he raised his eyes and looked squarely across at the man, who was watching him closely. "Doctor Schofield, it's evident you don't know me, and it makes it the more difficult—my explanation."

The doctor's keen eyes traveled up and down his guest searchingly. "I do not, as you say, recognize you; if I should do so, please forgive an old man the misdemeanors of a faulty memory. And your explanation, whatever it is, mayn't it wait until you are at least a little—stronger?"

But the man shook his head. "I am quite strong now. It is only that your appearance—your resemblance to——" he broke off suddenly and straightened up in his chair with a great air of determination.

"I may as well tell you first as last," he said des-

perately, "I am Duncan Whiting, private secretary to your nephew, Burton McLaughlin."

The elder man sprang to his feet, then collapsed weakly into his chair. His eyes again speculatively surveyed his guest. He shook his head unbelievably. "Duncan Whiting? Young Duncan Whiting? But you are an old man."

"A young-old man," corrected Whiting. "Yes, I am. My white hair and feeble limbs declare it through my every waking moment; I am never quite free from pain."

The doctor leaned back in his chair slowly. A great and shocking thought was taking hold of him. Presently he leaned forward, his eyes unnaturally bright. "Forgive me," he said in a shaken voice, "but my nephew, Burton? For what purpose are you here?"

Whiting experienced an overwhelming pity for the aged man before him—a pity that urged procrastination—but he set his teeth for the business at hand; he knew the time had come when he must go on.

"It is because of him that I am here," he said quietly, "and if you will bear with me—it is a long story—I will try to make it as mercifully brief as possible."

Whiting saw him gather his forces in preparation for whatever he might be called upon to bear, and there was something so patently familiar about the proceeding that involuntarily he turned his eyes away. Then very quietly, with little emphasis, he began his narrative, going into detail where detail was required, skipping long stretches where the thread could again be taken up with coherency. He went on steadily, as if reciting a prearranged speech, with no sign of his previous agitation. It was as though performing a duty—an unavoidable duty—and all question of self had been cast aside.

And through it all his companion sat quietly listening, a mask drawn over his face, an inscrutable atmosphere enveloping him.

At the close the two men sat steadily facing each other. On Whiting's forehead great beads of sweat stood out, and his breath came in short, uneven jerks that seemed to point out the great bodily weakness under which he was laboring.

The elder man rose and reached for the glass of wine. His hand shook, but his voice was firm. "Drink," he said gently, "it is I who know the depths of your Gethsemane, perhaps."

Whiting swallowed the wine and reached forth a trembling hand. "I'm all in, I guess; weaker than I thought—but, egad, that was hell to go back over."

The doctor resumed his seat. "Yes, I know," he said; "know more fully than you can understand. Nevertheless you'll do a little more for me—please—in view of the fact that, in a manner, I am the same as Burton's father. Do you feel assured that Burton is still alive? And how long, do you estimate, has it been since you were carried out of there?"

"I think he is alive, though I have no actual knowledge of what happened for weeks afterward. He was carried away during the fight by a camp gorilla, but they are almost completely under the subjection of Iluko, so I can't tell. Our porters were hard pressed and, thinking him dead, escaped barely with their lives and me—a mangled burden—which they considered discarding time after time. And how I lived is a mystery. For weeks I lay with a wrenched hip

and a fractured skull on a jolting litter, and was carried through the scorching heat and beating tropic rains back to a civilized native village, where I fought the great fight and—after a manner—won.

"We were ten months going in and but four coming out; you see, we found a new water way, and we followed it. I came as soon as I could travel—alone. I think it's been about eight or nine months ago, that is, since I last saw him."

"Um—h'm!" The doctor's tone was very thoughtful. "And this Iluko? She—you say she is a native of some sort?"

For some reason Whiting resented this question; resented it while he knew full well it was an unintentional encroachment upon a code of ethics which, in the face of his recent story, must appear absurd. The bright eyes of the old doctor—Mack's own eyes—were upon him, and held no hint of an appreciation of this resentment; instead, only a deep thoughtfulness and an appraisal of the issues at hand far beyond the information just granted him.

Now, in Whiting's narrative, he had, so far as possible, protected his absent friend. No word of the stolen notebook had been let slip, nor had he gone into detail concerning the woman, Iluko, and the doctor's question bothered him as well as touching upon a sore spot concerning McLaughlin.

Very slowly, almost guardedly, he answered: "She is white—thoroughly white—and very beautiful, and a most wonderful mystery. Doctor Schofield, what—what do you know about that mystery?"

The old doctor reached out a trembling hand and raised his glass of wine to his lips. Whiting saw the liquid flash purple as it caught a ray of light from the shaded lamp. The doctor drank like one parched with fever, then put the glass down shakily. The shadows in the room seemed to deepen. A strange sensation came over Whiting, a feeling that he was in the presence of some tragedy, some grim thing that he did not understand—that he never would understand or fathom.

The doctor was speaking. "The mystery of—" he repeated in a tone that somehow seemed to plumb the depths of agony. "Whiting, there are mysteries—things—that must remain—mysteries; that are not meant for us, if we are to preserve our civilization, our sanity. Darwin—but, oh, that I had never delved into such mysteries! They should be forbidden—and they are! And my poor friend Burton, who shot himself out there! He would be here now, Whiting,

as would his son, if it were not for this devilish prying into equally devilish mysteries!"

A weird note crept into Schofield's voice, a note almost suggestive of madness. "Mystery! Whiting, let us say that she is the child of some lost race—some half-human race of Satan! Perhaps I discovered—things out there in the unholy wilds, but my lips are sealed. I shall not speak, I tell you! Let it remain, then, a mystery—and thank your stars, Whiting! But now I shall organize an expedition at once for the rescue of poor Burton's son; he must be saved! I cannot bear to imagine——"

But suddenly he ceased to speak, and sank huddled in his chair, a half sob, half rattle in his throat. As he looked at the old man Whiting felt the cold sweat on his brow and his heart pounding wildly. Something—*Something* was in the room—rushing through the atmosphere—through their souls. The room seemed to go black, and Whiting seemed again to hear those devilish tom-toms, the gibberish that the woman had addressed to the gorillas—the gibberish which they *understood*. Again came that sickening odor, too sweet, as of crushed flowers. It seemed to him now that he was groping, grasping, plunging wildly to escape from *Something*—but from what? His eyes seemed drawn to the window. What was that on the lawn, standing erect, horrible, beating its hairy chest with its great paws, its eyes flaming?

Then, as suddenly as it came, that strange moment passed. The *Something* that had gripped him, and Schofield, too, that was evident let go, and they were there again in the quiet, dimly lighted room. Their starting eyes met.

"Ah, you, too, felt it, then?" said Schofield shakily. "Whiting, men cannot delve into the mysteries we have, cannot pass through the experiences we have without being subject to a terrible psychic aftermath. Africa, those great beasts of Satan, shall haunt us to the end; often we shall see it all again vividly—in the night. But not a word more shall I say, Whiting; there is nothing to be done—nothing except to go after Burton. Come here to-morrow, and leave me now, Whiting; I am overwrought."

Without a word, like one dazed, Whiting arose and went slowly from the house. He walked home slowly, thinking, thinking—afraid to think. What did Schofield know? The three of them—Schofield, Whiting, McLaughlin—were they all in the shadow of some devilish mystery of the jungle? And the woman—what was her power? But McLaughlin must be saved; there was something tangible.





The Gasp of Rank

By S. Garleton

MY solitary job in the winter bush was over. But coming back over the high barrens to my metropolitan cabin—three miles from the dizzy center that the priest's house, the Indian agent's, one trader's, and a few shacks have labeled "settlement" on the maps—it struck me that it was still a far cry to spring.

The morning was bitter; so cold that the water froze in my eyes and the breath in my nostrils, though it was March and there should have been some power in the sun. But it hung, bleak and bleached, over a world of snow, where even the distant spruce belt between me and my cabin stood gray and haggard as I made the shortest cut I could toward it. Once I reached it, I was not far from home; say about twice the distance a man could throw a stone. I am particular, because I have since had reason to measure it. But I was not dreaming of that business then.

I bolted well into the shelter of my belt of spruce trees, stopped to get my pipe lit, and ducked instinctively under the nearest tree. Something metallic and gleaming had arced in the somber boughs above me like a falling star. Like a star, too, I had not heard it drop, or I would have sworn some one had thrown a knife at me from behind and missed. For half a breath I thought I heard the faint rasp of snowshoes running over the crusted snow of the barrens I had just left. I had seen no one there, but that

said nothing, for between the cold and haste I had never looked anywhere but before my nose. I wheeled to peer through the thick spruces that shut me in like a fence, and laughed outright. For even as I turned my silly illusion had explained itself.

The knife that had sheered across my snow-dazzled eyes had been nothing but an icicle, and there was certainly no one running away, for my assailant was before me. There was a squaw crouching under the snow-clogged spruces between me and the barrens, among a mess of tree icicles fallen on the snow. I guessed she had tried to attract my attention by throwing one at me, and then changed her mind about it, for she crouched oddly motionless on her hands and knees in the ice-spattered snow, as if she did not think she could be seen. Her face was turned from me, yet all the same I recognized her.

"Why, it's Anne Labrador; Labrador's wife!" I thought, astounded. Labrador was the Indian chief in my district, but he and Anne and their two little children lived forty miles off, in a camp they never left except to look after their line of traps and their fur caches. I dropped in to see them whenever I was over their way, and took some sugar and stuff for their funny brown babies, who could just lisp my name. "*Kwa*, Anne," I shouted in Indian. "What was that you threw at me just now? And where's Labrador and the children?"

Anne neither moved nor answered. It might have been my fancy that she stared detachedly into the spruces in front of her as though she would have drawn my gaze after hers, but there was certainly an extraordinary stiff and bloodless look about her. For a moment I could almost have doubted that it was Anne. She wore no silver clasp of rank as a chief's wife in the blue shawl over her breast; she had not spoken; and she was not even looking at me. I made no step toward her, though she was not fifty feet off. I did turn my head and stare where her eyes seemed to be staring, but I saw nothing, and when I glanced back again she was gone. She must have shifted as stealthily as a wolf to have vanished like that into the blue shadows beside her, and the stupid tension of wonder that had held me snapped and left me angry. It was Anne without doubt, and this was no way for her to behave.

"Stop these fool tricks!" I called out. "Come down to my cabin if you want to see me. It's too cold to hang round here." And it was, for as I strode angrily after the woman I was shivering, and I shivered even when I brought up against an impenetrable thicket of brush that showed no sign of her. As I checked something pricked my ankle viciously, but I was too preoccupied over Anne's idiotic disappearance even to stoop and see if a jagged stick had torn my new leggings. However she had managed it in the deep snow, she was gone, with no more trail than a stone in water; though I might have persevered in looking for her tracks if I had not felt I was being evaded. I turned down the short cut that landed me at my own woodpile, and as I kicked the snow off my leggings against it I was unwarrantably upset. Anne and her husband were old friends of mine, and for her to play hide and seek with me struck me as a very poor joke. My cabin felt colder than outside when I went into it; the fire would not burn, and I had mislaid my tobacco. Altogether the day went so crooked with me that it was with no feeling of surprise that I saw Lazier, the Indian agent, walk in that afternoon on an unmasked visit.

"Things seem cut in the piece to-day!" I thought savagely, for he was the one man in the district for whom I had no use. He had never been in my house before, and I could not see why he had come now. It was absurd to say he wanted to hear my news. I said I had been in the bush and heard no voice but my own for a month, which was strictly true. For Anne Labrador had certainly not spoken to me that morning, and in any case I had forgotten her.

"You're a lonely man, Devlin, but if there is any news they say you are sure to hear it," Lazier assented dryly. I don't know why it struck me that he had come to find out something; there was no curiosity in his face, and it might have been by accident that his eyes searched my bare room. But I was not sorry when he suddenly said he must be going, if I saw less than ever why he had seen fit to come all the way from the settlement on such a day.

It was colder than ever, and the setting sun beat up from the snow in an intolerable glitter of color as I watched him walk away from my door. The track he left across my clearing lay dead and blue between the crusted drifts of gold and rose and crim-

son, and it pleased me to think it the spirit and image of the way the man trod this world.

"Well, deliver me from any dealings with him!" said I, and banged my door. I may as well set down why I hated Lazier: He farmed his wretched Indians. They never saw half of their government allowance; he was always sniffing out their poor quarrels, and our district was getting a bad name. If a man took out a knife he was a murderer, if he borrowed an ax he was a thief, and Lazier confiscated his flour and blanket money for a fine. No one was clever enough to catch him out on it, even if there had been any one but the settlement priest and myself who cared. He had once tried to drag me into his thief catching, and I was so angry at the memory that I forgot to throw any wood on my fire, and neither troubled to light my lamp nor to close the shutters of my window. It was with a start that I saw my fire was out, and the new moon shining in on me. I stood up to close my shutter, and saw more than the moon.

Lazier had come back, and at sight of him I knew I had guessed right that afternoon. He had come to find out something, and when it was clear that I did not know it had returned to discover it for himself. I opened my door in a soundless, inch-wide crack, and stood waiting to tell him it was no good, that I would give no liars nor mischief brewers the run of my house, and I must have stood ten minutes before I saw he was not coming near my house, was not thinking of me at all. He was looking for something in the snow. Sometimes he went on all fours to it; then he peered among the snow-choked spruces; then prowled into my clearing again and pounced at one place and another in the snow.

He was not a pleasant sight as he flitted in and out of the silent bush between me and the clean new moon, yet sheer curiosity kept me from shouting to know what he wanted in my clearing. But whatever it was, I thought suddenly that he must have found it, for he stood still and so unconscious of me that I heard him laugh with relief before he vanished into the bush at a round trot for the settlement. I stared after him, raging that I had missed ordering him off my place for the second time that day.

It was the cold on my face through the door crack that brought me to my senses and the knowledge that I was making a fool of myself; if the man had lost anything in the afternoon he had a perfect right to come and look for it in the evening; only I did not believe he had lost anything. It swept over me with a sudden trouble, and with no earthly reason, that it was a strange track he looked for, where no feet but his or mine had passed that day! I hunted uselessly for that or anything else he might have been looking for, and ended flatly enough at my woodpile to gather bark to rekindle my forgotten fire. Going back into my dark house with the bark under my arm, I thought something fell from it with a ring like metal, but it was not till I knelt in the heartening leap of a four-foot blaze that I turned to look, and I kept on looking.

The thing at my feet was not what Lazier had lost. The only Indian property he owned was a crooked knife with a round handle, of a kind never used in our district. And on my floor lay what never

would have been given to him and even he would not have dared to take—a squaw's *niskaman*, or clasp of rank. They are slightly convex disks of native silver with a round hole in the middle, through which the two ends of a shawl are pushed and secured by a hinged pin the size of a two-inch nail, but flattened to the point of a dagger. Held in a woman's hand, with the pin upright, the clasp would give a nasty wound, but I never heard of one being used as a weapon. The clasp of a captain's wife in an Indian tribe is perforated in a design of which the motive is a long diamond, and is pretty enough—but this was no badge of a captain's wife! It was the clasp of a chief's wife, three inches in diameter, cut out in circles and half circles; dear to the owner as her honor, and as hard to steal. More than that, it was a clasp I knew, for I had often handled it.

"Anne Labrador's!" said I. I remembered irrelevantly, and with a curious stare, how Anne's two children had been wont to finger it where it shone on her breast. "She must have lost it before I met her this morning! But why on earth hasn't she come to look for it?"

The dull silver of the thing held my eyes where it lay on the floor. I reached for it, wondering if I could be mistaken in it, and saw on it the symbol writing Labrador himself had taught me how to read. There was only one character, in angles and uprights, that might have represented either a three-branched candlestick or a devil, if I had not known it stood for a long word that means "my soul." Anne Labrador's own hand had cut it there, and I knew the meaning she set to it. Oddly enough, it occurred to me for the first time that it was a terrible meaning. And then I grinned at my own foolishness, since, while Anne was alive, the sign writing on her clasp meant nothing at all. For the superstition is this:

To cut the symbol of your own soul on your dearest belonging is to make it possible—if you so please, or happen to have earthly business a dead body cannot finish for you—that your spirit can enter into that belonging when you die and put life into it till it can go where it chooses and work out the desire of the dead. Anne Labrador believed it, for she had often told me so. She never let her silver clasp out of her sight, either, which made it the more unaccountable for it to have been lying on my woodpile. If she had lost it, why had she not told me when I met her in the morning? I wondered what could be wrong with the woman to make her prowl round my cabin in secret and run away when I spoke to her, but it is no use wondering where Indians are concerned, even those you know best. I put the clasp away till Anne chose to come to her senses and ask about it, and it was at that minute that the knock fell on my door.

"She's come now," I thought crossly, for I wanted to go to bed. But it was not Anne I opened the door on. It was an Indian, not a squaw, who brushed past me and stumbled over to my fire without speech or leave. I had words on my tongue till I saw the set of his mouth, and that the moccasins on his feet were frayed through. Even when he was fed he sat without speaking till I asked what he wanted of me, for he was not an Indian whom I knew.

"Nothing," he answered in English. "We come for

the priest. Very bad news we bring. Our chief is killed."

"What chief?" I asked stupidly. "Where?"

"Labrador—over there where he camps!"

"Labrador? Anne's husband?" I stood like a fool, thinking that it was no wonder Anne had not had the heart to speak to me that morning.

The Indian nodded, muttering: "That man who spies says his woman killed him," and I knew he meant Lazier. He rose, staggering with the words that tore out of him in the Indian tongue he had not used before: "She is my sister, my sister that is younger than I, and he will hang her to a rope when he finds her. He says he saw her running from her dead, without her rank clasp that she threw away when she—she was a chief's wife no longer! He says she left her little children to the wolves that they might not weight down her feet; he has their shawls all torn and bloody! He says if she did not kill her man why did she run? And where are the children? He says her rank clasp, that was her honor, she has thrown away into the snow!"

"Anne killed Labrador—and left the children! I don't believe it nor the rest of the stuff—about her clasp and her running away——" I began scornfully, and stopped, remembering Anne as she had knelt in the snow that morning without the children I had never known her to leave, Anne's rank clasp that lay in my pocket. I dared not speak of either. I turned on her brother instead. "Why do you come to *me*?"

"*Too-ok*," he returned vacantly, which is the last word of an Indian when he does not know or will not say. "I could walk no longer to the priest, and I saw your house."

My mind spun like a wheel. To the best of my belief Anne, innocent or guilty, was hidden close by my very clearing; she had certainly left her clasp in it, for there was no other way it could have come there; but I was afraid to say so, even to her brother, till I knew the rights of the story. Neither then nor till long after did I remember the shining thing I had seen arc over my head in the spruce trees that I thought was an icicle Anne had thrown at me, though even then I should have known better. Two other thoughts held me in a cold grip—the little bloodstained shawls of two children left to the wolves and the unostentatious return of Lazier to quarter my clearing in the moonlight for a track. I turned on Anne's brother again: "Why does Lazier say Anne killed her husband? Has he found her?"

"He looks for her; she is as good as found." He stared before him dully. "I ran a long way round that he might not know I came to the priest for help. But what can the priest do?"

"Go and see!" But it stuck in my throat, remembering Anne's silence as she crouched alone in the snow. What could any man do, if what that silence said were true? I stopped the Indian as he turned. "Tell me all you know first!"

"All I saw," he changed the verb to a literal one, "was Labrador lying dead, very lonely in his house. And the little children's shawls the man found. My sister no one saw."

"No one will!" But I did not think it. I had seen her already, and Lazier had ways of his own in the district. He had used them to get Michail Paul hanged

when we all knew he was crazy, and the sheriff was his led captain.

II.

I PUT Anne's brother out on his way to the priest, and came back with my mind spinning harder than ever. If Anne had not thrown away her clasp, which was equivalent to throwing away her rank and her people, why was it in my pocket? Unless she had killed her man, why had she crouched and run from me? And, above all, in God's name, what had happened to her little children? But there I knew in my soul furiously that Lazier was a liar. Anne was a passionately good mother; she would have fought to the death before she left her children to the wolves. That was some explanation of that, somewhere, though all the rest was beyond me. But what was not beyond me was that it was a killing night for a woman to be out who dared not light a fire, and that even if she had killed Labrador my house could shelter her. It had sheltered worse. But though I scoured the night till my blood chilled in me I could not find Anne.

There was no sense in tearing out to her camp to look for her children; the whole settlement would be doing that. And Lazier told me so when he came in for an insolent half hour next morning, carrying a baby's torn shawl that turned my stomach. I did not throw him out of my house for the sole reason that while he was in it he could not be hunting my spruces for Anne. But I was furiously certain he had wormed out that her brother had been to me before he went to the priest, and had come up on the chance that I would let out what the priest would hide. I expected Anne to be caught any minute, somewhere close to my clearing, and Lazier to haul me into witnessing against her; how I did not know, but somehow. Only those were not all the reasons that made me steal out of my shack the second Lazier had left me for the village and the sheriff and make a swift and devious departure into the tenantless barrens north of me. The others were an errand of my own, though I knew it was more like a crazy obsession, and a black certainty that sooner or later Lazier would find Anne's clasp in my possession. It was in my pocket all the time he talked to me that morning, and I knew what he would have thought if he had guessed it, which only luck had stopped. Therefore, before I crept out of my own house like a thief and before dinner I hid the clasp.

Ten miles south of the camp where Labrador had been killed lay a district where he had always run a line of traps and kept a fur cache or two. A huge green meteorite marked its boundary, and with that crazy obsession of my own in my head I snowshoed all day to get there, and at sunset saw my landmark of the green boulder shining like an emerald under the rose-colored sky.

"Praise be!" said I, for I had had enough walking; but it was for something else, too. My real errand to the place was nothing on earth but a hunt for Anne's children that without rhyme or reason were in my head day and night with their little brown fingers that had burrowed in my pockets for sugar and their friendly, confident eyes. I knew they had been killed by the wolves and that it was useless

to look for them, yet something inside me said passionately that I had to look for them, and that if there were any chance of finding them alive it was out here—by the green rock.

I had a perfectly unfounded certainty that Anne had taken her children with her when she fled, that even her iron strength would be exhausted by carrying and dragging the two little things till she must have stopped here by the green rock, and nowhere else, to make a fire and feed them, and more, hide them in some makeshift camp where they might still be alive. And when I say all that was a crazy obsession it was, for my own eyes had seen Lazier carrying the babies' torn and bloodstained shawls that were all the wolves had left. But, crazy or not, I was so set on the thing that I was certain of seeing Anne's camp, built against the other side of the rock, with Anne's children inside it, waiting for me by the dead ashes of her camp fire.

I rounded the green boulder, and checked with shock. There was no camp; there were no children. But the thing that really downed me was that I saw just the dead camp-fire ashes I had expected, only they had not been Anne's, but a white man's! The wide pile of half-burned wood said that; an Indian makes as small a pile as he can. Some stray trapper had been here not two days ago, but Anne—Anne had never been here, never made any camp, and the story the children's shawls had told was true.

I felt like a flat fool, but I felt sick, too. I was hurrying to blot out the deadly unexpectedness of those ashes with my own fire when I saw something shining in their blackness. I sweated as I looked at it, as a horse breaks out in the stable. Anne Labrador's clasp lay by that dead fire—which had not been hers—and I had left that clasp safely stowed in my own house!

I explained the thing to myself slowly and out loud, because I was ashamed to feel as I did about it.

"You must have put something else in the hole at the back of your chimney! This has been in your pocket all the time and dropped out as you stooped to make your fire. Or else it's some other squaw's clasp that has been lost here!"

But I stammered on the lie. There was no other clasp of a chief's wife among the Indians, and I knew well that it was this one I had carried in from my woodpile and hidden later from Lazier. I had no desire to touch the thing, but in spite of myself I looked for the three-branched candlestick on the back of it that meant the soul of Anne Labrador. It was there! And it shone too blood red in my new firelight for a thing I had left hidden at home. The incredible thought that shook me was that if Anne, dead, could send her soul into the thing, Anne, alive, might also be able to make it sentient, intelligent; that it had got out of the hole in my chimney to follow me, like a hunting dog; and that the quest it hounded me on was the search for Anne's children! I had about given that up, and I had no mind to be goaded to it afresh by superstition or coincidence. I shut my eyes and pitched the clasp away from me into the spruce trees in front of my fire and the green rock. And I breathed easier when it was gone.

But the thing in my head was not so easily switched

off. Though I made a scratch camp for myself, I could not rest.

All night long I dreamed of those two Indian children; dreamed till I woke myself, certain I heard them crying. I knew it was nonsense and that there was nothing for miles but the silence of bitter cold, yet with the first gleam of daylight I started to tramp onward again in my fool's quest for them. Anne might have made a camp in some other place and left them in it, though it was not a likely expenditure of time for a woman who was fleeing for her life. But tramp as I might I could find no Indian camp nor a sign of one, and suddenly—in the middle of the morning—I jerked up where I toiled through thickets and behind boulders. There again, in the snow at my feet, was the silver clasp!

In the sunlight I was ashamed of my last night's nonsense about it. But all the same I could not see how I had thrown it miles away from those dead ashes under my fire. I wondered if Anne could possibly have managed to rummage the thing out of my house after I left, and have followed me in hopes of help; afraid to call to me, but dropping the clasp to show me she was near at hand and picking it up when I threw it away, or, for all I knew, flung it at her, for the spruces were thick. And suddenly I realized my thoughts were once more the thoughts of a fool. Anne had had no share in the business; it was my own hand that had pitched the clasp where it lay. All my tramping of the morning had been mere y a circle back to the place where I had slept. The spruces round me were the spruces I had camped in front of the night before; I could see the green meteorite gleam through them as I stared.

It was stupidity fit for a man who had never seen the back country before. I was thankful no one would ever know about it. But as I was back at the green rock I would eat my dinner there, and then go home, in spite of Lazier. I had found no missing children, and never would, and I was sick of Anne and the whole business. I put her clasp in my pocket for no better reason than that it seemed wasted trouble to throw it away any more, and sat down in the lee of the rock to build a new cooking fire, and, with the match in my hand to light it, I sat paralyzed. Somewhere nearing me, I heard the creak of snow under snowshoes, heard men's voices.

The match burned out in my hand.

"Who in God's world?" I wondered, and suddenly I knew. Anne must really have followed me out from my shack, and men were on Anne's trail. I peered out from behind the green rock as a man peers when he is afraid, and my mind stopped in me as a jar stops a clock. Lazier was coming toward me with the sheriff and two trappers!

III.

WHAT possessed me I don't know. Not fifty Laziers could have dragged me into the hunting of Anne, but I was in a panic. I tore her clasp out of my pocket and flung it into the spruce thicket behind me, as I had flung it before, and once more I did not look to see where it went. The action took the blood from my heart, the rigidity from my mind. I knew instantly that I had been a fool to throw

away the clasp, but I dared not go for it. I turned and walked out to meet Lazier.

He stopped dead, at sight of me, with a face of the most appalling and blankest rage I ever saw. There was absolutely no expression in his eyes, and they seemed suddenly to have no pattern in the irides.

"You fool, Devlin," he swore before I could speak. "Get out of this and come home! That squaw's not here, if that's why you came. And you couldn't help her, if she was."

"I'd have a try at it," said I in a passion. "I believe it's all a pack of lies about her!"

But Lazier did not see fit to answer me. He made a sharp sign to the sheriff and the trappers to stay where they were, and moved round the green rock to my unkindled fire, looking at me with those eyes. "Come home," he said under his breath and furiously. "Can't you see I came out to warn you that the sheriff's after you—that he thinks you're hiding the woman?" He swung round at a stir behind him, and saw the two trappers moving toward the spruce thicket. "Sit down where you are! You don't want to go for wood; Devlin's got a fire built here that we can eat by before we go back again," he shouted, and swung round on me again. "Can't you see I came to warn you?" he repeated, so low that his lips barely moved.

"Why?" No more trenchant answer came to my tongue, for over Lazier's shoulder I could see the two trappers. They were no led captains like the sheriff; they were walking over to the spruces as coolly as though Lazier had never shouted at them, only I knew it was no firewood they were after. One, or both, of them had seen the silver clasp flash as I threw it behind me, and meant to find out what I had flung away.

I knew just what they would think when they found it, but there was nothing that I could do about it. I knelt down at Lazier's feet and lit my cooking fire, but before the lowest chip had kindled the trappers' voices sent me flying into the spruces, and the instant I stood in them I knew I had thrown the silver clasp to the right place at last. For I was looking at Anne Labrador.

She was on all fours on the crusted snow, stark on her hands and knees, exactly as I thought I had seen her two days ago and thirty miles away. Even now I could not believe I had not seen her, though my intelligence said it was impossible and that she must have been dead all of two days where she crouched now. A round lump under her shawl broke the smoothness of it between her shoulders, but none of us looked to see what it was, and none of us spoke. I did not, because I could see the woman's face as I did not see it in my spruces, also the shining of silver in the snow below her breast. I was all abroad as to how I had ever flung her clasp so truly, and as I thought it I forgot the clasp, Anne, everything.

"My soul," I yelled. "The children!" I leaped, galvanized, to what might have been the muffled whine of a dying hare.

It was close by, at my very side, that I found them, and so far my crazy obsession had been just plain common sense. Only they were in no makeshift camp, but piled over with rocks in one of Labrador's fur caches that I must have passed twice that very morn-

ing and been too big a fool to think of searching, even with a child's cry in my ears all the night before. They were hungry and pitiful enough, but alive; even almost as warm among the smelling pelts that all but filled their poor expedient of safety as when they had been packed in by their dead mother outside. All their little clothes were on them, except the torn shawls with which Lazier had sickened me, and their mother's thick blue cloth petticoat was round them both. The forlorn things wailed as they clutched me, their one familiar friend among the strange men round them. A trapper raced to my fire to boil up biscuit and hot water to feed them; the other two stood and swore—inappropriately. But the sheriff laid a sudden stolid hand on my arm, and nodded backward at Anne Labrador.

"Poor soul, poor soul!" he said, and it was the first time I ever heard kindness off his tongue. "She done her best to save them!"

"Soul!" Lazier broke in sharply. "Why do you say *soul*?" He had stood aloof through all the fuss about the children, and at his sneering voice the five-year-old I held opened its eyes on him and jerked in my arms.

"Keep him 'way!" it yelled. "Keep him 'way! Him hit my father—make my mother run!"

A trapper gave a flash-light glance at me. Neither of us spoke.

Lazier said contemptuously: "The child's demented!" He walked toward it from where he stood before the body of Anne Labrador, and slipped as he passed the rank clasp lying on the snow. He put out a hand to save himself, but none of us realized that it was he who had screamed out like an animal till he rolled in the snow like one, with Anne Labrador's clasp sticking fast to his palm. I saw the dagger pin of it showing through the back of his hand before he tore the thing out.

"How's that devil soul clasp here?" he screamed. "I don't see how it's here! I threw it away after I caught her here that night, running to tell the priest I'd done for Labrador. I caught her here. After that there was no running! She knelt down!"

IV.

I WAS knocked dead silent, though I knew a little of the babbling collapse of the nerves that comes with a wound through the very middle of a man's palm.

But the sheriff blazed out. "Lazier!" he shouted, furious. "Lazier!"

But Lazier was past shouting at. He stood staring at Anne's clasp lying where it had dropped when he tore it from his hand, a spot of concentrated white sunlight on the snow, stood staring as if he were hypnotized, and spoke as the hypnotized speak.

"She knelt down," he repeated. "She said her soul would live—she would make me fear her soul! Her body did not matter. But I lit a fire by the green rock, and stayed there till she was quiet. It was midnight when I started for home. I didn't know the children——"

I saw him wrench himself to lie, saw him stand powerless, unable to do it, his eyes still glued to the shining silver clasp at his feet.

"Anyway, she'd buried them," he said gratingly. "I

found their shawls, that she'd forgotten. They got blood on them somehow, and I thought of that about the wolves. I found that clasp, too, stuck on my sleeve when I was passing Devlin's, and I threw it away—on the edge of the barrens. Afterward I was afraid I'd thrown it into his clearing and he'd find it. I went there twice that day to make certain he hadn't, though I never could have thrown the thing that far over his spruce trees."

No one knew that better than I did, but it was not by any will of my own that I remembered the shape I had called by the name of Anne Labrador. Yet that could not have thrown the clasp on my woodpile, where I must find it, when I failed at the bidding of its eyes! For a dazed half minute I wondered if it were true that a bit of beaten silver with the soul sign on it could take life from its dead owner and go where it pleased, if it were the clasp itself that had found its way to my woodpile—and I looked up and saw Lazier's face.

"Lazier and I!" my mind flashed with cold, sane relief. "It was just Lazier and I who moved the thing from start to finish."

For, of course, it was!

Standing in my spruces that cold morning, I had really heard the drag of running feet on snowshoes over the open barrens, and I knew now it was Lazier—who had just thrown away the clasp in the metallic flash I had seen arc among my trees. And it was I myself who unwittingly carried it to my woodpile by its long pin that had pricked my ankle and stuck in my leggings till I kicked the snow off them against my stacked wood. For the rest, I put the clasp in my chimney right enough, only once more its pin had caught in my clothing, this time in the back of my sleeve, as I withdrew my arm; and from my sleeve it had dropped on the ashes of the fire Lazier had kindled by the green rock while he waited for a woman to die. As for my finding it again this very morning, it would have been a wonder if I had not, since I had merely circled back to the green rock, as I explained before. Every circumstance about the clasp was quite simple; there was nothing supernatural about any of them, and once more my eyes fell on Anne Labrador, kneeling inhumanly, stiff and bloodless, in the snow, finger for finger as I had thought I saw her kneeling in my own spruces, thirty miles from the children I had just found. The memory would have brought me up with a round turn, but in that same half second my mind came down on the truth like a hammer on a nail.

"By——" I swore aloud. "There was nothing supernatural in that, either!"

Nor was there. I suppose even a poor squaw, dying agonized for her helpless children, could think hard enough of the only man who could save them to bring her image before that man's mind. Anyway, Anne had brought hers before mine, and I knew it, though I suppose telepathic vision would have been the right term. It had taken twelve hours to get me, but it *had* got me. I took off my cap to the splendid soul of a dead mother, and looked away to see Lazier still talking and the sheriff holding his arm.

"Stop it, Lazier!" he shouted. "You dunno what you're saying!"

"I'm saying I was afraid of the clasp and the writ-

ing on it," Lazier returned evenly, as if he were reading out of a book. "I know it's an Indian lie that life goes into a thing you cut the soul sign on, but I was afraid of it all the same, and that Devlin had it." He spoke exactly as if I were not there. "I had to keep near him to feel safe. That was why I followed him out here. I thought——"

The dazzle off Anne's clasp made the sheriff blink. He put out an absent foot and kicked it aside into the shadow of a spruce bush. It lay there dull and dead as a slice of lead, and Lazier's speech broke off short, as if he had suddenly realized his own voice and the sense of what it said. I don't know why I stood silent. I had no pity for the man.

"You're crazy!" the sheriff burst out at him. "You're talking foolishness! Nobody killed this woman. She's just dead." He wrenched away Anne's frozen-down shawl, and recoiled in a kind of electrified dumbness. The round lump under it, that had broken its smoothness between the squaw's shoulders, was the round handle of Lazier's crooked Indian knife—the one such knife in the district. The sheriff gaped at it, missed Lazier's suddenly intelligent scowl at him, and spoke like a fool: "Why, that's yours, Lazier!"

Lazier made no answer. He looked at me, at Anne's children in my arms, at the changed, inimical faces of his two trappers, at the sheriff, then at Anne Labrador. There were six of us alive, and one dead, who knew the thing that he had done, and I saw him weigh his chances of slipping free of it. He had them; the sheriff was his satellite, the country wide. Whether he would have taken them or not I cannot say. I do say he did not mean to do the thing he did. He always carried his gun cocked, and in the side pocket of his coat. He slid his hand into his pocket now, and I guessed he was going to hand his gun over to the sheriff ostentatiously and make a play for injured innocence—and time—with me and the trappers, for he was no lightning gunman who could have shot us all up. If he had looked at us things might perhaps have been different, but his eyes were on the snow beyond him, where he stood a little turned away from us, and his hand and his gun came out of his pocket just as the wheeling sunlight pierced the spruce bush behind him and once more smote Anne Labrador's silver clasp into a burning star where the sheriff had kicked it aside. The blinding dazzle of it flashed fair into Lazier's eyes.

He jerked sharply away from the stabbing white light, the hand at his side flew up, and his gun snapped off like a whip, with the muzzle jammed upward under his chin, against the soft of his throat. That was all there was to it, except that he dropped full length like a tree drops beside Anne Labrador, with his own bullet clean through his brain.

"Lazier!" yelled the sheriff. He knelt over him, incredulous in spite of everything; knelt with his eyes goggling, a led captain still. "He's shot himself," he said fatuously. "He's dead! He—it ain't true what he was telling us, is it? He couldn't have killed Labrador and then An——" He recoiled on the name, pointing to the crouching figure that did not look as if it had ever had one, "and then *her* for fear she'd tell, and left little children to starve in a fur cache to cover it! And what'd he mean about the clasp and bein' afraid?"

I looked at the rank clasp, with the sign that meant the soul of Anne Labrador carved deep on it.

"I don't know," I said. But I did know that it was the clasp alone that had made Lazier betray himself with his own lips; that—accident, coincidence, or whatever you like to call it—it was also nothing else than a simple sun glint on it that had made his flung-up hand close convulsively on the trigger of his gun, and that it was by no intention of mine that I had brought it from its cache in the back of my chimney nor pitched it to the very place where Anne Labrador had died.


"Can you see what he meant 'bout bein' afraid of the clasp?" the sheriff yapped again.

I said nothing. It was not his business, nor any man's, that I was afraid of it, too. The vision of Anne Labrador over in my spruces was a simple thing, and the mere wireless of one mind in tune with another. But the thought that I could not fight down—in spite of all my plain knowledge that it was just Lazier and I who had carried the clasp from the green rock and back again—was that it had been Anne's ordinary, beaten-silver rank clasp that had really done the desire of a dead mother for her lost and starving children—I left out the rest—and used me for its tool!

I was thankful, of course, to have found the children. But as I turned to carry them to the nearest shelter I had once more no desire to touch that silver clasp of a chief's wife. It was a trapper who fastened it where it belonged on the dead breast of Anne Labrador.

Did you ever stop to think how much it cost to discover America? It has been ascertained that the entire bill didn't amount to more than \$7,000 in our money to-day. Columbus received a salary of \$300 a year, and he paid his sailors \$2.50 a month.

At The End of



the Wires

By

Athelstane Hicks



CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS JOB.

THREE things raise McGinn's hotel above the level of the common "flop house." It is reasonably clean; it has a small lobby, and—most notable superiority of all—the management places the daily papers in the lobby for the service of the guests. As no one who had a job was ever known to stop at McGinn's, the free perusal of the papers is its greatest recommendation, and only absolute lack of money or a growing realization of the futility of all "want ads" leads the hotel's patrons to seek other quarters.

For two months McGinn's had been my only home, and every morning of that two months had found me in the lobby anxiously awaiting my turn at the papers. Consequently it was with less irritation than usual that I watched the slow-witted Swede who occupied the room next to mine slowly spell out paragraph after paragraph in the *Morning Herald*. I knew that none of us would get a look at a single sheet until he had read every word.

He finished at last, and handed the paper over to me. I hastily picked out the only page that interested me, and began to scan the "help-wanted" column with the usual groundless hope that there would be something that looked promising. I was about to throw it aside in disgust when a short item in the "too-late-to-classify" section caught my eye:

Wanted—Young man of intelligence and education to take a position at good salary without asking questions. Only men of strong physique and active brains who are not afraid to take some risk need apply.

The advertisement gave an address in a near-by hotel, and also requested applicants to come between ten and twelve. I glanced indifferently at my watch, almost hoping that the lateness of the hour would prevent me from subjecting myself to another disappointment. I found that I had at least half an hour in which to reach the place designated, and decided that it was worth the attempt, even if I met with as little success as usual. "Always a chance,"

I thought, "and if he really wants a man with brains the competition isn't likely to be very strong."

By dint of fast walking I reached my destination shortly before the appointed time. The hotel varied little except in detail from the one in which I was stopping. I noted with gratification that the lobby was unoccupied except by the clerk, and upon asking him if I could see the gentleman in No. 310 was told that he would be in in a few minutes. I had still further cause to congratulate myself on my early arrival, for during the next ten minutes three other men came in and asked for the gentleman in No. 310, and like myself sat down to wait hopefully for his coming. While I was studying them furtively the clerk returned from a brief absence, during which I suppose he inquired if No. 310 was "in" yet, and, beckoning me to follow him, led the way to a room on the third floor.

I entered the room, and confronted a tall, middle-aged man seated at a small table opposite the door. He was busily engaged in writing, and merely glanced up as I came in and turned again to his work. "I came in answer to your advertisement," I started to say, but he interrupted me.

"I know, I know. It's unnecessary to waste any time in useless words. What is your name and how old are you?" He snapped the words out crisply and rapidly without looking up from his work. "Wade Beckley, and I'm twenty-four," I replied, "and——"

"That will do," he returned, as I was about to continue with the list of my qualifications. "How long have you been out of work?"

"Three months."

"And what is your profession?"

"I'm a newspaper man—or anything else that I can get work at."

He raised his eyes and scrutinized me carefully for the first time. The glint of his coal-black eyes seemed to pierce me like needles, and I felt as though he could read my innermost thoughts. "H'm! Nearly broke, and almost down and out, I see. Is that the reason you answered my ad?"

"Partly that," I returned, "and partly because I was curious to see what sort of a job required a 'man with brains who was not afraid to take some risk.'"

"Think you can meet the requirements?"

"About the brains you must decide for yourself. As for the other, I had as soon risk anything for a comfortable position as risk starvation for nothing."

"Have you any family? Any one to notice whether you are still in the world or not?"

"My only relatives are in the West, and, so far as I know, neither know nor care about where I am or what I do. My friends in New York are few, and poverty has taken me out of touch with them."

"You'll do, I guess." He rang the bell for the clerk and when he appeared told him to dismiss the other applicants. He turned to me again. "By the way, can you drive a car?"

"Well enough to drive for myself," I returned.

"Fine!" he answered. "You are just the man for me. That simplifies matters a lot. Now for your work. In the first place, you are to ask no questions whatever, but follow my instructions, and any that may be given you later, blindly. The moment you inquire into the reasons for any of the things that you will be asked to do you will lose your position. How soon can you leave New York?"

"This minute, if it's necessary, though I still have a few personal belongings that I would like to get together first. If I am to leave for any length of time, I would appreciate a small advance on my salary. I have a few things in pawn that I'd like to get."

He drew out his purse, and handed me a hundred dollars in bills. "This is your first month's salary. You will also be supplied with funds sufficient for your personal expenses in addition to the salary. Your home from now on will be Plainville, Massachusetts. Get ready to leave as soon as you can, and meet me here an hour from now, if possible. That's all for the present. I shall expect to see you then."

I hurried back to my hotel, and hastened to get my personal effects together. They were few and light, and my packing consisted principally in locking my suit case; so I was back to my new employer well within the hour he had given me. I found him standing in the lobby, waiting for me. Outside, conspicuous in the incongruous surroundings, was a large, high-powered touring car. He pointed to it as I came in.

"There's your transportation," he said, "and as soon as I've given you your parting instructions you can begin to tear up the speed limit between here and Plainville."

"But I know nothing about the roads or——"

"I'll attend to that part of it. Here's a road map with your route marked out in red ink to within two miles of your destination. From the crossroads

marked on the map your route is indicated on this plan.

"You should reach the crossroads about midnight, but if by any chance you arrive there earlier, wait until that time before going on. The house you are going to is about a mile outside of the town of Plainville, and it is essential, above all things, that you should reach it unobserved! The place is supposed to be unoccupied, and part of your work is to preserve that supposition. Do you understand?"

"Not at all," I returned, "but that need not prevent me from carrying out your orders. I'm to remain in this place?"

"Until you are told otherwise. You will find plenty of supplies in the house to last you for a month at least, and anything else that is necessary will be furnished. Arrived there, you will put the automobile in the barn, lock yourself into the house, and remain there. The only time it will be safe for you to come out will be at night, and even then you must not on any account go into the village or even leave the grounds. I'm trusting you a whole lot, but I warn you that sooner or later I will learn if you fail to carry out my orders, and it will go hard with you. All ready to start?"

"All ready, unless you have something more to say."

"That's all. I shall expect to hear of you in Plainville by to-morrow. One thing more before you go. Admit no one but myself to the house under any circumstances. Good-by. Hope you'll find everything comfortable."

I tossed my suit case into the back of the car, threw in the gears, and started on my way to Plainville.

CHAPTER II.

SHOTS IN THE DARK.

AN inexperienced driver and unfamiliar with the road, my whole attention was divided between the car and the map, and to this day I have no more idea of the nature of the country between New York and Plainville than I have of the country between the Amazon and the Orinoco—wherever those are. As long as daylight lasted, however, my journey was comparatively smooth and simple; it was after the sun had gone down, and I had to depend on the deceptive glare of my headlights to guide me, that my trouble began. The towns along the way began to look more and more alike; the darkness made it impossible to be certain of my whereabouts without inquiry, and the later I traveled the less chance I found of making inquiries. Three times I went miles out of my way through taking a wrong turning, and once I followed the wrong road for nearly an hour before my arrival in a town which, my map showed me, was miles off the course, warned me to turn back.

It was more by luck than anything else that I finally reached the crossroads my employer had designated about half past one. There were two roads forking off from the one on which I was traveling. A white signboard on the one to the right read "Plainville 2m," while the one on the left was unmarked. I took out the little plan which had been given me, and found that I was supposed to keep on in the same direction in which I was going until I had

traveled about a mile and a half, then turn to the right and seek my destination in the first house I came to after I left the main road. This was the simplest part of my task to me, and, traveling slowly to make sure that I kept on the proper road, I soon reached the house.

It was now shortly before dawn, and the darkness was almost impenetrable. All I could see of the place was a sort of tumbledown gateway which loomed up in the circle of light cast by my headlight. I stopped the machine, threw off the light, and got out to make a closer examination before venturing in. A driveway led from the gate to a large barn about a hundred feet from the road and then around back of the house, I suppose, though I could not see in the darkness and did not take the trouble to follow it up. I tried one of the keys which I had obtained from my new employer in the lock of the barn, found that it fitted, and decided that I had at last reached my proper destination.

I ran the car into the barn, took out my suit case, and, carefully relocking the barn door, started for the house. I had been given only one key to the place, and had supposed that there was only one door by which I could enter; but though the darkness made it impossible for me to make out the outlines of the building, I was soon sure of one thing—that it was large enough to be classed as a mansion and that it had more doors than the stateroom deck of a passenger steamer.

The place seemed to be a sort of conglomerate of ells and wings, built in a haphazard fashion, and I walked slowly about it, trying my key in every door I found until I was almost ready to give up in despair. I approached the sixth door, telling myself that if I failed of entrance here I would give up trying the key and make an attempt on one of the windows. It was situated in the rear of the house in one of the small wings, some three or four feet above the level of the ground, and had a flight of rickety steps leading to it. I mounted them gingerly and inserted my key in the rusty lock.

I worked it back and forth, vainly trying to force an entrance and hoping at the same time that the rotten steps would hold until I was through. I had given up, and turned to leave when they gave way suddenly beneath me, throwing me to the ground with a crash of broken boards, and at the same time, before I had a chance to realize what had happened, a shot rang out from one of the windows in the wing which I had just been trying to enter. I felt a heavy, shocking impact in my left shoulder, followed by a burning sensation, and knew that I had been hit.

The shock of the wound and the unexpectedness of it left me dazed for a time. It was several moments before I attempted to rise, and when I did so I took care to make as little noise as possible; I had no desire to tempt the unknown marksman further. My left arm hung helpless by my side, and my shoulder pained me excruciatingly. I retraced my steps slowly and carefully toward the barn, intending to quit my new position immediately and make use of the automobile to take me back to the city. I had little heart to risk an entrance into a house so well guarded, and I longed to meet the man who had sent me to do it

and wrest an explanation from him. Certainly the house was not unoccupied now, even if he had really supposed it to be when he directed me to take charge of it.

At any rate, I had had enough, and I opened the barn door with as much haste as my wounded arm would allow. I had left the machine standing just within the door, and, without stopping, tossed my suit case into it as I entered; I heard it strike the floor with a dull thud. "Guess my arm is getting weak," I thought with a laugh, and stepped forward, feeling ahead of me as I did so to locate the car. The automobile was gone!

I struck a match and looked about me, still feeling that my senses had deceived me and that the car must be where I had left it; but there was not even the slightest sign to show that it had ever been there. I leaned weakly against the wall and tried to shake off the uncanny fear that took possession of me; I felt as though I had stepped, wide awake, into the scene of a horrible dream; that there was any explanation of the events of this wild night never occurred to me. They had just simply happened without cause or effect.

A sharp twinge of pain in my shoulder warned me that there were serious practical considerations to occupy me. Whatever might happen to me, my wound needed immediate attention, and I must find some place where I could sleep with comfort. The strain of the long drive from New York over an unknown road, coupled with the fearfulness of what had followed, had left me exhausted. I had rather risk another pistol shot than spend the night in the barn, so I again approached the house with what boldness I could muster, determined to force an entrance in the face of the devil himself if need be.

A bright patch of clear sky in the east heralded the approach of dawn, but it was still too dark to see clearly. I managed to distinguish the outlines of the house, however, and saw that it consisted of a large main structure, which, from the style of architecture and general appearance, seemed to be the oldest part of the building. In my previous attempt to get in I had failed to try the main part of the house. I now walked boldly up to one of the rear doors, inserted my key, and was gratified to find that it fitted.

I stopped on the threshold and listened, fearful of advancing farther; but not a sound could I hear. To all outward appearance the place was deserted; the door stuck in the jamb and opened with creaking reluctance, as though it had not been touched for years. Had it not been for the tangible evidence of my wounded shoulder I should have thought that I had dreamed the episode of the shot. As it was, I entered gingerly, making as little noise as possible and attempting to see into the darkness ahead of me.

I lit a match and saw that I was in a long, wide hallway with a staircase at the farther end and doors leading off on either side. I opened the nearest one, and found myself in a large room, furnished with a table and chairs and a huge sideboard; it had evidently served as a dining room. My match burned out, and I reached into my pocket for another when there was a loud report and a spurt of flame from the other side of the room, and I heard a bullet whistle by my ear. I sank to the floor, almost stunned with fear; this

was the second time I had been shot at when there seemed to be no one anywhere near me.

Crouched on the floor to avoid the chance of being hit again, I waited and listened, hoping to locate my unknown assailant. I drew my own automatic from my pocket, intending to return his courtesy as soon as he should evidence his whereabouts by the slightest sound. But I listened in vain. At last, unable to bear the suspense a moment longer, I rose to my feet, and, with my pistol aimed in front of me and ready to shoot at the least disturbance of the quiet, I started to circle the room, one hand outstretched toward the center. I determined to locate my hidden enemy definitely and take the chance of coming out second best in the duel. Not a thing could I feel; my hand passed through empty space! I leaped to the middle of the room, striking a match as I did so. The light flared up, and showed me nothing but the empty chamber! I rushed to the door by which I had entered, and found it closed tightly; a door on the opposite side, which I had not seen before, was as tightly closed.

I dared not unlock them and move out of the room. I took off my coat, rolled it up to serve as a pillow, and curled up in the corner farthest from the doors; it was better to get what little rest I could this way than to risk further exploration before daylight.

CHAPTER III.

UNKNOWN SERVITORS.

DAYLIGHT found me still awake and sick from pain and weariness. My shoulder was stiff and unbelievably sore, but the wound had stopped bleeding and the pain had abated. My desires were pretty evenly divided between sleep and food; the terrors of the night succumbed before the combined attack of daylight and appetite, and I rose stiffly to my feet, intending to find out if the house contained food and a comfortable bed.

I noted, with a shudder of fear at the uncanniness of it, that there was no evidence that the old dining room had held any person but myself during the night. With the exception of the door through which I had entered, there was not even a finger mark in the dust which covered the walls and furniture. The whole place was silent as the grave, and appeared to have stood for years without an occupant.

The door leading into the hallway was locked, with a key on the inside, though I had found it open when I came in. The one opposite, which I now opened, and which, I found, led into the kitchen, was in the same condition; the key turned hardly in the rusty lock, and I was sure that it had been undisturbed for a long time.

The kitchen, though as dusty and dirty as the dining room, showed evidences of recent entry. There was a section of new stovepipe leading from the rusty range; a little pile of soot underneath showed that it had been put in recently, and in the deep dust which incrustated everything finger marks and smudges betrayed the fact that some one had been in there during the last few days. A small pantry opening into the kitchen was well stocked with groceries and provisions, and in a sort of outside closet which led from it was a quarter of fresh beef, frozen stiff and sure to keep until I could use it up if the weather

continued cold. At any rate, my boss did not intend for me to starve to death if I was lucky enough to survive the other dangers. Even the woodbox, beside the stove, was filled to the brim with well-seasoned maple, and in a few moments I had a roaring fire going in the old stove.

I heated water and bathed and bandaged my shoulder first of all. I noted with satisfaction that the bullet had passed clear through, just next to the armpit, leaving a wound which was not dangerous and would soon heal. By the time I had made way with a huge breakfast of bacon and eggs, washed down with several cups of strong coffee, I was myself again, and felt ready to face anything that might turn up.

I started out on an exploration of the whole house, ready, with daylight to aid me, to try conclusions with my assailant of the night before if he should appear; but nowhere, except in one of the bedrooms, did I find any sign of human presence. And in that case the only person who could have been there was the one who had prepared the room. That it had been prepared for my coming I had no doubt, for it was the only one in the house which contained any bedding. I hailed the clean sheets and thick, heavy blankets with glee; the strain of the preceding night had left me unutterably weary, and I lost no time in stripping myself of my clothes and crawling into the welcome bed. Further inquiry into the mystery of the house and the identity of the more than mysterious gunman could wait till I had slept.

It seemed hardly fifteen minutes before I was awake again, but the light of the rising sun streaming in through the window of my bedchamber warned me that I had slept through a day and a night. I had discovered a bathroom on the same floor before I had gone to bed, but what was my surprise when I reached it this morning to find water already drawn in the tub and a warm bath robe and clean towels thrown over a chair beside it. I looked around me, stupefied, almost expecting to see some one enter and berate me for appropriating his bath. "Either I have a mysterious fairy in attendance on me, or there is some one else living in the house," I thought. "However, if he needs a bath he can take one after I get through," and I plunged into the tub, determined to make the most of the pleasant circumstances of my new position and leave the unpleasant ones till I knew more about them.

I left the bath, and listened, while I was dressing, to hear if any one followed me. There was no sound, however, and I went downstairs to prepare my breakfast, completely mystified at the turn events had taken. Further surprises awaited me there.

A fire was already built in the stove; the food was laid out for me, ready to cook; the dining-room table was set with a white cloth and better service than I had been accustomed to for many months. My coffee was already made and set back on the stove to keep hot; there was a pan of fresh rolls in the oven. In short, breakfast was practically prepared for me. And there was not even the sign of another person besides myself in the house!

Two days before I should have stood dumfounded at such an unusual occurrence; I even doubt if I should have been able to eat until I had found some explanation; but by this time I was becoming inured

to mystery and was beginning to take it as a matter of course. Once grant that the world has turned topsy-turvy and nothing is startlingly strange. And my experiences since leaving New York had brought me to the point where I could almost grant that. As I sat down to enjoy my breakfast, my only feeling was one of thankfulness that I should not have to depend entirely on my own slight culinary skill. I even trifled with my occult servitors to the extent of leaving the dishes unwashed, and also left a note on the table to the effect that I should like my luncheon served at one o'clock; I wished to see how far their kindness extended.

In the meantime I sought diversion in going over the house more thoroughly than before. It was what is known as a "two-story-and-a-half" structure, with four bedrooms on the attic floor—which extended only over the main part of the house—and four more and the bathroom on the floor below. The ground floor attained to more spacious proportions by means of four wings which seemed to have been built on at different periods of the house's history to accommodate either a growing family or growing pretensions to size and magnificence. One of these served as the kitchen; the adjoining one seemed to have been used as a sort of pantry and storeroom, and the others did duty as a library and dining room respectively.

The whole lower floor of the main structure was given over to a large living room with a huge fireplace, which took up nearly all one end of it, the hallway containing the staircase, and two other rooms which were now unfurnished and gave no clew to their former uses. I found that my unknown attendants had built a roaring fire in the living room, and I could have asked for no more comfortable place to spend a cold winter day, though my mind was rather uneasy as I thought of my employer's instruction to preserve the appearance of vacancy about the place; certainly the smoke from the fires would be sure to attract attention from any chance passer-by and immediately betray the fact that there was some one in the building. But the ease of shifting the responsibility and the fact that the house was so isolated as to be practically safe from intrusion deterred me from forcing myself to undergo the unpleasantness of remaining in a cold house.

I selected the most comfortable chair in the room, drew it up before the fireplace, and sat down to smoke and ponder over the events of the last two days. There was little to lead me to a solution; I had been hired by a man I did not know; sent to a place I had never heard of; shot by some one whom I could not see, and the automobile, my only means of escape, had been—I jumped up from my chair. It was the first time the episode of the car had occurred to me since breakfast, and I determined to search the barn and discover, if I could, what had become of it.

I hurried to put on my coat, and, mindful of my orders, looked about the grounds and road in front to make certain that no one was around. The coast was clear, and I hastened out to the barn and threw open the door. The automobile stood on the floor just as I had left it when I first arrived. As far as I could see it had not been touched since I had left it two nights before!

CHAPTER IV.

THE LADY OF THE HOUSE.

I WAS almost ready to believe that I had been deceived the first night, and that the car had never left the barn at all. There were no tracks in the ground before the door except the ones I had made when I drove in. Some other means of egress must have been used, and in the rear of the barn I found it; the stable was so built that it was possible to drive right through it, and there was a large door opposite the one in front. I found it locked, however, and had no key which would fit.

Once again I risked being seen by some one and giving away the secret my employer had warned me to keep. I went outside, sought the rear of the building, and there found in the mud the marks of the skid chains. At least I knew how the machine had been removed, though I was uncertain who had done it. I suppose that my employer had been keeping tabs on me and that there was some one at hand to make sure of my arrival. The machine must have been removed while I was fumbling around the doors of the house.

In any event, there was nothing to be gained from further investigation here, and I hastened back to the house. I intended to keep an eye on the kitchen and dining room, and see if I could discover any one in the act of preparing my lunch; but, glancing at my watch, found that I was already too late and that it was after one o'clock. I entered the dining room, and saw everything set out for me as before, with the one exception that the food was already cooked. The first thing I did was to search the kitchen and adjoining rooms for some trace of the cook, but I discovered no one.

Dispatching the meal as quickly as possible, I sought the library. It contained hundreds of volumes, part of them still arranged in the bookcases which lined the walls, and part packed in boxes as though some one had intended to remove them. All were covered with dust an inch thick, and had evidently remained untouched for years. I selected a number at random and retired to the living room to read.

A clew to the identity of the owners of the house in the form of a name inscribed on the flyleaf of the first volume I opened at once started me on further research. A portion of the books bore no sign of ownership, but the majority of the volumes were inscribed with the signature "James Manton" in bold, clear characters. I was searching the books for still further information when a slight noise in the hallway attracted my attention. I jumped to my feet and rushed to the door just in time to see a woman slip through the doorway of the dining room. I hastened after her, but by the time I had reached the spot she was nowhere to be seen.

I ran through into the kitchen to meet—not the woman, but a wizened-looking little man with side whiskers. He turned to run as soon as he saw me, but I grabbed him by the collar and held him. An armful of dishes which he was carrying dropped to the floor with a crash.

"Ah, you rascal! So you're my mysterious valet?" I shouted, twisting his collar still more tightly. "And

perhaps you're the man who was so handy with his gun the other night, eh?"

"Y-yes, sir; thank you, sir. I—I—I'm the valet; that is, never shot anybody in my life, sir. No, sir; 'pon my word, sir!"

I laughed in spite of myself. His fear was so evident and so ludicrous that I felt my irritation at every one connected with the house evaporating. I released him.

"What are you doing here, anyway? Why didn't you let me know of your presence before, instead of hiding up and trying to mystify me this way?"

"Hi cawn't answer no questions, sir. Hi 'as my horders, and Hi'm 'ere to serve you, and that's hall Hi can say."

"Perhaps you can tell me who the woman was that I just saw in the hallway; and who shot me in the shoulder when I first came? Or at least who made use of my automobile as soon as I left it?"

"Hi cawn't tell you nothing, sir. Hi ain't seen no woman or no one else, and Hi 'ave my orders to answer no questions."

"All right," I laughed. "I appreciate your loyalty to your employers, anyway." I remembered that I had been instructed to ask no questions when I got the position. "Perhaps you can tell me your name, at any rate?"

"Yes, sir. 'Iggins, sir—James 'Iggins, sir. Hi'm called either James or 'Iggins, sir, according to taste."

"Very well, Higgins, you won't need to be so secretive about your work after this. You can have the meals whenever it's convenient, and just let me know when they're ready. I promise you I shan't trouble you much. And here's a little return for the breakfast and lunch." I slipped a dollar into his hand. "Sure you don't know anything about what I asked you?"

"Hi know nothing habout hit, sir. Hi'm supposed to know nothing." And he ended the discussion by stooping down to pick up the broken dishes that had resulted from my unexpected descent on him. I saw there was nothing more to be learned from this source, and left him to his work. "Probably sent out by the same man who employed me," I thought. "Certainly my boss is unusually solicitous for the welfare of his employee."

In the nature of things I feared to question Higgins further; it was evident that even if he knew any more about the mysterious events of the last few days than I did—and I was sure he did—he was unlikely to divulge any information. To question him might also endanger my position and work was too scarce that winter to run a risk like that. I could not bribe him over to my side for the same reason that made me so anxious to keep my position—lack of necessary funds.

Nevertheless an itching curiosity drove me to seek some solution to the mystery. If Higgins wouldn't talk, I must find some one who would or discover independently why I had been sent to this lonely house, why I had been told it was unoccupied, and who was there besides myself. Try as I would, I could deduce no logical conclusion from the data I already had. The facts could not be denied, but for all I could see to the contrary they might be just detached facts with no particular relation to anything else in the

world. I had been shot twice—the first time probably to keep me from entering the house, the second time to keep me from leaving it, perhaps. But who wished to prevent my entrance and exit, and why? Were they working with or against the man who had sent me out from New York? If with him, why had he told me there was no one in the house? If against him, why had my mysterious assailant—or assailants—ceased hostilities after the first night? Was Higgins on their side or on mine? The only thing I seemed able to do was to ask myself the questions again and again, as though by constant repetition they might answer themselves.

So far, all I had been able to learn by my own efforts was that the place had probably been owned at one time by a man named James Manton; I dismissed this pleasing bit of information as having no bearing on the mystery. At least it was of no help to me.

My examination of the premises had been a rather cursory one. I had simply made the rounds of all the rooms in the house and taken the general appearance of disuse and vacancy as conclusive evidence of the fact. I now looked carefully about the dining room for some exit other than the ones I had been using. I had distinctly seen a woman enter the room, and I was certain that she had not left it by either of the doors.

The huge sideboard that I mentioned before stood in one corner of the room, set diagonally across the angle made by the walls. I suspected that there was another entrance somewhere behind it, and felt rather foolish to think that it had not occurred to me before. Upon examination I found that there was sufficient space left between the end of it and the wall for a slender person to pass through without difficulty. I moved the thing out, and found, as I had expected, a door in the wall behind. I tried to open it, but found it firmly locked.

My curiosity to learn more of the woman I had seen tempted me to force the door open by violent means and follow her up, whether she would or no. A moment's thought, however, told me that I would be much more likely to encounter her and learn what she knew of the place if I waited. The door probably led into the cellar, but for all I knew there might be a dozen exits she could use to escape me if I forced an entrance. As I now knew her means of entering and leaving the upper part of the house, I was almost certain to encounter her face to face if I was careful to watch the dining room.

I stepped from behind the sideboard to find Higgins standing by the table and watching me with as much interest as a cat watches a rat hole. I determined to take no chances. "Higgins," I said, "you will please forget that I saw this door at all. And keep where I can see you the rest of the day," I added as he started to leave the room.

"Yes, sir; certainly, sir. I was merely about to clean up a bit in the kitchen, sir. I'll be back directly." He started for the door again.

"Stop!" I shouted. "The kitchen can wait for a while, and I'm going to be sure you don't warn the lady who has just taken refuge in the cellar."

"Lady, sir? Hi saw no lady. Hi merely——"

"That will do. You may know nothing whatever

about her, but I think you do, just as I think you know who shot me the other night. But as you don't choose to tell me, we won't argue about it any further. You'll accompany me to the library while I get a few books to pass the time away, and then you and I will spend the afternoon together right here."

I gave him no time to protest, but took him by the arm and pulled him along with me. Returning to the dining room, I made him sit down in a chair opposite me and drew out my automatic. "Any move on your part to leave the room and I'll make use of the gun. Do you understand me?"

"Y-yes, sir. Hi'll stay right here, sir, just as you say. Hi halways tries to please, and there ain't no need to tell me twice what Hi 'ave to do."

"All right; we'll get along fine then." I sat down to wait for the return of the unknown woman. Higgins fidgeted in his chair; he would look first toward the door of the kitchen, then at the gun, then back at the door again as though debating whether he could reach it before a bullet. Discretion was stronger than valor, however, and he evidently decided that a dash for freedom would involve too great a risk. But his actions confirmed my belief that he knew the other inmates.

I had waited possibly two hours or longer when my attention was attracted to the door behind the sideboard by the sound of a footstep; some one was coming up the basement stairs. With a threatening glance at Higgins, I tiptoed to the door and stood waiting. As it was thrown open, Higgins, finding courage too late, cried out in warning; but I had already reached through the half-opened entrance and grabbed the intruder by the wrist. I pulled her into the room with unwarranted rudeness, considering that I was dealing with a woman and that there was no real necessity for it, but in the excitement of the moment I forgot myself. I was brought to my senses quickly enough.

A sharp blow on my wounded shoulder caused me to loosen my hold for an instant, and before I could recover I found myself facing a very angry young lady, whose flaming cheeks and blazing eyes lent unneeded force to the threat conveyed by a small but businesslike-looking revolver which she pointed at me with an untrembling steadiness which would have done credit to the coolest of men.

I jumped back, startled half out of my wits. Intent only on encountering her and solving her identity, I had not dreamed of resistance.

She looked at me over the sights of her pistol with angry coolness. "What do you mean, sir?" she asked with a threatening note in her voice. "Isn't it enough that I have allowed you to enter and remain here without being forced to submit to personal indignities from you?"

"I—I—er—pardon me," I stammered. "I had no intention—that is, I—you see, I thought there was no one else here when I came in."

"Very likely not; but that doesn't explain your entrance or this unpardonable attack on me. Why should you have come here in the first place?" The finger pressed on the trigger trembled a little, and I was beginning to get nervous. Somehow I felt that she held my life rather cheaply at that moment.

"If you—if that gun was lowered for a minute I think I could explain things to you," I answered.

"And if it were you might not take the trouble to explain. You may sit down and give me the reasons for your strange behavior, if you will, however." I stepped toward the chair. "Wait!" she called out sharply. "Higgins, search him, if you please, and be sure that he is unarmed."

Higgins obeyed orders, but he did so with reluctance. His fear of firearms seemed to be chronic, and it appeared to make little difference whether they were aimed at him or at some one else. He accomplished his task with all possible dispatch. "No harms that I can find, Miss Elsie." She lowered the pistol. "Sit down," she said with such evident relief in her voice that I could hardly restrain a laugh. In spite of her boldness in warding off danger she was wholly feminine. She turned the revolver over to Higgins with an alacrity which showed that she disliked using it in spite of her evident proficiency.

"Perhaps you will feel better able to talk now," she said, taking a chair across the table from me.

"Much better," I returned, my self-possession recovered. "In the first place, I'd like to ask you what you are doing here."

"Well, of all the audacity! You force an entrance to my house and coolly take possession, and then ask me what I'm doing here! Don't you think it is for me to ask that question of you?"

"But, my dear young lady, I was told that the house was unoccupied."

"Please to remember that I'm *not* your dear young lady and that the house is mine. It makes no difference what you were told or who had the unparalleled effrontery to tell you; I want to know your object in coming here."

"Unfortunately I can't answer that question. I know no more about why I am here than you do," I returned.

"A pretty story! It seems hardly likely that you are a burglar; if you had come here to steal you would have left before now. You don't look exactly like a tramp who was seeking comfortable quarters for the winter; but unless you can offer me some explanation that I can accept I'll be forced to consider you one of the two and put you in charge of the authorities."

"I assure you that I'm speaking with perfect frankness. All that I know is that I was hired by a man in New York, and was sent out here to take charge of the house, with no further instructions. As far as I knew then and—pardon me—know now he is the owner. In my capacity as caretaker I feel that I have a perfect right to ask you what *you* are doing here, especially as I was told to allow no one to enter the place."

She smiled scornfully. "It would seem, then, that I'm not the owner of my own house and must dispute possession with a man I've never even seen before. However, I happen to have the upper hand for the present, and I must ask you to leave."

"But my orders were to—"

"And *my* orders to you are to leave immediately. Otherwise I shall be forced to shoot you again—or order Higgins to do it, which is just as distasteful to me."

"Then it was you who fired at me the other night?"

"Certainly. Do you suppose that I was going to

let a strange man enter the house if I could prevent it? I'm really sorry, though," she added solicitously. "I only intended to frighten you away, and never thought I'd hit you. I—I hope I haven't hurt you real badly."

"Nothing serious," I returned with a laugh, "only a rather painful scratch. Allow me to congratulate you on your marksmanship."

"I'm sorry. It was only because of the wound that I allowed you to remain so long. I felt that I owed you what little care Higgins and I could give you."

"Much more consideration than a housebreaker had any right to expect. But there seems to be a slight misunderstanding about my presence here. Now if you'll only let me——"

"That will do," she said, her voice taking on its coldness again. "There is no misunderstanding—not on my part at least. I must ask you to leave the house at once." Higgins weakly raised the pistol. She took it from him and aimed it at me. "Go or I'll shoot!"

I took one look at her determined eyes. It was no time for parleying; I decided to go.

"There seems to be nothing that I can do but act on your gentle hint that I'm not wanted here. Whoever owns the house, you certainly have the advantage of possession. If you'll permit me I'll get my suit case and leave directly."

"You will remain here, where I can watch you, while Higgins gets your things for you. There is no need for you to explore the house further."

Higgins left the room and returned in a few moments with my things. I threw my overcoat over my arm, picked up the suit case, and left with as much dignity as a man may when he is threatened with a violent end.

CHAPTER V.

THE MANAGER.

OF course my first thought was to take the automobile and return to New York, but before I had backed the car out of the barn I stopped. Where was I to go when I reached New York? Return to my employer and tell him of the events that had taken place? I doubted if I could even learn of his whereabouts; it was unreasonable to suppose that he was a permanent guest in the hotel where I had first met him, and I was ignorant of even his name. My position was gone, taken from me at the point of a pistol; I had no idea where to look for another. The month's salary I had received in advance had not been earned—at least as I had agreed to earn it—and in case I met the man who hired me I feared that he would ask me to refund the money. Altogether I had little reason either for seeking New York or my employer again.

I took my suit case out of the car, stowed the few necessary toilet articles that it contained in my pocket, and left the rest of its contents for any one who might find them; fortune on the open road was as likely to prove as favorable as fortune in New York, and I started out, stripped for action.

My road map showed me three small towns within easy walking distance—Plainville, Manton, and Osborn. All were about equally distant and formed

the angle points of a triangle of which the house I had just left was the approximate center. I chose Plainville, partly because it was the larger of the three and therefore more apt to offer chance of employment, and partly because it was the one which had been mentioned in my employer's instructions. He had told me that it was about a mile from the house, but I found that he had underestimated the distance; half an hour's brisk walking, however, brought me within sight of the village.

It was a typical New England factory town. A broad, crooked main street crossed by the river ran through the middle of it, and the houses spread out from that as center in a sort of planless fashion, as though they just "emanated" from it. A few hundred yards above the street a tall dam across the river formed a large reservoir, and in the shadow of the dam, a long, boxlike structure with many-windowed walls, indicated the source of the town's existence, and the reason for the reservoir—the inevitable factory. Judging from the bird's-eye view I first had of it, the town had a population of about three thousand or less.

I entered the outskirts of the village and reached the main street, expecting to find the usual quiet, half-alive country community; but before I had reached the "business center" I discovered that though it was undoubtedly a country community the village was far from being quiet and half alive. There was a stir and hum of activity, an atmosphere of excitement equal to the bustling business of a Western boom town. Most of the houses along the street had signs out "Rooms to Let" or "Board and Lodging;" there was an amount of traffic that would have done credit to a much larger town; several new houses were going up; down by the river, on the ground adjoining the factory, men were working on the construction of a huge shed which seemed purposed as an addition to the mill itself. I began to congratulate myself on my prospects.

Entering the village store, which also served as post office, I bought a few cigars and hung around a few moments, seeking conversation with the proprietor; I knew that here, if anywhere, I could get direct and immediate information.

"Seems to be quite a stir about the town these days," I ventured as he handed me my change. "Business picking up?"

"Business pickin' up! Say, guess you must be a stranger round these parts. Pickin' up! Why, it's the fust time the's been any business since old Manton went out of business ten years ago."

"Yes?" I questioned. "What's the factory down there by the river? Woolen mill?"

"Waal, it used to be the Manton Implement Works. You've prob'ly heard of the comp'ny. Biggest manufacturers of farmin' implements in New England before they went out of business. Old Manton died about ten year ago, and since then there hasn't been nothin' much done. His daughter hired a manager and ran the mills herself for a while, this one and the one over to Manton, but I guess she didn't make nothin' at it."

"Must be a pretty sudden demand for farming implements. There seems to be plenty doing here now."

"Farmin' implements nothin'! Them's airplanes they're turnin' out now. Why, they do say that they've

got orders enough ahead right now to keep them runnin' night and day for ten years."

"Daughter running things now?" I asked.

"Waal, Marvin, the old manager, had charge for a while, but he's gone and leased the old wire works over to Osborn and started in on his own account. The's been a new man in charge lately—man named Henderson that Miss Elsie got out from New York."

I started at the name. Elsie Manton! Manton was the name I had found in the books, and Higgins had called my unknown hostess Miss Elsie.

The storekeeper had observed my sudden increase of interest. "Mebbe you know him," he said, referring to Henderson.

"No," I replied. "The name just sounded familiar; that was all. Where can a man get a room and meals here for a reasonable rate? I expect to be here for a while, and don't care to stay at the hotel."

"Waal, 'most everything's plumb full right now, but I understand that Mis' Smith can accommodate a few more. She's got three of the office men stayin' with her now. She lives in the fifth house from the next corner, on the right-hand side. You might try there."

I thanked him, and went out to seek lodgings with "Mis' Smith." It was now half past five, and the street was thronged with men coming from work. I had little difficulty in finding Mrs. Smith's, and still less in arranging for board. From the other boarders I learned that there was a man needed in the office, and determined to go after the position the next morning. In the meantime I set myself to discover as much as possible about Elsie Manton and the factory.

The three men who were employed there knew little about it. They had been recently hired and knew Henderson as the only boss. Mrs. Smith, however, proved a perfect mine of information; she knew everybody in the place, it seemed, and the family history of the Manton's from the time they had first settled in New England in prerevolutionary days. Once I had fairly started her on the subject I had only to sit and listen without questions.

I learned that Miss Elsie had left for New York three days before—though I could have given her more accurate information as to Miss Elsie's real destination; that she lived, with her two servants, an old man and woman who had worked for her father, in the big house just on the edge of the village; that the old Manton homestead was about two miles out of the village and hadn't been occupied for years, though Miss Elsie went out once in a while to "kind of keep an eye on things," and a hundred and one other facts which did not interest me in the least, but which I had to listen to with the rest.

My first intention had been to look for employment of some sort in Plainville, but in the light of what I had learned I was uncertain whether I would not do better to return at once to the old mansion and attempt another audience with the intrepid Miss Elsie—all the more as I had been struck as much by her beauty as her courage. Though I understood nothing of why I had been sent there in the first place, I felt sure that my errand had some connection with her and was beginning to suspect that it was not entirely in her interests. My own interests came first,

however, and if by any chance I found employment in Plainville I would still have an opportunity to meet her again. I concluded to remain where I was for the present.

Handicapped as I was by my wounded shoulder, the more strenuous forms of work were necessarily out of the question, and I applied at the factory office in hope of obtaining some clerical position. The head bookkeeper politely informed me that, as far as he knew, there was no place for me, but told me that I might come in later and see Mr. Henderson, the manager. As I was leaving the office he called me to the rear window, facing the mill. "There is Mr. Henderson now," he said, pointing to a man standing near the mill door talking to one of the employees. I took one look at Mr. Henderson, and decided that I didn't care to see him just then. The man the bookkeeper had pointed out to me was none other than the man who had sent me out from New York!

I slipped out of the door and hastened away from the factory, hoping that he wouldn't observe me and recognize me. I fled from him instinctively, and it was not until I had reached the safety of my room that it occurred to me to ask myself why. Of course there was the possibility that he would upbraid me for failing to carry out his instructions and ask me to refund the money he had advanced me on my salary; but in the light of reflection it seemed as reasonable for him to avoid me as it was for me to hide from him. My previous suspicion that he had reasons for not desiring to work in the open was now stronger than ever.

The discovery of his identity as the manager of the Manton mills, coupled with the fact that he had put me in surreptitious charge of the old Manton house, was satisfactory proof to me that some underhanded scheme was afoot, and I was very sure that Henderson had several things to conceal from his fair employer. There was no question in my mind as to which side I should ally myself with; Miss Manton's beauty and courage and the peculiar circumstances under which I had met her were enough in themselves to have led me to champion her. And, though I fear I was not too scrupulous in inquiring into Henderson's motives as long as he was paying me, I could scarcely ally myself with a man whom I suspected to be a crook.

Learning from my landlady that Miss Manton had returned and was now in the village, I decided to lose no time in giving her a full explanation of my intrusion and to acquaint her with the duplicity of her manager. Calling at her home, I was duly informed by Higgins—who appeared shocked at the audacity of my visit—that Miss Manton was not in. I expected this, however, and paid no attention to Higgins, thrusting him aside and entering the house without stopping to argue matters with him.

"I think you're mistaken, Higgins," I said, as he began to protest that there was no one at home. "I'm sure that Miss Elsie will see me as soon as she knows I'm here. Tell her I have very special information for her lone."

"But Hi'm sure, sir, she——"

"That will do. I'm sure she wishes to see me. Tell her that I'm here and wish to see her, if you

please. Otherwise I shall be forced to go and look for her myself."

Higgins evidently believed that I was fully capable of carrying out my threat; he lost no time in apprising Miss Elsie of my presence. He returned with the information that she would be down in a few moments.

CHAPTER VI.

A BARGAIN CLINCHED.

MISS MANTON received me much more graciously than I had expected. Recalling her stern and determined aspect as she had ordered me from the house two days before, I had anticipated more difficulty in getting her to listen to me. Consequently I was pleasantly surprised to have her greet me affably and smilingly ask me the nature of my errand.

"How is your wound?" was her first question before I could get a chance to explain the object of my call.

"Doing nicely, thank you. Your bullets seem to make clean holes, and this one is healing up fine. I will soon be deprived of even that reminder of my sudden intrusion into your house, but I fear we will both have even less pleasant results from it."

"What do you mean? The episode is closed as far as I am concerned, and you need have no fear of prosecution. I feel that I have inflicted punishment enough on you already. What unpleasant results can come to me?"

"That I don't know; but I called this afternoon to explain more fully how I happened to come to Plainville in the first place and to inform you of the identity of the man who sent me. Miss Manton, I know nothing about what designs are being formed against you or the purposes of your enemies, but the man who sent me out from New York and instructed me to take charge of your house was your manager, Henderson."

She looked at me incredulously and laughed. I felt like a foolish boy for the moment; so certain had I been of Henderson's guilt and of the necessity of informing her at once that it had not occurred to me that I would be forced to substantiate my charges.

"Do you expect me to credit such a story from a man I know nothing about? I know Mr. Henderson as an honorable man who could have no possible motive for such an act. If it is fear that I will prefer charges against you for breaking and entering that prompts you to——"

"Believe me, Miss Manton, it is in your interests alone that I came to tell you what I had learned. You can believe me or not, just as you please; only you might ask Henderson what he was doing in New York on the day I left."

"He was there attending to business for the factory, of course. And if you are so certain that he is engaged in a conspiracy against me, why didn't you mention his name the other night?"

"Because at the time I knew neither his name or his connection with yourself. I did not even know who owned the house I was to enter, and only since I came into the village have I learned that Henderson is your manager and recognized him as my employer."

"You will have to tell me more than you have if you expect me to believe you," she returned.

"I would like nothing better," I answered. "That is what I came for." And I related the events that had led up to my establishment in the Manton homestead, and told her of what I had learned since I arrived in the village.

"Such a thing is very possible," she said thoughtfully, when I had finished. "Henderson was in New York at the time, and you *might* have met him. Some one had certainly prepared the old place for winter quarters. If I was only sure of you—if I only knew more about you——"

"And, if I am not too bold, may I ask how much you know of Henderson? How did you come to hire him and what did you know of him before then? You have questioned my honesty in telling you of this; I feel that I have a right to hear his side of the case."

"Why, I know very little of him, now that I consider it. I had met him several times socially in New York, and he was recommended to me as a steel expert."

"You could very easily have learned the truth of that."

"I—I never thought of questioning it. I only know that he seems very efficient and that everything has been going splendidly at the factory since he took charge. Oh, I hope there's nothing wrong! I've tried so hard to get things going again, and we needed the money so badly. Everything I have, credit and all, is tied up in these orders, and if——" She stopped short, recollecting suddenly that she was talking to a stranger.

"Miss Manton," I said, "please believe that I am your friend and am willing to do anything I can to help you. You needn't take my word for this. Just keep an eye on Henderson; I'm sure that he will show his hand sooner or later. Please trust me and allow me to help you."

"But I don't know you at all—and I didn't know Henderson and I don't dare to trust any one. What you have said has shaken my faith in my manager, and I don't know who to believe."

"You must admit that I could have little motive in seeking you out again after what happened the other night. It would have been far more to my own interest to have let the whole thing drop and gotten out of here as soon as possible. I'm convinced that Henderson is a crook and has some sinister design against you; that is the only reason I took the trouble to call on you."

I rose to leave. "I'm sorry you don't believe me. And whether I have your permission or not, I shall try to find out what this all means."

She stopped me with a gesture. "Don't go," she said. "I'm sure I don't know whether to trust you or not, but I have no one to depend on, and I know so little about these things. If you only would try to discover some proof of what you suspect. Surely there is nothing else I can do but wait for that."

"I will do my best, Miss Manton. I could hardly ask you to believe me without further evidence. And there is nothing to do but wait and learn what Henderson's purpose is. I will undertake to watch him myself, or, if you wish, you may employ detectives."

"I had rather not do that," she returned. "There is no reason why any one else should know of this

for the present, and I can trust you as well as I could a detective."

"Then I think that the best thing I can do is to return to the house and stay there, carrying out Henderson's orders as though nothing had happened. Do you think he knows that you have been there during the last week?"

"As far as I know, no one in town knows of it. I remember telling no one of my intentions when I left, and the people here probably suppose that I was in New York. Henderson was out of town when I left and knows nothing of my absence."

"Good! In that case I can meet him when he comes to look me up and feel sure that he does not know that I've ever left the place. And, above all, he must not suspect that you know anything about my presence there. By the way," I added as I was about to leave, "possibly that was his automobile that I used to come out in?"

"So far as I know," she replied, "he doesn't own one, though of course he could easily have gotten one in New York."

"The license number would tell," I ventured. "I failed to notice it the other night, but——"

"I noticed it," she answered, "but there is nothing to be learned from that. The number is all right, but the name of the State has been scratched off the tag. It might be under either New York or Massachusetts registry, and is valueless for identification."

"H'm! Our friend certainly had no intention of being traced easily. Well, we can only wait for something to turn up. If you need me for anything at this end, let me know. And please believe that I'm working sincerely in your interests."

She looked me in the eyes as she bade me good-by. "I do," she said. "I'm sure I can trust you fully. Please forgive me for doubting you. Good-by and good luck."

So, with definite purpose and consequently with more enthusiasm than before, I again took up quarters in the Manton homestead. I found everything as I had left it; the automobile was still in the barn, the place was well provisioned, and I missed nothing but Higgins' service. I sat down to wait as patiently as I could for further developments.

For three days I was left alone. My impatience increased apace with my loneliness, and, chafing at my enforced inaction when I felt that action of some kind was almost imperative, I could do nothing but wander nervously about the house, prey to my fears and anxiety. In spite of the paucity of facts on which to base my suspicions I was sure that the manager of the Manton mills was bent on mischief, and my heart was filled with fear for the safety of his fair employer.

Though I knew that my only chance to learn more of Henderson's intentions was to remain in the house, I was tempted to return to Plainville, and I dared not voice, even to myself, the chief reason for my uneasiness. My interest in Elsie Manton was rapidly developing into a deeper emotion. Of course it was absurd for me—an impecunious stranger—to even dream of her, but the dream persisted nevertheless, and it was that, more than anything else, that impelled me to continue in my attempt to fathom Henderson's

plans and run the risk of balking him if those plans proved dangerous to Miss Manton's interests.

As the third day of waiting dragged itself wearily along I was tortured by a thousand misgivings. What if Henderson suspected that I had been absent? What if he knew that I had met Miss Manton and was prying into the reasons for his sending me to Plainville? His failure to appear made me feel that something untoward had happened or was happening, and I promised myself that the next day would be my last in the old house. But shortly after dark that evening my mind was set at rest by the arrival of an auto truck bearing Henderson and two roughly dressed men who appeared to be workmen.

The truck drew up in front of the barn, and I had just time enough to note that it held several depleted coils of wire before Henderson reached the door and harshly ordered me into the house.

"Get in there out of sight!" he ordered. "There's nothing to interest you in what is going on out here. Look alive now and help me with this."

For the first time I noticed that he bore a large black box which he carried with difficulty. It was about three feet square and covered with tarpaulin, and, as I took hold of one side of it with him, proved to be a sufficient load for the two of us. We carried it into the dining room, and set it down on the floor near the window. Henderson stripped off the covering, and I saw that it was nothing more nor less than a large storage battery.

A moment later the two men who had come with him appeared at the window and passed in the ends of the wires I had seen in the truck. Henderson connected these to poles of the battery, and talked with the men for a moment in a low voice. I could not hear what he was saying, but he seemed to be giving them instructions as to their work, for they began immediately afterward to string the wires out across the grounds toward a near-by telephone pole.

Henderson turned to me. "Anybody been here since you came?"

"Not a soul," I said glibly. "I haven't seen even the sign of another person since I arrived."

"Sure no one knows you're here?" he snapped in his brusque way. "And I suppose you've been here all the time yourself?"

"I haven't left for a moment, and if any one knows of my presence I haven't been informed of it yet."

"Good! Hope you've found everything comfortable. You won't have to remain here much longer, and I may as well pay you and give you your final instructions now, as this is the last time we will meet."

In my heart I thought otherwise, but I didn't voice my presentiment. I remained silent as he drew out a roll of bills and handed me five hundred dollars.

"This is rather more than we agreed upon," he said as he paid me, "but I won't need you after tomorrow, and your work will be worth that much to me."

"I hardly see how that is possible, if I am to do nothing more. And, above all, I can't see the reason why I was sent here at all. Why is it so necessary that there should be some one to stay here, and why the storage battery and wires?"

"That is none of your affair," he barked at me. "You are to obey my orders and ask no questions."

If you don't care to do it, say so right now, but I warn you that it will be dangerous for you if you ever even mention what you've seen."

There was a sinister ring to his voice that sent a shudder through me. I felt that my life would be in danger if he so much as suspected that I intended to betray him. "Oh, very well," I returned as calmly as possible. "I'm not even curious, and five hundred dollars is reason enough for me any time. What am I to do to-morrow?"

"Simply remain here until midnight. At twelve o'clock sharp disconnect this battery, get into the automobile and back to New York as quickly as you possibly can. Leave the machine in front of the hotel where you found it in the first place. Also forget that you ever saw me or worked for me. Do I make myself clear?"

"Certainly. I'm to remain here until to-morrow night and then leave. That is simple enough."

"And *disconnect* the battery before you go. That is your reason for staying here, and if you fail——" He paused, and the pause was more sinisterly expressive than words could have been. "After making the disconnection, load the battery into the machine and take it with you. Also cut the wires at the telephone pole—you will easily be able to follow them from the window—roll up the two loose ends, and carry them away with the battery. Have you any objections to leaving New York after you arrive there?"

"None in particular. Why?"

"I would much prefer that you got as far away from this part of the country as possible."

"I'm perfectly willing," I replied, "but five hundred dollars is——"

"I can promise you as much more and transportation across the continent if you will leave. Just ask to be shown into room No. 310 again when you reach the hotel and you will find some one there to make arrangements with you. That is all. Good-by."

He went out abruptly, and I heard him call to the two men. A moment later the auto truck rattled off down the road, and I was left alone again. As soon as they were out of hearing I rushed out of the house to examine the wires. As Henderson had said, they had been strung from the battery to the nearest telephone pole, which stood just in front of the house and about fifty yards away. It was too dark to follow them farther, but I suspected that they continued along the whole line below the regular telephone wires. Puzzled to know what was afoot, I returned to the house. Whatever was to be the result of disconnecting those wires from the battery I was certain that it boded evil for some one. And I had only until the next night at midnight to discover the extent of the plot. My only recourse was to follow the wires to their source, and that must perforce wait until daylight.

CHAPTER VII.

LIVE WIRES.

DAYLIGHT the next morning found me setting out from the house, my eyes glued to the telephone wires overhead, making as swift progress as my occupation would allow. Knowing of their existence beforehand, I had comparatively little difficulty

in tracing the wires and distinguishing them from the telephone line itself; they had been strung along the poles below the regular lines, and to a casual observer would have appeared to be part of the telephone system. Though noticeably newer than the rest of the work, they were already rusted in some places and had probably been in position for several days at least. I noted with considerable trepidation that they were leading toward Plainville, and I became more certain than ever that all was not well with the Manton mills. I hastened my steps as much as possible, and soon arrived at the crossroads.

Here I found that the line split into three sections, one part leading toward Plainville and the other two along the roads toward Manton and Osborne. After a moment of indecision I kept on toward Plainville.

Arrived at the town, I walked boldly down the main street, still with my eyes on the wires. The possibility of meeting Henderson occurred to me, but I was forced to risk it. There was little enough time to discover the meaning of his strange actions, and I must take the chance of working in the open.

About three hundred yards below the factory a road branched off from the main street toward the reservoir. The two wires I was following so carefully branched off at the same place. They were now more easily seen, as there was only one telephone line on the poles, and I was able to proceed more rapidly. A short distance from the road, they appeared to cease abruptly; but upon examination I found that they were strung down the pole itself and then passed to a fence which led toward the river. Following it, I found myself, in a few minutes, on the river bank, near the edge of the dam and above the mill. The wires continued down to the water's edge and were lost to sight in a small willow thicket at the base of the dam.

Risking observation again, I made my way down the steep bank. Even if Henderson should see me now I was too near the object of my quest to be disappointed. Filled with excitement, I stumbled down to the willows. Effectually concealed by the brush was the opening of a small cave; the dam had been undermined!

The opening was large enough for a man to pass in easily and I rushed on to a small chamber dug out in the heart of the dam itself. The room was filled with boxes, piled one above the other, and before me was one with the cover torn off. It was filled with dynamite. And here I found the end of the wires and evidence of their purpose. On top of the box and so arranged that it would explode at the slightest shock was a stick of dynamite fitted with a percussion cap, and above it, suspended from a tripod, an electro magnet held a small weight ready to drop the moment the current released it!

So this was the reason why Henderson had wished me to disconnect the battery. For some unaccountable motive he wished to blow up the dam. I stood aghast at the horror of the scheme. The dam destroyed, the pent-up waters would rush forth in a raging flood to sweep everything before them. The factory, directly in its path, would be torn out and demolished like a pile of hay in a heavy wind.

I hastened to move this gigantic infernal machine away from the dynamite, taking the whole apparatus

out of the cave and throwing it into the brush. And then I recalled the two lines branching off at the cross-roads and leading toward Manton and Osborne. The scoundrelly manager was evidently plotting to wreck the three plants at the same moment, and the slightest derangement of those wires would probably work havoc in the other two mills!

Hurrying up the river bank, I started on the dead run to find a telephone and send out warnings which might already be too late. As I rushed across the bridge I saw Henderson coming out of the mill office, but I could not even attempt to conceal myself from him. I turned to see him pass on toward the mill, however, without seeming to notice me. I reached one of the stores, and, shoving the astonished proprietor to one side, dashed back of the counter to the telephone. I reached for the receiver and stopped. Who was I to call up, and what was I to say? For all I knew the whole office force of both the plants might be in the service of Henderson, and even if I succeeded in getting some one to listen to me and heed the warning I could not tell them what to do or where to look for the danger.

Somewhere about the mills was undoubtedly a cache of dynamite like the one I had just found, but they might search for hours without discovering it. No, I must leave Manton and Osborne to the fates. The only thing I could do now was to expose Henderson and call him to account for his dastardly attempt.

As I left the store, intending to seek Miss Manton, I saw her pass in her car and alight at the mill office. Gratified to find that I would not be obliged to go to the house for her, I hastened to the blacksmith shop, whose proprietor also did duty as town constable. I found him not at all the sort of person that the term "rural constable" always calls to mind, but a most determined and resourceful-looking man, well able to command respect from any evildoer. I told him of my discovery in as few words as possible. He simply threw off his blacksmith's apron, put on his coat, and followed me to the mill.

We entered the office, and faced Henderson and Miss Manton. Henderson turned pale as he saw me, but otherwise showed no sign of recognition. I was forced to admire the man's coolness as he stood there and deliberately waited for the charge he must have known was coming.

"Well, what can I do for you?" he snapped out. "Make it short, for I'm very busy this morning."

"I guess your business can wait for what we have to say," I answered. "Officer, arrest that man!" The constable stepped forward to do his duty, but Miss Manton intervened:

"What's the matter? Are you sure that this is necessary? I can't believe——"

"I will explain everything later, Miss Manton. We are just in time to save your whole factory and——"

Henderson, realizing that his plot was discovered, sprang back and dashed into his private office. The constable and myself followed, but not until he had reached his desk, taken a small vial from it, and endeavored to swallow the contents. I clutched at him in time to knock the vial to the floor, while the constable placed him under arrest.

As we reached the outside, Henderson suddenly wrenched his hand free and dashed off toward the

dam. By the time we had collected our wits he was halfway to the fence which bore the wires. We rushed in pursuit, but though he staggered and almost fell he reached it ahead of us. He turned and faced us, pulling a pair of wire clippers from his pocket as he did so. The constable and myself came up, and for the second time saved the situation. We put the handcuffs on him, and while he was being led to the jail I hastened back to the office to find Miss Manton. She was standing by the door, trembling from all she had seen.

"Quick!" I said. "Is there any one at Manton whom you can trust fully? I must warn them at once."

"Why, Murchison, the foreman; but I don't understand what is all the——"

I thrust her to one side, forgetful for the moment of all else but the danger that I must stave off.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE OF MANY.

I LEFT the Plainville Hotel the next afternoon and made my way toward Miss Manton's home. Higgins had been dispatched in the car to get my suitcase from the old Manton homestead, and I was prepared to leave Plainville on the night train. I was almost tempted to leave town without seeing her again, but, giving in to temptation, I called and found her eager to hear my explanation of Henderson's conspiracy and bursting with news of her own.

"You must tell me all about how you discovered the scheme," she said eagerly. "I don't even know yet just what it was, and what he intended to do. I heard from Manton to-day that they had discovered a large quantity of dynamite and a sort of infernal machine under the mill, and Mr. Marvin, of the Osborne mill, found the same thing there, but I don't know yet what it was all about."

I explained to her briefly what I had found and how I had stumbled onto it.

"Evidently," I said, when I had finished my account, "Henderson was a representative of some other aeroplane firm. Perhaps a crank. At any rate, it was only one of the many plots which have been unearthed during the last few years in this country, and we have reason to be thankful that it failed."

"But why should he have taken the trouble to hire you and arrange to blow up all three plants from a point so far away?"

"I suppose to disarm suspicion. If I had fulfilled his orders and left the vicinity, there would have been nothing to fix the crime upon him or his associates, whoever they are. By means of the battery he could blow up the three mills at once, and before any one could discover just how it happened I would be out of the way and enough of the wire could have been removed so that it would have been impossible to locate even the source of the explosion. Henderson would still have been free to do other damage."

She sat silent for a moment. With my story finished, and not daring to speak of what was in my heart, I sat awkwardly waiting for her to reopen the conversation. I didn't think it necessary to tell her that we had learned through other channels that Henderson was the last of all the clever spies who were

at work endeavoring to destroy the materials of war. He may have been a foreigner. This fact only came to light later on. I did know at the time, however, that he was interested in the manufacture of aeroplanes and objected strenuously to these three companies producing a type of machine which was similar to his own. He took this extreme method to put down all competition. He was safely put away in prison, and so his plans came to naught.

Without saying anything about these things, I rose and held out my hand.

"There seems to be no further reason for my re-

maining in Manton. My work is done, and I am leaving for New York to-night."

"Oh, you must stay here a little while. Why, I had hoped that you would dine with me this evening and let me thank you for what you have done."

I smiled. "There is nothing to thank me for."

"I have to thank you for—a new manager. You see, Mr. Beckley, I took the liberty of appointing you to-day, and I—I—have every reason to believe and hope you will accept it. And now—will you stay to dinner with me?"

I did.

The Living Dead

By Seymour Le Moyne

RALUFF was last seen as he entered the studio on that gray evening of October 30th. Some there were who called him insane. Some merely catalogued it "queerness." At any rate, he was a lonely spirit who refused all intercourse with his kind, preferring to work alone, selling his pictures now and then. When they found him lying dead in his studio, with his brush in hand and a ghastly smile upon his face, it was a nine days' wonder. His body was discovered beneath an immense canvas, upon which he had painted huge blotches of lurid color without form or reason. This was offered as an example of insanity. Whatever it was, it has remained a mystery to the world. But my conscience troubles me. I have known for years the real truth. I found him there. I superintended the disposition of the papers, being his closest friend. I may have done wrong to conceal the most important document, yet, after all, one hesitates to give away the closest secrets of a friend's life. Now that Raluff's pictures are all sold, his reputation established, I see no reason why the inside story of that tragic death should not be told. Here is the confession he wrote the night of the tragedy. Take it as it was. No writer should embellish it or tamper with so strange an event. I lay it before you in the form which I found it beside his body.

"Weird adventures have come to me these last few weeks, so weird that I must put them on paper. Twice now I have seen the form of a strange woman in my studio just at dusk. Always she stands there on my model's platform, her sad eyes gazing upon me with an ancient longing that thrills me to the roots of my being. I wonder who she is. I have dared speak

to her. I have even gone to her side. Each time she has disappeared. My lifelong desire to paint the portrait of Cleopatra's soul must be known to her. She seems to understand. She smiled when I looked across the dim room at her. She raised her arms in supplication the first time. I couldn't fathom her silence. Night after night she would appear and disappear, always with that provoking silence, that haunting invitation in her eyes. This evening I returned to the studio and found her standing on the model's platform. With a gasp of surprise I locked the door, threw off my coat, and rushed to the large easel. A moment later I was at work. She did not move. I worked in a frenzy, at last delirious with a dream and its final accomplishment. This would be my masterpiece. Little did I know what retribution waited upon my years of carelessness, disregard of convention, selfishness. Just a few hours ago I stopped working a moment. I had not turned on the light, my only illumination being a sharp glow from the moon which fell over my canvas. Her rigid attitude was beginning to perplex me. I could see her smiling in the half darkness. She had wound about herself a filmy robe which made her appear almost unreal. It confused me to see a model stand so long. I spoke to her. She did not answer. I dared not do more for fear she would disappear again from my vision. Hounded by my dream, I picked up my brush again. The hours fell away from me like leaves from a tree in fall. I was creating the greatest thing ever known—the soul of a mummified queen. Who shall know what I might have done had it not grown suddenly dark. The moonlight passed out of my window. I threw on the electricity. In its glow I looked at

her. She did not move. I threw myself at her feet. I implored her to speak, to rest, to do anything rather than persevere in that coldness and calm. Without thinking, I touched her hand. It was cold as ice. I drew back. A terrible suspicion entered my mind. It was the queen herself—the mummified body. I find it hard to write now—light mist before my eyes—rivers of sound curtain me. I paint fiercely—still she moves not. I have torn her to pieces—I am grop-

ing for air—strange hands are about my throat—I have tottered here to throw this paper. I—I—cannot—see—"

This document may throw some light on the fact that in the studio they found the large, plaster model of a woman broken into many pieces. It had been delivered by mistake the day before Raluff's death, and belonged to an art class on the floor above.

The Death of Columbine

By Roy Le Moyne

HE heard their songs, the mandolin,
The distant viol and the flute . . .
Silent he stood as they went in,
His scarlet lips grown cold and mute.

She looked so tired with her head
Against poor Pierrot's slender shoulder,
Since he had found her lying dead
He looked a hundred centuries older.

He heard discordant laughter, rounds
Of idle jests and idle quips.
Now grown oblivious to their sounds
He stoops to kiss her silent lips.

Then Pierrot must have softly smiled,
That no one saw in all that crowd,
Yet O a weary, weary smile . . .
Their pleasure was so swift, so loud.

Forgotten laughter and old pain,
Deserted castles of to-morrow;
Surging up they caught at him again
And washed him in eternal sorrow.

And now to go his lonely way
In dull desertion of the heart . . .
Gone was the glamour of the day
Each played a carefree, painted part.

The sleepless agony of grief,
The sunken silence, bloodstained need,
The fleshless dreaming, dead belief,
The crust of some deserted creed.

Beyond him now poor Pierrot sees
The throngs go gayly singing under
The lanterns strung among the trees
It holds him with a childish wonder.

He starts his laughter as of old,
Then sudden stops and looks upon
Her slim, strong body now grown cold . . .
He turns gray-lipped into the dawn.

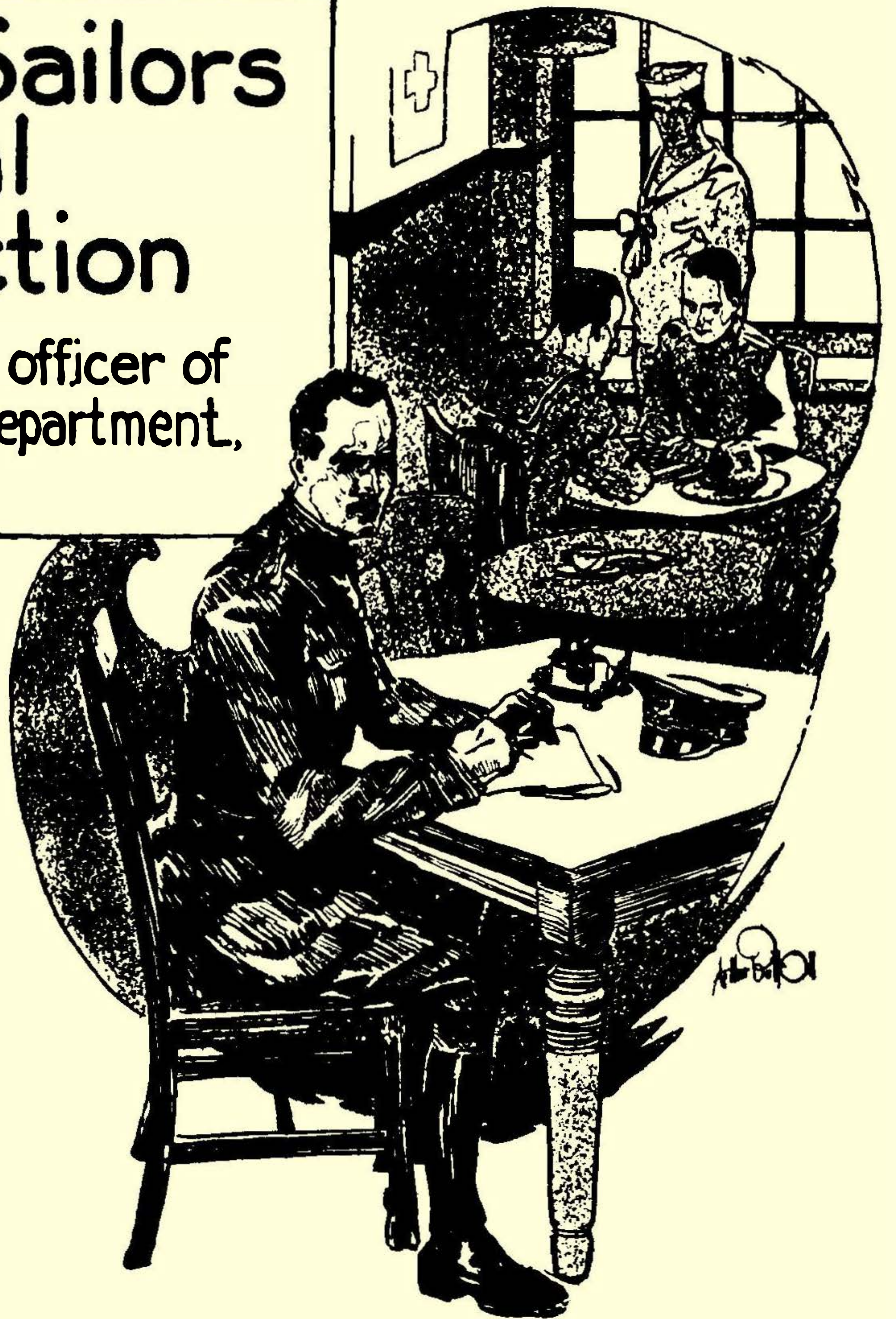
Soldiers and Sailors Personal Relief Section

Conducted by a former officer of
the Adjutant General's department,
U.S. Army.

EDITORIAL

WE feel that it is about time a concerted effort was made to help the discharged soldier and sailor in a more practical, efficient way. We know what the service means to a man. It strengthens, broadens, and deepens the spiritual side, as well as putting one physically upon his feet. We had two years in the game, and it did us a lot of good, but what we regret is the inability of a lot of our boys to get positions or the proper kind of positions. The trouble seems to be that they don't have opportunity to think about the matter. They are compelled to rush into whatever lies closest at hand, and this is naturally a bad method. A man wrongly placed is utterly contrary to the ideals of the army, where stern efforts are always made to put the right man in the right place. This, in fact, was a slogan of the Personnel Branch of the United States Army. Not only was it the slogan, but, between ourselves, it *worked*. Now, why don't we carry this thing right into civilian life? The most practical way, the most sensible way to accomplish this would be to give the discharged man in uniform a few months' pay. It isn't necessary that he get a huge amount of money, but it is vital that he get enough to carry him over those waiting months during which he is compelled to adjust his mind and body to the new life.

The Service has a peculiar effect upon the individual. It not only assists him in collecting his will power and making a square man out of him, but it acts in other ways which rather makes it difficult for the individual to tackle civilian problems. It is as though a horse stepped from tight harness into the open pasture. The first inclination is to run and leap and play. This is natural. It should be so. After a while, however, the desire comes to get back on the job again. Now, why couldn't Congress give the men who, in their way, gave their all, enough money to grant them some freedom for a few months during this "play time" and readjustment period? It is needed, especially because a large number of un-



employed men does not help this country. We had something like four million Americans in our army, and if one or two millions are going to be without work it will be a pretty poor example of our much vaunted efficiency. We can do away with this condition and not have our boys struggling for their livings if the government will allow a certain sum of money for each man.

We personally feel that this is the only thing to do. Putting all our deepest and most heartfelt feelings aside—our sentiment, our patriotism—we lay stress on the business angles. It is not good business to create dissatisfaction and unemployment. We must give these boys a chance. We can greet them with parades and committees all we want, but we want to back up this greeting with a straight-from-the-shoulder, true American method, and that is a practical helping hand.

Did you ever stop to consider how your American soldier feels when his ship nears our coast and discharge faces him, followed by his question, "What am I going to do?" He may even have a family depending on him, and yet he has to go out into the world in his uniform and look for a place, virtually starting

all over again. It is no pleasant matter, I assure you. Many of the men in our army gave up excellent positions—sacrificed everything they owned; their wives and sisters took positions, their mothers battled with terrific conditions. Is it wise to have these men come back to dissatisfied homes without the means to help and the necessity of rushing into anything that is at hand or lounging about without work? Not a bit of it. We want to give them enough to push them through these waiting days. Our boys are not going to waste this money. A few of them will, no doubt, but the average American is a pretty busy sort of a fellow, and he is not going to be contented to lie around very long.

Therefore, we speak our little word in favor of some extra pay for our men in uniform. Let it come right off the reel. There is no time like the present.

THE EDITOR.

A. S. T.—Question: I have just been discharged, receiving my travel pay, and am waiting to decide exactly what to do. Will it be wise for me to take it easy for a while, or should I go into a position being held open for me?

Answer: Don't wait a moment. Take up your work as long as you are lucky enough to have an opening at hand. It doesn't do any harm to take a week or so to think it over and get yourself adjusted to new conditions. That is long enough. The longer you wait, the harder it will be.

D. N. O.—Question: What kind of an insignia or pin should I wear on my civilian clothes to show that I was in the army?

Answer: Many buttons and pins are being made by manufacturers, but the best idea so far seems to be a little button worn in the lapel of the coat. This may be purchased at almost any of the larger stores.

L. S.—Question: What should I do with my uniform at the end of the time prescribed by the Government for me to wear it?

Answer: You should return your uniform in good condition by express to the place from which you were discharged.

D. L.—Question: When does the premium for my insurance increase?

Answer: The premium for War Risk Insurance increases upon the anniversary date on which you first took out your insurance. For example, if you first subscribed to insurance March 1, 1918, the date of increase would be March 1, 1919, without regard to your age.

R. T.—Question: Can I secure a discharge on industrial grounds?

Answer: Yes, the Government takes a lenient view of these cases, and if you will get your employer to make out an affidavit explaining the entire situation and forward this through Military Channels with your application for discharge, I am sure it will be acted upon quickly.

R. S.—Question: Could I secure a discharge because of dependency?

Answer: Discharges are granted in cases of dependency where the facts are clearly shown. Secure

an affidavit from some one with influence in your home city, and also letters from your dependents, and inclose these with your letter requesting a discharge, and forward it through Military Channels.

STILL IN SERVICE.—Question: How should I write a military letter?

Answer: You are referred to the book on Army Paper Work by Moss. However, the following simple rules apply: A military letter is folded in three folds, with the heading showing. On the upper fold, about two inches from the left-hand side, you write the word "From," followed by your name, rank, and organization. Under this the word "To," followed by the name of the person to whom you are writing, and in parenthesis "Through Military Channels." Under this the word "Subject," to be followed by a description of ten words or less of the subject of your letter. On the second fold you begin a paragraph two inches from the left-hand side of the paper, numbering it one. Write your letter briefly, laying stress on clearness, sign the letter, but do not repeat your rank if you have given it at the top of the page. Give this letter to your immediate commanding officer. Under no conditions ever write a letter and send it direct. It is a fundamental law that military correspondence goes through prescribed channels.

X. Y. Z.—Question: I am anxious to clear up the matter of the nonreceipt of a Liberty Bond which I purchased some time ago on the Army allotment plan.

Answer: If you will send us the full facts, we will endeavor to advise you in this case. It must be remembered that in order to settle questions of this nature we require a complete outline of the facts.

S. L.—Question: Can I be discharged abroad so that I might go to Italy?

Answer: The War Department is not conducting discharges in this way. It is necessary for you to come home with your unit. After you are discharged you can take whatever course of action that seems practical to you. You can see that if every man's wishes were gratified in this connection paper work would be so enormous and so involved that it would never get straightened out. Now and then the individual has to suffer because of the larger need.

R. S.—Question: Where can I place an application for employment? I am a machinist and have had additional experience in the army.

Answer: The following agencies are suggested as good places for you to register: United States Employment Service, State Employment Service, Red Cross Home Service, Salvation Army, Catholic War Council, Knights of Columbus, Jewish Welfare Board, War Camp Community Service, Young Men's Christian Association, Young Men's Hebrew Association.

B. A.—Question: Are Class-A men discharged at once from hospitals?

Answer: The men enlisted as Class A are ordinarily returned to their units from the hospitals, or else transferred to other units, but men in a very bad condition are usually sent home. This policy varies entirely with the individual condition.

"Around the World"

Single-handed, He Took Three Hundred Huns.

Sergeant Harry J. Adams, a "top cutter" with the "All-Kansas" Eighty-ninth Division, has been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for capturing three hundred Germans single-handed, with an empty revolver.

Company K was just entering Bouillonville and proceeding to mop up the town. Sergeant Adams had used all the shells in his revolver except two, when he saw a Boche on the run. He started after the German, shooting as he ran. One shot winged the Boche in the arm, but the Hun continued to run until he disappeared in a hole. Adams didn't have any more shells, so he stopped at the mouth of the hole and yelled:

"Hey, all you Dutch come on out of there."

And they came, long lines of them. Adams stood out in front with his empty revolver and lined them up five deep along the street as they came out. He swore and talked, all in English, and flourished his empty revolver, and the Boches all stood there with their hands high in the air, trembling for fear the revolver might accidentally go off and hurt some one. But they weren't trembling any more than Sergeant Adams was, according to his story.

"I think I was the most frightened one in the bunch," he said. "I only expected the one Boche to come out. That was all I had seen go in, and he was a little fellow. I knew I could handle him without a revolver. But when they came out in droves, my knees were shaking just as much, if not more, than theirs."

Bee Causes Auto Accident.

As Thomas Lawson, junior, was driving an auto along a narrow strip of road near Duffy, W. Va., a bumblebee lit on his face. He drew one hand from the steering wheel to brush it off, and lost control of the car, which ran into a telephone pole, breaking it off near its base and throwing Lawson into the weeds by the roadside. The car was badly wrecked, but Lawson was but slightly injured.

Hanging From Wires Sailor Saves Girls.

William J. Meyerrieck, a sailor of the United States navy, performed a daring feat recently in effecting the rescue of two girls imperiled by an explosion in the Standard Comb Manufacturing Company's plant on the fourth floor of 377 Fourth Avenue, New York, which cost the life of a man and resulted in the injury of two other persons. His act was cheered by hundreds of onlookers in near-by loft buildings.

The sailor, unable to reach the girls from the fire escape of an adjoining building because of the intervening space, worked himself over in a span of fifteen electric and telephone wires, and, clinging to them with one hand, swung the girls with the other to a fireman who had braced himself on the fire escape

to receive them. Had the sailor relaxed his hold on the wires, nothing could have saved him from plunging to the court below.

Meyerriecks, who lives at 966 Gates Avenue, Brooklyn, and who recently returned from nineteen months' overseas service in the navy, was passing when the explosion occurred. He ran to the rear and saw two girls at the window screaming for help. He went to the fire escape of the building at 373 Fourth Avenue, adjoining the one in which the explosion occurred, and went up to the fifth floor.

The sailor leaped out and swung onto the electric and telephone wires, about fifteen in number. They bore his weight, and he swung to the window, grasping Ida Erenburg, eighteen years old, of 72 East Ninety-ninth Street, around the waist. By the time the sailor had decided to try the desperate rescue, Fireman Otto Zischka, of Hook and Ladder Company 24, in West Thirty-third Street, had climbed to the fire escape.

As Meyerriecks swung back with the girl the fireman caught her and pulled her to the fire escape. For the second time the sailor made the swing back to the window, and caught Elsie Distell, of 205 East One Hundred and Twentieth Street, and swung her to the fireman. Employees of other plants in the eleven-story building at 373 Fourth Avenue who watched the two men rescue the girls applauded them when their perilous work was finished.

All the other women of the factory had gone out by elevator or stairway, and the firemen soon put out the flames. The body of Levine, the cashier, was found near the front windows. About two hundred men and women are employed by various firms in the building, and all of them ran out to safety following the explosion. The plate-glass windows of the factory were blown across the street, showering glass down upon pedestrians and motor cars. Visitors to the automobile show in Madison Square Garden heard the explosion and rushed out. The damage was estimated at three thousand dollars.

German Trophies Sought.

Many towns want captured German cannon and other war souvenirs for use as civic decoration. More than one hundred and twenty-five bills to authorize donation of captured field pieces have been introduced in the House and referred to the military committee.

Twice Pronounced Dead.

Twice pronounced dead and wrapped up in a blanket to be carried out for burial in France, Lieutenant John E. Wright is back at his home, near Connellsville, Pa., and is on the road to recovery. He was shot through the lungs by a machine-gun bullet. After lying in the mud and water for fourteen hours, he was discovered and removed to a hospital. Surgeons removed the bullet.

Kills Big Eagle Seen by Girl in Dreams.

Not all dreams come true, but this one did and in a manner that furnishes a remarkable story, which in abbreviated form is as follows:

Miss Ella McCoy, a well-known and popular young woman living about two miles from Buffalo, W. Va., dreamed on two nights of a large eagle sitting on a limb of a certain tree on the McCoy place. The evening before her first dream she had been looking at pictures of flags of all nations and various insignia for flagstaves and crowns.

This, she reasoned, might have prompted her dream of a real, live eagle. But upon dreaming the same dream a second time she told her father about it and begged him to take her to the spot where the dream eagle had perched, a part of the farm very familiar to her.

Mr. McCoy escorted her there and took along his shotgun. Sure enough, there was the big eagle on the limb of a tree, just as his daughter had dreamed it. McCoy fired and brought it down. It gave one or two twitches with its legs and expired. It measured eight feet from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other.

So there appears to be something in dreams, in spite of the skeptics.

Soldier and Bride Get Thrill in Haunted House.

The mystery of the "Haunted House of Mackville Street," in London, Ontario, Canada, shunned for seven years as the abode of evil spirits, which rustled about in the dead of night, dragging papers over the floor, and calmly pawing sleeping children, has been solved by the fearlessness of a returned soldier, Private John Chowen.

The house famine that has developed in practically every city in Canada with the return of heroes who have battled overseas, and who have chosen English, Scotch, and Irish brides while on leave in the old land, is at the bottom of it.

While the war lasted women and children were not permitted to travel, but since the signing of the armistice every returning troopship carries a contingent of brides with the soldiers. Meanwhile other soldiers who married before their departure for the front are setting up housekeeping, and houses are going at a premium.

But throughout the famine the haunted house of Mackville Street stood idle. Weird stories were whispered throughout the neighborhood, and while a few ventured within the place during the daytime, none would risk a night within its walls until Chowen turned up.

His bride, whose home was blasted out of the ground by a German naval projectile when the enemy bombarded the English coast city of Hartlepool, early in the war, was as dauntless as the soldier husband whose breast carries the ribbon of the military medal, won "For Valor in Action." She was willing to take a chance with the spooks.

"I have got to have a home, and I am going to see about these spooks," Chowen told the landlord as he took the key. "Ghosts have no terrors for any one who has been up against the sneaking swine that I have fought."

During the first night of Chowen's occupancy his wife was awakened by cries from their baby's cot. She thought she heard a rustle, and quickly flashed on the electric light, but all was peaceful. The infant again fell into a sleep and the parents returned to slumber, laughingly dismissing the subject as a mental concoction akin to nerves.

An hour later bloodcurdling screams that aroused the neighborhood brought Chowen staggering to his wife's bedside. Frantically tossing about, crying for help and threatened with hysteria he found her, but with the light turned on no cause for alarm could be discovered.

"The ghost, John," she moaned. "I felt its hand upon my face; I caught it, but it slipped from me. It was cold, clammy, repulsive—but it was there—I know it."

Chowen is not a man who believes in ghosts, but his wife's earnestness and certainty puzzled him. Dawn broke before his wife recovered from her hysteria, and the Haunted House of Mackville Street verged on the loss of another tenant.

But Chowen was resolved to see it through.

"Stick it out one more night with me, dear," he urged, "and we will see about the ghosts."

That night the wife returned to the same bed, admittedly with grave misgivings, while the baby dozed off to slumberland in the cot near by. Chowen, who had learned on the battlefield that a trench-raiding cudgel is a deadlier weapon than a pistol at close quarters, armed himself with a bludgeon he had brought from the front, and commenced the strangest night watch he had ever known.

The night hours passed, his wife's short, apprehensive breaths proclaiming her sleeplessness, while the babe slumbered in the cradle. Suddenly Chowen's keen ear, trained by many a vigil in the dead of night in No Man's Land, caught a faint noise of a rustling movement within the partition beside which he sat. His hands gripped the bludgeon and the electric switch as he sat tensely alert but motionless and in silence.

Minutes passed and no further noise was heard. He thought he heard a suspicion of a movement of the cradle in the inky darkness of the corner. Followed a period of silence. He relaxed and smiled for the sake of the relief it afforded, a trick of the trenches to ward off nervousness.

An instant later the baby's rattle tinkled vigorously from the cradle and dropped to the floor. Chowen flashed on the light, drew up the cudgel in his sinewy hands, and sprang toward the cot of the sleeping infant. A paper in the corner rustled and drew several thunderous blows from the thonged hammer. The young wife rushed to grasp her baby, but fell fainting on the cot.

Chowen threw aside the papers, revealing the shattered and gruesome remains of the rustling ghost—a huge snake. With a frank admission of relief from one of the greatest strains he had ever experienced, he revived his wife and pointed to the battered remnants of the reptile. When measured it was found to be nearly an inch and a half through the thickest part of its body, though it was but three feet nine inches long. It was of a dark-brown color.

Thus the "ghost" in the Haunted House of Mackville Street has been permanently disposed of. It

seems probable that the snake had long made its nest in the partitions of the house, and by its nocturnal wanderings had frightened off several timorous families.

Chowen's reward is six months' rent free.

The King Stayed.

"I didn't see the king myself," said one of the wounded Italians—he was an artilleryman from Piedmont, a powerful chap nearly seven feet high, who would never again walk without a crutch—"but a paesano from my town told me this true story about him, writes Gino C. Speranza in the *Outlook*:

"My friend was orderly to an artillery captain, and one day he went off with his officer to examine a newly placed battery which the king was expected to come up to inspect. All of a sudden, while the captain and my friend were there, the Austrians got the range and began a lively fire. A shrapnel ball hit the captain, who, as he fell, shouted to his orderly to run and save himself. The artillerymen got into a panic, and some of them began running back, not even minding passing the king's motor, which had just come up.

"Of course my friend stood by his officer and tried to stanch the blood from his wound, but the captain was fast dying and the orderly was so heartbroken and excited that, seeing the men running away and hearing the horn of his majesty's motor sounding farther and farther away in the distance, he grew rather desperate, and, throwing himself over his captain's dead body, shouted aloud, 'Even the king leaves us!' He had hardly said this when some one touched him on the shoulder, and, turning around, whom should he see but the king himself standing there quietly as if there were no shells bursting about.

"The orderly rose, stood at attention, shaking in his boots; but Victor Emmanuel said to him: 'My son, the motor has gone, but the king remains with his soldiers!' And my friend and his majesty sat beside the captain's body until the stretcher bearers came and carried it away."

Spiritualism is Cause of Talk.

It is to be admitted that speculation regarding psychic phenomena has proved a powerful attraction to some of the best intellects of the age, although it cannot be denied that the crudest fakes, the grossest of deceptions have been practiced by spiritualist impostors.

A great magician is often quoted in spiritualist literature to the effect that while he could duplicate by natural means most of the phenomena alleged to be spiritistic, there remained some things he could not account for, the residuum, presumably, being supernatural. One example of alleged spiritistic phenomena witnessed a few weeks ago in Toronto, Canada, by numerous reputable citizens may be related. Some of them are convinced the results could only have been achieved through the agency of departed spirits. Some insist that it is merely a clever piece of hypnotism or mind reading or legerdemain. Readers may form their own conclusions. These are the facts: A noted medium from Washington was in the city and gave private sittings to some scores of people who were interested in research. The interviews took place

in the daylight, in a well-lighted room of a private house, no one being present but the medium and the visitor.

A table was between them, covered with a cloth which reached only a few inches below its surface. Upon the table were two slates. Three or four blank pieces of paper or cardboard were inserted between the two slates, and a bit of lead from a pencil was inclosed. The slates were then bound lightly together by an elastic band. The questions to which answers were sought were written on tightly folded pieces of paper, not provided by the medium, but perhaps written hours before by the sitter. These folded-up scraps of paper were then placed on the slates, and the medium and the sitter indulged in general conversation until the spirits signified their presence by a mysterious tapping which seemed to come from between the slates. Medium and sitter would then hold the slates in their hand. From within would come distinctly the sound of rapid writing, a brisk scratching, in which one could identify the crossing of "t's" and the dotting of "i's." In a moment or so there would be three brisk, sharp taps signifying that the messages had been completed.

The slates were then opened, and within the cards were found to contain messages, in answer to the questions upon the folded slips of paper. The writings upon them were varied. It was not pretended that they resembled the caligraphy of the shades whose signatures were attached. The answers were invariably confined to the questions asked. Whether the answers were satisfactory depended upon whether one was a spiritualist. A nonspiritualist would say that they contained nothing that could not have been written by the medium or by a confederate if the possibility of either of them reading messages so tightly folded and concealed, some of them so ill scrawled, could be conceived without the papers being unfolded or without the watchful sitter observing them tampered with. The questions lay in plain view two feet from the eyes of the sitter throughout the seance. Once or twice they were touched lightly by the medium, none of them was concealed in his hand for an instant—at least so it seemed. Who can explain the reading of the questions, let alone the answers? As regards the writing that was heard, it was plain enough to most observers that the sounds did not correspond to the handwriting when revealed. That is to say, the sounds indicated the swift writing of a small hand. Some of the answers appeared in a large, sprawling hand. Moreover, it would have been a physical impossibility for so many words to have been written in so short a time. But as regards a psychic possibility—

A Detective Wanted.

The mystery of the Palisades has stirred into renewed life public curiosity of the sort that makes good detective stories best sellers, but the master detective of fiction has not yet made his appearance. Speculation in this case has turned entirely to the circumstances of the victim's marriage, if she were married, and has almost ignored questions connected with her death. It is assumed that Miss Packwood killed herself, always the easiest supposition, and in this case supported by much evidence. But it should not be forgotten that the woman who identified her body was

led to go to see it by a mysterious telephone message from a man who suggested that the unknown dead woman of the Palisades might be a girl whom she had known, not very long and not very well. Who sent this message, and why was he able to suggest this identification? A detective of imagination would grapple eagerly with the problem.

Seventy-seven years ago New York was excited over another mystery of the Palisades. Mary Cecilia Rogers, widely known as "the beautiful cigar girl," was murdered near Weehawken and her body thrown into the river. Police and public followed the case for months, but without result. That she had been brutally murdered was evident, but the murderer was not found. It happened that a then obscure literary man in Philadelphia, who had lately lost his job as a magazine editor and who had previously tried his hand at the then novel art of writing detective stories, became interested in the accounts which he read in the New York papers. He had no other source of information but these, but there seem to have been no effective libel laws in those days, and a paper could express pointedly its suspicions. This impecunious fiction writer, by name Edgar Allan Poe, read the papers, exploded their theories, and evolved one of his own, and embodied it in a story called "The Mystery of Marie Roget." And a long time afterward the confessions of the criminals revealed the fact that he was right.

Poe, thou shouldst be living at this hour. New York hath need of thee; she is a den of dull detectives. Only a few days apart, and a few miles apart, two women were brutally murdered in the Long Island boroughs. There were a number of points of resemblance between the cases, but, above all, the fact that in each case the murderer had taken away the glove from the victim's left hand. The science of psychopathology was not very far advanced in Poe's day, but he knew as much about it as any one; and the problem of the missing gloves would have given him intellectual pleasure of the keenest sort. What is more, he would probably have found the murderer. Poe lived three-quarters of a century too soon. If he had been born, say, in 1880, he would by now be head of a national detective agency, with gold-plated offices in a downtown skyscraper, and would be making so much money out of his practice that he could afford to take a few hours off each day to write what he liked. He might not be a classic, for a living writer can hardly become a classic unless he cultivates a somewhat ponderous and inhuman state of mind; but he would be prosperous, and he might make it somewhat safer to live in the outlying parts of New York.

Leaps From Moving Train and Escapes.

With a possible term in the penitentiary confronting him, Jenk Peters, en route to Springle, Okla., in charge of Deputy Sheriff Prinder, risked his life by jumping from a speeding Union Pacific train near Watkins, Colo.

The train was stopped as soon as the deputy sheriff discovered the loss of his prisoner, but the search for Peters was fruitless.

Peters, according to information given Police Captain Williams, is wanted in the Oklahoma city for

robbery. The train on which he and his captors were riding had just left the station at Watkins when Peters asked permission to go to the wash room. He locked the door behind him, opened the window, and leaped out.

Bull Snakes' Bellow Lures to Treasure.

The bellowing of a den of bull snakes in a cave on the bank of a cañon in Snyder, Texas, revealed to Miss Tina Gattling, a twenty-year-old school-teacher, the hiding place of a fortune and the grinning skull of a man who probably starved to death while guarding the secret.

Miss Gattling had started to her schoolroom, two miles from where she was boarding, when she heard the mournful bellowing of bull snakes emitting from the mouth of the cave. Knowing that bull snakes, although of enormous size, were harmless, Miss Gattling decided to investigate. She entered the little cave, raked the snakes to one side, and found an earthen vase which contained gold coins and nuggets valued at more than three thousand dollars.

After discovering the vase and without knowing what it contained, the pretty young schoolmarm continued her investigations. What she found chilled her blood. Lying a few feet from the vase was a grinning skull, and scattered about it were other bones of a human being. When she made the ghastly discovery she grabbed the vase and fled.

After reaching the road she stopped to ascertain what the vase contained. Here her agony turned to joy. When her hand was thrust into the vase it came in contact with something of a metallic nature. She drew it forth to find it filled with gold. She emptied the vase in her lap, and discovered that she had a fortune.

There was no school at the little stone schoolhouse that day. She went there, however, told her ten pupils of her discovery, and dismissed them. Then she trudged three miles and told the president of the school board. The trustees and the patrons of the school were gathered. They went to the cave. The skull and the bones were found, but no more gold.

Old residents of the county say they cannot remember that the cave was ever used by any person. They believe some bandit who robbed stagecoaches years ago took refuge in it and there died rather than come out and attempt to escape from his pursuers. Miss Gattling is now the sole possessor of the gold. There was nothing in or about the cave to establish the identity of the dead man or to whom the gold formerly belonged.

Miss Gattling declared, and the school board so found, that the bull snakes, five of them in number, each measured more than fifteen feet in length. The school-teacher believes they were moaning to lead her to the hidden fortune; that they are her fairies and that she will provide for them for all time. She has taken them to her boarding place and is trying to pet them.

The school board members are of the opinion that the bull snakes were merely fighting among each other for the best place in the cave during the winter. There are many "bulls" in this section, and when winter comes they fight it out for the most comfortable place to hibernate.

The Right Stuff

We should be pardoned if we take a certain amount of pride in the first issues of *THE THRILL BOOK*. Not only do we think we are putting forth the kind of story that can be read in no other magazine, but from the popularity of its sale and the expressions of approval which keep pouring in from the four points of the compass, we have swiftly come to the realization that *THE THRILL BOOK* is the right stuff. You would have to go a long way to find such tales as the "Wolf of the Steppes," by Greve La Spina, which appeared in our first issue; "The Web of Death," by Clare Douglas Stewart in the second, and "The Hank of Yarn," by Perley Poore Sheehan in this issue.

We started this magazine with a definite purpose in view, that purpose being to publish the type of story which possesses a real backbone of virility, an unusual texture, and a plot holding the interest from beginning to end. It can be done. It will be done. We are not going to put "space fillers" in *THE THRILL BOOK*. We are not going to use the drab, dull, conventional narrative that is laid around ancient scenery and behind-the-times characters. We started with the belief that all the readers, or rather the kind of readers we wanted, had good, red blood in their veins. We didn't hope to appeal to the "backward-looking" spirit who seemingly is content to read the same kind of silly story by the same tiresome writers. We believe this type of reader is so sadly in the minority that he couldn't be found except after arduous searching. We can't understand how even this small minority like the milk-and-water fiction that leaves a bad taste in the mouth. We have grown dissatisfied lately—*THE THRILL BOOK* being the result of a lot of thought along these lines. We finally determined to launch what we thought deserved a place in American literature—a magazine that not only published the weird and harrowing, but also the mystical, adventurous, spiritist, fantastic, and bizarre tale; in other words, any sort of story that lifted one out of this lethargy into which one falls while reading the average magazine.

We are proceeding with three ideals. First, our stories must be grippingly interesting—thrilling—absorbing—no matter whether they deal with mystery, adventure, or commonplace incidents. Second, our stories must be well done—not merely thrown together in a haphazard, newspaper fashion, but constructed carefully for the "new reader." Third, we will not spare our pocketbook or pad the pages. So far we have succeeded in the above three ideals. It is a big venture. It demands coöperation. Our readers must take up the cudgels and write to us and tell us what they think about *THE THRILL BOOK*. We contend that a magazine which does not appreciate the assistance of its readers' minds must prove worthless. We are the official publication of the "*Worldwide Fiction Readers Club*." We stand ready to produce the kind of story you can't get anywhere else for the smallest price at which we can issue the magazine. But we need the help of our Honorary Editors. Write to-day. Tell us all about it.

THE EDITOR.
