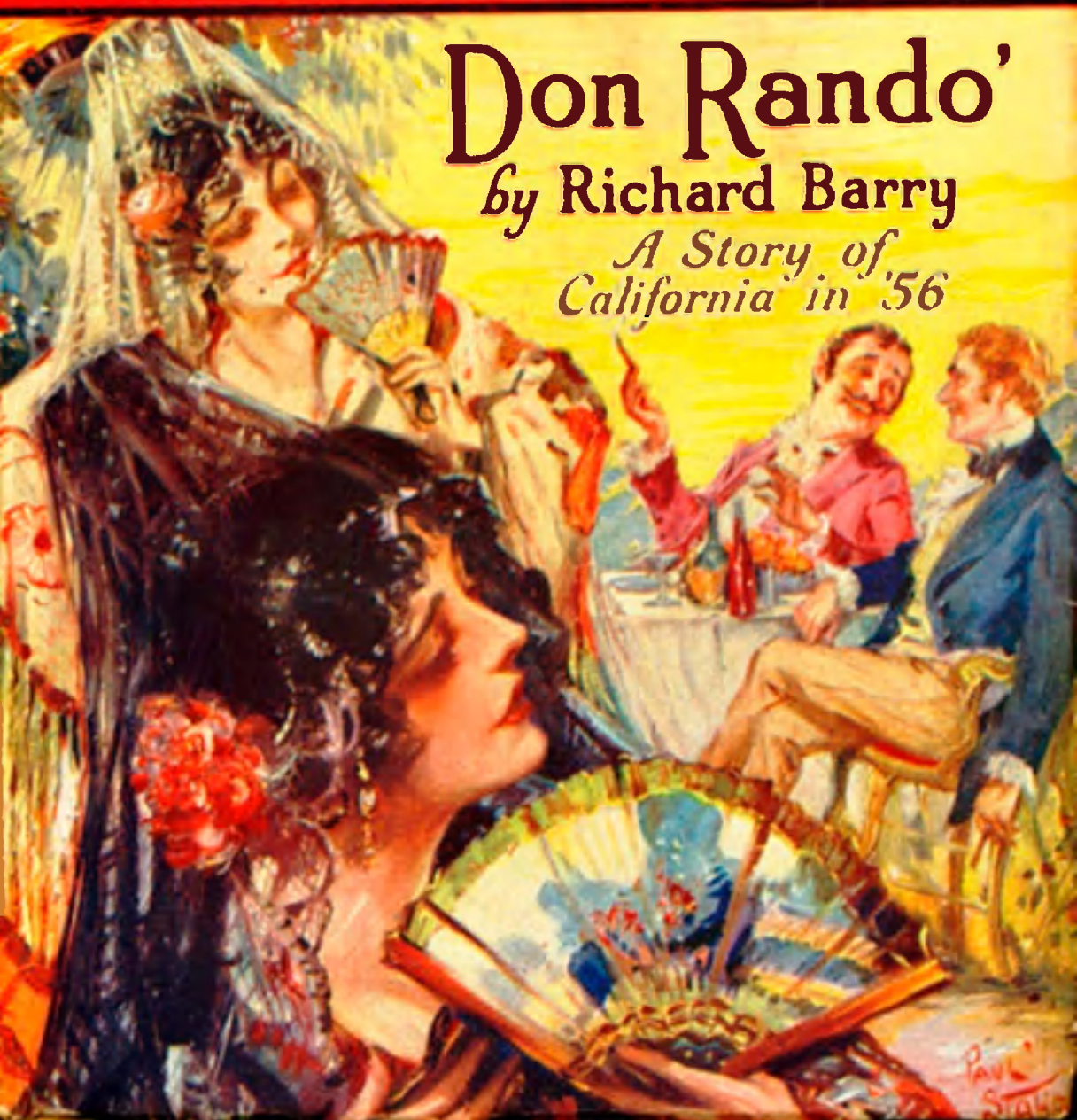
ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

OCTOBER 9

PRICE 10¢

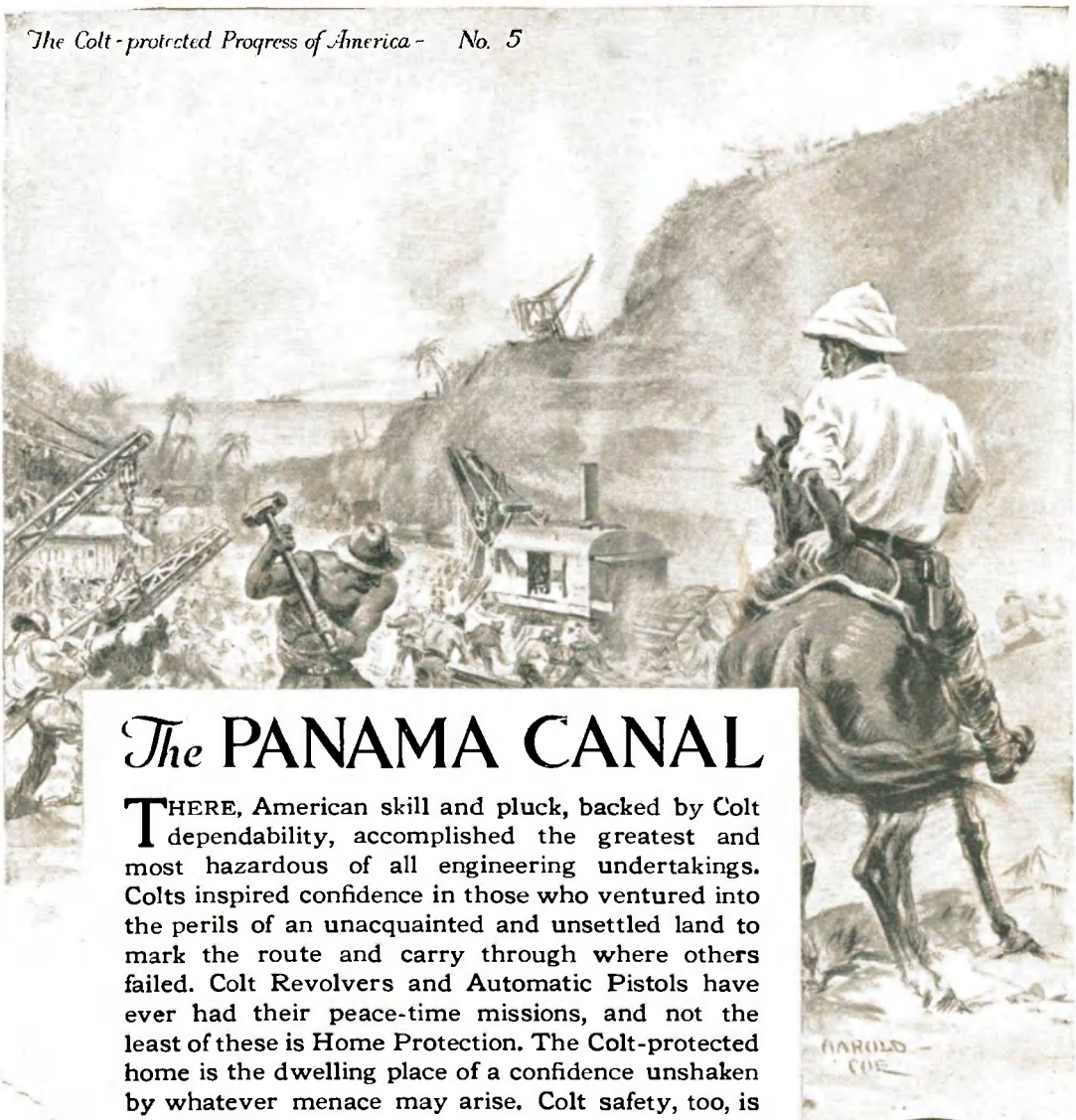


Don Rando'

by Richard Barry

A Story of California in '56

The Colt-protected Progress of America— *No. 5*



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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLXXXI | CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 9, 1926 | NUMBER 1

FOUR CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

POETRY

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and
LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE., 16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W.C. 2
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WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Vice-President and Secretary
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PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, COPYRIGHT, 1926
Entered as second-class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

See How Easy it is to

Be a Draftsman

Learn the line you'll like all your life—that never loses interest! Drafting is too fascinating to call it work. It's downright *fun!* From the week you begin! And every hour at a drafting table adds to your knowledge—*and earning-power!*

Answer This Call for New Men

The whole engineering world is clamoring for draftsmen. Millions of men are "mechanics" or "electricians"—and only a few thousand can *draft*. Yet drafting is so simple and sensible, it is very quickly learned. Not from textbooks, or at any school—but under direct supervision of a real engineer—a chief draftsman—who instructs you *from the drafting room.*

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"Have completed $100,000 worth of work this year, thanks to Dobe instruction." —D. E. B. SANDERS (S. Car.)

All Tools Furnished!

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Why Dobe's method above all? Because he has the *know.* His course has the *wallop.* His actual work as chief and consultant has *taught him what to teach.* Has made him independent. Teaching others is his *hobby.* Get acquainted with Dobe, and what he is doing! His big, beautiful, illustrated book, Successful Draftsmanship, is FREE. Clip coupon!

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Please send FREE and POSTPAID, new, fully illustrated book, Successful Draftsmanship, complete information, terms, etc., *in time for free tool offer.*

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NOTE: The advertising columns of this magazine contain many offers of home instruction, but the chance Dobe is giving ambitious men is all a man needs

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rate in The Munsey Combination comprising:

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66 MILES ON 1 GALLON—Wonderful, New, Auto Gas Saver. All makes. Spare or full time County and State Distributors wanted who can make $500 to $2500 per month. **One free to introduce.** CRITCHLOW, Inventor, N-427, Wheaton, Ill.

GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE—TOILET ARTICLES, PERFUMES AND SPECIALTIES. Wonderfully profitable. LA DERMA CO., Dept. D, St. Louis, Mo.

LET US MAIL YOU A FREE BOTTLE OF OUR LIFE TONIC ELIXIR, FACE POWDER, VEGETABLE OIL SOAP and terms to agents. All Big Repeaters. LACASSIAN CO., Dept. 45, St. Louis, Mo.

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EARN $120 TO $250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID, AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. WE SECURE POSITION FOR YOU AFTER COMPLETION OF 3 MONTHS' HOME STUDY COURSE OR MONEY REFUNDED. EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET CM-30. STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

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HERE'S YOUR LAND! $10 DOWN AND $10 A MONTH BUYS 20 ACRES OF MY BEST LAND NEAR LAKES AND TOWNS IN CENTRAL MICHIGAN FOR $400, OR 10 ACRES FOR $250. WRITE AT ONCE FOR FREE PICTURE BOOK. G. W. SWIGART, M-1276 1st Natl. Bank Bldg., Chicago.

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Mirrors resilvered at home. Costs less than 5 cents per square foot; you charge 75 cents. Immense profits plating like new, brassy worn-off auto parts, reflectors, tableware, stoves, etc. Outfits furnished. Details free. SPRINKLE, Plater, 19, Marion, Ind.

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REAL COMPOSER WANTS GOOD SONG POEMS AT ONCE. CORA BROADWELL, SPIRIT LAKE, IOWA.

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MISCELLANEOUS

YOU READ THESE LITTLE ADVERTISEMENTS. Perhaps you obtain through them things you want; things you might never have known about if you had not looked here. Did it ever strike you other people would read your message—that they would buy what you have to sell; whether it is a bicycle you no longer need, a patented novelty you desire to push, or maybe your own services? Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Munsey Combination, 280 Broadway, New York.

Still Harping on the Western String

Letters continue to pour in on the subject of Western stories, compelling us again to defer printing those on the subject of "Twin Bridges." No magazine in the world prints as many serials as *Argosy*, thus no other magazine can give such a wide variety in them. And no magazine in the world gives so much for the money as does *Argosy*. But we'll let the readers express their opinions, merely adding that more war stories are coming.

EAST WOBURN, MASS.

I am a reader of the ARGOSY for two years and can truly say give me the Western stories every time. I am a reader of quite a few magazines and story papers, but the ARGOSY I like more than any of them. I would prefer the Western stories. MRS. E. J. M.

DENISON, TEXAS.

I want more Western stories, such as "The Rider o' Spook Hollow." P. S.

PORT CHESTER, N. Y.

Again another year has spun around, and I am again forwarding the four dollars for another year's subscription to my dear old pal, ARGOSY. How I look forward every week for it and many hours of enjoyment I get from it during the year. How nice it is of a winter's evening, when the storms are raging outside, to sit snug and warm in the house and read some of the thrilling and interesting tales in ARGOSY! You certainly have the pick of the authors, all good. Please give plenty of Western tales; I love them, especially with red Indians in them. Also some tales of the Orient will give plenty of spice and variety to the ARGOSY, the *best*, the *very* best magazine on the market. I cannot—although I have often tried to—get any interest in other magazines, so have ceased to buy them. MRS. H.

TABERVILLE, MO.

The more Western stories the better, say I. How about Mme Storey? Would like another one about her. MRS. K. S.

COVINGTON, KY.

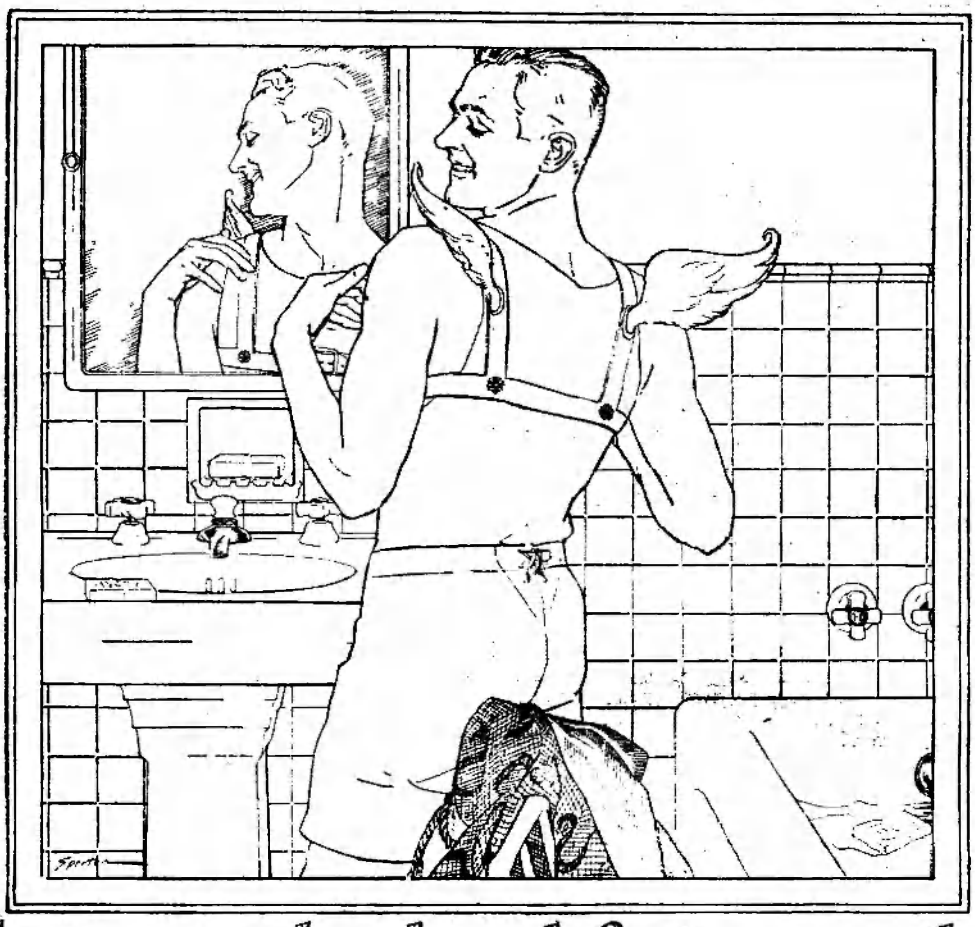
I have been reading ARGOSY for about three years and in my opinion there is no better magazine of fiction published at any price. But I think if it keeps on it will have to change its name to *Tales of the West*, or something like that. Now, I like Western stories, but not as a regular diet, and when I want one there are several magazines on the market where I can get all I want without having my ARGOSY filled up with them. Somehow, Western stories don't fit in with the ARGOSY type of stories and the ARGOSY type appeals to me. What would suit me better would be more business stories, such as "Personality Plus," "The Hole in the Wall," and many others of the same kind. And just a suggestion. Why doesn't some one publish a *Business Story Magazine?* They can't be beat, and it is the only field not entered.

G. W. L.

LUSBY, MD.

I would like more Western stories myself.

C. S. T.



To men who breakfast on nails!

THIS gentleman's before-breakfast temper, resulting from baths with sinker-soap, *used* to give his wife the impression that his favorite breakfast menu would be a rasher of crisp nails and a couple of hard-boiled padlocks on toast.

The temper would develop by stages. No sooner would our optimist exert his first strenuous effort at lather-culture than the shy here-and-there soap would flee his grasp and scuttle to the vast uncharted tub-bottom, defying recapture.

Now notice the change. How beneficent the smile! How charmingly effective the neat little wing arrangement, registering virtue and loving-kindness. Nails and padlocks are no longer on our gentleman's menu — the grace of his company at breakfast is now matched only by the engaging softness of his three-minute eggs.

This magic was achieved by wifely intelligence cooperating with a cake of the rich-lathering, quick-rinsing white soap that floats. Men who have changed to this soap for their morning baths tell us that they never knew before what a jubilant luxury bathing could be. *You can always find Ivory when you want it—at the grocery or in the tub.*

PROCTER & GAMBLE

IVORY SOAP

99 44/100 % PURE · IT FLOATS

OUR *Department of Feminine Economics recommends especially to wives: A cake of dainty new round-edged Guest Ivory for the saving price of 5 cents. Why not be extravagant, and buy 3 cakes at once?*

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CLXXXI SATURDAY, OCTOBER 9, 1926 NUMBER 1

Don Rando'

By RICHARD BARRY

Author of "The Big Gun," "Worth Millions," etc.

CHAPTER I.

SEVENTY YEARS AGO.

SAN FRANCISCO was seven years old.

On a September morning of that year—1856—a vessel with combined steam and sail, the City of Panama, passed through the Golden Gate, under canvas, shortly after dawn. As soon as she was under the shelter of the Contra Costa hills the huge paddle at her stern came to life, and she proceeded into the bay, kicking water like a river boat.

Three or four clipper ships, lovely greyhounds of the sea, lying far out at anchor, seemed to scorn the newcomer as if she were some amphibian monster without clear pedigree. And justifiedly, for the City of Panama had crept up the coast only from the isthmus, while the clippers had come and would return the long way about South America, passing through the Straits of Magellan and rounding Cape Horn.

The City of Panama, moreover, bore no such basic necessities as the clippers brought—flour, sugar, dried beef, clothing, and other sterling Yankee merchandise. Her hold was laden with champagne, cognac, port, sherry, and moselle wines, cases of Parisian gowns, ready made, a consignment of cut velvets from Genoa,

crystal glass from Birmingham, and a large number of cigars made to sell at one dollar each, all billed via the isthmus from the ports of Marseilles, Liverpool, Genoa, and Havana.

A " fancy " ship—for the fancy.

Her passengers were not of the rough-and-ready type which patronized the clippers—New England farmers, roustabouts from the cities of the East, grub-stakers from the older country east of the Appalachians, men willing to work a passage as sailors, or to put up with steerage fare of salt pork, hardtack, and plumduff, for the chance to get to the mines of California. The passenger list of the City of Panama bore the names only of those willing and able to pay eight hundred dollars in gold for passage from the port of Balboa at the isthmus, having previously made their way to Panama, on the Atlantic side, and having crossed the isthmus on horse or mule back.

They were saving three to four months on the trip round the Horn, and avoiding the terrible trek across the plains and the desert.

It was the last leg of the de luxe tour of the time—the express limited of the mid-nineteenth century. By it one could pass from New York to San Francisco in the incredibly short space of nine or ten weeks, D. V.

Among the passengers on the deck of the paddle wheeler, all eagerly surveying the evolving wonders of the far-famed harbor they were entering, was a young man in his twenty-fourth year, Donald Randolph, of Warrenton, Virginia.

That is, late of Warrenton—three months before. Never again, possibly.

His trousers of mouse-gray chamois cloth were strapped under high-heeled, varnished boots. A buff waistcoat with silver buttons was just discernible beneath a wide-belled coat of black, dull cloth, and his broad black stock held his high soft linen collar up under his throat. The ruching of his linen showed at his cuffs. A natural beaver hat swelled in full tones, from rolling brim to protruding top.

The hat stamped him.

" Huh!" remarked one feminine creature to another, surveying him from a distance, where they stood on the port quarter-deck, hoop-skirted, and with very tiny bonnets bearing long ribbons perched on the wavy ends of curling " buns " sat at rakish angles on their birdlike heads. " Wearing the duds his dad bought him four years ago—'way behind the times. Why, I haven't seen a man on Broadway wearing one of them scoops for two years—'cepn' an actor at the Park."

" An' gamblers!" added her companion.

Sartorial history justified this remark, though the young person may have been motivated in it by the fact that her voyage-long effort to captivate the young man had come to an anticlimax the night before on the edge of a lifeboat, in the moonlight, as they lay becalmed outside the Golden Gate, waiting for day to pilot them in. Certainly an ideal setting for her purpose.

And he had talked about his mother—huh! Dead two years before. And his father—similarly out of the picture. Thus moonlight and a quiet deck and seclusion and a svelte languishing beauty, with her taffeta furbelows sweeping across his mouse-colored trousers as if accidentally, had appealed to him.

Not a kiss—no declaration—not a hand-clasp—not a look. He had been as civil to her as if she were his sister, and as impersonal.

The last word from her companion hit her.

" Gambler!" she repeated. " Sucker, you mean. The army cap cleaned him two days ago—and at two-bit limit. Th' kid's a piker!"

The ship's surgeon, having finished with the quarantine officer who had come aboard at dawn, joined young Randolph at the rail. The two had struck up quite a friendship during the voyage.

The surgeon tried to exchange looks with the young women, but they shrugged shoulders and turned away.

" The gals are stepping pretty high this morning. Have you offended them, my boy?" he asked.

" I hope not," Randolph answered. " What made you think that?"

The surgeon seemed about to place a

convivial hand on the other, but the young man faced him. Something in his self-contained restraint seemed to discourage forwardness in the male as in the female.

"Oh, I've been watching you all voyage!" the surgeon laughed. "The dark one especially. You were hers."

"Miss Estrelly?"

"Dolly. You know about her, of course."

"She was rather explicit last evening. She is traveling from New York with her friend, at the request of her aunt, whose guests they are to be in San Francisco. Her aunt, I take it, is a very wealthy lady, with a large house, and lonely—"

"Aunt, eh?" the surgeon snorted. "Did she tell you the name of this hospitable aunt?"

"A Mrs. Parmentier, I believe."

"That's it—Belle Parmentier, of Parmentier's Cyprian Grove—owns the Paradiso Bar, too, since her lover, Mike Costello, was shot last year in a card game."

"Ah!"

"You'll find her to-night when you go to the Paradiso—every one goes there the first night—in the dance hall."

Randolph gave no hint as to what extent, if at all, he was interested in this information. His interest now was very legitimately directed toward a curiously inert group of ships sagging in against the farther shore. A forest of masts, but not alive. Some seemed falling.

"Why, that's as big a fleet as I saw in New York harbor!" he exclaimed.

"And yours for the taking," the surgeon responded. "Those are the ships the crews deserted in the first gold rush—five, six, seven years ago. For a coupla years nary a vessel left Frisco. What ye see right there is all that came in—an' stuck. Every man jack of every crew left 'em flat an' went into the hills. Gold fever—worse'n typhoid."

"How about the City of Panama? Are you not afraid?"

The surgeon laughed. "No more. The fever's run its course. Thing o' the past. No chance now for a man without capital. Good claims all staked out by big companies. And the gold's failing, too. Bank clearances this year coupla millions less'n last year. Bubble's bust."

Anxiety came into the voice of the young man for the first time.

"Do you really think," he pleaded, "there is no more chance to find gold in California?"

The surgeon became judicial. His knowledge of the world, on nearly every subject, was vast and final.

"Wouldn't say that, exactly," he replied. "Maybe there's a chance—but not like it was. Too bad you didn't come here six or seven years ago and get into the free-for-all. That's how it is in this country. Seldom a single poor man gets a chance like he had in California in 1849. Only takes a few years for the banks and the rich men to sew things up.

"Best chance now is to put on a red shirt, roll up your sleeves, and take five dollars a day for slinging a pick. That's the only bonanza—five a day for common labor. Ain't it a scream? And a man like me—a university graduate, and with thirty years' experience practicing my profession—can't make half that!"

Randolph wondered if he were a university graduate why he lapsed so ungrammatically into the vernacular. His early training, perhaps, had not been able to survive association.

"Too bad," the surgeon was still croaking, "you couldn't 've seen the town in the old days when she was wide open. She was a he-man's town then. Everything went. I'll tell you what put Frisco on the bum. Vigilantes! Sure. Ever since they got loose in the fall of 1850 things 've been dead. I guess they'll never come back. Frisco's like the effete East now—nothing but society and people high-hatting one another."

"I thought the Vigilantes merely punished crime."

"That's the idea, but I'll tell you something you'll find fer yerself soon enough. Th' real people in Frisco, the best lawyers like Judge Terry, 've got no use for Vigilantes. 'Outlaws, just like the killers."

Randolph's eyes were wide open in amazement at this statement.

"You may not believe that," the surgeon

confided. "But I'll just show you how it works. Th' thing that made Frisco in the old days was gambling. Can't get away from that. Every second joint in town was a gambling saloon—an' beauts, some o' them. High class, Tony. Why, the best man in town was Alec Campbell, who owned the Eldorado—square as a die, an' charitable, an' never drank a drop. Public gambler. 'Frisco lives below the belt,' he said, 'an' I'm here to keep the belt in place.'

"Then what happened? The Vigilantes strung up a coupla fellas who'd been quick on the draw in a card game. Just excitable, that was all. Guilty enough, maybe, but that's not the point. The point is, they should 'a' been left to be regulated inside the game, not from a force outside. See? It was a black eye for gambling.

"Get me? Kinda subtle, but everybody knows what happened. Gambling just quit being respectable. That was the devil of it. The Vigilantes meant to put killing out of favor, and instead they hit gambling. Now, you don't think that was a square deal, do you?"

Randolph, an ardent devotee of poker, although rather a consistent loser, soberly shook his head.

"I see nothing morally reprehensible in gambling," he asserted. "That is, not in its use, though perhaps in the abuse—"

The surgeon plunged on hotly to clinch his argument. "Well, I'll tell you how far it's went. Just before the City of Panama cleared coming down, Alec Campbell sold out the Eldorado and retired as a public gambler; told me personally his dignity no longer would permit him to engage in a profession that bore even a slight taint of suspicion. That's what the Vigilantes did —drove the squarest gambler in California away from the tables."

"He's quit gambling?"

"Absolutely! He went and organized him the Consolidated Stock Exchange, and got himself made the first president."

The steamer was now within a few hundred yards of the beach. It was low tide, and a stretch of about twenty feet of sand was visible between the edge of the water and the very low wooden wharf, which was really only an extension of the wide street beyond.

A few hundred yards to the left Randolph could see a real wharf extending into the water, and he wondered why the City of Panama did not tie up there, but the surgeon explained it belonged to a rival company, and that practically all the landing in San Francisco was still done by lightering.

Many small boats were already pushing off from shore, and presently the passengers were taken into them. When they were beached the oarsmen lifted their charges ashore, either in their arms or pickaback.

"Farewell, doctor!" Randolph cried, as he went over the side and down the rope ladder.

"Adios! See you to-night in the Paradiso."

A few minutes later a Chinese, his blue nankeen tied in closely to his ankles, and pulling his pigtail down his chest, backed up to the small boat in which Randolph rode.

"Lightee! Lightee!" he shrilled. "Chinaboy pony!"

Having seen others, Randolph knew what to do, as he placed his legs around the neck of the Chinaman, his varnished boots dangling in horizontal line with the pigtail. It was a bit humiliating, but better than wetting his feet as he saw some of his fellow passengers doing rather than mount a human back. Even as he started he saw Miss Estrelly and her companion, one following the other, being carried by two Chinamen each, who used their hands as woven baskets. He wished he had gone that way.

No matter. In a moment he set his dry and polished feet on the golden sands of California, and then stepped up buoyantly to the wooden wharf. As the Chinese placed after him his loose leather bag he felt in his pocket for money and produced a silver cartwheel, with which he rewarded his servitor.

He smiled wryly to himself. It was his last dollar. But here he was, in the land of promise. He pressed his arm against his breast pocket reassuringly. He felt resource within.

The clamor of bidding cabbies almost knocked him back into the bay. They swarmed on him with a din of crying, but he defended his bag, and looked along the wooden street. His late shipmates were dividing into two driblets, one walking, the other succumbing to the aggressive certainties of the cabmen, whose vehicles were mostly of the closed pattern designed for funerals.

Directly in the center of the line Randolph saw two carriages which stood apart from all the others. Private equipages, he concluded. Each was a high-wheeled open phaeton, lined with maroon, the body reached by two steps, and with a high rear seat, on which perched a colored footman in green livery with brass buttons. Each had a pair of very mettlesome horses, so mettlesome that the coachman stood at their heads, warily steadying them in the clamor. The livery of the coachman was of green, but with buff pipings.

The harnesses were trimmed with silver, and from each bit dangled little silver chains, while on the breastplate of each horse was a medallion of solid gold.

Fascinated, Randolph waited to see who would enter these distinguished equipages. Among his late shipmates he could think of none who would rate them. Then he saw Miss Estrelly and her companion approach the nearest. After a word with the coachman the two young women stepped languidly into the high basket, into which they were handed by the footman.

The coachman leaped to his box, cracked his whip, and the horses began pawing the wooden planks. The crowd separated with squeals of fear, and in a moment the phaeton was rumbling down the wharf, rippling along the wooden planks to the rat-a-pat-pat of the prancing horses.

A very pretty sight in the broad sun of high noon!

With a sigh of admiration Randolph turned to engage the nearest cab, thinking that Mrs. Parmentier must be a very rich lady, indeed, when he thought he noticed a sign of recognition from the colored coachman on the remaining phaeton.

He inclined his head slightly so the brim of his hat would shield his eyes from the sun, and afford him better vision. With this the coachman leaped to the ground, came forward, and seized his bag.

"Yassa, massa! Yassa!" he humbly bowed.

Randolph chuckled. "If you don't look like my father's body servant, Sam."

"Yassa, massa! Thank y', sah!"

The coachman led the way obsequiously to the high steps.

"Hold on, Sam!" Randolph protested. "I'm looking for a public conveyance."

"Sho', massa! Step in—an' give yo' ordah!"

Whereupon the coatchman left his place by the head of his team, vaulted to the box, and leaned back as if for directions, while the horses started forward. Before he knew it Randolph had plopped into the maroon velvet.

"Wha-to, sah?" queried the coachman.

"To the office of Wells, Fargo & Co.," gasped Randolph as the rapid rush of the phaeton knocked him flat against the cushions.

CHAPTER II.

GETTING ADVICE.

THE Wells, Fargo office was a frame building with a stoop, located on what was later known as Sansome Street, and flanked by two long sheds used for the shelter of stage coaches. As the ornate phaeton bearing young Randolph approached it along the plank paving, the coachman was obliged to hold a tight rein, and steer a careful course to avoid a curious structure which all but filled the rather wide street.

This was a four-sided wall of sandbags, piled about seven feet high, with embrasures, and two loopholes evidently made for cannon, but now vacant. It extended along half a block front, and left barely room enough on each side for a carriage to pass.

"Why, bless me, Sam, what's this?" Randolph called up to the footman on the rear box.

"He! He!" chuckled the darky. "Dat's Fort Gunnybags, massa!"

"Fort Gunnybags!" Randolph ex-

claimed. "A fort in the heart of the city? What does it mean?"

"Vigilantys, massa. Done lick ev-body. Uncle Sam's soldier boys, an' Cap Sherman, too. He! He! Dey's powhuhful strong —dem vigilantys!"

A moment later the phaeton halted with a flourish before the extended stoop just beyond. Reading the sign over it, Randolph descended, leaving his bag, and, with orders to the darky to wait, mounted the wooden steps, and disappeared inside.

This "up-to-date humming hive of activity," as the Wells, Fargo office in San Francisco was described in Eastern circulars, had five clerks and a manager—"the largest office west of St. Louis." Randolph asked for the manager, and presented a letter from his inner breast pocket.

The manager perused the document, and asked: "Do you bear any other means of identification?"

Randolph looked him very squarely, and very soberly in the eye. Then, pointing to the paper, he replied: "My description is there, sir, clear enough for an escaped convict, as I told your manager in Baltimore."

The paper bore these tallies:

> Height, five feet eleven inches; weight, one hundred and fifty-five pounds; hair, dark red, natural wave; complexion, sandy; eyes, light blue; face, smooth-shaven; cleft chin; dimple lower left cheek; distinguishing marks, three small black moles in a group on left forearm.

The manager surveyed his caller critically, evidently subjecting him to the comparative test. His eyes rested on Randolph's face, which now broke in a broad grin.

"Ah!" said the manager. "I see the dimple now."

The grin went far over the sandy cheeks. "And I suppose you'd like to see the moles." Randolph blushed, but pulled up the coat sleeve of his left arm and the ruching of his immaculate white linen shirt. He held out his bare forearm. Two inches below the elbow, on the front, were three little black spots, each the size of a pea.

The manager did not smile. He examined the moles and then in a businesslike way he said:

"In what form will you have the money, Mr. Randolph?"

"In what form have you got it?"

"Gold, silver, or scrip."

"Gold, I reckon."

The manager stepped behind his desk, placing the paper down, with a dipped pen beside it, remarking, "Kindly receipt this," while he reached back to a safe and twirled the combination. Presently he brought out a sack of coins, from which he counted twenty and laid them down.

They were hexagonal slugs, stamped by the government mint, worth fifty dollars each. Randolph started to pick them up, and found the combined weight would be four or five pounds.

"Pretty heavy to carry," he commented. "How about the scrip?"

"We have it in twenties, fifties, hundreds, and five hundreds."

"Is it legal tender?"

"Certainly. Republic of California, and guaranteed by the government of the United States."

"Give me five hundred dollars in scrip and the rest in gold, if you please. And break up one of those—what do you call them?"

"Pieces of eight. Very well."

The manager handed out five pieces of white paper labeled one hundred dollars each, nine of the slugs, and ten five-dollar gold pieces.

Randolph stowed them away rather carelessly in his trousers pocket. "Tell me," he continued, "the best way to reach the gold diggings."

"Which gold diggings?"

"Any. The best."

"And for what object?" The manager, matter of fact, surveyed his caller shrewdly. Was he merchant, gambler, capitalist, or what? His paper had been an order from the manager of the Baltimore branch for the payment of a thousand dollars, the practical traveler's money order of the time. It told nothing. But there was something enigmatical in Randolph. His rather dandified clothes suggested the gambler, though he lacked jewelry; but his boyish, ingenuous countenance belied a professional connection.

"To find gold," said Randolph.

"Ah! Then you are a prospector?"

"I reckon. That is, I'd like to be—expect to be."

"Well, our stage coach leaves here twice a week, at nine in the morning, for Sacramento. There you can change for points on the American River. One goes out tomorrow morning."

"I'll take that!" Randolph exclaimed.

By this time the manager had come from behind his desk, and seemed more friendly than at first.

Encouraged by his manner, his visitor asked:

"Do you think, sir, there is any chance left for a newcomer without much money—well, sir, like myself?"

Quite a chuckle greeted this. "Not one in a hundred hits California with a pile as good as yours."

"I was told on the boat that the good prospects are all taken—that the big companies have everything."

The manager quickly punctured this canard, a perennial bobbing on the flotsam of every enterprise since the first days following the Flood to Anno Domini 1926.

"A fellow about your age, Dan Quinlan, came through here ninety days ago—not as well heeled as you. He had eleven dollars. Yesterday I got a sack of gold dust from him from Oroville—it weighed up a little over two thousand dollars, and that's the third.

"He's taken out five thousand in less'n three months. And there's a lot of others. We cleared a million and a half in this office last month, about half from big companies, half from grub-stakers and partnerships and lone prospectors. Looks like any man's game, doesn't it?"

Randolph's eyes glowed. "I am delighted, sir!" he exclaimed. "And now may I ask you for a little more advice?"

"Shoot."

"What sort of outfit would you advise?"

"Well—pick, shovel, scale, blanket. As for provisions, they say all you need take in is tobacco, whisky, and sugar. You can buy them cheaper in town here than on the trail, but it hardly pays to tote in bacon and flour. Plenty of stores up there."

Perhaps it was the gold fever that could be seen in Randolph's face. He was breathing more quickly, but he restrained himself to secure more essential information.

"Tell me," he demanded, "just what is the nearest place they are actually taking out gold now."

"Why, I guess there's a few of the boys still over at Vallejo; that's only over the bay, half a day from here. And there's some still around Sutter's; that's just beyond Sacramento. But Sutter's is played out now.

"If I were you I'd go straight through to Oroville; that's two days and a half on the coach. From there you can strike into any one of half a dozen different camps in a day's journey, or—start one yourself. That's all the style now. And when you get your stuff, don't forget Wells, Fargo. Here!"

The manager stepped again behind his desk, and emerged presently with a handful of canvas sacks, in size about six by eight inches, and each stenciled in black letters, "Wells, Fargo & Co., San Francisco, California."

He handed them to his caller. "Pack your dust in those. Soon as you fill one, give it to one of our drivers. We'll do the rest. If you need more, let me know."

Randolph took the sacks tenderly, holding them with reverence, as if clutching them he already held fortune by the throat. Then he swallowed hard and asked: "How much 'll one of these hold?"

"Depends on the fineness of the stuff, but it runs around two or three thousand dollars."

"Whew!" The young man whistled inadvertently. He held in his hand the covering for a sizable fortune, judged by the standards of the life he had known, and yet it was treated casually, as of average incident.

Caution came to him. "How about bandits?" he asked. "They say those stage coaches are held up a lot."

"Not so often. We've only had one hold-up this year. But don't let that worry you. You get your receipt from the driver. That protects you. Wells, Fargo makes good any loss."

"Only one holdup this year! Why, the Eastern papers seem to print nothing but stories of stage coach robberies in California."

The manager laughed. "We're a long way off. A few lies won't hurt us. Fact is, the Vigilantes have made a road in California safer than a side street in New York or Baltimore."

"Vigilantes? My driver said something about their fort."

The manager pointed out the door and down the street. "Sure. Fort Gunnybags. There it is. Coleman's army made that, the second Vigilante uprising. The last, I think. No more will be necessary. They organized four companies of men, military formation, built that fort, marched to the jail, and got two killers, and hung them out of those windows. Look!"

Following with his gaze the manager's pointing finger, Randolph saw in the middle of the next block a two-story frame building, evidently a warehouse. From two middle windows on the second floor extended broad, rough planks, six or eight feet. Even before he heard their story, they seemed to have a sinister suggestion for the newcomer.

"The Vigilantes tried 'em in that room," went on the manager. "Fair trial, with a jury, and defense lawyers, and everything; but no red tape. Convicted 'em, and then made 'em walk the plank with ropes around their necks, and with the whole population of San Francisco down here in the street looking on. A great show! Did more good than all the executions on the American continent since Columbus discovered it."

"But I don't understand. Why the fort?"

"Vigilante companies massed there to prevent William Tecumseh Sherman and his soldiers from interfering. Sherman passed the buck."

"But you said these killers were already in jail. Why not let the law take its course?"

A sarcastic smile came to the face of the custodian of funds. "It was because the law wouldn't take its course," he explained, "that the Vigilantes organized. That's why most of the lawyers in town are against the Vigilantes—interfered in their business."

"And they hung only two?"

"Just two."

"All that effort to execute two murderers already caught?"

"Quite so. Then the Vigilantes went out of business. You see, two was enough. It was the way they did it. It's put the fear of God in every bad man this side of the Rockies. Just whisper 'Vigilante' in any camp from here to Salt Lake, and any card shark will lay down his hand. Why, our driver told me yesterday there hasn't been a horse stolen from Tulluride to Vallejo in thirty days."

The young Virginian looked quickly at his informant.

"Are you a Vigilante" he asked.

The manager's mouth shut tight, and he stolidly surveyed his caller for a moment. Then a very slow smile came into his eyes, though his lower face remained as if frozen. Finally with a menacing drawl he said: "You're a tenderfoot, my boy, so we will just forget that question; but I will advise you not to ask any one else that in this town. And for your guidance I will add this: you will find no Vigilantes in San Francisco. They came from—nowhere. They are gone—somewhere."

Randolph accepted the rebuke silently. The manager chuckled as he added in milder tone:

"But they were substantial-looking cits while they were with us—and they didn't wear masks."

The "tenderfoot" changed the subject. "How about hotels?" he asked.

"There's the Continental, the Bella Union, and there's some rooms above the Paradiso. A young fellow like you might like that—the Paradiso." The manager winked broadly. "Plenty doing there, what with the bar and the dance hall and the new faro bank and roulette wheel."

Randolph shook his head. "I'd prefer a regular hotel," he said.

"Try the Bella Union—there's no dinner served west of the Planters in St. Louis like the Bella Union serves."

"Thank you, sir." Randolph bowed rather formally from his waist and walked down to the waiting phaeton.

"Huh!" commented the manager to his

chief clerk as he came back to his office. "That kid's skipped out of one of the best plantations in the Old Dominion, or I miss my guest."

"How far will he get with his thousand?"

"Dunno. Oroville's a long ways—two, three days."

"Thought you said the road was safe since the Vigilantes—"

The manager shook his head, remarking: "Vigilantes didn't write prescriptions to keep tenderfeet plastered to gold they bring in!"

CHAPTER III.

FOR THE HONOR OF THE HOUSE.

FROM six in the morning until six in the evening the Paradiso had only three barkeeps. Then three more came on to serve until eight, when the full force arrived, five more. Thus while the chief business office in San Francisco had only five clerks, the chief bar had eleven dispensers of drink, straight and mixed. It was the glory of the Paradiso that every alcoholic beverage known to man was served over its bar—except beer. One could get beer in San Francisco of that period, but in the saloons along the water front and on Gold Row, where the miners outfitted; not in the Paradiso, which was the resort of quality. There Russian vodka and Mexican pulque recently had been added to the list of exotic stimulants.

It was Randolph's fate to arrive at the Paradiso the night of its narrow escape from a great humiliation. He had spent the afternoon buying the outfit suggested by the manager of the express company, which he had left in his room at the Bella Union, and in surveying the town. For a time he had watched the huge scoops digging up the sand from the hills for the making of roads. He had climbed up one of the shoulders of Nob Hill past a group of mansions which he had been told were the homes of the nabobs.

Then he had dined at the Bella Union on oyster stew, venison, grizzly bear steak, French artichokes, partridge, mushroom souffle, French fried potatoes, ice cream, and coffee. Because it was his last meal in civilization he treated himself to a bottle of champagne.

In the morning he was leaving via the stage coach for the gold fields. He had one night of leisure and sightseeing. He began it, as every one told him he must, by going to the Paradiso.

As Randolph entered past the mahogany doors, brass-bound in huge locks and hinges, he thought there must be some unusual excitement, for a crowd seemed pressing to the rear, past the card tables in the foreground. The crowd usually pressed toward the bar at the Paradiso, but this seemed more than the ordinary. Randolph joined the throng, which contained many of the prominent men of the city.

He saw a bar fifty feet long, three feet wide, and polished until it reflected like a mirror. Directly behind it was a huge painting, of more than life size, depicting a satyr with five junoesque nymphs, set in a gold frame eighteen inches deep. A framed, glassed box below it bore gold lettering, reading:

"Le Satyre" par Dupuis
Value, $50,000.

On either side of the painting was stacked pyramid after pyramid of glasses in all shapes and sizes. One pyramid was of delicate ruby glass made to hold burgundy; another of spiral pale green for moselle; another of amber cylinder for sauterns; another of a superimposed creamy beaker to hold egg-mixed drinks; and then champagne glasses, tiny liqueur glasses, and on each end, in the place of honor, stolid and plain American whisky glasses.

In all this paraphernalia of drinking only one bottle of actual liquor was visible. This was in a glass cabinet beside the picture, ostensibly padlocked, with a neatly printed card inside the case, announcing:

Napoleon sherry;
Fifty years old;
One drink, $10.

The price of whisky was four bits a drink, but it was not to serve whisky chiefly that the eleven bartenders stood at proud, equal

distances behind the fifty feet of the Paradiso's mahogany. Each was a picked man, each a master of his sophisticated craft, and the wages of the least of them was a hundred dollars a week. For it was the vaunted boast of the Paradiso that it could serve any mixed drink known to man, and the price was the same for one and all—one dollar. Ingredients strictly imported—except eggs.

The bartenders wore no aprons. Their clothes ran chiefly to waistcoats. Among the eleven could be seen almost every variety of gay check and stripe, surmounted by elaborate neckwear. And they were ornately barbered, in curling mustachios, waxed vandykes, and an occasional full beard.

The chief barman, Antoine, an elderly Frenchman, who alone held the secret of the swastika, a mixed drink of sibylline ecstasy, wore long, white, silky mutton-chop whiskers.

For the swastika it was necessary to levy an extra charge of four bits. No one knew of just what it was made; but there was honey in it, and champagne, and chartreuse, and the white of an egg, and nutmeg. It was also believed that Antoine never made two alike. This he would not confirm. As an artist he was above measurement or recipe. Instinct and impeccable taste were alone his guides.

As Randolph pressed forward he found a throng of men five or six deep before the middle of the bar. In the center, with an elbow on the mahogany, was sprawled a bizarre individual, wearing a suit of loose, velvety corduroy, engaged in the act of tossing off one drink after another with alarming rapidity. Three barmen were mixing for him with studious care, and the audience seemed to regard his casual occupation with similar seriousness.

"What is it?" Randolph asked the nearest man.

"A wager," came the reply from his elbow.

He turned to confront one, evidently a Spaniard, judging by his sombrero, his velvet trousers, tight at the knee and flaring at the ankles, his crimson sash, and his frilled shirt fully exposed.

"Señor Bonanza Pete has wagered he can drink seventy-five mixed drinks without stopping. Observe! The money is up!" He pointed to an upturned glass bottom up on the bar, holding two pieces of scrip.

"Five hundred dollars a side!" the next man added. "If he drinks a hundred it will kill him!"

At that moment a barman with waxed mustaches, and a pique vest with lavender pin stripes placed on the bar a small glass containing a pale purple fluid. As he did so he said, with the precision of a timekeeper or an auctioneer's clerk: "A Hindu swizzle. No. 37."

The one described as Bonanza Pete seized it and downed it with a gulp, looking avidly toward the next drink, one of straw color, emanating from a silver mixer, wielded deftly before a vest of red polka dots on a green field.

A ripple of applause and interest spread over the crowd. "The halfway!" "He's made the turn and going strong!" "Even money on Pete! Who'll cover?"

For a moment the tension was relaxed. The buzz of voices rose. Wagers were made. Unless the bettors were well known to each other, the money was put up, and in the hands of some disinterested bystander. Nearly every man in the crowd had put up money on the contest, and over half of them were holding stakes.

The prevailing odds had begun against Pete, but they had steadily risen in his favor as he tossed off the first thirty-seven drinks with as much ease as an ordinary man would have in disposing of two or three. He stood there, in semilolling attitude, propped by the protruding roll of the massive bar, downing the drinks as they appeared, like a boa constrictor gulping rabbits, with seemingly illimitable capacity. After each few drinks he would languidly shrug his shoulders, and his loose corduroys would ripple capaciously, as if swelling out and producing further subterranean caverns for the disposal of the extra freight.

A barman with a full black beard cascading over a yellow vest of natural chamois skin, slid a glass of green liquid under the nose of the voracious

Señor Pete, saying sonorously: "A Sandwich Island smash; No. 45!"

A cheer ascended from the crowd.

The newcomer felt a thump on his back, and an overeager voice greeted him with: "Hello, Don Randolph!"

He turned to confront the ship's surgeon, his eyes aglitter. Randolph stepped aside. The surgeon had not dared a personal touch throughout the long voyage, but now he was evidently more under the influence of the flowing bowl than Bonanza Pete.

In stepping hastily Donald collided with the Spaniard, to whom he turned with a quick apology. A most winning smile lit the swarthy countenance.

"No es nada, Don Randolph!" he replied.

For a moment the Virginian was tempted to correct the obvious inference made by his chance acquaintance in assuming that his nickname, "Don," which the surgeon had not presumed heretofore to use, was the prefix of a Castilian title; but the swift continuance of the novel contest in front of them was absorbing all attention.

Even the bibulous surgeon became engrossed, with the others. In a murmurous undertone the spectators were calling attention to the rules. It had been agreed in making the wager that there were to be no two drinks alike, and that there was to be no lapse of time between their placement on the bar.

The first condition had been made by Pete's opponent; the latter by the wily Bonanza himself, whose experience with the cumulative effect of alcohol had led him to believe he could take care of seventy-five drinks if he allowed no slack time for their kicks to multiply, while constantly feeding fresh ingredients to absorb the paralyzing potency.

But now there was evident a species of consternation behind the bar. One by one fresh tenders had been brought to the source of supply, but among them was rising a wave of protest and denial.

"Looks as if they thought he had had enough," Randolph said to the Spaniard.

"No, no, señor! The affair becomes serious. It is an impasse."

"I don't understand."

"The honor of the house is at stake."

"Honor of the house!"

"Sí, señor. The Paradiso will in a moment, if I mistake not, admit defeat. An evil evening for the first bar of the Golden West."

"The Paradiso defeated? What do you mean?" Randolph was bewildered.

The Spaniard threw his hands out from his waist, in a gesture of mock despair, while his eyes twinkled merrily. Then he leaned toward Randolph and whispered: "The mixers have exhausted their combinations. Observe!"

This explained clearly the hurried conferences among the amply vestmented tenders behind the mahogany, whose faces were studies in perplexity. Several of them glowered dully at Bonanza Pete as he downed drink after drink in famished gulps, each as if it were his first after a long abstinence.

"I see," agreed Randolph. "And, in a way, it is a prostitution of their art—this rapid guzzling, without tasting, of their most exquisite concoctions."

"Sí, señor!"

The Spaniard lowered his voice still more, whispering so that only Randolph could possibly hear, as he said:

"Señor Bonanza Pete is not a gentleman—riffraff!"

The voices of the tenders penetrated the ordinary noises of the room at regular intervals with the announcement of their mixtures, and the numbers. Now came one more authoritative, calling: "Cherry flip à la Malagane. No. 55."

A wilder cheer greeted this. It was the three-quarter post.

But the lips of the tenders were set tightly. They looked on the crowd with animosity. A group on the end came to a desperate decision, and one of their number rushed pell-mell through the little gate which held them in, and disappeared toward the rear.

"N'Orleans paternoster. No. 58!" cried the inexorable timer, setting forth a creamy beaker.

In a moment a murmur of new interest spread over the crowd, followed by sudden

silence. Then, through the little gate, and along the wide alley behind the bar, Randolph saw forcing her rapid way a solidly built middle-aged woman in a black gown buttoned tightly to her throat, wearing huge diamond earrings, her upper lip marked with a fine line of black hairs. Her coal-black eyes blazed.

The bartenders gave way before her respectfully, and as she came on she whispered instructions right and left. Instantly order and precision came out of the mumbled consternation.

The field marshal of this army of Bacchus had arrived to save the day—or the evening!

Cries, applause, shouts greeted her from the spectators in front of the bar. "Belle!" they cried. "Hurrah for Mme. Belle! Set 'em right! Show 'em their business!"

"Mme. Parmentier, the proprietress," whispered the Spaniard.

As she reached the point in the bar directly behind Bonanza Pete the tenders had exhausted their final combination. One of them had set his down wearily, with a weariness showing in his voice as he called: "The jolt of the Sicilian bandit; No. 61!"

The black-haired, black-gowned, black-eyed woman raised her hand imperiously. "Gentlemen," she called sharply, "I call you to witness that nothing in Europe, Asia, or America can compare with the Paradiso! Our mixed drinks of strictly imported materials cannot be matched anywhere in the wide world. And our combinations of mixed drinks are without number. The boys have spread before Mr. Bonanza Pete this night only sixty-one. The order is for seventy-five."

She beckoned to the suave white-haired Frenchman.

"M. Antoine," she commanded, "forward! Mix for the gentleman fourteen swastikas—and make each one different!"

With a gleam of triumph in her eye she folded her arms and glared at the crowd. None dared dispute her. It was of common repute that Antoine made no two drinks alike.

Swiftly then spread the dénouement. Antoine was ambidextrous. Assisted by two men on each side, who handed him materials as he asked for them softly, he prepared one swastika after another.

But for the first time Bonanza Pete gave signs of weakening. He sank against the bar, closed his eyes, and breathed deeply. Then he braced himself, seemingly gaining a second wind, and downed the drinks that came before him, each in a wineglass, two gulps to a drink.

Finally a tender intoned levelly: "Another swastika, with a dash of curacoa yellow; No. 74!"

Pete raised a pudgy, piggy right finger, while his eyes, blearily half open, looked across to Mme. Belle as if from a cataleptic.

"N' more sweet stuff!" he pleaded. "Gimme sompin t' chase'r. Sompin hard!"

Antoine was already mixing his seventy-fifth drink, the final swastika, but the genius of Mme. Parmentier rose again to the occasion. She swept her silky chief of staff aside with a gesture, and herself reached into the caverns under the bar, swiftly bringing forth two bottles which she planted before the beleaguered Pete.

"Sure, Mr. Bonanza!" she cried. "And a drink it will be of the finest!"

Whereupon she poured from each bottle a fingerful into a glass and set it before him. "Irish whisky and Spanish port—mixed!" she cried. "And may its water of life crown you with a holy benediction! 'Tis a combination to lick the world—Spanish-Irish! Me own father and me own mother. God love ye, manly Pete!"

"Port wine and whisky!" called the timekeeper's voice; "No. 75!"

And he swept the two pieces of scrip from under the glass on the bar and tucked them tenderly into the side pocket of the cavernous Pete, who was oblivious of this sign of his triumph.

With an uncertain gesture he waved the crowd aside. Then, sighting the stairs he made for them in a bee line.

In awed silence Bonanza Pete reached the first step of the stairs and lurched against the banister. A score of eager helpers rushed to him, but he waved them aside and began slowly to mount the stairs. He halted at the top, but finally made the landing.

Then he disappeared through the door beyond and dropped like a log on a bed, where he lay for two days without moving.

Barely had he gone than a wild crescendo of cries rose from the room below. Above it all a shrill woman's voice announced:

"Gentlemen, the drinks are on the house!"

Randolph looked wonderingly at the Spaniard.

"Is it this way every night?" he asked.

"No, no, señor," replied the flexuous Castilian, whose English seemed as perfect as his manners; "it is the first time I have ever seen it happen. It is an occasion. Mme. Belle has saved the honor of the Paradiso!"

"What a paradox! What a spectacle! I wouldn't have missed it for ten years of my life!" exclaimed the young Virginian.

"It is California!" smiled the Spaniard. "Come—let us approach the bar. Then you will realize the strength and the delicacy of the Paradiso's code."

CHAPTER IV.

GETTING ACQUAINTED.

AS they crossed the room the young man felt he must not presume more on the good nature of his distinguished companion, if the surgeon's addressing him as "Don" had mistakenly led the Spaniard to think he had encountered a compatriot.

For a moment he paused. "May I introduce myself?" he asked.

"Sí, señor! I am honored."

"I am Donald Randolph, of Warrenton, Virginia. I arrived on the City of Panama this morning."

A dazzling smile from the Spaniard revealed even, white teeth. He bowed formally.

"And I," he replied, "am Le Capitaine Don Enrique del Sectel y Rinualdo of Santa Elizabetta and Yerba Buena—humbly at your service, sir."

Randolph smiled half guiltily as he returned the bow. "I don't want you to think," he added, "from the way the ship's doctor addressed me that I was assuming a title I did not deserve. 'Don' is a Spanish title, is it not?"

"Sí, señor. Though I regret to say—not uncommon."

"But I am not one. That is merely a nickname—and only for those who know me well."

A look, an inflection in his voice, seemed to convey to le capitaine that the bibulous surgeon did not enjoy an intimacy warranting him in using the nickname. And the other seemed to understand. A half smile, a lowering of the eyelids, articulated this comprehension.

Already Randolph felt that in this gayly appareled, swarthy foreigner there was a gentility of breeding, and a subtlety of thought he had never known before except in his own father.

"I comprehend," the Spaniard replied, "and if you will permit the presumption of a short acquaintance I will render the title in a way legal." He smiled quizzically, adding: "I have the authority, for I represent the late gubernador of Yerba Buena, and he was empowered by his majesty the king to bestow titles. Therefore, with your permission, I will call you—what shall I say— Ah!" After a moment's thought he lit on the name—"Don Chichi!"

Randolph repeated, amusedly: "Don Chichi!"

"Si! The new don—the little—diminuendo! Ah! Not in size. You are a man—big—full grown—but," Don Enrique laughed, "a little Spanish!"

He ran his arm through Randolph's, who felt the glow of a kindling response surging through him.

"You overwhelm me, Don—Don—" He stopped, not knowing which of the many names it would be proper to use.

"Don Enrique! Come! Let us cement our friendship at the bar!"

Arm in arm they approached the mahogany. "What shall it be?" asked the Spaniard.

"I will follow your lead."

Don Enrique turned to the bar man. "A Bull of Barcelona!" he ordered. "Two!" And then explained to his companion as the mixer began his task: "It is a worthy male libation composed of Spanish

muscatel, Holland gin, and a dash of Barcelona bitters. There! Try it!"

The drinks were set forth. Randolph sipped his approvingly. "Excellent!" said he. When it was gone he went on: "Now—join me! What will you have?"

"I await your lead, Don Chichi!" The Spaniard bowed.

Randolph felt the urgent necessity of ordering something that would make an impression in that palace of gourmets. His simple repertoire brought from the shores of the James, from Baltimore, Richmond, and Boston had been exhausted on Bonanza Pete. For all Randolph knew were the old-fashioned cobblers, juleps, toddies, and sours.

But he was determined not to be outdone. With a decision which he tried to make quite casual he said to the mixer behind the bar: "A devilish lowball, please—two!" and went on talking.

The tender gave one hurried glance at Randolph, who, drawn to his full height, which was topped by its effective belled beaver hat, solemnly carried on his formal conversation. Like every one else who came in contact with the young Virginian, he was vastly impressed by the reserved and polished personality. He stroked his chin, scratched his head, and then went back to consult with Antoine.

The Frenchman shook his head gravely, peeked over, and narrowly studied the newcomer. Other tenders were called to the consultation, which lasted for long minutes. Mme. Belle, hovering in the background, was called in. She listened, pondered, and shook her head. Then her resourceful eye brightened, and she whispered a word of consoling advice to her distressed employee.

He returned to Randolph and the Spaniard humbly. "Pardon me." He spoke most respectfully. "But I am instructed by Mme. Parmentier to convey the apologies of the Paradiso, and to say that the mixer who alone is competent to compose the devilish lowball is not present. This is his night off. A thousand apologies, sir, but if you will be so kind as to instruct me concerning the ingredients I will do my best."

Randolph replied casually, in the midst of a sentence: "A finger of bourbon, a finger of rye, a finger of sour mash, half a lime, a pony of applejack, one drop of cayenne, and silver with the white of an egg."

"Thank you! Thank you, sir!" The mixer withdrew, crushed, servile, and eager. This was a tough night for the Paradiso. First Bonanza Pete, and now this high-stepper.

As Randolph turned Don Enrique said: "An invention if I mistake not, that devilish lowball—eh, Don Chichi?"

"How did you know?"

"By the twitching of your left hand. Ha! Ha! You are clever! And it is one joke—one excellent joke on Mme. Belle."

In a moment the mixer was back with two wine glasses containing the alleged mixture. Each sipped warily. Then Don Enrique consumed his.

"Magnifico!" he cried. He noticed the proprietress watching him narrowly. He lifted his glass toward her, and smiled. She caught the indorsement and summoned Antoine, whispering to him. The elderly Frenchman wrote obediently in a book. Henceforth the devilish lowball was to be a featured drink at the Paradiso.

"A toast," continued Don Enrique, "to the President of the United States!"

They drank, and then Randolph countered: "Will you join me in a toast?"

"With pleasure, Don Chichi!"

Randolph raised his glass high. "To His Majesty—His Most Christian Majesty," he spoke solemnly, "the King of Spain!"

They drained the bottoms up.

Then beside them stood the stout figure of Mme. Parmentier. "Gentlemen," she insinuated, "come wiz me!" and led the way along the bar, and into the rear room.

They found themselves in a long, narrow room effectually screened from the main structure which held the bar, and gambling tables, and the stairway to the bedrooms above. At the far end was a raised platform where a group of six musicians were strumming instruments, a guitar, a piano, and four violins. Like everything else about the Paradiso the music was refined, no brass, no drums.

A narrow, waxed dancing floor spread down to the musicians; and on each side were narrow, long settees, occupied at intervals by young women, and an occasional man. The attitudes of all the occupants were formal. It might have been a drawing-room except for a boxlike effect, and a rather scanty dancing floor. No great encouragement to linger long. It seemed, rather, a meeting place.

The young women all wore evening dress, but none had skirts higher than the ankle, nor arms bare above the elbow, nor décolleté more than two inches below the collarbone. This was in observance of the strict rules of the Paradiso. Everything refined.

Mme. Parmentier beckoned to two young women near by. They came forward and curtsied.

"Le Capitaine Rinualdo, and your friend—what is zee name?"

"Don Chichi!"

"Ah! And Don Chichi. I present you to the ladies, our new arrivals from New York—Miss Dolly Estrelly, and Miss Amenia Estrelly."

Randolph could not prevent a little gasp of astonishment. Miss Dolly came directly forward and greeted him most effusively, without the slightest embarrassment. Her "sister" immediately began fingering the brilliant sash of the Spaniard. Don Enrique bowed rather stiffly, as did Randolph. Each was polite, but with adjusted measure.

"What a jolly party," cried Dolly "to meet you so soon. I see you know Aunt Belle, too."

"For a minute, perhaps—" He was really quite embarrassed. He had been the companion du voyage of these young women for weeks without the slightest suspicion of their character, or lack of it, which was now most obvious; and he was unable to accommodate himself to the situation.

"Aw! Come! Sit down!" Dolly had him by the arm.

He held back. "I—I—" he stammered.

She tugged on his arm, across which his hand fell holding his belled hat. He resisted, and she dropped the arm, making a saucy little pout at him.

"I—didn't—know—" He stopped, feeling that he was blushing.

"Rats!" she exclaimed. "I liked you from the minute you came on deck. Come! Be a sport!"

She gave a quick glance around, then lifted her skirts deftly, and kicked his hat. It flew from his hand, and fell halfway across the room. Every one looked up. The chattering ceased, but Mme. Parmentier, watching, hawklike, from the doorway, swooped down in an instant. Her chief concern was the flush of angry resentment she had seen pass over Randolph's cherubic countenance.

She seized Dolly Estrelly by the arm, and with no gentle grasp, fiercely muttering, with an oath: "How dare you! I have only ladies in my house. Get back to your room! Back!"

The flare of feeling was blazing now. It hit Dolly with cumulative force. She launched a stream of foul language at Mme. Parmentier. The proprietress promptly seized her, and placed a hand over her mouth. Like an angry catamount the new arrival from New York leaped her California "aunt," biting, clawing, screaming.

Quickly there appeared a heavy-set, ugly faced man from near the bar. "Take her away!" said Mme. Parmentier. And he did, though Dolly kicked, and screamed, and swore.

"Perhaps gambling is more to your preference," Don Enrique observed, the long lines of his patrician countenance unmoved at the spectacle.

"Decidedly!" said Randolph.

"Then come. I will show you."

The Spaniard led the way back into the barroom, and beyond, where, as he had entered, Randolph had seen gaming tables.

"Too bad," said Don Enrique, "that Mme. Belle should be so deceived in her 'ladies'!"

"Why!" Randolph gasped. "I sat with them at table for weeks, and never guessed —never imagined. I am really very much astonished!"

The Spaniard laughed heartily. "It is a symbol of California," he replied. "Everything a man or woman has comes out here—most quick—the inner depth—the foul of character—the noble—as acid reveals gold. You will see it often, my friend!"

They crossed the room, and went up three steps to a very deep recess that lay along the street side. In the center was a long table, covered with books and newspapers. Already there were on file the copies of the New York *Herald* and the Baltimore *Sun* brought that morning by the City of Panama.

About the table and in the corners and at the sides of the room were groups of men, two and three and four, chatting, smoking.

Though separated only by two or three steps from the main barroom of the Paradiso, this seemed like an exclusive club. Indeed it was almost that. The chief men of the city were wont to foregather there every evening. A club had not as yet been organized in San Francisco.

The firehouses, each harboring a company of selected citizens who enrolled for social purposes more than for the avowed purpose of combating fire, were more exclusive, for only members could enter; but they were set severely apart from each other by their factional character, and the most important men of the city did not care to ally themselves with any faction, for various reasons.

Until the previous spring Alec Campbell's bar had been the center where these ruling spirits gathered; but, as the surgeon had told Randolph on the ship, Campbell had quit gambling to become the president of the Consolidated Stock Exchange; and in selling his bar its tone had deteriorated. His patronage had drifted to the Paradiso.

So now, in the fall of 1856, the "reading room" of the Paradiso was to San Francisco what the Metropolitan Club is to Washington in 1926—a political-financial-social center, the one place in the community where one might be sure to find the important leaders of affairs.

It was fifty feet from the bar, and only a few feet farther from the dance hall, with gambling tables in between.

Yet an empire was made there and fortunes won and lost.

"It is," said the Spaniard as he explained all this to Randolph, "the place where Lady Luck is wooed and wed to Beau Fortune! Each night, and sometimes late in the afternoon."

While apparently there were no rules for entrance to this informal yet powerful "club," while seemingly any chance comer could walk in and make himself at home, yet there was a close corporation in spirit which effectually barred casual outsiders.

Don Enrique, however, was apparently one of the favored members. As he entered he was greeted on all sides by nods or quiet words of fellowship. He led Randolph to a thick-set man with grizzled mustache and hair, who stood by a window alone.

"Ah! Amigo!" He bowed. "You will permit me, I pray, to present my friend from Virginia, the Señor Don Randolph. Don Chichi, my friend, Le Generale Coleman."

The two Americans shook hands. Coleman did not smile. His face seemed taciturn, grave. It would have been heavy and ordinary were it not for the blazing power of his eyes.

"The leader of the Vigilantes?" Randolph eagerly asked.

Coleman made no sign in reply, but his eyes seemed ready to consume the young man, not with enmity or resentment, but with a quiet static force. Randolph felt instantly chilled to the bone, yet not frightened.

The Spaniard deftly intervened. "My friend arrived only yesterday on the City of Panama," he explained to Coleman. He led Randolph aside, explaining in a low voice: "One does not speak of the Vigilantes. It is not, as our French friends say, au fait."

"I see! But that is the General Coleman?"

"Si, señor! Chairman of the Committee on Public Safety, disbanded five weeks since. The only man whose name is publicly known, yet even he no longer speaks of his connection. Ah, there is Judge Terry, the chief opponent of the Vigilantes. A fine man—a Southerner, like yourself. You should know him. Come!"

A moment later Randolph was presented to Judge Terry, a silver-haired gentleman in a frock coat. And then to Mr. Alexander

Campbell, not long since the "squarest public gambler in the West." And to a dozen others.

He felt that he was in the most select company in California. And he wondered how it had happened.

CHAPTER V.

FICKLE FORTUNE.

AS Randolph talked with Don Enrique and the others he realized he was standing by the side of a low rail. Just beyond it and on the main floor of the Paradiso he could see the gambling tables. Despite his real absorption in the important individuals he felt honored in knowing so readily, he was fascinated by the tables.

Don Enrique was quick to sense this. "Ah," he smiled, "pardon me! We came to game, and here we talk. How stupid! Come!"

They descended to the main floor.

"What is this" asked Randolph.

"The faro bank," said Don Enrique.

"Faro! We don't have that in Virginia. How is it played?"

"See the two boxes of cards. The dealer lifts from one to the other. The bets are placed on the color of the cards, as well as on their face values. Will you play?"

A shadow crossed the face of Don Chichi. "No," he replied, "I don't expect to play to-night. I am only an onlooker. Faro is new. I never saw the game before."

"You can find anything you like here—roulette, piquet, California Jack, draw poker, stud poker, jack pots, or—in the room beyond is a table for baccarat. Which shall it be?"

The firm young Virginian's face became closely knit. Randolph shook his head. "I do not gamble," he averred.

"No?" The Spaniard glanced at him shrewdly, saying: "That is not quite natural—in youth."

"I cannot trust myself. I do not know when to stop."

"Ah! You have lost lately, I see."

"Exactly. Too much."

"You need more practice, perhaps."

"I need only never to touch a card again."

The Spaniard passed this off lightly with a laugh. "'The wisdom of youth is a pearl brighter than the resolution of age,' says our good old proverb. I approve your resolution. However, let us observe."

They halted by the side of a round table containing six players. Three gentlemen in stocks and high hats, evidently merchants of consequence in the city; a bearded skipper from one of the vessels lying in harbor; a miner in blue flannel shirt and hip boots, bareheaded; and a young fellow wearing a colored neckerchief and a black slouch-hat, with rather a rakish air, and who filled the mind's eye as the proper picture of a desperado.

Noting his companion's interest in the latter, Don Enrique whispered:

"That's Johnny Flauntry, the express rider."

"The one with the red handkerchief?"

"Sí, señor—a dead shot and a plunger. It is said he has been rich oftener than any man in California. Ten, fifteen, twenty times. He has been the discoverer of four bonanzas, and each he has gambled away. Twice here in the Paradiso I have seen him clean up the table—only to lose everything the next night, or the next. Luckily he has steady employment as a rider for Wells, Fargo."

"He looks like a professional gambler."

"No, no. He is not cold enough."

"Or a bandit!"

"No, no! Johnny Flauntry is square as a die—but reckless. Look!"

It was a jack pot, and Johnny opened by sticking in every chip before him. He drew three cards, glanced at them, and cast a jovial look about the room, as if proclaiming to all that fortune had perched upon him.

All but one of the others stayed. A taciturn gentleman said:

"Your bet, Flauntry."

Johnny grinned. "My pile's in. Lend me some."

"How much?"

"Ten thousand."

"Wake up. There's a hundred."

Flauntry shoved in the hundred as cas-

ually as if he were backed by unlimited funds. Another hatted gentleman dropped out. There were left the skipper, the miner, the taciturn one, and Johnny Flauntry.

Said the taciturn one as he shoved all the chips into one pile at the side: "Johnny is in on this. I'll take the rest of you for a thousand."

He pushed forward a fresh stack.

The skipper dropped out. The miner covered.

Flauntry cried out: "The devil, I'm out. Come! Who'll stake me?"

He appealed to each in turn, but no one would advance him any more. He looked up at the spectators. His eye fell on the Spaniard.

"Don Enrique!" he called. "Lend me a thousand!"

The Spaniard courteously advanced two slugs.

Johnny's face fell. He rose from his seat and confided his hand to his prospective banker. The Spaniard looked, smiled, and shook his head.

"No, Señor Flauntry. It is not the value of your hand; it is the principle. Win or lose, I will lend one hundred dollars to Johnny Flauntry at any time—no more."

The express rider, standing by his chair, the five cards in his hand, his pleasant face tense with vexation, suddenly startled every one by seizing his shirt, ripping it open, and exposing a hairy chest.

"There," he exclaimed, "is the first national savings bank! I'll just call your bluff. I was aiming to hang on to this nest egg so's to grub stake a fellow that's got a new Gold of Ophir beyond Placerville—but a hand like this here don't come floating down every night."

As he talked he tugged at a piece of sticky paper adhering to his chest. He grimaced with the pain as it came away with difficulty.

"Couldn't trust myself," he explained, while all looked on in amazement, though a few snickers were spreading over the crowd, "so I stuck away these here scrips behind a porous plaster. Gosh A'mighty! The danged things do stick—just like I said they would. I reckoned nobody wouldn't ever get these away from me, and so they wouldn't if it wasn't fer a jack pot like this. There! Now, you stewed cayuse, I just see that thousand of yours!"

Johnny laid a piece of scrip triumphantly on the table. In places it exuded the yellow gum of the porous plaster, but it was a thousand dollars in currency of the realm.

"And raise you a hundred," he added, shoving after it the loan from Don Enrique.

The miner came in silently. The taciturn one covered, glumly adding: "See you, Johnny. What you got?"

Flauntry turned up four jacks.

The miner shoved his cards in the deck. The taciturn one did the same, smiling grimly.

With a yelp that could be heard all over the room, Flauntry pulled in his winnings; but his first move, even while the stakes lay before him, was to replace the thousand-dollar piece of scrip back behind the porous plaster, reseal it over his chest, rebutton his shirt, and then calmly readjust his neckerchief.

The balance, running over five thousand, after calling to the bank to settle, he stuffed in his pocket as he announced drawlingly: "Me for the Oroville stage in the morning, and this time, boys, I quit—same's as I'll quit when I strike my next bonanza. That's me, John S. Flauntry, and don't you forget it! Here! Who wants my chair?"

A dozen pressed forward for it. To sit in a chair where such luck was running would be a great piece of favor. Johnny looked them over studiously.

At one side stood Don Enrique and Randolph, intently interested but only observant. Johnny's glance rested on Randolph approvingly.

"Hey, there, young feller!" he called. "How about you?"

Randolph looked around to see who was meant.

"It is you he prefers, Don Chichi!" The Spaniard nudged him.

"But I—I don't gamble!"

A raucous laugh broke through the spectators. It came from the tipsy surgeon, who had edged a way in.

"Don't gamble, eh?" he tittered. "Have you forgotten the City of Panama, Don

Randolph? Better cop a lucky seat like that, and get back what you lost."

Randolph flushed.

"How about it, friend?" Flauntry's amiable victorious countenance beamed on the young Virginian. "Now, don't look at a chanst twice in Californy."

"Well—thank you, sir. I appreciate your singling me out. I will try to follow your lead."

With a constriction about his heart and feeling that he was turning pale, Randolph took the vacated seat.

At the same moment the skipper got up, and into his chair slid an officer in the uniform of a captain of the United States army. At sight of him Randolph gasped.

Don Enrique, standing behind him, leaned over and asked in a low voice:

"Do you know the officer?"

Randolph acknowledged a bow from across the table as he whispered back: "It is the man who cleaned me out on the steamer coming from the isthmus. It was his easy winning which made me swear never to gamble again."

Don Enrique murmured: "Then this is your chance to get even. Good!"

Meanwhile the cards were being dealt to the players.

The ante was five dollars, five dollars to draw. Randolph felt, even before he began, far beyond his depth; but resolved merely to be polite, to play a few hands as a piker, and then quietly withdraw. He determined to ante only in his turn, and not to bet, no matter what he drew. He bought a hundred dollars' worth of chips.

"Shall it be jack pots, gentlemen?" asked the taciturn one.

All readily assented. Every one wanted significant as well as quick action. In his first hand Randolph drew three nines. He anted, and drew a pair of kings; stayed and met the necessary bets, without raising any one. He won the pot. It held a hundred and twenty dollars.

Still he felt no elation. His chief thought was that now he would be safe for an extended piking. He let three pots go by without anteing, for he did not get even a pair.

Word had spread, however, that Johnny Flauntry had made a killing, and had left his mascot in his chair for a tenderfoot. A score of men clustered around the table, largely massed behind Randolph. From the raised platform of the "reading room" above, Judge Terry and a group of the more fastidious looked down.

The ante came to Randolph, and with it he drew a pair of aces. He came in on that pot, drew another ace and a pair of trays, saw every bet without raising, and won on the showdown. Three hundred and fifteen dollars.

"How goes it, kid?" Johnny Flauntry's voice greeted him. He had returned from the bar, where he had ordered a round of drinks.

"So-so!" said Randolph without even looking up.

Johnny saw the pile of chips before his successor. He laughed. "I see you got 'em eatin' outa yer hand. Go to it now. Clean 'em out. Remember—beginner's luck!"

"True!" commented a low voice behind him. It was Don Enrique. "The first game in California shows a man's mettle. It makes or breaks him."

Three tens came to Randolph. He won his third pot. In front of him lay chips calling for nearly a thousand dollars.

He felt no excitement. Rather, an enormous calm came to him. He felt clairvoyant, as though the past and the future were his. He held all in the hollow of his hand. Nothing was beyond him. He was unbeatable.

He had often heard of the gambler's "hunch" telling him when the cards were riding for him. He had never felt it before. But now it came to him. Yes, this was his tide of fortune, destined to carry him to the heights.

Instantly his plane of values was readjusted. Five dollars was the lowest minimum of exchange, an atom of counting; a hundred was more like a dollar; a thousand was barely respectable. Above that one came into reality.

An hour and fifteen minutes later nearly all the chips on the table lay before him. He counted them. They called for nine thou-

sand eight hundred dollars. His feeling was not different; he had neither elation nor depression. He decided calmly that when he got ten thousand he would quit.

Often in thinking of a bonanza in terms of actual cash he had decided that one of ten thousand dollars would be enough—for a little bonanza. He was not avaricious. A ten-thousand-dollar estate back in his country was a competence. That was all he wanted.

So one more pot would be enough—only a little one. He drew three kings, filled with a small pair, saw five hundred and fifty on the table before him, lay down his hand and reached to take the money.

"A minute," said the captain. "I think that is mine." He laid down four nines. "Nothing so worthless as a nine spot," he added dryly, "unless they travel in double pairs." And took in the money.

This was annoying. Randolph went after the next pot without openers—for the first time. And lost.

Twenty minutes later, with four nines, he heard himself bet one thousand. He shoved in all the chips he had left. They ran a little over seven hundred.

Without the slightest hesitation, as casually as if he had been betting from the pile in front of him, he unbuttoned his waistcoat, reached through his cambric shirt, and his linen undershirt, felt for his canvas belt, unbuckled, and drew it forth.

Was he influenced subconsciously by the fact that in that very seat not long before he had seen Johnny Flauntry pull from his chest the porous plaster which revealed the nest egg that lifted him over the hill to victory?

It was long afterward before he reflected on this. For the moment he felt merely as if he were reaching in his pocket for another slug. He covered the bet—and won.

Ha-ha! Who could doubt now?

Fifty minutes later he rose from the table, pale, his eyes staring wildly, and without a word walked out of the Paradiso.

The night was clear, the stars were out, and the moon half full.

He lurched against a pillar for support, breathing deeply. He felt as if he had run a terrific race, a desperate contest, and had lost. He closed his eyes in a bitter agony of self-pity. A tear splashed down on his hand.

At the same moment a friendly arm was tucked in his, and a familiar voice said: "Why run away, Don Chichi?"

He looked through blurred eyes at the Spaniard.

Slowly he forced a smile. "I hope you won't think me unmanly," he faltered.

"Not for a young man," smiled Don Enrique. "You have lost all, it seems."

"All! Everything! I am broke—cleaned out!"

"Not everything!"

"Yes—my patrimony! I am a weakling, a wastrel! I have gambled away my father's estate! I wish I were dead! I—I—"

Now emotion had him in a tornado of excess. The older man felt him trembling as if in a high fever. His eyes burned gauntly and his lips twitched spasmodically.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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RAINDROPS

DAINTY little raindrops,
Splashing on the lawn,
Pattering on the house tops,
Wake me up at dawn.

Glistening like the dewdrops,
Seems they want to mock.
All the world like diamonds
Just redeemed from "hock."

Aileen Lyon.

TOMMY GOES TO THE MOVIES

HIS mother sits him down hard on the seat
Next hers. Then, with a casual hand removes
His cap, and smooths his flaxen Dutch-clipped head.
That duty done, she leaves him to his thoughts.
So there he perches, immobile and awed—
Fat legs stretched out just like a jointed doll's,
Stubby-toed shoes dangling on nothingness,
Seeking the meaning of this curious place.
Gay music starts, and happily he drums
His heels together.

"Sh!" His mother scolds.
"Be still! The picture's going to begin."
The lights dip low, and, pop-eyed with surprise,
He sees a man and woman step right out
Across the square white sheet.

He's much intrigued,
But wonders why the lady cries so hard?
And then, why does this bad man fight with one
Who wears a long white beard like Santa Claus?
His thoughts begin to waver—and he yawns.
Oh-h-h!

There's a pony and a curly dog,
And little children playing on the sand!
Quick, interest revives! Then, lessens, as
The lady comes again—still crying, too!
Where's Santa Claus? He wonders.

Next he tries
To read just what the words say on the screen
(But A-B-C-s are all he knows, because
He's only four years old. That pastime palls.)
His cramped legs wriggle violently.

"Sit STILL!"
His mother tears herself reluctantly
From watching Mr. Sheik make "movie-love",
She fishes in her bag, and finds a stick
Of chewing gum. He pokes that in his small,
Receptive mouth.

Oblivion descends
Awhile, although both legs have gone to sleep.
Then, after 'most a hundred years or so,
The lights flare up again.
The picture's through. He blinks.
His mother, now intent on getting home
For supper, stands him on his prickling feet.
Restores his cap, and pulls him bodily
Through the great surging sea of women, who
Engulf his littleness.

Clutching her hand,
He stumbles out into the clean cold air,
Still pondering—as when he came—just what's
The reason of it all, and why he had
To stay indoors, that pleasant afternoon?

Mazie V. Caruthers.

Rolling Dollars

By JACK BECHDOLT

Author of "The Man Time Forgot," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

J. AUGUSTUS TORRINGTON was devoting an afternoon to family problems—and with the usual result. In the outer offices of Cranston's richest man the clerks went about their business softly and deftly in order to hear better. The partition surrounding Torrington's handsome private suite was the best mahogany and glass and considered sound proof, but no partition built could conceal echoes of the tangled domestic troubles of J. Augustus Torrington.

When a particularly violent rumble of the distant thunder permeated the peaceful atmosphere beyond the partition the eyes of various employees met. Winks passed. Lips quirked into sly grins.

"Why men don't marry," observed Jenks, the bookkeeper, jerking his thumb expressively toward the inner sanctum.

Miss Minninger, Torrington's secretary, to whom the remark was addressed, felt her position a delicate one. She regarded the bookkeeper with a freezing glance of shocked inquiry.

But an even more violent echo drifted to their ears and marred Miss Minninger's neutrality. She giggled.

Then Miss Minninger, who was unmarried but had hopes, turned indignant.

"You would say it," she observed with crushing emphasis on the personal pronoun. "That sounds like a bachelor!"

"Yeah?" the bookkeeper jeered. "And what would you do if they were your brats?"

"I'd use a good, old-fashioned hairbrush," Miss Minninger declared with prompt enthusiasm.

"Yes, you would! Spank a flapper of nineteen and a spoiled kid of twenty-two?"

"I would have used it years ago," the secretary affirmed. "What those children needed most of all was a mother. They need one now."

"A mother! What they need is a jail, only it would be rough on the jail!"

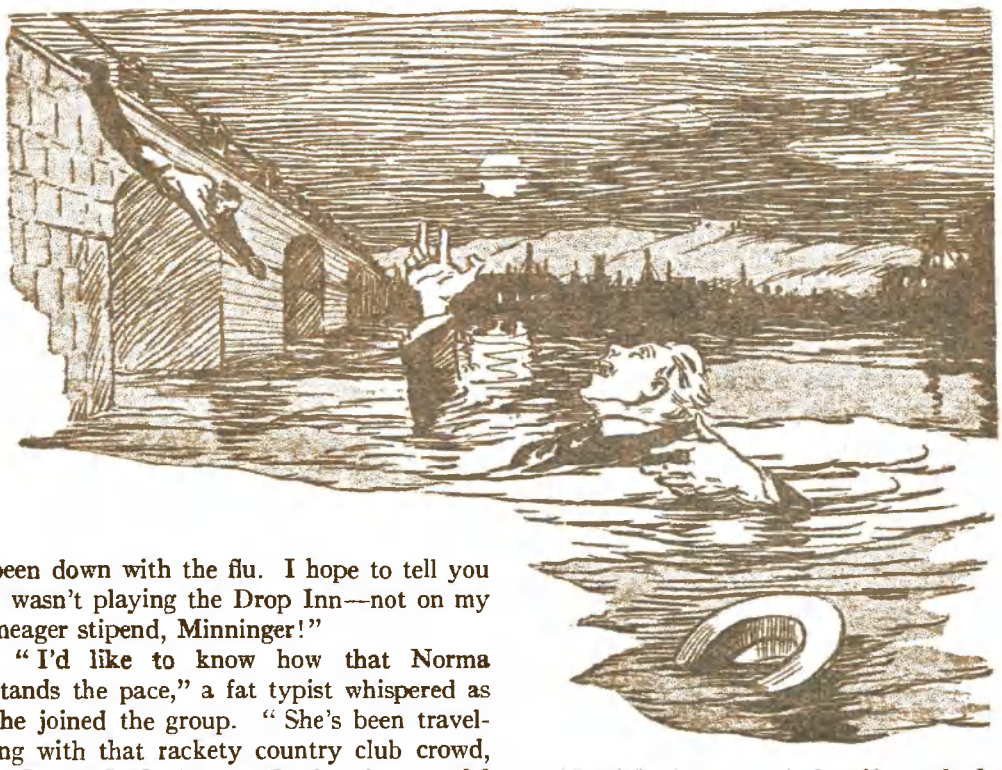
Horace Borely, the office misanthrope, joined the stealthy discussion uninvited. He was bristling with indignation.

"That kid Ralph is degenerating into a common pest," Borely went on indignantly. "A fat lot of help he is to me, getting into this office as late as half past ten o'clock and sleeping most of the day at his desk. 'Learning the business,' the old man calls it. The only business he'll ever be fit for is a good, first-class bootlegger. Maybe not that. It takes enterprise to be a bootlegger these days."

"I guess he's got that kind of enterprise, all right," Jenks agreed. "I saw him Tuesday coming out of the Drop Inn at 1 G.M. The way he jumped into his car and began burning up the road, I'll bet he knew *something* about bootleggers, if it was only what they peddle!"

"And what were you doing at the Drop Inn at 1 G.M., as you term it?" Miss Minninger demanded suspiciously.

"Coming home from my brother-in-law's in the flivver," Jenks answered. "He's



been down with the flu. I hope to tell you I wasn't playing the Drop Inn—not on my meager stipend, Minninger!"

"I'd like to know how that Norma stands the pace," a fat typist whispered as she joined the group. "She's been traveling with that rackety country club crowd, and everybody knows they're the scandal of the country! Good fathers, she looked terrible when she came in to-day! Nothing but skin and bone!"

The speaker glanced complacently at her own comfortable curves. Being unable to starve them off or roll them off with any of the patent devices on the market, she gloried in being just a sweet, simple, old-fashioned girl.

"Norma's a good kid, even if she does try to ritz this office," the bookkeeper declared, suddenly loyal. "Suppose she does run around? All the flappers do nowadays."

"I'd hate to undermine my health that way." The plump typist shuddered.

"And as for being thin," Jenks went on with a crushing glance at the maiden's plumpness, "I like 'em skinny. It's *trick* to be thin. And, say, I hear these jazzy little flappers hardly wear any clothes at all, except what you can see. Know anything about that, Nellie?"

Nellie, the typist, said with emphasis that she certainly did not.

"Clothes?" Borely growled. "I guess you'd think she wore clothes if you had to pay for 'em, Jenks! Eh, Minninger?"

"That's just what half the trouble's about," Nellie chimed in. "That girl's extravagant bills—"

"Not to mention Ralph's," Borely added. "His latest performance is smashing a flivver. Claims it was the other fellow's fault for crossing from a by-road. The bill came in just this noon. Torrington has either got to pay or stand suit."

The echo of an unusually violent roar floated just then to the group outside the partition.

"That's about the flivver!" Jenks chuckled.

Miss Minninger observed suddenly: "Jenks, you'd better get out that Panama statement, or Torrington will have something to say to you. And how about those letters, Nellie?"

The little group dispersed. Only Borely lingered for a moment more.

"There's only one thing to do with kids like that," the misanthrope observed. "But it's sure cure—"

"What?" asked the secretary.

"Drown 'em. Drown 'em in a pail of water. Drown 'em before they've got their eyes opened."

II.

AT that particular moment J. Augustus Torrington might have agreed with Borely that drowning was the best thing for children such as he had brought into the world. Torrington was pacing his private office, dividing his malevolent glances alternately and equally between his son Ralph and his daughter Norma.

Torrington was a round-headed, stockily built man, grown fleshy. His doctor told him he ate too rich lunches, but Torrington had no use for advice that did not coincide with his own convenience.

His doctor might also have told Torrington that to grow as angry as he was at this moment is very bad for a man who has eaten a heavy noonday lunch. His doctor could have told Torrington that anger contracts the stomach violently and brings on toxic poisoning and other unpleasant consequences, in which case Torrington would have told his doctor to go to the devil.

The rich man raged up and down his office, untrammeled by doctors. His face was very red and he felt giddy and secretly a little frightened at the physical effects of his own wrath.

His daughter Norma sat near the window, using two chairs. One chair she sat in and the other accommodated her feet, which were negligently crossed upon its cushion. Her brief skirts left exposed a great deal of very charming silk stocking.

Norma was a black and white little thing. Her hair was artfully cut like a boy's. Her features, which were charmingly regular, were coated evenly with the newest shade in brownish gray powder. It gave her skin a grayish, copper hue against which her rouged lips stood out in startling contrast. Norma had hunched one shoulder slightly as though to shut off sight and sound of her offended parent.

Ralph, a blond, two years her senior, lounged in a club chair. He kept his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the carpet. He was a handsome fellow made decidedly sulky by present circumstances.

Torrington, struggling for fresh phrases to express his displeasure, broke into a loud shout:

"Throw that away! I'll have no smoking here!"

Norma looked up from the cigarette she had just taken out of her case. Her expression was freezingly calm.

"You need never raise your voice to me again, dad."

"I'll raise my voice as often as I please!"

"And as for smoking, dad, Ralph smokes here; and I mean to smoke when and where I jolly well please."

Torrington roared: "You will not!"

The rich man gasped and turned purple. His daughter had snapped a little jeweled lighter and ignited her cigarette. She tossed the case toward her brother with a pleasant, "Have one, Ralphy?"

Ralph Torrington lacked his sister's defiant courage. He tossed the cigarette case back at her a little spitefully. "Aw, be yourself!" he groaned.

Norma's father seized his head in both hands. He strode angrily to his daughter's side. For a moment it looked as though he meant to deprive her of the defiant cigarette by force.

Norma glanced up at him and smiled.

"Better light a cigar, old dear," she advised. "You need something to soothe your nerves."

J. Augustus Torrington fell back, speechless. He turned his fury on his son.

"As for you," he growled, leveling a shaking, pudgy finger at Ralph, "this is the end of my patience. If I pay this claim for a thousand dollars' damages for that wrecked car, it's going to come out of your salary. Merciful Heaven! I put you to work here to make something of yourself. And what have you made? What! You're nothing but a gilded loafer, a common bum! You spend your nights jazzing and running around and drinking and spending. And you cap that with smashing an automobile on the public highway and then have the consummate nerve to bring me the bill—"

"Why not?" Norma yawned delicately. "Ralph hasn't got a thousand dollars, you know!"

"Yes, have a heart, papa," Ralph protested. "You gave me the car in the first place. How's a fellow going to run a car on the salary you pay me?"

"That's good sense, dad," Norma applauded.

"Sense! You talk to me about sense!" Torrington had to stop because he choked. "Young woman," he went on in trembling fury, "I'm going to teach you some of the common sense your father and mother used to go in for. Look here!" Torrington fumbled among the papers on his desk and brought forth one which he shook accusingly at his daughter. "This came yesterday. The bill from a Fifth Avenue shop."

"Oh, yes, Gilbert's you mean. That little thing—"

"A dun, by Heaven! Threatens suit unless the account is paid at once. Well, I'm going to pay them—"

"Thanks, dad."

"You won't thank me so heartily! Wait! I'm going to pay, but, by Heaven, you won't get one red penny more to spend on anything until you've made up the amount from your allowance. From now on you stay home. You don't leave the house until this bill is made up. That's what you'll do, Norma."

Norma sprang from her lounging with one quick little bound that brought her close to her irate parent. She faced him, all defiance.

"Is that final?" she inquired, tensely.

"Yes," said the father, instantly regretting the word.

"Very well. Then we part company. I'm going to get a job and support myself. How about you, Ralph?"

Ralph raised a woeful face. "Aw, be yourself," he croaked. "How can I?"

"You can act like a man, I hope?"

"Act like a man when I've got to dig up a thousand fish to pay for that damned flivver! Where'd I get that?"

"Ralph, we'd earn it for ourselves. We'd work and save and do something useful. Isn't that better than the bitter humiliation of the sort of treatment we get around here? Well, I guess!"

"You don't know the first thing about it," her brother rejoined. "That's what ails you. You try getting a job and see if it's so grand. That sounds just like a woman!"

"Well!" Torrington burst out, his sarcasm flailing like a war club. "Common sense from *your* lips! Who'd have expected that—"

"That's all right now, you lay off me," Ralph flushed resentfully.

Torrington refused the warning. "And who would think it of my son?" he jeered heavily. "Actually! He knows which side his bread is buttered on."

"You don't have to rub it in, I say!"

"You'd better listen to this, Norma. Ralph is going to give us a little sermon on gratitude to one's parents. All right, my boy, go ahead! Tell her. You ought to know—"

The daughter eyed her brother with breathless wonder.

"Are you going to stand for that—from any man?" she drawled.

The biting acid of her tone brought Ralph from his chair. "No," he shouted. "I won't stand it. I'm damned if I will!"

"Then you'll go with me?"

Ralph hesitated, miserable. "Yes," he said shortly.

Brother and sister moved closer for mutual encouragement and support.

"We mean it this time," Norman informed their father. "You apologize or we quit."

Torrington swallowed his trepidations and roared: "Sit down. Both of you."

His children remained standing.

"Sit down!" Torrington shouted. He raised one clenched hand.

Norma regarded him unflinchingly.

"Keep your voice down," she said. "And don't flourish your hands at me again. You act like a common bounder, dad. We've stood enough misery and discord and fighting. That's all our home stands for any more. We're through with you. And this time we mean it."

"Sit—" Torrington began. He was not quite sure whether he was going to be etxra violent and regret it, or whether he must capitulate before he was humiliatingly beaten by his own children. He never had a chance to find out.

Miss Minninger knocked sharply at the door and let herself into the private office.

J. Augustus Torrington lowered his clenched hand with guilty rapidity and scowled on the secretary. His children turned their backs.

"I thought you'd want to see him right away," Miss Minninger apologized, handing Torrington a card.

The richest man in Cranston glared unseeing for a moment. Then he focused his attention on the pasteboard. Suddenly his rage vanished in a tremendous expulsion of breath.

He growled in reluctant admiration at his secretary. "Minninger, for once you thought right! If that's really Bob McGregor out there, for the love of Heaven send him in."

III.

MENTION of Bob McGregor worked a miraculous change in the three Torringtons.

It was as though some master chemist had dropped a resolving constituent into a murky, muddled, angry confusion of warring elements. The nature of everything was altered instantly.

"Bob McGregor!" Norma exclaimed. She ran to her chair by the window, opened her purse and snapped out a little vanity mirror and powder puff.

Ralph turned eagerly toward the door. There was a sudden lightening of his sulk and defiance. He looked pleased.

J. Augustus Torrington wiped his red face and pulled down his vest. Then he retired behind his desk and awaited the visitor almost graciously.

Miss Minninger ushered him in, a tall, red-haired young man in shabby clothes that bagged at the knees, wrinkled about the shoulders, and bulged at the pockets.

Bob McGregor was a few years older than the younger Torrington. His face was slightly freckled, his eyes blue and keen, and his general expression pleased and pleasing. He stopped half way toward Torrington's desk and smiled a wide smile that flashed his white teeth.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "All of you here? It's certainly good to see you folks again."

"McGregor," Torrington said, "you came at a lucky moment. I'm glad to see you."

"I'm glad to hear that," the visitor agreed, shaking Torrington's hand.

He turned to Ralph, exchanging another quick, hearty handshake, and then to Norma. When he faced the girl McGregor's manner underwent a quick change. He looked puzzled and uncertain.

The last time they parted Norma Torrington had thrown her arms about McGregor's neck. She had kissed him a kiss moistened by tears.

But that was two years ago and Norma was still a little girl to McGregor and sometimes to herself. Norma was a woman now and McGregor, recognizing her new status, quailed a little at sight of her beauty.

Norma did not quail. She understood the change, and a tinge of triumph came into her smile as she clasped McGregor's hand.

"It's good to see you," McGregor said, eagerly. "I've never forgot you for a minute, Norma. In fact," he suddenly made the remark general, "I haven't forgotten any of you."

"You're lucky to see us," Norma answered, her tone becoming harder and bitter. "It's probably the last time you'll find us all together. Ralph and I are leaving—"

"Stop that damned nonsense!" Torrington cut in, his face suddenly purpling again. "I forbid it."

"But it isn't nonsense," Norma insisted tranquilly. "Is it, Ralph?"

"You're right, it isn't," Ralph answered uneasily. "We both mean it."

"You're both raving crazy!" Torrington burst out so angrily that they all stole a guilty look at the office door to make sure it had been closed. "Of all the utter, imbecile impudence—my Heaven, McGregor, you got here just in time to keep me from going mad!"

"But not in time to keep us from doing what we've got a perfect right to do," Norma added serenely. "And, believe me, I don't mean maybe!"

Torrington's answer was to beat his desk with his clenched fists.

McGregor's smile faded as he looked from one defiant face to the other. He sighed.

"This is just like old times," he said with a rueful grin. "Just exactly! What's it all about this time? You first, Mr. Torrington."

The family turned on McGregor *en masse*. Three voices broke into staccato recitations of grievances, the growl of J. Augustus Torrington riding above them all.

The shabby, bewildered visitor raised both hands in horror. He begged earnestly, "One at a time. I can't make out a word any of you say. Now, Mr. Torrington, you're the oldest, so you talk first."

IV.

THE shabby young man who had arrived so unexpectedly among the warring Torringtons was himself in desperate straits. His visit to J. Augustus Torrington's office was a last resort and his hopes all hinged upon its result.

He had come to borrow money from Torrington and the circumstances of his former position in the family of the richest man in Cranston made it necessary that he pocket considerable pride before he could bring himself to the interview.

Bob McGregor was born in the Far West. He was a young man without social position or money and he had to make his own way in the world. Out West he had left his mother, barely provided for from a dead father's insurance, while he earned his education.

Cranston had attracted McGregor because near there is an engineering college famous all over the world. While he finished his four years at this technical school, McGregor had to support himself somehow and the way that offered was the position of chauffeur in the household of J. Augustus Torrington.

Driving and caring for the Torrington automobiles, submitting with unfailing good nature to the whims and caprices of Cranston's richest man, McGregor had come to occupy a peculiar, nameless position in that tumultuous family.

Technically McGregor was the family chauffeur and a servant among several other servants. But the young Torringtons had made a companion of him.

McGregor was their friend, advisor and big brother and inevitably he was drawn into conflict with his employer. That the young man could function successfully in all of these difficult positions and retire at the end of four years to begin his own career, his departure openly mourned by Cranston's richest family was a striking testimonial to Bob McGregor's quality.

McGregor conceived a bright idea before he finished his studies at the technical college. In his meager spare time snatched from the numerous and thoughtlessly selfish demands of three Torringtons, he worked out the details of that idea.

Mostly he worked late at night in his own quarters over the Torrington garage, his drawing board lighted by a bulb discreetly shaded lest its rays betray that he was still awake and invite interruptions. That idea developed into the patents covering the McGregor keyless lock.

If a man invents a good keyless lock, there are two courses he can take in its development. He can sell the patent to a manufacturer, provided one wants it, and let it earn a royalty. Or he can manufacture it himself.

McGregor never lacked faith in himself. Without capital or influence to get it, he chose to be a manufacturer of his own invention.

The two years of his absence from Cranston had been devoted to getting himself started in that capacity. That the former penniless student was able to return and rent property and open a small plant to build McGregor keyless locks, had even been able to establish his mother in a little cottage in the village, all this was a triumph for McGregor. He had reason to be proud of his abilities.

The manufacturer of keyless locks listened attentively to the bitter recital of J. Augustus Torrington. When Torrington had finished, McGregor rose with a sigh and went to the door of the board room which opened out of Torrington's office.

He opened the door, held it wide and glanced at Norma and Ralph. The girl

shook her head, though she tempered the refusal with a smile.

"No, thanks, Bob, no lectures! I'm too old for that now."

McGregor held the door and regarded her patiently. "I'm not the lecturing kind, Norma. You won't refuse me a few minutes—"

"Not to-day, thanks." Norma maintained her aloof, slightly haughty air. "You're a good sort, Bob, but you came too late."

"Ralph?" McGregor invited.

"Anything for peace!" Ralph agreed sulkily and passed on into the board room.

McGregor continued to look at the girl. Norma rose, bristling with resentment.

"You might as well get this straight," she announced coldly. "I'm through. I've told dad that and it goes as it lays."

McGregor continued to say nothing, only to watch her. She turned on him with a flash of temper.

"And I'll have you know I'm not a child to be ordered about—not by you or anybody else." And yet she lingered, fascinated.

Bob McGregor abandoned the door and walked to her side. His hand touched Norma's arm. It was a gentle touch, but it had distinct firmness.

"Please go into that room," McGregor said so softly that only she heard.

"I'll not go. And don't you dare order me! Why, you're nothing but a servant—our ex-chauffeur. And you dare—"

Norma caught her breath sharply. A look of horror and shame swept her face and her eyes turned away, seeking to evade McGregor's steady regard. She gasped contritely. "Oh, Bob—"

"I want to talk to you and Ralph together," McGregor pursued steadily. "In that room, Norma."

"Oh, Bob, I didn't mean—I'm sorry I was so nasty—"

"In that room," McGregor repeated quietly.

Norma shivered. She turned abruptly and walked before him into the board room.

J. Augustus Torrington, a silent, awed spectator of the scene, heaved a mighty sigh of relief. He pulled out a drawer of his desk and fumbled in a box of strong cigars. His nerves needed soothing badly.

"Sit down," said McGregor, closing the board room door after himself and Norma. Ralph already had taken a chair. The ex-chauffeur faced them and his manner was stern.

"Both of you listen to me. If you want to kill your father, just keep this business up the way you did to-day."

Ralph gaped. His round, good natured face took on a look of awe. Norma muttered something that sounded like "Bunk!" and opened her cigarette case. But she avoided McGregor's eye.

Before she could light the cigarette, McGregor had laid his hand on hers. "Don't," he said briefly. "It infuriates him."

"You infuriate me, I'll have you know!" Norma was on her feet, her eyes flashing, her bosom heaving. "You assume too much when you come in here—"

It was Ralph who dragged her down. "Be yourself," he snapped. "Sit still a minute and listen to Bob."

Norma broke the cigarette between her fingers. She continued to crumble it as McGregor went on steadily:

"Your father's a dangerously sick man. Bad heart. High blood pressure. Nervous indigestion. God knows what all! And both of you trying to aggravate it by rows like this! Now you're going to listen while I tell you how to cut it out!"

In the private office Torrington smoked his cigar and kept his eyes on the board room door.

The heavy, rich smoke calmed him. A normal color returned to his face. He breathed more easily and digestion took up its normal functioning.

No sounds passed the door, but Torrington could not keep his eyes off it. He wondered in self-amazement how he had ever let himself be parted from Bob McGregor.

V.

THE board room door opened again, finally. Torrington, his cigar halfway to his mouth, stopped, amazed. It was Norma who returned, Norma alone.

Norma met her father's eyes with honest

directness, but the defiance was gone from her glance. As she walked to his desk she seemed less the young woman of the world and more of the little girl she had been until so very recently.

She offered her hand to her father, who seized it and would have had her on the arm of his chair, but for her refusal.

"I'm sorry I kicked up the row," said Norma. "And I'm sorry about that bill from Gilbert's. I'll pay you back in installments, from my own money—"

"You'll do nothing of the sort," Torrington blustered. "I guess I can stand a little bill like that—"

But his daughter remained firm. "I shall pay you back. That's the terms I insist on. That and freedom to find work for myself. I don't mean to leave you, dad, but I've got to have my chance to do something useful—either that or go crazy."

Torrington gaped. His face began to cloud over and a squall threatened. His quick eye saw the board room door open softly.

McGregor glanced in, unseen by Norma. McGregor caught Torrington's eye and shook his head significantly.

"We'll talk that over," Torrington said. "There's sense in what you say, maybe. Now give your dad a kiss and run along like a good girl!"

Norma delivered the kiss dutifully, though she eluded any protracted embrace from her parent with a tactful firmness. Her whole manner indicated that this surrender was not unconditional by any means.

But she smiled a good-by and walked out of the office without a glance toward the board room.

When she was gone the board room door admitted McGregor. The red-haired inventor sighed like a man who has done a hard day's work.

"Ralph has gone back to his desk," he said. "I told him not to waste your time now. You'd better settle for that automobile he smashed, Mr. Torrington."

"A thousand dollars for that pup's carelessness! I'll be eternally—"

"I wouldn't if I were you," McGregor advised. "Let's see that claim."

Torrington handed him a lawyer's letter and the inclosed bill.

"I thought so," McGregor announced after studying it. "Write this fellow a check for five hundred and mail it to-night. I was in the garage yesterday and saw that car. Dolger told me it would cost two hundred to fix it up. And it's a 1921 model. As for the personal damages, they are not serious. Send him five hundred now and you'll save money—"

"McGregor, I tell you I'll be damned—"

"Ralph is worth five hundred dollars," McGregor interrupted steadily.

Torrington growled and reached for his personal check book. When he had written the check and called in his secretary to attend to it, the richest man in Cranston sank back in his chair and stared hard at Rob McGregor.

"I guess I've been a damn fool," he announced.

"You have," McGregor agreed readily.

"But the biggest fool play I ever made in my life was the day I let you get away, McGregor! Thank God you came back!"

"I haven't exactly come back—to stay," McGregor smiled.

"Yes, you have!"

McGregor smiled again and shook his head.

"I say you have! You're coming back to your old job, McGregor. Lord, I haven't had one peaceful day since you left. You're the only man in the world that can do anything with those young devils—with me, too, for that matter. I don't give a hoot what you think your plans are, you've got to come back to us again."

"And be your chauffeur?" McGregor's cheeks reddened a little. His manner stiffened.

"Be a chauffeur? Be anything? Why not? Any disgrace in being a chauffeur?"

"Certainly not. Only I think I have skill in more useful fields."

"All right, pick your own field. But you come back to live at Alderbridge and keep peace in my family."

"I can't, Mr. Torrington. My mother is with me now."

"Bring her! Bring your mother along, Bob!"

"You make it hard to explain," McGregor said, his manner growing stiffer. "My mother is not exactly used to the status of a servant in anybody's house."

"Servant? She don't have to be a servant. Call yourself a secretary, advisor, anything you like. Your mother can be my guest. And I'll pay you anything your time is worth, but you've got to come. I want you."

Secretly McGregor sighed. His heart sank with misgiving. When Torrington wanted anything, Torrington expected to get it.

Torrington was a tyrant in his little world. At the moment his intentions were benevolent perhaps, but equally tyrannical.

McGregor dreaded to cross this spoiled child of money. To rouse Torrington's anger jeopardized everything. And yet it had to be done.

"I want to make you understand," he began. "I'm not ashamed of working for you as a chauffeur. I never was. That job paid my way through school. But I fitted myself for better jobs than that. I'm in business for myself to-day. I'm a manufacturer, manufacturing the keyless lock that I invented and patented. I want you to listen, Mr. Torrington!"

The rich man had described an abrupt gesture with his arm, as if to wave aside all this explanation. Torrington considered it superfluous matter. From his point of view all this was just a fool notion of McGregor's, a notion that was interfering with his own selfishly benevolent plans for McGregor's future.

"I invented and patented this lock," McGregor insisted. "When I left you I got a good job on the engineering staff of a water power project. I got enough capital to start my own business out of that. I came back here to Cranston and rented a little factory—"

Torrington burst out indignantly: "Well, why in the devil's name didn't you come around here before you did all that?"

"I had a lot to do, Mr. Torrington. I brought my mother back with me. We had to settle a little house. I had my own business to get started, men to hire, supplies to buy, all sorts of detail."

He might have added truthfully that he had kept away from the Torringtons because of a justifiable desire to make his success unassisted by any benevolent interference from the rich man.

"Mr. Torrington, I've got a good proposition in this. Look here!" From his bulging coat pocket McGregor extracted a compact unit of machinery that gleamed with loving polish. "The McGregor Keyless Lock," he announced with a parent's pride in a new baby. "That lock is going to make my fortune!"

Torrington rejected the lock with scarcely a glance.

"Some other time, McGregor. Let's get this business of your coming back to Alderbridge settled."

McGregor sighed and summoned more patience.

"Listen just a little longer. I've got a few of these locks together, my first samples. I've shown them to some of the big wholesalers and experts. Everybody agrees I've got a fortune in my hands. Mr. Torrington, I've had two whopping big offers to sell out already—"

"Grab 'em! Sell out!"

McGregor shook his head.

"I guess you don't quite understand! You see, this thing is my own. I'm—well, sort of proud of originating it. And I mean to keep it in the family. Besides, if I make it myself, I'll eventually own a bigger fortune than I could get any other way. But it costs money to start the business—money for plant and pay roll, money for salesmen and advertising, capital enough to insure long-time credits from toolmakers and supply houses. I've got to have capital, Mr. Torrington.

"I'll be quite frank. I've got to have capital at once, or quit. I'm up against it without backing. That's why I came to you to-day, as a last resort. I want the money to develop this business. I want it as a loan secured by a mortgage on the plant and patents. Shall I go ahead and show you a detailed statement of how I stand? Are you interested?"

"McGregor," Torrington demanded impatiently, "are you coming back to live at Alderbridge, or aren't you?"

"Don't you understand now why I can't do that?"

"You're not coming back?"

"No, sir; I cannot—"

"That's final?"

The color was rushing back to Torrington's face. His thick hands began to tremble with suppressed irritation.

"It's final," McGregor said with a deep sigh.

"Wait! Don't be in a hurry. Understand me, first. Come back to us on any grounds you like. Call yourself a guest. Call yourself my partner. Bring your mother, if you want to. I've got to have you, and you can make your own terms. Come back to me and help me bring some sort of peace into my own family. Do that, and I promise you I'll go into this lock business of yours. If it's worth a hoot, I'll back you to the limit. But those are my terms."

"Then, I'm sorry," McGregor said, wearily. "I can't accept your terms."

"Can't! Why not?"

"I tried to make you see it! I want to run my own business. Maybe it's pride—"

"Pride! It's worse than pride. I'll tell you what it is—it's nothing but pig-headed obstinacy; and rank ingratitude to the man who gave you a home for four years."

"I wouldn't say that," McGregor interrupted quickly. "I gave value for value during that four years."

But Torrington shouted with waving arms:

"I do say it! Ingratitude—rank ingratitude! And I'll tell you what you are. You are a plain fool, Rob McGregor. I would not invest a nickel in any scheme of yours to keep you out of the poorhouse. Get out of here!"

Torrington was in another passion. He was deaf to all reason, and McGregor knew it.

"Good-by," McGregor muttered sadly, and let himself out the door.

VI.

As he entered the plain, one-story, shed-like building that housed the embryo plant of the McGregor Keyless Lock Company, McGregor resolutely banished his gloomy thoughts.

Awaiting his return was a woman whose peace of mind the red-haired inventor valued so highly that he would go to any lengths to spare her his troubles. He straightened his shoulders and made his step brisk. He forgot J. Augustus Torrington and his humiliating afternoon, and forced a cheerful whistle.

With the exception of a small office partitioned off from one corner, the building consisted of one workroom. At the benches several mechanics were busy. Before McGregor could reach his private office door one of these had waylaid him. For reasons of his own, McGregor desired to see this man less than any person alive at that moment. Among his many worries of the day thoughts of the future of George Bishop had weighed heavily.

"Just a word with you, Rob," Bishop said. "I got a kind of idea to suggest to you, and I guess maybe it's a wow."

George Bishop spoke habitually in a hoarse, confidential whisper. He had, also, the curious habit of never appearing to see the person he conversed with. At the present moment he accosted McGregor while appearing to look straight beyond him, and he scarcely halted his steps to do it, so that he passed on toward a vacant corner by the window exactly like a man on an entirely different errand.

McGregor glanced at Bishop, and his forced smile turned to something of genuine amusement. He saw a short little man of stocky build, whose round work cap was pushed askew on a glistening bald dome. There was a sly alertness about everything done by this little mechanic, who was nearly sixty years old.

His pink-cheeked, cherubic face, now ornamented by a bar sinister of machine grease and soot, never lost its sobriety any more than his small blue eyes ever lost their little gleam of belying humor. And none knew better than McGregor that this same little man had almost uncanny mechanical skill at the tips of his sensitive fingers—a skill that was matched by a marvelous understanding of all machinery.

George Bishop was foreman of the very young and tottering lock factory, and McGregor's particular protégé. Old George was a find, in a very literal sense of the word.

McGregor had come upon him one March night on the streets of Cranston. The little old man, shivering violently in his shabby right clothing, had stepped out of a shadowy door and accosted him in that strange, whispering, ventriloquial voice and manner, asking for the price of a cup of coffee. McGregor, on the point of handing him a dime, remembered there was no lunch room open at that hour, and invited old George to follow him home.

Mrs. McGregor had supplied the coffee and sandwiches, and old George paid them both the doubtful compliment of swooning in their kitchen. A doctor pronounced it pneumonia.

The McGregors were not the sort to turn the dying stranger into the cold, and at the little cottage George remained, while the red-haired inventor discovered that, unlike most things picked up off a pavement, this queer find was a treasure.

Old George took to the McGregor lock with the enthusiasm of an understanding soul, and ever since, while he boarded with the McGregors, he had served Rob faithfully and with all his heart. A quiet, mild old eccentric, George was, bound to McGregor heart and soul, devoting his spare hours to McGregor's mother and the church they both attended. By the McGregors he was accepted at face value and no questions asked. And the church and the neighbors did as much for him.

McGregor followed his foreman to the corner. There George stood looking straight out of the window, while his unwatched fingers fitted a delicate little cotter pin into the half assembled lock they held.

"Well, George?" McGregor invited.

His attention fixed beyond the window, George exuded his ventriloquial, whispering speech. "What this business needs is to get suckers acquainted with the McGregor Keyless Lock. Am I right?"

"That's one of the things it needs, yes."

"Well, here's the notion. It kind of knocked me for a goal when I got hold of it. It looked like a chance to advertise cheap. All we need to put this over is a good, first-class yegg, and I think I can find you the very man!"

"A yegg!" McGregor gasped. "What would you be doing knowing crooks, a good church member like you?"

"Sure I know where to get my hands on any kind of crook we might need, boy. It's being a good church member is how come. There's a mission over in New York where I can find you any kind of crook, any day. Reformed, of course."

"And what do we want of a reformed crook, George? Going to send him to rob a safe and capitalize the lock business?"

"Naw! This is all clean fun, I tell you! Listen. Here's where the wow comes in. Suppose there was to be a series of mysterious burglaries all over the country. Big business offices and millionaire's homes, see? But there's never anything missing, see? Instead of the place being tumbled the crook leaves a circular letter saying how old-fashioned locks like they've got on the doors is a cinch and what they oughta do is install the new McGregor Keyless Lock instead? He might even leave 'em a sample lock. A free present, see? Would the newspapers talk? I'll say they would! And I ask you, Rob, is that a wow or ain't it? Huh?"

All of this George delivered without a glance at his employer. He awaited the answer with that same baffling appearance of being engaged elsewhere.

McGregor regarded his foreman with mingled horror and amusement, but there was little satisfaction in directing any sort of a look at a man who never met his eyes.

"So you think that would get us free advertising!"

"I hope to say so!" said the foreman.

"It would!" Rob agreed fervently. "Also it would get us all in jail. Nothing doing, George. But thanks, just the same—"

"You can't use it, Rob?" The ventriloquial query trembled with naïve disappointment.

"Sorry, George—"

"Hell! And I thought I had a knockout. I was awake nearly all night working out the details. I thought I was going to be some help to you for once in a lifetime!"

The little foreman croaked this last and turned from the bench. Even now he never noticed McGregor.

But as he went he jerked his mechanic's cap low over his eyes, and age and discouragement showed in every line of him.

McGregor would have laughed, but he felt more inclined to cry. Old George was slated to go. The amusing old man, whose spare time apparently was occupied solely in concocting hare-brained schemes to promote the fortunes of the McGregor keyless lock, would have to find employment elsewhere, just like the rest of them.

Next to his own mother, McGregor knew nobody he hated to part with more. But George was through. No more money to pay a foreman or anybody else. No money now to pay for anything. George was just another victim of the collapse of the McGregor Keyless Lock Company.

VII.

McGregor went on into his own office. Before he opened the door he hesitated a minute to put aside the depression that was weighing him down. He made his step resolute and his face serene.

The *clack-clacking* of a typewriter ceased as McGregor opened the door. The stenographer pushed the spectacles off her nose and brushed back her short, gray hair.

"Why, Robin!" she exclaimed in hushed, pleased tones.

McGregor bent his tall frame double and printed a kiss on the lips of the treasurer and secretary of the McGregor Keyless Lock Company. The secretary and treasurer returned the caress with a fond pat upon her little boy's shoulder.

She was none other than Mrs. Sarah J. McGregor, mother of the inventor, and somewhere past sixty years old, but very much of the present day.

McGregor sat at the opposite side of the one desk and addressed her. He made his voice casual to conceal the bitter disappointment he felt.

"When you pay off the boys to-morrow give them their two weeks' notice, all of them. Pay them up in full, mom."

"Oh, Robin! Have you got to quit?"

"Quit? I should say not."

"But paying off the boys."

"Oh, that! That's nothing. Money's a little tight, just now. All the big plants are retrenching. Little fellows like us have got to find a safe anchorage during the blow."

"But what are you going to do, Robin?"

"Oh, close up the plant. Scout around a little and find more capital."

"Go back to work for somebody else, you mean? Oh, my poor boy!"

"Here, now! Omit the flowers, mom! We're not dead yet, just playing 'possum."

The gray haired little secretary forced a smile. But a sigh succeeded.

"I'm going to miss it, Robin. I don't know what I'll do without a typewriter to run—and checks to write—and all those interesting letters coming every day. Are you sure? Isn't there some way—"

McGregor shook his head soberly.

"Did you see Mr. Torrington, Robin?"

"Yes."

"Oh!" Mrs. McGregor hesitated, knowing how her son had banked on this last resource and dreading to stir up painful details. McGregor saved her the necessity.

"Torrington was willing to finance us, provided I went back to live at Alderbridge and acted as sort of wet nurse to all of them. He wanted me to bring you, too. I told him that my mother isn't exactly used to being a servant or even a dependent in any rich man's family!"

The inventor added more details of the afternoon's visit. His mother listened. Her eyes gleamed approval. But when McGregor had done, her first question was aside from the main issue.

"Norma must be quite a young lady by now?"

"I don't know if you'd call her a lady or not. But she's still young—though grown up."

"Hm—hm! She must have been pretty glad to see you again, Robin."

"Not so's you'd notice, mom. Told me she wasn't used to taking her orders from the family's ex-chauffeur! No, it was just about like old times."

Mrs. McGregor said "Hm—hm," again. Her son remained silent.

The modern little old lady snapped suddenly: "I'd like to tell that big bully where he gets off at!"

"Who?" McGregor stared at her anger in amazement.

"Torrington. That big stuffed shirt!"

"Mom! Such language from you!"

"For a nickel I'd do it, too! The idea of scoffing at a thing like your lock! Just throwing away a fortune because he's mad. I suppose he calls himself a business man!"

Mrs. McGregor was on her feet and pacing the office in her indignation. McGregor sighed and observed that getting mad would not help them.

"I don't mind this setback a bit, except for one thing," he added. "It's going to be tough on old George."

"He's got to go with the rest?"

"He has. I have no money to pay any salaries."

"We'll miss him in the church. He is so highly thought of."

"Yes, it's tough luck. The worst of it is, George is old and shows his age. Not in his work. Lord, no! But a man his age hasn't much chance of getting into a job again. Lord, it's like pulling a tooth to turn old George out now! He was just getting his self respect back. Actually blossoming out into a busy little citizen after the years he had been a hobo!"

McGregor sighed. His mother stopped to lay her hand on his shoulder. "Couldn't we keep him on? Just sort of pay him until you could get the business going again?"

"Charity? George would be the first one to forbid it. He'll have to take his medicine like a man. That's the highest compliment I can afford to give him—just now."

McGregor bit off the last words with a start. The office door opened to admit old George. "Excuse me. Hope I don't butt in?" Old George addressed the remark to the far northeast corner of the world, looking directly past them, his face without trace of expression.

"I wanted to see you anyway," McGregor said. He made up his mind to get the painful dismissal over with at once. "I was about to send for you to tell you—"

"Excuse me, Rob," said the able ventriloquist in his hoarse whisper. "I had another kind of an idea. Figured maybe we could land a real butter and egg man for this business. If it ain't a wow, just you kick me out. Mrs. McGregor, ma'am, you sit in on this and give me your opinion as a business man. You see we'd start by staging a phony fire in this plant—"

"Excuse us, George. Not just now," McGregor interrupted. Before he could get any farther the office door opened again and a stranger to the keyless lock business entered with a nod.

The stranger removed a derby hat from his sleek black head and ducked the head at Mrs. McGregor. He continued to massage the stump of a dead cigar between his thick lips.

He was a squat, dark skinned, smooth-shaven man with quick, shifty glances. His eyes turned to McGregor and then to old George. A meaning grin twisted his face while he exclaimed softly:

"Well, look who's here; old George Lorgan, as I live. Hello, Lorgan!"

McGregor looked at his foreman, amazed at hearing him addressed by a new name. For once old George was staring directly at one who spoke to him.

Surprise and confusion disturbed the normal rigidity of old George's wooden features. His lips opened. A look of shock and entreaty gleamed from his alert eyes. Then suddenly the old look returned.

Old George turned his eyes away from all of them and looked at nothing, waiting. He seemed to wait for a death sentence. He looked shrunken and gray and rigid with despair.

"Guess you know me, all right, Lorgan?" The stranger grinned around his cigar.

"Yes," said old George tonelessly.

"Well, I should hope to tell you! You ought to know me, eh, Lorgan?"

"Yes."

McGregor broke in. He spoke with justifiable irritation at this ill-mannered interruption.

"Well, I don't know you. If you don't mind the trouble, who the devil are you, and what are you looking for here?"

The stranger recognized the question with a sly grin.

"Keep your shirt on, buddy! I'll explain. My name's Dibble. I'm from Center Street."

McGregor continued to stare without comprehension.

"Center Street," Dibble repeated. "That's police headquarters over in New York—see?"

Dibble flipped back his coat and displayed a gleaming metal badge.

"Got a little business with you, if your name's McGregor," he said. "Business about old George Lorgan, here. Suppose I sit down?"

VIII.

McGregor, who had taken an instant dislike to Detective Dibble, answered his suggestion.

"Sorry. We haven't any more chairs, Dibble. I guess you'll have to tell it standing up. Unless you'd like my mother to stand?"

The sarcasm was lost on Dibble. "Not at all," he observed with oily politeness. "But maybe the lady would rather be spared the details."

"What details?" Mrs. McGregor snapped. "How do I know if I want to be spared or not?"

"Well, it's not exactly a nice story—"

"Then, I guess I'll stay. If it's about Mr. Bishop here, I guess I can stand it—at my age."

"Bishop? Oh, that's the moniker now, is it, Lorgan? Bishop, huh?"

"Yes," George admitted, patiently wooden.

"Well, I heard something like that. You see, George, I'm out here working on the case of some fellows that blew a box in Pearl Street six months ago. They got a factory pay roll."

"You're wasting your time," said the disembodied whisper from George. "You can't hang anything on me, Dibble."

"Yes," Dibble admitted. "I know that now. First, I did think you might have had a hand in it—"

George's whisper became bitter with scorn. "Soup? I never used it in my life! When I get so I've got to torpedo a box I hope they plant me underground."

"Yeah," Dibble agreed. "Always was stuck on your skill with locks, eh, George? Well, you were good in your day, I don't mind saying it. Yes, you were there, George!"

McGregor interrupted again.

"Dibble, it strikes me you came here to talk with Bishop. If you did, wait until after quitting time, and see him outside the lot."

"Oh, no, I didn't, McGregor. No. You got me all wrong. I came to do you a good turn, that's all."

"Oh, you did!"

"Sure. Just a neighborly act. It's put me to quite a bit of trouble, too, but that's all right. I just dropped in to give you the real lowdown on old George Lorgan that's kidded you into thinking he's such an upright old pillar of the church. Here's the way of it, McGregor.

"I came over here looking for certain parties connected with that safe-blowing on Pearl Street. While I was getting the dope on them, I heard that George Lorgan is about these parts, going under the name of Bishop and passing himself off on decent folks.

"Well, I thought I'd better do you a good turn by notifying you that this bird you made foreman of your factory is an old ex-crook that has spent half his life in jails for safe robberies. Naturally, being a good citizen and a business man, you'd be interested in tying a can to a man like that."

"An ex-crook, you say? McGregor asked softly.

"I don't know just how *ex* he is, McGregor. But I admit I don't know anything I can pinch him for. But you tell 'em, Lorgan. Am I lying?"

Old George's husky answer was without expression of any sort. He said patiently: "He ain't lying. Opening other people's safes was my specialty—and I done a lot of time in jails, too."

"Exactly!" Dibble said with pleased eagerness. "Well, there you are, McGregor!"

"Where?" McGregor asked, densely.

"I don't get you—"

"I mean to say, Dibble, what do you

expect me to do now—act affectionate—kiss you?"

"Now, that's all right, buddy! No need to wise-crack about it. And I'm not asking for anything for myself. New York City is paying me to do my duty."

"Oh, your duty, eh? It's part of your duty, is it, to hunt out men who have tried to live down their mistakes and see that they get fired from good jobs?"

"Hey!" Dibble's voice rose in uneasy expostulation. "Soft pedal on that kind of talk, buddy! I'm not saying it's part of my duty or it isn't—"

McGregor addressed his foreman, who stood like a wooden image. "George, what's the trouble between you and this man?"

"Aw, what's the use, Rob?"

"Tell it, George—let's get at the inside of this thing."

"Well, if you're going to be nasty—" Dibble began, as he donned his derby.

"Wait," McGregor said sternly. "Now, George, let's have it. What's he sore at you about?"

George began huskily as he stared out of the office window:

"I turned the laugh on him. It was seven years ago. Dibble's always working to get his name in the papers. Well, he picked me up for cracking a safe I didn't have nothing to do with. And he made his blow to the reporters. After he got all the publicity he wanted I torpedoed him. The night he thought I was opening that safe I proved that I was working in a Bowery hash house opening oysters.

"It made a funny story for the newspaper boys—and Dibble never forgave me. The newspapers pretty near laughed him off the force. He's been laying to get even with me for that ever since."

The detective had flushed. He broke into hasty speech.

"Yeah? All right, maybe I did make a natural mistake. Maybe the papers did kid me a little. I don't deny it. But who's got the laugh this time, eh, George?"

"You have," George admitted, staring straight at emptiness.

"Dibble," said McGregor, "you expect me to fire this man because he is an ex-crook? Because he admits he's done time for opening safes?"

Dibble's mouth hung open in surprise at McGregor's question.

"Expect you? What would you do—elect him mayor of the town? Give him the keys of the city treasury, maybe?"

"And why not, I'd like to know?"

The interruption came from the gray-haired little secretary-treasurer of the keyless lock company. She had pushed back her glasses and glared belligerently at Detective Dibble.

"Robin, you keep still!" Mrs. McGregor snapped when her son showed signs of halting her. "I'll say a word to this detective, I guess."

Dibble broke in hastily. "Now, wait, lady! I ain't got no quarrels with you."

"Well, I've got one with you," said the gray-haired champion. "You had the consummate nerve to come in here and knock a friend of mine—"

"Mom!" McGregor entreated.

His mother shot a brief glance at him. "You keep out of this a minute, Robin McGregor."

"Yes ma'am," said her son meekly.

The fiery glance switched back to Dibble. The small lady shook her finger at the detective.

She walked closer, the finger shaking angrily. Dibble stepped back until he encountered the wall. There he remained, stuck there as it were, by an invisible hatpin. His face glistened, and he looked scared.

"If I were you, Mr. Dibble, I'd catch the next train back to New York," Mrs. McGregor advised severely. "I'd see if I couldn't make myself useful. You might catch the men who blew that box in Pearl Street, you know."

"Now, lady, please!"

Unplacated, McGregor's mother continued to shake the finger and talk fast, her cheeks pink and her eyes gleaming like steel blades.

"Look for the men who robbed that safe, Dibble. And be pretty careful not to catch another oyster opener instead! Now run along. As a detective you may be all right. But as a man you're not so hot!"

At this unexpected burst of vituperative slang from such a respectable old lady, Dibble's mouth opened so wide that the corpse of his cigar dropped out. He gasped: "Well, for the love of Maud!" Then he recovered himself and added: "Oh, well, you're a lady!"

"I'm not a lady! Don't fool yourself, Dibble. I'm not a lady when I'm mad. If you get me any madder you'll find out."

"Mom!" McGregor exclaimed.

"It's all right, Robin," his mother reassured him hastily. "I'll remember I'm not in a mining camp now."

She turned again to Dibble.

"The idea of a big, rich city like New York letting a man like you disgrace it! I should think you'd be so ashamed, you'd quit the police. Now you get out, Mr. Dibble, and don't let me ever hear about your bothering Mr. Bishop again."

"Yes," McGregor seconded, with a fond glance at his belligerent little mother. "That's darn good advice, Dibble. And as for George, let me tell you George is the best workman I've got. And I don't give a whoop what his past record is. He is going to stay on the pay roll of this company in spite of you and hell and high water. Dibble, you couldn't get George fired now if you proved him guilty of murder. Good day."

The detective continued to gape. McGregor met the amazement and indecision of his look with unmistakable emphasis. His hand indicated the office door.

"Don't slam it when you go out," he said significantly.

Dibble suddenly grabbed his derby with both hands and jammed it lower on his brow. He turned his back without a word and stalked to the door. But even his silent back was eloquent of what he thought of the McGregors.

Old George had heard all this in a daze. Once his eyes turned to Mrs. McGregor, and the look in them was like the look in the eyes of an adoring dog. Now he shifted his glance to the door through which Dibble had vanished, and appeared to look through the wood and far away, perhaps down a long, dusty vista of misspent years.

"George," McGregor said, "go back to your work. You've wasted a lot of time to-day. But you're not fired, and you never will be."

Old George started from his trance. He looked at McGregor and suddenly his wooden face splintered with emotions he could no longer control. He extended both hands toward McGregor, an abortive, stifled gesture that tried to speak his mind.

"Get out," McGregor growled. "I'm busy as the devil."

George moved toward the door. He passed McGregor's mother and paused. Without turning his eyes or seeming to notice her he whispered huskily: "Dibble spilled the beans. Everything he said was on the level. I'm as bad as he claims I am, ma'am."

Mrs. McGregor turned her head aside. "Don't be an old fool," she said. "Run along. You heard Robin tell you to go."

"But maybe you'd better understand about me. You introducing me to the church and all."

"Get!" cried Mrs. McGregor. "You're almost as bad as that fat-headed detective. Not another word!"

The ex-crook started to obey. But as he passed the old lady his fingers brushed the fringe of the shawl she wore. George's skillful, sensitive, clever fingers, once ten dreaded foes of society, brushed the shawl delicately. The little gesture was so grateful, so reverent, that it might have been a prayer.

Mrs. McGregor turned on her son with shining eyes.

"Robin, that was splendid—splendid!"

McGregor began a sheepish grin.

"Splendid? Huh! I'd have fired George if it hadn't been for that fat-headed detective. Why, I've got to fire him with all the rest. But how can I? How can I fire him now? And have people say I did it because he's an ex-crook? I can't do it. Great saints, mom—I can't afford to be splendid like this! Splendor costs money. And what are we going to use for money, I'd like to know?"

IX.

WHAT to use for money!

Money to meet a factory pay roll, money

to pay toolmakers who do not give credit to new and struggling enterprises, money to buy supplies that would produce more keyless locks.

McGregor and his mother sat late in the living room of the little cottage in the humbler suburb of Cranston, and discussed their need from every angle. It was the secretary-treasurer who suggested the bold expedient of asking a loan from one of the established lock manufacturers, the same who had offered a royalty for the patents covering McGregor's invention.

"That wouldn't be like trying to explain to Torrington," Mrs. McGregor argued. "Those people already know that your lock is good. They proved it by offering to buy it."

"But they don't want to establish a rival business that will cut into their trade, mom! That's asking more than human nature will stand!"

"You try it," his mother ordered. "If they've got money to lend, they ought to be interested. Go to your rivals. That's the logical place to go for help."

McGregor was half convinced. His mind was so harassed with worries and despair that any straw seemed worth grasping at.

The thought encouraged him to grin doubtfully, a result his mother had been trying to achieve for weary hours of talk. He promised to try the next day.

"Almost eleven o'clock," McGregor exclaimed, looking at his watch. "You should have been in bed hours ago. What became of George to-night?"

"He went out somewhere, Robin. He didn't say where."

"Queer! Do you realize this is the first time we ever discussed the lock business without George? I haven't heard one wild idea from him since afternoon. Mom, I'm afraid old George is crushed!"

"If I ever see that man, Dibble, again, I'm going to wring his neck," Mrs. McGregor exclaimed grimly.

But Dibble was not entirely to blame. Old George knew more of the affairs of the keyless lock company than they imagined.

George had lingered outside the door of McGregor's office and learned that he had been slated for dismissal with the rest of the men. Inspired by that news the ex-safe cracker had made plans of his own.

Feigning a complete recovery of his optimism, McGregor went to his own room and began undressing for bed. The inventor had gone so far as to remove coat and vest and shoes when he stopped, looked about him guiltily and took a small photograph from his pocketbook.

It was a snapshot of Norma Torrington, taken several years before. The unmounted picture showed signs of much handling.

McGregor propped the picture on his bureau and stared at it. Figuratively speaking, that picture had been the device blazoned on McGregor's armor during his years of struggle to make something of the McGregor keyless lock. It represented not so much a hope as an ideal to strive for.

To-night the ideal seemed so unattainable that even to think about it was a little ridiculous. McGregor wondered if he had any right to carry that picture about with him any more.

His mother knocked at the door. McGregor put away the photograph hastily before he opened it.

"Robin, get right into bed," the secretary-treasurer ordered severely.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, start! Let's see some action!"

McGregor grinned and removed his collar and shirt.

"That's more like it," his mother conceded. She pulled his head low and kissed him fondly.

"It's going to come out all right," she whispered. "They can't lick the McGregors, Robin!"

"I'll tell the world," her son agreed.

"And, Robin, if that little flapper tries to high-hat you again, just you tell her where she gets off!"

McGregor pretended an ignorance which his blush belied. "What in the world are you talking about now?"

"Norma Torrington. Where's that picture? I know you carry it around with you. I want to see it again. Trot it out!"

McGregor surrendered with a shamed grin. "I never could put anything over on you. There you are."

Mrs. McGregor examined the picture,

adjusting her spectacles critically. "She has her good points, I dare say. Not good enough for you, but— Why don't you bring her to call on your mother?"

"She asked me to. To-day. I'll give her credit for that much manners."

"Then, for Pete's sake, do it! Don't forget now. And you hop into that bed. If your light is burning two minutes longer I'm coming back with a hairbrush!"

McGregor turned out the light promptly. But sleep was an impossibility, and he knew it.

He sat a long time by his window, struggling with the insoluble problem of money and the keyless lock business. The town clock had struck the half hour after midnight when he dressed again and let himself out of the cottage softly.

The world was dark under a murky summer sky. McGregor walked out of the village and along the paved highway. An occasional late motor car flashed blinding lights on him as it topped the horizon, swooped toward him and sped on with a whir of exhaust. Otherwise he was completely alone.

When he reached a roadhouse set back a little distance among trees, McGregor knew that he had walked five miles from home.

He stared at its few twinkling lights and at the sign, the Drop Inn. A good place to turn back if he was to get any sleep that night.

Only one car passed him on his return. That came out of the night like a bullet and the breath of its passage was so violent that the cap was blown from his head. McGregor groped for his headgear and swore after the vanishing red tail-light.

"A lot that fellow cares for human life!" he growled.

Almost an hour later he reached the bridge across the Cranston River. His eyes made out the silhouette of an automobile parked close to the rail. It was unlighted, an open roadster. Apparently it was unoccupied.

Here was something out of the ordinary. Possibly something sinister. McGregor stared at the silhouetted car and hesitated to approach it.

There was no other sign and no sound except the subdued clucking and gurgling of a swift current about the piers below. And then a sound that made his flesh prickle: a cry in the dark.

The cry was incoherent. It might have been beast or man. McGregor ran to the bridge rail and looked over, convinced that the sound came from below.

The water in the shadow of the bridge was invisible. Everything was invisible. Just a black void filled with the eerie jargon of a swift river fretted by man's handiwork.

And then again a cry, a strangling, wild shout for help that came directly from the pit.

McGregor shouted an answer. He tore off coat and vest and leaped to the rail of the bridge. A faint echo of that same despairing cry for help came to his ears and served to launch him into space.

Cold water engulfed him and roared in his ears. The diver fought his way to the surface, struggled against the current and shouted anxiously, hoping for some answer to direct him. No answer came.

McGregor circled downstream, then breasted the river slowly, straining his eyes against the grayish light on the water, straining his ears for a sound.

Something upflung against the tumbling current like a stick of drift drawn by the flood started him in pursuit. He saw it vanish, then rise—a man's arm thrusting upward to grasp at empty air.

McGregor swam with all his strength. His searching fist caught at the slack of clothing. He got his arm about a body and swam an oblique course toward shore.

Ground beneath his feet at last, the inventor dragged his prize into the air. The man he had rescued lay limp and sodden.

McGregor applied himself swiftly to the rough work of resuscitation. He made progress and the discovery of a flask in the fellow's pocket helped revive them both.

The sodden wretch stirred. He sat up, weakly and aimed a wild blow at his rescuer.

"Damn you!" he sobbed weakly. "Damn you! Why couldn't you let me alone?"

McGregor could not see the speaker. He had no need to see. He knew that voice too well to be confused by darkness.

It was Ralph Torrington who shivered and gulped and tried to pummel the man who had rescued him from death in the river.

X.

McGregor got Ralph to his own roadster. Sometimes he alternately dragged and pushed the protesting wretch; sometimes he bullied him along.

McGregor jumped into the driver's seat and started the car. They sped through the village and stopped before the little factory of the McGregor Keyless Lock Company. The inventor let himself in and conducted Ralph to the office.

"Now," he said sternly, while Ralph sank into a chair and dripped water and mud on the office carpet. "Let's hear about this."

"You go to the devil!" the boy flared. "You fool, why in Heaven's name must you butt in—"

"Keep a civil tongue in your head," McGregor interrupted. "Don't think the troubles of your family are any treat to me!"

He began stripping off his dripping clothing and wringing the water from it. He made Ralph do likewise and wrapped him in an old overcoat which he kept hanging behind the door.

"Let's have the story now," he bade. "Here, you can have one more swallow."

McGregor helped himself first from the boy's flask.

"That's vile!" he shuddered. "No wonder you jumped in the river!"

Ralph tried to answer his grin. Then he gave himself up to woe. He buried his head in his arms and moaned.

McGregor's retort to this was a box on the ear, and it was no gentle caress. Ralph sprang from his chair, his face red. He lunged at his rescuer, sputtering with wrath.

McGregor caught him, pinioned his arms and sat him down hard in the chair.

"Maybe you'll learn a little sense after awhile," he observed cheerfully. "Lord knows you started bad enough. And why pick a river? I've got a good gun I'll lend you."

"Then give it to me!"

"Sure! Here you are." McGregor opened the drawer of his desk and tossed the weapon at the would-be suicide. "Only take it out into the shop," he advised brutally. "I don't want this office messed up."

Ralph seized the weapon and rose uncertainly. His eyes wandered to McGregor.

"That's all right. Go ahead!"

The boy hesitated a moment longer. His desperate, white face hurt McGregor like a knife thrust. But he kept up his pretense of cheerful, murderous coolness.

"Go on," he urged. "I don't mind!"

Ralph threw the gun from him and dropped into his chair. "I can't! I can't, Bob! Oh, Lord, I'm not fit to live. I'm not brave enough to die, even."

"That's all right," McGregor soothed him. "A lot of us are in the same boat. You couldn't have died by that gun, anyway. It isn't loaded. Just a bluff in case somebody tried to start anything around here. So you think you've made a mess of your life? At your age!"

"I have made a mess of it!"

McGregor laughed. His laughter had the ring of genuine amusement.

"Almost twenty-one now, aren't you? Why not try to live up to your years? You're not old enough to make a mess of anything!"

The boy's pride was stung.

"Is that so?" he cried, defiantly. "I guess if you'd got into a jam like mine you'd jump into the river yourself."

"Piffle! Dad speak cross to you again?"

"I'll show you if it's any joke! I'm shy nearly two thousand dollars!"

"If you're thinking about that bill for the flivver you smashed—"

"That's only half of it. It's a debt." Ralph gulped and added: "A debt of honor."

"Gambling debt?"

"Yes."

"And you jumped off a bridge on account of that! You poor nut!"

"I wish I had died. I'd be better off dead than alive when the old man hears—"

"Oh! So your creditor is going to your father, is he?"

Ralph nodded again, dumb with misery.

"Who is it?"

"What do you care?"

"Ralph, don't get me sore again! Who is it?"

Ralph answered sulkily: "A fellow named Byson. A New York man."

"Stopping at the Drop Inn?"

"How'd you know that?"

"Nothing mysterious about it. I guessed it. All right, I'll look after him."

"But I've got to pay him!"

"I'll say you have, my son! And you're going to. I'll see that you do. Only it will need time. But I've got an idea about that. You stay here and wait for me."

McGregor began donning his clothes, shivering with disgust at their clammy touch. He put on his moist cap.

"I'll be back pretty soon," he observed. "Meantime, I'll have to lock you in. I'm not taking chances diving into any more rivers after you to-night!"

McGregor made his word good by locking the office door as he left.

Ralph Torrington's roadster threaded its way quietly through Cranston streets. When he was past the village McGregor snapped the lights on and took the well known road to Alderbridge.

The house was eight miles from town, a square, imposing brick mansion, with elaborate lawns and outbuildings. McGregor knew every inch of that land intimately, and the car's lights were extinguished before he was within sight of the dark house.

The roadster parked at the gate, the inventor went up the drive on foot.

More than two years had passed since he walked out of that drive for the last time, intent on pushing his own fortune. The ex-chauffeur often pictured his return to the Torringtons, but never under such circumstances as the fag end of a close, dark summer night which found him slipping among the shadows like a thief.

On one chance McGregor knew he must stake everything. He had no way of knowing in advance if Norma was home or if she occupied the room that had been hers while he lived at Alderbridge. There was no option but to trust to luck.

He walked around to the north wing, picked up a handful of little pebbles from the gravel walk and began tossing them accurately at a second story window.

A long, alarming ten minutes went by while McGregor tossed pebbles and waited, his heart in his mouth. Then a window sash grated slightly and Norma Torrington's voice was heard. She spoke cautiously, "Ralph?"

"Bob McGregor," the visitor announced, equally careful to keep his voice down. "Ralph needs you. I'll talk to you in the library. Open a window for me, and make it snappy."

XI.

McGregor wasted no more words. He had not mistaken Norma either, for he had no more than stationed himself near the library windows when one of them was unlatched and opened to him.

McGregor leaped nimbly, caught his hands over the ledge and muscled himself up and into the house. Norma, a blur of gray in the robe she had slipped on, watched him anxiously.

"Bob," she whispered eagerly, the moment McGregor was inside. "Is Ralph in jail?"

"No. He was in the river when I found him. But he's all right now, except for mud and water!"

Norma gasped and caught his arm.

"He's perfectly safe," McGregor repeated. "But he was pretty close to a very ugly death to-night."

He could feel the shiver that seized Norma. But McGregor was not afraid of any hysterics from Norma Torrington.

She whispered: "Let's have the straight story, Bob. I've got to decide what we must do."

"He's been gambling."

"I was afraid of that. He tried to borrow money from me this evening. I didn't have any to give him."

"That's a good thing. He's in deep enough as it is. And I can imagine what sort of easy picking he would make for a professional sharper! He already owes a

thousand dollars to a man named Byson. Byson threatens to go to your father if he doesn't get the money pronto."

"Bob, what in the world can we do?"

"How much money can you get your hands on—to-night?"

Norma thought. "About seventy dollars!"

"Not enough. But I can add fifty in cash. And I can give him a check for a hundred more."

"There isn't any reason under the sun why you should rob yourself of a penny. I won't let you!" Norma exclaimed. "The idea! And after the way we've treated you!"

"Norma," McGregor said, "shut up, and listen! Ralph is in a bad jam. So bad that he tried to commit suicide. And we've got a blackmailing gambler named Byson to deal with besides. Whatever we do, we've got to keep the whole thing quiet. I'm going to ship Ralph out of town. I'll give him letters to a couple of civil engineers I know. They can find him some sort of work helping field surveyors. Nobody but you and I are going to know where he has gone—and we won't tell. That's the first step.

"Second, your father must never guess about this gambling debt. The shock might kill him.

"Third, all this has got to be done before morning. Norma, you hustle up to your room and get dressed. Bring along that seventy dollars and show some speed!"

Norma vanished into the gloom. McGregor found a chair and sat down to wait. He laid his cap on the library table.

He had many things to think out, and it seemed scarcely a minute before Norma was back and whispering: "Let's go."

As they reached the roadster, Norma bade McGregor wait.

"Take this," she said, placing a little parcel in his hands.

"What is it?"

"Security for the money you're giving Ralph. A piece of jewelry. Don't argue! Take it. I have a right to borrow on security."

"I'll give you a receipt the first chance I get," McGregor agreed briefly.

They got into the car and sped back to the lock factory, McGregor's red hair flying in the breeze.

Ralph Torrington stared resentfully when they let themselves into the office.

"You might have left me a cigarette," he said. "A fine wait I've had!"

The boy evidently had determined to brazen out whatever shame he felt. He merely stared at his sister.

"My cigarettes are as wet as yours," McGregor reminded him. "Besides, we've got something else to do but worry about cigarettes. You're going to catch a train for Buffalo in half an hour."

"I don't seem to have much to say about it!"

"You haven't anything to say about it," retorted McGregor. "You do as we say or you can get yourself out of this mess."

"You'll be sick of the job before you're through!" Ralph told him.

"That's my lookout—and Norma's—"

"What do I do in Buffalo?"

"I'll tell you when I get these letters done." McGregor seized paper and rattled at the office typewriter. Norma offered the black sheep her package of cigarettes. He accepted them with a grunt and retired to a post by the window.

Norma joined him and tried to talk pleasantly of things of no consequence. She avoided any mention of the night's happenings, following McGregor's advice.

But Ralph would not respond. He turned his back on her, stared at the blackness outside the pane and refused answers.

McGregor pushed his chair back and called Ralph. He handed him two letters and the money he and Norma had pooled. He added his personal check for another hundred dollars.

Ralph looked from his sister to the inventor. His lip curled.

"You think you're doing something smart, don't you? Something pretty handsome, I suppose—"

"Ralph!" Norma exclaimed, shocked by this ingratitude.

McGregor silenced Ralph with a gesture.

"Never mind what you think we think," he said. "What we expect of you is to follow orders. You go to Buffalo and present these letters. You'll get a job. You

stick to that job. If you're anything but a quitter, this is your chance to prove it. Stick to that job until you save a thousand dollars. Then come back home and square yourself like a man."

"And have Byson go to my father tomorrow and spill the beans?"

"Byson won't spill any beans. I'll handle Byson for the time being. Norma and I will handle your father."

"I wish you joy of that job!"

"We'll manage it. But remember, no letters to anybody except Norma or me. You report to us. And you follow our orders."

"Oh! Sold down the river, eh?"

"Maybe you'd rather jump *in* the river again? Now, forget that high-hat stuff. You're getting old enough to act like a man, Ralph. And that train is waiting for you!"

McGregor hustled them both into the roadster and they raced for the station. Their arrival was almost identical with the brief stop of the overland. McGregor hurried them down the platform, thrust Ralph onto a coach step and waved a good-by.

The train was gathering momentum. Ralph Torrington remained on the step, staring back at them.

The lights of the station platform made his face plain. His expression was still sullen.

"He'll be all right when he gets over the grouch," McGregor observed, turning to Norma. "Time he got away from home and did something for himself."

But Norma was suddenly clinging to his arm.

"I'm ashamed of him," she exclaimed. "Bob, he ought to have been whipped for the way he treated you! I don't see why you stood for it."

"I hardly looked for hysterical gratitude under the circumstances, Norma."

"Gratitude! When did you ever get any gratitude from any of us? We're a fine lot, we three! All we ever did was use you when we got into trouble."

"I was paid for it."

"You're not working for us now—and nothing ever can pay for to-night. What's the matter with us, Bob? What! It isn't as if we didn't know better, any of us. Why can't we be decent as you are?"

"That's all applesauce," McGregor smiled good naturedly. "You're just kicking up a dust about nothing."

"No, I'm not. I'm serious, this time. I know we're all wrong at home. And this, to-night, proves it! Dad is a bully and Ralph and I have been—well, just plain nasty. And I'm going to do something about it."

"You'll have plenty to do, Norma. We'll start by getting Ralph out of his troubles."

McGregor led the girl to the roadster and they got in. He turned the car toward Alderbridge. Over in the east, the sky was turning from black to a faint, sickly gray that promised dawn.

XII.

NORMA touched McGregor's hand which was grasping the wheel.

"Don't drive fast, Bob," she said. McGregor slowed the car to an easy fifteen miles. The inventor was in no hurry to end the ride, either.

"Tell me about your invention," Norma said presently. "All I could get out of dad was fireworks. Evidently he treated you with the courtesy and charm for which our family is getting famous."

"It's a good lock," McGregor burst out with his old enthusiasm. "It's a new idea in locks. A new principle. I've had experts tell me, honestly, too, that it's the nearest thing to a thief-proof lock that was ever invented. You see, here's how it works—"

The speed of the car slowed to a crawl. McGregor scarcely heeded the road. His subconscious mind kept them out of the ditch and the engine from stalling, but all of his attention and enthusiasm were given to his cherished hobby, the McGregor keyless lock.

Wrapped in a big coat, Norma huddled in the seat beside him and listened. She looked like a very little girl. Occasionally she asked a question that wound him up anew.

She learned more of McGregor's ambitions and struggle in ten minutes than she

had got at in years of previous acquaintance.

"How much money did you ask father for?" the girl inquired when the story was all told.

"I never got around to the sum. I didn't need much, in immediate cash. It's a question of cash to pay current expenses and tide us over until we establish a credit. Maybe a few thousand dollars would do it. If I had even a thousand I'd go on—"

"Somebody else will grab at the chance dad missed. Somebody will make his fortune along with yours. It 'll serve dad right. You won't quit, will you, Bob?"

"Not so's you'd notice it," McGregor promised. "Though I am closing the plant down for a time. Just until I make a better financial arrangement." Unconsciously he sighed.

"That's a burning shame. And, of course, it's the fault of our family again. Oh, what a shame—"

"It's the men I'm sorry about mostly. I hate to lay them off. Good men are hard to find. And I had a crackerjack foreman. You'd love him, Norma!" He told her the story of old George.

The story and the ride ended simultaneously. McGregor stopped the car short at the gates of Alderbridge. He stared in surprise.

The gray had spread across the east. The sun had not yet risen, but its reflected light was making short work of the lingering dusk. A few early birds were stirring and chattering about the day's crop of worms.

McGregor looked at Norma and laughed. "How many hours have I been lecturing?"

Norma declared he had scarcely started. She would have sat in the car to hear more, but McGregor forbade it.

"No, sir! You get in and get to bed before somebody asks questions. You'll have to tell your father about Ralph in the morning. Just say he got an offer to go out West and blame it onto me. Say I suggested it. Say I will be responsible for it."

"Make him cut out the jazz, Bob."

"He won't do any jazzing on this job. He'll work!"

"It 'll do him good. I tried to tell him so. But I suppose I haven't been such a shining example myself."

"You have not," McGregor assured her. "And the worst of it is, you've got sense enough to know better! It's time you used your head a little."

"Yes," said Norma, so mildly that McGregor started violently. She lingered beside him in the car.

"I wish it was four years ago," she sighed. "I wish you were still working for us, Bob!"

"I don't. Not much. It's a lot more fun working for myself. Your father doesn't seem to understand that. Now, Norma, you beat it. I've got a lot of things to do and I need sleep. I'll leave Ralph's car at the garage and have it sent out in the morning."

The Torrington heiress climbed out of the car with evident reluctance. McGregor turned the roadster and waved a good night at her.

She looked very small in the dusk. McGregor did not look back or he might have seen the little, boyish figure lingering at the gate. Norma watched him out of sight.

XIII.

McGregor slipped into the cottage at the hour his mother usually wakened. He had just time to bathe and change without being detected. His heart beat fast with consciousness of his guilt as he appeared at the breakfast table.

McGregor knew well that it was no easy matter to deceive his mother. He detected the old lady's critical inspection and adroitly forestalled any questions by one of his own.

"Where's George? He's usually down first."

"I'll knock at his door. He's got to hurry if he wants his cakes hot!"

Mrs. McGregor was back from the errand in a moment. She carried a slip of paper. Her son knew by her look that something was wrong.

"What in the world is the matter?"

"Robin, you read this! I can't find my darned glasses!"

McGregor read the note aloud, his mother sitting at the table to hear it:

"MRS. MCGREGOR AND BOB:

"Dear Madam—In view of things being what they are and my disgraceful past coming to light like it did, I am taking the liberty of saying good-by this way. The amount I owe you for the week's board I will mail in a few days, but how I can ever repay you for all the things you done for me I haven't got any idea. If I live to be two hundred I can't square that! All I can say is good luck and God bless you for treating me so white. But it would not do for me to stick around because Dibble would come back and spill all he knows all over town and people would hold it against me. Some anyhow. And that would get us all in Dutch. So I am taking this means of wishing you both every kind of good health and prosperity and hoping you will never have cause to be sorry you were so good to one who will never forget his debt to your Christian charity and good sportsmanship.

"I remain,

"GEORGE.

"Bob, I had to borrow one of your shirts and some collars. Mine didn't come from the laundry. Don't try to follow me and don't worry about me any. I will always be O. K."

"Robin, let me see that letter!"

Mrs. McGregor had not found her glasses but she insisted on a personal inspection of George's note. Holding it at arm's length she managed to spell through it. She set down the paper on the table and blinked rapidly.

"The old fool!" she exclaimed.

"Where did you find this, mom?"

"Pinned to his door. His room was all tidy. He hadn't slept on the bed. Must have gone last night early."

"Then it's no use looking for him. And I'm going to need him the worst way if I keep the factory going!"

Mrs. McGregor exclaimed: "I should think he might have had a little sense—at his age!"

"Maybe he did, mom. According to his lights. It was rather decent of him. He thought he would disgrace us if people knew he was an ex-crook. I don't think George wanted to go."

"Of course he didn't! He was fond of us. That's what makes me so mad at him!"

They discussed old George until McGregor realized with a start that he had to catch a train if he was going to seek financial help from his competitor in the lock business.

"Don't pay the boys until I come back this afternoon," he bade his mother. "Maybe I'll bring along some good news."

Mrs. McGregor kissed her son fondly and watched him out of sight. She returned indoors to give instructions to the maid who came in to keep her house. Then she dressed herself for the business career which had made her life suddenly and so unexpectedly interesting.

"I don't want it to end!" she exclaimed softly as she turned from her mirror. "Don't let the factory close, God! Thou knowest how dull my life has been before I bobbed my hair and learned to typewrite Rob's letters. Oh, let me be some use to my boy! Amen."

As the secretary-treasurer came out of the cottage a village taxi stopped before her gate with a jar. A young woman tumbled out. Mrs. McGregor instantly guessed that the caller was Norma Torrington.

Norma ran toward her exclaiming:

"Is Bob—is Mr. McGregor home?"

"No, he's not."

"At the factory?"

"He caught the train for New York. You're Miss Torrington, aren't you?"

"Yes. And you're Mrs. McGregor." Norma extended her hand. Impulsively she kissed the old lady on the cheek. Then her anxiety returned. "I've got to get hold of Bob!"

"I don't see how you can until afternoon. But you might try a long distance call. I know where he is going."

"I can't! I'm catching a train myself. It leaves in ten minutes. May I leave him a note?"

"Come right in. I'll find paper and pen."

Norma wrote in breathless haste, talking as she wrote. "Something awful has happened. It's about my brother. Bob will understand. I've got to drive like the devil if I catch that train!"

She thrust the note at Mrs. McGregor and ran back to the taxi. That vehicle went rocking down the bumpy street. The little old lady stood at her door and watched it.

She took off her glasses and polished them thoughtfully.

"So that's the girl, is it? She isn't half good enough for Robin! Not half! But she's got pep! Yes, sir, she's what you'd call a fast worker!"

Mrs. McGregor put Norma's note in her hand bag and started briskly toward the lock factory, thrilling to the thought that, for the time being, she was the sole executive in charge.

XIV.

McGregor joined his mother late in the afternoon. He looked grave and preoccupied, but his smile and greeting were so cheerful that for a moment the little lady's heart beat high with new hopes.

The hopes were soon dashed.

"Pay the men and give them their notice, mom," McGregor said gravely.

"You didn't get any help, Robin?"

"No. Not even encouragement to hang on. Well, I don't blame those people! They're making locks, too. They've got to protect themselves against us."

"Then we have to close the factory!"

"The sooner we do it, the better off we are. But it won't be for long! Don't you ever think it!"

His mother rallied immediately.

"I'll tell the wide smiling world!" she assured him. "There, Robin, boy! It's going to be all right!"

"Of course it is," McGregor agreed.

But he sat down wearily. His fingers seized a pencil and began marking meaningless arabesques on his blotting pad. He apologized with a smile.

"The train was like an oven; gave me a headache, sort of."

Mrs. McGregor got out the pay roll and started to work. Her son continued to mark diagrams on the blotter. The diagrams were idle scribblings, ciphers and scrolls that meant nothing to any other eye. To McGregor they diagramed the downfall of all his hopes.

Mrs. McGregor laid down her pen and exclaimed, "I'm dumb! I forgot all about that."

"Forgot what?"

"Norma Torrington came to see you this morning—just after you left."

"What did she want?"

"It was about her brother, she said. Wait, I've got the note in my hand bag."

McGregor took the note and stared at it doubtfully. His mother wondered that he showed no transports of delight and interest.

But the inventor anticipated no pleasure from any Torrington communication. He had received too many to be deceived.

"She's a pretty thing, Robin!"

"Yes." McGregor's voice was gloomy.

"She went over big with me. I must say I liked her, right away!"

"Oh-huh!" McGregor dawdled over the note, dreading to open it.

"Well, she certainly was stepping on the gas this morning! She was in and out of the house like a flash and off again in a taxi. How these flappers keep it up—well, for Pete's sake, Robin McGregor, are you ever going to *read* that note?"

"Oh, yes! Sure!" Her son slit the envelope and glanced over the inclosure. He read it through again, carefully. His mother could make out nothing from his sober face.

Finally he lighted a match and thrust the paper into its flame. The little bonfire flared up in the ash tray on his desk, and McGregor tended it until every scrap was destroyed.

Mrs. McGregor, whose curiosity was torturing her, sniffed audibly. Her son continued to stir the ashes in the tray with a pencil.

"In my day," Mrs. McGregor began, conversationally, "we used to lay them away in albums and press flowers in 'em. Oh, my, yes! I had a bundle that would choke a cow. Some were from your own father. Of course, times do change!"

McGregor continued to stir the ashes gloomily. His mother tried another tack.

"It's sweet of you to confide so freely in your dear old mother, Robin! I always say a woman ought to be her boy's best pal. But how we do run on, don't we! And all this work to get done."

McGregor looked up with a faint smile.

"It isn't my secret to tell, mom. It will all come out some time or another, I suppose," He frowned at the blotter.

"She certainly picked a happy time to tell me that," he muttered to himself.

Norma had written:

DEAR BOB:

I'm afraid it's worse about Ralph than we thought. Something awful happened last night. I don't dare trust it to writing, but I've got to find Ralph and make him come back. Meantime, I know you'll do your best for all of us.

In a tearing hurry,

NORMA.

McGregor was glad he burned the note. It was not the sort of document to cherish. Suppose it fell into other hands and started a scandal? And scandals were easily started in a village like Cranston.

XV.

MRS. MCGREGOR saw that her son was not going to confide this newest worry. He was more depressed than before. She felt that something must be done to rouse him out of these gloomy reflections.

"Here's the late mail," she said. "Open it while I work out the pay roll."

McGregor took the little packet of letters and began slitting their envelopes. He glanced over inclosures, crumpling the circulars and advertising folders and tossing them into the waste basket. Others of more importance he laid aside to answer.

A number of these letters were orders from dealers for the McGregor keyless lock. Orders for sample stock. McGregor sighed over them.

If only he could have held the body and soul of his business together just a little longer, long enough to weather this most critical period of infancy!

Then he became silent, holding one of his letters before him. His mother, glancing up from her pay roll, saw the queer, strained tenseness of his attitude and wondered.

She made shift to peep at his face. McGregor wore an expression of open-mouthed astonishment that surprised her into questions.

"When did this come?" he asked, waving the letter.

"About an hour ago. The late delivery."

"All of these?"

"Yes. I opened everything that came earlier. Robin, what's the matter?"

"I don't know," the inventor said in a queer, muffled voice. "I don't know what to make of it! Look here!"

He passed the letter and its contents to his mother. It consisted of a plain, cheap envelope, a sheet of cheap paper without any writing of any sort and folded within that several bills.

Once or twice small merchants, interested in the new lock, had sent currency instead of a check for a sample. Mrs. McGregor's first thought was that another one of these cash remittances had come. Then she examined the bills.

There were ten bills of hundred dollar denomination, two fifty dollar bills, and one for twenty. Eleven hundred and twenty dollars!

The secretary-treasurer looked hastily at the envelope in which this treasure had arrived. It bore a two cent stamp and was addressed to the McGregor Keyless Lock Co., and marked "Mr. McGregor. Personal."

The superscription was in typewriting. The postmark was Cranston, and showed that the letter had been mailed early that day.

"It's money!" Mrs. McGregor exclaimed solemnly.

"Money," her son agreed. Both in their excitement were perfectly unconscious of how unnecessary that observation was.

"But where in the world did it come from?"

"Where?" McGregor echoed.

His mother began to show signs of excitement. "That's enough money to keep the business going a little longer! That money might tide us over—and we could go on making your locks—and maybe—"

"Good Lord, mom! Don't I know that! I've been praying all day to find even half that much in immediate cash—and here, in the mail— But there's a joker about this! There's bound to be!"

"It's ours!"

"How do we know it is?"

"Well, it must be! Nobody else claims it. Think! Haven't you any idea? Isn't there somebody you know—somebody who knows how badly you need help just now?"

Mrs. McGregor stopped. She saw by her son's face that a name had been suggested.

"Who is it?" she whispered. "Can you tell me? Do you want to?"

McGregor flushed. A sort of happiness flamed out in his look. Doubt succeeded it, but the idea persisted.

"I wonder!" he said softly. "I wonder if it's possible! There's just a bare chance that it might be—"

"Norma Torrington!" Mrs. McGregor completed his sentence.

McGregor stared hard. "How the devil did you guess that!"

"Pooh! It stuck out all over you. Your face is just like a plate glass window when you think about that girl! Norma knew you needed that money, and she did this to help you! She knew you wouldn't take it if you guessed it was from her!"

Wild as the hypothesis was, McGregor could think of none more logical.

"I did talk to Norma. Last night—or, rather, early this morning, mom."

"Robin McGregor, you told me you went to bed!"

"Yes, ma'am. But I couldn't sleep. I took a walk. And something happened—about Ralph Torrington. That part of it isn't my exclusive secret, so we won't discuss it. But I saw Norma and we talked about the business and how I needed money."

"Well, great lovely cat! That's as plain as the nose on your face, then!"

"But I can't take Norma's money!" McGregor's face clouded. He shook his head stubbornly.

"How do you know it's her money? Nonsense! Where would she get eleven hundred and twenty dollars? Of course it wasn't her." In her panic his mother was gloriously inconsistent and ungrammatical.

She knew her son's scruples, and in her opinion any means was justified in overcoming them. The one vital issue was to keep the keyless lock business going in this critical time.

"I don't believe she could raise the money," McGregor agreed. "Come to think of it, she didn't have any money. I happen to know what she did with the last of it."

"Of course she didn't! But somebody sent us that money. God sent it in answer to our prayers. And, Robin, if you don't use that money to keep the business going you will be the world's prize dumb-bell! And I don't mean maybe!"

XVI.

FIVE o'clock whistles were blowing in Cranston. They told of another working day done.

In the office of the McGregor Keyless Lock Company a queer, strained little tableau held the boards.

The secretary-treasurer, her glasses gleaming, had risen, clutching the pay checks and the time sheet. She looked steadily at her son.

McGregor had braced himself with both hands against the edge of his desk, pushed far back in his chair as he frowned at the desk blotter in a fury of concentration and indecision.

In the shop outside three mechanics and a helper were laying off their denim work clothes, all unconscious that their future hung in the balance.

The fanfare of whistles died and Mrs. McGregor, startled by the silence, spoke.

"Robin," she began solemnly, "a real he-man knows what he wants and he isn't afraid to take a chance in getting it. Never mind where that money came from. It came! It's here! It's your chance—your luck. Are you big enough to use it?"

A great sigh came from McGregor. He raised his eyes to his mother's.

"You go ahead and pay the boys," he said steadily. "Never mind giving them notice. We'll hang on. I'll take the chance."

Mrs. McGregor needed no second bidding. She vanished with her pay roll. McGregor rose and looked solemnly about him. He was committed.

Directly after dinner he borrowed a car from his friend the village garage man and drove out to the Drop Inn. He inquired for a man named Byson, mindful of his obligation to attend to Ralph Torrington's tangled affairs.

Byson proved to be a well dressed,

smooth shaven young man with something so sophisticated in look and manner that it stamped his trade on him indelibly.

"I came to see you about young Ralph Torrington," McGregor explained when they were out of earshot of any other frequenters of the road house. "The boy owes you a thousand dollars. Is that correct?"

"I don't know anything about it," the gambler answered guardedly. "Who are you?"

McGregor told him who he was. "As for not knowing anything about it," he added, "just stick to that line and you can whistle for your money. Now, be yourself!"

"All right. What's the big idea?"

"You've got Ralph's note, I suppose?"

"I might have—in fact, I have."

"That's more like it. You'd rather have the cash?"

"Brother, you're talking good sense!"

"I understand you've been suggesting that if Ralph couldn't do something about this you'd go to his father? A little innocent blackmail?"

"Harsh words, brother! I don't like 'em!"

Byson twisted his lips into the suggestion of a slight smile as he said this. But his eyes were cold.

Something in the man's smug appearance provoked McGregor to wrath, but he showed no other sign of it than an added intensity as he advised him: "I happen to know old Torrington better than you. I worked for him during four years. You won't get anywhere with that game. Furthermore, he stands ace-high with the local authorities, and he can make the place hot for you."

"You had something else to suggest?" Byson asked softly.

"Yes. I suggest you wait for a few months for that money. I've packed the kid out West. He's going to earn it."

Byson interrupted with a more scornful smile. "Say, listen! What kind of a sap do you take me for? I'd starve to death doing business that way!"

"You're pretty apt to starve to death any way, Byson. That is if you're counting on young Torrington. But I'm here to tell you, on the level, he means to pay that money. And I'll advance a hundred on account out of my own pocket, to show you I'm not kidding. You'll get the rest as it comes along from Ralph. How about it?"

"I'll take it," Byson declared, mollified at once. "It's a nasty situation, I admit. God knows I tried to warn the young fool to keep out of my game. I'm not the kind to go stealing candy from babies!"

McGregor reserved his private opinion of Byson's scruples. He handed him one hundred dollars, and Byson wrote a receipt.

As the money changed hands the door of Byson's room, where this conference took place, opened quickly. The visitor was known to both men. He was Amos Calder, chief of police in Cranston.

The gambler was the first to speak. He snarled at McGregor: "What's this, a frame up?"

But McGregor was even more surprised at the interruption, and his face showed it.

As for the police chief, he merely nodded at the gambler and addressed McGregor: "Sorry to interrupt, but I had to see you about something right away, Mr. McGregor. They told me at the garage you drove out here."

McGregor thought instantly of Ralph Torrington. This call must concern Ralph in some way.

"What can I do for you, Calder?" he asked.

Calder cleared his throat. He was a middle aged man, bald headed and lank. His expression apologized for the trouble he was making.

"Suppose we run down to my office?" he suggested. "I hate to bother you, but—"

"No bother," McGregor agreed quickly. He lingered a minute to warn Byson. "Keep this affair under your hat if you want to stay healthy."

Byson agreed with a scared nod. "I wasn't born yesterday!"

On their way to the town's city hall, the police chief made one observation. "That Byson?" he said. "Near's I can figure out he's not a very desirable citizen!"

"He's a professional gambler," McGregor acquiesced. "I'm sorry to be found in his company."

Calder led the way to his private office.

"Here's a man I guess you know already," he observed as he opened the door.

McGregor did know the man. It was Detective Dibble, who lounged at the chief's desk and sprang up alertly as he entered. Detective Dibble of New York, his thick lips massaging the fire scarred stump of another dead cigar.

XVII.

DETECTIVE DIBBLE exclaimed genially: "Sit down, McGregor. Take a load off your feet!"

McGregor instantly felt like standing, such was his dislike of any suggestion from the Center Street man. But Calder pushed a chair forward and he sat, Dibble on one side of him, the police chief on the other.

"A little matter of business has come up," Dibble began after rolling his cigar stump violently. "In the way of duty I've got to ask you a few questions, McGregor."

"All right. Go ahead."

"Yeah. I was going to. Of course, if there's anything you don't feel like answering—"

"I'll decide about that for myself, Dibble. Shoot."

"Well, McGregor, we'd like to know what you were doing between midnight last night and six o'clock this morning."

"I don't care to say," McGregor answered promptly.

Dibble and the chief exchanged a quick glance. Calder spoke more soothingly:

"Now, Mr. McGregor, I wouldn't take that tack, if I was you. There's a way of getting at everything. Maybe Mr. Dibble was sort of abrupt with his question, but he was only doing his duty as he sees it—"

"I'm acquainted with one of the ways he sees his duty already," McGregor interrupted quietly.

Dibble flushed and pointed his cigar stump toward heaven.

"What I'm getting at," said the mild chief patiently, "is that there are certain things I've got to look into in the course of my duty to the town. One of those things has happened and we're looking for the explanation. Probably you were home in bed and sound asleep at the time Dibble is talking about. All I'm asking of you is that you say that was the case—"

"Not exactly all," Dibble interrupted.

"Yes, it is!" the chief insisted. "If McGregor says he was home and asleep between midnight and six this morning, then he *was* home and asleep! I happen to know Mr. McGregor."

"Well, I wasn't home or asleep, either!" McGregor exclaimed. "But I'm not at liberty to say just what I was doing, chief."

"That's your story, is it?" Dibble grew suddenly aggressive. "You're going to stick to that?"

"I'll stick to it, Dibble. Now I want to know what you're getting at."

Dibble rolled his dead cigar and framed another question. "At about a quarter of seven o'clock this morning did you or did you not drive up to the Cranston garage in a roadster automobile owned by Ralph Torrington and leave the car there, telling them to send it back to Alderbridge today?"

"Dibble," McGregor said composedly, "if you'll tell me what's behind all these questions, maybe I'll answer as many as I feel that I ought to. And I'll tell you the truth. But first I've got to know what you're getting at."

"Now wait a minute, buddy! Let me talk awhile. Maybe you'll answer this question. About half past five o'clock this afternoon did you go in person to the Cranston bank and make a deposit? A deposit in cash, amounting to eleven hundred and twenty dollars?"

"That's something I can answer, since it's my affair. Yes, I did—"

"Yes, you did!"

"Certainly. It was after banking hours, but we're not so strict about that in Cranston. The cashier was in and he was good enough to accommodate me."

"Was that money in the shape of ten one hundred-dollar bills, two fifties and a twenty?"

"Yes, it was."

"Would you know any of those bills if you saw them again?"

"I would not." McGregor smiled a lit-

tle. "Not that I'm so used to handling big money! But whoever could recognize money he had seen before unless it was marked in some way?"

"Ah!" Dibble exclaimed. "Well, buddy, that's a thought, for a fact! Unless it was marked! Sure enough!"

Inwardly McGregor turned cold. Something was wrong about that money he had accepted through the mail! The mystery had taken a criminal aspect. Yet how could it involve him beyond the necessity of explaining the simple truth?

"Let me tell you about that money," he said. "Since that has come into this discussion, I think a statement from me might help a little—"

"No, buddy, I'll tell *you* about that money!" Dibble grinned. "Talking seems to hurt your throat. Let me tell it—"

But the police chief intervened. "Mr. McGregor wants to make a statement, Dibble. I guess we'd better let him."

Dibble evidently did not like to be robbed of his dramatic moment. He looked rather sullen, but nodded agreement to Calder's will.

"Go right ahead, Mr. McGregor," the chief said.

"The money you asked about came to me in the mail this afternoon," McGregor explained. "I have been talking to several people about financing my lock factory and I had reason to think that one of them sent me this money. If I am mistaken—"

"Who sent you the money? Which one?" Dibble asked

McGregor hesitated. "I don't know—"

"You don't know!"

Even Calder looked incredulous.

"I know it sounds queer," McGregor protested. "But I have no idea. That money arrived in a perfectly plain envelope postmarked Cranston and mailed this morning. It had a typewritten address and nothing inside but a sheet of blank paper and the bills. My mother will bear me out in that statement. She examined the letter when I discovered it. I could think of no explanation for its arrival except that somebody interested in helping me had mailed it and would tell me about it later."

Chief Calder was watching McGregor with growing amazement. There was a tinge of pity in his glance, pity and a sort of shame. The good man actually was ashamed to see a fine, promising young man involved in such a lie.

Detective Dibble was fired with an unholy glee. It bubbled up in him and boiled over into speech. "Sweet daddy! And you expect us to believe that?"

"I'm telling the truth, Dibble."

"You think I'm going to fall for that banana oil! So a mysterious, unknown sugar baby just *sent* you eleven hundred fish by mail and never signed his name or nothing! Just left a bundle of kale on your doorstep and ran away to hide his blushes! Say, listen, kid? Didn't he even put in a line, 'To my valentine' or something like that?"

"I've told you the exact truth," McGregor said. "I'll be glad to have you question my mother who saw me open this letter."

Calder half rose from his chair as though to acquiesce in this suggestion. Dibble interrupted him.

"Wait, chief! Of course, his mother will bear him out! As a matter of fact I don't doubt that's exactly how that money got into his office this afternoon. But what was to prevent McGregor mailing it to himself? Postmarked Cranston, he says! Sure! He mailed it this morning, addressed to himself. And a darn clever alibi, if you ask me? Only he didn't cover up the rest of his tracks half so well!"

XVIII.

McGregor stiffened at Dibble's last words.

"Just what do you mean by that?" he asked with ominous quiet.

Dibble took something out of his coat pocket and held it out. "I suppose you never saw this before?"

"It's my cap!" McGregor exclaimed.

He began to think fast. He had worn that cap when he left home last night. He remembered putting it on again when he left Ralph locked in his office. He must have worn it to Alderbridge. He had laid it on the library table and left it there!

Dibble passed the cap to the police chief.

"Better lock this up in your safe," he advised. "Now, McGregor, after this I don't imagine you're going to deny you broke into Torrington's house by a library window along about half past two o'clock this morning?"

McGregor eyed the detective with more composure than he felt. He had no answer to give. But he guessed what was in the wind now.

Dibble went on with zest: "And after this, I don't suppose you'll deny you know all about the twelve hundred dollars that was taken out of Torrington's safe between midnight and six o'clock this morning! If I was you, McGregor, I'd come clean and save a lot of bother. Because we've got the goods on you all along the line. You were seen in that automobile, your cap was left on Torrington's table and the marked money was deposited at the bank by you this afternoon. Now, how about it?"

"Chief," McGregor said, ignoring Dibble, "did Mr. Torrington lose twelve hundred dollars from his safe?"

"That's what he claims, Mr. McGregor. He says it's the second time he missed money and he marked these bills, hoping to catch the thief. And I'm mighty sorry to say that ten of those same marked bills are the ones that you put in the bank to-day."

"And that's that!" Detective Dibble put a triumphant period to the damning disclosure.

McGregor's mouth opened, then closed without uttering any sound. His freckled face had paled. The inventor ran his hands through his red hair and stared grimly at his own shoes. He noticed, with that keen perception of incongruous things ascribed to drowning men, that his shoes badly needed polishing.

The police chief spoke again: "I tell you what, Mr. McGregor, if there's any way you can explain your connection with this affair, you'd better do it! I'm mighty sorry, but the charge has been made. It looks very much as if I'd have to hold you for burglary."

"Well, I should hope to tell you!" Dibble seconded with gusto. "I've got the warrant all ready, chief. Right here in my pocket."

"You see how it is?" Calder apologized. "Mr. Torrington hired Mr. Dibble. He's been working on the case all day—"

"And a mighty sweet, air-tight little case it's turned out to be," Dibble declared, cocking his derby over one eye and revolving the dead cigar contentedly.

McGregor raised his eyes. He had reached a decision.

"Chief," he begged quietly, "please get hold of Torrington and get him down here. Tell him I ask it. Just hold back that warrant until he comes, will you?"

XIX.

TORRINGTON was not inclined to come to headquarters. McGregor himself got on the wire and advised the rich man earnestly: "I've got something to say that concerns your private affairs. I can't come out to you. You'll have to come down here."

Torrington came, but in a bad temper. That temper found immediate outlet on McGregor.

The spoiled rich man glared at the prisoner and leveled his pudgy, accusing finger. He uttered one word, one word meant to be expressive of a volume.

"Gratitude!" he barked, stabbing the air, his finger indicating McGregor. "Gratitude!"

"Ah," cried Detective Dibble zestfully, "what does his kind know about gratitude? I'm telling you this birdie is a bad actor, Mr. Torrington!"

Torrington began to pant audibly. He was collecting his strength for further verbal assault.

"Chief," McGregor said quietly, "I want to talk to Mr. Torrington alone."

Calder agreed to wait in the outer office and withdrew, taking Dibble with him.

"Well, young man?" Torrington burst out.

"Sit down," McGregor said wearily. "You excite yourself. Take off your hat and cool off."

"Cool off? Cool off! I must say you take things pretty coolly! After four years under my roof you break into my safe and

steal my money to pay your gambling debts."

"Who told you that?"

"My own detective. Don't deny it! You were arrested at a notorious road house in company with a professional gambler!"

"Correct, except for one thing. I wasn't arrested. I'm not arrested. I'm not going to be arrested—"

"What!"

"Mr. Torrington, don't shout that way. Don't you know excitement is bad for your heart? Now sit down and listen. In the first place, you don't believe I robbed your safe!"

"I don't, eh? After my own detective—"

"Dibble? He's ridiculous. You don't believe that story. Not if you give yourself time to think. And anyway, it isn't true. I didn't rob your safe—"

"You didn't! Well, just try to prove that in court—"

"No. I'll prove it here. You don't want me to prove it in court. Any more than I want the truth to come out in court."

Torrington turned red. "Are you trying to intimidate me, McGregor? I'll have you understand—"

"I'll have *you* understand!" McGregor raised his voice a tone higher and gave it a hundred per cent more volume than Torrington's.

The effect of this maneuver was to quiet the rich man suddenly. It startled him, overawed him. He said mildly: "Don't shout, Bob!"

"I will shout, if it's necessary to get this into your head. I'm trying to do you one more favor. Do you know where I found Ralph last night? In the river."

"The river!" The rich man turned pale. He had risen in his previous excitement. Now he groped for a chair.

"Yes. He jumped off the bridge. He was trying to commit suicide."

Torrington looked about them guiltily, afraid they might be overheard. A shade of his old bluster returned. "How do I know that's so?"

"Because I'm telling you. Furthermore, because I can prove it by Norma and Ralph."

"Norma! She's gone—and Heaven knows where! Ralph is gone, too."

"Yes. I sent Ralph away. I know where to reach them both."

Torrington's mouth opened. He gaped while McGregor gave him a full account of the night's happenings.

"That's why we can't let this thing get into court!" McGregor concluded. "I hope you see it now!"

Torrington seized his head in both hands and held it. He looked utterly dejected.

"My own son!" he exclaimed. "A gambler! A suicide! McGregor, I begged you to help me out! If you had come back as I asked you to—"

The decisive straw had been loaded on McGregor's back. He revolted.

"Help you out!" he exclaimed. "Help you out? I spent four years helping you out, all of you! Yes, I was paid a salary for it! And I was supposed to be grateful besides! Well, all I did was spoil the three of you. I see it now! Help you out be damned! I'm through helping you out! It's your turn to help me out, now that I need help."

Torrington made a helpless gesture. His face was puckered with mingled amazement and grief.

"Help yourself after this!" the rich man's former chauffeur exclaimed vehemently. "I'm through. You're old enough, all three of you, to manage your own affairs. Time you learned. You can begin by helping me."

"But what can we do?"

"Do? Get Norma and Ralph back here. Wire them to-night. At once. I'll give you the address. Do that, then call off your detective! And get hold of him before he runs to the newspapers. That's the first thing he will do, if you don't stop him. Listen, if he gets news of this into the papers, my business credit will be ruined and I'm going to hold you to account! Yes, I am, if I have to drag you through all the courts!"

"I'll do it!" Torrington gasped. "Yes, yes. Right away. Dibble—oh, Dibble!"

The police chief burst in anxiously.

"Mr. Dibble just stepped out," he exclaimed.

"Get him," Torrington panted. "Get him! Get him! Get him! Find him for me, you hear, Calder!"

While Calder hurried off to send men after the detective Torrington turned to McGregor. "Bob, give me that address. I'll get those children back here. I'll burn the wires—"

"No, you won't," McGregor dictated. "You just wire them to come home, that all is forgiven. That's what you say to them."

"All right," Torrington agreed meekly. "Whatever you say, Bob."

Calder was half an hour producing Dibble.

McGregor fidgeted up and down the office. Torrington alternated fits of violent invective with protracted periods of scared silence.

McGregor had subdued him. Reason had triumphed over Torrington's prejudice. An important point was won.

But everything depended on the discretion of Detective Dibble, and McGregor's face grew grim as the strain of waiting told on him.

The police chief ushered in the detective at last. Dibble looked sulky and was inclined to bluster.

"Mr. Torrington," he began, "I hope you haven't been listening to any fairy stories from this hard boiled crook."

Torrington waved his pudgy hand. He panted: "Dibble, call your case off."

"Call it off! What do you mean, call it off?"

"You know what he means," McGregor said.

"Yes," Torrington echoed. "Don't trifle with me, Dibble! I want this case stopped. You hear? There won't be any prosecution! I say so!"

Dibble had difficulty with his dead cigar. He seemed about to swallow it. He gasped: "Say, listen, I can't—"

Torrington beat his fist on the police chief's desk. "Release Mr. McGregor at once. And apologize to him for the trouble you made. And, Dibble, not one word of this must get into the newspapers."

"And, Dibble," McGregor added, "if one word of it *does* get into the newspapers *I'll know how it got there.* And I'll make life too hot to hold you. Is that plain?"

Instantly Dibble turned from his normal dark brown to a lemon yellow. His black eyes rolled. But his recovery was almost immediate. He began to bluster.

"Say, what d'ye take me for? I got something to do besides run to newspapers. I'm handling this case as a private detective, Mr. Torrington! Whatever gave you the notion I'd be trying my cases in the newspapers?"

McGregor was stricken by an icy chill of premonition.

"Mr. Calder," he exclaimed, "where did you find this man just now?"

"Why, he was in a telephone booth, Mr. McGregor! At the hotel—"

"Dibble!" McGregor cried harshly.

"What of it?" Dibble roared. "A man has got a right to use a telephone, I guess—"

"Dibble, did you telephone the New York papers? If you told them I was arrested, you lied. And I'll make you pay. If you even told them a warrant has been issued—"

"I did not!" Dibble exclaimed. His face was red enough now. "Certainly not. What's eating you all, anyhow? Give me credit, will you? I guess I know how to handle a case after all the years I've spent on the police force. What do you take me for—a publicity hound?"

"Yes," McGregor said, "I do. That's just what you are. And Calder tells me you resigned from the New York force to start a private agency of your own."

"What if I did? It's my business."

"Dibble, I can read you like a book! You thought you had your first case sewed up. The first thing you would do would be to make a break for publicity. What a chance to get your business started with a front-page story! Now, listen, if you've broadcast anything about me—"

"I tell you I have not!" Dibble shouted.

"You'd better not," Torrington added. "It was all a mistake, Dibble. Forget that warrant; and apologize to Mr. McGregor."

"All right," Dibble said sourly. "I do."

Torrington rose and seized his hat. "I'll

get those telegrams off at once, Bob. See me in the morning."

"I'll meet you here at ten o'clock," McGregor agreed. He bade Calder good night and turned one last hard look on Detective Dibble. "If you made a slip, Dibble, you had better square it. Call the papers off me while there's still time."

"Stop calling me a liar!" Dibble shouted.

McGregor shrugged wearily.

Something told him that Dibble *was* a liar. And if Dibble had lied about giving this news to the papers, McGregor was a ruined man. Though he left police headquarters with his honor vindicated, he bore with him the feeling that he had lost his battle.

"Where in the world have you been?" his mother exclaimed when he got home.

Her son smiled without mirth as he answered:

"Nowhere. Just doing favors for the Torringtons—and paying the usual penalty for being an easy mark!"

He went on up to his bedroom wearily and full of forebodings for the morrow.

XX.

In spite of his forebodings, McGregor slept late. It was his mother's knocking that roused him. "There's a young man called to see you, Robin. He's waiting downstairs."

The inventor, halfway out of bed, subsided with a groan. "Did he say what he wanted?"

"No, Robin. But I'll make him tell me—"

"No!" McGregor shouted. "Don't do anything of the sort. I'll be right down."

Brief as he made his toilet, McGregor had not entered the cottage parlor before another young man had joined the first. The second one carried a camera. McGregor knew at a glance they were newspaper men.

McGregor shut the parlor door, leaving his mother outside.

"Boys," he asked softly, "let's see the morning papers."

Two of the sensational tabloid sheets were offered. McGregor glanced at their front pages and groaned again. Black headlines leaped at him:

INVENTOR IN JAIL

Millionaire Brands Ex-Chauffeur Thief.

Dibble's work—no doubt about that!

There was more of the same sort—fat black type in bold display, and small type recited the few facts.

McGregor did not bother to read more. He returned the papers to their owners silently.

"I can't say anything now except that I'm innocent. But it will all be cleared up this morning," he promised. "And I suppose you want the usual pictures? Myself? My humble cottage home—"

"And your mother, if you don't mind," the cameraman suggested.

Into McGregor's quiet look crept something so menacing that even the hardened cameraman quailed.

"Just leave my mother out of the picture, so long as I'm around. I'm telling you for your own good."

The inventor said it with significant calm. The cameraman nodded hastily.

"I'll get a cup of coffee," McGregor suggested. "Then I've got business at police headquarters. You boys wait and come along with me." He opened the parlor door and called: "Mom! Got a lot of coffee and some doughnuts? These gentlemen will appreciate a bite."

The secretary-treasurer's response was immediate.

"Be yourself, Robin! I laid plates ten minutes ago. And the coffee's getting cold already!"

"When you've tried her doughnuts," McGregor whispered to the cameraman, "you won't have the heart to grab her picture. I'm warning you."

McGregor got his mother aside before he left the house.

"You take charge at the plant to-day," he said. "I'm going to be busy. If anybody tells you I'm in jail, don't worry. I'll be out before I'm halfway in."

"Oh, that!" Mrs. McGregor sniffed contemptuously. "I saw those newspapers."

"You did!"

"One was sticking out of the reporter's pocket, so I borrowed it. I'm not worrying any about that applesauce!"

The inventor seized his surprising mother in a bearlike embrace. Then he joined the reporters, and they walked amicably toward the City Hall. McGregor was on good terms with both of them at once.

The fat was in the fire. The publicity that spelled ruin to his business credit had been broadcast. The McGregor Keyless Lock Company was undoubtedly bankrupt.

Well, there was nothing to do about that except pick up the scattered pieces the first opportunity that offered, and begin the dreary business of starting all over again. Meantime, why hold his bad luck against the newspaper men? McGregor had more sense than to do that.

More newspaper men were waiting for him at the City Hall. Cameras clicked as he posed on the steps of the building. To the reporters he repeated his assurance: "I am innocent; that's all I can explain now. I'll have something more to say when I'm at liberty. I won't be half an hour longer. Just a formality."

Chief Calder greeted the inventor with a worried face.

"We can't do anything until Mr. Torrington comes," he explained. "I've been trying to reach him. You see, Mr. Torrington made the charge. He'll have to withdraw it. We'll just have to wait."

It was past noon before Torrington's car rolled up. The millionaire came in company with Dibble, and his face was sullen. McGregor's optimism vanished when he saw that look.

"I want to know where my son and daughter have gone!" Torrington shouted at sight of the accused man.

"I told you that last night."

"Don't lie to me again, McGregor! If you know where they are, tell me, or by the Lord, I'll make you!"

"I've told you where to reach them," McGregor repeated firmly.

"I don't believe you. I've kept the wires hot all morning. I've had the police and detectives in Buffalo at work. Neither Ralph nor Norma is in the city. Nobody ever heard of them at the address you gave."

"But I told you the truth," McGregor exclaimed. His heart turned to ice. "I sent Ralph to that address. Norma wrote me a note to say she was following him. Unfortunately I burned her note."

Detective Dibble interrupted with a snort—a sarcastic, triumphant snort. Detective Dibble had regained some of the confidence he lacked the night before. Things were coming his way, after all!

"I've canvassed every train," Torrington puffed. "The children are not *en route*. Bob, if you know where they are, tell me."

"I've told you all I know—I can't do any more! I don't know any more. If they can't be found, you'll have to consider me a liar until Ralph and Norma are heard from. God knows when that will be!"

"Yeah! Make him tell you how he got ten marked bills that came out of your safe," Dibble broke out. "How did he come to deposit them in his bank account? Answer that, McGregor!"

"I did answer that."

Dibble turned to the rich man. "Now, Mr. Torrington, I guess you won't hold it against me that I considered this case closed and told the newspapers. A man of my experience ought to know something about this business, I guess. We detectives have got to have the confidence of the people that hire us, Mr. Torrington. I guess you see you was mistaken about last night? It's a God's wonder this bird didn't fly away while you was being so kind to him!"

Thus exhorted, Torrington nerved himself to sternness.

"McGregor," he said, "you'll have to give me further proof of what you said last night."

McGregor sighed. "I can't—"

"You can't! Then, by Heaven—Dibble, Calder, you hear? You've got that warrant. You'd better do your duty."

McGregor turned wearily to the police chief.

"I guess he's right, Mr. Calder. Serve your warrant. It doesn't matter. My credit is already ruined by the publicity." He turned sternly to Torrington. "If other

reputations suffer for this, blame yourself, don't blame me," he sighed.

"You can't intimidate me, McGregor."

"I'll have to hold you until you can get bail," Calder informed the prisoner.

"Bail!" McGregor groaned. "A lot of chance I stand of getting bail! I couldn't even borrow money on my legitimate business."

"Better lock him up, chief," Dibble advised eagerly. "I wouldn't take any chances. Going to search him, aren't you?"

"You can," Calder said, disgusted.

Dibble undertook the task with real pleasure. McGregor flushed, but submitted to the humiliating formality. Dibble went through his pockets with skilled fingers, laying the items on the chief's desk. When he had finished he examined everything in detail.

A small package wrapped in tissue paper and tied with a thread aroused his curiosity. He tore it open.

"Well!" Dibble exclaimed. "Now ain't that pretty? A lady's locket—and set with little diamonds too."

Torrington pushed forward to look.

"My daughter's locket!" he roared.

"Yes," said the prisoner. "That belongs to Miss Torrington. She'll have to tell you how I got hold of it."

Torrington swelled big in his surprise and indignation. Red-faced and trembling, he confronted his former chauffeur and stuttered his denunciation of this perfidy.

"McGregor! Of all the scoundrels! By Heaven, your ingratitude to me and my family passes all belief!"

"You know what I told you." McGregor warned him sadly. "You'll hurt yourself some day, getting mad like that."

Before Torrington could cap this astounding impudence a clamor of voices from the chief's outer office interrupted. A sergeant knocked and opened the door and before he could intervene Mrs. McGregor marched into the room.

With her she brought a visitor. It was none other than old George himself. Behind them pressed an eager knot of newspaper men.

McGregor's face burned.

"Mom," he exclaimed, "did you have to come just now?"

"I did," said the old lady crisply. "I guess, by the looks of you, I couldn't have picked a better time, either. Here's a man who's got something to say about this case. I'd advise you all to listen to him." She turned on her companion. "Now, George Bishop, you tell the chief what you just told me. Speak up, so's they can all hear!"

XXI.

Old George's face had no more expression that a hickory knot. He was staring before him, at nothing. As Mrs. McGregor pushed him to the fore he recognized his recent employer with a brief message which was delivered in one of those mysterious, ventriloquial whispers that left its recipient a little uncertain whether George was its real instigator. The disembodied voice said huskily:

"Stick around, Rob. This is going to be a wow!"

"Who is this man?" Torrington broke out, glaring at George and at all the uninvited witnesses of their conference.

"Yes, who are you?" Calder echoed. "If you have business here—"

"Ask Dibble," George said. "Dibble can tell you who I am."

"I hope to tell you!" Dibble echoed importantly. "This, chief, is one George Lorgan, alias Bishop. One of the slickest safe-crackers that ever frisked a box! I guess I'm not exaggerating none if I say he was the terror of police and public up to the time I got the goods on him and sent him over the road. And if you've got any doubts about what I say, look him up in any big-time rogues' gallery."

"Correct!" said old George huskily. "Much obliged, Dibble."

Without turning his eyes or altering his expression, George went on, his voice rising to a rusty, monotonous croak:

"Chief, it's like this. I'm not going to see an innocent man suffer for what he never done. You all are looking for the man that busted into Torrington's old cheesebox? All right, I'm the party you want. I come to give myself up."

"What's all this?" Dibble gasped.

George answered in the gusty sigh of the Delphic sibyl:

"Just another one of your boners, Dibble. You pinched the wrong guy again."

"Stop a minute!" Calder said as Dibble began an expostulation. "Here, you, Lorgan! Do you know what you're saying?"

"I do, chief. I'm telling you I robbed Mr. Torrington's safe. Out at that place they call Alderbridge. Night before last, along around two-thirty, or maybe it was later. I come here to tell you about it, and all I ask is somebody will take it all down and get it over with. I'll come clean rather than see Rob McGregor get railroaded for something he never had a hand in! Go ahead, take me down!"

"George," McGregor said sternly, "you don't know what you're talking about!"

"Well, I should hope to tell you," Dibble shouted. "Old George Lorgan rob that safe? He was never within a hundred miles of it!"

"Chief," old George wheezed patiently, "do I get justice here, or don't I? If I never robbed that safe, then how about this? One of them marked bills you've been yelping about, ain't it?"

The bald-headed ex-burglar held out his pocketbook for Calder to examine. The police chief accepted the invitation, stared at the bill indicated with widening eyes, and nodded slowly.

"Lorgan," he said sternly, "you'll have to explain how you got hold of this money?"

"Great grief!" George cried. "Ain't I begging to tell you I stole it? I stole it and mailed the rest to Rob McGregor. I stole it to help McGregor keep his factory going. I stole it because for once in my life I wanted to do something useful. I wanted to help Rob McGregor manufacture the only burglar proof lock I ever saw in my whole life, so's guys like me couldn't go around any more busting into people's safes! That's why I stole it, and all I ask of you is kindly listen while I prove to you that it was me that stole it and not McGregor, who don't know any more about that money than this here Dibble does about being a detective! Have a heart, will you, and let me tell you how I stole it?"

XXII

"Did you bring the papers?" old George wheezed the moment McGregor appeared at the end of the jail corridor. "Sure, you got 'em all, Rob?"

McGregor extended a thick bundle of newspapers. Every day he brought this bundle, a copy of every paper of importance he could find on a newsstand.

To George, nothing else seemed to matter. It was the one request he made of his friends. The newspapers!

George seized the bundle, opened it, and spread out front pages all about him. McGregor stared, always amazed by this eccentricity, which old George would not explain.

Ten days old George Lorgan had been locked in a cell in the town's jail. Ten days in which he would not hear of lawyers, or even consider his future.

"What's the kick?" he would wheeze when McGregor or his mother would remonstrate, try to awaken him to a sense of his peril. "I ain't kicking. Got a good cell, ain't I? Nice and light. Air's fresh. Grub's good. Never saw a better run jail in all my life—and, boy, I've seen a lot—"

"Good Heaven, George, you don't want to end your life in jail!"

"Who says so? Huh? All this talk about jail. What do you know about jails? You never been in one. Leave me alone—and don't forget to bring the papers, will you, Rob?"

To-day George spread out the day's literature, his eyes scanning the front pages. He grunted angrily.

"What do you know! Look at them front pages, will you! Nothing but stuff about a chorus girl in a bathtub! And where am I! Back in the middle of the paper. Crowded off the front page by a chorus girl. Can you beat it? What's the newspapers coming to—"

"You've been on the front page for ten days," McGregor expostulated. "What do you want—the Hall of Fame? George, you're a worse publicity hound than Dibble—"

"I deserve publicity," George grunted. "I gave 'em red hot news, didn't I? D'jever hear of a crook robbing a safe in order to promote burglar proof locks? Aw, where's my scrapbook and paste?"

The prisoner had a large scrapbook. His spare time was devoted to keeping it posted to date, and to re-reading the long and lively columns of anecdote he had inspired.

"Look here, Rob." George held forth another news sheet. "Look, I'm an author!"

McGregor glanced at the indicated page. Black type blazoned forth:

WHY I WENT WRONG

The Story of My Life of Crime—Written Exclusively for the Comet by George Lorgan, Author of the Crime to End Crime

"I get paid for that, too!" George grinned. "I get a hundred dollars for telling it to a kid reporter. Rob, there's things about me in here I never dreamed of. It's a real wow!"

McGregor thrust the paper aside. "George," he began sternly, "forget this nonsense. Listen. I was talking to the prosecuting attorney to-day—"

"Yes?" The prisoner was suddenly still, all attention.

"They're going to send you over the road, sure as death!"

George stared thoughtfully through the bars. "I wouldn't be surprised," he admitted.

"They've checked up your confession all along the line. They figure they got an air tight case against you—"

"I said I frisked Torrington's box, didn't I? They got my confession. What you getting excited about after that?"

"I'll tell you what I'm getting excited about. I think you're lying. I thought so all along. Listen, you old fool! You don't want to go to prison at your age for a crime you never committed. I won't let you go to prison just to keep me out—"

"I'm not interested in what you say," George wheezed drearily. "Where's that scrap book gone?"

"Stop it!" McGregor groaned. "Pay attention to what I'm saying. I want to know what sort of a game you think you're getting away with!"

Old George squinted thoughtfully down the corridor. "Rob, how's the business?"

"Hang the business! I'm asking you—"

"Did you raise the money you need?"

"Yes, I did. To-day. I had three offers to choose from, if you want to know. The man who helped me out is a safe designer. He said any lock that old George Lorgan admitted he couldn't open was the kind of lock he wanted to invest in."

"Huh," said George. He gave no further expression to his satisfaction, but his eyes, as they considered the jail corridor, glowed softly. Old George was happy.

"I hired a lawyer for you," McGregor announced. "He's coming from New York to-night. When he comes, you get busy and find a defense for yourself. You hear, George?"

"On the level, do you want me out of jail, Rob?"

"Do I want you out! You know I do."

"What could I do with my life? An old crook like me—"

"You'd come to work for me, that's what you'd do! Where the devil can I find another foreman to handle the factory, I'd like to know? Here I've got the capital and the business is coming in, and I can't get myself organized, because my foreman is in jail! What kind of a way is that?"

The old prisoner started violently. He turned his head and actually stared at McGregor.

"Is that straight? Would I be foreman at the factory? Don't kid me now."

"I'm telling you I've got to have you to keep the business going—"

"Aw, I'm too old!"

"You're not too old! I'm absolutely depending on you. I'm going to get you out of this, George, if money can do it, for the simple reason that I've got to have you."

The hope that flamed in George's face suddenly flickered and went out. That wooden countenance grew gray as ashes. George turned his eyes away and stared out of the bars. He said huskily: "I'd give a leg, if it could be done! I'd give both my legs—"

"Then say you're innocent! I know you are. You didn't rob that safe."

George hesitated. Suddenly he shook his head. His voice croaked despairingly: "It's too late now! They wouldn't believe me. Why, Rob, with my record against me, I couldn't make a jury believe it was a nice day, even!"

McGregor raged at him: "You old fool! You lied about robbing that safe and I know it! You did it to get me out of jail. If you don't get some sense into your head and tell the truth to that lawyer, I hope they hang you!"

"Aw, let me alone!" George croaked. "We can't prove nothing. Let me alone!"

McGregor gave it up. When he had left, old George laid down his newspapers and stared wistfully through the bars.

George was thinking about the lock factory. McGregor said he could be foreman again! Sad as his thoughts were, George could not forbear a grin at the ironical humor of it. There would not have been any lock factory to be foreman of if he hadn't gone to jail!

McGregor was thinking about old George with a savage desperation. He was convinced that George lied about robbing Torrington's safe. He was equally convinced that George could never make a jury believe in his innocence. The only hope that remained was to find the young Torringtons.

Norma and Ralph had simply dropped out of sight.

McGregor had employed a detective agency to find them. Their father was leaving nothing undone to accomplish the same end. The joint result of their troubles was no news.

Norma's defection hurt McGregor beyond words to tell. Just when he began to think the girl was getting some sense! Just when she seemed really to appreciate what he tried to do for all of them! McGregor tried resolutely to forget Norma.

He remembered that it would be well to leave word with Calder about George's lawyer and turned into the chief's office. Four people started up at his entrance and three of them were Torringtons, Ralph, Norma and their father.

Norma sprang at McGregor and he found his arms infolding her. She was crying excited: "I found him, Bob! I made him come back! It's all right now—they can't send you to jail!"

XXIII.

RALPH TORRINGTON'S confession, made to the prosecuting attorney, cleared away the charge against old George.

"I was in debt to Byson," Ralph explained. "And I owed for the car I smashed. Byson offered me another chance to win it back and I helped myself from the safe again. I couldn't see any other way to get it! When I lost that money, too, there just wasn't any use living!"

"You could have told us that the night we helped you out," McGregor observed dryly.

Ralph hung his head. "If I had, you'd have sent me to jail! I'd rather die than go to jail, Bob! Any day!"

Torrington hastily drew the prosecuting attorney aside. They conferred in whispers at one end of the room. McGregor guessed that the rich man was using all his influence and persuasive power to keep the case out of court.

He guessed that Torrington would succeed. McGregor hoped Torrington would succeed. He believed sincerely that Ralph had better stuff in him than he had yet shown.

Norma was telling her part in events, her eyes on McGregor's face, begging his approval.

"I only got as far as New York. I had to change trains. At Grand Central I ran into a school friend of Ralph's who told me he had seen Ralph just half an hour ago. In New York! Then I realized that I had trouble on my hands! I've been nine whole days running Ralph down. Nothing else mattered. I had to get my hands on the little beast and make him act like a man! But even that doesn't begin to pay what we owe you, Bob McGregor!"

McGregor turned a radiant face to old George. George had taken entirely a passive part in the proceedings up to this minute.

Summoned from his cell, he exhibited no particular surprise at hearing Ralph's con-

fession. His wooden face altered not a splinter when told he was a free man. He gazed out of a window now and rubbed his bald head thoughtfully.

"George!" McGregor exclaimed. "You old crook, what in Heaven's name did you do it for?"

"Rob," said the rusty whisper, "it was like this: I had a kind of idea the morning I saw the newspapers with the story about your arrest. It was a good idea and it knocked me for a goal. But it wasn't any kind of idea I could tell you. I just had to go ahead on my own.

"Your going to jail wouldn't help the lock business none, would it? No. But *my* going to jail was some use! Yeah! All I had to do was prove I robbed that safe and I could grab all the publicity I wanted. Then I told the newspaper boys I robbed the safe because the McGregor lock was the only thief-proof lock in the world, and I wanted it to succeed. Now, Rob, did that put over your business with a wow, or didn't it? I leave it you!"

"You old fool," McGregor grinned fondly. "You pretty nearly went to jail for the rest of your life because of that!"

George rubbed his bald head soberly.

"Ain't it a fact! That was the only trouble! Anybody would believe I robbed the safe, but I didn't leave myself any good get-away!"

"One thing, Lorgan," the police chief interrupted. "How about that hundred-dollar bill, that marked bill that came from Torrington's safe? How did you get that?"

"Chief, the real low down is this: I was going to be let out at the lock factory. I heard McGregor telling his mother they had to close down. I knew there was a live poker game at the Drop Inn and I saw a chance to make a stake, maybe enough to help McGregor out a little.

"That fellow Byson's just like every card sharp I ever met! He won twelve hundred off Ralph Torrington. Then he turns around and loses it to me, at his own game. I trimmed Byson out of nearly thirteen hundred smackers. But I never guessed the money was marked till after I'd mailed most of it to McGregor! Then I saw the papers."

Norma turned to McGregor. Her low-pitched voice trembled. "Bob, I'm ashamed! The best friend you ever had is that old man—a better friend than I am. And he's only an ex-crook! But I want to try to do better! Will you let me try, Bob?"

"Will I?" McGregor exclaimed. "I won't do anything else but!"

THE END

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AT SUMMER'S END

AT summer's end, winds will complain,
As from the sullen North they trend,
And early dusk drift on the rain
At summer's end.
Light frosts the morn will then attend,
While birds bring to the sky a stain,
As to the South they swiftly bend.

But we can glimpse a solid gain,
Less grass to cut, less flies to rend
With swatter, so we feel no pain
At summer's end.

Thomas J. Murray.

Moonglow

By CHARLES FRANCIS COE

Author of "Mark," "The Ranch Beyond," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

BOB DERREL, a young Northerner, goes to visit his wartime "buddy," Tommy Low, in Savannah, and is so captivated by the romance and beauty of Moonglow, one of the finest of the old Georgia plantations, that he asks its owner, Colonel Nelson T. Gard, for a chance to try and rehabilitate the estate by farming it. When Tommy hears Bob's plan, he indignantly protests that the work is beneath Bob's dignity; and when Bob persists in his purpose, Tommy puts him out of his home, and tells his friends that he has severed relations with his erstwhile buddy. But Colonel Gard and his daughter, Mary, encourage Bob. However, by the next night, he realizes he will have a stiff fight, when he finds his tent destroyed, and discovers that John Spear, an elderly white man whom Colonel Gard permits to live at Moonglow, is a dangerous maniac. As he sits by his collapsed tent, and gazes at the red Savannah River in the flare of the moon, he feels it looks like blood!

CHAPTER VII.

ESPIONAGE.

THAT night passed slowly over the crippled tent, and its lone occupant. The moon had gained a brilliance that was eerie. Derrel never had seen such a light as it cast over the reaches of Moonglow. Neither had he ever heard before the series of tiny noises that multiplied into a tumult in his imagination.

Everything was new to him, from the strangeness of the world into which he had flung himself to the depths of the thoughts that routed sleep. Deep within him there was an anger steadily rising. The fount of the anger was the hurt which Tommy Low had caused him.

How was it possible that a man of Tommy's station in life, of Tommy's experience among men, could do the things which he had done? Was it possible to attribute it to pride?

Or was it that there was some consideration which Derrel himself had not discovered? Was it possible, for instance,

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 2.

that Tommy Low had suddenly become jealous in the knowledge that Derrel was to meet Miss Mary? In the throes of distorted imagination it was not difficult for Derrel to grasp at the wildest sort of straws.

Thought of the girl brought her permanently to his chaotic mind. He thrilled to the words of encouragement, and the handclasp she had given him. He saw again and again the sweetness of her smile, the peculiar beauty of her eyes, and the glory of her hair.

He told himself that he was very glad that it was not bobbed, not that he disliked bobbed hair, merely that a woman seemed so much more a woman to him with long hair. And when a man thought of a woman he wanted a real woman, not just a hybrid creature born a woman and doing her best to look like a man. Miss Mary was a lovely girl—exactly his kind of a girl, he knew.

He had stretched out on the canvas cot, and now attempted to move. The motion quickly apprised him of the bruised condition of his shoulder. As he rubbed the hurt his thoughts switched again, this time embracing the sordid figure of the old man of the ruins.

Between pricking up his ears at fancied new sounds of the night, and trying to draw from his blasted thoughts some degree of coherence, Derrel reached a mental state that precluded even thought of sleep. From the ill will of Tommy Low and this old recluse, John Spear, he turned for consolation to the friendliness of Miss Mary. Yes, and the horrible token of esteem which the negro Ephraim had laid at his very door!

He abhorred all creeping things. Thought of a snake or a crab set his nerves atwitter. It seemed a complex with him; even a garden spider roused in him the unpleasant feeling of repulsion. He imagined now that the slithering crabs had become sheltered under the tent platform, and shortly his body felt creepy, and he wondered if the horny claws of the creatures might find a way into the tent for them.

Just a few inches above his face stretched what remained of the white canvas. It seemed suddenly to stifle him. He groped for his high shoes, slipped them on over bare feet, then partially dressed and stepped out of doors. The leaves of the trees hung motionless, deathlike on the air. They stood out almost as plainly as in daylight. A perfect silence had settled over Moonglow. Not a light appeared through the maze of limbs and moss that hung between him and the slave huts.

He looked again at the river, and it was red. On the far shore, he wondered if it was South Carolina, the marsh grass was visible, and at its feet ran the shimmering oyster shells. The dismal reaches looked almost as though they had slipped their toes into a silver slipper, and were daintily tempting the brackish water to rise and dampen them.

There was not a thing in the world to fear; yet he was afraid. Something about the place seemed to whisper of strange things which he could not see. He had the feeling that just as soon as he turned his back in any direction some menacing, strange thing crept closer to him.

He fought to control the foolish notion. Now and then he shuffled his feet that he might scare away any snake which had drawn close. He promised himself that the very next morning he would equip himself with an automatic pistol. He wanted to smoke, but there was something about the squatty appearance of the ruined tent which kept him from entering to get the cigarettes he had left in his coat.

"A bad case of shakes—that's what I've got!" he growled to himself. "Think of Ephraim! He walks around through these fields and marshes night after night catching his rotten crabs! Why isn't he afraid?"

But the thought gave little consolation. Ephraim, he thought, carried the blood of men who had trampled the jungle for ages. Fear was a thing cultivated, he was sure. The inherent complexes that attack the developed mind were not to be compared with the stolid acceptances of the uncultured brain.

Thought, he had come to believe, was little more or less than quickened imagination. What Ephraim knew was simply what the five God-given senses showed him. There was no acquisition beyond this; no groping for hidden knowledge, for greater

learning. Small wonder that his own mind should apprehend that which could not occur to Ephraim's!

But there was little consolation in the thought, after all. He admitted a huge envy of Ephraim in that one respect. He would have given a great deal to be able to drop to the ground and sleep, the sleep of the babe in arms with never a thought of snakes, or weird, shapeless creatures of the moon-washed night!

Impelled by the fascination of repulsion, he walked slowly toward the river. He gained the bank, and rather praised his own unexpected courage in traveling thus far through the meadow grass. For some time he stood on the bank. The ancient piling of the lost wharves careening toward the sea in their losing fight with the ceaseless current appeared to him like ghosts of defeat.

Every nerve and sense was sharpened to acuteness by his own mental state as he started back toward the tent. He could see the squatty, patched affair clearly in the moonlight. It looked ghastly white.

When he was but a few yards from it he was certain that he had caught a glimpse of something that moved on the far side of the canvas. His heart throbbed so tremendously that he was certain it must throttle him. His knees seemed suddenly weak with the weight of his discovery. He tried to convince himself that it was all a trick of his own imagination, but the thing persisted in his mind. There was a moving object just beyond the tent.

With the absolute conviction that his eyes had not deceived him there came to him a sudden rise of courage. He discovered that his apprehensions were largely inspired by the intangible. Given a definite enemy he had little fear.

Using every precaution he crept closer, squatting low in the meadow grass, and doing all that he could to keep the tent between himself and the something which was lurking beyond it. In the course of a few minutes he gained the near side of the camp without again having seen what he knew was on the opposite side.

It all seemed a little ridiculous, after all. Here was a night illumined almost as day; there seemed no reason why he should not dart around the tent and satisfy himself of any presence there. But he was under the spell of the mystic; the ages seemed to be whispering to him; and the mansion, its blank face sprayed with brilliant moonlight, seemed to be watching the tableau with breathless interest.

Not a sound.

Once again Derrel crept forward, this time around the front of the tent. When he had gained a point of vantage he paused to explore with his eyes. Had the strange thing gone into the tent? Was it there now? It might even have been simple Ephraim bringing another gift of his hideous crabs! At the thought Derrel's nerves tautened, and he hoped devoutly that he was not even then near such an unwelcome gift.

A faint sound reached his ears, and attracted his attention to a not far distant stump. His teeth clicked tight at what he saw there. Seated on the stump, motionless except for a slight twitching of the shoulders as he laughed to himself, was the recluse of the ruins!

"John Spear!" Derrel muttered. "Spying on me—or planning another of his insane attacks." At sight of the aged man the pain in Derrel's shoulder seemed to be revived. He was really angry over the unwarranted attack, and felt that he had every right to an accounting; at least an explanation.

John Spear sat on the stump like some eerie creature of the night. His wrinkled face twisted into a leer that gave birth to the soft cackle of his laugh. His hair, Derrel saw, was white as snow except at the ends, and there it seemed to yellow as though with the age that afflicts parchment. His staff lay against his knees, and his tattered clothing hung about him in shapeless folds.

When he laughed his lips fell into a toothless cavern, and his emaciated shoulders danced gleefully. Now and then his gnarled fingers rose to his vast nose, and tweaked it nervously. Suddenly he clenched his fist again, and shook it malignantly at the silent tent. His sunken eyes glowed with a more virile hatred than Derrel ever before had seen.

"You and I are going to have a nice little talk, my fine old devil," Derrel muttered, at the same time flexing his muscles for a sudden dash toward his nocturnal visitor. "I hope that you don't make it necessary for me to lay hands on you—but we'll talk if I have to sit on you the whole time while we do!"

Then he leaped around the corner of the tent, and on a keen run swooped down upon the figure on the stump. He had a passing realization of motion before him; saw that John Spear had stood as erect as his gnarled bones ever permitted, and raised his hand in a threatening and somewhat frightened gesture.

But there came to him no sense of danger until the whole world about him seemed suddenly aflame. His head seemed rent asunder, and a million strokes of vivid lightning played immediately before his eyes.

He was barely conscious of a stunning blow that was followed by a strangely blissful feeling of repose. Hurt and unconsciousness blended so quickly that neither was poignant. Just a flash, a maze that blackened the world; then Derrel pitched forward, and the force of his fall left him motionless, lying there on the moon-washed earth.

When his eyes opened again it was to a quick recollection of what had happened. He knew that his coma had been of but a few seconds' duration. His hand went to his throbbing head, then he sat erect. Some hundred feet away shambled the figure of John Spear, his staff measuring his strides as it aided them, his stooped shoulders working convulsively as he sidled toward the safety of the mansion.

Derrel cursed vehemently, rose unsteadily to his feet, and attempted pursuit. But he was too dizzy, too weak and nauseated from the blow on the head he had so unexpectedly received.

"You old hellion!" he cried out after the fleeing man. "You'll account for all this soon enough!" Then he settled to his knees in the grass, his hands spread before him for support, and his head swaying back and forth in unsteady, pendulumlike gravitations.

Framed against the black entrance to the ruins stood John Spear. His horrible fist was raised again, and he hurled imprecations at Derrel. Every word was interspersed by his hollow, sepulchral, insane cackle. Suddenly his face twisted upward, and he spat vindictively toward the injured man. Then he faded into the silence of the ruins.

Two great hands seized upon Derrel, and lifted him from the ground as though he were a child. Struggling against them, Derrel twisted to face this new attacker. He looked up into the frightened face of Ephraim.

"Lawd Gawd!" the great negro muttered over lips that shook with a nameless terror. "He done been an' stoned you, mosser. Stoned you, he been!"

"Put me down, Ephraim," Derrel said thickly. "Put me down; I'm all right!"

But the negro seemed not to hear. Still carrying Derrel in his arms, he walked toward the remnant of the tent. His head turned over his shoulder frequently as he watched for a possible reappearance of John Spear. Fear lived in his eyes.

A feeling of impotence assailed Derrel. It was belittling in the extreme to feel himself carried thus. He felt almost on the verge of despair. This christening into a new world was mastering him completely. Deep in his heart he knew that he thanked God for the presence of Ephraim. Ephraim was strength, power, a living presence with which to commune.

"Why in hell didn't you chase that old fool, Ephraim!" he demanded.

"Chase him, mosser? Great Gawd! Chase dat man? Me been chase him?" The very thought seemed more than Ephraim could tolerate. He looked upon Derrel as he might have upon a man who had committed a mighty sacrilege.

"Of course, chase him!" Derrel repeated. "That was what I was doing when he hit me with that stone!"

With all the force of his utter simplicity Ephraim made answer:

"Yas, suh. You-all was been chasin' him, an' he smote you, mosser! He's a devil from de dep's of hell, him is, mosser. Gam'e! Ephraim ain't been chase him

none! Not Ephraim! Him speerit, mosser—evil speerit!"

CHAPTER VIII.

DOUBLE DAWN.

"PUT me down, Ephraim," Derrel insisted as they drew close to the tent, "I'm all right; I can walk."

The negro set him on his feet, and Derrel watched as the wide black hand cast aside the improvised flap of the tent and made way for him to enter. The bare feet of the colored man made a flabby tapping as they touched the boards of the floor.

"You-all been lay down, mosser," Ephraim suggested, "an' I been get water fo' wash yo' head."

Derrel ran his finger tips over the bruise on his head, and they came away damp with blood. He was certain that his injury amounted to nothing more than a good sound bump, with possibly a skin abrasion in addition, but he was compelled to admit a consuming weakness and something which verged upon the borders of uncontrollable nausea.

Ephraim went through the flap again, and Derrel heard him getting the bucket and starting for the spring. Half mechanically he found himself a cigarette and match, and drew no little comfort from the inhalations that followed. He knew that more than half his weakness was due to his own mental and nervous condition rather than the effects of his injury.

During Ephraim's absence he gritted his teeth, and fought for control. He must not let the great, childlike negro suspect his weakness, he knew. If he was to make use of Ephraim he must control his respect absolutely.

When the negro returned he entered the tent doubled low over the bucket, and then sat down beside the cot upon which Derrel stretched smoking.

"How long has this old man been acting this way, Eph?" Derrel asked, after wetting a cloth and pressing it against the injury on his head.

"I didn't never went fo' to find out, mosser," Ephraim said frankly.

"You what?"

"I didn't never went fo' to find out," the negro repeated, slowly.

"Why the devil do you say it that way?" Derrel grunted. "Why not just say that you don't know?"

"Yas, suh."

Derrel's head was pounding now, and he pressed the cooling cloth against it again, and for a moment gave up questioning Ephraim. Then, in desperation, he tried to boil things down to a plain basis of understanding:

"Well, you live here," he charged. "A moment ago you said that Spear was an evil spirit. Aren't you afraid of evil spirits?"

"Yas-s-s-s, suh!" Ephraim acknowledged emphatically.

"Aren't you afraid of him?"

"Him no evil spirit fo' niggers, mosser. Him been evil spirit fo' white folks, thasall."

"Oh," hopelessly, "then there is a difference in evil spirits, eh?"

"Yas, suh."

"But you run away when he hollers at you," Derrel reminded.

"Yas, suh."

"Why? If he won't hurt you, why do you run away?"

"Him not hurt nigger, mosser," Ephraim said in a tone that indicated a desire to assure himself rather than Derrel. "Him know nigger got to be cared for nice. Him tell nigger do his work an' keep quiet, then no hurt come."

"You don't know how long he's been here, Ephraim?"

"Always!" Ephraim said, apparently surprised at the ignorance of his new friend.

"Nonsense! The place was built nearly two hundred years ago!"

"John Spear slave boss for oldtime white, mosser," Ephraim explained elaborately.

A great light dawned in Derrel's thumping head. At one sudden flash he sensed the romance that was back of this maniac Spear. If the man had known the plantation during the days of slavery, then it was understandable why Colonel Gard took such pains to protect him from a world that had so suddenly changed for him.

But such a conclusion meant that John Spear must be a man at least eighty years old; and one, too, who had preserved himself remarkably well in spite of his present weird appearance. Ephraim seemed quite content to sit quiet as Derrel pondered upon this remarkable discovery.

"How old are you, Eph?" he asked.

"Dunno—don't been to make no diff'rence!"

Again there was silence for a long time. Derrel drew a world of consolation from having the negro there. The desolation of loneliness was dispelled by his presence. Instead of deadening his thoughts the blow on the head seemed to have revived them, stimulated them to unwonted activity.

Through the words of the colored man he established bases for several deductions which immediately rang true to his judgment. First, he seemed to see in the huge Ephraim a symbol of his entire race; Ephraim with his vast strength, his mighty physique, his naturally sunny temperament.

There he sat, now, his great legs seeming distorted beyond human endurance, his huge, flat feet stained with earth and the blood of harmless song birds, his eyes dilated with belief in spirits.

And John Spear?

An old overseer of slaves! A man steeped in the customs of his youth, bred to the belief that the colored man was a valuable possession for an individual rather than for a world! Small wonder that there was no contact between the two! Small wonder that John Spear awed Ephraim, and that Ephraim followed his natural impulse to laugh, and play, and sing, and let a world grow out and over and above him!

And Colonel Gard?

A gentleman in whose veins raced the blood of gentlemen! A man bred of the stock which carried a rifle during the Revolution, and which, through succeeding generations, has kept alive and animate the ideals of true Americanism! True, he had turned away from the agriculture of his forefathers, but who could blame him?

A nation had just taken from him that one factor which permitted his forefathers to plant! A war had settled upon the peaceful reaches of his land, and had left it charred and forsaken by helpless black men suddenly freed, and unaccustomed to the ways of freemen. During that debacle wise fathers had directed the steps of their sons along other lines.

So Colonel Gard was a lawyer instead of a planter. So Moonglow came to its pathetic end as a plantation! As Derrel reviewed it all in fevered thought, he caught some of the things about this new world which made it great. He saw where and why it contrasted with the spirit of the North.

It struck him forcibly that here was greater courage than the North had shown! Here was the courage which lived on after comrades had trampled it under foot! Here was a consecration which raised its head above the ashes of its own ideals, and lived on! Here was the spirit of sacrifice, of courage, of idealism which, over lands that had been desecrated, rose to face a blackened world, and illuminate it by the light of its own pure might.

Tommy Low?

Once he had heard Tommy say, "War is hell!" That had been in the days of the World War, when there was no North and South, when men of all kinds and creeds threw their lives into the balance for their common ideal. But Tommy gave the phrase a different value than other men. Tommy put into the words the ringing truth of the man who knows.

"Go ahead and fight," Tommy had laughingly charged his buddies. "I know a gent with stars on his collar who burned and pillaged his brethren, who wallowed a hungry army through a starving land of desolate womenfolks. He took the finest mansion in my home town for his headquarters, and then announced that war is hell!

"Hell is right, lads—damnable hell, and it kind of tickles me to see you all get a taste of it! Only just remember this: My daddy and my mammy could tell you more about war than Kaiser Bill ever suspected!"

And that night, when the regiment went over the top, Tommy Low had been in the van. "Come on, there, you New England

codfish!" he had yelled to Derrel. "There ain't any Blue and Gray now; it's just plain khaki!"

Lying there in his battered tent with the big colored man at his side, Derrel caught a new significance to it all. He readjusted his valuations and his perspective. Tommy Low had never forgotten the trials of his parents and grandparents; Colonel Gard had never forgotten; John Spear had never forgotten. How could they forget?

He felt suddenly a sense of pain. Had it been necessary that this fair land be blighted by the hand of power? Could not these glorious plantations, with their economic system of an era long gone, have been preserved? He felt that they could. He hated the thought of this passing world. In his ears seemed to rattle the muskets that battered into lingered death a land of sunshine, of peace, of spiritual and idealistic growth.

What a price the North had paid in victory! Greater, he felt, than the South in defeat! For the North of to-day had lost a great portion of its original Americanism. Not so the South. Witness the gentle chimes of the church; the cordiality of the people, the faith and trust and glory of an Anglo-Saxon people which refused to die!

Tommy Low? Had Tommy ruined the tent? Had Tommy laid the mailed fist in this fashion?

"I don't care a damn if he did?" Derrel muttered. "In his place I might have done as bad!"

"Yes, suh," Ephraim responded dutifully.

Derrel was jerked back into the mundane by the words of the colored man. He reached out and laid his hand on the vague shoulder that appeared beside him. Darkness had come, as he thought. And now the light of dawn was flushing the heavens, and the form of Ephraim loomed in the new light.

"It is nearly morning, Eph," Derrel said. "It was good of you to help me. I won't forget it."

"Yes, suh."

"And listen to this, Eph," Derrel persisted. "There is a world that you don't know anything about, a world that will be good to you, and teach you many things that will help you. I am going to show you that world. I am going to teach you to read, and to write, and you will work with me here. I will pay you more than you can make catching crabs from the river, you understand?"

"Yes, suh." Derrel purposely overlooked the note of dubious wonderment that tempered Ephraim's answer.

"You may not like it just at first, Eph, but you will later on! And remember this: there are no evil spirits. This John Spear is just a tired old man with much to be said in his favor, Eph. Come, we'll cook some breakfast and start our work in the fields. If you do well the rest of this week I'll buy you a watch just like the one you are looking at so intently."

"Yas-s-s-s, suh!" Ephraim grunted in high glee.

"Good. Get some wood for a fire in the stove, Eph. We'll be damn glad we met each other before many weeks pass!"

When the fire was burning Derrel discovered that he had failed to lay in a stock of sugar and coffee. He mentioned the fact rather profanely to Ephraim.

"I been git some at the end of lane, mosser," Ephraim said eagerly. "They's lil' sto' out there."

Derrel remembered that there was such a store, and drew from his pockets two quarters. He handed them to Ephraim, and told him to get a quarter's worth of coffee and a quarter's worth of sugar.

He followed the darky out of the tent, and the glorious morning dispelled his apprehensions of the night before. Birds were singing happily; a patch of peach blossoms a short distance away splashed the soft world with dainty color. The sun was rising, and its first rays were warm. Far in the distance a cock crowed. On a limb near at hand a mocking bird greeted the camper with a song that was limpid.

Ephraim started toward the lane, then paused and scratched his head ponderously.

"Hustle along there, Eph," Derrel called.

Ephraim turned, and walked slowly back to him. His face was set in a look of disappointment.

"Mosser," he said sorrowfully, "I been

want fo' to do good an' get dis watch, but a'ready I done fo'got which quarter is fo' de coffee an' which is fo' de sugar!"

CHAPTER IX.

FURROWS.

BREAKFAST was a somewhat subdued meal that morning.

Ephraim hurried back with the sugar and the coffee, and sat silently by as Derrel ate his meal. Then he squatted outside the tent, and partook of food for himself. As he did this Derrel was busy uncovering the tractor and plow. He folded the tarpaulin with care, and laid it away by a corner of the ruined tent.

Ephraim had gone to the spring for fresh water, and Derrel lighted a cigarette and smoked as the darky cleansed the dishes and stored them away. Shortly he queried Ephraim in the hope of learning something of the manner in which the attack on his property had been perpetrated.

"Eph," he began, "did you see anything of the man that cut down my tent?"

"No, suh."

"Know who it was, Eph?"

"No, suh."

"Didn't you see any folks out from the city while I was gone yesterday afternoon?"

"No, suh."

"That's queer. You spend most of your time around here."

"I didn't been see nobody, mosser."

When the dishes were finished Derrel rose and went to the sturdy little tractor.

"Come along, Eph," he challenged. "Here's where we start work. I wish you had the sense in that hard head of yours to know what a big thing this start is, Eph."

Ephraim threw back the hard head alluded to and roared forth his merriment. "I ain't been got much sense, mosser!" he shouted gleefully.

"We are starting a big farm, Eph," Derrel said. "Pretty soon we'll set out turnips, and I'll go away for a time, and you'll have to keep people away and see that no one hurts our fields. Then when I come back and the turnips grow we'll both get a lot of money."

"Yas-s-s-s, suh!" Ephraim chuckled. "Money, dat's de stuff, mosser!"

"But we'll have to work for it, Ephraim," Derrel said. "Nothing is any good that a man doesn't work for. Earned things are the ones that bring happiness."

Ephraim shook his head doubtfully, his white eyes roaming over the surrounding ground almost as though in search of an avenue of flight from the impending work.

Derrel cranked the tractor several times, and finally the motor caught, and the staccato report of its exhaust filled the air. All about them frightened birds took to wing. Ephraim gazed wide-eyed for a moment; then roared out his merriment again.

"Gam'e!" he chuckled. "Don't dat big boy chatter plenty, mosser?"

Derrel smiled and climbed onto the iron seat.

"Eph," he said rather impressively from his throne of toil, "I promised myself I'd break ground here to-day. I won't break that promise. This morning we are going to plow this field to the east; this afternoon I'll run into town and get another tent, if they have it. While I'm gone I want you to see that no one harms anything more. Stand by your guns, whether it be white man or black who comes along. I'll see that nothing happens to you for it, understand?"

"Yas. suh! Nobody ain't been gwine to mess round here while Effrum's here, mosser."

"And remember what I said; there are no evil spirits. Old John Spear is just a foolish old man, and if he comes around here you chase him away. Just watch for his stone throwing, that's all. He can't hurt you any other way."

"What time you goin' to went, mosser? You been back befo' dark?"

"Yes."

Ephraim showed relief. "Him been stay in house all day; only dark when him come out, mosser."

Then Derrel showed the negro how to attach the tow-bar of the plow, and how

to keep the blade above ground until they had reached the point where it was to work. Ephraim took the joy of a child with a new toy from his efforts about the machinery. Derrel saw that he was apt at learning. Shortly afterward he called a warning to his strange helper, and slipped the gear of the tractor in mesh. Slowly he engaged the clutch, and with a strain and jerk the machine started forward. The plow was of the sulky type, and Ephraim rode the seat. When it lurched into motion he tipped backward to a perilous angle, fought for balance, then shouted gleefully.

Faster they moved across the bumpy meadow, the grass and weeds whining a complaint against the destruction of the wide, cleated wheels. Derrel headed for a tract of meadow some fifteen or twenty acres in area, and which was bare of trees but thickly grown with the heavy marsh grass that lined the river. The soft air rattled the grass, and it sounded to his ears like a welcome challenge.

He chose his spot at a point lying at right angles to the bank of the stream, then twisted in his seat, and called to Ephraim to drop the blade of the plow into the ground.

Ephraim, a smile of delight wreathing his beaming face, seized the lever and dropped the blade.

The tractor was moving slowly, and the plow slid easily into the ground, all things considered. However, the first jolt of impact with the earth caught Ephraim quite unaware. He pitched forward onto the tow-bar, a cry of dismay crossing his lips.

Derrel slipped the clutch and jammed the brakes, and the train came to a sudden stop in ample time to prevent serious injury to the sprawling, helpless negro. The heavy grass, however, bit into Ephraim's face, and he scrambled to his feet somewhat scratched.

"Gam'e!" he cried in surprise. "Dis here hell contraption sho' 'nuff, mosser!"

"Nonsense!" Derrel snapped, his blue eyes dancing with delight at Ephraim's discomfiture. "Climb up on that seat and learn to sit it. Naturally the machine will slow up quickly when you drop the blade in the ground."

"No-o-o-o, suh!" Ephraim avowed vehemently. "Dis here nigger never got done like dat for no crab!"

Sensing that the darky had determined not to work on the plow, and realizing what a loss his services would be, Derrel met the problem with sharp authority.

"Get up on that plow, Eph," he ordered. "None of your damned nonsense with me!"

The darky looked at him a moment, then climbed gingerly into the seat. Something of pity for the huge man gripped Derrel. He recalled the kindnesses Ephraim had shown him the night before. Slipping to the ground, he went back and showed the frightened darky how to run the plow.

"This is a ceremony, Eph," he laughed. "See, we are breaking ground now. For the first time since the days of your grandfather this land is going to feel the bite of a plow, and you are taking a big part in the event."

Ephraim spat over the side of the plow, and his great hands gripped the drop-bar tensely. He had no liking for the ride ahead, no appreciation of the glory that his work inspired in others.

Derrel started again. The tractor tugged at the plow, the tow-bar vibrated with strain, then the entire equipage lurched forward into the trough of the first furrow the land had seen in two generations. The motor roared, the plow and tractor rocked violently, the thick grass lashed about under the wheels, and the soft earth rose over the plow blade and fell aside.

Man had returned to Moonglow.

For perhaps a hundred yards Derrel steered a straight course; then, with a warning to Ephraim, who rode the plow like a giant billikin, he turned sharply. Within twenty minutes of the start he was back at the starting point, and behind them they left a trail and a furrow which described a great square.

Inside that furrow they made a second, then a third. As they grew accustomed to the action of both machines, a greater facility came to them. Derrel kept a sharp watch for stumps or heavy rocks that might lie under the ground. However, none appeared to damage or delay them. Despite

its years of weed-grown inactivity, the ground responded to the plow without great difficulty.

Something of the might of the tractor impressed Ephraim. He had tried plowing by hand a great many times. In an hour they had accomplished more than he ever had done in a day. Before the sun reached a height that warmed its rays three of the furrows had been completed.

In the excitement and the joy of his achievement Derrel forgot the tent, and old John Spear, and the intangible fears of the night before. His hands grew sore from contact with the metal wheel they held. His shoulders and forearms began to feel the strain of steering, and his back showed a tendency to bend in an effort to shake off a steadily growing weariness; but he was happy, infinitely happy, and supremely confident.

The warmth of the sun, the brightness of the day, the peace and simplicity of the trees, the grass, the birds about them as they worked whispered to him that no more such nights would come to pass.

By noon eight furrows had been completed. The sound of the tractor had attracted several negroes from the slave huts, and their curiosity was manifest in their faces. Here Derrel learned something about Ephraim that stood him in good stead many times later. It was the vast pride the colored man felt in playing a part in this scene which so deeply interested his kind. Ephraim's vast chest seemed to have grown larger. He waved a magnanimous hand now and then as he jolted past watchers. It was this, Derrel felt, that kept the man steady in his seat and more than willing to work.

The sun had grown warm, and perspiration dotted the brow of the workers when Derrel snapped off the ignition switch and turned to smile back at Ephraim and wave a hand of appreciation toward the work which had been done.

Ephraim slid from his unsteady seat and worked toward Derrel.

"We've done a heap of work this morning, Eph," Derrel cried happily.

"She's a workin' hound, sho' 'nuff, mosser!" Ephraim acclaimed, obviously referring to the plow he had ridden. "But, Gam'e! She sho' kicks wuss'n any one-eyed mule west o' hell itself!" By way of emphasis, he placed a black hand upon that portion of his anatomy which had been most often kicked.

Derrel laughed genially and slapped Ephraim's shoulder.

"Your friends are jealous of you, Eph," he told him. "They sure know a smart nigger when they see one, eh?"

"Gam'e!" Ephraim responded joyfully. "Mosser, Effrum's sho' gwine mess up any nigger what fools about dis here critter!" He pointed at the machine, and Derrel sensed that he felt something of the pride of ownership.

"And don't be afraid of John Spear, or any other white man that comes out here," Derrel warned him.

"Dat ole devil? Mosser, I sho' tangle him up in de limbs o' de trees—but you-all be back here 'fo' dark, huh?"

"I'll be back before dark," Derrel agreed uneasily. "Now you go over and fix up something to eat, Eph. There are beans, bacon, eggs, biscuits, almost anything you want."

"Mosser, how 'bout some grits fo' a nigger what has worked plenty?"

"Fix them up, Ephraim. You know how. You'll find the stuff in the pile of supplies."

Laughing happily to himself, Ephraim went toward the tent. Derrel lifted the plow from the ground, locked the blade in place, and towed the machine clear of the furrow and back onto the meadow outside the square he had plowed. Then he struck a match, fired a brand, and touched the flames to the inner marsh grass.

He waited only to see that the fire had taken hold and was blazing well, then he ran along the outer edges of the plowed square and fired all sides. Before he had finished the flames were leaping and crackling, and all the negroes from the slave huts had gathered at a safe distance.

The roar of the fire was tremendous. Burning brands floated on heat waves into the blue, cloudless sky. Huge clouds of gray-black smoke billowed heavenward, and the acrid odor of burning grass filled

the air. Terrific heat radiated across the meadow, and the negroes fell back before it, their eyes distended in wonderment as to the purpose back of all they had seen this strange white man do.

Derrel went to the tent and dropped onto the ground. He lay stretched out, his eyes following the rolling clouds of smoke that belched from the burning meadow.

"Let the fire help us out, Eph," he grinned affably. "It will be easier to plow that field now, and the grass won't be growing up again with the turnips."

They ate ravenously. Ephraim showed himself to be a good plain cook, and it was plain food that Derrel craved—plain food and plenty of it. During the meal he rose. The flames in the square had burned until they met. At no point had they leaped across the broad plowed areas. In the distance loomed the buildings of Savannah. He was certain that many people in the town had seen the smoke, and wondered at its source.

Something of defiance came over him. He listened to the shrill whistle of a near-by locomotive in the railroad yards. Addressing himself to the city itself, he spoke.

"Go ahead," he muttered; "wonder about it all. I'll tell you what it is. It's a signal fire. It warns you that Moonglow has revived; that it will not be swallowed into the maw of brick and smoke that is creeping so rapidly toward it. It tells the world that I am fighting—and that I will go on fighting! I hope Miss Mary sees it—and understands!"

CHAPTER X.

COMBAT.

AFTER the meal Derrel brought water from the spring, and bathed and shaved himself. When he left the tent he saw that Ephraim was discoursing grandiosely to a gathering of negroes which surrounded the tractor and plow. He smiled understandingly, then cranked up the little car and headed for the city. He managed to get another tent, which they promised to deliver that afternoon. The clerk was curious about what had happened to the first one, but Derrel managed to evade his questions.

"There was some talk around town that the whole of Moonglow had burned up," the man said. "There sure was a big fire out thataway!"

"I burned off some marsh grass; that's all," Derrel managed.

"Tent git caught up, did it?"

"No; I just want another."

From that store Derrel went to the great fertilizer plant in the city, and made arrangements for delivery of four truckloads, at a time to be specified later. After that he made some small purchases such as an oil reading lamp, a suitable shaving mirror, and a watch like his own, which he intended dangling before Ephraim's eyes should the great negro tire of his arduous toil.

Through it all his mind reverted constantly to Tommy Low. What was the proper course for him to follow with reference to his erstwhile friend? To ignore the damage done might well be to flaunt cowardice and invite further attacks. To go direct to Tommy was certain to create dire unpleasantness.

He compromised by deciding to see Colonel Gard, and tell to him the whole story. Then, the colonel willing, he would post on the land a warning to trespassers, and even go so far as to purchase firearms for the protection of his property.

But when he reached the office of the colonel he found that once more he was out. Time had passed, and Derrel realized that the inconvenient Southern dinner hour had again deprived him of an interview. Doubtless the colonel would indulge in the usual siesta, too.

Keenly disappointed, Derrel went down the stairs to Bull Street, and sauntered through the sunny square toward his car. In the center of the square, by the monument, he stopped short. Coming toward him was Tommy Low.

They met. Low seemed on the point of passing his old friend, affecting not to have seen him, but Derrel prevented.

"Just a minute, Tommy," he said earnestly, "you and I have got to have a word."

Tommy sneered his answer: "Not so far as I am concerned, we haven't!"

"Then I'll take the responsibility," Derrel snapped, exerting all his will power to keep himself in hand. "I can tell you very frankly that it is no pleasure on my part!"

"Then it better be done off with! Heaven knows I don't want to be seen talking to you!"

Once again Low stepped aside as though to pass on. Derrel caught his arm, and immediately Tommy clenched his fist and knocked the hand aside.

"Don't touch me, you rotter!" he cried angrily. "What in hell do you mean?"

The blow had been anything but an easy one, and Derrel's hand tingled from it. His face went white, and his square jaw set, but he controlled himself, though his voice shook as he spoke.

"You are acting like an idiot," he said.

But Tommy Low interrupted him fiercely. "When an ignorant double-crosser like you takes to telling a gentleman how to act, it's high time for the world to start over!" he retorted. "What right have you stopping me on the street? I don't even recognize you!"

"I've the same right—or a damn sight better than you had in destroying the property of a man entirely within his rights!" Derrel said angrily. "And, by Heavens, Tommy Low, don't forget this for a single second; I intend protecting my property against such cheap vandalism as you effect! You keep off my land, hear?"

As he spoke he leaned forward, and their eyes glared into each other's. Tommy Low's fists were clenched; he worked his teeth back and forth in a grinding motion that set his jawbones rigidly. For perhaps five seconds they stood thus, then the Southerner seemed to realize that Derrel was placing a direct charge against him.

"What do you mean, you sneaking hound?" he snarled. "It's your style to resort to innuendoes; you haven't the manhood to say things that carry definite responsibility. I don't know what you're talking about!"

"You lie!" Derrel retorted hotly. "You broke up my tent; you hacked it into tattered ribbons."

He got no farther with his charges. The clenched fist of Tommy Low rose in a sweeping arc. It gained impetus with every inch that it traveled. Derrel did his best to avoid the attack, but the knuckles were not to be denied their reward. The fist struck him glancingly, and scraped painfully over his cheekbone, leaving in its wake a rapidly swelling bruise.

The force of the blow staggered him, and Tommy Low, a soft curse slipping from his lips, charged in to follow his advantage in the fight that had opened. Derrel met the charge with a wild sort of blow of his own. Fortunately, or otherwise, Tommy ran directly into Bob's fist.

He straightened under the impact, and Derrel saw that his lip was split and bleeding. However, Tommy recovered quickly, and charged again. This time they exchanged rapid blows, though neither reached a vital spot. There the fight ended.

The magic hand of the law, clothed in a blue coat and inspired by a legal and physical strength that was not to be denied, swooped down upon them.

"What'n'ell!" the officer snapped, as he seized a collar of each of the combatants, and yanked them apart. "Don't make me frail you with this club now! Why, Mr. Tommy!" he cried then in surprise. "What the devil! Did this man attack you?"

In spite of himself, Derrel laughed softly. How perfectly clear it all became suddenly! Tommy had but to announce the fact that he had been attacked, and he, Derrel, was fairly certain to repose on the chain gang for at least a month, and possibly more. That would mean the end of Moonglow for him.

"Oh, yes," he grunted bitterly, "I attacked him. Sneaked right up behind him, I did, and hit him when he wasn't looking!"

He looked at Tommy Low as he spoke, and saw that the officer had released him, and Tommy was glancing quickly about to see what sort of crowd had gathered.

"Go ahead, Tommy;" Derrel sneered. "Everybody around here is a Southerner; they won't give you away."

"This skunk didn't attack me, officer," Tommy said suddenly. "But you did! You broke up a chance I've been itching

for. The matter is one entirely between us. I promise I won't try to settle it in town next time."

"Right, Mr. Tommy." The officer grinned. "You," to Derrel, "that's your car over there, ain't it? Hop into it, and git out of sight right smart!"

Derrel was dazed by the sudden turn of affairs. He did not know whether he had shamed Tommy into the truth, or whether he could now believe that Tommy's promise not to finish the dispute "in town" might be taken as a threat to come to Moonglow, and battle uninterruptedly.

He crawled into the car, and started it. Traffic laws made it necessary for him to circle the little square in order to reach Broughton Street. As he drove around it he saw Tommy Low walking toward his own roadster. The officer was walking at his side, and Tommy was pressing a stained handkerchief against his battered lips. Derrel passed them without a sign.

As he turned again into Buell Street, after making the circle, he uttered a low cry of surprise. Standing on the sidewalk he saw Colonel Gard and Miss Mary. The girl's face was white, and set in a frightened look. The wrinkles about the colonel's eyes had disappeared, and in their stead were furrowed in his forehead. Derrel pressed on the accelerator without giving sign of having noticed them.

A sense of infinite shame gripped him. He would have given almost anything he owned if Miss Mary had not seen the childish exhibition between himself and Tommy Low. He was delighted when the traffic light at Buell and Broughton Street favored him. He swung the little car to the left, and headed for the road to Moonglow. Now and then he ran his fingers over his cheek, and wondered how badly Tommy's lips had been split.

At Moonglow he found that the new tent had been delivered, and that Sanders, of the Board of Trade, had paid him a visit, and was waiting for his return. The publicity man met him with a smile and handclasp.

"Thought you burned up the place this morning," he laughed. "What's the matter with your cheek? Get a bump, did you?"

"Yes, bumped it a little hard, too!" Derrel smiled.

"Too bad. Looks like you've been having a lot of fun out here, Derrel. What the devil happened to your tent?"

"Some one chopped it up plenty," Derrel said, a little bitterly. He was disappointed that the news should get out. Had Sanders postponed his visit one day—

"Well, I'll be damned!" Sanders grunted. "Niggers?"

"I haven't any idea," Derrel said after the faintest sort of pause.

"Well, we came out to take a few pictures, Derrel," Sanders said then with a crisp return to business. "I brought our photographer out here, but he seems to have run off somewhere." He raised his voice, and called sharply. Soon another man appeared, camera and tripod under his arm.

"This is Mr. Derrel, Mr. Crandall," Sanders introduced. "We better move snappy, or light 'll be gone. What we want are a few shots of the ruins, the trees, and you, Mr. Derrel, beside your tractor and plow. Then let us have a few days, and we'll submit our idea of a booklet for you!"

Derrel laughed. "Darned if you boys aren't on the job! I certainly appreciate—"

"Never mind that part," Sanders suggested genially. "Think of the light! We gotta shoot these pictures right now!"

Derrel glanced uncertainly at the new tent, and Sanders seemed to sense his thoughts.

"Come along with us for fifteen minutes, Derrel," he said. "Then we'll pitch in and have this new tent up for you in a matter of seconds! I want those pictures while the light is right."

The negroes who had delivered the tent welcomed a few more minutes of indolence, and Derrel went with Sanders and Crandall. They took several views of the most interesting points; then Derrel changed into overalls and high shoes, and posed for pictures of himself as they requested.

Crandall, always the photographer, raced across the fields toward the slave huts, and shortly returned with a good specimen of the turnip. This he hung over the radiator

cap of the tractor for one picture. In the next he had Derrel hold the vegetable in an attitude of inspection. After that the two men closed their machine, and aided in erecting the new tent.

Derrel found that he liked them both. Sanders was the more communicative of the two, and Derrel seemed in need of conversation. When they had completed the work the first shadows were appearing under the trees. Ephraim had not been present during the events of the late afternoon, and Derrel had begun to feel somewhat uneasy about him.

He appeared now, his broad face beaming. In his hands he held two marsh hens.

"I been fix 'em up, mosser," he chuckled. "Fix 'em up fo' grub!"

"What the devil are those things?" Derrel gasped, his gaze embracing the long necks and legs of the birds.

"Man alive!" Sanders grunted. "You've got guests for dinner! Those are marsh hens, and the way that big boy will fix 'em shames any food you ever ate before! Go to it, big bov—roast 'em in the ground, huh?"

Ephraim laughed gleefully, and set about preparing the birds. Sanders seated himself on the running board of the little car at Derrel's side. They both kindled smokes and asked questions about Bob's plans. Derrel answered frankly, and Sanders seemed to warm to his idea. They became friendly.

"What do you know about old John Spear?" Derrel ventured to ask shortly.

"Mighty little! I guess he's a plain nut," Sanders said. "They say he used to be an overseer when this place was going good. The war between the States meant everything to him, you see? Old man Gard, the one who owned the place then, went with the Confederacy and lost his life at Gettysburg.

"His wife didn't survive him long. When Sherman reached Savannah lots of people here were pretty scared, you know, especially folks outside the town. The women had heard a good deal that terrified them, and most of them without protection from their menfolk fled for the open.

"Mrs. Gard was one of them. She had been a sort of mother to the community here, and the women went to her for guidance. When the first foraging expedition struck Moonglow, the women fled for the woods and safety. Just about that time John Spear appeared here, having been sent back by the old owner to protect the women.

"The Lord only knows how he did it, but he got through. He trailed the women through slaves, and came upon them huddled into a rough camp about six miles down the river. Mrs. Gard was already sick, and he didn't dare tell her about her husband's death. But he got her back to Moonglow, and hid her away in the basement of her old home.

"Pneumonia settled upon her, and John Spear had her treated by a friendly doctor from town. During her sickness another expedition came and discovered them. Spear fought them off, though he was badly wounded in the foray. The excitement of the thing killed Mrs. Gard. She died in the basement of the mansion that had been hers.

"Spear waited, though he was badly hit and must have been suffering like hell, to bury his old mistress in the sunken gardens she had loved so well. Then he took to the woods, and lived through weeks of agony and delirium. Guess he went nutty then, Derrel; he came back here when the Yanks were gone, and here he's been ever since, growing a consuming hatred for all mankind, I guess!"

Derrel remained silent for a time; then blurted out: "These Southerners! Lord Almighty, what people! You a Southerner, Sanders?"

"Yes, sir. A Southerner, and damned proud of it, Derrel!"

"You've every right to be. I'm not. I'm a Northerner. But I'm a man! I bear no ill-will toward the South."

"Nor I toward the North!" Sanders hastened to say.

"Tell me, Sanders," Derrel pleaded. "Placed as I am, suppose that a Southerner attempted to interfere with your working of this place, as I am trying to do. What would you do? What would you say to him?"

"That's easy," Sanders said frankly. "I'd tell him that Moonglow was here years before I knew it, and that he had every chance to work it if he had the brains and nerve. I guess I know who you mean, and what you're driving at, Derrel. I couldn't help but hear. Tommy Low?"

"Right."

"If you want my advice," Sanders said frankly, at the same time rising and pointing at Ephraim preparing the feast he had remained over to enjoy, "I'd waste just enough time on him to tell him very plainly to go to hell!"

The two shook hands silently, their fingers white from the pressure of the clasp.

"God never made this country North and South, Sanders," Derrel grunted feelingly. "How can either of us be held accountable for the deeds of our forefathers?"

"We can't. We aren't. Go ahead, and grow your turnips. You'll get a square deal all the way, Derrel. But, for the sake of understanding, try to imagine your own mother running away from a horde from the South—you know, after all, we're just human."

"I know," Derrel agreed. "But there is this fact: I'm a Southerner by choice; you fellows are because you couldn't help it! Who speaks loudest, thus, for the Southland?"

"You'll win, Derrel," Sanders smiled. "You'll make a lot of friends. In all the wide, wide world there are no finer men than those whose fathers and grandfathers wore gray!"

"I know it; stop and think a minute, Sanders. Had our lots been cast a generation ago, we might well have met at bayonet point!"

"Right. But don't make the mistake of thinking that the feeling one still finds here and there is a hatred born of war among men. It isn't that. It's a resentment that flourished economically, Derrel. You broke this fair land in the war, broke it flat and completely. You took from it the only labor it had ever known, and made it necessary that men readjust their whole standard of commerce.

"Yet you left that useless labor to live upon a starved land; you taught it to yell freedom and equality. Freedom you gave it, but equality you denied it. With the flourish of a pen and the solemn waving of a flag you reversed an economic condition that had lived for ages, and upon which this land was built.

"Then you turned your backs, and left derelict people with a freedom that ruined them! What has freedom done for them? I charge you to look upon their homes, their standards. Compare their clothing, their food, their learning, their economic value, or their personal happiness with that of their slave forbears—you can see for yourself!"

"God help them!" Derrel muttered earnestly.

"He will have to!" Sanders growled. "They won't help themselves!"

"Wait, Sanders!" Derrel snapped. "Have you children? Do they seek learning? Do they enjoy school? How many would finish school if left to their own impulses? Think that over! These colored folks are children! They play like children! I've seen them in the North where standards give them not only a chance, but force them to avail themselves of it.

"There they show qualities that might amaze you. I claim that, whereas your irresponsible darky may be a petty stealer of food and trinkets, he is, at heart innately honest. I claim he is less criminal by nature than any race on earth. Treat him here as we treat him there, and he'll rise in two generations to an economic factor that will bring the South into its own commercially!

"It can't be done overnight—I make no plea for a personal relationship between white and black—I see only a vast potential value being cast aside, and a race of people with every qualification for service withering under an indolence that has become second nature to them.

"I see the devotion of Ephraim; his mighty strength, his intense friendliness, and easy good will toward all. He seems to me to typify his race, strength that is dormant, brain power that is as a field cast to the winds and weeds!

"I compare him and his traits to those of a million laborers from foreign fields.

All men hate work of the manual sort. In the North we are being swamped in a wave of crime, and ninety per cent of that crime is perpetrated by men qualified only for manual toil, but who refuse to do it, who rebel against labor even as does your darky here.

"But your darky doesn't turn to crime. He just deteriorates. He smiles his way through his lot, and steals only that which he wants to eat, or wear. God knows he is a better citizen than the other! God knows commerce needs honesty!"

Derrel had flushed as he talked. Sanders watched him earnestly for a moment. Then he slapped him on the shoulder, and laughed softly.

"You've got ideas, Derrel," he acknowledged. "I'll be interested in seeing you work them out your own way. We'll hustle these pictures through for you. And now let's go tear up that marsh hen feast. You're about to learn something about food!"

CHAPTER XI.

CAPTURE.

THE marsh hen feast proved to be all that Sanders had claimed for it. It seemed to Derrel that never had he eaten such glorious food. Ephraim presided over the affair with the hand of a master. The meat fairly melted in their mouths.

"How did you come to get these birds, Eph?" Derrel asked.

"Been show mosser how good they is," the darky laughed. "Me, I been work fo' mosser now, huh? I get watch, mebbe?"

"You bet! I bought the watch to-day, Eph; all you need do is earn it. See?" He took the watch from his clothing, and showed the negro what it looked like. "Here, strap it around your arm, and see how it will look!"

Ephraim took the watch gingerly, and strapped it about his huge arm. Derrel had to punch an extra hole in the strap in order to fasten it, so thick was the wrist it encircled.

"Gam'e!" Ephraim chortled, his eyes dilated in contemplating the bauble. Then he held it awkwardly at his ear, and listened in rapt delight to its ticking. Derrel turned to Sanders.

"Ephraim and I are going to make a bargain. When Eph shows me he can work right, and make folks see that it pays he gets this fine watch in addition to his pay."

"Yas, suh!" Ephraim fairly howled. "Gam'e! When dem niggers sees Ef'rum wid dat clickin' time runner hooked onto his arm—Gam'e! Dem niggers be plumb green, I mean!"

Derrel unfastened the strap, and slipped the watch into his pocket again. Ephraim rubbed his vast palms together in a gesture of delight. When the three white men had seated themselves Crandall spoke up:

"You sure know how to handle a colored boy, Mr. Derrel," he smiled. "Ephraim will tote the mansion from here to hell and back, brick by brick, just to get that watch!"

"Damned if he knows them!" Sanders said slowly. "Damned if he does! Once Ephraim gets the watch he'll do no work for six months! He'll decide that he's a special nigger, and therefore above work!"

They laughed and talked for half an hour, during which darkness fell about them and the quiet of night silenced the creatures of the trees.

"An eerie sort of spot this, at night," Sanders ventured. "Too darned quiet for a city man!"

"The moon will shine soon," Derrel said hopefully. "I would suggest that you remain to see it. Finest moonlight I ever saw! The place is well named."

"Nope!" Sanders grunted. "You single men are blessed in some ways. Right now my wife is fretting and fuming, I'll bet! And when I do get home she'll be sore as a chafed finger if I don't eat the supper she's prepared!"

He rose, stepped on his cigarette, and turned toward the car he had driven out. Crandall joined him, and added his thanks and handshake.

"We'll be seeing you in a day or so, Derrel," Sanders promised. "Mebbe tomorrow. Crandall will run these pictures ahead of everything else, eh, Jim?"

"You bet!"

"Mighty good of you fellows," Derrel told them. "Come out any time; always welcome!"

In the silence following their departure, Derrel seated himself and smoked another cigarette. Presently Ephraim appeared, and stood before him.

"Mosser," the darky said, "yo' sho' nuff gwine gimme de ticker?"

"You're going to earn it, Eph," Derrel qualified. "I'll give it to you when you have shown me you mean to work for me, and for yourself."

"Mosser tellin' Ef'rum de truf now? No been joke wid Ef'rum?"

"I'll always tell you the truth, Eph," Derrel promised solemnly. "Don't ever forget that. I'll never joke you, or lie to you as long as I live!"

Ephraim shook his head in satisfaction. "Mosser ain't been lie to Ef'rum befo'?"

"I have never lied to you, Eph—and I never will!"

Without a word the darky went back to the tent, and busied himself about duties of cleaning and righting the place. Derrel smiled, and wondered if Sanders's idea of the thing would develop into the correct one after all.

His cigarette done, Derrel walked to the plowed field, and tossed the tarpaulins over the tractor and plow. As he worked the moon rose, and once again Moonglow was a flood of silver grandeur. The trailing moss of its trees shimmered in the liquid light. Shortly a thrasher roused itself, and sang sweetly. The song fitted into Derrel's mood somehow. He took it as a welcome to the moon, and he was very certain that the moon was welcome to him as well as to the feathered throat which greeted it.

Through the clear night came again the sound of the chimes. Derrel loved them. He decided that they were in the steeple of St. John's Episcopal Church, and he recalled that edifice, facing the beautiful square, both its sidewalks opening onto streets. There was an indescribable charm about this country!

The voices of the darkies in the slave huts reached him. Brooding they were, soft, eerie, melodious. He wondered if the shrill piping and malignant curses of John Spear again would drive the singers to silence. He began to see now why Colonel Gard permitted Spear such liberties.

The story about Spear which Sanders had related went deep into Derrel's heart. Here in the mystic silence of Moonglow, where all the hardships and woes of that desecrating war had taken place, it was easier to grasp such significances.

He imagined Spear as a young man, a young man who had dared the enemies lines from the love and loyalty in his heart! He almost heard the clatter of muskets as Spear fought off the attack that threatened his mistress, his own heart deadened by the secret it held, the knowledge that the owner of Moonglow was dead!

Then, in the sunken gardens, he saw the wounded hero burying his mistress in the ground she had loved, saw him stagger away from what had been his life to take refuge in the woods, and let his wounds eat the flesh and spirit of him into a twisted body and mind. Derrel could see how the great heart of the man had wizened under the blasts of hate, and death, and suffering. War!

"War is hell!"

The words rang in his ears. Once again he saw Tommy Low starting on that stretch of No Man's Land, heard him say the words, and caught the deeper meaning with which he empowered them.

Near at hand, their crumbling walls a silver ruin in the clear moonlight, loomed the sunken gardens. There slept the body of the mistress of Moonglow—and over her sacred grave squirmed rattlesnakes! Were they—and justly—the living spirit of hate that must linger in the hearts of her descendants?

Did Miss Mary feel as Tommy Low, as John Spear?

He gained his tent with such thoughts gripping his mind. There he sat outside again, smoking once more. In the distance the negroes still sang. Ephraim had disappeared again. Derrel hoped that he had not gone for another offering of crabs!

Suddenly, from the very gardens of which Derrel was thinking, there came a scream that was wild, raw, uncontrolled

completely. It was like the maddened shriek of the wounded puma, or the weird wail of the trapped wildcat. Derrel leaped to his feet. The singing at the slave huts ceased as if by magic.

"Spear again!" Derrel muttered, his heart throbbing violently, and his mouth gone suddenly dry with the suddenness of the terrible outburst. The screams continued. The wildest rage crept into their notes; they rose and fell, then rose again, and remained at crescendo unbelievably long.

Derrel's first thought was that the aged man had entered the garden, and been struck by a serpent. These cries were for that reason; perhaps he knew that, at last, his voyages into the weed-grown deathtrap had come to their inevitable end, and his hatred of the serpent was being thus vented.

Seizing a heavy splinter of wood which Ephraim had cut for kindling, Derrel went toward the entrance to the gardens. He was forcing himself every step. The screams of rage and impotence continued. Derrel thanked fortune for the high leather shoes he had put on for the pictures Sanders had taken. At least, he thought, his ankles and calves were protected against the snakes if he were forced to enter the garden to save the old man.

His mind was working fast. Once he reached Spear, he must carry him out, start the car, and race him to the nearest doctor. He began wishing devoutly for Ephraim.

He stepped gingerly onto the brick steps to the garden ruins. In the moonlight he could locate the point whence came the terrible sounds. His eye caught motion. As he watched, the form of John Spear was lifted some seven feet from the ground. There it lay, in midair, supported by some power unseen in the shadow of the wall. Then it began to come toward him.

Derrel wet his lips, fighting back a tendency to turn tail and run from this, the strangest sight he ever had seen. But he stood his ground, clutching tight his heavy stick. Here, he told himself, was a cheap trick of John Spear's to frighten him away!

But no!

The support upon which the fighting form of John Spear rode, now became visible. Two mighty arms were holding him up. Black arms, they were, the arms of Ephraim!

Derrel met them at the steps, Spear still screaming and kicking impotently.

"Mosser never lie to Ef'rum!" the negro shouted above the other man's screams. "Ef'rum know dat so be no been feared no mo'. Mosser want fo' to catch ole John Spear—Ef'rum find him plenty!"

"Take him to the tent, Ephraim," Derrel ordered quickly. "The Lord knows I'm glad to have a talk with him! Take him to the tent!"

Ephraim lowered the fighting form, and clutched him tightly under one arm. Then he went quickly over the tattered clothing, and from various pockets emptied half a dozen heavy, round stones.

"A-a-a-a-a-a-a!" Spear snarled over his sunken lips, his eyes alive with hate. "A-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a!" Then he spat upon Derrel, and it took all of the darky's strength to bring him under control once more, and carry him toward the tent.

"Careful, Ephraim," Derrel warned, "don't hurt him!"

Inside the tent Spear suddenly silenced. His eyes still burned feverishly, and his lips were drawn back into a snarl that was exactly like that of a wild beast.

"I want to be your friend, John Spear," Derrel hastened to say. "Your real friend!"

"A-a-a-a-a!" Spear snarled again. "The curse o' hell on ye! Yuh damned, woman-killin' Yankee!"

CHAPTER XII.

COMPACT.

IT was some time before Derrel could quiet the old man sufficiently to hold conversation with him. He fought against every advance made and, though he seemed fully to realize his helplessness at the hands of Ephraim, he showed no fear of consequences which might accrue from his various tirades.

But Derrel was patient. When, finally, John Spear had struck a morose silence, he began questioning him:

"See here, old man," he said easily. "Already you have banged me up on two occasions, and I haven't done a blessed thing to you! Once you hit my shoulder with one of your devilish stones, and next you nearly broke my head! I haven't got over those two things yet!

"If I'm going to be target for your stones I want to know something about the reason for it all—I want to know, for the first thing, what you and Tommy Low have been saying to each other?"

"A-a-a-a-a-a! Tommy Low? Tommy Low? A-a-a-a-a-a—another rotten Yankee perhaps?"

"You mean to say that you don't know Tommy Low?"

"I know nobody!"

"I'm not surprised, Spear!" Derrell grunted frankly. "I'll swear our acquaintance is not one I'd care to cultivate!"

"A-a-a-a-a!"

"Why have you attacked me, Spear?" Derrel demanded. "You're going to tell me, or I'll have the county police on you for assault with intent to kill! I'm going to put a stop to this business once and for all!"

"I tole ye to git!" Spear screamed at him. "I tole ye to git—an' you didn't!"

"For that reason you stoned me?"

"A-a-a-a-a-a-a!"

Derrel took the weird snarl of the old man to indicate an affirmative answer.

"I see," he said slowly, "and by what right do you run a man off this property? Do you own it, Spear?"

"A fool owns it! A damn coward owns it!"

"Yet you live on his bounty, John Spear!" Derrel charged. "Had he the notion he would run you off the place in three minutes!"

"A-a-a-a-a! Had he the notion, say you? A-a-a-a-a! Once he tried to build me a house here, that's what he did! Once he sent a man, and told me that he would make me a home here where I played and worked as a boy! Where I worked, too, for the last of the Gards befo' the war!"

"The last of the Gards?" Derrel quizzed. "There is still Colonel Gard, and his beautiful daughter—"

"A-a-a-a-a-a-a!" Spear snarled venomously. "They are not Gards! They are weeds that grew from wind-blown seed! They are weak, cowards, cheats—a-a-a-a-a-a!"

"Colonel Gard is one of the finest men I've ever known!" Derrel retorted hotly. "I felt at first that I dealt with a plain maniac when I met you. I see different now! I deal with a hateful old devil! I deal with the sort of snake that strikes the hand which protects it!

"Very well, Spear, let me tell you this: Keep away from me. Keep away from this tent. Keep away from the property that I put under cultivation. Don't ever again throw a stone at me, understand? Don't ever bother the colored folks I shall put to work in the fields here. I don't ever want to see you spying about the tent at night, either!

"You are an old man, and I a young one—but there is a limit to human endurance, and I have no idea of letting you run wild at my expense. I would like to be your friend, but you won't let me!"

"Friend!" Spear cackled. "Friend! John Spear with a friend? A-a-a-a-a-a! You would threaten me, Yankee? You would make me afraid?" The old body writhed into a stance more erect than Derrel believed possible, and into the mad eyes of the aged man grew a new light, a light of defiance.

"John Spear has never been afraid, damn ye!" he cried. "Old, say ye? An old man? Lay hand on me, Yankee! Lay hand on me! Never yet have I feared the clutch of a Yankee dog!"

Something of infinite pity and indubitable admiration for the aged fighter swept over Derrel. It seemed to him that by some magic power he was swept back to the years that had been kind to this old man. He seemed to see him in a gray uniform, his body erect and his eyes clear.

"God help me, John Spear!" he said earnestly. "I would be your friend. I would offer my hand, and my help! I've seen something of fighting, but damned if I don't tremble at the thought of facing you in your prime—I know something of your record!"

There was that in the words and tone used which must have impressed any one. Bob Derrel was perilously close to the breaking point. His sleepless night, his labor in the fields, his encounter with Tommy Low, all had contributed to a tensity of nerve that quickened his imagination.

Spear remained erect looking strangely powerful and dignified in his tattered rags. The tremble seemed to have left his gnarled hands. His eyes pierced those of Derrel, and the younger man sensed something of the burning rage and taut nerves which had raised him to present heights. There must, he felt, be a reaction. Surely no man as aged as this could stand such a strain for long.

"I must keep away?" he repeated, almost as though to himself. "A-a-a-a-a-a! Fool Yankee! Woman-killer!"

John Spear's body begun to tremble slightly, and Derrel was afraid that the old man must collapse. He stepped forward a little as though to catch the man in his arms.

"Keep off! Git!" Spear screamed. "You'd be my friend? A-a-a-a-a! I'll try you Yankee. You warn me away! I warn you away, too! I warn you away from the sunken gardens! I promise to keep away from you if you promise John Spear that, damn ye!"

It flashed into Derrel's mind that here was a last stand again against desecration of that which John Spear felt was holiest of all earthly things, the grave of his mistress. Here was more mystery! How would Colonel Gard permit the remains of his own mother to lie in the tangle of the gardens, and under the wriggling bodies of the rattlesnakes which Derrel knew to be there?

But Colonel Gard's laxity had nothing to do with the last stand of this valiant defender! Colonel Gard could in no wise detract from the heroic services which this emaciated John Spear had rendered his family for two generations! There was naught in Derrel's heart, but devout admiration.

"I promise, John Spear!" he said sincerely. "Promise that I will not enter the sunken gardens that are so dear to you. Those shall be yours completely; all that I ask are the open fields, and the right to feel my property safe, and my person immune from those devilish stones of yours!"

"A-a-a-a-a!" Spear snarled again. "Immunity! The Yankee begs of an old man not to hurt him! That's like a Yankee! But I promise—I promise—Yankee! So long as you keep your word I keep mine!"

Turning with a certain majesty of air, John Spear started toward the tent flap. Ephraim rose, as though to interfere, but Derrel waved him back. Spear managed the first few steps fairly well, then Derrel realized that, in his capture, the aged man had lost his indispensable staff. Quickly he stepped forward, and slipped his hand under Spear's arm to aid him.

Like a flash the gnarled fist of the old man whipped out, the knuckles striking Derrel's face stingingly. For a fraction of a second the young man's clenched fist threatened. His face was white with anger.

"A-a-a-a-a!" Spear screamed. "You'd touch me? Befoul me with the hand of a Yankee woman-killer?"

"You damned old fool!" Derrel snapped. "You're as crazy as a bed-bug! Go on! Get out! Just remember your promise, that's all!"

Cackling softly to himself Spear reached the tent flap. His twisted hand, knuckles raised with age, and doubtless the swelling of rheumatism, gripped the tent pole as he prepared to step into the night. But he misjudged the height of the floor which Derrel had erected against snakes.

A low cry crossed Derrel's lips as he saw the old man fall. He was too late to prevent the fall, and the efforts of John Spear were unavailing. The reaction which Derrel had feared came over him suddenly. It weakened the old muscles and struck palsy into the unsteady feet, which were more faltering than ever without the staff to aid them.

When he reached John Spear the man was crumpled on the ground. He was muttering something incoherently, and now and then he cackled softly. Derrel reached down and gathered the withered body into his arms. Spear did not object. His eyes

were open, and in the clear moonlight they struck Derrel as being too bright. John Spear seemed not to realize that which was taking place around him.

"Eph," Derrel called sharply, "show me where this man lives in the old mansion. I'm going to take him there; there is no way to care for him here, and I think he's badly hurt!"

Silently, his bare feet swishing through the grass audibly, Ephraim led the way toward the mansion. Outside the building he stopped and pointed.

"Under de porch, mosser," he indicated. "I ain't gwine no fudder, mosser!"

Attributing the refusal to proceed to more of Ephraim's ridiculous superstitions, Derrel lunged on. He did not fear the mansion, now that he was entering it at ground level. There was no floorless room through which he might pitch to the basement. Spear was still mumbling to himself, and Derrel groped on in the hope that the man's living quarters would quickly disclose themselves.

The moonlight seeped through glassless windows and doorless entryways. The littered ground floor of the ruin was amply light. In such a chaos of vanishing treasure the slightest note of modernity was outstanding at a glance. Thus Derrel had little difficulty in lugging his burden to a door which stood erect, and which obviously led to repaired rooms at the corner of the mansion.

The door opened at his touch, but he could see little now that the moonlight was cut off. The place was damp, damp with the lingering chill of rains that were ages old, damp with the tears of disintegrations. Derrel shuddered a little, groped carefully into the room, and was fortunate in finding a bed. He laid his burden down, and immediately struck a match.

Through the chinks in his fingers the yellow light flared about the room. Vast shadows appeared. Hanging before him Derrel saw a large painting; it was of a woman dressed in crinoline. In the center of the room stood a rough table, and there Derrel spied an oil lamp, which he quickly lighted.

For some reason unknown to himself he closed the door they had entered, and dropped a heavy bar in place. Then he bent over John Spear, and looked anxiously into the terrible face. The eyes were closed now, the breathing was regular. Derrel felt that no bones had been broken in the fall, because, had that been the case, John Spear must have been prodded to consciousness by the pain of his journey to the mansion.

Derrel stole a look about the room. The only thing in the place which fascinated him was the painting. He looked more closely now, and could see that it was a duplicate of one which appeared in the library of the Gard home in Savannah. He assumed that it was a likeness of the colonel's mother, of the sacred mistress whom John Spear had served when her husband offered his life at Gettysburg.

In another part of the room there stood an ancient musket, and hanging on the wall over Spear's bed was the cap of a Confederate sergeant, while crossed above that sacred relic were the epaulettes of a captain in the Confederate Army. The picture impressed itself upon Derrel's mind indelibly. It struck him as lucid, strikingly allegorical. The cap was Spear's. The epaulettes were those of Colonel Gard's father!

"He promised!" John Spear mumbled suddenly. "Damned Yankee promised! Won't come near you, Missy Mary—let you sleep just like I put you away. I'll kill him, Missy Mary, if he lied! I'll kill him, as sure as fate!"

Derrel was struck helpless by the semiconscious words. His eyes ran again to the painting. There were the same gracious and unfathomable eyes of the Miss Mary he knew! The same sweet mouth, the glorious hair! And Spear called this woman who lived only in oil "Missy Mary." Surely that was a darky name of affection! A name that was endowed in the spirit of love that still actuated John Spear.

"God help you, old man!" Derrel muttered tenderly. "How little the world knows! How little the history books tell! How vast a thing is love!"

His eyes dimmed with tears. "There is more to all this than appears at the sur-

face!" he told himself. "What a people! Have no fear, John Spear; your secret shall be guarded, and the sacred ground your love has hallowed will never know disturbance at my hand!"

He saw a bucket of water in the corner of the room. He went to it, dipped his handkerchief, and placed the cooling liquid on John Spear's forehead. Presently Spear roused, his sharp eyes piercing into those of Derrel's.

"I fell!" he muttered uncertainly. "I stumbled off that damn tent, and struck my head against the pole! A-a-a-a-a! You toted me over here—I'm where I belong. But I hate ye, damn ye! I hate ye like hell, woman-killer! Git! Git! I'll keep my promise, you keep yours!"

"I want to help you, John Spear," Derrel pleaded. "Please let me be your friend! Please do! God knows we both need a friend!"

"No! God help me! No!" Spear shrieked malignantly. "You got no right here—git! You promised to keep out of here!"

"But I only carried you here when you were hurt!"

"Git! Git! A curse o' hell on ye!" Spear cried, struggling to rise. As he reached an upright position his threshing arms disturbed his pillow. There fell to the floor from beneath it a large Bible, its edges yellow with age. The book sprawled open on the floor, and from it fell a piece of cloth.

Spear fought like a tiger to retrieve it, then to hide it from Derrel's eyes. Because he realized that there was something which the aged man held sacred, Derrel looked at the table. He could not avoid seeing there a bill from a supply store in Savannah. It was a memorandum bill, and it ordered delivery to John Spear of a weekly order, though the charge had been sent direct to Colonel Gard!

"Git!" Spear was screaming. "Damn ye! Git!"

Seeing that the man had recovered, and fearing that anything that he attempted to do would revert against his welfare, Derrel retreated through the door, partially closing it after him. Out into the ruins he went, making a straight line for the nearest way to the clean night outside.

But as he went there seemed to linger before his eyes the painting he had seen. It appeared almost like a wraith of the ruins. He dashed his hand across his brow in an effort to dispel the figment. It persisted, much as brilliant light often imprints its reflection upon the retina after the eye is closed.

And then he knew why; the dress in that painting matched exactly the cloth which had fallen from John Spear's Bible!

Out in the open air the rustle of the palmetto leaves was like that of crinoline.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

KIDDING

KID, and the world kids with you; grouch, and it hits the trail; sing it a song and it kids you along, but it harks not to your wail. Toss it a joke, and it giggles; gloom, and it coldly sneers; it will greet your chaff with a roaring laugh, but it will not heed your tears.

Grin, and the world is friendly; grieve, and it freezes up; it will quaff your wine and pronounce it "fine!" but it spurns your wormwood cup. Whistle a jig, and it dances to the lilt of your music gay; but mourn, and it turns to its own concerns, while alone you go your way!

Will Thomas Withrow.

The Clean Up

By TOM CURRY

MAYBE you think a dick's life is all cream cheese and dates; but it's not. A flatfoot has to jump around lively, and at times is just as much of a lock-step man as any stone-cracker on an Alabama road. He does what he's told, and if he don't he's given such a razz his eardrums burst.

"Stone bars do not a penitentiary make nor iron bars a cell." The guy who said that knew what he was talking about. There's times when a dick wishes he was sitting pretty inside of four good walls, with nothing to do but eat, sleep, and maybe break up a few thousand-ton bowlders during the day.

If the chief says go out and get that guy with the funny ears, dead or alive—why, you got to do it, dead or alive.

Most dicks get used to this and don't kick. If they are successful they get paid their dying wage, and if they ain't, why they get paid out just the same.

All this happened in a burg just big enough to call its chief of police commissioner. There had been a crime wave which had proved a wash-out for the old chief; a new czar was in charge and he intended cleaning up all the crooked gangs in the city, so he starts first with the police force.

I was a first-grade dick, and was retained on my good looks and fair reputation; but a lot of the boys fell by the wayside. The idea was that nobody should eat if he didn't work, which surprised most of the boys.

They took it easy, only putting in sixteen or seventeen hours a day as a rule. Most of the men fired set up agencies or got 'em jobs where they were paid real cash instead of given honorary mention on a tombstone.

In spite of the new regulation forbidding crime, the crooks were rampant as ever. All of us who had been retained humped ourselves to please the new boss, Mr. Wilbur Gregg, and after awhile he stopped talking to the press and looked around.

How old Softy Harris ever managed to escape that first frenzied firing I can't imagine. Maybe he was so close that Gregg didn't see him. Harris was working in the office at headquarters as sub-assistant recorder of personalities—in other words,

he did nothing all day but sit around and look wise.

He was a scrawny old goofus, with white hair and worried, washed-out blue eyes. He had about six million wrinkles, and drawn cheeks. But he still had some muscle in that arm of his.

"Say, Charlie," says he to me, when the new commish had exploded on the scene, "I'm getting worried. D' you suppose Mr. Gregg will drop me? I'm past fifty, y' know, and—"

"Hey," I butts in. "Past fifty? Past ninety, you mean."

"No, sir," says Harris emphatically. "I'm fifty-five if I'm a day."

I let the old bird have his say. He'd been a harness-bull for forty years or so, and had done pretty well, making ordinary arrests and keeping the peace of his beat.

Rondman, the old boss, had asked him if he didn't want to be retired on half pay, and poor Harris nearly died. He'd been on the force so long that if he couldn't report at a station house every morning he'd have thought he was dead and in heaven.

He begged and pleaded till Rondman brought him into the office, gave him a pen and a chair, and forgot about him. He was a member of the detective division, why, I don't know; probably because there was no vacancy on the clerical force just then. Anyway, he wasn't a clerk.

So you see how the old bird stood when Gregg took charge. First thing a new commish does is to blow loud blasts on his bugle and proceed to clean out the cobwebs in his predecessor's barn.

But, as I said, Harris in some way escaped the new commish's eagle eye. It was not until Gregg had been in charge for about a month that the old man, drawing a second-grade dick's pay and doing little but write his name on his envelope, came to his majesty's notice.

"What's this old bird Harris good for, anyway?" says Gregg to me, in the short, snappy way he liked to think was detectivish. I guess he must have read a good many detective stories, for he was always gnawing some mysterious bone.

"Why, he's one of the best men in the division, Mr. Gregg," says I.

"How old is he? Why hasn't he been retired before?"

"Oh, he's not so ancient. The records say he's past fifty, I believe," says I. All Gregg needed to do to get the dope on the old boy was to look up the record, of course. "But what about this Slim Sammy Broughton case? Shall I go on giving all my time to it?"

But the stall didn't block.

"I wish to speak of the man Harris," says Gregg, raising his eyebrows. "He is enrolled as a member of the detective division. Does he make any arrests? Is he a good detective?"

It was this annoying habit of harrying us like we were school kids that got us worked up.

"Why, yes," says I, lying for the old boy's sake. "He's a good dick. He's been on the force for so many years I don't believe he'd know what to do with himself if he was dropped. He—"

"Now, now, can the sob stuff," says Gregg. "What do you think this is, a court room?"

Truth to tell, the new commish hadn't been doing as well as had been promised by the administration. The crooks were just as brazen, and his *Sherlock Holmes* methods weren't working so well.

That was why he was trying to "clean up" again, for the benefit of the newspapers. The reason he'd been chosen was that crime was rampant in the old burg, stricter police work had been demanded, and Gregg had sworn he was the man to supply it.

"Call Harris," says the boss, frowning mightily. "I want to have a talk with him—so long as you say he's such a good detective."

I went out feeling sort of cold in the shoes—Gregg was kind of sore at me because I hadn't been able to pick up a badly wanted man. I found the old boy doddering around in the lieutenant's office.

"Eh? You say the chief wants me?" says he, looking scared. "What's he want?"

"I dunno," says I. "But he thinks you're a great detective. Do your best, and I'll back you up."

"I don't like to lie—" he began, but I pushed him into his highness's boudoir.

"Well, Harris," says Gregg, with his favorite frown—the one they photographed so much. "Johnson tells me that you are an extremely efficient detective. Why have you not been busy as have the other men? I have had no report from you since I took charge."

"Well, sir—" begins the old boy.

"He ain't used to writing reports," says I, quickly. "He's been working along quietly, giving us boys advice."

"From now on, you come to me for advice," says Gregg. "Harris, I believe that you are getting too old for the department—why have you not been retired on pension?"

"I don't want to quit, chief," says the old bird, looking worried to death. "I—"

"He's still good for a couple of hundred years, Mr. Gregg," says I.

"H'm." You could see Gregg smelled a rat. "I shall see what I want to do about your case, Harris," says he sternly. "You may go."

I hustled out and told all the boys I could find to boom Harris to the skies.

II.

I HAD been busy looking for a man known as Slim Sammy Broughton, alias Jack Harte, alias other things. He was a box-opener by trade. Two months before he had ducked the damper, opened a jewelry store can, killed two watchmen so dead they had to be buried, and got away with one hundred thousand dollars' worth of cash and jewels.

I had been hunting him high and low; requests for help had been sent to other cities, and all the boys were on the lookout for him. However, we hadn't been able to find hide nor hair of him—no word, no squealers, nothing.

It was two days later that Harris was again called into Gregg's office.

"Harris," says the chief coldly, "I am going to retire you from the force—"

"Oh, no," gasps the old boy.

"— unless you can prove to me that you are still competent," finishes Gregg. "I will give you a chance, and if you make good I will admit that I am wrong and will retain you."

"What have I got to do?" asks Harris eagerly.

"I have been told by every man I have questioned," says Gregg, with a nasty smile, "that you are an exceedingly fine detective, in spite of the records. I want you to prove this unqualified assertion. I will give you one week in which to work your wonder—bring Slim Sammy Broughton to me within that time, or find where he is hiding, and I will admit your claim. Otherwise, you will be retired on a patrolman's half pay."

Bam! The old boy sort of staggered when he heard this. I was shocked too, for it was an impossible task Gregg was handing the poor old goofus. If none of the division had been able to pick up Broughton, how could this old wreck, near-sighted and weak-kneed, ever find him?

But there was nothing to do about it. I wheeled Harris out before he could knock over the beans, and told the boys in the office what had happened.

"Now it's up to us, men," says I. "The man who finds Broughton must turn him over to Harris and let him bring him in. Be careful and follow 'em, in case Broughton is found—Slim's a tough customer, Harris, and you must let us know immediately if you discover him."

"A fat chance we've got of smelling Broughton out in a week," says Mackenzie, one of the boys. "Why, he's probably a thousand miles away by this time."

"You'll have to go out and stall along that you're hunting up Broughton," says I to Harris, who was almost blubbering. "Go down in the Tenderloin, but keep away from the tough joints; we don't want to have to come down and scrape your face off some barroom floor. We'll help you out, Harris, so buck up."

"What's this Broughton look like?" asks the old boy, perking up at our promises.

I take him to the gallery and open the files. "Here he is," says I.

The old man got up close so's he could see; I had to read most of the record to him because he was so near-sighted and the print was so small.

"'Slim Sammy Broughton, alias Jack Harte, alias William Slode, *et cetera*. Arrested on a charge of larceny June 16th, 1916—paroled. Arrested for violation of parole, July 5th, 1916. One year in Elmira. Burglary, second degree, July 17th, 1917," and so on and so on. "Escaped from State Penitentiary April 14th, 1926. Wanted for the murder of David Pellman and Ernest Smythe, May 12th, 1926. Dangerous, carries .45 calibre automatic pistol, will use it." There were a lot more details, and pictures of Broughton, a slim, evil-eyed tomato with a criminal's mug.

"I'll find him," says Harris, drawing such a deep breath that his lungs crackled. "I've got my old gun here, and I'm going out and find him. I bet he's right here in this town."

"I doubt it," says I. "But go ahead. Make a stab at it, and we'll help you." I was glad to see the old boy so perked up.

The newspapers had been calling for action; we'd made a good many arrests, but fast as we brought 'em in new offenders appeared.

Old Harris goes out into the dusk. It was time for me to go off duty; but I felt worried about the old boy, so I thought I'd follow him and see he didn't get hurt. So off I go, shadowing him in the best manner.

The old boy heads straight for the toughest part of the town. He stopped and spoke to the harness-bull on the beat, and then he goes to Rainbow Vaum's, the worst joint in town, where many a good dick had lost an ear.

It was shut up from time to time, but Vaum always managed to squirm out of it with a fine, and open the joint again. He was a fence and suspected of harboring criminals.

The old boy arrived at Vaum's at dusk. I sneaked to a side window on the alleyway and peeked in. The window was open, and I could hear and see him.

The old man, looking like some kind of retired banker, goes straight up to the bar and orders a drink. He got it, too, with no questions asked.

"Say," I heard him pipe a moment later, "I'm a detective from police headquarters, and I'm looking for a man by the name of Broughton—Slim Broughton. I'm going to get him too. Is he here?"

Well, now, I ask you!

Vaum, big, husky, and broad-faced, grinned at the old man. He thought he was joking. But he says:

"Why you old bum, I don't harbor criminals. What's the matter with you, you white-headed old roue?"

"Who you got in that back room?" says Harris, ignoring the insults.

"What's that to you?" growls Vaum.

"I'll show you," yells Harris, and without pausing an instant he ran at the door which led to the rear.

I saw Vaum frantically pressing an alarm button with his foot—it was to warn some one inside—and then I saw old Harris crash up against that door and knock it in.

I leaped in the window and covered Vaum and his men. The lights were out in the back room, and the most frightful rumpus was going on.

Three seconds later, when I managed to back over there, covering Vaum and his cronies, the old boy comes staggering out, dragging a slim guy with a patch over one eye.

"I got him," he crows. "Lie down, you dirty crook!"

If this was detective work, I'm a sea-going roller-skate.

III.

It wasn't Slim Broughton, by any means—but it was a man we wanted. I recognized him.

"You're under arrest, Margolies," says I, keeping an eye on Vaum and Co. "There is a couple of little charges you have to answer to. Come along."

The old boy had already subdued the prisoner; with me in reserve, we hustled Margolies into a cab and took him to headquarters.

Now, our lockup was a couple of blocks down the street, in the City Hall basement. It was used by the city as a jail for petty offenders, as well as to hold major criminals for trial. The cops and dicks kept their men there, and the police judges sent their prisoners to it for any term up to six months.

We questioned Margolies, and he confessed to two stickups, and then we handed him over to the jail officials to be held until court convened in the morning.

We were always apprised of the fact when any major-offense crook was brought in by a harness bull, so we could go down and look him over; but when a petty offender, a drunk, disorderly, and so on, was brought in, he was stuck away without a word to us. There were so many arrests for misdemeanors that it would have taken us all our time checking up on the petty offenders.

Now, after Harris's prisoner had been stuck away, I congratulated the old man, who didn't seem much excited.

"Pretty work," says I. "We've had our hooks out for Margolies for some time."

"Oh," says he. "I don't care about him. I have to get Slim Sam or I'll lose my job. He's the one I'm interested in."

Well, there wasn't much to say about that, so I trotted home to get some sleep. The old man had been out for sixteen hours or so, so he went home too.

But next morning he started out bright and early. We didn't hear from him all day. I was beginning to get worried about him, when the phone rang. I answered.

"Hello. Is that you, Charlie?" says the cracked voice of old Softy Harris. "Well, I've got the man the boss wants so much. I'm bringing him in."

"Atta boy," I yelled. "Hey, Harris has got Slim Broughton," I says, turning to Mackenzie and a couple of others who were in the office at the time.

"You want some help?" I asked over the phone; but the old boy had rung off.

"Say, I bet Slim socks him over the coco while he's trying to bring him in," says Mackenzie.

I was afraid of that myself; but twenty minutes later a cab draws up in front of headquarters, and the old man gets down, yanks out a guy along with him, and brings him right in. He had cuffs on the crook.

"Here he is, boys," crows Harris, slapping the prisoner on the back.

Well, this bend was about eight feet high and fat as a walrus's grandfather. He had a flat nose and light hair, and he looked no more like Slim Broughton than a ripe watermelon.

"This ain't Broughton," says Mackenzie. "You poor old coot, what's the matter with you? Where did you pick up this tomato?"

"Ain't this Broughton?" says Harris, his face falling. "I dug him out of a shanty down across the tracks. He's been up to something; he put up a terrible battle."

We tried to question the big guy, but he was sulky and wouldn't talk. We massaged him a bit, but he wouldn't come across. He kept saying: "I ain't done nuttin'."

Presently in walks Al Jimson, an old-timer who knew every crook in the State.

"Why, hello, Mugger?" says he, going up to the prisoner. "Where the hell 've you been hiding, anyway?"

"Howdy, Al," says Mugger Keeler, one of the toughest prowlers in the country.

"I want you for six little jobs," says Jimson. "How come you to pay us this delightful visit?"

Mugger cussed some, but he came across. The old man had brought in another rough guy.

IV.

We said nothing this time. If Harris could handle a guy like Mugger, why, he wasn't in much danger. We let him go out again that evening, and about 10 P.M., after I'd gone off duty, he rings up and asks for the wagon.

"I got a whole load of prisoners, and I suspect every one of 'em's Slim Broughton," says the old bird.

Well, sir, I heard about it from a couple of the prisoners the next morning. Harris had walked into a joint across the tracks and announced he was a detective. Nobody would believe him, he looked so old and decrepit.

He argued for a long time, and showed his badge; even then the Fagin of the joint wouldn't believe him. It was a fence's den, and there were about ten crooks in back waiting to hock their loot.

Pretty soon Harris gets impatient and socks the Fagin one in the snoot and rushed through the house. He found eight men,

whom he arrested on suspicion of their being Slim Broughton. A harness bull helped him out. The other two crooks managed to escape.

The old bird had to draw his gun, he told us, to keep the gang quiet. But he brought eight of 'em in. They were all suspects and wanted men.

It got to be a standing joke. The old boy didn't sleep but a few hours a day; the rest of the time he spent combing the city for Slim Broughton.

"How in hell do you ever nose out these joints?" I asked him, after he had brought in about fifty prisoners, and every one of them an A-1 proposition.

"Why," says he, "I know every harness bull in the city, and I just go to the man on the beat, ask him where the toughest joint in the vicinity is, get him to stand by while I go in and tell 'em I'm a detective. Then I raid the place."

That was his system. Nobody would believe he was a dick when he walked in, and the consequence was that when he started his rough stuff they were unprepared.

The newspapers were beginning to sit up and look alive, and were praising Gregg for his methods; the chief felt pretty good, and even commended Harris for his work. However, the Slim Broughton question was still in the air; everybody wanted to know why he wasn't apprehended. There were a couple of papers hostile to the administration, and they kept the subject alive.

"Harris," Gregg says, when the old boy had worked steadily for six days, "I want you to get Broughton. You have only twenty-four hours in which to do it."

"Chief," says the old boy, "I will bring him in, if I have to pinch every crook in the city. Give me just a day or two more."

"Not another minute," says Gregg firmly.

You see, Gregg didn't like to admit he was wrong; yet it was the old bird who was making his "system" successful.

Well, crime went on; but the old boy brought in so many rough characters you'd wonder there would be any more crooks left on the job. For the last twenty-four hours of his week he staged a grand round-up, and brought in twenty prisoners, most of 'em yeggs, dips and stick-up men.

"I can't find him," says the old boy to Gregg, when his time was up. "I'm beginning to think he ain't in the city."

"Nonsense," said the commish. "He's hiding here where he can be helped by his friends. Harris, I'm beginning to think you should be retired."

It was a dirty trick of Gregg to play the old boy the way he was; he hemmed and hawed about retiring him, when as a matter of fact he wouldn't have let him go then for a million bucks. He just wanted him to keep on bringing in crooks.

"Well, I tell you what I will do," says Gregg at last. "I'll give you another week. If by the end of that time you have not brought in Broughton, I will be forced to put you on the pension list."

Harris thanked him profusely. He sighed with relief, and immediately went out with a fresh burst of youthful enthusiasm and brought in a gang of dips he found in some shanty on the outskirts of the town.

He was no more a detective than a police dog is; what he did was to pick up all the evil-looking or suspicious characters he saw.

He made one or two mistakes, but they weren't serious. He was so near-sighted, though, that it's a wonder he didn't cop the mayor and bring him in.

His pals, the harness bulls, helped him out a lot. They were always willing to give us a word; but they would work around and smell out joints for the old boy.

You see, he was the grand old man of the force with them. He worked in their way, which was to rush up and sock a suspect on the jaw, and they just loved it. Most of the dicks had done their bits on the beat, but a plainclothes man works differently once he's called a dick.

By the end of the second week the crooks began to get scared. The old boy raided every suspected house and den in town, and nobody was safe. There was always a harness bull backing him up, and as for gangs, Harris simply ate 'em up.

He was knocked around some and got a couple of bullets through his old hide, but that didn't seem to discourage him. He was too old to bleed much, I guess.

The jail was getting overcrowded, with prisoners who were awaiting trial. Most of 'em had been brought in by Harris. There was a year's work for the D. A. and his men, and the old boy was dick in so many cases he wouldn't have time to testify in 'em all, not if he took every hour of the twenty-four for six months. That didn't worry him, however.

"I only got two days more," says he feverishly. "I got to find Broughton, or I'll be retired."

Gregg had softened up quite a bit toward us all, and especially toward old Harris. The newspapers were booming him and saying what a clean-up he was making. It was true, too; the crooks were thinning out and a great many of 'em left town.

Most of the boys sat back amazed and stood ready to do checking up, and so on, on the prisoners Harris brought in. Our little city's crime wave had about petered out by the end of the second week of the old boy's action. He had just brought in a couple of stickup men who'd shot a victim two days before.

They had been sort of tough and had tried to bore the old man, and he'd had to wing one of 'em. We got confessions from them.

It was the last day of the old boy's clean-up. If he didn't have Broughton by four o'clock that afternoon Gregg would fire him. At least, so Harris thought.

He was utterly worn out, the poor old beggar. He sank down in my chair and puffed away, his old eyes tired and most out. One arm was bandaged and he had a terrible bump over his right eye where some murderer had socked him.

"I'm through, Charlie," says he, pitifully. "I've only got two hours, and I've cleaned every joint in town. There's nothing for me to do but go home and die."

"Like hell," says I indignantly. "Gregg won't fire you now—but if he does, every one of us will quit. Isn't that so, boys?"

The boys all swore they would. After the work the old man had done, it would have been a dirty shame not to give him what he wanted—just permission to stay as a member of the force till he popped off.

Then Gregg comes in, with a frown on his brow.

"The mayor has just phoned me that the City Hall jail is so overcrowded that it 'll be necessary to move some prisoners to another building. He doesn't want to take a chance on keeping any major offenders in the warehouse that's to be converted into a lock-up; so he wants to move some petty offenders who have only a few weeks to serve.

"They are all doing time for misdemeanors—drunks, petty thieves, and so on—and are not dangerous at all. However, you must handle them carefully. There will be forty of them, and he wants me to send a detail of men to help transfer them. Mackenzie, Johnson, Williams, and—well, Harris, you might just as well go with them. It may be your last official act. It's two o'clock now."

Gregg said this very coldly. I didn't think he would let Harris go; there were still one or two crooks left in the city; but then, you never could tell. He might be going to retire Harris just to show he meant what he said.

Six of us go out, the old man tottering along after us. We went down to the City Hall, and downstairs to the block of cells in the rear of the building where the petty offenders were kept.

They were a brow-beaten lot, most of 'em, having come up against a harness-bull in action. Drunks, sneak thieves, wife-beaters—all of 'em doing thirty days to six months.

It was very seldom we dicks went to that block of cells, for, as a rule, we were not interested in petty offenders. We had grander troubles.

We started dragging out the men, and handcuffing 'em to hold 'em together on the wagons we had. They were to be taken to a vacant warehouse down the block, where they would be held under guard until their terms expired.

Harris had brought in so many prisoners the jail almost burst. It was an unprecedented situation.

About the eighth cell, we had trouble getting the prisoner to stand up. He was lying, face down, on his cot, and refused to rise when ordered. Harris was right behind me. The other boys were a cell or two up the line.

"Get up, you rotten tomato," says I, grabbing him by the collar.

I yanked the prisoner to his feet, and he stood there, his face averted.

"Get out—" I began, and then I let out a yell.

"Well, I'll be damned!" says I.

"What's the matter?" says Harris, who had been looking sort of dreamy and far-off while the proceedings were going on. I suppose he was thinking of how he would not be a detective by that time to-morrow.

I was too stunned to speak, as the full significance of it all burst over me.

For the man in the cell, standing with his back to me now, with sullen head bent low, was none other than Slim Sammy Broughton, the man we'd been after for so long.

"Look, Harris," I yelled. "Here's Slim Sam Broughton, or I'm a seagoing crab!"

"What!" says the old man with a gasp.

It was Broughton, all right. He started cursing at us when we mentioned his name, and made a pass at me. He was wanted for murder, you'll remember, and getting caught was no light matter. We had the goods on him.

I thought the old man was going to croak when he realized that at last Broughton was found.

I looked up the record of the prisoner—Jackson, his name was on the lieutenant's book. He had been arrested by a harness-bull the day after the murder.

He had thrown a brick through a plate-glass window and had been given three months by a magistrate. He had sworn to a false name, of course, and had been stuck away in as pretty a hiding place as can be imagined.

I kicked myself all around the place for not having remembered that dodge. It's an old one.

A wanted man will travel to some near-by burg, and get taken up on a petty charge. He stays snugly in a cell until the hue and cry dies down, when he is released, gets the plunder he has cached somewhere, and lives high till he is ready to commit his next crime.

Broughton knew our system, saw its possibilities, and knowing that he would be closely pursued and probably taken, worked the trick right under our noses. He didn't even have to leave town.

Well, Gregg was highly pleased. He commended the old man.

"From now on," says the boss, "you are my aid."

And he kept Harris by him after that. But to get back to the moment.

"You've earned the right to take Broughton to Gregg," says I. "If it hadn't been for you, we'd never have come down here. Go ahead."

The old man collared Broughton and started him off.

"Say," says Mackenzie, anxiously. "Ain't Slim liable to escape? He may crack the old boy on the dome and slip away."

"If he does," says I, "may I never see another day!"

Well, I've seen several days since then; the old boy had Broughton in Gregg's office inside of five minutes.

"Ah! I've got you at last, Broughton," says Gregg, when told who it was.

THE END

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QUEEN'S PAWN

By GORDON STILES

will be next week's Complete Novelette, a story that starts rather quietly ashore but runs into the most exciting passages afloat that modern fiction can furnish.

The Black Past

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "The Big Voice," "The Print of a French Heel," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PARTS I and II.

ARTHUR PRIDE, a junior Y. M. C. A. executive, saves Carolus Mordant, financier, from the attack of a crank, and is rewarded with a well-paid position as bodyguard of the millionaire, although ostensibly he is a confidential secretary. A girl calling herself Miss Mayfield attempts acquaintanceship with Arthur that she may get inside information on his employer for the band of crooks with which she is associated. George Folsom, another of Mordant's executives, cuts in on a date that Arthur has with Miss Mayfield, is believed by her to be a Mordant spy, and is blackjacked and shanghaied on a tanker. Arthur, unaware of Miss Mayfield's real object, continues to meet the girl, and falls half in love with her. He contrasts her apparent ladylike traits with those of Mordant's flapper daughter, who, though he does not know it, is an innocent girl pretending to be hard-boiled. Jameson, chief of Miss Mayfield's gang and an arch enemy of Mordant, gains access to the latter's office and threatens the magnate's life unless a large sum is forthcoming. Arthur gets a good look at the blackmailer, and determines to protect his employer at the risk of his own life, if necessary.

CHAPTER XIV *(Continued).*

CONCERNING A MILLION DOLLARS.

THE George Folsom affair had worried the other George; being a schemer himself he was wary of plots even when none was in sight, and the manner in which Mordant's secretary had thrust himself into his business indicated to him that Mordant was alert and taking the offensive. Before he proceeded upon the original lines he had to know whether such was the case or if what appeared to be a suspicious incident were just a coincidence.

His call had been for the purpose of settling that matter, and he had not touched upon it until he was about to exit. The evident surprise of the financier that the nonappearance of Folsom had anything to do with the intrigues of Jameson was all he

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needed. It was possible that Folsom had been making some investigations of his own, but certainly not at the instigation of Carolus Mordant.

As Jameson waited for an elevator, two clerks in different sections of the big office rose from their desks, put on their hats and sauntered toward him; although he did not appear to observe their approach he was entirely cognizant of it, had expected something of the sort. Mordant, of course, had a system of signals with his push buttons. These two men were detectives and they had been instructed to follow him.

He stepped quietly into an elevator, saw them thrust themselves in with him, although the car was quite crowded, and paid no further attention to them as the car shot downward.

He paused in the main hall on his way to the exit to speak to a young man who was loitering there, then left the building and turned up Broadway. He walked two blocks to a subway entrance, looked back and saw that he was not followed, then descended and took an express train uptown.

One of the detectives had been stopped just outside the Mordant building by a man who wanted to know how to get to Cedar Street.

The person insisted upon full directions, and grasped the arm of the operator when he tried to get away. Exasperated, the man told him and shook himself free, but Jameson was lost in the crowd.

The second shadow had gone half a block when a man carelessly swinging a cane knocked off his hat. As the detective stooped for it, the individual who had caused the accident also tried to retrieve it; they collided violently and both sat on the sidewalk.

Muttering apologies, the cane-wielder climbed to his feet and vanished, while the sleuth was left completely off the trail. Jameson had not bearded the lion in his den without making his preparations.

To Mordant, who was wondering how he could lay his hands on a million dollars cash, the visit of Jameson with a brazen demand for a second million was tremendously annoying. That he had more respect for his bold visitor than his manner to him had indicated was proved when he answered a telephone call a moment later as follows:

"No, I do not care to go into the Glomont affair at this time. I am aware that it is a good proposition. If no other arrangements are made I may be interested again in a month."

And having cast aside the biggest bargain in several years, he then continued his figuring for the purpose of getting hold of a million in a few days.

Between the Glomont Motor Company and his own life he considered the latter by far the best buy; however he was far from considering accepting the proposal of George Jameson—that gentleman would have to play his trumps.

CHAPTER XV.

ARTHUR PRIDE STEPS OUT.

ARTHUR PRIDE was dining with Miss Mayfield in the main dining room of the Hotel Moderne. As it was the first time that he had entertained a young lady at dinner in a hotel, and as this young lady happened to be the most charming he had ever met in his life, he was so happy that he was incoherent.

Lulu wore a dainty little black dress with old lace at the throat and sleeves, which fitted tightly at the waist, then became quite voluminous and stopped only six inches from the floor.

As she had spent an hour letting out the bottom of the dress, which was built to display her kneecaps, she was pleased at his admiration of it, although she would not have liked to be seen in it by anybody else.

She was deliberate in speech; in fact, she had modeled herself upon Elsie Ferguson, and she was thoroughly enjoying her impersonation of that actress in "The Grand Duchess and the Waiter."

She thought she was good, and she was good; had George Folsom, who was busy at that moment trying to clean up a foul bunk on the tanker Merton, where he was expecting to sleep after the unhappiest day in his life, been able to look upon the dainty,

demure and modest little woman who was hanging wide-eyed upon the remarks of Arthur Pride, he would have had difficulty in recognizing the damsel who had decoyed him out the back way at "Tony's."

It was a simple matter for Lulu to deceive Arthur; that serious-minded and simple young man was intoxicated by her presence and, assuming that she was as much interested in literature as himself, had started immediately to discuss it, and his tongue was so loose it hung in the middle. Before the roast he had referred to Huxley, Walter Pater, Pepys, Boswell, Addison and Sterne, names which had never been placed in electric lights on Broadway, and accordingly quite unknown to Lulu.

But all that Arthur needed was an audience. A nod and a smile would start him going when he seemed about to run down.

"Yes, indeed." "Of course, you are right." "Do you really think so?" "I agree with you perfectly."

These were her total contributions to the table conversation. Her face was set primly, her smile was one of graciousness and poise, her eyes were fixed upon his in admiration, which was not feigned, by the way.

While one would suppose that a girl of her type would be bored and annoyed at a man who talked continuously of things unknown, who did not flirt, made no effort to step on her foot, or to touch her hand as it lay on the table, who did not even know that you can't take an up-to-date girl to dinner in New York without producing a flask, it happened that Lulu was most favorably impressed.

He was a nice, clean, almost handsome boy, he was so thoroughly in earnest and he surely must be tremendously well educated to talk for a whole hour about things that she did not know existed.

Lulu found herself wishing that she was the kind of girl that Arthur supposed her to be; she told herself savagely that she had never had a chance, that she had always wanted to be a lady; if she had not lost her parents and been compelled to shift for herself at thirteen, if she had gone to good schools and college, and had not been forced to associate with toughs and crooks and tenderloin hangers-on, she could have held her own with Arthur Pride.

The girl she was pretending to be tonight was the real Lulu, the other one was the result of circumstances over which she had no control. Her personality had caught Arthur Pride. Without make-up or artifice the real Lulu had appealed to this cultured young man. How she would love to sit with him night after night, and let him educate her.

Her friend Pete would have roared with laughter if he had known what was passing through the mind of the snappy little Lulu.

George Jameson might not have laughed so loud. He was a strange person, a terrifying person, Jameson. She thought he was probably as well educated as Arthur, but he was a crook, the brains of a gang of which she was an humble member.

Jameson could pass as a gentleman. He was sort of contemptuous of his associates and companions, yet he could be very cruel; she knew he was utterly unscrupulous, she liked him, and was afraid of him.

A woman has many of the qualities of a chameleon. She is an actress on the stage and off. If she loves a man she tries to find out what kind of a woman he thinks she is and then she makes an effort to play that woman, only in moments of excitement or rage does she drop the mask.

While Lulu was not in love with Arthur, she liked him tremendously. Folsom, who spoke her language, who understood her at a glance, had made no impression upon her.

George said that she must be nice to Arthur, make him fall in love with her. If she wanted to marry him it would be all right. Well, it would not be hard to be nice to him, but she never would dare to marry him. Suppose some day he stopped talking and asked her questions about these strange matters he took it for granted she knew as well as he did. Wouldn't it be terrible?

After the dinner he suggested a motion picture theater where they sat in the darkness and looked at a stupid film, Arthur, so thrilled by the experience that he did not know what the picture was about, stealing a look at her pure little profile; Lulu wondering if it would be a false move to

slip her little hand into his. She always held hands in the movies, that was what they were for.

When it was all over, they had an ice cream soda then Arthur conducted her back to the hotel. They walked.

She promised to meet him the next night, or the night after, if his duties permitted. They shook hands, and parted.

Lulu cried for half an hour after she went to bed; for the first time in years she had spent an evening with a man who treated her with proper respect, who had not told bad stories, or assumed that she liked liquor, or made improper suggestions.

She had supposed that she would have a terrible time; instead she had enjoyed herself. During the movie the poor child had been thinking how nice it would be to live in the suburbs in a little house with a man like that, have him talk to her about literature all the time so that finally she would be very cultured; and they would have babies. Instead she was setting some kind of a trap for him. She was a decoy and when he found out he would hate her.

Arthur went home in a state of bliss. What a delightful girl, so beautiful, yet so intelligent! If he had been placed on a witness stand he would have been willing to swear that they had exchanged ideas upon Walter Pater and Pepys and Boswell and Huxley, and that she had made important contributions to the discussion.

He let himself into the Mordant house about eleven thirty and found the library on the second floor brightly illuminated. Mordant was not in the room, but Mrs. Mordant was present, and so was Grace, who hailed him as a break in a monotonous evening.

"Come in, Mr. Pride," she called. "Mother wants to meet you."

Mrs. Mordant was a ponderous person in black satin; behind her back the servants called her "the six ton truck." She had iron-gray hair which she wore wound around what used to be called a "rat," which gave her a high pompadour, and her face was round and solid, but a sickly white instead of being ruddy.

Her age was probably fifty, but she gave the impression of being much older.

She had several chins and jowls. Her manner to Arthur was severe and cold. Young men were an object of suspicion, as she had a daughter to protect from their guile. In her opinion the new secretary must already be scheming to marry Grace and inherit the Mordant fortune. She would show him that he was a domestic servant.

She had acquired a gold lorgnette which she used only to overawe persons, although it was not in the least necessary, for she was an overpowering personality without it. To Arthur she looked like Queen Victoria in her old age, only less motherly and more queenly.

"So you are Mr. Pride," she said, when he had been introduced. Her voice was deep, and she spoke slowly. "What have you been doing this evening?"

"I have been to a motion picture theater," he said politely.

"Indeed. Have you been drinking?"

Grace giggled. Her mother silenced her with a frown.

"I don't drink, Mrs. Mordant," retorted Arthur indignantly.

"Do you go to church?"

"Yes, ma'am, every Sunday."

"Really?" Her ice seemed less chilling. "Do you read your Bible regularly?"

"Quite often."

"Do you dance the tango?" she asked with a meaning glance at Grace, which referred to the Folsom disaster.

"No, ma'am." He was still polite, but there was something about Mrs. Mordant that was enraging.

"Were your parents church members?"

"They were."

"I understand my husband got you from the Y. M. C. A. You were an official?"

"Assistant manager."

"It is not the society it was once. I understand that they hold dances in Y. M. C. A. buildings."

"For those who have no prejudices against dancing. Most churches do not object to dancing, Mrs. Mordant."

"My church does. I do not approve of it."

He was silent, hoping that the inquisition was over.

"With whom did you attend this motion picture?"

"Really, Mrs. Mordant, isn't that my affair?"

"Not at all," she said placidly. "You are a member of my household, and I will not permit our servants to have bad associates."

"Mother, Mr. Pride is not a servant," protested Grace. Arthur looked kindly at the girl for the first time.

"Were you with a young woman?"

"Yes," he said, furious but truthful.

"Most reprehensible," said Grace. Her mimicry of her mother was remarkable. "Was she a church member?"

"I shall attend to this," said her mother.

"I do not think I shall answer any more questions, Mrs. Mordant," declared Arthur, white with anger. "I am your husband's employee. If you do not wish me to reside in your house, perhaps he will permit me to leave it."

"I have a young, innocent girl to protect," replied Mrs. Mordant. "Of course, you will have no social relations with my daughter in any event, but it is my duty to know all about you."

"I refer you to Mr. Mordant."

"Very well, you may go."

He turned on his heel and stalked out, so angry that he did not care if his defiance of the mistress of the house cost him his job. His fury was chiefly provoked by her insinuation that the girl who accompanied him to the movies must be a person of low moral character. When he considered the purity and sweetness, the culture and honesty of Miss Mayfield, and compared her to the daughter of this self-righteous woman, he could hardly contain himself.

Mrs. Mordant was looking for motes in other people's eyes and she had a very large beam in her own eye. Under her nose Miss Mordant carried on, behaved scandalously; he would have loved to tell her, but, well, he didn't know just why he couldn't possibly tell on Grace; perhaps he was beginning to sympathize with the young girl who was compelled to associate with the narrow, bigoted mother and the stern forbidding father. If Grace Mordant had the privilege of association with a high-minded, noble girl like Miss Mayfield, she might see the error of her ways.

He went on to his chamber, anger giving place to depression. Certainly this position which had seemed so wonderful with a salary beyond dreams of avarice was already becoming onerous.

His employer seemed to consider him a gunman, called him in and pointed out human targets, there was menace in the atmosphere he was breathing, the great financier was obviously in terror of his life. And his wife was a most unpleasant woman who intended to treat him like a servant. And he was deadly afraid of Miss Mordant. The girl was like a stick of dynamite with the fuse burning, liable to explode and do him injury at any minute.

Not feeling sleepy, he picked up a book and began to read. It was "Demon of the Island," the wild yarn he had been reading the night he fell out of bed after a horrible nightmare.

The volume had been packed with his other books. He had not opened it since, had not intended to waste any more time with it. How long ago it seemed, the night of the bad dream, yet it was only a week. How his prospects had changed, from the seven dollar lodging house room to this beautiful, superbly-furnished chamber in a Fifth Avenue palace, from thirty-two dollars per week to a hundred and fifty dollars—he had not touched his first week's pay as yet.

Wild stuff, this novel, all about murder and pirates and a girl with yellow hair as crazy as the rest of the story. He had opened at a description of the heroine. To his astonishment it seemed as if the man were describing Miss Mordant, her piquant face, her smile, the birdlike turn of her head, the tiny, lithe figure; though she wore a costume of woven leaves she looked as Miss Mordant might look in such a garb.

He remembered how she had looked the first day he surprised her in the library. He blushed to remember the abandon of her position—this author had the temerity to dwell upon the heroine's legs. With an exclamation he closed the book—melodrama, sensation, not life.

But was it not? Why, this position which he held was one of defense of a man who expected to be murdered, one of the richest men in America, a famous man. Could anything be more melodramatic than the scene in the office when he had faced a cool, keen-eyed middle-aged man who did not deny it when Mordant declared he proposed to slay him?

Was he not the hero of a melodrama, the last line of defense, as Mordant put it, against criminals of the deepest dye? Here was a wild, improbable situation in the heart of New York, humdrum New York.

And while he was contemplating this situation his phone tinkled. Mechanically he lifted the receiver from the hook and said "Hello!"

CHAPTER XVI.

ONE CANNOT ALWAYS BE A GENTLEMAN.

"COME down to the library," said a voice. "Mother's gone to bed."

"Most certainly not," he retorted indignantly.

"If you are not here in five minutes, I'll come up," Grace threatened.

He had taken off his coat, now he put it on. All right, he would go down. Why this girl pestered him he did not know. To meet her clandestinely was wrong, but not so wrong as to admit her to his chamber; that was intolerable. After all, supposing her father did find them together and discharged him? He did not like this job. He did not wish to shoot strange gentlemen whom Mordant suspected of having evil designs on him.

Most likely Mordant was crazy; he had scruples against killing which outweighed one hundred and fifty dollars per week. If he could get a position where life was quiet, where there was no demand for fighting or shooting, even if the pay was small, how happy he would be.

In this mood he descended the stairs and found Grace curled up on a divan like a kitten—a little yellow kitten, he could not help thinking.

"Come and sit down," she invited. "Change your face, too. There is nothing to be alarmed about. I think you are afraid of me."

"I am afraid of what you might do," he admitted with a smile, which changed his face as she had directed.

"Now you are all right," she said. "I didn't know that you could smile at all. Sit down beside me and tell me how much you love me."

"If you're going to start that—" he began.

"I won't. This is a serious conversation. How did you like mother?"

"Why—er—really!"

"She was appalling, wasn't she? I thought I should have died to watch your face."

"You didn't help me much," he retorted. Somehow he did not feel so uncomfortable with the young woman to-night.

"When I saw you lose your temper I began to like you. I suppose you expect to be fired in the morning?"

"I don't care."

"After she left she told me you seemed to be a nice young man, as they go nowadays. You passed inspection with honors."

Arthur flushed slightly, and she laughed amusedly.

"Who was the girl you were with?"

"A very nice girl."

"Your fiancée?"

"Oh, no."

"Nicer than I am?" she wheedled.

"She is different. She—er—oh, I don't know."

"How long have you known her?"

"A couple of days," he admitted.

"Then you don't know her any longer than you do me. Did you kiss her good night?"

"Certainly not."

"You were stupid. She would let you."

"She most certainly would not."

"Well," she sighed, "it takes all kinds of girls to make the world. Father has retired and mother has gone to bed. If you and I were to slip out to a night club—"

"No."

"There, there!" she said, touching him on the arm with a very small slender white hand. "I didn't expect you would, though the fact that you do take girls to the movies

gave me encouragement. Now tell me, what's the matter with father?"

Her mood and manner changed so suddenly as to astonish him.

"Why, nothing."

"There is something worrying him. Father is a very interesting person, and I have made a study of him. He was playing a heavy, pompous, benevolent old captain of industry until recently and liking the part; now he's performing as a grizzly bear at bay. What's baying him?"

"Why don't you ask him?"

"Might as well ask the Sphinx. Children should be seen and not heard."

"I am afraid I can't tell you."

"Why did he hire you? He told us you were a secretary, but he wouldn't pick a secretary from a 'Y' employment agency. He would select a man who knew something about his business. That is a blind. Isn't it?"

"In a way," he admitted.

"He doesn't need a secretary to live in his house. He never had one before. I got out of the butler the story of the rock that came through the window when I thought you were falling downstairs."

"I don't want to alarm you, Miss Mordant," Arthur admitted, because she knew so much she might as well know a little more. "The fact is your father seems to be afraid that he may be annoyed by criminals. I am sort of a bodyguard, you might say."

"You don't look much like a bodyguard," she objected.

"I am afraid I am a very poor one. It happens that he needed a man who might pass for a clerk but who could box and wrestle and who would be close at hand if needed. To engage a professional fighter would be to advertise that he was alarmed."

She looked impressed. "Why would they wish to injure Mr. Mordant?"

"I don't know. He hasn't informed me. I am sure that he has never harmed anybody."

Grace shook her head negatively. "I'm not so sure. He has a look in his eye sometimes that isn't kindly and benevolent. I suspect he was a rough customer in his time."

"How can you talk like that about your father?" he exclaimed, truly shocked.

Grace laughed a trifle bitterly. "That shocks you, doesn't it? I'll give you another shock. The Mordants are not my parents!"

"What?"

"I'm an adopted daughter. They took me when I was three years old. My father was a dear old friend of Mr. Mordant's. My mother died at my birth, so they adopted me legally."

"Oh," he said contritely. Somehow this explanation seemed to make up for many things.

"Nobody knows that I am not their child, and I suppose it was a most generous thing for them to do, but I can't seem to reconcile it with what I know of their character. And they never talk about my parents. I don't know my real name. But they have been kind to me according to their lights.

"It just makes me wild to have people who are not my own dictate to me as they do and prevent me from indulging in the most innocent amusements. You wait till I'm twenty-one," she warned. "Then I'll cut loose and raise hell."

"I trust you won't be twenty-one until you acquire discretion," he said stiffly. "Your idea of innocent amusements is not mine."

"How would you like to be shut up in this morgue all the time? How would you like to have to put up with that woman? You hated her to-night, and you hate this house already? I know you do."

"I don't like it as much as I did when I first came," he admitted.

"You hated me too, didn't you?"

"I thought you were sort of—er—"

"Depraved," she supplied, blandly.

"Oh, no."

"I'd love to be wicked," she sighed. "I want to do something terrible. Tell me about this girl. How did you happen to meet her?"

He found himself telling about the incident of the subway and then the encounter in the hotel. Her eyes sparkled.

"How lucky men are! You can have an adventure and nobody thinks anything about it. Brazen as you think I am, I

wouldn't dare pick up a strange man like that paragon of yours."

"She didn't pick me up."

"Of course she did, you goof. Only you don't realize it. I don't blame her. She didn't have Mr. and Mrs. Mordant glooming over her as I have. I'd love to be independent, and I'm thinking of running away."

"Don't be absurd."

"Only if I were that girl I wouldn't pick up anybody like you. You're too serious. I suppose you took her to the movies and bought her an ice cream soda and said good night at eleven?"

"Of course."

"But the night was only beginning. You could have gone to supper and visited two or three night clubs and breakfasted in a lunch room and come home in evening clothes in broad daylight. That's what the girls do who went to school with me."

"I'm sure I shouldn't ask Miss Mayfield to do anything like that. It's dissipation."

"It's fun. And if you asked her I bet she would be tickled to death; most likely she was hoping you would. Probably that's why she picked you up."

"Please don't say such things," he protested. "It's most unfair to Miss Mayfield."

"Bother Miss Mayfield. Why aren't you a regular man, a wicked man that a girl would have to watch carefully lest he get out of control?"

"You positively have an evil mind."

"Run off to bed. There are books in this library much more exciting than you. Milksop!" she railed.

Now, as great pains have been taken to explain, Arthur Pride was very nearly a model young man; certainly he had a fine set of principles, and so far in life he had never lost his head. But this strange girl, during the last few minutes, had been having a curious effect upon him, and he found himself wishing he wasn't quite so eminently respectable.

In her reckless mood she was really bewitching, and when she turned upon him so contemptuously he lost his head completely.

Without warning, he suddenly grasped her in his arms, and pressed a kiss upon her pretty mouth. What possessed him he could no explain; a devil entered into him, he had no control over his actions, he suddenly found himself kissing her and being inexpressibly thrilled.

And the effect upon Gracie was also inexplicable. For a second she submitted, then sharp finger nails tore his cheek, little feet beat savagely against his shins, she broke loose and flew across the room, then regarded him like a small yellow and white fury.

"You beast!" she hissed. "Oh, you snake in the grass! I'll kill you for that. I'll drive you out of the house. You took advantage of me."

Arthur leaned back on the sofa, faint and humiliated. He was shocked with himself and terrified by her attitude, and he said the worst thing possible.

"I—I thought you wanted me to," he mumbled.

"How dare you think such a thing?"

"You spoke about it."

She looked at him as one would look at some crawling and repulsive creature.

"I shall tell my father in the morning and have you horse whipped," she declared viciously. "Go away, now, or I'll arouse the house."

He got up limply and moved toward the door, but at the door something of defiance came back to him.

"I'm glad I did it," he declared.

She continued to glare at him and he retreated. In his room remorse took possession of him. What had got into him? Why had he forgotten everything he had learned on the conduct of a gentleman? Why had he thrown himself upon a girl whom he did not like, of whom he heartily disapproved, and forcibly kissed her? Why had he liked it? Why had he said he was glad he did it? Why was he glad?

And this girl, who had tempted him, lured him on, forced herself into his room, taunted him with being an old maid, called him a milksop, why had she taken it so?

It was just a kiss, and she had been outraged. He knew she was not acting. Despite all her loose chatter, her invitations, her

suggestions, she did not want to be kissed. Was it possible that she had never been kissed before? He believed it, and he was thrilled at the notion that he had been her first. It was worth being put to the door in the morning.

He undressed and got into bed, perhaps the last night he would sleep in that bed. Just before he went to sleep he smiled contentedly.

"Milksop, am I?" he murmured. And he dreamed all night, but he didn't dream of Miss Mayfield.

CHAPTER XVII.

A TALE OF THE OLD WEST.

IN one of those cozy corners in a ship's smoking room, where men sit for hours and hours because they are so comfortable, and the ice clinks pleasantly in the tall glasses, and the slow regular roll of the vessel is soothing, and there is nothing in the world to do except loaf unless you happen to play bridge, Father Ignatius Murphy was reposing, and opposite him sat George Folsom. They had been talking for hours, would talk for hours more.

The Humbolt was still twenty-four hours from New York. Folsom had found the passengers already welded into rings and groups with no room for a man who had not made the long voyage. Three days more to New York, not worth while to make a new acquaintance, but Father Murphy was a solitary. He did not play cards, he drank sparingly, he did not enjoy suggestive stories, he was just a plump, rosy, comfortable old priest who minded his own business, did not concern himself with the dissipation of the passengers, but preferred not to join in them.

He welcomed Folsom, who had wandered alone for the first day of his voyage and gradually had warmed to the gay, good-natured young man who had come up the high sides of the ship dangling on the end of a rope.

An Irish priest is a very human individual usually, kindly, tolerant; through the confessional he has learned to know men and women, chides them for their wickedness, coaxes them to better things, understands there is no evil without some good, learns diplomacy and tact, wins a broadness of vision through his intimate contact with mankind at its worst and best.

Always at the bedside of the dying teaching forgiveness of sins, lifting the fallen woman, pulling at the sleeve of the criminal, comforting the afflicted, overawing the turbulent among his flock, he knows how far a minister can interfere and when it is good judgment to turn his back.

To the charity of his creed he brings the humor of his race. He can tell a funny story and lift a drink to his lips without losing the respect of those about him. In a steamship's smoking room where corks are popping, whisky glasses are loosening tongues, women are laughing too loudly, tobacco smoke is thick and indiscreet tales are wafted across the room by careless talkers, an Irish priest can sit without drawing attention where no Protestant minister might venture without immediately throwing a mantle of restraint over the proceedings.

Father Murphy had talked of many things, fires and murders, crimes, vice, death, disease, strikes and disasters, for the church demands that the priest rush in where angels might fear to tread. And Folsom found him mightily interesting.

In some way the conversation had got around to the apparent injustice of a world where the good suffer and the wicked prosper, why a Divine Providence would permit the Kaiser to live in wealth and comfort when his folly and arrogance caused millions of better men to die.

"If this life were all," admitted the priest, "perhaps it would be foolish to try to obey the ten commandments. My comfort is that there is another life where wrongs are righted and the evil men get their just deserts.

"If I could not believe, I would not want to live another minute. Nobody except a priest can know the full extent of the wickedness that seems to go unpunished in this world. I am sixty-eight years old and I have been a priest for forty-five years, during which time I have heard thousands of death-bed confessions, wit-

nessed hundreds of men perish through violence, heard tales that would wring your heart.

"If I could speak, I could pull many men down from high places, vile criminals who are loaded with honors and dignities while their victims suffer want and finish miserably."

"You should speak," declared Folsom. "Why should a priest connive at wrongdoing? You should help bring such criminals to justice."

The old man smiled rather sadly.

"We have wicked men in our priesthood as in every walk of life; putting on a clerical collar doesn't remove one from temptation nor can you stifle passions and greed and a violent heart except by prayers and fasting.

"I have known men who were not worthy to be priests, but I never knew or heard of one so bad that he broke the seal of the confessional. We believe that a wicked priest can say mass and perform priestly functions and the mass he says is efficacious and the absolution he grants is effective; though his own soul be damned, when he functions as a priest for others his ministrations are good, although we do not permit such persons to remain in the priesthood if we find them out.

"No man comes to confession to tell lies, therefore when they confess their sins they speak the truth, and a man who confesses on his deathbed before receiving the last sacraments is trustworthy then, if never before."

"That seems logical."

"And what we learn under the secret seal of the confessional is not for us to use."

"If a man was about to be hanged for a murder, and another man confessed to you that he had done the killing, do you mean to say you wouldn't inform the authorities to save the innocent?"

"I couldn't!"

"But that is terrible! It would be your duty to tell. You would have to save that man."

"No," replied the priest. "I could do nothing. If God wished the condemned man to continue to live he would arrange things. The secret of the confessional is inviolate. I could refuse the man absolution who made the confession, demand that he admit his guilt, publicly threaten him with divine anger and hell everlasting, but if he refused I should be helpless."

"And you, a priest, thereby condemn the innocent to death!" George Folsom had never heard this phase of Catholic practice.

"As a man, it is as if I never heard the admission of guilt. Don't you see that if there were any exceptions to the secrecy of the confessional, the sacrament would be valueless? The priest has no discretion beyond the refusal of absolution; if this were not so the murderer would never confess."

"I see the point, but it would be a terrible situation for a priest, nevertheless."

"Fortunately, I never was placed in exactly that position; there happens, however, to be a man in New York who is tremendously wealthy and highly respected whom I know to be a brutal murderer through the deathbed confession of his companion in the crime who was convicted of it, although he was only the accomplice, and who was sentenced to imprisonment for life. He served thirty-nine years and died last year."

"But how can you admit evet. so much if you received the information in that way?"

Father Murphy laughed slightly. "Since I mention no names, make no charges and am talking generally, there is no objection. We have the right to preach sermons on subjects that were suggested by information received hearing confessions. We learn much about life that way. Of course we are careful never to refer to anything that would point to the source of our knowledge."

"And New York has numerous millionaires, doubtless a good many with crimes in their background," agreed Folsom.

"This particular crime was committed in the West forty years ago," said Father Murphy. "The man who died in jail, in company with the wealthy person to whom I referred, robbed a bank in a small town.

"It seems they had promoted a gold mine by selling stock through the mails and were in danger of arrest, as there was

no such mine. To get funds for their getaway they descended late at night upon the bank where they were both known, and found the cashier working over his books.

"They tied him up, but were unable to open the safe, and the cashier bravely refused to give them the combination. Accordingly they heated a poker red-hot and tortured the man until he was forced to open the safe for them.

"They took about fifty thousand dollars from the safe, all the cash it contained, and debated what they should do about the cashier, who could identify them. They made him swear that he would not reveal their names, then one of the robbers decided to take no chances and put a bullet through the heart of the man who sat before them tied to a chair.

"They fled to the hills. One of them was wounded and was abandoned by his companion, who carried off the stolen money. When the wounded man was captured he was very bitter against his accomplice and told his name, but he was never taken. The wounded man recovered, was tried and convicted to life imprisonment because the jury believed his story that the murder had been committed by the other robber.

"Jameson served thirty-eight years in prison—"

"You have mentioned his name."

"Why not? The crime was acknowledged, and he paid the penalty, and he is now dead. What I have told you was all published in newspapers at the time of his death. Here is the strange feature of the case. During this long imprisonment he never gave up hope of vengeance against the partner who had deserted him. His son, who must now be forty-five years old, promised the father that he would find him and force him to disgorge half of the loot of the bank.

"No trace of the criminal was discovered, either by Jameson and his son or by the authorities; the latter, of course, abandoned pursuit many years ago.

"But a few months before his death Jameson saw in a New York paper a portrait of a very prominent man which he recognized by a certain mark as his recreant companion. One of the pair died in prison after thirty-nine years of punishment, the more culpable of the two lived at large and in prosperity during this long time and at present is at the zenith of a great business career. As I said at the beginning, a man must believe in future reward and punishment or he could not stomach what is permitted to go on here below."

"But the convict must have informed his son of his discovery, and the son cannot be honest or he would not try to recover for himself the money stolen from the bank. Isn't he going to revenge his father?"

"I think it very likely."

"Then there may be a reckoning in this life for the miscreant."

"I am afraid so."

"Does the confessional cover this also? Are you justified in standing by and permitting a murder that you could prevent by telling the authorities what you know?"

"In this case I am not in a predicament," smiled the priest. "Jameson did not tell me the name of the man in New York, and his son has a criminal record and is being sought for by the police of two or three States. If I were free to speak there is nothing I could contribute."

"Well," admitted Folsom, "if the son does shoot up the man who betrayed his father, I suppose he has some justification. Imagine the feelings of that old convict when he found that his old pal had been living on top of the world during the years that he was lock-stepping about a prison."

"He did not take it well," said Father Murphy, with a smile. "I never saw the son, but he seems to have followed in the criminal footsteps of his father. Jameson's wife and two children were left destitute when he was sent to prison, while the other bank robber was about twenty-one or two and unmarried. Even a crook usually has human feelings. He might have sent money to the family of the man who was paying the penalty for both their crimes, but he did nothing. Brought up on sidewalks and alleys, the young Jameson fell into the hands of pickpockets and yeggs—what chance did he have?"

The conversation turned to another topic,

and they chatted until the lights in the smokeroom were dimmed, then went their separate ways. Folsom gave no more thought to the bizarre tale of the old priest. How could he dream that the unpunished murderer was his distinguished employer and his involuntary voyage upon the tanker Merton engineered by the son of the man who had died in prison? He had voted Father Murphy an interesting old man and let it go at that.

So the Humbolt steamed steadily toward New York, where the present day drama with a prologue laid forty years ago was progressing toward its climax, with George Folsom cast for an important rôle.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ARTHUR AGAIN FORGETS HIMSELF.

ARTHUR PRIDE found his way to the breakfast room about eight o'clock next morning. Mordant never breakfasted before nine, Mrs. Mordant took her coffee and rolls in bed, and Grace was not to be expected to be visible at such an hour. Yet she was sitting at the small table in the sunny little room, arrayed in a bewildering negligee and apparently astonished to see the secretary intrude.

Arthur hesitated at the door. If she had not seen him he would have fled, but her big eyes were on him and they were not angry, rather amused.

"'Tis the cave man," she proclaimed. "The gay deceiver, the Lothario of the Mordant mansion. Enter and partake of nourishment. After your unseemly outburst last night you must be feeling weak and faint."

He sidled into the room, but he could think of no retort.

"Ease yourself into that chair and ring the bell," she commanded. "I am glad to see you rise early. Early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and fresh."

"Miss Mordant, I wish to apologize for my conduct last night," he said stiffly. "I do not understand how I could have behaved as I did."

"What conduct?" she asked in apparent surprise. "Were you doing something you shouldn't?"

"Why—er—you know, I kissed you."

Grace threw back her blond head and her laugh tinkled sweetly.

"Oh, that," she scoffed. "I thought you had stolen the silverware. I had forgotten all about that. When one has been kissed as often as I have one doesn't remember."

"I don't believe you," he declared indignantly.

"Don't believe what?"

"That you have been kissed before. I don't think anybody ever kissed you until last night."

"Absurd!"

"You were furiously angry. You could have killed me."

"That was just play-acting," she assured him.

"Miss Mordant," said Arthur with a grin that was very likable. "It's my opinion that you are a fraud."

"Indeed!" she said scornfully.

"You are pure bluff. You're nothing but an innocent little kid, and all your sophistication is fake."

Grace looked at the buffet, and addressed it. "The man is mad," she observed. "He ought not to be at large."

"You were yourself when I surprised you, and you were absolutely horrified. Now you are acting again. I'm not afraid of you any more."

"Bring this gentleman a porterhouse steak, two plates of griddle cakes and a loaf of bread," she said to the maid who entered at that instant. "He's so hungry he is delirious."

"Please," protested Arthur. "Just two eggs, toast and coffee."

The maid, a stout, middle-aged Irishwoman, smiled tolerantly and retreated.

"You had no business to kiss me," said Grace in her normal manner. "I was very angry, but when I had time to think about it I decided that you had been drinking and I would not report the offense this time."

"You know I hadn't been drinking."

"Then you are prepared to go through with it?"

"What do you mean?" he asked faintly.

"When you kiss a girl, that is a confession of love. You are engaged to marry me."

He regarded her in dismay. This phase of his offense had not entered his thoughts. He would not have dared to love her because she was his employer's heiress and, anyway, the opinion he had held of her character up to the moment of the kiss would have prevented his harboring any such emotion. Grace watched him maliciously.

"I am sure this will be a dreadful shock to Miss Mayfield. When are you going to tell her?"

"But we're not, surely—you don't mean—"

"Then you are not in love with me? You don't want to marry me?"

"Really, Miss Mordant—"

"Of course if you are not in love with me, to overpower me and smother me with kisses is the act of a libertine."

"I assure you—" he said in horror.

"No assurances are necessary. You are a wicked man, Mr. Pride."

This was more than he could stand. If he had done wrong he should pay the penalty. If he had compromised this girl it was his business to be a man. He would have to propose to her and marry her if her adopted parents permitted it.

After all, she was very lovely. Although she was headstrong and wild, it was probably due to too much restraint and the companionship and guardianship of a serious person like himself might bring about a reformation. He pushed back his chair and rose.

"I have the honor to ask your hand in marriage," he said solemnly.

Grace could not contain herself; her laughter was loud and clear and almost hysterical. Tears of mirth stood in her eyes, while she regarded the tall, silent martyr to duty.

"It's all right, Rollo," she assured him. "I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man in the world."

Considering the circumstances of his proposal, Arthur should have been greatly relieved by the refusal, but instead he felt himself growing furiously angry.

"So you have been making fun of me," he said grimly.

"Spoofing you, Galahad."

"I am sorry that good manners will not permit me to express my opinion of you."

"Where were your manners last night?" she mocked.

For the second time in twenty-four hours he lost control of himself and behaved unaccountable. He was standing over her with one stride, he grasped the back of her slender neck with one hand, placed the other hand under her chin, lifted her little face, bent over and kissed her hard on the mouth.

Grace tried to bite, but he escaped damage, and he strode from the room without his breakfast, grabbed his hat and left the house, forgetting that he had to return to accompany his employer to the office.

Grace looked after him without moving for fully a minute. Then she took her napkin, started to scrub her lips, laid it down again and smiled, rather a twisted, wistful sort of smile. She ate no more breakfast.

There is something about the complete absence of humor in a man which attracts a woman, even one who can appreciate humor. There is no doubt, whatever, that all the great lovers of history were humorless men. Their actions demonstrate it clearly.

A woman wishes to be loved wholeheartedly, madly, unreservedly, and no man with a sense of comedy can qualify. Would Leander have swam the Hellespont if he realized how funny he would appear to Hero with a cold in the head? If Romeo had not been overserious wouldn't he have assumed there might be doubt about the death of Juliet? He would have demanded to see the death certificate before he assassinated himself beside the sleeping beauty. Study them all, Abelard, Dante, Marc Antony, Pelleas, Paul, Virginia's boy friend, the lovers who get into the newspapers nowadays, not one among them who could see a joke.

Arthur Pride was a fine, straightforward young fellow, as lacking in humor as any lover of history. Of course, he thought he disliked Grace Mordant and could not

explain why he had been moved to kiss her twice, but Grace, being a woman, knew.

He was in love with her, but he didn't know it yet. And she was wondering whether she liked him enough to enlighten him; something strongly attracted him to her.

Although her life was restrained she had met a number of men, none of whom had she enjoyed teasing as she did the serious young secretary.

To shock him gave her a thrill, to lure him as she had done last night and to anger him as she had done this morning delighted her. Since he had kissed her she had no fear of the young woman he admired so much, for Grace knew that love and admiration are entirely different things; you might despise a woman, yet love her madly, while you might respect and admire a girl and find kissing her as unexciting as washing your face.

Another thing which attracted Grace to Arthur Pride was the furious opposition that such an engagement would arouse in her parents, for nothing is so romantic to young lovers as violent parental opposition.

If Grace did not get out much, she knew all about love. In the library of Carolus Mordant was the pick of the world's literature in de luxe editions, all leaves uncut except in volumes which had fallen into the hands of the daughter of the house. Grace had read Maupassant and Gautier in finishing school, although it was not required to know those writers.

Since returning home she had added Balzac, Hugo, George Sand, Thackeray, Smollet, Goethe, and D'Annunzio to her list of admired writers, and if there is any phase of human emotions not thoroughly dissected between the covers of the works of these authors, it can hardly be found anywhere.

Shamefacedly, Arthur slipped back into the house in time to ride down town with his employer, but, to his relief, the tormentor was not visible. Grace watched them depart from an upper window contented to see that the secretary seemed perturbed.

The continued absence of Folsom had caused Mordant to make use of his chief stenographer in the capacity of secretary, as Pride was completely ignorant of the details of the business, and the financier continued to fume against Folsom, but not now, for the office inconvenience he had caused.

Instead of being grateful to George for making investigations in his interests, he was angry and alarmed. Bad enough to have the ghost of his past in the person of the other George awaiting an opportunity to strike at him, but suppose Folsom had stumbled upon some of the facts responsible for the appearance of Jameson in New York and upon the trail of Carolus Mordant?

Jameson had informed him that he had eliminated Folsom because he got in his way. What had put the secretary in the path of the avenger? How had he got an inkling of the dark secret? What was his purpose in spying? Was he actuated from a laudable impulse to aid his employer? Or was he seeking material for blackmail?

Carolus decided that he was very glad that Jameson had eliminated the inquisitive Folsom, whether his motive in snooping had been good or bad. It would have been disastrous had Folsom learned anything of the motives which actuated George Jameson.

Five days had elapsed since the disappearance of Folsom. A bright young man from the accounting department was breaking in under the tutelage of Miss Laundrigan, the chief stenographer.

No further move had been made by Jameson, nor had the unknown miscreants who had thrown the stone through the window of his house shown their hand further.

Jameson had denied being responsible for the act of sabotage, but Mordant was inclined to disbelieve him. True, there were at least two other persons who had made demands upon him within a month, but these he did not take very seriously. Assuming that he would know who was responsible for the rock in his parlor, there had been no signature upon the message fastened to the stone. "Our last warning. Take heed," was all that it had said.

Mordant had come to the conclusion that Jameson and his gang had murdered George Folsom. and he was content to believe it.

A potential blackmailer was out of the way. Judge, then, of his consternation when the following radiogram was laying on his desk upon the fifth morning:

> Transferred at sea from steamer Merton to liner Humbolt. Land in New York in three days. GEORGE FOLSOM.

The great man was in a bad humor, for he had been compelled to take a heavy loss in certain securities which he wished to turn into cash. He would have his million at the end of the allotted time, but it would cost him a hundred thousand at least, and he hated to lose money, like any other rich man.

Of course he might also lose the million, but that he would only sell in exchange for his life. Instead of being grateful that his business secretary was safe and on his way home he broke into oaths which would have shocked his staff if he had not been alone in the office, oaths of an old-fashioned character which had been popular in the West in the old days. Some of them had little modern significance.

Just how much did Folsom know; how did he happen to be on a steamer bound from South America; what was the Merton, from which he was transferred? How did he happen to be on the Merton? He set his stenographer to look up that vessel in the Maritime Register, and found her listed as a tank steamer of four thousand tons which had sailed from New York five days before.

Then a light broke over him; Jameson had eliminated Folsom by shanghaiing him, and Folsom, in some manner, had induced the captain of the Humbolt to stop and permit a transfer at sea.

As Mordant was quite sure that Folsom could not tell him anything that he did not know, he was not eager to hear his story. What worried him was how much the secretary had learned and to what use he intended to put his information.

Folsom, that night on the Humbolt, was put into possession of the entire mystery through the casual tale told by Father Murphy, with the exception of the key, and the key was the name Jameson. Having never heard of Jameson, being unaware that he was responsible for his voyage on the Merton, totally ignorant of the nature of the menace he knew to be hanging over his employer, he was not at present a danger to Carolus Mordant, but if he learned when he returned to the office that a man named Jameson had threatened the life of Mordant he could put two and two together readily enough, and then he would be very dangerous, for there is no statute of limitations for murder, and a man would be hanged for a killing forty years old as quickly as though the crime had been committed a few weeks previously.

Mordant was right in considering Folsom a new menace, despite his lack of knowledge of the facts, but Folsom did not know he was a threat. He would gambol into the office as gladly as a dog returning to his master.

CHAPTER XIX.

MISS MAYFIELD GOES CALLING.

DURING this time Arthur Pride had improved his acquaintance with the agreeable Miss Mayfield, and if he were not head over heels in love with her, as Lulu had anticipated, it was because he had kissed Grace Mordant and could not forget the feel of it.

In his mind there was no comparison between the two girls. Miss Mayfield was everything that Grace was not. She was just as beautiful, almost equally blond, not quite so petite but as graceful and better behaved.

Lulu had lowered her flags of sex appeal because she judged Arthur would not respond to them; that he would be won by refinement and graciousness. And she would have been correct in her opinion had it not been for his recollection of the two occasions he had not behaved like a gentleman.

Unconsciously he was treasuring those kisses, nourishing the recollection of how thrilling it had been to hold the little wild girl in his arms; therefore he was able to walk and talk to Miss Mayfield without caveman impulses. And somehow the girl of the subway did not improve on ac-

quaintance as he had expected. He had pretty well talked himself out, and he did not find her able to stimulate him when his flow of informing chatter began to run down. Instead of saying "Do you think Emerson was as great a philosopher as Nietzsche?" she would say "Isn't that a wonderful automobile?" The only answer to such a question was yes.

Although he still disapproved of Grace Mordant, he found himself yearning to see her, and for three or four days he had not set eyes on her at all. He had dined once with Mordant. Upon that occasion Grace and her mother were dining out. She had not appeared at breakfast at all, and he lunched down town with his employer—or, rather, at an adjacent table.

Miss Mayfield had grown to expect him every evening, and Arthur was beginning to resent having to go out of the house. Although he did not admit to himself that his reluctance was due to the hope of seeing Grace if he remained in, he told himself that he wanted to read and rest from his none too arduous duties.

On a Sunday evening, the fourth or fifth evening in succession he had spent in the company of the young "writer," they dined at an Italian table d'hote in the West Forties, and the dinner was rather solemn, as Lulu was wary of conversation, as usual, and Arthur had about run out of solo material.

"Shall we go to a movie?" he asked casually, as they finished their coffee.

It was just a matter of form, as they always went to a movie. Lulu would have preferred a legitimate show, but her act was to be considerate of his finances.

"Would you mind accompanying me to a friend's uptown?" she asked a bit nervously. "I have a message to deliver, and it won't take very long."

"Of course. It will be a pleasure."

They took a subway uptown and got off in the West Nineties, and after a brief walk she turned into the ornate entrance of a huge apartment house, walked into an elevator without troubling to have herself announced, stopped at a certain floor and led him along a corridor to an apartment already described.

The door opened instantly, and Lulu nodded curtly to a man who had opened it.

"This is my friend, Mr. Pride," she said. "Mr. Pride, meet Mr. Grogan."

"Any friend of Lulu's is a friend of mine," replied Mr. Grogan, who happened to be the person called Pete who had greeted Lulu a week or so before upon the subway platform at Madison Square after her initial effort to annex Arthur Pride.

"Step in and sit down," he said. "George will be here in a minute."

Lulu led the way to the sitting room, where she occupied the edge of a chair and fidgeted; she was obviously very nervous. Arthur was regarding severely a bottle of Scotch which sat upon the center table. He thought Mr. Grogan was a very queer friend for a girl like Miss Mayfield, and he did not remember that her name was Lulu.

"A little drink, Mr. Pride?" suggested Grogan genially.

"I don't drink," he said bluntly.

"You'll have one, Lulu?"

Lulu looked daggers at him.

"No, indeed," she said emphatically.

"How do you get that way?" asked Pete with a rough laugh.

"I can't permit you to speak to Miss Mayfield in that manner," declared Arthur, rising to his feet.

Lulu looked at him gratefully. The girl was in a very miserable position, and was hating herself thoroughly; though masks would be off shortly, womanlike, she clung to hers until the last possible minute.

"Aw, sit down," retorted Pete.

"And I won't permit you to speak to me in that way."

"Perhaps you will permit me to say something," said a cool, penetrating voice from the doorway.

Arthur turned, and saw the man whom Mordant had requested him to shoot on sight standing in the frame of the door.

Although Arthur had little worldly experience, he had read enough action novels to realize that he was in a trap, and he threw at the beautiful decoy a look of such meaning that she winced and turned her head away. Despite her criminal experience, Lulu was young and still impressionable, and she could not be associated for

nearly a week with a youth as decent and honest as Arthur Pride without appreciating the first good man she had ever known.

"Perform your errand and let us go, Miss Mayfield," said Arthur.

"She has performed her errand," said Jameson. "It was to bring you to see me. She can go, but I want you to remain."

"What can you possibly want of me?" he demanded.

"You remember me, don't you?"

"Of course. I met you in Mr. Mordant's office. I supposed your animosity was against him."

"Correct."

Arthur was studying the room as he talked. It was a sitting room about sixteen feet square with no exit save the door in which George Jameson was standing.

Behind him was a small hall with the bedroom on the farther side. There was no fire escape outside the windows, a sheer drop of a hundred feet. To get out, if it came to forcing his way out, he would have to overpower the two men.

He did not think the wretched girl would lift a hand against him. Perhaps the man had brought him there to bribe him. Craft might pull him through; otherwise, he would have to fight, and Pete looked like a fighter, while Jameson was undoubtedly armed.

"I wish to leave this apartment at once."

"See if he has a gun, Pete," suggested George in the sort of tone he would have used to say: "Pass the prunes."

Pete bustled up to Arthur, tapped him on the hips, and then felt at his breast pocket. Suddenly his wrist was seized and twisted so that he was forced to swing his body to save it from being broken, and the body swung in front of Arthur as a breastwork while the secretary's other hand secured the free arm of Pete and drew it into an exceedingly painful position. Driving the helpless man before him, Arthur bore down on George, who did not join battle, but stepped back into his chamber.

Arthur was now in the hallway, but he could not open the outside door without releasing his prisoner.

"Young woman, open the door, or it will be the worse for you."

Lulu was regarding the contest with staring eyes. Now she made a hopeless motion of her shoulders.

"I don't dare," she mumbled.

Arthur pushed Pete against the door, ventured to release one arm, and hold him with his body while he felt for the latch. And something swished through the air, a noose dropped around his neck and he was drawn roughly backward. George, from the center of his chamber, had thrown a noosed rope, and the contest was finished.

"I knew you were a good man with your hands," said Jameson as he stepped into the hall, "but I bet they never taught you how to throw a rope at the Y. M. C. A."

Arthur was led back into the sitting room, the rope so tight he could scarcely breathe.

"Lulu, strip him," demanded the chief.

"Please let Pete do it," she pleaded.

"No. Pete might murder him out of hand. Go ahead."

Flushing so crimson that both rascals laughed loudly, the girl approached Arthur, avoided his sorrowful eyes, and pulled his coat from his shoulders. Then she removed his vest and unfastened his belt; suddenly she sobbed and ran into the bedroom.

"Finish the job, Pete," commanded Jameson. "Lulu is getting modest. No rough work—yet."

In a couple of minutes the half-strangled young man stood in his B.V.D.'s, while Jameson collected his clothes and went into the bedchamber.

"Clear out," he ordered Lulu. "I'm going to put these clothes on. You better get out. You are no use here."

Lulu did not venture to look again into the sitting room; with her handkerchief to her eyes and her shoulders shaking, she opened the front door and closed it behind her.

In the meantime Pete had taken the lasso without removing the noose from around his neck, and proceeded to tie Arthur hand and foot with extreme competency and equal lack of consideration.

"You try to get your feet and hands free, and you strangle yourself; and if you yell for help, the neighbors will think it is some-

body singing on one of those damn radios," said Pete. "It's a wonder you didn't break my arm, you big stiff!"

Having trussed Arthur most successfully, he pushed him toward a sofa and tossed him upon it.

In five minutes Jameson returned dressed completely in Arthur's clothing. They were about the same height and weight. Jameson was a trifle thicker about the middle, but not enough to burst buttons.

"You will have to be very quiet, or you will hang yourself," he told Arthur. "I don't care much if you do. It's entirely up to your own good judgment."

From a bureau drawer he took a tin box and set it upon the table, then drew up a chair and inspected the captive very carefully.

"You and I have the same shaped face. Of course I am a lot older," he observed. "I doubt if I could pass for you in broad daylight. You don't cut your hair very short, so a wig will look all right."

"What do you intend to do?" asked Arthur, although he had a suspicion of the intentions of the man who had captured him.

"Pay a call on your revered employer."

Jameson had opened his make-up box, and was doing his best to create a resemblance to the boy in the sofa. Arthur's nose was longer, his mouth smaller, his eyes blue while Jameson's were gray, and he was twenty years younger; yet in ten or fifteen minutes the man had transformed himself so that he looked like his twin brother.

"I was once an actor," he said, "and I haven't forgotten the art of make-up."

He drew from his pocket Arthur's keys.

"Which is your latchkey?" he demanded.

"I have none. I ring."

"Too bad. However, I think I can get past a sleepy footman. Mordant has detectives in the street, and one or two in the house, but nobody is going to stop his secretary returning home at a reasonable hour."

"Are you going to kill him?" whispered Arthur, who was suffering exquisitely in his conscience. Had he not made a chance acquaintance, had he not been completely fooled by this wicked young woman, Mr. Mordant would not be in danger. He had been trusted by his employer; he was the last line of defense, and he had been trapped with the greatest of ease by the vindictive enemy of Mr. Mordant. If the great man was murdered, it would be his fault. Perhaps they would even accuse him of the crime because Jameson looked so much like him.

Involuntarily he began to writhe, and the noose upon his neck grew tighter.

"I told you not to do that. The only way you can remain alive until I get back is to lie absolutely quiet," said Jameson.

CHAPTER XX.

REFLECTIONS OF A CAPTIVE.

HE leaned over the victim and pulled up the cord at the back so that the boy could breathe again.

"I had a gag in my mouth for thirty-six hours once," the man declared. "When they released me I was half dead, and ever since I have hated to make use of it, but I need Pete in my business, and I can't have you creating a disturbance, so I am afraid you must put up with it for a few hours."

Arthur shuddered at the prospect, but he was man enough not to beg for mercy, and he knew that this clerical-looking, soft spoken individual was pitiless and not to be moved by pleas.

Jameson thrust a handkerchief in his mouth, then fastened a towel tightly around the lower part of his face. In the electric light of the small room the criminal seemed to Arthur to look exactly like himself. Anybody would be deceived in a dim light. He would probably achieve his purpose.

Jameson had made all his preparations. Now he summoned Grogan and went into the hallway, switching out the lights in the room and leaving Arthur in the dark.

"Sorry to inconvenience you, Pride," he said as a good-by. "If you lay quiet I'll have you released presently. If you try to wriggle out of those bonds, you'll be dead when we come back."

He then extinguished the light in the hall, the door opened and closed, and the last line of defense of Carolus Mordant was left to his reflections, which were as bitter as wormwood.

The majority of men go through life and come to their ends without ever having an opportunity to learn how they would behave in a great emergency. To be stepped upon in the subway, to be shaken up in an auto crash, or to drop a few floors in an elevator which is stopped by its safety appliances, are the biggest thrills which the average individuals encounter. All they know of violence, of strife, of knife work, shots in the dark, physical conflict, is what they read in the papers. Unless they dwell in a New York apartment they will live their whole lives without coming into personal contact with a burglar; if they do not live in Chicago they will never meet a hold-up man.

Until the morning after the night he fell out of bed Arthur Pride gave every evidence of being one of those not-to-be-tried men. If he had remained in the environment in which he had grown to manhood, he would have lived placidly, more or less contentedly, and as safe as an oyster on an uninhabited shore, but he had listened to ambition and ventured into a zone where desperate men were lurking. A large salary had tempted him. He had drawn it for a single week, and now, if he moved, he would garrote himself.

As he lay in the dark, afraid to lift a finger, breathing with difficulty, chewing on a rag which filled his mouth, his mind raced. Morosely he reviewed his own conduct, and found it stupid and reprehensible.

If it had not been for his vanity he might have escaped this situation; what an imbecile he had been to suppose that a girl with the physical attractions of this Lulu had been drawn to him for any qualities which he possessed, a man who had never before received encouragement from an attractive girl.

Now he realized that they had plotted to capture him from the moment he went to work for Mordant. No doubt Lulu had followed him into the subway car that night, and when he had not responded to her advances had moved into his hotel for no other purpose than to insnare him.

Although literature was full of stories of vampires who dragged men to their ruin, although the newspapers teemed with articles about unprincipled and wicked women, he had supposed that such females could be recognized on sight by the mark of the devil on their faces; that a bad woman would look wicked, and because the alleged Miss Mayfield had appeared sweet and innocent and unspoiled, he had been idiot enough to accept her without question, had spent evening after evening in her company without any suspicion that she was not what she pretended to be. And he had flattered himself that he was a judge of character.

Trusted implicitly by Mordant, he had failed in the first test. Although the great man had warned him to avoid chance acquaintances, he had succumbed to the first person who scraped acquaintance with him. If he did choke to death on this sofa he would richly deserve such a fate because of his arrant folly.

Yet his mental anguish was caused, not so much by his imminent peril as what would be the results of his failure to attend to his business. If Mordant came to harm —well, he hoped to die on this spot.

That Jameson would have no difficulty in obtaining entrance at the Mordant home he was sure, because they were expecting himself, and when the villain walked up the steps the outsider watchers would not question him. They were familiar with Pride's appearance. And the butler, if he were up, would not give him a second glance.

The villain could go directly to Pride's room, and from there swoop down upon his victim. One person in the house might know the difference. Grace, if she spoke to him, would know that Jameson was not Arthur Pride.

And this opened a terrifying line of thought. If Grace happened to encounter the masquerader and engaged him in conversation, what would happen to her? Perhaps you may imagine the terror of a man bound hand and foot and laid across a railroad track when he sees the train roaring down upon him; just that emotion was ex-

perienced by the youth on the sofa in the apartment of George Jameson as he thought of Grace Mordant in the power of that man.

He could see his brutal hands on her white throat, the pretty eyes staring with terror, the sweet little mouth open in a bleat of alarm, which would be so ruthlessly choked.

He gave an involuntary leap at the thought, and the dreadful noose about his neck tightened. He relaxed in time: it slackened again.

One of the diversions of pirates was to tie a husband to a tree on an island, and then torture his wife before his eyes; what such a husband suffered in those ancient days Arthur experienced now, for he could see the murder of the lovely child as plainly as though it were happening before his eyes.

His anguish was so intense that merciful Nature permitted him to faint; he lost consciousness for a time. With the return of his senses the dreadful thoughts returned; again he suffered.

It seemed to him that he should die of grief if anything happened to Grace. He had not known that he loved her; now he realized to the full how adorable the child was with her cunning basket of tricks, a kitten pretending to be a bad old cat. And time ticked; he could hear a clock somewhere. And a radio began to play in an apartment not far away; a sugary tenor was singing "Ben Bolt."

"How she laughed with delight when you gave her a smile,
And trembled with fear at your frown."

Though Grace had not done either of these things, at that minute he thought she had, and he shuddered as the doleful song continued to its tearful close about the slab of granite so gray, and sweet Alice lying under the stone.

Tears were streaming down the boy's cheeks when the tenor finished his wail, and then a tinkle of breaking glass near at hand startled him. He heard a woman's voice say "damn!"

There was a squeak of a lifted window sash, a thump as somebody landed on the floor in the bedroom. Steps, quick steps across the room, a click as a light button was pressed. Arthur lifted his head and almost choked himself, and saw Lulu standing in the doorway. One of her wrists was bleeding, and she was stanching the blood with a little handkerchief.

His head dropped back hopelessly; no chance of rescue from the source which had caused his predicament, but Lulu gave a low cry of pity and crossed the room. She tugged at his gag, loosened the towel, and pulled out the soaked handkerchief from his mouth. She was crying.

"You poor boy!" she crooned.

He tried to tell her that it was all her fault, but his tongue was dry, he could not speak. Lulu patted across the room, drew a carving knife from the top drawer of the buffet, and approached him. Having convinced himself that she was a black-souled wretch, he still had no hope of succor, and he was surprised when she began slashing at his ropes. In a moment he was free.

"Can you ever forgive me?" she sobbed, looking at him with eyes that were tortured.

"Water!" he pleaded. She ran to the bathroom and returned with a tumbler full of the liquid he needed so badly, and he drank like a camel after nine days.

It was typical of Arthur that he glanced in dismay at his B. V. D.'s, and she understood his embarrassment.

"Wait, I'll get you his clothes," she rattled off, and ran into the bedroom, returning in a moment with an armful of men's apparel. She turned her back while he dressed, and he began to appreciate that she had rescued him, had made amends in part for her offense, and was probably taking some risk in turning him loose.

"I appreciate this very much, Miss Mayfield," he stammered. "Aren't you in danger as a result of it?"

"I don't care," said the girl, passionately. "I'm leaving town right away. I just couldn't leave you in the lurch after we had been such friends."

"I'm surprised you were able to get in. How did you manage it?" he asked, dressing feverishly.

"I knew they would both go out on the job and tie you up. I had no key, but I

knew a woman three floors down. I walked the streets for a couple of hours trying to get up my nerve, then I called her and she was out. I had the bellboy open her door, and went in. There is a fire escape outside her bedroom window, and I ran up it to this one. The window was locked, and I broke it with the heel of my shoe, but I cut my wrist sticking my hand in to turn the catch."

"Let me see it," he said. The cut was not deep, and he bound it with two handkerchiefs of Jameson's which she found for him in the chief's bureau.

"You are very good," she faltered.

"Not at all. You probably saved my life. I suppose they have a hold over you, or you would not have lured me here."

"Something like that," she nodded. As a matter of fact, their only hold on Lulu was their willingness to pay her good money for occasional assistance, but if there were any scraps of credit to be secured she wanted them.

"What are you going to do now?" she demanded.

"Go to Mordant's."

"Don't. They'll kill you."

"I ought to be killed," he replied. "Good-by, and thank you."

"Wait for me," called the girl, but he was already running down the corridor. Jameson's hat was a trifle too big for him, and kept flopping up and down on his head; the elevator took an eternity to respond to his ring, and when he reached the street he was compelled to wait a minute or two before a taxi with its flag in an upright position came into view. Giving the address of Carolus Mordant, he flung himself into the machine and chafed because it was chained to the earth and had no wings.

Of course, he had no program. He intended to burst into the house and confront the impostor if he had not already perpetrated his crime and fled.

He had no fear of consequences to himself from an encounter with Jameson, did not give such things a thought. If there was a way of repairing the damage caused by his neglect of duty he would take it no matter what happened.

The determined young man in the cab was a very different individual from the self-conscious, mild mannered youth of a week ago; his two hours of agony on the couch had changed him so that he would never be the old Arthur Pride again. He was a two-fisted fighter burning for the fray, a defeated champion seeking another chance.

For the first time since he had become the bodyguard of Carolus Mordant he had the disposition and temperament of a guardsman, but the change might have come too late!

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

IMPRESSION

THE night is a very part of you, girl,
Its soft, sweet silence, the stars and the mist,
The tender light of the low-hung moon
These age-old mountains have mocked and kissed.

And the day is a very part of you, too,
This powder-blue sky, this healing sun,
The faintest perfume of desert flowers,
The urge that no task be left undone.

But if it be day or if it be night,
Whether labor be shirked or met—
Once on a time I kissed you, dear,
And, ah! I remember it yet!

Peter A. Lea.

Say Ah-H

By RICHARD F. MERRIFIELD

VIOLA hadn't said much during supper. She'd eaten hardly anything. Her expression was grave and meditative. Recognizing these symptoms, Albert had braced himself for the climax.

After awhile she would say something that would probably knock him off his pins. Then they'd have a quarrel about it. That was the way these things generally happened.

What could be wrong now, he wondered? Did she want a new dress? If she did, he knew she would not come out with it directly, but would arouse his sympathy by some such overture as this.

Waiting for the storm to break was no easy matter. He ate studiously, resolving that he would not make the first move. He would not start it this time, anyhow.

Nevertheless, he did start it. He swallowed his coffee, gulped, and said:

"What's eating you to-night, Vi?"

"Oh, nothing," she answered lightly, continuing to hold the mysterious expression. But he had heard his wife say that before. "Oh, nothing" meant that something was wrong.

"Something's eating you, all right." If he controlled his curiosity long enough, he knew, she would tell what ailed her. By searching her mood like this, he was putting himself on the defensive. Now, if she told him something disagreeable, it would be his own fault for asking.

"Mad about something?" he inquired.

Viola drew a deep breath, and turned it into a sigh of deepest care. Albert's sympathy moved him to lean toward her and pat her forearm solicitously.

"I'm worrying," she said in a low voice.

"Worrying? About what?" He followed up the clew eagerly. "Is it about—money?"

"What else could it be, except that?" She turned her head on one side, regarding him with a serious pucker of her brow. "Albert, you're working too hard, and not getting enough for it. It isn't that I'm not contented, only I feel that way."

So that was it. He smiled, feeling proud of himself.

It had not occurred to him that he was working too hard. Now that she mentioned it, though, he saw the truth of the matter,

and sighed heavily as if Viola had just discovered a great secret that he had been nobly keeping from her.

"I don't mind, though," he told her generously.

"You're only saying that. I've been thinking it all over, Al, and it's really very serious. It worries me."

Somehow he felt that she was still keeping her thoughts from him. Worrying doesn't require any deep secrecy. She was just stroking him to make him purr. Pretty soon she'd spring it. He waited.

"It isn't right," she declared. "We've got to do something about it. Look, we haven't a thing saved up for a rainy day. We just live from hand to mouth—your salary's spent before you get it. Albert, I'm going to work."

Crash!

"You're not going to do anything of the kind," he replied, shocked.

"Why not?" she wanted to know. "Lots of married women work. I don't see why I can't. I worked before we were married. Anyway, there's nothing to do at home except housework, and I'm sick of that."

Albert drew tightly into his shell, and set his mind doggedly against the idea.

"It don't matter what other people do," he said heavily. "I'm not going to have people saying that my wife's got to work. If I can't support a wife, then I shouldn't be married, that's all. You just try getting a job and see what happens."

"What'll happen?"

"You'll see. Either you have me or you have a job, understand? You're not going to have both."

—Viola's jaw was set as she rose from the table.

"You're the meanest thing on earth, Albert Wade!" she cried. "You're the selfishest, meanest—"

After it was all over, Albert lighted a cigarette with sweet satisfaction. He had won. Viola had promised not to return to office work.

II.

About a week later, they had another little spat. It happened at supper time, too. The mood was reversed.

This time it was Albert who ate very little and wore an expression of profound abstraction. Viola broke the ominous silence just after they sat down.

"Why don't you eat?"

Albert shifted in his chair so that he sat looking out of the window, facing away from the table. He wanted her to follow up her query.

It annoyed him when she remarked indifferently:

"Very well, don't talk then."

One could not keep silent for effect when the effect was not produced. Albert came out of himself before long.

"I hate to growl," he said, "but what's this change in you, Vi?"

"Change?"

"Sure. Gee whiz—we always used to have real suppers until a little while ago. Now all we see is canned tomatoes, canned peas, canned corn, canned soup, canned everything. Last night we had succotash and spaghetti. To-night you've got tuna fish and peas and beans. Gee, we can afford better food than that!"

But this wasn't really a quarrel, because Viola promised to do better in the future. She hadn't been feeling very well lately, and there was housework, and shopping. Sometimes it's like that, she explained.

Albert felt relieved the next night when she prepared spinach, boiled potatoes and hamburger steak with onions. This spurt of attention to the table soon faded out, however, and it was only a matter of a couple of days before the familiar cans reappeared.

They returned discreetly, of course, and he did not suspect the disguise at first—not at all, in fact, until one special morning.

He had risen early to beat the subway rush to the business section of Brooklyn where he worked. There was no need to bother Viola about breakfast. He'd let her sleep, and fry his own eggs.

But there weren't any eggs in the ice box. He looked high and low, on and under the latticed shelves below the ice compartment, and all he could see was rows of cans!

That discovery started a trying day for him. Quite disgusted, he went out without

breakfast, and snatched a cup of bad coffee in the lunch wagon on the corner.

Everything went wrong at the office, and the upshot was that at noon he had developed a ripping headache. The department boss was just slightly sarcastic when Albert asked for the rest of the day off. Albert won, nevertheless.

It was good to be out in the open air. He wondered, as he walked down Fulton Street toward the subway, how all these people managed to get out on fine afternoons like this. Didn't they have to work? Were they all millionaires?

Viola would put alcohol on his forehead when he got home. That would help. As usual, though, he'd have to tell her how to apply it.

Viola, capable in almost every other respect, was a failure at tending ailments. He remembered the time when she had run distractedly around the house because he had sliced his thumb with the meat knife.

Complete thoughts such as these formed with difficulty in his mind to-day, because of his throbbing head. It just ached for all its worth, maliciously, it seemed.

When he arrived home he looked all over the apartment, but Viola was out. Depressed, he dropped on the davenport in the front room and tried to sleep.

Surely he had dozed only for five minutes when Viola came home. But no, he had slept three hours. Surprised, he sat up blinking, and the idea struck him that it was probably to-morrow. Waking up like this gave him a delicious sense of unreality.

"Oh, are you home?" Viola was saying.

Her arms were held behind her, as if she were trying to conceal something.

"I w's 'sleep," he yawned, then yawned again, wider, luxuriating in the sensation. "Gosh, what time's it?"

"Almost five. How'd you get home so early. Were you sick?"

"Oh, I had a rotten headache. Still got it. I took the afternoon off and came home. What've you got there?"

She hesitated, then produced a small black satchel, a sort of cross between a traveling kit and a large handbag. Imitation leather.

"It looked so cute that I wanted it," she explained. "I was at the department store. Here, you get some more sleep while I get supper."

"What'd you use for supper?" he asked.

She did not wait to answer, but hurried out to cook. Albert lay back, wondering about certain things. What did she need that crazy satchel for? He mulled over it, deciding finally that women were a little cuckoo.

Two conditions spoiled his supper. First, there was deviled ham and potato salad, and he hated both. Second, his throat hurt when he swallowed.

A little catch at first, it became steadily worse, until each act of swallowing was a painful, slow gulp. He frowned over it, but refrained from saying anything until later, when the meal was over.

Viola placed her palm over his forehead when he told her about it.

"It isn't there," he said petulantly; "it's in my throat. Feels funny, when I try to swallow."

"Let me see your tongue," ordered Viola, raising his chin with her hand. "Open your mouth. Oh, stick out your tongue; I'm not going to hurt you! Way out. Say, 'Ah-h-h.'"

"Ah-h-uh," he obeyed unwillingly, and resumed his natural expression as soon as he had performed the feat. "Well, did you see anything?"

"I think you've got tonsilitis," she said gravely. "Your throat is coated."

"Coated? Got a coat on? No hat, eh?"

"Don't be funny. I mean it's white. You'd better go to bed and I'll call the doctor."

Albert fumed and fussed against going to bed. He didn't want any doctor to come and dig out his tonsils. Anyway, they couldn't afford one. Three dollars to a doctor would knock an awful hole in their finances.

Viola insisted that he obey her, and he did at last, grumblingly, declaring that he'd get up and go to work the next morning, doctor or no doctor.

When the physician, summoned by Viola, arrived, Albert disliked him instantly. He would have disliked any doctor. There

was too much dignity about that tall figure. Albert felt he was being high-hatted.

Whatever the cause, he did not stop to analyze his instinctive distrust of this lean, courteous Dr. Towning.

Viola seemed to become so darned self-conscious and coy as soon as the doctor arrived. She flitted about, offering a chair, a glass, a table, a spoon and whatnot. Albert decided that he didn't like Towning because Viola did.

"Of course, it's nothing serious," Towning remarked, as he flipped a thermometer. "Just mild tonsilitis, but we'll cure that, won't we? Now, let's see if you can explode this thermometer. Under the tongue."

Albert felt like exploding the thing over the doctor's thin, arched nose.

There was a lot more to Towning's visit. He seemed to be trying to give them their money's worth. Albert was made to say "Ah-h-h" several times, and to stretch his tongue 'way out while a culture was taken of his throat. He kicked like a little boy at the culture.

"But it's got to be done, Al," Viola told him. "Don't be such a big baby. It doesn't hurt."

One had to be careful, Dr. Towning blithely informed him. With all these cases of diphtheria around, it was best to have a culture for analysis.

Albert submitted to it with poor grace, and waited hopefully for the next manifestation of the doctor's vast medical knowledge. It came in the form of a prescription.

"You're to gargle this every three hours," Towning said.

"Does it taste bad?" asked Albert suspiciously.

"Terribly," smiled the doctor, rising. "Now, to-morrow, if some of that hasn't cleared, we'll put some iodine back there. If you're careful everything will be all right. Can't go to work. Otherwise, we'll have to get a derrick and hoist out those tonsils. Take it easy for a few days."

When the doctor had gone, Albert fretted and tossed in his bed.

"The room smells like a hospital," he growled.

"Don't be so fussy," answered Viola. "The doctor knows what's best."

He nursed his grouch for awhile, bothered because Viola looked so cheerful.

"Don't you think Dr. Towning is nice?" she remarked, as she patted his pillow.

"He's a pest," replied Albert. "I never heard of him before. Where'd you come to know of him?"

"Silly—he's the best doctor on this street."

But Albert was not satisfied. He complained that this was wrong and that was wrong, until Viola, out of patience, cried out at him:

"Oh, keep quiet for a minute, will you!"

"I won't. I've got a right to talk. Anyway, that doctor is too familiar. You'd think you and he'd been friends for life, since you went to school. I heard him call you 'Viola,' even."

His wife had compressed her lips and was moving primly from one piece of furniture to another, pretending absorbed industry.

Irritated at her silence, Albert went on bitterly:

"You'd think I was a dog in this house, the way you treat me. Bum food and everything. Even that satchel. If you ask me, it looks mighty funny the way you got that crazy thing—when you don't need it."

"Just what do you mean, Albert Wade?" she demanded indignantly.

"Never mind." He brooded, thinking of what might happen if he had diphtheria. Did people die of it? He did not know, but suspected that they did. The very name of the sickness was insidious.

He had a vague idea that one shriveled up and gave up the ghost as a fly did when sprayed with an insecticide.

His mind roved. He wondered how they'd ever pay for the doctor's attention. Too much attention, Albert thought, playing with the word. Presently another thought came to him.

"How'd you know I had tonsilitis?" he asked Viola.

She replied from the window where she was adjusting the shade.

"I had it once, so I knew what it was like. I suppose you're suspicious of that, too."

Albert did not answer. Her explanation was unsatisfactory. The wild notion passed through his mind that she and the doctor had framed up this sickness of his to—to what? So they could see each other oftener, maybe?

This brooding dulled him, and he fell asleep.

Dr. Towning brought good news in the morning. No diphtheria bacilli had been found in the analysis of Albert's culture.

"That means that you'll be up very soon," said the doctor. "A few days more, until we got those white spots out. Did you like the gargle?"

Viola answered for her husband:

"He's a naughty patient, doctor. You should have seen him kicking at the medicine."

"Well, it feels funny," the patient insisted. "Makes my throat all dry and tight like."

"Fine, my boy," said Dr. Towning cheerily.

Albert ground his teeth. "My boy!" Calling him "boy!" They were both treating him like a kid.

This was a short visit. The doctor had called early before running down to his hospital. Just before he left he offered to notify Albert's office on his way to town.

Albert listened very intently when the two, Viola and the doctor, went to the door. He could get only snatches of their conversation, but that was enough to corroborate his suspicions.

First there was Viola's voice, saying in a tone very near to reproach: "I can't do that now—" Aha. So she was turning the doctor down. Good for her. Dirty bum, that Towning fellow.

He listened as the doctor's voice rose a little. "If you reconsider, let we know, won't you, Viola?"

Albert's eyes narrowed. Would she reconsider? What a persistent guy, to keep on bothering her after a turn-down. If she'd reconsider, humpf!

What was she saying now? He strained his ears.

"There's nothing serious in this—" came her voice. Nothing serious in what? He pictured every possibility.

Oh, if he could only see into that hallway. He wanted to call out something sarcastic to them.

Wait, he'd get up and surprise them. Smash the doctor in the face. One, two. Left, right. The picture of Dr. Towning sprawled face down on the floor, whimpering for mercy. Viola pleading: "Don't hurt him, Albert, I love him."

Then he'd turn on her and tell her what was what. Lash them both with accusing words. Jam on his hat and leave. Next train to Chicago.

But he couldn't just jam on his hat and go out. He'd have to dress first. One couldn't go to Chicago with only pyjamas and hat on.

Towning was talking in low mumblings. Albert raised himself on one elbow to hear better.

"It's very pretty—" he heard the doctor say. Oh, the dog! Trying flattery now. "—and be sure to call me up." The hound.

When Viola came into the room she found her husband in the act of socking the pillow with both fists, growling like an angry puppy. He looked around at her, then sat up straight in bed, grinning foolishly.

"Just getting some exercise," he said.

"Well, you lie down and stop that nonsense, or you'll never get well. Do you want to work up a fever. If you don't behave I'll have them take you to a hospital."

Like threatening to call the bogey man, he thought. Next she'd promise to stand him in a dark closet for half an hour, or give him castor oil, or put red pepper on his tongue.

"What were you two talking about all that time?" There, it was out.

"Don't be so nosey," she returned shortly, and left the room.

Well, of all the nerve! As if he hadn't a right to be nosey in a case like this. Were people always as brazen as this?

By George, he'd do something about it. Show her he had a right to know. Take action.

Where was that satchel? He'd find out the truth of the whole thing right now, without any more delay.

People always kept incriminating evidence in black satchels, because the detectives had to trace them up. Look for the tall man with the black grip.

Albert slipped out of bed and stood up. His head rang with dizziness. The room swayed around him like a top at the end of its spinning.

He found the closet and bent over, groping for the satchel. Suppose Viola came in now?

Well, he'd wheel on her, rip open the bag and dump the contents on the floor. Then she'd have to confess, because he'd be looking at her with strong, direct eyes, searching right into her soul.

Ah, the bag. It was hard to open. He fumbled with the lock, moved the catch and spread apart the ridge.

There was nothing inside except a small white apron. Baffled and annoyed, he flung it down into the closet, and returned to bed just as his wife entered.

Pending the discovery of further evidence, he held his peace.

That afternoon Dr. Towning called again. This was fortunate, reflected Albert, since it gave him more evidence. Towning had no real reason for calling, that is, no professional reason. Therefore he had dropped in to see Viola. That was plain.

How simple people were in these secrets —how open! They probably thought that no one could possibly interpret the meaning of their actions.

The doctor was discussing the causes and effects of tonsilitis—a ruse, Albert smiled to himself, to cover the reason for the visit. Talking about medicine. As if any of them were interested in medicine.

The doctor was interested in Viola—she in the doctor. And Albert was interested in them both.

He didn't like being sick. One's mind played odd tricks. Fragments of song recurred and rang in one's ears monotonously. The same thing happened with phrases and words.

When the doctor mentioned the name of the gargle he had prescribed, Albert caught only the last part of the name. It clung to his tongue, and he found himself repeating it, silently chanting: "tannic acid, tannic acid."

There was more to the name, something like *glyceride tannic acid*, but that didn't worry him. The term had no meaning for him.

"Yes," Towning was saying in his cheery, brisk manner, "there's nothing better than that." He turned to Viola. "This is similar to that case that we, I mean, that I attended last week."

Albert seized on the word "we," but could not figure out its meaning. This was more evidence. He filed it away in his memory for reference.

Later developments would explain it, doubtless, would make it a link in the chain of all these incidents. Everything would eventually lead up to the truth, and then he'd face them.

Something much worse than this happened the following morning. Albert awoke to hear Viola walking through the hall. Usually, at this time of day, eight thirty, he heard her walking, so there was nothing strange about that. But usually she had on slippers, while this morning she wore shoes.

The heels beat a tattoo all the way into the front room. He heard the rasp of a window as it was raised, then the imperative buzz of an automobile horn.

Presently Viola returned down the hall. He closed his eyes, just squinting. She passed the door of the bedroom, and Albert caught sight of a tan hat and white sweater. In one hand she had the black satchel!

She had no sooner closed the hall door than he sprang out of bed and, spurred into strength by his anger and curiosity, ran to the front room window.

The car was a blue coupé, very new-looking. He could not see the man because the driver's seat was on the street side instead of the sidewalk side, and besides, his window was three stories above the ground.

He knew it was the doctor, though, and especially so when he saw Viola emerge from the door below and make straight for the coupé.

They drove down the street, turning to the right four blocks away.

Muttering, Albert tore around in a jeal-

ous rage, finding his clothes. He jammed his feet into the shoes, cursing when the backs of the heels gave way flexibly and folded under his feet. There wasn't time, now, to look for a shoehorn.

What could he do to get back at them? Send out a general alarm, perhaps, and have them stopped at one of the East River bridges. That would surprise them. A policeman saying: "Wait, you! I know who you are."

But they were too wise. When he judged their movements from past instances, he knew they'd never take that risk. Simplicity was apparently their best refuge.

They thought to fool him by doing exactly what no one else would do. This being the case, they'd go to the doctor's house. Albert would never think of going there.

But Albert did think of going there, and he went, walking swiftly along the sidewalk, watching for an M. D. sign on the houses to right and left.

The doctor's house was on the same side, a modest two-family stucco dwelling, fronted by ash trees that spread over the brick steps. An oblong black sign was placed in one window, with the name in gilt, "*Edward E. Towning, M. D.* Hours, 1-3. Evening, 6-8."

A gracious young woman with brown hair and impersonal dark eyes opened the door.

"The doctor isn't here just now," she told him. "Would you like to wait? He said he'd be back very soon."

Albert nodded and followed her into the waiting room. His mind recorded impressions of the place.

Evidently Towning had his office in the house where he lived. This joung woman, who was she? An assistant, probably.

It would be hard for her when she learned that her employer had eloped. She would be out of a job.

He was on the point of telling her about it when she motioned him to a seat and moved out of the room through a pair of green portières.

He gazed around. So the doctor would return pretty soon. What a hypocrite Towning was! He'd never return. The assistant had been taken in, too, by the fellow's suavity.

Albert could not tell why he was waiting. Perhaps it was because there was a possibility that they might come here, after all. He'd probably drive up, leave Viola in the car, and run in for his suit case.

Time passed. At the end of a half hour, Albert was leaning back on the sofa, reading a medical journal from the mahogany table. An article on homeopathy. It didn't mean anything to him, though. Homeopathy could be interior decorating for all he cared.

He was absorbed in a picture of university graduates when the door opened and Dr. Towning walked in, followed by Viola.

They were astonished to see him, but Albert waved aside their exclamations and jumped to his feet, gripping the medical journal in one hand for moral support.

"You never expected me, did you?" he began with a hard smile. "Well, I'm here. I'm here, do you understand? Now, what're you going to do about it?"

Towning and Viola looked wonderingly at each other, and the doctor shook his head, describing a circle with his finger to indicate that Albert was nuts.

"You can't throw me off like that," cried Albert. "I'm not crazy, and I'm not sick. I saw you go off together this morning. I knew you'd come here. Thought you'd fool me, huh? Thought I wouldn't suspect anything, that you'd come here. Well, I'm here, and when I get through, something's going to happen."

That would scare them. They'd think he had a gun.

"Albert! What are you saying?" interrupted Viola.

"Keep still, you," he came back at her. "Don't either of you interrupt me. I was getting suspicious when we started eating canned grub. That was enough. Then I saw that satchel and that was more. And then I heard you two talking.

"You, Towning, trying to get my wife. Asking her to reconsider! I heard her put you off when she said she couldn't now, and then you started to flatter her. Oh, I heard everything!"

Dr. Towning stood very still, one hand on the knob of the door. His face was contemplative, the interest of one observing a peculiar phrase of psychology. Viola had seated herself, regarding her husband with a contemptuous frown.

"You thought you'd sneak out on me this morning, eh?" Albert continued his tirade. "Well, I saw you. I heard you going out. You got in the car. So I came here because I knew you'd come here. Tonsilitis! Say, I haven't got tonsilitis any more than the man in the moon! That's a nice trick to get me helpless to bed. I can see through it all now, and you're not going to get away with it, Towning. You big bum, take this!"

He lurched toward the doctor, swinging wildly with both arms. Towning caught him, pinning him against the door with a tight grip on his muscles.

Albert, despite his struggles, could not free himself. He was too weak to resist.

"You're a fool, Wade," said the doctor, "an awful fool. Quiet there, and let me talk. I have no interest of that kind in your wife. As a matter of fact, I have a very charming wife of my own. She must have admitted you at the door. Oh, Beatrice, would you mind coming here?"

His wife, the gracious young woman, appeared at the green portières. She seemed worried, for she had overheard the entire scene. Towning released Albert and placed his arm around Beatrice.

"You see, Wade," he went on, "all your imaginings are wrong. My only relation with your wife has been a business one. She has been acting as practical nurse for a few of my patients."

Albert started off anew at this. Instead of calming him, the doctor's announcement stirred him to bitter anger. He turned upon Viola.

"So you did go to work after all! You didn't care what I said about it. No, it doesn't matter how I feel. You do what you want to, don't you? Trying to make people think you have to work because your husband is poor. Humiliating me. You'll be taking in washing next."

"You mustn't look at it that way, Mr. Wade," put in Beatrice Towning. "It is not a disgrace for a married woman to be a practical nurse. Before Dr. Towning and I were married I helped him the same way, didn't I, Ed?"

"I don't care what you did," Albert went on stubbornly. "What I care about is what my wife does, and she's not going to be a hired girl!"

"He's hysterical," remarked Towning.

Albert raved on until Viola rose from her chair and faced him. She spoke icily, withering him.

"If you weren't half sick," she said, "and I were a man, I'd thrash you good and plenty, Al Wade. You deserve it. You're acting like an idiot and insulting the doctor and his wife, to say nothing of me. You're only a petty, jealous husband. You ought to be spanked and put to bed. You're selfish. I despise you, Albert.

"I thought I married a man, but, no, I married a worm. Of course you don't realize what has come out of my working for Dr. Towning. You couldn't, because you're an imbecile.

"Suppose that night when your throat hurt, suppose I hadn't known what to do. If I hadn't worked for the doctor I'd never have known that you had tonsilitis. Then we wouldn't have called the doctor and you'd be six feet underground now from the complications, isn't that so, doctor?"

"It is quite possible," Towning assured her.

"Who took care of you night and day, Albert? I couldn't have done it if I hadn't been a practical nurse. And, tell me, my dear, sweet, loving husband, how do you imagine we've lived since you got sick? Did you give me any money to live on? No, because you had none. and pay day is four days off. They'll probably dock you for this week.

"Do you know that I have saved enough money, out of my working for the past week and a half, to pay the doctor and see us through until you're on your feet? You never think of that. You just think of your stomach.

"As a nurse I had to have that satchel. The talk with the doctor that day in the hall was nothing more nor less than a discussion about one of his patients.

"I'll tell you something, Albert, right now. Unless you snap out of this and apologize to the doctor, to Mrs. Towning, and to me, you're going to be good and sorry. How about it?"

Albert felt mean, low, whipped and miserable.

"Gee, I didn't know all that," he mumbled. "Guess I was too quick. Being sick made me like that, I guess."

"Say you're sorry, you egg," Viola prodded him.

"I am—stop poking me—I'm sorry, doctor, and you, Mrs. Towning. You too, Vi."

Dr. Towning smiled genially, putting out his hand.

Albert clasped it eagerly.

Mrs. Towning extended hers with the same melting cordiality. He shook it gratefully.

"You might shake hands with your wife," suggested Viola. "Just to show you what a fool you were, Al, let me tell you why I drove off with the doctor this morning.

"One of his former patients, a Mr. Dance, wants a man who does the work you do. He's interested in you because we boosted you, and it means better work and better pay.

"We went to see him and brought him over in the car. He's waiting outside for us now!"

"Holy smoke!" Albert gasped. He couldn't say anything more.

Dr. Towning broke into what threatened to be a sentimental scene.

"Before we go, Wade, let me have a look at that throat of yours. Say 'Ah-h-h.'"

Albert said "Ah-h-h" with a will.

"Ah, that's much better now," smiled the doctor.

THE END

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A MODERN NOBLEMAN

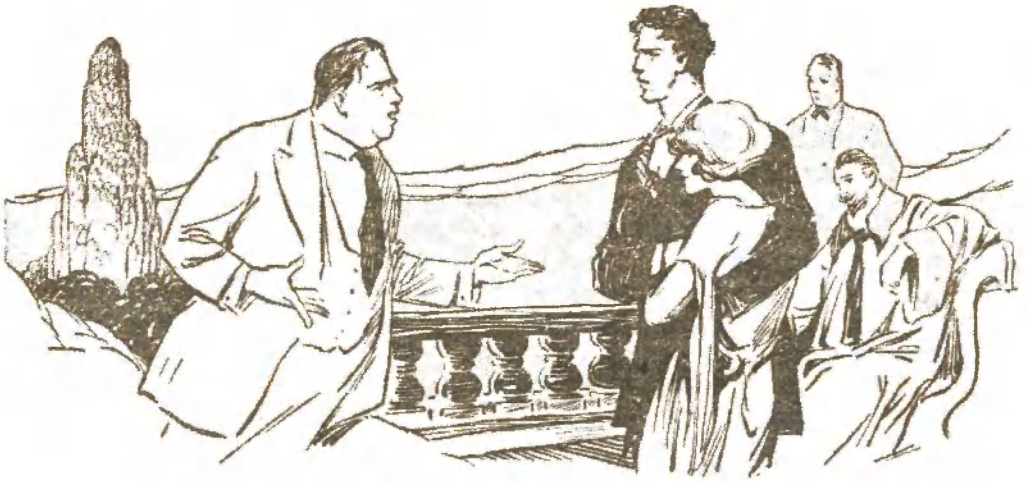
HE failed; to fight inclining,
He will fight and fail again;
Rather than he'd win out whining,
He would be an outcast pining,
He would be the spurned of men

Where's the virtue of succeeding
If you cannot stand upright?
Where's the luxury of leading,
With a conscience that is bleeding?
Let him fail; but watch him fight.

If to win by ruthless measure
Ever stamps a man as brave,
Call him coward at your pleasure;
And some day, when he has leisure,
He will fill a failure's grave.

But this one principle has stood
His soul's delicious balm—
That if he did himself no good,
He did the State no harm.

James S. Ryan.



The House of Invisible Bondage

By J. U. GIESY and JUNIUS B. SMITH

Authors of "Poor Little Pigeon," "The Opposing Venus," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CONFERENCE IN THE TOWER.

MOIRA MASON was white. All color seemed drained from her. Shadows lay under her blue eyes. Her appearance shocked me. One felt that the faith and hope she had said so confidently should support her had deserted her instead.

The last time I had seen her Bo-Peep had been so much more her normal self, even if a bit disturbed, a bit uncertain. Lamb and his mad course since his release had rendered her haggard with fright.

Bryce though was more natural, less formal than myself in his surprise.

"Bo-Peep—what the devil's happened now?" he exclaimed.

"Wait," Semi Dual spoke, before she could possibly answer. "Much has happened—and most of it of import to us who would undo a wrong, and make straight a crooked path. That you may hear of it I have called here this morning in order that, having heard it, you may once more render aid. Some little Miss Mason has told me. Yet she shall tell it again, and perchance at greater length. Be seated."

Jim and I found chairs.

"And now, Moira," Semi prompted. "Speak to us those things within thy heart, and speak as one speaks to friends."

"I didn't know. I hadn't heard a whisper of it till I got home," Bo-Peep began. "Imer's dreadful flying I mean. I didn't even know he had been released until after I had reached my home, and called his brother on the phone. Then he told me, and said he must see me at once. It sur-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 18.

prised me greatly. He'd never been very friendly.

" But he was so urgent that I said he might come. And then I called Imer's apartments, and a strange man answered and said he was Imer's valet, but that he wasn't there at present, but out at the flying field. I was surprised when he said he was Imer's man, because he'd had Joe Kingsley for years, and I didn't know about Joe either until after I saw George.

" I left word for Imer to call my number, and then George came and told me about Imer's flying. I'd never seen him quite as he was. He was frightened. I could see he was frightened, and he asked me, told me I must make Imer stop, because if he kept on he was practically certain to be killed. I asked him what made him do such a thing, and he hesitated a minute and then said he didn't know.

" But some way I knew that he lied. Then he went on and told me about Joe after I had asked him why Imer had a new man. And after I'd promised to do what I could with Imer he left; and I waited until I couldn't stand it, and then took my car and drove out to the field. Imer had just come down. I stopped as near to his hangar as I could, and when he came out and walked toward his own motor I called his name.

" He was laughing, and even after he saw me he kept right on laughing. But he came over. 'Hello, Moira,' he said. 'Wasn't expecting you back.' He was very casual about it, almost as though I hadn't been out of town.

" 'Imer,' I said, and looked straight in his eyes. 'Imer, what is the meaning of this?'

" And he set his lips, and looked very strange—almost as though I had some way hurt him. 'Rather hard to answer that here, dear girl,' he said. 'But I'll see you this evening, if I may, and explain.'

" I asked him if I couldn't drive him back, and he set his jaws again, almost as though he were gritting his teeth, and refused. And I drove home alone. I was dreadfully worried. You see, I couldn't understand, not then.

" But he came to me that evening just as he had promised, and then I did understand what they'd done to him in that dreadful place—how they'd ruined his life and mine. He was hurt by finding I'd gone away before he got out too.

"And I couldn't tell him, before I'd seen you, Mr. Dual. But I did tell him there was a reason—a very good reason—which, when I could tell him, he would understand. And when I said that he laughed again, and said it didn't matter.

" 'Why, Imer—why?' I asked.

" And then he told me. You see he doesn't think he is still quite sane. He doesn't think he is insane at present, but that dreadful man, Dr. Drake, told him, before he was turned loose, that while he was all right now, and in his estimation would remain so, still the history of cases which had once exhibited symptoms of a homicidal nature was that they might at any time recur."

" The infernal hound!" Jim's ejaculation cut into the sound of her voice.

In a flash I saw what Drake, for some purpose of his own, had done—how he had turned Imer Lamb out of his institution with a suggestion of a recurrence of his recent affliction to ride him haglike the rest of his life.

It was an infernal, a fiendish thing. It was diabolical. My mind balked at any term foul enough to describe the thing. And it had been cold-blooded, deliberate. I thought of Drake's first assurance to me that Lamb would soon return to a practical normal, and I began to understand. It had been part of a thought-out scheme.

I saw Moira Mason's eyes turn to Jim, to Semi, to me, and back to Dual again. " You see what he had done," she resumed. " He had set him free, but with that terrible thought in his brain. I cried out that I didn't believe it. But it made no impression on him. He said that the mere chance that it was true spelled the end of all things between us—that he would never marry, never consider marriage as long as he felt that he carried an unsound spot in his brain.

" And when he said that I—I—" for the first time a faint tinge of color crept into her white cheeks—" I threw myself into his arms, told him I was sure it was all false—that—that I was willing to prove my faith by marrying him at once.

"But it wasn't any use. He held me, he was very gentle; but he was so dreadfully, terribly strong. He was strong enough to refuse me. He stood firm in his determination; he held me, talked to me, and then at the end—he kissed me. It wasn't just good night—it was good-by.

"And he's flying again this afternoon. He told me he would before he kissed me good-by and went. And I can't stand it—I can't stand it!"

She clenched her hands. "I can't let him. It means just one thing. He won't come back; he doesn't mean to come back if he flies this afternoon. I don't know. If I'd never gone away—perhaps. But now—now—"

"Peace, child." Dual's mellow voice struck bell-like into the gasping phrases of her emotion. "Had you not gone, could you then have rendered your fullest help to him?"

Her eyes turned toward him. They were wide, dark. I watched her, this girl who was fighting so hard for her mate. And, too, I saw now the measure of that man; Imer Lamb had become a figure to excite my admiration as one who did what he thought right, refused to pander to self no matter what it might mean to him. It had been a final farewell his lips had conveyed to Moira's lips. This afternoon he would no longer leave his fate to chance. He would seek, and find it in a quick and whirling plunge.

Her pale lips moved. "No, of course not," they whispered. "If I had not gone, done what you told me, I could not have brought back proof of those things you felt must be proved. But—to come back with it, feeling I was bringing help to him, and then to have what is happening this afternoon happen—to find they had wrecked all the future while I was gone."

"Wrecked?" Dual's tone expressed a question that seemed to catch her up, to excite other thoughts in her brain.

"Oh, I've tried to be strong," she cried. "I've tried to have faith, hope, to go on. I've done everything I could, everything you said, as nearly as I could. I've brought back proof of everything you said I must."

"Everything?" Dual questioned again.

"I think so," she returned. "I found why Drake left Los Angeles, where he practiced. I found out that Nathalie Norton is not Nathalie Norton really, but his sister."

"What's that?" Jim rose half out of his chair.

Nathalie Norton, George Lamb's intimate friend, was Nathalie Drake, the sister of the man who had been so greatly involved in the affairs of Imer Lamb.

"Yes." I heard Moira speaking. "She was in pictures, as you know, for a time, till Drake had to leave California. Then she came here with him, and met George Lamb.

"I think George is scared, dreadfully frightened, since he sees that this affair is going to result in Imer's death. He was frightened yesterday afternoon. But he lied; I knew he lied when he said he didn't know. There was a guilty knowledge in his eyes. I—oh—why can't men learn that women feel such things? He knows—I'm sure of it."

"He knows," said Semi Dual. "Listen, Venus, did I not say in the beginning that you should greatly aid—and have you not done so since that time? Yet listen, further, and possess thyself in peace. Let not the clouds of doubt and lack of understanding affright you as a child is affrighted in the night by an ugly dream.

"He knows—and Uranus is a sign of explosive nature. Uranus is sometimes named in astrology as the policeman of the Sun. Uranus in the present instance is drawing ever closer to that overlord of his, to the time when Neptune and Mars shall feel the flaming fury of the Sun himself and thereby be destroyed.

"Child, think you that I have sat idly while you have worked? Did I not say to you that Jupiter was the judge? Nay, I have worked and watched, and marked each move in this sorry matter. Even in this matter of thy lover's flying I have not intervened. For a man dies at the time when his death is written, and my study of the life chart of Imer Lamb has shown me that his death is not to come upon him for yet many years."

"You mean—oh—do you mean that?" Bo-Peep cried out, while again I saw the explanation of Semi's seemingly paradoxical actions at which I had marveled and now marveled once again.

He answered her softly: "Know you who the man was who answered you yesterday afternoon from the rooms of Imer Lamb?"

"No."

"Henri," said Semi Dual. "My own man—the man I sent into this unclean house of Hugo Drake's to watch over thy beloved and at the same time to learn many things."

"Henri—your own man?" Moira asked.

"Henri," Dual repeated, who won thy lover's liking and confidence, who went with him by my orders to watch over him still, after his own man, the British ex-soldier, Joseph Kingsley, fell an unintended victim to the working out of others' plans. Peace, child. While you have worked under my direction, and seen my assumptions proved in a concrete fashion thus far, I have watched. Thy lover will not fly this afternoon."

"Will not?" she questioned, and lifted a hand to her throat, where the words were half strangled."

"Nay. Have I not called my friends, those whom I named my satellites, to me? Are they not present to take my commands? That which is to be will be, Moira—but not before its time. Hence, listen again and attend to my words, as to how this thing shall be done."

For a moment he paused, and his glance swept from her to me, to Bryce, before he resumed.

"Henri, my friend and companion, has watched and reported everything. Ye, my friends, shall now intervene. You will go to the rooms of Imer Lamb this afternoon at half after one.

"But you shall not go before, since before you go Henri shall have been withdrawn with no word of explanation to the man to whom he has rendered attendance. This shall perhaps impress that man as strange. But you shall go to him, and say that you know that his man has gone. And you shall say to him that he was but the trusted agent of one who has watched the progress of this whole matter from the first, because the woman who loves him, the woman he loves, requested him to do so.

"And you shall invite him into the presence of this unknown friend of them both, the friend of his mate to be, the friend of his vanished man. You shall ask him to come with you. He has seen you. He may even vaguely remember the time—after his arrest and incarceration at the jail—when you called upon him. Remind him of it, if the need arise.

"And say further that shall he accompany you here to my quarters he will gain an explanation of this matter which shall make all plain and convince him that there is not, never has been, any real or material derangement of his reason, since all that has happened is but the working out of a corrupt scheme.

"Drowning men grasp at straws, my friends. I do not think Imer Lamb will refuse you after you have spoken to him thus and he has a glimpse of the future and all it may hold for him."

"Oh—oh—" Moira Mason was sobbing.

But, to me, there was a hint of relaxing tension in the sound.

"And thou, Venus," Dual addressed her as I glanced at Bryce and saw comprehension and eager understanding in his eyes, "who have aided greatly, you shall aid yet more in one thing. Return from me here to thy own home and make use of the telephone.

"Upon it call the office of George Lamb, or seek him elsewhere until found. Say to him then that last night you failed to redeem the promise made to him as regards his brother; that he refused you, broke your engagement, bade you farewell, and announced his intention of flying this afternoon. Make plain to him that his decision appeared unalterable to you at that time."

"And then?" Moira questioned, her expression mystified and startled.

"Nay," said Semi Dual. "Have you yet found me lacking of a reason for those things I directed in anything?"

"Oh, no," she answered quickly. "Forgive me. I've been so terribly frightened. But I might have known. I think maybe

I did know in my soul—even if I couldn't see any way out in my brain. At least I brought all my trouble to you again. And I'll go now."

"Aye, go," Dual assented, rising. "I have much to which I must attend. But the time is short until that time when everything, even to the smallest detail of this matter, shall be plain. Go, then, Moira—Venus—and ye, too, my friends."

The three of us left the tower and passed down through the garden toward the stairs.

"Oh," she half spoke, half sobbed, "I feel so sorry, so ashamed. I've disappointed him so. I've been so weak at the end."

"An' don't you doubt for a minute but he understands it, Bo-Peep," Jim told her. "Semi Dual don't only read minds and stars; he reads the hearts of his fellowmen. My great aunt, Miss Mason, what you've gone through is enough to break any girl's nerve! You've been amazing—immense.

"An' don't you see what he's doing to George by having you call him and tell him you failed last night? Didn't he say Uranus is explosive—an' ain't George Uranus, just as you are Venus an' Gordon an' me are satellites?

"An' explosive things have a habit of blowin' up. Oh, Pip! It's a dead open an' shut proposition—dead open an' shut. When you slip that to Lamb, an' he feels sure Imer's goin' out to commit suicide this afternoon, he's goin' to simply blow up with a loud noise.

"I'd sure like to hear it, but I won't. I'll be over with Gordon, persuadin' that boy of yours that his brain ain't as moth-eaten as Doc Drake said it was."

"You really think so?" Moira Mason questioned. Renewed hope and a reborn faith were in her eyes.

"Do I?" Jim grinned. "Well, I'd bet a million on it; an' since I ain't got it, I'd be a total ruin if I lost."

And suddenly, unexpectedly, Moira Mason laughed—though her laughter still held the sound of unshed tears.

On the seventh floor we left her and walked toward the office. "George is Uranus—an' Nathalie Norton is Drake's sister," Jim growled. "Can you beat it, son, can you beat it? No answer. You can't. But I suspected George was Uranus all along, remember. An' he is. Uranus, the policeman of the Sun. Do you get it? Moira is goin' to blow him up when she gets him, an' he's goin' to spill. At that rate Uranus is just about goin' to arrest himself. Dual sure is the serpent's hips. I—"

He threw open the door of the outer office and paused.

Norman Haddon sat there, cool, immaculate in dress, smiling as our glances met. Norman Haddon, Federal secret agent, a man we had known, worked with more than once in past years, dark, debonair, more like a society dilettante in speech and bearing than a man of keenly analytical mind and inflexible nerve.

"Haddon—what the deuce are you doing here?" I exclaimed, as Jim emitted a sort of inarticulate grunt of both recognition and surprise.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FRIEND DROPS IN.

"WAITIN' for you chaps, old top," Norman Haddon returned as he rose and took my hand. "Just waitin' to say bon jour or buenos dias, as you prefer. I'm a bird of passage, you know. Flit here, flit there, never long in one place. In town for a day or two. Thought I'd look you up. Old friends, you know, and all that sort of rot. Also Dual, wonderful chap. Expect to see him too before I flit somewhere else."

"Well, suppose you flit into my private room over here first," I suggested, smiling in spite of myself at his affected speech, which was as much of a mask as anything else, as I had long ago found out.

"Righto!" he accepted, and accompanied Jim and me inside the room, the door of which I closed. I turned as Haddon sat down. "Now talk English. Is this just a friendly call, or isn't it?"

"Oh, but—" His eyes twinkled. "On the level, Glace, you're a suspicious chap. Can't even a J. D. man make a call on a friend or two without standing a third degree from a private 'tec?"

"He can," I said, grinning. "And the friend will be decidedly glad to see him. Where've you been since our last meeting down on the Mexican border?"

"Here and there," he explained without apparently any considerable interest. "Los Angeles last. And that reminds me, I met an acquaintance of yours in the Angel City. A Miss Moira Mason, charming little lady."

"Bo-Peep?" At last Bryce found his voice in a rasping fashion.

"Eh?" Haddon eyed him. "Well, really, I can't say, old dear. Are you one of her sheep? As I recall, the lady lost them, and there was no mention of goats. I raise the point merely because my idea of a sheep hardly fits the picture. But a goat now—that bit of cabbage in your mouth—"

Jim grinned, and removed his cigar from between his teeth. "Some time ago a lamb took exceptions to my particular brand of tobacco," he growled.

"And the lamb?" Haddon suggested.

"Was adjudged insane," Jim told him.

"Moira's, not Mary's, Lamb, eh?" Suddenly knowledge leaped at both of us in Haddon's words.

Haddon knew; then his call was not a casual visit.

"By th' Lord!" Jim fairly howled. "Haddon, kick in! Come through! She was down there—met you? Did Dual have you meet her?"

"Well, he did suggest it." Haddon smiled.

"And what did you find out? What did you two do?"

"Oh, we looked up an address." Haddon shrugged. "That is, I did after she had furnished the address."

"And you found?" Bryce was leaning forward.

"Enough." Again Haddon shrugged. And then he sobered, his provocative manner dropped from him, sloughed off. "Enough, Bryce," he said. "Quite enough to make a lot of trouble for the man who lived there. He doesn't live there now. But—that's all for the present. I wired Dual I was coming, and I have an appointment with him for eleven."

He glanced at his watch. "We'll have to go into it later. As a matter of fact, though, there is quite a tale behind Moira's Lamb, as I suspect. You probably know that as well as I do. She told me you were interested in the case. See you some more." He stood up.

"Haddon!" Bryce fairly mouthed after the Government agent had taken himself off. "Moira met him—he made a pinch down there by Semi's direction. Now, what the devil!"

"Jim," I said. All at once I saw it, or thought I did. "Jim, do you remember what Dual just told us to tell Imer Lamb this afternoon—that there is not, never has been, any actual trouble with his reason? Material trouble, he said. That means any actual trouble with his brain. See here, has it ever occurred to you that Imer Lamb may have been driven insane by drugs?"

"Drugs?" he parroted, but I saw the stirrings of comprehension in his eyes.

"Yes, something has made him temporarily insane; something has gradually upset his mental balance, something that having once produced the effect could be gradually withdrawn?"

"Good Lord!" he scowled. "I know Haddon's done a lot of work in the narcotic division of the department, but—how was it worked?"

"Use your head," I told him. "Imer Lamb had one excessive habit—smoking."

"Gordon!" He sprang up. And now I saw he understood. "That's it. They mixed it with his tobacco. He smoked a special brand, he and George both; Kingsley said so."

"Yes, and Kingsley said he scragged, as he expressed it, a pipeful now and then, if you'll remember," I returned. "And when Lamb was taken to jail he must have left some of it in his rooms. We know he did, because according to Kingsley again, Drake went there to get it the day Kingsley attacked him, and—"

"Yes, an' Kingsley had been smoking it after Imer left," Jim broke in. "That's it, son. He smoked it right along while he was alone, an' it got in its work on him. You know Dual said his blow-off was an unexpected thing in the working out of others' plans.

"It works out. It's riveted. That's why Drake went after the stuff; that's why he was so damned sure Imer would recover. They took him over there, an' took him off the stuff, whatever it was, an'—they didn't want that old supply he'd left to be in his dump when he went back there again!"

"You've got it, Jim," I agreed. At last the thing was plain. As he said, it was right. It matched up. Here, then, in our deductions, once more Dual's assertion that Imer Lamb was mentally sound was verified. We could go to him this afternoon and deliver that message to his troubled soul in absolute confidence—a confidence that could scarcely fail to carry conviction to his only too willing mind.

We took a taxi. It put us down at Monk's Hall, at half past one o'clock. Ignoring the desk, we took the elevator to Lamb's floor, and went directly to his suite and rang.

Imer Lamb opened the door himself. I noted the fact with satisfaction. Henri was gone then; everything was working out.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Lamb. May we come in?" I said.

He regarded us with a slightly questioning frown. "Would you employ force if I refused?" he suggested.

"Why, no," I said. "But we might use argument. Have you forgotten us, Mr. Lamb—Mr. Glace, and my partner, Mr. Bryce?"

"Glace and Bryce." His frown deepened in an effort at association. "Frankly, Mr. Glace, I seem to have seen you somewhere, but I've no clear recollection. You'll pardon it, I trust. Come in."

We entered the suite, and he gave us chairs. "You saw us at the jail after they took you there, and I gave you a cigar, and you said it was a filthy bit of tobacco," Bryce remarked with his at times bludgeon-like directness as we sat down.

"I did?" Lamb said quickly. "Oh, but—you see, at that time I was scarcely myself, as I hope you understand. I'm sorry."

"That was said merely to recall the incident, Mr. Lamb," I told him, watching his face. It was haggard, worn, its eyes hot and feverish as they turned to me from Jim. "Our errand here this afternoon is to bear you an invitation from a friend. You see, we are acquainted with your man Henri, who has been your personal companion and attendant for some time, but who left you this morning."

"Henri?" His expression showed a sudden quickened interest. "You know that, do you? Well, if you do, possibly you can tell me where he's gone. As you say, he left me to-day, and without a word of warning. He was here this morning when I went out for a time, and gone when I returned. I found it a bit odd. He'd been an ideal fellow, and I'd come to depend on him. Had intelligence; used his brain—"

"All of that, Mr. Lamb," I interrupted. "But what would you say if I were to tell you, as I am here to tell you, that he was merely lent to you as an attendant first at Dr. Drake's institution, and later here by this other friend of yours from whom we come?"

"A friend?" he said. "Really, Mr. Glace, I'm afraid I don't understand. You say, he lent him to me?"

"Following a suggestion made by Miss Moira Mason, the young lady to whom at the time of your present trouble you were engaged. She—"

"Just a moment," he checked me sharply. "I'm not discussing personal matters, you'll please understand, Mr. Glace."

"After she had gone to this friend whose companion Henri was," I ignored his interruption, "first coming to us with Mrs. Marya Harding—"

"Wait. I know Mrs. Harding, certainly," he again interposed. "You say Moira—"

"Came to us with her in order that she might meet this other friend, who lent Henri to her as your attendant, and ask his aid."

"What are you trying to tell me?" he demanded as I paused.

"I'm trying to tell you that through all your trouble you have had an unknown friend, Mr. Lamb," I replied.

"An unknown friend?" Again he knit his brows.

"Who says there ain't anything wrong with your head, an' never was, an' never

will be so far as he knows?" Bryce suddenly threw his amazing statement at him.

For a long time Imer Lamb said nothing. And then he drew a deep and slightly audible breath. His lips set, the spandrils of his nostrils flared. His eyes turned from me to Jim. They seemed to probe, plumb, search.

"Who says, in other words, that I am sane?"

"Absolutely." Bryce nodded.

And again there was silence, while Imer Lamb wrestled with that positive declaration, seemed to strive to match it up with all that had been, all that had occurred, all that to him was now a past knowledge which, were Jim's words true, became something less than fact.

"Then, just what was the matter with me?" he finally asked, his lip curling a trifle in a way to indicate unbelief.

And, because it seemed best to me to do so, I left it to Bryce to answer: "You was doped."

"I was what?" Lamb's expression altered again.

"Drugged," Jim told him. "At least that's what we suspect—just as we suspect they had it in that tobacco you smoked so much before you went off your nut."

"Good Lord!" Lamb brought the words out in a hoarse gasp. Consternation, and a dawning comprehension were in his face. He seemed dazed. Belief, at least what I thought might be a wish to believe, struggled with unbelief within him in so far as I could judge. He left his chair and walked the length of the room, pausing beside the table whereon was the tobacco jar I had seen the day I came there with Jim, after Kingsley had attacked Drake, the jar that had seemed so innocent a thing then, and yet might well have held the very agency of its owner's undoing if what seemed so probable now were right.

For a time, difficult to measure mentally, he stood looking down upon it. One could imagine him seeking to give it full value, questioning, arguing with himself, seeking to determine all it had meant, all it might mean yet to him in view of what he had heard. Presently he turned and came back.

"But I got my tobacco from my brother. We smoked the same brand after he discovered it. It was a blend he got from a friend. I always obtained it from him."

"Well?" Bryce dragged his comment across his tongue.

The eyes of the two men met.

They met, and held through an interval of silence.

Then: "There is a rather unpleasant implication in that, don't you think, Mr. Bryce," Imer Lamb said. "Hadn't you better explain?"

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Lamb," I again took part before Jim had seemingly decided upon an answer, "we would hardly be here—hardly venture even indirectly to suggest such a possibility, as I see you recognize, unless in our estimation it were fully possible of being supported by proof."

"That my brother George was a party to—to what was done?" he queried, once more frowning as though he found the thought hard to accept.

"We have every reason at least to think so," I reaffirmed. "As I told you, practically every step in this whole affair has been watched by the man from whom we come. In that watching we have had some little part. We are not making any accusation blindly."

"But for Heaven's sake, Mr. Glace," he exclaimed, "you're asking me to believe that I've been the victim of a cowardly bit of work—that I've been tricked, deceived in every way, duped. And if you're right—" He paused and once more drew a deep and slightly unsteady breath. An expression of swift appreciation altered the entire cast of his features. "If you're right, I'm as sound as I ever was!"

"Exactly," Bryce asserted. "That's the point, the thing we've been tryin' to hammer into you, Lamb. It's the kernel in the nut."

Lamb set his teeth. The muscles tensed in his cheeks till they showed as tiny knotted bundles. "But—this—drug?" he questioned, thickly.

"Something which could be given to you gradually, and, once it had produced its intended effect, as gradually removed," I said.

He stared into my face. His own was white, set, with those little corded muscles

still bulging in his cheeks. "By God, I believe you mean it!" he suddenly rasped.

"Of course we mean it!" Something akin to exasperation sounded in Jim's voice. "An' we're askin' you to give us a chance to prove it. What's the matter? Don't you fancy the notion, or what?"

"Fancy it?" Suddenly Imer Lamb swayed, sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. I saw their fingers quiver. "Fancy it! Lord, if you knew what it means—what it means to me! It's nothing short of a pardon to a condemned man, the difference between life and death. It means life if it's true. Life—life—" His voice sank to a whisper and trailed off. He sat staring straight before him. It was as though he gazed into a future his final words had conjured up.

"That you let us prove it true, Mr. Lamb, is all we ask," I broke the ensuing silence. "We bring you the invitation from a man who stands ready to explain everything that has happened. He asks you to accept, and Miss Mason asks it. Last night you refused her, but can you refuse her again to-day this request of hers that you go with us and grasp the opportunity to be convinced?"

"You know that, do you, that I refused her?" he asked as I paused.

I nodded. "She told us this morning, Mr. Lamb. And she's worked for you—your interests all through this matter—worked. Now—"

"Oh, I'm going with you." He stood up. At last I read belief in his eyes. "I want to be convinced—want to, do you understand me? But this thing is a shock. It staggered me, shook me up. I wasn't expecting it. But now—" He broke off.

There was a sound of a heavy hand hammering against the door of the suite.

"Excuse me a moment," Lamb said, and went to open the door.

"Imer!" Bryce and I heard the sound of a heavy, excited masculine voice. "You're here! Thank the Lord! See here. I've got to see you, got to see you alone! I've just come from Moira—"

I glanced at Jim. I recognized the speaker despite his shaken tones, and I found recognition in my partner's face.

Then Imer Lamb was speaking. "Well, just a minute, George. What the deuce is the matter with you?"

"I tell you I've got to see you, got to see you now," his foster brother replied. "I was afraid I might miss you."

"Just a minute," Imer stayed him. "Come in here." He closed the door and led George Lamb into the room where we sat. "I have visitors, George—Messrs. Glace and Bryce. Gentlemen, my brother, George Lamb."

"Er—yes. Glace and Bryce?" George Lamb was disheveled. He was perspiring freely; his collar was a wilted thing about his heavy neck; his face was actually livid as he turned his eyes upon us. "Er—glad to meet you gentlemen—again."

"Again?" Quickly Imer Lamb appeared to seize on the word. "Oh, so you've met them before then, have you, George?"

"Yes—yes," the brother said thickly. "Yes, Imer, I've met them. But see here—I've got something to tell you."

"Suppose I know it already?" As he spoke I saw a full conviction form on Imer Lamb's face. It looked from between his narrowed lids as they marked his brother's perturbation. It sounded in his voice as he repeated: "Suppose I know it already, George?"

And that quiet, almost accusing question left George Lamb puzzled; I could see that too. A half-frown formed on his sweating brow. "Know it already," he stammered, and then, as understanding came upon him, "You mean these two here told you, Glace and Bryce? You mean they were wise, came here to wise you up?"

Imer Lamb nodded his head. He smiled, but there was not the slightest hint of humor in his act. Rather I thought it was the acceptance of a fact, the surrender of the last shred of unbelief, a sad thing that marked the final relinquishment of a faltering hope.

"As a matter of fact, George, they did come to see me about it," he said. "They came to ask me to go with them to a man who has been an unknown friend, while one I should have had every right to trust seems to have lent himself as party to a rotten scheme against me."

"Semi Dual, you mean Semi Dual!" George Lamb fairly shouted. "You mean their sidekick with the funny name sent 'em to you?" Guilt set its mark upon him as he stood there. It was in his entire bearing; it was in his voice.

I glanced at Bryce. There was no question now but that George Lamb, true to his Uranian nature, had blown up. He stood there self-convicted by his guilty knowledge mirrored in his own words. And Moira Mason, Bo-Peep, had sent him. He had said so. She had followed Dual's directions, and this was the result.

I felt Imer Lamb's glance upon me, met it, and nodded slightly. It shifted back to his brother. And then he spoke: "I didn't know his name before. They didn't tell me. But I am going to hear what he has to say about it. I had agreed to go before you got here. Hadn't you better come along?"

The thing was more than a question; it was a command, a challenge. Imer Lamb, the man who had been an American "ace," who had within the last few days won himself the title of the "Mad Aviator" by his aerial antics, had regained control of himself. And George Lamb seemed to feel it.

"Imer—" he said hoarsely.

"I think you had better go with us, George," his foster brother cut him off. "Very well, gentlemen. Suppose we start. Really it seems scarcely necessary now, so far as I am concerned; but common courtesy could scarcely dictate less."

"I—Imer—I've hardly time," George Lamb began as Bryce and I rose. "I've quite a bit to attend to this afternoon. You—"

"Oh, if I was you I wouldn't bother telling Nathalia, George." Jim's suggestion cut off his words. "If you did she might tell that precious brother of hers that you'd spilled the beans, just like she probably told you what I said to her the other day on the street.

"Brother?" Imer Lamb stiffened.

"Nathalia Norton is Dr. Drake's sister," I advised.

"George?" he swung back to the broker. Comprehension, sorrow, and something like loathing were in his face.

George Lamb hung his head. His bearing became that of a chidden culprit. He made no effort to meet his brother's eyes.

Imer's jaw set again in decision. "Well, George, now more than ever I think you had best go with us. Come, gentlemen, he said.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SHOW-DOWN.

WE left the suite, and descended to where our taxi waited. The four of us entered the machine. I told the driver to take us back to the Urania. We were off.

George Lamb sat slumped down in his seat; there was a certain spineless quality about his heavy-set figure that spoke of an inward collapse. His former forceful, blustering demeanor had vanished. He did not speak.

Nor did Imer Lamb speak either as we ran back to the heart of the city. Now and then I saw his glance turn to George, the man whom as a boy his father had taken, adopted, treated in every way as his own child, the man who had requited such treatment in the way it now appeared he had.

Bryce lighted a cigar and smoked. I leaned back and waited. This was the end, I thought, of the strange, well-nigh invisible course the whole affair had run until now at the last, when things were to be explained, the picture was to be built up, by Semi Dual, the one who throughout it all had marked its veiled progress from first to last by the steady onward sweep on the face of the Clock of the Skies.

The cab fought through the traffic, edged into the curb before the Urania, and stopped. We got out, paid our driver, went into the lofty foyer, and entered a cage.

On the twentieth floor I led my companions out, and along the tiled corridor to the bronze-and-marble stairs.

At their foot, Imer Lamb paused. I saw a quick comprehension in his face.

"Up here?" he questioned.

And when I nodded, went on. "This friend of yours is up here? I say, Glace,

when I've been flying over, you know, I've seen something that looked like a garden on the roof."

"It is," I told him, realizing how well he might have marked it from his plane, little dreaming even so what it was.

We climbed the stairs, and came out at the top. The chimes rang out in the tower. Imer Lamb smiled with a fleeting appreciation of the beauty of that unexpected spot in the heart of the milling city, of the roses, the fountain where gray and white doves were preening themselves on the basin. I heard George Lamb draw a rasping breath.

Then we were at the tower, and Henri was bowing slightly as he spoke in greeting: "Welcome, friends of the master. He awaits your coming. You are the last."

"Henri!" Imer Lamb exclaimed.

"M. Lamb," Henri returned. "One follows orders, *monsieur*. I trust *monsieur* understands."

"Oh, quite." Imer nodded. We crossed the anteroom, passed the door of the room beyond, and paused.

I myself, I may as well confess it, was surprised. Dual sat by his desk as was his custom, clad in his white and purple robes. But the room was otherwise occupied. Marya Harding, Moira Mason and Haddon, debonair and smiling, I saw; and Johnson, heavy-set, stolidly waiting, and Gladys Ashton, come forth now as it seemed from her period of recuperation in Marya's house, and Simpson, who nodded as his eyes met mine, and Joe Kingsley, who, as we appeared and as he saw his friend and former employer, half started from his seat, and sank back again with his eyes never shifting from his face.

It was quite a jury before which, as I saw now, Semi Dual was to present the evidence in this matter which had in greater or less degree involved each in its course.

He rose. "Welcome, Mr. Imer Lamb," he said "whom though I have never met before in the flesh I have come to know in a different fashion through those methods which it is given me to use. Welcome, since now it is come time for us to meet, and review the records of those things which have been, but which now are happily past."

Imer Lamb bowed. "I thank you, sir," he made answer. "And you will pardon me if I do not fully understand as yet. But I have brought my brother with me. It appeared to me that it was best." He glanced at George.

"A needless precaution, but one which can alter nothing in the further course of this matter," Semi Dual replied.

"So?" The word was a question. And as he spoke, I saw Imer Lamb's eyes run to Moira Mason, who sat on a heavily-cushioned couch. There was a place beside her, and he went toward it as the rest of us found seats.

Dual picked up his auditors with his glance. "We are complete." He began speaking again in his bell-like voice, that in that moment some way reminded me of the intonations of a priest—a priest of justice, I thought, a priest of right, of high principle, integrity, truth, as he stood there in his vestments.

"We are complete," he repeated, "save only Saturn, Neptune and Mars; Neptune who brought this matter to an issue, and Mars who carried out those things which Neptune designed. Yet are Neptune and Mars foredoomed to be smitten with the fiery sword of the Sun now that their scheming has led them within the path of its destroying arc?

"And I to that end have assembled you here that you may understand how selfishness, treachery, double-dealing, disregard of the rights of others, greed, avarice, lust may bring the undoing of those who employ them, about.

"In the beginning, my friends, I am one who reads the stars. Men's lives are a complex of influences of an electro-magnetic nature even as man's life is an electro-magnetic thing, as science dominates the invisible, ceaselessly active electro-magnetic quality of which all matter is composed.

"Viewed so, my friends, each planet is but a center of electro-magnetic force, of a quality polarized to itself, a quality which each radiates, the one to the other endlessly. And those radiations from one planet to another endlessly affect each the material force forms which it supports.

"Hence man's life is affected by the

combined radiations active at the moment of his birth, and the further course of his life is, as we may say, polarized. Wherefore if one knows the hour of a man's birth and the position of the planets, the stars at that hour, then may one predicate upon that basis the events of that man's life. Am I clear?" He glanced at Imer Lamb.

He inclined his head as he sat beside Bo-Peep. There was a tiny frown of concentration on his forehead.

"Then to the practical demonstration." Semi Dual smiled. "In the beginning, Mr. Lamb, I set up a figure of the happening at Monk's Hall on the night when your affliction came upon you in full force, the influences of the actions of others against you, and the course of your life came as it were to a head. For no man lives to himself alone, my friends. The lives of this one and that one overlap, interlock. The life of another meeting yours may wholly alter it. So it is written, and experience proves it truth.

"Also I erected astrological figures for the natal dates of you, Mr. Lamb, and of the woman beside you now, Miss Moira Mason, who brought the entire matter to my notice first. And I found your Mercury and your Moon afflicted by Saturn, by Neptune, by Mars, and by Uranus. And remember that each planet holds a quality of its own, a quality designed to produce certain effects. Saturn in this case would incline to nervous and mental conditions, epilepsy by day, insanity by night, perhaps."

Moira Mason gasped. The sound whispered through the room.

"You attacked your valet, Joseph Kingsley, at night, Mr. Lamb," Dual continued. "So much for that. Neptune rules drugs which strongly affect the nerves. Mars rules tobacco among drugs. It was this connection which made me first suspicious of the method employed against you when I learned that you smoked overmuch. Neptune and Mars both evilly posited to your Mercury and Moon might well indicate that your tobacco was blended with a reason-destroying adulterant."

Again a sound ran through the room, and turned all eyes on George Lamb where he sat, sheer horror and consternation on his face. It was not an articulate thing. It was more a groan, raucous, all-confessing, hoarse.

"Wait," Dual spoke into the tensely ensuing silence that marked that self-betraying audition. "Wait, Uranus. Thou, too, wast evilly posited to thy brother's Mercury and Moon, and before this meeting is finished each planet I have named shall be identified as an individual present, or one who if not present still played his or her part.

"From what I have said then, the case of Imer Lamb were hopeless, save that Venus, Jupiter, and the Sun throw their friendly rays toward his Mercury and Moon to give him aid. In this was his salvation which led me to predicate his full return to a normal mental balance in time, a time which has now arrived. And so to redeem a promise. I, Jupiter, have watched this matter from the beginning.

"Jupiter is the arbiter, the judge; Jupiter is justice, who shall see justice done. Jupiter marks, watches, waits. And in this matter, Miss Moira Mason is Venus. Let Venus speak."

All eyes turned on Bo-Peep as Semi paused.

"I—was terribly troubled when Mr. Lamb was arrested," she began her narrative. "And I went to Marya Harding, and she knew Mr. Dual and brought me to him, and he agreed to do all he could.

"Then when Mr. Lamb was paroled to his brother I came and asked him if I couldn't get a special attendant for him, and he sent his own companion to be with him in that House of Invisible Bondage as he called Dr. Drake's place.

"He went by his orders, and he watched, and one day he found an address in a waste paper basket in Dr. Drake's study, as Mr. Dual told me afterward. Then Dr. Drake told me I ought to go away; that it would be better for Imer if I were not here when he was released."

"Moira!" Imer Lamb whispered harshly.

She turned her eyes to him briefly, and smiled. "I told Mr. Dual about that, and he told me to go to Los Angeles. And he told me to try and learn what I could

about Dr. Drake who had practiced there before he came here, and about Miss Nathalie Norton who had been a motion picture actress some years ago.

"And he gave me this address Henri had found in the wastepaper basket, and told me that a man would call on me after I got to Los Angeles, and I should give it to him. So I went, although I hated to, because I felt it would seem very strange to Imer if I was gone when he got out.

"But Mr. Dual told me that by doing what he asked I could help him most. And maybe I did, because I found out that Dr. Drake had left Los Angeles because he had got into trouble there, and that Miss Norton is really his sister, Nathalie Drake, and Mr. Haddon, who is here to-day, hunted up the address of this man Henri found.

"It was the address of a Mexican; he placed him under arrest after it was found he was raising and selling a certain drug. You see, the address Henri found was on the wrapper of a package of drugs Dr. Drake received from Los Angeles. And then I came back."

"And from the first," Dual's voice came again before any one could speak in comment, "it was written that Venus should greatly aid. And what is to be will be, my friends. Herein as applying to Venus it stands verified.

"Yet if one studies the conjoined charts of Imer Lamb and Venus one sees that the end is not yet, but that in the future as in that which is now past she shall aid him, should he keep her with him, and make her the influence in his life for which in every way she is fit."

"Moira!" Imer Lamb whispered once more.

She turned to him, reached out, and covered his hand with hers.

He drew it into his.

"And now, Henri," Semi prompted. "You have played a part, indicated already, yet not wholly."

"The straw-gatherer," Bryce mumbled to me as Henri rose and advanced.

"The master sent me as Miss Mason has said," he declared. "And I went. *Certainment*. I went, an' I watched. I was all eyes, all ears. I heard things; I saw things. My suspicion was intense. I found the address as it is said I found it. Antonio Moreno—"

"Saturn," Dual broke in to announce. "Saturn, a raiser and marketer of the drug, a drug many Mexicans mix with tobacco and smoke, a reason-destroying, murder-inducing drug which even robs the murderer of a recollection of the act after he has recovered from its influence. And did not Saturn afflict the Mercury and Moon of Mr. Lamb through the effects of the drug he raised? Proceed, my friend."

"I found it as already stated," Henri resumed. "But I did something else. *Mon Dieu*, yes. As a spy I was a success. I found that the woman Nathalie Norton came often to the house. I found another woman—this young woman who sits here, Miss Gladys Ashton. I found she was being detained as a prisoner.

"Oh, yes. She told me of her uncle who was paying to have her kept there. I learned her date of birth. I carried it to the master, and in the stars he read the truth that she was being held there without need, and being given drugs. Also I discovered that Dr. Drake mixed something with tobacco, and gave it to those in his house who smoked, and I managed to gather a little of that tobacco into my possession, and bring it to the master.

"Also I went to see M. Lamb's valet who was at his rooms. That was easy; I was now M. Lamb's attendant. I called at his rooms, and we had a talk. In the course of it I discovered I had no tobacco, and this valet of his kindly supplied me out of a quantity his master had left. But I smoked not all of it—oh, no. It, too, I brought to the master. And in both instances it contained the drug.

"But that was not all. I listened as I have said, and I discovered what was in the life chart of Miss Ashton also, a danger to her life. It was a plot to destroy her I overheard, between this Norton woman and Dr. Drake. Her uncle was financially ruined, what you call broke. No longer could he pay, an' she knew too much of what went on in that house. So then I helped her escape. That is all of importance. *C'est fini.*"

It was all matching up, all working out. Step by step everything was coming now to the surface as each star, each planet, actually present, they or their satellites, those who had aided them in all that had been, step by step described his or her part.

It was a bit weird, a bit odd, to sit there, and hear each speak as though a star itself had for the moment been endowed with a human voice, to see the picture growing so complete that one even saw how it had not mattered that Drake took away the evidence of the tobacco Kingsley had not smoked before Imer Lamb was released.

"And now," said Semi Dual as Henri retired, "I shall ask Miss Gladys Ashton to take up the story which can but prove how the thread of one human life is interwoven with yet other lives. No man lives to himself alone.

And had not Imer Lamb entered the House of Invisible Bondage those things Henri has described as affecting her might well not have been discovered—and if not, she had died.

"Yet to-day she is with us to furnish a further demonstration of how in selfishness, in blind self-seeking, are contained the fatal causes by which a man may be destroyed."

He ceased, and Gladys Ashton fumbled in a little bead bag on her lap. From it she drew a letter, and held it in her hand as she told her story, sketching those facts I have already narrated until the time Bryce and I had left her at Marya Harding's house.

"I've been there ever since," she said, "until to-day, when Inspector Johnson came and said Mr. Dual had sent him, and that I was to go with him to my uncle's attorneys in the Stroller Building. Marya and I went with him, and they gave me a letter, and I brought it with me. I'll read it if you like."

"Read it, Gladys," Semi prompted.

And she nodded, drew several sheets of closely written paper from the envelope she held, and began:

MY DEAR NIECE:

I am a condemned man. My fellow men would condemn me if they knew, and I condemn myself. I am a cheat—a thief, and worse. I can write it down, because when you read it I shall be beyond any human law. I shall kill myself to-night.

Gladys, at the time your mother died I was in desperate financial straits. And you were a child in experience in such matters as I knew, and in a state unfitting you for any cool judgment as a result of your mother's death. I came to you, and you know the rest.

I met Dr. Drake—quite accidentally at that time—and mentioned your nervous condition, and he suggested that he see you. At that time, I swear, I had not thought of what I afterward did. But I did get you to give me a power of attorney, meaning to use what I needed of your money, and replace it later, the false hope of the gambler always.

You will recall that your mother transferred her property to you before her death to avoid the necessity of probate proceedings. No one was concerned about it save you, and I, who needed money so badly, and the State, to whom an inheritance tax was due.

I paid the inheritance tax out of your property, of course, and what few bills that were incurred as a result of your mother's illness and death. This done, I had a free hand, with you out of the way.

It was Drake who suggested how easy it would be to keep you in his place. I don't know, but I think he had an inkling that things were going badly with me. Be that as it may, I agreed to his unholy scheme to keep you a prisoner, and use your money in my constantly failing efforts to recoup each succeeding loss.

For I lost, Gladys. I lost, lost—always I lost. I am a broken man. I made a prisoner of you, Gladys, and then I made a prisoner of myself to Drake. He bled me white. His demands grew and grew, and I had to meet them; I dared not refuse—until I could no longer meet them.

Then he—he is a fiend—he hinted that sometimes those in his institution grew sick, and died; and then he called me, and told me you had escaped. And I do not know—I may be a murderer, Gladys; this may never meet your eyes. I may have killed you, been the cause of your death at least.

And so I am taking the one way out. There is a little something left, I think—not much, but maybe enough to keep you from want if you still are alive. Heaven grant it that you are alive, and that it will prove enough. It is the last prayer of one who has wronged and betrayed every human trust he should have kept inviolate, before he goes to meet his God.

Your uncle,
JOHN PARKINS.

"That's all," Gladys Ashton said as she folded it up. "It's—very sad."

"Good told me to-day that as far as he could tell the money end of that prayer was apt to be answered, though he couldn't say how far," Johnson said, speaking for the first time.

Moira Mason wiped her eyes.

It was another bit in the story. It was an odd posthumous sort of revenge John Parkins had taken on the man who had persuaded him into his clutches, and then blackmailed him to the last. I let my eyes run about the room. There was understanding, and a sort of grim anticipation on each face I met. And there was a sort of growing horror on the face of George Lamb where he sat.

"And now, Mr. Haddon," Semi prompted.

Haddon nodded. "That helps to check up this end of it," he replied. "As for my end, there isn't much. Mr. Dual located me, and wired me to look up Miss Mason in Los Angeles. I did so. She gave me an address. It was that of a Mexican who had a little truck farm, a market garden. But along with the other stuff he was raising was a patch of this marihuana—"

CHAPTER XX.

MARIHUANA.

"MARIHUANA!" Bryce erupted gruffly.

"Marihuana, yes, Mr. Bryce," Semi said, "a drug which produces a homicidal mania in those who indulge in its continued use, the drug which was found in the tobacco my friend and trusted companion Henri obtained both from the rooms of Mr. Imer Lamb, and from Dr. Hugo Drake's house. Pardon the interruption, Mr. Haddon."

"I think the fact is sufficient, and is appreciated by every one present. Antonio Moreno was arrested, and incidentally a letter to him from Dr. Hugo Drake was intercepted. That letter was answered to the effect that no further supply of the drug could be forwarded at the present, and Antonio signed it to that effect at my request." Once more Haddon smiled.

"An' after he got that letter Drake turned loose a couple of other patients besides Lamb!" Jim exclaimed in sudden comprehension of what might have lain back of the fact he announced, a sudden shortage in the supply of the subtle drug Drake was using, the drug that rendered and kept men insane.

"And perchance he deemed it best to do so, once Miss Ashton had escaped beyond his control, and he knew not her whereabouts," Semi said. "As to him, and his institution of illegal and dishonest practice Dr. Simpson has still more information to give."

Simpson nodded. He cleared his throat. "Both illegal and dishonest," he declared. "Dr. Dual, after we had met, asked me what I knew about Drake, and I told him little except that he was unpopular with the regular profession. But even so, I never suspected the truth of what was going on right under our eyes until following my first conversation with Dr. Dual I determined to investigate.

"Then it wasn't long until I had uncovered Drake, and was ready to proceed against him any time our friend here gave the word. Putting it briefly, Drake isn't any more a doctor than one of these fakers that used to stand around the corners with a banjo player under a gasoline torch, while they peddled patent lotions and pills.

"The school he claims to have graduated from is a school all right, but he never graduated, let alone attended it. His diploma is a forged document. Dr. Hugo Drake, as he calls himself, is a diploma-mill graduate. It was easy enough for me to find out from the registrar of Waburn College.

"His name does not appear on his lists of either graduates or matriculates, but you know what a tear-up there was about this diploma mill business, and I ran out that part of it. Some of the people arrested in connection with that business kept records of their own, and Drake's name is on one of those. Well, that fixes his standing as a 'doctor,' and, of course, makes illegal any professional work he attempts in this State."

"Wherein once more a man's double

dealing has, like an uncertain tool, turned in his hand against him," Semi said as Simpson ceased.

I glanced at Jim, and saw he understood. Not merely to care for Gladys Ashton had Semi contrived his meeting with Simpson, but to inspire him to investigate Drake's professional standing, which as both an accredited member of the profession, and a man in touch with the police of the city he very easily could. He met my glance, and nodded in what I took for comprehension.

Dual's voice went on: "Thus, my friends, the picture grows; thus is its every light and shadow brought out. It is not a pleasant picture, this; yet thus was it painted by those responsible for it in their own acts. Joseph Kingsley, have you perhaps something to add to it?"

Joe Kingsley rose, and came a step or two forward with his halting walk. To me it seemed that he did so in order that as he spoke he might still keep his eyes on Imer Lamb's face.

"Hi 'aven't much to sye," he began in his cockney fashion. "But Hi ain't goin' to pass the chance to sye a word. Hit's a rum go—ha rum go. Though Hi didn't know 'arf 'ow rum hit was till Doc Simpson 'ere told me arfter Hi was in th' county 'orspital, w'ere Hi've been since.

"But 'es a w'ite man, Doc Simpson, an' Mr. Dual 'ere, 'e's a prince. Arfter that Hi seen hit, hof course. Arfter Mr. Himer was took away Hi did smoke that baccy, never dreaming there was hanythink wrong with the stuff. Gor blyme, there waren't nuthin' to do but smoke. Hi smoked hand looked arfter 'is things, hand took 'em hover 'ere to Drake's, as 'e needed 'em till the day w'en Drake come hand arsked me for what was left of the baccy hand said Hi was fired, 'cause hit wouldn't be good for Mr. Himer to 'ave me around arfter 'e was turned hout."

"He told you that did he, Joe?" Imer Lamb asked quickly.

"Ho, yus, sir." Kingsley nodded. "Them was halmost 'is very words."

"And they told me you'd left me, Joe, after I was out and asked about you, told me you'd left because you were afraid—"

"W'at's that?" Kingsley shouted. "Hafraid, sir—me, w'o did me bit in the war, w'o never turned tail yet—afraid? Why, Gorblast their bloody, rotten 'earts for bleatin' liars!"

"Here, here," Imer stayed him. "They did lie, Joe, but it's all right now. You're coming back, old fellow; you're coming back, aren't you?"

"Ham I?" The two men looked upon one another. "You're jolly well right Hi ham, sir, hand thankin' you for th' chance." And suddenly with a touch of the dramatic I had not expected he drew himself up, soldierwise at attention, and snapped through a hand salute.

And Imer Lamb returned it before Kingsley hobbled back to his seat. Some way it brought a sudden tightness, a sudden ache into my throat.

And then again Dual was speaking. "And now, thou Uranus. Thus have the friendly planets, the friendly satellites of those planets, those who aided them in their troubles or their endeavors, spoken save only my two friends, Glace and Bryce. Yet have they worked under my personal direction and their words could but duplicate those we have already heard.

"But thou—thou are of those who have threatened in the life chart of the man I have considered, yea even from the first. And thou art here among us since now, as I think the evil influence of thy position in this matter has run out, even as perchance the evil of thy first intent has within the past few days drained from thy heart. You have sat among us, and heard what has been said. Say thou then whether truly or falsely have those who have spoken borne witness. Speak, Uranus, speak."

George Lamb stirred. The attention of every one in the room was focused upon him in a flash. He lifted his head. His face was a sickly pallor, the whites of his eyes showed reddened between their lids. "There isn't much I can say. Most of it's been said already. I'm guilty," he began with a visible effort at last, "though Heaven knows this thing went a lot farther than I meant it should when I went into it.

"Some of what's been said I knew, and

some of it I did not. All I meant to do really was to keep Imer from marrying. That's the truth. You know his money as well as mine is in our business, and if he died without an heir, why, I'd inherit it, or if I dropped off first it would be his. So—"

"So that was it, was it?" Imer interrupted. "Well, you would have got it this afternoon if this conference hadn't come up. Hard luck, George—hard luck!"

"Don't!" Suddenly George Lamb whimpered. "I didn't want it, that way. I didn't want it. I don't want it, damn it!"

His voice cracked, broke. "I didn't, I tell you. I've proved it. I went to Moira last night, and told her she'd got to stop you, and to-day again I went to her after he telephoned me she'd failed, and told her to marry you, do anything to keep you from goin' up this afternoon in any more of those fool flying stunts of yours.

"I told her—begged her to marry you; I all but went down on my knees. And she sent me to you, and I came. That's how I come to be here. I came to tell you, stop you—confess." He broke off, and sat panting like one who had run a long distance.

"And how," came the voice of Semi Dual, "did you come also to think of the plan you put into operation first?"

Lamb turned his bloodshot eyes to him. "I didn't," he declared. "I—just told Na—a friend of mine—"

"Hugo Drake's sister, your intimate friend." Semi forced the issue upon him.

He nodded. "Yes. I told Nathalie about Imer's engagement, and said I wished there was some way to keep him from marrying Moira or anybody else. And she—she suggested that she talk things over with her brother. You know the rest.

"He told me it could be done without permanent damage to Imer, that he would furnish me the tobacco already mixed with the drug. I told Imer about the new blend I had discovered, and I smoked it too; I really did, only mine wasn't mixed with the stuff like his.

"I got him to try it, and he liked it, and then the rest happened and everything seemed working out all right, though Glace and Bryce here did come to see me, and afterwards Bryce stopped Nathalie on the street, and it worried me a bit.

"Drake didn't like Imer having a special attendant either. But Mrs. Harding and Moira insisted, and there didn't seem to be any reasonable way for us to refuse, and we didn't think any one could really suspect.

"You see, Drake had got onto the stuff when he was in California, and we fancied it safe. Our plan was to get Imer off it while Drake had him, and then to turn him loose after telling him he was all right unless his trouble should recur. We figured that would keep him from marrying.

"I knew him—I knew he wouldn't take a chance on marriage, on having children with a thing like that hanging over his head. But when he started trying to commit suicide in that plane of his I blew up. I hadn't counted on that. I ain't a Cain—and I wasn't trying to kill him; I didn't want him to be killed. I didn't—as the Lord is my witness!"

"Nay," said Semi Dual, "I do not think so, nor have I thought so. Wherefore I have not included you in those against whom the law shall take its course—save only the higher law which says that by a man's actions shall he be judged, under which, as it chances, a man ofttimes judges himself to the end that he continueth in the path he has followed, or deciding it unworthy, decides further to alter his course. But Saturn, Neptune and Mars—"

Through the course of the whole proceeding from the time he had greeted Imer Lamb he had been seated. Now he rose as a judge might rise in passing sentence.

"Saturn already in durance, and Neptune, poisoner of men's minds, ruler of poisonous drugs. Neptune, Nathalie Norton, Nathalie Drake, the adventuress. Neptune secretive, scheming, crafty, who in this affair stands as the guilty one—the primal cause, who devised this plan to dethrone a man's reason if no more than for a time, that she might profit by it perchance, who conceived this unholy plan by which a man was turned against his benefactor's child, debauching others and herself debauched.

"Neptune, and Mars who aided and

abetted her in her treacherous scheming; against them the Sun, which is the law in this affair, shall strike with a flaming sword; the law of man as well as the law of God shall take its course. Mr. Johnson—"

Johnson stiffened as his name rang out. It was as though he came to attention at a commanding voice.

"And you, Mr. Haddon—"

Haddon nodded. His lips twitched in a faintly comprehending smile.

"You are the law in this matter. Go; do your duty. Lay hands upon this guilty Mars and Neptune, brother and sister in iniquity as in the flesh, go seize them and hale them before the bar of justice, that the law may have its will of them, because of their unlawful acts. Go now, at once. They are waiting for you; they shall not escape, inasmuch as since the day when Antonio Morena, Saturn, was apprehended without their knowing they have been watched."

Watched? Now I understood the smile that still lingered on Haddon's lips. That had been a part of his participation. He had provided against Drake or his sister succeeding in any endeavor to escape. They had been watched by unseen eyes, their every move marked. It was so the Federal service worked.

Johnson was on his feet. Haddon got up. They were men assigned to an errand; one felt it would be carried out. They were men, but it seemed they were more than that. They were the Sun, the Law, the visible, tangible symbols of an eternal, never to be escaped force, a power as eternal as the stars themselves by which the mandates of the law were carried out.

"All right then, we'll get 'em," Johnson's voice came gruffly in a pledge of a mission to be fulfilled. "Good afternoon, folks."

Followed by Haddon, unruffled, still slightly smiling, he stalked out.

A sigh ran through the room, a relaxing of tension, a release of half-bated breathing. It was as though now at the end of the past hour, we who still sat there were slipping back into the normal grooves, the normal channels of everyday life.

For this was the climax. We had met, we had spoken together, and the verdict had been reached. The Sun, toward the carrying out of that verdict, had gone forth to strike.

Soon that House of Invisible Bondage in which the slaves of an invisible bondage had been held chained by unlawful means, doubly enslaved by a crafty, conscienceless schemer, would be as though it had never been. Its unholy secret, its invisible menace, was at last unveiled.

Imer Lamb sat here beside the woman he loved, the woman of his choice, his mate. He had been freed from that invisible bondage which others had forced upon him by means of an illicit drug. This then was the end.

And once more Semi's voice: "Wherefore, Venus, here is the ending, and the beginning. For as the present runs imperceptibly into the past, so does the future melt ever imperceptibly into the present, and what the future shall be depends wholly upon what we make of it in the present. Man is exalted or destroyed by his own just or unjust acts."

And, as though his words were a signal for dismissal, those he had gathered together looked not at him, but at one another, stirred, shifted, and rose.

"Joe," I heard Imer Lamb speaking, "go on over to the rooms and stick around. I'll be back sometime, and we'll have a jolly good talk." He tossed a bunch of keys to Kingsley, who caught them and went out with a smile upon his face.

Henri went with him.

Simpson glanced at his watch, shook hands with Dual and left.

Then Marya was speaking to Semi. I caught her words: "You're just the same—just the same as you were; you never change. You're as immutable, as sure, as right as your own stars."

"Because I read them, Marya, my friend," I heard him answer.

And then. "Well, Bo-Peep, you got your Lamb back, but—after listenin' to all that's been said, I dunno—looks more to me like he'd been a goat." Jim's voice boomed out as he crossed to where Moira and Imer stood.

Imer Lamb frowned slightly, uncomprehendingly, and Moira laughed.

"Oh, Mr. Bryce calls me Bo-Peep, because she lost her sheep, you know, Imer. And I rather like the fancy."

And then she turned to Jim. "Just so, I've got him again, Mr. Bryce, I don't care what he is. And now I've got him I'm going to keep him." Her fingers curled themselves in a possessive way on Imer's arm.

I heard a lagging footfall behind me, half turned, and looked into the bloodshot eyes of his foster brother.

"Imer?" he said thickly.

Imer turned his head, but did not answer.

"Imer," George Lamb repeated. "I—I just want to tell you I'm glad. I've lived in hell the last few weeks. I got into it, boy—and I couldn't get out. I had to go through. They had me where they wanted me, Imer. I think maybe they meant to keep me where they wanted me, if this hadn't turned out as it did—just like they kept Parkins where they wanted him till he killed himself. So I'm glad, boy—glad, and I'd like to be best man."

"George!" Imer's voice was grating, harsh, yet even so, a bit unsteady.

"Oh, Imer, let him," Moira pleaded, with a sound half sob, half laughter, in the words.

We stood in a well of silence. Without our realizing it, the voices of those around us had ceased. Then into it Semi's words dropped plummet like:

"Let her guide you, her by whose efforts you are saved. Let her guide you now, and in the future. She will not lead you astray, so that you let her hold you in the bonds of love. For love is truly the activating, motivating force of the universe itself. Only those who deny it are destroyed."

"It won't be difficult. It won't be difficult." Imer Lamb looked down deep into the lifted blue eyes of the girl who raised them to his. And then he laughed out, shrugged like a man who casts a clogging weight from his shoulders, and turned again to his brother.

"All right, George," he said.

DR. HUGO DRAKE, NATHALIE NORTON, ARRESTED

Once more the headlines flared the following morning. And the minute I got to the office Jim came in with the paper, of course.

"Well, they got them, I see," I said.

"Got 'em. Of course they got 'em. Them two was slated for gettin'," he declared.

I nodded. It is hard indeed for the guilty to escape when the Law, the Sun, turns the light of his vengeance upon them, and strikes with a flaming sword.

THE END

ADA

GOLD are Ada's tresses,
Blue are Ada's eyes:
Every chap professes
Joy as her he spies.

"She's a bear!" says Eddie;
"She's a wolf!" says Bill;
"She's a dear!" says Teddy;
"She's a duck!" says Phil.

What a way to flatter!
After they are through
With their silly chatter,
Ada seems a zoo!

Harold Susman.

A Born Salesman

By ROSE HENDERSON

IT was a smiting hot August afternoon, and Bert Collins stopped on his tedious pilgrimage down East Main Street and stepped into the shade of a large box-elder tree that stood beside a white picket fence.

He was out of sight of the old-fashioned white house set back behind clumps of shrubbery, and he threw his heavy black book agent's folder on the grass, took off his hat, and sat down wearily. A cool breeze crept out of the garden, carrying the fragrance of blush roses and phlox.

Bert took up his folder and glanced over the signed order blanks, though he knew just how many he had. There were not half as many as there should have been. Not a quarter as many as he used to turn up in a half-day's time. And he had been working like a horse.

"Folks don't want books, that's all there is to it," he mused. "Too darn busy buying phonographs and radios."

Bert took a letter from his pocket and read it a second time. A letter from Nellie Collins, his wife. It had a cheerful tone. Too cheerful. Bert knew that the optimism was forced.

"I'm feeling better this morning," the letter said. "I think I'm going to get along all right without the operation. So don't you worry about that or anything."

Bert's lips tightened a little as he read. He could see her drawn face and eager eyes. "If I can get that loan on my life insurance she's goin' to have it," he muttered. "Needs it all right. She can't fool me."

It had been rather warm, Nellie wrote. She hoped it was cool where he was. He must be sure not to work too hard. This was the dull season. What if business was slack just now! It would pick up next month, and then he could get home oftener. And before long he must get into different work that wouldn't be so hard.

Bert put the letter back in his pocket, got up and went on past the box-elder tree to the white picket gate and the grassy brick walk that led to the white house. The

air felt cooler as soon as he stepped through the gate under the rusty elms.

Rose bushes bloomed beside the walk, beneath rows of rock maples, the grass was long and seedy, and the rose petals lay on the ground in thick withering heaps. Shutters were closed at the front windows.

"Nobody at home," Bert told himself. But he went on up the steps, thumped the old-fashioned knocker, and waited, thumped it a second time, and stood listening.

It was part of a book agent's business to be thorough, he had learned. Thorough and persistent and everlastingly good-natured.

The unexpected was always happening. No opportunity should be overlooked. Time and again when he thought a place hopeless it turned out otherwise.

But the silence settled down mustily over the racket of the ancient knocker, and Bert went back down the walk and out into the hot August sunshine.

"Last house on Main Street," he scribbled in a pocket notebook as he went along.

He would drop back again before he left town. There were two houses across the street from which he had received no response.

He walked briskly into the yard of a new brown cottage next door, where a woman sat sewing on the front porch. Bert glanced at the work in the woman's lap, and saw that she was smocking pink organdie, or mull, or something of the sort.

"Could I show you something, madam? Take just a minute," he began in his most wheedling tones. And as he studied her face he remarked with his engaging smile, "Lovely stuff, isn't it? Makes me think of things my wife likes to sew on."

The woman looked pleased at his interest, and he pulled out his prospectus and began showing her pictures as he talked.

The set of books had one strong point at least. You could say almost anything about them. Entertaining, educational, practical, inspirational. Biography, travel, fiction, photographs.

It was a more or less clever hodge-podge intended to reach the widest possible public. There were many authors, among them a few well-known names, which, of course, were played to the utmost.

"I'm sorry, I—"

"Good as a trip abroad," put in Bert, catching a wistful look in the woman's eyes as he turned to a picture of Paris shops. "Good as a tour of the world. See it all right here on your own doorstep. All of the beauties and none of the discomforts. Then if you really want to go some time you'll know what you want to see. Be familiar with all the interesting places."

"It is interesting, but—I can't afford it."

"Afford it, shucks! Pay on installments. Lots of folks are doing it. Well-to-do families prefer it often. Five dollars down and a dollar a week. You won't miss it."

"I would like them."

"Sure you would. Anybody would that's intelligent and broad-minded. Anybody that likes beauty and travel and wants to keep up with the world. They're handsomely bound and illustrated, as you can see. They're a splendid addition to any library. Gives a home just the right touch of refinement."

The woman went into the house and came back with a five dollar bill, and in half a minute Bert had her signature on the dotted line.

"Thank you, Mrs. Bradley. You'll enjoy the books. I know you will, and I'll see that you get them promptly."

He was off down the new cement walk and up on the street to a green and yellow house that had a bilious, aggressive expression. He rang the doorbell, the door opened about six inches, and a sharp-faced woman peered out, slipped her hand through and hooked the screen.

"Good afternoon. Could I please show you something, madam? Take just a minute of your time," he smiled.

The woman withdrew hastily and the door banged in his face. At the next two houses the action was similar. He wasn't able to get beyond his first introductory sentence.

The afternoon was getting hotter. All of the women who had time were taking naps. They came to the door out of curi-

osity, but were peeved and disgusted when they found he had something to sell.

In his balmier days Bert would have taken a few hours off until it was cooler. But he needed every cent he could get just as soon as he could get it, so he kept on, grinning cheerfully in the face of insults, playing ingratiatingly for the faintest opening.

For several years he had made a good income selling books. Then he married, and promised himself and his wife that he would give up the agency business. But Nellie got sick, and he hated to let go until he was sure of something better.

And when he began to lose out on his sales he felt also a perverse desire to come back to his former efficiency before he quit.

"That Collins can sell books to illiterates," an old manager had said of him in his top-notch days. "He's a born salesman."

Bert had a foolish ambition to live up to that remark. And recently he had the more urgent need to reap as many commissions as possible.

Down the hot, dusty, small-town streets he kept his tireless course, his heart set against discouragement, his face bearing the easy, nonchalant expression that attracted interest, and his mind alert to read human nature as he found it, and to pick up any chance opportunity or advantage.

But under his careless exterior he felt a gnawing anxiety for his wife. Nellie was foolish about doing in debt. Her father had lost everything he had that way, and she was determined her husband shouldn't borrow money for her operation. Bert had borrowed on his insurance, and that worried her.

"All the same I got to get it. Got to," he said to himself, over and over, day after day.

At three o'clock he struck a corner drug store, and stopped for a chocolate malted milk.

"Know how they prepare this chocolate from cocoa beans?" he asked the soda fountain clerk.

"Nope. Never thought much about it."

"Well, it's kind of interesting," said Bert, and he launched into a vivid description of cocoa and South American forests and Indian head-hunters.

He saw the clerk's face grow less stolid as he played up the picturesque details. At the psychological moment he produced the colored illustrations in his prospectus.

At the next psychological moment he explained his job and the price of his wares. He threw a dime on the counter, and put his book back in his pocket.

"Great job," he grinned. "Almost as good as a trip around the world, these books are. If I ever want to travel I'll know what I want to see and how to see it."

A little well-chosen flattery, and the sale was made. He walked out under the striped awning and on toward the post office. He was anxious to get the afternoon mail as soon as it was distributed.

He tried the clerks in the drygoods stores without any luck. He had sold a set to a barber the day before during a hair-cut.

If you could catch your victims unawares and work up gradually it was usually a good way. They were not so scared.

At the post office he got a letter from his life insurance company saying that they could not let him have the loan he had asked for. For a minute his face fell, and a haggard fear leaped into his eyes.

"Hell!" he muttered. "I suppose they do have to stick to their rules."

He had tried them only as a remotely possible chance, but now he was clutching at the most forlorn hopes.

He mailed out his orders, and went to his hot box of a hotel room. He had a bath and his dinner, and wrote a letter urging his wife to go ahead and have her operation and he'd manage to get the money before long. Then he went out again, up and down the streets, up and down front doorsteps, where people had come out to sit reading or talking as the evening grew cooler. He took snubs good-humoredly. He smiled at aggressive discourtesy.

II.

THE next morning was not so hot, and people were more amiable generally and more easily approached. He made fairly good sales in the forenoon.

At noon he got a letter from a woman friend of Nellie's, saying that his wife was not so well. The doctor urged her to have her operation, but she was obstinate about it, refusing because of the expense, though they had agreed to do it as reasonably as possible.

Bert's face flushed angrily.

"She is foolish. Plumb foolish," he thought. He wanted to rush home and insist that she go to the hospital at once. Then he remembered that he had insisted, and how she had cried in a frightened way, and told him that she couldn't; that it would be worse than being sick to know they couldn't afford the expense, and that he was working too hard trying to earn the money.

He remembered, too, that her father had lost his mind worrying about his debts, and he realized that it was best to be patient. It was really better, perhaps, for him to be away. He might be able to influence her more, and he could keep from saying too much and hurting and frightening her.

His wife meant everything to him. He couldn't imagine going on without her.

As he sat in his hot cubby-hole of a room he stared back at the gaunt, worried face that looked at him out of the cheap wall mirror above his wash-stand.

"Gee, I've got to buck up. Got to," he sighed, and forced the breezy casualness into his expression, like an actor assuming a character rôle.

At a table in the hotel dining room he swapped yarns with a fat traveling man, forced himself to eat a plate of ham and eggs, and drank two cups of strong black coffee.

He went up to his room and sat on the bed staring at nothing. He had not been sleeping much for several nights. His head throbbed, his ears rang, and his whole body felt taut and tremulous. The memory of his wife's pale face kept floating before him, ragging his nerves with ghastly forebodings.

"She must be a lot worse," he told himself. "If she possibly could, she'd write to me everyday. And if I could just send her the money she'd go ahead and come through all right. She's got the nerve for it. Gee, I'm a hell of a husband!"

His face twitched and his fingers clutched at the bed covers.

He had tried to borrow from the company he represented, and of every friend he could think of. Drifting about as he had been doing for years, he had made few business acquaintances, none that did him any good now.

People generally distrusted book agents. He knew that. He ought to have saved somehow. He knew that, too.

But the same persistent optimism that had made him a good salesman had kept him a poor one.

"Born salesman! Hell!" he muttered.

But somehow the old compliment whipped him alive, and he jumped up and went downstairs whistling. He had a little money, and he decided to send it to Nellie. It always cheered her up to have something coming in.

He'd get along without it, somehow. He'd get some commissions in time to pay his hotel bill. Two more days would just about finish the town, and he could always do better the first few days in a new place.

He was working right up to his limit considering the hot weather, and he realized that he ought to save himself all he could. He had never had a breakdown, but when Nellie first took sick he had come near enough to it to appreciate the possibility. Yet his racking anxiety drove him on and on. That afternoon he felt the heat abominably. Housewives were sleepy and cross, and sales were correspondingly slim.

Bert found himself wincing at the indignant insults he met. Anxiety tortured him, and a sense of futility and defeat.

"I can understand how an honest man can steal, sometimes," he thought drearily.

He remembered a jewelry store down near the hotel. Some pretty good stuff in the window. Bert knew jewelry. A handful of rings and watches would pay for the operation that would restore his wife's health and maybe be the means of saving her life.

He saw the pain in her face and the brave hope. He saw her tear-dimmed eyes.

A handful of rings! They seemed to glitter before him there in the broiling sunshine. His face burned suddenly.

"Oh, God! I—I got to rest—a bit!" he murmured dazedly. As he went on, the walk seemed to come up in gray waves to meet his feet.

He was out at the edge of town just back of the left-over places he had checked on East Main Street. The old white house in the big yard. He felt a sudden urge to go back to that, if only to smell the roses and feel the coolness of the air under the maples.

He rested again, for just a few minutes, beside the rustling box-elder, went up the grass-grown walk, and saw that the shutters were open.

It was a beautiful, homey place. People who lived there ought to want to buy books, it seemed to him.

It was very quiet. He stood on the porch a few minutes before he lifted the knocker. He must pull himself together. He was only a book agent, but he was a decent, honest chap, and he used to have what they called the knack of salesmanship.

He had to keep decent and straight—for Nellie. But he had to get money for her, too.

A nice-looking, gray-haired woman opened the door. Bert took off his hat.

"Good afternoon, madam. I hope you'll pardon my disturbing you," he smiled. "I—I'd like to show you something. Just take a minute of your time."

"Come in," said the woman so unexpectedly that Bert almost forgot what he wanted to say next. He fumbled for his prospectus.

"Thank you," he said. "You're awfully kind."

"You look tired," said the woman. "Won't you sit down?"

"Lord, I am tired!" sighed Bert, and caught himself up suddenly.

The woman was sitting down opposite him in the cool, clean room that was restful with the feel of good furnishings. She didn't seem in a hurry to have him go.

He smiled at her wistfully and launched forth in his best vein. It had been a long time since any one had really given him a chance. He'd had to steal his chances, sometimes pretty brazenly.

The words rolled off his tongue glibly and yet with the ring of conviction. He was half surprised at himself. He sounded like a lecturer rather than a book agent, it seemed to him as he flipped over the familiar pictures and told the familiar stories.

He almost forgot that he was trying to make a sale, the woman had such a nice face and followed him so intently. He was determined to make her like those books, to realize that they were interesting, and he felt vaguely that the rest would take care of itself.

"Interesting, don't you think?" he grinned.

"Yes—very."

He was off again on a fresh line of talk that he almost never got a chance to say. It was a blurb that he'd made up himself with practically no help from the book company's directions. But he liked it and threw himself into it feverishly.

The woman smiled her appreciation.

"Wonderful, aren't they?"

"Yes, indeed."

Biography, travel, fiction, photographs. He checked them off in his mind. Index, headings, authors, bindings. He had covered the whole field and he reversed enthusiastically and picked up certain points to elaborate.

"Don't you think they're—great?" he asked. "W-wouldn't you like the set?" he stammered a shade uncertainly.

The woman got up and laughed. "I think *you're* great," she said, "and I'm going to get you a glass of iced tea."

Bert leaned back in his chair. It was a rocking chair, he discovered.

He glanced about the room a little nervously. The real thing, this was. Without analyzing them, Bert felt the refinement and charm of his surroundings. And the woman fitted them.

And she had laughed at him, after all her eager listening. She thought he was funny—a kind of a joke, maybe.

Well, he was too tired to care very much. It ought to be worse to have a nice woman laugh at you than the scolding, commonplace sort. Yet, she hadn't been disagreeable about it, really. The big room was cool and shadowy, and Bert could hardly

keep his eyelids from closing over his aching, bloodshot eyes. There was a huge bowl of roses on the table beside him, and Bert stared at them drowsily till the woman came back with the tea.

III.

"My dear boy," she said, "I think your books are remarkable; but I don't want to buy them."

She sat down again and looked him over with a kind of motherly concern.

"There," said Bert to himself as he sipped the iced tea gratefully. "I'm no salesman, or I'd have sold her long before this."

"I am Mrs. Grayson," she went on—"Mrs. Cynthia Grayson. I own this house, but I don't intend to live here. This was my aunt's place, and she died recently, and now I'm going to dispose of her things and go back to the city where I have another place. There's a lot of things, you see. The house is full of them."

"Yes, ma'am," said Bert, wondering where he came in. "She's the sociable kind," he thought. "Just wants somebody to talk to."

He rose, and set the tall, thin glass on the table beside the roses.

"I thank you very much, madam," he said stiffly. He wasn't sure just how formal he ought to be. "I—I've enjoyed my call—and the tea. Not every one is as kind as you've been, even when they buy my books."

"Please don't go yet," smiled Mrs. Grayson. "I want to talk to you a little while."

"W-why, thank you, madam—Mrs. Grayson," he stammered.

Such unprecedented politeness was rather overwhelming. And, besides, he ought to be getting on with his calls. But there was something compelling about the pink-cheeked, gray-haired, determined little woman, and he sank into his chair again almost with a sigh of pleasure.

"I know you'll think it's strange," she began. "But you see this house is full of old furniture; and it's got to be sold. I've arranged for a sale, in fact, for to-morrow afternoon. I've invited some dealers out from Boston. And just to-day I got word that my auctioneer is unable to come.

"Imagine! Disappointing me at this hour! So when you began telling me about your books, I said: 'Here is a man who can sell my furniture.' The townspeople will come, too, you see. It must be a regular auction."

"But, Mrs. Grayson, I'd be a total failure," Bert protested. "I don't know much of anything about furniture, and I never auctioneered."

"You can do it," she insisted. "I know you can. Why, anybody that can talk about books—or anything—the way you do! And anybody that can *sell* books in this town is a genius. Why, they don't care for anything here except movies and radio sets."

"I—I'd love to accommodate you—" hedged Bert.

"Well, then, you've got the chance," snapped the little woman. "I'll tell you all about the furniture; and I'll pay you well, of course."

"How—how much would you pay me?" demanded Bert with sudden interest.

"Well, I don't know. I was going to pay the other man on a commission basis. I guaranteed him five hundred dollars, though. And, of course, I'll do the same for you."

Five hundred dollars! Bert's head gave a giddy whirl. He didn't hear what she was saying about a commission on sales above a certain amount. He didn't care for that now.

"I'll do the very best I can for you, Mrs. Grayson," he promised.

"Good enough," she agreed.

They went through the house, and she described everything to him. She could talk, too, when she took a notion. She knew a lot about furniture, and she seemed to know a good deal about auctions.

Instinctively Bert loved the fine old pieces, and he had an almost photographic memory for a conversation. He followed Mrs. Grayson around, taking in every bit of history and anecdote and enough of the facts about the furniture to link the rest together. She gave him a list of the pieces,

and he was quick to associate names and details of character.

"I'll go back to the hotel and mull this over," he told her. "And to-morrow morning I'll come over here and rehearse."

"Fine! And don't you worry about it. I know it 'll be a good rehearsal," she smiled.

IV.

A FEW professional buyers and a crowd of curious villagers filled the old house and overflowed into the shady yard. At two o'clock sharp Bert stepped up on a stool, rapped a gavel on an old kitchen table, and the sale began.

He was a bit nervous at first, but nobody knew it. His training as a house-to-house canvasser had given him the poise and assurance of a street faker. He had learned resourcefulness, and he had rehearsed for the performance with Cynthia Grayson criticizing and applauding generously.

His ready tongue caught up the prepared lingo, and in a little while auctioneering seemed like an old game as he played one dealer against another and realized what people are willing to pay for modest-looking antiques. He had stayed awake most of the night, and he was dog tired, but he forgot his weariness, grinned and joked after his own fashion, and reeled out picturesque bits of history that Cynthia Grayson had given him.

The villagers provided an interested audience, and a few of them bought. Mrs. Grayson kept at his elbow to smile her encouragement or tip him off if he got lost.

He didn't get lost. He found himself fascinated by the performance. He felt curiously exalted and consequential. Nobody shutting doors in his face, nobody snapping his head off. Instead, everybody listened and watched, and hung on his words.

He was the fluent, debonair master of the show. And there was the five hundred dollars, and a trip home to Nellie, and everything right again. Everything square.

"Splendid! You've saved my life," declared Mrs. Grayson, when the sale was finally over and Bert got off the stool and the people were starting home down the old brick walk under the maples.

"Good work, young man," said a French-bearded dealer, coming up to shake hands. "Cynthia here tells me that you're a green hand she drafted at the last minute. Remarkable woman she is, Mr. Collins. Trust her to land on her feet every time."

"Yes, she's wonderful," agreed Bert.

"And, Mr. Collins, I want to congratulate you on the way you handled this job," the man went on. "If you want to come in to Boston, I can use you in my business. May be some different from anything you've done, but you can handle it. You've got the gift of salesmanship."

"Oh, thank you. You—you really think so?"

The old dealer laid a hand on Bert's shoulder.

"Think so?" he chuckled. "Dead sure of it, son. You're a born salesman."

THE END

HOME

THOUGH long the wanderer may depart,
And far his footsteps roam,
He clasps the closer to his heart
The image of his home.
To that loved land, where'er he goes,
His tenderest thoughts are cast,
And dearer still, through absence, grows
The memory of the past.

J. D. Burns.

A House and a Plot

By ERIC HOWARD

WHEN Jim Collier retired to his own little cubby hole of an office, one of several off the reception room of the advertising agency, the words of failure were ringing in his ears.

"It won't do!" Murdock, the real estate man, had said.

"It won't do!" Jim's boss, Prentice, had repeated.

"It won't do?" Jim himself had questioned. "What's the matter with it?"

"Everything!" Murdock had growled. "Absolutely everything! It don't ring true. It don't sound convincing. It ain't good copy. Why, you couldn't make anybody believe in that stuff. Do you really think that that kind of dope will help me sell houses? Not much! I want something live!"

"But," said Jim, "you can't be sure of that unless you try it out."

"Huh!" grunted Murdock. "I'm paying for it, and I'll be the judge of what's good."

"It won't do, Jim," said Prentice again. "I guess it's because you don't know your subject. I'll turn it over to Hutchins. He's a married man, with a home and a family. Maybe he can say something about homes that will make them attractive to buyers. You can't, that's plain."

It occurred to Jim that he might have objected that Hutchins was too close to the subject to write well about it, but he said nothing. He merely took up the copy that he had prepared and retired to his own office.

"Well, it won't do!" he stupidly repeated, as he laid the copy on his desk. "And that means—"

He paused to consider just what it meant. For one thing, it meant that as soon as Murdock left, perhaps somewhat modified by Prentice, the boss would burst in with a long lecture.

Prentice had left the job entirely to him. He had asked him twice how it was going, and Jim had assured him that he was progressing very well.

Prentice, busy with other accounts, had not even inspected his work. It was Prentice's business, as he often told his copy-writers, to land business. It was their work to supply the right kind of copy.

And he had failed, so Murdock said. Prentice, of course, agreed with their client. The client was always right. But was he?

Jim granted that since Murdock was paying the bills it was his privilege to pass upon what he was to pay for. But Jim was by no means sure that the real estate man was correct in his opinion.

It was not that Jim had any far-fetched notions of his own ability, but he had felt, from the beginning, that this bit of work was the best thing he had ever done. He had staked a lot on it. He had worked hard. He had made it, he felt, something a little better than had even been done in this line.

Murdock had wanted a small booklet, dealing with the advantages and delights of home-owning and home-making, to use in his great sales campaign. Thousands of booklets were to be mailed to prospects.

Lists of renters were to be secured, and all of those who rented houses and apartments were to be taught the advantages of buying their own homes with their rent money. Murdock was going to sell houses as they had never been sold before. And the booklet was to be the beginning of that campaign.

It was to be educational, full of facts about home-owning, and it was to stimulate every tenant's desire to buy a home.

It was such a booklet that Jim thought he had written. But it wasn't, according to Murdock and Prentice, at all what was wanted.

Jim turned the pages of his copy, studying each paragraph. He could find no serious fault with it. It seemed very good.

It had, in fact, convinced him. While he was working on it his own desire to own a home had grown. He had considered it very seriously, had talked it over with Virginia, who was to be, at no far distant time, Mrs. James Collier.

While he was reading the copy for the tenth time, Prentice came in. The head of the advertising agency was a man to whom success was a habit, failure a disease.

It pained him to have a client like Murdock leave unsatisfied. It gave him a headache, and it made him disagreeable for the rest of the day.

When things went well, Prentice was as amiable as a well-tipped waiter. When they did not go well, he was as grouchy as the same waiter, untipped.

"I'm surprised at you, Jim," he announced. "Lord, I thought I could trust you to handle this! A simple little job, and you bungle it! Must I always keep an eye on everything you fellows do? Can't I leave anything to anybody else? Another mess like this and Murdock's account is lost! And with this campaign just opening his account will be the biggest on the books."

"I wish I could see what he doesn't like," said Jim. "I don't see it."

"Never mind!" snapped Prentice. "It's enough that he doesn't like it. Now listen! I'm going to put Hutchins on it. It's out of his line, but I've got to try him. And I want you to go at it again. Maybe I'll put one of the other fellows at it, too. Out of the bunch we ought to get something that will hit the bull's-eye.

"But," Prentice sadly shook his head, "I'm certainly surprised at you. I thought you could do it. I ought to fire you, but I won't—yet. But I'll tell you this—if I lose Murdock's account I'll fire everybody!"

With that threat Mr. Prentice stormed out of Jim's room and retreated to his own.

"Then I'm due to be fired!" said Jim.

II.

THAT was Monday. Jim was fired the following Saturday, after another week's work on the Murdock booklet.

His second attempt was even worse than the first, in the opinion of Murdock and Prentice. Jim quite agreed with them, but he also held to his own good opinion of the first draft.

No other of the copy-writers had been able to supply what Murdock demanded, and, consequently, Prentice lost the account.

When that happened, Jim lost his job. Prentice did not, as he had threatened, discharge Hutchins and the other man who

had tried their hand at the task; but he was angry enough to let Jim go.

Jim went, without argument, without anger, but with a profound conviction that he had been unjustly treated. This conviction resulted in a determination to show them that they were wrong.

He did not hold it against Murdock. The latter was entitled to his own opinion. Nor did he feel any ill-humor toward Prentice, knowing that his former employer was a man of choleric humor.

"But they're wrong, dead wrong!" Jim insisted. "And I'll prove that they are!"

But how to prove it? The loss of his job was really a blow to Jim. It had been an excellent job, despite Prentice's occasional flashes of temper. He had been well paid, he had had pleasant work to do, and, when success attended his efforts, Prentice had been liberal in the way of bonuses and vacations.

Also, of late, Jim and Virginia had thought a good deal about buying a home. They had planned to buy one—at least, to secure it by making one payment—before they were married. They had even selected a lot in the neighborhood in which they wanted to live.

The property, Jim knew, was in a tract that Murdock was developing. If he had succeeded with the Murdock advertising, the realtor would have been more than kind in helping him to purchase the selected lot.

And, besides, Murdock would have financed their house, allowing Jim to pay for it over a period of years.

Now that plan was doomed. They wouldn't have any house, let alone one they liked. It was in this vein that he spoke to Virginia, soon after Prentice had told him to get out.

Virginia Gray was too happy to care.

"What," she might have asked, "is a house and lot in my young life?"

It was characteristic of her that she did not take Jim's announcement of his failure solemnly. Instead, she grinned.

"Well," she said, "if you're not working for awhile we can have a lot of fun! It'll be like a vacation."

Jim smiled, too. Their whole life was going to be like a vacation."

"But I thought you wanted that house!" he said.

"Of course I do! Also, I want a Fortuni gown, and a Rolls-Royce, and a million other things. But do you see me weeping because I can't have 'em? Not a weep! The fun is in the wanting, anyway, and not in the having. Look at all the people that have everything they want. They're mostly sad. And, besides, we'll get the house!"

"How?"

"I don't know. I just have a lot of faith in us. Something will turn up. Just you wait. That booklet is good—if it made us want to have a home, it would have the same effect on others like us. We're better judges than Mr. Murdock, even if he doesn't think so. By this time he's forgotten what it means to want a home."

"I hope you're right," said Jim. "But that doesn't help me now."

"Gee, it would be great if you could convince him in spite of himself!" observed Virginia. "Then Prentice—old sour face—would have to apologize, increase your salary and take you back. That'd be just like it is in a story, wouldn't it?"

"It would," smiled Jim, "but it won't, if you get me."

"I get you," chuckled Virginia, with that tender, throaty laugh of which he was so fond. "But I'll bet that booklet would sell houses, if it were only tried out. If there were some way of trying it—"

"There isn't. Murdock's the only realtor big enough, in this line, to use it. And he won't."

"Well, then, let him keep his old houses! He's lost us as customers already."

"I guess he can stand that loss," laughed Jim.

Then they forgot Murdock and planned an outing, now that Jim was not working. They might as well take advantage of the enforced vacation, said Virginia. Jim thought that he should be hunting another job.

"Got any ideas?" asked Virginia.

"Not exactly," Jim admitted.

"Then there's no use staying in town. Looking for something with no idea of where to find it is just a waste of time. Let's go!"

They went.

During the following days, after his return to the city, Jim did make a systematic survey of the field. The chances for securing another position seemed woefully slim. One or two agencies told him that they might give him a little part-time work, but that would not be sufficient to finance his marriage.

In his search he encountered Mr. Percival Throckmorton. This gentleman was in the printing business. He was a round-faced, round-eyed, round-bodied man of about forty.

"As I live and breathe!" he exclaimed with his passionate friendliness, when Jim entered his office. "James Collier himself! Sit down, old chap! Have a cigar! Have a drink, eh? To what do I owe the honor of this visit?"

"Well, Percy," said Jim, "I'm looking for a job."

They were members of the same luncheon club, one of the by-laws of which was that they must call each other by their first names.

"You don't tell me!" observed Percy. "You, the world's champion advertising writer—looking for a job! How come?"

Jim explained, briefly. Then he pulled out the copy he had written for Murdock. He was trying it on all his friends, endeavoring to find out whether he or Murdock was wrong.

Mr. Throckmorton read it through.

"Great! Bully! Why, my boy," he cried, "Elbert Hubbard himself couldn't have done any better! Man alive, did Charlie Murdock turn this down?"

"He did!"

Mr. Throckmorton's round, smooth face became lined suddenly with thought-wrinkles. While thinking, he held his breath. Then, when he got the thought, he exhaled with a whale-like explosion.

"I got it!" he cried. "I got it! Listen. Printing's slow right now. Costs have gone up, and people are cutting down. I've had to rustle business. This gives me a hunch. Can you use this? Murdock isn't mentioned in it, and—"

"No," said Jim, "he isn't mentioned. You see, we were going to have his firm name printed on the inside front cover. Otherwise, there was to be no mention of him."

"Fine! Call up Prentice and Murdock. Ask them if they'll give you permission to use this on your own!"

"But I don't see—" began Jim.

"Never mind! Listen to me! Call 'em up!"

Jim did as he was commanded. Both of the gentlemen whom he telephoned told him to go as far as he liked—the copy was no good to them. Murdock was politely cheerful about releasing it; Prentice profanely emphasized its worthlessness.

"Aha!" said Throckmorton. "Now we'll print ten thousand of these booklets, as a starter."

"What for?" demanded Jim. "Nobody but Murdock will be able to use this sort of thing, here. And you can't expect to sell 'em elsewhere without a sales organization. Besides, if Murdock doesn't see it, no other real estate man would."

"All that," smiled Throckmorton, "can come later. The national selling, I mean. For the present, we'll concentrate on Murdock. Leave him to me! This is good! Now, Jim, I'll put this up to you in two ways.

"Frankly, it looks big to me. If you want to go in with me, on a fifty-fifty basis, you'll have to put up half the cost of printing—about two hundred dollars. The booklets must be good-looking, and in two colors. If you don't want to take a chance, I'll pay you five hundred for the copy, and make what use I like of it."

Jim hesitated.

"But—" he began.

"No questions and no answers!" Percy held up a fat, pink hand. "Take it or leave it!"

Still Jim hesitated. Five hundred in the hand looked very good to him. But Percy was no fool; in fact, quite the contrary. He wasn't overlooking a bet. And he was offering Jim a partnership in something that, as he said, "looked big."

Hastily Jim estimated the amount of cash in his bank account. Could he afford two hundred dollars? Could he afford to take a chance?

Percy was humming softly to himself. Jim had heard some one say that when Percy hummed, a killing was to be made. Well—

With an audacious gesture, Jim whipped out his checkbook and bravely scrawled a check for two hundred dollars.

"Oh," said Percy, "there was no hurry about that! I just wanted your decision."

"You have it, and the check!" announced Jim. "Now what's the scheme?"

"Get out!" replied Percival. "I'm busy. And don't come back till I send for you, which will be when there's something to show you."

"But—"

"Get out!" repeated Percy. "You've done your part. Now I'll do mine."

III.

THE following month was that one which is the very dullest of the year in the advertising business. Jim sought work with a commendable assiduity, but without success.

Those who knew him advised him to go into some other line, temporarily; things were very bad. It would, every one agreed, pick up after awhile, but for the present, business was unanimously termed "rotten."

Only the outings with Virginia helped Jim to carry on during this period. They were joyous events, and not even his bad luck could affect Virginia's healthy appetite for pleasure.

Fortunately for them both, Virginia's idea of pleasure did not require the expenditure of much money. A hike over suburban hills was a joy to her, and, as everybody knows, one need not be plutocratic to engage in hiking.

Daily at first, and then weekly, Jim called up Percival Throckmorton.

"Nothing doing yet!" Percy would invariably respond. "I'll let you know."

Jim began to feel that he had lost his two hundred dollars. Whatever scheme Percy had in mind, it was not maturing very rapidly. This peeved him so much that, at last, he decided to go after Percy and collect a part, at least, of his investment.

To annoy him further, he began to see huge billboards, bearing Murdock's advertisements of his new subdivision, on all the highways.

Murdock was indeed launching a great selling campaign. He had built and opened for inspection a model house, which was being visited by scores daily. Even Virginia had gone to see it.

"It's a dream, a perfect dream!" she had reported to Jim. "Oh, what an adorable house! It's just what we want. And what we'll get—some time!"

"Yes," agreed Jim, but rather weakly. He had begun, some time since, to lose his characteristic confidence.

When would they get such a house? When?

Having nothing else to do, he went to call on Throckmorton. He found the round little man bursting with enthusiasm.

"Just in time! Just in time!" cried Percy. "I've been trying to get you all morning. We have a conference this afternoon. And then—well, we shall see what we shall see! Aha! The great Charles Murdock! Aha!"

"What are you talking about?" demanded Jim. "What did you do with my two hundred?"

"Aha! Worried about that, are you? Well, Jim, if you're really afraid you've lost it, I'll buy you out—now—for five hundred."

"Buy me out of what?"

"Out of our partnership, of course."

"Partnership in what?"

"In the world's most successful advertising project!"

"Come on, Percy," pleaded Jim. "Tell me just what you've been doing—or trying to do."

"Not yet! Not yet, me lad! When the time comes! And not before! When we have Charlie Murdock right in this chair, begging for mercy."

"How?"

"Look at this!" Percival Throckmorton thrust into Jim's hand a letter signed by Murdock, the great realtor.

It was a cordial little note, in which this paragraph appeared significant: "Of course. Percy, I'll be very glad to have you send prospects to my organization. I need not

tell you that I'll be very glad to make it worth your while. In fact, I'll pay you a five per cent. commission on everything we sell to any one sent by you. How's that?"

"Well?" asked Jim. Then a light began to break across his countenance. "Did you— I mean, have you— Look here, did you distribute ten thousand of those booklets? You've been sending prospects to Murdock—that way?"

"Sure!" nodded Percy. "If he wouldn't try the booklet, and I thought it was good, why not? Sure! And look at this: I got out ten thousand, and with every one I inclosed a letter, asking the readers to say that Throckmorton had sent 'em to Murdock. See?

"Well, it had Charlie puzzled. He didn't know I knew so many people! Aha! Hundreds of 'em, running into his office, mentioning me! Ha! And then—of course—he got wise, when he saw the booklet. So he called me up, ready to fight. That's no way to treat a friend, says he, and all that. He can't pay five per cent on sales like this, he protests, and so on.

"Well, I've held out for what this letter offers! And we've got him, smart Charlie Murdock sewed up in a bag! Of course—" Throckmorton grinned happily—"we won't sting him. But we'll make a nice profit."

Jim sat down. So Murdock, not through his efforts, but through Throckmorton's, had been made to realize the value of his booklet. He had agreed to pay a liberal commission, and Percy had said—

"Say!" he burst out, forcefully if inelegantly. "Say how many sales has he made through this?"

"Oh, I'd guess a hundred, at least," replied Percy. "And as none of his houses sells for less than five thousand, and our commission on that would be two hundred and fifty dollars, why—we've got—well, count it up, yourself!"

"But we can't soak him that! That's robbery!" protested Jim.

"Of course it is!" nodded Percy. "But he agreed to be robbed! No, of course we can't soak him. But it won't do us any harm to let him think we intend to. That's why I'm going to handle him. You'll be here, in the next room, but you let me do the talking—until I call you in. Then you can suggest a reasonable payment for our services, based on what Prentice would charge, plus the printing cost, plus a just tax for his ignorance."

It was left at that, and they went out to lunch. Murdock would not appear until two o'clock.

IV.

WHEN Charles Murdock, realtor, did appear in the office of Percival Throckmorton, printer, he was accompanied by a lean, taciturn man. The latter was Mr. Murdock's attorney, retained to get him and keep him out of trouble.

The round little printer welcomed them happily and impartially.

"This is a show-down!" announced Murdock, grimly.

"Fine!" chuckled Percy, rubbing his pink and white hands together. "Fine!"

"What do you mean, holding me up for thousands on a thing like this?" Murdock waved the beautifully printed booklet in the face of the fat printer. "When I wrote you that letter you're so fond of quoting I meant, of course, that I'd pay you that on sales made to your personal friends. You know very well that this is altogether different! What right have you to expect two hundred and fifty dollars on mighty near every sale we've made? For what you've done! Bah! Just bought up that fool advertising man's copy, and used it! Percy, I'm surprised at you!"

"No more than I'm surprised at you!" retorted Percy. "Imagine a man of your intelligence letting that booklet slip!"

"How'd I know it would go like this? Just luck, that's all! You didn't know, either; you took a chance and were lucky."

Percy nodded agreeably.

"Lucky—and wise! Besides, I didn't buy up Collier's copy, as you suppose. Collier and I are partners in this. If it were only my affair, why of course I'd like to let you off as easily as possible. But since Collier's in it, and Collier lost his job because you turned down that very copy that's done more than anything else to sell your houses and lots, well—Collier naturally looks at it as a matter of business, not

friendship. I was arguing the point with him. I said, 'Jim, let's not rob Charlie Murdock.' And he answered, 'Why not? He wants to be robbed!' You see, that's the way he feels!"

Jim, in the next room, separated from the others by only a thin partition, had an impulse to break down that fragile wall and to correct the impression Percy was willfully creating. But he thought better of it. Let Percy handle it!

"I won't be robbed!" protested Murdock. "I'm willing to make any reasonable adjustment, realizing that your work has been of value, of course. But it's not worth as much as you claim, by a long shot. And if you won't listen to reason—well, Mr. Clark here is my attorney! Sue if you like, but Clark will see that you don't collect!"

Mr. Clark, at this compliment, coughed suggestively.

Percy grinned. "Oh, I don't know!" he said. "I, too, have an attorney. But let's be friends, Charlie—I'll call Jim Collier in. Any arrangement that's all right with him is satisfactory to me. Jim!"

Jim had spent the time since their return from lunch in going over a few figures. He had down in black and white just what Prentice would have charged for the booklet, had it been accepted, the printing costs, the cost of securing lists of renters, mailing booklets, and so on.

He added these figures and then tacked on a thousand dollars as a reasonable penalty for Mr. Murdock to pay. The total was only a fifth of what Percy was demanding, and even so it would give Jim a neat profit of two thousand dollars! He entered Percy's sanctum with restored confidence.

Murdock met him more than half way.

"Young man," he growled, "I find I was wrong about your booklet. Your test proves that it's good stuff. Now let's get down to brass tacks—how much do you want?"

For answer Jim passed the slip of paper bearing his figures to Percy. The printer beamed and nodded.

"We're not going to hold you to your offer of five per cent commission, sir," Jim smiled. "We realize that that wouldn't be fair. If we did, you would owe us in the neighborhood of twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Preposterous!" cried Murdock.

"I agree with you," said Jim. "And we wouldn't think of holding you up. No, we're going to ask you for just what the same thing would have cost you had Prentice handled it in the usual way, plus printing and so on. The total—" he paused while he pretended to refer to his memorandum; there was no need for that, for he knew the figures by heart—"the total is fifty-five hundred dollars."

Before Murdock could speak, Jim went on to specify how he had arrived at that total.

"And that is the best we can do," he summed up.

Murdock glanced at his attorney, who gave an almost imperceptible nod.

"I'll take you!" announced the realtor. "But give me that fool letter I wrote you, Percy. Clark here says you could have held me up on that, or made a good stab at it!"

"Sure we could!" chuckled Percy. "But we're friends, aren't we?"

"Yeh!" growled Murdock, writing a check, which he handed to Percy. "I'll say you're a great printer, Percy. I only hope you'll never go in for real estate. And you, young man"—he addressed Jim directly—"if you're not thinking of going back to Prentice, how about taking charge of my advertising? I guess we can come to terms."

"I guess we can," said Jim, "and I'd like that job. By the way, Mr. Murdock, I'm thinking of buying a house. That model you've opened—we'd like one of that kind."

"Pick your lot! Pick your lot and we'll build it. And say, I'll allow you ten per cent on a deal like that!"

And when, that evening, Jim reported his good fortune to Virginia, she cried: "Oh, I just knew you'd do it!"

"But *I* didn't! Percy—"

"I just knew you'd do it," Virginia repeated. And no one could make her believe that he hadn't.

THE END

Spirit of Barnum

By THOMAS THURSDAY

IN the year 1664 B.F.—before flivvers—an ex-sheik with the movie-comedy name of Ponce de Leon observed with alarm that his goatee was streaked with white, his limbs rheumatic, while the charming *señoritas* began to pass him up like he was a beaker of arsenic.

Getting as peeved as a giraffe with a two-inch neck, old Ponce packed his summer underwear, bought a large supply of pimentos, and set sail for the fevered land of Fla-Fla., which same is the abbreviation of Florida doubled. As every school-lad knows, Señor de Leon was in search of the Fountain of Youth.

Landing at twenty-nine different ports at one and the same time—read the booklet of any Sunshine State realtor—the Spanish grandee took a few inhalations of the Gulf Stream breeze, and proclaimed it the ideal place for a subdivision. Since that time there's a division in the sandy peninsula for every man, woman, and offspring in China, Japan, and the South She Islands, including the development started by me and Ballyhoo Burns.

As the husband remarked to his missis, who discovered a scented note in his pocket, I'd like to tell you about that!

After getting an option on two hundred and ten acres of some of the best cypress swamp land in the chin-whisker State, Ballyhoo erects a many-colored field office, promotes a few sucker buses to bring out the customers, then imports a squad of the finest circus and carnival grifters that ever cluttered up a midway, such as " Paddle-Wheel " O'Levy, " Cock-Eyed " Snyder, and " Hoop-la " McCann, supported by an all-scar cast of the same bilk.

The title of our delightful development was no less than Largo de Leon, named after—way after—the jovial Ponce; but if it wasn't exactly the Fountain of Youth it was certainly the Fountain of Profit, I'll tell the sand-buying world! No kidding, during the first few weeks the lads peddled the lots to one-hundred-per-cent non-thinkers so fast that it seemed like a dream.

Ballyhoo, however, being a showman, first, fast, and all the time, decided to pep up the joint by pulling off an advertising stunt that was very rough, very raw, and very rotten.

" Speaking of advertising, Doc," he says to me one day, " it's the thing that puts over about everything but the sun and

moon. When these guys tell you that this boom is a natural one they're talking through their tonsils. Ninety per cent of this Great Sand Rush is as artificial as a tin alligator, and everybody with a spoonful of brains knows it. The one thing that put it over is the same thing that put over breakfast foods, canned beans, chorus girls, and California, to wit and *i.e.*, Advertising.

"In other words, kid, if you have anything you want to peddle, tell the world about it. Once upon a time a guy named Ralph Waldo Emerson made a wise crack that always irritated me. He said that if a bird was to build a better mouse trap than anybody else the world would beat a path to his door, or words to that effect. Applesauce! How in hades is the world gonna know that the sap has a better mouse trap than any one else if he don't advertise the fact? Why—"

"Listen!" I snaps. "What's the idea of the lecture? I thought you was gonna tell me something about a stunt for Largo de Leon."

"I am, and here it is. What this dump of ours needs is an advertising stunt that will put it over big. We want to get the crowds out here like flies around tanglefoot. Now, then, what do we do?"

"Have one of those cluck one-cent sales," I suggests.

"All damp," he frowns. "We must do something that will be a knockout; something that will bowl 'em over. That being the case, I have a perfect scheme. Listen. You know how the public likes to look over famous people, such as the Prince of Wales, Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, Mary Pickford, and so on, don't you? It's human nature."

"Are you thinking of hiring the Prince of Wales as a salesman?" I asks.

"I would if I could. However, maybe we can get some other big fish. Maybe we can get Gloria Swanson, Douglas Fairbanks, or Charlie Chaplin."

"The climate has gone to your head," I says. "You couldn't afford to hire those babies for ten minutes. Why, they'd want at least ten grand a day for just saying "Good morning" twice. And then maybe they wouldn't be able to sell any of our lots, at that."

"You don't get the idea. I don't want them to sell lots personally. All they have to do is to sit in the office and shake hands with the suckers. The idea is to bring the customers out to the development—see?"

"I do not," I admits. "For one thing, where is the money coming from to pay these heavy-sugar pets, and for another, how are you gonna get one?"

"Hell!" he snorts. "I thought you was a showman. Listen. I ain't simp enough to even try to get one of those big guns. What *I'm* gonna do is to promote some lady or gent who could pass as a 'ringer' for some well advertised lad or lassie, and then put him or her over as the real thing."

"That would be suicide!" I yelps.

"Nope; that would be nerve plus showmanship. Besides, what's the harm?"

I leaned over and felt his head, figuring that the climate had got him.

"You're getting balmy," I says. "Suppose, for instance, that we pick up Charlie Chaplin or Mary Pickford ringers, and have her or him come to this field office and pose as the real thing. All right! Suppose, further, that the real Charlie or Mary gets wind of it? That means assorted trouble for us!"

"So does your old sedan!" he grins. "What if they *do* find out, hey? That will be apple pie for us. If they are fool enough to squawk, the newspapers will be full of it, and that means we get some publicity that couldn't be bought for a million. Forget it, Doc. Meanwhile, I want you to search around Miami to-morrow and pick me a winner. Hope you get some guy who looks like the Prince of Wales."

II.

BRIGHT and early the next morning finds me ambling down Flagler Street, searching for any one who looks like some one of fame and importance. Although I am certain that the scheme is as nutty as a squirrel's pantry, I am also aware that when Ballyhoo gets an idea lodged in his bean he's like the Rock of Gibraltar—hard to budge.

Well, sir—or ma'am—the first lad who looks like some one I had read and heard about was a bootblack. I spot him in the middle of the block shining the Oxfords of a binder Bennie. After giving him a close inspection I feel certain that he is a ringer, or double, for Monsieur N. Bonaparte, the well-known doughboy.

I'm about to promote this john, when I get the sudden thought that Mr. Bonaparte had quit this funny world a few years ago. So I drop the boot cleaner and walk down farther.

In the middle of the next block, slouched against a lamp-post, I discover a boy who looks like no less than Charlie Chaplin, who is gaining fame around the Hollywood lots. He's wearing a Palm Beach cap, pulled rakishly over one eye, and the hardest work he seems to be doing is basking in the sunshine.

As to wearing apparel, he's there; in fact, if Beau Brummel had got one peek at 'im, he'd have collapsed from envy.

"Fellow," I begins, stepping up suddenly, "I been looking for you for some time. You're—"

He whirls around, gets as white as a Cape Cod snowflake, then narrows his eyes like a leopard's.

"No fly cop ever took Slippery Pete!" he snarls.

To make his curt statement more convincing, he hauls back his right hand, clenches his fist, then lands a torrid fist to my positively glass jaw. And that sock was a success.

I settle to the pavement, take a quick course in astronomy, and awake some time later to observe a circle of admiring citizens. Noting that Slippery Pete had slipped away, I remarks to the assembled folks that banana peels should never be left on the sidewalk.

I felt like quitting work for the day, but I knew if I came back to the field office without a ringer Ballyhoo would even things up by smacking the other jaw, and, personally speaking, my daddy never reared any stupid children.

At the next corner I walks into a very soft-drink factory, and order a large beaker of sulphur water seasoned with orange juice. The dame who waits on me has everything that Professor Ziegfeld demands in a chorine, and after I had loaded both eyes with peek at this winner of some beauty contest I am positive that she could pass off as a ringer for Gloria Swanson.

"It's a nice day," I begins, with my best smile. "After that, I'd like to know if anybody ever told you that you resembled Gloria Swanson?"

"Yes, it's a nice day," she returns. "After that, I'd like to know if anybody ever told you that you resembled Ben Turpin?"

"No fooling," I goes on. "If you'll listen to me for a minute I'll make you a proposition that will get you out of this humdrum trap and give you some important money."

"Thanks a lot," she shoots back. "I will list that offer in my file, which will be No. 235 for the week. Meanwhile, perhaps the following details concerning my career may be of interest: I'm married, the sole mother of three kids, and think my husband is the greatest boy on earth. That being that, if you can't find the door I'll be glad to furnish a map."

Seeing a husky-looking lad edging up from the rear, and judging this jill to be no less than the fair one's chief and only husband, I gulped the last of the liquid insult, and scoots out. Realizing that my nerve was gone, I quit the game and went back to Ballyhoo empty-handed.

"What!" he yelps, when I tell him the synopsis of the story. "D'yer mean to say that you couldn't promote *any* one? Why, you should have been able to find some one, easy. Didn't you even see any lad who looks like Charlie Dickens, Lydia E. Pinkham, or birds like that? Believe me, you're a complete, absolute flop!"

"Suppose," I says, with more heat than they have in Florida, "that you go out and try to pluck one for yourself. Guys who know as much as you should give a demonstration. No use of me being killed while so young."

"I'll do that small thing," he snaps. "Follow me, and I'll get a ringer in a short time, if not sooner. Your approach must have been rotten!"

When we reach town, I let Ballyhoo stroll a few paces in the lead—not wishing to be identified with him when a crash came. In case of fire, I never like to be near the hose.

Fin'ly, Ballyhoo spots a beauteous creature gazing into a milliner's window and edges up beside her. I take a look and decide that the lady must of come from Palm Beach or Newport. She's a pipping blonde—almost to the roots.

"A-ha!" gloops Ballyhoo to me. "A dead double for Lillian Gish. I'll book this lady, and the customers will mob the field office. Watch how I do it, Doc."

"Good luck," I whispers. "In case of trouble, don't nod to me when a cop leads you by."

Confidently edging close to the luscious lady, Ballyhoo tips his hat with all the grace of a Malay truck driver, and smiles like a poisoned pup.

"Eh—I beg your pardon, madam, but aren't you Lillian Gish?"

The blond panic raises her synthetic eyebrows an even inch, then gives Ballyhoo a glare as cold as an Esquimo's beak.

"Lithen, big boy," she says with a delightful lisp, "ith you speaking to me?"

"Sure," replies Ballyhoo, warming up. "I know that my approach is a little raw, but when I happened to lamp you here, girly, I knew that you was just the type I was looking for. Now, if you'll listen to me for—"

"You ith very kind, sir," says the lady, "but my husbandth never allowth—"

At that moment a pugnacious-looking butter-and-omelet man comes dashing from across the street. Coming to a short, sudden stop, directly in back of Ballyhoo, he proceeds to cock an ear.

"On the level," goes on Ballyhoo, "my proposition will pay you—"

Well, since this is not a report of the Dempsey-Firpo brawl, we'll pass up the next five minutes—just long enough for Ballyhoo to revive, dust off his clothes, and remove himself from the gutter.

"Where's that big bum?" he yelps, looking around. "If he does that again I'll smack him down!"

"Return engagements don't pay," I says. "Meantime, are you through searching for ringers?"

"I am not!" he flares. "Ballyhoo Burns never was a quitter; and I won't give up until they carry me away in an ambulance."

"Suppose it's a hearse?"

"Makes no difference—just see that it's a pink one. I hate them black babies. They always remind me of a funeral."

After another ten minutes of fruitless searching Ballyhoo decides that a bite to eat would not offend the stomach. Coming to the Yank-Cracker Café, we ease in and sit on one of those revolving stools that lined the counter. After ordering everything that sounded like food, Ballyhoo suddenly taps me on the shoulder.

"Sh-h," he whispers. "Who does the guy next to me remind you of?"

"Oliver Twist," I says, without even looking.

"Take another look," he buzzes. "He's a ringer for a world-famous guy."

"P. T. Barnum?" I asks, paying strict attention to a wicked grapefruit.

"So's your Aunt Miami," he snorts. "Lay off them half-witticisms, and get down to normal. I ask you to look at this john and see if you see what I see."

I take a half look.

"Maybe I don't see what you see," I says. "There's a lotta gravy on that lad's chin."

"You got gravy on your brain," he sends back. "D'yer mean to tell me that that fellow don't look like Jack Dempsey?"

This information jolts me into respectful attention. The heavy-weight champ of the world! We always respect the lads who can lick us, and that ain't no bedtime scenario.

"Yes, sir," buzzes on Ballyhoo, "this baby is a dead ringer for the champ. Watch me promote him!"

"D'yer mind if I leave now?" I asks, losing all interest in the fried tarpon, or whatever it was.

"Stay here or I'll brain you!" he whispers. "I may need your assistance."

"I ain't a doctor," I says. He lets that go by and turns to the big fellow.

"Beg pardon, brother," he begins, "but do you know who you remind me of?"

The husky chap turns around, wipes a dime's worth of pork chops off his chin, then gives Ballyhoo an amused smile.

"Who do I remind you of?" says the large boy. "Your wife's cousin, from Hicksap, New York?"

"Ha, ha," comes back Ballyhoo, with a forced smile. "That's a rich one. But—eh—no fooling, you could pass for Jack Dempsey. Why, you're a dead double for him!"

"You don't say?" returns the big guy. "Well, I'm glad you didn't take me for Little Red Riding Hood."

"Gosh, you're full of wit," beams Ballyhoo—but had I of pulled that hokum he'd have cracked a plate over my nut. "Haven't you ever been taken for the champ before?"

"Yes, indeed," he admits, "Jess Willard believed I was Dempsey, Carpentier felt fairly certain I was Dempsey, while Firpo is convinced I am the champ. That's funny, isn't it?"

All of which gives me and Ballyhoo the idea that the lad is balmy in his belfry.

"D'yer mean to say that you met all those famous fighters?" asks Ballyhoo. "You must dream pretty well, fellow!"

"I not only met them, but I knocked them out," says the gent. "In other words, I'm Jack Dempsey."

Alley oop!

Naturally this bit of news goals Ballyhoo—but not for long. In order to surprise him for more than ten seconds you'd have to present him to Alexander the Great.

"Well, well, well!" enthuses Ballyhoo, "so you admit you're Jack himself, hey? Well, you didn't fool me—I knew it all the time. Put 'er there, Jack!"

To all of which Monsieur Dempsey grins broadly.

"By the way, Jack," goes on my snide partner, "how'd you like to pull down a little money whilst you're hanging around here?"

"I don't know. I already have contracted to have my name on hair tonics, exercises for fat men, collapsible bathtubs, skin ointments, and any number of other things. What are you selling—a new brand of mince pie?"

"Nothing so ordinary," replies Ballyhoo. "I've got the best real estate proposition in Florida. I'm the sole owner and developer of Largo De Leon—The Magic Sunshine Spot—The Athens of Florida—The Sub-Division De Luxe—The Heavenly Rest Spot—The Best—"

"No doubt about it," the champ cuts him off. "However, what's your proposition?"

"Your own terms, Jack!" sizzles Ballyhoo. "Er, how'll one thousand bucks per day hit you, hey? All you got to do is less than nothing. Just hang around the field office and shake hands with the sand-grabbers. My whole idea is to get the crowd out there, and if Jack Dempsey can't attract a crowd, then I'll have to stage the Battle of Waterloo. How about it?"

"I'll go you, Mr. Burns," says Jack, whilst me and Ballyhoo near hit the counter from shock.

After which came the tattle of the century!

III

Two days later five of the largest newspapers in Southern Florida ran a stock advertisement, stating that Mr. Jack Dempsey would be glad to meet everybody at Largo De Leon. Just to add to the excitement, we have ten thousand dodgers—or throwaways—printed and tossed in every direction.

The champ is to get one grand a day, for three days—that being all Ballyhoo cared to slip anybody, even the King of Sweden. However, that suited the champ, as he says he would like to get back to Broadway as soon as possible in order to sign up for a bout with Harry Wills. East is East and West is West—but never the twain shall meet!

Well, to come to the last round of this outrage against good literature, the first day that the champ was at the field office he gets swamped like a canoe in a Pacific storm. The crowds came out like white duck pants at Palm Beach, and the other realtors began to grind their teeth with sizzling envy.

Our own busses were loaded to the snubbers, and we hired special cars to carry the

mob to the grounds. Jack made the boys and girls a little speech—written by Ballyhoo, right out of his own head—saying that Largo De Leon was a positive knockout, in his opinion, and that he was going to build a love nest right there himself.

After the champ had made his little speech, the salesmen went through the customers like cheese through a rat hole.

On the second day the mob was bigger than ever, and the lots began to sell like slum jewelry in a colored settlement. Ballyhoo is so tickled at the results that he begs Jack to stick around for ten years. But Jack couldn't be budged, claiming he had important business in New York, so we had to be satisfied with one more day.

The third and last day was a near riot. Half of Miami, Coral Gables, not to mention—though that's what I'm doing—huge consignments of people from as far as Orlando, De Land and Daytona, came motoring up to the grounds. It was the type of crowd that would have made Mr. P. T. Barnum wiggle his ear with joy! Then a terrible thing happened.

The champ failed to show up!

"You better do some heavy thinking, and do it quick!" I buzzes to Ballyhoo. "This mob came to see Jack Dempsey, not Largo De Leon, and if you think different you're just kidding yourself!"

"I don't think different," moans Ballyhoo. "We're in a jam, and I don't mean perhaps. What'll we do?"

"Make a speech. You used to be one of the best kid-show spielers on the midway. Get on a chair and tell the ladies and sugar papas that the champ is sick."

"Guess he must be," he admits. "Or maybe he hadda pull out for New York."

He hops upon a chair, yelps for attention, then tells one and all that Mr. Dempsey is indisposed and will not be able to appear to-day.

When the crowd hears that bit of wet news they let forth a groan that could be heard as far south as Spree West. To make matters more irritating, they folded their cents like the Arabs, and silently stole away—without buying a dime's worth of our choice sand.

Immediately after we get the best sock of the day.

When most of the mob had stepped on the gas a little runt of a bird comes slowly up to me and Ballyhoo, and stares at us, a quizzical smile on his shrewd face.

"How do you do?" he begins. "My name is Buck Tryon, sports editor of the Miami *Sunshine*. I came out to see Jack Dempsey—but I knew he wouldn't be here; but don't worry," he says, "I won't give your game away. Worse stunts than yours have been pulled off in the real estate field."

"I don't get you, brother," blurts Ballyhoo. "One of us must be crazy."

"Listen," goes on the sports editor, "you and me speak the same language, so you're just wasting your time giving me a pushing around. If that fellow was the real Jack Dempsey then I'm the twin of Cal Coolidge."

"What d'yer mean, he wasn't Jack Dempsey?" barks Ballyhoo. "I gave that baby one grand a day. D'yer think I'd pay that to a plumber's assistant? If he wasn't the champ, then I'm a terrible sucker!"

"You must be all of that," agrees Mr. Tryon. "And perhaps the reason why your man didn't appear to-day is because I met him late last night and showed him a telegram. After he had read it he smiled, mentioned the fact that he was a great admirer of Barnum, then walked briskly away. Here—perhaps you'd like to see the telegram yourself."

It was signed by the sporting editor of the New York *Telegram*, and was right to the point:

> Jack Dempsey sailed for Paris four days ago.

After me and Ballyhoo had got an eyeful of that we collapsed in one another's arms, then took a nine count. What would you?

"Well, for shedding tears in public!" moans Ballyhoo. Then he gets a sudden thought. "Say," he goes on, "if that stewbum wasn't the champ, who *was* he?"

"A ringer," replies Mr. Tryon.

Toodle-oo, Mr. Barnum!

THE END

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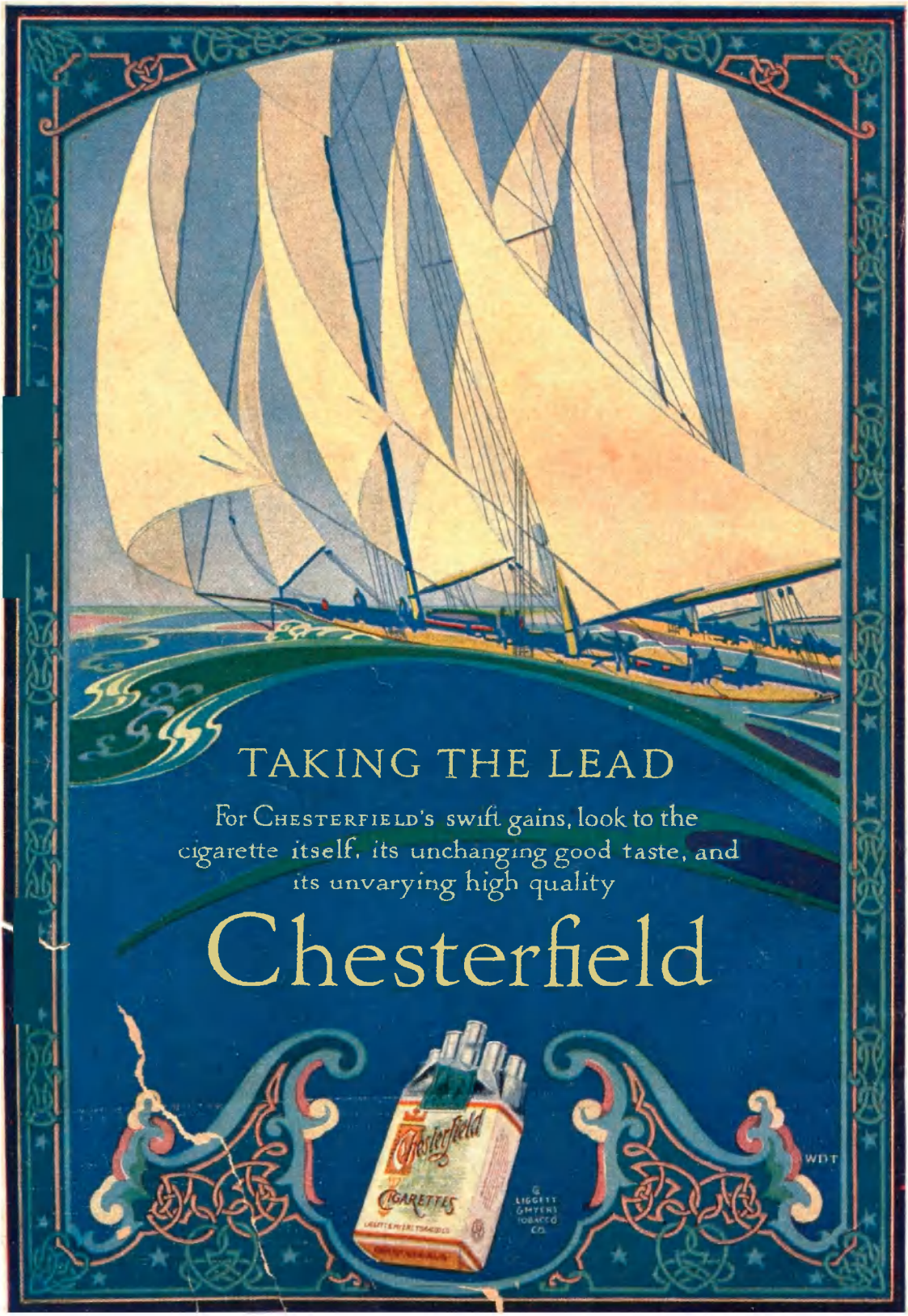
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