

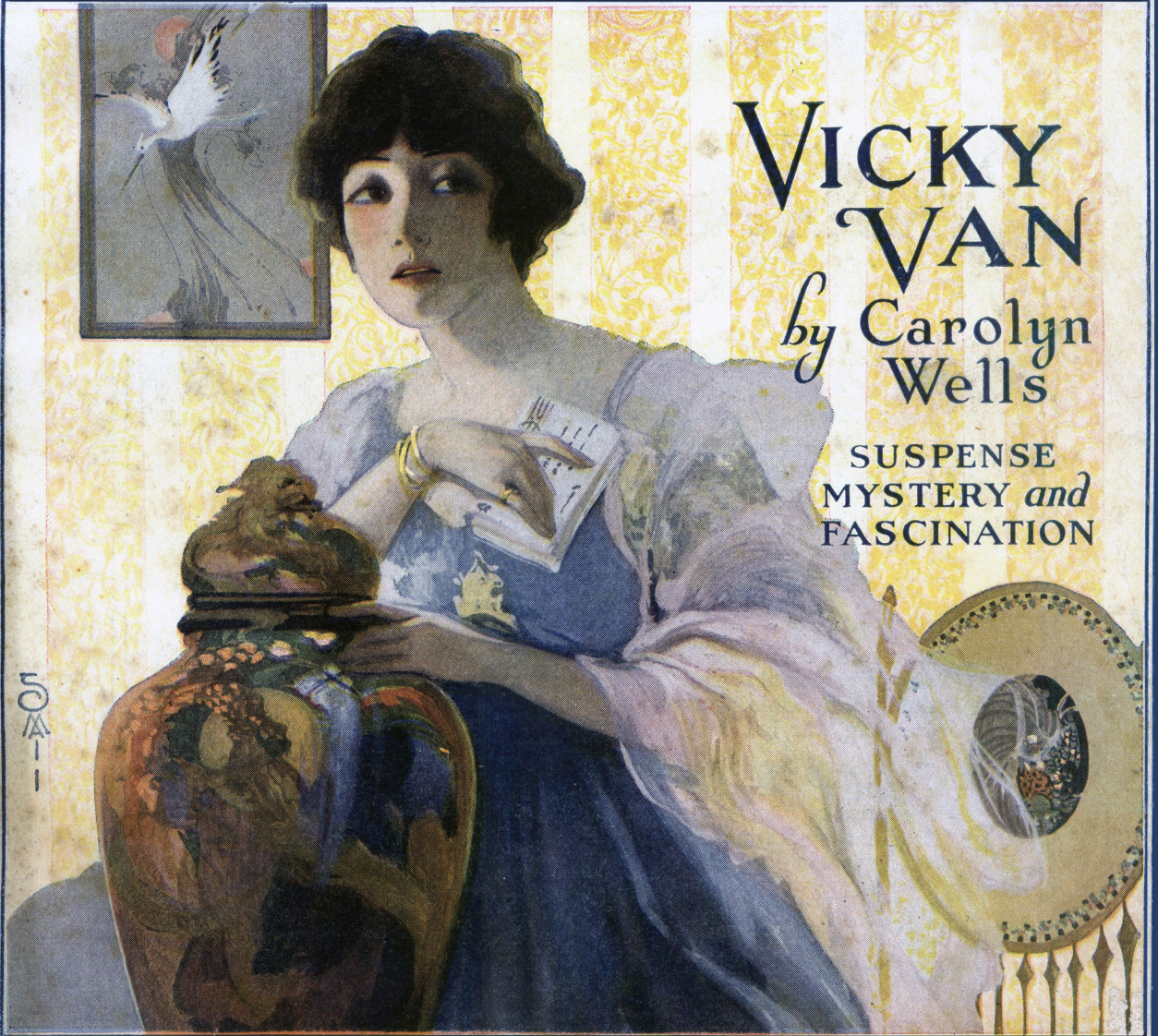
THE ARGOSY

DECEMBER 29, 1917

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Issued Weekly



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by Carolyn Wells

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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 8 West Fortieth Street New York

THE ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

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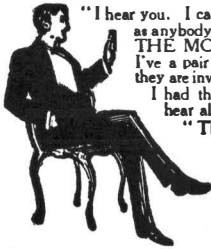
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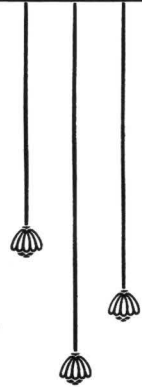
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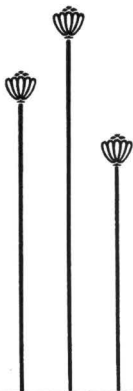
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THE ARGOSY

Vol. XC

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29, 1917

No. 1



Vicky Van By Carolyn Wells

Author of "The Maxwell Mystery," "Anybody But Anne," etc.

CHAPTER I.

VICKY VAN.

VICTORIA VAN ALLEN was the name she signed to her letters and checks, but Vicky Van, as her friends called her, was signed all over her captivating personality, from the top of her dainty, tossing head to the tips of her dainty, dancing feet.

I liked her from the first, and if her parties were timed by the small and early numerals on the clock-dial and her bridge games kept in circulation a goodly share of our country's legal tender, those things are not crimes.

I lived in one of the polite sections of New York City, up among the East Sixties. At the insistence of my sister and aunt, who lived with me, our home was near enough to the great boulevard to be designated by

that enviable phrase, "just off Fifth Avenue." We were on the north side of the street, and nearer the avenue, on the south side, was the home of Vicky Van.

Before I knew the girl I had seen her a few times on the steps of her house or entering her little car, and half-consciously I had noted her charm and her evident zest of life.

Later, when a club friend offered to take me there to call I accepted gladly and liked her from the first.

And yet, I never said much about her to my sister. I am, in a way, responsible for Winnie; and, too, she's too young to go where they play bridge for money. Little prize-bags or gift-shop novelties are her stakes.

Also Aunt Lucy, who helps me look after Win, wouldn't quite understand the atmosphere at Vicky's. It was not exactly Bo-

hemian—and yet, I suppose it did represent one usage of that handy-box of a term. I'll describe a party I went to there, and you can see for yourself what sort of a girl Vicky Van was.

"How late you're going out," said Winnie, as I wriggled into my top-coat one night. "It's after eleven."

"Little girls mustn't comment on big brothers' actions," I smiled back at her.

Win was nineteen, and I had attained the mature age of twenty-seven. We were orphans and spinster Aunt Lucy did her best to be a parent to us. We got on smoothly enough, for none of us had the temperament that rouses friction.

"Across the street?" Aunt Lucy guessed, raising her aristocratic eyebrows a hair's breadth.

"Yes," I returned, the least bit irritated. "Steele will be over there and I want to see him—"

This time said eyebrows went up frankly in amusement, and the kind, blue eyes beamed as she said:

"All right, Chet, run along."

Though I was Chester Calhoun, the junior partner of the law firm of Bradbury and Calhoun, and held myself in due and consequent respect, I didn't mind Aunt Lucy's calling me Chet, or even as she sometimes did, Chetty. A man puts up with those things from the women of the household. As to Winnie, she called me anything that came handy, from Lord Chesterton to Chessy-Cat.

I patted Aunt Lucy on her soft old shoulder and Winnie on her hard young head, and was off.

True, I did expect to see Steele at Vicky Van's—he was the club chap who had introduced me there—but, as Aunt Lucy had so cleverly suspected, he was not my sole reason for going. A more urgent reason was that I always had a good time there; the sort of a good time I liked.

I crossed the street diagonally, in defiance of much good advice I have heard and read against such a proceeding. But at eleven o'clock at night the traffic in those upper side streets is not sufficient to endanger life or limb, and I reached Vicky Van's house in safety.

It was a very small house, and it was the one nearest to the Fifth Avenue corner; though the long side of the first house on that block of the avenue lay between.

The windows on each floor were brilliantly lighted. I mounted the long flight of stone steps, sure of a merry welcome.

I was admitted by a maid, whom I already knew well enough to say "Evening, Julie," as I passed her; and in another moment I was in the long, narrow living-room and was a part of the gay group there.

"Angel child!" exclaimed Vicky Van herself, dancing toward me. "Did he come to see his little ole friend?"

Laying her two hands in mine for an instant, she considered me sufficiently welcomed, and danced off again. She was a will-o'-the-wisp, always tantalizing a man with a hope of special attention, and then flying away to another guest, only to treat him in the same way.

I looked after her—a slim, graceful thing, vibrant with the joy of living, smiling in sheer gaiety of heart, and pretty as a picture.

Her black hair, arranged in the newest style, covered her ears with soft loops and exposed the shape of her trim little head. It was banded with a jeweled fillet, or whatever they call those Oriental things that pretty girls wear, and her big eyes with their long, dark lashes, her pink cheeks and curved scarlet lips seemed to say, "the world owes me a good living and I'm going to collect."

Not as a matter of financial obligation, be it understood. Vicky Van had money enough, and, though nothing about her home was ostentatious or overornate, it was quietly and, in the best of taste, luxurious.

But I was describing Vicky herself. Her gown, the skirt part of it, was a sort of maize-colored thin stuff, rather short and full, that swirled as she moved and fluttered when she danced.

The bodice part was of heavily gold-spangled material; and a kind of overskirt arrangement consisted of long gold fringe made of beads. Instead of a yoke there were shoulder-straps of these same beads, and the sleeves were not there.

And yet, that costume was all right. Why, it was a rig I'd be glad to see Winnie in when she gets older, and if I've made it sound rather—er—gay and festive, it's my bungling way of describing it; and also, because Vicky's personality would add gaiety and festivity to any raiment.

On her little feet were golden slippers, a lot of ribbon criss-crossed over her ankles, and on the toe of each slipper was a gilt butterfly.

Yet with all this bewildering effect of frivolity, the first term I'd make use of in describing Vicky's character would be Touch-me-not. I believe there's a flower called that, *noli me tangere*, or some such name.

Well, that was Vicky Van. She'd laugh and jest with you, and then if you said anything by way of a personal compliment or flirtatious foolery, she was off and away from your side like a thistle-down in a summer breeze. She was a witch, a madcap, but she had her own way in everything, and her friends did her will without question.

Her setting, too, just suited her. Her living-room was one of those very narrow, very deep rooms so often seen in the New York side streets. It was done up in French gray and rose, as was the dictum of the moment. On the rose-brocaded walls were but few pictures, but just the right ones. Gray-enameled furniture and deep window-seats, with rose-colored cushions, provided resting-places, and soft rose-shaded lights gave a mild glow of illumination.

Flowers were everywhere. Great bowls of roses, jars of pink carnations and occasionally a vase of pink orchids were on mantle, low bookcases or piano. Sometimes the odor of a cigarette or a burning pastille of Oriental fragrance added to the Bohemian effect, which is, oftener than not, discernible by the sense of smell.

Vicky herself detested perfumes or odor of any kind save fresh flowers. Indeed, she detested Bohemianism when it meant unconventional dress or manners or loud-voiced jests or songs.

Her house was dainty, correct and artistic; and yet I knew its atmosphere would not please Aunt Lucy or be just the right place for Winnie.

Many of the guests I knew. Cassie Wel-

don was a concert singer and Ariadne Gale an artist of some prominence, both socially and in her art circle. Jim Ferris and Bailey Mason were actors of a good sort, and Bert Garrison, a member of one of my best clubs, was a fast-rising architect. Steele hadn't come yet.

Two tables of bridge were playing in the back part of the room, and in the rest of the rather limited space several couples were dancing.

"Mayn't we open the doors to the dining-room, Vicky?" called out one of the card-players. "The calorics of this room must be about ninety in the shade."

"Open them a little way," returned Miss Van Allen. "But not wide, for there's a surprise supper and I don't want you to see it yet."

They set the double doors a few inches ajar and went on with their game. The dining-room, as I knew, was a wide room that ran all across the house behind both living-room and hall. It was beautifully decorated in pale-green and silver, and often Vicky Van would have a "surprise" supper, at which the favors or entertainers would be well worth waiting for.

Having greeted many whom I knew, I sought further speech with my hostess.

"She's up-stairs in the music-room," said Cassie Weldon, seeing and interpreting my questing glance.

"Thank you, lady, for those kind words," I called back over my shoulder, and went as directed.

The front room on the second floor was dubbed the "music-room," Vicky said, because there was a banjo in it. Sometimes the guests brought more banjos and a concert of glee and college songs would ensue. But more often, as to-night, it was a little haven of rest and peace from the laughter and jest below-stairs.

It was an exquisite white and gold room, and here, too, as I entered, pale-pink shades dimmed the lights to a soft radiance that seemed like a breaking dawn.

Vicky sat enthroned on a white divan, her feet crossed on a gold-embroidered, white satin foot-cushion. In front of her sat three or four of her guests, all laughing and chatting.

"But he vowed he was going to get here somehow," Mrs. Reeves was saying.

"What's his name?" asked Vicky, though in a voice of little interest.

"Somers," returned Mrs. Reeves.

"Never heard of him. Did you, Mr. Calhoun?" and Vicky Van looked up at me as I entered.

"No; Miss Van Allen. Who is he?"

"I don't know and I don't care. Only, as Mrs. Reeves says, he is coming here to-night, I'd like to know something about him."

"Coming here! A man you don't know?" I drew up a chair to join the group. "How can he?"

"Mr. Steele is going to bring him," said Mrs. Reeves. "He says Mr. Somers is a first-class, all-around chap and no end of fun. Says he's a millionaire."

"What's a millionaire more or less to me?" laughed Vicky. "I choose my friends for their lovely character, not for their wealth."

"Yes, you've selected all of us for that, dear," agreed Mrs. Reeves, "but this Somers gentleman may be amiable, too."

Mrs. Reeves was a solid, sensible sort of person, who acted as ballast for the volatile Vicky, and sometimes reprimanded her in a mild way.

"I love the child," she had said to me once, "and she is a little brick. But once in a while I have to tell her a few things for the good of the community. She takes it all like an angel."

"Well, I don't care," Vicky went on, "Norman Steele has no right to bring anybody here whom he hasn't asked me about. If I don't like Mr. Somers I shall ask some of you nice, amiable men to get me a long plank, and we'll put it out of a window and make him walk it. Shall we?"

We all agreed to do this, or to tar and feather and ride on a rail any gentleman who might in any way be so unfortunate as to fall one iota short of Vicky Van's requirements.

"And now," said Vicky, "if you'll all please go down-stairs, except Mrs. Reeves and Mr. Garrison and my own sweet self, I'll be orfly obliged to you."

The sweeping gesture with which she

sought to dismiss us was a wave of her white arms and a smile of her red lips.

I, for one, found it impossible to obey. I started with the rest, and then after the gay crowd was part-way down-stairs I turned back.

"Please mayn't I join your little class, if I'll be very good?" I begged. "I don't want Bert Garrison to be left alone at the mercy of two such sirens."

Miss Van Allen hesitated. Her pink-tipped forefinger rested a moment on her curved lip.

"Yes," she said, nodding her head. "Yes, stay, Mr. Calhoun. You may be a help. Are you any good at getting theater-boxes after they're all sold?"

"That's my profession," I returned. "I learned it from a correspondence school. Where's the theater? Lead me to it!"

"It's the Metropolis," she replied. "I want to have two boxes for a party there to-morrow night, and this awful, dreadful, bad Mr. Garrison says they're all sold and I can't get any! What can you do about it?"

"Oh, I'll fix it. I'll go to the people who bought the boxes you want, and I'll fix up such a yarn that they'll beg me to take the boxes off their hands."

"Oh, will you, really?" The dazzling smile she gave me would have repaid even a more herculean task.

Of course, I hadn't meant it; but when she thought I did, I couldn't go back on my word.

"I'll do my best, Miss Van Allen," I said seriously; "and if I can't possibly turn the trick, I'll—well, I'll buy the Metropolitan Opera House and put on a show of my own."

"No," she laughed, "you needn't do that. But if you try and fail—why, we'll just have a little party here, a sort of consolation party and—oh, let's have some private theatricals! Wouldn't that be fun?"

"More fun than the original program?" I asked quickly, hoping to be let off my promise.

"No, sir!" she cried. "Decidedly not! I want especially to have that theater-party and supper afterward at the Britz. Now you do all you can, won't you?"

I promised to do all I could, and I really had a faint hope that I could get what she wanted by hook or crook.

Then, as she heard a favorite fox-trot being dashed off on the piano down-stairs, Vicky Van sprang from her seat and, kicking the satin cushion aside, asked me to dance. In a moment we were whirling around the music-room to the zipping music, followed by Mrs. Reeves and Garrison.

Vicky danced with a natural talent that is quite unlike anything acquired by lessons. I had no need to guide her; she divined my lead and swayed in any direction, even as I was about to indicate it. I had never danced with any one who danced so well, and I was profuse in my thanks and praise.

"I love it," she said simply as she patted the gold fringes of her gown into place. "I adore dancing, and you are one of the best partners I have ever had. Come, let us go down and cut into a bridge game. We'll just about have time before supper."

Pirouetting before me, she led the way, and we went down the long, steep stairs.

A shout greeted her appearance in the doorway.

"Oh, Vicky, we've missed you! Come over here and listen to Ted's latest old joke!"

"No, come over here and hear this awful gossip Ariadne is telling for solemn truth. It's the worst taradiddle she ever got off!"

"Here's a place, Vicky Van; a nice cozy corner 'tween Jim and me. Come on, lady-girl."

"No, thanks, everybody. I'm going to cut in at this table. May I? Am I a nuisance?"

"A Vicky-nuisance? They ain't no such animal!" Bailey Mason rose to give her his chair.

"No," said she, "I want you to stay, Mr. Mason. 'Cause why? I want to play wiz you. Cassie, you give me your place, won't you, Ducky-Daddles, and you go and flirt with Mr. Calhoun. He knows the very newest flirts! Go, give him a tryout."

Vicky Van settled herself into her seat with the happy little sigh of the bridge lover who sits down with three good players,

and in another moment she was breathlessly looking over her hand.

"Without," she said triumphantly, and knowing she'd say no word more to me for the present, I walked away with Cassie Weldon.

Cassie was good fun. She took me to the piano, and with the soft pedal down, she showed me a new little tone-picture she had made up, which was both picturesque and funny.

"You'd better go into vaudeville," I exclaimed as she finished. "Your talent is wasted on the concert platform."

"That's what Vicky tells me," she returned. "Sometimes I believe I will try it, just for fun."

"You'll find it such fun, you'll stay in for earnest," I assured her, for she had shown a bit of inventive genius that I felt sure would make good in a little musical turn.

CHAPTER II.

MR. SOMERS.

IT was nearly midnight when Steele came. With him was a man I had never seen before and whom I assumed to be the Mr. Somers I had heard about.

It was. As Steele entered, he cast his eye around for Vicky and saw her at the bridge table down at the end of the room. Her back was toward us, and she was so absorbed in the game she did not look round, if, indeed, she heard the noise of their arrival.

The two men stopped near the group I was with and Steele introduced Mr. Somers.

A little curiously I looked at the stranger. I saw a large, self-satisfied man wearing an expansive smile and expensive apparel. Clothes the best procurable, jewelry just inside the limits of good taste—he bore himself like a gentleman, yet there was an unmistakable air of ostentatious wealth that repelled me.

A second look made me think Mr. Somers had dined either late or twice, but his greetings were courteous and genial and his manner sociable, if a little patronizing. He seemed a stranger to all present, and

his eye roved about for the charming hostess Steele had told him of.

"We'll reach Miss Van Allen presently," Steele laughed in answer to the glance, "if, indeed, we dare interrupt her game. Let's make progress slowly."

"No hurry," returned Somers affably, beaming on Cassie Weldon and meeting Ariadne Gale's receptive smile. "I'm anchored here for the moment. Miss Weldon? Ah, yes, I've heard you sing. Voice like a lark—like a lark."

Clearly, Somers was not much of a purveyor of small talk. I sized him up for a lumbering oldster who wanted to be playful, but didn't quite know how.

He had rather an austere face, yet there was a gleam in his eye that belied the austerity. His cheeks were fat and red, his nose prominent, and he was clean-shaven, save for a thick, white mustache that drooped slightly on either side of a full-lipped mouth.

His hair was white, his eyes dark and deep-set, and he could easily be called a handsome man. He was surely fifty, and perhaps more. Had it not been for a certain effusiveness in his speech I could have liked him; but he seemed to me to lack sincerity.

However, I am not one to judge harshly or hastily. I met him half-way and even helped him in his efforts at gay affability.

"You've never been here before? I asked good old Steele to bring you to-night."

"No, never before," and he glanced around appreciatively. "But I shall, I hope, come often. Charming little nest; charming ladies!"

A bow included those nearest.

"Yes, indeed," babbled Ariadne. "Fair women and brave men."

"Brave, yes," agreed Somers, "to dare the glances of such bright eyes. I must protect my heart!"

He clasped his fat hands pretty near where his heart was situated, and grinned with delight as Ariadne also "protected" her heart.

"Ah," he cried, "two hearts in danger! I feel sure we shall be friends, if only because misery loves company."

"Is it really misery with you?" and

Ariadne's sympathy was so evidently profound that Cassie Weldon and I walked away.

"I'll give Ariadne her innings," said the vivacious Miss Weldon, "and I'll make up to the Somers kid later. Where 'd Vicky pick him up?"

"She doesn't know him at all. Norman Steele brought him unbeknownst."

"No! Why, Vick doesn't allow that sort of thing."

"So I'm told. Anyway, Steele did it."

"Well, Vick's such a good-natured darling, maybe she won't mind for once. She won't if she likes the little stranger. He's well-meaning, at any rate."

"So's Ariadne. From her smile I think she means to sell him her latest 'Autumn in the Adirondacks,' or 'Lady with a Handbag'."

"Now, don't be mean!" But Cassie laughed. "And I don't blame her if she does. Poor Ad paints above the heads of the public; so if this is a high-up publican she'd better make sales while the sun shines."

"What's her work like?"

"You can see more of it in this house than anywhere else. Vicky is so fond of Ariadne and so sorry her pictures don't sell better, that she buys a lot herself."

"Does Miss Gale know Miss Van Allen does it out of—"

"Don't say charity! No, they're really good stuff, and Vicky buys 'em for Christmas gifts and bridge prizes."

"Does she ever play for prizes? I thought she preferred a bit of a stake."

"She does at evening parties. But often we have a dove game of an afternoon with prizes and pink tea. Vicky Van isn't a gay doll, you know. She's—why sometimes she's positively domestic. I wish she had a nice husband and some little kiddies."

"Why hasn't she?"

"Give it up. She's never seen any man she loved, I s'pose."

"Perhaps she'll love this Somers person."

"Heaven forbid! Nothing less than a crown prince would suit her. Look, she's turning to meet him. Won't he be bowled over!"

I turned, and though there were several

people between us, I caught a glimpse of Somers's face as he was presented to Miss Van Allen. He was bowled over. His eyes beamed with admiration, and he bowed low as he raised to his lips the dainty, bejeweled hand.

Vicky, apparently, did not welcome this old-time greeting; she drew away her hand, saying:

"Not allowed. Naughty man! Express proper compunction, or you can't sit next me at supper!"

"Forgive me," begged Somers. "I'm sorry! I'll never do it again—until after I sit next you at supper!"

"More brains than I thought," I said to Cassie, who nodded.

Vicky Van rose from her chair.

"Take my place for a moment, Mr. Somers," she said, standing before him. "I"—she dropped her eyes adorably—"I must see about the arrangement of seats at the supper-table."

With a merry laugh, she ran from the room and through the long hall to the dining-room.

Somers dropped into her vacant chair, and continued the bridge game with the air of one who knows how to play.

In less than five minutes Vicky was back.

"No, keep the hand," she said, as he rose. "I've played long enough. And supper will be ready shortly."

"Finish the rubber—I insist," Somers returned, and as he determinedly stood behind the chair, Vicky, perforce, sat down.

He continued to stand behind her chair, watching her play. Vicky was too sure of her game to be rattled at his close scrutiny, but it seemed to me her shoulders shrugged a little impatiently as he criticised or commended her plays.

She had thrown a light scarf of gauze or tulle around her when she was out of the room, and, being the same color as her gown, it made her more than ever like a houri. She smiled up into Somers's face, and then, coyly, her long lashes fell on her pink cheeks. Evidently she had concluded to bewitch the newcomer, and she was making good.

I drew nearer, principally because I liked to look at her. She was a live wire to-night!

She looked roguish, and she made most brilliant plays, tossing down her cards with gay gestures and doing trick shuffles with her twinkling fingers.

"You could have had that last trick if you'd played for it," Somers said, as the rubber finished.

"I know it," Vicky conceded. "I saw, just too late, that I was getting the lead into the wrong hand."

"Well, don't ever do that again," he said lightly. "Never again."

As he said the last word, he laid his finger-tips on her shoulder. It was the lightest touch and her shoulder was swathed in the transparent tulle, but still it roused Vicky. She glanced up at him, and I looked at him, too.

But Somers was not in flirtatious mood. He said, "I beg your pardon," in most correct fashion. Had he then touched her inadvertently? It didn't seem so, but his speech assured it.

Vicky jumped up from the table and, ignoring Somers, ran out to the hall, saying something about looking after the surprise for the supper.

To my surprise, Somers followed her; not hastily, but rather deliberately. Quelling an absurd impulse to go, too, I turned to Norman Steele, who stood near.

"Who's this Somers?" I asked rather abruptly. "Is he all right?"

"You bet," said Steele, smiling. "He's a top-notch."

"In what respects?"

"Every and all."

"You've known him long?"

"Yes. I tell you, Cal, he's all right. Forget it. What's the surprise for supper? Do you know?"

"Of course not. It wouldn't be a surprise if we all knew of it."

"Well, Vicky's surprises are always great fun. Why the grouch, old man? Can't you chirrup?"

"Oh, I'm all right."

I felt annoyed that he read in my face that I was put out. I didn't like Somers, but I couldn't say so to the man who had brought him there.

"Oh, please! Oh, please!" shouted a hoarse, strange voice, and one scarcely to

be heard above the hum of gay voices and peals of gay laughter. "Oh, somebody, please!"

I looked across the room. In the wide hall doorway stood a man, who quite evidently was a waiter. He was white-faced and staring-eyed, and he fairly hung on to a portière for support as he repeated his agonized plea.

"What is it?" said Mrs. Reeves, as everybody else stared at the man. "What do you want?"

She stepped toward him, and we all turned to look.

"Not you—no, madam. Some man, please—some doctor. Is there one here?"

"Some of the servants ill?" asked Mrs. Reeves kindly. "Dr. Remson, will you come?"

The pleasant-faced, capable-looking woman paused only until Dr. Remson joined her. The two went into the hall, the waiter following slowly.

In a moment I heard a shriek, a wild scream. Partly curiosity and partly a foreboding of harm to Vicky Van, made me rush forward.

Mrs. Reeves had screamed, and I ran the length of the hall to the dining-room. There I saw Somers on the floor and Remson bending over him.

"He's killed! He's stabbed!" cried Mrs. Reeves, clutching at my arm as I reached her. "Oh, what shall we do?"

She stood just in the dining-room doorway, which was at the end of the long hall, as in most city houses. The room was but dimly lighted, the table candles not yet burning.

"Keep the people back!" I shouted, as those in the living-room pressed out into the hall. "Steele, keep those girls back!"

There was an awful commotion. The man urged the women back, but curiosity and horror made them surge forward in irresistible force.

"Shut the door," whispered Remson. "This man is dead. It's an awful situation. Shut that door!"

Somehow, I managed to get the door closed between the dining-room and hall. On the inside were Remson, Mrs. Reeves, who wouldn't budge, and myself. Outside

in the hall was a crowd of hysterical women and frightened men.

"Are you sure?" I asked in a low voice, going nearer to the doctor and looking at Somers's fast-glazing eyes.

"Sure. He was stabbed straight to the heart with—see—a small, sharp knife."

Her hands over her eyes, but peering through her fingers, Mrs. Reeves drew near.

"Not really," she moaned. "Oh, not really dead! Can't we do anything?"

"No," said Remson, rising to his feet from his kneeling position. "He's dead, I tell you. Who did it?"

"That waiter—" I began, and then stopped.

Looking in from a door opposite the hall door, probably one that led to a butler's pantry or kitchen, were half a dozen white-faced waiters.

"Come in here," said Remson. "Not all of you. Which is chief?"

"I am, sir," and a head-waiter came into the room. "What has happened?"

"A man has been killed," said the doctor shortly. "Who are you? Who are you all? House servants?"

"No, sir," said the chief. "We're caterer's men. From Frascini's. I'm Luigi. We are here to serve supper."

"What do you know of this?"

"Nothing, sir," and the Italian looked truthful, though scared.

"Haven't you been in and out of the dining-room all evening?"

"Yes, sir. Setting the table and such. But now it's all ready, and I am waiting Miss Van Allen's word to serve it."

"Where is Miss Van Allen?" I broke in.

"I—I don't know, sir."

Luigi hesitated and Dr. Remson interrupted.

"We mustn't ask these questions, Mr. Calhoun. We must call the police."

"The police?" cried Mrs. Reeves. "Oh, no! no! Don't do that."

"It is my duty," said the doctor firmly. "And no one must enter or leave this room until an officer arrives. You waiters, stay there in that pantry. Close those doors to the other room, Mr. Calhoun, please. Mrs. Reeves, I'm sorry, but I must ask you to stay here—"

"I won't do it!" declared the lady. "You're not an officer of the law. I'll stay in the house, but not in this room."

She stalked out into the hall.

Dr. Remson went at once to the telephone and called up headquarters.

The guests in the living-room, hearing this, flew into a panic.

Of course, it was no longer possible, nor, as I could see, desirable to keep them in ignorance of what had happened.

After calling the police, Dr. Remson returned to his post just inside the dining-room door. He answered questions patiently at first, but after being nearly driven crazy by the frantic women, he said sharply:

"You may all do just as you like. I've no authority here, except what the ethics of my profession dictate. That does not extend to jurisdiction over the guests present. But I advise you as a matter of common decency to stay here until this affair is investigated."

But they didn't. Many gathered up their wraps and left as quickly as possible.

Cassie Weldon came to me in her distress.

"I must go, Mr. Calhoun," she said. "Don't you think I may? Why, it would interfere greatly with my work to have it known that I was mixed up in a—"

"You're not mixed up in it, Miss Weldon." I began to speak a little sternly, but the look in her eyes aroused my sympathy. "Well, go on," I said. "I suppose you will testify if called on. Everybody knows where to find you."

"Yes," she said slowly, "but I hope I won't be called on. Why, it might spoil my whole career."

She slipped out of the door, in the wake of some other departing guests. After all, I thought, it couldn't matter much. Few, if any of them were implicated, and they could all be found at their homes.

And yet I had a vague idea that we ought all to stay.

"I shall remain and face the music," I heard Mrs. Reeves saying. "Where is Vicky? Do you suppose she knows about this? I'm going up in the music-room to see if she's there. You know, despite all the excitement down here, those up-stairs may know nothing of it."

"I shall remain, too," said Ariadne Gale. "Why should any one kill Mr. Somers? Did the caterer's people do it? What an awful thing! Will it be in the papers?"

"Will it!" said Garrison, who was standing near. "Reporters may be here any minute. Where is Miss Van Allen?"

"I don't know," and Ariadne began to cry.

"Stop that," said Mrs. Reeves gruffly, but not unkindly. "Stay if you want to, Ariadne, but behave like a sensible woman, not a silly schoolgirl. This is an awful tragedy of some sort."

"What do you mean, of some sort?" asked Miss Gale.

"I mean we don't know what revelations are yet to come. Where's Norman Steele? Where's the man who brought Somers here?"

Where, indeed, was Steele? I had forgotten all about him. It was he who had introduced Somers to the Van Allen house. No one else present, so far as I knew, was previously acquainted with the man now lying dead the other side of that closed door.

I looked over the people who had stayed. There were only a handful; perhaps half a dozen.

I wondered if I had not better go home myself. Not for my own sake; indeed, I preferred to remain, but I thought of Aunt Lucy and Win. Ought I to bring on them any shadow of trouble or opprobrium that might result from my presence in that house at that time? Would it not be better to go while I could? For, once the police took charge, I knew I should be called on to testify in public.

Even as I debated with myself, the police arrived.

CHAPTER III.

THE WAITER'S STORY.

DOCTOR REMSON'S call had been imperative. Inspector Mason came in with two men.

"What's this? What's wrong here?" the big, burly inspector said, as he faced the few of us who had remained.

"Come in here, inspector," said the doctor from the dining-room door.

From that moment the whole aspect of the house seemed to change. No longer a gay little bijou residence, it became a court of justice.

The two men were stationed at the street door and the area door below. Headquarters was notified of details. The coroner was summoned, and for the moment we were all under detention.

"Where is Miss Van Allen? Where is the lady of the house?" asked Mason. "Where are the servants? Who is in charge here?"

Was ever a string of questions so impossible of answers?

Dr. Remson told the main facts, but he was reticent. I, too, hesitated to say much, for the case was strange indeed.

Mrs. Reeves looked gravely concerned, but said nothing.

Ariadne Gale began to babble. That girl didn't know how to be quiet.

"I guess Miss Van Allen is up-stairs," she volunteered. "She was in the dining-room, but she isn't here now, so she must be up-stairs. Shall I go and see?"

"No!" thundered the inspector. "Stay where you are. Search the house, Breen. I'll cover the street door."

The man he called Breen went up-stairs on the jump and Mason continued:

"Tell the story, one of you. Who is this man? Who killed him?"

As he talked, the inspector was examining Somers's body, making rapid notes in a little book, keeping his eyes on the door, and darting quick glances at each of us, as he tried to grasp the situation.

I looked at Bert Garrison, who was perhaps the most favored of Miss Van Allen's friends, but he shook his head; so I threw myself into the breach.

"Inspector," I said, "that man's name is Somers. Further than that I know nothing. He is a stranger to all of us, and he came to this house to-night for the first time in his life."

"How'd he happen to come? Friend of Miss Van Allen?"

"He met her to-night for the first time. He came here with—" I paused. It was so

hard to know what to do. Steele had gone home. Ought I to implicate him?

"Go on—came here with whom? The truth, now."

"I usually speak the truth," I returned shortly. "He came with Mr. Norman Steele."

"Where is Mr. Steele?"

"He has gone. There were a great many people here, and naturally some of them went away when this tragedy was discovered."

"Humph! Then, of course, the guilty party escaped. But we are getting nowhere. Does anybody know anything of the man but his name?"

Nobody did; but Ariadne piped up:

"He was a delightful man. He told me he was a great patron of art and often bought pictures."

Paying little heed to her, the inspector was endeavoring to learn from the dead man's property something more about him.

"No letters or papers?" he said, disappointedly, as he turned out the pockets. "Not unusual—in evening togs—but not even a card or anything personal; looks queer."

"Look in his watch," said Ariadne, bridle with importance.

Giving her a keen glance, the inspector followed her suggestion. In the back of the case was a picture of a coquettish face, undoubtedly that of an actress. It was not carefully fastened in, but roughly cut out and pressed in with ragged edges.

"Temporary," grunted the inspector, "and recently stuck in. Some chicken he took out to supper. He's a clubman, eh?"

"Yes, Mr. Steele said so, and also vouched for his worth and character."

I resented the inspector's attitude. Though I knew nothing of Somers, and didn't altogether like him, yet I saw no reason to think ill of the dead until circumstances warranted it.

Further search brought a thick roll of money, some loose silver, a key-ring with seven or eight keys, eye-glasses in a silver case, handkerchiefs, a gold pencil, a knife, and such trifles as any man might have in his pockets, but no directly identifying piece of property.

R. S. was embroidered in tiny white letters on the handkerchiefs, and a monogram R. S. was on his seal-ring.

His jewelry, which was costly, the inspector did not touch. There were magnificent pearl studs, a watch-fob, set with a black opal, and pearl cuff-links. Examination of his hat showed the pierced letters R. S., but nothing gave clue to his Christian name.

"Somers," said the inspector musingly. "What club does he belong to?"

"I don't know," I replied. "Mr. Steele belongs to several, but Mr. Somers does not belong to any that I do. At least, I've never seen him at any."

"Call in the servants. Let's find out something about this household."

As no one else moved to do it, I stepped to the door of the butler's pantry and summoned the head-waiter of the caterer.

"Where are the house servants?" I asked him.

"There aren't any, sir," he replied, looking shudderingly at the grisly form on the floor.

"No servants? In a house of this type? What do you mean?"

"That's true," said Mrs. Reeves, breaking her silence at last. "Miss Van Allen has a very capable woman who is housekeeper and ladies' maid in one. When guests are here the suppers are served from the caterer's."

"Then call the housekeeper. And where is Miss Van Allen herself?"

"She's not in the house," said the policeman, Breen, returning from his search.

"Not in the house!" cried Mrs. Reeves. "Where is she?"

"I've been all over—every room, every floor. She isn't in the house. There's nobody up-stairs at all."

"No housekeeper or maid?" demanded Mason. "Then they've got away! Here, waiter, tell me all you know of this thing."

The Italian, Luigi, came forward, shaking with terror and wringing his fingers.

"I d-don't know anything about it," he began, but Mason interrupted.

"You do! You know all about it! Did you kill this man?"

"No! *Dio mio!* A thousand times no!"

"Then, unless you wish to be suspected of it, tell all you know."

A commotion at the door heralded the coroner's arrival, with a detective and a couple of plain-clothes men. Clearly, it was a mysterious case.

The coroner at once took matters into his own hands. Inspector Mason told him all that had been learned so far, and though Coroner Fenn seemed to think matters had been pretty well bungled, he made no comment and proceeded with the inquiries.

"Sure there's nobody up-stairs?" he asked Breen.

"Positive. I looked in every nook and cranny. I've raked the whole house except the basement and kitchen."

"Go down there, then, and then go back and search up-stairs again. Somebody may be hiding. Who here knows Miss Van Allen the most intimately?"

"Perhaps I do," said Mrs. Reeves, "or Miss Gale. We are both her warm friends."

"I am also her friend," volunteered Bert Garrison. "And I can guarantee that if Miss Van Allen has fled from this house it was out of sheer fright. She never saw this man until to-night. He was a stranger to us all."

"Where's the housekeeper?" went on Fenn.

"I think she must be somewhere about," said Mrs. Reeves. "Perhaps in the kitchen. Julie is an all-around capable woman. When there are no guests she prepares Miss Van Allen's meals herself. When company is present the caterer always is employed."

"And there are no other servants?"

"Not permanent ones," replied Mrs. Reeves. "I believe the laundress and chore-boy come by the day, also cleaning women and such. But I know that Miss Van Allen has no resident servant beside the maid, Julie."

"This woman must be found," snapped the coroner. "But we must first of all identify the body. Mason, call up the principal clubs on the telephone, and locate R. Somers. Also, find Mr. Norman Steele. Now, Luigi, let's have your story."

The trembling waiter stammered incoherently and said little of moment.

"Look here," said Fenn bluntly, "is

that your knife sticking in him? I mean, is it the one belonging to Fraschini's service? Don't touch it, but look at it. You can tell."

Luigi leaned over the dead man.

"Yes, it is one of our boning-knives," he said. "We always bring our own hardware."

"Well, then, if you want to clear yourself and your men of doubt, tell all you know."

"I know this"—and Luigi braced himself to the ordeal—"I was waiting in the pantry for Miss Van Allen to send me word to serve supper, and I peeped in the dining-room now and then to see if it was time. I heard, presently, Miss Van Allen's voice, also a man's voice. I didn't want to intrude, so waited for a summons. After a moment or two I heard a little scream, and heard somebody or something fall. I had no thought of any wrong, but thought the guests were unusually—er—riotous."

"Are Miss Van Allen's guests inclined to be riotous?"

"No, sir; oh, no," asseverated the man, while Mrs. Reeves and Ariadne looked indignant. "And for that reason I felt a little curious; so I pushed the door ajar and peeped in."

"What did you see?"

"I saw—" Luigi paused so long that I feared he was going to collapse. But, as the coroner eyed him sternly, he went on:

"I saw Miss Van Allen standing, looking down at this—this gentleman on the floor, and making as if to pull out the knife. I could scarcely believe my eyes, and I watched her. She didn't pull the knife, but she straightened up, looked around, glanced down at her gown, which—which was stained with blood—and then—she ran out into the hall."

"Where did she go?"

"I don't know. I couldn't see, as the door was only open a crack. Then I thought I ought to go into the dining-room, and I did. I looked at the gentleman, and I didn't know what to do. So I went into the hall, to the parlor door, and called for help, for a doctor or somebody. And then they all came out there. That's all I know."

Luigi's nerve gave way, and he sank into a chair with a sob. Fenn looked at him,

"Can this be true?" he said, turning to us. "Can you suspect Miss Van Allen of this crime?"

"No!" cried Bert Garrison and the women at once.

And "No!" said I. "I am positive Miss Van Allen did not know Mr. Somers and could not have killed an utter stranger—on no provocation whatever."

"You do not know what provocation she may have had," suggested Fenn.

"Now, look here, Mr. Coroner," said Mrs. Reeves very decidedly, "I won't have Miss Van Allen spoken of in any such way. I assume you mean that this man, though a stranger, might have said or done something to annoy or offend Miss Van Allen."

"Well, if he had done so, Victoria Van Allen wouldn't have killed him! She is the gentlest, most gay and light-hearted girl, and though she never tolerates any rudeness or familiarity, the idea of her killing a man is too absurd. You might as well suspect a dove or a butterfly of crime!"

"That's right, Mr. Coroner," said Garrison. "That waiter's story is an hallucination of some sort—if it isn't deliberate falsification. Miss Van Allen is a dainty, happy creature, and to connect her with anything like this is absurd!"

"That's to be found out, Mr. Garrison. Why did Miss Van Allen run away?"

"I don't admit that she did run away—in the sense of flight. If she were frightened at this thing—if she saw it—she may have run out of the door in hysterics or in a panic of terror. But she the perpetrator? Never!"

"Never!" echoed Mrs. Reeves. "The poor child! If she did come out here and saw this awful sight—why, I think it would unhinge her mind!"

"Who is Miss Van Allen?" asked Fenn. "What is her occupation?"

"She hasn't an occupation," said Mrs. Reeves. "She is a young lady of independent fortune. As to her people or immediate relatives, I know nothing at all. I've known her but a year or so, and as

she never referred to such matters, I never inquired. But she's a thorough little gentlewoman, and I'll defend her against any slander to my utmost power."

"And so will I," said Miss Gale. "I'm sure of her fineness of character and lovely nature."

"But these opinions, ladies, don't help our inquiries," interrupted Fenn. "What can you men tell us? What I want, first, is to identify this body; or, rather, to learn more of R. Somers, and to find Miss Van Allen. I can't hold an inquest until these points are cleared up. Mason, have you found out anything?"

"No," said the inspector, returning from his long telephone quest. "I called up four clubs. Norman Steele belongs to three of them, but this man doesn't seem to belong to any. That is, there are Somerses and even R. Somerses, but they all have middle names, and, too, their description doesn't fit this Somers."

"Then Mr. Steele misrepresented him. Did you get Steele, Mason?"

"No; he wasn't at any of the clubs. I found his residence, a bachelor apartment-house, but he isn't there, either."

"Find Steele; find Miss Van Allen; find the maid—what's her name? Julia?"

"Julie, she was always called," said Mrs. Reeves. "If Miss Van Allen went away, I've no doubt Julie went with her. She is a most devoted caretaker of her mistress."

"An oldish woman?"

"No. Perhaps between thirty-five and forty."

"What's she look like?"

"Describe her, Ariadne; you're an artist."

"Julie," said Miss Gale, "is a good sort. She's medium-sized; she has brown hair and rather hazel eyes; she wears glasses, and she stoops a little in her walk. She has perfect training and correct manners. She is a model servant, and she gives the impression of watching over Miss Van Allen, whatever else she may be engaged in at the time."

"Wears black?"

"No; usually gray gowns, or sometimes white. Inconspicuous aprons and no cap.

She's not quite a menial, but yet not entirely a housekeeper."

"English?"

"English-speaking, if that's what you mean. But I think she's an American. Don't you, Mrs. Reeves?"

"American? Yes, of course."

CHAPTER IV.

SOMERS'S REAL NAME.

DETECTIVE LOWNEY, who had come with the coroner, had said little, but had listened to all. Occasionally he would dart from the room, and return a few moments later, scribbling in his note-book. He was an alert little man, with beady black eyes and a stubby black mustache.

"I want a few words with that caterer's man," he said suddenly. "Then they'd better clear away this supper business and go home."

We all turned to look at the table. It stood at the end of the dining-room, and that was back of the living-room. The sideboard was at the opposite end, back of the hall, and it was directly in front of the sideboard that Somers's body lay.

Lowney turned on more light, and a thrill went through us at the incongruity of that gay table and the tragedy so near it.

As always at Vicky Van's parties, the appointments were dainty and elaborate. Flowers decorated the table; the lace, silver, and glass were of finest quality; and in the center was the contrivance known as "Jack Horner Pie."

"That was to be the surprise," said Mrs. Reeves. "I knew about it. The pie is full of lovely trinkets and little jokes on the guests."

"I thought those things were for children's parties," observed Fenn, looking with interest at the gorgeous confection.

"They're really for birthdays," said Mrs. Reeves, "and to-day is Vicky's birthday. That was part of her surprise. She didn't want it known, lest the guests should bring gifts. She's like a child, Vicky is, just as happy over a birthday party as a little girl would be."

"What does Miss Van Allen look like?" asked the detective.

"She's pretty," replied Mrs. Reeves—"awfully pretty, but not a raving beauty. Black hair, and bright, fresh coloring—"

"How was she dressed? Giddy clothes?"

"In an evening gown," returned Mrs. Reeves, resentful of the detective's manner. "A beautiful French gown, of tulle and gold trimmings."

"Low-necked and all that? Jewels?"

"Yes," I said, as Mrs. Reeves disdained to answer. "Full evening costume, and a necklace and earrings of amber set in gold."

"What I'm getting at," said Lowney, "is that a woman dressed like that couldn't go very far in the streets without being noticed. We'll surely be able to trace Miss Van Allen. Where would she be likely to go?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Reeves. "She wouldn't go to my home. I live way down in Washington Square."

"Nor to mine," chirped Ariadne. "It's over on the West Side."

"I don't believe she left the house," declared the coroner.

"Tell us again, Luigi," asked Lowney. "Just where did the lady seem to go when you saw her leave this room?"

"I can't say, sir. I was looking through a door crack, and I was so amazed at what I saw that I was sort of paralyzed and didn't dare open the door farther."

"Go back to the pantry," commanded Fenn, "and look in, just as you did."

The waiter retreated to the post he had held, and, setting the door a few inches ajar, proved that he could see the body by the sideboard, but could not command a view of the hall."

"Now, I'll represent Miss Van Allen," and Lowney stood over the body of Somers. "Is this the place?"

"A little farther to the right, sir." Luigi's earnestness and good faith were unmistakable. "Yes, sir, just there."

"Now, I walk out into the hall. Is this the way she went?"

"Yes, sir; the same."

Lowney went from the dining-room to

the hall; and it was clear that his further progress could not be seen by the peeping waiter.

"You see, Fenn," the detective went on, "from here, in the back of this long hall, Miss Van Allen could have left the house by two ways. She could have gone out at the front door, passing the parlor, or she could have gone down these basement stairs, which are just under the stairs to the second story. Then she could have gone out by the front area door, which would give her access to the street. She could have caught up a cloak as she went."

"Or," said Fenn musingly, "she could have run up-stairs. The staircase is so far back in the hall that the guests in the parlor would not have seen her."

It was true. The stairs began so far back in the long hall that Vicky could easily have slipped up-stairs after leaving the dining-room without being seen by any of us in the living-room unless we were in its doorway, looking out. Was anybody? So many guests had left that this point could not be revealed.

"I didn't see her," declared Mrs. Reeves, "and I don't believe she was in the dining-room at all. I don't care what that waiter says!"

"Oh, yes, madam," reiterated Luigi. "It was Miss Van Allen. I know her well. Often she comes to Frascini's, and always I take her orders. She came even this afternoon, to make sure the great cake—the Jack Horner—was all right. And she approved it; she clapped her hands at sight of it. We all do our best for Miss Van Allen, she is such a lovely lady."

"Miss Van Allen is one of your regular customers?"

"One of our best. Very often we serve her, and always she orders our finest wares."

"You provide everything?"

"Everything. Candles, flowers, decorations—all."

"And she pays her bills?"

"Most promptly."

"By check?"

"Yes, sir."

"And there are no servants here but the maid Julie?"

"I have often seen others, but I fancy they do not live in the house. Madam Julie superintends and directs us always. Miss Van Allen leaves much to her. She is most capable."

"When did you see this woman, this Julie, last?"

"A short time before—before what happened." Luigi looked toward the body. "She was in and out of her pantries all the evening. She admitted the guests, she acted as ladies' maid, and she arranged the favors in the pie. It was, I should say, ten minutes or so since she was last in the pantry, when I peeped in at the door."

"Where was Julie then?"

"I don't know. I did not see her. Perhaps up-stairs, or maybe in the front of the hall, waiting to bring me word to serve supper."

"Tell me something distinctive about this maid's appearance. Was she good-looking?"

"Yes, a good-looking woman. But nothing especial about her. She had many gold fillings in her teeth—"

"That's something," Lowney noted it with satisfaction. "Go on."

But Luigi seemed to know nothing else that differentiated Julie from her sisters in service.

"How could Miss Van Allen get that knife of yours?" Lowney asked.

"I don't know, sir. It was, I suppose, in the pantry with our other utensils."

"What is its use?"

"It is a boning-knife, but doubtless one of our men used it in cutting celery for salad, or some such purpose."

"Ask them."

Inquiry showed that a man named Palma had used the knife for making a salad, and had left it in the butler's pantry an hour or so before the crime was committed. Any one could have taken the knife without its being missed, as the salad had been completed and put aside.

"In that case Miss Van Allen must have secured the knife some little time before it was used, as Luigi was in the pantry just previously," observed Fenn. "That shows premeditation. It wasn't done with a weapon picked up at the moment."

"Then it couldn't have been done by Miss Van Allen," exclaimed Mrs. Reeves triumphantly, "for Vicky had no reason to premeditate killing a man she had never seen before."

"Vicky didn't do it," wailed Ariadne. "I know she didn't."

"She must be found," said Lowney. "But she will be found. If she's innocent, she will return herself. If guilty, we must find her. And we will. A householder cannot drop out of existence unnoticed by any one. Does she own this house?"

"I think so," said Mrs. Reeves. "I'm not positive, but it's my impression that she does. Vicky Van never boasts or talks of her money or of herself. But I know she gives a good deal to charity and is always willing to subscribe to philanthropic causes."

"I tell you, she is not the criminal, and I don't believe she ever left this house in the middle of the night in an evening dress! The child is scared to death and is hiding—in the attic or somewhere."

"Suppose, Mrs. Reeves," said the corner, "you go with Mr. Lowney and look over the house again. Search the bedrooms and storerooms."

"I will."

Mrs. Reeves seemed to welcome an opportunity to help. She was a good-hearted woman and a staunch friend of Vicky Van. I was glad she was on hand to stand up for the girl, for I confess things looked, to me, pretty dubious.

"Come along, too, Mr. Calhoun," said Mrs. Reeves. "There's no telling what we may find. Perhaps there's further—tragedy."

I knew what was in her mind; that if Vicky had done the thing, she might in an agony of remorse have taken her own life.

Thrilled with this new fear, I followed Lowney and Mrs. Reeves. We went downstairs first. We examined all the basement rooms and the small, city back yard. There was no sign of Vicky Van or Julie. We came back to the first floor, hunted that, and went on up-stairs. The music-room was soon searched, and I fell back as the others went into Vicky's bedroom.

"Come on, Mr. Calhoun," said Lowney. "We must make a thorough job of it this time."

The bedroom was, it seemed to me, like a fairy dream. The furniture was of white-enameled wicker, with pink satin cushions. Everywhere were the most exquisite appointments of silver, crystal, and embroidered fabrics; and a bed fit for a princess.

It seemed profanation for the little detective to poke and pry around in wardrobes and cupboards, though I knew it must be done. He was not only looking for Vicky, but noting anything that might bear on her disappearance.

But there was no clue. Everything was in order, and all just as a well-bred, refined woman would have her belongings.

The bedroom was over the dining-room, and back of this, over the pantry extension, was Vicky Van's dressing-room.

This was a bijou boudoir; the dressing-table, chiffonier, robe-chest, and jewel-caskets all in keeping with the personality of their owner. The walls were paneled in pale rose color, and a few fine pictures were in absolute harmony. A long mirror was in a Florentine gilt frame, and a *chaise longue* by a reading-table bespoke hours of ease.

Ruthlessly Lowney pried into everything, ran his arm among the gowns hanging in the wardrobe, and looked into the carved chests.

Again no clue. The perfect order everywhere showed, perhaps, preparation for guests, but nothing indicated flight or hiding. The dressing-table boxes held some bits of jewelry, but nothing of really great value. An *escritoire* was full of letters and papers; and this Lowney locked and put the key in his pocket.

"If it's right," he said, "there's no harm done. And if the lady doesn't show up, we must examine the stuff."

On we went to the third floor of the house. The rooms here were unused, save one that was evidently Julie's. The furnishings, though simple, were attractive, and showed a thoughtful mistress and an appreciative maid. Everything was in order. Several uniforms of black and of

gray were in the cupboard, and several white aprons and one white dress. There were books, a work-basket and such things as betokened the life of a sedate, busy woman.

We left no room, no cupboard unopened; no hall or loft unsearched. We looked in, under and behind every piece of furniture, and came at last to the unescapable conclusion that wherever Vicky Van might be, she was not in her own house.

Down-stairs we went, and found Coroner Fenn and Inspector Mason in the hall. They had let Doctor Remson go home, also Garrison and Miss Gale. The waiters, too, had been sent off.

"You people can go if you like," Fenn said to Mrs. Reeves and myself. "I'll take your addresses, and you can expect to be called as witnesses if we ever get anything to witness. I never saw such a case! No criminal to arrest, and nobody knows the victim! He must be from out of town.

"We'll nail Mr. Steele to-morrow, and begin to get somewhere. Also we'll look up Miss Van Allen's credits and business acquaintances. A woman can't have lived two years in a house like this and not have somebody know her antecedents and relatives. I suppose Mr. Steele brought his friend here, and then when this thing happened he was scared and lit out."

"Maybe Steele did the killing," suggested Lowney.

"No," disagreed Fenn. "I believe that dago waiter's yarn. I cross-questioned him a lot before I let him go, and I'm sure he's telling what he saw. I'll see Frascini's head man to-morrow—hello, who's that?"

Another policeman came in at the street door.

"What's up?" he said, looking about in amazement. "You here, Mr. Fenn? Lowney? What's doing?"

It was Patrolman Ferrall, the officer on the beat.

"Where you been? asked the coroner. "Don't you know what has happened?"

"No; ever since midnight I been handling a crowd at a fire a coupla blocks away. This is Miss Van Allen's house."

"Sure it is, and a friend of hers named Somers has been bumped off."

"What? Killed?"
 "That's it. What do you know of Miss Van Allen?"

"Nothing, except that she lives here. Quiet young lady. Nothin' to be said against her. Who's the man?"

"Don't know, except he's named Somers; R. Somers."

"Never heard of him. Where's Miss Van Allen?"

"Skipped."

"What's that you say? Skipped! Why that little thoroughbred can't be mixed up in a shootin'!"

"He isn't shot. Stabbed. With a kitchen-knife."

"Let's see him."

The coroner and Ferrall went toward the dining-room, and, on an irresistible impulse of curiosity, I followed.

"Him!" exclaimed Ferrall, as he caught sight of the dead man's features. "That ain't no Somers. That's Randolph Schuyler."

"What!"

"Sure it is. Schuyler, the millionaire. His home is on Fifth Avenue, around the corner and only half a block down."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



The Flying Chance

by Gordon McCreaugh

I.

THE commandant of the Philadelphia navy-yard looked up from the sheaf of papers which bore the superscription of the Bureau of Naval Affairs, Washington, at the young man who stood at attention before his desk.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Rankin," he said simply.

The brown, alert face showed no surprise. Ensign Rankin belonged to those men who cannot afford to be easily shaken from their balance, but his passionate argument was already on his lips.

"But why?" he cried. "Why? I passed in everything else. My sense of balance was perfect. My nerve reactions

were A No. 1. My blood pressure, hearing, everything! Only those paltry two points I fell short in."

Official dignity relaxed just a trifle before the bitterness of the young man's disappointment.

"I'm sorry," the commandant said again. "But this flying business is dangerous enough as it is without our adding to it by overlooking the slightest imperfection in the human machine. The service requires a full twenty in eyesight, and your test measures up only eighteen. Therefore you have been judged 'unfit for aviation.'"

The hundred and sixty pounds of hard, lean athlete stiffened yet further with the fighting spirit.

"Then, with your permission, sir, I shall

appeal for a waiver. Because I've flown all kinds of machines long before I ever got this commission."

The commandant's eyes were steely.

"It will do you no good to appeal to Washington for a waiver, Mr. Rankin. There have been a few cases, I admit—a very few, like Williams and Steffanson—but only after the men concerned have proved themselves to be expert beyond all question in spite of their physical shortcomings.

"These orders are final. You have already been transferred to line duty, and you will report to Lieutenant-Commander Evans for further instructions."

Even the rawest and scrappiest ensign could make no mistake about that tone. Rankin sensed vaguely that the authority of the whole United States stood behind that incisive, unruffled voice.

He went, and reported.

"Ha, Rankin," Lieutenant-Commander Evans greeted him. "I've already received orders about you. I'm sure we shall be pleased to have you with us. If you will call for me at the mess some time this afternoon I'll take you on board and introduce you in the ward-room."

Rankin murmured a conventional thanks. But he meant not a word of it. His mind was full of the injustice of his case. He was not interested in line duties; he had come into the service for aviation.

"I guess there's nothing you can do till then," Evans continued. "Only don't get lost. Stick around the yard somewhere; because we're under orders to hold ourselves in readiness to put out at a moment's notice, and all leave has been cut short."

"Very well, sir."

"All right. See you around three o'clock then."

Rankin's was a war commission. That is to say, his rating in the naval militia had been accepted at its face value by the navy. He was therefore a full-blown ensign, just the same as any Annapolis graduate, much to the indignation of those same graduates, who had spent many toilsome years in qualifying for the same rank.

Militia commissions were always looked upon with disfavor by the Annapolis men.

Rankin, for instance, had put in just two months with the naval militia of his State, and had been *elected* to a commission by his fellows on account of his happy popularity and his superior experience in flying.

The sacred traditions of the service, therefore, meant nothing to him. Stern discipline and unquestioning obedience were vague unpleasantnesses, half understood, and in theory only. To "stick around the yard," then, for the rest of the day with nothing to do didn't have any sense in it; furthermore, there was a girl who lived in West Philadelphia—and there was loads of time before three o'clock.

II.

WITHIN the hour Rankin was ringing that familiar bell on the other side of the river. The girl kept him waiting, to stride nervously up and down the veranda. A wry grin twisted his firm, straight lips. She hadn't forgotten that little difference, then, and her ultimatum.

When she finally came out, after fully five minutes' delay, Rankin knew at once from the hard, set look about her usually dimpled mouth, and the steadiness of her gray eyes, that she had been schooling her determination, and that she still considered the barrier to exist. He knew well enough what it was, too, and his first rueful words were meant to remove it.

"Well, Eileen, I'm out of it at last."

"Out of what?" There was a half hope and a hint of willing surrender in her eager question.

"Out of aviation—for keeps."

"Oh, Jack! Did you really? I—I never thought—" The joyous exclamation stammered down to a more diffident, almost apologetic statement with a rising color. "I never really thought you'd ever give up so much, just for me."

Now there was a whole lot of plain human in Jack Rankin. He didn't ordinarily lie without necessity; but here was a sudden, irresistible temptation positively thrust at him to steal at least a little credit out of a situation which held nothing but the bitterest disappointment for him. His hesitation was just for a fraction of a second, and then he prevaricated by inference.

Nor was he overskilful about it. He was just wise enough to hold his peace and to squeeze her outstretched hand with a world of meaning. Her surrender was instant and complete. With radiant eyes in which there was just a hint of tears, she led him to the comfortable hammock, plethoric with pillows, which swung in the veranda breeze.

"I know it's an awfully big thing to have asked you, Jack," she comforted him with the half regretful confidence of a big-hearted girl who has just forced a sacrifice from her lover. "But you understand now how I felt about it, don't you, dear? I just couldn't marry you as long as you stayed in that horrible business.

"I could never sleep without seeing that awful grand stand and that field where poor Bob— Oh, I can't bear to think about it. And with Jim sticking to it yet; he's so obstinate. One in the family is bad enough. I just couldn't bear it, Jack."

Rankin just patted the round curve of her shoulder and still said nothing. Bob was one of the many who had paid the toll to the greatest of all games; Jim was the other brother. Rankin understood how the girl felt, and the scrupulous conscience which besets every decent young man when he is in love smote him.

Almost he confessed. But when a beautiful, tearful girl jumps to a conclusion and makes a self-sacrificing hero out of one, how shall a man who is ordinarily human disillusion her? Jack Rankin stifled the still, small voice and postponed the telling to a vague, more propitious future. Sufficient to the day the evil thereof. He would have trouble enough explaining his absence from the navy-yard, should his commanding officer by any chance look for him before his return. In the mean while, there were matters of infinitely greater importance.

Given a beautiful girl, a hammock, and the impending prospect of an indefinite separation, three o'clock in the afternoon arrives all too soon. When Ensign Rankin came to the officers' mess, hurrying to make up for lost time, and trying to carry off an air of innocence as if he had been looking for his chief for quite a while, a couple of juniors looked furtively at him.

His guilty conscience was quick to catch the glance, and he knew that his nemesis had overtaken him. But of the full virulence of its malice he had no inkling as yet.

"Seen anything of my skipper?" he asked with an assumption of ease.

"No," said one of them shortly.

"Not for hours and hours," added the other with equally ominous brevity.

"Hours and hours?"

"Yes. He was looking for you. Making knots all round the yard."

"Why so anxious?"

"Commandant's looking for you now."

Rankin hid his anxiety by threatening to slay the last speaker.

"But why? Why? Let me in on the mystery, won't you?"

"Leggo, you deserting ruffian! Why? *Because your ship put out from her berth under telegraphic orders at just about five bells this afternoon.* That's why. Now you'd better go hide till you can think up a good excuse."

Smash! The bomb had fallen! No wonder the whole navy-yard had been looking for him. Missing ship was a serious enough thing in itself; and when it had happened in the face of direct orders it became a matter for the outraged attention of the commandant himself, with prospects of court martial looming dark in the immediate background.

Even Rankin sensed that he had offended beyond his realization. With the instinct of quick thinking which is so essential to the man who takes his life up into the shifting air currents, his mind flashed to the wireless plant. Perhaps he would be able to communicate with his commanding officer and rejoin at the first port of call. He made the radio station in just two jumps. The operator saluted him quite hastily.

"Yes, sir. Crowded with official business just now, sir; but I'll be able to put your message through in about fifteen minutes. Where can I send the answer, sir? I guess I'll have no trouble pickin' up your ship."

"His ship" again. The words jarred with an indefinable sensation. It conveyed

an impression of irrevocable divorce from his ambition—aviation. Everybody seemed to regard him already as a part of the line organization. And, what was more, there was a distinct air of congratulation about it; as though it let him into an honorable and superselect fraternity.

He murmured an abstract instruction to send the reply to the quarters of Junior Lieutenant Mason, and went there to wait for it, dodging furtively behind the various yard buildings to avoid a possible message from the commandant before he should be able to produce the news of his rejoining as a measure of mitigation.

Fifteen minutes drifted on to thirty. But Rankin hardly noticed. His mind was occupied with that queer idea about "his ship." He saw the thing in vague pictures. Himself, in charge of a gun-crew directing practise; himself, officer of the deck; himself, again, a brother officer in the comfortable relaxation of the ward-room with some of the first gentlemen of the world. Always himself holding down some position of trust as a member of a great and proud organization—a United States fighting-ship!

The thing obsessed him. There was an illusive stirring of his emotions, a vague thrill about it all. But, hang it all, what had he to do with ships at all? His ambition was to be a fier.

Into his abstraction broke two men engaged in speech.

"Operator reports very sorry, sir, but he can't get in touch with your ship, sir. Somethin' must be wrong with her wireless for the present; or mebbe it's static in the air. All messages are bad just now. He'll try again in a half an hour or so."

The retribution which dogs the steps of the wrong-doer! Before Rankin could commiserate himself on his ill-luck the other man saluted and spoke up. His belt and side arms proclaimed him an orderly at a glance.

"Commandant's compliments, sir, and he'd like to see you immediately."

It had come! The inevitable! Ensign Rankin had to face his fate without a single extenuating circumstance in hand! He strode to the interview with something less of carelessness than had been his habit.

For some reason the fact of having missed his ship troubled him more than he had ever thought possible.

In the commandant's office he waited for some minutes in silence. That stern, self-possessed autocrat let him stand unheeded. He was nervously agitated over the papers which he held, official radio forms. He bit his pencil, frowning. At last he scribbled a message on a pad, fired it at an orderly, and looked up sharply at the delinquent officer. His tone was snappily brusque.

"H-m. Just arrived, I suppose. Well, my message was meant to reach you hours ago. Sorry. Can't attend to your case just now. Urgent matters come to hand. You will consider yourself confined to the officers' mess till I can find time to send for you again."

III.

RANKIN tiptoed out, thankful as any schoolboy that his sentence should at least have been postponed. On his way to the mess he was determined to look in for a last chance about his message to "his ship." He was thinking of it in those terms himself now; though his anxiety to get in touch with her was quite beyond his own analysis.

In the little sending-room, heavy with ozone, there was an atmosphere of frenzied haste. The operator was working frantically at his sender and straining to listen for the answering whispers which came only in intermittent dashes or in blurred nothings. The man continued sitting at his instrument and shot broken sentences at the officer between the spasms of staccato raspings from his key.

"Sorry, sir—nothing yet—tried five minutes ago—try her again later. Urgent code stuff comin' in—awful jumble. Static is somethin' fierce, 'count o' this storm brewing."

In the intervals of hurried speech he worked his key with his right hand and scribbled simultaneously with his left. He tore the form from his pad and thrust it at his messenger.

"Commandant! Jump to it! Yes, sir; somebody's all excited up somewhere; cod-

ing like mad. Trying to give a bearing, but I can't get it. There she goes again! If you'll wait a bit, sir, I'll try your ship again soon's I'm clear."

Rankin waited, feeling vaguely uneasy about the breakdown of his ship's wireless. The key crackled on, harsh, powerful, suggestive of imminent mystery somewhere. Rankin's elementary study of the international Morse presently recognized the recurring dash-dot, dash-dot as "repeat." Suddenly the operator sprang to his feet and stood to rigid attention.

Rankin wheeled, and saw—the commandant! With him was the officer of the watch.

Once again he was caught. A little thing this time; but still it was dallying with the thin edge of obedience. Rankin was surprised to find himself feeling his guilt.

But the commandant noticed him no more than he did the stiff-standing messenger. That great man's usually impassive face was flushed with uneasiness. The sheaf of decoded messages was clutched into a crumpled ball in his hand.

It must surely be something of the most extreme urgency, thought Rankin, which would bring the lord of all the navy-yard universe hurrying to the radio station in person. The commandant's whole attention, in fact, was directed fiercely at the operator.

"Get me that bearing!" he shot at him. "I must have that bearing! Seventy-two west, you say; is that correct? But the latitude, man; what's the latitude?"

"Correct as I can catch it, sir. Receiver's somethin' awful to-day; but seventy-two's what I make it out. An' I just got latitude thirty-three, twenty."

The information seemed to upset the great man entirely.

"Great Heaven! Just what I thought. She's steaming right into it! Call the destroyer Woodruff immediately and stand by to send this; my code number, precedence of everything!"

The operator's face went blank at the thought.

"Destroyer Woodruff? Sorry, sir. Can't pick her up. Been trying for an hour. Wireless must be out of commission."

"You can't pick— My God! Dead in her course, too!" The flush of excitement on the commandant's stern face had paled. "Call again, man! Keep on calling, and don't stop!"

The tenseness was broken by the flashing crackle which streamed again from the sender. The commandant waited, tapping his foot in his agitation. Into his ferment Rankin with all his inexperience of official propriety intruded.

"Pardon me, sir. May I ask what is the trouble?"

"Eh, what!" The commandant looked at him blankly for a moment. Then indignation added to his nervous irritation. "What the— Your curiosity is out of place, *Ensign* Rankin."

"Pardon me. *My ship*, sir." Rankin said it with a feeling of pride, as though it conferred a right upon him.

"Your—ah, yes. And you missed her! Well, sir, *your ship is steaming into a whole fleet of submarines!* That's the trouble. Five of them; or maybe ten, or a hundred, as far as we can make out from these confounded code flashes."

"Whe-e-ew!" The wireless operator whistled his startled amazement before he remembered that he was merely a machine who heard nothing and knew nothing of what passed in that little electric-charged room, a highly sensitized automaton, bound by many oaths to eternal dumbness; then he hid his confusion under the crisp hissing of his key.

Rankin echoed his whistle. But his was a personal interest. There was a danger; and he thought somehow that he ought to be there to share it. "His ship" had taken a definite meaning in his mind. In the strained silence which followed, broken only by the intermittent crackling calls into the void, he pictured her rushing into the peril, all unwarned and unsuspecting. Vaguely the commandant's voice came to him, talking to the operator seemingly out of the distance.

"It is imperative to communicate. We *must* get in touch."

It woke him out of his abstraction with a start. A wild idea had begun to take shape in his brain. Thoughtless of all pros

and cons, he grasped at it with enthusiasm. Eagerly he burst out:

"How about an aeroplane, sir?"

"Ha, an aeroplane!" With the exclamation the commandant's face cleared, and for a moment he contemplated the idea as an inspiration of Providence. Then he shook his head.

"Impossible! Why, man, the Woodruff is two hundred miles on her way to Havana by now!"

"I could make that easily, sir; I've flown more than that before now."

"And if you should miss her?"

"With a hydro, sir, I could come down alongside and be picked up."

"Nonsense, boy!" the commandant snapped testily at his thoughtless enthusiasm. "I don't mean that. Think, man, think. In any case, with a sea running like to-day's, you'd be smashed to splinters long before you could ever be picked up. But what I mean is, suppose you should miss her entirely?"

"From what I know of those things, your course is a matter of guesswork, anyway, and you have to keep checking up by landmarks all the time. Out at sea you'd lose yourself in ten minutes. And when you've missed her, how are you coming back? Two hundred out and two hundred back, to say nothing if another hundred or so lost in overhauling her and scouting around. Why, man, there's not a machine in the service capable of making that. Certainly not without special preparation. No, sir; the chance is too desperate for me to order any man out on a thing like that."

Rankin's enthusiasm fell with a cruel slump, and all the happy eagerness died out of his face. All these things he had overlooked in the first flush of his inspiration; and they were all true, too.

The older man, keen old veteran, with practised anticipation of all possible eventualities, had put his finger with unerring accuracy on each of the weak spots. Nor did he magnify their weakness at all. The thing was desperate, a forlorn hope.

Rankin turned them dully over in his mind, looking for a possible saving clause, but not a one could he find. The eagerness then died from his face. But slowly its

place began to be taken by a cold determination.

"I—I'd like to volunteer, sir, anyhow—to convey a warning to my ship."

"Hey, what? What's that? You'd like to volunteer?" The snappy irritation in the commandant's voice was tempered with a sudden human understanding. He looked with fierce appraisal into the pale, hard-set face. The drama had crystallized down to just the two of them, two strong men looking into each other's wide eyes with a single vital question-mark between them.

The rest of the scene and the men in it were forgotten as far as these two were concerned. But the others stood in strained, expectant positions as though they had been frozen. The signaler ceased from his incessant crackle to hang on the commandant's words. Twenty seconds—thirty—a full minute; and only the broken, noisy breathing of somebody was heard. Then the commandant shook his head slowly, regretfully.

"Impossible, boy! I can't do it! No, we must find some other way. Besides"—there was a world of kindness in the tone—"you see—I'm sorry—but you've been officially declared 'unfit for aviation.' I couldn't let *you* go, even if I could contemplate your plan for a second. No, no, my boy, I'm sorry."

He walked slowly to the door. There he turned suddenly, and the voice was snappily terse again.

"Signaler! What have you stopped for? Keep calling, and don't stop for anything under any circumstances. If your wrist gives out, get a relay; and let me know immediately as soon as you connect. Immediately, by cycle order—Mr. Tracy, will you see to that? And my compliments to the senior officers of the yard to confer with me in my office immediately, please."

The officer of the watch saluted. The commandant strode from the room. And in the immediately following swift bustle Rankin was the only man with nothing on his hands.

But his soul was full of bitter disappointment and heart-burning. "Unfit!" The reminder was a cruel stab into his enthusiasm, however kindly it had been put. He

stood inertly, wrestling with bitter indecision for whole minutes, and then a queer expression, half smile, half grimness, stole slowly over his face and he crept out of the room.

His next movements certainly looked like desertion, urged by desperation and tinged with madness. For, once out of the radio-room, he raced about the yard like one demented. To the sacred precincts of the instrument-room he rushed, and, making some wild explanation to the man in charge, he removed therefrom several of the neat leather cases of queer shapes. Another swift foray procured him a chart. In like manner he *borrowed* a car from the long, neatly parked line of officers' private conveyances. Whose it was he didn't know, and he didn't care; only he took the one which seemed to give promise of the greatest speed.

Within five minutes of the commandant's decision he was disobeying for the second time that day his orders to confine himself to the yard. Disobeying with speed and violence, for he was shooting down the long concrete road which led to the main gate like a dark-red shell.

Senior Lieutenant Tracy, the officer of the watch, became aware of the thing hurtling down upon him, and he jumped angrily aside. What fool was breaking yard regulations like that? He recognized Rankin as he whizzed past, and remembered the commandant's order. He called wildly after him, but Rankin never swerved an inch. Bent low over the wheel, he fired himself at the gate. Officers' cars, of course, were never questioned. The gate opened with profane promptness, and Rankin whirled out of his prison. Ten minutes later he was roaring down the road which pointed like a long, straight tape line to Atlantic City.

IV.

AT Atlantic City, on the beach, opposite to the newest ten-million-dollar hotel, stood a huge tent of unusual shape, guyed down and double guyed with wire cable for security. Its occupant and owner was viewing with critical satisfaction the beautiful, wide-winged flying-boat which bal-

anced so gracefully on its truck, stretching from one far canvas wall right across to the other, when he was suddenly overwhelmed by a breathless young man in a dusty uniform who demanded fiercely:

"Jim, I want you to *give me your bus* right away."

This Jim was another of those men whose nerves do not start at sudden and unexpected happenings.

"Sure," he said without hesitation. "Want to go joy riding?" And he held out his hand.

"No, no, you don't understand," the other panted. "I want you to give it to me—to wreck!"

Jim's voice became serious, though the slow smile never left his face. He seated himself methodically on a tool-box.

"Button off the power, Jack; come to earth and tell us all about it," he said quietly.

Jack told him, in fierce sentences and few.

"So, you see, Jim, it's make or break," he concluded, "and we've got no time to lose. Come on!"

Jim sat solid on his tool-box.

"Wait a minute, Jack," he said soberly. "This is a big thing you're asking me. There's ten thousand dollars gone into this outfit, and it's all I've got in the world; it's my last stake. Half of it's not mine, anyhow. I had to get backing, and it's not nearly paid off.

"This passenger work isn't the gold-mine any more that it used to be; I can't charge these summer sports more than fifteen dollars a jump; upkeep is something fierce; and I'm still in the hole for about three thousand bucks. I figured to clear by the end of the season."

"But don't you see, Jim," Rankin appealed piteously, "it's the only way! And she's running right into deadly danger! My ship! A United States fighting-ship, Jim. And—and—" His voice trailed away searching hopelessly for something to say, some conclusive argument that would accomplish his purpose.

Jim sat motionless. His face had the torn, introspective expression of Rodin's "Thinker." Presently his voice came in a

ruminative monotone through lips that scarcely opened:

"And Uncle Sam needs his ships mighty bad just now, eh?" Then suddenly: "Hell!" he shouted, and jumped to his feet. "Damn our old uncle, anyway! Stick your head out of the flap and holler for my mechanics."

Rankin jumped at him with both hands outstretched.

"Jim! I knew you'd do it! You're white all through!"

"Aw, hell," muttered Jim again with gruff discomfort, pushing him off. "Get busy and fill up that gas-tank to the last drop you can make her hold, while I get into my helmet and togs."

"Your togs! What d'you want your gear for?"

Jim's jaw was thrust out with belligerence.

"If Uncle Sam needs you on this job," he said doggedly, "he needs me, too. This is a two-man stunt. Shut up now, and beat it."

The next few minutes were a whirlwind of strenuous effort, punctuated with snapped question and fired-back answer and swift directions to the sweating mechanics. Under their practised handling the machine was ready for its great task in record time.

"I swiped a Sperry synchronized drift-set and compass from the yard, Jim," panted Rankin.

"You did!" shouted Jim, and his face lit. "That's the first slim chance I see, then, of our picking up your darned ship. Mighty like hunting the needle in the haystack anyway. How far's she out?"

"Commandant said two hundred miles."

"Good stuff! If any bus in the country can do it, mine will. She makes just over the hundred per hour, and she's fitted with every mechanical improvement there is."

There was a note of regretful farewell in the tone. He had been very proud of his machine; and she certainly was the acme of American aeronautic skill.

Stagger, she had, and *dihedral*, and *reatreat*, mystic technicalities of wing construction which came very near to realizing the

dreamer's goal of automatic stability. Control wires had a safety factor of eight. There was a dashboard before each of the dual control yokes dotted with a maze of glass-dialed instruments.

The two seats were tandem, with telephonic communication so that the occupants could converse above the roar of the engine. Nothing, in fact, which might contribute to speed and safety and accuracy had been omitted. And now—she was going out into the approaching night beyond her capacity of return, like a swimmer who swims out to sea beyond the limit of his strength. No wonder that the owner swore at his old Uncle Sam even while he made his gift.

On the beach, where the great machine floated like some graceful, swift storm petrel, Jim suddenly pushed Rankin to the rear seat.

"What's the matter?" asked Rankin hurriedly. "Aren't you going to fly her?"

"Nope," said Jim with determination. "'S your job. You're a better flier anyway. Me for the instruments. I've been boning up a lot on this new dope about wave crest length and wind ratio and bomb dropping and all. Kinder hoped to get a commission myself—once; but—hell! Hop in and make your tests. If I'm in on this funeral I'm going to phone good-by to the girl."

Then for the first time did Rankin remember his girl, and her trust, and his promise, and what it meant between him and her.

He hesitated a moment; he, too, would have liked to telephone. For he was very human and just then some mysterious providence or other which looks after those who strive with a great purpose flashed to him a vague realization of his own weakness. Telephoning, the voice on the wire, with its note of appeal from the purely personal view-point of the woman who waited, might undermine that high resolve. He set his teeth and climbed into the seat ready for action.

With lips hard pinched, he tested his controls to see that everything was running smoothly. He tested the Christensen self-starter. With an explosive whir the pro-

PELLER caught up the ignition. He ran the engine at idling speed, watching his oil pressure and water gages for free feeding. Everything ran with the smoothness of a fine watch.

Jim came running.

"Give her the gun!" he shouted, hurling himself into his seat.

Rankin pulled back the throttle lever. With a roar the propeller took up its speed; the tachometer dial jumped to fifteen thousand revolutions; and the beautiful great bird glided out from the shore, trusting to fate to attain its purpose.

Rankin pulled tentatively on the elevator control. The machine answered beautifully; lifted at once to its planing angle and skimmed the surface. Rankin hauled back on the control.

"How does she climb?" he asked into the telephone mouthpiece which rose from his chest.

"'Bout six hundred," came the muffled reply from the observer's seat in front. "Let her go."

V.

THE great adventure had commenced. Half an hour had sped since one impetuous fanatic had charged into the tent and persuaded the other to race out with him and offer up possibly their lives and certainly the machine in their wild quest of service to their so much berated Uncle Sam. Only half an hour! But in view of the ship that was rushing inexorably on into it knew not what, a priceless thirty minutes.

The machine hurtled ahead into the dark cloud bank, dipping and swaying and yawing like an instruction flight. Rankin was "feeling out" the little individual peculiarities of the machine which was new to him.

Presently he settled down to a long steady climb up to his traveling level which he proposed to make about five thousand feet in order to hold as wide a range of vision from the height as the heavy atmosphere would permit of. His face was very grim and stern; he was making no mistakes about the percentage of chances which were out against him.

"What d'you need for setting your course?" he spoke shortly into the mouthpiece.

"Where's your ship?"

"Can't say; don't know her speed. Commandant said two hundred, and she's made maybe forty or fifty since."

"How in blazes are we going to find the blasted tub then?" Jim was feeling subconsciously the loss of ten thousand dollars.

"Say she's making twenty, and we approximate a hundred, we ought to overhaul her in about three hours at the outside. Lay off her course on the chart from Philly to Havana; get on to it and take a high level after her."

For ten minutes there was silence while Jim scribbled frantically with his pencil and the great machine roared and throbbed all round them. Finally:

"Huh," came a grunt. "'Bout thirty miles out, and then south by east and keep guessing for luck."

Rankin watched his clock for eight more minutes with infinite care, for when one is hurtling through the air at a hundred miles an hour delay means more than a little difference. Then he banked sharply over and swung round.

"Ought to be on her tail now," he muttered. "Now figure drift and give me my variation."

Technical sounding-stuff, but easy of explanation. Just as a boatman rowing across a tide rip has to point the nose of his boat several degrees into the current in order to hold a straight course for the desired landing, so an aeroplane rushing through a cross wind must "crab" sometimes.

Easy of explanation; but for an aeroplane flying over water with no landmarks to guide, a considerable calculation. And *time!* Every minute of time counted so vitally! To arrive at a correct conclusion many factors had to be taken into consideration, the least error in the smallest of which would mean many miles of difference.

The main factors, of course, were actual speed through the air and wind speed. The first was easy; an instrument gave it. But

wind speed? On the ground, stationary, an instrument could give that too; but at five thousand feet in the air it had to be calculated. To do that one had to know the approximate length between the crests of the waves; and to approximate that, one had to know the exact height.

Suddenly an explosive snarl came from in front.

"Curse it! In the hurry I forgot to adjust my altimeter to sea level."

Without a word Rankin pushed the control over into a steep dive. Within a few feet of the surface he "flattened," and on receiving a confirmatory grunt he lifted the machine into another long climb.

Presently:

"Wave length twenty feet—gives velocity fifteen decimal four. Fierce for a landing."

"Pitot tube gives a clear hundred and four miles per. Work it out."

Came a whole series of grunts; and presently the movable lubber line on the dial of the Sperry which was synchronized with the drift indicator in the observer's hand in the front seat, began to swing round.

Rankin followed it with a sigh of thankfulness and a prayer for luck and settled down to a long steady grind of keeping her nose down to it. No easy matter in a high gusty wind; and a few points deviation meant so many priceless minutes lost at this critical time.

Two hours passed; and as the work became mechanical, Rankin's thoughts turned inevitably to the girl. What would she say? How would she regard his fall from his promise? How could he ever make her see the thing as it was?

"Ha, ha!" He barked a short laugh. Fool! Very possibly there never would be any occasion for an explanation. He glued his eyes down to the lubber line and followed it as it shifted from one side to the other as the observer recalculated and checked up his figures from time to time.

But his thoughts kept coming back to torture him. The girl; always the girl. The imminent chance of coming down somewhere in the ocean, helpless, with gas all expended, and being battered to a wreck in a minute found no place in his

mind. Suddenly the grumbling voice came across and woke him to action.

"Smoke on the port bow; three points."

Rankin's heart jumped up into his mouth and he peered through his wind-shield. Then he shot the machine down for the thin smudge across the horizon like a swooping eagle.

Five minutes; ten minutes. He could see Jim leaning out from his seat with the Zeiss prism glasses to his eyes. Jim waved an arm wildly to the right and ducked back into his hole.

"Blasted United Fruit boat."

Grimly, without a word again, Rankin swung back and climbed on his course. After many minutes he spoke tersely, without emotion.

"Jim. Suppose we find her—and the waves smash us before she can pick us up. Better write a note; make a package. Maybe we can drop it."

"Huh! If we find her we've been doing some flying, lemme tell you."

But Rankin knew in the silence that Jim was scribbling furiously.

Dusk began to come. Rankin unconsciously began to strain his eyes over his wind-shield as though he had to rely on himself alone. Suddenly:

"Smoke! Way over starboard!"

Instantly Rankin dived for it with a quickening of the pulse. Testily the voice came.

"Hey! Not that, you goat. Farther over. Heavy stuff; looks like a mile of cloud bank." In a few more minutes: "Yes, that's the one—lower; can't make her out; she's smothered."

After a strained period again, in snappy intervals, but in a passionless monotone:

"Two master—some speeder—but she's steaming up and down and around and cutting all sorts of fancy patterns—dive to it son! Destroyer, making knots!"

Rankin dove. All he said was:

"Get your package ready."

But in his heart was an exultant thankfulness that he had arrived in time to warn "his ship." In a few more minutes he was able to distinguish her himself, smothering herself in foam and black columns of smoke as she smashed her sharp nose into

the high-running waves. He could make out the short stumpy signaling masts, the torpedo tubes, the quick, rapid-firing guns, and—

Suddenly there was more smoke! Not from the low, raking funnels, but from the starboard quarters! Then a sharp puff! And then another! And then a spitting stream! At the same instant came Jim's voice, vibrant and tense; and Rankin could feel through the micrometer that even that passionless man was excited at last.

"They've got her, by God!"

Rankin gripped the wheel and leaned forward as though he could by sheer muscular effort impart a yet greater speed to the hurtling machine. Then again the wire-drawn voice:

"Jack, it's God's luck! Under my—under your seat there's another kind of package. Been doing some hand-bomb practise on a raft, and *there's two or three left!* Was going out again to-morrow. Can you reach? Can you steer her?"

Rankin's heart leaped with a wild exhilaration of sudden battle. "Steer her with my feet," he hissed back, and he groped below the seat.

"To the right!" came a yell which jarred his ear-drums.

Rankin peered over the edge of the fuselage. At first he saw nothing but surging whitecaps; and then, cutting through them at a long slant from one gray patch of water to another, he discerned a thin streak which left ripples behind it like the fin of a shark.

Without any definite idea of what he was to do he swooped down for it like a giant fish hawk. Then he saw that all round it there kept rising an erratic shower of fountains of high-flung spray which repeated themselves half a mile farther on, and then repeated again, and again at lessening intervals.

But the phenomenon conveyed nothing to him, and he continued to rush on into the danger zone and noticed only that the ship had turned almost like a rabbit and was charging down on the same object at the same time.

"To the left!" came another ear-splitting yell.

Rankin snatched a hurried glance from the shark to look over his shoulder. There, within three hundred yards of him a long gray whale was emerging. There, was something he could see, something he could aim at. Instantly he banked over so that one wide wing-tip skimmed the wave crests, and hurled himself at it. Almost before he had regained his equilibrium he was above. His arm flashed over the side and heaved a conical black object clear of the wing, and then he was over.

There was a giant splash, and:

"Missed her!" yelled Jim, hopping in his seat to face backward.

Rankin spat a terrible oath through his grim set teeth and wheeled over again on a sixty degree slant. As he came round he could see that the whale was hurriedly submerging again. The next second he snatched another black shape from its resting place between his knees and flung it out, well forward. It passed from his view immediately.

He saw Jim's arms go up with an exultant yell; and the same instant a terrific blast of hot air from behind him kicked the tail of the machine up with a resistless suddenness which drove its nose down at a steep angle for the water. At that height there was no possibility of regaining control. In a second there was a tearing, foaming smash, and Rankin was hurled forward onto the wheel with the force of his own suddenly arrested momentum!

VI.

HERE was one test of the born aviator. Presence of mind. Rankin did not hold wildly on to everything within reach to save himself from falling; his first instinct was to fling himself clear from the entangling brace wires. Though he was under water and half smothered, he kept in mind the most open way out, and within the half minute he struggled out onto the limp wreckage of what had once been a lower wing plane. Jim was already crawling up onto an upper surface.

"Hell!" was his greeting. "Guess I'll earn no more toward that three thousand out of her. Come on up, the view is fine. This side isn't smashed up so terribly, and

there's air enough in the camber spaces to keep her afloat for a long while yet."

Rankin climbed up and joined him on his sagging raft, careful not to put his foot through the fabric. The whale was gone utterly! So were all the shark fins. At least, they could see none from their rocking perch. The dominant thought that had impelled him for so long was still uppermost in Rankin's mind.

"Good stuff!" he kept muttering. "Great! Now's her time to get away. Why don't she turn and make a blue streak?"

Their own plight remained in the background of his mind, to be taken out and dealt with after other more important matters had been settled.

But the United States Destroyer Woodruff was showing no desire to get away. Instead, she rushed back and forth and up and down like a questing terrier and every now and then she barked viciously as one gun crew or another fired at anything which appeared to them to have the remotest chance of being a shark's fin.

For a full half hour she hunted, and then at slower speed she steamed for the soggy, slowly sinking raft. With navy smartness a boat hit the water long before the ship had lost her way, and in a few more minutes the two fanatics, nearly normal now, stood on the heaving deck which rolled thirty degrees each way and felt to them as solid as a city sidewalk.

At the gangway a petty officer saluted them.

"Cap'n's compliments, sir. Waiting for you in his cabin, sir."

Rankin was surprised. He had looked for surprise from the other side, but they seemed to have been expecting him.

Lieutenant Commander Evans stood in his holy of holies, the captain's cabin. Ensign Rankin was quite normal by this time. That is to say, he did not know exactly what navy etiquette demanded for the occasion. He drew himself up stiffly, dripping sea water all over the carpet, and saluted.

"Report on board for duty, sir."

His commander gasped at the amazing young man. For the first time in all his

navy experience he did not know himself exactly what such an occasion demanded. For a few minutes he said nothing; then, with a dry smile:

"H-m, yes; we heard all about you. Managed to pick up a wireless; but I'm hanged if we ever expected to see you." He broke into a grim laugh. "Yes, we were surprised enough; but you must have looked like the premeditated malice of the devil to those submersibles. It was great work my boy, great. We'll be sorry to lose you now."

"Lose me?" wondered Rankin.

"Well," Commander Evans spoke with slow deliberation. "I suppose you'll be re-assigned to aviation after this. It's not every day that one saves a United States destroyer, you know."

Rankin's heart jumped and he felt his color rising; and since it is not seemly for an aviator to display emotion he saluted hastily and turned to go. The deliberate voice stopped him.

"Better put in a claim for that machine. Since she's been in active service I guess the navy 'll take her over."

"Thank you, sir." Again Rankin turned with his hand on the door-knob lest his face should betray the double exultation in his soul.

Once again that exasperating recall.

"Oh, by the way; there was another wireless; private, for you; a most insistent person."

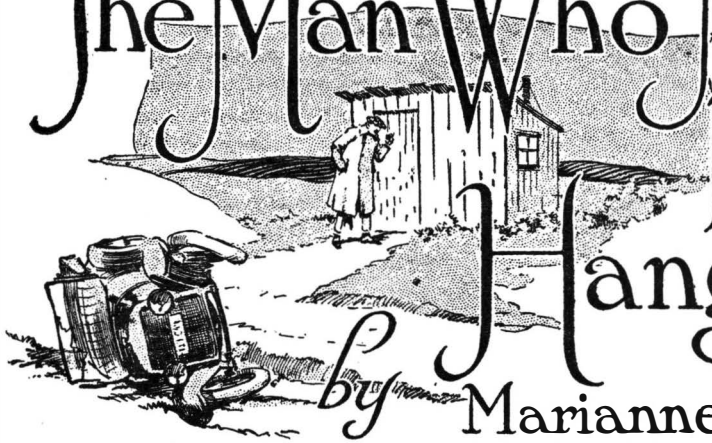
Rankin wheeled in a flash. There is a limit to emotional suppression. His commanding officer was holding out a long envelope to him. Rankin took it with a haste which amounted almost to a rudeness and tore it open with fingers that trembled unmanfully. The first thing he looked for was the signature—Eileen! It loomed as big as a theater advertisement.

"Bully for both of you," it read. "I know you'll succeed."

Rankin waved it wildly over his head and whooped like a hysterical Indian. It was a shameful display of emotion for an aviator, and a most improper action for an ensign in his commander's private cabin. But Lieutenant Commander Evans only smiled.

The Man Who Must Be Hanged

by Marianne Gauss



Author of "The Spirit of the Feud," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

QUEER PEOPLE.

THE street before the criminal court building was so still the sluggish wash of the river could be heard and the wind before the dawn was rising when Jere McRae, the district attorney, crossed the bridge and the dark slum beyond and took a wild prairie road for Kahokia.

By sunrise he was far on his way.

Once a coyote leaped up, ran a little way and stopped to stare at the car—for motors were a rare sight on that road. Beyond the expanse of gray prairie grass, translucent with hoar frost, rose white peaks washed over with the peach-blow pink of morning. Nearer, McRae could see the bright blue hills surrounding Kahokia.

In his mind was one firmly resolved conviction; Rawley Lord must hang.

Suddenly, as if responsive to the determination within him—as if it had been the bandit's answer to his unworded thought—a gun crashed, and a bullet cut along the ground. McRae leaped up, as if he had been shot.

But the bullet had not touched him. A rabbit somersaulted and lay still in the trail, spotted with her blood, the prize of a hunter abroad somewhere in the morning.

Long after McRae had left the hunter and his bleeding quarry behind, he felt

greatly excited. It was not from fear of Lord, for word had reached him the day before, that the boy bandit was in custody and would be brought to Kahokia. Was it, then, doubt which he felt regarding his course toward Lord?

He thought it could not be that. He recalled: This boy—a musician with a vaudeville company—had been imprisoned at Kahokia for trying to beat a board bill. With others he had broken jail; and one of the mutineers had killed the sheriff. In such a case the law was plain; the crime of one conspirator was the crime of all.

Jere McRae took from his pocket certain papers relating to the Kahokia case; among them a theatrical poster with a portrait of Lord. He looked thoughtfully at this face—which was of that merry, black-eyed type so prepossessing to ordinary jurors.

Well, the district attorney was no boarding-school miss; it would not be hard for him to look a handsome young man in the face and call on a jury to hang him by the neck till he was dead.

Lord was very young and said to be a wizard with a violin. He had always been a turbulent fellow. When with a road show in Missouri he had been convicted of rioting, had received a jail sentence and had broken out of his place of confinement. He seemed to have some of the gifts of a

weasel. And his record showed that he could usually cajole a court into dismissing him with a reprimand.

Now, he must die.

In a few hours, Jere McRae would see him in Kahokia. And he was resolved not to offer Lord any leniency in return for evidence he might offer concerning his fellow outlaws.

As McRae proceeded, he realized that his interview with Lord was to be delayed. The trail was unfit for motor travel, and he had constantly to leave his seat and attend to the machine. Finally he took some of the machinery apart.

In spite of the rawness of the wind, he became so warm that he discarded his fur coat, and appeared a strange figure—neat to the extreme we call "dapper" in his gray business suit—on that wild strip of prairie.

When he finally persuaded the car to move, it was noon and he was still far from town. The only house visible was a home-
stead shack of tarred paper.

As he walked toward this place, two dogs with stiff black hair like hog-bristles rushed out. The place had an air of being inaccessible to visitors. Evidently the occupants of the shack had moved in but recently, for a white-topped wagon stood before the front door.

As McRae fought his way through tumbleweed blown from the prairie, now and then directing an agile kick at the dogs, the strains of a violin ceased, inside. McRae had heard only an exquisite bar or two, in which the bow made a sound like whistling.

He had seen this place before—on a white-hot day, just after the murder of the Kahokia sheriff, months before. Apparently the people who lived there received few guests, for the dogs were wild with indignation at the approach of the district attorney.

His kicks finally forced the ill-tempered brutes to retreat, growling; and he knocked at the door of the shack.

He was answered by a tall, bony Southerner in overalls and—instead of a jumper—an ample garment of feminine cut, with lace on the sleeves. Inside the shack, McRae saw an old woman. On his former call

at the place, he had encountered neither of these persons—only a young and remarkably pretty girl.

The men held the door at an inhospitable angle, but McRae—shivering and hungry—was insistent.

"My motor is stalled out here and I must have a place to get warm," he said with determination.

The man stepped aside in an irresolute fashion, and McRae entered the front room.

Its air was close, with a strong smell of cooking that was not appetizing. After a sniff of mingled flavors, he decided not to remain and share the family dinner. "I see"—as he spoke, the district attorney indicated through the window a tall, dark red beast, with a meditative cast of feature, due to burs tangled over her eyes—"I see you have a cow tethered in front."

"That ar," boasted her owner, "is a Missouri cow."

"I thought I might get some milk."

"We uns ain't got no milk for you, mister," the man replied—distinctly forbidding, notwithstanding his lack of resolution in getting rid of his caller.

The old lady had taken the pipe from between two last-remaining teeth which leaned toward each other.

"We uns ain't got around to milk yit this mawnin' early. But say, mister, could you uns use some buttermilk?"

The man flung the garrulous old woman a look of sullen reproof, which McRae pretended not to see. He said he was especially fond of buttermilk, sat down and drew off his gloves.

An alarm clock ticked brazenly in the room. Finally the Missourian remarked:

"It's a snowin'."

The old lady was just returning from her kitchen, with a large goblet of buttermilk.

"Ya-as, it shore is a snowin'. I 'lowed to Ed this mawnin' it were a layin' off to snow, and Ed, he 'lowed that were just my foolish talk. En 'Airy, she 'lowed it sholy wouldn't snow, she 'lowed, up and down they wa'n't no sign of snow. But I allus know when it lays off to snow, by the feel of my bunion. It commences to—"

Her son had been waiting his chance to check her. He fiercely interposed:

"Maw, what's all this here purple streak-in' in the buttermilk?"

The old lady set the goblet before her guest.

"That-all purple-lookin' mark? Waal, las' week, we uns was alayin' off to wash and we put the clo'es to soak in the churn. Then looks lak we couldn't git around to wash, noway, so come churnin' day I dumped out the clo'es and dumped in the cream, and I never notice where one of Ed's socks stayed in. It kind of bled, lak, in the cream. So that's all it is, mister, it won't pizen no person."

The district attorney had raised his glass; he set it, as if absently, on the table.

Here, a diversion offered. The door of the lean-to room opened, and a girl came in—the girl McRae had seen on his former visit. He rose.

Now, standing by the table, he had for the first time a view of the alley of floor space between the two feather beds. It showed the muddy prints of large shoes. His host was barefooted, that morning. Moreover, there was a firmness and neatness about these large footprints that was irreconcilable with the Missourian's character.

They were not the footprints of the girl. Her feet were light and small as a dancer's and she wore neat slippers tied with black ribbons. McRae's mind recurred to the violin he had overheard, then to the evident uneasiness of his host when he entered. What species of caller had this girl been entertaining?

Rawley Lord was in custody.

Again the man called Ed entered the conversation. "'Airy, there," he complained, "is the one what brung us all out West. She hearn of free land and couldn't take no rest till she got us moved hyar. No wonder this lan's free; it don't grow nothin' but tumbleweed."

"Unless," Hilairy inserted, "you happen to plant something else."

Her voice had a sound as if she might have come from the same section of country as the others; but her speech and manners indicated an entirely different stratum of society.

McRae glanced from her to Ed; vague

suspensions stirring in his heart. He thought he heard a sound in the lean-to room, but Ed's voice broke over it:

"Mister, you uns ain't used yo' milk. Cayn't you relish it?"

The district attorney had out his watch.

"I have just remembered an important engagement. I mustn't stay to drink it—really." He had slipped a coin under his glass.

He hurried out of the shack, for he now felt a degree of uneasiness in these surroundings. But when he turned, after passing the threshold, he saw that Hilairy had followed him.

She wore a thin, pink frock, the sleeves of which were flattened against her arms by the cold wind. The snow drove against her face, as it swept with a wild noise around the shack. But she seemed unconscious of the weather.

"I began to feel as if you'd never come back to see me." Her voice was like a complaining bird's.

McRae started; he felt a trifle alarmed, but did not want to go away.

"It's good in you to remember," he said.

They were standing just outside the window of the lean-to room; but the shed-kitchen jutted between so McRae could not see the window. Just then, he did not want to look into the lean-to room.

Her eyes, almost golden in color, were misty, and appealed. She lifted them to meet McRae's.

"Where it's as lonesome as it is out this way, a person always remembers," she said.

McRae smiled and laid his hand on the tar-paper wall. Then he caught himself with severity.

"Your husband," he asked by way of reminding her, "finds it hard to get on in this new country?"

Hilairy changed color and laughed.

"Oh, you thought I was married to Ed! He's not my husband, he's my brother."

It was impossible to believe that a blood relationship existed between the man within and this young and beautiful being. The district attorney did not argue with himself; though, in a misty way, he knew that she lied.

He ought to have known she was not a

married woman; there was a softness about her eyes, but it was girlish, not maternal passion. The mouth—and that tender throat melting into the chin—were virginal. Her hair was of a lusterless dark-brown, like lamp-black. When she lifted them, the man looked far in; but between glances they were veiled like Turkish beauties.

Her beauty went to his head—her fluted, upper lip, with the shadow! She seemed proof against cold. The wind lashed her bare throat rose-color. There was a dimple between her neck and shoulder, where the round-necked frock fell away, that looked like a finger-print inadvertently left by whatever artist hand had modeled her.

"I was mighty glad to see you the time you came for a drink," she said. "Ed and his mother were away, and it was just after that Kahokia murder. I thought one of those bandits might happen along any minute."

"You didn't think I was one of the murderers," McRae laughed. Then he added rather triumphantly: "You weren't afraid of me!"

"Mister," Hilairy broke in, "what makes you call all of those men murderers? That ain't right, is it? The law wouldn't convict a man of murder, would it, unless he had murder in his heart? And they say at least one of the men didn't shoot or even have a gun."

"You'll have to put that question to a lawyer."

McRae brushed the matter aside with his quickened voice. But something in her face alarmed him again. For an instant it seemed to him that her drawl and her Missouri dialect were assumed.

"Don't go yet," breathed Hilairy, and laid her hand on his arm. "I want to ask you something."

She leaned against the tar-paper wall, her shoulders drooped negligently. Just clear of her gently-curving breast swung a necklace of dull-green stones; curious stones that looked like stage properties, but were fascinatingly pretty. She laid her hand on McRae's arm. The slight pressure of her fingers stirred and woke him, then held him like a chain. He wanted to go away and could not.

"What's your name? You told me last summer, but not the truth."

The district attorney hesitated; he felt helpless with her and a little afraid. A spark showed in her eyes. She removed her hand and opened the cabin door.

He was no longer afraid, except that she would run away in anger. He followed her over the threshold.

Hilairy shut the door to keep out the snow, and leaned against it. Her breast heaved as if with indignation. The man and the old woman had gone into another room.

"I did tell you the truth, really," insisted the district attorney. "My name is McRae and I live at Queen City.

"Honestly?" She smiled up at him. "Ed said you were fooling me, and I hated to think you would treat me like that."

She had gone a trifle too far with him. He took alarm; he was afraid she was flirting with him, making a fool of him. Yet her eyes held his until he smiled.

McRae was Scotch; a well-groomed, well-behaved little man of forty, who had never cared to marry. Now, suddenly it seemed to him he was still young. Was it too late—for everything in life?

"I come this way rather often," he said. "If I stop, will I always see you?"

"Always! I never go anywhere," she added wistfully.

McRae bade her good-by and picked his way through tumbleweed to his car. Snow was flying in the air, but he did not see the snow; he saw only light-brown, shining eyes and dark hair without luster and a finger-print on a cold, white shoulder.

Yet Hilairy seemed unreal; indeed the last hour was like a dream. He reached into the motor for his fur coat. As he was putting it on he glanced back at the shack. Hilairy was not in sight; his eyes fell on the window of the lean-to room.

Under this window a weed had been broken off near the earth; footprints, plain in the film of snow that now covered the prairie, stretched away from it, around the shack, to an arroyo piled high with tumbleweed.

As the district attorney observed, a look of disillusionment and mortification grew in

his eyes. Then a grim light replaced the mortification.

That girl had made him, the district attorney, a man of middle age and dignity unapproachable to the society women in Queen City, her very pliable fool.

He guessed that her lover must have been in the act of getting from the window when he started to leave the cabin; else she would not have thought it necessary to lure him back, but would have let him go on his way.

The man who had escaped was Rawley Lord.

McRae knew that Lord was the man because the violin he heard had been touched by a master. The district attorney could not play any instrument, but he had a great passion for music and was not to be deceived about it. If only he had known that much about women!

He recalled the touch of the girl on his arm, and it made him rage. He remembered her little, adorable gestures as she had decoyed him; like a mother-bird, bent on showing how lovely and desirable she was and also how easy to get.

Lord's face rose up in his mind; young and gay, as the theater bill had it. Well, beauty does not save a criminal—nor yet music. McRae's face hardened till it looked like quartz. He started his car in the thickening storm toward Kahokia.

CHAPTER II.

THE SHOT.

THE snow-storm had become a blizzard. It was late afternoon, and the district attorney had made little progress on the road to Kahokia. The road was a drift of white, through which he had the greatest difficulty in pushing his car. He could not see his way. He seemed to drive the motor against its will through dense, wet clouds. He felt as if he were wandering somewhere in the sky.

At first he was glad of his isolation. In his anger and mortification that he had been duped by the woman of a criminal, he felt as if he could never return to his world and perform his next duty—the hanging of Rawley Lord. The boy had escaped,

but he must be caught again at any cost. It would be a shocking precedent if he were not.

The criminal's sweetheart would tell him about the district attorney! Perhaps it would come into court. The district attorney felt a growing hatred for Lord.

But as it began to grow dark and he saw none of the landmarks which indicated approach to Kahokia, a gradual uneasiness put the bandit out of his mind. Progress with a motor became increasingly difficult; and he was afraid of losing the trail. He had constantly to leave his seat to assure himself that he was still in the road. So he moved forward very slowly.

He had put on his fur coat, but he shivered in the raw wind; for by mid afternoon he was weak from long fasting. He had taken coffee before leaving the city, expecting to breakfast at the Kahokia Hotel by ten o'clock.

His motor stopped before what appeared to be a light drift, and he tried to push through. Without warning, the whole machine—a light roadster—careened violently.

McRae leaped clear of the thing, just as it turned turtle. It went into an arroyo, completely burying itself in the snow-dusted tumbleweed.

The district attorney had no choice, but to continue afoot to Kahokia. Sky and atmosphere mingled in one as he went; he seemed to be lost in a cloud. And he was dizzy from cold, hunger and fatigue.

It was at nightfall that he came on a grove of cedars.

Now, he distinctly remembered, there were no trees near the road to Kahokia until after the winding cañon was passed. He had gone through no cañon; evidently he had strayed from the road, somewhere toward the foot-hills north of Kahokia.

The snow had ceased falling and it was bitterly cold. Soon it was dark also. McRae went on—aimlessly now, for the cold had affected the motions of his heart; he could not think clearly.

After a long while he stumbled against a gnarled cedar—and fell. He thought he would get up presently.

Yet he made no move. He lay oppressed with a feeling that it was his duty

to be up and on. Finally McRae became persuaded that he had risen and was on his way to Kahokia. But he was dreaming this; in reality he remained where he had fallen.

How much time passed while he lay in this stupor, McRae did not know. He was aroused when some one poked him with the toe of a determined boot. And a charming voice, permeated with laughter like a mocking-bird, spoke to him:

"You drunken pig, get up!"

McRae desired to rise and follow the voice, but could not.

"Schwartz, you pig," it persisted, "if you lie there you'll freeze like pork."

The owner of the charming voice then stooped and offered McRae a bottle of whisky. The district attorney drank; his mind was beginning to clear.

"You had had enough whisky as it was," commented the airy young voice. "Now, see here, Schwartz, you'll have to get up, I can't carry your weight."

McRae's dulled mind did not trouble itself about the name "Schwartz." For all he knew, in his frozen state, that might be his proper surname. He managed, jerked at by his rescuer, to get on his feet. Then he followed him.

His benefactor seemed to be tall, slight and young. McRae had wandered, since overturning his car, far into the foot-hills. He followed the young man alongside a cañon wooded with dwarfed evergreens; then struck across a level mesa, where he stumbled now and then on piles of loosened rock.

Finally his guide stopped before a tight little cabin, which was dark, except for a slit of light under the door. He kicked the door and whistled. The door opened and he stepped in.

"Well, I found Schwartz," he said. "He's drunk as a pig and was freezing to death. He deserved to be let alone, but I have brought the swine home."

He laughed—with a sound curiously like the whistle of that violin-bow McRae had heard from inside the tar-papered shack. Then he turned and pushed the district attorney into the lighted room.

McRae fell into the place and huddled on a bench beside a red-hot stove. Then he brushed the snow from his eyebrows and looked about him.

"Lord—you God-forsaken fool—that's not Schwartz!"

The district attorney had heard this voice before; before the memorable jail-breach, in fact, when the fate of Rawley Lord and his companions had been sealed forever. It was the voice of the man they called "Slim."

Slim was so stout his shirt rolled about him in creases. He sat at the table opposite "Pinhead," who had been a farmer's hired man before his committal to jail for some trifling offense, and was big-bodied and had huge, hairy arms in grotesque contrast with his small head.

The man's mouth, fuzzy from a week's beard, hung open and there was a puzzled expression, like a porcupine's, in his little eyes. But his food drew his attention from the stranger; he soon fell upon it again, tearing it like an animal.

McRae was rapidly gaining possession of his faculties. He knew Rawley Lord from his portraits, Pinhead from description, and the man called Slim from a casual glimpse of him one day in the Kahokia jail; but neither of the three, he thought, knew him for the district attorney. He looked at Lord.

The bandit stood whistling a theater song, his arms folded across a chest like a young catamount's. The lilt of his whistle reassured the district attorney: it sounded as if he was not to be feared.

"I see," Lord admitted, "that it is not Schwartz I brought home. I ought to have let him freeze." He carelessly shrugged his shoulders, then turned his head, listened a while and remarked:

"Here comes Schwartz now."

A moment later Schwartz burst into the room. At the time of the jail-breach he had been under life-sentence in the Kahokia jail for killing a fellow-crook in a quarrel about a woman. He wore a large, dark fur coat, which had probably misled Rawley Lord into bringing home the district attorney, similarly wrapped.

Schwartz knew the district attorney; he

had sat under his invective while a jury was urged to hang him by the neck till he was dead. He had not forgotten. His ratlike features assumed a wary expression; yet there was something triumphant in his grin. McRae did not like that grin.

And still he assured himself these men would not dare offer personal violence to the district attorney. As soon as it became known the whole county would be roused to hunt them.

At the trial, months before, Schwartz had cowered before the severe gaze of the district attorney; he had whined for mercy and had promised amendment, to no purpose.

He did not cower now; but neither did the man who had fallen into his power. The pupils in McRae's eyes became mere specks. And Schwartz, who had tried to face him insolently, was compelled to look another way. He walked over to Rawley Lord and asked:

"Do you know who that is?"

Less and less McRae liked the look on the faces of these men. Finally they held a sort of conference by the table at which Slim and the man with the small head had just taken supper.

The man nearest the well-shaded lantern was Rawley Lord. The light showed his features plainly—a mist of freckles brown on his nose. He had beautiful eyes, very dark and shot through with laughter, yet with shadows of lurking passion in them. In his gay youth, seated among these wretched beings, he seemed to belong to a finer race.

All at once the district attorney saw this boyish face go white as starch. What proposition or decision had suddenly shocked Rawley Lord? McRae's heart quickened with apprehension.

And yet he hoped they would not dare.

After a little, Lord rose and walked toward him. The district attorney did not flinch, yet did not let his eyes leave the boy. After all, he was a murderer, the law said he was a murderer; and there was no saying what he might do.

Lord was trembling. As he walked toward the district attorney he rolled a cigarette with an attempt at nonchalance;

but his fingers, which were long and delicate as a girl's or an artist's, shook from nervous fear. If he had a sentence to execute, he was shrinking.

"What time is it?" asked McRae.

At the sound of his voice Lord started. McRae, who was not so sensitive as this boy, had once been compelled to shoot a dog; and as he approached, the dog had looked up and barked a friendly query. He had stopped his ears from hearing.

Lord, however, laughed and took out a gold watch.

"Nine o'clock," he said.

McRae continued to watch him. He moved around to the side of the prisoner. McRae turned his head. Lord was drawing aside the blanket that shaded the window to peer into the night.

Presently he began to whistle something from "Madame Butterfly." McRae began to be sure that if any harm had been determined by the council of his enemies, the sentence was to wait a while for execution.

The violinist continued whistling. Now, it was "The Girl of the Golden West." He whistled like a mocking-bird; and his voice went through and through the prisoner, flexible, gay and passionate. In his nervous state, music was soothing wine to McRae.

Soon afterward Lord and the man with the small head went to sleep in a rear room. The other two sat up playing poker. Nobody spoke to the district attorney; and he decided that if he saw a good chance he would slip away and take his chances in the storm.

But he was watched far too closely. After a time he abandoned the idea and dozed a little in his chair.

He was roused by the noise his guards made in going to bed. Lord and Pinhead immediately took their places at the table. McRae did not like that; it resembled too much the changing of a man's guards before the death-cell at State's Prison. But he was determined not to let the situation get on his nerves.

Rawley Lord looked around and saw him watching him.

"You had better go back to sleep; it is only two o'clock," he said.

He had a vibrant voice, soft and compassionate, like a woman's. But it was much too compassionate; and McRae did not like that note in the boy's voice.

He asked:

"What are you going to do with me, Lord?"

"Oh, no harm; I can promise you that." The young bandit then rolled a cigarette to show his unconcern; but this time his hands made such a mess of it he tossed it into the wood-box.

"Don't lie to me," said McRae.

Lord looked at him—white as starch again—and did not say a word.

"I have been watching you all evening," said the district attorney, "and, of course, I know a good deal about you. I don't believe you want to live this kind of life. Why don't you let me go? You will only get yourself into trouble by holding me here."

Lord significantly raised one shoulder. His companion on the watch was snoring, prone across the table.

McRae resumed.

"Let me go, and come with me. If you wait till you are arrested—as you surely will be some day—I can do nothing for you. But if you will surrender, I can promise you a good deal. We have been looking for a man ready to help the prosecution—and just now, the sheriff's office—in return for immunity. If not complete immunity, at least—"

He stopped. The gentleness of Lord had been quenched as by a blaze. The boy laughed, with unutterable scorn.

"You snake," he said.

"You had better take that back, Lord."

"I will. I never knew a snake to say a thing like that. I apologize to the snake. You little hypocrite, do you really think I'm on a level with you? What do you take me for? A lawyer?"

Jere McRae smiled indulgently. He knew, of course, that what he had suggested was perfectly proper; the precedent of district attorney's offices everywhere was with him. He began patiently to explain.

"You don't understand, Lord," he said.

"You haven't caught the idea. When a man informs, he does a service to the State;

he atones for his offense against its peace and dignity. It is an evidence of repentance; it shows he intends to be a good citizen in future. Don't get a wrong conception."

"Don't you get a wrong conception of Schwartz," roughly responded Lord. "He's wide-awake in yonder and hears you whispering." The bandit then turned his back on the district attorney, and for some hours did not speak to him.

Just before daybreak he made coffee and offered the prisoner breakfast. But McRae could not eat. He drank some coffee, very hot and strong. It now seemed to him that he had received a false impression the night before regarding Rawley Lord. The boy looked like the very devil this morning.

Now and then he would whistle a bar or two of "Il Trovatore," the "Miserere"—anything that came to his head; and once or twice he threw open the door and looked into the black early morning.

Finally the other men came from their bunks, just as the violinist was closing the door.

"I am keeping an eye out for that posse," he explained. "Hilairy told me yesterday there was one on the hunt. If I see it first, I fire three shots. Is that understood? And the rest of you do the same, wherever you are, if you hear it first."

Schwartz grunted. They all stood around the stove, their backs to the prisoner; but their intended victim could see them preparing to draw lots.

"Here, give me the first." Lord swooped on the hand of straws with a laugh.

He drew a straw that was very short and threw it on the floor; then he pushed the others aside and took another that was six inches long. He waved it in triumph.

Then he walked around the cabin, whistling or laughing. Once he turned to the others to say:

"It's a long while getting light, isn't it?"

The lamp still burned, so McRae could not tell just when it was dawn. But Lord came to him and said:

"Come on now, we're going to show you your way home."

The district attorney distrusted him, but knew it would be useless to resist, so he

started to follow him from the cabin. One of the others put in fuel and shut the stove, leaving a kettle of water to heat against their return. All then went out, the three who were to breakfast later in the cabin, forming a kind of guard around the one who was not to return.

Daylight came on rapidly.

They made McRae walk among the foothills till they came to the brink of a defile through which a shallow, but rapid river went. They all paused to look warily up and down this cañon, lest the posse of which they had heard should appear. Of course there was sure to be a posse. The new sheriff at Kahokia would be chagrined past endurance at Lord's giving him the slip.

McRae started to go across the cañon with Lord; but Schwartz cursed him for a fool and told him to stay where he was. It grew on McRae at last what their plan was.

Months before, a man who lived at Queen City had been shot by an unknown hunter in a cañon among the foot-hills. The coroner had returned a verdict of accidental death; and this was no doubt correct. But it had occurred to McRae at the time that a murder might be accomplished and successfully concealed in such a manner.

That same way they meant to murder him. It would seem, when he was found, as if some one hunting deer a long way off, had shot wide of his mark and accidentally killed a man.

Death—he had thought little of that. He had supposed it would come when he had had enough of life. But now he seemed very young to himself. He had not tasted life yet.

In the east a pink stain spread rapidly like blood on snow. He stood facing the east. And for a few minutes he could not think at all. It was almost as if he had already died. The sun was right at the threshold; the gate-keepers rolled back the gray clouds; the threshold was all afire.

What? Was he to stand tamely here and be shot like a barn-yard animal? He started to jump from the rock where he had been told to wait the pleasure of his masters. At once a man laid hold on him

from above. He could not see him, but he was held fast.

At last, suddenly, he saw the lithe figure of Lord climbing the opposite slope.

High on a rock the bandit paused. With a wild cry, a dark-blue, long-crested jay flashed across. The arms that had held McRae released him and gave him a shove against the rocks. Next he heard two men making off down the slope with long leaps, going to hide among the rocks.

Through the sunrise hush a rifle crashed. In tones of amazement the rocks, which seem never to grow accustomed to the dealing of death, repeated its sound.

McRae swayed a moment from side to side, plunged forward on his face and lay with his limbs huddled against a boulder.

There was a terrified screaming of birds, on whom the fact of mortality had broken with a shock. The echoes died off from the rocks. A jay flew just over the limp figure at the brink of the cañon. At the crash of the bullet the three men who had been guarding the district attorney had looked cautiously from their hiding-places. An instant later Schwartz ventured from behind a rock.

But there came three shots in quick succession, their signal to hide. Rawley Lord, who had fired them, stood in his place, high on a rock across the defile, and waved his long arms excitedly; then he too dived for cover—and everything was still a while!

Presently the men could be heard running away down the defile.

The district attorney at last opened his eyes; but he ventured no other movement of his limp body. He could see the rock where the rifle bullet fired by Lord had struck—not two feet from his head, making a dent in the hard rock. He had not planned that trick of falling in a feint of death in case the bullet should miss him; but when the thing happened this had seemed the right course, and he had instinctively taken it.

He was afraid to rise. The air was not very cold; it had begun to snow again. As McRae lay motionless in the soft, gray storm, he thought with a passion unusual to him of Rawley Lord, who now seemed to him a very devil. How had this devil

missed him? By a special interposition of a righteous God?

After a time, when there was a thick film of snow on his shoulders, McRae ventured to shake it off, to raise his head and look about him. There was by this time so heavy a fall of snow that it afforded a better screen for his movements than the darkness of night. As nothing happened, resultant from lifting his head, he got to his knees, then to his feet.

All was still. There was no sign of the sheriff's posse announced by that young fiend with the rifle. McRae was for the first time in his official life possessed of a passionate desire to punish. He wanted the posse more for Lord's apprehension than for his own protection. Probably when the time came his conscience would prompt him to leave the prosecution of this hated bandit to his assistant; for he was a righteous man.

He found himself shut in by a gray wall of snow; if he looked up he could see dark-colored flakes tumbling through pearl-colored atmosphere. If he stayed where he was he would become numb and then freeze to death; so he rose and started down the cañon, with a vague idea of finding his way to the railroad thirty miles distant.

Still he thought of Lord. Passion lurked around that young mouth. Some day he would kill the girl who lived at the tarpapered shack. McRae knew that she was good. However, had she attached herself to this young devil? The district attorney could answer his own question; he had felt Rawley Lord's charm.

Now and then as he walked he saw what looked like human figures; but they all materialized as bushes or low trees, banked up with snow. At last he approached a huge pine tree leaning almost horizontally across the cañon.

Here was silence, except for the sound of twigs and leaves settling under a weight of snow, and the little voices of the desert-horned larks, who plaintively complained that they were cold. After passing this point of quiet he began to notice a sound some distance behind him as of a lone man following his trail.

At first he thought his nerves were playing him a trick; but the soft step behind him grew more distinct. Finally it ceased. This must have been when his trailer made a *détour* of the cañon slope and came out in front of him.

For as McRae made his way down the cañon he saw a dark figure, blurred by the snow, directly in his path. Then he heard a man's laugh, low, mocking, and musical.

CHAPTER III.

THE STRANGE YOUTH.

RAWLEY LORD knew perfectly that when he turned his rifle so as to send the bullet eighteen inches from the breast of the district attorney he had sealed his own fate.

Slim and Schwartz were hiding now, taken care of for the moment by his ruse about the posse. But they would understand afterward; and the boy knew what they would think—that he had refused to kill the district attorney because he was intending to get mercy some day by turning State's evidence. They would swear with one voice that he had shot the Kahokia sheriff; or—more to their liking—they would betray Lord to the officers and themselves slip out of the country.

But he could not have killed if the penalty for showing mercy had been instant execution. He was not made of bandit stuff. It was a strange position in which he found himself: in the eyes of the law a murderer! It had begun in a most trifling way. At Kahokia he had quarreled with the hotel people over a bill he thought extortionate, and he had attempted to remove his suit-case through the window—which turned out to be a serious offense under the strange law of the western State.

His imprisonment at Kahokia had not been his first experience—as he had been twice jailed in Missouri, once for rioting and once for refusing to witness in court. So he vowed he would not remain behind bars here, either. He had joined Slim and Schwartz in their jail breach, and Schwartz had killed the sheriff—and now all were guilty in the first degree.

He thought of Hilairy. He was so young; he had not begun to live. And Hilairy—it would kill her if he met the fate declared for him by this district attorney. He knew perfectly that she would suffer it all with him—no, a thousand times more than his part. He was much too proud to ask mercy for himself. But for Hilairy—

He stepped in the falling snow directly before the district attorney. For a moment he did not speak, but looked down at the man whose life he had spared because he was not a murderer; the man who insisted he was a murderer. Then he laughed and put a disorderly lock of hair out of his eyes with thumb and forefinger.

He could hear the horned larks, the weeds and twigs settling, and a dozen other snatches of music to which the district attorney was deaf. In the black depths of his eyes lurked trouble, but over it a great joy of living sparkled.

“I hope you don’t think I’m such a bum shot as to miss by accident,” he laughed. “I hope you know why I insisted on having the long straw.” His smile was tremulous, wanting to be understood.

The district attorney looked at him a long while. At last he said:

“You did that for *me*?”

Lord shrugged one shoulder.

“Indeed no, I’ve got no love for you and I loathe your business. But I’ve never had the blood of a fellow creature on my hands, and I couldn’t have stood it. I’d have shot myself afterward.”

He looked curiously at the lawyer. A lawyer was to him a cold, alien creature, like a snake.

“When you get to Kahokia you’ll hear that I wasn’t in custody at all; that phone message you got before starting on your present trip was a mistake.”

Lord had, in fact, got it sent as a ruse. If the Kahokia posse out in search of him could be made to believe he was under arrest somewhere and go home he might get out of the county.

“I thought you might have broken jail,” said McRae, “with the help of the girl in the tar-papered shack.”

Lord turned on him.

“You mustn’t think Hilairy is mixed up in my affairs. If ever you try to drag her into court I’ll *kill* you! Do you hear? She hates me. She’s mortally afraid of me. We used to know each other in Missouri, but I didn’t follow her out here to get her into trouble. Besides, if I asked her to help me out she’d give me away in a minute.”

McRae smiled to himself. The boy saw that his attempt to deceive was unsuccessful and threw it up with a laugh and a gay gesture made with both hands. Then he recalled what a fool Hilairy had made of this little man. And his black eyes sparkled with enjoyment.

“Lord,” broke in McRae, “get out of this life. Come to Queen City with me.”

The boy’s eyes grew wistful.

“If you will assist in finding the others and getting a conviction,” resumed the district attorney, “I can give you, if not complete immunity—”

Lord’s laugh of contempt made him wince; but he went on:

“I can’t show you any favors, Lord. If you are caught, as you will be some day—”

Lord shook his head impatiently.

“Well, I didn’t stop you to ask you about that.”

He paused. He had intended making a clean breast of something to the district attorney. It was this:

At the time of the jail breach he had dragged that man with the small head—who was almost half-witted—out of the jail by the ruse of covering him with a stick, which the poor creature thought was a gun.

There was no reason why the wretch should be outlawed; he was as guiltless of the crime as McRae himself. And Rawley Lord was afraid that if Pinhead should be arrested and in danger of being hanged he would be tormented past endurance by his conscience. He might go give himself up—like a fool!

Schwartz and Slim were fiends, deserving anything they might get. But he wanted with all his heart to have that poor devil off his conscience. Only, as he looked at the district attorney, he suddenly realized that there was a great gulf between. McRae would not believe anything he said;

he would think the two fugitives had joined hands to lie for each other. The less he talked to the district attorney the better.

He started to go away. The district attorney laid a hand on his arm, but he shook it off.

"You've saved my life—"

"Oh, forget it! I hadn't the nerve to shoot you. Isn't it awkward for a murderer to be like that?" He turned abruptly. "Good-by!"

"Lord—just a moment!" the district attorney called after him.

Lord did not turn his head. He went down a gulch, and almost immediately the snow-storm separated them as if they had been parted by miles on miles of distance. But he knew that he and the district attorney would meet again—some day.

CHAPTER IV.

ACCOMPLICES.

IT was such a warm day as now and then falls in midwinter in the Rockies. The sun sparkled on the white breasts of the low hills on either side of the trail. But there was little snow remaining on those vast patches of prairie weeds, which looked soft as brown velvet, and really were full of sharp thorns and beggars' weeds, with their prickling seeds.

Horned larks and goldfinches in winter plumage were feasting on these seeds, devouring by hundreds the future generations of the weeds.

In the wheel-ruts the sun had melted and the brown earth sent up a steam that smelled like spring. A loaded beet-wagon, with nothing unusual in its appearance, traveled slowly along the road toward Puckingham Dump.

But the wagon was driven by Ed Bayliss of the tar-papered shack; and beside him, on the high seat, sat Hilairy. She had refused to be left at home. At home she would have gone wild with fears.

So she was now accessory after the fact in anything Rawley Lord had done. He had implored her with his tongue to have nothing more to do with him, and with his eyes never to leave him. Well, she had

known from the first that sorrow would come of letting her life become intertwined with Rawley Lord's.

While her brother lived it had not been hard to fight against the charm of this turbulent lover. She had come West, as the doctor had said she must, with Harry; they had taken a homestead, and Harry had thought he would soon be able to care for it.

Rawley Lord had followed to help, not to hinder. About the time Harry died and she got the Baylisses to keep the claim, Rawley had suddenly wrecked his life in Kahokia. After that, though she had leave of absence from the homestead, she could not go away to earn money. She had stayed on; and now she was doing what would send her to jail if it should be known. Ed Bayliss had taken the risk for a hundred dollars.

Hilairy's face was concealed by a sun-bonnet of black sateen warmly quilted with cotton. Lest any one know her by her eyes she wore large blue glasses. Her body had been made shapeless by clothing, on top of all an old and dusty coat with wisps of straw clinging to it.

In the bottom of the wagon Lord's body had been protected by a false bottom from the weight of the beets. This space, boarded up at the end, had a peculiar look which might catch the eye of a very close observer.

But the wagon had passed, unquestioned and apparently unnoticed, through two little towns. Now, if all went well, in an hour Lord would be safe aboard a freight. The wagon drove into a winding cañon. At the other end of the cañon were two roads, one leading to Buckingham beet dump, the other to that station in the woods where Lord was to catch his freight.

Already, in the purple hills rising toward the west, the sunset was here and there reflected, as lakes of fire. It was very dark in the cañon; but when they reached its end they emerged into twilight. It was a shadowy road that led to the station.

In a little while now he would be safely away. And she would never see him again in this world! She drew a deep breath with a catch in it.

The wagon turned toward the station, and Hilairy saw two men on horses standing in the road. They were waiting for some one to come or had paused to talk at the forking of the roads. It was too dark for her to distinguish their faces. Hilairy's heart beat violently; for she knew that Schwartz and Slim had vowed to put the authorities on her lover's trail.

She started when one of the men turned and shouted to Ed:

"Hi, there, beet-hauler! You're going wrong with that load—there's no dump at this station."

Ed hesitated; and Hilairy made a little motion of her hand, bidding him turn the wagon toward Buckingham Dump. They could go that way, slowly, until the horsemen had passed them, then face about and still have time to catch the freight.

And yet—she did not like the tone in which that man had spoken to Ed. It had been too peremptory for a casual bystander on the road.

As the wagon went toward Buckingham Dump she heard the two horsemen behind. They made no attempt to pass. Perhaps they were merely interested in talking together. No doubt they were bound for Buckingham village. Where the road for the village branched away from the one to the dump they would leave the wagon; and there would be time enough for the train.

The heavy wagon creaked on. Hilairy could hear also the flapping of the tops of Ed's shoes; a large pair of gaiters that had belonged to his mother and had lost their elasticity. He pulled nervously at the piece of pink ribbon—dirty and perilously frayed—with which he had pieced a failing suspender.

The penitentiary loomed before him. He wished Rawley Lord had his hundred dollars back again.

"I never thunk, 'Airy," he remarked in a husky tone, "to ask ef thar was anything hid under these beets contrary to law. Rall guv me money to drive the wagon, but ef I'm breakin' the law I don't know it. You uns could swear to that in a law court, 'Airy?"

"If you try to give Rawley away I'll swear to what 'll send you to the Pen,

that's what I'll do," the girl replied. "Go on!"

The man obeyed uneasily. He was smoking a foul pipe, the smell of which mixed nauseatingly with the sirupy odor of the sugar-beets. Huge cottonwood trees rose beside the road, with wintry, brown and yellow leaves clinging to their branches. A gust blew a few shriveled ones down on Hilairy's head.

It was growing late, dangerously near train time. Behind the lacy cottonwood boughs she saw the gray sky, still shot with rose color, but faintly. There were brown fields, roughened from the digging of beets, and here and there in some low house the yellow light of a lamp.

A farmer was out watering stock. Hilairy heard the sobbing and straining of his stationary engine and the gurgle of the water it raised, into the troughs around which calves and bullocks clustered, their broad faces white in the dusk.

Still, the two men did not pass the wagon. Ed drove down a hill where the passing of heavy beet-wagons had worn the road, and entered a depression where it was dark as midnight and water stood in the wheel-ruts. More water gurgled under the culvert at the lowest point.

It was so cold Hilairy shivered in her heavy wrappings. She glanced back and could not see the two men—only the white-faced horse which one of them rode. They had stopped in the road, she thought, to exchange a word. But they came with a sudden spurt of speed after the wagon. At the same moment Ed released the brake.

As the team started forward, splashing through the wet of the road in intense darkness, a few beets from the heaped wagon rolled off at the back. Then she heard a great splash, as if bushels more had fallen. The wagon was weak at the back, on account of the false bottom. She feared the fall of beets would attract the attention of the two horsemen behind; but the darkness and the noisy wheels afforded concealment. The momentum of the heavy beet-wagon had carried it far ahead of them.

They overtook the load just as it reached the summit of the opposite slope, where

the touch of the afternoon sun still lingered, a hint of warmth in the night. Nearly all the color had gone from the sky. And now surely they were approaching the point where the road lead to Buckingham village. Would the two men turn that way? Or were they trailing the wagon?

Now, the sickening odor of beet pulp reached Hilairy as they approached the pens where refuse of the Buckingham sugar factory was fed to cattle. The moaning of these imprisoned beasts, awaiting slaughter, never ceased, day or night—there was always, at least, one awake. Now and then one of them would break out into futile rage, bawling a defiance that did him no good and alarmed nobody.

Rawley Lord had always been fascinated by the moaning of cattle; he used to say he would make a piece of music one day, entitled "The Dumb Beast." Hilairy could make out low-browed, sullen white faces, between horns that branched like trees.

Their voices were like the groaning of all the suffering creatures in the world. It filled her with fear, so that she felt sure the two men in the road behind were trailing her wagon.

Stolidly, guided by silent Ed Bayliss, the beet-wagon creaked on. It passed the road leading off to the village, and Hilairy looked back.

First she thought the white-faced horse was turning—

No; both horses came deliberately in the wake of the beet-wagon. Soon the man on the white-faced horse rode up alongside the wagon; and Hilairy saw his profile against the west.

She had seen it before; he had once come to the Bayliss shack with a county sheriff to ask questions about Schwartz and Slim—and Rawley Lord. All the heart went out of her at sight of him. She wanted to cry out:

"He is under the beets. Come and take him if you are going to."

But she did not say that—or anything. She sat motionless beside Ed Bayliss; and the wagon creaked on toward the dump.

They passed a cemetery neatly fenced, with slender trees growing around its enclosing fence; and inside the blue spruce

trees of the West among the marbles. Harry was there—she wished that she were, too, and Rawley Lord.

She had kept heart through a hard life. Now suddenly it fell on her and crushed her. She could not bear any more after to-night. The beet-wagon creaked on to the scales at Buckingham Dump.

It went on for weighing. There were other beet-wagons, belated, waiting around the scales. A huge acetylene lamp made a circle of light. A Western ranch woman, large, handsome, dressed in short skirt and sweater, presided at the scales. The two men who had followed Hilairy's wagon rode to the other side of the group of teams and stood watching.

"It's pretty light for such a looking load," the weigh-mistress commented.

Hilairy had no plan; she knew Ed Bayliss had no plan. He took up the reins and started toward the dump car. The deputy sheriffs followed.

She thought they were not sure and were hesitating about searching the wagon. The hole through which beets were dumped was reached by an inclined plane. When the horses had been driven over the floor it would be tilted and the load would drop into a flat car waiting on the track below. If Ed did that—to save himself from detection—the beets would crush Rawley to death. And she knew he would rather be crushed than given over to the law. She trembled and was cold.

Ed turned to climb the inclined plane.

"Stop there!" cried the man on the white-faced horse. "Get off your wagon; we have a search-warrant." He showed his star as he spoke.

Ed's face became greenish and his body seemed to sink at the pit of the stomach.

"Mister," he protested, "ef thar's anything in this hyar wagon contrary to law it sholy is unknown to me. It must have crep' in under them beets while I were in the cabin, where I went back in to get my mittens just before I started. Some person sholy might have trampled with my load, then, because mammy she couldn't find them mittens nowhere and she 'lowed I hadn't orter go on without 'em. En 'Airy there, she set on the wagon all the time,

but she never let on to me. En when I got my mittens and come along out—”

“Shut up.” The man with the warrant shoved Ed from the wagon, and he climbed down, impeded by his gaiters. Hilairy was already on the ground.

She wanted to scream:

“He is under the beets. Take him and have it over with!”

But she made no sound; only stood watching, the damp on her forehead, while the beets were thrown out in shovel loads.

Now as they threw aside a shovel load they came on the false bottom. A half-dozen beet-haulers were helping in the work; they cheered shrilly like dogs yelping on a rabbit trail, and attacked the false bottom.

The nails in the boards were slow to yield. The eyes of the men looked red in the lantern light and their arms moved like hounds' paws. At last Hilairy heard the scream of the yielding nails parted from the wood. The deputy sheriff swung his lantern. In the space the false bottom had covered—

They saw a little hay, a scrap of cloth caught on a nail, dust and darkness.

Hilairy crept a little nearer. It was true. By some miracle Rawley had escaped from the beet-wagon.

CHAPTER V.

THE ESCAPE.

WHEN the passenger train passed Buckingham Dump, Hilairy had been allowed to go aboard. She left it at the flag-station, the one at which Rawley was to have taken his train to safety. There were pine woods all about this place and piles of cut logs waiting for shipment. The freight had been delayed.

Wherever he was he would surely try to reach this station in time. As she walked up and down the track and he did not come, she squeezed the fingers of one hand with the other or clenched each hand by itself. It seemed to her she would die if he did not come.

At last she heard some one in the weedy growth near the tracks—

It was not Rawley, but a man on a horse; no, two men on horseback. She hid behind a pile of lumber. And the two men took posts in the shadow of the woods to wait. It seemed to Hilairy that many hours passed. Every moment she strained her eyes into the darkness of the woods, afraid of seeing Lord. He did not come.

She heard the whistle of the freight—at last. Then she slipped around her lumber pile and into the woods, unseen. As she crossed the ditch by the edge of the woods her foot touched something soft and alive.

No sound came from it; and she held her breath. The freight rushed up. Under cover of the noise she whispered:

“Keep still. Right where you are, Rawley!”

The glare of that headlight seemed to fill the whole world. Its searching beams went far into the darkness, scouting ahead; they penetrated the depression of the ditch and placed a bright circle on Lord's cheek.

Then the train rushed on, and the two men turned their horses away from the station.

Lord waited an instant—till he heard their hoof-beats in the cañon. Then he whispered:

“Can you guess how I got out, Hilairy? It was like this:

“I suppose you heard a lot of beets fall out at the back of the wagon as we were going through that depression across the culvert? Well, that was because I had worried the end board loose. I began to work at it as soon as I heard those voices; I didn't like them a bit. I threw out a lot of beets; and when the wagon got down there in the dark, I dropped after them. I went into two feet of water.”

He reared his shoulders from the ditch, and they were dripping.

“But I don't mind a wetting,” he laughed.

She was down on her knees beside him, her ear close to his lips:

“Hilairy, I didn't want you dragged into this. I begged you to keep out of it.”

She put her arms around his neck. All her life she had suffered for her men: for a drunken father who had once been a good actor; then for the brother whose

music was to have pulled them all out if he had not died; and now for this most unfortunate of her brood.

Suddenly she turned and clung to him savagely with those small hands that had fought so long for her men. She could not let him go. And she could not in any way escape the fate he had brought on himself.

"You've done nothing wrong, Rawley; nothing wrong!" she cried. "I love you; and I'll bring you through!"

He was silent a moment, holding her in his arms.

"No, I've done nothing wrong that people know about. And yet, Hilairy, there's one thing I wish I could cut out now. I hate to think about it."

He must have felt her body stiffen. She was afraid of what he might have to tell her. He had done so many wild and foolish things since she knew him first.

"What is it, Rawley?" she asked. Just that way she had asked her father often what he had done to bring them all more misery.

"It's about Pinhead," said Lord.

"Oh, that man who looks like a porcupine?"

"Yes." He hesitated. "It's my fault that he's hiding out here. I wish I—hadn't—got him into this affair. Hilairy, if I—get away, out of this—will you let me know about Pinhead?"

"What could you do if they should get him?" She asked it sharply, in alarm.

"I don't know," he answered.

The woods around looked black and felt cold. She was worn out with excitement and chill. She seized his arm.

"Rawley! You would not give yourself up?"

"No, indeed. I'll save my skin. Don't worry about me. But it 'll do me lots of good to hear from time to time they haven't got that sun of a gun."

CHAPTER VI.

AT BAY.

MIDNIGHT. Lord had some faint hope of getting aboard a train at Millico. Though the moon was very bright, he ven-

tured to leave the arroyo in which he had been hiding and struck boldly across a stretch of prairie.

Where a low butte, strewn with pebbles, melted into the level, he saw a gray shape, motionless. He walked toward it, and it did not turn and fly. So he walked up to it.

The creature quivered from neck to tail, but did not whimper for mercy as a dog would. It knew the law and the penalty for being a coyote.

"You darned son of a gun!" exclaimed Lord. "You think you're going to get your deserts now, don't you?"

The coyote, fast in a trap, faced him with unblinking eyes. It had known since the trap snapped on its foot that this would be its last night of life. For two hours now the last stars it would see had wheeled over its wicked head. It had expected to live until morning; pink skies, perhaps, sunrise, and then the end. Like a man condemned, the coyote usually pays the extreme penalty in the first light of day.

"You're a puppy," admitted Lord; "so I reckon you didn't kill the hen yourself. But you were along when it happened, and you know the conspiracy law; or, if you don't, you ought to."

He stooped and picked up a rock. A slight shudder swept through the brute's body; but its pride did not allow it to whine.

The nervous fingers of the violinist closed around the rock. His whole body thrilled to the point of pain, for he felt everything more keenly than other people. If he had wanted to do it, he could not have quenched the flash—of hate and longing—in the beast's eyes. And he did not want to do it. He used the rock to pry apart the jaws of the trap.

The puppy leaped aside and looked at him bewildered.

"Luck to you," said Lord; and at the sound of a man's voice the coyote was off, a vanishing streak of gray on the prairie.

Lord continued across the prairie.

The moon had set when he approached Millico. A pile of hewn logs made a black shadow on which he fixed his eyes apprehensively as he crawled down an arroyo. The freight was due in a half-hour.

Suddenly he paused in his wriggling motion down the arroyo—and lifted his head. He had heard a voice. An instant later a match was scratched on the lumber pile, and a man's head appeared for an instant in its flare. Lord crept softly back the way he had come.

Morning came. Every little stream had a light film of ice, turquoise-blue. Flocks of horned larks flew over the white-flecked, brown slopes. Lord lay still in the arroyo. It was warm in the sun, and he did not suffer that day. Before night the sky became overcast, so there would be no moonlight to betray him.

He crept along the edge of a creek, among tall rushes to which were attached old nests of red-winged blackbirds. It was now dusk, and there was mist in the air. He could hear the coyotes yapping, and the scandalized response of law-abiding dogs.

For he was now in the ranching country north of a little flag-station. He walked boldly across a meadow until he saw, approaching him, a ranchman with two dogs. His description had been posted throughout the county, and there was a reward. So, like a fool, he turned to run. He was light-headed from hunger and fatigue.

But luck was with him, for the ranchman paid no attention to him, and the dogs, after chasing him to the edge of the ranch, stopped and yelped murderous threats after him. He ran on. The voices of the dogs grew fainter.

But the ranchman alarmed the neighborhood when he returned to his telephone. An hour had passed, and Lord was hiding under some weeds in an arroyo, when he saw two men beating about the undergrowth. He crept up his arroyo, into another, to where it was crossed by a fence, and made his way into a corn-field, where last year's fodder stood. It was very dark and damp. The wind in the fodder made a rustling noise like paper. He lay, exhausted, between furrows.

Presently he heard a rustling louder than wind among the dry blades. Then came a quick, eager breath, and a head was thrust between two stalks of corn. Lord turned his eyes toward it—imploringly.

The dog was just such a one as he had always loved to play with; but to-night it looked to him as it might to a rabbit. It seemed a huge and merciless monster. Its tongue, dripping moisture, lolled between fiercely white teeth. The red of the western sky was reflected in its eyes.

With dry lips, Lord feebly attempted to whistle. It scornfully rejected the advance, threw back its head, and joyously gave tongue to its master.

Lord now heard men crashing through the fodder toward him. He sprang to his feet and stood at bay. But he swayed from side to side from weariness. He knew this was the end.

A half-hour later, tied to a chair with a clothes-line, he sat in the kitchen of a cabin built for the ranchman's hired man. And the winner of the county's reward had gone to telephone the sheriff and the district attorney.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY ASSISTS.

JERE McRAE was in Millico on business for the county. Every one looked up to McRae. He was as clean officially as he was physically and morally. He had always stood for the enforcement of law. No bribery of him was possible, and no sob stuff got past his hard, shrewd eyes to the jury. One look from McRae was enough to kill counsel's speech introducing the weeping sweetheart or the angel child—as the case might be—of a prisoner.

When he went into the Millico hotel that evening at nightfall, the landlady felt it an honor, and cut a lemon pie. Seated before the spotted table-cloth in his well-fitting gray business clothes, he looked a person of distinction. Since Hilairy's eyes and voice had touched a strange chord in his heart, stirring forgotten things, he had asked a girl in Queen City to marry him, and had been accepted. He was a successful man in every way.

But he was troubled that night at Millico. If word should come that Rawley Lord was a prisoner, what should he do? McRae had never before been afraid to

meet an issue. He asked with evident anxiety whether a telephone call for him had come to the hotel.

"Hoping to hear news from them Kahoky bandits?" impertinently asked the landlady.

"Why so?" responded McRae with dignity.

Before he had finished his meal the telephone buzzed outside the dining-room door. McRae instinctively pushed his plate from him and half rose. Then he remembered; it might not be his call.

The landlady remained in the hall till he breathed freely in relief, thinking the call was not for him. Then she thrust in her head.

"You're wanted over long-distance, Mr. McRae. No; keep your seat. Central just wanted to know if you were here."

It was so quiet McRae could hear hushed, sibilant whispers from a flock of birds that had settled in a bush outside the dining-room window. The west was red beyond them; he saw their gray bodies, their tufted heads, the red dots, like sealing wax, on their wings. In that direction lay the foot-hills, a certain cabin deserted now, and a certain cedar-haunted cañon. Nearer was ranching country, hard for a hunted man to cross.

"I'll bet they have one of them bandits," commented the landlady. And after a moment: "I hope it ain't the fiddler. I heard him play one time at the show."

The telephone rang again, and the wax-wings took flight with cries of alarm. McRae went to the receiver.

The voice on the wire was strange to him.

"I don't get your name—who is it?"

As the district attorney asked this, he felt his lips very dry—and moistened them nervously. The name was repeated; he responded promptly, "Yes, yes, Mr. Robertson," and gripped the receiver.

"I've got one o' them Kahoky bandits on my place, Mr. McRae. Got him roped and tied"—exultantly—"and in my hired man's room this minute."

"Which of the men is it, Mr. Robertson?" broke in the district attorney. "A very fat man or—" His voice failed him.

"This ain't a fat fellow; he's young. I think he's the fiddler."

"Ah, yes—Lord!" McRae once more moistened his lips.

"Sure; Lord," replied the winner of the reward. "The shuriff has been notisfied, of course; but I thought if you would come right out you might get him to confess before the shuriff gits here. It wouldn't do to lose convictin' him."

"No; you'd lose your money."

"Sure. We made the arrest, the boys and me. If you come right along out, you can testify to that. The shuriff hadn't a thing to do with it. And if him or any officer applies for that money—"

McRae hung up the receiver. As he walked through the hall, the landlady accosted him:

"Say, you ain't sick, are you?"

The district attorney smiled a little and went out to his car.

It was a short way, through the dun-colored February evening, to the Robertson ranch. As McRae left his car, a dog with eyes burning from excitement leaped the fence at him.

The dog was much elated by his success in trailing a criminal, and desired to make a professional record. He felt himself born for a detective; and his yelps demanded instant attention from his master to his new quarry.

Robertson came out and kicked him.

"You blame fool, spotted houn' pup, don't you know the difference between a bandit and the district attorney?"

"Perhaps he's right," said McRae, "and there's not so much difference as we usually think."

Yet the boy in the cabin was a murderer—the law said he was a murderer—and the law must be carried out. McRae did not waver in his duty.

"He's wounded; some fellow put a bullet in him," remarked Robertson.

When McRae reached the cabin, he saw at a glance that Lord was desperately wounded. He sat limp in the kitchen chair. Perhaps he would die.

"I'm shot, you see"—Lord addressed the district attorney—"but I won't die. This is a Christian country; I'll have every

sort of care. Of course if I was an ordinary person without funds, you wouldn't bother to get me a doctor. But you'll see to it I live to—"

"In Heaven's name—hush!"

As McRae said this, a look of surprise met him; then of understanding. Lord's eyes, which had been hard and gay, suddenly implored. Then he seemed to lose his courage. A freckled face can look ghastly!

He pulled himself together once more.

"Well, Mr. McRae, you and I have met before. Do you remember the last time?"

He paused. There was no sound in the room but the tick of the seventy-five-cent alarm-clock on the hired man's shelf.

McRae was conscious of many things: of two cravats, one pink, one purple, hanging under the clock; of the hired man's Sunday clothes, yellow leather belt and derby hat; a bottle of bay rum and a razor. A bluejay screamed at the door, for the moment drowning the hurry of the clock.

The district attorney looked into the face of the boy who had given him his life. There were evergreen foot-hills not far away, and a breath of cedar blew in; such cedar as Lord's body had bruised that morning in the cañon.

"I can't prosecute you!" he cried.

Lord's eyes questioned him.

"I would do anything in life for you," huskily continued the district attorney, "except be a traitor to the State."

The boy laughed harshly.

"That means you will give the case to your assistant? Well, I would; he can win as well as yourself; you have done your preliminary work pretty thoroughly, Mr. McRae."

There was just one way for McRae to save the boy. He must keep the prosecution in his own hands, and must say to the jury:

"This boy is not a murderer. Justice demands his acquittal."

But he felt that Rawley Lord was a murderer; the law said so. Beads of moisture came out on his brow.

He resumed huskily:

"You see, Lord, the law does not give

a district attorney any option, any pardoning power."

"What are you going to do about it?" demanded Lord, to whom the justice of the case seemed plain; who knew he was not a murderer.

As Lord looked at him, the district attorney—for he was a fair-skinned man—became blue-white. He looked as if he, not Lord, was the prisoner. He tried to speak, but could not get the words out. He tried again, and this time he succeeded:

"My duty."

Lord threw his head back and smiled. Then he whistled a bar or two.

"Don't do *that!*" implored the district attorney. "It's hard enough for me without that."

The accused man looked at him. A kind of understanding dawned in his face.

"I see," he admitted at last. "It isn't a matter of holding your job."

"For Heaven's sake, Lord, what do you think of me, anyhow?"

"I think you are a queer fish. But it's all right."

He made a slight, restless movement; and suddenly Lord suspected that the wound was a fiction. The arm he had said was shattered had just displayed remarkable nimbleness. The district attorney looked gravely at the prisoner; it would be his duty to tell the sheriff that he did not believe the wound was genuine.

It was about nine o'clock when Hilairy came on horseback and accompanied by Ed, who remained outside the cabin.

"His folks sent him a little bundle of things," she explained to Lord's captor, the ranchman. The bundle was carried under a soft green scarf she wore in Mexican fashion. As she darted toward the prisoner, to lay it in his lap, the scarf for a moment enveloped him.

The ranchman, who was very careful about his reward money, growled to her to let him see the bundle before the prisoner received it. She obeyed instantly.

"There's nothing in it he won't be allowed to have," she insisted. "Just you open it and see. I'm a cousin of his. I live with his aunt, Mrs. Bayliss. And between us, when we heard he was arrested,

we fixed up a few things he'd need going to Queen City."

McRae observed her face upturned to the ranchman. Her shining eyes reflected the lamp-light. Her mouth melted alluringly. With a grim smile, the district attorney recognized the mother-bird ruse. With every flash of her eyes she was telling that man she would be very easy to get; she was beautifully dressed, too, with her green necklace resting in the hollow of her breast.

Robertson was an easier dupe than the district attorney had been. His small, evil eyes, set about with rolls of fat, gleamed with appreciation. They found out that dimple, like the master modeler's fingerprint, which showed above the round neck of her frock. They did not turn toward the prisoner; and the other men had left the cabin.

McRae was sure there was contraband in the bundle, and that she would not let Robertson find it. But he knew, also, that the sheriff, who was momentarily expected now, would get hold of it. Her cheeks glowed crimson; her forehead was intensely white.

The sodden, overfed man asked her some question, and she threw him a look from her veiled eyes that made him bend toward her, flushed and smiling foolishly.

She did not wince from having that face so near hers; but the rays of the one tiny lamp fell on her breast, and McRae saw it heave suddenly as she repressed a sob. Robertson was shaking out a blue yarn sock.

McRae heard a slight noise behind him where Lord sat tied into the chair. He turned.

The ropes had been cut through. McRae knew in a moment that Hilairy had given Lord a knife when she bent over him. But Robertson did not guess.

"He's chewed them ropes; look at him!" he cried as Lord got to his feet. "Ketch him; hold him!"

With a sweep of his arm—the one which he had said was terribly shattered—Lord overbalanced a man who had approached the cabin door.

At that the crowd of men and boys scat-

tered before him. He leaped down the three steps and was away.

Robertson ran out of the kitchen, shouting:

"Head him off! Stop him!"

The district attorney followed. He did not know what he would do. But outside he became one of a crowd that pursued the bandit. And Lord had not yet got away. He was dodging around the barn in the dark. A white-and-yellow dog was leaping at him with loud and excited barking.

"Don't shoot to kill!" roared Robertson. "Wound him! For God's sake, don't kill him!"

"There's no reward if he's killed," said a boy of sixteen, who seemed to be Robertson's son. "Hit him in the shoulder or the leg. Don't kill him."

The bandit made toward the fence that divided the barn-yard from a timbered pasture that offered dark cover. McRae had no purpose to help him.

But suddenly an impulse possessed him. It was like a divine inspiration. He had no time to question it.

He leaped forward, throwing up both hands, just as Lord mounted the fence and Robertson leveled a revolver his way.

There was a report from the gun. The bullet struck the district attorney on the shoulder, plowed along for two or three inches, and glanced away. McRae fell on his face close to the corral.

"He's killed! He's dead! Robertson shot the district attorney!" shouted a voice. And another, who had not seen anything clearly, began to shout:

"Murder! Murder!"

So there was great confusion, and the prisoner was forgotten.

McRae lifted himself on his uninjured elbow.

"I'm not hurt to speak of; just a scratch," he called into the crowd about him.

Then the pursuers remembered Rawley Lord. They gave an impromptu hunting cry, like Apache Indians, and vaulted over the fence into the pasture where the ever-greens grew.

But Robertson remained. Of a pessimistic disposition, he had instantly aban-

doned hope. His only relief was in upbraiding the district attorney.

"He's gone for good this time," he said. "We'll never see *him* again. Why didn't you keep your head—say? What made you get in the way of my gun?"

"I don't know why I did that," McRae replied. "It was an impulse that came to me. If I had had time to think, I should never have done that."

Yes; if there had been time for reflection, he would have done all in his power to get Lord hanged by the neck till he was dead. What force had compelled him, then, to let himself be shot in the bandit's stead? He did not know.

He got to his feet and walked toward the cabin, holding out the injured arm, from which a little blood dripped. The wound was, as he had said, scarcely more than a scratch.

The shouts of the pursuers now sounded far away, and the dogs yelped in baffled tones. Evidently they had found no trace of the quarry. McRae had saved him. Yet he felt this issue he had dodged must be faced some day. He would yet have to decide Lord's fate.

The news of Lord's capture had gone over the county, and the watchers at the railroad stations had been called in. It was the hour for escape. Before the watchers could be at their posts again, the fugitive had caught a freight at Millico.

This took him over the Wyoming line before morning. For two days he lay out on the prairie. Then the February thaw was over; a cold wind blew over the range, and he ventured to a Wyoming railroad station. Here he was not molested. He boarded a north-bound train.

A week later he crossed the Canadian border.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUMB BEAST.

SUNSHINE poured into a pleasant little flat in a large Canadian town. Hilairy liked sunshine at her windows. Lord had taken the flat a week before her coming because it was such a charming one. And

he had bought something to hold the roses he would have for her to see when he opened the door for her.

Nobody had questioned him since he came from the States. It was quite safe for her to come now and marry him.

Suddenly he thought he could feel her in his arms; her head on his breast, his lips in her hair. He leaned against the pretty mantel shelf in that room which was to be hers. He came to himself after a moment, with his arms clasped about empty air. His arms ached empty. Then he laughed aloud.

In one week and one day he would see her. Then there would be nothing lacking to him that a man can have. Money came easily; nobody questions the past of a man who can play. His mother had been a Frenchwoman, and he went by the name of "Louis Lecoq" at the theaters. When Hilairy came, he thought they had better go up into Alaska, where the miners would be even more certain to ask no credential beyond his fiddle.

The prospect was perfect—but for his shadow. He would not have told any one about that shadow of fear which constantly pursued him. It was not fear of the law—he seldom thought about that—but something fantastic and absurd. And now, with everything going well, as he stood alone in the room he had ready for his bride, the shadow leaped at him, and all but got its fangs into him.

He began to do a futile thing; to go over all the things that had happened at Kahokia, and justify himself. First he had been locked up on that absurd charge of beating a board-bill. How could he endure the humiliation of being punished for refusing to pay an extortionate charge?

He had not known that Schwartz and Slim were plotting to escape; but that night, when he saw the outer door open and the sheriff bound and gagged, he had seen his chance as he was loose in the corridor. He did not really repent that he had run then.

But there was one thing he could not justify: he ought not to have taken poor Pinhead—otherwise "Happy Appleby." Happy, with his small head and big body,

had been a trusty at the jail, and was never locked up. Schwartz had called out: "Bring that fool along; he'll raise the town!"

Whereupon Lord had covered Happy with a stick in so dramatic a fashion that the small-headed man had immediately accepted it as a gun. Gun-shy as a puppy, the fellow had immediately become docile, and Lord had dragged him out of the building. Then, at the threshold, Schwartz had turned and shot the sheriff for sheer, wanton lust of killing.

Of course, Lord's conscience acquitted him as to the sheriff. He was no stickler for the technicalities of law. But he knew he was to blame about Pinhead.

So that shadow of fear kept trailing him. He was haunted by a feeling that some day he would have to give himself up; as if he and the district attorney must meet face to face in the end and decide what justice was.

He put aside the thought of the district attorney, and his mind centered on Pinhead. He wondered where Pinhead was now. He had no mind to get along in a strange place. What if he had frozen or starved during the winter? He had been in mortal fear; for Schwartz had told him the law said he was a murderer, and the district attorney would surely get him hanged if he went back. He might very well die of hunger rather than surrender.

Hilairy had not been able to hear anything about Pinhead. It seemed to Lord that the matter was getting on his nerves to-day and disturbing his balance. He had dwelt on it constantly since his own escape. Perhaps if he went out to walk in the dusk, the shadow of apprehension would let him alone.

He walked till he was tired out. When he turned toward the flat again, the newsboys were calling the evening papers. Lord beckoned one of them and said:

"Bring me a States paper; a Denver *Post* or *News*."

When the boy had started to get him what he had asked for, he decided he did not want to see a Denver paper. He felt a little afraid. He was always afraid; yet he bought the Denver papers every day.

"Don't get a Denver paper!" he shouted after his boy. "Bring a *Toronto Gazette* instead."

But the boy did not hear his correction, and presently returned with a *Denver Post*.

Lord carried it up-stairs to his pleasant flat. Under the door he found a letter from Hilairy—square, white, sweet-scented, and postmarked, through the Baylisses, somewhere in Missouri. He laid the letter and paper on the table in the room he had prepared for Hilairy. He took the paper before the letter.

When he opened it and saw what appeared on the first page, the muscles tightened around his heart. He spread the paper flat on the table. What had caught his eye was the picture of Happy Appleby.

The newspaper print was dim, but there was no mistaking that gorillalike body and small head. The camera had caught an expression familiar to Lord. The small eyes, like a porcupine's, looked out, bewildered.

There was no rebellion in them, not even protest. It was as if the soul imprisoned behind that inadequate forehead would never try to penetrate the mystery of its own life. Pinhead would accept his new misery as he had always accepted his mental inferiority, as a simple fact. What must a being like that think of God's justice? Lord read the text:

"Happy" Appleby, Kahokia bandit and alleged murderer, who was captured yesterday.

He read on until he came to a paragraph on an inside page:

Under the law it will not be necessary for the district attorney's office to establish which of the men did the actual killing. If it can be shown that all participated in the jail-break, conspiracy can be assumed, and all will be held guilty in the first degree.

Lord laid down the newspaper. A moment later he took his knife and detached the first page, making great gashes in it, like a drunken man. He had made a little fire in the grate, to test whether it would draw. The window was open, the thin curtain blew in and out in a little wind of

spring. He crumpled the newspaper and threw it into the fire.

It was not his fault that Pinhead was to be wronged—but the fault of the law. He put the whole paper on the grate and took up Hilairy's letter.

But he could not read it. He kept seeing the face of Happy Appleby—low-browed, with eyebrows heavy as if entangled with burs, and the stupid expression of a bullock. The dumb beast! Lord felt very cold, and his teeth chattered.

He took Hilairy's letter again, and again could not read it. He had fully resolved not to go back—but he could never tell her. She knew that it was his fault about Pinhead. A thing like that would kill her. She would feel that he was a murderer.

And he was—now.

He thought he would go down-town and wait for the hour for opening the theater. When he came back he would read that letter.

He was afraid of the black staircase, lest his shadow get him there, and he decided to go back. He escaped it and reached the lighted street.

He felt better there. And at the theater he managed to get rid of Pinhead's face before his eyes. Pinhead had been a hired man on a farm. He had got to drinking from lack of mind, and had spent most of his time, the last year, in jail. He used to be rather happy in jail, and proud of his position of trust. He had never had anything other people want out of life, yet he had been satisfied because he was so inferior.

Lord played in the orchestra out of sight from the audience, and came on once for a solo, in elaborate disguise as a negro fiddler. It was in such ways as this that he overcame the disadvantages of his position. Pinhead could not overcome disadvantages. The dastardly advantage taken by the stronger overwhelmed him, as he finished his act, with shame.

He was afraid to go home.

When he came there at last he found Hilairy's letter still unopened on the table. And still he could not read it. As he held it in his hand, he felt a strange recoil through him. And he saw what surprised

him; he would not want to marry Hilairy if he murdered Pinhead. It would be impossible for a man who had done a thing like that to have peace with her. He would hate her. Some day he would kill her as bad men kill good women they have married, for the look out of their eyes.

He was not fit, any more, to marry Hilairy. He ought to have a woman of his own kind. And what was his kind? Some painted thing who could laugh all the time and not care what he did to get money for her; and drug him to forget!

He leaped to his feet. If he did not find some respite this thing would drive him mad. He began to play on his violin something that was a great favorite of his—from the "Messiah." But the minute he touched the strains that celebrated infinite love, there came before him that dull, animal face, with the big, hairy body—the mouth half open, the wistfulness of the eyes. Christ, who loved the least and lowest—he would never be able to think of Christ again.

His hands were cold, he handled the bow badly. He abandoned the "Messiah" for "Pierrot's Serenade." But Hilairy loved that, so he could not play it.

He threw himself down and finally went to sleep. But he did not sleep because of a dream. The worst thing which had flitted through his mind came back in that form. He thought he had married Hilairy and she drove him wild. He thought he flew at her, he thought he was gone mad and his hands were on her throat.

He sat up in the dark, in the pretty room prepared for her. The dream had been hell; and he was still in hell.

Then suddenly the thing he had most feared came. The shadow he had been dreading leaped and fastened itself. First came the thought that he might still be as he had been before, if he would go back to Queen City and clear Pinhead.

Then he wondered why he did not settle it that way and escape the hell of the past few hours. As he wondered, he was lost. The shadow had him; he had resolved to give himself up. And the relief was so great that he could never reverse his decision.

He felt like himself again. He went to the table and read Hilairy's letter. It was a simple, sweet letter, about her coming to him, and now it seemed so beautiful he could have wept over it. He wanted her as never before in his life.

By taking the train next morning he could reach her before she left to join him. He could not bear to send her any word; he wanted to see her and make her understand.

So he did not try to sleep any more that night. He played his Handel a while, re-read Hilairy's letter, and started for the railroad station. He felt excited and strangely happy. He was in such a frame of mind that he could not believe in any sort of unhappy ending; he was sure that he would come out of that trial ahead of him triumphant over the law. It was the law of fools.

Yet the district attorney was not a fool. And in his eyes one whom the law condemned was a lost man.

It was on Saturday morning that Lord found himself again in the district of McRae's authority.

Broad day! Still, he was not arrested. No one seemed to recognize him, no one had him in mind, any more. Schwartz had been hanged; the man with the small head was in jail awaiting the brief, ceremonial trial that would seal his fate. People had accepted the probability that the other two bandits would never be taken.

From his window in the passenger coach, Lord saw Robertson's ranch and that cornfield in which he had once been apprehended by a dog. It was now June. The sky bent over the earth a luminous breast of white clouds shot with blue. And through the rest of the blue, sunlight danced and flickered like the lights in Hilairy's eyes. As the mother sky embraced the earth it seemed that every spark of life must be precious—even the life of the wicked.

Lord left the train at a flag-station not far from Millico—he wished to see Hilairy before surrendering. As he walked across the prairie toward the little town where she was at work, he came across a coyote trap

that might have been the same one from which he had once set the victim free. Meadowlarks were blowing silver trumpets everywhere, shouting faith in the ultimate joy of all the earth.

Looking westward, he could locate the tar-papered shack on that claim to which Hilairy had come a long while before with her dying brother in a passionate, last attempt to save him. Lord remembered how, when he heard of that pilgrimage, he had resolved to follow, also to earn a great deal of money to help her. So he had come to Kahokia with a road show. And in an evil hour, what misery he had brought on her!

He walked through the one street of the little town where Hilairy played for a motion-picture theater and acted as accompanist for the road shows. Nobody recognized him. He went to the boarding-house and the landlady showed no surprise at sight of him. At last he stood waiting for Hilairy in a dingy little parlor. That very day she was to have given up her position to leave for Canada.

He heard her step on the stairs and her voice, singing Tosti's "Good-by." She had a soprano that might have amounted to something if the money for training it had not been spent on her brother.

Her voice came nearer: "Hark a voice—"

She broke off with a little cry; she had seen him from the hall. He could not see her for a mist before him. But he held out his arms.

When they were around her—

"I had to come back, Hilairy. I'll tell you about it in—in a minute. It's going to be all right, now; *perfectly all right*," he murmured ecstatically.

CHAPTER IX.

FACING DOOM.

MCRAE was not doing hard work preparatory to trying the man with the small head. His guilt was too obvious, his fate inevitable. He swore he had been intimidated by Rawley Lord, who had cov-

ered him with a stick he took for a gun. But the tale was so thin McRae knew no jury would listen to it. Besides, the man was revolting! His appeal would give the prosecution no trouble.

McRae spent his force on something that did not immediately concern the prosecution; he wanted to know what defense could be made—in case he should be taken for Rawley Lord. So, the Sunday morning following Pinhead's arrest, he quizzed the deputy sheriff who had been bound and gagged with the murdered Kahokia officer. This Westerner was a very laconic person, who might know more than he had told. On one cheek was a scar, still raw and wide open.

"Where did you get that, Joe?" asked McRae, though he knew it had happened at Kahokia, the night of the jail-break.

"Mex," replied the former deputy.

"Oh, it was a *Mexican* that cut you! It must have been that Mexican who made a row and gave Schwartz the chance to break for liberty."

The former deputy nodded assent.

"Schwartz said it was Rawley Lord who cut you," remarked McRae, whose eyes had narrowed eagerly. "If he should be caught you'd be put on the stand again, Joe."

When Joe did not reply, the district attorney resumed:

"Well, you're sheriff yourself, now. Do you think they'll ever get Lord?"

"Nope. Too much talking been done."

"Lord is better stuff than the others, don't you think?"

"Nope. Worse. Talks too much."

"Wait a moment," urged McRae. "You were in the jail that night. If Lord should be arrested, would you have anything to testify?"

"Yep—for defense."

"How so?" eagerly replied Lord. "You don't think he was in the conspiracy?"

"Nope. But I can't prove it—bad egg, anyhow. Let him hang."

"You think you could clear him of being in the conspiracy?"

"If you wanted to let him go anyhow—maybe. Wha's matter with you? Going to resign?"

McRae started. "Why so?"

"And take his case? You seem to want him cleared."

McRae felt alarmed. It was not merely that the Kahokia officer should have perceived this bias of his. His conscience troubled him. If he could have been sure that the former deputy would clear him, he would have made powerful personal efforts to have Lord brought back, by way of atoning for his own fault in virtually helping him to escape.

He went to church that morning—for he was a very religious man—and during the service was most uneasy, feeling that he had done wrong that night at the Robertson ranch.

Those eyes, that voice, had somehow found their way to his soul, overcoming his conscience. It seemed to him now that he had come within a narrow margin of being accessory after the fact. At times he felt that he ought to make a great effort to recapture Rawley Lord. Perhaps he should ask the county to offer a larger reward. District attorneys might do such things.

He felt very uneasy in church. Of course if he ever had to face Rawley Lord in a court-room he would do his duty, though he had to call on a jury to hang him until he was dead. But if the bandit were never captured, would he, the district attorney, not have defrauded the State?

He worried about this till the organ began a voluntary. They had a wonderful organist at that church; and McRae was easily swayed by music. It might be said he lived two lives; one of faithful, fine-spun, conscientious toil, the other of musical passion.

As he was coming out of church, a messenger who had been waiting on a wheel, gave him a note. McRae started. He knew Rawley Lord's handwriting; he had a specimen at his office, with the portrait on the theater bill. The note read:

I am now on my way to your office, where I wish to see you as soon as possible. I have a disguise for the street, and hope not to be arrested.

As McRae finished reading, he heard chimes—mellow and exquisite bells—from

a cathedral whose gold cross gleamed far above the city.

But when he left his trolley at the criminal court building, there were no bells and no music to confuse his mind. Only the river splashed, thick with city filth, around the piers of the bridge—just as it had the day Schwartz was condemned to die.

Inside the court building, it was dim and dirty as always. McRae went down a corridor and around a corner and entered an elevator which was filthy with tobacco, and greasy and malodorous from contact with wretched human beings. He had never felt, as to-day, how the sordid tragedies enacted in this building overhung in the spiritual atmosphere.

At the second floor he left the elevator and walked past the criminal court-room. The blinds were drawn there. The empty and silent place opened, a black hole, from the corridor. He thought of Schwartz who had sat there manacled, cringing like a rat in a trap, his beadlike eyes intent on the district attorney. In a little while, now, it would be Rawley Lord who sat there—and the district attorney could do nothing.

In the shoulder which had been wounded that night at the Robertson ranch, he felt a prickling, then a numbness. Perhaps it was because that shoulder would never be quite right that he was not able to forget Rawley Lord and the thing he had done for him without thinking.

It was plain that Lord had insinuated himself into the building without attracting attention. The watchman on the floor passed by and looked with mild surprise at the district attorney. McRae continued down the corridor to the familiar rooms at its end.

The door of the front office was unlocked, everything of importance was locked in the safe in the inner room. As McRae laid his hand on the door-knob he was assailed by a fear; what if his emotions should sweep him away? He had always had a horror of being carried away by emotion—something of which no person who knew him felt the least anxiety.

He stood a moment reading his own honorable name, in large black letters that appeared on glass which seemed smeared

with soap-suds. It reassured him. The bearer of that name had never been guilty of hysteria. His life for years had been dedicated to protecting weak-nerved juries from the sob stuff constantly being dragged in by counsel for the defense. He turned the knob and went in.

The public office was in Sunday trim; neat matting, a desk with writing things, a swivel-chair by the desk. But the window-blind had been jerked up and sunlight poured in. McRae walked to the window and straightened the uneven blind.

There was no one in sight. Perhaps Lord had reconsidered his resolve to surrender. Surrender was a strange course for a man who seemed to have no respect for law. Just as he decided the boy had not come, after all, in the shadow of the book-shelves, between the last row and the wall, he saw him.

Lord had a large book, and was assuring himself as to the conspiracy law. When he saw that McRae had seen him, he came over to the table. He looked white as chalk, and his freckles were conspicuous. McRae put out his hand.

But the boy flinched nervously and refused to see the hand. Whatever McRae might be, as a man, the district attorney was an enemy.

McRae began:

"There's one thing in your favor, Lord; you surrender of your own accord. You feel that to be your duty. You respect the law and wish it to take its course with you."

"Oh, bah! No rot like that!" returned Lord. "I came back because I haven't got a grain of respect for the law." He folded his arms over his lynxlike, young chest. "You see, I know how easy it is to murder a man according to law, and I knew you were fixing to murder Pinhead."

"I?"

"Oh, legally, of course. You don't stick knives in people, like Schwartz.

"Just let me tell you about Pinhead. Schwartz and Slim got ready to run, that night, and they had got the sheriff and that deputy they called 'Joe' bound and gagged. Well, I joined right in with them, as you know, and I saw Pinhead standing

there, and I thought if we didn't take him along he'd be sure to peach, so I bullied him and he went. He'd no more look cross-eyed at a sheriff than a rabbit would bite a hound.

"But I've been reading some in your books, and there's no doubt about it; if he can't prove he didn't want to run he's a murderer. If a man once gets into jail, he's about gone. That's what the law is for, isn't it? To hustle a jail-bird out of the world as quick as possible? That's your business, incidentally." He turned on the district attorney. "How did you feel when I told you Pinhead was innocent?"

McRae started; he had felt disappointed and chagrined. He would not answer the boy.

"Won't you tell me your own story? Just as it happened?" he asked.

Lord made his little gesture of defiance; that is, with two fingers he tossed the hair out of his eyes. Then he folded his arms again.

"What makes you fight me so? I'd give anything to find you not guilty."

Lord's nerve failed him. He had been picking up and pressing a metal ruler like the neck of a violin he had found on the desk. His hand shook suddenly like grass in a wind, and he dropped the ruler.

"Go on; trust me!" urged McRae.

There was a dawn of hope in Lord's eyes. He began. McRae's had narrowed to slits. As he followed the story, with his keen head, now and then he would make a note on a scrap of paper.

The room was very quiet. That end of the city was overrun by squirrels. One of these little beasts ran along a window-ledge and paused outside the district attorney's window. It could not be still, but palpitated with the joy of living.

Now, the squirrels, introduced as park pets, had become nuisances in town, and the janitor at the criminal court had orders to shoot them on sight. This one was not long for sunshine and wind, the pleasure of food filched from city fruit-stands, the palpitant joy of movement, the delight of hoarding property against cold days, the bliss of mating and parenthood.

In spite of its death-sentence, it was all joy as it looked, bright-eyed, into McRae's window and watched Lord tell his story. Finally, in an ecstasy of superabundant vitality, it leaped through a wide space of air to another window-sill. More fortunate than the men condemned in that place, it would die but once.

What a man suffers, the price of having a deathless soul entangled in mere flesh and blood—

Lord finished his story. He did not look at McRae, in whose power he was, but at the sky. From inside, the dirty river, the slum street, were invisible. He could see the ledge where that clean, wild thing had been, and beyond that, blue sky, without smoke because it was Sunday, and crossed by white clouds shot through with sunlight. Lord resumed:

"I have told you the exact truth. You know as well as I do that I am not a murderer. I liked that sheriff, I never wished him harm. And as a matter of fact, I was not in the conspiracy. But I took advantage of it. I ran away. I am guilty of breaking jail."

"Since you came and surrendered," responded McRae, "and since the charge against you originally was malicious, as it appears, you would not be prosecuted for that."

Little beads of sweat stood on his forehead. He had seized on this minor issue to evade the question that met him.

There was silence a while. At last the district attorney looked at Lord. His clean-cut, righteous face was perfectly composed. He spoke.

"I am sorry."

Lord smiled, faintly and grimly. Then he threw the lock of hair off his forehead and folded his arms. Just these things he would do at his final trial; just this way he would take his doom.

McRae began again.

"You see, according to the law, it would be necessary for you to show that you were not in the conspiracy. You were breaking the law, so the burden of proof is on you."

Lord shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, you needn't argue the question. Save your speech for the jury."

"I will leave the prosecution to my assistant," said the district attorney.

Lord thought of the assistant; a yellow-faced little man, who looked like a rat-terrier. He laughed.

CHAPTER X.

WAITING.

IT was often said afterward that there was a great similarity between the trial of Schwartz and that of Rawley Lord. In both cases the jury stayed out just fifteen minutes; in both the jury had an obdurate Scotch foreman. In both, the public trial was short, the work beforehand long and involved.

To Hilairy, the long delay and suspense beforehand seemed to augur badly for Rawley. It seemed to her a very simple thing: he was not a murderer because he had never in his life wished to harm a fellow creature.

But it seemed to her, during the preliminaries, that the district attorney's office was gradually winding him in a net. Somehow those months of dull apprehension passed. Anxiety—dull, diffused, like snow in the air—gave place to something sharply acute; in short, to fear. To-morrow, it would be terror; for to-morrow, she thought, she would know.

She could not get Rawley's enemies out of her mind; that little, yellow-skinned sharp-eyed man, eager to shake the life out of him, and Jere McRae. She did not hate the assistant as she hated McRae.

For McRae, it seemed to her, was too cowardly to prosecute the man who saved his life, and yet too careful of his official popularity to risk losing the case. Rawley's lawyer said it was that. To let any of the Kahokia bandits slip through the net would be unpopular. Pinhead had escaped, Slim was not caught; and so Rawley had to be sacrificed.

She had told the lawyer what happened to McRae that snowy night on the road to Kahokia, but he had said he could not use the story. If he subpoenaed McRae, the prosecution would know what he was about, they could get the story cut out as irrele-

vant, and there would be a bad impression on the jury—they had tried to slip in sob stuff.

McRae had not told that story to any one, so it was plain he did not mean to do so. Probably, Rawley's lawyer said, he did not believe that Rawley had missed him by accident. He might tell the story in a way that would ruin him.

Hilairy was afraid the lawyer knew he had no case. He seemed to think of nothing to introduce but sob stuff. He had proposed putting Hilairy on the stand on some dragged in pretext. But Rawley had said if that was done he would plead guilty; it would "ruin" her, they might even prosecute her for helping him elude justice.

But he talked very bravely, insisting he was not afraid to face a jury; but it was quite plain he did not expect acquittal. He would not let Hilairy come to see him and would not touch a penny of her money.

The trial was to be on the Friday after Thanksgiving. All day Thursday the air was cold and dark with that pervasive gloom which presages snow. The inevitable could be felt before, like a certainly impending doom. But Hilairy could get no train until after midnight on Thursday.

She made no attempt to sleep; she was in terror lest the storm keep her from Queen City. About ten o'clock on Thanksgiving night, it began to snow.

As she sat waiting, constantly going out to look at the weather, she thought backward along the years. She had known Rawley almost all her life, since he first took music lessons with her brother. If only he had been different! If only he did not have that wretched way of dashing into a thing and afterward taking thought!

Yet it was just because he never counted cost that she had cared for him.

As she sat in the dark, waiting to dress for her journey, it seemed that her heart would break in her desire to get to him. And though she blamed him for not letting her come to him, in her heart she was glad of it. That was like him. He always took consequences by himself. He had forbidden her coming to the trial; yet she knew he would be glad.

After midnight, her anxiety lest the snow prevent her going became acute. She stood at the window, straining her eyes to look into the night. But at five minutes before one, she heard the hack in the snow.

She ran down-stairs. The hackman told her the train was almost on time, in spite of the snow.

On board the train she found the people almost all asleep. It was hot and foul inside; the roof lurched overhead. Her cheeks burned so she put them to the glass, to cool them. Outside, she could see a white ridge piling against the black window.

At an early morning station, some passengers came in, all drifted over with snow. They said the train was sure to be snow-bound going through Long Pass.

A little after that, blocked by drifts in the road-bed, the engine stopped, began again, wheezed—and subsided. It was now daylight. Hilairy could see the slopes of the pass rise, drifted over with white, on either side. They were snowbound.

The hour came for opening court. The other passengers buzzed about her; children romped in the aisles; every one was happy and in high spirits because the railroad would serve meals in the diner.

Now and then Hilairy looked about her at all these sensible people, who thought before they did things and acted better than they meant. How well they fared in the world! When they spoke to her she answered absently and turned her face to the window. It grew very cold; bitter air blew through the cracks.

A man came and offered her a magazine, which she opened in order that no one should come and talk to her. There was an article about the shooting of an Irish rebel after the Sinn Fein uprising. She hated it so that she could not help reading it to the last paragraph:

We gave his wife a sleeping draft, hoping it would keep her asleep till after the hour—sunrise. It worked like a charm at first. But when she had slept five hours she opened her eyes. Dawn was just coming into the room. Her first words were: "What time is it?"

As Hilairy laid down the magazine a shriek startled her. The blood seemed to retreat to her heart. What had happened

at Queen City that she should hear it so far away?

It was only the engine starting; the tracks had been cleared. In one hour they would be at Queen City. What was being done there, now?

CHAPTER XI.

THE VERDICT.

THE street before the criminal court building was clean that day, since the snow covered every foul footfall and wheel-track as fast as they were made. It was so still the sluggish wash of the river could be heard. The air had that muffled coldness which had penetrated McRae's furs and almost stopped his heart one night on the road to Kahokia.

McRae sat in court. The day before his assistant had come to him with a request that he make the final summary of evidence. People might think he was not wholly committed to the prosecution. And it had seemed to the district attorney like the call of God. The thing was not to be evaded; he must do his duty.

"We have to ask the jury to hang him," his assistant had remarked. McRae could see that it would be a dangerous precedent to make any difference between conspirators in crime. That would lead to gangs organized for murder and robbery, with one scapegoat on whom to put the blame. So he had told his assistant that he was entirely in favor of enforcing the law. And he had promised to make the final summary.

Only, as he waited his turn, he wished Lord had chosen a different sort of counsel. The man was the kind of lawyer who deals in irrelevancies. When held strictly to the law he was a blunderer and no match for the State. He did not even know the law. The little yellow-skinned man was on his feet a dozen times during the defense, and did not once fail to get his opponent overruled by the court.

The State had contrived to have the case tried before a judge who had been many years on the criminal bench and was hardened against pathos. The jury, too,

had been fought for by the State; they were all business men who did not like being summoned on a jury and wished the trial quickly over. One was a Scotchman of about sixty who always scratched his ticket in favor of Jere McRae because McRae was a man after his own heart; because he punished sinners.

Lord's counsel had surely been napping when he used his challenges peremptory before coming to this man. With him on the jury, acquittal would be impossible; the wildest hope of the defense must be eleven for acquittal and one for hanging the defendant.

When Jere McRae rose, a grim smile expanded the countenance of the Scotchman. He removed his spectacles, put them into a case lined with red flannel, pocketed the case and leaned forward to enjoy the speech of the district attorney. McRae was sure to do his duty.

To do his duty—McRae's mind had closed like iron on that one idea. He would do his duty always; though it should be to hang his brother.

Rawley Lord sat with arms folded across that young chest of his that was as lithe as a catamount's. He was twenty-two, but a boy can look harder than a man when he tries. His lips curled a trifle, as if he might be humming a tune to himself; and that air of indifference was doing him no good with the jury.

He rolled a piece of paper into a sham cigarette, just as McRae had seen him do that night in the cabin. It was now afternoon. The snow in the air made it a carrier of sound, and when a violin led off in a ten-cent theater somewhere, the tune strayed into the court-room; a hesitating, troubled sort of tune. Involuntarily, Lord's arm crooked and his fingers curled as if around the neck of an instrument. McRae thought he would break down.

Instead, he braced himself so hard that he looked like a fiend. Through a colored pane over a window, a streak of light filtered and fell on his throat, under the jaw—a sinister line of crimson. He shrugged one shoulder.

McRae began in a low voice. He did not look at the prisoner. Never before had

he been seen to avoid the eyes of a man he attacked. People noticed this. The court-room grew so still that Lord could hear his lawyer's watch ticking aloud.

There were few in the court-room that snowy day. The case had not promised to be interesting, since it was thought counsel knew McRae too well to try any sob stuff. But a bright young reporter had dropped in to pick up what he could. By something in McRae's voice he sensed a story. He slid over some empty seats to be near the district attorney.

McRae was summing the case. The old Scotch juror leaned far forward in enjoyment of his logic. It was a beautiful case to argue. Either Rawley Lord had conspired or he hadn't. If he had it was murder in the first degree; if he hadn't, he could not be held on the charge. The burden of proof was on him, since he had run away. He denied his conspiracy and offered in proof the testimony of the former deputy-sheriff. Was that proof? McRae riddled it. It was merely a man's opinion.

The criminal court was not far from a railroad. While McRae destroyed the defense, the whistle of a train was heard; and a little later a taxi drove up to the building. The junior member of Rawley Lord's counsel then tiptoed out, to keep Hilairy from entering during the speech of the prosecution. It would be hard for a woman to hear what he was evidently going to ask of the jury.

He went on. But now he was speaking with great effort; he felt like a man swimming up-stream.

"And so, gentlemen of the jury"—he paused to breathe—"gentlemen, it becomes my duty—"

The reporter held his pencil poised.

McRae had stopped; he seemed to be thinking on his feet.

"It is my duty, in the—in the sight of God—"

Again he caught himself. His words had a queer sound. It was all he could do to control himself. But he must do his duty.

Rawley Lord had gone white; had braced himself with both elbows on his chair. He still smiled—scornfully.

Suddenly, as if by some force outside his

control, McRae found his head turning toward the defendant. He looked into the boy's eyes.

Then it was to him as if another spoke with his voice.

"It becomes my duty—if the court permits—to tell the jury why I could not prosecute this defendant."

"You ask to be sworn as a witness, Mr. McRae?" The judge had always a deferential way with the district attorney because McRae was professional and did not allow any tricks or irrelevancies.

McRae thought the court would think his testimony irrelevant; that he was about to lose the court's confidence. But he did not mind. He minded no more than once when a rich malefactor had sworn he would break him like a stick if he dared prosecute; or another time when a gang of crooks, long protected, sent an anonymous screed promising to blow up his motor unless he nolle-prossed a certain case.

He took the oath and the judge told him to go on.

"One day last winter," proceeded McRae, "I started for Kahokia to get evidence against this boy. As has been shown, he knew all about my business. He has told the jury that he hated all officers of the law. Accepting his statement, he hated me. He had some reason, on account of facts in my possession, to be afraid of me. My point is that if I had been murdered that day it would have been easy to show motive."

The Scotch juror leaned farther forward. His eyes gleamed.

McRae went on.

"Something happened that night and the day after to give me a personal bias. What I will say bears on the character of the defendant, with reference to the charge of murder. His counsel has repeatedly said, 'He had no intent to kill.' Let us see."

The district attorney then recounted his adventure in the snow, and told how, in the cabin, he fell into the power of the men he had firmly resolved to punish to the limit of the law.

The reporter—who usually wrote in his natural tongue and translated later on the typewriter—set down: "Little Jerry could

see his finish." The room was as quiet as a theater. Faces upturned to the district attorney looked white out of the gray afternoon.

McRae told of the morning after the storm; how Rawley Lord had drawn the lot; how they had all gone to the cañon; how he had watched his appointed executioner climb the opposite slope.

"And then," finished the district attorney, "he fired above my head. It has been shown in this trial by the State that he is a wonderful shot. He followed me down the cañon in the storm. He could have killed me then. I don't know why he didn't, unless the reason he gave me that morning was correct.

"He said I might use all I knew against him. I admitted that it seemed my duty to do so. He told me then he would rather be condemned for murder than to kill a man. This gave me a bias. I could not argue that he was a man to plot the death of a sheriff."

Somebody started to applaud. It was like a match to firecrackers. Applause broke out here and there all over the room. The reporter, who had started the applause under cover, scribbled with exaggerated meekness on his pad; he seemed the only man in the room not taking part in the demonstration. His private notes had the quality of real literature, though his style in print was flat. Large on his pad loomed the remark: "Then little Mac busted the thing wide open."

The judge was scandalized by the applause. In that court the jury was protected from the drafty sentiments of the mob, like a teething baby. He threatened to fine every one who had clapped. The reporter put his pencil behind his ear, his face expanding infantilely. He, too, was evidently scandalized.

While these things went on, McRae took his seat. For a minute or two the place was discordant; the noise of the mob struggled with the voice of the judge. Then the law triumphed. Everybody was quiet and abashed. McRae looked at the jury and saw no change in their faces. The fog of uncertain doom settled back on the atmosphere.

When the case was closed he went into the hall and found Hilairy.

"The jury has gone out," he said. "Will you go in and wait?"

She shook her head. Her eyes were red and swollen. She was afraid if she went in like that Rawley would break down. She shivered with her fear and horror of McRae.

Nobody knows what a jury will do! It was possible, McRae thought, this one would disagree; then they would be out all night. It had taken just fourteen minutes for a jury to decide what to do with Schwartz. Surely they would not dispose of Rawley Lord like that! Only the Scotchman would be ready for such quick action.

McRae walked down the corridor and stood by another window. The snow had stopped outside. Sparrows sat huddled in their bunchy feathers.

He heard a noise in the court-room. He knew what it was and it made him ill. They had agreed with the Scotchman.

McRae hurried back along the corridor. Hilairy knew the jury was back in the court-room, for she was trying to find her way there. She came instead to a little door with the sign: "Admittance to Members of the Bar Only."

The district attorney did not want to pass her and go in. They both waited. Hilairy was shivering as if it had been cold in the hall, though the steam hissed in the pipes and the air was stifling.

Then inside the room McRae heard a bar of music whistled—"The Girl of the Golden West." It began like any other music, and broke in the middle from excitement. There came the hum of many voices.

"Go in there," said McRae to Hilairy. "He's all right or he wouldn't whistle like that."

Hilairy began sobbing as if her lover were dead instead of acquitted. Somebody jerked the door open. McRae saw the judge and heard him say to Lord:

"I am glad of the verdict. What Mr. McRae said made me feel sure you were innocent."

The iron gray face, hardened on the

bench, was luminous and lovely. McRae had not known the judge could look like that. McRae stood in shadow, away from the door.

Rawley Lord came out and put his arms around Hilairy, who stood with her face against the door, sobbing and laughing.

"Don't cry, honey!" he said. "Don't be a silly. I knew all along I'd be all right." Yet the boy was still ghastly from that awful minute when he had sat watching the jury file in.

"Don't, now, don't," he kept insisting. "It wasn't anything—really. In this country"—a passionate pride throbbed in the voice of the recently avowed anarchist—"in this country, when a man knows he isn't guilty he's got nothing to fear. Men like McRae—"

He could find no words to tell what he felt about McRae. But he caught sight of him; he took hold of his hand and wrung it fervently.

Suddenly he flung off the weight of horror that still burdened him. He seized Hilairy by one hand, like a schoolboy, and pulled her after him to the elevator. A minute later, from the front entrance downstairs, McRae saw them—laughing, running ankle-deep in snow across the little triangle of grass which is kept in front of the court building—to hail a cab in the street.

McRae knew, every one knew, that if he had not told his story Lord would now be awaiting sentence. The papers would tell the public so to-morrow. The story would read:

"The district attorney then made an impassioned appeal in behalf of the defendant"—newspaper English for "Little Mac busted the thing wide open."

In short, McRae had done the very thing his conscience had told him he could never do; he had been guilty of dragging in what he had thought was irrelevant.

But his conscience did not trouble him at all. He knew he had not freed a guilty man. For his spirit thrilled yet with the touch of a mighty hand; he had been the instrument of a justice broader than can be contained in books of law. He had done his duty.

(The End.)

Little Boss of Big Ben

By Katharine
Eggleston



Author of "Buckskin Beauty," "The Taming of Fierce Elton," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED.

BEN MOORE, defeated for election as mayor of the town he had labored to benefit, by Boss Leonard, was comforted by Rose Leonard, the boss's daughter, who told him her father did not wish him to be elected as mayor because he meant to make him Governor of the State. Moore inwardly resented the implication that he would become the tool of Leonard; but Rose was very beautiful, and almost before he realized what he was doing he proposed to her and was accepted.

A bit disquieted with himself, and needing a rest, he abruptly left town for his ranch in New Mexico, which was managed by a person named F. Fleming, whom he had never seen, but who evidently was an excellent manager.

Upon his arrival he met an exceedingly attractive young woman who seemed to have a surprising grasp of affairs. After a very earnest talk with an oldish man, she introduced the man to Moore as her father, the manager. However, she seemed to dominate the old man; and at last Moore, who could not bear to see women doing mannish things, interrupted severely:

"Miss Fleming, your father and I are men of affairs. May I suggest that you devote yourself to matters more suited to a girl's attention, and allow us men to attend to the ranch business?"

CHAPTER V.

THE SECRET BURIAL.

BEN MOORE wore his most masterful manner. He had let it grow on him somewhat during his experience as a leader of the people. The step he stood on was his rostrum. The girl was his audience. He was very confident.

But the effect of his pronouncement was a surprise to him. Fleming, before ill at ease and stupid, suddenly straightened up and stared. Then he turned sharply.

Ben watched him with growing discomfort. Then Fleming stumbled off with hunched shoulders after the cayuse that had already followed the cattle toward the corral.

Ben whirled and looked at Miss Fleming.

With golden brows drawn she was staring off across country and biting her pink lips.

Moore tried to tell himself that it was chagrin he saw in her face. But his common sense repudiated the assumption. There was actually a hint of laughter subtly traveling over her, like a light that barely leaves the pressure upon a field of grain.

"I believe you think you see something funny!" he said sharply.

"Oh, no, it's just perfectly natural," she said as if she were uncertain of her voice.

"A man wants to run his own business," he asserted.

"That's what I meant," she replied, but the veil was suddenly lifted and he saw her silent laughter unmistakably.

He caught her pony's bridle. He stared up into her face, compelling her gaze.

This story began in The Argosy for December 22.

"Look here, Miss Fleming, we may as well have an understanding. I have an aversion to women in men's places. I can quite understand how your father's judgment is warped by his affection. And I suppose he is used to having you around with him. He doesn't realize quite what this kind of thing means."

Her gaze poured into his, not less steady than his own.

"This kind of thing is—what?" she asked coolly.

"Bossing. Butting in. Forgetting your place as a woman," he replied rapidly.

"You're not narrow-minded enough to try to fit a girl like me into conventional bounds!" she flared.

"You're just the kind of a girl who ought to glory in a woman's position. You are preeminently fitted to grace it," he responded.

A flicker of scorn curved her upper lip more decidedly. She tried to pull the rein from his hand. But he held it securely.

"I can't see that I do anything I should not. I've had four years of very fashionable school life. Most of it was dreadfully irritating and limiting. It depends more on the girl than on any particular right or wrongness of certain activities. Above everything, each of us, girl or man, has the right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness in our own way so long as it hurts no one else. That right is inalienably mine!"

She was a gorgeous little creature of glow and fire. The fire of her fervor poured over Ben. He had the feeling that it was all meant for him. He appropriated it with an exuberant joy that took little account of the principle she proclaimed. He just masculinely reveled in her beauty and stimulating vitality.

"It does hurt some one else!" he proclaimed.

"Who?" she asked in genuine surprise.

"Me. You're so exceptionally attractive. It grates on a man's idealism to hear you bossing and interfering in matters that are not in your line."

She swept him from the tips of his well-polished shoes to the crown of his well-groomed head.

"You're so exceptionally good-looking

that it grates on a girl's idealism to find that you are only broad and high physically!"

With a suave little move to which her pony responded, she started.

Ben had to spring aside to avoid the trampling hoofs.

It had been said of him that he rarely met a foeman worthy of his linguistic spear. He watched her brown back as she swayed lightly in the saddle. He acknowledged reluctantly that a very agile and interesting foe-lady had put one over on him—a pretty big one.

Not that Ben conceded anything to the truth of her position, to the force of her logic. He merely acknowledged that she had fitted his words to her bow and shot them back at him with telling accuracy.

He did not like bossy women. He did think that the beauty of a girl was her biggest reason for being. He was determined to comb Fleming down to a level of common sense where he would see the absurdity of letting his daughter do his talking.

Off to the right of the ranch-house there was a small cottage. It was nearer the corrals, alone on the slight knoll that it surmounted. Miss Fleming was making for it with the full speed of her vigorous little mare.

A moment later he saw Fleming canter away from the neighborhood of the corrals and go to the little house.

"Nunkie, he's a pill!"

Fortunately for all concerned, Moore could not hear that remark. He pulled a box of cigarettes from his pocket and sat down on the edge of the porch.

"We've got him to swallow," the man addressed as Nunkie responded grimly as he got down from his horse and flung the bridle over its head.

Fan stared into nowhere. Her golden brows were puckered. Her eyes were dark with worry.

"It's so—so stupid! To have him come now! He'll interfere with everything!"

"Lord, honey, 'tain't as bad as that! Just 'cause a man's too stuck on himself ain't no sign he ain't got sense some ways! Sometimes it's because he has that he's so puffed up. He's likely made a few more ten-strikes

than misses, and folks have talked him up till he's took their opinions of himself!"

"He thinks girls can't do anything more than look pretty!"

"That's a pretty common idee with folks in the East. I reckon the wimmin's had something to do with making them think like that."

Fan looked at the wiry old man. He was as ugly as nature in ungenerous mood, and wind, rain, and weather could make him. But there was a fine reasonableness and a hale seasonableness about him that proclaimed him a man. To Fan he looked like one of the earth's best.

"Nunkie, you're fine; but you're wrong. The women in the East start things besides fashions. They've had to work like everything for a lot that men like you and the boys out there just naturally give us. A man must be an awful nut to live in the midst of things and never get a big enough crack in his head to let in an idea about us! Besides, he isn't from the East; it's only east of here!"

Back on the edge of the porch Ben was completely lost. He saw no guide-posts to give him a clue. It never occurred to him to think that Frances Fleming was attaching an amazing amount of importance to Ben Moore's opinion of her sex.

"Nunkie, you'll stick?" the girl suddenly demanded, leaning forward to lay her hand on his shoulder.

"Gosh! I've got to!" he ejaculated miserably.

"Yes, you've got to!" she affirmed mercilessly.

Moore, watching from the ranch-house, saw her lean forward. A queen might have conferred the sign of her favor on a subservient knight with some such action. Moore's lips closed; and his jaw stiffened. The determination to run his own ranch without Miss Fleming's interference hardened.

Presently he went over the ranch with Fleming and it was after six when he returned to the ranch-house. As he entered the living-room, he saw that the table was laid for dinner.

Rather curiously he stopped beside it. The linen was good. The dishes were of

china with a Japanese design. The knives and flat silver were disposed according to conventional usage. On the side of the table a low bowl filled with yellow flowers was placed. And there were covers for two.

Moore went to his room. Who were the two? Himself, of course. But the other? Fleming or Fleming's daughter?

He took time to change to blue serge from khaki. All the while his curiosity and his appetite pricked him to speed. He reentered the living-room.

It was empty, though a big acetylene lamp in the middle of the room had been lighted. And a chair had been placed at one side of the table. He went toward it. The second plate and its accompaniments had been removed.

He dined alone. It was not the last time. For a week he was served by Paleface, who was about as conversational as a gnarly pine-tree on the sunless side of a cañon.

During that week he caught occasional glimpses of Miss Fleming. He often saw her at a distance. She seemed to spend her time when out of the saddle in and around the little house. But twice he was sure he had heard her in her own room when he had returned unexpectedly to the ranch-house. She was avoiding him.

The thought was as uncomfortable in his mind as a bur in his boot would have been. He could not seem to get away from it, busy as he was.

He was more than pleased with the condition in which he found his interests. He began wondering that he was letting others do the enthralling work of bringing this desert into rose-garden shape.

Fleming was peculiarly difficult. He knew every detail of the ranch, its equipment and its management. But he appeared to have no notion of the animating purpose which Moore detected behind all the detail.

The ranch owner tried to get his manager to open up along the lines about which he had written freely. But Fleming always fell into an irritating silence, punctuated with grunted monosyllables when he was forced to answer.

A feeling of uneasiness took possession of Moore. It was aggravating to suspect that things were doing on his own ranch about which he was not permitted to know.

Fan's avoidance of him irritated him and stimulated his resentment. He began to look on her as a kind of trouble-center. The suspicion of her as the inspiration of what he could not understand nagged him into efforts to get a word with her.

She foiled him with the grace of a born coquette and the ease of an experienced manager of men. Which only added to his interest and stimulated a masculine determination to show her the "thus far and no farther" where a girl's power might go.

From the window of his own room he had seen her mount the pony that one of the hands named Nick had brought to the cottage for her. She had ridden off toward the north.

Ben suddenly remembered that he had not yet taken time to visit the settlement where the married cowboys lived. It was toward the north. He waited till Fan rode beyond the swelling crest beyond the corral; then he hurried out.

A horse was kept for him in a small stable near the ranch-house. He saddled and rode off, northward.

Nick, leisurely strolling back toward the corral, grinned as he saw Moore put spur to his mare and gallop away. He instantly changed his course and started toward the ranch-house. As he went he whistled shrilly.

Pete, another ranch-hand, appeared at the big gate of the corral. He jerked off his sombrero and waved it. Then he started toward the ranch-house. The routes of the two men met.

"Some trick! Say, ain't it geese that's ketched with decoys, Nick? Seems like the gander's got took in, too, don't it?"

Pete laughed.

"Wish to hell he'd hike! I ain't no diplomat or court-ear! Takes too much time to do my work and fool the boss, too. Heard when he was a goin' to make tracks to where they want him?"

"Nothin' doin'! He's used to bossin' an' it hurts his pretty pride not to be the cock-of-the-walk 'round hyah! Old Jeb's about

dippy tryin' to be two folks at wunst! Is the grave dug?"

Pete's sinister inquiry elicited only a nod from Nick.

"What's got you?" he asked, impressed by Nick's silence.

"I ain't so wild about stickin' a man in the ground as if we'd had somethin' to do with his death. Of course, I reckon Miss Fan knows what she's up to; but she ain't mentioned it to Jeb. I axed him."

"Gee! I guess not! Old Jeb's got all he kin hold right now. She's got too much sense to run him over!"

"Well, what's the meanin' of it anyway?" Nick demanded gruffly.

"Search me! But I'm for doin' whatever the little lady orders."

They passed along behind the ranch-house and went toward the teepee, where Paleface persisted in living. The little pointed dwelling rose from a slight elevation that commanded a sweeping view of the surrounding country. The old woman who inhabited it appeared. She flung back the flap and stood watching the men in silence.

"Come on, Paleface, let's get it over!" Pete said, making a move to push her away from obstructing the entrance.

"Wait," Paleface said quietly, maintaining her place.

"Oh, shucks! What's the use of lettin' her see the performance. 'Tain't specially eddyfying for a lady!" Pete protested, picking up a spade and mattock that lay beside the teepee.

Paleface did not move. Nick turned and looked north. Pete flung the mattock in a swift circle and buried its point in the ground as if he had to have action to work off his sentiments.

"Damn! When you git the dad-burned stubbornness of a female an' an Injun done up in one bunch, you jes' got to lay down!"

"Brown Baby!" The Indian woman grunted it.

Fan, racing toward them from a direction entirely different from the one she had taken, approached.

She had seen Ben on her trail and, outwitting him, had turned back to the teepee. A moment after she arrived Paleface stepped away from the entrance to her

teepee. In spite of the radiant gold of the sunshine poured over the undulant reaches of the land, Pete and Nick stooped to enter with misgivings.

Nick stopped and turned to Fan. He had caught a glimpse of a still figure, bound Indian-fashion in a blanket, ready for burial.

"Say, Miss Fan, I—somehow this hyah business gives me the creeps!" he exclaimed.

"Why, Nick?" Fan asked, her blue eyes on his.

"Seems like we're a sneakin' him under ground 'cause we've got something to do with his dying! I mean, that's the way it 'd seem to folks that didn't know different."

Fan answered very seriously.

"Nick, I wouldn't ask a man on the place to do anything underhanded. We know, you and Pete and Paleface and I, that this poor man came here yesterday, crazed and almost dead. We all saw him. The only moment of sanity he had was when he begged to be buried without any one knowing about him. It's little enough to do for him, isn't it, Nick? Who knows what he wants to lie dead and buried with him? Lots of us have things we want to hide till they are forgotten."

Nick's face was a study. But Fan read it easily. He extended a big hand toward her with a curiously grateful gesture.

"You're right, Miss Fan! You've helped a lot of us to bury something and let it lay forgotten! I get you!"

They laid the blanket-wrapped body in the deep grave that Nick and Pete had dug. Fan stood there in the sunshine with the tears running down her cheeks.

Instinctively the two men lifted their eyes to hers after they had straightened from their grim task.

"Please, God, forget what he wants forgotten. Just see his good points!"

Fan spoke as if the Great Spirit of the universe were all about her in the sunlit air. Then she turned and started back toward the teepee.

In silence, and with a care that expressed the tenderness that the girl and her brief, honest prayer had inspired, Pete and Nick covered the body of the unknown man.

Before the teepee, her eyes fixed as if space were filled with a dire spectacle, Paleface stood. Fan's noiseless step on the grass did not warn her.

Fan watched her a moment, impressed by the look of horror imprinted on her gaunt face. Then she approached her and laid a soothing hand on her shoulder.

"Indian mother, what ails you?" she asked.

The inscrutable veil fell over Paleface's countenance—the still, inexpressive Indian look.

"Do you—can you guess why he begged to be buried secretly?"

Paleface did not answer. Her hand fumbled in the folds of her dress. She handed Fan a small and very soiled bag.

Fan opened the bag with her gloved fingers, repelled by its dirtiness, but urged by curiosity. She drew out a piece of paper, clean but crumpled, and she stared at it with puzzled eyes.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ATTACK IN THE DARK.

FAN lifted her head quickly. A shout rang out from the direction of the corral. She stepped away from the teepee and looked across the intervening space.

"Paleface, isn't that Joe Phelps?" she asked, calling the long vision of the Indian to her assistance.

Paleface grunted. Fan started across the prairie. Joe Phelps never came to the ranch-house unless some urgent need drove him.

Fan caught the little pistol she wore from her belt. She fired three shots in rapid succession and then a single one after a moment's interval. It was her signal.

She saw Joe ride away from the ranch-house, where he had evidently gone to look for her. He caught sight of her and came toward her at breakneck speed. She ran to meet him.

"We've located ten of our critters on the Bonita range!" he called as he approached her.

"Sure?" she questioned quickly.

"Sure. Two of the men seen 'em. Got

close enough to see the brand before they was seen by the Bonita boys. Our fellers asked them what they wuz doin' with our cows. They said they didn't have 'em. But they did, all right! They've got 'em now!"

"I'll see Sam Petheroe!"

Fan spoke firmly. She came to Joe's side and lifted her hand. He caught it. She set her foot on his in the stirrup and swung up behind him.

"Take me to the corral. I let Dick go."

Joe's horse cantered off. Fan, with a serious expression, rode easily behind Joe. But while her left hand rested on his shoulder, her right one thrust the bit of paper into the pocket of her skirt. She took the precaution to fasten the three buttons that secured the pocket.

"Saddle the bay mare, Joe; she makes better time than Dick," Fan said as she slipped to the ground at the big gate of the corral.

"Say, Miss Fan, I told Jeb about the critters. He said he'd go over," Joe explained as he lead her horse out.

"Tell him I've gone," she called as she lifted the reins and the mare stretched out for speed.

But she stopped at the ranch-house. She entered it with more freedom than usual and by the door. Ben was away. She went to the desk and rolled up the top. Then she opened a small drawer. In it she laid the piece of paper that had been found by Paleface on the body of the dead stranger.

She made a hasty search through various boxes and drawers to locate the rarely-used key of the little drawer. She found it at last and thrust it into the lock, but it refused to turn. She worked with it a moment. Then suddenly, with impish freakishness, it turned. She drew the key out and hid it under the edge of the blotter. Then she rode away toward the Bonita ranch.

Meanwhile, Ben rode into a group of houses with flowers about their doors. It was quaintly like the Spotless Town pictures, except for the local color of the West and the reclaimed desert over its single, sunny street. A company of children burst

from a miniature schoolhouse. An intelligent-looking woman followed them.

"Is this Spotless Town?" Ben asked as he took off his hat and drew rein.

"I'd like to call it Frances Village," the woman answered with frank cordiality. "Only without a name, we are not on the map. And that's rather restful."

Her words rang pleasantly. It was agreeable to be away from the world with the clean winds of the plains and the mountains sweeping the chambers of his tired brain.

"Why Frances Village?" he asked, guessing that she did not identify him as the ranch owner.

"It's Miss Fleming's idea—a part of the big idea in which she gives us a share. You see, she believes that heart interest is as valuable in the reconstruction of men and women as head interest. So she lets us all love our work. Indeed, she sets us the example."

Moore was looking into the animated face with unrepressed curiosity.

"I don't think I quite get you," he said.

"You don't know Miss Fleming then? She's very busy just now. The owner of the Big Ben is here. It was named for him when he was a baby. I suppose he seemed very big and important to his father. We've been told that his mother died when he was very young."

Moore looked away. It was a curious, breaking-up experience to hear this sunny-faced woman speaking, in accents of warm, human sympathy, of the boy who had lost his mother and was loved by a lonely father.

"I suppose Miss Fleming told you about the ranch owner?" he found himself asking.

"Yes," she replied, then laughed aloud. "I told her once that I believed the reason she liked him so much was because he stayed away and didn't interfere with the running of the ranch!"

Moore had appreciated that the woman to whom he talked was refined and possessed force of character. He was not altogether surprised when she spoke intimately of Miss Fleming. But his mind was racing away with the thought she had put into it.

Miss Fleming had had a good impres-

sion of him. She had talked him up to the people on his land. Yet she was avoiding him with a success that was far from flattering.

"Of course, she sees so clearly that big ranching—the old-time vast acreage, you know—cannot continue. The Big Ben is more than fortunate in having a fair kind of a river pretty much its own, as well as being in touch with the big dam. So she thinks the wise thing to do is to break the ranch into agricultural units as fast as possible. In the end she thinks it will yield more to the acre besides giving more homes to people. She thinks Mr. Moore will eventually sell it off in farms. It's a fine idea, isn't it?"

Moore did not answer. He stared off across the rolling plains to the peaks of the mountains. It was odd to hear the opinions of Miss Fleming quoted rather than those of her father. However, he knew how little Fleming talked, so it was natural that his daughter should be his mouthpiece. But there was no reason for her undertaking the same service for Benjamin Franklin Moore.

Ben lifted his hat and left the woman who had so frankly imparted Fan's ideas of his intention to sell the ranch off in farms. He was thoroughly put out. What right had Miss Fleming to assume so much? And where had she disappeared to?

He knew that she had not been in the environs of Spotless Town or her radiant admirer must have said so. He reflected that he had not told who he was to the woman. Oh, well! Why should he? He had gained some information at least, if his ride had not brought him to Fan Fleming.

Fan Fleming! He jogged along, disgruntled, trying to get past the fact that he could not wholly dislike her, angry as he was with her. She swung in the foreground of his mind with the free grace and the buoyant brightness of the yellow flowers he passed. He felt he might do some thinking to the point if once he could get beyond thinking of her.

He called his will into action. He sat up straight in the saddle and put his mare through her paces as if he had a grand stand filled with people to admire his effectiveness. He told himself that it would be a long

time before he let her exert an influence over him as she did over the ranch folks.

Then he reflected further, it promised to be a long time before she let him get near enough for any kind of an influence to act.

What if he set about forcing her into the open, compelling her to defend what she so boldly planned on his land? He could make her argue for the ideas evidently dear to her. Wouldn't she fight! She would blush and glow and blaze.

That night after he had eaten and hoped for some interruption to his solitude, he turned out the lamp and sought the veranda. The big night with its soft breath crept close about him. He stretched himself on the floor of the veranda like a lazy, lonely boy.

He heard the back door slam. Paleface had finished her work and was making for her teepee. He was alone. He thought of it resentfully. Why couldn't the manager's daughter see in him what other girls had? Why didn't she let him pass along the avenues he had tried to open into some kind of an acquaintance with her?

The poignant regret for his father came over him; it always did when he was lonely. They had been such wonderful pals. But why the deuce had his father built this comfortable ranch-house so far from the companionable bunk-house where the single cowboys lodged? Suddenly he understood. His father never recovered from the grief of losing his wife. They had planned this house together. It was finished after her death. Ben knew that it was filled with tender and haunting thoughts of her.

He thought of Rose Leonard. Would he some day get to care for her so that he would miss her for a lifetime if she were taken? But she slipped like a wraith from his mental grasp. Swaying with the grace of wind-swept grasses, with the golden glint of the sun on her brows and the blue of far-flung cloudless skies, Fan Fleming took her place.

His fancy rioted about the delectable little figure; the strong, slim ankles in their brown leather puttees, the evenness of her breathing under the brown blouse with the perky little pockets delighted him.

Then he breathed quicker, drifting to the

day when he saw her first and she blushed under his gaze. If he could make her blush again? If she were with him, there in the velvety gloom, feeling—

Suddenly every muscle stiffened. She was in the house. He heard sounds like the cautious fall of her feet on the bare floor.

He listened. But he smiled in the dark. She had seen that the house was dark. She had taken it for granted that he was away. She had come on one of those excursions which he was sure she made to the house when she believed she would evade him.

He started to rise noiselessly, his fancy busy with the excitement of catching her trespassing. He would make her give an account of herself. She must tell him where she had disappeared to so suddenly when he rode after her. She would blush when she found herself his prisoner.

Some one bolted across the porch. He was struck by the flying feet of the one who came from the house.

With an oath a big form came down on him. Ben gripped and clung.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LOCKED DRAWER.

DOWN the five steps they rolled. The momentum of their fall and the efforts each made to secure the advantage carried them out onto the ground.

Suddenly, Moore felt cold steel press against his throat. His grip on the brawny shoulders relaxed for a second. His unseen adversary took advantage of the moment's chance. An instant later, he was gone.

Moore sat up on the short grass and stared into the blackness of the night. Moonless, starless heavens seemed to have settled down, a black pall over the earth. He rose.

Instinctively, he moved warily and silently back to the steps. The man who had clinched with him might be anywhere in the impenetrable gloom.

Up the steps and to the door Moore crept. He listened intently. He was sure he heard bare wisps of sound, sounds like the slipping of papers or the stealthy tread of a light creature.

For an instant caution held him still. There was positively some one or something in the room. Could it be possible that the rush of the man had been planned to get him out of the way while an accomplice busied himself inside?

Then his judgment decided against the idea. The man had made no effort to hold him on the ground. Rather his recourse to the knife had indicated that he wanted to make as short work as possible of their encounter. Probably the presence of some one inside had prompted the other's flight.

Moore reached into his pocket. He pulled out a box of safety matches. Grasping the whole bunch firmly, he struck it against the side of the box. A brilliant glare illuminated the room.

With her hands clutched against her breast and her frightened eyes wide, he saw Fan Fleming. She looked as if the light had congealed her.

He made a step toward her, then stopped. She stood beside the roll-top desk which he had supposed belonged to Fleming, but which he had never seen Fleming use. It was open. Papers were tossed about; some thrown on the floor in front of it.

"I thought you were away on a visit," he said.

"I came—back."

She was frightened or embarrassed or both. His eyes measured her coldly.

In a soft little frock of pale green she was exquisite. But she was doing something that he ought to have had explained to him. It was the first time he had seen her in anything but riding things since the memorable morning of his arrival. She looked charmingly feminine. But he jerked his mind away from the thought. She was doing something she was ashamed of.

More and more she gave him reason to believe her in the wrong or to blame for something. She was silent and uneasy.

"You thought I was out of the house!" he said accusingly.

She only blushed and glanced at the scattered papers as if she knew how convicting they were.

"Did I cough or snore?" he asked.

"I—don't understand," she barely whispered.

"How did you and your friend discover that I was out there on the porch?"

"My friend? You—you— I don't understand yet!"

She gained poise somewhat. Jealously, Moore recalled the muscular perfection and prowess of the man who had fought with him. She was getting her wits together to defend him.

"There was something in that desk that you wanted him to have. Don't you think you should have let your father give it to him instead of sneaking it out?" he asked with quiet scorn.

"I don't want him—I don't want any one to have it!" she exclaimed nervously.

Suddenly she collapsed into a miserable heap in the chair that had been shoved from in front of the desk. She began to cry.

Moore was moved in several ways. He began to get excited. He was angry with her. He was jealous of the unknown man. But above everything, he felt a clamorous desire to sweep her sob-shaken body into his arms. He went toward her. Almost before he knew it, he had lifted her sweet weight close against him. His blood sang ecstatically.

"There's been nothing but trouble since you came!"

The words spat at him. He had dropped his waning torch. The fierce tattob of her fists fell hard on his breast as they stood in the dark.

"Look here," he exclaimed tensely, catching her hands and holding them despite her struggles. "I let one trespasser go just now. I'll be hanged if another escapes me!"

The announcement appeared to quell her for an instant. The darkness had silence added to it, closing densely about them.

"You don't mean to keep—to hold me—" she began, her body stiff and resistant.

"I have no handcuffs or straight-jackets handy. You know who that man was. I find you here beside a rifed desk. If anything's stolen, you must answer for it!"

"Oh! I hope it isn't!" she breathed fearfully.

"That remains to be seen."

"Let me look!" she suggested quickly. "Please."

Her voice was honest, earnest, coaxing. The softness of her body thrilled him. But he released her.

"Will you light the lamp?" she asked.

He caught hold of her arm. He spoke sternly.

"You're not going to impose on my confidence and run away?"

"Oh, no, I give you my word. I'm more concerned about this than you can possibly be.

Moore stumbled about till he located a table where matches were always kept. He lighted his way to the hanging-lamp in the middle of the room. The vigorous flame burned up, illuminating the space that had been crowded with darkness.

He turned at once toward the desk. Fan had taken instant advantage of the light. She was trying to turn a key in a lock. It refused to budge.

"I can't make it turn!"

Her voice was high with fright and excitement. Moore hurried to her. She submitted when he pushed her fingers aside and tried his luck and strength on the obdurate lock. But it did not yield.

"You must be interested in—in what you expect to find here," he said, eying her perturbation sharply.

"You act as if I hadn't a right here!" she said resentfully.

"If you had the freedom of your father's desk, you wouldn't be trying to get what you want in the dark. I suspect that you are trying to serve some one with whom your father is at outs. You are trying to get hold of something to which neither you nor that man has a right."

She looked rather confused and made no reply. Her eyes turned wistfully to the little drawer.

"A drop of oil might help," he suggested, seeing that his reproaches had not lessened her desire for the contents of the drawer.

She darted to the door of her own room. He started up, suspecting that she was going to escape and communicate with the man.

But she did not close the door. A mo-

ment later she was back. She brought a small metal vial containing machine oil.

He doctored the lock. The key turned smoothly. He pulled open the drawer.

Before he could get a glimpse of the inside, she darted her small hand into it and drew out a bit of folded paper. It looked like a note.

"A love-letter! No wonder there's been such a fuss! Did your father get it by mistake or did he take it from you?"

His voice was nettling. It rasped and jangled through her. She was tired. She was anxious. And he was a nuisance.

"How silly!" she ejaculated scornfully.

"But you don't deny it!" he exclaimed, hoping she would.

"It's too absurd!" she scoffed, moving toward the door.

"Going to return it to the fighting gentleman?" he asked. "I guess not!"

He intercepted her. He seemed as big as a mountain to her as she was obliged to pause and look at him.

"You can't go out in the dark alone. You haven't any right to be giving what belongs to your father to some one he doesn't like. That man out there is a desperado. He has a sharp knife. I don't care if you are fond of him. He's an unprincipled sneak to get hold of anything in this fashion. I'll take you over to the cottage. But you cannot leave this house alone!"

"I'm not afraid," she said in a small voice, still edging toward the door.

"Sit down!" he ordered. "And listen to me!"

Her eyes went to the door. He stepped directly between her and it. She sat down as if she could do nothing else and accepted the situation.

"Circumstances look very ugly. You may as well see how they appear to me. A man comes shooting out of my house. He uses a knife to be free of me. I come in and find you near the desk. You get hold of a bit of paper. It's what he wanted. It may be something that belongs to me in the sense that it refers to interests of mine in your father's charge. As master of this ranch, I demand that you either give me the paper or remain here till this can be

threshed out with your father here to defend my own and his interests—and, perhaps yours!"

"But you mustn't have this paper about you!" she exclaimed with apparent sincerity.

"Why not?" he asked quickly.

"I—can't tell you."

She saw the incredulous and scornful smile on his lips. She started to speak; then gave it up.

"If you insist on being so senselessly stubborn, you'll have to make up your mind to stay here!" he said impatiently.

"But I—I can't spend the night here," she faltered.

"It isn't as dangerous as meeting desperadoes alone. I'm entirely harmless," he replied. "Anyway, your father will get anxious about you and come over."

"He isn't—" she began, then interrupted herself quickly as a thought came to her. "If you'll turn out the light, I can give you the paper."

She rose and ran to the large window that opened to the south. It was like a great eye watching miles and miles of desert and irrigated land. He mistook her intention. He thought she meant to jump out and escape from him. He rushed after her.

"Stand back!" she commanded so seriously that he minded. "I'm not going to jump out. Stand back and you'll see!"

She stood directly before the window. Then Ben understood. If the man were lurking about, he could command a view of most of the room from that window.

She held up the bit of paper. She opened it, looked at it and nodded. Ben read the signal; she was showing the man that she had the right note.

Then she folded it and deliberately thrust it into the low-cut neck of her frock.

"I guess you've made it clear to him!" Ben fumed.

"May I go to my room?" she asked, turning wearily.

"You may not!"

"Really, I'd give it to you—if I dared," she said, her blue eyes, soft and tired, raised to his.

"Since you don't dare," he said quickly,

"I don't intend to have you give it to him!"

"Oh, no, I won't," she began, starting toward the door.

"You're right, you won't!" Ben affirmed, stepping in her way.

"What do you mean?" she questioned sharply.

Ben saw a shade of fear in her eyes; but her courage instantly erased it.

"I'm not a brute or a devil!" he said in hot self-defense. "But I'm going to have more to do with what happens on my own ranch. You can rest there in that swinging-couch. In the morning that skulking coward outside won't dare to be about. You'll have time to decide that you will show a little more loyalty to the owner of the Big Ben before you see him again."

"But that isn't—" she paused uncertainly.

"Isn't what?"

"Truly, this is *my* affair!"

"You take it for granted that too many things are your affairs. You'd better lie down and try to accustom yourself to the fact and I own this ranch and—"

"I couldn't sleep with you watching me!" she interrupted.

"Which you can bet your life I mean to do!" he asserted grimly.

"Oh! Mr. Moore, if you'd only let me alone! I can manage—"

"Not without me!"

"Oh, mercy!" she breathed, flinging herself into the cretonne-draped couch.

With a sigh that told how tired she was, she settled herself among the pillows. Moore drew the Morris chair in front of the door and sat down. Silence settled over the ranch-house—except for the acetylene lamp that buzzed and burned with trying brightness.

"Would you mind if I turn out the light?"

No answer. He waited, trying to shut his eyes against the glare. But it was useless.

"I'm going to turn it down at least. Speak up if you do not want me to!"

"You'll do as you please, Mr. High-and-mighty. You told me this was your ranch."

Ben delayed a second. She was irritating; but her anger stirred something in him that was agreeable, too. He glanced toward the open door and the unshaded windows. Open as they were, he knew they were pretty much alone unless the man was outside in the dark.

He recalled that he had seen no light in Fleming's cottage. Very likely he was away. Of course no one pretended to observe conventions on the ranch. She herself was as free as air. But—she had left the ranch-house in preference to remaining in the house with him.

Fleming would come for her when he got home. What would he think if he found her in a dark house with the owner of the ranch?

"Miss Fleming, I have changed my mind. I won't—"

"Don't speak to me!" she snapped.

Another thought popped into Ben's head. If she minded being there alone with him why had she refused when he offered to take her to the cottage? He was making a fuss about nothing. She and all the ranch's people were too natural, too really unconventional to think anything except the sensible thoughts about the situation. She did not even know it was difficult.

Anyway, he could dim the glaring light. He crossed to the center of the room. He lifted his right hand to turn down the light.

There was a report. A small gilt ball that decorated the lamp-frame spun across the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PIECE OF PAPER.

"HANDS off!"

The words hurtled after the gun report. Fan leaped from the swing. Ben started across the room where the little gold ball rolled back from its sharp contact with the wall.

Ben saw the swing plunging about erratically. But, for sheer inconsequent madness, Fan's actions outdid it. She ran at Ben and began to jerk and pull him.

He submitted. She drew him toward

the corner of the room. There were no windows offering the man-outside a chance to shoot at him. Ben realized that she was trying to get him out of harm's way.

Wrath took possession of him. He resented being protected by a girl. He raged at the cowardly advantage taken by the one who had shot. He raced to the window.

"You damned coward!" he yelled into the night. "If you think I'm the kind of a sneak that takes advantage of a dark room, come and say it! If you dare!"

Fan's eyes grew dark; her breath caught in her throat. She put her hand up as if she fought for freedom to speak.

"That's not the reason!" she cried out.

He whirled to face her, his figure still outlined, an inviting target, against the brightly lighted interior.

"No? You mean there isn't some one out there who is afraid of—of— Then what's he shooting for?" Ben said, his excitement calming.

Fan did not answer. She endured his gaze a second; then her eyes left his and her proud little head bowed.

"Oh! I see!" Ben exclaimed, watching her. "The reason's tucked away in the front of your gown. He wants that paper; or he's afraid I'll try to get it!"

The red fanned into her face. He saw her breathe hard.

"Please, please come away from the window," she begged.

"I don't dare. When a dastardly scoundrel is outside; he'll interpret my actions inside by his own code—unless he sees! What astounds me is that a girl like you can make a confederate of a barefaced crook who—"

"I don't make a confederate of any one!" she cried, stamping her foot. "I'm trying to keep you and others out of trouble."

"You're defending that damned skunk!"

The words ripped off his lips with the white-hot impact of wireless reports. His fingers ached to close on the throat of the man outside. It drove him almost beside himself to realize how the man had the whip-hand of him. He could regulate the steps that Moore might take toward Fan.

"It gets me crazy to be sighted along a gun-barrel and not able—"

"Then come away from the window!"

"I will not!" Ben shouted.

She sank into a chair in her corner. She looked across at him with a curious expression in her tired eyes.

"At least you're not afraid!"

Something seemed to pull Ben toward her. But he braced against it. The man outside was probably watching.

"No, I'm not afraid. But I'm mad as hell. You'll have to forgive the language. You're to blame for the occasion that inspires it. You'll have to take the consequences."

Fan buried her face in her hands. He paused for a scarcely perceptible instant.

"To-morrow morning a new régime begins on this ranch. You'll make up your mind to be loyal to the man who owns it—and runs it!"

"You mean Nun—" she caught herself quickly.

"I mean—me. Loyal enough to tell me who the crack-shot out there is. Loyal enough to help me introduce modern methods of preventing wild gun-play. This isn't no-man's land any longer. It's got to go according to the dictates of law and order. And I'm the man that will start the going."

She made no effort to stem his rushing words. But they seemed to fill her with gloomy foreboding. She shook her head wearily.

"If you—look here, Miss Fan, if you've been double-crossing your father, if you're in love with some one he doesn't approve of, I'll—"

"You'll what?" she asked, raising her head to regard him curiously.

"I won't tell him about this dirty work to-night."

"The less said about it the better," she surprised him by replying coolly.

"I can't see it that way!" he instantly affirmed. "But if it will make things easier for you—"

Fan laughed, a hard little laugh that got on his nerves cruelly.

"Make things easier! You wouldn't know how to do that."

"What do you mean?" he asked rather hotly.

"Because you have made so much fuss about nothing to-night. And you will stand in front of that window."

Ben's sympathy for her was crushed under the weight of his wrath.

"Very well. We'll continue things according to my ideas. You won't get away with that piece of paper. I'll take you to the cottage if you say so. There you can make a clean breast of everything to your father. If you won't do that, you'll just have to stay here. You can take a while to decide. Meanwhile, go into my room—leave the door open—and bring me my gun. If you try to get out of the window I'll come after you—"

"He'd shoot!" she exclaimed anxiously.

"Let him. If I'm killed, it's your fault. Now go in and get my gun. It's lying on the chiffonier. If you're so wrapped up in that sneak out there you can easily get rid of me. You know how. For I tell you I'll run him down and bring him to justice if I live!"

She ran across the living-room. He moved a step to the left to be able to see her as she entered his room. A picture on the wall opposite the window fell in splinters of glass and wood.

Fan raced back, frightened almost to death. She gasped as she saw him, white and so angry he could not speak, but unhurt. She carried his gun with the ease of one used to weapons. Ben's back was toward her; he was facing his unseen enemy defiantly.

Deliberately, holding it so that the man outside had every chance to see, she broke the gun and extracted the loads. She held up her fingers to show that she had taken them all out. The gun was empty.

A shout rang through the night. It smote the lock of silence from Ben's stiff lips.

"You laugh now! But my time's coming!" he called through the window.

He slammed the window down. He turned to look for Fan. She was standing there, meekly holding his gun.

"Give it to me!" he commanded.

"But what can you do? You are here

in the light! You can't shoot a man in the dark!" she said, without making a step in his direction.

"Bring it here!"

"Please, Mr. Moore, you only make things worse!" she begged.

"Worse?" he exclaimed scornfully.

"There isn't any 'worse' than this!"

"I—I beg you to believe me when I tell you there is!"

In spite of his disgust at the situation in which he was held powerless, his eyes took account of her appearance. It would have been hard to believe that she was the fiery creature who had stamped her foot at him.

Her wild-rose color was gone. Her blue eyes were dark under the shadow of her drawn brows. Her lips were trembling. She looked as if she had endured all she could and was at the breaking point.

"You're not going to cry!" he asserted as if the declaration might keep her from doing it.

But it did not. She burst into sobs. She darted to the swinging-couch as if it were a haven in a storm.

Moore stared at her, uncertain, as the sobs shook her body. She was completely played out and too miserable to care how much she showed it.

"Miss Fleming, you're used up. That brute out there—"

Ben turned vengefully toward the window. But the darkness outside was as black as ever. And the wind breathed into the open door, hot and swift, as if a storm approached.

"I've ridden over thirty miles; I am tired out," she acknowledged between sobs.

Ben's rooted convictions sent up quick, live sprouts. He looked at her, small, shapely, alluring, and he commented silently on the waste of her.

"It's an outrage for a girl like you to wear herself out in a kind of life that—"

"Oh! be still!" she flared, rising and looking at him with blue lightning flashing from beneath her golden brows. "You don't suppose I do it for fun, do you?"

"I don't know what you do it for!" he replied hotly, ready to launch into a detailed exposition of his ideas.

But she halted him effectively.

"I did it for you! So now!"

She plunged back among the pillows. She sank her face into them. She began to cry again.

Moore was completely nonplused. But he was more than that. A leaping ecstasy was chasing itself through every atom of him. Fine white thrills of light seemed to shoot in illuminating showers through his mind. Yet he tried in vain to read a solution to what she had said.

"I don't know what you mean!" he exclaimed.

"You don't need to! If you'll just let me alone!" she wailed.

"I—I can't let you alone!"

Moore's hands were clenched. His gray eyes flamed. About the corners of his lips a trembling threatened the smile that he had used often with telling effect.

But the strange battle was unobserved. Fan interpreted his words as meaning that he proposed to manage the affairs of the ranch without her. With utter discouragement and complete physical exhaustion enveloping her, she sobbed helplessly.

"Fan, do you know that I'm engaged?"

Conscience works strange freaks sometimes. Ben ached for the feel of her small hands in his. He felt the bigness of his body and the self-reliance of his nature form into a solid support on which the girl in the swing might lean and be consoled. But the great urge hung numbed and ineffective before the fact that he announced so awkwardly.

A girl's pride reacts as strangely as a man's conscience. Fan stopped crying.

For an instant Moore was grateful for the result without a thought of the expense at which he had achieved it. He did not guess that the moment's breathing-space was simply the tiny interim in which her pride rose to flay him.

Fan lifted her face. It was as hard as any face so gifted with the power to beam and melt could be.

"What possible difference can that make?" she asked coolly.

Ben turned chilly. He could not tell her how tragic it was to him. He saw his assiduity in assuming that it meant anything to her.

"Just what do you mean by daring to tell me anything of your personal affairs?" she demanded.

"I—it—anything was better than seeing you cry!" he answered.

"I want to cry!" she snapped.

"I don't want you to!" he asserted.

With heedless speed he made at her. She gasped, and the rose came blooming fully in her cheeks. But she put out her hands to hold him off.

"Don't! Don't! He'll think you want the paper!" she implored.

"But you know I don't!" he exclaimed in triumph.

He had stopped; but his blazing eyes bridged the distance between them. They held hers in a gaze that exulted.

"You know what I want! Your words said so! You know!" he whispered; and the force of the whisper went echoing through her like the voice of a tempest.

"I—I only meant—" she began.

"You meant that you knew I wasn't coming toward you because I wanted any paper. Fan, I want—you!"

"Oh! you'd worry death into turning on you!" she cried out desperately.

"If that devil outside thought I wanted you, he'd fire! Is that what you mean?" he asked fiercely.

"No, but you—you seem to keep right on the edge of coming too close to me. He'd think—"

A wonderful look of relief swept Moore's face. For the moment he believed that the man outside was not interested in her. The smile she had rarely seen lighted his face. He looked down on her; and the strangeness of the gay glance at such a time fascinated her.

"If I come close to you, he'll shoot me! You know that. Now, I'm coming—"

He put his right foot forward. Her breath stuck in her throat.

"—unless you take that paper from—where it is and stick it right there at the corner of the swing."

He glanced toward the window through which he knew the watcher gazed. The end of the couch was well in line. The man outside could not fail to observe the paper.

"But I—"

"Shall I come?" he asked.

She watched him like a creature hypnotized. Slowly her hand lifted and slipped under the edge of her low-cut dress. She drew forth the paper.

"You must have a pin about you. There! Take that pin in your gown. Pin the paper to the rope. I guess your friend outside can keep it in sight then!"

She automatically obeyed him. She unfastened a bar-pin she wore and pinned the paper to the rope. Then, she sat back and folded her hands like a child who finds satisfaction in achieving something difficult.

But Ben Moore was riding on the heaven-born wind of joy.

"Pick up two of those cushions and go over to that corner!" he ordered with a curious softness in his voice.

"I can be—more comfortable here," she pleaded, unable to keep her eyes lifted to the fire of his.

"That's no place for me! You know that! But I'm coming if you don't go over to that corner! Take my gun along."

She rose slowly with the pistol clutched in her hand. She moved toward the windowless alcove.

Ben faced the window. He made an ironic bow to the unseen watcher. He waved a generous hand toward the paper.

"Here's your bit of paper, my dear Alphonse!"

He crossed the space that separated him from Fan. Half-timid, half-exultant, he stood for a second looking down at her.

With one hand gripping the revolver and the other closed tightly and hanging at her side, she stood trembling slightly.

"Don't—come—any nearer," she besought him.

Inside and close beside him, her head flung back as her eyes sought his beseechingly was a girl so subtly made of charm and strength that any man would be fool for not suspecting every other man of loving her. And outside was the man with the unerring gun and the one Ben believed to be her lover.

But Ben had slipped the cables of common sense. He was experiencing the first

overwhelming emotion of his life. He took her words for proof that she did not regard the man outside as her lover, that she thought him interested only and solely in the bit of paper.

"I will, Fan, I will!" he whispered.

He caught her hands. The right one fought his grasp. Masterfully, he forced the warm fingers open. In the pink palm lay two cartridges.

His hand shook as he took them. He loosened her clinging clasp of the gun. He saw the empty chambers.

It struck him like a blow—her service to the man outside. Grimly, he released her. Still grimly, he reloaded.

Then he made himself look at her.

She scarcely breathed, though her lips were parted. Her eyes shone with fevered luster. He could not read their meaning. They hurt him. Her empty hands hung limply as they had fallen from his.

How she loved the devil outside! How she had lied and deceived for him! She had even put another man helplessly at his mercy.

Even in his wretchedness, Ben knew that it was no easy thing for a girl like her to descend to the means she had used. He excused her involuntarily, remembering how she had begged him to keep away from her, to desist in his efforts to find out about the man and the piece of paper.

"Why didn't you say that you loved him?" he asked hoarsely.

"I don't!" Fan answered quickly.

A tortured smile drew Ben's lips.

"Do you think any lie you could tell would deceive—after the way I've seen you act?"

Suddenly there was a report. The big lamp went out.

"I jes' want yuh to know, Mr. Moore, that I'm still on the job!"

The voice came from near the door. Ben heard Fan cry out. He stepped away from her for her sake and his own.

"Who is it?" Fan whispered.

Even in his concern with the man he could not locate by sight, Ben felt an angry desire to assure her that such acting no longer served any purpose.

"I jes' want to remind you, Mr. Moore,

that that piece of paper means a good deal to me. Stumble around here and bring it to me or I'll shoot your head off!"

"I still have it!" Fan cried out.

Ben's heart leaped. But before he could speak, Fan rushed on.

"Mr. Moore's gun--"

"Be still!" Ben warned her.

It was unendurable that she should try to put him so entirely at the mercy of the other man. He waited grimly, thinking that only the uncertainty of his location prevented the intruder from taking a shot at him.

He wondered if she would.

For things were changed. The man could not have seen him reload his gun. And Ben was sure that he had been shown when Fan extracted the bullets.

It was a singular situation. The man at the door spoke with the voice of a master. Ben knew he had the means to question such an assumption.

But Fan had already tried to warn the intruder. She had desisted at Ben's imperious command. But it was a toss-up whether she would keep still. And even if she did not speak, she was such a past-mistress of means by which she could inform his assailant.

Ben waited. His gun was lifted, pointed vaguely toward the direction where he had last heard the strange voice.

At any moment, Fan's voice might break the velvet, menacing silence. As moment after moment passed, his heart accelerated its beats. Even with every instant threatening the change the grim game in which each man thought he had the better of the other in a fight for life, Ben's hope grew.

With the force of his reason opposing it, his mind kept forming the question. Would she tell?

CHAPTER IX.

SHOTS IN THE DARK.

FAN stood petrified. The two men were watching and waiting for a chance to shoot. Only the black mystery of the starless night saved them from killing.

She noticed how breathlessly heavy the air was. She gasped for breath. The horror of the situation weighed on her numbly. Then the paralysis of her mind was suddenly awakened luridly to the realization that the man in the door thought Moore still unarmed.

Moore was ready. She knew that. The slightest sound from the intruder would point his gun. He had every excuse to fire. The individual had shot at him from outside. He now dared to trespass on Moore's very threshold.

Fan tried to cry out. But her voice was frozen in her throat.

Then, another horrible aspect of the situation came to her. If she warned the man at the door, she would be taking from Moore the small advantage he needed. For she knew a master operated the weapon that had shot the little gold ball off the lamp-frame. She took it for granted that the owner of the Big Ben had had neither time nor occasion to perfect himself to equality with his adversary.

She stood there, trembling, freezing, burning by turns—waiting. The clock ticked, dominating the silence as if it knew it counted the last precious moments of life for some one.

"For God's sake! don't shoot!" she screamed wildly.

Moore, used to the gloom inside, saw a pale shade fly from the alcove and stop in line with the door. He could interpret her action. She was putting herself between him and the man. She was risking her life.

Moore interpreted her action. She would be killed herself before she would give him a chance at the man skulking in the dark.

The agony of realizing it gripped him like a hard, frigid hand. His heart faltered. Then a dull wonder grew in him. Was he the same Ben Moore who had thought he suffered the crucial torture of life when he was defeated in his political aspirations?

What a fool he had been! How little he had known of suffering! They were right to call him too young for high responsibilities. He had not guessed that human hearts could faint and fail and revive to new and greater pain with the passing of instants.

"Get out of the way! I won't shoot," he heard himself saying hoarsely and decisively.

He saw the vague drifting of her light gown as the wind stirred it. But she did not change her position.

"Get away, I tell you!" he ordered, his nerves wracked. "I'm armed, you sneak! We'll fight this out man to man!"

"All I want's that piece of paper," the intruder growled.

"Who are you?"

Fan's voice rang through the significant silence. Doubting her as he did, its amazement, its excitement surprised Moore. It sounded exactly as it would if she had heard the speaker's voice more clearly and discovered it to be other than the one she had believed it. She was certainly a perfect actress, was Ben's conclusion.

In spite of the tension, he recalled his own impressions of the voice very accurately.

The intruder had spoken twice. Each time the voice was different. But one or the other was a disguised voice. Fan knew who the man was, surely. Ben warned himself not to believe in any of her ruses. It was natural that she would want to hide the identity of a lover who had taken such extreme measures to attain his own end.

"That's not important!" the growling voice replied. "Stand away!"

"Isn't it?" Fan retorted. "I guess you'll see!"

A moment later she touched him. Yet he had not seen her light figure move in the gloom.

"I guess you'd better give up whatever you are trying to do!" she said. "I have that paper. I just took it from the end of the swing. Besides, I have my own gun; and Mr. Moore has his—loaded! So—suppose you go!"

Moore felt her hands sweep along his arm to his hand. She lifted it so that the gun he grasped aimed high.

"Now, shoot! Shoot!" she whispered, her lips so close to his cheek that he felt the warmth of her breath. "Let him know you have a loaded gun!"

Ben caught her close to him with his left

arm. He made no effort to lower the aim she established. He fired.

They heard hurried steps on the veranda. There was no return shot.

"Again!" she whispered.

He obeyed. There was dead silence afterward. He started toward the door. But she dragged him back.

"No, no, he may be waiting for that! Fire again!"

"You little devil!"

Moore ground the word out between clenched teeth. He gripped her as if he meant to crush the power she dared to use against him.

Her object was plain to him. She meant to make him empty his gun and leave him where she had him once before—at the mercy of the man in the dark.

"Why—do you—call me—that?" she asked in indignant gasps.

"When I'm out of bullets, you'll turn me over to the enemy, invite him to gloat over me, and—you'll give him that paper!" he replied, grimly holding her in his crushing grasp.

"No, no, I just—want him to know—that you have plenty of—ammunition! Your belt's there on the desk with lots of—let me go; I'll get it for you."

Moore laughed aloud. Then he waited for the bark of a gun, dreading what he had done more for her than for his own sake. But no sound came.

He felt the panting body against his grow tense and still.

"Listen! Don't you hear. He is leaving. His horse is galloping! You hear?"

Ben did not. He tried but his ears were not trained to the acuteness of hers—or was she merely trying another ruse?

"I wonder I don't use one of these bullets on you!" he muttered.

"You won't have to—if you keep on—squeezing the breath out of me!"

In spite of his anger at her, he saw game-ness. It rather blinded him to her deviltry. He loosened his hold. But he did not release her.

It was a duel between them, now. He was determined to secure the paper that the man in the dark had coveted. He believed that she had meant to give it to him

when he was in the dark house with her. But the lock had resisted them. Some sound had started the man. He had rushed out—to fall over the owner of the ranch. Now, that owner would have his innings.

"I'll let you go if you turn over that paper to me," he said.

He kept his right hand free; and his gun pointed toward the door. But her head was on a level with his chin; and loose strands of her hair blew across his lips and were whisked away again by vagrant breezes.

The softness of her body, the faint fragrance that drifted tantalizingly to his nostrils thrilled him exquisitely. But his mind's eye was fixed on a big, discouraging fact. How splendidly she used brain and wit and risked her very life to serve the man in the dark!

That man was gone. He felt sure of it. And she was in the arms of the owner of the ranch. But no exalting sense of possession came to Ben.

"Since you are engaged, it isn't advisable for you to hold me in your arms—any longer than necessary!" she suggested.

"I'm the judge of that!" he answered quickly.

"Might doesn't make right, you know," she said. "And its triumphs are short-lived!"

"Therefore to be held as long as possible!" Ben whispered, bending till his lips rested lightly on her hair.

He felt her rigid body relax. Its protest ceased. She breathed deep and evenly for the first time since he held her. She really hung in the support of his arm, unresistingly.

Her yielding stirred a feeling of shame in him. She was a little thing for all her buoyant strength and splendid health. She could no more have freed herself from him than she could have made him willing to release her. His big muscles exulted in their power; but his finer self grew ashamed of the advantage they gave.

He argued with himself for a moment. She deserved all she was getting. She had not hesitated to use every expedient that occurred to her to command the situation for her lover. Why shouldn't he claim the

brief satisfaction of the poor possession his strength gave him?

But the argument did not bring conviction. He fought against trembling with the subtle assaults that vibrated through him. He tried to make his voice sound calm and natural.

"After all, it's up to you, you know!" he observed.

"How?" she asked, gratefully, as if release seemed nearer.

"Just give me the paper; and you may go," he answered.

"I haven't it!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, come now, I'll make allowance for your motive. But the time's gone when lying will help any!" he said impatiently.

"No. It's still there on the rope of the swing. When I heard a strange voice, I—"

"Strange voice! You have me guessing in more ways than one; but not about that! You knew perfectly who that voice belonged to."

He started toward the center of the room, taking her along and feeling his way toward the swing. She tried to escape. He knew she meant to dash ahead of him and get the paper—if it was actually there.

He stumbled slightly. Something was trailing down from her. He pulled himself free. It was the dark rug that usually lay folded on the swing-couch.

"You used this to cover your retreat to the arms of the enemy!" he observed. "Just let me use it now."

He drew the rug around her, pinioning her arms in its folds. Then, holding it securely, he recommenced the journey to the couch. She gave no assistance. Indeed, he felt she was pulling away from the place he wanted to reach so he guided his efforts by her opposition.

Outside, the hot darkness had brought rain that spat fiercely on the veranda porch and against the window he had closed between them and the man in the dark.

Through the open windows and the front door, the wind that bore the storm soured and retreated, dragging the white curtains till they flaunted ghostly draperies in the night.

Moore had completely lost his sense of direction. He could not locate the swing.

And Fan pulled and twisted in her effort to get away.

Suddenly there was a glare of lightning. It seemed to rip the very roof from the room. Moore saw clearly. The bit of paper was on the rope of the swing.

The next instant, it was pitchy black again. Blacker than ever, for the gloom seemed to pour in to fill the white spaces that the lightning had made. A clap of thunder, that sounded as if the world had burst asunder beneath them, broke and boomed and bounced with terrific detonations. Fan's face plunged helplessly into the shelter nearest—Moore's breast.

Instinctively, he held her close. But the location of the swing was clear in his mind. He started toward it.

Above the chaotic revel of the elements, voices reached them. Moore felt Fan start.

"It's some of the boys. They must have heard the shots;" she whispered as Ben bent close to hear.

Louder than the dying detonations of a great peal of thunder, they heard the thump of feet on the steps and porch.

"Go to the door, please. I—here alone with you in the dark! Please!"

Ben felt more than he heard the embarrassment and hurry of her words. Suddenly the stamping feet outside were still.

"Hello there! Did Fan get home O. K.?"

It was certainly Fleming's voice, high with anxiety, loud with demand.

A shove from Fan energized Ben. He started toward the door.

"Tell them you saw me go to the cottage!"

Fan's words penetrated the darkness incisively. Ben felt a glow of satisfaction. It gave him a small sense of intimacy; at least, they had one secret in common.

He stumbled against the rocker of a chair that thrust like a horn. He swore under his breath.

"Matches on the table by the door!" came to him from somewhere in the gloom of the room.

He felt his way, guided by the noise of the men outside. He located the table and felt the matches. Then he lit one and

turned instantly toward the center of the room.

Fan was gone.

He looked toward the couch.

So was the bit of paper.

CHAPTER X.

A STARTLING DECISION.

FLEMING saw the blaze before the wind flicked it out.

"You boys there! We've got to make tracks to the Bonita! Git the glims! Fan started back from Petheroe's two hours before I got there!"

Ben heard the boys leap down from the porch. He found a candlestick and lighted the candle.

"Fleming! She's all right!" he called, striding toward the door.

Fleming, already back in his saddle and starting toward the corral for a fresh horse, drew rein.

"Have you seen her?" he asked.

"Yes; she came back before the storm broke," Ben replied.

He had glanced at the shattered lamp. He debated about telling Fleming of the evening's occurrences.

"Fleming, can you come in a while?" he asked finally.

Fuzzy Pete and Nick Skelton stood at the foot of the steps, looking up at him. Pete's fair skin never got further toward being tanned than a glowing red. This contrasted ludicrously with his curly tow-colored head. But his expression discouraged any levity.

"We heard pistol-shots over this way, Mr. Moore. You hear 'em?" he asked anxiously.

"I made 'em," Moore replied. "A confounded polecat was exercising around the block. I took a few shots. Thanks, fellows, for coming to look into it."

Moore swung an easy salute. The two men strode off into the night. Fleming clumped up the steps. He stopped short as he saw the lamp.

"Polecat get in?" he observed laconically.

"Look here, Fleming, let's find out who

the guy was who stood outside and shot in at me," Moore said.

Fleming had dropped wearily into a chair. But he sat up at Ben's remark.

"What's that?" he asked sharply.

Ben told the story of the rush of the intruder across the veranda and into him. He described the look of the desk when he entered the room after the man had escaped. Then he paused.

He was put to it to know how to proceed without casting too great an illumination on the fact that he had had a companion in the experience.

"The chap hung round outside," he said carefully. "Then, all of a sudden, he blazed away and knocked the lamp out of commission. He came to the door and demanded that I give him a piece of paper. Do you know anything about a document in your desk that some one else wants mighty bad?"

"My desk?" Fleming repeated as if nonplused.

Moore picked up the candlestick and walked over to the disorderly desk.

"You see what's been done to it!" he observed. "You'd better take a look. That small drawer has been opened, you see!"

Moore pointed to the drawer from which Fan had extracted the piece of paper. He watched Fleming closely.

But the weather-beaten face of the ranch manager expressed no alarm. It mirrored an uncertainty peculiarly trying to Moore's patience.

"If you kept anything valuable here, you'd better be looking to see if it's gone!" he exclaimed, stepping back.

But Fleming did not budge. He looked thoroughly uncomfortable.

"You don't seem very much concerned about that piece of paper!" Moore snapped.

"No, I ain't. I don't know nothing about it!" Fleming exclaimed.

"It was here in your desk!"

"This ain't my desk. That is, I ain't used it for some time."

Fleming made the admission in curt tones. He turned as if he meant to make his getaway. But Moore interposed. He stepped between Fleming and the door.

"If this isn't your desk, whose is it?" he asked.

"Fan's been using it for a good while—till you come," was the reply.

"You say you know nothing of a piece of paper that might be of importance to some man willing to shoot and steal for it?" Moore said thoughtfully.

"I don't know nothing."

Moore believed him. But the conviction was attended by a poignant twinge. The paper was a matter between Fan and the man.

"You couldn't make a guess at who might be interested—who the man was?" Moore asked.

"Search me!" Fleming replied.

In spite of Fleming's apparent truthfulness, something in his manner stimulated Moore's suspicion.

"If I just knew what the paper contained I'd be able to draw some kind of a conclusion," Moore ejaculated, worried and vexed.

"I got to see Fan, Mr. Moore," Fleming suddenly declared, starting toward the door.

Moore watched him go, impressed by the awkward suddenness of the manager's departure.

"Confound it!" he muttered.

Fan's actions, her father's behavior, the mystery of the man who had played so strange a part during the evening, all combined to irritate him. He went out on the veranda. A light glowed from the windows of the cottage. Fan was safe.

He heard the thud of a horse's feet. Listening, he concluded it was Fleming. He seemed to be making for the corral as if he were pursued.

Indeed, he was. For Nunkie was a timid man with words. His actions were the interpreters of himself. His position as go-between for Fan with the ranch-owner was wearing on him painfully. He knew he balked and floundered in the simplest statements he made to Moore.

Now a new trouble had come up. Moore suspected him of some knowledge that he did not possess. He tried to think what lay behind the inquisition on the subject of the paper. It was obvious that Moore

had grounds for his statement that he had been shot at. The desk seemed to indicate that activities had centered around it. Fan was the only one who might throw some light on the matter.

His patience was almost exhausted. Things were getting impossible. What she was up to he could not guess; but he would know or quit.

Moore stared off after him, though he could not see in the darkness.

"You boob!" he muttered.

But he meant the appellation for himself. He had let Fan get away with the paper. Even while she begged protection from gossip, she had been paving the way to secure possession of it. Now Fleming was rushing toward the cottage where he would be drilled in what he was to do. Ben saw Fan as a conspirator working to keep the owner of the Big Ben in the dark about his own affairs.

Scattering rain-drops struck his face. He realized that he was hot and excited.

To the south, brilliant as though the wind and rain had rid the atmosphere between it and him of every disguising blemish, a great white star shone. The wonder of its presence in the black sky smote him. He stood still and gazed at it.

As if his heart spoke aloud, the name of Fleming's daughter breathed through him. Between the brightness of the white star in the black sky and the presence of that name in his heart, he traced a likeness. Faculties, perceptions apart and different from any he had known and used before, were working subtly in him.

Suddenly, with a giant sweep, like a huge, destructive sword mowing down the finer, frailer lovelinesses blooming in him, his reason came into play. She had consistently deceived him. She had served the other man.

Then the great blade fell powerless. Moore's brain and body vibrated to a combined harmony of which the thought of Fan Fleming was the commanding keynote. Was this love? The proclamation rang through him as if a thousand hitherto silent voices of his being waked and sang.

The ineffable, fresh cleanness of the rain-washed grasses wafted to his nostrils,

The sweet warmth of the damp wind touched his face.

He started swiftly across the distance between him and the cottage, moved by the overwhelming need to be near her.

Suddenly he paused. Out there, alone, on the big, wind-swept plain, the great white star looking down on him, he thought of Rose Leonard.

Rose Leonard loved him. She felt toward him as he did toward Fan. With horror at what he had rushed to do, he stood shivering as if a polar wind had circled him.

Love! The awful pain of it. He suffered as if a spear were digging at his very being. Rose loved him as he loved Fan. Fan loved the man in the dark as he loved her.

With swift rebellion, Moore found his heart arrayed against what his mind had long accepted as its standard. Self-mastery had been his ideal of achievement. Now it seemed to him the roots of his character were being ruthlessly shaken by a new force that threatened to wreck the structure he had made of himself.

Fan! Fan! Fan! The wind called out that he wanted her. Fan! Fan! The white star flashed his need of her. The big night grew vastly and darkly empty because of his lack of her.

He railed at himself, called himself a fatuous fool to whimper and ache and despair for a girl who loved another man as Fan had given proof of loving. He shifted his mental gears and tried to get back to the pace he made when the idea of marrying Rose fitted well enough with his plans.

But it seemed to him that the ambitions he had nourished became thin and flimsy, self-seeking, small, worthless in the light of possibilities he glimpsed when he thought of Fan. God, what he could be and do if he were the channel through which her love poured out into work for the world!

Spotless Town rose before him. Her ardor for service waved like a glorious guidon above the fused intensity of his aspirations. If she loved him, he could—

It was a freak of the wind; but it sounded like the laugh of the man in the dark.

The exaltation was gone. Hot and mad, plain mad, Ben gritted his teeth and clenched his hands as he strode toward Fleming's cottage.

The light still burned. Fan burned, too. At any rate, she looked like a creature of fire to Fleming's confused eyes.

"Damn it, Fan, I'm going to quit!" he exclaimed. "You jerked me out of a job I kin manage and jacked me up into one I can't. I'm gittin' corns on my brain! I can't stick! Petheroe's willing to take me—"

Then it was that Fan flamed.

"So that's why you have been over to the Bonita so much lately! Sam's trying to get you to go back on me, is he? I guess that cuts out a large pattern of what he'll get!"

"Tain't that, Fan, honest! I about asked him to give me a job. I tell you I ain't ekal to this one!"

"Nunkie, can't you see that I'll be fired if you go?"

Fan fell into the vernacular as if she wanted to use all the means at her command to influence the man who stood rather shamefacedly before her.

"Lord, the Big Ben can't run without you! You know more about it than any one except your father. Since he died you've done more than he ever did. Moore ain't a fool. He'll keep you as manager—"

"Oh, Nunkie, Nunkie! How can I make you understand that there are men who— Well, I'm a woman, Nunkie, and he's a man! And he's young and awfully good-looking. He thinks— Nunkie, do you know what a Turk is?"

With tears in her eyes and laughter in the pink curves of her lips, Fan asked the question. Nunkie's brows puckered.

"I got a few idees about 'em. Mostly that they're killin' devils," he said thoughtfully.

To his complete amazement, Fan, with the tears still on her lashes, sank into a chair and laughed. Nunkie stared at her in confusion.

"Say, Fan, I've bin pertending I'm your dad! But I'll be hanged if I'll be any old kind of a goat. You'll have to explain

things to me. My long suit ain't 'making up what other folks mean by what they do—specially when they do such darn queer things!"

Fan was out of her chair and at Nunkie's aggrieved side in an instant; the same instant that Ben Moore, lured by her laughter into haste, came near enough to see into the cottage through the open door.

"Nunkie dear, you've been the next best to a father that any girl ever had. I'm sorry I see so many points of interest at once. It makes me confused. But here's the simple lay of the land!"

The conciliatory tone was unaccompanied by even the slightest sign of a caress, though the old man had almost raised her. It would have embarrassed him almost to death. But the fervor of her words and the look of her carried the sincerity and affection in her heart straight to its goal.

"I can't get at the bottom of this continual disappearance of our steers," she said. "And I can't overlook the fact that twice we have found them somewhere on Sam Petheroe's land, and three times it has been Sam himself, or one of his men, who has located others for us. It's always steers from the western range that disappear. You know the cattle don't come away from the shade and the stream at this time of year unless—"

Ben mounted the steps. Fan had spoken low. She started visibly as she heard his steps. Nunkie rose rather hurriedly. It was plain that both of them were unwontedly susceptible to any impressions.

"Who's that?" Nunkie asked.

"Moore," the answer came.

Moore's voice was cold. His pride was smarting with the whip of Fan's laughter. He believed that she had heard Fleming's report of his talk with the ranch-owner, and was laughing at the way in which she had outwitted him.

"Good evening. Sorry to disturb you," he said, his lip curving as he realized he was still guarding her by covering the fact that he had so recently seen her. "I'd like a few words with your father, Miss Fleming."

Nunkie shifted his feet as if he half in-

tended to leave the room. Ben saw Fan flash him a warning glance. He interpreted it as meaning that she had given her father her own version of things, and proposed to prevent him getting any other ideas from him.

"I will have to suggest—" she began.

"Excuse me, Miss Fleming, but you may spare yourself the trouble. What I have to say to your father may make your suggestions worthless."

Fan looked at him questioningly. He felt the intention that had come suddenly to life in his mind harden into a firm determination.

"I was only going—" she began.

"Suppose you wait till you find out whether what you say makes any difference one way or the other!" he interrupted.

Fan swept him from tip to toe. Her glances were like silver spears. He stood grimly waiting for her to go.

"Have you a choice about where I go?" she asked, little edges of scorn glinting in her words.

"None."

He looked about the room. It was the whole of the cottage. A bunk was at one end. A screen covered part of one side.

"I'll retire to my room," Fan observed punctiliously.

She went behind the screen.

He saw in a flash just how seriously his coming had discommoded Miss Fleming. She was plainly just staying at the cottage till he should see fit to return to his normal scenes of activity.

He also saw that what he had to say must be said with her in hearing. Turning to Fleming, he said it.

"Mr. Fleming, I have concluded to take over the management of the ranch. I shall assume full responsibility at once. Meanwhile your salary continues, and you remain till you can decide upon your future. Good night."

Moore strode out of the cottage from the midst of a quiet that seemed to crowd him toward the door. His announcement had fallen like an unexpected blow.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



Red Hamblin

Entertains

by Raymond S. Spears

ONE day, while the Black Creek gang of loggers were skidding on the Cotton Lake Ridge, Mr. Vroon, the owner of the paper mill to which the spruce was bound, arrived at the camp and im-

mediately accompanied Foreman Bigger up into the chopping to see the men at work.

They followed the footpath up to the back of the ridge behind the camp and then

along the crest to the top of the new chopping which had been made during the summer months. Within three hundred yards of the camp a regular old rocking-chair buck stepped out of a clump of pole spruces, stared at the two men for five seconds with startled brown eyes, and then bucked sideways, turned and bumped down the far side of the ridge.

"Many deer around?" Mr. Vroon asked.

"Quite a lot—yes. None of the boys hunt any."

"Um-m," the capitalist nodded.

They had gone nearly half a mile when there was a sudden flurry in some witch-hopples, and into the pathway ahead of them bounded a bale of black, which seemed to roll and tumble along, and finally scurried into the woods out of sight.

"Wasn't that a bear?" Mr. Vroon asked mildly.

"Sure as you're born, sir!" Bigger replied.

"Lots of game around here, it seems to me?"

"Lots of it—I see a deer every day or two."

"How do you account for it?"

"No one hunts here. Too far to hunt in one day, and too near to camp out."

"Lots of room in camp?"

"We've some extra cots, usually."

"Well, perhaps a man will come here hunting toward the end of the season," Mr. Vroon suggested.

"Friend of yours—glad to have him!"

"Oh, yes, one of those—um-m—well, he's always looking for a chance to go hunting, or fishing, or like that. Perhaps I'll dump him onto you?"

"I can stand it if he can," Bigger grinned.

"Oh, you must be real nice to him!"

"I'd certainly be!" Bigger declared, looking around sharply, and then he added: "But I've some very rough men around camp, here—Red Hamblin—"

"Red? Say, now, you know, I can't get that man here too quick. His name is Pelyon—D. Cucy Pelyon. You've probably read about him?"

"Not since I was a boy," Jim shook his head and Mr. Vroon chuckled.

When they arrived at the scene of the skidding operations, Red Hamblin had just become provoked at a spruce stick ten inches in diameter and twelve feet long. This stick had been hooked at the end of a string of five logs, which a horse was towing down a gutter on the rough hillside, and a little crook in the log made it corkscrew into every root, stump, and tree, and fall over every rock and wedge in.

Red seized a bar and pried the dog out of the log and yelled for the horse to go on its way. The horse took the logs down alone without difficulty, now that the spite-log had been cut out. The man picked the stick up by one end, wrapped both arms around it, and began to pull and growl and worry it, suggesting nothing else so much as a puppy eating a rubber boot.

Of course, Red's voice could be heard half a mile. He carried the log down to the skids, and threw it at the two men who were skidding the timber. Then he jumped on the horse and rode it backward up the side hill, swearing at the scenery and his mates.

"Yes," Mr. Vroon continued, "I think I'll surely have to send Cucy up here. Red'll do him good!"

Cucy arrived ten days later. The leaves had all been whipped down from the witch-hopples by a heavy autumn rain-storm. The woods were gray, wet, and soggy. A chill, suggestive of frost, was in the air. Cucy had paid Lafay, the liveryman, twenty dollars, which was double rates, to bring him in to the Black Creek log camp, where he arrived on Saturday afternoon.

Four suit-cases, three gun-cases, and two or three wooden boxes comprised his baggage, and he had Lafay put them all in the lobby. There they remained until the log crew returned from the chopping, tired, sweaty, and yet with threats of chills and incipient colds.

Cucy had taken one of his guns and gone hunting. Mr. C. Vroon had told him about the path along the back of the ridge behind the camp, and he must immediately go up and try to see the big buck, or perhaps the bear.

Red Hamblin walked into the camp, with his red-bearded face turned over his shoul-

der to tell Ross Compty that if he despised anything in all the world, it was Saturday night, after four days' rain, and when everybody was tired out and there wasn't anything—

Red stepped against a suit-case, and to save himself, he jumped ahead and over, landing upon another suit-case which was leaning against a small, wooden box, and though Red was agile, and reached in all the directions, the hay-wire overhead, on which were numerous shirts, socks, and other things drying, proved too weak to give him the support he most needed. He fell upon the floor, with the drying-line full upon him, and numerous ribs bumped by corners of leather and wood.

Red fought the pile of baggage in the dim light, not sure that some of it was not alive. When a light was struck, and a lamp lit, Red was on his feet, prepared for any needful action. The logger looked around at the suit-cases, boxes, and gun-cases.

"Jee—gosh—some dangwhanged party of sports—"

"Oh, no!" Jim Bigger hastened to correct a misapprehension. "There's only one—Mr. D. Cucey Pelyon's his name—"

"What—one?" Red demanded. "But there's—one, two-three, four, all them suit-cases and the boxes, 'sides the guns!"

"Only one," Jim shook his head. "Mr. D. Cucey Pelyon—"

"Cussy Pell which?" Red demanded.

"D. Cucey Pelyon," Foreman Bigger repeated again gravely.

"Well, by—um-m—D. Cussy Hellion! Ain't that a name—friend of yours, Jim?" Red asked quickly.

"No; Mr. Vroon sent him up here."

"Must of wanted to get rid of him!" Red snorted.

"Yes, very likely," Jim admitted. "Mr. Pelyon had been pestering Mr. Vroon a long time, for a chance to enjoy sport from one of his log camps. Mr. Vroon hated to let him in any of them. You see, Mr. D. Cucey Pelyon might accidentally—"

"Mistake somebody for a deer?" Red demanded. "And Mr. Vroon asked him to this camp? Why, the dod-blasted—"

"Oh—Mr. Vroon asked if a tough old fellow he used to know was here—man

name of Red Hamblin. Then he said perhaps we'd have a visitor—"

"Eh—what? The old boy said that? He seen me fight, wunst, to Forestport—time I took Old Barney, the Black River canaler, and painted his boat with him, an' a barrel of tar fer paint! Yes, sir! By Jee! An' he said—he said?"

"He didn't say anything, Red," Jim exclaimed sternly. "Mr. D. Cucey Pelyon is—er—the guest of the camp. We must entertain him!"

"We'll do it!" Red declared vehemently. "What the—"

All stopped to listen. Up on the ridge a few hundred feet they heard a firing and a shooting of many cartridges in swift succession. The shots ceased after a time. A few minutes later, Mr. D. Cucey Pelyon arrived in the camp lobby.

"Oh, Mr. Bigger!" he shouted. "I heard a deer, and I don't know if I hit 'im or not, but if he was there anywhere, I hit him! I certainly did!"

"You shot exactly where you heard him?" Foreman Bigger asked softly.

"You bet I did! My! He made an awful racket!"

"You must have done a lot of huntin' in your day," Red Hamblin exclaimed, with admiration, "knowing a deer by the sound of his jump!"

"Oh, I've hunted!" the young man beamed. "I never hunted deer before, but I've hunted foxes on horseback—"

"You're qualified!" Red shook his head violently. "Yes, sir! Now I expect we're going to have a lot of venison to eat in this camp—"

"Oh—I—you see, I'm going to carry the deer home with me," the hunter declared. "Really, you know, you must have lots to eat here. You couldn't afford to eat venison—it's very expensive, you know!"

"Oh, that's all right!" Red hastened. "Come on in and set up! Supper's ready—come on, old boy! We've took a shine to you. Stick that gun up in the corner—the damned thing's loaded?"

"Why—"

D. Cucey started to hand the weapon to Red, but it slipped, and the butt fell to the floor. At that, there was a roar, and every

man yelled. The rifle had been cocked, and the jar had pulled the trigger. The bullet, happily, went straight up, through a beam, then the floor, then a rafter, and out of the roof. That far the loggers traced its course.

From all sides there ensued low and profane swearing, but Red Hamblin laughed aloud.

"That's all right, old sport!" he said to the blue-lipped young man. "Accidents will happen, y' know. Two, three years ago I killed a feller myself, kind of accidentally."

"You did?" the youth asked breathlessly. "How did that happen?"

"Why, all there was to it, I picked up a gun like this, and I poked it against his ribs that way"—Red poked the young man just above the belt with the rifle muzzle—"and I was kind of fooling with the trigger—like that, you see! And the danged thing went off!"

"Oh—yes!" the sport gasped, side-stepping the muzzle quickly, exclaiming: "Look out—that might—"

"Oh, no! This ain't loaded!" Red shook his head. "I just seen it go off! I tell you, since I killed po'r ole Pete, I be'n awful careful. I never seen a man bleed the way he done! Well, come on to supper!"

Red and the rest of the crew went in to eat. D. Cuency wanted to wash. When he finally looked into the dining-room, Red spied him on the instant.

"Right here, old sport!" he shouted. "Saved a place here for ye!"

D. Cuency walked along doubtfully, and when he saw that he must step over the long bench to take his place, he hesitated just long enough to show that the bench was not to his exact liking. Moreover, piled on his place, ready for him, were four potatoes, three great greasy slabs of fried pork, beginning to grow cold, and nearly a cup full of good old pork grease—the kind that makes the hair grow on a man's chest! as Red told him.

"Get around it!" Red exclaimed. "Here's the butter. Pass that bread, you blue-eyed sow-belly! This gen'laman's been huntin', an' he's hongry! Say, mister—d'ye eat cake er bread with yer taters?"

"Why—I—usually—" D. Cuency was nearly speechless.

He made a stagger at eating, and the flavor was not really bad. It was good; besides, he was hungry, as Red had said, and Red stood by and with the most friendly solicitation in the world, heaped more and more things to eat on the big plate, till there was an outlying ridge of fried cakes, bread, meat, potatoes, and other things which had fallen off the plate, or which the guest had succeeded in pushing away as Red's big hands tried to press it upon him.

Commonly, the log crew ate its fill in twenty to twenty-five minutes, but this night it took them nearly forty minutes to dine. Some of them ate twice as much as usual, just to have an excuse to remain. The cook brought two cups, one for coffee and one for tea—and while D. Cuency was putting one down, Red would be lifting the other to his lips.

Probably D. Cuency never had another meal like that. His woods hosts could not do enough for him. One even brought a ham from the shed and asked if he would have a slice. With some relief he escaped for a moment to the lobby, but there all hands turned too, to make him comfortable, and Red and Ross Compty tried to pull him to the log-end chairs which each provided for him.

Red proceeded to clean the rifle, which had been discharged that afternoon. It was a beautiful octagon barrel, with engraved breech and carved stock. Red brought out a long piece of hay wire, and wrapped a piece of red flannel around the end. Then he swabbed the flannel in stove ashes and proceeded to draw it through the barrel.

D. Cuency could hear the wire scratching through the barrel, and he began to worry—he tried to explain that he had a real cleaner, real gun oil, and real linen rags.

"Them fancy things ain't no good!" Red declared. "Takes good wood ashes to have a bite to clean a gun barr'l out!"

D. Cuency protested, but in vain. In the mean while each of the others took out his other weapons and looked at them—a beautiful double-barrel shotgun, and a little twenty-two repeater. One fired the shot-

gun at the thinkings of the logs; another emptied the "twenty-two" at an imaginary mouse in one corner—it was the toe of an old rubber boot.

"To-morrer!" Red Hamblin declared, "we'll all go huntin'!"

D. Cuency and his belongings were taken up into the dormitory, and he was shown to a cot beside the aisle, about midway between the ladder and the office, in which Foreman Bigger slept. His suit-cases and boxes were piled around him, and the loggers went to their own places.

Long after the loggers were in bunk, D. Cuency was feeling around among his possessions, by the dim lantern light, trying to dispose of his things. He had never seen a log camp before!

During the night the loggers were restless. First one, then another would go ambling around. Red wanted his chewing tobacco; Ross Compty was trying to find his old pipe—not the new one! Slip Wanda pretended to be a somnambulist, and fell over D. Cuency's cot, and then it required five or six loggers to carry him back to his own cot and put him to bed.

At dawn D. Cuency was heavy-eyed for want of sleep. The loggers stirring out for the day, however, boasted what a good night's rest they had had, and Red remarked that he had never seen the boys so quiet as that night.

"Quiet! Quiet!" D. Cuency repeated wonderingly.

"We got to get an early start this morning," Red declared. "Them deers 'll be all over the ridges, a purty morning like this. Mebby we'll get that old bear an' her cubs started, too—the ones Mr. Vroon saw!"

They hurried down to the lobby, and by the time they were washed the cook called them to breakfast. D. Cuency, hopeful of escaping to another seat than the one next to Red, failed. He discovered that once a man claims a seat at the table, it is his for the duration of his stay.

If he feared a repetition of the previous night's overliberal helping, he was disappointed. Red urged him to hurry with his eating, so they wouldn't be late. Gulping down the hash, bread, hot coffee, and other things, Red urged his seat-mate to do like-

wise, and D. Cuency, modest, embarrassed, and in strange quarters, was dragged away from the table before he had fairly tasted his breakfast.

Early as he was, however, he found that his woodsmen friends had prepared for the hunt. Slip Wanda had his big rifle, Red had his shotgun, and Ross Compty had his "twenty-two." His nine-inch blade hunting-knife was flourishing in the hands of Peter Lansley.

"Come on, boys!" Red shouted, and led the way up the ridge.

D. Cuency, with nothing but his hunting-boots to carry, pressed up with the others. Every time he hinted gently, that he would just as soon carry his gun, the woodsmen poo-hoed the idea. Let a guest carry a gun! That 'd never do in the world!

They hurried breathlessly to the ridge back, and along the top to Cotton Mountain, and down to Cotton Lake, through the balsam swamp and caribou moss to Pekan Rocks, and up over the broken stones to the foot of a high ledge, and around through gullies and over ledges—everywhere at top speed.

"Lot's of bears in this country!" Red exclaimed, hauling up his gun and firing a charge of buckshot down the mountain.

Immediately the rifles opened up, and there was a fusillade.

"Wha—what you shooting at?" D. Cuency exclaimed.

"Heard sunthin'!" Red exclaimed briefly. "Same's you did last night! I didn't hear nothin' squeal, so I guess there wa'n't nothin' hit that time!"

In half an hour, D. Cuency was breathless; in an hour he was steaming with sweat, and before mid-morning he was so tired he could hardly stagger along. Over and over again he had declared that he never had hunted that way before—didn't know people ever hunted that way—always had supposed people must keep quiet when they hunted!

"This ain't still huntin'!" Red declared. "This is what we call drivin' 'em! You see, when you get 'em all stirred up an' runnin' all around, good, all you got to do is set down, an' purty soon the deers an' bears 'll be runnin' right up to you, ker-

slam! Got to keep yer eyes peeled, then, er they'll jump on you, like's not!"

"You bet!" Ross Compty exclaimed. "I'd ruther be gouged by a hemlock bark spud than git hit by one of them deer's dew claws!"

D. Cucey was staggering when Red stopped all hands with a yell. There are many tasks less exacting, less exhausting than following a score or so of loggers six or eight miles up and down mountains and through heavy Adirondack timber.

D. Cucey dropped upon a log and sat with lower jaw hanging, catching his breath. He was so tired that his face was streaky white and red, and his lips pinched out and bluish.

"Here's a good place to wait. We'll set D. Cussy here, and the rest of us 'll scatter around—you set here!" Red ordered, and immediately the loggers started away on their made courses.

"Here's yer gun!" Red handed him the double-barreled shotgun. "Set here! Don't move! When ye see a big buck, er bear, er anything you want to kill, plug 'im! Then holler! We'll all be around here, settin', an' waitin' fer them deers to stir aroun' our way!"

Then Red hurried away at top speed, watching over his shoulder, for he was afraid that D. Cucey might begin to shoot before he was out of sight. A few minutes later Red joined the rest of the loggers a quarter of a mile away, in the direction of the log camp.

"Leave him any cartridges?" some one asked.

"You bet!" Red grinned. "'Bout a hundred. Come along toward night, and he'll need some. That gun of his'n makes a good roar, an' we can hear him when he gets excited."

There was a laugh, and the crew walked slowly toward the camp, which was hardly a quarter of a mile farther on. They were jubilant. It had been a hot and breathless ramble through the woods, but they had had their reward in watching the "city feller" tripping and stumbling and staggering along.

"Mr. Vroon will certainly be pleased, greatly pleased, the way you boys have en-

tertained D. Cucey!" Foreman Bigger grinned, when they had given him a minute description of the ridges they had gone over, of the swamps they had crossed, of the ledges they had climbed.

"The entertainment ain't only jes' begun!" Red declared. "Long about ten-eleven o'clock we'll have to go out 'n look for him! We kinda want to listen, so's he won't get too fur away!"

The camp guest was not at his place for the big Sunday dinner. But two or three hours later, after taking naps in the dormitory, shaving and washing, doing the various odd little jobs that fall to the Sundays in a log camp, Red and Slip Wanda went out to see if the hunter was still at his post.

They were half-way to the gap in the ridge where D. Cucey had been left when they heard the double-barreled gun roar twice.

"Shootin' at some noises!" Red spat in disgust. "Them kind ain't fit to go out without a chain an' collar on their necks! He'd probably kill us if he hearn us!"

"I ain't goin' clost to him!" Slip swore vehemently. "I never wanted to be took for no buck!"

From the top of the ridge they could look into the gap. There sat D. Cucey, with his shotgun ready for instant action, looking first one way and then another. His alertness was commendable. The woodsmen, after a few minutes, returned to the camp.

"He's all right," Red announced. "He ain't learned much, yet!"

The day waned, and a little while before dark the boys heard more shooting—four quick shots—out toward the gap where D. Cucey was sitting "hunting deer."

"Whoee-e-e! He's killed 'im now!" Red grinned, and the boys all laughed. "By an' by we'll hear 'im tryin' to come to camp with his meat!"

They had left D. Cucey out on the ridge to "enjoy the night." They knew that long since the tenderfoot had begun to grow hungry and that he was now expecting them to arrive any minute to lead him to the warm shanty of the log jobbers.

After supper, in the dark of the night, they went outside and listened. They had

not long to wait. They heard a cry up on the mountain, a long, ascending wail. It was followed by the hollow thunder that a shotgun makes in the gloom. For answer, there was a hooting by a great white owl somewhere down in the creek swamp. The woodsmen kept silent.

"We'll go get him, after a time!" Red grinned. "Two—three hours up there 'll do 'im a lot of good!"

The woodsmen were restless, however, and an hour later they took lanterns and started out to find the man. They spread out on the ridge side, and they whooped and yelled at each other at the top of their voices. Sometimes they stopped to listen; when they listened they heard loud response to their cries, and they all laughed. D. Cucey was waiting for them!

"I bet he won't forget his'n's fustest deer hunt!" Red laughed. "He'll be that plumb wore out an' hongry that he'll never rest till he's hit the trail fer home—and Old Vroon'll send us a Thanksgivin' dinner of thanks on his part, riddin' him of that kind of a bug!"

"Look out the darned fool don't shoot any of you!" Foreman Bigger warned. "Find out where he is, and watch him! Probably he's crazy, now!"

They hunted along the ridge back and called down into the gap from a safe distance.

"Hey-y! You there?" Red roared.

"You bet!" a shrill voice replied. "I can see your light—right down this way!"

"He don't seem scairt up much," Red turned to Bigger with disappointment. "Got a fire, too! See it! The son of a gun!"

Sure enough, D. Cucey had built a little fire between a rock and a log, the sparks of which they could see flying up. They roared down the slope, talking, laughing and shouting for the hunter not to shoot.

"What luck 'd you boys have?" D. Cucey demanded the first thing. "See any deer or bears, or anything?"

"Only a few shots at 'em, here and there," Red admitted. "I suppose you got a few?"

"You bet!" D. Cucey exclaimed. "My! But game's awful thick around

these woods! Why, seems like there must be hundreds of deer and bears around—right over there. Come on, I'll show you!"

Twenty yards away, lying sprawled in the gap runway was a two-hundred-pound buck, and then, part way up the side of the gap, opposite, D. Cucey showed them two bears, an old mother and her yearling cub.

"Two got away!" the hunter exclaimed. "My! If only I'd had a repeater! I couldn't shoot but two, and the others ran so fast—I'd been awful hungry, but I killed a rabbit and a partridge, and I ate them, and wasn't it lucky I had one of those woods salt-cellars in my pocket? I'm going to take these right home to-morrow and then I'm coming back to hunt around here a month. I got some friends 'll be just wild to come! I just must tell Mr. Vroon how awful good you've been to me! And say, boys, I must do something for you, letting me have the best place to sit, the way you did! I'll make it right, I certainly shall!"

"I guess we'd better cut some poles to pack them—them games in," Red turned to the speechless loggers. "I just knowed that feller 'd plug 'em. When 'd the bears come along?"

"Just after I shot the rabbit for supper. I shot twice at the rabbit and then the bears came running—"

"They smelled the blood—fresh blood!" Red explained.

D. Cucey Pelyon talked to midnight, telling the boys what he had done and how he had done it. In the morning he saw his game loaded on the tote wagon on its way to the railroad. He departed with the wagon, but he left his luggage behind, except one suit case. He announced that he was going to return immediately. He was going to bring his friends, he said, and they 'd all enjoy it so much, among such good fellows!

"Bring 'em on!" Foreman Bigger cried grinning. "We kin stand it, if you can!"

Out in the chopping the boys wondered how many of them would be mistaken for deer, when the chappies were all there. No one could tell. Foreman Bigger announced that every man would have to wear a red shirt for safety's sake.

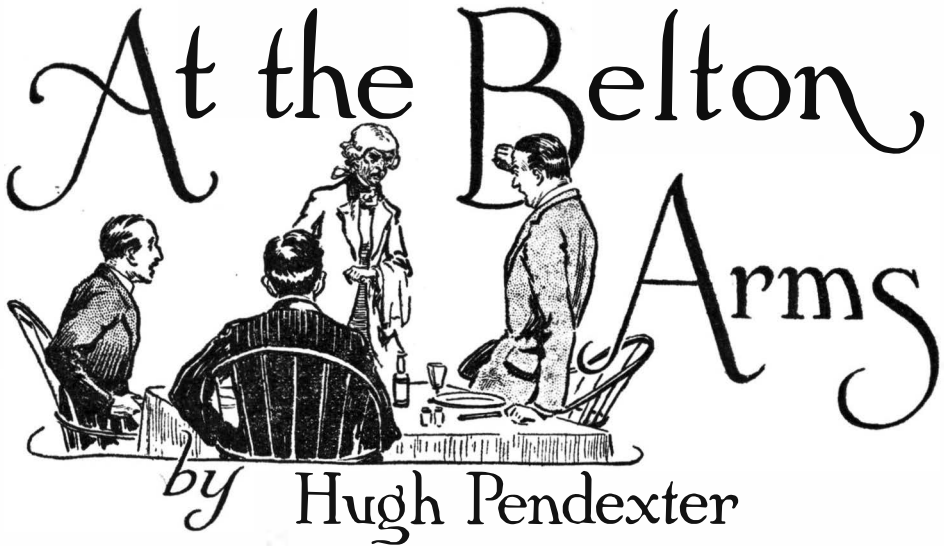
Instead of D. Cucey and his friends coming, however, Mr. Vroon arrived.

"Good evening, boys!" he greeted them at the supper table. "I thought I'd thank you for entertaining D. Cucey so—so well. He wrote and told how you drove deer and bear to him in flocks. There's a wagon load of stuff coming in, special, for your Thanksgiving dinner. But he couldn't come up himself with his friends, not this year."

"Well now, that's too danged bad!" Red exploded.

"Yes—yes," Mr. Vroon shook his head. "He specially said I should thank Mr. Hamblin. I thought at first I'd just send word—but, say, boys, what did you do to him? I couldn't make out from what he said."

"Nothin'!" Red exclaimed, grinning sheepishly. "It's what he done to us what bothers me!"



AS I had feared, Amos Camper shook his head and refused my invitation. "Some other time, Henry," he said with a weary smile. "I must go to Washington to-night. Take Batak here in my place."

Batak was his general superintendent and well liked by both of us.

"You could get back in time for your train," I persisted, drumming out my disappointment on the window. "Of course, Batak was included in the invitation. But, hang it, Amos; you're done up. You need a breath of fresh air. We'll reach Storville in time for lunch, and you two can wait for me to interview Dr. Manning, or you can return without me."

"Why don't you go, chief?" Batak urged.

Camper shook his head stubbornly, but his smile was more boyish as he repeated:

"Perhaps in a few days. I've just fin-

ished my work. Once it's delivered in Washington—no, no story, Henry. The Washington end must give it out."

"No one but the chief has all the strings in his hand," explained Batak. "I know what my committee has done and that's all. He knows what every committee has done."

I was glad at least to learn that Camper's gigantic labors in mobilizing the nation's industrial resources were ended. He looked worn to the bone, but his eyes, I was pleased to see, shone as brightly as ever.

War stuff had the call, and being assigned to run up the river and interview Dr. Manning for a Sunday special, I had been inspired to drop in on Camper, thinking to take him along for a few hours' relaxation, including lunch at the historic Belton Arms.

"I suppose you must have your own way," I grumbled, making for the door and beckoning Batak to follow me.

Camper, who had been washing his hands at the corner lavatory, was still shaking his head good-naturedly, but as Batak handed him a towel from the cabinet he staggered and leaned against the wall, and his face became fearfully distorted.

"Good Heavens, Amos!" I exclaimed, making to assist him.

He motioned Batak and me back and stood erect, panting for breath, and glaring at us wildly.

Then he tottered to his desk and rested his hands on it, and again I expected him to collapse. The face he turned toward us was livid, and he could not yet control his breathing.

Batak, quicker of wit than I, sprang to the telephone to summon a doctor; but Camper halted him with a harsh:

"Stop! I—I've changed my mind. I'll be all right in a minute. We'll all go up to Storville for lunch."

I eyed him askance, wondering what chances he was taking in not calling a physician.

"I used to know Storville—when a boy," he mumbled as he waited for us to precede him through the door. "When I was ten, I went to the Belton Arms with my father—never there since."

"If you'd only go home and go to bed—" Batak began, but Camper silenced him with a gesture, saying:

"Never been there since, and lived so near all these years. New York takes the sentiment out of some of us—sometimes takes the soul out of a man."

He had aged ten years since I entered the office. I'm inclined to boast how the newspaper grind burns the life out of a man, but my activities were jokes compared to the terrific grind of hooking up a nation's resources inside of two months so as to overcome the neglect of years. And only Amos Camper with his iron will could have turned the trick so successfully, I opine. Even Batak, much younger and very virile, showed the strain of his lesser responsibility.

During the run up-river Batak and I stealthily studied the chief. I was fearing he would die before we reached Storville. Once arrived there, Dr. Manning could

take him into his private sanatorium and patch him up. A storm was brewing, and the dark heavens banked us in with an unwholesome half-light which accentuated the pallor of his face.

Batak exchanged significant looks with me and pursed his lips dubiously. I tried to rouse my friend with some of my nonsense. Although usually quick to respond, he now refused to hear me, and remained with his chin sunk on his breast, his gaze riveted on the black rack of oily clouds crawling over the eastern horizon.

Once he turned and stared at me, but his gaze must have been fixed on some inner picture; for never had a friend looked at me with that expression. The same terrible intensity, bordering on the malignant, was evident when he suddenly turned his eyes on Batak:

Dr. Manning was a golf friend of the Sunday editor, and had informed him that he had the material for a good feature story. The sanatorium was a short distance back of the Belton Arms. I proposed they wait for me at the inn, lunch to be served as soon as I had covered the assignment. My purpose in reversing my original plan of lunch first and assignment afterward was to enlist Dr. Manning's services and bring him back with me to prescribe for Camper.

To my consternation, Camper received my proposal with a savage display of heat, and in an ugly tone announced that my "scribbling" could wait till we had eaten.

I was shocked. Had any one intimated that Amos Camper could be capable of roughness toward me, I would have ridiculed the notion. In spite of my realization that he was a sick man, my face burned at the severity of his speech; and, clucking my tongue to keep my mouth shut, I followed as he led the way to the inn.

"How long has he been as bad as this?" I whispered from the corner of my mouth.

Batak cautiously glanced ahead at the bowed form and as secretly replied:

"Been coming on for some time. Never thought he'd crack so quick, though."

"If he would only lay off for a bit," I sighed.

"He must. He has finished his work. We subordinates can do the rest now."

"Wish he'd given me a forecast of his report," my news instinct prompted me to say.

"Better not ask him, seeing how he snapped you up." And Batak smiled grimly.

The rain began as we reached the veranda, falling in a dull-gray downpour. The pounding of the water on the veranda-roof made conversation difficult. The twilight made it hard to believe it was high noon in May. The dining-hall, long and low of ceiling, would have been as gloomy as a cellar if not for the scattered yellow blobs of candles. Colonial atmosphere was everything at the Arms.

Camper strode to the door of the hall and paused to survey the few diners grouped near the opposite wall. Then he turned to a string of empty tables near the door and waited for me to make a choice.

Seeing he was averse to fellowship, and recalling I was the host, I hustled ahead and scared up a waiter from the shadows, and conducted my guests to a side table. The waiter punctuated the gloom with two candles and departed with our orders, my friends refusing a preliminary drink.

We slumped back in the old-fashioned chairs, Camper's melancholy mood exerting its influence on Batak and me. It was more like a funeral than a friendly luncheon. I heartily wished them both back in town.

For nearly a minute the dismal silence remained unbroken, with Camper staring down at the table, the grayness of death on his face. Just as my nerves began jumping, he jerked up his head and in a hollow voice began:

"I can't see as it has changed any."

"A very old place," murmured Batak, eager to encourage him.

"It was here, serving man and beast, during the Revolutionary War," muttered Camper, again darting a peculiar glance at Batak and repeating it on me. This time I could have sworn the man was frightened at something.

"It must have seen some history," I prompted. "Colonials and king's troopers must have called here frequently. Bully for local color stuff."

"Legend says something more important

than loc^{al} color was witnessed by the Arms," and imper ominously replied, the croak in his voice fitting in with the depressing atmosphere.

We waited for him to go on. His head fell forward, and his fingers plucked aimlessly at the table-cover till I feared he was sinking into a stupor. Then he resumed:

"According to ancient gossip, repeated to me by my grandfather when I was a lad, the history of this country was decided here at the Arms. For it was here, so went the story in the old days, that the captors of Major André first learned of his trip to negotiate with Benedict Arnold for the surrender of West Point."

It is impossible to convey any impression of how these few words were twisted from his lips, as though some agency were dragging them from him against his will. I was positive his manner cast the same sinister spell over Batak. And it may be that the electrical disturbances added to the effect.

"Quite momentous, only history fails to mention it," said Batak, pushing forward his cigarette-case.

Camper refused to smoke, but gazed steadily at Batak for some moments, as if trying to sense his words. Then he returned to pleating the table-cloth, and deep creases sank into his forehead. And he was laboriously saying:

"My grandfather used to tell the tale. It made a deep impression on my young mind. That's why I remember so vividly the day my father brought me here—I peopled the place with ghosts.

"The story consisted of this: A servant served André with refreshments in this very room. He suspected his errand was hostile to the welfare of the colonies. After André departed, the three colonials came along and sat on the veranda and called for food. While serving them, the waiter voiced his suspicions about André, and as a result of that information André was captured—and *hung*. Worse than death was Arnold's lot—the eternal condemnation of mankind."

His vehemence in declaring the last caused me to shiver. His fashion of pausing before pouncing on the word *hung*, and the hint of exultation or fear in speaking the word made me wince and draw back.

Nor did his recital fail to register a strong effect on Batak; for all of his red-blooded buoyancy. To add to our mental discomfort was the physical shrinking from the raw, cold breath of the storm invading the open window. Batak, with a little shudder, said something about an open fire and a hot drink.

In a tone that sounded sickly Camper kept on:

"Some of the old settlers believed this place to be haunted after that. Boys gave it a wide berth at night, even when it was occupied as an inn."

"Ghost of André or Arnold?" I jested.

Camper eyed me coldly and answered:

"Neither. Ghost of the waiter."

I pictured the room of a winter's night, with the white moonlight flooding it. I imagined it on a summer evening, deserted except for the damp shadows. If a man be given to that sort of thing, it possessed rare potentials for lively fancies. Even now I had but to half-close my eyes to behold the servant and the three men who exposed Arnold's treason, and the shade of the unfortunate André.

"My grandfather often saw the young waiter, grown up to a man, and was fond of describing him as a tall, gaunt chap that would make you think of a death's-head," monotonously continued Camper. "It pleased him to think of him as the personification of inevitable justice, or retribution."

His voice came from far off, for already my nervous brain was reconstructing the dramatic values of that legendary scene. It was at this very table that André sat to break his fast after completing arrangements for Arnold's betrayal of West Point. The table instantly became repugnant to me. Out on the veranda, probably beside the window nearest the steps, the three colonials had halted to rest their legs and eat and drink.

With shivery satisfaction, I summoned the colonials from the dust to play their part. They formed a homely little group, unkempt, homespun men. I conjured back the shade of the waiter and fancied him placing a warning finger to his thin lips before bowing his head over the three rough

polls and whispering the death sentence of the British major.

"God! It's a dead man!"

This startling exclamation fell from Batak's lips and capped the climax to my mood. I fairly jumped and met Camper's gaze burning into my eyes. Turning, I beheld the cause of Batak's emotion.

A most remarkable figure was moving about the lower end of the hall, but vaguely discernible, and then only when he entered the zone of some candle. The face, surmounting an old-fashioned stock, appeared to be fleshless. The weird-looking creature carried a napkin over his arm like a waiter and moved with a shuffling, noiseless step.

Camper, too, was now observing him, his eyes wide with amazement. Because the thought came to my mind, I knew it was in his—his grandfather's description of the patriotic waiter, long since dead.

For the moment I was glad the burly Batak sat beside me. Had I been there alone in the shadows, with Camper's story fresh in my ears, and the cold breath of the storm on my neck, I should have experienced uneasiness. This, especially, had the spectral figure approached me.

We leaned forward and watched. The tables cut off a full view of the strange figure, but his coat, like the stock, was of an ancient style. It was the face, however, that riveted our attention. In the uncertain light it was cadaverous to a disturbing degree. When the deep-set eyes reflected the candle-light they glowed with an unearthly luster. Surely no one could eat a meal served by such an apparition.

The man passed to an empty table and bent over a chair as if taking a patron's order. It was uncanny to see the bony head bowing respectfully as the waiter glided to the next chair, where the same pantomime of learning a diner's wishes was gone through with. There were four chairs at the table, and the servitor paused at three. Across the hall flesh-and-blood men were dining, but none noted his presence.

"He's working toward us," I commented under my breath, now feeling a hysterical desire to laugh and relieve my nerves.

My friends paid no heed. Camper continued staring spellbound. Batak passed a

hand to his forehead and scowled feebly. The gloom of the place, the depressing influence of the storm, and Camper's legend had made us susceptible to the same suggestion. The waiter seemed unreal.

"He acts as if there were just three at each table," mumbled Batak.

"Probably the three colonials who got André," I whispered with a foolish snicker.

"And spoiled Arnold's game," murmured Camper.

Batak grunted something unintelligible, then said:

"The other waiters don't seem to see him. I've been watching to see if one of them wouldn't walk right through him."

The words were scarcely uttered before the figure straightened and the ghastly countenance turned in our direction. For a moment we looked into the sunken eyes, where sparks of ancient fire slumbered. Then the emaciated figure returned to bow over another empty chair, the impossible head being cocked to one side as if heeding a fantom's order.

"Only three at that table apparently," muttered Batak, this phase of the pantomime seeming to obsess him.

He started to light a cigarette, abruptly changed his mind, and reverted to his former thought, saying:

"I'm still waiting to see a waiter walk through him. Unless they bump, I won't believe he's real."

I sought to encourage his touch of levity by declaring:

"Amos, it must be your friend, the waiter, who tipped off the colonials about André."

Camper frowned at my jocularly, warning:

"He's coming this way."

"He only tends empty tables," reminded Batak, drawing his feet under his chair.

Unnoticed by the waiters flitting back and forth across his path, the man glided to the line of tables paralleling ours by the wall and began working up the hall. His halt at each table was marked by the same deportment. In fact, so identically did he deport himself at each empty chair, I was impelled to think of a grotesque automaton, capable of certain motions only.

As he drew abreast of us, I could detect no sound of a footfall. A nearer view increased the likeliness of Batak's first utterance—that he was a dead man. For the yellow skin was drawn as tight as parchment over the bones of the face, and the hands appeared to consist of bones only.

"Coming for our order," I whispered. "Let's order drinks."

I was mistaken. Instead of approaching our table he passed to the window, and for a moment bent over the sash and gazed out on the storm-drenched veranda. When he faced about and glided back to the center line of tables, Batak, with a touch of relief in his voice, said:

"He's going back to his grave. Management must be crazy for allowing such a spectacle in the room."

"No one seems to have seen him but us," said Camper thoughtfully.

"I'll bet he went to the window to tip off the colonials about Arnold's treachery," I joked.

My voice must have carried farther than I had intended, for the man faced our table and for nearly a minute stood motionless, his sunken eyes fixed on us like eyes peering through a bone mask.

I, for one, did not move under that steady scrutiny, and when he took a step forward I think we all had the same thought, that we were the only living men he had deigned to notice. Camper's feet scuffed staccato under the table.

The attenuated form drew nearer. I was seated so as to face him. To gain my side he must pass one of my companions who held the ends of the table. We remained quite rigid as he came to a halt behind the fourth chair, waiting for something to happen. But in an anticlimax his mechanical figure turned aside, and he would have departed down the hall had not Batak's jangling nerves prompted him to cry out:

"By God! I'm going to see if it's real!" And leaning from his chair, he grabbed for the long, thin arm.

As he exclaimed this, the man stopped and one bony hand met Batak's clawing digits for a second. Then the man glided away. Camper and I gaped after him. When we sifted our questioning gaze, it was

to behold Batak sitting bolt-upright and rigid, and glaring at something he was clutching in his right hand. Not till he slowly withdrew his hand into the candle-light did we make out what he was grasping. It was a small American flag.

Before we could give voice to our amazement at this unexpected finale, Batak staggered to his feet, holding the flag high above his head, his left hand pressing against his side.

"Fingers of ice! The flag! God!"

With this astounding outcry he swerved and would have fallen headlong had I not caught him under the arms and eased him into his chair.

He lay there, sprawling back, his head tilted up, his eyes rolling. Then he commenced hiccuping. Camper sprang up and tried to force water between his lips, but the hiccups only increased in violence. Once, while on the court-house beat, I had seen a witness on the stand taken like this and die of heart disease. When the heart runs down in that fashion it is hideous to behold. Releasing him to Camper's care, I frantically called for the waiters to bring stimulants.

When I turned back, Camper was resting his hand inside Batak's coat, testing his heart.

The hiccups were dwindling away.

"He's dying!" I choked.

With a shrill cry that distressed me, Camper withdrew his hand; distressed me because of the insane thought shooting through my mind that Camper was exulting.

"The man's dead," he announced.

As I gazed down into the immobile features of my friend, overwhelmed by the tragedy, my mind persisted in resenting Camper's behavior. He had known Batak longer than I. He had given him employment and promoted him to a position of trust in a mighty industry. When volunteering to head the general committee on industrial mobilization, Batak had been his choice for chairman of the most important subcommittee.

And yet, with Batak dead, he failed to express the degree of grief I would have expected. Rather, he seemed to be check-

ing some unnatural display. I knew he was worn and played out by his arduous labors and was willing to plead it as his excuse, but when with a brusque, rough motion he snatched the flag from the dead hand, I found it hard to forgive him.

"Business is business," I sadly remarked as we stepped from the wet veranda into a patch of sunshine. "I must see Dr. Manning. Suppose you'll return home at once."

"I'll go with you," Camper replied.

He clapped my shoulder affectionately, and his voice had the old ring. I preferred to be alone, but could not well refuse his company. So we set forth for the sanatorium; he talking rapidly and with a fierce zest; I was morosely silent.

Dr. Manning shook his head regretfully when I explained my errand.

"It was Mr. Pachard I mentioned to your editor as having a human interest story. But he is in no condition to be interviewed. I wish I had known you were coming to-day. I would have saved you the trip."

"We're not supposed to report failures," I reminded. "Can't you help me out? I must take something back."

"I can't revive the mentality of a man in his hundredth year," he answered. "He is the most interesting character I ever met, but to-day he is under a cloud. I could take you in to him, but he would not sense our presence. Had you come yesterday, he would have talked."

"I've got to take something back," I repeated. "He's talked with you a lot. Suppose you talk for him."

He hesitated, then agreed, saying:

"If that is permissible, all right. I can also furnish you with his latest photograph.

"To begin with, Mr. Pachard is more of an institution than the sanatorium. He was born at the Belton Arms in 1817, his father being the proprietor. His father worked there as a youth during the Revolutionary War, and took over the business in 1800. Our Mr. Pachard succeeded his father in the late 30's and ran the inn for many years. What isn't generally known is that he owns the Arms to-day. It's never been out of the family since 1800."

"Pachard!" softly exclaimed Camper. "I remember now."

Dr. Manning continued:

"Mr. Pachard came to live here during the management of my predecessor, who gave me his life history. It has been his daily custom to visit the Arms for a few hours. During the last few months he has had spells of imagining he was running the place. The proprietor has humored him, the regular patrons admire and respect him, and, like the employees, never pretend to see him when his mind is clouded. Unfortunately, he had one of his spells to-day. Possibly to-morrow he may be normal."

Camper squeezed my arm. I was beginning to anticipate the rest of the doctor's recital.

"He is very patriotic," interposed Camper.

"Extremely so, as was his father before him. Understand me; he is not unbalanced in any sense of senility. His mind has merely turned back some fifty-odd years. To-day he had the illusion he was proprietor of the inn and that Lincoln was calling for volunteers. During the Civil War it was his custom to refuse to serve a guest who did not wear the national colors. If such came to the inn, he was presented with a small flag by his host. If he hesitated in accepting it, he was shown out."

"His father—strange yarns when I was a boy—did his father figure in the capture of André?" cried Camper, tripping over his words in his eagerness.

"I don't recall his mentioning anything like that," slowly responded Manning. "He may have to my predecessor, however."

If the two said more along this line, I did not hear them, for now my eyes were fixed on a photograph on the doctor's desk.

"I must take that picture. I'll see you get it back, all right," I said, pointing to the likeness of the waiter who had thrust the flag into poor Batak's hand.

"A remarkable story, only it's cruel the death of a friend must figure in it," I said as we were returning to the city.

"A miracle instead of a story," impressively corrected Camper. "I now humbly beg your pardon and ask your forgiveness."

I believed he had cracked in earnest. My expression betrayed this fear.

"I mean it," he assured, resting his hand on my shoulder and glancing back to make sure we were isolated from the other passengers. "When you entered my office to-day there was a thin package of papers on my desk which contained my summary of the industrial mobilization committee's work for the last two months.

"I was the only person who possessed all that vital information. Should it fall into the hands of a spy or a traitor the result might be disastrous to the nation. Yet those papers disappeared shortly after you arrived in the office. Batak and I were the only other persons in the room when they vanished. Only one hypothesis was possible—either you or Batak took them."

"Good Heavens!" I choked. "Me! A spy!"

"Softly," he warned, pressing my shoulder. "The papers were on my desk when I rose to greet you. You passed close to the desk when you went to the window. Batak walked by the desk when he procured me a towel. I discovered the theft while wiping my hands. I had two courses open to me: to summon help and have you both searched, or accompany the two of you to Storville and perhaps learn which was guilty before taking any action.

"Each of you had been my trusted friend. I had no reason for suspecting one more than the other. So I came up the river to fight it out with the two of you. I will confess my mind began turning against you when you seemed so eager to leave us before lunch. I had been waiting for one of you to make excuses for breaking away long enough to conceal the papers.

"I regretted then I had not had you both searched, although that would subject an innocent man to a terrible humiliation. So I insist Mr. Pachard is a miracle rather than an interesting special for your Sunday edition."

"Batak—André?" I faintly whispered.

"No—an Arnold," Camper grimly replied. "He was an American citizen and he was a traitor. When I placed my hand over his heart to see if he lived, I found the papers inside his waistcoat."

The Other Trent



by Joseph
Ivers
Lawrence

Author of "The Money Hater," "Playing the Man," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

HARTLEY STUART TRENT, a snobbish scion of wealth, was greatly annoyed at a disrespectful write-up in a newspaper when a poor man of the same name joined the 31st Infantry, N. G. N. Y. He resolved to make his numble namesake a man of position and wealth or, if the fellow refused such gracious largess, to break him.

Hartley Stuart Trent, the poor man, scornfully rejected the rich man's offer; whereupon the other, acting through a lawyer, deprived him of his position and also managed to make his military experience unpleasant.

The poor Trent, however, was a fighter. He found a friend in Jack Ives, a regiment acquaintance, whose very attractive sister he had met. The sister thought she was engaged to "Snookums" Buckingham, a member of the aristocratic set, who really had no intention of marrying her.

Trent, persecuted by a man named Hallock who actually attended to the details of the rich man's scheme, lost job after job until he had not a penny left and had to walk the streets all night. He procured a breakfast of fish beside the Hudson River, and proceeded to the armory to look at the bulletin-board. A first sergeant asked him if he was free to do guard duty, as a declaration of war seemed imminent. The poor Trent replied:

"I can shoulder a gun and shoot, and I can assure you that it won't interfere with my business."

CHAPTER XI.

IN UNIFORM.

"**G**O and get into uniform then," ordered the sergeant. "If you can stay on the job, you can have a cot to sleep on in the company room, and there's a cook on duty in the mess kitchen who will feed you. You'll be on duty two hours, and off four hours, and you can go outside the armory if you want to, so long as you are here for your tour every time."

Trent, listening to the instructions a little doubtfully, brightened perceptibly at the mention of food and quarters. Those two details formed a solution of his most perplexing problem, and he lost no time in getting to the locker-room for his uniform and equipment.

As soon as he was ready, the first sergeant turned him over to a corporal from another company. The latter ordered him to fall in with three other men, and they were marched to the street in front of the armory to relieve the men on guard.

Trent's post covered the eastern end of the large building, including the gateway and entrance for horses and wagons. The corporal instructed him to allow no one to loiter near the building, and to admit no one who had not the proper credentials.

The new sentry shouldered his rifle and began his first two hours of monotonous patrolling with something very like elation. He was now serving his country and State, actively engaged in an important duty; and even if there was to be no pay for him until the regiment was mustered into the Federal

This story began in *The Argosy* for December 15.

service, he was comfortably sure of food and lodging.

Officers and men with business for the regiment came and went, and Trent took care to follow his instructions for facing and saluting.

Captain Soames, of his company, alighted from a motor-car and started for the main entrance, but caught sight of the sentry at the east gate and walked back to look him over.

"What are you doing here?" demanded the captain curtly, as Trent carefully executed port arms, according to the instructions for sentinels when talking with any one on their posts.

"The first sergeant detailed me to guard duty, sir," Trent answered gravely.

"I'll see what his idea was in putting a green man on post!" snapped the captain. "What do you know of the guard manual?"

"I've had one drill in it, sir," was the answer, "and I have studied the book at home."

Captain Soames laughed unpleasantly.

"Studied at home!" he sneered. "I suppose you are fitting yourself for promotion already! Well now, don't think that I have forgotten how impertinent you were to me the first time I talked with you, my man. You'll have to get a lot more popular with me before you can think of anything like promotion."

He stepped back and inspected the sentry's uniform and equipment critically, but Trent's shoes were polished and his buttons and buckles were clean and bright.

"Out of a job, I suppose—or you wouldn't be here!" Soames sneered.

"I have nothing else to take my time at present, sir."

"Well, I suppose it's a good thing to give you loafers something to do. Some of the boys here have sacrificed business and important interests to volunteer for service, but a lot of you are just killing time, wearing a uniform, and lounging around here two hours at a stretch. I'll tell the officer of the guard to see that you get enough to do."

Trent listened in silence, knowing that the captain was striving to anger him.

"Well, all right," said Soames. "As long as this duty doesn't require any unusual intelligence, I suppose we'll let you try it. I'll tell the first sergeant, though, that he must be responsible for putting you on, and he'd better look to it that you don't do anything to make the regiment ridiculous."

The captain stalked away, frowning darkly, and as Trent brought his rifle back to the right shoulder and resumed his pacing he smiled quietly and reflected that the advantage of the encounter had inclined slightly toward him.

Presently a slender young man came hurrying along the street on the opposite side, and though he did not glance at the sentry in passing, the latter quickly recognized him as Mr. Hallock. He crossed the street and made for the main entrance of the armory, but there the sentry at the door turned him back and seemed unwilling to engage in conversation with him.

With characteristic persistence Hallock started for the eastern entrance and came face to face with Trent.

"Oh, *here* you are!" he cried, with obvious satisfaction. "You got fired out of your boarding-house, didn't you? I was there this morning and the old woman told me what a raw deal you gave her."

"You'll have to move along," Trent said sharply; "no one is allowed to stand here unless he has business at the armory."

"But I have business here, with you," Hallock explained. "Come now—"

"Move on!" Trent ordered sharply, "or I shall have to call the corporal of the guard and report you for loitering. You'll be arrested and turned over to the police."

Hallock backed away grinning.

"Say, you're a regular soldier, aren't you?" he said mockingly. "But I want to see you about something important. How can we fix it?"

Trent considered for a moment. He felt a bit curious to know what new plans the spy was bent on.

"I shall be off duty in about an hour," he said. "If you won't take too much of my time, I'll meet you at the next corner as soon as I am relieved."

"I'll wait for you there," Hallock agreed.

In due time Trent was relieved by a new sentry and marched back to the guard quarters in the armory. He laid aside his rifle and cartridge belt and went out to keep the appointment with Hallock.

"Let's go somewhere where we can have a little drink and talk it all over," Hallock proposed as they met on the corner.

"I prefer to stand here; I can't spare you much time, and I don't care to go far from the armory," was the blunt response.

"Have it your own way," agreed the other. "I have come to see you, Mr. Trent, to show you that I am really your friend."

"We shall not need to get sentimental about it, I hope," said Trent dryly.

"I'm dead serious, though," Hallock assured him. "I can do a lot for you, if you'll only listen to me. You're probably wondering what I gave you that letter for. You've had time to read it over a couple of times and think about it, and now I want to have a little talk with you."

"If you don't use up all my time with preliminaries," said Trent, "perhaps we may have a little talk."

"Of course, you know I'm employed by Judge Waring and that he is employed by Hartley Stuart Trent," Hallock began. "Well, sir, I have done a heap of work on this case—trying to put you down and out, and all that—but I can tell you that there isn't a lot of profit for me in it. I'm getting a little bit sick of the job, and it's about time that I put in a little real work for a young man named Frank Hallock."

"You are still on the preliminaries," Trent objected, "and I warn you that the meeting will be adjourned very soon."

"Why, I'll get right down to business fast enough," said Hallock. "Now, Mr. Trent, why don't you sue your millionaire namesake for damages?"

"Why don't I buy the New York Central Railroad?" laughed Trent.

"Any good, bright shyster lawyer would take the case for you," argued Hallock.

"Not if I saw him first," returned Trent. "You see, I should want the money for damages for myself, in such a case; not for the good, bright shyster lawyer."

"You're pretty near right at that," Hallock agreed amiably. "Well then, you go ahead and get a lawyer that will suit you. Show him that letter I gave you, and he won't have any doubt about making a case for you. And then—this is where your friend Frank Hallock comes in—then I'll agree to stake you to a little money for expenses. I've got a little bank account, and I'll take a chance on it. You sue him for fifty thousand—that isn't too big, or too little—and I'll agree to appear as a witness for your side."

"I'll tell old man Waring that I'm tired of crooked business and am going to quit him. If you get a live wire for a lawyer, you ought to get at least twenty thousand out of the suit—and for helping you win it I'll agree to settle on a fifty-fifty basis."

Trent broke into a hearty, ringing laugh.

"That's fair enough, Lord knows!" exclaimed Hallock. "You couldn't win the case on that letter, not in a thousand years; but with my testimony to help you out, you've got a cinch. Why, don't you see? I'm staking everything on it myself. I'll quit old man Waring cold, and throw all the cards on the board. That's how sure I am! There's twenty thousand in it, if there's a cent—and fifty-fifty is fair enough!"

"It's about time I looked into the armory; there might be something interesting there," said Trent.

Hallock caught him by the arm.

"Don't always be a clam!" he cried.

"A man owes it to himself to have a little thought for his future. I suppose you feel pretty fine to be independent and cocky, and refuse a fortune when a man offers it to you, but you could feel even more pride in beating the man at his own game—pulling out your fortune by fair and square legal methods."

"Only lawyers believe that legal methods are fair and square," remarked Trent. "I may as well tell you, Mr. Hallock, that it won't pay you to waste any more time on me in any manner. I am tired of bothering with you, and your employers may as well give up their game as a bad job. I am occupied now in military service, and no doubt I shall be until the

end of the war which is about to be declared.

"I am so tired of the whole ridiculous business, that I want to forget it. You may report to Judge Waring and he may report in turn to Hartley Stuart Trent, that I have dropped the whole matter. I do not intend to visit Mr. Hartley Stuart Trent for the purpose of beating him up, and he may now come back to the city and have no fear."

"You're a funny guy!" Hallock observed with a sickly grin. "Just for that I'll send that message to his highness. But you needn't expect to get away with it. He'll be mad clean through when he hears that—and he'll be likely to show *you* just about where you get off. He'll show you just how much protection a uniform is against the Trent millions and the Trent influence. If he and old man Waring don't finish you off by getting you court-martialed for treason, you'll be a lucky boy!"

"Let it go at that," returned Hal Trent. "But please don't bother me any more with your visits, Mr. Hallock. You may stand across the street and make faces at me, if that will do you any good, but don't continue these little friendly chats."

"Young man!" Hallock exclaimed oracularly, "you'll wish a thousand times that you had listened to me and had a little sense!"

CHAPTER XII.

HARKING TO THE TRUMPETS.

THE Trent mansion was open for the convenience of its master, who had returned suddenly to town, and the first caller to greet the young millionaire and welcome him home was Judge Waring.

"You have dropped in so soon after my arrival," said the millionaire, "that I almost suspect that you were informed of it."

The two men neglected to shake hands, either through carelessness or by mutual consent. Both sat down in the large drawing-room, and Judge Waring chuckled good humoredly.

"Let us say rather that I calculated to a nicety the time of your home-coming,"

returned the judge. "You see, my dear Hartley, I know how irksome it is for you to stay away from New York, and I knew how quickly you would come back when you learned that your dangerous namesake had promised not to lay violent hands on you."

"You carry your jests too far by half," Hartley retorted with obvious irritation. "I'll admit that I did receive your letter, but its arrival was coincident with my preparations to return. Frankly, I didn't care for your humorous insinuations that I left town on account of that fellow's threats. You know that I did nothing of the sort!"

"Why, of course, of course!" agreed the judge soothingly. "I always like to have my little joke, you know."

"When it comes to a question of courage," Hartley went on spiritedly, "I will not step down for any man. If you are at all curious about the cause of my return to town, I'll tell you something: I have watched the progress of our trouble with Germany, and the prospect of war interests me very much. I wish to put myself at the disposal of my country, and I am thinking of taking the command of one of the National Guard regiments."

"Bless my soul!" cried Judge Waring in mingled consternation and mirth. "My dear fellow, you don't think you can get a colonel's commission!"

"And why not?" Hartley demanded gravely. "I have money, which is very useful in recruiting and developing a regiment; and I have had some military training. You may remember that I spent several years in a military academy while preparing for college, and, as a matter of fact, I am quite ready to face the technical examination before a board of officers."

"I believe," said the judge dryly, "that the commands of regiments are not usually in the market, to be picked up by the first passer-by. Have you decided to honor any particular regiment by announcing yourself as its colonel?"

"I am thinking of accepting the colonelcy of the Thirty-first Infantry," Hartley answered coldly.

Judge Waring laughed immoderately.

"I suppose the present colonel will retire to yield his place to a better man," he said.

"There is no colonel at present," Hartley explained. "The regiment is temporarily in command of a major from the regular army. That is why I have been invited to take the command."

"Invited—to take—command!" echoed the judge utterly aghast. "You can't mean it! Invited by whom?"

"By persons with the authority to transact such business," was the disappointing answer.

Waring grew suddenly serious.

"Your various whims, Hartley," he said, "are astounding in their extravagant absurdity. I implore you to abandon this new one before you make yourself ridiculous before the public. It is no small matter to buy your way to the command of a regiment, and then let people discover that you are not qualified to command a corporal's guard."

"I beg to correct you in one or two errors," Hartley replied: "For one, you should know that military honors are not bought nowadays; they are awarded, *for merit!* As for my being qualified for such a position, you assume rather too much authority in judging for yourself. I am not under your authority in that respect, you know."

"But you *are* in certain other respects, I believe," Waring retorted a little testily. "I have not the power to forbid you to make a perfect idiot of yourself, and I cannot easily confine your wild expenditures to any reasonable amount; but I *can* curtail your income to prevent you, in a measure, from financing the National Guard. I dare say that you have promised to build that regiment a new armory, or do something equally magnificent; otherwise, I am quite sure that you would not be invited to be its colonel. In spite of the dreams of the idealists, money still talks."

"I have kept myself quite decently out of sight, as the guardian and trustee of your fortune," he went on sternly, "but you may force me to come out in the open. I may be compelled to announce publicly that the distinguished colonel of the Thirty-

first Infantry is practically my ward, and that I find myself obliged to cut down his spending money."

"And I, in turn, might then be forced to ask the courts to decide the matter," said Hartley. "I might have to explain, you see, that my misguided father appointed for me a most unreasonable guardian. You were to give me control of my estate when I, in your judgment, was sufficiently mature to use it wisely, but I find that to you maturity is a thing to be associated with old age and senility."

"It is a pity," said Waring a little more calmly, "that we clash so frequently, when I have nothing but your best interests at heart. Well, I won't argue with you, but I shall not permit you to run wild, Hartley. I indulged you in that idiotic whim about persecuting the fellow who wore your name in public. To me, that took on the color of an interesting experiment, and it did not involve a million dollars, I dare say that notion is forgotten now, for you never ride two hobbies at once."

"Nothing of the sort!" snapped Hartley. "I told you to keep your man at work on that case until the fellow came to terms or disappeared. And now, don't you see, the thing is even more serious? The Thirty-first is the very regiment that the rascal enlisted in, when that absurd newspaper story came out. Well, can't you see that I will not have him in that regiment? It would be a sad joke to have Colonel Hartley Stuart Trent and Private Hartley Stuart Trent in the same regiment!"

"I must say, Judge," he went on sullenly, "that your clever young Mr. Hallock has hardly fulfilled your estimate of him. There seems to have been no end of talk and correspondence, but only a devil of a mess to show for it! What have you accomplished? Why, the brazen ruffian sends word by the clever Mr. Hallock that he will agree not to harm me if I return to the city!"

"At least it enabled you to return," murmured Waring, who could not resist the temptation thus offered.

"Don't refer to that again!" cried Hartley, losing his temper. "I explained that fully to you. I certainly wouldn't change

my plans about returning just because I got your damned letter."

"There, there, we'll drop that little joke," said Waring. "I'll tell Frank Hallock, if you like, that he will have to show some definite results, or resign the position of special Nemesis. As I now understand it, you require the man's removal from the regiment, at least."

"Your understanding is all wrong then!" Hartley snapped crossly. "I want your man Hallock to do the work assigned him, or get out. I want this Trent fellow out of the regiment—out of the city—out of my sight and hearing! Understand?"

"I will try to convey all that to Hallock as clearly as you have conveyed it to me," said Waring with irritating mildness.

Hartley got up then as though expecting the visitor to go, but the judge kept his seat.

"Stay as long as you please, judge," the host said with open rudeness. "I have an appointment, so I'll bid you good-after-noon."

Waring smiled rather sourly.

"Really, you have the fine old English gentleman's manner of treating your lawyer like a servant," he remarked.

"Indeed?" said Hartley. "Well, then you have pointed out another one of my inconsistencies, for my servants say that I treat them very well."

Waring knitted his brows and proceeded to puzzle out the intended meaning of the reply, and Hartley left him abruptly.

The young man's motor-car was waiting and he jumped in and ordered it driven to the Buckingham house. He found his fiancée at home and he announced to her that he came to pay his respects after his absence from town.

"H-m! I got the idea that you were to be away rather longer," she said indifferently. "Sweet of you to come to see me right away! Have you managed to enjoy yourself?"

"Hardly that!" Hartley exclaimed disgustedly. "I was beginning to feel almost comfortable in a stupid sort of a place up in the woods, but it didn't last. Your brother arrived—"

Miss Buckingham laughed gaily.

"And you had to flee back to the city for peace and quiet!" she exclaimed. "What a desperate time you have, Hartley! I'm afraid you'll have to start off again directly, for Brad is coming back too. He wrote me that he had decided to chuck the fishing trip and come back. He has some beastly affair going on with some girl of no account."

"Yes, I know," said Hartley, concealing a yawn. "In fact I left him talking about it up there in the woods. The pathetic part of it is, that Brad fancies himself a sort of Don Juan. It's too excruciating."

"Oh, leave the poor chap to his fancies!" Dorothy protested. "He has to be amused somehow, and if he can find amusement for himself, so much the better for all of us."

"But the poor ass is in danger!" Hartley informed her impatiently. "Do you want his back-stairs romance aired in the newspapers? The girl will bring suit for breach of promise, naturally, and the papers will print Brad's face, you know—'brother of the beautiful Miss Buckingham, who is betrothed to Hartley Stuart Trent.' Oh! a sweet mess for all of us!"

"Poor chap! what a horrible worry for you!" Dorothy exclaimed ironically. "Why don't you inform Brad that his vulgar love affairs are disturbing your peace of mind?"

"I told him what a bally idiot he was making of himself," growled the young man, "and—by Jove—he rather took it all as a compliment. Yes, I fancy he has got into that state mind; people avoid him so much, you know, that when one stops even to call him an ass, he feels quite flattered by the attention."

"Oh, well!" Dorothy sighed wearily. "We are about to have war, it seems, so there'll be a little of something new to talk about. I suppose that a lot of the chaps we know will be putting on khaki and going along."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Hartley rather uneasily. "In fact, I—I am expecting to go myself."

"Oh! not really!" cried the girl, affecting a stare of horror. "Oh I say, Hartley, that would be simply ripping and noble of

you, but you surely couldn't go and enlist with a lot of—oh! men of all sorts of classes, you know!"

Hartley raised his eyebrows and looked at her with an air of cool superiority.

"War is a great leveler," he remarked; "the classes and the masses mix quite indiscriminately, you know, in such a crisis. But the men who are qualified for the higher places aren't likely to enlist in the ranks. I am thinking of taking a commission."

"A commission?" she exclaimed wonderingly.

"I am now considering the colonelcy of the Thirty-first Infantry," he announced, and looked out the window, striving not to appear self-conscious.

Miss Buckingham gulped as though about to choke and then laughed shrilly with excessive mirth.

"War is a deucedly humorous thing, isn't it?" Hartley said coldly.

"In some of its aspects," she replied.

"Pardon me, old boy—but it's almost as killing, you know, to picture you a colonel as it is to think of Brad as a modern Don Juan!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ONE THING HE COULD DO.

PPRIVATE Hal Trent was strolling near the armory toward evening of the second day of his sentry duty, when he met Edith Ives. She was on her way home to dinner and she stopped abruptly and looked at his trim uniform with a bright smile of admiration.

"It is very becoming to you, Mr. Trent," she said.

"It's good of you to say that," he responded. "A fellow feels rather awkward and self-conscious in these togs at first."

"It is a noble livery for a man to wear," she said gravely. "You deserve even more credit than some of the men, because you enlisted when war with Germany was a practical certainty."

He shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly.

"Jack is desperately worried about the war," she went on, "but I try to pretend

that I am not. It would almost kill me to see him go, but I wouldn't have him stay at home."

"He is worried?" Trent queried.

"Oh! not about himself!" she hastened to assure him. "At heart he is wild to go; his patriotism is at white heat; but he worries constantly about me. He thinks that I work too hard, that I will break down presently; and he wonders how I can live if he goes to war—particularly if he—if he—shouldn't come back."

The words ended in what was almost a muffled sob, and Trent was silent, not knowing what to say.

"I am not at all worried about myself," she explained, recovering her composure. "I am strong enough to work and take care of myself; but it will be terrible for him to go—as he must go—thinking that he is deserting me and causing me to suffer. It makes my—my other problem all the harder, Mr. Trent. Much as Jack dislikes Mr. Buckingham, I can see that he is beginning to wish that I would marry him. He wouldn't like me to be mercenary, of course, but he has such a dread of poverty for a woman, that—"

"I understand," Trent said solemnly. "His anxiety is quite natural, but he hasn't stopped to think that a woman may experience worse things than poverty. Poverty is responsible for a lot of misery, but there are societies that care for the helpless women. For the miseries that go with unhappy marriages, however, there is not much help provided. The divorce courts furnish a certain relief, but they are not able to cure the bitterness that remains."

"I'm afraid that your opinion of Mr. Buckingham is a little worse than Jack's, if that is possible. But please don't think I would marry him, Mr. Trent! I hope I have too much character to allow me to marry a man whom I couldn't respect."

"After all, there's a brighter side to this worry about the war; poor Jack will have to resign his position when the regiment is called, and then I shall no longer fear Mr. Buckingham, you see. I hope you can imagine how mean and ignoble I feel, pretending to be friendly to that man in order to safeguard Jack's position."

"Jack will blame you if he ever hears of it," said Trent.

"Yes, he will," she agreed; "but such things seem to be part of the woman's lot. We make weak, foolish sacrifices to help our men, and even then we don't help them much. If the present situation should continue long, a crisis would surely come; and then Jack would be more wretched than he ever dreamed of being. He would blame, as you say, and he would—I don't know but he might kill Mr. Buckingham for holding me to such a bargain. So you see the war is coming to us as a blessing, in spite of Jack's worries."

"So it seems," Trent agreed soberly, and his face showed deep concern. "I wish that I might do something more than advise you, Miss Ives, but it's damnably true that a poor man is a helpless one. I would gladly settle with this Buckingham in the most natural way, but that would only bring your crisis upon you and Jack more quickly. If I had money and influence, you see, I could find a better position for Jack, and deal with Buckingham in any way that suited me. As things are, I am worse than useless."

"Your friendship is a splendid thing for both of us," she asserted feelingly. "Sympathy is a wonderful thing for any one in trouble. I wonder why it is that the honest and sympathetic men are usually among the poor men."

"A cynic would say that an honest and sympathetic man couldn't get rich nowadays," answered Trent, "but that's rather unfair: human nature is about the same old thing in all walks of life. The rich oppress the poor and the poor impose upon the rich, if they get the chance—so there's a good deal of suspicion and distrust between the classes.

"Let us hope that Mr. Buckingham isn't a representative of his class. I have a few troubles of my own with certain men of wealth, but I try to confine my hostility to individuals. When I come to think of it, I've known some poor men that were about as bad as they could afford to be."

"Jack and I must try to learn some of your philosophy," the girl said approvingly. "And now I must be getting home to

dinner. I'm to have company this evening, but unfortunately I can't look forward to it with pleasure. Mr. Buckingham went away on a fishing trip, and it was a real relief to have him gone, but he has returned sooner than he expected to, and he is to call this evening."

"I wouldn't worry about him too much, at any rate," counseled Trent. "You may be sure that Jack and I will never let him become any more of a trouble than he is now."

She thanked him and gave him her hand with a friendly heartiness as they said good night, and he remained on the corner, gazing after her thoughtfully until she was out of sight.

He remembered just in time that he was almost due at the armory for two hours of sentry duty, and he covered the short distance at a run.

His tour between six o'clock and eight, in the evening, was less monotonous than in other hours; people passed the armory in throngs, home going, and he had to look sharp to his post. There were enough wags among the passers-by to keep up a running fire of raillery of the Johnny-get-your-gun and the didn't-know-it-was-loaded sort, and the homely humor pulled Trent up out of himself and into a lighter mood.

This evening, however, he could not get his thoughts entirely away from the brooding troubles of his friends, the young brother and sister. Self-made troubles they were, like nearly all troubles: Jack Ives should not have enlisted in the first place, with a sister dependent upon him; and Edith should never have let herself into the entanglement with Buckingham; but they were nevertheless in pressing need of sympathy and help.

At eight o'clock Trent was off duty again for four hours. He was excused from drills on account of the guard duty, and was free to roam about the armory or outside; and he quickly got away from the noise of marching feet and loud voices, and walked in the quiet streets where he could think.

He wondered anxiously if the heavy-witted Buckingham could be crafty to a dangerous degree, and if the inexperienced

girl was alert to the possible dangers of the situation. He felt that he should warn Jack Ives of the treachery of the man, but there was the danger of offending him with too much interference, on the one hand, and on the other the grave possibility of arousing him to desperate anger.

He walked around and around the city blocks, unmindful of fatigue. He stopped at the armory twice within an hour to make sure that he was not wanted there, and continued his nervous rambling.

In the course of the evening, as it grew later and quieter, he almost unconsciously gravitated toward the neighborhood where his friends lived, with no definite reason for doing so. He passed the house twice, with no thought of stopping there, and it was with a start of vague dismay that he suddenly discovered Edith Ives and Buckingham walking just ahead of him, and recognized the man by the loud and high-pitched voice in which he habitually spoke.

To follow them deliberately was distasteful to him, but he walked slowly and regarded them, as he discovered that their conversation was rising to the point of heated controversy.

They walked northward to the blocks where Audubon Avenue is sparsely settled, the houses being interspersed among vacant lots and rocky fields. Trent followed slowly and uneasily, and suddenly his dismay was increased to panic as the pair turned and came toward him.

He could not turn about and retrace his steps without attracting their notice, and the girl would probably recognize his uniform, so he took advantage of the shadow in which he had halted, and darted quickly into the adjacent vacant lot to conceal himself behind a low wooden shack where builders' tools were kept.

In an instant he heard Buckingham's voice, shrill and angry.

"I came all the way back to the city just to see you," the man complained, "and you've got to quit this foolishness. You listen to me, my dear! I'm going to marry you, an' you've got to chuck that job o' yours right now and live like a lady. Jolly pleasant thing, ain't it, to have my fiancée working for her living!"

The girl remonstrated with him in a low voice.

"I'll be damned if I don't think you're stringing me!" Buckingham cried harshly. "But you can't get away with it! I'd be a silly ass, wouldn't I, to spend all my time and money on you, and never get so much as a kiss?"

Edith stopped and drew away from the man angrily. She spoke in short, tense phrases, but Trent could not catch the words.

"Oh, I know you never said right out that you'd marry me!" the man growled, "but you've been stringing me along. We'll quit all the polite funny business now, though—and I'll be the boss, for a change!"

He lunged forward suddenly and caught her by the arm, pulling her to him. She cried out in alarm, but, heedless of possible witnesses, he enveloped her in a rough embrace and fought with her to draw her face close to his.

Trent sprang from behind the shack, jerked him backward by the collar, and struck him in the face.

Edith uttered a low, gasping cry, and ran panic-stricken down the avenue.

Buckingham turned on his assailant, astonished and frightened, but roaring with rage. He saw Trent's hand drawn back for another blow, and he rushed at him, swinging his arms clumsily.

Trent gave way a step, to avoid the ponderous weight of the stout man, then caught him with a straight blow on the chin and stretched him on the sidewalk.

The sudden appearance of a policeman was to be expected, and Trent did not care to be arrested in uniform. He felt that the gasping, moaning man at his feet would remember his punishment, and as soon as he made sure that he had not injured him seriously he darted away and ran as quietly as possible down the street.

He covered six blocks swiftly, and then he came upon Edith Ives. She was trying to hurry home, but she staggered and swayed, half fainting.

At the sound of his footsteps she turned about in fresh alarm.

"Mr. Trent!" she gasped.

Trent took her arm and supported her gently.

"You must get home at once," he said quietly, "but you must try to calm yourself before Jack sees you. He might start out to murder—somebody."

"Jack is at the armory," she said faintly, "and I will try to control myself before he gets home."

"Then I'll take you home," said Trent. "Please don't try to talk now. I understand everything perfectly, and I'm glad that I happened to be near when you needed me."

They arrived presently at her door.

"I—I can't even try to thank you," she said plaintively, giving him her hand. "I hope I shall never see that man again, but I suppose he will try to make all the trouble he can. Jack will have to suffer, now, for all my foolishness."

"I think that Jack is man enough to take care of himself," Trent assured her, then bade her good night and hurried to the armory for his midnight tour of duty.

On the way he found one more incident to attract his interest. At a brightly lighted street intersection, a policeman was solicitously assisting a stout and badly disheveled young man to climb into a taxicab.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PAIR OF LUCKY HITS.

HAL TRENT was resting in the company room next morning when Captain Soames came in to look at his official correspondence and confer with the hard-working company clerk about his records.

The captain returned Trent's salute and bade him good morning with unusual courtesy. A little later he sat down by Trent and assumed a conversational attitude.

"I've been thinking about you, Trent," he said, "and it seems to me that you're quite a decent sort of fellow. Now, I should think you would be more comfortable and happy in some other regiment. It's easy enough, you know, to arrange a transfer, and if you care to select the regi-

ment that you prefer I will undertake to fix it up for you. Mind you, I want to do it as a favor to you."

Trent looked frankly astonished.

"With all due respect, sir," he said slowly, "I would like to inquire why I can't remain in this regiment—and in this company also."

Soames assumed an air of patience.

"That's all right, my boy," he said, "but you ought to see that you would be better off somewhere else. You're rather unpopular around here, and—"

"I don't intend to talk back to my superior officer," Trent said quietly, "but please allow me to say, Captain Soames, that I thought my unpopularity was confined to you, sir, and to Corporal Perkins—and for reasons best known to yourselves."

"We won't quarrel about it," the captain said graciously, "but you'd better take my advice. The fact is, Trent, that it will soon be just about impossible for you to stay here. The regiment is—well, it's still more or less a secret, but I'll tell you in confidence that we shall probably have a new colonel in the near future."

"But what in the world has a new colonel to do with me, sir?"

"I'll tell you, and you'll understand perfectly," answered Soames with an unpleasant smile. "The powers that be have selected a wealthy young society man for the honor—to raise the tone of the regiment, I suppose—and his name is Hartley Stuart Trent!"

"As colonel of this regiment!" exclaimed Trent.

"Why not?" demanded the captain sharply.

"I suppose it is not for me to say," Trent returned quietly.

"But you must see," persisted the captain, "that it might be embarrassing for the new colonel to find a man in the ranks bearing his own distinguished name."

"Wouldn't it be just as easy for you, sir, to admit frankly that you were requested by Judge Waring, or some of his political associates, to get me out of the regiment? I knew it, you see, soon after I was enlisted."

The captain started up from his chair in a rage.

"Be careful you don't go too far!" he snarled. "I'm trying to do you a good turn, and you don't appreciate it. I want a definite answer from you, and then I'll know how to proceed."

"I think," said Trent slowly, "that I had better get expert advice in the matter; then perhaps I can speak more intelligently."

"Expert advice?" snapped Soames. "What do you mean?"

"I will write to the adjutant-general," Trent explained, "and ask him if an enlisted man can be removed from a company without specific charges being preferred against him."

Soames turned white.

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" he roared. "It would be just like a piker of your sort to stir up a devil of an official mess over nothing at all! Stay in the company if you're so keen about it, but I warn you to watch out for trouble. I'll land good and legitimate charges against you, my man, before I'm a month older—or I'll get out of the company myself!"

"Is that a pledge?" Trent asked calmly.

Soames glared at him, too furious to reply, and strode out of the room.

An instant later First Sergeant Rayson entered the room wearing his citizen's clothes and a grin of unusual breadth.

"Hello, Trent!" he cried jovially. "Say, you got the old man's herd of goats! I was coming into the room when I heard a scrap going on, so I thought I'd better wait outside. Didn't really mean to listen, but I heard the finish, and I nearly died! Do you know just how you got his goat, my boy?"

"I don't know what you're driving at," Trent answered.

"Then I guess you did it innocently," said Rayson. "Well, sir, you hit a mighty tender spot when you spoke of writing to the adjutant-general. It happens that Cap'n Soames and the adjutant-general are about as fond of each other as the kaiser and the king of Belgium; and if the general could catch the cap'n in anything

crooked, this company would have to get a new cap'n in about half an hour.

"You'll have to watch out for him mighty sharp, Trent," the sergeant went on seriously. "He'll stay awake nights trying to think of some way to get you. Look out that some trick isn't put up on you when you're on post. There are a few poor boobs like Corporal Perkins who trot around after him and do anything he wants 'em to. But you can depend on me and a lot of the fellers to stick up for you if there's anything crooked done. I've no use for Cap'n Soames or any one like him, and I'm for you all the way, my boy, so long as you play straight."

Trent grasped the sergeant's hand and shook it warmly.

"Then I think I'll stay in this regiment," he said heartily.

"You bet you will!" agreed the sergeant, "and it'll take more than a crooked captain and a swell guy colonel to get you out."

A little later a soldier came to the room looking for Private Trent.

"There's a man outside the armory asking for you," he said. "He can't get in, but he wanted me to tell you that he had to see you right away on very special business."

Trent had suspicions of the identity of the visitor, but he decided to investigate, and he accompanied the messenger to the street outside.

It was indeed Mr. Hallock who was so desirous of seeing him, and Mr. Hallock seemed unusually grave and a little more important.

"Sorry to bother you again, Mr. Trent," he said politely, "but something has come up that you ought to know about. If you'll kindly walk around the block a couple of times with me, I'll explain."

"All right," said Trent coldly, "but if this is another one of your bluffs, Hallock, it will be the last time."

"You will see how much I trust you, Mr. Trent," Hallock said in a mysterious whisper, "when I tell you what is about to happen. It is really something very sad, and I am really quite depressed about it."

"Dear me!" Trent murmured ironically.

"The fact of the matter is," said Hallock: "Mr. Hartley Stuart Trent is no longer mentally responsible for his acts. I regret to inform you that his mind is unbalanced."

"I don't know whether I should regard that as *news*, or not," said Trent.

"Oh, have a heart, Mr. Trent!" pleaded Hallock. "Think of the poor chap, with so much to make him happy! It is suspected that his mind has been failing for a long time—and so many people have blamed him, you know, for little so-called eccentricities, when he really wasn't responsible at all!"

"Thank you for coming to bring me the news," Trent said with mock gravity; "but would you mind telling me where I come in? Do you think that I should send flowers, or write the gentleman a simple note expressing my deep sympathy?"

Hallock made a gesture of despair.

"Please be serious, Mr. Trent," he implored. "I really have important business with you. It is now necessary to have poor Hartley Trent confined in some private institution, and the necessary proceedings must be got over as quietly as possible. I'm sure you will be willing to testify before a board of alienists that you have been a victim of the poor man's insane ideas. It will be practically a kindness to him, don't you see? Judge Waring is his guardian, and almost a father to him, and the judge will pay you liberally for your trouble.

"You see," he went on earnestly, "everything that the unfortunate man has done indicates an unbalanced mind. Even now he is talking of becoming the colonel of this regiment, and he might as well think of being the Pope of Rome, you know."

"I believe it is a fact that he is to be the colonel," said Trent, "so it appears that the military authorities have not regarded him as a dangerous lunatic."

"Oh, of course, he still has tremendous influence," Hallock explained; "no one likes to believe a popular millionaire any-

thing worse than eccentric. But I know what I am talking about, I assure you. All we shall ask of you, Mr. Trent, is to come to the appointed place when we send for you, and give your testimony in a simple, straightforward way."

"I think I shall have to conduct a little investigation for myself first," Trent said gravely.

"What now? What are you driving at?" the other demanded nervously.

"I'll tell you," said Trent. "I am getting a little too much fed up on mysteries, and I want a few facts for a change. It occurs to me that I have to deal with secret agents and go-betweens in all the mysterious business that is thrust upon me. I shall be off duty for four hours this afternoon, and I have just decided to call upon Mr. Hartley Stuart Trent—"

"*What!*" Hallock almost shrieked.

"I shall then be able to see for myself whether he is insane to any marked degree," Trent explained simply. "If he is rational, he will be interested to hear my story, I think, and I shall find out if he has really issued all the orders that you have attributed to him. I will show him the letter that you say he wrote, and—"

"Stop!" cried Hallock, trembling with a sort of ague. "You—you will do more harm than—you will make a frightful mess of things."

"Good!" Trent exclaimed. "I want to make a mess of things! It's my turn to mess things up a bit. You other fellows have been having all the fun."

"Don't do it to-day!" Hallock begged. "Wait until I have seen Judge Waring. He may want to see you and talk with you."

"I have decided to make my call to-day," Trent insisted. "You see, I am naturally worried about my distinguished namesake."

"You'll regret it!" declared Hallock desperately. "I'll venture to say that if you don't agree not to go there, you won't be able to do so this afternoon. There's more at stake than you know anything about!"

"I shall go," said Trent.

"My God!" Hallock cried explosively,

and suddenly ran down the street as fast as his slender legs would take him.

CHAPTER XV.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

HAL TRENT walked back to the armory smiling quietly over his busy morning and its triumphs. For an oppressed and comparatively helpless man he had succeeded at least in demoralizing the enemy by mere force of words. That he must be alert to possible treachery on Captain Soame's part he was well aware. What the energetic and mysterious Hallock and his influential employer might do next was beyond conjecture, but it was evident that they were getting their plans into a desperately involved state.

Trent could easily picture Hallock dashing to the nearest telephone and making the wires hot with his sudden alarm; and if Judge Waring was moved to a proportionate state of panic, there might be interesting results within a few hours.

It was, in fact, less than three hours later that Captain Soames returned to the armory and relieved the lieutenant who was on duty there as officer of the guard and recruiting officer. The captain explained to the lieutenant that he had volunteered out of his goodness of heart, to take his place for a day or two, and the adjutant had gratefully accepted the service.

The lieutenant quickly got into his citizen's clothes and disappeared, and Captain Soames almost immediately issued orders that no man on guard detail should leave the armory without his permission. There were rumors, he explained, of possible trouble from enemy aliens—or those about to become enemy aliens—and he deemed it best to keep his guard ready for any emergency.

Trent laughed quietly when the corporal of the guard communicated the new order to the men, and understood at once why Captain Soames had so generously volunteered for armory duty. It was plain that the order to hold the men in the armory had not originated with any military au-

thority, but with that resourceful civilian, Judge Waring.

In the afternoon Trent was patrolling his regular post, when a young woman, handsomely dressed and of more than ordinary attractions, stopped and spoke to him.

"You soldiers look so splendidly warlike and dangerous that I hardly dare speak to you," she said in a musical voice, with a radiant smile, "but can you tell me if Lieutenant Johnston is in the armory? I would like to speak with him if I may; it's really very important."

Trent, who had brought his rifle snappily to port arms, answered the lady with grave courtesy.

"I am a new man in the regiment, and I don't know Lieutenant Johnston," he said, "but I will try to find out if he is here."

He called one of the soldiers that were lounging just within the gate, and asked him to go into the armory and inquire about Lieutenant Johnston. The man doffed his hat to the attractive young woman and flew to bear her message.

"Soldiers are so gallant and accommodating!" she observed sweetly. "You don't mind if I stand here and admire your uniform while I am waiting, do you?"

Trent could not refuse the permission. He could hardly tell her that loitering was not allowed, and it was obvious that she was there on business with the armory until some information was gained regarding Lieutenant Johnston.

"I suppose all women are naturally wild about uniforms," she said enthusiastically. "It used to be 'brass buttons,' you know, but now that brass buttons are out of fashion, I guess we are just crazy about bronze buttons. I think khaki is simply adorable, and I love all those practical-looking pockets and straps and things, don't you?"

Trent heard a subdued snicker from the men in the gateway, and he flushed slightly, but he agreed with the lady politely.

"Oh! I should have been a soldier if I had been a man!" she declared spiritedly. "You may hardly believe it, but I can fire a gun and actually hit the target. I have

practised shooting at our country club. Of course my rifle was quite small and light compared to that young cannon that you have to carry. Isn't it frightfully heavy?"

"It is quite a little heavier than sporting rifles, but it's not hard to carry," Trent answered soberly.

The young woman playfully touched the rifle and patted the walnut stock, and Trent drew back a pace.

"It looks deliciously dangerous!" she exclaimed. "Oh! would you mind if I just held it in my hands for one little minute?"

Trent flushed painfully and drew back a little farther.

"I'm really very sorry," he said, "but I couldn't let you do that. You see, it is strictly against regulations for a sentry to give up his rifle to any one, without orders from his commanding officer."

The young woman pouted adorably, like a hurt and disappointed child.

"Now don't you think that's just a bit horrid of you?" she demanded. "I'm not flattered at all if you think I could possibly be one of those frightful German spies. Poor little me! Do you think I could take your great big heavy gun and run off with it—and that a great strong man like you couldn't catch me?"

Trent tried to be good-humored in a disagreeable predicament.

"It's rather hard for a susceptible man to be tempted like this by a fair lady," he said banteringly.

She became infantile and appealing, and laid a pretty hand softly upon his arm.

"What would you do if a little girl just took the horrid old gun?" she cooed. "Would you box a poor little girl's ears, big man?"

"I'm afraid," Trent laughed uncomfortably, "that I should call the corporal of the guard, and shift the responsibility. Perhaps he might be more indulgent with children."

She grew sweetly serious and made her eyes large and round.

"Do you know, I admire men that are stern and independent like you?" she said. "If you gave in right away and petted me, I wouldn't like you half as well."

The man that Trent had sent into the armory returned at that moment.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," he said, "but no one inside happens to know any Lieutenant Johnston."

"Why, I must have made a mistake and come to the wrong armory," she said lightly.

She thanked the man, and he saluted her and returned to his friends at the gate.

"Well, I suppose I must go now," she murmured sweetly to Trent. "And I haven't held that awful gun, after all. Please let me!—just for the tiniest little minute! I just dare you to!"

Trent shook his head firmly.

With the engaging air of a mischievous child, she suddenly grasped the rifle with both small hands and tugged to wrench it away from him.

Trent jumped back sharply, jerking the rifle away from her, and she cried out shrilly and clasped one of her hands tightly in the other.

"Oh! Oh! How brutal!" she wailed tearfully. "You have hurt my hand terribly!"

Captain Soames suddenly strode out of the gateway.

"What is the trouble here?" he demanded sharply, and raised his hat to the young woman.

"I'm sorry, sir," Trent answered, "but this lady tried to take my rifle, after I explained to her that it was against regulations. I was forced to resist, and the lady says that her hand is hurt."

"I don't wish to make any trouble," the young woman said coldly, "but I must say that this soldier has been frightfully discourteous and brutal to me. I came here, sir, to inquire if a friend of mine was in the armory, and I didn't expect such treatment from a member of this regiment."

"Trent!" said Captain Soames savagely, "you will call the corporal of the guard and tell him to relieve you at this post. Then you will report at my quarters under arrest. Some of you ruffians think that because the country is going to war you must display your authority over innocent citizens. I'll make an example of you for this!"

Trent saluted and obeyed the order.

"I am sorry that there should be so much trouble," said the young woman, "but—oh, thank you so much, sir, for protecting me!"

"It is an honor, madam!" declared Captain Soames. "Gallantry to ladies should be one of the first duties of a soldier."

Five minutes later the captain came to Trent in the company room.

"You're a disgrace to the regiment!" he declared. "You are very keen about regulations, aren't you? Well, it's a pity that you couldn't defend yourself against a frail young girl without injuring her. I shall make a full report of the outrage to headquarters, and I'll have you court-martialed and dishonorably discharged."

First Sergeant Rayson stepped into the room suddenly.

"Captain Soames," he said, saluting.

"Well, sergeant?" the captain responded, with a scowl.

"Beg pardon, sir," the sergeant went on, "but I happened to see the whole trouble from one of the lower windows."

"What trouble?" growled Soames. "Who asked you anything about any trouble?"

"Nobody asked me, but I felt a little bit interested," Rayson replied dryly. "I'd like to say, sir, that Private Trent behaved like a gentleman, and the woman didn't get half that was coming to her by rights. She was probably one o' them female spies that are sent out by somebody to trap the poor boobs that don't know the regulations. Down in Pennsylvania the other day a poor young lad gave up his rifle to a soft-spoken jade that wanted to examine it; then she reported him and got him jugged for a year, for violating the regulations."

"That's a very interesting story," muttered Soames, "but when I want any information from you, sergeant, I'll ask for it."

"Yes, sir," responded Rayson. "I'd just like to say, sir, that if Private Trent has to face a court-martial, I'll be ready to appear and give my testimony as an eye-witness."

"Get out, will you?" the captain growled. "I can't be bothered with your tales. All you fellows stick up for each other. I know well enough that the lady was not a

spy, sent to try out the sentries. She was a well-bred young lady, and evidently a person of some consequence."

A captain of another company suddenly appeared in the doorway and called out jovially:

"Hello there, Soames! You here today? Say! I just saw that pretty little stenographer of yours out on the street. I was joshing her the other day in your office down-town, and I recognized her just now in spite of her being dolled up like the queen of the May. She was all upset, and she said that one of our sentries insulted her and jammed her hand with his rifle."

"The damned little fool!" Soames cried explosively, losing his head completely.

The other captain laughed and passed on his way.

"It seems that the 'well-bred' young lady was sent here by somebody, to try out one sentry," observed Sergeant Rayson.

Soames sprang up, hands clenched, and eyes glaring.

"If you enlisted men think that you can put anything over me, I'll show you!" he roared. "I'm not here to explain anything, or to argue with you. I'm going to run some of the low-down muckers out of this company and I know who will go first!"

"Shall I go back to my post, sir?" Trent inquired, trying to conceal a smile.

The captain thundered at him that he might go anywhere he liked, and suggested a much talked-of mythical region.

"There's a regulation against officers using strong language to their men," Rayson said quietly. "I think I'll have to write to the adjutant-general and find out about it."

The captain commended the adjutant-general to the same region, as he snatched his cap from the table and flew out of the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

PUNITIVE MEASURES.

ON the 6th of April, Congress declared the existence of a state of war with the German Empire, and directly the armory of the 31st Infantry was a scene of official

bustle. Regular guard details were provided, and the sentries, relieved from Captain Soames's domination, were allowed more liberty when off duty.

Trent found himself at leisure about five o'clock one afternoon, and he decided to call at the Iveses' apartment. Jack Ives had said nothing to him at the armory about the trouble with Buckingham, and probably knew nothing about it, so Trent wished to learn if Edith had been subjected to any further annoyance.

She was alone when he arrived, and he knew by her appearance that she had lately been crying.

"No, I haven't seen Mr. Buckingham," she said, in answer to his cautiously worded inquiry; "I wouldn't see him again, you know. I have had letters from him every day, though, and telegrams. He has apologized and threatened, alternately, over and over. I wrote him one letter, and I told him that I would never see him again."

"I hope that your troubles are over," said Trent.

She laughed bitterly and shrugged her shoulders.

"The troubles that are over are giving place to others," she said. "I am in rather low spirits to-night, Mr. Trent. It is hard for me to believe that I have lost my position. It was a good position, and I'm afraid that I shall hardly find another like it."

"You mean—that Buckingham—" Trent faltered, in his astonishment.

"That is it, of course," she said dejectedly. "My employer, Mr. Andrews, has always liked my work, and he has raised my salary twice, so you can imagine my astonishment when he told me to-day that he had promised my place to some one else."

"You remember when you got the position there in the office," she continued, "and lost it the next day; you remember that Mr. Andrews was a quick, nervous sort of a man. Well, when I begged him for an explanation of my dismissal, he seemed irritated and he refused to discuss the matter. The secret of it is, that he manages some of Mr. Buckingham's real estate for him, and I suppose Mr. Buckingham ordered him to discharge me."

"And your brother," said Trent: "does he know anything about it yet?"

"I didn't tell him what happened the other night," she answered; "I have dreaded to let him know. He has noticed my nervousness, but he attributes it to overwork. I suppose he will be glad that I am now forced to take a rest, but I am afraid to tell him of the circumstances."

A key rattled in the lock, the door opened slowly, and the habitually buoyant Jack Ives slouched heavily into the room and sat down.

"Hello, Trent," he said dully, showing little interest in Trent's presence.

"Jack!" cried his sister, "are you ill?"

"A heap worse than that," was the answer: "I've lost my job! I have been fired—after making good, at that. I was expecting to be promoted again—if I didn't go to war—and they fired me to-day as they would fire the office boy!"

"I'm mighty sorry, Jack," Trent said feelingly.

Edith went to her brother and put her arms around his neck.

"Never mind, Jackie," she said soothingly, "we shall manage to keep alive."

"You haven't heard the worst of it yet!" Jack muttered. "That sneaking, fat-faced, yellow pup of a Buckingham is the cause of it all! I swear I can't believe it's true, but the man that fired me said that Mr. Buckingham, one of the largest stockholders, requested my dismissal. And he said, Edith, that I owed my job and my advancement to Buckingham."

"I'm afraid that most of it is true," the sister groaned.

"Did you have to beg jobs and promotion for me? Am I as much of a dead one as that?"

"Mr. Trent will tell you how hard it is to find employment," she said. "I never asked Mr. Buckingham to help you, but he did it as a favor and I was grateful to him for your sake."

"But what's the matter? Have I done anything to make him sore? Why should he want them to fire me?"

"Because we couldn't afford to accept his friendship any longer, Jack. His favors are insults to any one that has self-respect."

"You don't mean that you are through with him!" he cried.

"Absolutely! He couldn't keep up his masquerade of decency any longer. He had pretended to be kind and thoughtful, but the cloak fell off the beast at last."

Jack got up, and his eyes glittered ominously.

"Has he offended you? Did he do anything to—"

"He had really no respect for me," she said, and her sensitive chin and lips began to quiver.

A dark flush spread over the young man's face. He glanced vaguely at Trent, as though puzzled by Edith's frankness in the presence of the visitor. Then he sat down again, unable to straighten out the tangle.

"When did all this happen?" he demanded, rather sternly. "Where was I? Why didn't you tell me?"

"It was several nights ago," she said uneasily. "You were at the armory and I went for a walk with Mr. Buckingham. I—oh! it was a horrible experience!"

"Why didn't you tell me?" he repeated. "That was the time for me to know about it. Perhaps I can't find him now!"

She brushed some tears from her cheeks and smiled very slightly.

"I don't think that he has recovered yet," she said, with a shy glance at Trent. "Even if he was not punished enough, you would hardly wish to attack a man that had been beaten black and blue."

"What—who did it?" cried Jack in amazement.

"Mr. Trent."

Jack sprang up again and caught Trent in a bearlike embrace.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed fervently. "If I can't protect my own sister—if I'm such a fool that I can't see when she's in danger—then we're lucky to have such a friend as Hal Trent!"

Trent extricated himself from the enveloping arms and paced up and down the room to conceal his embarrassment. He begged them both to say no more about his part in the affair.

"I guess it is up to me to quit talking, and show some action," Jack said, with bitter self-reproach. "I'll get out now and

hustle for a real job, without any millionaire to help me get it and keep it. I guess this experience will teach me to think. There's one more humiliation for me, too: I'll have to let my poor little sister support us both while I am looking for work."

"We can starve together at least, Jackie," Edith said huskily. "The poor little sister is out of a job, too. You were not the only one to be 'fired' to-day."

"More of the work of that green-and-yellow hound?" he cried.

She nodded.

He started to apostrophize the gods that were waiting to blast the soul of Bradley Buckingham, but stopped abruptly.

"That 'll be about all from me," he announced. "Please don't think I'm so sore because you've lost your job. Fact is, I'm happy to hear of it. It's about time you took a long rest, and if I can't support you I'll die trying. I'm ready for any punishment that's coming to me. It's all up with me now about going to war with the regiment. They can call me a quitter if they feel like it, but I'm going to do my duty—and my duty is at home."

"We'll talk it all over, Jackie, when we are more calm," Edith suggested. "I didn't raise my brother to be 'a soldier, but I wouldn't have him be a quitter. I wasn't born to be a lady of leisure, and I have to work to be happy. Presently I shall find another position, and then you needn't worry about me any more."

"Let's forget all the trouble and have some dinner," Jack proposed. "Here's a hungry soldier, waiting to be fed."

"I dropped in just for a call," protested Trent. "I really must get back to the armory."

"Not until you've dined with your grateful friends!" Jack declared, and forced him back into his chair.

"Dinner is almost ready," Edith said cheerily. "I'll put it on the table and call you in just a moment."

Jack looked at Trent long and earnestly when they were left alone.

"I'll never forget it, old pal!" he said hoarsely.

"Please do!" Trent urged him. "If you refer to the fight, why—the man is not

much of a fighter. Neither am I, for that matter, but I had no trouble at all—so you see how little credit I deserve.”

“It was the spirit of the thing.”

“I’m almost ashamed to say it was a pleasure,” laughed Trent.

“I can see that,” Jack agreed, with relish, “and I’m afraid I envy you.”

“The most difficult thing about it was to keep from killing the beast,” Trent said soberly. “I wanted to kill him, and I wonder that I didn’t. I think I ought to tell you, Jack, that it was entirely a personal matter for me. I couldn’t tell your sister that; I’m not in a position to do so; but it was my own affair, with all my heart and soul in it. Your sister is the only girl I ever—cared for.” Jack seemed to choke slightly, but he grasped Trent’s hand and wrung it fervently.

“I haven’t known you long,” he said, “but I know that you are the best friend I ever had. I—I guess you won’t believe it when you hear what I’m going to say—but I want to be just as good a friend to you.”

“I do believe it,” said Trent.

“I don’t often set myself up to give advice,” Jack went on, with a face suddenly filled with misery, “but I want to tell you how to keep from being unhappy. I’m proud that you feel as you do toward my sister, and I’d be mighty proud if she could have a man like you for a husband—but try to forget it, old man. It might even be better if you didn’t see her any more.”

Trent started back, thunderstruck.

“I suppose you’ll hate me for this,” Jack groaned, “but I’m saving you future trouble. Some of the best fellows never seem to have success in business, and I guess you and I are both like that. You’ll admit, old man, that at your age you ought to be better off than you are: and it’s the same with me. I had a girl a while ago, and I wanted to get married and be happy, but I didn’t have any money—not even enough to keep my sister—and I saw how things were, and told the girl to forget all about me.

“My father was always unsuccessful, and my mother couldn’t have the comforts that women ought to have. We were brought up worrying and wondering where the next meal was coming from, and my sister still has to keep it up. You see what I mean, don’t you? It’s time that Edith had a few little comforts in life. I want her to find a good man that will give her such a home as she deserves. If you love her, I’m sure you wouldn’t be the one to condemn her to a life such as her mother had; you wouldn’t want her to spend all her time wondering if her husband was going to keep his job.

“You’re a fine man, Trent, but you play in hard luck. Love is a big inspiration for a man, and you may say that you’ll dig in and set the world afire for Edith’s sake—but that doesn’t bring home the bacon! See what I mean?”

Trent sat silent for a moment, then—

“Yes, I see what you mean,” he answered; “I understand.”

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

THE BEACH BY WINTER TWILIGHT

HERE is no life except the lone patrol,
Now the cold trumpets of the north wind blow;
Sailless and sad the leaden waters roll,
And icy foam slips up to touch the snow.

The sun, the zephyr, and the wave’s caress
Have changed or fled, departing with the birds.
Here is no maiden in her loveliness,
Nor any murmuring of tender words.

Young hearts that dreamed, may no such change be yours,
By twilight hearths at eve regathering!
In memory the summer noon endures,
And summer waits beyond the distant spring.

George Sterling

The Wild East



by
Paul
Steele

PRIDE goeth before the fall. Also spring, summer 'n' winter. You hit men where they're proud an' they're always resentful. Which was why Len Haswell got in wrong in Cactus City the minute he stepped into the Au Claire de la Loon.

It was the way the iron-faced mutt looked around him as he came in. 'Twasn't a lingerin' look. You'd know he wouldn't linger much. Get a thing done an' go on to the next; that 'd be him. No, it was a *flashin'* look that took us all in, and the place, at a sweep. And it sort of implied the natural sequence of a clean-sweep; the dust-pan.

'Twasn't a sassy look. 'Twasn't even superior. It was just sort o' cold and disapprovin', as if Cactus City an' its leadin' hostlerly didn't look good to him.

Cactus Cityites is proud of the town an' of the West, because they has to live in both of 'em. So, as this palpable tender-foot marches up to the desk to scribble his cognomen, whatever it may be, the boys, who is used to havin' Easterners enter our precincts humble an' meachin' like they had ought to, looks at each other plumb flabbergasted.

Uncle Billy Westlake, who is clerk and handy-man and general swab, is behind the desk in the absence of Jeff Prevost, the proprietor. To uncle, blinkin' like an old gray dog what's in the sunshine, the stranger delivers crisp and salient a request that sounds like an order.

"Give me a good room."

When he'd gone trompin' up the pine stairs, with Uncle Billy toddlin' behind him with his grips, Sagebrush Jake Carroll turns to us and sums up the indictment.

"Who the hell does he think he is? He wants a good room!"

Jake glowers something spiteful and sucks his whiskers, like he always does when something tatters his temperament. Some man, Jake! He's an intermittent miner. He's extra long and wide, and he's often extra dry, which accounts for the intermittency.

And strength! He's bumped all over with muscles, like they was tumors. One night when lit up like a prairie fire, he wanted to push over the hotel, and the landlord had to bribe him not to do it. Also, his shaggy head is a cave, in which the bats of malice an' unkindness is now flappin'.

Excuse me for prattlin' about myself, but if I do say it as should, I'm the only three-ply, double-dyed California peanut of a philosopher in Cactus City. What life ain't done to me she ain't thunk of. So I am by way of seein' all four legs of a bucking mustang to once. Lariat Pete Hiscock—that's me—had ought to been a judge. 'Stead of which I'm usually the defendant.

Now I raise my voice in mild and reasonable reproof of that hasty puddinghead of a Sagebrush Jake Carroll.

"Leave the imported guest who has horned into our midst want a good room,

can't ye, Sagebrush?" I said. "He won't get it; not here!"

But my subtle sarcasm is lost on that slag-huntin' primate, whose bone-ribbed dome is impervious to the rapyahs of wit. The only kind of humor what would dent it would have to fall ten stories.

"Let's see what wants a good room!" he growls, leadin' the way to the register on which representatives of every tribe except chop sueys has been inkin' their alphabets for the past few months. For Cactus City was by way of bein' cosmopolitan.

There's his name, slung together in the fist of a man who grips a penholder like he'd choke it. And his residence also, which is unusual.

LEONARD HASWELL, *Back East.*

Ever study the kinks of a trouble-hunter? They're like the yarn mother has been knittin' for socks for the soldiers when Fido has got into it.

Sagebrush lamped that 'funny scrawl. Immediate his Cossack map, what you could see of it, turned the colors of the Painted Desert. He batted his saffron eyes and the pupils circled. He brung down his fist on the desk like he'd split it.

"Back East!" he snarled. "Men, this here's an insult! Back East! You all seen him, you seen him look around. He comes into the swellest hotel in Coyote County, christened sweller than any bunk-house in the land—the Au Claire de la Loon, which is named so by Mine Host Prevost after 'Trilby' has hypnotized him—and he gives it the Apache eye like it was a dog-house!

"And never a howdy do, an' 'what 'll it be, gents?' Naw! 'Stead o' that, it's 'Gim'me a good room!'—the damn dude!—and then fistin' his home, 'Back East'!"

"Yes, Sagebrush," I insinuated, "but maybe he wanted to show us that he is but a stranger and a sojourner, as all his fathers was. Maybe he wished to inculcate to us the information that this Western world is not his home, and that he's lonely, and for us to take him to our bosoms like."

But if Sagebrush was ever reasonable I'd flop the other way. I'd consider my ethics had suddenly gone wrong.

The man had just gone plumb grand

stand nuts with hatred of that innocent cause up-stairs. So he further orated his antipathy.

"Take him to our bosoms, hey? Leave him as much as roll an eye at me, an' I'll take him to my bosom so he'll know he's took! I'll bosom him! Like a grizzly bosoms a hound! Our world is not his home, hey? Well, God help him in the next if he gets tangled up with me. He'll be twangin' a tunin'-fork for the angels!"

By this time Jake was roarin' like an irrigation ditch with the sluice open. Which-upon he sloshed into his peroration.

"Somethin's goin' 'back East' on ice if he mixes with me! It 'll be Rest in Pieces for him! They'll be carvin' a busted colyum on his tombstone and the birds 'll chirp their evensong over his turf. I'm sorry for his family, but they had ought to kept him to home! He don't want none of my game!"

"Shut up!" hisses Ike Friddell. "There he comes down!"

We all turned our heads. The stranger was comin' down, as Ike said, deliberate and slow, with measured tread.

And Jake had shut up, like he was told. Just why, we didn't know, for he never had before, whether any one had asked him to or hadn't. But now he was silent as requested, glarin' surly at the fellow as he come down the stairs.

Maybe it was the stranger's face that shut off Jake's lingual faucet, and that Jake thought there might be doin's in a minute. For his fist stole into his coat-pocket, from which he was wont to shoot through when there was symptoms of unharmony extant.

For Jake realized, as well as every one else, that the fellow had heard every word up in his room. It was a frame hotel, skeleton built, and besides that, Jake's dulcet tones, when he got impassioned, was uniformly audible in the next county.

So all of us opined that there might be trouble, especial when we gazed speculatin' at the stranger's face.

No; he didn't look mad at all. It wasn't that. Lampin' it, I could only think of a blend of two maps; a poker player's that might be holdin' all the way from a hand o' deuces to a royal flush, and one o' them

gilt-edged boxers, whose map in action is a graven image. The stranger's is one of them clean cut, smooth, steady faces from which any emotion is sponged off before it's started, and he's got you continually guessing what he'd be likely to do next.

Well, while we waited he came down and walked right toward us. I noticed he wa'n't very tall—about five foot eight—and he wa'n't very big. Jake would ha' made two of him, an' the top of his head would have about met Jake's chin up among the whiskers.

He walked along brisk, never by the bat of an eye lettin' on he'd seen us at all, passed us an' went on outdoors to see the sights of Cactus City.

Jake looked at us an' we looked at Jake. The features of that apostle of evil was triumphant.

"What did I tell ye?" he crowed. "That Eastern inshoot don't want none of my game!"

And bein' a philosopher like I was, I had to admit that it didn't look no ways as if he did.

Jake, growling, departed to pursue his several ways, and the rest of us followed suit.

It was that mild May evenin' after supper that I had a hand in cinchin' the saddle girth of Fate, though I couldn't have known then that I had done it, or that a few words spoken from man to man, and leadin' quite naturally along the old blazed trail to woman, would contain the makin's of this story.

I'd had supper at Prouty's, an old pal o' mine, and was saunterin' down Bonanza Street, our main thoroughfare, on which the Au Claire de la Loon Hotel was by way of being situated. Peacefully pickin' my fangs with my knife, I drew near to the steps thereof. On them, sadly squattin', was the stranger.

He hailed me after a fashion which showed the gulf in speakin' which is always fixed between the East and the West. His voice was middlin' deep and kind o' quiet and pleasant.

"Mister," he syllabled, which no son of the Golden West would have used that dull-drab term, "my stomach has always been

a friend o' mine, and I can't begin to pick on it now."

I grinned, knowing from sad experience what he meant. The kewzeen of the Au Claire de la Loon sure puts a crimp in the tolerably fair reputation of Cactus City.

"How far did you get in the menu?" I asked him.

"I looked at the first of it comin' onto the table. That was enough. I got out. Why should I insult my interior? Could you direct me to some joint where a man could get lined right?"

I nodded and p'inted down the street to the only illuminated sign in town that didn't hover over a dance-hall or gamblin'-hell.

"See that sign, stranger? The one that says 'Feed Up'? That's Alf Mangan's eatery, an' between I an' you it's the only public hashery in a radius of fifty miles that you don't need a pepsin course to top off with."

"Yours truly, old man," he says, and slides in that direction, walkin' easy in his dark serge scenery, with a little gray go-to-hell hat pulled over his eyes, and his shoulders that square you could lay a ruler flat against 'em behind.

A fine set-up citizen, I opine, and regrettin' that Sagebrush Jake had started feelin' mussy against him for no reason to speak of, seeing as how Jake, who didn't have brains enough to forget a thing, would be inclined to follow up his irritatin'. Which I deplored, feelin' that it outraged our Western hospitality.

Say a half-hour later I happened to be strollin' down the thoroughfare an' looked in at the window of Mangan's refectory.

With his elbow on the counter by the cash-register stood this Haswell person, toying with death.

"You'd never guessed it. "If that be death," you'd suggested, "lead me to it."

For little Gussie Lindley was some cherubim. But Sagebrush Jake Carroll, who clung to a forlorn hope of makin' her Missus Jake, had swore he'd make a seraphim out of any cross-eyed, spavined, cow-faced maverick that dared to shine up to her. So when he was in town nobody shone.

But here was this back-easter lookin' earnest into Gussie's eyes while she chat-

tered to him. Gussie's got a voice like the low notes on an organ. And her laugh rings as cheerful as the silver in your pocket.

Haswell wasn't only listenin'; he was lookin'. An' no wonder. Gussie never appeared better. Her coppery hair was piled pretty with a loose strand or two ticklin' her pink ears. Her brown eyes sparkled like sunlight on forest water. Her little hands shuttled like a Frenchwoman's, for emphasis as she talked. Her cheeks was pink like sunset clouds. She was encased in somethin' or other that was the goods.

She saw me an' waved her mitt. So as not to be thunk pryin' I moved on, musin' on what might be.

Gussie had fell for him; fell for a man the first time in her life of twenty years. I could tell that. And I was bettin', from the absorbed look of the feller, he'd fell for her, too.

I felt sorry for the poor girl, trompin' along by my lonesome. Gussie had come to Cactus City with her father when she was ten. Even then she showed the makin's of a great woman by holdin' his besotted head when he'd come home stewed.

A year later him and a greaser killed each other in Rawhide Mike's saloon. So we buried him an' his boots and sort o' brung up Augusta Miranda.

She'd come up like a flower, aided an' abetted by the town. She was as sweet as an April breeze an' as straight as the gaze of her eyes. An' God help the man who would have harmed her! We was a rough lot in Cactus City, but what we would 'a' done to a human wolf that tried to hurt her would 'a' made the old Spanish inquisition look like first aid!

I was worried. Sagebrush Jake would hear of this tender entanglement. Then he'd tear the Haswell person's limbs from their usual consanguinity. Gussie would be waterin' his grave with her tears. But you can't grow any flowers in alkali that are worth a damn.

Early next mornin' I heard some news that it would seem would postpone the massacre anyway. Sagebrush had gone broke, an' had gone back to the mines to earn increment for another joust with joy.

I seen Haswell wanderin' around that

day, an' I got resentful with him. You'd thought he'd showed a whiffle of interest at least, in our affairs, him bein' a tenderfoot from the East, which every one knows is about as lively as New Orleans molasses.

It was just a usual day; nothin' to brag about. The stage-coach had been robbed. Two cowboys shot each other up scandalous an' was conveyed tenderly to the hospital, which, for mutual convenience, was walled off from the jail.

Haswell had seen it all, with the expression of a man who's playin' authors and had rather switch to poker with penny limit. Right after the cowboy argument he yawned and went into the hotel for a nap.

I sashayed right down to Mangan's. There's Gussie, pretty as a picture, an' she give me the happy hello. I plunged right into my argument.

"Gussie," I says solemn, "old Pete has always been a good friend o' yours, ain't he?"

"He sure has," she ripples. "But why the crape, Pete? I look well in black, but I hate it."

"It's about this stranger from back East," I tells her. "Where's he hail from? Who does he do?"

"He hasn't given me his census," retorts the little queen, flushin' up so I know my bet is right. "Come to think of it, I don't believe I asked him for it. He don't say much anyway."

"When your optical nerves is tickled with loveliness," I reminds her, "yer over-worked larynx gets a vacation."

"Aw, you go on!" she shoos, giving me the mollified grin my compliment has earned, for it's as true as it is smooth. "But why the inquest, Uncle Pete?"

"You an' him was holdin' a confab in here last night."

"Yes," she pursues, flushin' rosier, "and when I went off duty, we walked together through the sagebrush beyond the city limits, with the howlin' of adjacent coyotes furnishin' an obligato to my prattle, while he listened interested to both. What of it?"

"Girl," I mandates, "you had better give up that product of civilization while

there is yet time, before the tendrils of your girlish affection gets naturally wound around the critter.

"Oh, I know you ain't seen him but once, but you're allowin' on seein' him repeatedly, an' I'd hate to see you do it, for I know the signs of Cupid's zodiac. I'd hate for you to go farther in this here matter, for a variety of reasons."

"What are they?" She asked it soft, without lookin' at me.

Encouraged, I kept on.

"I don't think he's just right in his bean, Gussie. He don't seem to respond to the spur of events hereabout, howsom-ever lively they may be. Here's a good man's size pistol-fight in the main street, and it makes him drowsy, like it was a cradle song. He's snoozin' now, in the daytime!

"Then, too, I'm worried about what 'll Sagebrush Jake Carroll say when he knows this import is payin' his addresses to you. Jake hates him a whole lot now; just naturally took a dislike to his gen'ral style. An' I'd dislike to see you gettin' yer pretty eyes red weepin' around on this Haswell person's grave."

She looked up. Her cheeks is pink as if I'd slapped 'em, and her eyes snaps like they was generatin' electricity. Her tone is the one her funny sex adopts when it wants to wind up a subject—and winds it so hard the mainspring naturally busts and the action stops right there.

"About his drowsin' at a pistol fight, I don't know," she comes back at me. "I suspect he had his reasons. He ain't a man to spin on one ear about anything much, I take it. About Sagebrush, I guess this Mr. Haswell can take care of himself. About my future tears, leave him get a chance to ask me to marry him, will you?"

"He was tryin' to hint around about it last night, but I switched him. A lady had ought to be courted at least two or three days before the proposin' starts. When I do let him get it off his chest, I expect he'll tell me all about who I might marry, if I felt like it, whether Sagebrush liked it or not.

"And about the grave Sagebrush might put him in, I'm thinkin' it will be like the

apple core. There won't be any; not if I read this Eastern party right. I'm obliged to you for wantin' to help, Uncle Pete. An' I love you just the same!"

What are you goin' to do in a case like that? I went away with a curious new line on our immigratin' friend. Him, in his quiet way, hintin' about their gettin' married already! He wa'n't so slow, if he was from the East!

You know, it never occurred to me that he might be a fellow who'd hand the little girl a raw deal. Sagebrush might fulminate about him like a fireplace, but the fellow looked straight as a string to me. And I can judge human nature as well as I can inhuman.

But that night somethin' occurred that shook my faith in him as far as one requisite an' necessary trait o' manhood was concerned. A number of others felt the same way. An' most serious of all for Haswell's chances, Gussie was included.

The cause of it arrived in Cactus City in the P.M., afternoon. He was Sagebrush Jake Carroll. He hadn't gone back to work after all. He had touched some easy mark at the mines for the loan of a modest flock of yellow boys, and he'd come back to the center of the neighborin' unrest for to resume his interrupted spree.

Now Jake had a capacity for ferments like a Standard Oil tank, and what would have had a ordinary performer sleepin' under a canopy of a table-top, merely irritated him. Along with a wilful little group of his own, he began to perform. Mainly in the barroom of the Au Claire.

And Landlord Jeff Prevost, noticin' the levels in the kegs an' demijohns lowerin' like a dam had busted, begins to make out a new order on the wholesalers at Piping Frog, on the main line.

In the shank of the afternoon some he-gossip, who had ought to ringlet his hair with one o' them hot irons an' put on a bombazine dress an' go set in at a sewin' circle, whispered to Sagebrush how the stranger was conversin' with Gussie Lindley at Mangan's the night before, an' how they'd been seen later walkin' together under the jubilant stars.

A howl like a gray wolf's at once parted

company with Jake's kiln-dried throat. In the next two minutes I heard the absent sojourner consigned to more forms of eternal damnation than I supposed there was.

Sagebrush allowed as how he'd scatter him so copious they'd need a whole flock of graves to bury him in. He said he could cry with thinkin' of the assorted things he was goin' to do with him. And he hurled a lot more liquid into himself for to fan his unrighteous wrath.

I left, plumb disgusted with his intemperance, alcoholic and vocal. I knew Haswell had left the hotel, an' I wanted to warn him as a friend to get out o' town. I went by the eatery, but Gussie was off duty, and neither of 'em was in there. I thought they might be strollin' together, but as it turned out I was wrong.

Somethin' called me away; an' it was about eight o'clock, with the lights all goin', an' a sound of revelry by night through the town, when I went by Mangan's again. And comin' from the opposite direction, with some of his satanites in tow, was Sagebrush Jake, hotfooting it for the eatery.

I looked in through the window. There's the eastern party again, havin' apparently eat his supper, and with the pippin talkin' to him at the counter.

Sagebrush is nearly there. I hustles right in with my blurb for safety first.

"Say, friend, 'scuse me, but you don't look like a trouble hunter to me, an' Sagebrush Jake is comin'. He's twice your size, and you can get out through the back way if you're lively!"

"Why, Uncle Pete!" gasps Gussie, while the fellow looks at me with as much expression in his face as you'll find on a slate before you figure on it.

Just at that moment in came Sagebrush, who had leaped the whole three steps to once. There was three or four followers, who had come to see the fun, and whatever of the boys who was feedin' at the tables ostriched around.

Jake let out a fearsome yowl, then glared down at the fellow, who's faced around with his elbow on the counter.

Like a bull, Jake bellowed an ultimatum.

"Say, you hammered down, wasp-

waisted, pigeon-toed misfit, I don't like you! You're a cinder in my eye! So it's your move. Twenty-four hours for you to get out in, an' ramble back where you ambled from, or I'll pump you so full of lead you'll bust the car flooring goin' back!

"Get me, you frosted little slab of angel-cake, what wants 'a good room'? I'll get you a good room; it 'll be in the vault! You daffydowndilly, I hate your liver! I hate the mistaken offshoot of humanity what started your tribe! Don't rile me here in this eat joint, or I'll naturally sift you for seasonin'!"

Durin' this speech, which Sagebrush had delivered reasonable and fair mild, out o' consideration for there bein' a lady present, who, by the way, was as still as an icicle behind her counter an' eyein' 'em both with her orbs-extra size, the Haswell person had stood an' took it.

More than that, while Jake was thunderin' he'd pulled a cigar out of his vest-pocket an' lighted it. As Sagebrush finished he blew out the match an' dropped it in a cuspidor.

With every one watchin' him, his gaze wandered for a moment to Sagebrush's inflamed countenance.

"Aw," he murmured, as unconcerned as a kitten who's been reproved by a lady member of the S. P. C. A., "go swing from a tree by your tail!"

I mistrust this polite reference to the probable origin of his species was kind o' lost on Sagebrush. He was unused to the more polished passages of wit, as I have intimated. He just glared and breathed hard. The fellow turned to Gussie, standin' white-faced behind the counter, an' raised his little go-to-hell hat.

"Good evening, Miss Lindley," he said calm, an' walked by Jake to the door.

"Hold on!" 'Twa'n't a man's voice. 'Twas a girl's, like a bugle.

We all jumped; all but this Haswell. He turned around leisurely like and inquirin'. You might have figured it two ways. Either he was slow thinking or he had nerve. The kind that 'd ignore even a cannon-cracker that 'd bust under his feet.

Gussie Lindley had jumped from behind the counter an' stood at my elbow. As

pretty as an accusin' angel, she faced the man she'd just been smilin' at. But she wa'n't smilin' now. Her silky brows was drawn together, an' the eyes under 'em was two fires. She pointed at him with her hand tremblin', and for a moment she struggled for words that wouldn't come.

I flashed what she had to say before she mustered the indictment. By all Western standards, this Eastern party had crawled when faced by an enemy. She was goin' to bawl him. But his map gave no inklin' he had any idea what she was goin' to say.

At last out it come.

"You'd better leave town, quick, as you're ordered!" she says, her voice low but clear as a bell. "Cactus City ain't got no use for a coward!"

I saw him stiffen like he'd been froze in a breath, like the sun that warms the world had gone out. And there was expression to him now. His face got set like the hinges of hell, and his eyes seemed to burn through her.

"You mean that?" he asked her crisp, and there was a funny little note of wonder in his tone.

"I sure do!" she flung back. But I, that knew her so well, caught a little uncertainty in her voice, as if her mind wa'n't quite sure it had called the right turn.

He didn't say another word. He pulled at the brim of his hat again, as if he'd been saluting, whirled on his heels like a soldier, and walked out, turning toward the hotel.

Chin up and shoulders back, as if she'd been a soldier, too, Gussie marched back toward the kitchen, eyes straight ahead. But as she neared the door she was running, and I heard her sob as she bolted through it.

Sagebrush Jake Carroll and his attendant devils went across to Shafto's resort of that king of indoor sports wherein many chips pass in the night. I knew they'd be spreadin' the glad tidin's of Haswell's instructed imminent departure from our city of brotherly hate. But I was of no mind to follow them into sinful associations. If we was all broke all the time, I mistrust this 'd be a world Billy Sunday 'd more cordially approve of.

Instead, I took a stroll out to the prairie an' back before bunk time. And as I stood under the stars in the six-mile strip of alkali road and dog-holes, intervening before the range where the miners toiled in the hope of future purple and fine linen, I wondered.

The thing was a mystery to me. I was the only man in that small but select group, barring the target of our recriminations, that was onto the truth.

I knew that Haswell wasn't afraid of Sagebrush Jake Carroll!

I'd caught a flash of his eyes while he was lighting his cigar as Jake syllabled his dissatisfaction with his presence. That look was all I needed to know. It's the sort of impatient glance you give a sassy fly that's buzzing around your head.

Then why hadn't he tackled Jake, if he wa'n't afraid of him? Anywhere in our circles Sagebrush's oratory would ha' been the signal for a rough-house right there and then.

I puzzled over it till I got a headache. Then I went to bed, marveling at the inconsistencies of life.

Next morning I got another shock. Uncle Billy Westlake contributed it as I was goin' by the hotel, of which he was sweeping the steps.

"Pete," says Uncle Billy, transferrin' the sweat from his corrugated brow to a section of his pants, "our visitor — who ain't so worse, havin' tipped me two bones — is goin' to wander back East this afternoon. Goin' to catch the stage and proceed to the Yel-pin' Dog station, bag and baggage."

I stopped short, my eyes radiating mild dismay. I must have been wrong, the fellow carryin' out Sagebrush Jake's order like this. This Haswell must be yellow, after all.

"Well, you don't say so!" I alleged, when Uncle Billy just had. "Did he say anything, Uncle, about—Cactus City, in partic'lar?"

"Nothin' in partic'lar," bleated Uncle Billy, munching off about half of the plug o' longcut I extended him. "But in gen'ral, he remarked that our happy little settlement was a dormitory, and he'd be glad

to get back where he could keep awake, at least in the daytime."

This touching confidence, hintin' at experiences of our guest in wonders of unrest beyond my ken, which I hadn't supposed existed, kind o' locoed me.

"Well, now, ain't that too bad?" I murmured, somewhat at random.

"Oh, I dunno," blatted Uncle Billy, with sordid satisfaction. "He handed me a two-spot."

Seemed like Uncle couldn't think of nothin' but that pair o' numbered aces, so I paced along. And for my life, I couldn't make it seem, despite the circumstantial evidence, that Haswell was afraid of Sagebrush. There must be some explanation, if we could find it.

So the idea struck me of bein' a sort of emissary to this feathered kiddo of a Dan Cupid. I had a feeling that trouble existed between two potential lovin' souls that had ought to be in harmony.

So I started for Mangan's eatery to see Gussie, thinkin' in a vague way that I could mebbe fix it up between 'em. For, in spite of all appearances, I couldn't shake loose from my instinct that the Haswell citizen was O. K.

Say two city blocks from Mangan's, I passed Alf MacDermott's pony, standin' by the wooden walk, with his bridle trailin' and his ears laid back. I expect Alf was under some table in Larrabee's saloon opposite, not woke up yet from the night before, and the cayuse was waiting for him.

Alf was the most daring rider in the West, bar none. He was a cowboy on the Bar-Z ranch, forty mile out, and he possessed in the shape o' Heat Lightning, this mustang, the worst fiend that a cowpuncher ever slung a saddle onto. He had conquered him as a colt, and no other Stetsonized and chapped son-of-a-ranger had ever succeeded in flingin' a leg over Heat Lightning without strikin' a tree or somethin' else immediate afterward.

I kept on and turned into the gustatory factory. There's Gussie standin' behind the counter, looking puffy under the eyes as if she'd passed a salty night.

"Say, girly," I preambled, "I can't get loose from the idea there's some mistake

about that affair last night; something we don't know. Have you seen this Haswell male since then?"

"No, Uncle Pete," she chirped defiant, "and I don't want to! What mistake could there be? Ain't he packin' to leave, like Sagebrush told him to do?"

Right there I got a glimmer of light.

"But can't you see," I argued, "that mebbe it ain't on account of what Sagebrush said, but on account of what you said."

And while I imparted that flash that had come to me, I reflected that, considerin' she wanted him to go away, and never wanted to see him again, she was showin' a toler'ble degree of interest in his preparin' for departure.

At my words her map lights up with the flame of hope, which is at once extinguished by the hose of memory.

"It don't jibe, Uncle Pete," she asserted. "If he wa'n't afraid of him, why would he stand and take his sass? Why wouldn't he naturally take a chance to try to dent him through the wall? Now you're gen'rous as you can be, wantin' to be a comfort, but it ain't no go. I'll tell you what you do. You go look up some troubles of your own an' 'tend to 'em!"

I went, without feelin' resentful. Gussie was always sort o' independent toward my sex in Cactus City. Besides, any peace-maker had ought to be a sort of philosopher in advance. He'll need it.

Came noon, an' the grand slam.

I'd been down the street, tryin' to borrow a ten-spot, but my friend had spoke first an' I'd lent him my last two bits. Kind o' chastened, I'd arrived nearly in front of Mangan's. There was Sagebrush Jake an' a friend, approachin' me. Sagebrush seemed to be quite sober.

Just then down the steps comes trippin' Gussie Lindley, on some errand or other. Sagebrush must have been feeling his oats over the night before, and thought he was some hero in her eyes, for he grinned like a catamount and stopped.

"Hello, Gussie!" he boomed. "Didn't I tell that spongy flapjack a mouthful last night?"

It didn't make a hit with Gussie, no-

ways. She looks up at him, mad as a hatter, a quiet hatter.

"You big lummo," she opines, "I judge you're all mouth!"

She got clean under his rhinoceros hide with that! His face got black as a Mexican's, and he grabbed her.

"Just for that," he growled, "you'll give me a kiss to seal our engagement!"

He lifted her, a little fightin' fury in a holy second, and chastely pressed his unshaved lips to her alabaster brow. And negligently he looses one arm, while he's doing it, to send me rolling like a bowlin' ball as I rush up to stop him, while his friend stands by grinning, with no move to interfere.

I came right side up out in the gutter as he started to set Gussie down on her kickin' little feet. But I wa'n't watching them. There was a panorama up the street that plumb held me fascinated.

It seems there was a man who had seen the start of the performance. By the time it had ended, he was on his way to us. And the manner of his comin' was exceedin' picturesque.

In the wake of Sagebrush and his pal had been this Len Haswell. When he saw Jake grab her, Shank's mare wasn't fast enough for him. He was then passin' Larabee's saloon, before which was standin', with his head down, Alf MacDermott's fiend of a cow pony, Heat Lightning. And the resultant tableau was what held my eye.

Say, I'll bet my immortal soul, that when that Easterner had whirled, he never touched ground again till he'd touched leather. He just gave one spring from the walk. Simultaneous, the bridle was up over that cayuse's head. Haswell was in the saddle and Heat Lightning was in the air, buckin' like a accordion.

Remember, the fellow didn't have a spur or a whip. But it was like a animated dummy in store clothes had been glued to that pestilential animal. And somehow Haswell got him straightened out right in the air on the third jump, and started for our little group like an express train, just as Sagebrush was implantin' his unappreciated salute on Gussie's forehead,

Haswell and Heat Lightning arrived almost before they started. I whooped with simple joy and rolled out of the way of the mustang's hoofs as the Easterner stopped him short on the bound, droppin' off him as he reared.

Sagebrush's pal was in the way. Haswell never touched him with his hands at all. He just shot out a leg as he went by. That cheap satanite went rollin' clear across the street, spittin' alkali all the way.

Sagebrush had just set Gussie down. He looked around, kind o' stupid with surprise. Then he drew.

But Haswell beat him to it. His hand flashed to his pocket and came up with an automatic. He shot Jake's Colt clean out of his fin without grazin' the skin! Then he dropped his automatic on the walk.

For the first time since he arrived, Haswell is mad, and it's some sight. But even then, he don't make no commotion about it.

"A bum can rag me to fringes!" he explains, murderous like and cool. "It's all in the game. But he can't get gay with a lady. Come on, you pretzel!"

Say, the things that back-easter done to that poor misguided an' mouthy grizzly was a sin and a shame. I never supposed that a man could be changed so in so short a time.

Just to show you, durin' the jag that Sagebrush accumulated subsequent to forget it, Uncle Billy Westlake found him on the hotel stoop and started to tote him around to the kitchen. He mistook him for a consignment of hamburger steak that had been left by the express company.

And say, the female of the species is more deadlier than the male. All the time Haswell is alterin' the physiology of Sagebrush, Gussie Lindley is hoppin' like an animated jumping-jack, and screechin':

"Attaboy, kid! Go to it! Kill the wild man of Borneo!"

When the reconstruction policy had been completed, and Jake laid there blissful oblivious, Haswell, who hadn't even took off his coat, swings out his right wing and gathers Gussie to him.

Meanwhile he cursory addresses the middlin' crowd that had gathered and was

staring at him with the respect he has unexpected earned.

"Miss—miss—I forget her last name," he announces, "is going to be loved, honored an' obeyed by me for life. She ain't let me ask her yet, but it goes! And you can't trot out the first spavined old justice of the peace that can be reached any too quick to suit us! Ain't that so, deary?"

"Yes," comes Gussie's voice, all muffled up in the fellow's coat. "I was on my way to the hotel to ask you to—explain."

"Then pack!" he orders. "I've explained. And some one lasso a justice for us, for we're goin' to catch the stage this afternoon for back home. I wouldn't spend another day in the West if you'd give it to me. It's too tame for me!" That's what he hands us.

Meanwhile I'd been wonderin' about a certain matter. Haswell had reined Heat Lightning, and afterward licked the now silent Sagebrush with one hand.

"Say, stranger," I asks respectful, "what's the matter with your left wing?"

"Oh," he tells us negligent, "it got shot up in a mess with gunmen. I'm off a month to let it heal a little more. I'd had a curiosity about the West, but it's satisfied!"

Gunmen! All of a sudden I got a suspicion. A mobbin' center back East where everything happens at least twice. A danged Babylon where every outlandish

accident an' heroism an' blood an' thunder you ever heard of is just daily incident. A daily record of strife an' movement and *chile con carne* that 'd make any dime novel you ever heard of read like a record of proceedin's of the Epworth League.

A place I'd heard of in dim traditions, that I'd think of an' mused on often, an' had wished I might be whisked from Cactus City to somewhere east of Broadway, where there's thirst an' liverwurst.

If my suspicion was right, no wonder we had seemed slow to him!

"Stranger," I pursues timid, while all of us, includin' Gussie, looks with awe at the fellow who's licked that prostrate mountain lion with one hand, and hasn't a scratch to show for it, "excuse me," and with reverence I pronounces the name of the palpitating center of the wild East, "Might you be from New York?"

He'd turned, still with his good right wing around Gussie's waist, and together they're mountin' the steps into the eatery.

"Little old New York!" he answers succinct. "That's me!"

I cast a look at the mustang, Heat Lightning, standin' with his head down by the walk. The certainty of my instinct was grippin' me.

"What's your line?" I asks him.

At the door he looks back over his shoulder. He lamps the cayuse, then me. He grins.

"Mounted policeman!" says he.

ROSES—FOR A SONG

"BUY me roses for my garden,"
Said the lady whose least word
Blends the iron of a mandate
With the sweetness of a bird.

"But I have no golden money;
Scarce have I a silver crown!"
"Buy them with Catullian honey,
Sweet as wild bees' dripping down.

"Take some golden words to market;
Don't you think the merchant knows
Beauty always is good barter,
Rose is fair exchange for rose?"

"Then, when next time in my garden
By my side you walk along,
You shall see how words look growing—
Buy me roses with a song!"

Richard Franklin.



Author of "The Events Man," "The Bauble," etc.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE REVELATION.

WHEN Una had asked him to leave the room so that she might talk alone with his prisoner, Welling had granted the request for a more important reason than merely to appear obliging. Rather, he welcomed the opportunity to go somewhere and communicate with the police department.

When he had first arrested his man in the living-room he had expected to call from the Harlingood house for help, and accordingly had inquired about the location of the telephone. This, being in the library, had led him to the second door, but he had made his *faux pas* with the diamond in an effort to shine before Mrs. Harlingood. That had succeeded only in entangling him in a skein of explanations he would have to make both to Fane and her mother, neither of whom he was anxious to face at that moment.

For the same reason he was not desirous that they should hear his communication to the station. It was his first arrest, and it might be accompanied with embarrassments which he felt more capable of enduring alone than under the scrutiny of any one, especially that of his intended mother-in-law.

Therefore he skipped down the front stairs quickly and tried to get out the front door, but it was locked, and this turned him back into the house. He tried his usual entrance through the rear basement, but, to his extreme annoyance, found this also guarded with a slip latch which he could not unfasten. Fane usually did this for him and he had never bothered to observe its manner of working. He returned, baffled, to the living-room.

He saw that he must actually do now what he had so glibly claimed to have done before—go through the bow-window and scale the fence. He quickly estimated the distance from the window-ledge to the cellar projection below, and leaped.

Horrors! His coat caught on the hook that held the awnings and was ripped right up the back to the collar.

Otherwise he was all right. He quickly gained the street, but the tearing of the coat placed him in a peculiar predicament. If he returned with it torn he would be obliged to explain the accident. He was supersensitive about his previous untruth. Having already been detected in one, he feared to chance another, although it might be more plausible than either of the others. There was nothing to do, then, but have his coat mended.

Fortunately there was a tailor across the

This story began in *The Argosy* for December 1.

street, in the basement of the St. Opposite. Should he telephone the police, or go there first? He debated this a minute, and finally concluded to go to the tailor first, for if he telephoned the police they would come on the run, and he must be on hand when they arrived. He felt there was no hurry to get back, for there was no possible way for Prince to escape. Had he not himself found it most difficult to get out of the Harlingood house?

He entered the tailor-shop. It was empty, but an open door led into a sub-cellar. He penetrated there. The tailor was arranging some stock. Responding to Jack's imperative summons he came out, seated himself at his bench and began work on the torn coat; while Jack planted himself by the window where he could command a good view of the house across the street. He could plainly see the library windows behind which Una and Prince were talking, and so felt doubly secure.

About the time Welling planted himself in the lowly tailor-shop window with a clear command of the one behind which the man who called himself Prince had been receiving the advances of his volunteer "pal," that worthy was led to the rear door and offered an easy way of escape.

However, to Una's astonishment, instead of making a dive for the seldom-used stairs as she had expected, this odd specimen of criminality the more stockily stood his ground.

"You want me to run away?" he asked incredulously.

"Certainly. If you stay here they will put you in jail. Didn't you hear Mr. Welling speak of the Tombs?"

Instead of frightening her new pal this seemed to challenge him.

"Oh! Will they?" he exclaimed beligerently.

She placed her hand over her bosom where reposed the match-box containing the diamond ring.

"You haven't anything but this, have you?" she asked sweetly, as though to reassure herself that she was not compounding a felony, or whatever it was they called being a party to a theft.

"No," he chuckled, "I guess that's all

I took. Leastways, I believe it is," and added thoughtfully, "there's no telling, though, for sure, seeing the way I came by that."

He started to tell her the absurd way in which he had come into possession of the match-box, through starting to light a cigar and being interrupted by her entrance to the living-room.

But she was in no mood for reminiscence. Instead of listening she tried to push him down the stairs, insisting that he must hurry or some one would come and discover him. He lingered, looking at her fondly.

"I prefer this," he said. "I'd rather have your interest in me in this way than—"

She did not let him finish, but pleaded desperately:

"You must go. I don't exact any promises from you. I don't believe in promises. I am going to rely on your honor never to steal anything again."

He ignored this magnanimity, but suddenly reached over close to her and asked:

"If I do go how about you? Won't they take it out on you? Won't they hold you responsible?"

He was too uncomfortably near and she stepped back a pace, protesting that she would tell them he had overpowered her.

His eyes twinkled.

"And how did you get the diamond?" he asked, raising his two manacled hands to point to its soft resting place.

"I seized that from you. And as that is all you have actually stolen, my conscience will be safe."

He was speechless for a moment at this triumph of feminine reasoning. Then he shook his head gravely, saying:

"I am afraid I could not accept a sacrifice like that."

"It's no sacrifice. I want to do it," she protested.

He was quite serious.

"Maybe you don't know the law. You see, I do. I've had occasion to."

This was a point where she felt she could safely "sympathize" and "understand."

"I know what you mean," she said covertly, as though agreeing to a subterfuge

with him that might even be particularly heinous.

"The law might take you as an accessory to my escape," he insisted, "and I couldn't let you run that chance."

Una shook her head vigorously.

"I know Jack Welling," she assured him. "He'll have to believe what I tell him."

The man, however, was adamant:

"It's too big a risk. I couldn't let you take it," and he stepped back well into the room again.

This caused her fierce dismay, for she had evidently made up her mind firmly that he was to escape then and there and in the manner she had outlined. She seized him by the bound wrist and tried to force him to the open door, though he resisted, and she found it difficult.

"Please, please hurry," she coaxed and commanded. "They'll come in any minute, and then your chance will be gone."

She managed to stir him only a step, for he was unaccountably strong, even if his hands were useless, and she halted with a gasp of vexation. To complete her dismay he flicked the door shut with his foot and advanced to the center of the room, where he wheeled and faced her, saying tensely:

"Very well. Let them come!"

She was so sure she was right, and so determined to put her scheme through, that this unexpected opposition made her frantic. She stormed and ordered him to go, and he smiled at her; she pleaded again and he gravely shook his head.

Finally she sat down, weakly, in despair, ready to cry. She had heard this about criminals; they never would let you help them; they always interposed their own headstrong notions.

He was so accustomed to bluffing and blustering that he could see no other way out of this scrape. The very severe handicap he would face in appearing in handcuffs on Fifth Avenue at six o'clock in the evening of a midsummer day did not deter her; she had once thought of it, but had dismissed it then as one of the petty details of duress which a criminal would find no difficulty in evading.

She resolved, however, on one last, desperate appeal. It involved betraying the

Harlingoods, but she quickly reasoned it would probably be for their ultimate benefit. If this poor man were arrested in their house the resultant scandal might be embarrassing, though just how embarrassing she did not realize. At any rate, she unconsciously at that moment joined further forces with her cousin, who was impatiently waiting in the upper room the return of Fane from the quest on which she had been sent to accomplish the same errand.

However, the method Una chose was destined to result in most unhappy consequences, although she did it, as she afterward tearfully protested, all for the very best. Good motives! Fine intentions! How many men have been hanged for these! How many women have lost all for them!

She did not know how to tell him outright what she had in mind, but she led up to it by threatening:

"Mrs. Harlingood will never let up on you. She will prosecute you to the limit of the law. You won't be able to beg out with her. Come now, please go. It's from her I'm trying to save you."

"She don't know anything about this. She's in Bar Harbor," said the perverse man.

Una saw she would have to tell him boldly and outright. She took the bit in her teeth.

"She is in this house now," she asserted coldly. "You talked with her below in the living-room."

Prince looked at her blandly. It was clear that he had not once suspected the neat little game Arthur and the others had played with him.

"There was only the hired girl and the housekeeper," he replied, open-eyed.

"That was Mrs. Harlingood and her daughter, Fane, and Mr. Harlingood and Arthur Harlingood. They are too poor to have servants."

So now the plot lay before him in all its nakedness.

He moved about slowly, maneuvering so the light would fall on her face. He wanted to be quite sure of what she said, and also of her veracity. She noted now for the

first time since she had seen it in the barber-shop when he summoned Mr. Stakes for the purpose of purchasing the hotel, or pretending to purchase it, a quick expression of crafty shrewdness came over him; one animated by a swift decision for action.

For a moment, however, he held himself in.

"I'll be jiggered," he said slowly. "Let me get this straight. Do you mean that the real Harlingoods tried to put that over on me, tried to rent their house and themselves as servants?"

"That's it?"

"And the secretary, Mr. Lenox's name is—what?"

"Arthur Harlingood."

"And Mrs. Mapes?"

"Is Miss Fane Harlingood?"

He stopped for a short chuckle as if he did not have time for it, but really could not help it.

"And Mrs. Riggs, I suppose, is Mrs. Harlingood, and Squire, Mr. Harlingood?"

"That is right."

Una was a bit frightened now. A look of intentness which was almost ugly came to his face. She thought she had made the last appeal and he would go now. But he stood as if chained to the floor, raised his two manacled fists and shook them at the door out of which the others had lately gone.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CRIMINAL REFUSES TO ESCAPE.

BY this time Welling's coat was mended. He hastened into the St. Opposite and soon was in communication with police headquarters. He told them he had apprehended a man he believed to be Joe Connors, the con man, gave them what he thought was the house and street number of the Harlingood mansion, and added that they might reach him, if need be, by telephone there; adding that the number could be obtained from the book.

This done, he started back the way he had come.

Meanwhile Fane had ransacked the house for him. Eventually she discovered

the open window of the living-room, and could only imagine that he had gone that way. She did not dare venture after him, though she went so far as to go onto the street and look up and down. This was at the moment when he had disappeared into the hotel.

Accordingly, she returned to her room to tell her father and mother. Arthur was also there, and in a frame of mind quite different from the jaunty one in which he had returned home from the St. Opposite earlier in the afternoon.

Indeed he was so fagged with a realization of what he had done that his mother did not have the heart to say a harsh word to him, though, as Fane observed this, she could not help wondering to herself if her mother would have been so lenient if her daughter and not her son had been guilty of bringing such disgrace upon them.

The four members of the family held a consultation of war. It was quickly agreed that that horrible man must be got out of the house immediately. If Welling could not be located, let him be chucked out forthwith. And what could Una be doing, talking alone with him?

It was then that Arthur thought best to tell what he knew of the ostensible purchase of the hotel and of Una's employment, at a ridiculously impossible salary, in a ridiculously impossible position of manager.

Mrs. Harlingood snorted at this and went so far as to express the thought that possibly Una was down there now plotting with him against them. Fane objected to this strenuously, and Mr. Harlingood weakly.

The mother then suggested that perhaps Una had informed him of the defenseless condition of the Harlingoods in the beginning, but Arthur cleared her of that suspicion, in all justice explaining, in his effort to evade as much of the blame as possible, that the bold forger had learned of them through the manager, Mr. Herter.

Mrs. Harlingood finally uttered the decision of the four in declaring that they must one and all return to the library and get the odious person out of the house in some manner. There was safety in numbers and she urged that they all come.

Mr. Harlingood hung back, declaring he did not feel well, but to this the martinet would not listen.

"No, Henry," she declared, "there are few enough of us against such an attack as this, such an outrage. It is your place as the head of the family to share the danger. Come!"

And off she marched, followed by her cohorts.

On the middle of the stairs the old gentleman asked, in a weak voice, if his spouse still intended for them to masquerade as their own servants, and she snapped back:

"Yes, of course. It won't do to let such a creature out in the world with such knowledge against us. He must never know who we are, only what we have pretended to be."

Mr. Harlingood accepted this with a groan and Arthur with a sigh. Fane did not care, for she felt that it all meant the rapid consummation of her union with Jack.

At the very moment when the four came to their decision, or, rather, to Mrs. Harlingood's decision, in the room above, and just as Jack left the telephone-booth in the St. Opposite, having received assurances that the police wagon would leave immediately for the Harlingood mansion, he who had first appeared as Petroleum Prince was shaking his manacled fists at the library door.

"Call them in. Call them all in," he shouted to Una.

Visibly frightened, she still protested.

"Do as I say! Call them in. I'll show them and I'll show you!"

"But they'll put you in prison for a long, long term."

He lowered his hands and he turned on her in a different manner.

"No," he said quietly, as though his storm was over, "they will release me."

"Oh, they are cruel," she admonished desperately, "especially Mrs. Harlingood."

"They'll beg me to go."

He stood as firm as granite, facing the door, as if taunting his enemies to enter.

"You don't know them. You don't know them," Una begged. "Please go. It is not too late."

His anger, if indeed anger it was, was now dissipated. He was able to comprehend that she was much wrought up, and he seemed at last to realize that this nervous condition was occasioned by concern for him. His manner changed. He approached her.

"Look here," said he tenderly, "if I get you right, Miss Devon, you're feeling sorry right now for a crook."

The words stung her, and he spoke almost as if he were accusing her.

"I'd like to see you get away," she answered lamely.

"Don't worry about me," he replied, with a rough directness that startled her. "I'll show these birds a clean pair of heels, and in my own way, not yours; but before I do I want to give you a piece of advice.

"You're wasting your time pitying a jail-bird. Don't do it. They're not worth it. Girls like you know nothing at all about the tough side of crooks: You see 'em when they're down and out, at the seedy end, and it looks hard on 'em. And you cry and carry on and think they're getting the worst of it.

"You're wrong. They only get what's coming to them. And you'd agree with me if you ever saw a crook at his business. That's where they get you; you see 'em off duty, and they're sad and touching. Now you ought to see them when they're on duty. You'd change your ideas about 'em. Believe me, I'm giving you the straight talk for your own benefit, for I like you; you ought to know that."

Una was blanched white.

"Now you've proposed, girlie, haven't you, to let a crook go free of the law?"

She tried to answer but could find no words.

"And you're pretty sure I'm that crook, aren't you?" he insisted.

"Aren't you?" she gasped. "Oh, tell me. I'll believe anything you say."

He relaxed, seeing her fright.

"You're too scared to see anything just now," he continued more gently, "but I want you to sit over there," and he led her to a chair in an obscure corner, where she sat obediently.

"Now," he admonished, standing above her, not without solicitude, "don't make a move and don't say a word. I'm going to show you how a first-class crook operates. It won't do you any harm, and it may do you some good."

She hid her face in her hands.

"Mr. Prince," she moaned, "they'll prosecute you to the very limit of the law!"

He heard the steps on the lower stairs now.

"Give me back that ring," he demanded. "Quickly."

She started to refuse, but saw the intent look on his face and did not dare. She took the match-box from her bosom and handed it to him. He hardly had time to get it into his pocket, which was a difficult operation with his hands tied, when a loud knock sounded on the door.

"Come!" he called gruffly, and stood in the center facing the Harlingoods as they filed in.

He managed it so that he stood between them and Una, and as she cowered low in her chair they did not observe her at once.

Mrs. Harlingood advanced to meet him with suavity.

"Sir," she said severely but with an attempt at a smile, which gave her mouth the effect of a dog's when the lips are pulled over his teeth, "we have been considering everything in connection with your case and have decided to release you."

The captive lurched in front of her, his manacled hands held out menacingly between them.

"So!" he growled.

"Yes," she answered with a desperate attempt to be sweet. "And Mr. Lenox here"—she called Arthur up with a gesture—"will return your check; so there will be no evidence against you."

Fane was suffering, as she afterward told Jack, the worst torture of her whole existence as she realized that her mother was going to let that thief off while he still held her precious ring, but what could she do? She must remain, it seemed, for a while longer, a sacrifice on the altar of the family.

But the taker of the ring was in no evident hurry to be off with his ill-gotten gains. For answer to the magnanimous

proposition he thrust his bound hands in front of Mrs. Harlingood's face and shook the irons at her.

"How about these?" he demanded roughly. "Who'll take these off?"

This was a facer for Mrs. Harlingood. She bit her lip.

"Don't you want your liberty?" she demanded.

"It's no liberty with the irons on me," reasonably replied he who evidently was determined not to be set free.

"Ar—Mr. Lenox here will go with you and assist. He will assure you of protection and no danger of police interference."

As she spoke she got no reassurance from the dour countenance of the man who opposed her. He seemed hardly to hear what she was saying, but instead was listening carefully for sounds in the outer hall. He was rewarded, for before he could make any further reply to the proposition Jack Welling hastened into the room, breathless from running up two flights of stairs.

"You won't have to wait long!" he cried. "I've phoned for the wagon. The police will soon be here."

"Police!" cried Mrs. Harlingood and Fane in a simultaneous shocked and abhorrent breath.

"Certainly! What did you expect, the paperhanger?"

For the moment no one except Una noted the grim satisfaction with which the man in manacles greeted the announcement.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HORROR UPON HORROR.

JACK was in high good humor with himself. His interview over the telephone with headquarters had been eminently satisfactory. He regretted now that it had not occurred in the presence of the Harlingoods, or at least that Mrs. Harlingood had not overheard. He had been quite professional about it, direct in his statements, not nervous or excited as might have been excusable in a young investigator who still had his spurs to win.

And the man at the desk had treated

him with serious attention, had not ridiculed his assertion and had promised curtly to send the wagon with an officer immediately. To be sure, he had forgotten the number of the Harlingood house, but he had described its location exactly, he thought. Yes, Fane's mother must have rated him highly if she could have heard him giving his first important communication to the guardians of the city.

Therefore, he was ill-prepared to meet the glowering looks with which she greeted him on his buoyant entrance. He glanced eagerly to Fane, only to find her abashed and sullen. Arthur and his father wore hang-dog expressions, while a glance at Una told him that she had failed miserably in whatever mission she had assumed. Indeed, it was a pretty kettle of fish.

He was soon enlightened as to the meaning of his somber greeting. Mrs. Harlingood, having resolved that it was no time to stand on ceremony, and shrewdly calculating that her words would have extra weight with Welling in view of his intentions regarding Fane, advanced toward him and asked:

"Will it be necessary for the police to come into the house?"

"No, I could meet them outside, I suppose," said Jack puzzled.

"Then do so, by all means," urged Mrs. Harlingood, "and take this—this man with you."

She dared not look at Prince, and only vaguely inclined her head in his direction.

"If you wish it," Jack agreed lightly and nodded his head to Prince. "Come along, you."

Before Prince or Welling could move, Mrs. Harlingood, greatly encouraged, stepped very close to Jack and, placing her hand on his arm in a semi-affectionate manner, added, coaxingly:

"Arrange this matter so it will not be known in which house you made the arrest, won't you, please?"

He paused.

"I'm afraid, Mrs. —"

Fane was close at his other side, and before he could utter the name had whispered to him, sotto voce, "Mrs. Riggs, Jack."

He reassured his innamorata with a nod and continued, as if nothing had happened:

"I'm afraid, Mrs. Riggs, that may be difficult, though I will see what I can do."

Again he moved to the door, opened it and stood aside, motioning to Prince to precede him out.

However, Prince did not stir. He was standing in the center of the room, his arms in front of him as if he intended to hold them only in that way, and his coat cuffs dropped down to conceal the irons. He was smiling most good-naturedly, and beaming from one to the other, not eaves-dropping, but watching all that occurred.

"Isn't it about time to drop that, Mrs. Harlingood?" he observed with good humor, but without looking at any one especially.

"I am Mrs. Riggs," exclaimed the mother.

Prince laughed.

"Then why did you answer to the name of Harlingood?" he asked blandly.

The mother trembled, but managed to reply firmly:

"I thought you were looking at me."

"No, I wasn't looking at you, but I was speaking to you, Mrs. Harlingood," insisted the atrocious person.

Fane, vigilant and with her wits now quite alert again, saw that her mother was in a bad way and rushed to her defense, but still with the pretense that they were entertaining a millionaire tenant, for she was not sure just how she ought to behave toward a breaker of the laws.

"Her name is Riggs, indeed it is," she asserted in an explanatory tone.

"And a right handy little title, too," added Prince pleasantly.

Mrs. Harlingood stepped primly aside.

"Don't talk with him, Fane. Let Mr. Welling take him away. I am glad to see the last of him."

"What's that?" called Prince, "'Fane?'" He addressed the youthful "housekeeper." "Thought you were Mrs. Mapes?"

"That's my first name, sir—Fane," she answered and looked imploringly to Jack, who now stepped to the center of the room to remove his prisoner by force if he were not willing to go.

"Fane Harlingood, eh?" continued Prince banteringly, as Welling took him by the arm.

Jack interposed dictatorially.

"Here—enough of that. Come with me," he commanded, and tried to drag his prisoner off.

Prince jerked his arm free, hurled about and impetuously addressed them all.

"Look here!" he cried. "Let's quit this nonsense. This is where we get down on the level."

The mother had taken Fane by the arm and was passing out, but Prince's next words halted her.

"I mean you, Mrs. Harlingood," he shouted.

In the anxiety of the two women to escape and the eagerness of Jack to get his prisoner out there was a collision at the door, where the four met and blocked the passage.

"The man is crazy," muttered the mother to Fane as she fairly shoved her daughter ahead of her.

Fane bumped into the door and back into her mother, who was precipitated so close to Prince that she almost fell against his shackled arms. Withdrawing in evident disgust she found no escape except to go back into the library. Prince turned on them with his back to the door, with Jack ineffectually pulling at him. He had out-manuevered them, but his good nature was still apparent.

"I want to say something to you, Mrs. Harlingood," he continued. He nodded over toward the quondam "butler." "Yes, and to you, too, Mr. Harlingood." Finally he included Arthur in his generalty. "And you, too, Mr. Arthur Harlingood."

The son and daughter were speechless. The husband was not only speechless but he appeared also to be legless, for he sat suddenly as if shorn of his nether limbs.

But not Mrs. Harlingood. She knew where to spot the mischief and she wasted no time in doing so, but swooped down on Una like a hawk.

Una, cowering in the far corner, saw what was coming and, conscious of her guilt, drew herself up into the protecting arms of a huge chair and looked up defenseless at

the enemy, but with an unspoken plea for mercy in her eyes.

"Una, you've been talking!" savagely accused Mrs. Harlingood, her eyes blazing, her hands clenched. "That's what was going on in this room when you were alone with this créaturé."

She spoke the word "creature" as though it were the vilest name in the language.

Jack, of whom it can hardly be said that he was sympathetic with the mother, listened from the door, rather amused. His hand was on his revolver and he had it in mind to draw it if the prisoner showed any further signs of disobedience, but his curiosity got the better of him for the moment and he waited to watch developments.

This left Prince free for the moment, and he hastened over to the corner where Una lay supine under the militant advance of her elderly cousin. He interposed his large bulk between the threatening forefinger of the late "Riggs" and the blanched face of the late "cashier" and offered diplomatically:

"Pardon me, ma'am, but I hate to see you do an injustice."

Mrs. Harlingood looked at him stonily. He was beneath contempt and certainly it was beneath her dignity to bandy words with him. She turned away, resolving to bide her time; she would have that out with Una Devon yet, and read her a piece of her mind.

Prince evidently divined this mental resolution, for he was quick to step back and block her way to the door again.

"Don't make a mistake, Mrs. Harlingood," and she squirmed more at this utterance of her right name than she did at his previous utterance of "Riggs." "I knew all the time."

Fane, with a sudden horrific apprehension, rushed up, exclaiming:

"Knew all the time! Our right names?"

"Certainly," replied Prince casually.

This looked like an impeachment of Arthur and he felt forced to meet it directly by interposing:

"This is a devil of a joke."

"How could you know?" demanded Fane.

Prince looked back to be sure that Una heard and then looked from one to the other of the Harlingoods, as he drawled with what evidently was fatuous vainglory:

"There's nothing a crook don't find out when he starts to pull off a trick."

For a moment Prince was halted as he observed that a tear or two was trickling down Una's cheek. But he promptly had other things to think of, for a hubbub ensued among the Harlingoods, while Jack stood in the doorway in the impersonal attitude of an officer of the law.

The father now found his feet and his tongue. He might not be master in his own house and there might be many things he could not do, many things he could not attempt, but he still was a citizen and to all intents and purposes the owner of property. It was evident, even to his slow-thinking mind, that the time for masquerading was at an end. He no longer would be required to enact that hideous rôle of the butler. He leaped to his feet and came forward shaking his fist.

"It's an outrage!" he cried, full in the teeth of the marauder. "I shall see to it that you get the full extent of the law for this."

Fane alone of the Harlingoods was keeping her head. She saw Una's distress and the concern of Prince for her, and she was far from being satisfied. What had the two been talking about? And there was much else to explain. Meanwhile she must know more.

"How could you find out?" she persisted, to Prince.

"You can't fool a crook, Miss Harlingood," he answered with the same bland smile, and Arthur felt like assassinating him, for at one fell blow Prince had destroyed all his delicately reared claims to business eminence.

Mrs. Harlingood threw up her hands and shrieked:

"Merciful Almighty! He admits it!"

Mr. Harlingood, cumulatively indignant, stormed at the prisoner, crying:

"I shall see to it personally that you spend the rest of your life in prison for this."

Indeed, no punishment, to his fevered

mind, seemed too severe for one who would perpetrate, by conscious design, so dastardly a trick. Theft, arson, perhaps even murder would not have appeared at that moment so heinous to the overwrought paterfamilias whose long outraged masculine instincts were now reacting frightfully.

Prince, towering above the violent Harlingood, remarked with a supreme good nature that was more tantalizing than could have been any defiance:

"There now, Squire. There's no call for you to be violent. Petroleum Prince or Hoffman House Charlie, I'm the same guy you was bowing and scraping to a while back. Put that in your pipe and smoke it."

The father jumped up and down.

"I shall see the district attorney in person. I shall prosecute," he raged.

"Hush, Squire, calm yourself!" purred the large fellow, holding his coat-sleeves discreetly over his handcuffs.

"Damme," cried Mr. Harlingood, almost frothing at the mouth, "if I wouldn't like to see you in the electric chair!"

Turning away in frantic desperation, his fevered glance fell on his son, toward whom he raised his hands.

"Arthur!" he cried. "You—you—" and paused, lacking the words to express his indignation at one who had been a party to such a crime.

"Don't be hard on the boy, father," said Prince, jovially, "he did it for the best."

This was all but a fatal blow.

"Welling, take him away!" screamed the proprietor of the mansion. "Take him away!" and he collapsed into the nearest chair.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NEWSPAPER PUBLICITY.

SEEING that Prince evidently had no intention of leaving passively, Welling now drew his revolver and advanced on his prisoner, Prince saw the movement and the danger and moved toward the door remarking, casually:

"Never mind, son, I'm coming. Put up your iron. I'll behave."

Jack was impressed by the self-confident

but unresisting manner of the man and again pocketed his weapon, though he seized Prince by the arm, and began shoving him vigorously.

Fane, alone of the Harlingoods, kept her wits at this juncture. Her mother was momentarily suppressed in excitedly ministering to her overwrought husband and Arthur was too sullenly consumed with his own mortification to think of the fast-fading family fortunes; he was ready to throw everything overboard now. Not so Fane; she would fight to the last ditch.

As Welling reached the door the second time with his fantastic charge she precipitated herself on him, exclaiming: "Oh, Jack, the police will get here before you get him out and you've got to keep this out of the papers!"

"I'll do my best, Fane," he said, tugging at Prince's arm. "Come on, Connors."

But Fane leaped between them, tearing loose Jack's hold.

"Wait a minute," she implored, "Jack, you must do as I say."

It was now time for Welling to be upset and he was; this interfered with his authority and would not do. He tried to brush Fane aside, but the more he brushed the more she clung, and his attention was quickly transferred from the docile Prince to the fierce Miss Harlingood.

She forced him a few feet away from Prince, half outside the door, where her smothered pleadings would not be heard by her parents. But Prince remained a willing and amused spectator. Though he may not have heard all she said, he got "dear" and "for my sake" and "I'll never marry you if you don't."

The prisoner chuckled as he felt the match-box in his pocket and reflected on the meaning of the diamond ring. If he suspected before the relations between Miss Harlingood and the active young agent of the police, now he could be certain of them, and as this revelation came to him fully his plan of action became matured.

He glanced over at Una. She lay wilted and helpless in the big chair, and he saw the reproach in her eyes; reproach, he concluded, that he had not availed himself of her offer of escape.

Welling and Fane now returned. She had evidently won her point, for he closed the door decisively as though he meant to stay, and she rushed to the side of the room where her mother and father were.

Doubtless she meant to keep her voice low, but what was said could be plainly heard by every one in the room, and especially by the object of all the trouble. However, the tension was so great that no one noticed this.

"Don't disturb me," moaned Mr. Harlingood, his face in his hands, as Fane began her pleading.

She had scant respect for such evasion. She dragged her father's hands from his face and threw her appeal to him.

"You must!" she demanded. "Father, you must listen. Jack says that it is all up to you. If you don't want the man arrested he will have to let him go. And you must let him go. Don't you see the terrible danger in this now? He knows our names, knows what we have done; knows everything."

"We shall punish him for that as well as for his lesser crimes," muttered his parent.

"Now, father, don't be silly," she rattled on as if she were correcting a naughty child. "You can't punish him for that but he can punish us. Don't you see that if he tells about us, what we have done—everything—it will be put in all the papers, and that the publicity would utterly ruin us!"

"Yes," added Mrs. Harlingood, "Fane is quite right, Henry. Can you imagine how it would sound to hear people calling me 'Riggs' or you 'Squire'—even in fun?"

Prince emitted a vigorous laugh.

"That's right, Mrs. Riggs, you've got the combination to the safe, all right."

This gained from Una a dry little smile, the first she had displayed for some time.

Welling covered his face with his hands to conceal his feelings.

Arthur had turned his back on the scene in disgust.

For once, however, Mr. Harlingood was the head of the family. Perhaps he enjoyed the novel sensation of being the key to a situation and did not care to turn himself over too quickly.

"It's too late now," he answered laconically, to all their arguments.

"Sure it is," replied Prince as though the remark had been addressed to him, and turning to Welling, he said:

"Come, young fellow, are you going to call a taxi?"

He moved magnificently toward the door, but kept an eye on Fane, as he drawled:

"I guess I turned the trick that time all right. They won't put me on any inside page to-morrow."

"Father! Father!" cried Fane, frantically. "Don't you see what he is going to do?"

Indeed Mr. Harlingood had heard and he rose to his feet, choleric.

"He's going to the penitentiary, that's what he's going to do," he exclaimed, shaking a palsied fist at the despoiler of his home who had double discounted the work of any common thief.

"But this creature wants the publicity," said Fane.

"And it would ruin us," added her mother.

"I'll see that it's kept out of the papers," responded Mr. Harlingood, who unaccountably, at least in his own mind, had revived his ancient importance, as he recalled that his father had known Charles A. Dana and that he once met the editor of the *Sun*.

"Welling," he said to Jack. "You will assist me?"

"I'll do all in my power, sir," obliged the young man.

This nettled the captive.

"You haven't got power enough to keep me from telling the judge about it," he interposed, "nor to keep me from dropping a little note to the newspaper boys, providing they're not on hand. I'll have my day in court, you bet."

Arthur had come up in time to hear this and thought it was his turn to take a hand in the outré proceedings.

"What do you mean by all this, Mr.—" he demanded, hesitating to use the *nom de criminalis*.

"If you want something, son," laughed his quondam barber-shop pick-up, "you might as well be polite and call me Prince."

"Well, Mr. Prince, what do you mean

by all this? Aren't you about satisfied? Haven't you gone far enough?"

Prince was chuckling to himself, very much at his ease.

"Not by a jugful. You've had your turn so far; now it's my turn. Of course I'm not saying I ain't enjoyed the whole show—"

Mrs. Harlingood was aghast.

"Enjoyed it!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," said Prince, "seeing you hop around like the help so as to fool an old oil-driller. Of course you didn't know I was a crook, did she, Miss Devon?" and to Una's horror he included her in a friendly smile.

For the moment Una suffered more poignantly than ever. So that was to be her reward? The man whom she had stood ready to befriend meant to betray her. Evidently there was no honor in thieves even if among them.

Yet, he may have meant well; she would still hold open the benefit of the doubt, though it was a bit hard right now, for Mrs. Harlingood descended upon her in a storm of righteous indignation, saying sharply:

"I feel somehow that you are at the bottom of this. How dare you stay one moment longer in my house?"

Under that hawklike glance and those gimlet eyes Una rose unsteadily, but the next words from Prince diverted attention again from her.

"Hush, Riggs," he said in his best manner. "As long as Hoffman House Charlie is with you don't spill any family secrets. Remember, everything you say may be used against you."

The father shrieked to Welling: "

"Take the impertinent wretch away!"

Fane rushed again between Jack and his prisoner.

"Don't you dare take him to jail, Jack. I won't have it!" and she faced Prince with fire in her eye.

"Yes, he will," responded that worthy. "I'll not lose my chance to get into the Four Hundred."

Fane was breathing defiance at the marauder, but this made her vaguely apprehensive.

"What do you mean?" she asked. The banality of the phrase "four hundred" al-

ways upset her anyway, and this time it jangled fearfully.

"I mean I'm going to get into the Four Hundred, all right," continued Prince, "only it 'll be the Four Hundred of Sing Sing."

They all started guiltily, and he glowed with his thought as he dwelt on it lovingly.

"You see, Hoffman House Charlie usually works under a handicap. As a rule he hasn't much chance for notice from the newspapers, and there's no use talking, you can't get very high in any society unless the papers give you some attention. Now, when Charlie gets arrested it's a petty larceny charge or some swindling frame-up, as a rule, and the papers print that much about it"—he indicated about half an inch, between his thumb and forefinger—"on the back page, and the judge gives him a year or two." Prince shrugged his shoulders, deprecatingly. "No class!" he muttered.

Fane strove to laugh but only a hollow sound came from her chest.

"You have quite a sense of humor, haven't you?" she remarked, with an attempt to be conciliatingly pleasant, for she felt that she was struggling with a sinister force of which she alone knew the power.

However, though previously laughing, he was now quite sober.

"Never heard of it," he replied. "Do you think the newspapers ain't going to put it on the front pages to-morrow morning in big headlines how Petroleum Prince of Oklahoma worked the swell Harlingood family into a bunch of hired help and him being nothing but Hoffman House Charlie all the time. A cheap con man! And them supposed to be in Bar Harbor, too? Whew!

"The judge'll give about ten years for that and when Charlie gets to Sing Sing he'll be in the Four Hundred there, all right, and able to hold his head as high as any embezzler or forger or bank-wrecker in the place—as high as any of the swellest crooks. Why, he'll be on the executive committee of the Welfare League inside of two weeks!"

This interested Welling as a peculiar expression of an unique phase in the psychology of a criminal.

"Your logic seems a bit twisted, Con-

nors," he commented, but with an air which seemed to admit that it had much force in it.

"Not a bit of it, young fellow," responded the manacled one, with good nature, as from one professional to another. "You get me all right. You know what ambition is; you know it's true that 'once a crook always a crook.'

"You know I can't get up in my calling any more 'n you can in yours without making a splash, doing something that gets in the papers big. That's the way nowadays, the only way. You're a man and you know the ropes; not a girl"—and he cast a deft sidelong glance toward Una, who sat fascinated and tense—"with a lot of sentimental rot about cons. Come on. Let's you and me mosey."

He paused, while the Harlingoods recovered from his harangue by breaking into imprecations.

"You terrible man!" said Fane.

"Rotter!" came from Arthur.

"Scoundrel!" hissed the father.

"How perverted," muttered Mrs. Harlingood.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE HANDS OF THE LAW.

HOWEVER, if the family which had lived for three generations honorably on the avenue thought this was an end of it, even for the moment, they were much mistaken. Prince was not the one to endure their hard words without reply.

"Don't call names," he adjured them, while Jack stood irresolute beside him, wondering why the wagon did not arrive and relieve him of his distressing problem. "If I am a crook I'm not living in fear in the back of my house when I'm supposed to be in the country. If I am hiding from the police I can still hold my head high among my own kind. I ain't welched on the clan that bore me."

"The iniquity!" cried Mrs. Harlingood. "Have you no moral nature?"

He turned on her severely.

"No preaching, Riggs!" he admonished, not without a twinkle in his eye, and Una,

at that moment, felt almost as if she could hug him. "Didn't you try to bamboozle poor old John C. Prince of Oklahoma out of twice the rent this house was worth?"

"Take him away!" cried Mr. Harlingood.

Prince did not mind paterfamilias, for he was not yet through with her whom he had well divined to be the head of the family.

"Is it any worse for Hoffman House Charlie," he continued to Mrs. Harlingood, "to want to mix with nifty folks than it is for you to tell your poor cousin to get out of the house for working in a barber-shop?"

This was the last straw. Mrs. Harlingood set her chin and her mouth assumed its thin hard line.

"I agree with my husband," she sternly answered. "You should be vigorously prosecuted."

The arch swindler was in fine fettle, and not to be halted now.

"That's right!" he answered, swinging into his stride. "Go for the crooks. And keep on teaching your children deceit and false pride by living in a back room where it's unhealthy when they might as well be out in the good air."

This enraged Fane. It was too much humiliation to expect her mother to endure, especially in front of Jack.

"Mother! Father!" she admonished. "The man is a viper. Don't bandy words with him."

She turned pleadingly to Welling:

"Jack," she said, "Don't you think it better to let him go? He has no stolen goods."

"What's that?" Welling interrupted her, and was on the verge of reminding her of the diamond, but the look she gave him said that she had not forgotten, and she added under her breath that he could take that from the prisoner first, concluding, out loud, with: "Do let him go—and mother will be so grateful."

From the beginning the tide of compassion had flowed peculiarly in the Harlingood family, one in which it appeared to be of particular moment whose ox was gored.

When the father was being ridiculed it was Fane and her mother who were most eager to give the prisoner his liberty; now

that they were being toasted over the keen fire of his ungainly wit, the father changed his mind. He had had a few moments on the side lines to observe the unequal battle and he had been doing some quick thinking. He now came forward ponderously and with an assumption of compassion.

"Perhaps, Welling," he said, coughing hesitantly, "it might be better to let him go. In fact, I have decided not to prosecute."

"What!" cried Jack, astonished at the quick flop from unrelenting animosity to this merciful consideration. He did not realize that Mr. Harlingood had enjoyed several minutes of advance sampling of what the family might expect in court from such an unbridled tongue.

Of course, the rogue richly deserved the worst that could be meted out to him, but, concluded he who in the last analysis would be responsible for the family honor, there should be a discretion employed in all prosecution, and after reflection this seemed to be the place for a very wise discretion.

"I think, the law will be satisfied," continued Mr. Harlingood, "if you permit him to go. No actual harm has been done. He has no stolen goods; the check has not been cashed. Return it to him and he can go his way. I am a mild-mannered man, and while I realize my duty to the community it does not seem to me that in this instance the probable notoriety would warrant my seizure of this—this—person."

The "person" chuckled deeply at this and looked to Una. She felt ashamed of herself for meeting his eye with a responsive twinkle.

Jack was not eager to let the fellow go. In fact, he may be suspected at that moment of purposely delaying the negotiations in anticipation of the arrival of the police, for whom he had phoned and who were already unaccountably detained. While he doubtless desired to retain Fane's good graces, still he could not be anxious to let escape so notable a criminal, whose taking could only redound to his lasting benefit, and also help him in earning the respect of her family.

"I haven't searched him carefully," temporized Jack. "He may have other jewelry about him."

"Impossible," said the father decisively. "All the jewelry is at the Provident Loan."

"Henry," admonished Mrs. Harlingood, nettled at the indiscreet tongue of her spouse.

It was too late.

"Wouldn't that skin you," remarked Prince, as it were sotto voce to Una, "and me putting up a first-class game!"

Mr. Harlingood was oblivious of his comment, so anxious was he now to terminate the disgraceful and exceedingly distressful episode.

"My dear boy," he advanced and placed a hand intimately on Welling's arm, "I would very much appreciate it if you will take him outside and turn him loose."

"Yes, Jack," pleaded Fane, "you must let him go. You know you said yourself you have no right to hold him unless father says so, and father won't prosecute."

Seeing that the scales were all but turned, Mrs. Harlingood decided to enter the balance. She came forward.

"You really owe it to us, Mr. Welling," she insisted.

Confronted thus by a united family which he had so long wished to placate, and which had so long opposed him, Jack may be excused for yielding to the pressure.

At that moment the clang of a police ambulance sounded distinctly from the street. No one but Jack apparently noticed it. Perhaps the ears of the others were not educated as were his to the sound. At last, he concluded, his call was answered. Let him delay only a minute or two more, without seeming to oppose the family he had every desire to keep as friends, and the matter would be placed altogether beyond his jurisdiction.

Jack searched his pockets for the key to the handcuffs and while doing so amiably glanced from one to another of the Harlingoods. One and all they registered the friendliest concern. He felt at last that he was one of them, but he proposed to let them know, even while he made his sacrifice, just what he was doing for their dear sakes, and remarked:

"It will cost me the best chance I ever had to make good, but if it means anything to Fane or those she loves, I am willing to

step aside, especially as I have the legal right to do so."

By this time he had found the key. He stepped up to Prince and unlocked the irons, slipping them from his wrists with a deft motion and throwing them carelessly on the library center table where they jangled with an ominous sound.

At the same time he slapped the prisoner heartily on the back.

"There, my man," he exclaimed indulgently. "You are free!"

To the consternation of every one, instead of moving the captive stood more firmly, though he did show signs of gratitude at having his hands freed and moved them about with apparent delight. His immediate concern seemed to be Una; he looked over with anxiety to her, where she had remained throughout the scene ensconced in a huge chair.

In Una's eyes he seemed to read that which pleased him not. She appeared, like the others, eager for him to go, and this caused him to shake his head, as if in disapproval of himself. Had he sufficiently shown her how a "crook works the business end of his calling?"

He answered his own question by turning to Jack.

"Aren't you going to arrest me?" he asked.

"No," replied Jack, opening the door. "Get out," and he stood aside.

"Not when you got the goods on me?"

"No. Get out."

Prince moved threateningly on his captor.

"Young fellow," he glowered. "I'll report you at headquarters."

"Quit that bluffing, Connors," and Jack motioned toward the door. "You're free. Go!"

Prince looked over slyly at Una. He noted the consternation she revealed and seemed satisfied. Fane, overeager to terminate the dreadful scene, rushed at him, exclaiming:

"Don't you want to be free?"

"Me? Now? He smiled at her. "I guess not."

He continued to Welling:

"You've got to run me in, young fellow. I'll never get another chance like this," and

he turned on Mrs. Harlingood, eying her suggestively.

Whether it was a hypnotic effect of his eye or some correlating idea she could never say, but certain it is that Mrs. Harlingood screamed instantly:

"Blackmail! He wants money to keep this out of the papers!"

She ran her hands through her hair, in desperation. Her overwrought nerves had broken.

"Scoundrel!" cried Mr. Harlingood.

Fane instantly removed her earrings, pretty but worthless little things of lapis lazuli.

"I've nothing but these," she apologized as she offered them to Prince.

He took them with a grimace.

"What a terrible man! What perversion!" continued the mother, frantically searching in her pocket for the small change she kept for marketing, and producing a few coins which she offered him humbly.

"This is all I have—truly," she implored.

He grabbed them from her.

At the same moment Mr. Harlingood fumbled in his waistcoat and produced an old gold timepiece, one that had come to him from his father, and on which the case from much use was as thin as paper.

"Perhaps it's the easiest way," he murmured, giving a long loving farewell look at his heirloom, as he passed it over to the wondering Prince.

Arthur stood moodily in the background. He had nothing to offer, and he would not have offered it if he had, he afterward declared.

Prince held the pitiful ransom in his broad hand and looked at it, greatly amused. Then he moved to the table and laid them beside the handcuffs: the lapis lazuli earrings, the small change and the gold watch. To complete the swag he removed from his pocket the box of safety matches, opened it, took out the ring and spread that alongside the earrings which Fane had given him. As Fane saw this her heart failed her and she sobbed.

While Prince was laying out his haul he looked across the table narrowly at Una. He saw there only fright, even horror. This,

apparently, was the thing that interested him chiefly, for he now quickly turned his back on her and on the table, again facing the Harlingoods.

"Folks," said he. "I allow its pretty mean of me to scare you, but you do me wrong if you think I want your stuff. I never asked for it. There it is, and the ring, too. Take it—"

Before he could say more the heavy sound of a quick tread coming up the stairs startled all, and an instant later a uniformed policeman appeared in the open door.

"There was a call from this number," said the officer, "but nobody responded to my knock. I saw the outer door open and I came on up. Looks as if I'd found the right place."

He stepped well in and looked meaningly at Prince.

"It's all a mistake, officer," amiably responded Prince. "No trouble here but a little family party, that's all."

The officer looked about. The appearance of the Harlingoods did not indicate ease or happiness. Finally he saw Jack, who stood near the door and thus was the last to catch his eye. In Welling he recognized one whom he had seen at headquarters the day before.

"What's up?" he asked. "Aren't you from the D. A.'s office?"

"Yes," said Jack. "We thought this fellow looked like Joe Connors, the con man, but he has nothing on him, and Mr. Harlingood here, the owner of the house, has no charge to make, so I don't see how we can trouble you."

"Connors!" exclaimed the officer, and looked Prince over thoroughly. "Sure enough, he does answer the description. He's too rare a bird to let go. I'll take him with me. The inspector knows Connors well and is waiting down in the wagon. He'll identify the man and spare you the trouble. Come, you!" And the officer waved Prince toward the door with his stick.

Prince looked toward Una and saw that despair had succeeded her horror. He turned to the officer to protest, when further action was arrested by the sound of a

brisk little skirt swishing along the hall to be immediately followed by a brisk little knock on the open door.

CHAPTER XXX.

AUNT BELLE.

IN the confusion and conflicting interests no one appeared willing to assume authority except the policeman, who, after a moment, said, boldly:

"Come in."

Whereupon there entered a tiny old woman, "not bigger than a pint of cider," to use Prince's phrase. Though the wrinkles on her face indicated age, nothing else about her seemed more than fifty, and her hair, which was as black as coal, not even that.

She appeared like an apparition from a previous generation. It was as though one of the belles of the old St. Opposite from forty years ago had come to life. Her straight black hair was combed across a lovely forehead and parted nicely in the middle under a high old poke bonnet trimmed in Spanish lace.

A trim black silk was cut to fit her charming little slender bust like a boy's coat, in the style of long ago, far beyond the days of big sleeves for women; while the silk gathered and flowed from the waist with rippling cadence and in a style that was of no period at all, but made for all time. Her hands were protected by black net mitts, which came only to the second knuckle.

Her eyes glanced from under the poke bonnet with the piercing directness of an Indian's, and she seemed to devour the situation in a trice, though interested in only one of the persons present. This was Prince and she went to him, apologetically, holding out her arms.

"Aunt Belle!" he cried.

"Johnny!" said she, and they embraced.

"My!" she exclaimed, holding him off at arm's length and looking him over to be sure he was all there. "I never was so glad to see you in all my life. Had a fearful time in Cleveland. Everybody's dead out there; said it was time for me to die,

too, but I told them I would not think of it until you got tired of me. So I came right on to the St. Opposite.

"Oh, Johnny, I'm plumb disappointed in the St. Opposite. It's not like it used to be. They told me you were across the street and had left word for me, so I came right over. The door was open and nobody answered my knock and I came right in, only a policeman in a wagon asked me what I wanted, and I told him I was looking for my nephew, John C. Prince of Tulsa, Oklahoma, who lived here, and he laughed, but I came right on—and here I am."

The patrolman seemed amused and a bit puzzled, but he was no more puzzled nor as much so as every member of the Harlingood family. Una alone was uplifted. She had no doubts.

Prince, whose chief concern always was with her, saw the uplift on her countenance and was at peace with all the world, but only for an instant. He soon was dragged rudely from his thoughts by the voice of the policeman who touched him with the stick and said in an easy manner, but in an unmistakably businesslike tone:

"Come on, Connors."

"Stop this nonsense," roared the big fellow, "I'm not Connors;" but he saw the stern look on the officer's face and then the question on his aunt's.

"What is it, Johnny?" she asked meekly.

"It's a joke, aunty, I guess," responded Prince, but the sweat now stood out on his forehead as he hesitated, searching for words to tell her. The uniform made a difference. He could cope with Welling, palpably a boy, but this man in brass buttons, with a big stick and wearing a large badge of authority, made him timorous.

"It's this way," said Prince, grinning awkwardly and speaking to the little old lady who stood close to him as if to shield him, "I rented this house from these good people here and it turns out they think I'm a burglar or a con man or something. Don't believe my check's any good; think I want to blackmail 'em; try to make me out a jailbird.

"Why they even sent for the police. That's why this fellow is here. And it looks as if I would have to go with him to

headquarters and clear it up. It's a pity, too, for it's a bit different reception than I planned for you."

He concluded the confession weakly, with a sort of half confession of shame and guilt, while she stood guardedly beside him darting her eagle glance about the room.

"Come along then," persisted the officer amiably. "You can tell your aunt all about it at the visitor's room at the station if you want," and he jerked his head in the familiar manner employed with old offenders, the manner which plainly says, "the jig's up."

This roused the old lady to fighting pitch.

"Don't you dare lay your hands on John C. Prince!" she cried. "You put the weight of your little finger on him and I'll see that your blue clothes and brass buttons are snatched from you like candy from a baby.

"Get out of here, I say! You old blunderhead, you, trying to annoy a man rich enough to buy your old police department and your rotten old city, too, and wear it around for a watch-fob."

She advanced with such fury that the officer stepped back a bit and looked over at Welling with a wink as much as to say that this was a queer one and wondering just how to manage her without bloodshed.

She, however, seeing that her onslaught was at least initially successful, was doing the thinking for all of them.

"Go down," she ordered the officer, "by the front stoop and ask that fellow there to come here. He's got more brains than you have. He'll have sense enough to see what's what. I got that out of him in one minute."

She turned from the patrolman and Welling with contempt and back to her beloved "Johnny," as if to shield him from further threat.

The patrolman looked at Welling sheepishly.

"She means the inspector," he said, "perhaps that is a good idea. If this is Prince and the old lady's right we don't want to make a mistake. The inspector knows Connors. I'll get him; you watch."

The patrolman slipped out.

' Satisfied with this demonstration of her efficiency the old lady turned to her nephew.

"Now, Johnny," she said in a voice all honey sweetness, in sharp contrast to its previous insistence, "introduce me to your friends."

"Sure," said Prince with a partial return of his jovial manner; and Una, watching from the corner, could not fail to note that the presence of the old lady brought back all of his initial ease and certainty. "This is Mrs. Henry Harlingood and her daughter, Miss Fane. This is Mr. Harlingood and his son, Arthur, and over here"—he indicated the huge chair in the corner with a wide gesture—"is Miss Una Devon, their cousin."

All looked blankly, except Una, who smiled sweetly. Prince spoke to them inclusively, while he motioned magnificently toward the little old lady.

"This," concluded he, "is my Aunt Belle I told you of"; but he received a vigorous and protesting jerk from her black-mitted hand, and added hastily: "Miss Abigail Arbella Haynes, of Tulsa, Oklahoma."

Even this did not exactly suit her for she finished the definition precisely by saying, "formerly of Benton Falls, Massachusetts. My mother was an Adams and my father's mother came of the Rutherford stock. His father was lieutenant colonel of the third Massachusetts in the war of 1812, and his father served under Pitcairn at the battle of Bunker Hill."

Mrs. Harlingood alone pricked up her ears at this. Fane was by this time quite prostrated; Mr. Harlingood had given up all idea of resistance to the catastrophe of notoriety, which he considered now but a few minutes off.

Arthur was too deeply disgusted to show more than a casual concern. It was plain to him that the "aunt" was only an ingenious accomplice and he was too personally concerned in the matter to have any sympathy for or little interest in her.

But Mrs. Harlingood thought she saw a glimmer of light, which was brightened the next moment by the further remarks of the queer little old lady who, whether one

were willing or not to believe her story, well acted the part of a *passée* maiden who had cherished for half a century the all but forgotten records of a dead and dying generation.

She whom Prince had introduced as Miss Haynes felt this response in the matron of the house and advanced to her unctuously.

"Did my nephew say 'Mrs. Henry Harlingood'?" she inquired.

Mrs. Harlingood glanced at Welling, saw him shake his head and hold up his hands in derision; and therefore nodded rather coldly, though there was such sweet gentility and repose in the little old lady that the woman whose social position had never been questioned until now instinctively felt drawn to her.

Miss Haynes, however, took the nod for the word and immediately poured forth a voluble reference.

"I remember reading about your wedding," she said, "it was the 10th of September, 1881, was it not?"

This remarkable coincidence brought a start from Mrs. Harlingood, who could not help saying, "yes."

Gratified, the inhabitant of the poke bonnet rattled on.

"And your maiden name was Burhans, Emily Burhans, if I remember correctly."

The look of amazement on Mrs. Harlingood's countenance was evidence that she did remember correctly.

"And your elder brother, Watson Thorn-dyke Burhans, married Evangeline Everett, of Brookline, and Evangeline Everett's mother was a Rutherford, the one first cousin of my father's mother. They were born in neighboring houses in Benton Falls and went to school together. I have often heard my grandmother speak of Evangeline Everett. Now, let's see. That would make me your fourth cousin by marriage, wouldn't it?"

Though Mrs. Harlingood was doubtless astounded, Prince was more affected than any one by his aunt's revelation.

"By the Holy Saint Peter, Aunt Belle," he exclaimed, "I did get in right, didn't I? You often said I wouldn't be able to pick the real thing, but I did. I may never have had your advantages, may never have

been East before, but I guess blood will tell all right. So the Harlingoods are right into the Four Hundred, and no mistake."

"Four Hundred!" replied his aunt scornfully. "Mrs. Harlingood is of better New England blood than any of the Four Hundred ever thought of having. Four Hundred, huh! Have I not often warned you against using such slangy talk?"

She gave him a look that squelched him and Prince retired for the moment, abashed.

Miss Haynes returned to her fourth cousin, by marriage, and reached forth her hands, heartily declaring that she felt as if she were participating in a family reunion.

Mrs. Harlingood again was unable to decide on her mode of procedure. If, by any chance, all this preposterous story were true, if Prince were not a criminal, if he did possess the forty, or was it fifty millions, if this queer old creature were his aunt, and if she were also Mrs. Harlingood's fourth cousin, even by marriage, this was the best possible moment to establish a lasting *entente cordiale*.

On the other hand she had been repeatedly that afternoon chagrined and degraded, and she dreaded another mistake. But the personality of the little old lady was masterful and Mrs. Harlingood was impelled to answer the greeting of both hands by at least one hand, which she felt to be in the nature of a diplomatic compromise.

However, before the ladies could grasp each other's hands Welling had called out sharply:

"Nonsense, Mrs. Harlingood, don't be hoaxed any more. This woman is only an accomplice of Connors and a very clever swindler. Don't let yourself forget that he has practically confessed his previous crimes, asserted his intention to make use of your name in further criminal notoriety, that he has refused your offers of clemency, that he has humiliated and outraged you beyond expression. Wait one minute and the inspector will be here to lock them up."

Welling walked over to the window and opened it to look out that he might discover what was keeping the inspector.

Miss Haynes paused, utterly inert for the moment, and without deigning even to glance toward Welling, she narrowly watched Mrs. Harlingood. That worthy matron could not prevent her tired aristocratic face from showing the keen anguish Welling's words occasioned and the ancient maiden saw unmistakably that the young man had spoken truth.

She turned on Prince like a catamount, her eyes blazing, her ninety pounds of tense fierceness rendering eloquent that well-known assertion that "the female of the species is more deadly than the male."

"What have you been up to, Johnny?" she cried. "Is all this true?"

He hung his head listlessly in shamed protest.

She seized his huge frame, more than twice as large as hers, and shook him with high nervous force.

"You ought to be whipped," she continued, "and I promised your dead mother to bring you up like a gentleman! I never could do a thing with you. You're rude, and you joke and you wear those diamonds like a ruffian. No one would ever believe you had a mite of decent blood in you. You're no better than a desperado, a cattleman, a miner. I disown you; I'll never speak to you again. Why did you do it? Why? Why?"

She had exhausted herself and sank sobbing into his arms. He soothed her as he might a tired child, and in the accent of remorse and repentance he tried to explain.

"It was on account of Miss Devon, Aunt Belle," he said. "I saw 'em imposing on her here, and she such a helpless little tike, and she looks like my Aurory, and I got mad at 'em, and I plumb forgot. I just wanted to put 'em in their place and make 'em suffer like they'd made her suffer.

"And then she got uppity, too. She's only a girl, aunty, and girls don't know much, so she hopped on the idea I was a con man and wanted to reform me right off the bat. Now, you know I can't abide that sort of a mess from women. Let 'em leave criminals alone for men to look after. And I thought I'd teach her a lesson at the same time. And then the police came and you, and the whole stuff was in the

soup. There! There! Please don't cry any more. I'll never do it again."

Her sobbing ceased, and she looked up at him with deep reproach while he produced a big lavender-bordered handkerchief with which she dried her eyes.

"Oh, Johnny!" she moaned. "If I take you back, will you promise never to leave me again? You never know how to take care of yourself with refined folks."

"I promise, Aunt Belle," he said dutifully.

"But," she said, drawing away from him and a further sense of the outrage coming to her, "how am I ever going to teach you not to meddle in other people's business? Haven't you enough of your own?"

Without pause, and giving him no opportunity to answer, she turned again to the bewildered Mrs. Harlingood.

"Oh, Mrs. Harlingood," she pleaded, "for the sake of his dead mother, who I assure you was the sweetest, truest woman that ever lived, do forgive him. He's nothing but a self-made man, Johnny isn't, nothing but a millionaire, and he's a terrible trial to me; but please be Christian and forgive him, for he's right gentle inside when you know him better; honestly he is."

Mrs. Harlingood again looked to Welling, and saw there only cynical derision. Fortunately for her she was not compelled to decide her own answer at that moment, for the patrolman now returned and with him appeared a gray-haired, keen-faced man, in the undress uniform of the police department.

"Good afternoon, Inspector Donovan," said Welling respectfully.

"Hello, Welling," responded the inspector. "Which is Connors?"

Welling pointed out the crestfallen Prince, who did look, at that moment, very like a detected thief; but the inspector thought differently. He gave Prince only one keen glance.

"I'm very sorry," said the inspector. "You're mistaken, Welling. I know Connors well. This is not your man."

The inspector now held out his hand to the late prisoner.

"I must apologize to you for the error

of the police department, Mr. Prince. You do bear a slight resemblance to a suspect on our list. This young fellow is a bit green and his overzeal, I fear, led him astray."

Prince's manner now suddenly changed. His jovial smile came out like a sun from behind the clouds. He shook the offered hand heartily.

"Ain't your name Donovan?" he asked.

"Yes," admitted the inspector. "I'm glad you remember me. I met you two years ago at the International Oilmen's Convention in Denver City. Do you place me?"

"Sure thing."

"Drop in and see me some time, at the Thirtieth Precinct headquarters around the corner. You'll always be welcome. And don't be too hard on the young fellow; he meant well."

The patrolman had long since slunk out, and the inspector now followed him, with a curt nod to the assembled Harlingoods. The father had come to life. Arthur had curiously resumed his initial listless and confident pose of a successfully bored man of affairs.

Fane had sidled over toward Jack to be sympathetically near him in his extremity, while her mother appeared to have forgotten the iniquity of Welling in a sudden desire to do obeisance to Aunt Belle.

The inspector's back was no sooner turned than Prince seized the idle handcuffs which lay on the table. He slipped one quickly over Jack's wrist and the other over Fane's, and locked them securely.

"There, young fellow," he exclaimed—"that's the best catch you'll ever make." He placed the little diamond in Jack's hand. "Put that where it belongs," he added jovially.

"Johnny," protested Miss Haynes hopelessly, "now you're up to your rough tricks again. And only right after promising me to try to behave like a gentleman."

Prince was himself once more, however, and at one with his world.

"Hush, Aunt Belle," he chided banteringly. "I never promised not to hitch up any young couple I happen to see that need splicing and deserve it like these two do."

"But you should consider the feelings of the young lady's mother," primly resisted the little old lady who stood stanchly at the side of her fourth cousin by marriage.

Prince included Mrs. Harlingood with an expansive smile which as much as said he freely forgave her for all he had done to her, and laughingly replied:

"Mother won't object when I give them a good home to start in, and"—he turned to the manacled pair—"say, Welling," he asked in a businesslike manner, "what kind of a job do you think you'd like? I'll start you at most anything you want, but if you take my advice you'll leave detecting to the regular sheriff."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"MY AURORY!"

TO describe the individual feelings of the several Harlingoods at this moment would require far greater space than should be allotted now to so voluminous a subject. Whether it was relief, chagrin, apprehension, or only a reborn desire to make available any opportunity cast their way by fate, or a mingling of all these that dominated them, it is, however, certain that henceforth they indicated only the warmest respect for their guest—or was he tenant? tenant?

This latter question was promptly answered by Prince, who addressed Mr. Harlingood, and by tactful ignorance of the late relations with Arthur in the assumed character of secretary, immediately won the owner of the mansion by asking if he still had it in mind to lease his house.

To this Mr. Harlingood replied, with a decent amount of reserve, that he would not be unwilling to accommodate a man of such high standing as John C. Prince, whereupon the favorite nephew of Miss Abigail Arbella Haynes relieved the Harlingood tension by remarking loudly so all could hear:

"Fine! Then I keep the house. That's settled. Now, you'll find my check's all right, so we'll go right along as if nothing had happened."

He paused, then added, chuckling:

"Of course, I may need a new batch of help, even to a rat-catcher," and was gratified to get a sickly response to his radiant smile.

But he covered up any embarrassment that might have been felt by asking them all if they would let him have the library to himself.

"I want to talk with Miss Devon—alone," he said; and the Harlingoods obligingly retired, followed by Miss Haynes.

Of all those in the room, Una was doubtless the one most anxious to leave, yet she was the only one he asked to stay. If he had anything more severe to say to her in private than he had said to them in public, she felt that she could not endure it; and yet she richly deserved anything that he should choose to mete out to her.

Her chagrin in the barber-shop at discovering how petty were her suspicions of him was as nothing to the mortification she now endured for her grosser misjudgment. When he said that he would like to see her alone she sank back into the chair inert.

Prince closed the door and came over to the table which, she gratefully realized, stood between them. She knew he was looking at her and waiting for her to respond, but she lacked the courage to meet his eyes. Had she not, as he had well said, "made a mess" of trying to help a criminal get away; and a double mess, for he was not a criminal, and he would not have deserved to get away if he had been one?

The softness of his tone was a relief. She had expected it to be hard, but it was not.

"Miss Devon," he said, after quite an interval, during which the silence became oppressive. She looked up and saw him in a melting mood, his luminous eyes soft, and this frightened her.

This was the first man she had ever met who frightened her: there was something about him that carried her far beyond herself, beyond her reason. She was panicky; she wanted to run, to get away, to be alone, to have time to recover in silence. Yet there she was pinned in that huge chair, and he looking over at her disarmingly in

a tender mood (she could more easily have endured roughness) and with the door closed.

"Miss Devon," he repeated slowly, "I want to ask you about that sympathy you spoke of. You know the very worst about me now. I'm not a criminal. I'm hardly worthy of your attention. I'm only a slob millionaire; Petroleum Prince from Oklahoma."

"Please," she pleaded, "please don't make any more fun of me!"

"I'm very serious," he added gravely. "I want to know; I must know from you if now, after you know the worst, you think you might get anything *personal* into that sympathy?"

She struggled out of the chair. She must make a fight for it now. She came around the table and ignored the implication in his question and tried to be businesslike as she replied:

"I know you think I'm a little fool, and of course you never could have any confidence in my being a good enough judge of human nature to manage a hotel; but I do want to go on with the St. Opposite, if you don't change your mind," she added, her lip trembling. "I could hardly blame you if you did."

"Manager of the St. Opposite!" he exclaimed. "Did you think I'd let you do that? Never! I've something else in mind for you, *only*—"

It was his turn to be abashed and awkward like a schoolboy. It was in this mood that she afterward said she "adored" him.

She was excited and hardly knew what she said as she interposed:

"I do hope you can forgive me for all the mistaken ideas I have had about you."

"Forgive you?" he cried, seizing her hands and laughing delightedly as he felt that she did not resist him. "Why, I've been looking for you for eleven years—yes, all my life!"

She held off, abashed, and murmured something, she never could remember just what. He evidently did not hear it, for the next instant he blurted out:

"Don't you know you're the spitten image of the picture on that soap-box? You're my Aurory!"

This acted on her like a stimulant. She looked at him clearly, and a tiny wistful smile twisted up the corners of her mouth.

"I never knew what kind of a man I'd like," she answered, "because I never saw one like you before, but if I had—then"—she hesitated, and concluded with a bit of a laugh—"then I am sure I would have known."

What happened then and later that evening, after they had dined together on the Waldorf roof, is a matter outside the province of this chronicle to relate. They never told more than merely bits of conversation.

The checks proved highly acceptable at any bank, and both Mr. Henry Harlingood and Mr. Roger B. Stakes decided to retain them.

Mr. Stakes, be it observed, took longer to make his decision than did Mr. Harlingood, but when his broker told him he was getting a quarter more than the St. Opposite was worth in the open market he decided to let the bargain stand.

The hotel was one of Una's wedding gifts, among the others being a diamond solitaire almost as large as the one Prince had formerly worn. Curiously, he stopped wearing diamonds entirely shortly after that, and Aunt Belle never ceased to remind him querulously that he cared more for his bride than for her because he never stopped wearing diamonds as long as she alone insisted.

He laughingly admitted this, declaring he had waited for more authoritative feminine decision. But there is no conflict between Aunt Belle and the present Mrs.

John C. Prince. They have a mutual object of devotion.

"Petroleum" bought the Harlingood mansion, and made a present of it to Miss Haynes, and has given her, in addition, the income on a million with which to maintain it in its former splendor. This she does, assisted by Mrs. Harlingood, who still retains her home there, and where, to all intents and purposes, the Harlingoods still reign, for Aunt Belle had made Mr. and Mrs. Harlingood her permanent guests, and in return has had no difficulty in making her way among the social circle which alone can appreciate her.

The Chink who managed the Oklahoma ranch left last year, and in his place was installed Jack Welling at fifteen thousand dollars a year; and when he left to undertake his new work his wife and their first-born, one year old, went with him.

Arthur, thanks to his well-known intimacy with that picturesque Western character, Petroleum Prince, has secured a peculiar and enviable position as confidential adviser to a prominent firm of brokers in oil stocks, and his mother is justly proud of his facile dealings in high finance.

On their first wedding anniversary John C. Prince presented his bride with a new home quite some distance up the avenue from the old Harlingood mansion and in the heart of the most exclusive residence section of the metropolis. A little later he secured from a foreign agent, with whom he had been in correspondence, that most valuable of Bouguereau's exquisite masterpieces, "Aurora," and it was hung in the drawing-room of Una's home the very day that John C. Prince, Jr., was born.

(The End.)

MID OCEAN—AFTER A STORM

WHITE clouds that muse, drowsed in the morning light—
Ethereal fragments from the wind-swept night;
In the boat's wake each billow's ebbing crest
Shot through with colors like the rainbow's breast.

No fringe of land to blot the boundless view;
A world of water, domed with tranquil blue;
And mystery wedded to melodious art,
In the soft beating of the ocean's heart.

William H. Hayne.



With the Best of Intentions

By Lee Bertrand

I.

MRS. PALMENTER frowned at her niece in strong disapproval.

"It is all very well to be patriotic, my dear," she said, "but for a young girl of your gentle up-bringing to be riding around town with a lot of strange soldiers—"

"Not a lot of them, aunt," Nella cut in with a laugh. "I never take on more than one or two at a time. There isn't room in the runabout for a crowd."

"I call it positively scandalous," the elder woman continued, ignoring the interruption. "I think you must have taken leave of your senses to do such a thing. When your uncle presented you with the car he certainly did not intend that you should use it as a public hack. Several of the neighbors have observed your carrying on, my dear, and have called my—"

"Bother the neighbors!" Nella exclaimed, her blue eyes flashing. "They're the kind of people who think that they have fully served their country by standing up when the Star-Spangled Banner is played, and hanging out a flag on the Fourth of July. Anybody who can see anything wrong about my giving a lift now and again to a tired soldier-boy ought to be locked up in a concentration-camp—present company excepted, of course."

"Seriously speaking, Aunt Martha," the girl continued, "you are really making a big fuss about nothing. It isn't as though I—er—went out deliberately looking for soldiers to ride in my car. But when I am motoring alone, and I happen to be hailed by a man in uniform who courteously asks me to carry him to or from the camp, I—well, how could I very well refuse?"

"Those dear, brave boys are doing so much for us that we women ought to be eager to render them a service whenever an opportunity presents itself. Nothing that we can do to make their lot a little easier ought to be too much for us."

Mrs. Palmenter shrugged her shoulders.

"There may be something in your viewpoint, but—er—one has to consider the conventions," she declared. "Especially when a young woman is as good as engaged to be married—"

"But I am not as good as engaged to be married," Nella interrupted. "You are referring, of course, to that disagreeable cousin of yours, Sylvester Barnes. I have told you repeatedly, Aunt Martha, that I am not at all in favor of your plan to get rid of me by marrying me off to that—that slacker."

"I am not seeking to get rid of you. Don't talk ridiculously, Nella. You know very well that since the death of your

parents you have been as welcome here as if you were our own daughter. But Sylvester Barnes is an estimable young man. Your uncle says that he is very prosperous in business. In every way it would be an excellent match. And as for calling him a slacker, that is hardly fair. Is it the poor boy's fault that he has flat feet and weak eyes?"

"I am inclined to suspect that his feet are more cold than flat," Nella remarked, spitefully. "At all events it was positively disgusting to behold his obvious joy and relief when the draft board rejected him. I made up my mind then that I would rather die an old maid than become the wife of such an undesirable citizen." Her blue eyes twinkled. "I told him so, too, in plain, unvarnished terms."

Mrs. Palmenter was shocked.

"That explains why we haven't seen anything of him for the past few weeks," she muttered deprecatingly. "I was wondering what was keeping him away. How could you do such a thing, Nella! You must write to him immediately and apologize!"

Mrs. Palmenter was a strong-minded woman who ruled her household with a rod of iron. Her husband was as clay in her hands; her niece, despite her spirit, was more or less afraid of her; even the cook quailed under her displeasure. There came now a glint to her eyes and a look of determination to her austere countenance.

"You will write to him at once, and tell him that you are sorry that you hurt his feelings," she insisted. "You will assure him that you—no, you had better make it we—that we shall all be glad to see him whenever he cares to call."

"Oh, very well; I will write that if you wish," Nella assented with a shrug. "I suppose I was a bit more rude to him than was necessary, and if you want him to call at the house I have no right to keep him away. But I tell you flatly, Aunt Martha, that I am not going to marry him, no matter how much he pesters me with his attentions."

"We will discuss that later, my dear," was the cold response. "In the mean time, I want you to promise me that in future

when you go out alone in your runabout you will avoid the roads between here and the camp. Then there will be less danger of your meeting any tired soldiers and having demands made on your—er—patriotism."

"But I like to ride past the encampment," the girl objected, pouting.

"You will give me your promise, or you will not be permitted to take out the car without an escort," was the stern ultimatum.

Nella surrendered. In justice to her it must be said that she faithfully adhered to her promise, too. From that day on, when she went for a spin in her runabout, she resolutely resisted the temptation to head for Van Cortlandt Park, the site of the military camp.

Fate, however, seemed to be against Mrs. Palmenter. In the first place, several weeks went by without any word from young Mr. Barnes, in response to Nella's note of apology. And although the girl continued to avoid the roads which led to the encampment, she nevertheless, when out motoring not infrequently encountered men in uniform who courteously asked her for a "lift." It seemed impossible to travel along any road without meeting a soldier.

Such requests were always promptly and cheerfully granted. Nella had not promised her aunt to refuse them. It would have been impossible to have exacted such a promise from her. She would have let herself be burned at the stake before she would have consented to compel a weary warrior to walk when it lay in her power to save him the exertion. Even if the soldier happened to be young and handsome it did not detract from her patriotic fervor.

II.

NELLA had motored out to Hastings-on-the-Hudson, two towns north of the Van Cortlandt camp, one evening, and had just turned to begin the homeward trip when a tall, good-looking, young man in khaki approached the red runabout.

"Guess I'll travel with you, partner, if you've no objection," he said in a mat-

ter-of-fact tone, as he jumped on the running-board. "I want to get back to the camp, and as you seem to be going—"

He stopped short, with sudden embarrassment.

"I beg your pardon, miss," he apologized. "I didn't notice—er—I supposed at first I was talking to a man. I don't know how I came to make such a queer mistake, I'm sure."

"This cap and duster I'm wearing probably misled you," said Nella with a laugh. "But does it make any difference—the fact that I'm a girl, I mean? I am going as far as Van Cortlandt Park and shall be glad to take you to the camp."

The soldier hesitated. She thought at first that he was going to refuse; then, with a slight shrug, he swung into the seat beside her.

"If you are sure that I sha'n't be intruding I shall be glad to avail myself of your kind offer," he said.

They rode for a while in silence. Nella's passenger appeared to be a very taciturn young man. Either he was the most bashful member of Uncle Sam's army she had ever met, she told herself, or else he was trying to make it clear to her that he had no intention of presuming on her kindness by forcing himself on her acquaintance.

It was the girl who broke the ice.

"I suppose you have been visiting friends in Hastings?" she remarked.

Her companion nodded.

"Yes; I went up there to take dinner with—my fiancée," he informed her.

"Oh, you are engaged to be married!" Nella's eyes twinkled. "Is that why you hesitated about riding in this car when you discovered that there was a girl at the wheel?"

"That was one of the reasons," he confessed simply. "Of course I was considering the matter from your standpoint, too. I didn't like to force my company on you. But I must admit that the lady I am going to marry is—er—of a very jealous disposition. If it should happen to reach her ears that I was seen riding in a runabout with a pretty girl at my side, it might put me in rather bad with her."

"But you could explain."

The soldier laughed deprecatingly.

"That might not be so easy as you imagine. Irene—her name is Irene—is—er—very exacting. She thinks that when a man is engaged he has no right to as much as look at another woman. I am afraid my explanation would hardly satisfy her. Naturally she would be somewhat incredulous if I attempted to make her believe that I mistook you for a man when I hailed you."

"Then why did you finally decide to ride with me?" Nella asked whimsically. "Aren't you taking an awful chance?"

Her companion shrugged his broad shoulders.

"It isn't very likely that Irene will hear of it. Anyway, a soldier has to take chances, you know. I am in a hurry to get back to the camp, and yours was the only car in sight."

From the expression that came to Nella's pretty face it was evident that she was not greatly pleased by his frank response. There followed another long pause, as the red runabout sped over the dark roads.

"Is she very pretty?" Nella asked presently.

"The most beautiful woman in the world," the man declared, rapturously. He laughed. "I suppose you're thinking that's a bit strong, but—well, I'll show you her picture and you can judge for yourself."

He produced a wallet from a pocket in his uniform and took therefrom an unmounted photograph. As he drew out the print an oblong slip of yellow paper fell from the wallet to the floor of the car, but neither of them noticed that occurrence.

"She certainly is beautiful," Nella declared, in all sincerity, as she held the picture so that the light of the incandescent lamp over the speedometer fell on it. "No wonder you are so afraid of losing her. Unless this photograph flatters—"

"Flatters! It falls far short of doing her justice. It's a fairly good likeness of her, as photographs go, but, of course the camera has its limitations. It would take a portrait painter to give you a real idea of what she looks like, and even the greatest of artists couldn't make good if he

tried to reproduce on canvas the wonderful coloring of her auburn hair and blue eyes, to say nothing of her peaches-and-cream complexion."

"I suppose you have known her for a long while?" Nella asked.

"About six months. I met her in the office where she is employed as a stenographer. She has been working since her husband's death—"

"Oh, she is a widow—"

"A widow with three children. Of course that's nothing against her," he said. "I know lots of men who have married widows with—er—families, and have been very happy. I have never seen the children—they are being taken care of by a married sister out West—but I understand they are little angels.

"They must be, if they resemble their mother in looks and disposition. Except for her jealousy, Irene has the sweetest disposition of any woman I have ever met."

For the rest of the trip he continued to talk about his fiancée. His companion no longer had cause to complain of his taciturnity. She would have preferred to have him tell her more about himself and his life in the army, but found it impossible to divert him from the subject of the fair Irene. They arrived at Van Cortlandt Park long before he had exhausted that topic, and Nella parted from him without even learning his name or his company.

It was not until she was half way home that the girl noticed the oblong slip of yellow paper on the floor of the car. She picked it up and examined it curiously. It was the first time in her life that she had ever held a pawn-ticket in her hand and at first she was puzzled by what was printed and written on the paper.

Gradually, however, the truth dawned on her. One Sol Baumgart, whose name and address were printed at the top of the ticket, had accommodated a Mr. John Smith with the loan of seven dollars, and the article pledged was a gold locket.

"It must have dropped from his pocket while he was showing me the picture," Nella mused. "I suppose it's no use trying to get it back to him to-night. I'll have to wait until to-morrow."

The next day she broke the promise she had made to her aunt, and motored to the camp. A sentry barred her way as she alighted from the runabout and started to cross the picket lines on foot.

"You can't pass here, miss," the soldier informed her. "Saturdays and Sundays are the only days the public is admitted to the camp. But if you wish to see anybody I will try to get word to him for you."

"I want to see a soldier named John Smith," Nella announced.

"What company?" the sentry asked.

"I don't know his company. I can't even tell you what regiment he belongs to."

The soldier grinned.

"Then I'm afraid you're going to have quite a little difficulty in locating him, miss. There are at least twenty John Smiths scattered about this camp."

"The one I am looking for is tall and dark, and very good-looking," said Nella smiling. "Will that help you at all?"

"Not very much, I'm afraid. Probably there are several tall and dark John Smiths. But I'll call the corporal of the guard, if you wish, and see if—"

"One minute," Nella cut in with a frown. "On second thought his name may not be John Smith at all. It never occurred to me until just now, but it is very likely that he didn't give his real name when he—er—when he received that ticket. I have heard that people often use assumed names in such circumstances."

The sentry looked at her blankly.

"If you're not even sure of his name, miss, I guess you're up against it. May I ask why you want to see him?"

"I have found a—something belonging to him—an article which he probably values highly, and I wish to return it to him. If you would waive the rules and let me walk through the camp I think I could pick him out from the rest. I am positive I should recognize him instantly if I saw him again."

The soldier shook his head.

"You'll have to wait until next Saturday to do that. You can't pass through the lines to-day. But if you merely wish to return his lost property to him you might get quicker results by handing in

the articles at the headquarters tent and leaving it to them to locate the owner. That would save you a lot of trouble."

"I'm afraid that wouldn't do," she decided presently. "You see, this—this article that I have found is something that he wouldn't care to have anybody else see or know about. It would be very embarrassing for him to have to claim it at the headquarters tent. No; it's got to be handed to him personally. Unless—"

She stopped short suddenly, and her face lighted up as an idea came to her.

"That would solve the problem," she muttered, under her breath. "And it's only a matter of seven dollars. I'll do it."

III.

AN hour later Nella, her automobile veil lowered so as to conceal her features, entered a store over the doorway of which was suspended three huge, golden balls.

Mr. Solomon Baumgart, familiarly but not affectionately known to his steady customers as "Uncle Sol," greeted her affably. He had watched her alight from the trim, red runabout which had stopped at the corner, and surmised that he was about to deal with a lady who had more "class" than the majority of his patrons.

"What you got, my dear? Ain't come to hock the flivver, have you?" he asked jocularly.

"I haven't come to pawn anything," his visitor replied indignantly. She laid the ticket on the counter. "I wish to redeem this pledge."

The pawnbroker picked up the ticket and looked at her keenly. "Your name isn't John Smith," he said, a note of challenge in his tone.

"Of course it isn't. Don't be ridiculous. I am redeeming this for—for a friend."

Mr. Baumgart's lips moved as though he was about to say something, but he changed his mind, with a shrug, went to his safe at the rear of the store. He returned presently with a small, round locket in his hand.

"Here it is, my dear. Seven dollars and twenty-one cents, please."

He examined the trinket critically. "I

don't know how I came to advance him so much on it. Believe me it ain't worth it. Why, I've got one on sale in the window now—an unredeemed pledge—exactly the same identical thing, for which I'm asking only a couple of dollars more than this was pawned for. I shouldn't ought to have advanced him more than half the amount. But then he was a soldier, and I've got a soft heart for soldiers."

He opened the locket, and a broad grin spread across his face.

"A lock of your hair, eh?" he chuckled.

"Certainly not," the girl denied, indignantly.

"Well, it's exactly the same shade as yours. I ain't color blind, my dear."

"Mine isn't the only auburn hair in the world," Nella rejoined coldly.

The pawnbroker shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, it's none of my business. Anything else I can do for you, young lady? I've got some great bargains in unredeemed pledges I'd like to show you. How about buying a nice wrist-watch for your soldier sweetheart? Maybe he'd take better care of that than he did of the locket."

Nella checked the angry response that rose to her lips. After all, what did it matter to her what this man thought? Coldly informing him that she was not interested in any bargains in unredeemed pledges, she hurriedly completed the transaction and left the pawnshop.

As soon as she was seated in the runabout she opened the locket and examined its interior. There was no picture inside—only a lock of hair which, as the pawnbroker had remarked, might have been cut from her own auburn tresses.

"Irene's hair, of course," she said to herself, with a whimsical smile. "And he pawned the locket—contents and all. What an unromantic thing to do! The poor fellow must have been desperately hard up."

Her eyes sparkled as she pictured the delight and gratitude with which "Private John Smith" would receive the token. Perhaps her act would be the means of saving him from a very uncomfortable session with the jealous widow.

The thought of being able to render such a service to one of the gallant heroes who was helping to make the world safe for democracy was ample compensation to her for the disagreeable experience she had been through and the money it had cost her to redeem the trinket.

It was Nella's intention to return immediately to the Van Cortlandt Park camp and hand in the locket at the headquarters tent with a request that the owner be advertised for. The latter might have hesitated to come forward and claim the pawn-ticket, but he could now reveal himself without embarrassment.

She did not carry out that plan, however. As she arrived at the camp and, alighting from the runabout, approached the picket-lines, a column of infantrymen, just returning from a long hike, came marching past her.

The girl's pulses quickened as she watched that stirring sight. Perspiration was streaming down the faces of the brawny hikers, and their uniforms were stained with dust and mud, but their stride was as jaunty and vigorous as if they had just been going out on parade, and there was not a man among them who was not grinning cheerfully despite the fact that they had been marching for hours under a hot sun and carried their full field equipment on their backs.

Suddenly a joyous exclamation came from Nella's lips, and she started forward.

A sentry brought down his rifle from his shoulder and stepped in front of her.

"You can't go any further, miss."

"But I want to talk to one of those soldiers who just came in," the young woman exclaimed. "He's the man I've been looking for, and—"

"You can't talk to him now," the sentry cut in. "But if you'll tell me his name I'll see that word is sent to him as soon as they break ranks."

"I don't know his name, but he's that tall one in the last row," said Nella. "Perhaps you can tell me who he is?"

The sentry glanced at the man she indicated.

"Sure I know him," he declared. "That's Howard Blandish of Company H.

If you'll let me have your card, miss, I'll take it to him myself presently. I'm due to be relieved here in a few minutes."

"I haven't a card with me. And, anyway, my name wouldn't mean anything to him. But if you'll be good enough to tell him that I have something for him—something that he dropped in my car last night, I think he'll understand."

Evidently Private Howard Blandish of Company H, when he received that message a little later, did understand, for as soon as he was at liberty he hurried toward the picket lines.

"You have that—er—that paper I lost last night?" he greeted his visitor abruptly. "I can't tell you how grateful I am to you for bringing it to me. I discovered that it was missing from my wallet immediately after I returned to camp last night, but I didn't know that I was fortunate enough to have dropped it in your car."

"You don't deserve such good luck," said Nella severely. "The idea of a man pawning a keepsake from his sweetheart!"

"It wasn't I that pawned it," he cut in, frowning. "Great Scott! Do you suppose I would do a rotten thing like that! I dropped the locket in camp, and one of the men in my company picked it up. Instead of returning it to me he pawned it and handed me the ticket. That was his idea of a joke, but"—he paused, and a grim smile curved his lips—"I guess he doesn't think it quite so funny now."

"You thrashed him?"

Private Blandish grinned deprecatingly.

"It isn't often that I lose my temper, but that was a little more than any man could stand. As you have guessed, the locket was a keepsake from my fiancée. It contained a lock of her hair.

"You can imagine how worried I was when I thought that I had lost the pawn-ticket. She always insists on my showing her the locket every time we meet. I managed to head her off last night, but I couldn't do that all the time. Sooner or later the truth would have come out and there would have been the deuce to pay. Now, thanks to you, I am saved!" He held out his hand expectantly. "You have the ticket with you?"

Nella opened her hand-bag.

"Here it is," she said, her blue eyes twinkling. "I hope you won't be—"

The rest of the sentence died on her lips and her smile froze into an expression of consternation.

"Goodness gracious!" she gasped. "It's gone! I've lost it."

The soldier looked at her blankly.

"You—you've lost the ticket?"

"Worse than that. If it was only the ticket perhaps I could have gone to the pawnshop and explained and persuaded that horrid man to redeem the pledge, anyway. But I have lost the locket. There is a hole in the bottom of my hand-bag and it must have dropped through."

Her face suddenly lighted up.

"Perhaps it is in the car," she suggested hopefully.

They walked over to the runabout and made a thorough search, but they did not find the missing trinket. An inspection of the ground over which she had walked after stepping from the car proved equally unproductive.

"I'm afraid it's gone," Nella declared at length. "I can't tell you how bad I feel about it."

"Well, it can't be helped," Blandish muttered gloomily. "Don't worry about it, little girl," he added more gently, touched by her obvious distress. "Of course, I'm not blaming you. Your intentions were good, anyway. And, after all, I'm not any worse off than if you hadn't found the ticket in the first place. Perhaps that locket will show up later. It seems to have a habit of disappearing and bobbing up again."

"I shall never forgive myself," the girl declared miserably. "What will you say to Irene now?"

"I shall do my best to dodge the issue," he replied with a dubious grin. "If that fails, I suppose I'll have to face the music and tell her the truth—or, at least, part of the truth. Naturally she'll be hurt at my carelessness, but I dare say I'll be able to square myself with her and persuade her to give me another locket."

Another locket! Those words caused a bright idea to flash through Nella's mind. Her thoughts went back to her visit to the

pawnshop, and she recalled a remark that Mr. Solomon Baumgart had made.

The pawnbroker had told her that he had an unredeemed pledge on sale in his window that was "exactly the same identical thing" as the locket she had taken out of pawn. She had not been sufficiently interested to verify his statement at the time, but if such was really the case, she now told herself, it might still be possible to rescue the unfortunate infantryman from his dilemma.

"Well, perhaps, after all, it won't be necessary for you to explain matters to your fiancée," she told Blandish excitedly. "I believe I know how—where I left that locket. I am going back to—to look for it."

When she arrived at the pawnshop the trinket in which she was interested was still hanging from a string in the display window, with a tag attached to it announcing that it was a "colossal bargain" at eight dollars and ninety-three cents. Nella observed with satisfaction that so far as its outward appearance was concerned, it was an exact counterpart of the lost locket.

As for its interior, she found when she had purchased the article that it contained a lock of light yellow hair. That, of course, would not answer the purpose, but Nella was not at all discouraged by the discovery. She had foreseen such a contingency and was prepared to meet it. By a fortunate coincidence her own hair was, as the pawnbroker had pointed out, of almost the same shade as the tresses of the fair widow.

It would not be a very difficult matter to remove the strand of yellow hair from beneath the glass and install one of her own auburn locks in its place. Irene would never suspect the fraud. Even Private Howard Blandish would forever remain in blissful ignorance of the fact that the keepsake he carried had not come from his fiancée's head.

The plan might have succeeded, too, if Nella had not gone home to make the required change in the contents of the locket, and if her aunt—who had a habit of spying on the members of the household—had not watched her through the keyhole as she stood before the mirror in her bedroom and applied the shears to her hair.

Now, Mrs. Palmenter, being a woman who usually had her way when she wanted it, had by no means given up the idea of marrying her niece to her cousin, Sylvester Barnes. In spite of the girl's prejudice against that young man, and notwithstanding the fact that the latter had not called at the house in several weeks, she still clung to the belief that the couple could be brought together again.

So when she saw her niece clip off one of her auburn tresses and carefully adjust it within the little gold case, Mrs. Palmenter's face grew dark.

Naturally placing a wrong construction on the incident she jumped to the conclusion that the girl was preparing a keepsake for some favored suitor, and she was quite sure that suitor was not young Mr. Barnes.

Nella was called to the telephone presently, and when she went out of the room she left the locket lying on her dressing table. That was Mrs. Palmenter's opportunity and she was quick to seize it.

Pouncing on the locket, she stood for a moment scowling at its contents. Then her glance chanced to fall on Rover, Nella's black and white collie, who lay asleep on the bed. A malicious gleam came to her eyes and her thin lips curved in a smile of grim humor.

Picking up the shears from the dressing table she clipped a fragment from the dog's shaggy coat. Then she removed her niece's hair from the locket and put the dog's glossy fur in its place.

When Nella returned the locket was lying on the dressing table, apparently just as she had left it, and her aunt was not in the room. Unsuspecting, the girl picked up the trinket and went down-stairs.

IV.

It was just after the evening "mess" when Nella returned to the camp, and she found Private Howard Blandish standing outside the picket lines, enjoying an after-dinner smoke from a much-blackened briar pipe.

He stepped forward eagerly to meet her. "What luck?" he asked. "Did you find it?"

"I guess you won't have to make any

excuses to your fiancée after all," the girl responded, smiling. "Here it is."

His face lighted up as he took the trinket from her. He insisted on reimbursing her for the expense she had been put to in redeeming the pledge.

"But that doesn't begin to make us quits," he declared. "I can't tell you how much I am in your debt. And you have come to my rescue just in time, too. I expect Irene here any minute. I have an appointment to take her to the theater to-night. If—ah! here she comes now. What a narrow escape!"

Nella glanced at the beautiful, stunningly dressed woman who was advancing toward them.

"Then I suppose I'd better be going," she said with a laugh. "If she is as jealous as you say I won't stay to be introduced."

After she had walked some distance away she could not resist the temptation to turn and watch the pair. They were walking slowly across the lawn, arm in arm, and thoroughly absorbed in each other.

"Thank goodness I was in time," said Nella to herself. "And what a piece of luck that I happened to think about that second locket!"

And then suddenly she became aware that something was wrong. The pair had halted, and the soldier, evidently in response to a challenge from his companion, had taken the locket from his pocket and handed it to her.

Nella saw the woman laugh as she started to open the trinket, but an instant later a startling change came over her manner. She began to gesticulate wildly, and, although at that distance Nella could not hear what was said, she could see that Private Howard Blandish was being violently upbraided.

The latter stood as though stunned while the woman poured out the vials of her wrath on him. Presently he laid a hand entreatingly on her arm, but she angrily shook him off, and, turning on her heels, walked swiftly away.

It was not until the irate widow was out of sight that Nella plucked up courage to approach the dazed infantryman, who still stood as though rooted to the spot.

"What happened?" the girl asked anxiously. "Did—was there anything wrong with the locket?"

"Anything wrong with it!" The man laughed mirthlessly. "Oh, it's you again! Is it? So you stood by to watch the result of your little joke! You know very well what was wrong with it. Why on earth did you play me such a shabby trick?"

"Then she detected the difference!" Nella gasped. "I didn't think she could. I certainly had no intention of playing a trick on you. I thought—"

"Detected the difference!" the soldier cut in savagely. "Of course she did. How could she help it. Anybody who wasn't color blind could see at a glance that black hair wasn't red."

"But it wasn't black hair," the girl protested with a frown of bewilderment. "It was auburn—the same shade as her own. I cut it from my own head. You can see yourself that there isn't much difference. And I—I thought I was doing you a good turn. That was my only motive in buying that other locket. I couldn't find the lost one, so I bought another just like it and put a lock of my own hair inside. I didn't suppose the substitution would be noticed."

Blandish regarded her with astonishment. "Is this a lock of your own hair?" he demanded ironically, thrusting the little gold case into her hand.

Nella stared blankly at the fragment from Rover's glossy coat. Then suddenly the truth dawned on her.

"My aunt must have done it!" she exclaimed. "I met her coming down-stairs from my room as I came from the telephone. I recall now that there was a queer look on her face. I'm so sorry." She looked at Blandish sympathetically. "Is the engagement broken?"

"Smashed to pieces," he groaned. "She wouldn't listen to any explanations. When she opened the locket and caught sight of that black hair it was all up with me. She told me she never wants to see or hear from me again."

"Perhaps if I went to see her I could straighten things out," Nella suggested.

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be any use. She wouldn't believe you. However, I suppose it wouldn't do any harm for you to try it. She lives in Hastings—boards with some friends there, but I guess you'd better not go to her home to-night. Give her a chance to cool down and see her at the office in New York, in the morning, if you don't mind. She works for a man named Sylvester Barnes, and—"

Nella interrupted him with a sharp exclamation.

"Sylvester Barnes!" she echoed in amazement.

"Yes; that's her employer's name. She's his private stenographer. His office is in the Produce Exchange Building. I don't think it will do much good, but if you care to go to the trouble of calling on her tomorrow and explain matters to her, I should be much obliged to you."

Nella went down to the Produce Exchange Building the next day. She felt that it was the very least that she could do to make amends for the trouble she had caused. Barnes was not in his office when she arrived there. Neither was his stenographer. The office boy informed her that they had gone out together about an hour before.

The fair widow and her employer returned presently, and a frown came to Barnes's face as he recognized the visitor seated in the outer office.

"You, Nella!" he exclaimed, a trace of a sneer in his tone. "This is indeed an unexpected pleasure."

"I didn't come to see you," the girl informed him coldly. "I came to call on this lady."

"Indeed!" Sylvester arched his eyebrows. "That's surprise number two. I didn't know that you were acquainted with my wife."

"Your wife!"

"We were married fifteen minutes ago at the City Hall," the man announced, with a fond glance at his bride. "You are the first to hear of my good fortune."

Nella kept herself in hand until she reached the street. Then she gave way to an uncontrollable burst of laughter.

"Of all the queer freaks of fate!" she mused. "If it hadn't been for that black hair in the locket this wouldn't have happened. She'd have married her soldier boy instead of that slacker. It's the funniest thing I've ever heard of."

Her face suddenly grew grave.

"But it isn't so funny from the standpoint of Private Howard Blandish," she reflected. "Poor fellow, this is going to be a great blow to him! I'm afraid he'll never forgive me!"

V.

A FEW weeks later Blandish was standing in front of the recruiting tent on the outskirts of the encampment when a dejected-looking man approached him.

"Is this the place to enlist?" the latter asked. "I've got flat feet and weak eyes, but if they're willing to overlook those trifling defects I'll be glad to do my bit!"

The soldier looked at the other keenly.

"Isn't your name Sylvester Barnes?" he asked.

"How the deuce do you know me? I don't believe I have the pleasure of your acquaintance. Ah! Yes, I have, too. I recognize you now. You're the lucky chap she turned down to marry me! I've seen you before, when you called on her at the office."

"Lucky chap!" Blandish echoed, frowning.

"Yes—lucky!" Barnes groaned. "Maybe you don't appreciate what a narrow escape you had. That woman has the temper of a fiend. Look at these scratches on my face. She did that to me at the breakfast-table this morning because I spilled some coffee on the tablecloth. And look at this lump on the back of my head. She threw a bronze figure at me yesterday because I smoked a cigarette in the parlor."

"I thought I was the most fortunate man in the world when she came down-town that morning and told me that her engagement to you was off and that she was willing to reconsider the offer of marriage I had made her," he continued bitterly. "I was so afraid that she might change her mind that I hustled her right out to the City Hall and had the knot tied. That

was the biggest mistake I ever made in my life. We hadn't been married two days before she began to show herself in her true colors.

"And those terrible children of hers! The minute we were married she telegraphed to have them sent on. Even if the mother had been all that she seemed, those vicious brats would have been enough to drive a man from home." Barnes glanced wistfully toward the recruiting tent. "Do you suppose there's any chance of their taking me? My feet aren't so very flat and I can see pretty well with glasses."

Blandish frowned reflectively.

"Can it be possible," he muttered, "that a woman with a face like that—"

The other interrupted him with a hollow laugh.

"Her face!" he groaned. "That was the bitterest disappointment of all. Most of it comes off when she goes to bed. Even that wonderful red hair of hers is placed on the dressing table when she retires for the night. Say! If they turn me down as a soldier, is there any chance of my getting a place in the ambulance corps?"

Thus it came about that when on the following Saturday — visitors' day — Nella came to the encampment with a party of friends and chanced to encounter Private Howard Blandish, that young woman was agreeably surprised at the cordiality of the latter's greeting.

"I didn't suppose that you could ever forgive me," the girl said in an undertone. "It makes me miserable every time I think of the part I played in your—your misfortune!"


"Don't let it worry you. Perhaps it was all for the best," the good-looking infantryman responded resignedly. He paused, and his gaze rested wistfully on her pretty face.

"By the way," he remarked. "I still have that locket—and it's empty. I threw away that lock of black hair. I wonder if I—if you would be generous enough to come to the rescue again."

"You want another lock of auburn hair?" said Nella, her color deepening.

"If it's all the same to you," he replied uneasily, "I'd rather have a picture this time!"

The Fifth Ace



by Douglas Grant

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

KEARN THODE, an American oil man in Mexico, is greatly attracted by "Gentleman Geoff's Billie," an uncontaminated girl, who had been adopted in infancy by the gambler. The Limasito was raided by El Negrito and his bandits, and although Thode, at great risk, brought Carranzista soldiers, who routed the bandits, Gentleman Geoff was mortally wounded.

With a weird old woman named Tia Juana, who knew the secret of Lost Souls' Pool, a fabulous deposit of oil, Billie traveled into the mountains. Returning, she was informed by Mason North, a New York lawyer, that her rich grandfather had left her a fortune on condition that she allow Mrs. Halstead to educate her in the metropolis. She scorned at first to accept the legacy of the man who had practically killed her parents; but finally, as a plan shaped in her mind, she consented.

In New York she met Starr Wiley, a millionaire oil operator, who had insulted her in Limasito, and who had been thrashed in consequence by Kearn Thode. He tried to win her love, but she spurned him. She brought Tia Juana and her hunchback grandson to the great city and secretly visited them, to the consternation of the aristocratic household wherein she lived and was being educated. She befriended Vernon Halstead and won his confidence and cooperation.

She informed Starr Wiley that he had conspired with El Negrito to raid Limasito, and thus force American intervention in Mexico; and in return Wiley hinted at vengeance upon her if she did not persuade Tia Juana to reveal to him the location of Lost Souls' Pool.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE KNIGHT ERRANT ONCE MORE.

"**W**E'LL be late," Angie observed, as she and Willa waited in the drawing-room for the rest of the family to come down.

It was the first remark she had voluntarily addressed to her cousin since she had come upon the *tête-à-tête* in the library.

"Not that I care, of course," she continued. "These dinners are always stupid; but the Erskines are so horribly particular. I've heard that the bishop was late once, and they went in without him."

Willa smiled.

"I wonder who will be there?"

"The same old crowd, I suppose." Angie shrugged. "For Heaven's sake, Willa, if they send you in again with Harrington Chase, don't monopolize him as you did at the Wadleighs'. It's horribly bad form; I wonder that mother didn't tell you."

"Did I monopolize him? I wasn't conscious of it," Willa said reflectively. "He interests me."

"Evidently!" Angie sneered. "So do a few others, I imagine; but you shouldn't show it so plainly. I admit that you've gotten on very well so far, but your methods are still horribly crude."

"My methods?" Willa was honestly

This story began in *The Argosy* for December 8.

puzzled. "I wasn't aware that I had any. When people bore me I let them alone; but those I find interesting, for one reason or another, I listen to. Is it crude to discriminate?"

Angie bit her lip.

"You can be very simple and naive when you want to," she burst out. "But do reserve it for outsiders and spare us. I know you for what you are—sly and sneaking and mean! Your cheap, common little airs and graces don't deceive me; they only disgust me more and more. I wish Mr. North had left you where he found you, with your gamblers and horse-thieves and roustabouts!"

"So do I," Willa retorted frankly. "They were men, anyway. You are unjust because you are hurt, and I am sorry for you. I wish you could understand, but I am afraid you will not believe me. Mr. Wiley—"

"Will you kindly leave his name out of this discussion?" demanded Angie. "I am not in the least jealous, I assure you! He is nothing to me. I merely object to the underhand way you maneuvered to receive him alone. That sort of thing may be all right where you came from, but it is a little bit too raw to put in practise here."

The appearance of the others brought the quarrel to a close, and they went out to the waiting limousine in a constrained silence. Mrs. Halstead glanced from her daughter's flushed face to Willa's pale one, and her lips tightened. Had Angie been foolish enough to betray herself to this interloper?

Willa was sincerely distressed. There had never been any real congeniality between the two girls, but her heart ached for the other's evident suffering. Her own conscience was not quite clear, for she had permitted Wiley to show his hand without stopping to think of Angie, so determined had she been to learn the depths to which this man would descend in his ruthless self-seeking. She had weighed her cousin shrewdly, and she did not believe her capable of deep and lasting affection, yet she shuddered at the thought of any girl's heart in Starr Wiley's keeping.

They were late, as Angie had prophesied.

The Erskine drawing-room was crowded, and Willa stared about blankly, her mind still burdened with her cousin's resentment. Then, all at once, she became conscious of a tall figure which disengaged itself from a near-by group and came eagerly forward.

Mechanically she held out her hand, and a voice sounded in her ears which drove all else from her thoughts and sent the hot blood flooding her cheeks and neck in a crimson tide.

"We meet again, Miss Murdaugh. I told you that it would be soon!"

She found herself looking up into Kearn Thode's eyes, and the wonder of it held her dumb. As unconscious as a child of the instinctive moment, she extended both hands, and he caught and pressed them tightly for a moment before releasing them.

"Mr. Thode! I had almost given up hope." The words sprang to her lips. "I thought you would come before, and I used to look about for you everywhere we went at first. It was silly, of course, for I knew that you had your work to do down there; but it would have been nice to see a really familiar face."

The young engineer, too, flushed.

"I meant to come before, but I was delayed—" He broke off. "Was it so awful then, the first plunge? May I remind you that you have fulfilled my prophecy? Just to look at you now makes me half believe those Limasito days were a dream!"

"They're still real to me," Willa said gravely. "They are the only real things and real people I have known. All this up here— Oh, it's very pleasant, of course, and new and amusing, but it doesn't reach deep down. It doesn't seem to mean anything."

"So soon?" He raised his eyebrows in whimsical dismay. "My sister wrote me of your success, and I was very glad. I knew it would not change you, but I did not think the glamour would wear off so quickly."

"Your sister?" Willa cried. "I'm so sorry that I only met her once. She dined with us, but since then I have not seen her. I should like to have known her better."

"She called twice, but you were not at home. After that she went south, and has

only just returned. May I bring her to call to-morrow?"

"I shall be delighted." Willa paused, regarding him with a puzzled little frown. "Do you know you have changed, somehow, Mr. Thode? You are ever so much thinner, and pale beneath your tan, and you look—oh, almost as if you had been suffering! Am I imagining things, or have you been ill?"

"I had an accident just after you left Limasito. It was nothing serious—just a slight concussion—but it laid me up for some weeks," Thode replied easily. "That is what delayed my work and prevented my return before."

He looked beyond her as he spoke, and his face darkened swiftly. Willa, noting the transition, glanced over her shoulder to see Starr Wiley, smiling and urbane, standing just within the doorway.

"Another reminder of Limasito," she remarked. "A most unwelcome one. But tell me about your accident. I am so sorry—"

His hostess claimed Thode at that juncture and bore him away to fresh introductions. Willa started across the room to Mrs. Halstead, but Starr Wiley intercepted her coolly.

"How do you do?" he asked. Then, without waiting for her reply, he went on: "But that is a superfluous question, isn't it? You are looking as distractingly charming as ever. So our knight errant has put in an appearance once more! He looks a little the worse for wear."

"Mr. Thode has been ill," Willa remarked through stiffened lips. "There was an accident—"

"A hootch bottle in the hands of a jealous *señorita* becomes an effective weapon, but I would call it more like fate than accident." Wiley laughed unpleasantly. "There were some interesting rumors afloat about our friend's conquests after your departure from Limasito. He'd be an expert porch-climber if his practise in gaining access to certain balconies on certain back streets counted for anything. I could have told you before, but I did not want to shatter your illusions concerning the local Paul Revere."

"You are trying to now, however." Willa looked straight into his eyes and then quickly away in immeasurable disdain. "I have no ears for idle, malicious slander, Mr. Wiley. Please let me pass."

"It does rather jar on one, doesn't it? A reminder of the low, primitive life down there is out of place in this highly esthetic atmosphere." He made no move to step aside, and a shade of deeper meaning crept into his tones. "It would be a pity if one were compelled to return to it. The charms of Limasito would pall, I fancy, after all this; yet such things sometimes happen."

"I trust not, for your sake," Willa responded. "You would scarcely find the climate of Limasito a healthy one, if your activities were fully comprehended there."

"I was not thinking of myself"—he smiled once more—"but of an old fairy tale which I mentioned to you in the park. You look a very confident *Cinderella*, but midnight is not far off; and only you can stop the hands of the clock, remember."

"I am not fond of riddles." Willa shrugged and turned away to greet her host, who came forward with one of the inevitable callow youths in tow.

Dinner was announced almost immediately, and Willa sat through it with the food untouched before her. Wiley's insinuations against Kearn Thode she had dismissed utterly from her thoughts, but his renewed taunt of the morning filled her in spite of herself with dread foreboding. Could Fate have indeed been playing with her, after all; and was it possible that Wiley held within his hands the strings of her future destiny?

She was Willa Murdaugh, of course. Mason North and the Halsteads had satisfied themselves of that beyond a shadow of a doubt. But what if Wiley had really stumbled upon some facts unknown to them all which might throw a shadow across her title? Was it an idle threat to coerce her, or a very tangible menace?

She raised troubled eyes to meet Kearn Thode's smiling ones across the table, and her native courage came back in a swift rush. Surely she had nothing to fear; she would meet Wiley and beat him at his own game, and then— She smiled again into

Thode's eyes. What did anything else matter, now that he had returned?

An informal dance was the order of the evening, and Willa and the young engineer gravitated to a seat on the stairs after a romping fox-trot. Both were flushed and sparkling, but when they found themselves alone together a diffident silence fell upon them.

"It must seem good to you to get back," Willa ventured at last when the pause had become oppressive.

"It is." His glance rested upon her with a world of contentment. "I can't begin to tell you how wonderful it seems!"

"And your work down there?" she pursued hurriedly. "You have finished it? You will not have to return again?"

The contentment faded, and in its place there came a look of bitterness and dogged determination.

"It has scarcely begun. I wonder if you ever heard an old legend around Limasito concerning the lost location of a marvelous oil-well?"

Willa laughed nervously, a little taken aback by the abruptness of the young engineer's question.

"One hears so many legends in every country of lost or buried or hidden treasure," she parried. "Scarcely any one pays attention to them except the tenderfeet. You know, up in the mining country one is forever hearing such tales of vast deposits of ore, but nobody can ever find the lead."

"This particular one concerns a well in a mysterious pool of water where a massacre is supposed to have taken place. It dates back to the time of the Spaniards' coming."

He paused, but Willa said nothing. She was striving to mask her thoughts in continued composure lest his quick mind grasp the significance of her interest.

"The place is spoken of as the Pool of the Lost Souls," Thode went on. "Surely you have heard of it? The people to whom you were so kind—old Tia Juana and her grandson—knew more than any one else about it. Did they not mention it to you?"

"Tia Juana?" Willa glanced up quickly, but she could not meet his eyes. "She

is very secretive, you know, and jealous of the old legends which to her form the sacred history of her beloved country. Suppose you tell me the legend yourself."

Briefly he recounted it to her, and she listened until the end in a dismayed chaos of mind which culminated in a staggering blow.

"And I have found the well," he remarked casually, no jubilation in his tone, but paradoxically a note of defeat.

"You!" she stammered breathlessly.

"Yes. You seem surprised," he added with a quick glance at her. "I know these old legends are mostly regarded as bunk, but now and then one proves to be a straight tip. Generations have searched vainly for the Pool, as I thought you must have heard, but they did not know where to look."

"Then how did you, a newcomer, discover it?" Willa scarcely recognized her own voice.

"By the simple expedient of following some one else who had stolen a march on me in a despicable fashion." His jaw set in the old characteristic way she remembered. "I don't mind admitting that I would have taken almost any means to locate it; that was my main objective in Mexico, and I was acting under instructions from my chief. But I would scarcely have stooped to the method employed by the man of whom I speak."

"Starr Wiley?" The question was wrung from Willa's lips.

He stared at her.

"You know, then?"

"I—I guessed," she countered hurriedly. "I knew that you two were enemies, of course; and it came to me that if any one had played a false trick upon you, it must have been he. You say you found the Pool by following him. How did he know where to search?"

Thode hesitated.

"I found a map of its location, but I had scarcely got my hands upon it when I was struck down from behind and the paper stolen."

Willa uttered a startled exclamation, but he continued, unheeding:

"Some one found me hours later, lying

unconscious, and carried me into Limasito, where your good friend Jim Baggott took care of me. It was weeks before I was able to be about again, but I had time to think it all out.

"Of course I had not seen my assailant, but I had had an uncanny intuition all day that I was being shadowed—it was the very day of your departure, by the way—and I knew of only one other besides myself who had taken that legend seriously.

"Wiley was doing his best to locate the Pool. He was aware that I was there for the same purpose, and he would have stopped at nothing to win out, for, as you know, there was bad blood between us. If he did not actually strike the blow that felled me, I solemnly believe that he was instrumental in it in some way. Please don't think me ungenerous toward an enemy because I tell you this, but events really seemed to bear out my suspicions."

"No"—Willa was gazing moodily straight before her—"I do not think you are ungenerous, and I am very glad that you are telling me. I believe, too, that you are right; I feel sure that he must have been responsible for your injury. But I am amazed about the map."

"I found it in the ashes of Tia Juana's fire; the little fire in the grove of zapote-trees where she cooked her tortillas and brewed her strange concoctions. - You had told me of it, do you remember? But perhaps you have not heard; Tia Juana and the boy, José, have disappeared!

"They must have gone on the very day you started for New York. No one has been able to discover a trace of them, except one, and that is very significant. Have you no curiosity about the Pool?"

He turned to her suddenly, but Willa could not raise her eyes to meet his now.

"Of course," she stammered.

"It is located on a grapefruit ranch known as the Trevino hacienda, about two hundred miles due north of Limasito. Wiley made the best of his time while I was laid by the heels, but his treachery didn't do him any good in the end. He found the Pool, but another had been there before him; old Tia Juana herself!"

Willa's lips moved, but no sound came

from them. She was praying that he would not look at her again.

"A few days before Tia Juana and the boy disappeared, the Trevino hacienda changed hands. It was sold for twenty-five thousand dollars to one Juana Reyes. Reyes, if you recall, was the name of the old Spaniard who owned the Pool originally, and whose daughter, Dolores, was killed by the Indians on her wedding night.

"Reyes is also the almost forgotten surname of Tia Juana; so it looks as if the old lady had come into her own at last. It is a mystery, of course, where she got the money to purchase the hacienda, but it may have been hoarded in her family for generations. It is possible, too, that she only then succeeded in deciphering the map, and tracing the location of the Pool from it."

"So you and Starr Wiley both failed." Willa spoke as if to herself.

"Not I!" Thode's eyes flashed with determination. "I told you I had only just begun. I am going to find Tia Juana, if she is above ground, and buy out her claim. To her it only means the ancestral estate. That is much, to be sure, if she has gone through her long life in poverty and want in order to hoard her riches for its purchase; but it is only a sentimental consideration.

"When she learns that she has a fortune in petroleum, worthless without the money to develop it, I think she will agree to share her interest. The *casa* and the land about it can still be hers; we only want to drain and develop the Pool, and my chief will be strictly fair with her. The old lady will be rich beyond her wildest dreams, and we will have the greatest producer known since the Dos Bocas gusher went up in flames!"

Willa rose.

"If you find Tia Juana, Mr. Thode, don't build your hopes too high. Should she prove to be indeed the owner of the Pool of the Lost Souls, I am confident that you can never gain possession of it."

"I can try." He took the hand she held out to him. "You seem very sure, Miss Murdaugh."

"I cannot imagine Tia Juana relinquish-

ing anything which she could claim, especially if, as you surmise, the property may once have belonged to her ancestors. Cousin Irene is signaling me; I must go!" she added. "You will come to-morrow?"

Thode promised, but he watched her slender figure disappear with a frown of troubled thought. How much did she know? Could it be that she, too, was interested in the Pool of the Lost Souls? Instead of a mere contest between himself and Wiley, had it become a three-cornered affair, with Willa the apex of the triangle?

Had he but known it, he was destined not to keep his promise of the morrow; and once more it was Starr Wiley who intervened.

It happened that Thode stopped in at the club after taking leave of the Erskines, and arrived at a most opportune moment. He was emerging from the coat-room when a familiar voice came to his ears through the half-open door of one of the smaller card-rooms, and the words arrested him like a command.

"The little Murdaugh? Very naive, very charming, but I knew her in the Never-Never Land, you know, and I can assure you she's not as unsophisticated as she seems."

"Oh, come, Starr! You're tight!" A strange voice intervened. "Ladies' names, you know—it's not done here."

"Lady?" Wiley hiccuped derisively. "Who mentioned a lady? I'm speakin' of Willa Murdaugh. Gentleman Geoff's Billie, they used to call her; pet of an old card-sharp and mascot of a gambling hell—"

He got no further. Some one had seized him by the shoulders and spun him around like a top, and he found himself confronting Kearn Thode's blazing eyes. His half-fuddled companions shrank back in consternation.

"Take that back, you miserable cur!" Thode's voice was scarcely recognizable. "Take back your damnable lies, or I'll ram them down your throat!"

But an alcoholic courage possessed Wiley, and he leered:

"The knight errant, by Jove! You know whether it's true or not! You ought to know better than any one else—"

A crashing blow straight on his maudlin mouth sent him reeling back against the table. His wildly groping hand found a tall glass, and with an oath he hurled it full in the face of the man advancing upon him. A moment later he was lifted clear of the table by an impact that flung him against the wall, a sodden, inert heap with the last ray of dazed consciousness gone.

CHAPTER XV.

GONE.

A METAMORPHOSIS had taken place in Vernon Halstead. He was distraught, and mooned about the house, getting in people's way and apologizing with an air of such profound abstraction that the family were moved to comment.

"I think Vernon must be ill." This from his mother. "The poor dear boy seems very pale and hollow-eyed. Haven't you noticed it, Ripley?"

"I've noticed that he looks as if some one had given him a jolt that he hadn't yet recovered from," her husband retorted. "Maybe he's waking up and getting on to himself at last. It's high time! It would give any one a shock to find they'd been wasting the best years of their lives—"

"You were never sympathetic with his sensitive, highly strung temperament—"

"Temperament, Irene? He's about as temperamental as an army tank!" Ripley added more mildly. "I don't say there's no good in the boy, but it needs waking up. He asked me last night about a course in petroleum engineering, like young Thode, and that's a promising sign. I wish I felt as easy in my mind about Willa."

"I wash my hands of her." Mrs. Halstead shrugged coldly. "It was to be supposed that she would be quite impossible, coming from such an environment, but I fancied at least that she would want to advance herself. But she cares nothing for making acquaintances or getting in with the right people, and hasn't the slightest conception of the importance of establishing herself. If I had the proper authority over her, it would be vastly different; but you and Mason—"

"We haven't it ourselves," her husband reminded her. "We've got to accept her on her own terms or not at all, it seems. She has too much principle to get herself into disgrace—I am confident on that score—but she has such ultrademocratic ideas that I am afraid she may lay herself open to comment. Have you heard anything, Irene, about a—a gray car?"

"What is that?" Mrs. Halstead sat up very straight. "I've been expecting trouble from her absurd independence, but you know my position. What about a gray car?"

"Nothing much." Ripley looked decidedly uncomfortable. "You are not to mention it to her, Irene, remember. Mason spoke of it, and it's up to him to take care of it; but I thought you might keep your eyes open. Mason has an idea that he has seen her more than once running around town in a fast little gray car with a mighty good-looking chauffeur. He's near-sighted, but he asked me to find out about it."

"I know nothing of it!" his wife said bitterly. "An elopement with a person of that sort is quite within the possibilities, Ripley. I will watch, of course; but what good will it do? I have tried to guard her, and been insulted for my pains. If I had my way, I should lock her in her room until I brought her to terms. A chauffeur, indeed! Really, Uncle Giles's money is scarcely worth the strain; and now, with poor Vernon acting so strangely and you so unsympathetic, it is a wonder I am not down with nervous prostration!"

On the morning after the Erskine affair, however, Vernon came in at lunch-time with a cheerful air of suppressed but pleasurable excitement which nullified the effect of his former solemnity.

After the meal was over, he drew Willa mysteriously into the library and shut the door.

"Say! I've simply got to tell you! I don't peddle club gossip, as a rule, but this is too good to keep. Starr got his last night!"

"What do you mean?" Willa cried. "He's not—"

"Not dead, you want to say? No, it isn't as good as that, but he got the thrashing of his life, and his beauty is pretty well

spoiled. Gad, if I'd only been there to see it!"

Willa turned a shade more white.

"Who—did it?" Her voice was a mere whisper.

"Kearn Thode. He is pretty well cut up about the face himself, for, of course, Starr didn't put up his fists like a man; he threw glassware."

"Oh, is he badly hurt?" Willa caught at her surprised informant's arm in sudden dread. "Is Mr. Thode—"

"Hello! What's the tragic idea? Of course he's not; but you ought to see Starr! The fellows say it was all over in about two seconds, but it must have been great while it lasted!"

"Where—where did it occur?" she asked faintly.

"Right in the club, of all places in the world! The board of governors got together this morning like ducks in a thunder-storm and held a special meeting. Of course they're both suspended until the board can get hold of the facts, but it's a pretty general opinion that Starr will be asked for his resignation. Nobody seems to know what the row was about, or else they are all keeping mum; but Starr must have said something rather average awful. The only name he called Thode, though, as far as I can make out, was 'knight errant.'"

Willa turned away to hide a shiver.

"That isn't so terrible, is it?" she stammered.

"Silly word to start anything! But you never can tell what's back of it with Starr—"

"Excuse me, miss. Note for you by messenger." Welsh stood in the doorway.

Willa took the envelope from the salver the butler presented. The superscription was in an unknown hand, but a swift intuition came to her as she broke the seal.

MY DEAR MISS MURDAUGH:

Will you believe me when I tell you that I am more than sorry I shall not be able to come to you to-day? I was caught in an annoying but superficial motor smash-up last night, and the broken wind-shield has made a bizarre spectacle of me, but I shall be my normal self again in a few days. My sister, Mrs. Beekman, will call to-morrow,

and I shall present my apologies in person at the earliest possible moment, if I may.

Very sincerely and regretfully,
KEARN THODE.

Willa mused so long that Welsh finally asked, with a deferential cough:

"Any answer, miss? The messenger is waiting to know."

"No—yes! Just a moment!"

She seated herself at the desk and wrote rapidly:

MY DEAR MR. THODE:

I am deeply sorry to learn of your motor accident. Knights errant rode on chargers in the old days, I believe, but the spirit remains the same, doesn't it? I scorned it once to my shame, but it is a spirit for which I am now profoundly grateful. Come to me when you can; I shall be at home.

Hasta la vista,

WILLA MURDAUGH.

"Well, for the love of Pete!" Vernon exploded, when the butler had withdrawn. "You're blushing like a June rose! Willa, are you holding out on us? Have you a steady you are keeping company with, unbeknownst?"

"Don't be absurd, Vernon!" She dimpled, in spite of herself. "That was only from Mr. Thode. He was going to call this afternoon with his sister, but he can't. He's had a slight motor accident."

"Then Starr must have met a steam-roller!" Vernon stopped and added in sudden suspicion: "I say, you didn't give me away? You didn't mention—"

"I?" Willa's eyes widened demurely. "I expressed polite regret, of course. What have I to do with motor accidents?"

"Nothing, I hope, if you go slow," Vernon hesitated. "I don't want to butt in, Willa, but I'd like to give you a hint, if you don't mind. Gray cars are not invisible."

She had paused at the door.

"Just what does that mean?" she demanded. "Of course I know you and Starr Wiley followed me the other day, but how do you know where the car came from?"

"I don't," retorted Vernon quickly. "That's your own affair, Willa, only I thought you ought to know that Art Judson and one or two others spoke of the nifty

little car they'd seen you about in in the last two or three days. I thought I had better tell you before Mason North gets hold of it and asks questions."

"Much obliged, Vernie, but if he does I sha'n't answer them." Willa smiled. "I'll take you out some day, if you like. The little car is a wonder, and you and Starr Wiley would never in the world have been able to hang on the trail that time if I hadn't meant you to! If any one asks you about the car, however, you never heard of it. Understand?"

She turned lightly and ran from the room, leaving her cousin chuckling. The simple, formal little note was pressed tightly to her breast as a most passionate avowal might have been, and her eyes were like dew-drenched violets when she reached her room. Thode had come at the moment of her unapprehended need, and he had fought for her once more, asking no guerdon but the unalienable right of man to protect the woman of his world and kind from insult and contumely.

And she? She must repay him by thwarting his ambition, dashing his hopes, bringing to defeat his most cherished plan! What would he think of her when he learned the truth and recalled how she had accepted his confidence and given him in return only silence pregnant with deceit?

Her head drooped and burning tears smarted in her eyes, but she held them back grimly. If Willa Murdaugh was a self-pitying weakling, Gentleman Geoff's Billie was not, and she would see the game through! Because of all that the old name had meant, she would not be a quitter, though her own happiness be forever lost. What was her happiness? she demanded wrathfully of herself. A side-bet, nothing more! She was out for bigger stakes than mere happiness, and she was playing to win.

Wrapping herself in her fur coat, with a tiny, close-fitting cap upon her head, she slipped out of doors and around the corner to where, half-way through the block, Dan Morrissey waited with the gray car.

It was commencing to snow; great, soft, feathery flakes which lighted upon her as softly as thistledown and melted, each in a

single, glistening drop like a tear. The air was coldly still and the sky a sheet of lead.

"Have I kept you waiting long, Dan?" she asked as he tucked the robe about her. "I'm sorry; I hope you've not been cold. It looks as though we were in for a real storm, doesn't it?"

"I wisht it'd come down a regular blizzard, miss," he responded dourly. "Then maybe we could shake off the boys that have been hangin' on my trail for dear life! It's not cold I've been, sitting here trying to figure out how to stall them, but hot under the collar! Where to, miss? It don't make any partic'ler difference, they'll be right along behind!"

"Then around the park, please, Dan. You can tell me about them as we go."

She snuggled down in the soft robes as the car leaped and fled like a lithe gray cat through the storm. Her thoughts were busy with the new problem.

These followers were Wiley's men, of course. He had boasted that he would have more able tools to aid him in the future than Vernon had proved. Where had he obtained them?

"Are they professional detectives, do you think, Dan?" she asked.

He needed but the word to start him.

"They are that! I was chauffeur once for a private detective agency, and I know them and their ways, though these fellows seem to have a new wrinkle or two. It started a couple of nights ago when I was waiting in the garage for a call from you, miss.

"A fine, big touring-car was edged in beside mine, and the chauffeur, a little, dark feller, began talkin' to me. I remembered what you'd told me, and keepin' my own mouth shut, I let him rave. In just about ten minutes I knew it was all bunk; he was tellin' too much, tryin' too hard to get thick with me all of a sudden. His gentleman was a free-handed sport, and what was good enough for him was none too good for his driver. Champagne the feller wanted me to go out and have with him, and I couldn't tell you what all, miss."

"I rather expected that," Willa nodded.

"Then, when I got home to my boardin'-house, there was a new lodger in the room

next to mine, a long-legged, sandy-haired galoot. The same thing began again; he came in to borry a match and stayed half the night. I let him down easy, though if I hadn't remembered your instructions I'd be after sendin' him home through his own transom!

"Everywhere I've been for the last two days, barber-shop and all, I've been trailed. It's fun if you look at it in one way, but it gets my goat, too. If you say the word, miss, I'll sail in and lick the bunch of them!"

"No, Dan; not yet," Willa smiled. "The man behind them is responsible and he's been punished for the time being, anyway. How many men are trailing us? I haven't looked back."

"I made sure of three, but they may be strung out after us like an Irish funeral, for all I know," replied Dan gloomily. "My chauffeur friend is on a motor-cycle now, my red-headed neighbor is in a run-about, and a strange feller is in a big car. There's small chance of losing them, I'm thinkin'."

"Then drive straight to that apartment-house from which the two taxicabs followed us the other day. They've spotted me there already, you see, and I've no doubt they've investigated there, so another visit won't do any harm. Wait around the corner for me, as you did the last time."

Willa alighted before the shabby vestibule, and without a glance to right or left made her way in and pressed a button marked "Lopez." The front door clicked a prompt response, and she ran lightly up two flights of dark and dingy stairs.

A thin, sallow little woman with soft, black eyes awaited her at an opened door and ushered her into the stuffy, garish front parlor, where she eyed her visitor in palpable nervousness.

"How are my friends?" Willa asked without preamble. "They are quite comfortable at your mother's house? You have heard from her?"

"Ah, yes!" the woman replied with the slightest trace of a Latin accent. "The young lad has been suffering a little with his back, *pobre cito!* It is the climate here, no doubt, but my mother rubs him with a

remedy of her own making, and he is soothed."

"And the *señora*?"

The woman hesitated visibly.

"She—she sits all day by her fire and talks but seldom, yet she seems well."

"They understand why I have not been to see them?" Willa eyed her narrowly, for the woman's agitation boded ill.

"Yes. They ask when you will come, but they know it must not be for a time." Señora Lopez paused, and then added in a swift rush: "My mother bakes for them tortillas and they are pleased together. José begs my mother to tell him of Spain, but the old *señora*, she has not the interest. It is always as if she waited, but she is content."

Willa nodded. The description was such as she had anticipated, yet, despite the volubility of the other's assurance, the suggestion of something odd and furtive remained.

"Have there been any inquiries for them here?"

The woman smiled in obvious relief, and spread out her hands.

"But yes! You spoke truly, *señorita*, when you warned me of those who would seek them. In the evening just after you were here last, a gentleman, an Americano, came, asking for the Señora Reyes. I knew nothing of her." She drew down her eyelids significantly.

"Next morning there came a young man of our country. He said that he was from Mexico, but he lied; the speech of the Basque was on his tongue. The Señora Reyes was his aunt, and he came to tell her that he had found her lost son, his cousin. He, too, departed.

"Yesterday it was a boy. He came as an *amigo*, a *compañero* of José; he desired to know where he might be found, but he, also, was unsatisfied. We are the Lopezes, what have we to do with the Señora Reyes or José?"

Her tone of bland candor was inimitable, but it did not eradicate the consciousness of anxiety and unrest that was in her bearing at first. Nothing more was to be learned from further parley, and Willa presently departed, leaving behind her a substantial roll of bank-notes.

Her mind was far from easy, and as she descended the dark, steep stairs she came to an abrupt decision. Something was wrong, and despite the hirelings of Starr Wiley she must know.

"Dan," she began when he sprang down to assist her into the car, "I don't know how it is going to be done, but we have got to lose those trailers. I don't care how long it takes, or how many miles we cover doing it, but we must manage to get to Second Place, Brooklyn, without being followed. Do you think you will be able to make it, or shall I try to give them the slip by taking the subway?"

Dan reflected.

"There's more than one in the big car, and you'd be trailed sure, miss. Better take a chance with me, and I'll get you there safely without them knowing, if we ride till morning!"

Then began a strange and devious journey. To Willa, who, aside from her infrequent visits to the cottage on the parkway, had seen little of New York and its environs save in the beaten path of the conventional social road, it was a revelation.

They tore through crooked, teeming side streets whose squalor was veiled in the falling curtain of snow, and shot across broad avenues with gleaming vistas of light stretching interminably in either direction. They dashed sharply about a corner and off through a lane of cañonlike factories and sweat-shop hives.

Once they skirted huge railroad-yards, and twice they circled along the river's edge between towering warehouses, with the tang of salt winds swirling the flakes about them, and a forest of tall masts looming up ahead.

Dan Morrissey knew the city as only one can who has grown up practically on its streets, and he was following a well-defined route as he wove back and forth through the myriad threads which held together the vast and varied pattern on the loom which was New York, drawing ever nearer the great bridge. The runabout had been left behind, but the larger car still trailed, and the sharp exhaust of the motor-cycle reached their ears tauntingly above the subdued rattle of occasional traffic.

All at once Dan commenced to chuckle, and Willa could feel his shoulders shake beside hers.

"What is it?" she demanded, with a quick glance at him.

"I've just thought of something, miss. If Delehanty is on his station now, watch us lose the laddybuck on the motor-cycle!"

They had reached a corner on lower Broadway, whence the home-going stream of humanity had long since disappeared like ants into the burrow of subway entrances, but where a burly traffic policeman still loomed bulkily in the middle of the thoroughfare.

Dan drew the car up at the curb, leaped out, and approached the minion of the law. A short colloquy, and he had returned, and the car shot down Broadway.

"You can look back now, miss," suggested Dan.

Willa turned. The motor-cycle had been halted in mid-pursuit, its rider gesticulating in futile rage and vexation while the obdurate bluecoat held him fast.

"How did you do it, Dan?" Willa asked.

"Delehanty's death on motor-cyclists since one ran him down last summer. I told him this feller was a chauffeur in the same garage as me, and trailing me now on a bet, but that the license on his machine was phony. We'll be there and back before he gets through explaining at the station-house."

Once across the bridge, Dan led the big car far out to a sparsely built-up section of Flatbush, and there at last his object was achieved. A loud report echoed behind them, and glancing over her shoulder, Willa saw the big car swerve and come to an abrupt halt in the ditch.

"Tire burst!" she announced. "Luck is with us, Dan!"

"It was, in the shape of some broken glass!" her ally retorted, grinning. "I said a prayer myself as we went over it. The way is clear now!"

Second Place was a dull row of sober brick dwellings, with prim muslin curtains behind each window-pane, and an air of bearing its indubitable respectability self-consciously.

The car halted before a house midway in

the block, and Willa was up the steps in a flash and peeling the bell.

A swarthy, middle-aged woman, with a white apron over her ample silk gown presented herself and stammeringly bade the girl welcome.

"The Señora Reyes and José? I must see them, Señora Rodriguez. I have come from your daughter."

"She did not tell you, then, *señorita*?" The woman raised her fat hands in exhortation. "Heaven is my witness, it was not my fault! I did not think to watch her; she did not even glance toward the window! Could I know what she meditated?"

"What is it?" Willa seized the woman's arm and shook it convulsively. "What has happened to Señora Reyes? Tell me!"

All at once a frail, crooked little form catapulted itself down the stairway and fell sobbing at the girl's feet.

"Señorita! Señorita Billie! The grand-mama has vanished! She rose and went from the house in the dawn, when all were sleeping! She is gone!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE POOL OF THE LOST SOULS.

WILLA went home at last in a daze of consternation which took no note of the heightened storm. The unexpected catastrophe was a death-blow to her long-cherished plan; but even that faded for the moment before her stern anxiety for Tia Juana's safety.

The story which Willa succeeded in dragging from the Rodriguez woman and José was simple on the face of it, yet many possible complexities presented themselves to the girl's vivid imagining. Tia Juana had seemed contented enough in her new abode for the first day, taking a childish pleasure in the novelty of her surroundings, but later she had become depressed and sunk into a moody silence, save that now and then she muttered ominously to herself and made strange gestures with her clawlike hands.

José she had driven from her harshly, only to seize and draw him close, and on the previous day she had eaten nothing, but

crouched through the long hours before the glowing coals of her grate. At twilight she had demanded a large cooking-pot which she placed upon the fire, and with an earthenware jar of liquid and sundry packets of herbs from the conglomerate heap of her luggage she had brewed a concoction that piqued her landlady's curiosity.

It had not pleased Tia Juana, however; and after glowering darkly into its depths, she had flung it, pot and all, from the window down into the back-yard.

She had retired passively enough, but when the Señora Rodriguez came with her morning coffee the room was empty. There were no signs of a struggle, the silence had remained unbroken throughout the night, and the front door was found to have been unfastened from the inside, although the Señora Rodriguez asserted that she had locked and bolted it before retiring.

This argued that Tia Juana had of her own volition slipped away from the house on some unknown mission; but to Willa such a hypothesis seemed unlikely. In the first place, the old woman was heart and soul in the plan in which Willa herself was the moving spirit, and well content to leave all things to the guidance of her idolized young friend.

Then, too, she dreaded the strange, new city as one who had followed a long and open trail, and, in her right mind, would scarcely have ventured forth to brave it on her own initiative. Had some cajoling or threatening message reached her which induced her to play into Wiley's hands, or could it be that Señora Rodriguez had been bribed to aid in her abduction?

Fierce and implacable as Tia Juana's will was, age had taken its toll of her mental strength and resiliency, and Willa shuddered to think of the coercion which might be brought to bear upon her bewildered and shaken sensibilities.

Dan noted his mistress's profound despondency, but ventured no remark until she addressed him just as they reached the bridge once more.

"Dan, you drove a car once for a detective agency, you told me. Did you ever do any detective work yourself. Do you know anything of their methods?"

"I do, miss!" he responded promptly, a sparkle dawning in his eyes. "Not that I ever did any of it, but I used to watch the other fellers at work, and I'm thinking I could go them one better at it. I've seen them make some bonehead plays in my time, and some wonderful hits, too, I'll admit that."

"Do you want to try a little of it for me?" Willa asked. "An old Spanish woman disappeared early this morning from that house back on Second Place, and I want her found without delay. It's she whom those other men are after; she used to live with her grandson, a hunchback, in that cottage upon the parkway. There will be double wages in it for you while you're working on it, and a thousand dollars reward if you find her and bring her to me."

She went on to describe Tia Juana, and Dan listened in rapt attention to every detail, fired with instant enthusiasm for the new job.

"You leave it to me, miss!" he announced confidently when she had finished. "I'll get into that house to-morrow, one way or another, and have a talk with the landlady and the kid. I'll soon find out if they know more than they've told. In the mean time, I'll make the round of the hospitals to-night and have a look-in at headquarters to see if she's turned up missing.

"Those fellers trailing us this afternoon don't make it look as if they or the man they're workin' for could have got hold of her already, and there's a chance that she just wandered off like, on her own hook. I'll let you know the minute I've got a line on her. Wish I spoke her lingo!"

"Oh, Tia Juana understands English well enough when she wants to, and speaks it, too, but only when necessity compels it. She hates everything American but me. I—I could not bear to think of her wandering about, destitute and dazed and freezing in this storm. Dan, you must find her for me!"

The erstwhile chauffeur promised, with extravagant protestations of assurance, and it was evident that he was in earnest, with illimitable faith in his own powers.

His attitude of mind was infectious, and when Willa descended before the Halstead house her own natural buoyancy of thought

had reasserted itself, although the mystery remained as black and sinister as ever.

Wiley, still *hors de combat* from his thrashing at Thode's hands, could scarcely have been a factor himself in this new development; and if it proved to be the result of any of his agents' activities, surely Dan would be able to find some trace.

She passed a sleepless night, however, and arose to find a foot of snow glistening on the ground and the air keen and brittle with cold. No word came from Dan, and in the afternoon she threw discretion to the winds and went boldly to the Brooklyn house.

Nothing had developed save that José had worried himself into a fever, and the Señora Rodriguez's lamentations were tinged with a querulous resentment.

The young *señorita* was paying handsomely for the hospitality to her friends, and she herself would gladly do anything to aid her country people, even if they were but Mexican-Spanish and not of the blood. Nevertheless, she was not to blame for the old *señora's* departure. She had not agreed to stand guard over her, and surely the Evil Eye had descended upon her house!

She would nurse the little José as though he were her own, and the old *señora's* room should be kept in readiness for her return; but she, Conchita Rodriguez, would worry her own head no longer!

Willa placated the woman's displeasure with promises of more generous pay, and arranged for extra care and comforts for José, whom the *señora* evidently regarded with a tenderness born of superstition. To aid a *jorobado* brought luck to one's hearthstone, even as the touch of his humped shoulders gave promise of good fortune.

Secure at least in the thought of his well-being, Willa was content to leave José in the hands of his irascible but kind-hearted landlady, stipulating that daily messages should be telephoned to her of his condition.

"And if any one comes to inquire for him, remember that he is not here, please," she added. "He and the *señora* have both gone; that is, unless a young American named Morrissey should appear. He is a

friend of mine, and trying to help me find the *señora*."

"Morrissey? I shall not forget." Señora Rodriguez repeated the name thoughtfully. "No one has been here to-day but a plumber, who arrived without my order. He said there was a leak in the cellar next door which came from my house, and he did strange things to my pipes, so that now I can draw no water in my kitchen. Now my neighbor tells me there was no leak, and I cannot understand. They do singular things, these Americans."

Willa returned to her home in a more despondent mood even than before, and a telephone call from Dan late in the evening did not tend to raise her spirits.

"I've canvassed every hospital and institution in the five boroughs!" he announced. "I even tried the morgue; but there ain't hide nor hair of the old lady. Looks like the earth might have opened and swallowed her up. I take it you don't want me to report her missing at headquarters, do you?"

"Only as the very last resort," Willa responded. "We must avoid publicity if we can; although, of course, if she is ill or in any danger, I shall have to let every other consideration go."

"You leave it to me, miss!" The familiar slogan came as cheerfully as ever over the wire. "I don't think the old lady's in bad, wherever she is. Nobody'd dare do anything to her, would they? It ain't a rough-house gang that's after her, from what you told me."

"No, Dan. I am not afraid of any violence to her at their hands. They will only worry and annoy her."

"Well, the chances are, if she just wandered off and lost herself, that somebody's taken her in. I'm doin' fine, so far. I had a grand talk with the dame over in Brooklyn to-day, and she never once got on to me."

His tone was filled with such honest pride that Willa was loath to disturb it; yet she could not forbear remarking:

"I did though, Dan, when she told me what had been done to the plumbing. What did you find out from her?"

"Everything she knew, and a lot that she threw in for good measure. I didn't have to start her; she was just aching to tell the whole story, how they came to her, and all! If them other people get on to the house, she'll spill the beans to them sure, miss. She don't own that house; she only rents it; and the next time I go I'll have an order from the agent to put in weatherstrips or clean the chimneys and grates. I want a talk with the lad as soon as he is well enough. I'll report to you, miss, just as quick as anything turns up."

Willa gave him some final instructions and hung up the receiver, to find Angie at her elbow.

"You've been an unconscionable time!" the latter complained, veiling her eyes to conceal their gleam of awakened curiosity and interest. "We're waiting for you to make up a rubber. Who was that message from? Any of the crowd?"

"No," Willa replied directly. "It was from a friend of mine; you do not know him, Angie."

"Oh, I'm sure I didn't mean to intrude. Dear me! To-morrow's Thanksgiving, and this wretched season is scarcely begun!"

It was a weary holiday for Willa, and she sat through the elaborate formal dinner with which the Halsteads celebrated it in an abstraction of mood which gave two of her callow admirers much concern.

The presence of Kearn Thode's sister, however, brought her out of her reverie, and later, when Mrs. Beekman sought her out in the drawing-room, Willa left her problem to take care of itself for the hour in her interest in the breezy, clear-eyed woman, so like Kearn himself.

"I must apologize for not coming yesterday, as I assured my brother I would. An epidemic of something or other has broken out at my kennels, and I spent a disheartening and doggy afternoon."

She laughed, adding with sudden seriousness:

"My brother has told me so many interesting things of you, Miss Murdaugh, that I have wanted to really know you; but I suppose you have been submerged in a sea of festivity with your cousins. I am a gregarious person, but not a conventionally

social one. I suppose that is why we have not happened to meet since that first dinner. I do not follow the beaten path, as a rule."

"Nor I, except when I am led by the nose!" Willa responded, laughing, too. "But tell me! Is Mr. Thode improving?"

Mrs. Beekman gave her a swift, keen glance.

"Oh, yes! He suffered a mere scratch or two; you know what babies men are about such things. Look at them trailing in now from the dining-room, fed up on the newest stories and the oldest cognac! There's something almost tragic in their boredom, isn't there?"

Willa gasped, a little taken aback by her companion's cynical frankness, and Mrs. Beekman laid an impulsive hand upon her arm.

"Come and lunch with me to-morrow; just we two. We'll have a nice little chat, and if Kearn comes bothering around I'll send him away. I want you to tell me about Mexico."

Willa promised with an odd little thrill of warmth at her heart. With the exception of fat, comfortable Sallie Bailey and old Tia Juana, the girl had had no intimates of her own sex, and the competition appeared to be so keen among the members of the set in which she found herself that friendship was eyed askance as a subterfuge to be wary of.

The daily bulletins from Brooklyn were not encouraging, nor was Dan Morrissey gaining ground in the search. Three days had passed since the disappearance of Tia Juana, and Willa decided despairingly that should a week go by without news, she must go to the police and brave the storm of notoriety and questioning from Mason North and the Halsteads, which would mean the end of her cherished secrecy and hem her in with a multitude of complications.

She lunched with Mrs. Beekman, as she had promised, in the dingy, old-fashioned house on the square, which somehow gave the girl, untutored as she was, an impression of aristocracy that the newer, more ornate piles of stone farther up the avenue had utterly failed to convey.

She was miserably aware that the other

woman was making a sympathetic effort to understand her and gain her friendship, yet the thought of Tia Juana drove all else from her mind, and she knew she was creating a far from propitious impression.

An unaccountable shyness, too, took possession of her at the possibility of meeting Kearn Thode beneath his sister's discerning eye, and as soon as she could courteously do so, she tore herself away from her disappointed hostess and went to José.

The cripple's fever had abated, but he was still very weak. His little hot hands clutched hers nervously, and his big eyes seemed to burn into hers as he asked in his own tongue:

"The *señorita* has a friend whom she trusts?"

"Yes, José," responded Willa promptly. "Have you seen him?"

"He came this morning, and told me his name. He said I was to ask it of you, and you would tell me the same."

"Is it 'Dan'?" She watched the thin face brighten.

"That was it! And am I to trust him, too?"

"You can tell him anything as you would me, *amigo*; but remember, no word of the Pool!"

"That is written, *Señorita* Billie, on my heart! But will the grandmama ever return?"

Willa soothed him as well as she was able, and after a brief conference with *Señora* Rodriguez, took her departure.

A man was standing near the bottom of the steps, lighting a cigarette. Her eyes rested upon him with no flash of recognition until he glanced up, and then with a slow smile tossed his cigarette into the gutter. It was Starr Wiley.

His puffed, discolored lips stood out against the pasty whiteness of his face with the grotesque effect of a mask, and his eyes gleamed malevolently, but he lifted his hat with the old airy insouciance.

"We meet again, my dear Billie!"

She bowed gravely, and made as if to pass him, but he barred her way.

"Are you in such haste? I've come on purpose to escort you back over the bridge and have a little chat with you. There is

something almost comic in the situation, don't you think?"

"If there is, Mr. Wiley, it is discernible only to you," she shrugged. "I will leave you to an enjoyment of it."

"Not yet, my dear! Our bird has flown, I know, but I am curious to learn why you haunt the empty cage."

Willa paused, eying him steadily.

"What is it to you, as long as the *Señora* Reyes is not here?"

"Because I believe that you will lead me to her more quickly than my agents can!" Wiley's smile became a knowing leer. "Very clever, your conversation over the telephone the other night, designed for Angie's benefit. You knew that she would report it faithfully to me, and you counted on it to throw me off the track; but it didn't quite serve its aim."

Willa's heart gave a leap, and then sank in a sick wave of fear for Tia Juana. She did not realize until that moment how certain she had been that the old woman was in the hands of those whose interest it would be to keep her safe.

Wiley's attitude betrayed the fact that he knew no more than the girl herself where Tia Juana was. What, then, could have happened to her?

"I really must congratulate you once more!" he went on, ironically. "It was a master-stroke, a flash of genius to spirit the old lady away from this latest retreat of hers, and pretend that you, too, were in the dark as to her whereabouts. It was not your fault that the shot fell short of its mark!"

Willa hesitated. Should she tell him the truth? That would, of course, give him equal ground with her, and he would move heaven and earth to beat her in the search; but in her hideous new anxiety she would almost rather know that Tia Juana was in antagonistic hands than face the vague but terrible possibilities confronting her.

Starr Wiley accepted her silence as an admission, and on the instant his manner changed.

"I have followed you here to tell you that the time is past for quibbling, and no mere ruse will suffice longer to put me off!" He moved close to her and glared down

implacably into her unwavering eyes. "You refused to meet me half-way, and now you shall hear my ultimatum: You will produce Tia Juana or take me to her within three days, or I shall tell all!"

"Mr. Wiley." Willa drew herself up very straight and tall. "I have no statement to make about Tia Juana, save that I cannot and will not take you to her. I have listened to your threats and innuendos until my patience is exhausted, and I warn you not to approach me again on this or any other matter. What you know is immaterial to me. You may tell it to whom you please. Will you leave me now, or permit me to depart without a further scene?"

He bowed and stepped back.

"As you desire. Remember you have three days. Think it over well, my dear Billie. It is your present position, the Murdaugh money, a brilliant future and a name against the Pool of the Lost Souls!"

CHAPTER XVII.

ANGIE SCORES.

"I WAS sorry to have missed you at my sister's, although I do not think you would have welcomed my appearance!" laughed Kearn Thode. "I was striped with plaster like a savage in war-paint."

"I had the pleasure of seeing the other victim of that motor accident," Willa remarked demurely. "He was even less prepossessing than usual. I—I knew something of what occurred, as I think you could understand from my note. I think that I have again to thank you for your championship."

They were sitting out a dance in the Al-lardyce's conservatory at their first meeting since the night of the Erskine dinner, and for some reason speech was difficult to them both. Willa's eyes, usually so candid, were veiled from him; but Thode swept her with a hungrily wistful gaze.

"You are mistaken. You have nothing to thank me for. I am sorry that any idle gossip reached your ears; but believe me, no other course was open to me. No man could have helped himself—"

"Oh, I understand, of course." Willa blundered helplessly in her haste. "You would have done as much, under the same circumstances, for any other girl; but it is good to feel that there are real men in the world who will protect the name of a friend as though it were that of a sister."

"It wasn't exactly that, Willa." His voice was very low. "A man would naturally resent any insinuation against a good woman, whether she were his sister or not. But there is only one woman in the world for whom a man fights with the primitive blind rage of a human creature for his mate; only, fool that he is, he does not always recognize the feeling which consumes him for what it really is."

He paused, and Willa, too, was silent, but she feared that the very beating of her heart would be audible to his ears. The dreamy waltz had given way to the syncopation of a fox-trot, yet neither were aware of the passing minutes.

"I was blind in Limasito!" he went on. "No woman has come deeply into my life except my sister, and I did not know, I did not realize what you had come to mean to me in our few meetings until you were going away into this new existence which was awaiting you, and then I could not speak."

"I did not follow you then because I had nothing to offer, but I made up my mind to succeed in what I had set out to do, if honest endeavor and the hardest kind of work could achieve it, and then, if I were not too late, I meant to come to you and ask you to be my wife."

Willa stirred tremulously, but still her lips were dumb. Thode misinterpreted her silence.

"Please don't be afraid!" he assured her bitterly. "I am not going to ask you that now, for I have failed! I'm not even going to ask you to wait for me, to give me any hope, for I am losing faith in myself; not in my love for you, Willa, but in the success which alone would make it possible for me to approach you. I only wanted you to know that I had awakened to the truth. No girl was ever yet displeased at one more victim bound to her chariot-wheels."

"I am not displeased, but I—I am distressed!" Willa stammered through stiffened lips. "You think because I accepted the name and the fortune of the grandfather I never knew, and apparently forgot the old life and all that dad had done for me, that I am just coldly mercenary! You think I am that sore, ambitious and pushing and soulless! I thought you knew and understood me, I thought that we were friends!"

"That, I hope we shall always be," he said gently. "It would have been quixotic, absurd for you to refuse the golden opportunity when it came. I did not think of that, nor did I believe you mercenary. I did not mean to whine about my failure, either; it was the chance of fortune and I have lost.

"You will forgive my having spoken. I had to tell you! I could not keep silent any longer. It was as if you all unconsciously were twisting the heart from my breast. You could not help it if you wanted to, you are so sweet, so wonderful! Please don't be sorry for me, either. It is the greatest thing that ever happened to me, and I shall be glad of it always, even when I have to stand aside and see you turn to a better, bigger man. No matter what happens, I shall, all my life through, be at your service."

"Oh, I am not the least bit sorry for you!" Willa cried. "I am exasperated with you! Do you suppose I am the sort of woman to care what a man has, rather than what he is? Am I a painted, pampered doll that I must be approached with gifts and sweets and dangled before the highest bidder? My mother married the man she loved, and starved with him, and died working to take care of his child! Am I less a woman than she?"

"Willa!" He breathed her name in a fervent whisper. "Willa, look at me!"

She raised her blazing eyes and the flame died to a soft luminous glow, while the rich color mantled to her brow.

"Willa, do you mean that you care, really? Oh, I vowed I would not ask you until I had proved myself worthy, and now, when everything is at a standstill, an *impassé*, and you yourself have warned me

of the impossibility of winning out in my plan for the future, I—I forget all my resolutions.

"It is unfair for me to speak now, it is not playing the game, but will you tell me at least that you won't be displeased with me if sometime I come to you, when I have won the right? I will ask no promise now, I cannot, but if I could know that you cared ever so little—"

"How can you know if—if you don't ask?" Willa's downright honesty had gotten the better of her timidity, and with characteristic fearlessness she disclosed all that was in her own wildly throbbing heart. "I don't know how a man could prove himself more worthy of any woman than by taking his life in his hands on a hundred to one chance of saving hers! I don't know what difference the loss or finding of the Pool makes in the happiness of you and me. Go ahead and make a martyr of yourself over your silly pride if you want to!

"If I thought you didn't care, that you were just trying to carry on the ghastly game they call flirtation up here, I wouldn't be so angry with you. I'm not Willa Murdaugh down inside of me, and you know it! I'm just Gentleman Geoff's Billie, a waif raised by the greatest-hearted man that ever lived; but I've got some pride myself. I don't want any man who hasn't spunk enough to ask me!"

"Willa! Oh, my dearest, will you—"

"Here comes Winnie Mason!" She drew her hands from his and sprang up with a nervous tinkle of laughter. "That means we've missed three dances, and you were to have had two of them with Angie! You'll be in for a dreadful panning—"

"You wicked little—adorable little—girl o' mine!" he exclaimed softly, as Winnie's mildly inquiring face appeared around a narrow alley between the close-packed flowering plants. "I'm coming to-morrow, before breakfast—"

Willa shook her head, the light waning in her eyes.

"No, not to-morrow, Kearn. There is something that I must do; something I cannot put aside even—even for you."

"In the evening, then? I must see you

to-morrow some time! It's going to be hard enough to live through to-night!"

She nodded, and not trusting herself to speak again, turned and slipped away to meet Winnie Mason.

That placidly dense young man was mightily pleased with the effusive greeting with which she favored him, and had she vision enough to note it, she might have read in his worshiping eyes a like message to that which she had just heard.

But she was blind, dazed in the light of her own swiftly gained wondrous happiness. The music, the dancers, the little crystal-laden supper-tables, the final romp, all passed in a kaleidoscopic dream before her, and only the wintry night wind beating upon her in a frigid blast as she stepped from the awninged passageway to the limousine awakened her to a sense of reality.

Just then the flash of a street-lamp in at the window fell for a passing moment on Angie's face as she sat half-turned from her cousin, and Willa caught her breath to stifle a sudden, startled exclamation. She had seen Angie in many fits of temper, sullen and raging, but never had the girl's expression been so fiendish! The doll-like beauty was gone in a distortion of anger, but there was a suggestion of malignant triumph, too, which aroused Willa's apprehension.

She knew that in her heart Angie despised her as an upstart and bitterly resented her small success in the social world, besides blaming her for the episode with Starr Wiley. She remembered, too, how Angie had betrayed her to him. In her maddening anxiety for Tia Juana's safety, Willa had given no thought to the means Wiley must have used to reinstate himself once more in her cousin's willing eyes.

Was this evidence of fury directed against her because she had been the unwitting cause of Kern Thode's defection in the matter of the two dances, or was something deeper and more significant in the wind?

Willa was not left in doubt for long. She had scarcely finished her preparations for the night, and was braiding her hair, when a light tapping came upon her door.

Almost before the wondering assent had

left her lips, Angie slipped in and stood before her. She was still in her dance frock, and her blue eyes were fiery.

"I suppose I have come on a thankless mission, Willa," she began. "Every time I have tried to help you or teach you anything, you have looked on it, in your spiteful way, as mere jealousy on my part, although why I should be jealous of you, Heaven only knows!"

"Please, Angelica! We have had all this out before and I am very tired. Would you mind if I asked you to wait until morning?" Willa gave her hair a final twist and turned from the mirror. "I am honestly sorry Kern Thode missed those dances with you to-night; but it really wasn't my fault--"

"Do you suppose I wanted to dance with him?" Angie interrupted in immense scorn. "I only permitted him to put his name down on my card in ordinary courtesy because of his sister; she has such a caustic tongue that one must keep on the right side of her. If he chose to ignore his dances with me it was because he was playing a game which you, you conceited little simpleton, couldn't see through. Oh, I heard what he said to you in the conservatory!"

"You listened!" Willa turned on her at last. "Lord, what a miserable specimen of a girl you are, anyhow! I knew you were spying about and listening at my heels here at home to learn what you could and run with it to the man who's making a tool of you and a fool besides, but I didn't think you were so low down as to skulk about and pry into affairs which are no concern of yours! Is nothing sacred to you?"

"I was only doing my duty!" Angie returned loftily. Then her consuming rage got the better of her once more. "You dare to speak of any one making a tool of me! It is you who are waiting for any one's hand! Starr Wiley made a fool of you, and you simpered and purred and thought you were taking him from me, when he was only amusing himself for the moment because he was jealous of me with Art Judson!"

"Now, in your bursting conceit you

think this impecunious fortune hunter Thode is in love with you. I listened because it was my duty to keep any member of the family from throwing herself away, and I wanted to see how far he would dare to go. I'm here now to tell you the truth."

"I do not want to hear another word!" Willa cried hotly. "It is no affair of yours, and you shall not speak of Kearn Thode as a—a fortune hunter! He is the only real man in this whole crowd! If you listened, you know how proud and independent he is!"

"I heard; but that was only his cleverness; he knew how eager you were, and he simply led you on to almost propose to him yourself! That was good stuff about not knowing he cared for you down in Mexico until you were leaving. What would you say if I were to tell you that he made a deliberate play for you from the moment he reached that town? Oh, he's serious enough! He'll marry you if he can; that's what he meant to do from the first."

"I think you must be mad!" Willa stared at her cousin in sheer wonder. "Why should he have wanted to marry me? There were lots of other girls in town—"

"Because he knew who you really were all the time! He knew before Mason ever found you, and he knew, too, what a fortune you were coming into. You needn't look at me like that, I know facts!"

"I don't think you do," Willa remarked simply. "You must have taken leave of your senses, or else Starr Wiley has been making you believe the silliest sort of lies. How could Kearn Thode have known who I was? No one did but—but the man who had made me his own daughter, and he would not tell me because he did not want to hurt me by letting me know what mean, contemptible snobs my people were, and how they had served my own father for marrying my brave mother! Kearn Thode knew nothing!"

"What if I were to show you proof? Here is a letter in his own hand, telling all about you, and what he meant to do!" Angie pulled a crumpled wad of paper from her bodice and held it out, her whole

body quivering in triumph. "Read it and then you'll know whether he cares for you or not! Read it, I say!"

"And I say to you that if you don't leave this room at once I will ring and have you put out! Don't you imagine that I can see through a scurvy trick of Starr Wiley's to get back at the man who beat him twice to a mere pulp? I do not want to see the letter; I will not read it."

"Then listen!" Angie smoothed the sheet of paper. "You shall listen! You shall know what that man is scheming to marry you for! There is only a part of it here, but it ought to be enough to open your eyes, blinded with conceit as you are!"

"I will not—" Willa began indignantly, but Angie's voice silenced her.

"'Except for him, of course, no one here knows her real name,'" she read, "'and it wouldn't mean anything to them if they did; but I spotted her at once, and later events have only proved the truth of my suspicions. She is the undoubted owner of almost boundless wealth, and when I have gone after her and won her consent—'"

"Stop!" Willa clapped her hands to her ears. "I will not listen to one more word! It is a lie, I tell you! A lie!"

"There isn't any more," Angie announced with a sly grimace. "That is the bottom of the page, but it ought to be enough for you."

"Kearn Thode never wrote a word of it!" exclaimed Willa passionately. "I would not believe you if you swore it from now till you die! Go, before I make you!"

"Oh, I'm going." Angie shrugged, and the letter fluttered from her fingers to the floor. "I've no desire for a disgraceful brawl, I assure you! Of course I am not familiar with Kearn Thode's handwriting, but I have proof enough to satisfy me that the letter is his. If you marry him now, you will have bought him with your eyes open, and have no one but yourself to blame if you're not pleased with your bargain! I have done my duty anyway, my dear cousin. Good night."

Her footsteps died away down the hall, and Willa dropped into a low chair before the hearth, covering her face with her

hands. It was just a trick of Wiley's, of course! She would not let her gaze stray to that tell-tale sheet of white paper upon the floor, and yet something seemed to draw her eyes to it.

Wiley must have written it himself and put it in Angie's hands to work what mischief she might with it. There could be no harm in one glance at it: a glance which would prove instantly its falseness, just as she knew it in her heart to be a falsity.

Slowly Willa rose and made her way to where the letter lay. She made no effort to touch it at first, but it had fallen with the written side uppermost, and gradually as she stared down at it the scorn in her face gave way to wonder.

The brief note she had received from Kearn Thode after he had thrashed Wiley at the club was engraved deep in her thoughts with every line distinct, and the

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

characters on the paper before her eyes were so similar in every detail that it seemed impossible for them not to have been fashioned by the same hand.

With suspicion surging in her heart, Willa rushed to the little drawer of her dressing-table, where the first note had been treasured, and drew it forth. Then, seizing the other paper from the floor, she compared them.

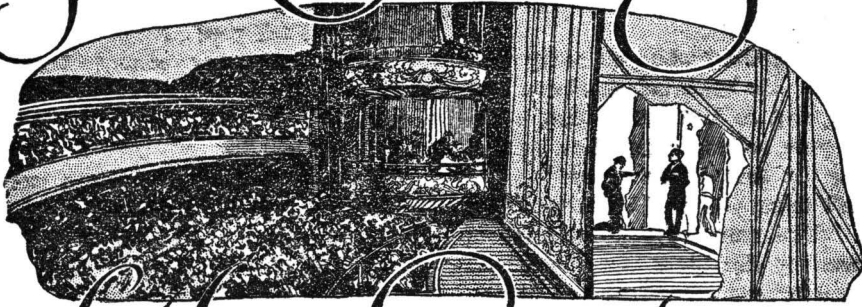
The next minute she had crumpled them both fiercely and cast them from her, flinging herself across her bed in a paroxysm of bitter grief and disillusionment.

Kearn Thode had written both letters; there could be no doubt of that.

Truth and chivalry departed from the world with her shattered dream, and once more Willa found herself alone, but in a depth of solitude she had never known before. Love had gone.

The Other Side of the Curtain

by Neil Moran



I.

“OVERTURE, Mr. Sinclair.”

The assistant stage manager stopped before the door, decorated with a big star, to call out his customary announcement.

Receiving no answer, he tapped against the wooden panel.

“Overture, Mr. Sinclair,” he said again.

The door suddenly opened, and Henry Sinclair, Broadway star, appeared, dressed in evening clothes for the first act.

“Ready.” He snapped out the word as

he pushed by the other man and with a quick step started down the corridor.

It was characteristic of Sinclair to act like that; to answer curtly and brush by people, seeming to feel his superiority.

For fifteen years he had been a star, and members of the theatrical profession looked upon him as a man wrapped up in himself.

At first glance he might have been taken for forty, but a closer study would show that he looked all of his fifty years. He was six feet tall, well proportioned, with iron-gray hair that covered a well-shaped head.

With his make-up on he was good-looking, but when the grease-paint came off his face appeared heavily lined and decidedly cynical.

The strains of the orchestra could be heard, back stage, as the star paused behind the left wing. Suddenly the music stopped, and the curtain went up on the first act of "The Man-Rules."

From where he stood, Sinclair commanded a fair view of the front of the house.

What he saw pleased him. Row after row of fashionable-looking people, who always turned out to see his opening night performance.

Back stage a deep silence prevailed. Several members of the company were standing here and there, waiting for their cues.

Suddenly Sinclair shifted his gaze. A young girl, a very pretty girl with large, brown eyes that looked out of a dark, oval face, came up beside him with one hand over her heart.

"Nervous?" he asked, looking down at her.

The girl raised her eyes to his. "Terribly. I suppose it's suspense," she told him.

He was about to answer when he heard his cue, and with a hurried step crossed behind the back drop.

The next second he had made his entrance. The sound of applause rang through the house. It was Sinclair's usual reception.

Breathlessly the girl waited. It would only be a minute before she would follow

the star, and within that time a hundred thoughts flashed through her mind.

It was her first big chance. She had never played in New York; had nothing to recommend her but three years' stock training in a company miles from the Great White Way, where she had been discovered by Frank Williams, the theatrical producer, who, seeing her ability, was now putting her out as Sinclair's leading woman.

It was the thing she had always dreamed: playing the lead in New York, the city where so many stars are made. Now, as she nerved herself to face the critical Broadway audience, she heard her cue, and with a beating heart walked out on the stage.

Three hours later Henry Sinclair sat alone in his dressing-room, with narrowed eyes and tight lips.

Something unexpected had happened. The girl who had been selected for his leading woman had made a terrific hit at once.

He closed his eyes, thinking about that big scene in the second act. It was one of those situations that critics generally refer to, and it led up to the climax of the act.

He had played it with the art of the finished actor; but after the fall of the curtain and his repeated bows, the audience kept applauding, until it was obvious that the clamoring was for the new leading woman.

And the stage manager, realizing this, ordered her to take a curtain call alone, after which the applause subsided.

Sinclair gritted his teeth. He had already become jealous of the girl. He realized that her part in that particular scene was bigger than his, her lines much stronger.

Suddenly the door opened, and Frank Williams, the producer of the play, entered the room.

"Henry," he said, giving Sinclair a familiar clout on the back, "that new leading woman surpassed my expectations. She's made a hit."

Sinclair did not answer. The manager, seeing that the star was upset over something, sat down and looked at him.

"What's wrong?" he finally asked. "Why the silence?"

Sinclair got up, and began pacing back and forth. Somewhat astonished, Williams stared at him.

Suddenly Sinclair stopped and pointed a finger at the producer.

"Williams," he said, as his eyes flashed, "I want her lines cut!"

"Cut?" echoed Williams. "What do you mean?"

"Just this," Sinclair went on. "That girl's part in that scene of the second act is bigger than mine. That's why she made the hit."

"Do you mean to have her lines changed—cut, as you say—so that the part will be smaller?" Williams gasped.

"That's exactly what I mean," Sinclair answered. "It's the first time in my career when I've had any member of my company detract from me."

"But it might spoil the part," Williams objected. "Possibly throw the whole scene out of joint."

"That can easily be fixed," Sinclair cut in. "And no one will ever notice the difference."

Williams shook his head.

"I'm strenuously opposed to such a thing," he began emphatically.

But he got no further. Sinclair banged a fist on his dressing-table with such force that the manager jumped.

"Either those lines are cut, Williams, or I resign from the company!"

For a second Williams stared at the star in amazement. Then, seeing the serious, set expression on his face, he picked up his hat and started for the door.

"Very well," he said; "be in my office to-morrow at noon, and I'll have the playwright there."

Sinclair nodded, and the manager, with clenched jaws, left the dressing-room.

II.

THE following day at twelve o'clock Williams sat in his private office opposite a good-looking young man in a dark suit, who was Donald Hale, the playwright.

"I'm bitterly opposed to it," Hale declared, banging the desk. "I tell you,

Frank, that scene is perfect as it now stands."

Williams shook his head.

"I know it as well as you," he answered.

"But Sinclair is up in the air."

"Then let him be up in the air," Hale growled. "I guess the playwright has something to say in the matter."

"No use arguing," Williams rejoined. "You know Sinclair, and how eccentric he is. Either we got to do it, Don, or it means we both lose money."

"Perhaps we could bring him around," Hale suggested. "Sometimes persuasive powers will—"

But he stopped short as the door opened, and Henry Sinclair walked into the room.

With deliberate care the star removed his gloves and tossed them on the desk.

"Now, gentlemen," he began, casting a keen look at the playwright, "let us get down to business. Let me advise you not to try any persuasive powers in this matter."

Williams looked at Hale. It was evident Sinclair must have overheard the playwright's remark.

But Hale was assuming a nonchalant air, studying the face of a celebrated actress whose picture adorned the far side of the wall.

Sinclair, noting Hale's pose, was apparently annoyed. "I presume you have been made acquainted with my idea, Hale?" he asked.

Hale shifted his gaze to the star.

"I have, Sinclair, and I don't approve."

The star smiled.

"I don't intend to mince matters," he went on. "Either you agree to cut those lines, or I refuse to play to-night's performance."

Suddenly Hale pounded the desk. "Very well, I refuse."

Sinclair smiled and picked up his gloves.

"All right," he said, starting for the door. "Don't expect me at the theater to-night."

Williams held up his hand.

"Wait, Henry," he called out—"just a minute."

Sinclair turned.

"I'm in earnest," he said in low, cutting

tones, "and I won't have any manager or playwright dictate to me."

Hale smiled.

"You're the one who has been doing the dictating," he replied. "And when we refuse, you threaten to leave us in the lurch."

Sinclair lifted his eyebrows. "Well," he remarked, "putting all that aside, what is your answer?"

"I'm willing," Williams said, seeing that the star had them where he wanted them. "And you are, too, Don," he added, turning to the playwright.

Hale looked at Williams and then nodded.

"All right," he replied. "But let me tell you one thing, Sinclair; no good is going to come of this."

"That remains to be seen," Sinclair replied coldly.

Hale gave him one swift look and then turned to the manager. "Hand over that second act, Frank."

Williams reached into a drawer and produced the script.

"Go to it," he said as he tossed it on the desk.

Eagerly Sinclair took it and turned to a page near the end. "Here is one point," he said, addressing Hale. "And here—"

"But we haven't told Miss Travis," Williams suddenly remarked. "She should be here to—"

"I've thought of that," Sinclair cut in. "Suppose you phone to her hotel, and if she's in, have her meet us at the theater, say about two o'clock."

"For rehearsal?" Hale asked, looking at the star.

"She can easily adapt herself to the change in lines," Sinclair answered, "and get accustomed to some new ones I want put in for myself."

Williams picked up the telephone and called a number. Several seconds later he had Anne Travis on the wire.

"I can't explain now," he said, after he had given the order. "We'll be there at two o'clock, Miss Travis. All right. Good-by."

Williams hung up and turned to the star.

"She's mystified, but she'll be there."

Sinclair frowned. "One thing more, Williams; if this Miss Travis should object, she's to be overruled. Understand?"

Williams nodded, but did not answer.

"And now," Sinclair continued, picking up a pencil from the manager's desk, "we're ready to cut those lines."

At two o'clock star, playwright, and manager entered the stage door of the Shakespeare Theater.

Anne Travis was sitting on a chair, waiting for him. Briefly Williams acquainted her with Sinclair's demand.

Anne puckered her brows.

"But, Mr. Williams," she protested, "that scene is wonderful. Even the critics spoke of it in the morning papers."

"I know it, Miss Travis," Williams replied. "But the star rules, and I can't help it."

Sinclair came forward, bowing to the girl.

"That scene," he said airily, "must be revised so that your part shall not dominate mine. In other words, you have a number of lines with too much of a punch. They are, in fact, stronger and more dramatic than mine."

"But what am I to do?" Anne objected, trying to conceal her anger. "That particular scene which leads up to the climax of the second act is wonderful. Why, last night the audience actually applauded it," she added, looking up into his face with innocent eyes.

Sinclair bit his lip. He didn't care to be reminded about that.

"You forget, Miss Travis," he said with a forced smile, "that I am the star. It is just because the audience applauded your lines, and the climax they lead up to, that I am having them changed."

Sinclair at least had the courage of his convictions, for he explained the situation with the utmost candor.

For a second Anne looked up into his face. He was watching her with narrowed eyes and set lips, waiting to see if she would argue against him.

Then she turned and looked at the other two men, whose expressions showed that they were helpless.

Slowly she turned to the star and bowed her head in silent assent.

That night, after the performance, Sinclair sat alone in his dressing-room, quite pleased with results. The lines had been cut to suit his demand, and Anne had not roused the audience the way she had done on the opening night.

It had been Sinclair all the way through the act, with the clamoring all for him after the curtain dropped.

All of which goes to show that particularly strong lines worked into a dramatic situation, especially near the climax of an act, have a whole lot to do with getting the audience, provided, of course, they are put over with ability.

And while the star was gloating over his victory, Anne was pacing to and fro in her dressing-room, much disturbed over the whole thing.

She realized that Sinclair had practically deprived her of efficient ammunition.

"It's unjust—an outrage," she told herself over and over again.

And then, for nothing better to do, she sat on her trunk and began reading a theater magazine to divert her mind.

And while the star was in one dressing-room and Anne in another, Williams and Hale were having a drink in a near-by hotel, discussing the changed part.

"Sinclair's a wise old owl, Don," Williams remarked, squirting some vichy into his glass; "that is, where his own glory is concerned."

Hale shook his head. "I still predict," he replied, "that no good is going to come of it."

III.

THE next day Anne had something else to disconcert her. The star had ordered more of her lines cut, this time in the first act, much to the strenuous opposition of Williams and Hale.

Anne's spirit rebelled at this second injustice, but realizing how powerful the star was, she controlled herself, and abided by his decision. All that afternoon she worried about the change, and the night found her at the theater, nervous and upset.

During the first act she missed the laughs that had formerly greeted some of her comedy lines. The playwright also missed them, and with a grim face he watched the act out.

His practised eye noted something else. Anne was not playing well. She seemed nervous, and, in fact, somewhat unfamiliar with cues at the spots where the lines had been cut.

After the act was over he joined Williams, who was standing alone at the back of the theater.

"Frank," he said, "Miss Travis was not herself in that first act."

Williams nodded. "I thought the same," he said.

"It's all Sinclair's fault," Hale declared, his eyes flashing.

"He's got us where he wants us," Williams replied, "and we have to put up with it."

During the second act, Hale watched the stage with set lips. The big scene, the one Sinclair had originally ordered cut, was about to take place, with only the star and Anne on the boards.

Anne seemed to be more nervous than she had been in the first act even.

"That girl looks as though she were on the verge of hysterics," Hale muttered.

Then he suddenly sat up in his seat, as a loud report resounded through the house, starting from the stage.

Anne had thrown back her head, and had deliberately snapped her fingers under the star's nose!

Astounded, Sinclair fell back a step, watching his leading woman as she made rapid strides toward the right exit.

The audience did not know what to make of it. It certainly could not be in the part, for the incident was contrary to everything the scene depicted.

Helplessly, Sinclair stood on the stage looking around with the expression of a man who had lost his senses. Then the house laughed.

Hale, bewildered, sat still in his seat, staring at the stage. Suddenly the curtain shot down, and a murmur of astonishment passed through the audience.

Williams, who had also witnessed the

startling incident, rushed back stage. Hale, falling over a few people in getting from his seat, hurried in the same direction.

The first thing he and Williams learned was that Miss Marshall, Anne's understudy, believing that she was no longer wanted, had left the theater before the incident occurred.

Sinclair was pacing back and forth like a maniac, hurling choice remarks at everybody and everything in general.

Williams grabbed him by the arm.

"What does it mean?" he demanded. "Where is Miss Travis?"

Sinclair turned to him, his face convulsed with rage.

"I'm done for," he shouted. "That girl has made a laughing-stock of me."

Back stage came the strains of the orchestra playing a lively rag-time air. The leader realizing that something had gone wrong, had the presence of mind to start the music.

"I'm a laughing-stock," Sinclair roared again. "Great grief, Williams, what am I to do?"

But Williams was already accosting Reynolds, the stage manager.

"Where is Miss Travis?" he demanded.

"In her room," Reynolds answered. "Absolutely refuses to go on. Say, Frank, what's it all about?"

"Never mind that now," Williams cut in, mopping his brow with a handkerchief. "Hurry, Reynolds, they're starting a racket out front, and unless they're stopped it will turn into a riot."

"What's to be done?" Reynolds asked, with the air of a man who is perfectly helpless in such an emergency.

Williams shoved his handkerchief back into his pocket and grabbed the stage manager by the shoulder.

"Some one has got to go before the curtain and explain."

"But what is there to explain?" Reynolds wanted to know. "What can we say?"

Leaving the stage manager abruptly, Williams passed into the first entrance and the next second stood before the curtain ready for a speech.

Immediately the music and handclapping

that had been trying to drown each other stopped.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Williams in a faltering voice, "I regret to inform you that the performance cannot go on. If you will present your seat checks at the box-office, your money will be refunded."

Bowing slightly, he swung on his heel and disappeared.

Astonished, and realizing that something was wrong, the audience slowly made preparations to depart.

Seats were banged back with warlike sounds, comments exchanged here and there, some unpleasant, and others treating the affair as a joke.

There was not one in the audience who could understand the meaning of it all. Everything was a mystery.

Several newspaper men who had been in the orchestra, made a hurried exit to get to the stage-door, seeing the possibilities of a good story.

The orchestra began playing, tearing off some discordant notes, for the musicians were as much bewildered as any one, and it was not long before the house was emptied.

Back stage Williams hurried toward Anne's dressing-room. The door was closed and he had to knock twice before it opened.

Anne's maid stood before him, a scared look on her face. Anne was sitting in a far corner, her head resting on the palms of her hand.

"Miss Travis," Williams said in a trembling voice, "why did you do it?"

Anne slowly looked up, expecting to see him enraged, but instead found him gazing at her with reproachful eyes.

"I am sorry for your sake, Mr. Williams," she said. "I was impulsive and really regret it. But if you could have seen the leer on his face as he was playing that scene; the way he seemed to gloat over my belittled part, I think you would understand."

Williams said nothing, but stood staring at her.

"I didn't seem to realize what I was doing," she went on, "until I had snapped my fingers at him, and there was nothing left for me to do but walk off the stage."

"You surely showed your contempt," Williams remarked. "I don't know what to make of it yet, Miss Travis."

"You don't seem to be terribly enraged with me," she replied timidly. "Really, Mr. Williams, I am sorry as I said, for your sake."

"No use crying over spilt milk," Williams answered. "It's the first time, though, in my whole experience that such a thing has happened. Sinclair is wild and, of course, it means a loss of money for me."

Anne did not answer. Instead, she sat staring ahead at a trunk on the other side of the room.

"Even if you had consented to go on," Williams continued, "the mischief would have been done. Miss Marshall, unfortunately, had left. I had to tell the audience to go home."

Suddenly Hale appeared in the doorway. "Frank," he called, "may I come in?"

Williams nodded, and the playwright entered the room.

For a second he looked at Anne with wistful eyes, and then in a gentle voice he put the same question that Williams had asked: "Why did you do it, Miss Travis?"

"She explained it all to me, Don," said Williams. "It was on account of the lines being cut."

The shadow of a smile played over Hale's features.

"I knew," he said, "that no good would come of it."

"I suppose I had better resign," Anne remarked. "Under the circumstances I could not think of going back."

Williams knit his brows, and looked at the playwright.

"I'm afraid it's the only thing to do," he said, turning to the girl. "The understudy will have to jump in."

The back-doorman appeared in the hallway.

"Mr. Williams," he said, "there are several newspaper men want to see you and Miss Travis."

For a second Williams frowned. Then suddenly his face lighted up, and he grabbed Hale by the arm.

"We must give an explanation, Don, and I have a great idea. Send them in," he

ordered, turning to the back-doorman, who immediately disappeared.

"Miss Travis," Williams began, "if I didn't know Sinclair had no right to force my hand by having your lines cut, I'd be terribly angry with you."

Anne looked up and smiled. It was a grateful smile, and it seemed to please the manager.

"But," he continued, "I want you to do as I ask. Tell the newspapermen the true story. There is no harm in it, and it certainly is not being malicious. It is up to you to explain your strange action."

Anne was about to object, but Williams held up his hand. "It is the only way you can repay me," he said.

For a second Anne looked at him, then nodded her head in assent.

"And now, Don," Williams finished, turning to the playwright, "to-morrow morning the papers will have stories and pictures about Miss Travis. The publicity will make her famous."

Hale looked at the girl, who suddenly seemed excited over what Williams had said, and for a second their eyes met.

"That's true," he replied, facing the manager. "But she won't play with Sinclair again."

"Not with Sinclair," broke in Williams, "but in that new play you've just finished. The part is for a young girl, and I'm ready to gamble and make Miss Travis a star."

Anne looked up, her eyes flashing. What she had heard she could hardly believe. But her ears had not deceived her, for Hale enthusiastically remarked, "She's ideal for the part and I don't want anybody else to have it."

Several men now appeared.

"The reporters, sir," came the announcement.

"Show them in," Williams ordered, as he reached in his vest pocket for cigars.

IV.

THE following morning the newspapers ran front-page stories of the whole affair. Pictures of Anne appeared in all of them and several published Sinclair's.

Broadway was alive with gossip. In hotels, restaurants and bars, members of

the theatrical profession and other characters of the Great White Way discussed the extraordinary act of the new girl who had unintentionally jumped into prominence.

Sinclair remained alone in his rooms and refused to be interviewed. "I have nothing to say" was the order he gave to the clerk.

An afternoon rehearsal was called to familiarize Miss Marshall with Anne's part.

The box-office of the Shakespeare Theater turned people away that night, for many wanted to see Sinclair out of natural curiosity.

In a room situated in the theater building, Williams and Hale sat discussing the way things had turned out, with exclamations of surprise and joy.

"Sinclair is still wild and upset," Williams remarked. "Of course I didn't tell him anything about Miss Travis going out in the new play."

"When does she begin rehearsals?" Hale asked, ignoring the reference to Sinclair.

"In about a week," Williams answered. "The notices went out to the newspapers to-night."

"Strike while the iron is hot," Hale replied, as he and the manager started downstairs.

They reached the orchestra floor just as the curtain rang up.

When Sinclair made his entrance a subdued murmur ran through the house.

"He's nervous," Williams said, casting a keen look at the star.

"Decidedly," Hale whispered back. "He's not over the shock yet."

When the second act began they noticed that Sinclair seemed somewhat unstrung. Finally the big scene was about to take place—the one where Anne had snapped her fingers.

As the understudy reached the part, she shot across a line with the ginger that was supposed to be in it. Sinclair was about to deliver his reply when he stopped, staring ahead with an abstracted air.

Suddenly he shook his head and brushed the palm of his right hand across his troubled face.

Behind the left wing the stage manager prompted the line, believing that Sinclair

had forgotten it. But Sinclair stood immovable and speechless, brushing his hand in front of him again as though to drive something away.

"What's wrong?" Williams demanded, turning to the playwright.

"It's the identical spot and line where Miss Travis snapped her fingers," replied Hale. "Look!"

Sinclair had thrown back his head, lifting his right hand in the air. The next second he snapped his fingers.

The report vibrated through the house like a shot from a gun. Then Sinclair, unable to go on with his lines, stood standing as he had done the night before, with a bewildered expression on his face.

The curtain dropped. Once again the orchestra leader tapped his baton to start the music, wondering if the actors and actresses in the company were going crazy one by one, while a buzz of conversation ran through the house.

Hale and Williams hurried back stage and made for the star's dressing-room to determine the cause of his action.

Sinclair was pacing up and down, tearing his hair as he had done the night before.

"I'm done for," he gasped. "Williams, the face of that Travis girl loomed up before me. I could even see her snapping her fingers. I was unnerved. I tried to speak my lines, but I was like a dumb man."

"Can't you go on?" Williams asked. "This means a second night's loss, Sinclair."

The star shook his head.

"I couldn't play. It's impossible. I doubt whether I can ever play the part again."

The sound of hand-clapping came to them from the auditorium.

"Another explanation," Williams said grimly, starting for the stage apron.

The following morning Anne read in the papers about the affair.

After finishing the account she sat with melancholy eyes looking out through the hotel window at some clouds that were racing through the sky.

Already she felt sorry for Sinclair, for the newspaper stated that he was leaving

the city for a rest and that the play would close. Yet at the same time she told herself that it was a retribution.

Even the announcement in the same paper that she was to start rehearsals in a week for a new play in which she would be starred did not revive her spirits.

For she realized that with the closing of "The Man Rules," Williams and the playwright would both be out financially. And she also realized that if she had not snapped her fingers on that eventful night all this could have been averted.

For some time she sat looking at the clouds, her mind far away.

The New York theatrical circle which she had recently entered with high spirits, and from which she had emerged with a sensational exit, had made her very unhappy.

Her one thought was to get away from town for a few days—from stage life and everything it represented.

Had she not felt that she owed Williams and Donald Hale a debt of gratitude she would have bidden the Great White Way farewell, for home and her mother and the friends she had left behind.

None of them she told herself, had ever been jealous of her. Their one object had always been to make her happy.

The maid entered the room, handing her a letter. It was addressed to the Shakespeare Theater, and the maid said a boy from Mr. Williams's office had brought it over.

The postmark read Tuxedo, and somewhat mystified, Anne tore open the envelope.

After reading the contents she gave an exclamation of delight. It was from Muriel Townsend, a girl she had gone to school with four years ago in Washington.

Muriel said she had read of the Sinclair-Travis incident, and understanding that Anne had resigned from the company, wanted her to start for Tuxedo immediately to attend a week-end party. ●

She made up her mind at once.

"I'm going to Tuxedo," she told her maid. "I'm going away from New York—from managers and actors and everything connected with the stage."

The maid bowed. "When do you leave, Miss Travis?"

"This morning," Anne replied, her eyes dancing, "if there's a train."

V.

THE same evening Anne rolled up to the Townsend house in the Townsend limousine.

A pretty girl ran down the path to meet her.

"Anne!" she exclaimed rapturously.

Anne threw her arms about her hostess, and for a second they both stood talking at once, until a musical, masculine voice came from the veranda:

"A picture for the gods, Arden. Come and take a look."

Both girls turned as Ralph Bayne, fashionable clubman and society idler, started down the steps with a young man about his own age following.

"A picture for the gods, indeed!" laughed Muriel, looking up at Bayne. "And pray, since when have you acquired an artistic eye, Ralph?"

Bayne laughed as he was introduced to Anne.

"She does nothing but cross-examine me, Miss Travis," he said. "Now that you're here, I insist that you be the court."

Anne laughed, and the other young man, who had been watching her from afar, walked over to the machine.

"Mr. Chase," Muriel said, turning to Anne.

For a second Chase looked into her eyes. He was without a hat, and Anne thought what an attractive-looking fellow he was.

And then her heart started to beat rapidly as he took the hand which she extended to him.

Suddenly realizing that Chase was holding her hand longer than propriety allowed, she somewhat shyly drew it away.

Turning to Muriel she smiled.

"I'm full of dust," she said, "I had better—"

Muriel seized her by the arm, and they started for the house.

Bayne and Chase stood looking after them. "She's a dream, Arden, isn't she?"

But Chase did not answer. For, as she

was about to enter the door, Anne looked back, and their eyes met.

Ten minutes later the two girls sat in Muriel's room.

They were talking over school-days, old times, and Anne's affair at the Shakespeare Theater, until Messrs. Bayne and Chase were brought up as an interesting topic of the hour.

"Ralph, you know," Muriel said, "met Mr. Chase four years ago in Los Angeles. Hadn't seen him until yesterday, when he ran into him in New York at the Knickerbocker Hotel, as he was signing the register. He told Ralph he was in New York for 'atmosphere,' as he calls it."

"Atmosphere?" repeated Anne. "What on earth—"

"He's a writer," Muriel explained. "An author, I suppose you would call him."

Anne shook her head and smiled.

"Writes love stories?" she asked, with a twinkle in her eye.

"I don't know what he writes," Muriel replied seriously. "Ralph never read any of his works. Reading to Ralph is a bore, you know. All he looks at are the society notes in the newspapers."

For some time they sat talking, Muriel always reverting to Ralph, and Anne skilfully leading the conversation back to Mr. Arden Chase.

Twenty minutes later they went downstairs for dinner.

There were other guests at the Townsend week-end party, a good-humored, lively crowd, that listened with well-bred patience to some of the droll stories Colonel Townsend told over the dinner-table.

During the meal Anne felt Chase's eyes upon her. He was sitting on the opposite side of the table next to some talkative society girl, who was doing her best to impress him with her knowledge of dogs and horses, and various other species of animals.

But from the expression on Chase's face, he was anything but interested, for he said little to the girl with the animal knowledge, constantly shifting his gaze to Anne.

Once or twice she caught his glance, only to drop her own before his steady eyes.

And then that fluttering sensation she

had felt when she first met him, started around her heart, and she felt the blood rushing to her cheeks.

No one referred to the incident where she and Sinclair had been the chief characters. Apparently this small group of society people understood the meaning of tact, for the conversation was general, stopping every now and then so that the colonel could tell one of his long-winded stories.

The dinner finally ended, much to the relief of Anne, who was beginning to feel somewhat self-conscious from the near presence of Arden Chase.

He cleverly escaped from his partner at table and made his way to Anne's side.

"We're going several miles into the country," he said in low tones, "in Ralph's machine, to bring over his sister who is visiting friends. Perhaps you'd care to come with us. Miss Townsend will be along."

Anne looked up into his eyes and smiled. "I'd love to," she said.

"Perhaps I should have waited for Miss Townsend to invite you," Chase added, somewhat embarrassed, "but you see Ralph wants me to run the car, and I suppose, like the captain of a ship, I can pick my crew."

Anne laughed over his way of explaining the thing, and Muriel and Bayne, who had just come up, broke into the conversation.

"No secrets," Bayne said, trying to look serious. "Will Miss Travis go with us, Arden?"

Chase nodded, and the four left the room.

A half hour later Bayne's automobile was tearing along a country road with Chase at the wheel, and Anne at his side.

She felt happy, and reflected how miserable she had been some few hours before.

She wondered again if Mr. Arden Chase wrote love stories.

The following afternoon a telegram came for her.

Muriel, Bayne, and Chase, who with Anne seemed to constitute one of the cliques of the week-end party, watched her as she read it.

She knit her brows, then the vestige of a

sad smile passed over her face as she turned and for a second looked at Chase.

Turning to Muriel she handed her the telegram.

"It's from Mr. Williams," she said. "I must leave to-morrow. Rehearsals begin."

"I'm sorry," Muriel answered. "Is there no way for you to stay, Anne?"

The young actress shook her head, and again looked at Chase. He was leaning against a big pillar of the veranda, smoking a cigarette, with his head thrown back and his eyes staring up into the air.

It was almost nine o'clock that night when Anne, tiring of the activity indoors, started alone for a stroll in the Italian gardens. It was the middle of September, but the nights, while cool, still retained a lingering breath of the balmy air of summer-time.

She wanted to be alone for a while. The following day would see her back in the city with its Times Square and Broadway atmosphere, all of which she had come to detest.

It had been so different, she reflected, here at Townsend Manor. No stage, no managers, no actors, nothing associated with the theater but herself.

Then she thought of Chase. She had thought of him a great deal since the previous day.

The aroma of a cigarette was wafted through the air. Then making a turn in the walk she saw a man in evening clothes sitting on a marble bench.

As he raised his head she recognized him. It was Chase. For a second she stopped, her heart palpitating.

Suddenly he turned and saw her.

"Don't stop," he called. "Come and help me count these stars."

Slowly she walked toward him, and as he rose she sat down on the bench.

Chase reseated himself, tossing away his cigarette. For a second neither spoke.

"You're going away to-morrow," he finally remarked.

"In the morning," she answered. "Back to the stage. Do you know I'm beginning to hate it?"

"Your profession?" the man asked, mildly surprised.

"My profession," she repeated. "I don't know why I tell you, but it seems good to tell some one," she hurriedly went on with a little catch in her voice. "Perhaps I shall never be able to act again."

"Why?" he asked, quite interested.

"I don't just know. I suppose it's because I detest the stage."

"Detest it!" His tone showed his amazement.

She shook her head.

"It's hard to say such a thing, I suppose, but it has made me so unhappy that—that I hate it and everything with it; actors and—"

She suddenly stopped, realizing that she was becoming somewhat overemphatic. Slowly she turned her head and looked at the man by her side.

He was gazing ahead, apparently interested in a fountain twenty feet away, which was playing a spray of water that looked like silver threads in the moonlight.

"You have some very decided views of life," he finally remarked, "for such a young girl."

She did not answer, and turning he saw that she had buried her head on an arm which she rested on the back of the bench they occupied.

She looked dejected in that position; a pathetic figure whose distress drew his sympathy.

"Anne," he said, placing a hand gently on her shoulder, "you must not feel this way. Why, all the plays and actors in the world are not worth your little finger. So why worry?"

Slowly she raised her eyes and looked at him. It was the first time he had called her Anne.

This man whom she had known little more than a day seemed to understand. It was the sympathy she had been craving for.

And as she saw the soft, yearning expression in his eyes, she bent her head a little nearer to him, and the next second it slipped on his shoulder.

"Anne," he murmured; then all was quiet.

And for a long time they sat there in the moonlight, until he finally spoke:

"Perhaps we had better go back to the house. Miss Townsend and Ralph might be looking for us."

Anne nodded, and in silence they started back.

VI.

THE following afternoon Anne was sitting in Williams's office opposite the manager.

"We're starting in sooner than we expected, Miss Travis," Williams explained. "Luckily I am using some of the cast of 'The Man Rules' for the new play."

Anne nodded. "And do we start rehearsals to-day?"

"Perhaps not rehearsals," Williams answered, "but Mr. Hale is over at the theater and wants to see you."

"Is it the Shakespeare?"

"Yes," Williams smiled. "I had it on my hands and have to use it."

Ten minutes later she was shaking hands with the playwright back stage.

Several members of the company who had played in "The Man Rules," were standing about, and all of them greeted her cordially.

Hale, looking over her head, smiled.

"Your new leading man, Miss Travis."

Anne turned, and her heart almost stopped beating. There stood Arden Chase!

For a second she looked at him, paralyzed with astonishment. Then she turned to where Hale had been standing, but he had vanished.

"I hope I didn't frighten you," Chase smiled, as Anne continued to stare at him, wonderingly.

"But Ar—Mr. Chase!" she stammered.

"Not here," he said in low tones. "This is no place for explanations."

And willingly she allowed him to take her by the arm as he walked her down the hallway to her old dressing-room.

"Well," he began, after she had seated herself, "I hope you do not still hate actors, Anne."

"Why did you deceive me?" she replied in injured tones.

Chase looked at her for a second, then knitted his brows.

"Because circumstances compelled it,"

he answered. "I did aspire to write when I met Ralph Bayne in Los Angeles four years ago. I told him I was doing a little of it, but didn't have the heart to confess that I was but a poor amateur, who always got his manuscripts returned.

"I always knew I had temperament," he continued, "and when it refused to come out in my literary efforts, I suddenly turned to the stage. I played three years in stock and one on the road, and met with fair success."

Anne, who was not over the shock yet, sat watching his earnest, sincere expression.

"I came to New York several days ago to get an engagement. I went to Don Hale, whom I knew when we were both kids, and he fixed it to give me a chance in his new play. He and Manager Williams swore me to secrecy, so I could say nothing about it. Later I met Ralph Bayne in the Knickerbocker, and when he asked me what I was doing in the city, I said I wanted atmosphere for writing."

Chase threw back his head and laughed. Anne watched him, the shadow of a smile playing about the corners of her sweet mouth.

"Ralph insisted that I get some atmosphere in Tuxedo," he continued, "so I arranged with Don to let me know when I was wanted, and accepted."

"But how is it you are here so soon?" Anne asked, with a puzzled look on her face.

Chase smiled.

"The day you came to Tuxedo I slipped into the house and phoned Don. Of course he had spoken about you, and I explained that you had come to the same place where I was visiting. He said that Williams expected to send you a telegram any minute, and that when it came it would be the signal for me to leave for New York, too."

Anne shook her head.

"You certainly are a man of mystery," she smiled.

"But the funniest part," Chase laughed, "is, that after I had seen you to the train, I swung aboard the same car and went into the smoker."

"And you came in on the same train,"

Anne gasped. "Oh, Arden, why didn't you come and sit with me?"

"Just because," Chase smiled, "I knew you hated actors."

One month later, on a Monday night, Hale's new play opened.

Theatergoers hadn't forgot Anne Travis, and well-paid press-agents took particular pains to remind them that she was the young girl who had bravely and defiantly snapped her fingers under a celebrated star's nose.

Now she was a star herself, and the theater was jammed with people to see her. And by the most singular event the irony of fate dealt out a mocking blow.

The coincidence of coincidences had happened, for Arden Chase, the new leading man had made a decided hit in a big scene in the last act.

Alone in her dressing-room after the play Anne was having an inner struggle. It was the same feeling Sinclair had experienced—jealousy. Only now it was brought home to her by the man who had comforted her that night in the Townsend gardens.

Even as her part had been bigger than Sinclair's in one particular, so was Chase's bigger than hers now.

Up and down the room she paced, remembering how the audience had responded to his acting.

Suddenly she stopped. A thought flashed through her mind even though she tried to check it.

She was the star. Why not have his lines cut the same as hers had been!

Suddenly a knock came on the door. She threw it open and Arden Chase stood before her.

Coldly she invited him to enter, then closed the door.

"Anne," he cried boyishly, not seeing the worried expression on her face, "oh, Anne, I was so nervous. And when they applauded me after that act, I could not believe my good fortune."

She did not answer, but stood in the middle of the room watching him. Then he walked over and took one of her hands tenderly.

"Anne," he said again, "you must know

what I've been wanting to tell you. I love you, dear, and—"

She closed her eyes for a second, her heart pounding furiously. Then the thought of that scene flamed up in jealousy.

Slowly she pushed him from her.

"Please, Mr. Chase, I don't feel well to-night. Will you kindly excuse me this time?"

For a second Chase stared at her. He had been hurt by her tone more than her words.

Then he thought that she was offended because he had spoken of his love. His enthusiasm and high spirits were dashed to the ground as he slowly started for the door.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Good night."

Anne stood looking after him, and as the door closed she sank into a chair, crying out what was in her pent-up heart.

The following night Chase entered the theater depressed. Anne felt if anything worse.

During the first and second acts they tried their best not to show the barrier which had sprung up between them so suddenly.

After the second act she remained in her dressing-room, while Chase sat in his with sorrowful eyes.

With her face slightly tear-stained, Anne played the third and last act.

It was in a scene near the end when she and Chase were alone on the stage that she noticed how sad he looked as he watched her with wistful eyes.

Then came the big awakening; and with it the realization of how small and foolish was the jealousy which she had felt toward him.

Now as she watched him she felt happy, for she knew that she was proud of him, of his success.

As he slowly advanced to take her in his arms in the scene that ended the play, she looked up into his face and smiled.

And then suddenly she lifted her mouth and kissed him on the chin.

"I love you," she whispered.

But those out front did not hear words that were not in the play, for they were on the other side of the curtain.



The Log-Book

By the Editor

A HAPPY New Year to you all! As 1918 dawns, all over the world men and women are looking forward into its misty depths, wondering what of good or ill it may bring. With more nations concerned in war than were ever at the grim game at one time before, speculation as to the future has a keener edge put on it. Whatever comes, it behooves us all to remember what we are fighting for, and to realize that the only peace worth having is that which insures that this greatest of all the wars the world has ever seen shall also be the last.

The announcement of a big, vital railroad serial in which a great-hearted man matches resources of mind, muscle, and money against a traitorous gang of public despoilers will, I am sure, be welcome news to all of you.

“ODDS AND THE MAN”

BY VARICK VANARDY

in seven parts, the first of which will appear next week, is the name of this virile story of America's last frontier—the Canadian Northwest. Up to that frost-locked dominion of desolation, resources that stagger the imagination await the coming of master men who will unlock nature's treasure-trove with the magic key of railroad transportation. It is a land of big men and big deeds.

Dan Randall went there to forget, and remained to fight the greatest battle of his life. *Joyce Maitland*, a sweet and winsome American girl, went there for recreation, and remained for a more vital reason. The two met—and their meeting inspired a great civilization-molding enterprise and a still greater love.

“TESSIE OF RAINBOW GLEN”

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS

is the title of our complete novel for next week. You all know Mr. Hopkins's happy talent for mingling humor with the strongest and most tense situations, and in this sterling drama of the Golden West we believe he has excelled himself. The main character is a young Easterner who, while peacefully riding his pony across the prairie-stretches of a Western county, suddenly stumbled upon the most amazing sight he had ever beheld. How that sight changed the course of his career, and why he decided to remain in the West, makes a novel that will please even the reader who does not care for ordinary Western stories.

You wouldn't think that old Demosthenes, dead and gone centuries ago, could cut much figure in the love affair of a department-store clerk now, would you? In

"DEMOSTHENES, JR.," a short story by Lee Landon that will appear next week, *Billy Barr* did not know at first whether Demosthenes was a Russian general or a new pitcher. But he found out; and the manner in which he enlisted the services of the ancient orator makes a delightfully humorous story that is not at the same time without food for thought. It will be one of the many attractions in *THE ARGOSY* for January 5.

"YANKEE DIMES," by Jennie Harris Oliver, is an extremely interesting yarn of the Ozark Mountains. It concerns a young mountaineer struggling, Lincoln-like, to break the fetters of his native ignorance and poverty; a girl who did not belong in such a primitive district, and a mountain gang-leader, who swore he would "put his face under Mary's bunnit" and extract some "Yankee dimes"—mountainese for kisses—regardless of her wishes. Read what happened in *THE ARGOSY*'s first issue for the new year, out next Thursday.

The mere mention of the name Alsace suggests a frontier fraught with heart-break and misery. In the story by Helen A. Holden, "HIS RETURN TO ALSACE," one of next week's features, you will find a graphic account of what happened when the great war brought to a climax an enmity which during the years of boyhood had been steadily mounting nearer and nearer to the danger-point. The interposition of a love affair complicates matters still further, and a skirmish between the opposing forces precipitates a crisis.

THE CLEANEST MAGAZINE PRINTED

I am very sensible of the compliment paid *THE ARGOSY* by the good words of our friend from Nebraska. It is very good of her to send her numbers to the soldier abroad. I hope many others may be moved to follow suit.

Fremont, Nebraska.

As I have noticed so many times your asking your readers to write and tell you how they first came to read *THE ARGOSY*, I am going to write a few lines and tell you about how I came to read that splendid magazine. It was like this: Just about two years ago I was mourning the loss of a dear relative, and I was on my way from my home in the western part of Nebraska, coming east to Omaha, where I had a position as assistant bookkeeper and cashier, and I was, at the time, feeling blue and all broken up.

Well, on the train I sat next to a gentleman who was reading a magazine, and as he got up he left it lying beside me. Whether he meant to do it or not I cannot say; but my thanks to him for leaving it. I broke a rule of my home and picked the magazine up, and noticed what a funny name for a book, as I called it then, for it was the first of its kind that I had ever had in my hands.

For this reason my folks at home strongly opposed us children, especially the girls, from reading anything outside school-books and books on the Bible; but as we get to be our own bosses, you know, we get to do as we please, and really I cannot see where my reading a magazine like *THE ARGOSY* could hurt any girl. There are a thousand things that could be done that would be a thousand times worse, I am sure; and so I read several stories in it, and took it along with me when I left the train. I have bought it ever since, and will do so as long as I can.

I have no kick to make, as I am not a knocker.

The only thing I will say is I am a little timid about a story with a murder in it. I like Western stories and I like to see a Western play. I am a movie fan, and go to see all the Western plays I can.

My very best wishes to *THE ARGOSY*, and let me say I am so glad it's got to be a weekly. But with my duty in the daytime it is coming too fast; I can't keep up. But *THE ARGOSY* is a welcome visitor any time, and I shall subscribe in the near future for a year or more.

And now I am going to say something else. I see in the October 20 issue about a soldier in England wanting some one to send him some magazines, so as I have got quite a few of them, I will send him some; but I cannot send him my first book, as I call it, because it brings back memories to me that are dear. It's the December, 1915, issue, and I intend to keep it as long as I can for a kind of keepsake. I hope what few I send will get there safe and sound, because I am so glad to be able to do anything for a soldier fighting for his flag. I have sent several to a relative I have down there in New Mexico and some to New York, too, and now I am going to send a few a little farther. My heart goes out to all of our soldiers and I almost envy them. If I was a man I would by all means be among them. I would, anyway, if I could. Please excuse my lengthy letter, and if you can get a few lines out of it to put in the Log-Book, I'll thank you, in advance, again. I wish *THE ARGOSY* all the success in the world. It is the cleanest magazine that is printed. Thanking you for your trouble in reading my letter,

J. E. W.

EVER SINCE HE WAS OLD ENOUGH TO READ

Now that we are running five serials in place of six, Mr. Lobnow will surely have no kick coming. And every now and again he will note that we

give him either an extra long short story or two complete novelettes.

Santa Ana, California.

Say, suppose you start to read a story the way you are trying to run your serials now and see how you like it. Why, "gee Clyde," your instalments are getting so short we have to wait until we get at least two magazines ahead before it's worth while sitting down to start. Why not print, say, one story less each time and make the ones you do print long enough to make it worth while starting?

Personally, I've been reading both *THE ARGOSY* and the *All-Story Weekly* ever since I've been old enough to read, and will say this is my first kick, and right now I think you've got the *only* magazine on the market; the way you are getting them out now just strikes me to a T. I never could keep stories enough ahead to furnish me with reading until the next number came out, but now I have *THE ARGOSY* on Wednesday and the *All-Story Weekly* on Saturday, which is just about right.

Another thing, ask H. Bedford-Jones if it isn't possible for him to forget that East India "Dipo Negro" stuff and give us something up to date. I know he can if he will. Don't want to tire you out with my first letter, so will close, wishing you the greatest of success with *THE ARGOSY*, issued weekly.

B. F. LOBNOW.

WHAT HE WANTS US TO FORGET

With reference to a remark of Mr. Fellows, I would remind him that *THE ARGOSY* is the biggest weekly magazine in the world.

Long Beach, Washington.

Enclosed find check for four dollars for an extension for one year to *THE ARGOSY*, as I would not care to do without it. I think the present shape of *THE ARGOSY* is the best, so in case you are contemplating a change to the same style as *McClure's*, for instance, I hope you will forget it.

JOHN FELLOWS.

LIKES THE WEEKLY FAR BETTER THAN THE MONTHLY

Mr. Reid's final sentence suggests that even a good thing can be improved upon.

Walthill, Nebraska.

Will you please change address of my *ARGOSY* from Canistota to Walthill, Nebraska? I like the weekly far better than I did the monthly issue. It is surely a big improvement on a good magazine.

CHESTER N. REID.

KEEN FOR THE HISTORICAL

Mr. Everett will be delighted with "Odds and the Man," to start next week, as it gives him the railroad atmosphere for which he is longing.

Boston, Massachusetts.

I have been a reader of *THE ARGOSY* for over twenty years, and have always enjoyed it. The

sort of stories I enjoy the most are historical ones, such as "Playing the Man," and particularly the Payson Terhune stories. I think Terhune is a very clever writer as well as historian. Please give us some more, such as "A Pilgrimage for Pie." Among the serials, I enjoyed reading "Four-Forty at the Fort Penn," "Over a Cliff at Point Firmin," and I am reading with great interest "Wooden Spoil." Canadian stories are mostly always good reading. While I realize the *Railroad Man's Magazine* is supposed to carry the railroad stories, I think *ARGOSY* readers would enjoy some as well. I agree with you that book-length, serial, and short stories are equally desirable. Wishing you continued success, I am,

B. M. EVERETT.

LOST WITHOUT HER FAVORITE MAGAZINE

For the benefit of any reader who thinks *THE ARGOSY* comes too often to be digested, I commend the following from Mrs. Baughman, who dotes on both *THE ARGOSY* and the *All-Story Weekly* every week.

Springfield, Missouri.

Please send me *THE ARGOSY* of October 20. I failed to get that number, and was so sorry. I have been reading *THE ARGOSY* a great many years and the *All-Story Weekly* for about six years, when it was the *Cavalier*, and I like them both so well that I am lost without them, and I do so hate to lose a number. Enclosed find ten cents for the book. I am writing to wish you success with *THE ARGOSY* as a weekly.

(MRS.) MAY BAUGHMAN.

WHAT CAME OF A CASUAL PICKING UP

I am very glad to have Mr. Collins name the stories he likes best. As to sport tales, it is very difficult to get good ones; but he may rest assured that we shall pass by no opportunity to secure such.

Fitchburg, Massachusetts.

I have been reading *THE ARGOSY* now since June, 1916, and felt I should let you know how I became a reader. When I assumed the position I now hold, I found three old *ARGOSYs*, which had evidently belonged to my predecessor. I did not notice them for a week or two, but one afternoon casually picked them up. Ever since I have been an ardent reader. The stories I have liked best are "The Man Hunt on Capitol Hill," "The Keys to Freedom," and "Riddle Gawne." I think the last named will prove popular with all the readers. My only suggestion is a few more baseball or football stories mixed in.

Yours for *THE ARGOSY*,

EDWARD COLLINS.

DETECTIVE, WESTERN, AND SEA TALES FOR HER

Note that "Fate in the Balance" and "Ranger No. 7" were both by Hopkins. We have a corking war serial by Perley Poore Sheehan, author of "Four-Forty at the Fort Penn" (sched-

uled for the movies), which we hope to start some time in the near future.

Savannah, Georgia.

I read my first ARGOSY about eight years ago, when I was kid enough to believe everything I read. It contained a novelette called "Off the Earth," which was a most remarkable story. I was so deeply impressed with it that parts of it are quite clear in my memory yet. Since then I have read THE ARGOSY a great deal, but only recently became a regular reader, buying it the first day it appears on the news-stands.

I like the complete novels and the serials best, although there are some fine short stories. The serials are better since you began the weekly publication, because one does not have to wait so long between times. I am anxiously awaiting the conclusion of "Where's the Woman?" in the next issue. Those detective stories are fine. I also like the Western stories and those of the sea. "Fate in the Balance" was fine, and "Ranger No. 7" was better. "The Desert Thrill," "The Keys to Freedom," and "McPhee's Sensational Rest" were very good. "Four-Forty at the Fort Penn" had a thrill in every line. It contained more swift action than any story I ever read. I like that. If THE ARGOSY continues as good as it has always been, nobody should have any kick.

RUBY C.

A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

You will note Mr. Miller says he can hardly wait for the next number now THE ARGOSY is a weekly. But we are not prepared to turn it into a daily.

Honolulu, Hawaii.

Enclosed please find check for four dollars, for which you may send me THE ARGOSY for one year after my present subscription expires. I have been a constant reader of THE ARGOSY for a good many years. Just finished reading the story entitled "The Desert Thrill." It is some story, believe me. I agree with Mr. Charles S. Howard's letter in the October 13 number. THE ARGOSY is the best magazine that was ever published in New York or elsewhere. I am glad that you changed for the better. A month is too long to wait when you read a good story. I can hardly wait for the next copy. Best of luck to THE ARGOSY.

A. H. MILLER.

'THIS READER KEEN FOR ADVENTURE TALES

Here's another fellow who likes Hopkins's stories.

Laurens, Iowa.

Enclosed please find ten cents for November 3 ARGOSY. I have been a constant reader of THE ARGOSY for the last four or five years and I think your stories like "The Desert Thrill," "The Keys to Freedom," "Riddle Gawne," and "Ranger No. 7" were great.

HENRY BANGER.

SWEEPING PRAISE FOR "GE- NIUS OF VICTORY"

The request for a November 3 number voiced by Mr. Banger reminds me to let you see a quite

unsolicited press notice for the novel in that issue that floated in to-day from the Ozona *Stockman*, a weekly published down in Crockett County, Texas.

There is a wonderful story in THE ARGOSY for November 3, "Genius of Victory," by George Foxhall. While of absorbing and compelling interest, it yet breathes a spirit of intense patriotism, from both our own and the German view-points. This story should be read by every member of every family in every civilized country.

"HIS ENCHANTED REGIMENT" AS THE BEST SHORT STORY

As I think I have already intimated, our stock of stories on the great open spaces of the West is a large one, so I am sure our friend from Morrin will have no cause to complain of not having his special desire gratified.

Morrin, Alberta, Canada.

Enclosed you will find my renewal to THE ARGOSY weekly. In the October issue you expressed a desire of wanting us to write our opinion of the great change in THE ARGOSY, so I can't refrain from telling you that it suits me just fine. "His Enchanted Regiment," by Alicia Ramsey, was the best short story I've read. "The Spirit of the Feud" was just great. "Wooden Spoil" promises to be a good one, too. Why not have a long story by Raymond S. Spears or Zane Grey? My favorite authors are L. Carew, Hopkins, Spears, Parson, and others who write of the big, open spaces of the West. This is getting to be a long letter, so I will cut it short by wishing for a big mystery of the West that centers around a mine (William Wallace Cook should be able to do that).

HERBERT WALBECK.

HOPES NO BAD COMES OF IT

Surely no harm appears to have come of our changing THE ARGOSY from monthly to weekly. Letters from delighted readers everywhere bear witness to the welcome nature of the shift, and I defy any one to prove that the standard of stories has deteriorated.

Michigan City, Indiana.

Several times I have thought of writing you a letter in regard to the Log-Book, but I always put it off until I could see that nothing would ever be accomplished that way, so here goes. I am an enthusiastic reader of your magazine. I was glad to hear of the change from monthly to weekly issues, and I hope no bad comes of it. You know, some of the magazines that I have read have made this same change, and it was for the worse; the stories began to get bad, but here's hoping THE ARGOSY does not, of which I am nearly certain with the splendid bunch of writers you have.

I am "stuck" on the stories of Charles Alden Seltzer, Fred Jackson, Victor Rousseau. Oh, I could name any amount of them if I but wished. "The Green Opal Ring," "Riddle Gawne," and "Wooden Spoil" are great, not to mention the many other fine ones. Wishing THE ARGOSY a long and prosperous future, and hoping that the knockers will keep still for a while, as many stories which they knock hit me as being grand, I remain,

THOMAS ESTES.

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