Stageland

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

THE BLUE BOOK
MAGAZINE

The Blue Book Magazine

For October

A SPLENDID Western novelette will head the list of contributions to next month's BLUE BOOK. It is called "Aladdin Jones—Mascot," and it will start things off with a bang. We have seldom read a story of swifter action than this latest novelette of William Wallace Cook's; things begin to happen right at the beginning, and they keep on happening until the very end. There's a thread of charming romance all through the story, as well as a luring, ever-present mystery—so you are sure to find "Aladdin Jones" a mascot indeed. Then as to short stories: There will be over twenty in in all. Note le among them are a remarkable "Mystery of the Sea;" a fine "Trackless Jungle" tale; another of Richard Post's stirring Mexican dramas; a fifth vigorous narrative of "The Fiery Mills of Men;" our old friend "The Diplomatic Free Lance;" and the first of a delightful new series, "The Adventures of Willie Bill" will also appear. All in all, our October issue will be an unusually fine one. Watch for it on the stands September 1st.

CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER, 1912

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Missing Page

Stageland pictoral section (multiple pages)

September 1912

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

Vol. XV No. 5

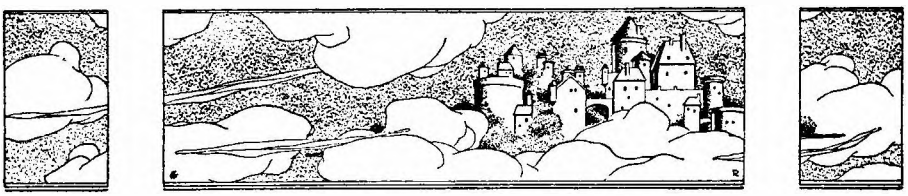
Cloud City

A Complete Novelette

by

CRITTENDEN MARRIOTT

Author of "THE WATER DEVIL," "SALLY CASTLETON, SOUTHERNER," - - - etc.



THEY DISAPPEARED! Man after man, millionaires, politicians, actors, scientists, men prominent in all circles, vanished from the earth and left no trace. Whither had they gone? Why? How? Read for yourself the answer in this fascinating narrative. You will find that neither Jules Verne nor Edgar Allan Poe has ever written anything more plausibly fantastic—or more wholly delightful.—The Editor.

ON THE night of September 25, 191—, Ruskin Page and Joseph Craig, speculators, multi-millionaires, and associates in great national affairs, disappeared.

At 8:30 Ruskin Page rose from a seat on his veranda near Sound City, Long Island, and picked up his heavy cane. "Very well, Tom," he said to his son. "Very well! God knows what will come of it, but I'll do as you wish. If it brings ruin, as it very likely will, you'll suffer more than I. I'll tell Fordney to-morrow." Shaking his head dolefully, he limped away down the gravel walk that led to the gate and the lapping waters of the Sound—and did not come back.

Three hours later, on the same night, Joseph Craig, multi-millionaire, sat in the library of his palatial estate at Ferry-on-the-Hudson, gazing dejectedly into the face of his confidential secretary. "I wish I was out of it, George," he breathed, heavily. "I don't like it! I don't like it. But that devil Fordney has got me and—" He pushed back his chair and rose. "I think I'll go to bed," he finished.

He went to his room. The secretary

saw him enter its door. His valet was waiting for him and saw him safely in bed. But when morning dawned he was not there. Sometime between eleven o'clock and daylight he had disappeared.

These two disappearances were the culmination of a long series of similar disappearances that had marked the summer of 191—. During all the long, hot months of that memorable season one could scarcely pick up a morning journal without reading that some person of greater or less importance had vanished, leaving no sign to tell either the where or how of his going. He had simply disappeared and that was all.

Of course, mysterious disappearances are by no means rare. People are always disappearing. From day to day and from year to year they go, in truly amazing numbers—how amazing only those who have access to police records can guess. And even those who examine such records can do little more than guess, for probably scarcely a tithe of the disappearances are reported. If a multi-millionaire or a society girl disappears, their people usually keep the fact hidden, at least for a time; in how many cases they keep it hidden for always, no one can know. If a man in moderate circumstances disappears, his employers look into his accounts; if these are found correct and he has no family to complain, his disappearance will probably go unrecorded. If a girl vanishes, her parents will often keep silent to screen her from possible scandal. When poorer people disappear, their friends suppose they have simply "gone away" and let them go. Probably not one case in ten receives even a cursory mention either in the police reports or in the daily papers. And yet the number that are so heralded is very large.

The disappearances in the summer of 191—, however, had attracted special attention by the prominence of the people who had vanished. How prominent they were is best shown by the fact that their disappearance could not be concealed, despite many frantic efforts on the part of their friends and secretaries. A number of them were very wealthy men, whose mysterious absences, when once they leaked out, caused more or less important flurries on the stock exchange and in the lines of business with which they were associated. Others were men and women professionally prominent. Two theatrical stars, both men, were included in the number, as were also two distinguished doctors, a world-famous eye specialist, a well-known electrical engineer, the inventor of an important wireless telegraph system, and a distinguished chemist. The public heard of all of them except the actors; these, the papers, with that excess of acumen which sometimes distinguishes them, refused to mention at all, suspecting their enterprising press-agents of attempts to take advantage of the prevailing sensation.

The first disappearances were naturally considered on their respective merits—that is to say, they were variously explained, one on the basis of financial difficulties, another by overwork, a third by domestic troubles, and so on. After a time, however, their multiplicity drew attention to them as a whole, and the papers began to draw comparisons and to speculate on the possibility of their having a common cause. Their wide distribution, extending all the way from Maine to California, and the apparent lack of connection among them, or even among a few of them, made theorizing along this line difficult. Still, the facts remained, stubbornly obtrusive, demanding consideration. Some papers suggested kidnaping, but this was promptly set down as ridiculous, especially as weeks and months passed by without any demand for ranson. One New York paper spent much time and money in an effort to prove that many of the "vanishees" were members of a secret society and had withdrawn at its behests. The tale was ingeniously worked out, but no one really believed it. It was located on the wrong side of the Atlantic to be credited.

The summer wore on, and the world seemed to get along fairly well without the missing men. In each case somebody else stepped forward to fill the vacated niche; some of the new men fitted in well and some fitted in badly, in which latter case they soon gave way

to some one else. None of the "disappearees" were missed anything like as much as people had at first declared that they would be. Even the excitement caused by the steady increase in their number died measurably down—only to rise again when some fresh disappearance revived it. Men went on living and dying, marrying and giving in marriage, making money and losing it, quite as though their associates of yesterday had not been the victims of some undiscoverable fate.

The disappearances of Ruskin Page and Joseph Craig, however, had about them certain points that seemed somewhat to set them off from others. Most of those who had vanished that summer were strangers to each other, or at most were only bare acquaintances. Page and Craig, however, had for years been closely associated in business. Further, for several months they had been engaged, in company with Hiram Fordney, another and much wealthier speculator, in laying the fortunes of a scheme of legal brigandage by which they hoped to transfer to their individual pockets a large share of the fortunes of their fellow citizens. The plan was a little "raw" even for hardened millionaires, and as the crisis drew near, Page and Craig became panicky and sought to back out. Fordney, however, was built of sterner stuff and held them to their bargain, now by cajolery and now by threats. It was only four days before the date assigned for the projected *coup* that the two men disappeared.

Knowing this, both Tom Page, Ruskin Page's son, and George Franklyn, Joseph Craig's secretary, were at first more puzzled than alarmed. Fordney was a hard man to deny and it was not altogether incredible that Page and Craig should choose to absent themselves temporarily rather than face him and rather than go on with the penitentiary looming before them. Their choosing the same plan might well have been a mere coincidence suggested by the oft-repeated disappearances chronicled in the newspapers. Each might have hoped that the other two would put through the scheme in his absence and thus in some measure lessen his responsibility. Both would naturally have feared that Fordney would turn on them vengefully, but each might have preferred that risk to the other.

But it was the manner of their disappearance that puzzled Tom Page and George Franklyn. The Page place was on Long Island, three miles from a railway station, though only a few hundred yards from the waters of the Sound, and therefore in easy reach of boats. Usually the Pages came and went by automobile.

Mr. Page was lame in one foot and had not walked half a mile in five years. For him to walk to the railway station was so nearly impossible that Tom scarcely considered it. No vehicle had been seen or heard about the place that night, though this of course did not prove that none had been there. On the whole, however, Tom concluded that his father had gone away by water. But he was sufficiently familiar with the old man's affairs to be reasonably sure that he could have taken almost no money with him, and for a man of Mr. Page's age and condition abundant money was a necessity. Besides, why on earth should he go without warning. At this point the other numerous disappearances popped into the young man's mind and sent the first shiver of apprehension over him.

Even more inexplicable was the disappearance of Joseph Craig. He lived in far more state than Page did. The Page place was rather small and simple and had no special protection other than its distance from the lines of travel. The Craig place was surrounded by a high brick wall, well spiked, and was guarded by half a dozen stalwart footmen, who took turns in patrolling it by night. The house was almost a fortress, so formidable were its locks and bars, burglar alarms, and so forth. Craig himself would have been hard put to it to get out of it by night without attracting attention. Even if he had wished to vanish, he would have found it difficult. And why, asked Franklyn, should he go without leaving any instructions behind him?

Neither Tom Page nor George Franklyn was prone to lose his head, and both were slow to take the public

or even the police into their confidence concerning the disappearances. Each took abundant time to think and to push local investigation to the uttermost. It was not until almost a full day had passed that each felt impelled to take action. But each decided first to consult with Hiram Fordney.

II

MAN AND MAID

In a widely popular romance, the heroine, clothed in a bathing suit, bobs up out of the ocean beside a small boat in which the hero is meditating.

Somewhat similar was the meeting of Tom Page and Miriam Walker. Young Page, an ardent lover of the water, had gone for a jaunt on the Sound in his motor boat one night about a week before his father had disappeared. The moon was shining brightly when he started out, but two hours later, when many miles from home, a heavy fog rolled in from seaward, enveloping him in an impenetrable wet blanket. Perforce he slowed down and felt his way homeward, not knowing when he might find himself on shore or in collision with some larger vessel that would crush his cockle-shell and himself into eternity.

An hour passed, and if his reckoning was correct he ought to be close to home; but his reckoning might well be very far from correct. In vain he strained his ears for the lap of the water on the beach.

Suddenly, dead ahead, there came a heavy splash; and a few seconds later a series of swells—or rather, ripples, for they were scarcely heavy enough to be called swells—made his boat bob up and down. Greatly wondering, he went ahead cautiously.

Soon his straining eyes made out something that looked like a landing stage and he ran alongside it. But as he rose to make fast, some one else rose too, and a voice—a singularly sweet voice—greeted him.

"Oh, thank goodness," it said. "I was just wondering whether I would have to stay here all night."

Amazed, Tom stared, and saw that instead of a landing he had run alongside of a good-sized float on which a girl was standing, holding to a sort of tripod or quadrupod, apparently of iron rods.

Tom snatched off his cap. The dense deepening of the fog filtered out on the moonbeams and made it impossible for him to distinguish the girl's face clearly, but her voice had assured him that she was a lady. "I beg your pardon!" he gasped.

The girl laughed. "It isn't necessary," she declared, lightly. "I have been wishing for you."

"For me?"

"For anyone that can tell me where I am, and help me to get ashore. I'm afraid I've drifted a long way from home. What part of the world is this?"

Tom hesitated. "I don't quite know myself," he admitted, ruefully. "I took your—er—raft for the pier of the boat club, and I don't think that it can be very far away. But, good Heavens! What are you doing out here like this?"

The girl laughed. "The situation *is* rather unusual, isn't it?" she asked. "I drifted away from some friends of mine who— But it's too long a story to tell now. Can't we get ashore?"

"I'll try." Much wondering, Tom turned and once more strained his eyes through the fog. This time he seemed to sense a faint yellow gleam high above the water. "I think I see a light," he said, doubtfully. "If you'll get into the boat I'll investigate. I might tow you in on the float, but—"

"No, thank you. It's rather damp, even now, and I imagine it would be very much so if you towed it. Some swells nearly went over it a few minutes ago."

"Oh! yes!" Tom had forgotten the swells. "I wonder what caused them?"

The girl did not answer. Perhaps she thought no answer was required. She bent down and picked up a suitcase that lay at her feet and passed it to Tom, who found it so amazingly heavy that he nearly dropped it. What on earth, he asked himself, were a girl and a suitcase doing afloat on Long Island Sound at night?

He asked no questions, however, but took the suitcase and bestowed it safe-

ly. Then he helped the girl to a seat, made fast his painter to one of the legs of the iron quadrupod and started the engine.

Slowly the motor boat gathered way, puffing and straining under the drag of the sluggish companion at its heels. The beacon light, however, brightened rapidly. Almost in a moment it was close at hand. Beneath it a wooden pier shaped itself dimly in the darkness.

Tom stopped the engine and ran alongside. "Good!" he exclaimed. "I know where we are now. This is my own landing—the one I was hunting for. I thought it was close."

"Thank goodness!" The girl drew a long breath. "You don't know how grateful I am to you for rescuing me. I suppose I can get a train soon." She stood up and prepared to step on the pier.

Tom did not move. "The railway station is three miles away," he said slowly. "Of course, I can take you there by boat, if you like. But my father's place is only a stone's throw back from the beach here. We keep bachelor's hall, but we have a motherly old housekeeper who will be delighted to get you some supper. Afterwards I can take you to town in the machine. It isn't really late, you know."

The young fellow spoke eagerly. He was more interested in this girl than he would have believed possible an hour before. He hated to let her go out of his life in this summary fashion. "Wont you let me take you home?" he finished.

The girl hesitated. "You are very good," she began. "But I must not lose any time in letting my people know that I am safe—"

"You can do that at our place! I've got a first-class wireless outfit, tower and all, and I can send a message for you anywhere. I'm rather a dab at wireless, you know."

The girl sat down suddenly. "So am I," she said. "Really, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Page."

"Thank you! I am Miss Walker, Mr. Page. You are quite a fairy godmother. I was just wondering how I could get to a wireless station. As you may have guessed from the circumstances under which you found me, my friends are not within very easy reach of an ordinary telegraph office. The wireless is the only thing that will reach them quickly. If you really will let me use it and will then take me up to town in your auto'—"

"Let you! I'll be delighted." The young fellow jumped to his feet and swung the heavy suitcase up to the pier; then he leaped after it and held out both hands to the girl.

She took them and sprang to his side in a manner that bespoke long and thorough training.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "You're an athlete, I see."

"I'm a new woman," returned the girl lightly. "By the way, I suppose you can tie my—er—float up somewhere for me until I can send for it? The owner would hate to lose it."

Tom nodded. "Of course!" he agreed. "It'll be here when you like to send for it."

He turned and dragged the float close to the pier into the full glare of the beacon light—where for the first time he could see it clearly.

It was a very peculiar float. It consisted of two light pointed tubes or cylinders a foot or more in diameter and ten or twelve feet long, upon which was laid a light flooring. So far it resembled the type of raft known as a catamaran. From the four corners, however, there ran up the converging legs which met at the center, forming a quadrupod, from which depended a box-like structure fitted with set screws and vises clearly intended to hold in place some missing apparatus. From this two small pipes ran down, ending in the two float cylinders. This part looked something like a bell buoy. In addition to this, however, it carried, rigged between two of the quadrupod legs, a light propeller set on a shaft that ran from the central box.

Page scratched his head over this propeller. The object of a propeller is to propel, but this one was set well above the water and could not possibly touch it. Moreover, it was obviously too light to propel as clumsy a craft as the float. Page guessed that it was some new-fangled steering device.

Much wondering, he tied the float securely to the pier and turned to join the girl. Greatly he desired to question her, but his position as host forbade.

Side by side the two walked up the gravel path—the same gravel path down which Page, senior, was to walk into oblivion a few nights later. Once at the house Tom seated the girl on the porch and went inside. Soon he was back with the housekeeper.

"My father is not at home, Miss Walker," he said, formally. "But Mrs. Cox will take you upstairs, and help you in any way she can. You will be next door to the wireless room and can go in and send any messages you like. I suppose you know the call?"

The girl nodded.

"All right. The house is yours. If you'll come downstairs when you're through, we'll see what Creighton can get us to eat. Meanwhile I'll see to the auto.' We live rather simply down here, you know."

"Thank you. I think, though, if you don't mind, I wont have anything to eat. I'm not at all hungry."

"As you please, of course." Tom bowed and stood back to let the girl pass him. As she came into the full light of the hall he saw her face distinctly for the first time and a sort of shock went over him. It was not merely that she was beautiful—Tom Page had seen and known many beautiful women. It was rather that her beauty had a something curious about it—an ethereal or transcendental quality had instantly convinced him that its owner was in some way set apart from other women. Page knew nothing of physiognomy, or he might have recognized her expression as one common to martyrs—and fanatics—of all times and all ages of this world.

His glance was only a fleeting one, and then he turned away and gave orders about the automobile. As he superintended its bringing out and saw that it was in good running order he heard the rattle and crash of the wireless and saw the long sparks flash behind the uncurtained windows of the operating room. "CC—CC—CC," the girl was calling tirelessly through space; Tom noted with a flash of pleasure how firm her touch was and how sharp and clean-cut her sending. Clearly she was a good deal more than an amateur.

Suddenly he realized that he was eavesdropping and went back into the house, where the thick walls and draperies would make any message she might send indistinguishable.

Fifteen minutes later he met her at the foot of the stair. By some feminine alchemy she had made herself look as neat as though she had just come from her own home and not at all as if she had been floating on a raft in a fog so short a time before.

"It's all right," she nodded, brightly. "I got them and told them I was safe. Now—I hate to seem insistent—but it is really getting late and—"

"The auto' is waiting." Tom waved her to the door. "I'm going to drive you myself."

The fog did not reach to the higher ground back from the beach, and within a very few moments the automobile rolled out into the moonlit expanse of meadow and field that stretched away to the verge of Brooklyn.

The run was not long, but it was interesting. Curious though he was to know the explanation of the girl's predicament, Tom made no reference to the subject. If she wanted to explain, she would explain, he thought; if she did not want to explain, he would be the last man in the world to force her confidence. So he turned to other matters and had his abundant reward.

In all the world there are only two topics of conversation—persons and things. His ignorance of the girl's associates prevented any attempt to talk of persons and so shut out the inanity of small talk and gossip, and forced him to pitch the conversation on more or less abstract things.

The result was amazing. Once started, the girl proved to be a strong and startlingly original thinker—one, too, who was interested in the cure of the ills and the reformation of the methods of civil and industrial life—the very subjects in which Tom Page was most interested. Never, so far as he could remember, did he meet anyone whose ideas were so surprisingly new and yet so thoroughly coincident with his own.

Before the end of the ride he felt as though he had known the girl all his life.

As the automobile jolted across the first city trolley tracks, the girl grew suddenly silent. For a moment she seemed to revolve some matter in her mind. Then suddenly she spoke.

"Mr. Page," she said, "I owe you an explanation. I know you must be very curious as to who I am and how I came to be where you found me to-night. I ought to tell you. But I can't. All I can say is that my predicament is the result of an accident. You'll forgive my not saying more, wont you?"

Tom bowed. "Of course!" he protested. "I don't want to pry into your affairs."

"Oh! You're entitled to be curious. Anyone would be. But, honestly, if I once started explaining, I'd never stop. The tale is altogether too complicated. I'm grateful; I can't say how grateful, but I must remain a mystery—for the present, at any rate."

Tom laughed. He felt suddenly lighthearted. "Mysteries are always delightful," he declared. "Of course, when you say you must remain one for the present, you really promise that there shall be a future—"

"Oh!"

"Of course you do. Seriously, I hope you'll give me the chance, in your own good time, to meet you formally. I should feel very sorry if I thought that I should never see you again."

Perhaps the young fellow put more fervor in his tones than he intended. At any rate a slight color brightened the girl's cheeks.

"I can't promise," she answered, slowly. "But if you really do want to see me again—"

"I do! You know I do!"

"Very well! I can't give you my New York address, for I haven't any, and I wont be home for several weeks yet, anyway." She opened her pocketbook and took out a card, and scribbled a word or two on one side. "Please stop at the next elevated station," she went on, holding the card in her hand. "I am quite at home and entirely safe in this part of the city, and I wont keep you any longer."

"But—"

"Now, please! I mean it!"

Tom shrugged his shoulders ruefully. "All right!" he acceded. "If I must, I must." He stopped the car close beside the elevated stair and helped the girl to the ground. "I do hate to say good-by," he burst out gloomily.

Impulsively, the girl flung out her hand. "Then don't say it," she cried. "Say 'till we meet again,' instead. *Auf Wiedersehen,* Mr. Page."

Page took the hand. *"Auf Wiedersehen!"* he cried obediently.

"Auf Wiedersehen," re-echoed the girl. "No, don't come to the top with me. I'd rather you wouldn't, really." With a bird-like dart she ran up the stairs, leaving the card pressed in Page's hand.

As she vanished into the obscurity of the upper levels a train came clanking up. When it had gone, Page looked at the card. It read, "Miss Miriam Walker, Cloud City."

Page stared at it perplexedly. "Cloud City what?" he muttered. "Where in the dickens is Cloud City?"

III

WAR

Hiram Fordney was a great man—as greatness is measured in these days. He was possessed of property valued at forty million dollars, and he controlled several hundred millions more through associates who were bound to him by chains of self-interest. Over hundreds of thousands of his fellow-citizens he exercised the rights of high, middle, and low justice, making laws, dictating judgments, giving appointments, and punishing any who disputed his sway, either by accident or design. To try to evade him was dangerous; to defy him was almost certain financial suicide. It was not surprising that Craig and Page, senior, had hesitated.

Tom Page, however, had not hesitated. Page, senior, familiar with the ideals that his son had preserved despite the life of the "Street" amid which he passed his existence, had tried to conceal from the young man the details of the plot in which Fordney had

involved him. But Tom, suspecting something, had dragged the truth from his reluctant lips; and, once he realized its bearing, had insisted that his father recede at no matter what risk of Fordney's enmity. And the old man had consented only a few minutes before he walked away into oblivion.

It was necessary, therefore, that Tom should see Fordney, not only to tell him that Page had disappeared, but also to notify him that before disappearing he had determined to withdraw his co-operation. He hoped by speedy announcement to condone to some extent the offence of quitting the black flag under which his father had been temporarily sailing.

Therefore, he called at the Fordney mansion soon after dark on the night after the day his father had disappeared.

Despite the fact that he had sent in word that his business was urgent, Fordney kept him waiting for an unconscionable time. As he sat in the library, clerks and servants came and went, vanishing and disappearing through the heavy door that opened into Fordney's private office, but no call came for him. At last, when he was about to rush away in anger, a young woman, trim, neat, shirt-waisted, came out of the door and approached him. The room was ratherly poorly lighted, and it was only when the girl was close at hand that he could see her face. Then he sprang to his feet. "You!" he cried, amazedly. "You!"

Surprise and pleasure mirrored themselves in the girl's face, and she put out her hand. "Why! Mr. Page!" she exclaimed. "I had no idea that it was you who was waiting."

"And I didn't know that it was you who was with Mr. Fordney!" responded the young man, happily. "I hadn't a single premonition that you were near. That seems incredible, but it's true!"

"I don't doubt it." The girl laughed amusedly. "You remember you hadn't any premonitions when you bumped into me when we met before." Then she suddenly grew serious. "Mr. Fordney is waiting for you!" she announced.

"Let him wait! He's made me wait long enough. Tell me, where is Cloud City? Is there such a place? It was cruel of you to trick me so!"

The girl's eyes twinkled. "I didn't trick you," she protested. "I really do live in Cloud City. I'm only sojourning in New York."

"But where is Cloud City? I can't find it on any map!"

"It isn't on any map. It exists, nevertheless. But I can't tell you where, just yet."

"When will you tell me? You promised, you know."

"Did I? I don't remember it. But I'll promise now to tell you some day—if you really want me to. More! I'll give you permission to find it—if you can!"

Page's face brightened. "That's something, anyway!" he declared. "But—but you are staying somewhere in New York. May I not call?"

"I'm afraid not," returned the girl, laughing. "I'm a stenographer and typewriter, you know, temporarily here with Mr. Fordney. I'm here to-day and gone to-morrow, and I haven't any permanent address except Cloud City. And you musn't keep Mr. Fordney waiting any longer. Please go in. She stood aside for him to pass.

Page did not move. "But—" he began.

"You must hurry—really you must," insisted the girl. "Mr. Fordney is none too friendly to you even now. In fact, I want to warn you. I suppose it is treachery to him to do it, but I owe you a good deal, and—"

"Nonsense! But go on."

"I suppose you came to tell Mr. Fordney that your father had disappeared?"

"Good Lord!" Page started back in amazement. "How do you— Nobody knows. Nobody can know unless—"

"But somebody does know. I know, and Mr. Fordney knows! I have no right to warn you, of course. But be on your guard. He does not feel very kindly toward your father. Please hurry!" She gestured toward the door.

Page nodded. "All right," he said. "What you've said is a good deal of a surprise. But—well, till we meet again!" With a bow he passed by and hurried through the door into the magnate's office.

The financier was seated at a desk piled with papers, in which he seemed engrossed. Page, however, caught a flicker of a lifting eyelash that showed him that the millionaire had not failed to notice his delay in answering the summons, and he braced himself for the encounter.

At his approach Fordney looked up, staring coldly beneath beetling brows. He did not rise nor offer his hand, nor even ask his visitor to sit down. From his lips came a sort of throaty rumble —a characteristic warning note, whether uttered by man or bulldog. "Well, Mr. Page?" he questioned.

Page drew down his brows. He had not expected the interview to be exactly pleasant, but he had not anticipated quite so marked a disregard of the amenities. It showed him that he had nothing to gain by half measures.

Deliberately he took a seat. "My father has disappeared, Mr. Fordney," he said, slowly.

An ugly scowl spread over Fordney's face. "Disappeared, has he?" he growled. "How?"

"I don't know. He left me at half past eight last night to walk down to the gate of our place, and he did not come back. He is very lame, as you know, and he could not have walked far. Whatever happened to him must have happened within a stone's throw of the house. All day I have been searching for him unavailingly, and I don't know what to think. The other disappearances throughout the country alarm me and—"

"A-a-ah!" Fordney's rumble had grown deeper. "Why do you come to me?" he demanded, with no syllable of surprise or of regret.

"Because,"—Page spoke with extreme patience—"because I was, to a large extent, in Father's confidence and knew all about his projected deal with you. Therefore, in common fairness, I have come to tell you that you cannot rely on his co-operation!"

"Cannot?" The word was a growl. "And I suppose I could have counted on it if he hadn't disappeared? Eh? Eh?"

Tom hesitated. Then he threw his cards on the table. "No!" he admitted, frankly. "Father had decided not to go on with the deal. To be candid, the risks are too great. The penitentiary was too imminent."

"Bosh!" Fordney dismissed the warning in a word, and hurried on. "So!" he snarled. "The real trouble is that you and your father are a pair of white-livered curs!"

"Mr. Fordney!" Page was on his feet, white with anger.

The elder man waved his hand. "Oh! sit down! Sit down!" he grated. "Let's have no mock heroics. Your father has been trying to squirm out of his bargain for a month or more. But he didn't have the pluck to say so. And you and he have concocted this precious scheme —this fake that wouldn't deceive a child—this—" He broke off. "Dare you say it isn't a fake?" he demanded.

Page inclined his head slowly. "To the best of my knowledge, I believe Father has gone away unwillingly," he asserted. "I give you my word that I neither know nor suspected him of any intention to disappear. I do not believe he went willingly, and I have not the least idea where he has gone."

"Haven't you?"—grimly. "So much the worse for you and for him! To-day is Friday. If he isn't back by Monday, I'll strip you and him of your last dollar. There've been too infernally many convenient disappearances. It's time to call a halt, and I'll call one right here and now. Understand?" He paused and looked up. "Well, what is it?" he demanded.

Miss Walker had glided into the room and approached the desk. As Fordney looked up she laid a card before the millionaire.

Fordney glanced at it. "Let him come in," he rasped. Then he turned to Page. "Our friend Craig has sent his secretary here. I suppose he's got some scheme for crawling out, too."

Mr. Franklyn came hurrying in. When he saw that Fordney was not alone his face fell, but an instant later it lighted again as he recognized Page.

"This is lucky!" he exclaimed. "I came first to you, Mr. Fordney, but I was going next to Mr. Page's. I have very grave news. Mr. Craig has disappeared!"

"D—n!" Fordney sprang to his feet. "This is too much!" he roared. "I suppose you'll tell me that he vanished from his garden at Ferry-on-the—"

"No! No!" Franklyn looked bewildered. "No! No! He went to bed at eleven o'clock last night, and this morning he was gone." The young man scarcely knew what he was saying. "It's incredible," he hurried on, "incredible that he could have been carried away or have gone away without somebody's knowing it. The place is guarded day and night by half a dozen men, and it's surrounded by a brick wall that Mr. Craig could not possibly have climbed. Besides—"

"That's enough, young man. I agree with you. Craig couldn't have disappeared without some one's knowing it. In fact, he didn't disappear at all from that place of his. I have excellent reasons for knowing it. Therefore, you will at once send word to him that he must return at once—or take the consequences."

"But—how can I send word? I don't know where he is!" The unfortunate secretary gasped.

"Find him," roared the magnate. "Find him by Monday, or I'll strip him of every dollar he has in the world. The infernal faker!"

"Faker!" The secretary looked more aghast than ever. "Good Heavens, Mr. Fordney! This is no fake. I wish it was. It's kidnaping or murder!"

"Murder? Bah! Where's the body? You can't murder people without leaving some sign. And you can't carry away a full-grown man from a place like Craig's without somebody's knowing it. It's preposterous. And I wont stand for it. No white-livered hounds are going to give me the double-cross and get away. Understand! And you, too!" He turned to Page. "If Craig and Page are not back here by Monday morning, prepared to keep their engagements with me, I declare war. You tell them I said so!"

Realization dawned on Franklyn. "Page!" he exclaimed. "Good Lord! Tom! Has your father gone too?"

Tom nodded. "Yes!" he answered, soberly. The threat of war by a man of Fordney's resources was not to be ignored. Bitterly as he resented the magnate's hectoring, he resolved to make a last effort at conciliation.

"Mr. Fordney," he began. "You must believe me—"

"I *don't* believe you," roared the old man. "You do what I say! If you don't know where your father is, find out. You've got till Monday. If Page and Craig don't come back then and stand to their engagements, I'll break them in two and fling them naked into the street. That's my last word. Now get out, both of you."

IV

BY WIRELESS

When Tom Page came out of Fordney's sanctum, he of course hoped that he would find Miriam Walker in the library, or in some other near-by room where he might hope for further conversation with her. In this hope, however, he was disappointed; nowhere did he see the girl, and he hesitated to ask for her lest his so doing might be reported to Fordney, and cause her unpleasantness. Besides, Franklyn stuck close to him as the proverbial leech, making it difficult for him to free himself. Reluctantly he left the house, comforting himself with the reflection that he at least knew the stenographic agency for which she worked, and that he had her permission to try to find the mysterious Cloud City where she had her home. This, he took it for granted, was not really a city at all, but was a home somewhere in the mountains, probably not far from New York; or it might be a nickname for a room in some skyscraper.

For the moment, however, he had little time to consider this, for Mr. Franklyn was keeping up a steady stream of foreboding.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "I don't know what to do. If Fordney keeps his word, and he will keep it, all right, he'll come mighty near stripping Mr. Craig. You, at least, can try to defend your father's fortune, but I'm helpless. And Mr. Craig will hold me responsible!"

Page did not dispute the assertion; that Craig would hold the secretary responsible seemed very probable indeed.

"Didn't he leave authority for you or anyone to act?" he asked.

"No general authority! I have authority in some matters, and other men have authority in others. But only in minor things. Nobody has power to fight Fordney as he would have to be fought, and nobody would dare to use the power if he had it. Good Lord! I can't believe Craig could have gone away without a word of warning."

"He knew Fordney would be angry, of course."

"Of course. And he was deathly afraid of him. He knew the old scoundrel would take advantage. He couldn't possibly have hoped for mercy. I'm sure I don't know what to do!" The secretary fairly wrung his hands.

Page felt almost as desperate as Franklyn seemed to be. His and his father's property were in a safer form than Craig's and much less subject to attacks. Fordney could not ruin him in a day nor a month, whereas he could probably practically ruin Craig in a very few days indeed. With him, however, it was his own fortune that was at stake, and with Franklyn it was only his employer's, a fact that certainly made some difference. Then, too, the personal element was involved; it was his father and Franklyn's none-too-indulgent employer that were missing. Page did not believe either man was dead; he could not believe it. Both had vanished so casually that he could not believe that either of them had gone forever.

"I don't know what to do either, Franklyn," he confessed. "Except that I am very sure we had better do nothing to-night. If it hadn't been for the disappearances that have been filling the papers all summer I should conclude both my father and Mr. Craig had gone away of their own accord and would come back when they got ready. I would believe so despite what seems almost an impossibility in my father's case, and what you say is a sheer impossibility in Mr. Craig's. Those other disappearances trouble me, but I'm going to wait at least till I get to-morrow's mail before I report the matter to the police. If I don't hear anything by noon to-morrow, I'll—well, I'll consider what to do. Suppose you call me up at the office to-morrow if you get any news."

With this understanding the young men parted, the one to go north to Ferry-on-the-Hudson, the other to go south and east to Sound City.

It was nearly midnight when Page got home, but he found both the butler and the housekeeper waiting for him.

These two were the only persons on the place whom he had taken into his confidence about his father's disappearance. The rest merely understood that Mr. Page was absent in town.

A glance at the anxious faces of the two old servitors was enough to end the faint hope he had cherished that he might find his father at home.

"No news, I see, Mrs. Cox," he said wearily as he entered the hall.

"No, sir! Nothing—leastways, nothing of importance, sir."

"Oh! Then there is something?"

"Not exactly sir. It's just that Crighton noticed something late this evening sir." The housekeeper turned toward the butler, as if to yield him the floor.

Page's eyes followed hers. "Well, Crighton?" he inquired.

"It's just a trifle, sir." The butler seemed a little nervous. "You know that young lady you brought here a week ago, and afterwards took into town in your car, sir?"

"Yes! Of course! What of her?"

"Nothing, sir. But that float thing of hers is gone, sir!"

"Gone!"

"Yes, sir. I noticed it was gone just before dark to-night. I don't know how long it's been gone, sir. I can't remember seeing it to-day at all, sir, and I thought perhaps Mr. Page might have gotten on it and floated away or—or something, sir!"

"By Jove!" Page struck his forehead violently with his hand. "By Jove! You're right, Crighton. It's been gone all day. It wasn't at the pier this morning. I'm sure it wasn't. Good Heavens! That explains! Father must have drifted away on it."

"Yes, sir! That's what I was thinking, sir. Is—is it safe, sir?"

"Safe! Yes, I suppose it's safe in a

way. I don't think it would sink. But God knows where it would float to. Yes! Yes! Father must have gotten on it and floated away and he couldn't get ashore and—poor old man! He must have had a dreadful time."

"Wouldn't somebody pick him up, sir?"

"Of course, sooner or later. When daylight came, anyhow. Probably not in the night. Somebody's picked him up long before now, of course. Probably he'll be back to-morrow. But I can't take any chances. I'll call up—"

He broke off and ran up the stairs to the telephone and demanded a through wire to New York. Convinced that he had the correct explanation of his father's absence and realizing that in every case his inquiries would very quickly reach the newspapers and set them buzzing, he first of all called up the Amalgamated Press, explained the situation, and asked for any information it might have. "If Father is picked up, the Amalgamated will get the news quicker than anyone else," he told the curious butler.

The Amalgamated knew nothing, but the manager promised to send a general alarm and to transmit promptly any news he might receive. "You're sure Mr. Page really did float away on this raft-thing?" he asked.

"No! I'm not sure," replied Page, reluctantly. "But he's gone and the float is gone, and he's lame and couldn't have walked to the railway station."

"You don't think he has—er—disappeared like—like—Well! you know a good many important people have vanished in the last two or three months, Mr. Page."

"Yes, I know it. But I don't think Father went in that way." Page spoke positively. "I really don't put much faith in those disappearance stories. I'll confess I was shaken for a little while, but when I found that the float was gone that explained everything."

"Oh! Well! I'll let you know the moment anything turns up. We are calling all near-by vessels with wireless; if any of them have picked him up, we shall soon know of it. Of course, he may have been found by some small craft that hasn't wireless apparatus."

"Of course! Thank you. Good-by!" Page hung up the receiver for a moment; then he took it down again and called for Mr. Franklyn, intending to tell him what had happened. He was unable to get the connection, however. He then called up a number of other people—the revenue cutter service, harbor police, life-saving service, and so on. All promised any aid in their power.

An hour passed without news—an hour during which Page walked the floor in suspense. He found it much harder to wait now than he had before he had fixed upon the explanation of his father's disappearance. He felt that he ought to do something, but he could not think of anything else that would help. At last he wandered into his wireless room and adjusted the earpiece to his head.

"I'll see what I can pick up," he muttered. "Perhaps I'll hear some ship reporting that Father is on board."

For some time he sat listening, running his slider up and down the scale, catching all sorts of shreds and fag ends of news and gossip, but nothing that availed him. At last, tired out and nervous, he was about to fling down the headpiece when a faint, far-off call caught his ear. Quickly he moved the slider and adjusted the wave-length till the call came clear and strong.

Yes! He was not mistaken. "PAGE —PAGE—PAGE," ran the call tirelessly, over and over again. Somebody was trying to call him, unless some surprising coincidence was at hand.

He snatched at the key and the blue spark flashed and mumbled as he answered: "PAGE — PAGE — PAGE. Who calls?"

Instantly the answer came, "PAGE! PAGE! Thomas Page of Sound City?"

"Yes! Yes! Who calls?"

"Cloud City! Give the countersign!"

The countersign! For a moment Page hesitated. But only for a moment. Only one person would call in the name of Cloud City. Clearly Miss Walker wanted to be sure that it was really he who was at the machine.

"Fog! Fog! Fog!" he thundered back again. "Where are you?"

"At home. I came unexpectedly. I called to tell you not to worry over F.'s

threats! He will make no attempt to harm you or your father. And I am very sure your father is all right and will come back safely in good time."

"Thank you! Thank you! I'm sure he will. I'm expecting news now any minute. Your float has gone and I feel sure he has drifted away on it. Hundreds of people are looking for him, and he's bound to turn up soon."

"I'm glad to hear it." The answer came slowly and uncertainly. "But—but don't be too cast down if you are disappointed. Remember! I'm sure your father is safe. Now I must say good-by!"

"Wait a minute, for Heaven's sake. When shall I see you? When can I come to you? To-night I hoped that—"

"I don't know when! I'm afraid I wont be in New York again for a good while."

"But I must see you!" Page rapped out the words fast and furiously. "I must see you. Please—please—"

"I'm sorry! But—" The girl faltered and stopped.

"Let me come to you. Please!"

"I can't. Really I can't. You couldn't find the way. And I can't tell you."

Page's face fell. "At least, you'll call up again, wont you?" he begged. "I'll be here any day or every day at any hour you like. Only tell me when."

"I can't. I don't know that I can ever call again. I can't get to the wireless often. I'll try, but—"

"Then you must listen to me now." Page took a sudden determination. "If there's any chance of my not getting you again you must listen to me now. I love you! I love you! I've loved you since that first night when I met you in the fog. I can't live without you. Miriam! Miriam! Wont you leave Cloud City for me? Wont you, dear?"

For a long time—at least it seemed a long time to Page—no answer came. In vain he strained his ears. Then at last came the flashes, slow and hesitating, which spelled out the words: "I—I can't answer you now. I—I don't know what to say. I—you—truly you are not—not indifferent to me, but I can't talk through these miles of space with all the wireless people in the world listening—"

"Let them listen!" Page's heart was bounding with fierce delight. "Let them listen! What do I care? Let all the world listen. I'll be proud to have them hear. I love you! I love you. Let them make the most of that. If they could see you they would understand. I love you! I love you!"

"But—" The girl began impulsively; then suddenly she stopped. When she began again, her words came so fast that Page could scarcely interpret them. "Some one is coming, and I have only a minute more. Yes, I'll come to you when I can! If I can. It wont be easy to get away from here. If you could only come for me. But you can't! You can't! Sssh! Don't call again. There is risk. Ssh! Good-by! Good-by! —dear!"

The words ceased. Far away Page heard the mumbling of the static. Close at hand he heard the broken calls of other operators. But Cloud City was silent.

Nevertheless his heart leaped within him. She had called him "dear." She loved him. She loved him! Ah! He *must* go to her. He must find this Cloud City! He would find it if it was on the earth to find.

The sharp ring of the telephone broke upon his efforts.

It was the Amalgamated Press! "No! We haven't any news of your father, Mr. Page," came the voice of the manager. "But we have some rather sensational news that may have some bearing on his disappearance. Weren't you and your father engaged in some enterprise with Hiram Fordney?"

"We were! But we have broken off all negotiations."

"Oh!" The manager's voice was disappointed. "Then I suppose there can't be any connection."

"Any connection? What do you mean?"

"We've just learned that Hiram Fordney has disappeared."

V

MYSTERIES MULTIPLIED

Hiram Fordney had disappeared. Not an hour after he had declared that

the disappearances that had shocked the country were faked, he himself had vanished.

The details, as Page read them in the morning papers, were inexplicable. Mr. Flanders, his secretary, had been absent that night. Fordney had received two or three visitors at about nine o'clock. After that he had worked with his stenographer till 10:15, at which hour she had gone for the night. The butler noted the time when he let her out; half an hour later, hearing no sound in the study, he had peeped in and found it vacant. Surprised and vaguely uneasy, he had searched the house without finding any trace of his employer. He tried to get the secretary, Mr. Flanders, on the telephone; failing to do so, he had in desperation called in the policeman on the beat—who had promptly telephoned the news to headquarters, which as promptly gave the story to the newspapers, who rushed a swarm of reporters to the scene. Neither newspaper nor police, however, learned anything that served to elucidate the mystery.

Fordney's study had two doors, one leading through the library to the front hall and the street, the other to the stairs and the upper floors. The butler swore that he had not left the hall and that Mr. Fordney had not gone out by that way. He also swore that he had personally locked up the back of the house, and that he had found it fast, with the keys standing in all the locks, when he made his search later. The upper floors, of course, had plenty of windows, and the roof garden was open to the sky, but as the lowest windows were more than fifteen feet above the ground they did not seem to afford any satisfactory means of exit to a fleshy man more than sixty years old. There seemed to be no possible means by which Hiram Fordney could have disappeared.

Nevertheless he had disappeared.

Failing to discover any clues at the Fordney mansion, the reporters hurried off to interview the secretary, the stenographer, and Mr. Page, who had apparently been Mr. Fordney's last visitor. Flanders was found after some difficulty, but he was frankly incredulous as to Mr. Fordney's disappearance, and refused to answer hypothetical questions—or any questions at all, until he should have had time to learn conditions for himself. This, of course, made his ideas too late for publication in the next morning's papers.

Page, who was interviewed over the wire by the Amalgamated manager, explained that he and Franklyn had gone to Fordney's house to tell of the disappearance of his father and of Mr. Craig, and had met there by chance. (Page had decided that the conditions compelled his telling about Craig, without waiting to consult Franklyn.) He and Franklyn had left the house together, leaving Mr. Fordney alone in the study.

This left only the stenographer; and that young woman could not be found in time for the morning papers. She had come to the Fordney house on a temporary detail from the Livingstone typewriting agency, and Mr. Flanders did not know her address. The agency would of course know it, but the agency manager could not be reached at that time of night.

Such was the tale as Page read it in the morning papers. Side by side with it, he read the tale of the disappearance of Mr. Craig and of his own father, and his own theory as to what had happened to the latter. He read, too, columns of speculations concerning the disappearances, nearly all of which assumed that these three men were the victims of the mysterious doom that all summer had hung over the heads of rich and prominent Americans.

But nowhere did he see and from no source did he hear anything as to his father's whereabouts. If Page, senior, had floated away on the raft, he must still be upon it or must have been picked up by some outward-bound vessel too small to carry wireless. Or he must have been drowned! His son could see no other possibility.

Yet wait! What had Miriam Walker said on that subject? Page laid down his paper and strove to recall her words. In the turmoil of the night they had almost slipped his mind. But now he rehearsed them.

"Don't worry," she had said. "Fordney will make no effort to harm either you or your father. And I'm sure your father is all right and will come back safe." Apparently her words had come true, so far as Fordney was concerned; he would hope that they might also come true in regard to his father.

At any rate, whether Fordney's disappearance should be permanent or temporary, it gave him a respite from the threatened attack on his and his father's fortune—a respite he must not fail to take advantage of to make all secure before the storm should break. He had lost one day; but he would not lose another. He flung down the paper and called for the automobile to take him up to town.

Scarcely had he reached his office on the Street when a dozen cards were brought to him. The newspaper men had descended upon him in a swarm.

"I wont see them now," he declared. "Tell them I am too busy to talk now, but I will see them all at twelve o'clock sharp. Tell them I don't want to hear a word—until then—unless, of course, my father should be heard from."

So saying, Page closed and locked the compartment of his mind that had to do with the mystery in which he was involved and set himself "to the instant need of things." For four hours he labored without cessation. Then when the noon rang out with thunderous shocks, marking the Saturday closing of the stock exchange, he threw down his pen and gave orders to admit any newspaper men who might be waiting.

The reporters came in—nearly a score of them—all eager for news. Their preliminary questions Page answered instantly and frankly, but by and by one of them plumped a query at him that made him hesitate.

It was Carter, of the *Gazette,* who asked it. "Did you and Mr. Fordney part on bad terms?" he asked bluntly.

Page did not hesitate long. Clearly evasion would be useless. These keen-eyed newspaper men would drag the truth from him. Slowly he nodded. "Yes!" he answered, "I suppose you might call it that."

"What was the trouble?"

"Mr. Fordney and my father had differed about the details of a business matter, and my father had decided to break off negotiations entirely. He disappeared before he could tell Mr. Fordney. I called on Mr. Fordney not less to tell of his disappearance than to notify Mr. Fordney that Father would no longer co-operate with him."

"Humph! Would you mind telling us what the nature of this business was, Mr. Page?"

Page smiled. "I *should* mind very much," he answered promptly. "It is Mr. Fordney's affair now, and I don't feel justified in talking about it."

"Was Mr. Fordney very angry at what you said?"

"He was. Very angry, indeed!"

"Did he threaten to ruin you unless Mr. Page came back and rejoined him."

Page started. "How did you—" he began. Then he broke off. "I suppose Franklyn told you," he concluded. "Yes! Fordney practically declared war on us."

"But he gave you till Monday!"

Page shrugged his shoulders. "Your information seems to be minute and exact," he observed. "I wonder why you trouble to ask me."

"Well!" The reporter hesitated—or appeared to hesitate. He was a very shrewd young man and had undoubtedly planned his questions from the start. "We came to you for confirmation," he declared, slowly. "You see, Mr. Page, you and Mr. Franklyn are about the only people we can hear of who had any interest in making sure that Mr. Fordney would not be at his office on Monday to begin an attack on you."

"What!" Page almost sprang to his feet. "Why! Confound you!" He broke off and dropped back in his seat. "I beg your pardon!" he went on. "But you nearly took my breath away."

"Then, too," went on the reporter, blandly, "you are the last persons who saw Mr. Fordney."

"The last persons! What in the world do you mean? The morning papers said that the butler and Miss Walker saw him!"

"Miss Walker?" The name seemed to puzzle the reporter.

"Certainly! The stenographer!"

"Oh! The stenographer! Miss Walker! Humph! I am surprised that you should know her name, Mr. Page. None of the morning papers gave it. They all went to press before it could be learned. By the way, only one paper said that the butler saw Mr. Fordney after you and Mr. Franklyn left, and that one seems to have been wrong. As for the stenographer—she cannot be found!"

"Not found?" This time Page rose to his feet in good earnest.

"No, she did not show up this morning. Of course she may appear later. But just now it looks as though she had vanished with Mr. Fordney. Whether she was carried off with him or whether she carried him off is a question."

"Good Heavens!" Page sank back in his chair. Could Miriam really know anything about Mr. Fordney's disappearance, he wondered. Did she know he was to disappear? How else could she have been able to promise that he would not attack the Pages? If she knew anything about Fordney's disappearance, perhaps she also knew about other disappearances — including his father's. If she did, it would explain her prophecy that his father would return. Could it be? Could she be involved—innocently, he felt sure—in some web of intrigue that had led her into this trouble? He recalled the still unexplained mystery of her appearance and the—

Sharply he pulled himself up and looked around. Everywhere curious eyes were bent upon him, and with a shock he realized that his expression must have betrayed much that he would have been glad to keep secret.

He tried to speak lightly. "It's absurd," he said. "You gentlemen are building mountains out of mole-hills. Franklyn and I left Fordney in his study, and I, for one, have not seen him since. As for Miss Walker, she will undoubtedly turn up very soon. Probably she merely overslept."

The reported shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he said. "You know she was supposed to have come from the Livingstone agency? Well, it seems that the agency knows nothing whatever about her—did not even know that Fordney had wanted an extra stenographer, and certainly never heard of the young woman. Moreover, the name she gave Mr. Flanders was Mildred Rowe! Curious you should have thought her name was Walker, Mr. Page!"

VI

KIDNAPED

Just how the interview with the reporters concluded, Page never could recollect, though he read abundant accounts of it in the afternoon papers—read them with hot cheeks and burning eyes. They were all different, yet all the same. None of them charged him with anything, yet every one insinuated that he was holding something back. No two of them suggested the same "something," but all were very certain that there was something.

And so, of course, there was—at the end of the interview, if not at its beginning. Page had met the newspaper men without the least idea of concealing anything, not dreaming that he had anything to conceal. He had parted from them in deadly terror lest he had unintentionally said something that would throw added suspicion on the stenographer. The moment the quest had turned to her, he had instinctively mustered every effort to shield her. In later interviews as well as in his first one, in questionings by reporters, by police, by the district attorney, despite the cloud of suspicion that thickened around him, he flatly denied all knowledge of her. Only in flat denial was there any hope of concealing what he did know. The smallest admission would demand many more.

The days went by and neither she nor his father—nor Mr. Fordney nor Craig, for the matter of that—came back. And no word came from them or her; Cloud City was to him still a bare name and nothing more.

Day after day he sickened for her, but hesitated to take any steps to find her for fear of involving her in the mystery even more deeply than she already was. Night after night he sat at

his wireless apparatus, ear-piece on head, raking the heavens for some call that might tell him that she still lived and remembered him.

At last an idea came to him—an idea ridiculously simple. He could advertise for her.

Twenty-four hours later, in the "personal" columns of a score of papers in half a dozen cities, this appeared:

> Ten dollars reward. Anyone who knows where Cloud City is can earn $10 by sending or bringing the information to Box 66, this office.

For a week the advertisement ran, without result. He received half a dozen letters, but all were obviously the work of idlers or jokers, or perhaps newspaper men, and he promptly threw them away. At last, however, came the following:

> DEAR MR. FOG:
> I saw your advertisement to Cloud City in the paper this morning. I aint wise to what you're after and maybe it's just a coincidence. But I had a gentleman friend who used to talk a heap about Cloud City. He went away four months ago, saying that he had a job at Cloud City, and was going to make barrels of money and come back and marry me. But he aint come back and I'm fair heartsick about him. I don't want no reward and I don't suppose you can tell me anything, and then again maybe you can. Anyway, I'm writing. Yours,
> LOTTIE HARPER.

An address in Brooklyn followed.

Page hesitated a good while over this letter, but finally he wrote to the address given and asked the girl to be at the Sound City railway station late the next afternoon, promising to meet her. When the time came, he sent Crighton, the butler, in the motor, to bring her down to Pageland. Time and place had been chosen in order as much as possible to avoid attracting the attention of any sharp-eyed reporter or detective who might still be on the job.

When the automobile rolled up to Pageland, Miss Harper jumped out and took the hand that Page offered. "Mr. Fog?" she questioned.

"No!" Page smiled. "I am Mr. Page. There isn't any Mr. Fog. That signature was used for a special reason. Wont you come in, Miss Harper?"

"Sure thing—leastways, if you're the gent that's been advertisin' about Cloud City." She was a rather pretty girl about twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, and she had evidently put on all the finery she possessed.

"Yes! I'm the gent!" Page did not smile. He fell in by the girl's side and guided her toward the house. "You must excuse my asking you to come down here instead of going to you," he went on. "I assure you I had good reasons!"

"Gee! I don't care. It aint often I get a ride in a whiz wagon. Pete was always promisin' to take me out in one, but he never come to time. An' now he's gone. Say, do you know Pete—Pete Cosdon?"

"I'm afraid I don't." Page showed the girl into the house and placed a chair for her. "Sit down, wont you?"

The girl sat down hesitatingly. "I didn't reckon you'd know him!" she remarked, unhappily. "And I reckon I'm a fool to be worryin' over him. I guess he's just got another girl and's givin' me the frosty mit. But it aint like Pete to do that sort of a thing, either. Something may have happened to him an' he aint got nobody in the world to inquire for him but me. Say, mister, where is this Cloud City you've been advertising about?"

"I wish I knew. A friend of mine went there from New York not long ago without telling me where it was. It isn't in the 'Postal Guide' or in any atlas I can find and I don't know how to reach it. I advertised in the hope I could find out something about it."

Miss Harper's eyes had grown round. "Say!" she exclaimed. "It was just that way with Pete. God's truth, it was! Pete's a mechanician, you know. He's been tending to the machines for some of them aviators. Pete can aviate real well himself—a sight better'n a lot of the fellows that puts up a big front and gets the applause. But Pete aint never had the money to buy a machine, and so he couldn't even try for a prize. It's just like everything else; there aint no chance for a poor man nowadays; the Aviation Trust has got 'em all soaked."

Page nodded. "Yes! I suppose so!"

he agreed, rather vaguely. "But about his going away?"

"Oh! Yes! Sure! Pete come to me four months ago and he says that he's got a chance at last. A rich gent has offered him a job at Cloud City that'll pay him enough to let him buy an aëro' an' go into the racing game for fair. He says the job is a secret, but that he'll be back in a couple of months and we'll get married. I asked him where Cloud City was and he said he didn't know and didn't care a hoot. And off he goes. And that's four months ago, and I aint had a single word from him since. It kinder looks like I was going to have lemon buds instead of orange blossoms. An' you say you don't know where this Cloud City is?"

Page shook his head. "I don't believe it is a city at all," he said. "I think it is just a name for somebody's country place on a hill—or maybe for a flat in a skyscraper or something. That is, I did think so till you wrote me that your friend had gone to work there. Now I don't know what to think. I hoped you might be able to give me a clue."

The portières at the door parted and the butler, Crighton, appeared on the threshold. "There's a—a person asking to see you, sir," he said. "He's very insistent, sir!"

Page frowned slightly. "What's his name?" he asked.

"He wont give it, sir. But he says he's in a hurry and wants to see you on a matter of great importance and that you'll be sorry if you don't see him. He's waiting on the veranda, sir."

Page got up slowly. "I suppose I'd better see him," he decided. "Miss Harper, would you mind excusing me for a few moments?"

The girl hesitated. "I guess I'd better be hiking," she declared. "It's getting dark."

"No! Please don't! I want to talk further with you. Please wait a little while. I'll see that you get home safe."

"All right!" The girl sank back in her chair and Page went out.

On the porch he found a tall, dark man with sandy hair and fierce, restless eyes—a Scotchman of the Covenanter type, Page guessed instantly—who greeted him impatiently.

"Mr. Page?" he questioned. "I thought you were at home, though that mon of yours was tellin' me it was away you were."

"I was busy!" Page's tones were dry. "What can I do for you, Mr.—er—"

"McPherson. Sandy McPherson. There's nought you can do for me, Mr. Page. But mayhap I can do something for you—if it's you that's been advertising for Cloud City."

Page started violently. The advertisement had contained no clue to his name or address. This man could have gotten them only from Miss Harper or from Miriam. It behooved him to be cautious.

"Cloud City?" he echoed. "What is that?"

The visitor shrugged his shoulders. "Tush, mon!" he said. "Why will ye be wasting precious time, when ye've been screaming for news of Cloud City in a dozen newspapers for two weeks and more?"

"What makes you think so?"

"I don't think. I know." The man looked around cautiously and dropped his voice. "I've just come from Cloud City," he went on, "and I've brought you the word from the braw lassie—and from your father, besides. The old gentleman is well and hopes to come back to you soon."

"Who the devil are you?"

"Na! Na! Dinna be profane. I've telled you my name, and I've no more to say, except that I can take you to Cloud City in a very few minutes, if you want to go!"

"Of course I want to go!" Page's distrust was giving away. The man must be speaking the truth. How else could he have known who had inserted the advertisements?

"Very good. But, you'll understand, Cloud City is a secret. We'll no be tellin' the world about it. You will have to be blindfolded when you go."

"Blindfolded! Nonsense! I wont do it!"

The man shrugged his shoulders. "As you like," he said. "If it's afraid you are—"

Page broke in. "See here!" he rasped. "You wont gain anything by that sort of talk. Of course I'm afraid. Anybody

but a fool would be afraid to trust himself blindfolded to an utter stranger. I *wont* be blindfolded, but I *will* know about Cloud City. You'll tell me, or you'll go to jail—understand?"

"On what charge?" The man's face lowered with contempt.

"Kidnaping. You've just confessed to kidnaping my father and—"

"I?" The man's dour face writhed itself into a grim smile. "Na! Na!" he said. "It's fooling yourself you are, laddie. It's talking about the weather I've been."

Page gasped. The man's impudence was paralyzing. "You—you—" he began.

"Now! Now! Laddie! Dinna excite yourself. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe I did tell you what you say I did. But did ye no spier it was a joke?"

"A joke?"

"Of course! If ye canna take a joke, send for the police and arrest me. Tell them how ye met Miss Walker floating about on a catamaran in the fog just before she went to work at Mr. Fordney's—"

Page threw up his hands. "How do you know that?" he gasped.

The man grinned. "How should I not know?" he asked contemptuously. "But if ye wont be blindfolded, there's no more to be said."

He was turning away when Page called him back. Madness though it was for him even to consider such a proposition, he found himself hesitating. "Hold on!" he said. "Give me some proof that you really are from Cloud City."

"I carry no proof in my pockets. But I've got proof and plenty down at your own boathouse on the beach here. She —it, I mean—would not come to the house."

"She! Good Lord! You don't mean that—"

The man leered at him. "If it was me, I'd go down to the beach and see," he rasped.

"Go! Of course I'll go!" Without even delaying for his hat, Page ran down the steps and raced toward the beach. No thought of personal peril occurred to him, and if it had, he would probably have disregarded it.

Down the gravel walk he ran, his visitor at his heels, not realizing that the moment he passed the hedge at the foot of the lawn he would be out of sight of the house.

On he hurried in the gathering darkness. He passed the hedge and plunged down the shelving beach to the boathouse at the landing. As he went, he saw, floating on the water, the missing catamaran—the same on which Miriam had first floated into his view. Certain now that she was waiting for him, he threw precaution to the winds, rushed out along the side of the landing and rounded the boathouse to the landing on the water-side.

The next instant he found himself seized by a pair of strong arms and held fast. Desperately he struggled, but the attack had taken him by surprise. Before he could brace himself, he saw McPherson racing up. One yell he gave; then his mouth was closed and his voice stifled by a cloth wet with some sweet, sickening liquid which was clapped across his mouth.

Still he struggled, but his senses were fast leaving him. Dully he heard a woman shriek and dimly he saw Miss Harper rushing around the corner of the boathouse toward him. Then darkness flowed upon him and consciousness fled. His last thought was that the papers of the next day would have another mysterious disappearance to chronicle.

VII

IN CLOUD CITY

Page opened his eyes and looked around him. He was lying on a couch in a small, scantily furnished room, whose walls had a metallic luster. Except for the couch, a washstand, and a single chair, the room was bare of furniture—so bare, indeed, that it might have suggested a cell, had it not been for the broad open window through which a cool breeze was soughing. On the chair lay his coat, collar and cravat, and hat; on the floor beside it were his shoes; for the rest he was fully dressed.

For a few moments he lay and wondered, mentally reconstructing his

memories. Suddenly he decided that he was in Cloud City, wherever or whatever that mysterious place might be. And Miriam Walker was in Cloud City! He would see her and—"

Springing to his feet, he hurried to the window and stared out; then he stood stock still in wonder. Never before had he seen such a place. Before him stretched an open square, bordered by buildings. On the three sides, these were low, two-story affairs; on his own side, as he saw by craning his head out of the window, they were the same, except for a much taller building that rose in the center.

The buildings cut off more extended view; above them he could see nothing except the blue vault of a cloudless sky, against which a brilliant sun was burning. Evidently no trees nor tall buildings or hill tops were close at hand.

His gaze swept the buildings and dropped to the occupants of the square. There were not many of these—scarcely a dozen. They were clustered in the corner farthest from where he stood, and seemed to be talking earnestly. They were too far away for him to distinguish their features or hear their words, but from their movements and general appearance he guessed that none of them were young. Vainly he strained his eyes, wondering whether his father could be among them.

Another peculiarity of the place struck him. The surface of the square and the walls of the houses were alike in color and appearance, all having the same metallic luster he had noticed in the walls of his own room. The whole square seemed paved with metal. Not a tree, not a shrub, not a blade of grass interrupted the prevailing steely gray.

Yet stay! High in a window of the one tall building, he caught a glimpse of red and white and green; some one had put a box of flowering plants there. Could it have been Miriam? he asked himself.

But where on earth could he be? On a hill-top? Or a sky-scraper? A chill in the air argued that he was not in New York.

Suddenly he became conscious that the building in which he stood was not absolutely at rest. When he sharpened his senses, he could feel a very faint jar as of some engine. This, however, did not account for all the motion that he felt. The whole building seemed to be swaying, gently indeed, but perceptibly. Page raised his eyes to the sky, with an instinctive endeavor to note by the clouds whether his impression was correct. But there were no clouds, and the speckless blue contained no fixed point by which he could judge.

Nevertheless the impression of motion grew stronger. He was afloat, he decided; Cloud City must be a huge raft.

But where? But where? To float, a raft must have something to float on. The sea was of course handy to New York, but a raft would scarcely float quite so quietly on the always-tossing ocean. What other water was within reach? No river or lake near New York could possibly carry such a structure as this and not have the Sunday papers ring its fame. Page was rather uncertain in his geography, but the nearest lakes that he could think of that would fit the requirements were some of those in Maine. But how could he or anyone else have been carried to the Maine lakes?

The situation was inexplicable. Page gave it up and turned away from the window, resolved to seek further information before wasting any more time in useless speculation. The door of the room was shut, but the key stood in the lock and trial showed that it turned easily.

It took him only a few minutes to plunge his face in the bowl of cool water that he found on his washstand, and to put on his coat and shoes. Then he descended to the square.

The stairs rang metallic to his feet as he ran down them. Metallic was the sidewalk, and metallic the paving of the square as he hurried across it toward the group of old men in the far corner. Everything that he saw or touched was metallic; no wood, no earth, no growing things (except the box of plants in the window) were to be seen.

As he approached, the members of the group heard him coming and looked up. Then one of them rose to his feet

with a cry of both welcome and of sorrow.

"Tom! Tom! My boy! Have they caught you, too?"

"Father!" Tom sprang forward and grasped the old man's hand. "Father! I've found you, anyway!"

Mr. Page cackled nervously. "Yes! You've found me, Tom," he agreed. "But who's going to find you?"

Tom shook his head, soberly. "I don't know, Father!" he answered. "Where are we?"

"Nobody knows!" The old man flung out his hands hopelessly. "Nobody knows! We don't even know whether we're floating on water, or whether we're balanced on some devilish contrivance of springs. We don't know anything. Don't you know where we are?"

Tom shook his head. "Judging by the temperature, I should think we were a good ways north of New York—unless the weather has turned suddenly cold."

"It's always cold here! That isn't much of a guide," sighed the old man. "I guess they got you the same way they did me and all of us," he deplored. "Crept up behind us and grabbed us and chloroformed us—damn 'em. But come and meet our fellow unfortunates."

As Tom turned obediently toward the other members of the group, Mr. Page went on. "Some of our friends you know, Tom! You know Mr. Craig, of course. This is Mr. Goodman; we saw him as *Iago* last winter, you remember. This is Mr. Edson, the famous electric engineer. This is Dr. Carter. This is—" Mr. Page named half a dozen others, ending with, "Gentlemen! This is my son and partner, Thomas Page."

Tom recognized many of the names as those that had figured in screaming headlines in the newspapers announcing the disappearance of prominent men. Others he knew personally.

All shook hands with him, most of them with a heartiness that surprised the young fellow, used as he was to the careless or frigid greeting common among the New Yorkers. Few of them seemed greatly excited by their confinement. Perhaps they had become accustomed to it. Goodman alone gripped his hand feverishly, glaring and muttering the while. Tom guessed that the imprisonment or something else was working on the actor's nerves.

All the prisoners were anxious for news about the life from which they had been so summarily snatched. So eager were they in their inquiries that Tom had to forego all questions until he had satisfied the general curiosity.

Even when he did get a chance to interrogate, he got little information. His father had summed things up very accurately. All the prisoners had been kidnaped when absolutely unsuspicious of danger, generally in or near their own homes, by men who had slipped upon them unawares and had chloroformed them by main force. Not one had been given a chance to resist or to cry out. Some of them had been prisoners for several months; others for only a week or two. All of them had been brought to the place unconscious, and none of them had been allowed to go outside of it. All they knew was what they could infer from the place itself—and that was just what Tom could infer, no more, no less.

Tom could not understand it. "But what's outside the wall—back of these houses?" he demanded. "Can't you see out?"

Mr. Page shook his head. "All the openings in the houses face on the square, Tom," he explained. "If you'll look, you'll see that they are all metal—aluminum, I think—smooth as glass, with overhanging eaves. A fly could scarcely scale them. And we haven't a thing to climb on."

"Climb on! Great Scott! Can't you climb on each other—stand on each other's shoulders?"

"No doubt,"—Mr. Page's voice was dry—"no doubt we might if we were young athletes, like you, but we're not. We're old and lame and fat."

Tom flushed. "Of course. I beg your pardon. But surely there are some young men here?"

"You are the baby of the place, Page!" It was Mr. Craig who spoke. "There isn't another man here that's much less than sixty."

"But why are we here, anyway? Who brought us here? And what for? Ransom?"

A sudden silence fell. Tom, glancing round, saw a surprised flush, almost a flush of shame, on all the faces. No one's eyes met his.

"No! Not ransom." Mr. Page spoke just as the silence was beginning to grow painful. "Not ransom. If it were a question of money, things wouldn't be so hopeless. But it isn't. We are in the power of—well, of a madman!"

"A madman!"

"That's what most of us think, though— Well, you'll have a chance to judge for yourself soon. He's a man of seventy, I should say, very fine looking and venerable, and he's in deadly earnest. He believes that every one of us has been guilty of one or more crimes, and that only his bringing us here has prevented our committing other crimes. He brought us here to repent of our sins and he declares that he will hold us prisoners till we have repented. Twice a day he preaches to us, calls us by name, and tells us all the evil things we have done in our lives—many of them things that we thought no one knew except ourselves. How he found them out I don't know, but his information seems to be positive and complete."

"It's a lie—a lie!" Goodman was on his feet, shaking with passion. "It's a lie," he shouted. "Every word he says is a lie—a foul lie. D—n him! I'll ram it down his throat some day."

Tom looked up amazed, but neither his father nor any of the others showed any particular excitement.

"Certainly! Certainly, Mr. Goodman!" answered Mr. Page soothingly. "Of course you know I meant no reflection on you. I was speaking generally." He caught Tom's eye and shook his head explanatorily.

"Well, that's the sum and substance of it, Tom," he went on, "Elijah—we call him Elijah because he looks the part and we don't know his real name—Elijah claims that we have all been desperately wicked and that we intended to be wicked again, and he has brought us here to repent. I guess he's crazy, but we're helpless."

"But—but—" Tom's tones were incredulous. "What evidence of repentance does he want?"

Mr. Page threw up his hands. "Nobody knows! He gives us no chance to talk. He does the talking."

"But— Oh! this is preposterous! How can he dare? And how is he able if he does dare? But I suppose he has helpers."

"I suppose so." Mr. Page spoke doubtfully. "He must have, for somebody brought us here. Most of us saw two long-legged Scotchmen, who captured us. But we never see them here."

"But how—"

"I suppose you waked up awhile ago in a second story room of that house to the right of Elijah's palace yonder?"

Tom looked where his father pointed. "Yes!" He nodded.

"That's the way we all came. We all wake up in the same room. It's right up against Elijah's palace and the natural supposition is that there is a concealed entrance there somewhere, but we've never been able to get in to look for it. The door of the room is kept locked except when a newcomer is inside."

"I see! But do you mean to say that there are no guards—and no cooks? What do you do for food?"

Mr. Page laughed ruefully. "We rule ourselves and we cook for ourselves," he explained disgustedly. "Elijah has things down fine. He advised us to govern ourselves and we do. He or his men poke food and water out of the doors of his house once a day and we've got to cook it. And we've got to attend to the necessary work of the place. Everybody has to do his share; some tried to shirk, but we brought them to time."

"I see! Who's the cook?"

"The cook," Page chuckled. "Old Fordney is, this week."

"Fordney!"

"Even Fordney! And a very good cook he is, too! You'll have to do something, my boy. We'll assign you some work."

"Assign—Good Heavens! Father, you talk as if this imprisonment were indefinite. How many of you are here? Surely there are enough to turn the tables on this Elijah and his men—"

"Don't you suppose we've been all over that? Of course there are enough of us, if we could ever get at him. But we can't. Look over yonder." Mr. Page pointed. "He lives in that high building—he and his henchmen. The walls are smooth and there are no windows less than twenty feet from the ground. Elijah preaches to us from that balcony there; he never comes within reach of us. None of us are armed. We are helpless—helpless!"

Before Tom could answer, the sound of an organ, low, clear, sweet-toned, broke on his ear, and he looked up. "What's that?" he asked.

All the members of the group were getting slowly to their feet. "That's Elijah's call," explained Mr. Page, rather grimly. "He wants to preach to us. Come along."

Tom arose. "Glad to," he responded, eagerly. "I want to see the fellow."

"Perhaps you wont be so eager when he tells you of your sins. It's—it's embarrassing, Tom. It may be good for one, but it's embarrassing. I never realized the sort of a man I was till Elijah told me—in the presence of witnesses."

The number of men in the square was increasing rapidly. From every house they came, all heading toward the high house with the overhanging balcony.

The little group of which Tom was a part kept pretty well together, talking more or less unconcernedly. Only Goodman stalked alone, muttering. Tom noticed him and looked to his father for explanation.

Page, senior, shook his head. "He's crazy, Tom," he murmured. "I think he was crazy when he came, but he's gotten worse. He's brooding over something. We're all afraid that he will do or say something to Elijah some day that will make our position even worse than it is. But he's too big and strong for any of us to keep in order."

"Can't you keep him away from the meetings?"

Mr. Page shook his head. "Elijah insists on all of us coming," he explained. "If a single man is absent, he cuts off the food and water of all of us for twenty-four hours. So we take good care that everybody shall come."

The throng was packing in close beneath the balcony. Tom estimated that it numbered at least a hundred, all of them, except himself, men well along upon the shady side of life. Some seemed anxious and excited; some seemed almost beside themselves with suppressed fury; and some seemed perfectly contented. The majority, however, were merely sullen and hopeless.

While they were gathering, the organ continued to play, softly and sweetly; but once all were collected it ceased. The next instant a man stepped through the window out upon the balcony and stood looking down at the captives.

From any point of view he was most remarkable. Tom recognized that fact the moment he saw him.

Splendidly built, over six feet tall and broad in proportion, with features as regular and clean cut as those of a cameo, it needed not the piercing eyes and great white beard to make him impressive.

His whole personality was commanding. So Zeus or Odin might have looked as he brandished the lightning. Tom's wonder at what he had done lessened. Clearly here was a man built for great things.

For a moment he stood gazing over the throng. Then he raised his hand.

"Almighty God!" he began, and his voice rang like a great deep-toned bell. "Almighty God, who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live, has given unto his ministers power and commandment to declare unto their people, being penitent, the remission and absolution of their sins."

He paused and glanced at the upturned faces. "Once more, oh generation of vipers!" he hissed. "Once more I call upon you to repent. Day after day I have called upon you, and day after day you have disregarded my words. Beware! Beware! The sands of my patience are running out. Soon! soon! will I take vengeance. Soon! soon! will I hurl you down to the pit where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched."

He paused, and in the pause the actor Goodman burst out, furious with anger.

"Let me go," he screamed, shaking his fist in impotent rage. "D—n you! Let me go! You devil! I'll murder you! Let me go!"

Like a flash of light Elijah turned upon the man. "Who speaks?" he cried. "Ah! is it you? Is it you? Betrayer! Seducer! Thief of honor! Too long have I delayed to send you to the place fore-ordained for you from the beginning of the world. Stand back from him, all of you! Stand back!"

The order was not necessary. So furious were Goodman's gestures and so terrifying his aspect that those near him instinctively shrunk back, leaving a little clear space around him. Only Tom pressed forward. "What's Elijah going to do, Father?" he asked.

The old man shook his head. "I don't know, Tom!" he gasped. "He never talked that way before. I don't suppose he'll do much."

Goodman himself seemed not to be afraid; his rage had carried him beyond fear. "Liar!" he screamed. "Liar! Liar! Liar!"

"No liar I!" thundered the old man. "I am the prophet of the most high God. To me are revealed all things; and I say unto you that the ghost of the ruined, murdered Charlotte Moray—"

"Charlotte Moray!" The actor staggered back. "Who said I knew Charlotte Moray? It's a lie!"

"I said it. I, the judge. I, the avenger! I the prophet of God, to whom the keys of heaven and hell are committed. Liar and seducer. Go to your place, where the ghost of the lost Charlotte waits for you. Go!"

His hand stretched out for a moment. It fell on the rail of the balcony and seemed to press something.

Instantly, beneath the feet of the actor the seemingly solid pavement yawned. Tom saw him throw up his hands, heard him shriek—a single wild shriek, that trailed away to nothingness. Then he was gone and the trap snapped back into place.

Dumfounded, horror-stricken, scarce believing their eyes, the throng stood still.

Then once more the voice of Elijah rang out. "To your rooms," he thundered. "To your rooms! Fall upon your knees and repent and pray! Else you too, shall follow the scoundrel that has gone."

For a moment the crowd stood still. Then it broke and fled, every man for himself, fleeing from death.

Tom went with the rest, sweeping his father along with him. He, too, was frightened; but he had more to frighten him than had most of the others.

Standing, as he had stood, and at arm's length from Goodman, at the very verge of the trap, he had looked down it for a single moment before it closed. And in that moment he had seen —or dreamed that he had seen—instead of a pit of blackness, a vast light-lit space, infinite in depth, infinite in extent, without foundations, without walls, paved only by billowing clouds that tossed and tumbled below—clouds into which the grotesque, fore-shortened figure of the actor plunged and disappeared!

And, blending with the death-scream of the actor as he shot down to his death, Tom had heard another scream —the horror-stricken scream of a woman.

VIII

THE CITY'S SECRET

How Tom Page got through the rest of the day he never knew. The hours seemed eternal. And through them all he had to listen to the gabbling of the old men around him, to hear their wondering speculations on what had happened, and to note their amazing ignorance of the truth.

For him alone the mystery of Cloud City had been solved. The rest either had not seen or did not understand. He alone—God help him!—had seen and understood; not all, but enough.

He made no attempt to explain to the others. He knew they would not believe him; the thing was too incredible, too preposterously impossible for anyone to credit it without proof. And he could furnish proof only by opening one of the many trap-doors he was now certain the square contained. He did not know how to open them and he did not dare to try to find out.

So he kept silence and listened. Even to his father he kept silence. He would wait till he was alone and could think calmly and uninterruptedly—till the night had come and gone, bringing reflection. Then—

At last the interminable day wore itself to an end, and he went back to his room to sleep. Page, senior, told him it was useless to go there, but he insisted.

"You'll find the door locked," the old man declared. "It always is! You wont be able to get in. Stay with me; I'll find you a bed."

But Tom shook his head. "I think I'll watch over yonder to-night, anyway," he explained. "You say that is where the newcomers always appear. Maybe something will turn up that will give me the chance to checkmate Elijah!"

"Oh! All right, if you insist, my boy. By the way, Tom, if anything *does* turn up, just give a yell, and we'll come and help. We're old and we're not athletic, but there is a little fight left in some of us yet, and we'll come, all right, if you call."

Tom nodded and went off. He had not been entirely candid in what he said. He did not expect that any chance to turn the tables on Elijah would turn up that night. But he did hope that Miriam might try to reach him and he wanted to be easily found. So he went to his room.

And there he found her!

The door was open and within the room burned a single light. By it he saw Miriam and Susie Harper, sitting hand in hand upon his couch, waiting.

Swiftly he went forward and took Miriam's hands in his, and firmly he drew her toward him. For a moment she resisted; then all at once she melted into his arms in a passion of tears. "Tom! Tom!" she sobbed. "I have been so wicked, so wicked."

Page patted her head gently. "How wicked have you been Miriam?" he questioned, gravely. "Tell me all about it."

"Ahem!" Miss Harper coughed ostentatiously. "How do you do, Mr. Page!" she said. "Don't let me interrupt you. I'll just step outside and look over this sleeping city while you and Miriam say your say. Lord! I've been there myself." Without waiting for a reply, she ran out of the room.

Tom turned to Miriam. "Sit down, dear!" he commanded, "and tell me all about it." He glanced round and noted that a door—one that he had not seen that morning—stood open at the other side of the room. "I suppose that leads to Elijah's quarters," he suggested.

"Elijah! Oh! You mean my uncle."

"Your uncle, Miriam?"

"My aunt's husband. No blood relation! But he has always been a father to me." Miriam noticed Tom's eyes fixed hungrily on the door, and shook her head. "No, Tom, you can't get through there now. There are other doors to be passed, you know. Do—do you know where we are?"

Page nodded. "I think so!" he answered. "I'm not sure, but to-day I saw something when Goodman—"

"Oh! Oh! The poor man! It was murder, Tom—deliberate murder. I never thought that Uncle—I was brought up in his house, Tom. I have lived there ever since my parents died—ever since I was two years old. He was always so good and kind; everybody loved him. He was a clergyman and the church wanted to make him a bishop, but he wouldn't have it; he said he preferred to stay with his people. All my life I was taught to look up to him, and to honor him. Then, two years ago, a terrible thing happened. Uncle had collected a great deal of money for the church—thousands and thousands of dollars. He put it in a big trust company bank, one that seemed as safe and secure as Gibraltar. But it failed. All the money had been stolen by the president of the company—legally stolen, I don't know how, but it was all gone—all Uncle's trust fund, all God's money. The congregation turned on Uncle—all the people whom he had loved so—all said that it was his fault that the money was lost. And just then Aunt Mary died. And a little while after, his niece, Charlotte Moray, ran away with an actor who turned out later to be married already; when she found out the truth, she killed herself."

"Charlotte Moray?"

"Yes! Did you know her?"

Page shook his head. Clearly Miriam had not heard her uncle taunt the actor with the name of Charlotte Moray before she sent him to his death. But this was not the time to tell her. "No! I did not know her," he answered, slowly.

"They never found the man. Uncle loved Charlotte and her fate nearly killed him—everything coming at once that way. Then, just as suddenly, things changed. Somebody, an old lady in Uncle's congregation, died and left him a million dollars—a million dollars!

"But it was too late. Something in his brain had snapped and he was never the same again. He paid over to the church all it had lost, and resigned, and began to travel about the country preaching. I went with him, of course.

"At first, everybody wanted him; invitations came from city after city, and from clergyman after clergyman, inviting us to their houses and their pulpits. They remembered his wonderful sermons in the old days. But he had changed. He preached vengeance instead of forgiveness. He denounced men by name to their face from the pulpit. He told the truth. He thought it would make them repent. But it didn't. It only made trouble, terrible trouble. People stopped inviting us; ministers refused to lend their churches; at last Uncle was arrested on a charge of libel. He gave bail and spoke again—and was arrested again. Every time he preached he was arrested. All society seemed to stand behind the guilty men and the wicked men, and to punish only those who denounced them and their crimes. Oh, it was shameful! The papers said things, dreadful things, about Uncle. Oh, you must have heard of him. His name was Courtenay Rowe."

Page nodded. Many times he had heard of Courtenay Rowe.

"He always gave cash bail and was set free. Each time he grew more and more certain that society was all vile—that it was banded together to protect evil-doers. At last, in one sermon he prayed for a place where he could take wicked men and argue with them and persuade them to repent.

"That night two men came to him with a wonderful tale— Tom! Do you really know where we are?"

Once more Tom nodded. "I know, because I saw, dear!" he answered. "But perhaps my eyes deceived me. It seems so impossible."

"Yes! Yes! It seems impossible! It *is* impossible. And yet it is true! Tom! Do you remember a story of Kipling's called 'With the Night Mail,' published a few years ago?"

"Yes!"

"It was the story of a wonderful airship that was supported and driven by a wonderful gas that was controlled by a wonderful flame. Well, the men who came to see Uncle had discovered almost that very thing. They had invented a wonderful oil and a wonderful lamp that evolved a wonderful gas that could lift anything, and that could be regulated just by turning the lamp up or down. With a pint of oil, the lamp could lift a ton and the oil could be condensed and used over and over again; it would last for days and weeks and months.

"The men who had invented the thing were Scotchmen—fierce, uncompromising fanatics. They had followed Uncle's preaching and they sympathized with him. They explained their discovery and offered to use it in holding a floating island in the sky where justice could be done on men powerful enough to defy the law.

"Uncle accepted and built this place—Cloud City, he called it. Your eyes did not deceive you, Tom. Cloud City floats in the air 12,000 feet above the earth, held up by the power of the gas and the lamp!"

Tom shivered. The thought of the vast space beneath made him weak.

"Cloud City was built in England, Tom, where people are not inquisitive. It is built of steel and aluminum. All the roofs and all the floors are hollow—all are great tanks filled with the wonderful gas. The lamps that renew it are in a circular tower on the roof where only Uncle and his men may go. By their aid he can rise or sink at will. By night he comes low—very low; by

day he goes up too high to be seen. Storms do not trouble us—we rise above them. We have engines driven by the expansion of the gas; they could drive a real air-ship very fast, but Cloud City is not a ship; it is a raft, and the propellers do little more than keep it in place, close above New York. We have smaller rafts for going and coming; I had just come down on one the first time I saw you. I thought I was dropping through the clouds and instead I dropped through the fog into the water. You came upon me before I could rise again. You remember?"

"Yes!" Page nodded. Well did he remember. Should he ever forget?

"It was my first effort to help Uncle. He had found out that Mr. Fordney, Mr. Craig, and your father plotting a great steal—it was a great steal, wasn't it, Tom, dear?"

"It was. But Father decided not to go through with it."

"We did not know that. McPherson and Saunders, the two men who held the secret, carried away your father on my own float from the sea beach. They entered Mr. Craig's house by the open window and carried him off by the same way. I myself opened the door to the roof and let them into Mr. Fordney's house and they chloroformed him at his desk and carried him off from the roof. I did wrong, I know—very wrong! But I had always trusted Uncle and I thought— Oh! I thought he must be right. So I helped him that once. I never did it before. I don't think I could have done it that time when it came to the point if it hadn't been that it would save you!"

"Save me!"

"Yes!"—naïvely. "If Mr. Fordney wasn't there, he couldn't attack you—could he? That was really why I did it. But—but one thing leads to another, doesn't it, Tom? I had no business to tell you about Cloud City, and when you began to advertise for it, Uncle saw it—he gets the papers every few days, you know. He was afraid his secret might be found out and he ordered me to go and get you and I refused; and then he sent Mr. McPherson and Mr. Saunders and they brought you and they brought Miss Harper, too, because she saw them, and—and that's all, I think."

"Miss Harper! Oh, yes! And her friend, Pete Cosdon? Is he here?"

Miriam nodded. "He's here. He helps to run the engines. He is really a prisoner, and he's very discontented, though Uncle has promised to let him go, after a while, with a small fortune."

"How many more are there, Miriam?"

The girl did not pretend to misunderstand the object of the question. "That's all!" she breathed. "Just Uncle and Mr. McPherson and Mr. Saunders and Pete. And Pete will make no resistance. You could overpower them, I know, if you could get at them. But—but—"

"But what, Miriam?"

"Would—would they punish Uncle for what he has done, Tom?"

Page shook his head. "I don't think so, Miriam," he answered, slowly. "He is undoubtedly mad. He would have to be confined in some hospital, of course. As for McPherson and Saunders—well, they would be judged fairly."

The girl nodded. "I suppose so," she sighed. "I owe them nothing. For days I've been terribly afraid about Uncle. And to-day was the culmination. I'd let you in through that door, Tom—you and your friends—but—"

"Well, Miriam?"

"You don't know what you would have to meet. This whole float is a succession of traps. It was built in sections. Each has its own lamp. With a touch of his hand Uncle can free this part or that part, and let it shoot up or let it plunge down, according to the power of its lamp. I don't know half the danger spots. If Uncle got desperate he might kill half of you all in an instant."

"Then we must pin him and his men down before they have time to do anything like that. Let me call Father and the rest."

"What! Now?"

"Yes! Every minute's delay adds to the danger."

"Well—Oh! wait, Tom! You don't think I am a traitress to betray Uncle

—do you? I am sure he is mad. I can't let him put any more blood on his soul, and to-day he threatened— Oh, Tom! When he murdered that poor man to-day, I knew that he was mad. I knew that he was mad! mad!"

Page stroked her hair gently. "I think you are right, dear!" he declared. "Your uncle is undoubtedly mad."

"It isn't just his murdering the man," went on the girl. "It's what he said. He claimed to be the prophet of God —the keeper of the keys of Heaven and Hell. Oh, Tom! It terrifies me. He might—he might—kill us all some day."

"He might!" A deep voice broke in. "Ungrateful girl! Traitress! Why should I not send you and your lover to your doom?"

Page sprang to his feet, thrusting Miriam behind him. Before him, framed in the secret doorway, stood two men with fierce faces—the same men who had taken him captive at his own home the day before.

IX

FROM THE BRINK OF DESTRUCTION

For nearly a minute the five stood staring at each other. Then Tom, out of the corner of his eye, caught a glimpse of a white face that showed for an instant just outside the door that led to the square, then melted indistinguishably away into the shadows. With that sight, courage came back to Tom, for he knew that Susie Harper had gone for help. But he said nothing. He merely waited. Every second's delay gave the more time for his companions to be roused.

Nor did Rowe seem in any hurry. Towering, majestic, he stood glaring at his unhappy niece, who cowered before him, unable to meet his gaze.

"So!" he said at last. "So even you are false, Miriam, serpent that I have warmed in my bosom. What have you to say? What can you say in your defense? Traitress! Traitress against me and against God! What have you to say?"

Miriam did not answer; and the old man went on: "For such a crime as yours, Satan was hurled from Heaven to Hell. Why should I not hurl you after him?"

Still the girl said nothing, but only crouched and sobbed as though her heart would break. Page knew that Rowe was playing his game for him and that he ought to keep quiet and let him talk as long as he would. But he could not bear the sight of the girl's grief. Besides, he did not know what devilish means of destruction Rowe might have at his hand. So he broke in.

"Nonsense!" he cried. "Who are you to compare yourself to Jehovah?"

With flashing eyes and deepening voice Rowe turned on the young man. "I am the prophet of God!" he roared. "I come from high Heaven, bearing God's warrant to do justice upon sinners. Tempt me not, young man, or I doom you to everlasting torment."

Page was watching him warily, but even more closely he was watching McPherson and Saunders, who had advanced into the room and stood behind Rowe, waiting. Aid ought to be very near now, but it could be barred out by the mere closing of the door. At all costs, this must be kept open.

He strove to temporize. "Oh!" he said. "I did not know that you claimed supernatural attributes. I thought"—he paused for an instant, sure that he heard footsteps below—"I thought—"

McPherson was leaning forward, listening, suspicion on his fierce, dark face. Suddenly he sprang for the door.

Page sprang too, striking out as he did so. His blow staggered the big Scotchman for a second, a second that Page improved by flinging the door back against the wall and planting himself against it.

Just in time! Like two bulls, the Scotchmen came at him. Page was a boxer, and he got in one more blow as they came. Only one, however! Then he was brushed aside, reeling. But even as he fell, he managed to writhe himself across the threshold, blocking the door from closing.

McPherson bent to brush him aside, but in the nick of time there came a rush of feet and the prisoners poured in, forcing the Scotchman back by sheer force of numbers.

Kicked, bruised, trampled, Page kept his senses. The rescuers would win, but winning would be useless if the enemy should escape through the other door and close it behind them. Writhing sideways, he crept from under the press and staggered toward the exit.

Just in time! Rowe had already pressed through it into an inner passage. Saunders was actually in the doorway. Only McPherson was still outside. Madly Page flung himself against Saunders, reeled and fell across the threshold, just as McPherson took a step backward, tripped and tumbled backwards across his body.

In an instant the big Scotchman was up again, striving to close the door. But already the prisoners were crowding through it and he turned and fled.

Tom felt himself grasped and dragged to his feet. "Hooray!" yelled his father. "Horray! Give 'em hell, Tom! Hooray!" Twenty years had fallen from the old man's shoulders.

Tom swept his hand across his forehead, flinging away the blood that was streaming from a cut down into his eyes. "After them!" he screamed, in a high, cracked voice. "After them!"

The prisoners were already after them. He felt rather than saw them pouring by, as he clung, panting, to the wall of the passage.

In a moment the stream slackened, and with reviving strength he stumbled forward, clinging to his father, following the rush.

Along the passage the two sped at a staggering run, up a flight of stairs onto a broad roof lit by a brilliant moon riding high in the cloudless heavens.

From the middle of the roof, a dozen feet away, rose a circular tower, against which a score of old men were battering feebly with their naked hands. "They're inside," they clamored. "They're inside."

"Silence!"

On top of the tower stood Rowe, never more Elijah-like than in that hour. His long white beard, moonlight-silvered, tossed in the night wind. He raised his hand and the tumult hushed.

"Worms of the dust," he rasped. "Crawling insects! Vipers that you are. Your hour of doom has come. Pray! Pray! For you die!"

Hushed, terrified by the unknown, the prisoners were silent. Wildly they gazed, shrinking back to the parapets, seeking refuge from the threatening death.

In vain! High above in the blue-black sky soared the moon. Its rays, marvelously white, penetrated the void, and rested on the trembling clouds far below. Back from that awful void the prisoners shrank with blanched cheeks, turning appealing eyes on the merciless judge who towered above them.

"Pray! Pray!" he clamored once more. "Pray for the dying!"

Into Page's hand a palm was pressed—a soft palm, cold as death—and he opened his arms and drew Miriam toward him; then he reached out for his father.

He raised his eyes to Rowe, then "Do your worst, madman!" he yelled. "But we will not die. God will not permit such a crime. Do your worst."

Rowe's hand shot out as it had shot out upon the balcony when he sent Goodman to his death.

Then slowly the tower began to rise. Foot by foot it lifted, bearing Rowe and his two companions higher and higher. Faster and faster it rose, and even faster. At last the end came. Beneath it appeared a space of moonlit sky, and the whole cylinder, detached from the roof, shot up, up, up, rocket-like, lifted by the compelling gas.

For an instant it stood upright against the sky, hiding the moon from Tom's sight. Then, abruptly it capsized!

From its top three bodies, flung far into space, hurtled downward, barely missing the edge of the roof—hurtled downward till the cloud carpet far below opened and took them to itself.

Even as they shot down, the whole great air-float lurched, shooting far to the left. Again and again it lurched, yawing to the left, to the right, forward, backward, in dizzying plunges. Page clasped Miriam closer. "We're falling, sweetheart," he breathed. "It is the end."

But the girl shook her head. "Not yet," she sobbed. "Not yet. The tanks are full of gas. We are falling, but we are falling slowly. There is hope yet."

There was hope, but it was slight. More and more violent grew the dips, more and more heart-breaking the checks. Like a kite with string cut, high in the air, Cloud City plunged and dived and checked and plunged again, each dive taking it farther earthward. Unlike a kite, its modicum of rapidly wasting gas saved it from a headlong dash.

Down, down, it went! The clouds seemed to rise to meet it; soon they swept over it, enveloping it in their moist draperies. A moment more and they hung overhead, darkening the moonlight. Far below Page saw the sparkle of tossing waters.

Swiftly and more swiftly plunged the doomed city. Now and then a shriek told that some hapless prisoner had been jerked from his hand-holds and flung into space. The survivors could do nothing. Barely could they hold on for their lives.

Then the end came. With a rending splash, Cloud City dived sideways into the waves. A breaker, salt with the salt of the sea, rolled over it—rolled and sank away. Like a cork, the city bobbed up, throwing the water from its shoulders. Its gas tanks, empty of gas, unable to sustain it in the air, yet served as air tanks to sustain it in the water. Till they should become filled, Cloud City would float.

For six hours it floated, sinking, steadily but slowly, floated till the night was past and the sun bobbed up above the horizon and showed a schooner not a cable's length away. As she took off the last survivor, the top of the sinking city disappeared beneath the waves.

It took twenty-four hours to get back to New York, and before the end of that time the survivors, forty in number, four-fifths of those who had voyaged so high, had sworn each other to silence and had bought the silence of the schooner's crew.

"No one will believe us, if we do talk," said Fordney, strangely chastened by his experience. "No one will believe us. In fact, I don't more than half believe the thing myself. If we talk, people will say we're crazy, and nobody will trust a crazy man with his money." The threat of so great a calamity as that, settled the matter.

Only Pete Cosdon and Susie Harper demurred, claiming that they could make a fortune by exhibiting themselves and lecturing with a circus sideshow. They decided, however, to accept the fortune raised for Miss Harper by the grateful prisoners, and to keep silence.

That is why no papers ever told the story of Cloud City.

The Welchers

By

AUGUSTUS R. ROBERTS

THE discharged prisoner hung back, blinking out at the strong sunlight. When the way at last seemed clear, he thrust his hands deep in his pockets, and sauntered carelessly toward Sixth Avenue. At the corner, a crowd of idlers watched two men on a scaffolding, cleaning the stone of Jefferson Market with a sand-blast. It was not until he had shuffled his way in on one side of this crowd, and edged circuitously out on the other that he felt at ease with the world. It was like dipping into a stream; it seemed to wash away something scarlet and flaming. A touch of the familiar bravado came back to his boyish face; each insouciant shoulder took on its old line of reckless amiability.

He crossed Sixth Avenue with quicker steps, and pushed his way into a saloon on the corner of Tenth Street, vaguely wondering what the next turn of life's wheel would bring to him. But, at heart, he was still sick and shaken and weak. He called for a beer, and, between gulps of it, swallowed down slices of pickled beets and the last of the free-lunch bread and crackers. Seeing the bartender eying him, he laughed, conciliatingly, and put down his last nickel for another beer.

It was not until then that he noticed the stranger beside him looking at him pointedly. He was corpulent, and friendly enough of face, but for the blocked squareness of the flaccid jaw and the indefinite pale-green glint to the deep-set, predatory eyes. He was floridly dressed, with a heavy chased-gold band on one fat finger, and a small diamond stud in his shirt-front. There was, too, something beefily animal-like in his confident, massive neck, and the discharged prisoner returned his half-quizzical gaze of inspection with a glare unmistakably belligerent. The stranger merely smiled, and leaned amiably against the bar.

"What'll you have, Walker?" he asked, easily.

The other still glared at him in silence.

"Climb down, my boy; climb down, and have something with me!"

"Who're *you,* anyway?" demanded Walker coldly.

"Oh, I was just watchin' you over yonder!" The stout man jerked his head vaguely toward Jefferson Market, and turned to the bartender. "Give us some brandy, Tom, and a plate o' hot beans and sandwiches. Yes, I was kind o' lookin' on over there; you're up against it, aren't you?"

"How d'you mean?" asked the young man.

"Here, brace up on a swig of Tom's nose-paint; then we can talk easier. Hold on, though; let's get comfortable!"

He ordered the lunch over to a little

round table in the corner. Walker could already feel the liquor singing through his veins; and he decided to get some hot beans inside him before trying to break away.

"Now, first thing, do you want a cinch on a good job?"

"Maybe," said Walker. "Doing what?"

"Same old thing—operating, of course."

Walker hated to fall out with the stranger while that plate of steaming beans stood still unconsumed, so he parried for time.

"I'm kind o' sick of operating," he mumbled, washing a mouthful of his lunch down with a glass of brandy. "My arm's giving out."

"Well, I want a man, and I want him quick. You're not very well fixed, maybe?"

"Oh, I'm broke, all right!" laughed the other weakly, surrendering to some clutching tide of alcoholic recklessness.

"Well, you're a fool to go broke in the teeth of a cinch like this. But first thing, how'd you ever get pinched by Connors? Here, take a drink—hot stuff, eh? Now, how'd you get pulled that fool way?"

"Oh, I'd been living like a street-cat for a week," said Walker, wiping his mouth, "and a friend of mine showed me a wire back of his roof, and advanced me five dollars to short-circuit it. Connor's men caught me at it, and Connor tried to make me out an ord'nary overhead guerrilla." He cursed his captor roundly.

"But you saw he didn't appear against you?"

"Yes, and that's more'n I can get onto," Walker answered, puzzled by the stranger's quiet smile.

"Say, Walker, you didn't think it was your good looks got you off, did you?" The younger man looked at him out of half-angry eyes, but the stranger only continued to chuckle in his throat.

"I fixed Connor for you," he went on, easily. "You're the sort of man I wanted—I saw that, first thing; and a friend o' mine kind o' dropped in and saw Connor!"

The younger man gazed at him in dreamy wonder, trying to grope through the veil of unreality that seemed falling about him. Then he listened, with suddenly alert eyes, as the stranger, to make sure of his man, tapped with a knife on the edge of his plate. Walker read the Morse easily—"Don't talk so loud"—and wagged his head childlishly over the little message, under the keen eyes of the stranger.

"Where'd you work, before you went with the Postal Union?"

"Up in the woods," laughed the other, as he rambled. "I was a despatcher for the Grand Trunk at Prescott, where the tunnel trains cut out west for Chicago, and they work their men like dogs. Some way or other, I sent an excursion head on into a gravel-train—saw it twenty minutes before they touched, and wired in my resign."

"But how'd you come to leave the Postal Union?"

A momentary slyness crept into Walker's eyes, but he laughed weakly, and reached out for another drink; the older man shook his head, and held back the bottle.

"Oh, that's another dose of my luck! They black-listed me, damn 'em!"

The other held up a warning finger. "Not so loud! Go on."

"Of course, I went into the P. U. carrying a fly, so I got along all right. But I kind o' wanted to see a little life, and had telegrapher's paralysis coming on, and got sick of the grind. So, when some of the Aqueduct races were going through on a repeater next to me, to Harvey's pool-rooms, I just reached over and held up one side of the repeater. Then, say third horse won, I got over to the window, and took out my handkerchief three times. Then a friend of mine 'phoned to our man, and when he'd had time to get his money up I sent the result through. But they got onto the dodge, and soaked me!" Regretfully, he added, "I'd have made a clear five hundred, if they'd given me another day's chance!"

"Well, I guess maybe you can even up, with us." The younger man looked at the other narrowly, unsteady of eye, but still suspicious. Good grafts, he knew, had to be sought for long and arduously on this earth. "I guess I'd rather get something decent," he grum-

bled, pushing away his bean-plate, but still waiting with some anxiety for the other to explain.

"We all would, maybe; but a dead sure thing's good enough, now and then."

"But where's all the money in this cinch?" demanded Walker.

"I can't tell you that here, but I'm no piker! Get in a cab with me, and then I'll lay everything out as we drive up to the house. But here, have a smoke!" he added as he got up and hurried out to the door. Walker had never dreamed that tobacco—even pure Havana tobacco—could be so suave and mellow and fragrant.

"Now you asked me about the money in this deal," the older man began, when he had slammed in the cab-door, and they went rumbling toward Fifth Avenue. "Well, it's right here—see!" And as he spoke, he drew a roll of bills from his pocket. Walker could see that it was made up of many fifties and one-hundreds. He wondered, dazedly, how many thousands it held; it seemed, of a sudden, to put a new and sobering complexion on things.

"Now, if you want to swing in with us, here's what you get a week." The stranger pulled out four crisp fifty-dollar bills, and placed them in the other's bewildered fingers. "And if our *coup* goes through, you get your ten per cent rake off—and that ought to run you up from five to seven thousand dollars, easy!"

Walker's fingers closed more tightly on his bills, and he drew in his breath, sharply.

"Who *are* you, anyway?" he asked, slowly.

"Me? Oh, I'm kind of an outside operator, same as yourself!" He looked at Walker, steadily, for a moment, and then, seeming satisfied, suddenly changed his tone. "Did you ever hear of Stevens, the big pool-room man? Well, I've been a plunger at Stevens' now for two months—long enough to see that he's crooked as they make them. I'm going to give him a dose of his own medicine, and hit that gilt-edged gambler for a slice of his genteel bank-roll—and a good, generous slice, too!"

"But what's—er—your special line of business? How're you going to get at Stevens, I mean?"

"Ever hear of the Cairo outfit?" asked the other.

"That cut in and hit the Chicago pool-rooms for eighty-thousand? Well, I guess I have—a little!" He looked at the other man in wonder. Then it all seemed to dawn on him, in one illuminating, almost bewildering flash.

"You—you're not Donnelly?" he cried, reading his answer almost as he spoke. Half a year before, the Postal Union offices had been full of talk of the "Cairo Outfit" and Donnelly, buzzing with meager news of the audacity and cool insolence of Cairo's "lightning slingers,"—who, when they saw they had worked their game to a finish, cut in with their, "We've got your dough, now you can go to—" as they made for cover and ultimate liberty ten minutes before their hillside cave was raided, and nothing more than a packing-case holding three dozen Brumley dry batteries, a bunch of "KK" and a couple of Crosby long-distance telephones were found.

Walker looked at the other man once more, almost admiringly, indeterminately tempted, swayed against his will in some way, by the splendor of a vast and unknown hazard.

"You're pretty confidential," he said slowly, looking the other up and down. "What's to stop me squealing on you and the whole gang?"

Donnelly smiled gently, and stroked his scrawny beard, touched here and there with gray. "What good would all that do you?" he asked.

"You *are* a cool cuss!" ejaculated the other.

"Oh, I guess I know men; and I sized you up, first thing, in the court-room. You're the make of man I want, and—well, if you don't come out of this quite a few thousand to the good, it's all your own fault!"

Walker whistled softly, and he looked out at the flashing carriages as they threaded their way up the crowded avenue. "Well, I guess I'm game enough!" he said hesitatingly, still trying to sweep from his brain the teasing mental cobweb that it was nothing more than a vivid nightmare. "I guess I'm

your man," he repeated, as they turned off the avenue, and drew up in front of a house with a brown-stone front, much like other private houses in New York's upper Thirties. They jumped out, and went quickly up the broad stone steps.

"So you're with us, all right?" asked Donnelly, as his finger played oddly on the electric button beside the door.

"Yes, I'm with you," assented Walker stoutly, "to the finish!"

It was a full minute before the door opened, and the unlooked-for wait in some way keyed the younger man's curiosity up to the snapping point. As the door swung back, he had the startled vision of a young woman, dressed in sober black, looking half-timidly out at them with her hand still on the knob. As he noticed the wealth of her waving, chestnut hair, and the poise of the head, and the quiet calmness of the eyes, that appeared almost a violet-blue in contrast to the soft pallor of her face, Walker felt that they had made a mistake in the house number. But, seeing Donnelly step quickly inside, he himself awkwardly took off his hat, and under the spell of her quiet, almost pensive smile, decided that she could be little more than a mere girl—until he noticed the womanly fullness of her breast and hips and what seemed a languid weariness about the eyes themselves. He also noted the sudden telepathic glance that passed between Donnelly and the woman, a questioning flash on her part, an answering flash on his. Then she turned to Walker, with her quiet, carelessly winning smile, and held out her hand—and his heart thumped and pounded more drunkenly than it had with all Donnelly's brandy and seltzer. Then he heard Donnelly speaking, quickly and evenly.

"This is Mr. Bob Walker; Walker, this is Miss Lou Allen. You two're going to have lots of trouble together, so I guess you'd better get acquainted right here—might as well make it Lou and Bob; you're going to see a mighty good deal of each other!"

"All right, Bob," said the woman girlishly, in a mellow English contralto voice; then she laughed, and Walker flushed hot and cold as he felt her shaking hands with him once more. Strangely sobered, he stumbled over rugs and polished floors after them, up two flights of stairs, listening, still dazed, to Donnelly's hurried questions and the woman's low answers.

A man named Matthews, Walker gathered from their talk, had been probing about the subway for half a day, and had just strung a wire on which much seemed to depend. They stopped before a heavy, oak-paneled door, on which Donnelly played a six-stroke tattoo. A key turned, and the next moment a middle-aged man in the cap and blue suit of a Consolidated Gas Company inspector thrust his head cautiously through the opening. The sweat was running down his oily, dirt-smeared face; a look of relief spread over his features at the sight of the others.

The room into which Walker stepped had once been a sewing-room. In one corner still stood a sewing-machine, in the shadow, incongruously enough, of a large safe with a combination lock. Next to this stood a stout work-table on which were a box relay and a Bunnell sounder. Around the latter were clustered a galvanometer, a 1-2 duplex set, a condenser, and a Wheatstone bridge of the post office pattern, while about the floor lay coils of copper wire, a pair of lineman's pliers, and a number of scattered tools. Walker's trained eye saw that the condenser had been in use, to reduce the current from a tapped electric-light wire; and the next moment his glance fell on a complete wire-tapping outfit, snugly packed away in an innocent-enough looking suit-case. Then he turned to the two men and the woman, as they bent anxiously over the littered table, where Matthews was once more struggling with his instrument, talking quickly and tensely as he tested and listened.

"Great Scot, Matt, it's easy enough for you to talk, but it was fool's luck, I ever got this wire up! First, I had forty feet o' water pipe, then eighty feet o' brick-wall, then over fifty feet o' cornice, and then about twice as much eave-trough, hangin' on all the time by my eye-lashes, and dog sick, waitin' to be pinched with the goods on! Hold on there—what's this?"

The sounder had given out a tremulous little quaver, then a feeble click or two; then it was silent once more. "Lost it again!" said Matthews, under his breath.

"Let me look over that relay a minute!" broke in Walker. It was the type of box-relay usually used by linemen, with a Morse key attached to the baseboard, and he ran his eye over it quickly. Then, with a deft movement or two he released the binding of the armature lever screws, and, the next moment, the instrument felt the pulse of life, and spoke out clearly and distinctly.

"Listen!" he cried gleefully, holding up a finger. "That's Bradley, the old slob! He's sending through the New Orleans returns!" And he chuckled as he listened with inclined ear. "That's Bradley—same old slob as ever!"

The four silent figures leaned a little closer over the clinking instrument of insensate brass—leaned intent and motionless, with quickened breathing, and strangely altering faces.

"We've got 'em at last!" said Donnelly quietly, mopping his face and pacing the little room with feverish steps.

"Yes, we've got 'em!" echoed Matthews.

Walker could feel the woman's breath playing on his neck, and he turned to her, and could see by her quick breath and dilated pupils that she too, had been reading the wire. And again he wondered, as he looked at her, how she ever came to such a place. To Walker—who had heard of woman bookies and touts in his day—she seemed so soft, so flowerlike, in her pale womanhood, that she still remained to him one of the mysteries of a mysterious day.

The woman saw the impetuous warmth in his eyes as he gazed up at her, and quickly looked away. "No goo-gooing there, you folks!" broke in Donnelly brusquely. Then he turned quickly to the other man. "Now, Matthews, we've got to get a move on! Get some of that grime off, and your clothes on—quick!" He turned back to the other two at the operating table.

"I've certainly got a couple of good-lookers in you two, all right, all right!" he said — half-mockingly, Walker thought. "But I want you to get groomed up, Walker—rigged out complete, before trouble begins, for you're going to move among some kind o' swell people. You two've got to put on a lot o' face, to carry this thing through. Remember, I want you to do the swell restaurants, and drive around a good deal, and haunt the Avenue a bit, and drop in at Stevens' lower house whenever you get word from me. You'd better do the theatres now and then, too—I want you to be seen, remember—but always *together!* It may be kind o' hard, not bein' able to pick your friend, Walker; but Lou knows the ropes, and she'll explain things as you go along."

He turned back once more, from the doorway.

"Now, remember, don't answer that 'phone unless Matthews or me gives the three-four ring! If she rings all night don't answer; and "Battery Park," mind, means trouble. When you're tipped off with that, get the stuff in the safe, if you can, before you break away. That's all, I guess, for now!" He joined the man called Matthews in the hall, and together they hurried down-stairs, and let themselves out, leaving Walker and his quiet-eyed colleague alone.

He sat and looked at her, dazed, bewildered, still teased by the veil of unreality which seemed to sway between him and the world all about him. It seemed to him as though he were watching a hurrying, shifting drama from a distance—watching it as he used to watch the Broadway performances from his cramped little gallery seat.

"Am I awake?" he asked weakly. Then he laughed recklessly, and turned to her once more, abstractedly rubbing his stubbled chin, and remembered to his sudden shame, that he had gone unshaved for half a week.

"Yes, it's all very real!" laughed the woman herself, now unrestrainedly; and for the first time he noticed her white, regular teeth, as she hurried about, straightening up the belittered room.

During his narrow and busy life Walker had known few women; never

before had he known a woman like this one, with whom Destiny had so strangely ordained he should talk and drive, work and plot. He looked once more at her thick, tumbled chestnut hair, at the soft pallor of her oval cheek, and the well-gowned figure, as she stooped over a condenser—wondering within himself how it would all end, and what was the meaning of it.

"Well, this certainly does beat me!" he said at last, slowly, yet contentedly enough.

The young woman looked at him; and he caught a second glimpse of her wistfully pensive smile, while his heart thumped, in spite of himself. He reached out a hesitating hand, as though to touch her.

"What is it?" she asked in her mellow English contralto.

"I don't exactly know," he answered, with his hand before his eyes. "I wish you'd tell me!"

She came and sat down in a chair before him, pushing back her tumbled hair with one hand, seeming to be measuring him with her intent gaze. She appeared in some way satisfied with him; it seemed almost as if she had taken his face between her two hands, and read it, feature by feature.

"I hardly know where to begin," she hesitated. "I mean, I don't know how much they've explained to you already. Indeed, there's a great deal I don't understand myself. But, of course, you know we have tapped Stevens' private wire. And, of course, you know why. He gets all the race returns at the club-house, and then sends them on by private 'phone to his other two pool-rooms. He has to do it that way, now that New York is not so open."

Walker knew all this, but waited, for the sake of hearing her voice, and watching the play of her features.

"Every track report, you know, comes into New York by way of the race department of the Postal Union, on lower Broadway. There, messenger-boys hurry about with the reports to the different wire-operators, who wire the returns to the company's different subscribers. Stevens, of course, is really one of them, though it's not generally known."

"But what have you and I to do with all this?" he broke in.

"Quite enough! You see, there's a delay of nearly fifteen minutes, naturally, in getting a result to the pool-rooms. That gives us our chance; so we hold up the message here, 'phone it at once over to Donnelly's rooms, three doors from Stevens', and when he has had time to drop in and place his money, we send through our intercepted message."

"Then Stevens has no idea who or what Donnelly is?"

"He knows him only as a real-estate agent with a passion for plunging, a great deal of money, and—and—" The girl shrugged a rounded shoulder, and did not finish.

"And you—?" Walker hesitated, in turn.

"Both you and I shall have to drop in, on certain days, and do what we can at Stevens' lower house, while Matthews is doing the Madison Avenue place. We've been going there, on and off, for weeks now, getting ready for—for this!"

"Then Donnelly's been working on the scheme for a long time?"

"Yes; this house has been rented by the month, furnished, simply because it stood in about the right place. We've even dropped a few hundred dollars, altogether, in Stevens' different places. But in the end, the three of us are to hit Stevens together, on a ragged field, when there's a chance for heavy odds. But, of course, we can do it only once!"

"And then what?" asked Walker. Again the girl shrugged a shoulder.

"Stevens' patrons are all wealthy men," she went on. "A book of a hundred thousand is common enough; sometimes it goes up to two or three hundred thousand. So, you see, it all depends on our odds. Donnelly himself hopes to make at least a hundred thousand; but then he has worked and brooded over it all so long, I don't think he sees things clearly, now!"

"He seems sharp enough to leave you and me here, though, to take all the risk in a raid," protested Walker.

"Yes," she assented, wearily, "we take the risk; he supplies the money."

"How did *you* ever git mixed up with

—with—in this sort of thing?" Walker demanded, turning to her, suddenly. The eyes of the two met, for a moment, and the girl at last looked away.

"How did *you?*" she asked, quietly enough. She was strangely unlike any woman "bookie" he had ever before seen.

"Oh, me! I'm different!" he cried. For some subtle reason she went pale, and then flushed hot again.

"You're — you're not Donnelly's wife?" he asked her, almost hopelessly.

She moved her head from side to side, slowly, in dissent, and got up and went to the window, where she gazed out over the house-tops at the paling afternoon. "No, I'm not his wife," she said in her quiet contralto.

"Then why wont you tell me how you got mixed up in this sort of thing?"

"It's all so silly and commonplace," she said, without turning to look at him.

"Yes?" he said, and waited.

"It began two years ago, when I answered an advertisement from London. I came to be a governess in a New York family. At the end of my first week here, my mistress suspected me unjustly of—I can't explain it all to you here; but she said I was too good-looking to be a governess, and discharged me without even a reference. I was penniless in two weeks, and, when I was almost starving, I was glad enough to become the secretary of an investment company, with an office in Wall Street. The police raided the office—it turned out to be nothing but a swindling scheme; and then—oh, I don't know—I just drifted from one thing to another until I was the English heiress in a matrimonial bureau, and the stenographer in a turf bureau; and then, at last, I met Donnelly!"

"And then what?" Walker's careless shoulders were very upright.

"Oh, first it was a woman's get-rich-quick concern in Chicago, then a turf-investment office in St. Louis; then it was a matrimonial bureau of our own, until the police put a stop to it because of the post-office people; then it was chasing the circuit for a season; and finally, this wire-tapping plan!" She looked at him, weary-eyed, smilingly hopeless.

"I—I send home money, regularly," she went on more quietly. "They think I'm a governess here; and I daren't let them know. So, you see, I've been nothing but cowardly — and — and wicked, from the very first!"

"And is that all?" demanded Walker.

"Yes," she answered, wearily, "I think that's all."

"But you're too—too good for all this!" he cried impetuously. "Why don't you break away from it?"

"I'm going to, some day! I've always waited, though, and everything has dragged on and on and on, and I've been half-afraid of Donnelly—you know, he never forgives a person—and half-afraid of myself. But some day—"

"I know what it's like!" cried Walker, drawn toward her, strangely nearer to her in some intangible way. She read the sudden look on his face, and blushed under it, almost girlishly, once more.

"I want to rest, and be quiet, and live decently, away from the world, somewhere," she said dreamily, as though speaking only to herself.

"So do I!" said the man at her side, gazing with her out on the gathering twilight of the city, and lapsing into silence once more.

More than once during the feverish kaleidoscopic days that followed, Walker found himself drawing aside to ask if, after all, he were not living some restless dream in which all things hung tenuous and insubstantial. The fine linen and luxury of life were so new to him that in itself it half-intoxicated; yet outside the mere ventral pleasures of existence, with its good dinners in quiet cafés of gold and glass and muffling carpets, its visits to rustling, dimly-lighted theatres, its drives about the open city, its ever-mingling odors of Havana and cut-flowers—there was the keener and more penetrating happiness of listening to the soft, English voice of a bewilderingly beautiful woman. Walker found work to be done, it is true—rigorous and exacting work, when the appointed days for holding up Stevens' despatches came around. But the danger of it all, for some reason, never entered his

mind, as he sat over his instrument, reading off the horses to the woman at his side—who, in turn, repeated them over the 'phones, in cipher, to Donnelly and Matthews; and then, when the time allowance had elapsed, cutting in once more and sending on the intercepted despatches, even imitating to a nicety the slip-shod, erratic volubility of Bradley's "blind send."

Only once did a disturbing incident tend to ruffle the quiet waters of Walker's strange contentment. It was one afternoon when Matthews had been sent in to make a report, and had noticed certain things to which he did not take kindly, Walker thought.

"I'm not saying anything," he blurted out, when they were alone, "but don't let that woman make a fool of you!"

"You shut up about that woman!" retorted Walker, hotly.

"You d—d lobster, you!" the other cried, with some wordless disgust on his face. "Don't you know that woman's been—?"

But here the entrance of the girl herself put a stop to his speech. Yet, troubled in spirit as that currish insinuation left him, Walker breathed no word to the girl herself of what had taken place, imperiously as she demanded to know what Matthews had been saying.

On the following day, as Donnelly had arranged, the two paid their first visit to Stevens' lower house, from which Walker carried away confused memories of a square-jawed door keeper—who passed him readily enough at a word from the girl—of well-dressed men and over-dressed women crowded about a smoky, gas-lit room, one side of which was taken up with a blackboard on which attendants were feverishly chalking down entries, jockeys, weights and odds, while on the other side of the room opened the receiving and paying tellers' little windows, through which now and then he saw hurrying clerks; of bettors excitedly filling in slips which disappeared with their money through the mysterious pigeon-hole in the wall; of the excited comments as the announcer called the facts of the races, crying dramatically when the horses were at the post, when they were off, when one or another horse led, when the winner passed under the wire; of the long, wearing wait while the jockeys were weighing in; and of the posting of the official returns, while the lucky ones gathered jubilantly at the window for their money, and the unlucky ones dropped forlornly away or lingered for still another plunge.

Walker found it hard, during each of these brief visits, to get used to the new order of things. Such light-fingered handling of what, to his eyes, seemed fortunes, unstrung and bewildered him; the loss of even a hundred dollars on a horse in some way depressed him for the day. Lou picked her winners, however, with studious and deliberate skill; and, though they bet freely, it was not often that their losses, in the end, were heavy.

It was one night after a lucky plunge on a 20-to-1 horse had brought him in an unexpected fortune of eighteen hundred dollars that Walker, driving up Fifth Avenue through the waning afternoon of the early winter with Lou at his side, allowed his thoughts to wander back to his thin and empty existence as a Postal Union operator. As he gazed out on the carriages and the women and the lights, and felt the warmth of the girl at his side, he wondered how he had ever endured that old, colorless life.

With a sudden, impetuous motion he caught up her hand, where it lay idly in her lap, and held it close. She tried to draw it away, but could not.

"Everything seems so different, Lou, since I've known you!" he said huskily.

"It's different with me, too!" she all but whispered, looking away. Her face, in the waning light, against the gloom of the green-lined taxicab, looked pale, almost flower-like.

"Lou!" he cried softly, in a voice that started her breathing quickly, "Lou, wont you—wont you marry me?"

She looked at him out of what seemed frightened eyes, with a strange, half-startled light on her pale face.

"I love you, Lou, more than I can tell!" he went on impetuously. "You could walk over me, and I'd be happy!"

"Oh, you don't know me, you don't know me!" she cried. "You don't know what I've been!" And some agony of mind seemed to wrench her whole body.

"I don't care what you've been—I know what you *are!* You're the girl I'd give my life for! Good Lord, look at me; aint I bad enough myself? I love you, Lou; isn't that enough?"

She let him catch her up to his shoulder and hold her there, with her wet cheek against his; she even said nothing when he bent and kissed her on the mouth, though her very lips grew colorless.

"I do love you!" she sighed weakly. "I do love you! I do!" And she clung to him, childishly, shaken with a sob or two, happy, yet vaguely troubled.

"Then why can't we get away from here, somewhere, and be happy?"

"There's Donnelly!" she cried, remembering, opening her drooping eyes to grim life again. "He'd—he'd—"

"What's he to us?" Walker demanded. "I only wish, by heaven, I had my hands on a few of his thousands!"

The girl looked up quickly, with the flash of some new thought shadowed on her white face.

"Why *shouldn't* we?" she cried, half bitterly. "We've gone through enough for him!"

"Yes," hesitated Walker, "why shouldn't we?"

"Then we could go away," she was saying dreamily, "away to England, even! I wonder if you'd like England?"

"I'd like any place where you were!"

"He's never been on the square with the people he uses. He wont be on the square with us!"

She turned to Walker with a sudden determination. "Would you risk it, with me?"

"I'd risk anything for you!" he said, taking her hand once more.

"We've a right to our happiness," she argued passionately. "We've our life—all our life, almost—before us! And I've loved you, Bob," she confessed, toying with a button on his sleeve, "from that first day Donnelly brought you up!"

For all the calm precision with which Louise Allen had planned out a line of prompt action with Walker, she was shaking and nervous and unstrung as she leaned over the sounder, breathlessly waiting for the rest of the day's returns to come through on Stevens' wire.

Walker, with two thousand dollars of his own and an additional eight hundred from her, had already plunged his limit at Stevens' lower house, on the strength of her tip over the 'phone. There was still to be one final hazard, with all he held; and at five o'clock they were to meet at Howland's restaurant, whence they were to escape to a new world of freedom and contentment. But the fear of Donnelly still hung over her, as she waited—fear for certain other things besides their secret revolt on the very eve of their chief's gigantic *coup*. For she knew what Donnelly could be when he was crossed. So she leaned and waited and listened with parted lips, wishing it was all over with, torn by a thousand fears.

Then to her sudden terror Matthews called her up sharply.

"Is that you, Lou?" he cried excitedly.

"Yes. What is it, Matthews?" she answered, calmly enough, but with quaking knees.

"Connor's men are watching me here—they've got onto something or other. Cut this wire loose from outside, and get your 'phone out of sight. And, for heaven's sake, don't cut in on Stevens' wire. I've just tipped off Donnelly—he's off his dip about it all. Look out for yourself, old girl!" he added, in a different tone of voice.

She rang off, and vowed passionately within herself that she would look out for herself. Catching up a pair of pliers, she cut the telephone wire from the open window, leaving two hundred feet of it to dangle over the little back house-courts. Then, she ran to the door and locked and bolted it, listening all the while for the wire to speak out to her.

A minute later, Donnelly himself rang up, and asked for Walker.

"What're you doing there?" he demanded, with a startled oath, as he heard her voice. She tried to stammer out an excuse. There was a moment's pause; the man all but hissed one ugly

word over the wire to the listening woman. Matthews had been hinting to him of certain things; now, he knew.

He did not wait even to replace his receiver. While she still stood there, white and dazed, he was in a taxi, rattling and swaying nearer her, block by block. He let himself in with his own pass-key, and raced up the long stair, his face drawn and of a dull, claret tinge.

He found the door closed and bolted; he could hear nothing from within but the muffled clicking of the sounder as it ticked out the later New Orleans returns. No answer came to his knocking. He seized an old-fashioned walnut arm-chair from the next room, and forced it with all his weight against the oak panels. They splintered and broke, and, under the second blow, fell in, leaving only the heavier cross-pieces intact.

Quite motionless, waiting over the sounder, bent the woman as though she had neither seen nor heard. "White Legs—Yukon Girl—Lord Selwyn"—those alone were the words which the clicking brass seemed to brand on her very brain. In three seconds, she stood before the telephone, at the other end of which she knew Walker to be waiting. But she saw the flash of something in the hand of the man who leaned through the broken panel, and paused, motionless, with a little inarticulate cry.

"Touch that 'phone, you welcher, and I'll plug you!" The man was screaming at her. His face was now bluish purple, and horrible to look at.

"I've got to do it, Matt!" she pleaded, raising one hand to her face.

He called her many foul names, and deliberately trained his pistol on her breast.

"Matt, you wouldn't shoot *me,* after —after everything? Oh, Matt, I've got to send this through! I've got to!" she wailed.

"Stop!" he gasped; and she knew there was no hope.

"You wouldn't shoot me, Matt?" she wailed again, with the cunning of the cornered animal; for even as she spoke, the hand that hovered about her face shot out and caught up the receiver. Her other hand flashed to the bell-lever, and the sharp tinkle of the bell rang through the room. Her eyes were on Donnelly; she saw the finger compress on the trigger, even as her hand first went up.

"Bob!" she called sharply, with an agony of despair in that one quick word. She repeated the call, but a reverberation that shook shreds of plaster from the ceiling drowned her voice. The receiver fell, and swung at full length. The smoke lifted slowly, curling softly toward the open window.

Donnelly gazed, stupefied, at the huddled figure on the floor. How long he looked he scarcely knew, but he was startled from his stupor by the sound of blows on the street-door. Flinging his revolver into the room, he stumbled down the heavily carpeted stairs, slunk out a back door, and, sprawling over the court-fence, fell into a yard strewn with empty boxes. Seeing a near-by door, he opened it, and found himself in a noisy auction-room, filled with bidders. Pushing hurriedly through them, he stepped out into the street, unnoticed.

When the wounded woman had made sure that she was alone—she had been afraid to move where she lay, fearing a second shot—with a little groan or two she tried to raise to her knees. But this, she found, was beyond her strength. The left sleeve of her waist, she also saw, was wet and sodden with blood. Already, she could hear footsteps below, and again and again she told herself that she must be ready when Walker came, that he, at least, must not be trapped. She, as a mere pool-room stenographer, had little to fear from the law. But as she tried, with her teeth and her free arm, to tear a strip from her white underskirt, the movement, for all her tight-lipped determination, was too much for her. She had a faint memory of hearing footsteps swarming about her, and then of ebbing and pulsing down through endless depths of what seemed to her eider-downed emptiness.

When she came to, one of Connor's men was leaning over her, with a pocket-flask of brandy in his hand. She looked at him, bewildered, and from

him to the other four men who stood about her; and then it all came back to her.

She closed her eyes again, vaguely wondering if some teasing, indeterminate mishap, which she could not quite remember, had yet come about. At first, she could not grasp it, as she lay there, moaning with pain; and then it came to her in a flash. It was Walker. He was coming back; and they were waiting there, waiting to trap him. Again she told herself that she must keep her head, and be cool. She looked at the five men in the room; three of them she knew were plain-clothes men from the Central Office; the other two were Connor's agents. If Walker came while they were still there—and now he *could* not be long!—they would let him in and say nothing, and there they would have him, like a rat in a trap.

She grew hysterical, and cried out to them that she was dying, yet, waiting all the time for the sound of Walker's step, trying to think how she might save him. At last, to her sudden joy, she remembered that he was to bring from her rooms with him her own handbag, filled with a few things which she had gathered up to take away with her. He would surely carry that bag in with him when he came; that was her salvation.

She fell to shrieking again that she was dying, demanding shrilly why her doctor had not come. Through her cries, her alert ears caught the sound of voices at the street-door. It was Walker, at last; he had spoken a word or two with the plain-clothes men—who, she knew, would readily enough let him pass.

"Doctor!" she screamed, as she heard his steps on the stair. "Doctor! I'm dying, doctor! Are you never coming?"

She wondered, in her agony, if he would be fool enough not to understand. *Would* he be fool enough?

Connor's agents and the three plain-clothes men gathered about her silently, as they saw the intruder hurry in and drop on his knee beside the woman. "Is it you, doctor?" she wailed, shaking with an on-coming chill.

Walker, in his dilemma, did not dare to look away from her face. He was blindly trying to grope his way toward what it all meant. The others stood above him, listening, waiting for the least word.

He bent lower, and tried to read the dumb agony in the woman's face. Then, out of the chaos and the disorder of the chattering of her teeth seemed to come a hint, a whisper. She was sounding the double "I" of the operator—she was trying to tell him something. He bent still closer, and fumbled artfully with the sleeve, wet and sodden with her warm blood.

He read her signal, as she lay there with chattering teeth, "All up! Get away, quick! These are police! Meet you in London—two months—Hotel Cecil—hurry!"

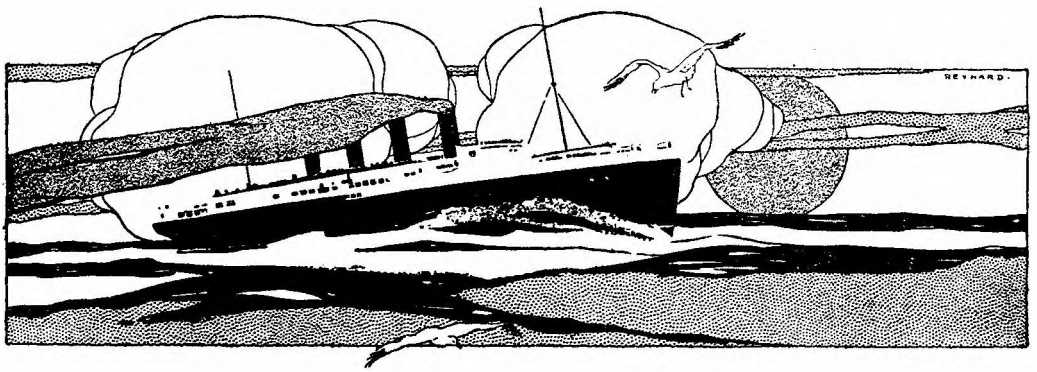
He looked up at the men above him, with a sudden towering, drunken madness of relief, a madness which they took for sudden rage.

"You fools, you," he called at them; "you fools, this woman's dying! Here, you, quick—compress this artery with your thumb—hard, so! You, you—oh, I don't care *who* you are—telephone for my instruments—Dr. Hamilton, No. 29 West Thirtieth!" Luckily, he remembered Lou's throat doctor.—"And get me a sheet off one of the beds, quick!"

He tossed his hat into the hall, and jerked off his cuffs, almost believing in it himself.

"Water—where'll I get a water-tap?" he asked feverishly, running to the door. Outside the room, he suddenly caught up his hat. Then he turned and bolted noiselessly up a pair of back stairs, and gained the roof. There he crept, cat-like, across half a dozen houses, slipped down a fire escape, and gave a startled Irish house-maid a five-dollar bill to let him pass through her mistress' apartment.

As he turned hurriedly into Madison Avenue, toward the Grand Central Station, he heard the clang of a bell, and saw an ambulance clatter down the street. And then he repeated something in his mind, to make sure of it: "London—two months—Hotel Cecil."



Mysteries of the Sea

By CULPEPER ZANDTT

THE DISCIPLINE OF DANGER is probably the finest education in the world. A certain rich man's son was sent to sea: he lost his identity, was thrown upon his own resources, encountered hardship and peril and grave responsibility. The story of his experiences, as related below, is not only a dramatic narrative of sea-adventure, but a splendid description of that most interesting of evolutions—the making of a man.

No. VI—WHAT NO COLLEGE EVER TAUGHT

MR. WING SHUEY FANG—capitalist and real-estate magnate, of Singapore—is a Yale alumnus and a polished gentleman except under extreme provocation or in disciplinary dealings with fellow Orientals. Upon his business trips—up and down the China Sea, in India, Europe or the United States—he wears London clothes of the latest fashion, in excellent taste. But in Oriental cities where he is financially interested, there are many occasions upon which he considers it policy to appear in the costume a Chinese gentleman of his rank and family would naturally affect. Consequently, as he privately owned the place, there was nothing remarkable in his appearance in embroidered silk jacket, trousers and "red-button" skull-cap, at one of the small tables in the rear of Pat Casey's "Sailors' Retreat" on the water-front at Singapore.

To be sure, it was unblushingly a grog-shop, with sleeping-rooms overhead, where seafaring men of all ranks and nationalities congregated from ships lying at the long wharf of Tanjong Pagar, across the "Bund." But it wasn't one of the disorderly ones—Casey looked after that—and the men who patronized the "Retreat," be they captains, mates or foremast hands, were respectable from a seafaring point of view.

At the other side of Fang's table, in the rear of the saloon, was an unmistakable Yankee captain who might have been forty-five or sixty. The gray in his short mustache was just perceptible, and the crow's-feet only such as every sailor gets from exposure to sun, wind and sleet. His movements were active, betraying considerable reserve power. His eyes were clear and piercing, but they had in them a look of worry, of anxiety, that one seldom notices in those of a captain on his own quarter-deck. An American living in any of the eastern states would have set him down as

a Bath or Cape Cod man—with the odds in favor of Bath. Where he first became acquainted with the affable Wing Shuey Fang, or how long they had known each other, is of no consequence, but the fact that he was under obligations to the Celestial capitalist for his berth as master of a Tanjong Pagar Company's harbor-tug, has some bearing upon this narrative.

"Cap'n Zephaniah Sewall" truckled to no man, even in his days of misfortune—least of all, to a Chinaman. But he had a gentleman's appreciation of another gentleman, no matter what his race, color or politics might be—so the personal relations between the two were mutually respectful. While they were chatting over their ale and sandwiches, a faint reflection upon the wall drew their eyes to the door of the saloon—outside of which a tall, athletic man in white duck and pith helmet had stopped to examine leisurely a steamer which lay against the bulkhead of the "Bund," about two hundred feet away. As he caught a glimpse of the stranger's face, "Cap'n Zeph" started from his chair as if to go out and speak to him—but settled down again with a partly repressed grunt of futility.

"You seem to know Mister Satterlee, Captain—yes?"

"*Know* him! Well I just guess! Known him for years! But I wa'n't looking for him in Singapore, jest now."

"Why didn't you go out and speak to him?"

"W-e-l-l—I might's well own up, I guess, Mister Fang. Last time I saw Jack Satterlee, I was master of a clipper that 'twould do ye good to look at. I was some pumpkins in those days, if I do say it. And now—I'm in command of a harbor-tug—sixty tons—gross. Damn glad to have it, too, Mister Fang—don't make any mistake about that! I was pretty near on the beach when you recommended me, and I'm obliged to you for the 'pilotage,' too. But—well—you know how it is. I aint in the same class any more. My ticket's still clean, thank the Lord—they've never been able to dirty that—but I guess Satterlee's wuth a hundred thousand dollars—mebbe a leetle more—and I don't suppose he'd really care about wasting half an hour on a 'has-been.'"

Fang thoughtfully removed the amber mouth-piece from between his lips and flicked off the cigaret-ash with a tapering finger-nail.

"To my own knowledge, Captain, our friend, Satterlee, is worth over six millions, gold—how much more, it would be idle to guess. He is a man who craves excitement in one form or another. I do not believe he would settle down to the quiet life if he had a hundred millions. But I have an impression that he might be the best friend a man in trouble ever had. There are prosperous men all the way from Suez to Yokohama, to-day, who have reason to thank him that they didn't blow their brains out at certain crises in their lives. Look you, Captain—I have never questioned you, though I've meant to do so more than once. Your private affairs are none of my pidgin. I know you're straight, and that you've been playing in hard luck. I would offer any financial help you may need—but I can't force it on you. Now it strikes me that, being an old friend and one of your own people, you might feel less hesitation in telling Satterlee the story than me—whatever it is. Really, you know, I think you're foolish if you don't. Go look him up—at the Raffles Hotel. He keeps a room at the club, but he's around the 'Raffles' a good deal when he stays in Singapore. He'll be glad to see you—that I'll guarantee, for I know the man. Tell him the story or not—as you please. I think you'll find it worth your while."

Sewall drew from his pocket a couple of long, brown cigars of a grade one might have thought it difficult for a man of limited income to obtain. The Captain knew his Asia as well as he did the Maine coast. Passing one of them to the appreciative Wing Shuey Fang, he judiciously trimmed the end from his own and took several meditative puffs before answering.

"Why do you think I've any particular yarn to spin, Mister Fang—anything more than a very ordinary hard-luck story?"

"The sort of language you're using at this moment, for example. You

lapse into vernacular, of course—just as do most men who knock about the world—just as I do when it better harmonizes with my company and surroundings to be careless in my speech and forget the sort of English I was taught at Yale. But you are really a well-educated man, Captain—and stood high in your profession for many years. I've seen you come ashore, here, from one of the fastest American clippers that ever rounded the Cape—master, and merchant as well. Yet, for the past two years, you've been knocking about the Philippines and the Treaty Ports—taking anything that came along and living on half-rations, at times, in order that you might send a little money home. Of *course* there's a story in it somewhere! And not an ordinary story, I think. You're not a drinking man—you don't gamble. I doubt if there's a better navigator east of Suez. You're straight—you're a good business man—and you're still young enough to be valuable in active affairs. In fact, your personality and your present job don't match. Why? *Why?* I don't really expect you to make a confidant of me, because I'm of a different race. *We* think it superior to *yours,* but you naturally hold an opposite opinion. With Satterlee, that question doesn't come up at all. And were I in your place, I'd spend the evening with him—in reminiscences."

"Fang, you're just about the whitest chap I've seen, out here. Doggoned if I wouldn't as soon tell you what happened to me as anyone—if 'twould do any good. But it wouldn't! You couldn't help me any, though I know darned well you'd do it if you could—in one holy minute. Some day, mebbe, I'll tell you the story—if you want to hear it. And just because of your all-fired kind interest in my affairs, I *will* hunt Satterlee up this afternoon. Not to bother him with a hard-luck yarn, but just because—aside from his money—I'm his equal, and there's no reason why I shouldn't talk over old times with him!" Into the inscrutable Chinese face there came an expression of appreciation—of realization that the man before him belonged to a class which never knows when it is licked.

Instead of the Captain's hunting for Satterlee that afternoon—and stiffening the back-bone of a poor man to thrust his company upon a very rich one—it happened the other way around. He had taken the electric tram from Tanjong Pagar into the city and, getting off at Collyer Quay, was leisurely walking past the Exchange and Club toward Cavanagh Bridge when there was a shout from one of the Club windows. It sounded like his name, but he thought it a mistake—and had reached the middle of the bridge when he heard the patter of a "rickshaw-wallah's" feet behind him. Satterlee jumped from the little vehicle—thumping him on the back in evident delight.

"Cap'n Zeph! Hanged if it aint! Gee, but I'm glad to see you, Cap'n! I was pretty sure when you passed the Club, but I couldn't make you turn around! Lucky the 'rickshaw' happened to be waiting by the steps—it's too blamed hot for a white man to do much running! Well—well—this is certainly luck. Come on back to the Club—I don't know how long you're to be in port, but I can put you up while you're here. I know your mate's a safe man to leave in charge or you wouldn't have him aboard, and you don't want to sleep on the ship every night. Where are you loading? Out at Tanjong?"

"My boat's there—yes. But I'll have to be aboard most of the time, Jack—so—" He cast a weather eye around to note the effect of this little familiarity. After all, there *was* a difference in their social positions, in spite of his sturdy independence.

"So you think it might be a waste of time to put you up—eh? Nonsense! I've dropped in on Mrs. Sewall at mighty inconvenient hours—and there never was a time when there wasn't a meal and a bed for me. You're my guest while you're in port—don't you get that?"

"But dammit all, Jack, I'm in port for quite a spell! I've no square-rigger, here—I'm Admiral of a *tug-boat,* and *I've got a yellow Bantamese for a mate!* Do *you get that?*"

"Not entirely—sounds a little involved—but it has no bearing on the Club proposition. I'll put you up for a

month—if you're here longer, it's merely the formality of renewing the card. We'll not waste time discussing it—come along. We've just time for a bath and a shave before diner—and we'll have that on the upper veranda, overlooking the water. How are Mrs. Sewall and Marjorie? Gad! Let's see, now—Marjorie must be eighteen or so, by this time—too grown up for kisses from adopted uncles, I suppose? I must remember to hunt up something nice in the bazaars and send it to her, to-morrow."

As the Captain followed him into the Club, with the manner of one quite used to the non-essentials, there seemed no doubting the genuineness of Satterlee's pleasure in the unexpected meeting. The dinner was borne pleasantly along on a tide of reminiscence, and it was not until the table-boys had disappeared after the cigars were lighted that Satterlee referred to his friend's present occupation. They were quite alone—at a secluded end of the veranda.

"Cap'n, I wish you'd loosen up a little on that 'tug' proposition you mentioned. I don't quite savvy. You're not *living* here? Where are Mrs. Sewall and Marjorie?"

"They're home in Bath—or rather, in the old place on the Island, down the harbor. I've been here ten months, now—two years, counting Manila and Hong Kong."

"But, what doing? Libel? Salvage? Admiralty Court proposition?"

"No, just holding down a job—that's all."

"But what—how the dev'—Oh Lord! Look here, Cap'n; either I'm an old friend of yours, and a good one, or I'm not! If you feel that way about it, of course I can't butt into your private affairs. But in a way, don't you know, it seems as if I'd the right to ask questions. Wont you give me a bit of explanation?"

"Shucks! What's the use of unloading a hard-luck story on you! It's a rotten return for your hospitality!"

"Hospitality be damned! You've a right to expect a lot more'n *that* from me. Get those fool notions out of your head, and let's have the story!"

Oh, well—if you insist. I suppose you've heard of Morton P. Glendenning?"

"Name sounds vaguely familiar. Trust and railroad magnate. Octopus sort of chap, with tentacles reaching out all over the globe."

"Exactly. It was the 'tentacles' that got me. Ever hear of Dennington Heppelwaite?"

"Famous brain and nerve specialist, of New York—made a 'K. C. B.' by King Edward, a few years ago."

"That's the man. You seem to be a walking 'Who's Who.' Well, Heppelwaite has been a good friend of mine longer than you have—and though he'd no intention of doing it, he was the man who started my toboggan."

"I don't just see the connection between the *dramatis personae,* but I *will.* Go ahead."

"Glendenning has, or had, three sons. The eldest—the one he'd picked as understudy for his vast operations—entered Yale six years ago. The old man is very much self-made—thought it all tommy-rot—but his wife, like most of the women, set her mind on college for the boys, and Percy was the first to go up. He'd been a liberally spoiled pup before that, but after his freshman year he was just about the limit. Selfish, impudent, dissipated, cigaret-smoking dude—and then some! Old man used to snort and get apoplectic when they came together. Took him down to Heppelwaite's office, one morning, paid a hundred dollar fee, and left him there to be thoroughly overhauled—wanted a written report on the youngster's physical, mental and moral condition. Well, you know what Heppelwaite must be to get where he is. He's thorough, to the limit. Went over that cub with a fine-tooth comb, and sent him home. Wrote the old man that he found in the patient a fully developed case of malignant *filius Croesi*—would outline a course of treatment if the old man cared to drop in some morning between eight and twelve. The disease worried Glendenning a little until his stenographer translated for him—she was just out of high-school—then his opinion of Heppelwaite rose a hundred degrees. You see, the diagnosis agreed perfectly with his own. He called next morn-

ing and the game was blocked out like this. Two young city chaps were to get acquainted with Percy and, when the proper time came, see that he was thoroughly pickled. That detail was like taking candy from a child. Then they were to shanghai him aboard a sailing vessel clearing for a long voyage—this was where *I* happened into the scheme. Heppelwaite gave me a Sunday-school rating—referred to my education and breeding, reputation for discipline, decent treatment of my crews, and all that. Said he'd vouch for me personally. They caught me in Dearborn's office on Bridge Street, and I saw no harm in the scheme—two thousand dollars seemed a liberal payment for all the trouble the pup was likely to give me. And I could see just how Glendenning felt, too—the material wasn't shaping up at all for a proper son of his.

"It seems there were certain private instructions given my mate—but I don't know that I'd have objected to them as a detail in the idea. We'd made about thirty miles outside of Sandy Hook—bound for Sunda Strait and Singapore, around the Cape—when Percy tumbled out of the fo'c's'le and relieved his feelings over the lee rail. It wa'n't until next morning that he was fit to buckle down with the other hands, and Bowles had to start him with a bit of rope's-end. He was plumb funny, that day—going to shoot up the whole ship. His father was Morton P. Glendenning, and he'd hang me to the yardarm if I didn't apologize and take him back to New York *at once!* There's where the instructions to Bowles came in. He told Percy if he really *was* Glendenning's son, he'd know enough to keep his mouth shut—as the old man had just met up with a Wall Street earthquake—gone completely to smash—and was then suposed to be in Canada.

"Well, it hit the boy hard. If he'd had more experience, he wouldn't have swallowed it—you can't wipe out a hundred odd millions like that. He didn't say any more about his dad—and he buckled down to work before long, too. Bowles offered to give him lessons in navigation—more of the secret instructions, you know—and Percy took him up. He'd made an ass of himself at Yale, from what I gathered—but he'd plenty of the old man's concentration when it got down to cases. There were occasional bits of rough-house in the fo'c's'le—he got mussed up at first—but the second greaser taught him to box, and he was holding his own before we rounded the Cape. Struck a typhoon, east of Mauritius—but the boy was on the to'gall'nt yard getting in canvas with the best of 'em. Fact is, I was really surprised at him—congratulating myself that he'd enough of the old man to make pretty good stuff, and was figuring on a bonus when I returned the finished article.

"Then we anchored here, off the Bund—and my troubles began. He'd been cheerful—apparently contented—never occurred to me to watch him. And he wa'n't aboard next morning." (There were several minutes of silence while Sewall trimmed and lighted one of his long cigars.) "Jack, in the next two weeks, I spent three hundred dollars, gold, trying to locate that boy! But if he was at the bottom of the China Sea, he couldn't have disappeared more completely. Finally, I had to sail—but I left five hundred more with the Government detectives to continue the search. That was nearly five years ago. The boy has never been seen, or his body identified!"

"And Glendenning held you responsible—has made you sweat for it?"

"That's it, Jack—that's the whole story! I went to him with Bowles and the second mate, first chance I got—took the log along to show just what had occurred aboard—even brought the cook and bo's'n, so he could ask them what sort of treatment the boy had. Glendenning made no threats—had his stenographer take notes of what I'd done to find the boy—and terminated the interview. A month later, my owners made an offer which I couldn't well refuse for my interest in the ship—and gave the command to one of their mates. I obtained a barque, out of Philadelphia—made one voyage—was superseded on my return. Same story—over and over. I've seen no direct evidence of Glendenning's influence, but it's been against me every time. Noth-

ing has been said against my seamanship, thank the Lord! No one could dirty my ticket. But the tentacles of the Octopus have searched me out in one port after another until I've got my back against the wall in Singapore as master of a harbor-tug. And I'm expecting to feel one of the tentacles *here,* sooner or later. Glendenning never wastes his breath in threats—he just quietly breaks the man who gets in his way."

It was characteristic of Satterlee that, for perhaps ten minutes, he seemed lost in a revery of his own. One leg was thrown comfortably over an arm of his bamboo chair, and he was looking across the shallow water in front of the city at the lights of several tramps and sailing craft which lay at anchor a mile out. Directly below them, near the sea-wall of the Bund, there were a number of smaller craft—junks, sampans and the like—from which there came an occasional echo of voices in the still night air. To the left, the adjoining twin-building of the General Post Office cut off the view of Fort Canning Light—but its reflection could be seen plainly on the water, pointing toward the dim mass of Batam Island twelve miles away, on the farther side of Singapore Strait. There were no distinct noises that one might pick out as dominating the others—just the languorous hum and murmur of a tropic city, on a tropic night—and overhead, a starry illumination such as one has no conception of in the temperate zones. The captain was smiling a little bitterly to himself when Satterlee finally spoke—one doesn't really expect absorbed attention to the details of a hard-luck story, but seeming indifference and indications of boredom do add their drop of gall in spite of one's philosophy. It appeared, however, that Sewall had misjudged the man.

"Just where were you anchored, Captain—that night the pup dropped out?"

"Oh, it's of no consequence. He disappeared, and he's never been heard from. That's enough, isn't it? Let's talk about something pleasant."

"Now see here, Cap'n, if you didn't want to interest me in your experiences, you shouldn't have told me the story. I asked you a civil question. Possibly I'd an object in it—you never can tell."

"Oh, if you want details, I'll give 'em to you. What was it, now? You asked where I was anchored? Well, they used to bunch us over yonder, just beyond Malay Spit—until they could berth us at Tanjong Pagar. There's six fathoms at low water—deepening to eighteen or twenty in the hole just south of it. Call it straight sou'-sou'-east from where we're sitting, now—say, a mile and a quarter out."

"Anyone else lying near you?"

"Oh yes. Not so many, though. Let's see—there was the *Guthrie*—'Burns-Philp' boat, you know. Come to think of it, she pulled out before sunrise; she was lying a leetle beyond us, waiting for one of the managers, I think, because she cleared and got away from her wharf in the afternoon. Then there was a No'wegian tramp, clearing in ballast for Banka, going down for a cargo of tin. She'd discharged, and lay out there waiting for the captain, who was stopping with friends back on the Island. I remember there were three or four other tramps which seemed to be waiting for orders; they were lying there several days—in fact, we left 'em there. And of course, the usual mess of junks and sampans alongshore, inside of us."

"Sure you've got 'em all?"

"Yes—positive. Went aboard of every one with that detective. The *Van den Bosch* of the 'Koninklijke' came out from her wharf just as we anchored—bound north to Penang, and the 'P. & O.' *Arabia* passed us going in to her wharf, an hour later. She wouldn't stop over thirty-six hours, probably, and I suppose she must have gone out by the west entrance to Sinki Strait—I don't remember seeing her again. Of course there were several boats anchoring and weighing in our vicinity before the harbor master finally berthed us—but I'm giving you those I remember as being around during the forty-eight hours after we missed the boy."

"You say the detective went aboard of 'em with you? How much of a search did you make?"

"As much as anyone *could* make on

another man's boat. Most of 'em were riding light—we looked into their holds and pretty well through the deck-houses. Tramps don't leave their accommodation ladders down, you know, as a rule—and if a swimmer climbed a cable as far as the hawse-pipe, he'd find six or eight feet of smooth plating above. The junks, of course, we made no attempt to go through—that would have been stirring up a hornet's nest to no purpose."

"Hmph! What sort of a chap was the boy, personally? Careless in his habits? Slovenly? Or was he inclined to be finicky—go to the other extreme?"

"When he came aboard he was a college dude, as I told you. Mebbe some of that was veneer. But from what I know of the old man, I guess his housekeeping must have been run on up-to-date lines from the time the youngsters were able to crawl. Percy had his cold bath pretty regular, every morning."

"That's what I wanted to get at. He would have heard opinions in the fo'c's'le as to the personal habits of Orientals—and the chances are he wouldn't have made for any of the junks. First place, he wouldn't have been able to speak their language. He'd have had to swim over half a mile through water pretty thick with sharks—and, instinctively, he'd avoid the Chinks and Malays. A slovenly cub, on the other hand, would have seen his chance with that kind of people in preference to whites. By the way—who were the detectives you had?"

"One was a Mr. Atkinson and the other, John R. Brady. They were in the employ of the Straits Government—recommended to me by our consul, here."

"Atkinson, I know—and I've heard of Brady. If those two men couldn't locate your missing cub, he either got away into the jungle before daylight—and probably stepped on a cobra—or else he never came ashore on the Island. If you'd only had a good picture of him, it might have helped some."

"Oh, I had his pictures all right—got 'em now, right here in my pocket. Brady had duplicates all the time he was searching. Guess you've forgotten how much of a camera-fiend I used to be. Why, I've plates of big seas and individual waves that I've sold for a hundred dollars a print, just because there was nothing like 'em obtainable. I took several shots at Percy. Besides, Heppelwaite got another for me, taken in his college clothes by one of the big New York photographers. I'm well supplied with *souvenirs* of the youngster—here they are: look 'em over."

Satterlee walked along to the lighted doorway and examined the pictures carefully—they were taken in various characteristic positions. Presently, he came thoughtfully back and returned them to the Captain.

"Unless I'm very much mistaken, that young fellow is alive to-day, and I've seen him within the past two years. Under what circumstances, I can't think. If my attention is once directed to a man's face, I never forget it—even though the circumstances may be so ordinary that I forget *them entirely*. In knocking about the world, I've had reason to cultivate a memory for faces—one never can tell when it may be a valuable accomplishment. And I've seen the original of these pictures—somewhere. That being the case, it's not a question of whether he got away from you alive—but of *how* he got away without leaving a trace that so keen a man as Atkinson would find? You say you searched all those other boats? How about that 'Burns-Philp' liner—the *Guthrie?* I know her well; she's one of the high-poop tea-ships, running down through Torres Straits. She'd have been going out with a pretty full cargo—and some twenty or thirty passengers, I suppose. How much of a search did you make on *her?*"

"None at all; I told you she left before sunrise."

"Y-e-s—but—when did you miss the boy?"

"When the port watch came on deck—eight bells in the morning."

"You weren't keeping 'watch and watch' through the night—in port. You had merely an anchor watch of two men, didn't you? Probably no one really knew whether the boy was in his bunk or on deck between midnight and four in the morning—the time he *would* have been on deck, at sea. By the way,

did you miss any deck stowage—a boat —a spar or a hatch-cover—next morning?"

"One of the cork life-buoys turned up missing before we left port, but no one remembered just when it disappeared."

"Hmph! I reckon I can guess. Say, Cap'n, how far was the *Guthrie* lying from you?"

"Not over a hundred yards, I should say."

"How was the tide running? Into, or out of the harbor-strait? From the *Guthrie* to you, or t'other way about?"

"Why, let's see, now? I remember it was high tide about midnight—because the decks of the junks hid some of the lights along the Bund, near Cavanagh Bridge. That would make it running out from Tanjong Pagar in the morning—and the *Guthrie* was lying beyond us. The tide-way must have been from *us* to *her*."

"So that, if anyone slipped overboard with a life-buoy around him—say, from your martingale—and tried to swim ashore, that tide would have drifted him right down on the *Guthrie*. And finding it impossible to swim against it, that person would have been scared —ready to grab at anything in the way of escape. And if the *Guthrie* lay there waiting for one of the Company Managers, she'd have had her accommodation ladder down—over her side."

"By gravy, Satterlee—I hadn't thought of those points at all! Shouldn't wonder if that's just how Percy got away. But it's a heap too late for the knowledge to do any good. You think he's still alive? Well, possibly he may be—somewhere. Hunting for a needle in a haystack would be a cinch compared to the job of finding him!"

"That's where I don't agree with you. If he went off down Rhio Strait on the *Guthrie*, I'll bet a thousand dollars I can find some one who saw him during the next month or so, and, step by step, we can trace him, sooner or later."

"It's hardly a possibility, unless you run across him by sheer accident—without spending a good many thousands of dollars, and several years' time. It just so happens that I've neither the time nor the dollars—and no one else has any interest in the matter except the boy's father."

Satterlee lighted another cigar, and smoked for a while in silence. "Look here, Sewall," he said then. "If I offered to go into this with you—furnishing the necessary money—I know just how you'd look at it. You wouldn't consider it for a minute, because you'd see no way of repaying me, even if we found the boy, and would think it a wild-goose chase at the best. So I'll put the matter in a litttle different light, and force your hand a bit. In the first place, I'm a man of leisure, with more money than I can possibly spend. My temperament craves one of two things: excitement, or an absorbing interest. Beyond that, there's so much injustice in the world—so much lying, trickery, deceit and outrage—that a case like yours makes me rabid. Having listened to the details, I'm the wrong build to forget them. You were in no way to blame; that was proved to any reasonable man's satisfaction. Yet Glendenning is breaking you with his millions, grinding you out of existence, just to get hunk on *some one* for what he considers an irreparable loss. It's unjust; it's an outrage! I'll put a stop to it and see that you're partly reimbursed for these lost years and the mental suffering he's caused you. I mean to do this whether you help me or not. If you *wont* see it through with me, step by step, I'll charge up the time and expense to profit and loss. But if you come along, see the affair through, I'll lend you all you need and promise you a master's berth in a trade where you can make ten times the salary by speculation on the side. Pay me what I advance, when you conveniently can—not before. Better come along, hadn't you?"

"That amounts to a 'hold-up,' Jack. How would you start in?"

"Take the *Van Noort* to-morrow afternoon for Batavia, I think. That was the *Guthrie's* first stop. If the boy did get away on her, he'd try to leave at the first port. By the way, how are Mrs. Sewall and Marjorie fixed for money? Comfortably?"

"Well—y-e-s—if they're mighty careful. Marjorie's learning short-hand, so she can get a place in one of the Bos-

ton offices next winter. The interest on what I got for my share of the *Benjamin Hadley* just about keeps 'em going."

"That's not enough, Cap'n—'tisn't a safe margin in sickness or emergency. Marjorie always called me 'uncle' since she was a baby, you know—and I've been meaning to give her a little nest-egg when she married, anyhow. You can't object to that. I'll just cable ten thousand dollars to-morrow—or rather, I'll instruct my Boston correspondents to send her shares of some good preferred stock to that amount; then she'll get her dividends regularly, and they'll be a heap more comfortable. You don't want her knocking about in some man's office when you are twelve thousand miles away from her."

On the second day following, Satterlee and Captain Sewall landed from the *Van Noort* at Tanjong Priok and took a suburban train to the Molenvliet in upper Batavia, where they found comfortable rooms at the *Hôtel des Indies.* After dinner, the Captain strolled down the Molenvliet with Satterlee—who seemed merely out for a constitutional until they came to a small *toko,* or shop, between others belonging to a Chinese fruit-seller and a Madoeran curio-dealer—a tobacconist's, by the appearance and odor.

Pushing through the outer shop, where a smiling Malay greeted Satterlee in voluble "pidgin," they went through a narrow passage in the rear to a larger room in which a stiff game of *fan tan* was in progress—the air being heavy with pungent opium fumes from an adjoining room in which the walls were covered with bunks in tiers. In a revolving office-chair, watching the players, was a bright-eyed Bantamese, who sprang up the moment he caught sight of Satterlee's white suit.

"Mees' Satt'lee! My mos' glad to see you, one time. You no come play *fan tan?* No—of clo'se not. You come top-side along my—on velanda. My bling good seegars."

The front room over the outside shop was a most astounding surprise. Spotlessly clean, furnished in carved teak and silk-mohair rugs, it was the living-room of a highly cultivated person of considerable fortune. The folding windows opened directly upon a balcony overlooking the Molenvliet, but so deeply in the shadow of projecting *tokos* at either side as to be unnoticeable from the street. Here, a smiling *"jonges"* brought a tabouret with egg-shell cups of fragrant coffee and cigars of a sort which are not offered publicly for sale. Satterlee had cordially shaken hands with the neatly-dressed Malay—whom he introduced to Captain Sewall as Rawa Ali—and presently got down to the chief object of his visit.

"Rawa, I think you once told me that you owned most of the sailors' resorts at Tanjong Priok, and several in the old town. Also, that you stand pretty close to the Chief of Police—supplying him with information concerning suspicious characters?"

Rawa Ali nodded assent, and Satterlee turned to Sewall: "You're familiar with Government regulations here in Java, aren't you?"

"Why, I know that everyone stopping ashore is supposed to procure a paper from the Police which must be shown to local authorities, on demand, all through the Dutch Indies."

"Exactly. That's the point I wished to make clear at the start. Now, Rawa, suppose a young fellow comes down on the *Van Noort* from Singapore, and stays ashore. If he's a stowaway, he'd be hungry after a forty-eight-hour fast, and would make for an eating-joint—probably a sailors' saloon, if he had but little money. If he worked his passage down, some of the crew would recommend him to the same kind of a place. On that supposition, how much chance would there be of your seeing him before he left the Island?"

"My see him, I theenk—eef he stay two-three-four day. My b'long each *toko* sometime ev'ly day—takee money, bling money to bank. Suppose mans come along for sometheeng to eat, he not have 'pidgin' aftelward—he stay an' smoke pipe—he lissin what peoples say. Bimeby, mebbe, he tly get place where makee money. He ask My Numbel One *jonges* where get that place. *Jonges* tell my chop-chop when My come along.

Then My see that young mans—an' mebbe fin' place fo' 'im."

Satterlee handed the Malay a bunch of seven photographs. "Think you ever saw that chap anywhere, Rawa?"

"M-m-m—oah yass. My see that young mans—mebbe thee-four-five year back. He b'long My Numbel four *toko,* by Tanjong Priok. He take coffee an' biskit—an' smoke pipe. He say heem name 'Pu-Pussy Jones'—say heem want chob, money chob. My give heem chit along Mijnheer Voorspad at Wijnkoopsbay. He go stay Mijnheer, eight-nine-ten month. Come back lookee fine—new clo', new hat, w'ite shoe. Heem buy cap'n's sextan' in ole town, b'low-side. Come see my, pay back ten guilder heem bo'wow. Say heem navigato'—say My git heem place fol cap'n-mans or mate-mans on sheep—say loose heem tikkut w'en heem shanghai. My bling heem sheep's commissioner. Mans ask heem beeg question, then nod head an' say 'All lite.' You have mate tikkut, my git sheep fo' you to-mollow.' So, he go-away an' be mate-mans. Two-tlee year ago he came back—then go away. Sheeps-commissioner tell my that mans—that young mans—do some beeg theeng on sheep; dose owner theenk heem numbel one fine young mans—mebbe makee cap'n-mans, bimeby."

"Well—I'll — be — darned! Worked on a plantation until he had money enough to put up a good front, and then had the gall to go up for examination and pass for a mate's ticket, eh? Reckon your course of instruction was fairly thorough, Cap'n. I suppose you don't remember the ship he sailed on, Rawa?"

"That one, my not know. But when come along nextime, he mate-mans of tlamp steamel, *Lass O'Glenmuir*—under charter by Po't Darwin Tlading Com'ny. That com'ny, heem charter steamels from Benham Blothers in Hong Kong."

"Then the officers of any Port Darwin Company boat are probably running for Benham Brothers of Hong Kong—go with the ships when they're chartered. Unless I'm wrong in what I remember of them, Benham Brothers are simply a building and owning concern; their ships are chartered out to little trading companies, mostly in the East Indies or the South Sea Islands. I think they've a lot of small-tonnage, 'half and half' boats—carrying ten or fifteen passengers—under charter to companies that also run a few tramps. How about that, Rawa?"

"That's lite—heem chartel boats that way."

After enjoying another of Rawa Ali's priceless cigars, they walked up the Molenvliet to the Harmonie Club at Rijswijk—where Satterlee despatched cable messages to the Port Darwin Trading Company and to Benham Brothers in Hong Kong. Next morning, they received answers to both at the *Hôtel des Indies*:

No such mate on our books.
BENHAM BROTHERS.

Mate Percy Jones not in our employ since 1908. Think was with Borneo & Sulu Co., last year.
PORT DARWIN TRADING COMPANY.

Sewall had been a little more hopeful after the interview with Rawa Ali, but these cablegrams disheartened him.

"It's like chasing a ghost, Satterlee. Of course, Percy Glendenning *might* have sand enough to pass a mate's examination, but his inexperience concerning steamers would put him up against it, first voyage. Don't believe he could hold the berth two months. Then Rawa Ali may have got the name wrong. We *think* he meant 'Percy Jones'—mebbe he didn't; mebbe he misunderstood the name. If the boy changed his name once, he might do it again. I don't see why he should have done so at all, way down here in Batavia. We know the Port Darwin Company had a Percy Jones sailing for them, but he may not have been the same person at all. You said yourself that Benham's mates would be carried on their own books, and they've nobody of that name. Besides, Rawa Ali may have been mistaken in identifying those pictures. He's an Oriental—like all the rest of them. He saw you wanted him to recognize that boy, and he accommodated you. Why shouldn't he? Anything to oblige a friend. *'Our friend*

believes such a thing—very good, let us confirm his belief and thereby persuade him that we are as wise as he.' That's the Oriental of it, Satterlee—every time. How came you to think of Rawa Ali, anyhow?" Satterlee appeared to be weighing the Captain's objections, carefully, before answering.

"As far as Rawa is concerned, I'll answer for him. I've known Rawa Ali for several years, and there are excellent reasons why he wouldn't lie to me. Accepting that as a fact, there isn't a man in the Dutch Indies who would have been more *likely* to see young Glendenning if he were in this part of the world. A man doesn't knock about the East Indies four or five years without running into Batavia once or twice. It's one of the six great ports. If he ever went to Batavia, Rawa's 'longshore *tokos* and his connection with the police make it extremely probable that he would see the boy. He occurred to me when you first told the story. Then when you spoke of that 'Burns-Philp' boat sailing before daylight, I knew this was her first stop. No—you can bank on one certainty: Rawa saw the original of those pictures, unquestionably—and the other details he gave you are equally reliable. Now, right from the start, I've been trying to put myself inside that young fellow's head and deduce what a chap of his temperament would do. The change of name is so obvious that it is added proof. He didn't know how far the law reached, in the case of a deserting sailor, and he was taking no chances. His knowledge of navigation was an asset—probably his only big one—so he'd work it for all it was worth. But he'd sense enough to see the value of a good front when he took his examination, and worked at any old thing for several months in order to rig himself decently. Then he evidently made good as a mate. But he'd enough of the old man in him to want something better—if there s anything in heredity, he *had* to be a climber. That's why he quit the Port Darwin Trading Company. Their boats are small ones; very likely they don't pay their officers much. Percy got a better offer, somewhere else, and took it. He's probably had the shrewdness to pass an examination for master before this, and will have his eye out for a command. When he gets it, he'll begin speculating a little on the side—you see if he doesn't."

"There's just one fact, Satterlee, that knocks all your good arguments into a cocked hat. If the boy has had five years ' steady employment, he would have long ago saved enough to get him home to New York. Chances are, he'd hear of his father in most any port—see one of the Company names stenciled on some case of goods, possibly in his own cargo. *How long do you suppose the heir to a hundred millions would keep a job as mate of a tramp, when he had the price to get home?*"

"Do you know, Cap'n, that's one of the things I'm banking on in the kid's temperament. In the first place, the hundred millions'll keep—they aren't likely to get away. He undoubtedly had some inkling of how much his father was disgusted with him at college. He couldn't see why, *then*—but after being kicked about a little, he *began* to. Then the strain in his blood began to tell. It probably surprised him some to find that he was actualy making good—making a living, independently, off his own bat. And I figure he's made up his mind that the old man's going to *respect* him when he *does* go back. In fact, he may be just cocky enough to think he can paddle his own canoe if he *never* goes back, and he thinks the old man healthy enough to last for some years, anyhow."

"W-e-e-l-l—perhaps you or I might feel that way, Satterlee, but with a boy who's been fed up on millions and all the luxuries, I don't know. Suppose he's on the bridge for sixty hours through a China Sea typhoon—thinking of the palace he used to live in, the motor cars, steam yachts, expensive grub and handsome women that are all parts of his every-day life when he does go home? He'd be kicking himself for a damned fool if he didn't chuck sailorin' when he reached port—wouldn't he?"

"Not if he had much of old Glendenning's blood in him."

"Well, you haven't seen enough of

the seamy side to fully appreciate that slant of view. However, if we do have the luck to find the boy, we'll know. What's the next move?"

"Hunting up some boat that'll take us to Sandakan or one of the Philippine ports. There's a two-thousand-ton boat under Maltby & Hocking's flag at Tanjong Priok, now bound for Zamboanga and Ilo Ilo, I think. She'll carry a dozen passengers or more, and her forehold is fitted up as Asiatic steerage—four tier bunks with iron frames, you know. There's always a bit of steerage traffic to Sulu and Mindanao at this time of year; the Sultan of Sulu is said to be a descendant of the Prophet, and so on. We'll drift over Zamboanga way—and see what we can pick up, there."

The *Barawata* pulled out of Tanjong Priok just before sunset—heading eastward, up the Java Sea, for the Straits of Macassar. Satterlee had noticed her captain on the bridge as they cleared the long jetties, and was favorably impressed with his appearance. A trifle under six feet, but well proportioned and exceedingly active—a man who gave an impression of being stronger than he looked at first glance. Like many of our shipmasters, he wore a brown Van Dyke beard and mustache—and under the visor of his uniform cap were a pair of deep-set, level eyes that never wavered when he addressed a person. The steamer was of the "well-deck" type, forward and aft, with her saloon and passenger accommodation on two raised decks amidships—the build sometimes referred to as "camel-back." In the bow, under the raised fo'c's'le, was the Asiatic steerage, in which a heterogeneous mixture of Hindus, Mohammedan Lascars and Chinese coolies were berthed to the number of a hundred and fifty. An occasional sound of quarreling had come up the companionway from the time the ship sailed—and it was this which drew Satterlee's attention to the captain. He knew that a bunch of quarrelsome Chinese and Lascars make dangerous passengers under any conditions, and he was curious to see what action the Captain would take.

For a while, he seemed oblivious to the noise from the companionway, but presently he descended the ladders in a leisurely way and stepped down the companion, alone, into the budding inferno. It seemed almost a foolhardy thing to do—Satterlee instinctively followed him, loosening the automatic pistol in the holster under his white coat as he went. At the foot of the companion, the Captain stood looking quietly at the crowd of shouting, gesticulating Orientals between the two middle tiers of bunks. Some had krisses in their hands, and seemed looking for a favorable opportunity to use them. In a moment, the Captain, with vigorous shoves, sent four men reeling backward.

"What's all this row about? Put up those krisses!"

For a moment, there was sudden stillness; then a Babel of explanation broke out: This man and that man, and a few others—swine that they were, and of low caste—had thrown the luggage of higher caste persons upon the floor and trampled upon it, etc., etc. Ordering them forward under the incandescents, the Captain examined the caste-marks upon their foreheads and, noting differences in costume and cleanliness, separated ten men from the others. The women were cowering in the background.

"Look here, you scum! These be of higher caste than the rest—and ye know it! These men shall choose their berths and shall order what part shall be set aside for the women. The rest of ye shall obey their orders, and take what is left!"

There was a sullen murmur at this, and two of the malcontents spat at the Captain—who promptly knocked them down. They were on their feet again in a second with krisses in their hands, but with a quick *jiu-jitsu* kick that was new to Satterlee, he sent the weapons flying — and then systematically knocked them senseless. There was a muttered undercurrent all around him, but no one else offered to make an open attack—and he presently turned his back upon them, going leisurely up the companion—with Satterlee after him.

"That was a nervy thing to do, Captain—but I'm afraid you're not done with them yet!"

"No—it'll come to a show-down before they get their lesson. Quartermaster! Pass word to the engine-room for Sandy MacAllister—I want to see him for a moment."

He was about to ask Satterlee what business *he'd* had in the steerage, just then, when there was a patter of slippered feet and a well-dressed Punjabi came up the companion, with his luggage in two red-cloth bundles.

"Mister Captain, Sar—I would like to spik conversation with you for a little minute—a vairy little minute!"

"Go ahead. What is it?"

"Mister Captin, Sar—I not low caste mans. I be Rissaldar, one time—now, I be Jaghirdar in Johore. Those *badmash* down in *charpoy* place, they thinks I much roopy mans—they try make take my *saman*—my, what-you-call luggidge. Mister Captin, Sar, I not can stay with such *badmash*—I go get keel, if I stay. So I pay what-you-call propair tareef—roopy, money—for room by myselfs, like *huzoors* of the Raj. Please, Mister Captin, Sar—do not about eet make bobbery. I pay roopy—money—now."

"Why, I'm afraid that'll make trouble among the white passengers, Rissaldar. Still, none of 'em would kill you, I guess. Meals by yourself, I suppose?"

"If such be law on your sheeps, Mister Captin—yes Sar. But my *khitmutgar* will sairve my food if I may sit in saloon."

"Hmph! I suppose, according to your caste, the stewards would pollute your dishes by touching them? All right—you can have a stateroom by yourself at the regular price. It may help to straighten out things below. Call your *khitmutgar* and come along—I'll show you where to go."

At that moment, the Chief Engineer came on deck. "Oh, hello, Sandy!" pursued the Captain. "Say, I want two lengths of armored hose connected to the steam-pipes, for'ard. One length on the sta'board, and one on the port side. Fifty feet ought to be enough for each, I think."

"Aye, aye, Sir. Too much *bhang* in the steerage?"

"Too much caste, I guess. If there's any *bhang*, we'll get the effects of *that* later. Have the crew on deck through the night watch—they can make up their sleep to-morrow."

The Captain didn't appear in the saloon at dinner. Satterlee gave Captain Sewall and the other passengers a brief account of what had happened, suggesting that they remain on deck a few hours with such weapons as they had. If there was to be serious trouble, they might better take a hand defending themselves and the ship than risk butchery in their bunks. The hundred and fifty Orientals in the steerage were pretty stiff odds, if they made common cause against the whites.

Just what started the trouble, shortly after midnight, no one knew. It appeared during the evening that the Rissaldar's course in taking a stateroom with the saloon passengers had proved an exasperating surprise to the steerage Orientals. Twice the mate found some of the Lascars sneaking about the upper decks to locate the stateroom in which he was keeping quietly to himself. Who or what the man really was, the officers never learned. But they inferred from what happened that he must have been of greater importance in British India than he appeared.

As the time crept along to eight bells, the quarreling between Hindus and Mohammedans in the steerage seemed to quiet down. There was a murmur of subdued talk, in which a number appeared to be taking part—but the steerage was silent after six bells. And had the Captain been the sort of man who is easily bluffed, he would have been caught napping. He had posted himself at the forward rail of the promenade deck, just under the bridge, about four bells—ten o'clock—and for the next two hours had sauntered up and down, watching the forward "well" around the fore hatch and steerage companion.

Half an hour after eight bells had struck, a mass of dusky shadows poured silently out of the companion until the "well" was full of them. The Captain was standing motionless in the deep shadows under the bridge—it is doubtful if they saw him at all. For several moments, nothing happened—the

well-deck being the steerage recreation-ground, no move was made to interfere with the crowd as long as they stayed there. But suddenly a score of them sprang up the ladders to the saloon decks, while others swarmed up the rigging and attempted to swing across from the derricks around the foremast. There were two sharp commands—from the bridge and the promenade deck:

"Get down there, you scum!" "Back—or you'll get hurt!"

Then came a torrent of bullets from automatic pistols which checked the rush for a moment. When it came again, two jets of live steam seared the faces of those on the ladders until they fell back into the crowd, who now began firing shots from cheap but murderous pistols. In the meantime, however, three of the Lascars had managed to cast loose one of the derricks and swing themselves across to the bridge. The Captain saw them as they were disappearing back of the wheel-house and, handing the hose-nozzle to Satterlee, who had just come up, sprang after them. For a few moments, it was a chase in the dark—during which they managed to reach the state-room gangway and force the door of the Rissaldar's cabin. As the Captain reached the door there was a sound of snarling, like a pack of wolves over a carcass—then he deliberately shot and killed the three, but not before they had managed to thrust a couple of krisses into him.

The Mate being now in control of the situation, forward, Satterlee and Sewall had run after the Captain—reaching the room as he was stuffing a handkerchief into an ugly gash in his side. The room was a shambles—the Malays lying in distorted positions on the floor just as his shots had crumpled them up. On the transom under the port was the Rissaldar—still conscious, but gasping his life out. In the stillness after the fight, they caught his words distinctly:

"Mister Captin, Sar—you—one brave—mans. You try—stop me keel. You stan' off hundred *badmash* an' what-you call—ween out. I call you—'Captin Bahadur,' Sar. Me—I am go—very queek—but you mus'—take my *jowhars*—here—for yourself. Me—I not have fam'ly—single mans. You—you take. Goo'by—Mister 'Captin Bahadur,' Sar." With a final effort, he held out to the Captain a small but heavy bundle, done up in red cloth. Then he gasped, once or twice—and was gone.

By this time, the Captain was dizzy from loss of blood, so they got him up to his own room, stripped off his clothes and dressed his cuts—through all of which he did not lose consciousness. An hour later, he was still weak but in condition to give the mates their orders for the night—Satterlee and Captain Sewall remaining with him after they went out.

"I want to thank you, gentlemen, for taking a hand in this game, to-night. We might have pulled through without you—but we were short-handed against that mob—guess the steam saved us; they wont try it again. Two-thirds of them are killed or scalded so badly they're out of business. By the way, aren't you Cap'n Zeph Sewall? And you, Sir, aren't you Mr. Satterlee, of Hong Kong and London?"

"That's right, Captain. Knew I'd seen you before, but I haven't been able to place you. Where was it?"

"You came up from Port Darwin to Sourabaya with me two years ago, Satterlee. And I once shipped with Cap'n Sewall—so I know *him* pretty well."

"Oh, the devil! What an ass I was not to see it! You had no beard, then—you were mate, not captain, on that Port Darwin boat. Sewall, he used to call himself Percy Glendenning!"

"By thunder, you're right! You're *right!* I recognize him now! Boy, boy—you haven't an idea what you've cost me in the last five years!"

"Why, how's that, Cap'n? *Cost* you—*how?*"

"Your father held me responsible for your disappearance—and he broke me, to get square. Hounded me out of one berth after another until Satterlee found me commanding a harbor tug in Singapore! Say, Percy—honest Injun, now—did you ever get any real abuse, anything that wa'n't good for you, aboard my ship?" Sewall's voice was pleading in its intensity.

"No, I didn't, Cap'n—not one little bit! I *thought* I did at the time, but I

changed my mind within a year. No, Sir, you treated your crew *well*—far better than the average master—and I had no reasonable excuse to desert as I did. So Father took it out of you, did he? I thought he might touch you up a little, but never imagined he'd be really unjust about it. Look here; I know that he never did go to smash, and I've been suspecting something. Had he any hand in my being put aboard of you in New York?"

"He certainly had, Percy, but he meant it for your good. 'Twa'n't because he wanted to get rid of you—not a little bit. He wanted you to be a man—and the college didn't seem to be heading you that way, as he saw it. Say, boy, why have you never gone home to see him? You've worried him some—and other people as well. He don't quite believe you're dead, but it's getting so he will, before long. And he wont last forever, you know. Mebbe your ma'd like to see you, too."

The young captain was silent awhile. Presently he observed: "When I found the old man was still on top, and suspected he'd shipped me off, I was pretty sore. I was making good as mate, then, and I thought to myself: 'Well, if that's the way he feels about me, I guess I'll paddle my own canoe.' And I have, too. I'm a master, in good standing, and I've a little speculation in the afterhold that'll put me ten thousand dollars to the good if I discharge it safely in port. A few more years and I'll be on Easy Street—barring the usual element of casualty. Really, you know, I see no object in my going home—though I've no objection to writing the Governor I'm alive and independent."

After a moment, Satterlee began talking—and the younger man found his point of view shifting as he listened:

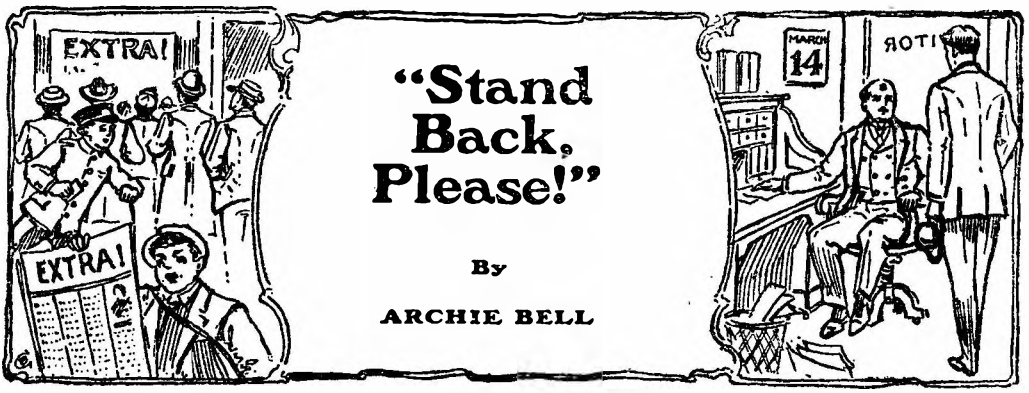
"Look here, Glendenning—as the Cap'n just said, your father had nothing but your ultimate good in mind—he'd no intention of casting you off. If that had been the case, he'd never have hounded Sewall until he broke him—can't you see that? Now, consider for a moment. There's a matter of a hundred millions that he was bringing you up to manage when you were fit. Well—I should say you're in a fair way of being fit, all right. Your father'll be the proudest man in New York when he hears what you've done on your own hook! Of course, I suppose it's a little late to finish your time in college—"

"College be hanged! Look what I was in my first year—I can remember it even now! It wasn't the fault of the college, of course—*but college plus unlimited money is a bad combination for any boy!* And I've not lost anything, you know. *Do you realize what any man can learn by an average of just one hour's study or reading, every day?* That's what I've done for the last four years—and I'm graduating from a far greater college than Yale—the University of the Big Wide World! As for the millions—shucks! I'll make my own."

"Wait a bit. I'm going to make two more suggestions—then I'm through. Your two brothers have gone through college at about the same gait you started—and are in the old man's office now, getting ready to succeed him when he passes on. Are you willing to have that kind of timber in control of the Glendenning interests, to have the millions leak away like pennies shaken from a child's tin bank? Aside from all that, how about Cap'n Sewall? Is it fair to leave him saddled with this hoodoo—a broken man, with a family dependent upon him?"

"*No*, by gad! That argument fetches me! Here! Do you know what's in this red bundle that Hindu gave me as he died? I've got my suspicions, but let's have a look at it!"

Untying the bundle, a mass of cut rubies, diamonds and sapphires rolled upon the table in a dazzling mass. "Just about what I thought!" cried Glendenning. "Now, we'll just divide this stuff evenly in two parts—one of which goes to Cap'n Sewall as a very small return for what he's been through. You may select one of the big stones, Satterlee, as a personal souvenir—I know you're not in need of money. And I'll go back to New York *muy pronto*—next boat from Manila or Yokohama. I'll run the old man's interests myself when he's good and ready to let me—and I'll put the fear of the Lord into those pup brothers of mine—believe me."



"Stand Back, Please!"

By

ARCHIE BELL

I

THE money was here at three o'clock Saturday afternoon; we are sure of that," said Norton, president of the bank, as he studied the features of Allan Blake, endeavoring to detect the remotest indication of guilt. He secretly plumed himself upon his ability to put a man through the "third degree," and openly declared that he could build up evidence by his own process of deduction. In fact, he thought, perhaps feared, that he had done so, and he feared that he was addressing the youth who had stolen $3,000 in gold coin from the institution five days ago.

"Now tell me again, Blake, what time did you leave the bank?"

"About 2:15, as nearly as I can recall," replied the youth.

"And you were the last man out?" he quizzed, although that detail had been practically admitted several times in preliminary conferences between the official and his employee.

"The last man—yes, sir," replied Blake quickly. "O'Neil was in his cage when I went to the wash-room, I remember that perfectly, but he was not there when I came out."

"He said something to you—something about a girl, didn't he?"

"Yes, sir; he said that girls didn't care much for a fellow without the coin nowadays."

"Mention any particular girl's name?"

"Yes, sir, the name of Alice Cummings. Said he expected to take her to the theatre and to supper afterwards."

"Alice Cummings—yes, I see," repeated Norton. "And you rather called this Miss Cummings your girl, didn't you."

"We have been going together, yes."

"You had told her something about spending too much money lately, hadn't you? Didn't you kind of hint that you'd have to retrench?"

"Yes, sir."

"And O'Neil reminded you of that, didn't he? He said that he intended to show Alice Cummings that all bank clerks weren't pikers?"

"Practically that—yes, sir; he said he'd show her the difference between a $50 a month clerk and a paying-teller."

"Yes, I thought so," replied Norton.

"What did you say to O'Neil after that?" he pressed.

"I told him I'd show him yet," replied Blake quickly. "And I will show him too. O'Neil has had it in for me, Mr. Norton, had it in for me ever since I came to this bank. We used to live on the same street; I've known him all my life—never liked him and he never liked me. I showed him up at school once and he never forgave me."

"Showed him up—what do you mean by that?" asked the president, quickly.

"I thrashed him before the other fellows because he said I had cheated at examinations to get a high mark. He never forgot that thrashing, and

he's never missed an opportunity to humiliate me here at the bank. That's the only reason he began his flirtation with Alice Cummings—just to get even with me."

"And you told him you'd show him yet?" repeated Norton.

"Yes, sir."

"What did you mean?"

"I meant that money wouldn't count in the long run, because I knew she cared for me and did not care for him."

"You never thought that you'd spend more money than he could and win her back that way, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

"But now, Blake, you *did* tell her that you'd make a big lump of money some day all in a hurry—didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you expect to make it?"

This was the first question that the clerk couldn't answer; it was the first time that he hesitated during the inquisition. It was true enough that he had made some such remark, but it was commonplace enough at the time—just what any young chap is likely to say when he looks vaguely into the future and thinks perhaps he'll get the pot of gold at the rainbow's end. Positive of his ability to prove himself innocent, Blake now for the first time realized what a chain of circumstances seemed to be conspiring against him.

"How did you expect to make a lump of money?" repeated Norton, taking advantage of Blake's hesitation.

"I don't know—I never stopped to figure that out, Mr. Norton. I thought that some day something might happen," he replied weakly.

"Had it ever occurred to you that you might pick up a lump of money without working for it?"

"No, sir."

"Blake, now I'm going to tell you something that may surprise you. I don't want to find out that you took this money. I'd hate to know that you did. I haven't mentioned your name to one of the detectives and I told the bank officers to wait. I take a personal pride in you boys—perhaps you didn't know that, but I do—I'd give my word that every one of you is an honest man. I've bragged about it lots of times. Don't think I'm goading you with questions to find out that you're guilty. I don't want a confession from you. I want to know that you're innocent. But I want to *know* it—understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied Blake, visibly more nervous. Even the last words of Norton, an expression of confidence in him, were perhaps spoken for a purpose.

"Now go ahead and tell me what you've got to say for yourself. Tell me all about it, what happened after you went to the wash-room last Saturday—just after you had told O'Neil that you'd show him yet?"

"I came out, passed through the bank, went over to the Bon Ton restaurant to get a bite to eat," said Blake. "I—"

"Nobody was in the bank when you left? O'Neil's cage was not occupied by him or anyone else, was it?" interrupted Norton.

"I think O'Neil had left. The watchman was going into the wash-room as I came out."

"*Into* the wash-room, eh? And he was the only person on the first floor?"

"So far as I know—yes. Then as I tell you, I went to the restaurant for a fifteen-cent lunch, came out and took the car and went to Crystal Beach to see that airship fellow, Wedgewood, land and then start east again on his fly across-country. I stayed until after he had left; then I took the car and came back home, where I stayed until Sunday."

"You're pretty well acquainted about town, aren't you Blake?"

"Yes—that is, I know a good many people."

"Now then, tell me: whom did you see at the restaurant, on the street-car or at Crystal Beach? Who can prove this story for you?"

Blake bowed his head. His hands twitched nervously. It seemed an easy thing to answer this question. Of course he had seen some one, perhaps several persons had nodded to him. But he couldn't recall their faces or their names.

"I saw plenty of people, Mr. Norton. The car was crowded and there was a mob at the Beach, but I can't remember that I saw anyone I knew—not a single person or face."

"At the restaurant then; they know you there, don't they—some one will remember, the cashier or the waiter?"

"No, probably not—I don't usually go to the Bon Ton, but did it last Saturday because I was in a hurry."

Following this admission, both men were silent for perhaps a minute. It seemed to Blake that judgment was to be pronounced upon him then and there. He felt that he had confessed his guilt, although he knew that he was innocent. As he saw Norton's brow contract, he thought the president of the bank had doubtless reached some decision, and he thought of throwing himself upon his mercy, begging that he would not believe the story that had been carefully planned to cause his disgrace. But his pride rebelled and he was speechless. Then he thought he would ask for more time to prove his innocence and the truth of his story, but he could not muster the courage to do even this. He merely waited, and as he did so Norton arose.

"That'll be all," said the president. "I may add, however, that this looks pretty ugly, Blake. You're going to have every fair chance in the world to prove that what you say about Crystal Beach and so forth is true. But you can see that it's your word against the word of another. You've got to have proof. Get it if you can. I'm not going to have you arrested—not yet. But don't be a fool now. I shall have you watched every minute—I owe that to myself and to my associates here in the bank. Go back to work as if nothing had happened. I shall meet the directors at three o'clock to-day and I shall tell them just what I think about you. But for God's sake, and for your own sake, try to get some proof that you were not around this bank after you left for lunch on Saturday—until Monday morning. Understand? Proof—that's what you've got to have and what I've got the right to demand from you."

II

Two days later, when Allen Blake entered the bank building for the day's work, he saw O'Neil in the president's office in conversation with two other men.

"My time has come," he thought, as O'Neil looked up and then suddenly stopped talking—at which the others looked out into the corridor where the young clerk was passing. "They'll arrest me to-day" he mused, and passed along.

Although he had visited the restaurant at the same hour again, endeavoring to find some one who would remember having seen him there the previous Saturday afternoon, all the faces at the tables were strange to him. He remembered the cashier, now that he came face to face with her, and he had a faint recollection of what the waiter looked like, but neither of them could remember having seen him before. The idea flashed across his mind that O'Neil might have been there before him, making similar inquiries, but he dismissed that and went out to the curbing to watch the street-cars pass, hoping that he might recognize the face of the conductor who had taken his fare the day he went out to Crystal Beach. But he was unable to remember what the conductor looked like. Every resource seemed to have failed, and he began to reach the state of mind where he was ready "to take his medicine"—although he had a faith that the eternal justice of things would not permit him to suffer for the crime of another.

But even this faith was uprooted when he saw the glaring eyes of O'Neil observing him as he passed the latter's cage, and he passed along to his desk with a heavy heart. "To-day's the day," he thought, as he opened his books and endeavored to go about his work. Up to noon nothing happened. None of his associates mentioned the theft to him, but he felt that they knew all about it and purposely avoided mentioning it, knowing that he was under suspicion. He saw them in little groups of twos and threes, discussing something or other. There was no question in his mind that they too were asking each other: "When will Blake be nabbed and taken to jail?"

These were distressing hours. At noon, when he went out to lunch, he recognized two men on the curb in front

of the bank building, whom he had seen the night before near his home. They followed him at a polite distance, but had their eyes closely riveted upon him. After lunch they followed him back to the bank doors. The hands of the clock moved slowly. Two o'clock came. He was almost resigned to his certain fate. In his mind there came a picture of a court-room and his accusers. Of course O'Neil would be there. He decided that he would tell the same straight-forward story that he had told to Norton. It was the only story to tell—it was the truth. Certainly a judge wouldn't be so skeptical as Norton had been. A judge could read human nature, he consoled himself; a judge could tell when prisoners were telling the truth and when they were lying.

Then he thought of Alice. He wished that he had followed the impulse of the preceding night when he came near going to her and telling her all that had happened—all of the bitter suspicion that clouded his name, and what he owed to O'Neil for having besmirched his character. But he couldn't do it; she would hear it all soon enough from O'Neil himself, for it was not in the latter's make-up to let such facts go unrepeated. Probably Alice knew at this moment just how close he was to prison bars.

And in this reflection he was not mistaken, for at two o'clock Alice Cummings was at the bank, in President Norton's private office. She was a slender, frail girl with blue eyes, light hair and a modest appearance, whose worries concerning Blake accentuated the pallor of her cheeks. She was somewhat bewildered as she entered Norton's office, though he received her kindly, and when she explained her mission, consented to hear all that she had to say.

"Just at what time do you want to account for Allan's whereabouts?" she asked.

"If he can't account for his own whereabouts, I'd scarcely expect you to be able to do so, Miss Cummings," replied Norton. "And besides, I may tell you that we've done everything we can to save him. Personally, I held out until to-day, but now a member of our staff has brought to me what I consider not only additional but unmistakable evidence that Blake returned to the bank before three o'clock last Saturday afternoon. At three twenty-five or between that and half-past three, he was seen at the corner of Bond and High streets. At four-fifteen the money was gone; between three and three-fifteen the money was here in a till."

"I suppose that Mr. O'Neil saw him at three twenty-five?" asked Alice, barely able to conceal her contempt for the man who had given this "additional evidence" after she had pleaded with him not to say anything further in the matter—for she had no doubt of the identity of this informant.

"I didn't say who saw him," replied Norton.

"It's a lie" snapped Alice, now quite sure of herself. "It's a malicious lie, Mr. Norton. Nobody saw Allan Blake near the bank or in the vicinity of Bond and High streets after two o'clock on Saturday."

"But that's what he can't prove," said Norton calmly.

"Well, I can prove it," she said triumphantly.

"Oh, you were with him, I suppose?" sneered Norton. "But you'd better not say that, young woman, for he says that he was alone."

"He was alone."

"How can you prove it—how can you prove where he was or what he was doing?"

"At four-fifteen the money was gone and at three-fifteen you know it was here?" she interrogated, snatching Norton's tactics for her purpose.

"Yes," replied the president.

"It's an hour's ride on the car from Crystal Beach to the bank, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Even a little more, on such crowded days as Saturday. Well, a man can't be at the Beach at three forty-five—or three forty-six to be exact—and at the bank or in the vicinity of the bank between three-fifteen and four-fifteen, can he?"

"No, I guess not; but what in the world are you driving at?" quizzed Norton.

Alice Cummings stood up, certain

that she had won her point, still indignant concerning the suspicion which she felt that Norton had entertained concerning Blake, but confident that within a few minutes she would hear his apologies.

"You're a busy man, Mr. Norton, but I'm sure you're not too busy to take a little walk with me—just around the corner. It wont take more than fifteen minutes and I've got something interesting to show you. It must all be in the dark—it's quite impossible here."

"In the dark? What do you mean?"

"Come on, I'll show you," she said as he took his hat from the rack and followed her through the door, out past O'Neil's cage, with not so much as a glance in that direction.

III

A few minutes after three o'clock, Blake received a call to Norton's office. It was just the call that he had expected. Some of the clerks had already finished the day's work and left, but Blake lingered on and on. He had been too much disturbed to get on with his work at regulation speed, and besides, it had been his belief throughout the day that this was to be his day of doom. Not usually prone to believe in signs, his nervous condition had assisted him in recollecting that he had passed beneath a ladder when entering the bank in the morning.

He knew it—he could feel that this was the last time he would close his desk and put away the books and statements. He took a last glance around the room, which sometimes had seemed close and stuffy. The boys had often referred to it as their prison. But the room now seemed to be a cheery place, and he hated to leave it. The afternoon sun was sending its warm yellow beams aslant through the windows. He wished that he could stay there and work forever.

As he passed out into the main corridor, he saw O'Neil entering the office of the president, and if there had been one remaining spark of hope in his mind, it was now extinguished. He was not only to be arrested and taken off to jail, but O'Neil was to be present to add to his discomfiture and humiliation. On reaching the door, he was shocked and surprised to find—not "two strange men" whom he had confidently expected to be there to lead him away, but—Alice Cummings and Norton, with O'Neil standing sheepishly at one side, leaning over the back of a chair.

"Hello, Allan," exclaimed Alice. And apparently unmindful of the surroundings, she hurried toward him and grasping his hand, shook it warmly and forgot to let go, while the youth looked at her in amazement, unable to acknowledge her greeting. At a glance, however, he saw that Norton was smiling, a sly, suppressed smile perhaps, but an indication nevertheless, that something had happened.

"You called for me, Mr. Norton?" Blake asked after a moment's hesitation.

"Yes," said Norton.

"Please let me tell him," pleaded Alice, dropping Blake's hand and going toward the president's desk.

"All right—but I've got a word to say first. Blake, you remember that you told O'Neil you'd show him?" he asked, and without waiting for a reply continued: "Well you've done it, all right. And I hope it will be a good lesson for you, O'Neil. You were wrong and you'll want to apologize to this happy pair before long. But you two go along," he added, pointing to Alice and Blake. "We'll come later."

Blake dumbly followed Alice out into the corridor and to the street. He couldn't grasp it all, and thought he must be dreaming.

"Mighty fine little girl, Miss Cummings," said Norton, as he leaned back in his chair.

"Yes, but—" the teller advanced a step.

"Not the kind of girl who would give a fig for a fellow's money," he continued. "You were mistaken again on that, O'Neil. And Lord, how she does like Blake! Ever since you told her about the suspicion that he had meddled with the money here at the bank, she's been playing *Sherlock Holmes*—didn't leave a stone unturned, I tell

you. He didn't even know it, perhaps he doesn't know it yet, but she's a wonder. Like *Everywoman,* who looked everywhere for love and then finally found it at her own fireside, Miss Cummings found just what she was looking for right at home."

"Blake wasn't there—he wasn't at her house," snapped O'Neil.

"Of course not—certainly not; that would have been easy. I'll wager he'll be there to-night though, and I'm glad of it. I like to see people happy, despite a notion to the contrary that some people like to entertain occasionally."

"Blake admitted that he was alone on Saturday," pursued the teller.

"No, not exactly alone. He said there was a crowd around, but he didn't know anybody. That was it, you remember. And what a crowd it was! Get your hat and come on, O'Neil—I want you to see for yourself."

The two men left the bank together, Norton smiling inwardly and O'Neil quite as ignorant of what was about to transpire as Blake had been, when he had started out with Alice Cummings. It was true, as Norton had said, that he took a personal pride in his office staff, and prided himself upon his ability to pick honest men. He felt that he had vindicated himself, and now the officers of the law might make their fullest examination. He hadn't been quite so anxious to have them follow up this rather stubborn evidence against one of his own "boys"—as he called them.

They turned the corner, went down the hill and, to O'Neil's astonishment, Norton led the way to a little glass box-office in front of a moving-picture theatre, where he deposited twenty cents and asked for two tickets. It was dark inside and they couldn't distinguish the faces in the audience. Upon the screen was being shown the landing of Wedgewood the bird-man, at Crystal Beach the Saturday before. Norton and O'Neil took seats and silently watched the manœuvres of the aviator, as he swooped around in circles, finally landing in the open space surrounded by trees, and waving his cap in salute to the crowd that cheered him.

There was a dark period of a few moments, while the films were being adjusted for the next pictures, showing the get-away of Wedgewood on his trip east. The camera operator had come close to the aviator and his machine, showing the crowd that surged around him as he stood near by preparatory to flight.

"There I am," shouted a voice in the darkened theatre. "That's me," it repeated, as the crowd chuckled in amusement. It was Blake's cry of triumph. The camera had proved his innocence of the charges brought against him and had given the lie to malicious slander. Twenty years earlier, a man might have gone to jail under similar circumstances, for the evidence against him had seemed positive.

As they watched the pictures, they saw the big policeman enter the arena and wave his club menacingly toward the crowd, seeming to cry out "Stand back, please!" As the crowd obeyed, there was the likeness of Allan Blake, plain and unmistakable. He was standing in the front line of spectators, leaning against the ropes. Fully a minute he stood there as Wedgewood winged his flight upward and on out of sight.

"Miss Cummings' little brother wanted to go out to the Beach on Saturday and see the real thing," whispered Norton to his companion, "but they wouldn't let him go to the Beach, so he came down to see the pictures and told his sister that he had seen the picture of Blake. The official starting time for Wedgewood was three forty-six, you remember."

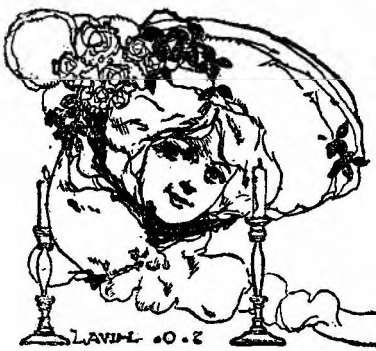
"What can I do to thank you, Alice?" whispered Blake as he grasped her hand and raising it to his lips, pressed a kiss on her trembling fingers.

"Ask me that over again—you know what," she replied.

"Will you?"

"Yes."

Three ladies seated behind them, who had the essentially feminine ability to see in the dark, thought that there was a "disgustingly spoony" couple in front of them, for just before the lights were flashed up for the intermission overture, Alice Cummings and Allan Blake were sealing their engagement with a kiss.



Hats and Hearts

By
FRANK X. FINNEGAN

TO SOME people a hat is merely a head-covering; to others it is a work of art, reverently to be regarded as the sculptured Venus or the painted masterpiece. To still others, including those whose checks enable milliners to make their annual journeys to Paris, a hat may be an abomination of the spirit, a thorn in the flesh, an incitement to profanity—a very banana peel on the threshold of all the virtues. But to Genevieve McNamara a hat—one particular hat of all the creations of straw, ribbon and flowers that were ever twisted together—represented a dream of earthly perfection, unattainable, it might be, but still adorable in its plate-glass shrine.

It dawned upon her enraptured vision one memorable morning about three weeks before Easter Sunday, as she was hastening past Mme. Marie's establishment, and it brought Genevieve to a halt as effectively as a Gatling gun suddenly unlimbered in her pathway would have done. She had been late with breakfast; her car had been delayed and she knew she had but scant time before she would have to face an unimpressionable time-clock and a forelady with a basilisk glare, who avenged her spinsterhood upon all femininity that chanced to be young and pretty. But Genevieve could not have passed that hat without a second look if the forelady had been standing in front of the window with the time-clock in her hands, and so she stepped close to the glass and looked her fill, meanwhile unconsciously uttering soft aspirations expressive of wonder and admiration. It was really the sort of a hat that baffles description, like the scene in the convention hall when somebody is nominated for President. It was blue to a large extent and somewhat pale yellow to another extent, and it had a bunch of sort of grass-like things drooping over one side and some corn-flowers on another side and—oh, you know what they have on that kind of a hat. This one had them all, and by the time Miss McNamara was able to tear herself away from Mme. Marie's window and get her feet started toward the paper-box factory, she had a photograph of it in colors printed on a lobe of her brain that was probably reserved for just that sort of thing.

During the long hours that Genevieve spent at the labeling table under the watchful eye of the unattached forelady, the hat glowed before her mental vision like an aurora borealis of blue straw and cherry-colored ribbons, and as soon as the factory leash was slipped at six o'clock that evening, she spent only half of her usual time in fixing her hair and restoring the delicate flush of health to her cheeks. That hat awaited her hungry eyes and she dashed hurriedly through the street crowds to refresh herself with another inspection of the sartorial epic. This time she had the advantage of viewing it under the electric light, and if anything had been wanting in the way of delicacy of tone, perfection of style and grace of line in the garish light of day, the shaded bulbs in Mme. Marie's window softened and

subdued and completed things until Miss McNamara was in a fair way to miss her supper, so long did she stand entranced before the window. For the other confections which Mme. Marie had tastefully displayed she had not a glance to waste, and so closely was her attention centered upon the hat that she did not notice she was not alone at the window until a voice sounded almost in her ear.

"That's some hat, isn't it?" said the voice, and turning quickly, Genevieve found herself looking into the face of Mr. Cornelius Ruddy, an ardent admirer of other days, whom she had dismissed rather summarily in favor of Mr. Thomas Hartigan, some weeks before. Genevieve tossed her head and returned to a contemplation of the hat.

"Oh, do you think so?" she said freezingly and apparently to Mme. Marie's plate-glass window. "You can't have much to do—looking in millinery windows, Mr. Ruddy!" With this cutting rejoinder she swept regally away, leaving the discomfited Mr. Ruddy with his mouth open and a conciliatory remark hanging fire. But before she reached home, Miss McNamara had begun to repent, at least in some small measure, of her aloofness with her erstwhile slave, C. Ruddy. His successful rival, Mr. Hartigan, had temporarily eclipsed him in the favor of the fair Genevieve by virtue of the astounding fact that when he escorted her to the theatre on the Thursday evening after she had first met him at the masque carnival and reception of the Shirtwaist Makers' Local No. 614, he had called for her in a taxicab, which stood more than a half hour before her door, to the amazement of the neighbors. The effulgence of this unprecedented evidence of prodigality had palled considerably, however, in the ensuing weeks, when Genevieve discovered that Mr. Hartigan, graciously permitted to supplant the faithful Ruddy as her steady escort, evidently followed a system of averaging up his expenditures whereby the taxicab incident stood out as a lone rock in a wilderness. He called frequently, but his devoirs were limited to long and fatiguing walks, equally fatiguing conversation and occasional ice cream sodas and motion picture shows. In fact, Mr. Hartigan was beginning to pall upon Miss McNamara at the time of the disturbing encounter with Mr. Ruddy in front of Mme. Marie's window, but the pride engendered by a line of ancestors extending back to the days when a McNamara was king of Ireland forbade her noticing the olive branch which Cornelius was unquestionably trying to wave. In the privacy of her chamber, she smiled at herself in the mirror as she reviewed the incident in her mind.

"Poor Con!" she sighed. "He isn't a bad fellow, but he hasn't got a bit of style about him."

And that night she dreamed that she was in Mme. Marie's establishment fighting with another girl for possession of the glorious hat, and that they tore it to tatters between them.

For three days, morning and evening, Genevieve worshiped at the shrine in the milliner's window before she summoned up sufficient courage to go in and inquire the price of the masterpiece; and then she deliberately arrayed herself for the occasion, that Mme. Marie and her assistants might be properly impressed. She entered the establishment languidly and pointed at the creation with a finger that trembled ever so slightly. The answer to her question would decide whether the hat was to be put definitely out of her life forever or whether hope was to leap into the arena and keep her company until Easter.

"How much is that hat, please?" she asked when a trim little assistant came forward and looked her over quite as superciliously as she tried to appear on her side, "—the blue one."

"Twenty-two fifty," responded the clerk, a trifle more sweetly than the occasion warranted; and Miss McNamara, after a brusque, "Thank you," walked out of the shop with her chin in the air and her heart some distance below her knees. Twenty-two fifty! If it had been five twenty-two, the hat would not have seemed many more millions of leagues beyond Genevieve's

possibilities just then. She had been wildly hoping that it might possibly be somewhere around ten dollars—or even twelve and a half—although in her heart she declared it was worth a hundred. But with two dollars and sixty cents to carry her through the week and six dollars coming to her at the paper-box factory at the end of each week of the three intervening until Easter, not the most mental kind of mental arithmetic could demonstrate to Genevieve how she could acquire that hat and live in the meantime. And just outside the shop, pausing in a casual way as though he had happened along and stopped to admire the hats, she encountered Cornelius Ruddy.

"Good-evening—Genevieve," he said, hesitating a moment over her name as though he was not quite sure whether to hazard such a familiarity under the circumstances. For some reason Miss McNamara paused and favored Mr. Ruddy with a wan smile. Possibly it was because in her depression of spirits she welcomed a familiar face and a friendly voice—as one who turns from the bier of a loved and lost one welcomes the sympathetic hand-clasp of an indifferent neighbor—possibly it was for some other reason. At any rate, Genevieve unbent and the ice of her disfavor thawed and vanished.

"Good-evening," she said almost cheerily. "Were you waiting for some one?"

Cornelius shifted his weight to his other foot, though either of them seemed well fitted to sustain it, and stammered in his embarrassment.

"N—no, not exactly," he said. "I see you was looking at that swell hat again. You're kind of keen on that bonnet, aren't you?"

"How do you know?" demanded Miss McNamara. He had unwittingly touched a tender spot which she believed was hidden from the world.

"Well, I've been watching you stop here and look at it every evening on your way home since—since that first night when we saw it," he admitted. "And I kind of thought you had taken a shine to it."

Genevieve felt a little glow of pleasure in her breast at this demonstration of knight errantry, but she was not ready to let Mr. Ruddy suspect anything of the kind.

"You have?" she retorted, though she could not wholly restrain the smile that curled the corners of her mouth. "You had little to do, hanging around here every evening."

"I get through at half-past five," explained Cornelius seriously, "and I might as well take a chase along here as not. I see you stop here every evening, so I kind of hung around myself. After you frosted me the first time, I didn't have the nerve to speak to you until to-night. I don't think twenty-two and a half is much for that hat, do you?" he added. Miss McNamara looked at him keenly.

"How do you know the price of it?" she demanded.

"Oh, I went in and asked 'em the other night," Mr. Ruddy said simply. "But I don't know much about women's hats."

Genevieve took a last, long look at the confection perched jauntily on its little standard under the shaded electric lights.

"Oh, it's a nice enough hat," she said loftily, "but I've seen prettier. Why don't you come up some time?" she added as though the idea had just occurred to her. Cornelius gulped hastily.

"Sure, I will," he said. "I'll be up to-morrow night—if—if it's all right."

She smiled at his eagerness, and there was a little sigh of satisfaction in her voice as she replied:

"All right, Con. I'll be expecting you. Good-night—I'm late now." She hurried away to her car.

During the succeeding fortnight Mr. Ruddy was a constant worshiper at the shrine of Miss McNamara, and by those deft methods known to femininity the world over, she gradually allowed the idea that he was *persona non grata* to permeate the intelligence of Mr. Hartigan. When he called, she was reported not at home by various junior members of the McNamara clan, and when he telephoned to the corner drug store and had importunate messages forwarded, Miss Genevieve developed alarming

symptoms of chronic headache, toothache, housemaid's knee and other maladies that precluded her enjoying Mr. Hartigan's presence.

In the meantime Miss McNamara solaced her soul with daily visions of the hat. But one morning as she passed the establishment of Mme. Marie and cast her reverential glance toward the familiar corner, she stopped in pained surprise. The hat was gone and in its place lolled a black and white monstrosity that gave her vertigo. After a moment or two she walked slowly on, trying to compose her thoughts. It was sold. It would ornament another's coiffure Easter Sunday morning. It was gone beyond hope. She laughed bitterly as that thought came to her. What hope had she ever really had of attaining it? It had all been a wild dream from the outset and now it was over—she was awake and she would forget it.

That resolution, however, like many another, was more easily made than kept; and when Cornelius called that evening to take her to the theatre, Genevieve casually mentioned the disappearance of the hat as she was pinning on her own felt and feather *chapeau* before the glass.

"You remember that hat we were talking about in that window down town, Con?" she said. "It's gone."

"Yes, I know it is," he replied. "I missed it when I went by there today."

Something in his tone made her turn and look at him narrowly. A sudden thought that was quite untenable to the McNamara spirit had flashed through her mind.

"Say, look here, Cornelius Ruddy," she said sharply, "*you* didn't go and buy that hat, did you, thinking you would make a hit by giving it to me?"

"I should say not!" he declared indignantly. "I'd have my nerve! And anyhow, you said you didn't think so much of it, after all. No, honest, Genevieve, I didn't buy it."

His apparent earnestness convinced her that her suspicion was not well founded, and she turned back to the glass with a sigh.

"Well," she said, "now that it's gone I don't mind saying that it was a beauty and I'd have given my eyes for it, Con. It was a dandy Easter hat."

"Yes, I sort of liked it," he admitted. "Come on, we'll have to get a move on us or we'll be late."

In the days remaining before Palm Sunday, Mr. Ruddy made famous progress in his wooing of the fair Genevieve. The penurious Hartigan began to fade into a distant and unpleasant memory before the impetuous onslaught of Cornelius, forewarned by his previous unhappy experience, and Miss McNamara began to devote her scant leisure to rosy dreams of what life might be like with the paper-box factory eliminated.

For her Easter hat, she had selected an ornate creation that came from the nimble fingers of Mrs. Schwartz, around the corner from the McNamara home; this, while it lacked something of the *chic* and exclusive air of her first love, had the advantage of falling well within the limits of her purse, and she idly removed the cover of the hat-box when she found it on her bed Monday evening. The next moment she suppressed a scream of surprise, amazement, joy and other emotions which young women are able to assemble in quantities, for she was looking down upon *the* hat—the confection, the masterpiece from Mme. Marie's. And in a corner of the box, when she had mastered her fluttering nerves enough to search, she found a card inscribed simply: "From C. R. with best wishes for a happy Easter."

"Cornelius Ruddy!" she gasped. "The darl—"

Then she stopped. Her lips came together in a straight line and she almost glared at the adorable hat. He had no business to do it—she had warned him not to. It was a piece of impertinence she would not countenance! But, oh, what a love of a hat! She took it out of the box and when she actually held it in her trembling hands and turned it about and gazed her fill at it, her heart softened toward Cornelius. She began to feel that he was not so much to blame. And when she put it on and looked in the glass, he was forgiven on the spot, though Miss McNamara still

had a lot of things to say to him. A dozen times before he arrived that evening for his regular call she changed her mind about the hat. Once she was determined to hurl it at him indignantly and drive him forth in regal anger. Then she looked at it and decided that an explanation and a sharp scolding would do. And in the end, when the precious hat-box was safely stowed under the bed with its secret, and she faced Cornelius in the dimly-lighted parlor, her question lacked much of the indignation she had intended it should carry.

"Con Ruddy, what did you mean by buying me that hat, after what I said to you?" she demanded. Cornelius grinned as one who knows he has the better of an argument.

"I didn't buy that hat for you," he calmly replied.

She blinked in amazement.

"Of course you did!" she protested. "Your card was in the box; and besides, you were the only one that knew I wanted it. You had no right to do it!"

"I tell you I didn't buy that hat," he repeated. "And I told you so the day it was sold. But I went into the millinery shop and ordered 'em to make another one just like it," he added triumphantly. "You didn't say anything against my doing that!"

"Oh, Con!" Miss McNamara gasped through her smiles and tears, "how could you—you dear!"

Cornelius leaped and flung his arms around her.

"I intended that hat to be our engagement ring," he said fiercely, "and I guess I've got a right to buy you that, haven't I?"

"Y—yes, Con," Genevieve said meekly, and the incident of the hat was considered disposed of in favor of more important matters.

The Dorroh Mystery

By MARGARET BUSBEE SHIPP

ALEXANDER DORROH, whistling more cheerfully than tunefully as he brushed back the stiff, boyish hair, paused in both occupations as Tom Blair entered the room.

"Hello, Tom! What on earth gets you up before eight?"

"I—I've bad news for you, Sandy. Lucas has just called up on long distance."

"Fanny?" Dorroh's lips, white and dry, could barely frame the question.

"No," replied Blair, gently—though he had not known before that there was a Fanny in his friend's life. "Your father is dead, Sandy."

Sandy echoed the word blankly, almost incredulously. Then as the fact forced itself into his consciousness, he added with a sharp intake of breath: "Thank God, we did not quarrel yesterday!"

The words were a second surprise to Blair.

"There is more to come, old man. Brace yourself. Your father was murdered. The janitor noticed over the transom that the electric light was still burning, and when he went into the office, he—found Mr. Dorroh. Evidently your father had tried to get to the telephone, for he had fallen in front of it."

Blair brought out the remorseless facts quickly. The truth had to be faced and the only thing he could spare his friend was the rack of suspense.

"I ordered Wallins to bring your car

at once, Sandy. Of course, I'm going with you. Lucas telephoned that the coroner and the physician had been summoned."

Dorroh had been golfing with Blair at the Country Club links the afternoon before and had spent the night at his friend's apartments in the Club House.

The two men were quickly speeding on their way, but it was a good half-hour's spin before they could reach the business section of the big, sprawling city in which they lived.

When young Dorroh entered the office, his father's body had been lifted to a leather couch, and the hands folded quietly across the breast. A worker's hands they were, the palms square, the fingers spatulate—hands which but yesterday had struck the master's note on many keys. The face, heavy, fleshy, underhung, was not greatly changed since yesterday. The ball had entered the back obliquely.

There came over Sandy a piercing recollection of his twelfth birthday, when his father had given him a gun. "If these other boys can shoot at fourteen, you can do it at twelve. You're as big as any of them." Caleb Dorroh had rarely voiced his pride in his only child, and the little incident stood clear and tender in Sandy's memory.

The coroner, the six jurymen whom he had summoned, a central office man, a physician, Lucas, Mr. Dorroh's private secretary, and the negro elevator boy, made the office seem crowded.

They made way silently for the son to approach the couch. Alexander Dorroh took one of the stiff hands in his warm, strong one, and held it closely as his eyes mutely asked the doctor a question.

"He had been dead for hours when found," the physician said, gently.

The officer was making his trained examination of Caleb Dorroh's office. A big, square room it was, on the highest floor of the Dorroh building. A door on the right opened into a bathroom, one on the left into Lucas' office. Young Dorroh's office adjoined this, and beyond it were the rooms of the clerks and stenographers.

"Do you find any clue?" asked Dorroh, in bewilderment and pain.

"The pistol was fired twice, one shot striking the mirror over the mantel," the officer replied. "That suggests that it was fired by an inexperienced person. On the bathroom floor was a towel, crumpled and stained. The fingerprints are too blurred and faint to prove anything beyond the fact that the hand was a woman's, and unusually small. There is a woman's handkerchief, Mr. Dorroh, which your father evidently caught up in the endeavor to staunch the blood. It was found in his hand. The initials are 'F. M. K.', which, Mr. Lucas advises, are the initials of your father's stenographer."

Dorroh wheeled around as sharply as if lashed.

"They are the initials of my *fiancée*. As she works here, it is natural that her handkerchief should have been dropped in the office. I will take it."

At this boyish arrogance, the pompous coroner drew himself together. "It is needed in evidence."

The negro elevator boy was summoned as the first witness.

He was ashy with terror, his eyes rolling fearfully towards the still form on the couch. "Yaas suh, I knew de cawpse. Mistuh Dorroh, he allus comes down de elevatuh at six o'clock—he allus do, wintuh and summuh all de fo' years I been here, cep'n las' night. Miss Kent, she comes down at five, but las' night she doan come down twell nigh onto six. She was de las' pusson I brung down from dat flo'. Mistuh Lucas had already come down and the young gemmens who is clerks come down at five, same as dey allus do. She sat down right quick like she was feelin' mighty po'ly. When we got to de main flo', she sez, 'Kin you git me a glass of water?' Den she sez, 'No, nebber mind.' And she walk out kinder staggerin' like she doan know whar she's goin'. I keep on 'spectin' Mistuh Dorroh to ring, and he doan nebber do it, twell eight o'clock comes and I go off duty, and de night watchman, he comes, and de elevatuh shuts down, and Mistuh Dorroh aint come yit."

"Then the last person who came out of Mr. Dorroh's office and took the elevator was Miss Kent?"

"Yaas suh."

"Did you hear any sound that might have been a pistol shot?"

"No suh. When de elevatuh's runnin' I jes' lissen out for my bells. I doan study 'bout no noises 'cept'n my bells."

Lucas, the private secretary, was called next. Visibly reluctant to give his testimony, he was impelled by a sense of duty towards the man whom he had served half a lifetime.

"The office force leaves at five, except myself. I generally have a half hour's talk with Mr. Dorroh, arranging for the next morning's work. Yesterday afternoon he said, 'I wont need you to-day. Tell Miss Kent to remain, as I wish to speak to her after hours.' I was surprised, because this was unusual with him. His habit was to dictate his correspondence into a business phonograph instead of to a stenographer.

"Miss Kent went into his office a few minutes after five. I suppose it was nearly half an hour later when an important telegram came and I took it in to Mr. Dorroh. When I opened the door, Miss Kent was standing, facing him. She is very small, sir, and I noticed that she was trembling, but she spoke to Mr. Dorroh as if"—he paused at the memory, still almost incredible to him —"as if he were her inferior. I heard her say quite clearly, 'You cannot be to your son what I can be to him, because your ideals for him are immeasurably lower. Your purpose to change your will does not touch me, because he would be poorer in losing what I give him than anything you can give him.' I cleared my throat to attract their attention, and I handed Mr. Dorroh the telegram. I was very much stirred, very much agitated. After I left the room I heard nothing more, except once when their voices rose, and he said, 'You dare to threaten me?'

"And she replied, very clearly and distinctly, 'I do more than threaten; I dare to act.'

"Gentlemen, I realize now that I was unwise in not remaining at the office, but when I handed Mr. Dorroh the telegram, he said, somewhat gruffly, 'I told you that I had finished with you for to-day, Lucas,' and I felt it incumbent upon me to hurry away. If only I had remained within call of my employer and friend—but who could have foreseen?" he ended mournfully.

"Had you any information in regard to the purported change of will?"

"Mr. Dorroh had telephoned his lawyer and made an appointment for to-day, in regard to a codicil to his will."

"Have you communicated with Miss Kent in regard to Mr. Dorroh's death?"

"I telephoned to her home at the same time that I called up Mr. Alexander Dorroh. Her aunt, Miss Sophia Kent, answered the telephone and said that her niece was in bed and feverish; that she had not come in until eight o'clock the evening before and was wet to the skin; and that if Mr. Dorroh imposed on his clerks by keeping them after hours, he should at least offer an umbrella when a storm came up."

"That is all, Mr. Lucas."

It was plain, therefore, that though Fanny Kent had left the office after her usual hour, she had not gone directly home. The storm had not come up until half-past six. To every man in the room save one, that long, purposeless tramping in the rain presented the picture of a conscience-driven woman, oblivious of anything but the terror of her own thoughts.

The coroner then turned to the son.

"Mr. Dorroh, we shall detain you only a moment. When did you last see your father?"

"Yesterday at luncheon. I went to the links with my friend, Mr. Blair, for the afternoon, and we spent the night at the Club House."

"Had there been any quarrel between you and your father?"

"I told him in the morning of my engagement to Miss Kent. He merely answered, 'We will talk this over in the morning'—not another word."

"Did you see Miss Kent afterwards?"

"Only for a moment in the office, not alone."

"That is all, Mr. Dorroh. You may stand aside."

At a whispered suggestion from the officer, Lucas was recalled.

"Mr. Lucas, you say it was Mr. Dorroh's custom to discuss the events of the day with you and to dictate letters after the office force had gone. Please see, Mr. Lucas, whether the machine shows if he had time, after Miss Kent's supposed departure, to dictate any or many letters before he was shot."

The business phonograph stood by Mr. Dorroh's desk. The secretary hesitatingly adjusted the machine.

One of Caleb Dorroh's teeth was broken, and it gave an odd, jarring intonation to some of his words. There on the couch lay the dead man with the little business of this world forever behind him; and there spoke his voice from the machine, in the harsh, familiar accent:

"My dear Mrs. Sinclair:—

"I have yours of the 26th inst. As I have previously informed you, the matter is closed and cannot be opened again. Very truly yours,"

The voice ceased. The negro elevator boy was trembling visibly. There was heard only the monotonous sound of the revolving cylinder, and Lucas stopped the machine with relief. He felt sorry for the son to hear, as his father's last authoritative word, that curt refusal of a widow's plea for clemency towards her son. Young Sinclair was a weakling who had been in Caleb Dorroh's employ and who had been guilty of misdemeanors which had culminated in embezzlement and a prison sentence. The boy's mother had been making efforts to persuade his former employer to sign an application for his pardon.

It was credible that the pistol had been fired just as Mr. Dorroh finished dictating the letter, as Mrs. Sinclair's communication was the top one on a file of a dozen or so letters.

The jury retired into an inner room for consultation. They briefly discussed the few facts: Miss Kent was the last person known to be with the deceased, she knew of his purpose to change his will the following day; she was heard to threaten him in anger; her blood-stained handkerchief was found in the dead man's grasp; and the marks on the towel could only have been made by a woman's hands.

Sandy, who was standing by the couch looking down upon his father with that futile, aching longing to break the silence of death, turned his head apathetically as the jury slowly filed back into the office. It had not occurred to the boy, dazed with swift, successive impressions of pain and distress, what their verdict would be. The foreman announced:

"We, the jury, find for our verdict that the deceased came to his death by a pistol shot inflicted by Frances M. Kent, and we recommend that she be held on a charge of murder in the first degree."

Sandy sprang at the foreman and shook him as a dog would a rat. Half a dozen men pulled him off.

"For God's sake, Sandy, don't lose your head; remember the girl," whispered Blair.

The injunction swept Sandy into sudden purpose. Without another word, oblivious even of the quiet figure on the couch, he rushed from the room.

His car was waiting in front of the Dorroh building, and he sprang into it and dashed at a prohibited rate of speed to John MacFarland's. He found MacFarland in the vestry room, in the act of taking his surplice from a chest.

"Mac, come with me. Quick! It's a matter of life and death"

"Why, I can't go anywhere just now, Sandy. This is St. Andrews' Day, and there will be service in ten minutes."

"Mac, it's a living saint—perhaps a martyr—you must help now."

The terrible earnestness of his college friend's voice, the tragic pallor of his face, stirred the young minister's generous heart.

"Let me tell the sexton there will be no service," he said, quietly.

A moment later he and Dorroh were speeding to the suburbs where Fanny Kent lived.

"I want you to marry me, Mac, this morning. I need your help as pray God nobody else may ever need it. I can't talk right now. I've got to think. I mustn't frighten Fanny. Just *trust me.*"

Boyishly, he slipped his hand into MacFarland's and gave the old fraternity grip.

Miss Sophia Kent flutteringly op-

posed Dorroh's determination to see her niece.

"Why, Fanny is in bed. It is impossible."

"Nothing is impossible that is absolutely necessary, Miss Kent. Wait in the sitting-room, Mac, until I call you."

Fanny's big brown eyes were bright with fever and looked too big for the slight, childish face. Her aunt threw a kimono about her and propped her with pillows, not pausing in her voluminous complaints.

"It is not decorous, not proper. It is against my wish, Fanny, but Mr. Dorroh would do it, and if it makes you worse, you must say to the doctor that I am not responsible; and if it makes the neighbors talk, all I can say is that such things were never permitted in my day, and I—"

"Pardon me for interrupting," said Dorroh, goaded beyond endurance, "But I have to speak to Fanny alone."

As the door closed on Miss Kent's offended back, he burst out, "I want you to marry me to-day, dear—this morning."

"To-day?" she echoed. "It would make your father only the angrier to have you defy him immediately."

"You said his forbidding it wouldn't influence you, Fanny."

A flash, as if from an inward radiance, illumined the girl's face. "I told him yesterday that I believed that nothing he could give you, Sandy, in the way of money or possessions, could mean as much to you as love like mine; that I wouldn't belittle my love by comparing it with any material thing on earth. But we must be patient. We can't expect him to think that an insignificant girl is the best thing that can come to his son, though I believe I am the woman God meant for you."

"And I know it, darling. I cannot bear that you should be ill and that I should have no power to see that you have the proper nursing and care. I cannot bear that you should face—any ordeal,"—his voice broke, but he regained his control—"except as my wife. So you must marry me at once."

She smiled happily at the masterful note but shook her head.

"You want to shield me with your dear, large love because I'm a penniless, dismissed stenographer, whose stupidity has made her ill. For I walked home in all that downpour, dearest; I just felt as if I couldn't face Aunt Sophie's chatter until I was quieter. Oh, Sandy, I want to come to you when I am well and strong and glad—yours sha'n't be all the giving. It isn't fair to your father for us to marry in a spectacular, defiant way; it would hurt him needlessly, and you owe it to him not to do that. Yesterday he insulted us both so terribly that I retaliated, but I'm sorry now. He said that we might 'belong' to each other if we chose; that he would increase your allowance and give me an independent sum of money, if we agreed not to marry; but that if you made me your wife, he would disinherit you. And I said, 'You are at my mercy now, for if I tell Sandy of this hideous proposition, he will never again feel towards you as a son.' Then Mr. Dorroh asked me if I dared to threaten him. But I was wrong: it was his love for you that made him feel as if he must crush me out of the way, put me where you could never respect me again. Sandy, we must try to see that, though his course is all warped and wrong, fatherhood lies beneath it."

Sandy bent to kiss her hand, that she might not see his face.

"My darling little girl, how burning hot your hand is! Oh, Fanny, let me take care of you." He dropped on his knees beside the bed and laid his face against hers. "In the name of our dead mothers, I implore you to marry me at once."

Tenderly the slender fingers strayed over his face.

"It's for your sake I can't. I am so dazed, so light-headed, I can't argue very well, but I know it is best for you for us to wait, and I must hold to that."

A ring at the door told Dorroh how fast the precious time was slipping by.

He made a last desperate effort. "Listen, dearest. If I were under a terrible false suspicion, if the police were on my tracks, if a warrant were actually sworn out against me, would you not feel—"

A scream from Aunt Sophie interrupted him. Flinging open the door, she shrieked, "Mr. Dorroh, there's a man here who says he is a deputy sheriff, and that he has a warrant of arrest. Oh, what has happened?"

"I'll see him," Dorroh said.

In a moment more, he was back with MacFarland.

"There are only a few minutes," he said. "Will you marry me, Fanny?"

"Yes, yes, yes, ten thousand times yes!" cried the girl.

The love of womanhood, the faith of wifehood, the protective instinct of motherhood seemed embodied in her cry.

John MacFarland was still blessedly young enough to recognize love and faith, and to accept them in lieu of a fuller comprehension of the situation. Without hesitation, he began: "Do ye here, in the presence of God . . ."

His eyes softened at the illumined look in the girl's face when he pronounced them man and wife. Fanny lifted her lips to her husband, and the kiss was a sacrament to them both.

"Now let that man come," she said quietly. "Nothing can really touch us now, though the whole world believed evil of you."

The sheriff came into the room, awkward and awed. He fumbled with a document.

"I have here a warrant for the arrest of Frances M. Kent, charged with the murder of Caleb Dorroh."

Without a sound, Fanny fell back senseless against the pillows.

Above Miss Kent's hysterical cries, MacFarland's voice rose with authority:

"Sandy, take your car and get Dr. Martin, eight blocks west, on the corner. I can do more here, as I have had to work with the sick."

Yet in spite of MacFarland's ministrations, the girl was still unconscious when the doctor arrived.

Sandy had given Dr. Martin a brief *resumé* of the events of the past hour. The physician, eying his patient from the viewpoint misnamed "professional" when the simple word "human" would be more accurate, made curt comment:

"You haven't succeeded in killing her —yet." After Fanny showed signs of regaining consciousness, he added: "Not quite; though when you subject a patient in the first stage of pneumonia to repeated nervous shocks, the result must be uncertain."

The sheriff, accustomed as he was to agonized partings, felt stirred by something unusual in the scene.

"May I speak to headquarters over the 'phone, as the party cannot be served with the warrant?" he asked.

His instructions were to guard the residence, and to see that Miss Kent's door was locked and that only physician and nurse were admitted.

Afterwards this order was modified to include Sandy, upon the physician's affidavit that in her delirium the patient believed some danger was threatening her husband, and as only he had power to quiet her, his presence was essential to her recovery.

The murder had come in an off year politically and was a welcome sensation, good for columns of space daily, even in the metropolitan papers. Fanny was described as a Delilah who had ensnared the young millionaire, who had shot down his father before the latter could alter his will, who had lured the boy into immediate marriage — unseemly, hideous, repulsive marriage — with the father's body not even buried at the time of the mad defiance of the dead man's wish.

Photographers and reporters swarmed about the Kent cottage. The principals, not having been available as photographic subjects, an old snap shot of Sandy Dorroh, taken just after he had won a golf tournament, appeared in every paper in the land. Tom Blair had said something to quiz him at the time, and in the picture Sandy was grinning boyishly. It now appeared under the caption, "The Beaming Bridegroom," and women shuddered to think how callous he was towards the dead, and how fatuous over the murderess. The report that young Mrs. Dorroh was feigning illness was a two days' excitement. One paper published a cartoon in which Fanny was portrayed as a dashing, buxom woman, seated upon Sandy's knee, and raising a champagne glass to her lips.

John MacFarland, shy, sensitive, with the simple and single aim to serve his fellow man, found himself thrust into unenviable notoriety. He was interviewed, quoted, misquoted, pilloried, until he felt beset by a swarm of gadflies.

He reiterated steadfastly his belief in Mrs. Dorroh's innocence. "No guilty woman could have feigned her look of incredulous horror when she heard the charge against her. I am convinced that when she married my friend, she was laboring under the delusion that some terrible charge was made against him, and that her marriage was one of unselfish determination to stand by the man she loved."

The majority of the vestry and the congregation disapproved heartily of the rector's stand. He could be no safe shepherd for the young who was so readily swayed by sentimentality, or who could be so readily duped by an adventuress. MacFarland refused to send in his resignation while under fire; it was the wish of the majority to demand it, but they were deterred by the earnest conviction of a few members that they should wait until the grand jury acted upon the case.

It was hard on Sandy to realize what his friend was enduring for his sake, and to be obliged to stand passive. He determined that later on he would endow the home for friendless boys in which MacFarland was absorbed, but now it would only hurt his friend for him to make the offer, and ruin MacFarland's reputation if he accepted. Tom Blair had tried to stand by Sandy, but when his silence proved that he believed Fanny to be guilty, there had come an inevitable break.

Very slowly the interminable days slipped by, with the balance of life and death hanging ever so agonizingly uncertain—days which transformed Alexander Dorroh from a happy-hearted, thoughtless boy, very much engrossed in his first real love affair, to a man selflessly devoted to his wife, with the single passion of his life.

In her delirium she had but one obsession—that some danger threatened Sandy; she exhausted her feeble strength beating back imaginary pursuers. Even when convalescence set in, the memory of that terrible hour did not at once return to her, and when it did, there was a relapse. One of the papers which catered to the masses was filled with daily denunciations of Fanny's "malingering," and demands that justice should be meted out to Caleb Dorroh's blood, crying for vengeance, and no further favors vouchsafed the wife of the millionaire which would not have been granted to the wife of the day laborer.

At last physician and nurses reluctantly acquiesced that it was possible for Mrs. Dorroh to appear at the preliminary hearing before the magistrate without any danger to her life.

The great lawyer who had undertaken the defense had found nothing to strengthen the girl's case save the spotless record of her past life: her devotion to an invalid father until his death, and her subsequent care of a garrulous and selfish aunt. But character is a small asset against evidence. Fanny's own account of the events of the night of the murder was confused and chaotic in the one interview which he had been granted with her.

"I was terribly agitated," she had said. "I remember that I walked block after block . . . that I felt as if I could not face Aunt Sophie and have any questions asked me. I think the rain was beating against my face—I am not very sure. Did I see anyone else go into Mr. Dorroh's room? I believe I saw a woman toiling up the stairs, and wondered why she had not taken the elevator—no, I don't know who it was . . . I am not even sure of the impression."

It was the lawyer's wish that his client should waive examination, but as this would in all probability mean commitment to jail until the trail, the crime charged not being bailable, the young husband furiously fought this proposition, and insisted that there should be a full investigation before the magistrate.

The court room was packed when the hour for the trial came. The prisoner, a slight, fragile figure, leaning heavily against her husband's arm, aroused amazed comment.

For Fanny was giving close attention to Lucas' testimony, and no child listening to its first fairy tale could have looked more bewildered. Sandy had not permitted her to discuss the murder, so that she was hearing for the first time the story of the events which had connected her with the case.

The elevator boy gave his original testimony. The next witness was a young clerk in the office, whose attempted attentions Fanny had repulsed. He gave in elaborate detail the way in which Fanny had "laid herself out" to attract and entrap young Dorroh. The girl's cheeks burned as she heard innocent acts and words of hers distorted until they became unrecognizable. She saw Sandy clench his fist until the knuckles went white.

Her heart yearned over him, ached for his agony, for she realized that in the deadly array of circumstances against her, there was nothing for the magistrate to do but to commit her to jail to be held for court.

Then suddenly it swept over her that sooner or later she would be condemned; perhaps to imprisonment for life, away from Sandy—perhaps to the horrible chair—to a dishonorable death—as a vile thing put out of the way for the safety of its fellows, like a mad dog or a venomous snake. Her brain was reeling; she did not know whether she cried aloud to God, or only called from the depths of her desperate soul.

Sandy took her hand and the touch steadied her. As in a dream she could hear the deliberate voice of the prosecuting attorney as he stated that by means of Mr. Dorroh's business phonograph he would show that presumably only a few minutes elapsed between the close of his interview with Miss Kent and the probable time of the shooting.

The girl quivered as Mr. Dorroh's voice sounded harshly from the instrument. She recalled its cold and bitter inflection as she had last heard it. It was a relief when the letter to Mrs. Sinclair was concluded, and the court room was silent save for the faint whirring of the revolving cylinder.

The magistrate motioned to Lucas to come forward and stop the machine, but as Lucas touched it, he recoiled as if thrust back by an invisible hand, and he wheeled around as if doubting the evidence of his own senses. For the voice, odd and jarring, the unmistakable voice of Caleb Dorroh, spoke again.

Lucas stood as if petrified, and Sandy involuntarily rose to his feet.

"I, Caleb Dorroh, have been shot by Mrs. Sinclair. She slipped behind me as I sat dictating a letter to her, and shot me. I make this statement lest my faithful secretary, John Lucas, should be implicated."

The voice was steady enough so far, though labored, and with lengthening pauses between the words. Then it changed to a purely human cry:

"Sandy!—if I could—speak once more to you—boy . . . ."

Perhaps he had then remembered the telephone but a few steps away, and made that last futile effort to reach it.

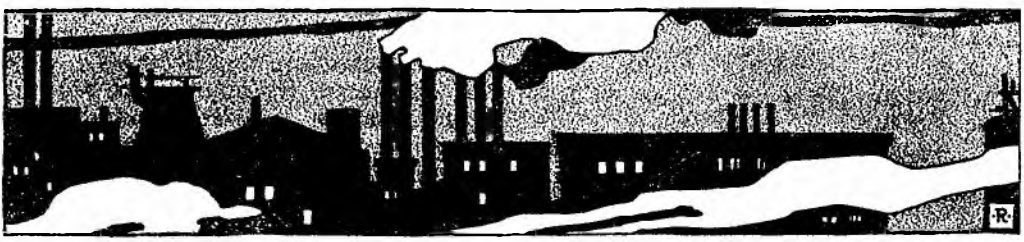
Again and again the magistrate rapped for order as the crowd cheered like mad; finally he ordered that the court room be cleared. Popular sympathy had been entirely against Fanny, and now united for her in one fine human impulse of atonement. Yet as soon as her dazed mind could fully grasp what had happened, the suffering which she had endured made her very pitiful towards the other woman.

"Poor, poor Mrs. Sinclair," she stammered, her lips dry and stiff, her voice scarcely audible. "Will you try to forgive her, Sandy?"

"She is in an asylum, dearest. I was making inquiries the other day and learned that her mind was quite blank, that she plays with dolls like a little child, and is happy for the first time since her degenerate son grew up."

To Fanny Dorroh, the magistrate's formal dismissal and the frantic cheering outside the court room seemed equally far away. The only thing which was real and absolute in all the chaotic world was the illimitable tenderness in Sandy's voice:

"Thank God it is over! Let us go *home,* my wife."



The Fiery Mills of Men

By CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS

A POWERFUL drama of life in a mill-town is unfolded in this story. A struggle for a woman is the theme: one man wishes to lead her from sordid surroundings to the perilous paths of a theatrical career; the other wishes her for himself alone. If you care for a tensely exciting story, read how this world-old conflict culminates.

No. IV—"SUITABLE FOR FRAMING"

THE girl paused at the foot of the stairs which led to the photographer's studio.

"I don't know as I ought to let you pay for them, Twinkle," she said, dubiously.

As the man faced her, even a stranger could have told how he had come to get and to deserve that nickname. His big blue eyes lighted up with a twinkling smile, though his lips were grave. He was taller than she by a foot, though he lost some of the effect of his height by the lounging attitude which he constantly assumed. Standing straight, he would have been six feet. He had sweated away his superfluous flesh in the mills, so that he was made up of bone and muscle. The muscle could not be detected beneath his loose clothing, but it lay on his arms and legs in sinews like buckskin which has been wet and dried many times.

"And why not?" he asked the girl now. "I'm going to be your promoter. You can pay me when you make good."

That had been his argument all along, and it was as potent with her on this occasion as it had been on others.

"Well," she said, and her tone held a quality of yielding.

"Come on," he said.

They mounted the stairs and he ushered her into a room adjoining that in which the photographer did his work. A little bell tinkled above them as the door was opened, and the photographer promptly presented himself. His customers were not many, so that he bowed and rubbed his hands at sight of these two.

"The lady wants her picture taken," Twinkle said in a business-like tone. "We want the best you have."

The photographer indicated a rack in which cabinet pictures were displayed.

"Something like this?" he suggested.

"Naw," said Twinkle.

He cast his eyes about the room till they rested on a framed picture of a young girl.

"That's about it," he said. "Like that, but not quite so big. Oh, you ought to know what we want—something suitable for framing."

"You want only one?" the photographer asked.

"We'll want one now, and then you can save the plate. Maybe we'll want more after a bit. Eh, Madge?"

Sarah Deming flushed at the name. She had not got used to it yet, though she secretly liked it and was given to

speaking it aloud when she was alone. "Madge Ovington" fitted her better, she was sure, than the homely "Sarah Deming."

"Oh, yes," said the photographer, unctuously. "Very well. One will be three dollars."

"You could get a dozen of the others for that," Madge said.

"That's what we want," Twinkle said; and the photographer proceeded to place the girl for the picture.

She removed her hat, and he brought a glass and instructed her how to arrange her abundance of soft brown hair. Then he placed her in an affected pose with her slim right hand at her chin and her left hand resting in the crook of her right arm. Her brown eyes were wide and her cheeks were pink as she looked into the camera. The photographer clapped his hands.

"That is fine," he said. "You will make a very pretty bride."

The color burned in the girl's cheeks at that. She did not look at Twinkle.

"We're not getting married," Twinkle said. "Go on with your job."

The photographer retired behind his camera, sorry he had made a mistake with customers whom he was charging a double price.

When the picture had been taken and Twinkle had made arrangements to see the proofs, the couple went down into the street. It was at the end of a fierce July afternoon, and the street was like a furnace. The wooden store-fronts seemed ready to burst into flame. Women came to upstairs windows and looked out, vainly seeking a breath of air.

"It'll be awful in the mill to-night," Twinkle said. "I wish I didn't have to work. Let's get an ice cream soda, Madge."

"No," she said, shaking her pretty head. "We mustn't do that."

"Oh, all right," he laughed. "See you to-morrow. Good-by."

"Good-by," she said, and she turned away in a direction opposite to the one which he was taking.

As Twinkle walked, he uncovered a slight limp, which had not been noticeable before. In spite of the listlessness which the heat caused, his merry blue eyes roved the street, and he spoke to nearly everybody he met. There were few who did not smile back at him.

He entered the first saloon he came to. The room was empty save for one man sitting at a table, playing with a pack of cards. As Twinkle entered, he looked up. He was as tall as Twinkle, but he had nothing of Twinkle's grace. His shoulders bulked beneath his blue shirt, and his turned-up sleeves revealed arms like steel billets. He was as handsome as Twinkle in his way, however. His face was broad, with high cheek bones, and his eyes were big and dark, though slightly bloodshot. His jet hair grew too low on his forehead.

"Hello, you Slavonian bear," Twinkle cried. "Why aint you in bed?"

"Couldn't sleep," said the Slav, with a touch of sullenness in his voice. "Too hot."

"Play you a game," said Twinkle, picking up the cards which the Slav had dropped.

The Slav squared his chair with the table.

"For beer," he said, and he had his drink brought in a great glass which he put on the ledge under the table.

Twinkle dealt the cards. The Slav picked up his hand, but before he looked at it, he let it fall together by dropping the edges of the cards on the table.

"I seen you going down the street with Sarah," he said, without lifting his somber eyes.

Twinkle shot him a quick glance.

"Yes, Sarah was going to have her picture taken," he said.

"Zo?" asked the Slav, and he picked up his hand.

II

Twinkle came to the door of the rolling mill to escape for a moment the flaring heat within. Here outside there was still a dead calm, but at least there was air which had not been baked in a dozen fires. He took his towel from about his shoulders and wiped his face and chest. He was naked to the waist and his strength stood revealed in all its perfection. But for the leg which

had been broken in a railroad accident, he would have been without physical blemish.

He looked across the valley to the cluster of houses on the hilltop, dark and silent at this midnight hour. He picked out the house in which Madge lived, and he smiled. He wondered whether she would ever amount to anything in the career which he had pictured for her. He believed she would. He knew what the stage wanted—knew how it received winsome little girls like her with open arms. His own heart turned fondly always to that life, and he was thrilled with the notion of taking her out of her present drab environment and placing her in that bright one. He had had hopes of her the first night he had met her. There had been a "party" at his boarding-house, and she had sung. She had a small, sweet voice, but one sufficient for the purpose which he designed it for. She had taken singing lessons, she told him, and—strange to say—her teacher had not spoiled what voice she had, though he was only a neighbor, who played in a cheap orchestra.

Twinkle had watched her dance, and she was as light as thistledown. In the crowded room, she weaved in and out among the others, oftener guiding her partner than being guided by him. Though there was scarcely room to move, she never collided with anyone.

"Ever do any fancy dancing?" Twinkle asked, when he had sat down beside her.

She flushed to the roots of her fair hair.

"By myself, I have," she told him.

Next day he had her dance for him, and she went through a myriad of steps which were crude but not awkward.

"You ought to go on the stage," Twinkle said.

She caught her breath with her hand on her breast.

"I'll teach you," Twinkle said. "I used to be on the stage when I was a kid—seventeen years ago. I busted my leg and had to quit. None of 'em had anything on me in the dancing line."

So he had begun the lessons and she rapidly developed an astonishing dexterity. Twinkle had the musician arrange a song and dance for her, and in a month he said she was as adept as many girls then before the footlights. He began to try to remember old friends whom he might write to enlist in her behalf. That morning he had had her picture taken—"suitable for framing." He told her he was sure that it would soon adorn the lobby of a theatre.

In a few minutes he turned into the mill again. The furnace door was open, and a gleaming mass of metal, spitting little tongues of fire, was ready for him. He took hold of it with the big swinging tongs and started for the roll which converted it with one slow, grinding revolution into a red ingot. At the same moment the Slav started from the opposite side of the room with another mass of metal. Twinkle was still somewhat in the midst of his dreaming. The chains stuck a little. He exerted all his strength and they yielded and he swung round. He had pulled so hard that the mass had taken on more momentum than he had figured. He sped across the room at a trot. The Slav was coming directly toward him, headed for the roll next to his. A collision seemed imminent.

Twinkle cried out, and the Slav looked up. Twinkle tried to brace himself with his feet like a horse slipping down hill, but he could not hold his load. He stooped and twisted his tongs. The Slav did likewise. The two masses of metal slipped past each other with scarcely an inch between. The metal in Twinkle's tongs seared the Slav's right hand. There was a slight odor of burned flesh. The Slav made no sound. His burned hand still clutching one of the handles, he deposited the metal in the roll. Then he dropped the tongs and turned on Twinkle, his face white with hate in the glare from the door of a furnace suddenly opened.

Volleying vile curses, he took a step toward Twinkle. Twinkle dropped his own tongs and faced him, amazement written large on his handsome face. The Slav's hairy chest was heaving.

"Trying to put me out of the business?" he hissed, with a queer foreign precision in his use of the American slang.

"You're crazy," Twinkle said. "It was an accident."

The Slav covered his burned hand with his towel. Then he bent a look of unspeakable anger on Twinkle. His breath whistled through his nostrils as if he were some enraged animal. His lips trembled so that his teeth struck together.

"You wait!" he said.

Twinkle uttered an incredulous, scornful laugh, and turned away.

III

The Slav had known from the very beginning what the girl and Twinkle were about. He had listened to their talk many a night as they had stood at her front gate. His slow mind was filled with suspicion, but he had seen or heard nothing so far to indicate that Twinkle was showing an interest in the girl outside of the interest which he professed.

He was sure that Twinkle had tried to maim him in the mill. He believed that Twinkle was in love with the girl, and that his talk of the stage was but a lure. His clumsy brain saw the mill incident as a climax, and he doubled his vigilance.

On the Saturday afternoon following the accident he came upon Twinkle in the saloon which the mill workers frequented. He sat down at Twinkle's table.

"You were with Sarah again yesterday?" he asked.

"Why, yes," said Twinkle, "and I'm going to be with her this afternoon. I've found a theatrical man who's going to give her a hearing."

"I haven't talked to her much since you put that—that bug in her head," the Slav said. "Did you understand that we were going to be married?"

"You're not regularly engaged, are you?" Twinkle asked.

"Yes. She promised me in the spring. You hadn't better monkey too far, hay?"

Twinkle shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't try to put any of that talk over on me," he said. "You know you can't bluff me."

"You're in love with her yourself, hay?"

A sudden, startled look came into Twinkle's eyes. He had never asked himself that question. But he saw now that he was growing more interested in the girl than would have been the case if he had sought only to forward her in a career.

"No, I guess not," he said slowly.

"Yes," the Slav returned, "I have watched you. You are in love with her in your fashion—the way you were in love last year with Josie Peters. I knew about you and Josie. Josie went away and she did not come back."

"There was never anything serious between me and Josie," Twinkle said. "She know we were only flirting."

The Slav stretched his big arm across the table, showing the seared back of his hand. His face was malignant.

"Listen, Twinkle," he breathed. "I've been watching and I'm just going to keep on watching. If you harm Sarah, I'll choke you like that." He slowly closed his hairy paw. "You'd better be careful."

The veins stood out in Twinkle's neck.

"Why, you damned, dirty Slav," he said. "You can't scare me. What do you want to do? Do you want to marry that bright, pretty little girl—make her a mill man's wife? Or do you want her to get a chance to be somebody. In a year she'll be making more money in a week than you make in a month."

"If I thought she would be happy, I would give her up," the Slav said. "But I don't believe what you say. I think you are a liar."

Twinkle's teeth snapped together. The Slav, he could see, was spoiling for a fight. His slow brain had digested at last an idea that had been lying in it for some time. But Twinkle was not keen for a fight just now. He was too much interested in the girl.

He rose and stood looking down on the Slav.

"You can keep that kind of talk to yourself from now on," he said coldly. "If you object to what I'm doing, why don't you go to the girl and get her to stop? You talk as if you owned her."

"She doesn't know what she is doing," the Slav said in his precise way. "She isn't old enough to understand about men like Twinkle."

"Oh, you're crazy," Twinkle said, and he threw himself out of the front door before he should come to violence with this stupid, old-world lover.

He went directly to the girl's house. His fighting blood was roused, and he was not made uneasy by a notion that was coming to him—that perhaps he was rather fond of the girl. He blamed the Slav for the notion. He believed he wouldn't have thought of it himself if the Slav hadn't insinuated it.

The girl was waiting for him. She opened the front door as he came up the steps. Twinkle caught his breath as he looked at her. A man might be forgiven if she stirred his pulses. She was dressed in a simple muslin dress which revealed her round, white throat and her brown arms.

"How do you feel?" he asked, as they went to the car.

"All right," she said.

"Nervous?"

"No."

And he saw that her breath was coming as evenly as if she were going on a holiday instead of to a test. That was one thing about her that gave Twinkle confidence in her. She had not the timidity, or the pretension of it, that many girls would have had in her place.

"I was talking to the Slav just now," he said.

She turned a quick, inquiring glance on him.

"What did he say? I was thinking last night that he has been acting strangely. Ever since he was hurt in the mill, he keeps away from me. Why is that?"

"Jealous," Twinkle said.

Her face turned scarlet.

"He doesn't suppose that you—" she began in an incredulous voice that smote Twinkle's vanity.

"He thinks I'm in love with you," he said.

"How foolish," she said, and Twinkle burned with resentment. "Why, he ought to know that you're not that kind of a man. Any girl who'd look at your smile would know that you were never serious. I'm sorry about the poor old fellow. I must look him up to-night and have an understanding."

"Are you going to marry a Slav?" Twinkle asked bluntly.

"He isn't like other men of his country," she said, in quick defense. "He's very good, even if he is slow. And he's done wonderful things in school. Six years ago he couldn't speak any English. Now he speaks better than I do!" She flushed a little. "I've had to study to keep up with him. He wont always be a mill worker. You may not think so, but he has brains."

"You're in love with him?" Twinkle asked.

"I told him I'd marry him," she said.

Twinkle lapsed into a sullen silence, which he held till they reached the office of the theatrical man. This was a sort of studio with a piano in it. The man had cleared away a space about the piano, so that the girl could dance. He had her sing the song and go through the steps which Twinkle had taught her. As he finished, he looked at her critically.

"With a few months' close instruction, you could get into the chorus of a musical show," he said. He handed her a card. "Come and see me to-morrow," he added.

The girl's eyes were bright and her color high as she and Twinkle went down the stairs. Her breath came a little faster than usual between her parted lips. Twinkle took the little hand that hung by her side. She did not seem to notice the action.

"What did I tell you?" he cried. "Say, let's celebrate to-night. We'll go to the beach. I'll telephone and get a night off."

All thought of the Slav seemed to have gone from her. She assented without seeming to realize just what she was doing. She had had a peep at another world, and she was dazzled.

She waited in a drug store while Twinkle telephoned to the mill. Permission to be away was granted him.

"Now, you Slavonian bear," he said to himself, "you can lug that hot stuff around by yourself."

He did not know, of course, that the

Slav also within the next hour got permission to be away. The permission was not hard to get, for the summer lull was on.

Twinkle and the girl went to the beach and danced till supper time. Then they ate heartily, wandered on the sand for a while, and danced till ten o'clock. At that time the girl said she must go home. A little of the color had died out of the picture of the future, and Twinkle had all he could do to restore it. By the time they reached the end of their car ride, however, she was glowing again.

He drew her hand into his arm and they went slowly toward her home. The Slav was in the shadows across the street. When they came to her gate, he was within a dozen feet of them, standing motionless outside the circle of the arc light.

Twinkle was still talking. Somehow he did not want the girl to leave him. She was fairer to-night than he had ever seen her before. It was like heaven to be here in this soft summer night instead of moiling with fiery metal. As the light of the blast flared into the sky, he thought of the Slav. The Slav would be furious if he could see him now.

The girl seemed to sense something of his feeling, and she put her hand on the latch of the gate.

"I must go in," she said.

"Oh, what's your hurry?" he asked, standing closer to her. "It's not late. Your mother has gone to bed, anyway."

"I must go," she only repeated. "I'll see you to-morrow. "You're going with me, I suppose."

"Yes," he said. "But it seems a long time till to-morrow."

She looked up at him quickly. There was no mistaking his emotion now. She was no longer safe in the serene friendship whose only object was her welfare.

Twinkle suddenly stooped to her and put his arms about her. Before she could defend herself he had kissed her twice on the lips. She put up her hands and pushed him away from her.

"Oh—" she began.

And then the bulky, giant figure of the Slav came hurtling from the shadows. Twinkle turned at the sound of his feet on the stone walk. The Slav's face was terrible to look upon. All color was gone from it, and there were lines, suddenly graven, on each side of his nose and beside his mouth. He showed his teeth in a snarl like that of a wild animal. Twinkle, strong and brave as he was, felt a shiver of fear.

"Get back!" he cried, and he heard the girl scream the Slav's name in fright.

But the Slav either did not hear her or refused to heed. His great arms closed about Twinkle, and they were locked in a vise-like embrace. The Slav's fingers sought Twinkle's throat, and Twinkle had to exert all his strength to evade the grip. As they whirled back and forth, Twinkle could see the girl standing inside the gate watching them. After her first scream, she had lost any fear she had had. The self-control which Twinkle had so admired kept her calm. Even in the present whirl of his thoughts, he had a notion that she loathed him—that she wanted the Slav to win this fight.

The notion gave him added strength. He fought the Slav back step by step and then suddenly he tore loose from the Slav's crushing grip.

"Now, come on," he shouted. "Come on and fight like an American."

He put up his hands and the Slav raised a clumsy guard. This was not his style of fighting, and he knew it. He went at Twinkle, however, as if the odds were all his own. Time and again Twinkle cut his face with blows from both hands, but the Slav only grunted and kept coming on. Every now and then he reached out his hands to seize Twinkle but Twinkle kept away from him. Soon the Slav's shirt-front was red with his own blood and it seemed as if he must be beaten down. But Twinkle felt no weakening in him, despite the blows that he was taking; and presently the leg which gave him his limp began to ache. A slow anger grew in him. He redoubled his attack, raining his blows on the Slav's face and body. But the man seemed to be made of iron. While the blows wounded him, they did not seem to jar his thick body.

And then Twinkle began to feel himself weaken. The Slav must have felt it at the same moment; he must have been waiting for it. He closed in on Twinkle, brushing aside his blows, and Twinkle was caught in a clasp that choked the breath from his body. He could feel his face and neck fill with blood, and his heart pounded in his ears. Slowly the Slav bent him backward. Twinkle could not bear to have the girl see him thus humiliated, and he braced himself with his legs to keep an erect position. That threw all the weight of the two heavy bodies on those legs. The one which had once been broken could not stand the strain. Twinkle sank to the sidewalk with a moan of pain, the Slav on top of him, his fingers feeling for Twinkle's throat.

"Get up," Twinkle gasped. "You've broken my leg."

IV

The Slav was as patient and as enduring in service as he had been in his hate. All through the night of pain, while the leg was being set and after, he and the girl fetched and carried for the injured man. The Slav had borne him into the girl's house as soon as he knew that the injury was real; and he had helped the doctor set the leg. Twinkle had wanted the operation performed at once, refusing to go to a hospital. It was at a hospital, he said, that his leg had been improperly set before.

Toward daylight the Slav called the girl, and he lay down to get some sleep. Twinkle turned to her as she came into the room.

"That Slav is a queer duck," he said. "He's like a woman when he does anything for a man."

"I said he was a good man," she said.

He turned his eyes on her—eyes that still held the twinkle which gave him his name.

"I suppose you're not going on with your—your stage career," he said.

"I promised Anton to marry him in a month," she said.

"That's rotten," he said. "I wish I'd not lost my head last night. I guess I'm no good. If you hadn't been so almighty pretty—"

His voice trailed into silence.

"The doctor says your leg will be better now than it was before," she said. "It was broken in exactly the same place as before and it's properly set now."

"Yes," said Twinkle, "he says I can go back on the stage. I can get a job doing a song and dance act in the twenty-cent houses. That'll take care of me all right. There isn't anybody else to think about."

Something in his voice struck her.

"Wasn't there ever anybody else?" she asked.

He looked at her queerly.

"Why, yes," he said. "There was my wife. We were on the stage together. She was killed in the railroad accident that I got this busted leg in."

"Well," said the girl, "that's what the stage did for you. I should think you'd stay in the mill."

"Ah, it doesn't make any difference where I go," he said. "It's always the same."

He turned his face to the wall. The girl perceived that unconsciously he had offered her an explanation of his instability—"it's always the same." And she admired him now for presenting to the world a smiling face and a twinkling eye to mask an uneasy heart. Suddenly he turned back to her. The twinkle was brighter than ever.

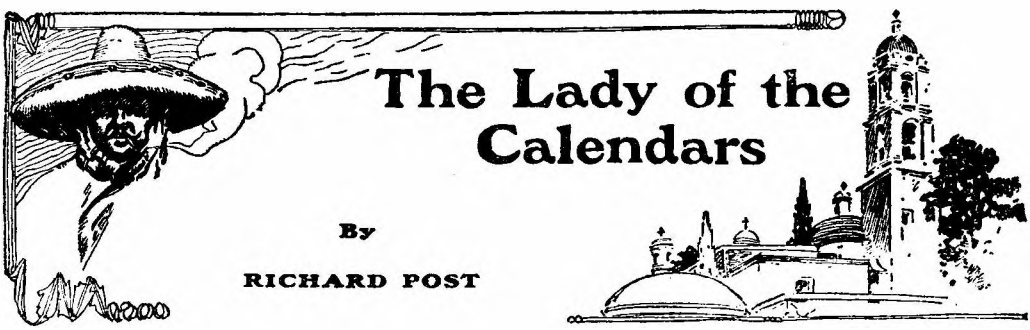
"Say," he said, "I got your picture from the photographer. I meant to bring it to you yesterday, but I forgot. You can give it to that Slavonian bear. It'll help him to recall what you looked like when you were a kid. It's suitable for framing, you know."

"He has framed something a good deal more suitable than that," the girl said.

"What's that?"

"Oh, me—what I ought to be now—my own self—in his heart."

"Yes," Twinkle assented. "I suppose he *is* the kind of man that never forgets—that Slav!"



The Lady of the Calendars

By

RICHARD POST

THE TALE OF ONE MEXICAN NIGHT

"SHE'S sure a wonder and no mistake," asserted the man in the forward seat. "For a Mex' woman! Why, that girl's a regular Chihuahua dust-storm for business. Pretty—looks like a languishing *señorita,* has brown eyes with long, drooping lashes—you know the type. But you'll find before you've *habla*-ed a dozen words, that she's short on sentiment and long on selling goods."

"That's right," his companion agreed. "She swung into our office, and notwithstanding that we put out some of the line ourselves, the girl clinched an order before the salesman of the Mexican masculine gender could have finished gesticulating, good morning. Then she passed into the *zapateria* of old Jesus Sanchez next door—you remember the mean old customer—and in half an hour she had him signed. The girl's regularly bilingual, good for a line of dope in either language. Revolution or no revolution, she gets the business."

The American in the rear seat leaned forward in interest: this was good to hear. These men who conversed in his own language had only entered at the last station and the ring of Americanisms was pleasing to his ears.

For the desert dust still gleamed white from the car windows, its patches of scrawny cacti stretching away like a stubbled beard to the distance of the turquoise mountains. A hot wind blew in through the car-windows, for the train was rushing along now, its last box-car station made; soon the lights of Gomez Palacio and Torreon would flash welcome.

Dean squirmed uneasily in his seat. He had found the ride from the border exceedingly tedious. The El Paso papers, the Mexican *Herald,* which he had assimilated at Chihuahua, the few frayed English novels which the train boy had sorted out from among their brightly hued Spanish brethren—all alike had been glanced over and tossed aside, as poor solace for dust and heat and the companionship of those separated by a lingual chasm.

Naturally, under these conditions, the American listened in genuine interest to the conversation. A Mexican woman salesman! Dean belonged to the salesman fraternity and his professional instinct was aroused.

But in a moment the two in front were off the topic, discoursing of the revolution that was sweeping over the Republic. Voices sank lower, for even in Spanish, men did not wish to say too much. Then, as the deepening shadows of the tropical night settled over the train, the lights of the twin Laguna cities flashed from out the desert darkness. In a few moments Dean was standing suit-case in hand on the platform of the Torreon station.

A brakeman passed along the line of cars, shouting words which brought Dean's fellow-passengers from the cars in frightened groups. After a dozen repetitions, the American gathered that the train would go no farther—that

there would be no more trains, as the rebels had finally cut off the city from outside communication.

Dean shrugged his shoulders. No matter, he reflected, already imbued with the philosophy of the country. Torreon was as far as he was traveling, in any event. His vacation was long, and the present situation would be all the better for the adventure. The idea had been rather a chimerical one anyway, the suggestion of the company for which he covered Texas, that he spend his vacation in Mexico making the acquaintance of their agent, Carlos De La Pena. The American was to ascertain how it was that in the last year the business of the Union Calendar Company had trebled in the Republic. Perhaps new methods could be found which would be applicable to the Southwest field. Dean had telegraphed to Mexico City, and found that De La Pena was in Torreon.

What difference did it make to him if the city was encompassed by a rebel army? The company was financial sponsor for the trip's expenses, and the prospect of siege and adventure rather pleased the Texan. Dean swung himself upon an express-truck while a *cargador* departed in search of his baggage.

For the moment he was almost alone. The bewildered passengers, like a flock of chickens turned loose in a strange field, had departed for the main *calle,* where the lights of the hotel, *cantina* and gambling-house blazed forth a luminous welcome. Five, ten minutes passed, and still the *cargador* did not return.

Growing restless, Dean was about to swing himself from the seat, when the sound of voices came from out the shadows. A woman's rang out, clear, mellifluous, with a note of appeal.

"You must not, you must not, Fernando," she pleaded. "It's my own, my very own, what I've made myself. You know when you left me, there wasn't anything, and you evidently didn't care."

"What's that to me?" the man interrupted with insistent roughness. "You're my wife, aint you? I know you'd like to get rid of me but you can't. You're my wife and I want your money."

The American slid off the truck and crept nearer. It was none of his affair, yet his whole being quivered in righteous indignation. He was a Texan.

"But Fernando," the woman cried in piteous appeal. "All I have, and it isn't much, I've worked for. You never gave me a *centavo,* and then when Father died and you found we were poor, you ran away without a word. How can you ask me, Fernando? And once I thought that you were noble and brave and fine. Oh Fernando!" The memory of a dead love was in her voice.

"Give me the money," the man reïterated with brutal determination. He laughed in sneering insinuation. "I don't know how you've made it, but I'm sure you have it, *bonita mia.*" Suddenly he grasped the girl by the shoulders and shook her with vindictive strength. "Now will you, my pretty?"

Before he could turn, Dean struck with his fist, a glancing blow. "You cowardly cur," the American cried, hot rage in his voice.

The Mexican reeled backward, reaching for his knife, but his assailant was close upon him, striking with the science of a man who knows how to use his fists. Once, twice, the blows landed. The man fell heavily and lay still.

Righteous anger satiated, the American glanced around in search of the girl, but she was gone. He felt vaguely hurt. Why had she not lingered, at least to ascertain how the *mêlée* resulted. In his memory her voice still echoed, strangely sweet and vibrant with feeling. Dean pictured her as young and beautiful.

Married to this man! It did not seem possible, and yet as Dean gazed at the insolently handsome face staring up at him, he understood the attraction. He bent over the prostrate figure in rapid examination, but found no serious injury. In a few minutes the night air would bring a return of consciousness.

It occurred to Dean as he noted the gold trimmings on the uniform that perhaps it would be well if he were not present when this happened. He raised his late antagonist to a sitting posture against a truck, and then looked about

the station in a vain search for the missing *cargador*.

Reluctantly reaching the conclusion that the man had disappeared. Dean picked up his suit-case and proceeded across the cindery waste of sand surrounding the depot, to the main street. As he registered at the hotel St. Francis, his fingers slipped vacantly in the pocket where his note-book was wont to repose. The loss irritated the American as he lingered over a dinner of many courses and strange food, to the inharmonious music of a discordant orchestra in the palm-garden—not that the diary was so important in itself, but he realized the serious consequences that might ensue. Still, what did it matter? Had he not come for the adventure, anyway?

His meal finished, Dean glanced through the ink-stained register. No C. De La Pena there. Through the dusty streets, solely illuminated by the streaming light from the open doors of *cantinas* and restaurants, he proceeded down the main avenue to the great hotel Guardiala, where, he reasoned, the Mexican representative would be found. Massive buildings, their fronts grated, solid in their prosperity, loomed on each side—banks, great wholesalers, retail establishments, all filled with the embellishments of luxury; around him were the store-houses of the wealth of northern Mexico. From without the night, shots echoed between intervals of impressive silence. Dean felt that he was on the brink of tragedy and he wondered if there was a part reserved for him.

Two or three officers, resplendent in uniforms of scarlet and gold, lounged in the hotel lobby. The American gave scant heed to their inquiring glances and crossed at once to the desk. He tried his execrable Spanish upon the clerk, only to be answered in fair English that the *señorita* was in her apartments—would he please step up?

"But it is *Mr.* C. De La Pena, the *señor*," Dean explained, "—not the young lady." This mention of a woman was disconcerting.

The clerk smiled suavely, displaying a glittering range of golden teeth. "It is *Señorita* Concha," he said. "She is the calendar lady, who sells much. There is no other." He directed with a wave of the hand and bowed effusively.

His mind awhirl, Dean passed up the stairs. The Lady of the Calendars! She, it must be, to whom the Americans on the train had referred, the wonderful feminine salesman. He knew that his employers had no suspicion that their Mexican agent was a woman. Dean did not understand, yet his mind was already groping toward the light.

As he entered the hallway on the third floor, his advent noiseless with the hush of deep carpets, the American discerned a form kneeling before a door, its gaze held by some sight within. Dean glided over the floor rapidly, but careful as he was, his foot struck a projecting chair-leg with a slight resultant click. The alert ears of the crouching figure caught the sound. With a surprising agility he rose to his feet and ran softly down the hall. In the half-light, it seemed to Dean that the surreptitious watcher was a Chinaman, but he could not be certain. Pursuit was out of the question. It might not be his affair after all, though the night was indeed full of surprises. Perplexed, he rapped.

A rustle of skirts, and then the door swung open. "Wont you come in?" invited a voice with the sweet ring of bells in its timbre, a voice that he knew. For a full moment the man stood, hat in hand, unable to advance, incapable of a common-place, lost in admiration.

She was indeed beautiful, this Lady of the Calendars. So had this girl been described, and yet not as this. Tall, with the regalness of the northland without its chill, a rose flaming in the coils of her black hair, the luminous eyes varying with every changing sweep of emotion, the fair skin imperceptibly shaded with a touch of the velvet-cream—such was the woman before him. In her, the Americas seemed to meet. Dean gazed, charm-compelled.

"Wont you enter, please?" the girl repeated.

With a start the man came to himself. "I couldn't help it, really," he protested with a laugh. "I'm not a Mexican and I don't wish to begin with compliments, but truly, though we are

proud of our girls in Texas, yet I stared. Surely, I will come in," he said.

Laughter was in the girl's eyes. "I'll forgive it in my cavalier," she smiled. "Tell me, did you hurt him very badly?"

Again the man was surprised. Yet he should have known, for surely the sweetness of the voice, still sounding in memory, could belong to no other than this radiant being before him.

"Not as he deserved," Dean replied, hot rage surging again within him. The brute who would dare to strike this vision of beauty! "I hit him a few and knocked him out, but he's come to before this—the scoundrel."

Then abruptly Dean paused, appalled by the remembrance. After all, the fellow was her husband. "Forgive me, if I have expressed myself too violently," the man pleaded.

The girl still smiled. "He is all that and more," she agreed. "You state it well. But you didn't come for that," she continued. "Sit down and tell me. If it's calendars, I can be as businessy as anyone."

"Yes, it's calendars, but not to purchase them," Dean explained. "I cover Texas for the Union Company—pretty well, if I say it myself, but not with the results that you've been able to get in Mexico. We didn't know our agent was a lady," he added.

"My father was the representative, Carlos De La Pena," the girl interrupted, a red flame burning in her cheeks. "He died. There was nothing left, so I became C. De La Pena. My name is Concha."

"I understand," the man responded gently. "Forgive me if I awakened sorrow. Now it is all very clear. But that doesn't explain the astonishing amount of business which you have secured, in troubled times, too. It appears wonderful to the Union Company in what they always called their 'sleepy Mexican field.' "

"I just went out and worked and worked," the girl explained, her brown eyes wide-open, in her turn surprised that there should seem anything unusual in what she had done. "You know papa was a Spaniard, a Spanish-Mexican, full of the dignity and pride of the De La Penas—but oh, so good and kind. Mamma was an American; I was born in the States, in El Paso, but she died, long ago. I learned ever since I was a tiny *niña* to speak, first English, then Spanish, with equal facility. Maybe that helped, you see."

Understanding slowly came to the man as all the silent pathos of the brave struggle unfolded before him, though as yet only in the outline did he perceive the tragedy.

"I am glad to know all," Dean assured her. "Well, as I have said, it came my vacation time, and as I haven't any family or any folks to spend it with, the company remarked that while I was a good salesman I might be better, and suggested that if I'd go to Mexico and find out how C. De La Pena made those wonderful sales, maybe I'd get some pointers. Anyway, they'd take the chance and pay my expenses. Therefore I came. I telegraphed to Mexico City and found you were in Torreon, so I headed this way."

"I'm so glad." The girl rose and came to him, clasping his hand impulsively. "I've only known you half an hour, and I've told you half my history, because—because you look as if you could be trusted." The brown eyes were serious now and they measured the man before her slowly. "Yes, you can be trusted—you can be a friend, and I need one, oh, so much."

In the silence, the dull boom of guns came from the night. The tension of the hour in the besieged city cast its somber shadow upon them.

"Try me and see," the man urged, resolute gravity in his voice.

"I will," the girl replied with conviction. She smiled. "Anyway, we're both with the Union Company, and its representatives ought to aid one another."

Through the window they could see to the eastward on the mountain slope the flicker of a thousand pin-points of light, like an army of fire-flies moving in unison. The two knew that it was the rebels drawing closer.

Banter was gone, when next she spoke. "I'm in serious trouble, Mr. Dean, very serious, as you know, but you don't realize all. I'm going to tell you, because I'm all alone and you've

been so brave." The voice trembled and her form quivered, as the girl felt the nearness of the fear. "It's that man, Fernando Gonzalez, who calls himself my husband. I'm afraid of him—so afraid." She extended her hands in piteous appeal.

A great longing to comfort her, to take the girl in his arms and tell her it was all right, surged within the man. With an effort Dean restrained himself. He had no right. He must remember that their acquaintance had been only of the half-hour.

So all he did was to grip her hand warmly, with reassuring pressure. "I'll see that he does not trouble you, Miss De La Pena," he promised earnestly.

"It was this way—" The girl told her story with simple directness. "While Papa lived, we were rich, or rather we thought we were. So did everyone else, I believe. For papa was very proud and liked to drive good horses and have every luxury. We lived in a lovely *casa* in the Calle De Liverpool in the City of Mexico. Papa didn't think it was seemly to have much business, and while he maintained an office and was Mexican representative for this and that firm, the Union Calendar Company among others, he refused to devote much time to business. He was a member of the Jockey Club, and that didn't leave many hours for the office."

"The company had only a very mediocre trade in the Republic up to two years ago. That was why they were so much surprised," Dean interpolated.

The girl smiled sadly. "In those days I was young—seventeen and, I suppose, pretty. Anyway, they told me so. Among the others was this man, Fernando Gonzalez. I don't know why, now—I suppose I was foolish, but I thought him fine and handsome. He had big, swaggering mustaches and we Mexican girls have been brought up to consider them just elegant."

The American, embarrassed, passed his fingers over his smoothly shaven upper lip.

Concha smiled, merriment in her eyes. "My opinions have changed," she confessed with a blush.

A moment of hesitation, and then the girl continued, her voice once more grave. "It is the usual story of a charming, bold cavalier and a foolish little girl. I thought then that Fernando wanted me for myself, but I found out differently afterwards. On my part, I suppose I was in love with those mustaches! We were married, and then, in a month, papa died suddenly. After the funeral, his old friend, General Pezaro, went over everything and found as you have guessed—nothing."

She rose from her seat and crossed to the window. "You cannot realize what it meant to a girl of Mexico reared in luxury and idleness. Everything was gone. Oh, I can't talk of those days," she exclaimed passionately. "The man who should have been my protector ran away over night, leaving an insulting note, saying he had not intended to marry a beggar girl. It was awful, terrible!" Concha buried her face in her hands, and then came slowly back to the chair. Forcing her composure, she continued evenly.

"General Pezaro took me in, for even our house went. But my pride wouldn't allow me to remain a dependent. I found among Papa's papers his contract with the calendar company, made out to C. De La Pena. I wondered why I couldn't be that *C*. Then I tried it. I've managed somehow." Her glance involuntarily wandered around the calendar strewn room.

"You've succeeded, splendidly," Dean cried with enthusiasm. "You've done wonderfully well. Tell me the rest," he urged.

"That was all, until now," she answered. "For two years I've been free and quite happy, my thoughts upon my work. I didn't know where Fernando had gone and didn't care."

"And then, when I had made a success, I found him here in Torreon. I don't understand how he secured his commission, but somehow he's a captain in the Federal army. My husband was attentive enough when he discovered I had money. At first he whined and pleaded, claiming that he was in debt and that if I refused to aid him, he would be disgraced.

"In a moment of weakness, I gave him five hundred *pesos* on his agreeing

to leave me. Of course he promised, and then in a week returned for more, assuming, I suppose, that I had an inexhaustible bank-account upon which he could draw. When I refused he tried force. You know—" The girl's voice trailed to a dismal end. "What am I to do?"

"Do?" The man's words rang out clear and incisive. "Leave the scoundrel. Secure a divorce. You have all kinds of reason."

"Yes, I would have, in the States." The monotony of despair was in the girl's voice. "But here, in Mexico, all a wife's property belongs to her husband, and the laws do not permit more than a separation. No, it's no use. I'm afraid I can't be helped, after I've taken all your time, and burdened you with my troubles. Look here." Finger on her lips, Concha crossed the room to where a pile of sample calendars reposed on a stand.

"The money," she whispered, "all in large denominations." The girl ran her fingers through the date-pads, revealing the bills pasted under the slips for September, October, and November, at the bottom. "Ten thousand *pesos,* half mine, half the company's!" She tossed the calendars into a corner, where they lay in seeming negligence. "It is the best place I could find," the girl concluded.

At that moment there came a sharp rat-tat on the door. Dean sprang to his feet, but it was Concha who responded. "The *Señor* Dean, he here?" the clerk inquired. "He is asked for in the hotel office."

Though their words were but the persiflage of leave-takings, the man and the girl gazed for a fleeting moment into each other's eyes and understood. Troubles and trials, the question of the future, were forgotten; this only was real.

As the portal closed behind him and Dean stepped into the hall, he was seized by each arm. "Don't struggle," the clerk advised. "The detectives do not speak English, but they wont hurt you, if you are quiet."

Too surprised to resist, the American was escorted down the stairs and through the lobby into the open air. "To the *comisaria,*" said one of his captors, as they pushed him into a coach. Once started, they grew garrulous and explained to the American in such simple Spanish as they thought he could understand, that he was arrested for the assault on *Señor* Gonzalez. He had been traced by his lost note-book, from one hotel to another—not that it was of their doing, the two elucidated. Don Fernando was *muy malo,* exceedingly unpopular, but such were the commands of the *commandante.* The men extended their hands in demonstrative apology. They must obey orders.

The American grasped the situation immediately. He rejoiced, he told them, that they were *muy buen caballeros* and good *amigos.* Would they have a drink? They would. One followed another.

The trip to the *comisaria* was long and devious; and when on arrival, the detectives turned over the prisoner, the American found that their good-will was not entirely a matter of internal lubrication. The search was most superficial and instead of being thrown into the corral with the peons, Dean was ushered into the *considerado,* as the *gendarme* told him—the place of consideration for the distinguished American.

Consideration or no consideration, it was a prison; and as the key grated in the lock, the American experienced the inevitable depression that accompanies confinement. "The appellation doesn't mean much," he muttered, as his glance took in four or five Mexicans, ensconced in blankets, lying on thin mattresses or on the cold stone of the floor itself. For furniture, there were a half-dozen chairs and a couple of tables.

But as Dean advanced into the murky, half-light of the solitary lantern, a man who had been seated at the table came forward with a laugh, hearty even in its forced repression. "Dean, by all that is holy," he gurgled. "Look out! Don't speak loud. I've got those greasers pretty full of *mescal,* but they might stir, at that."

"Well, of all the wonders," Dean began. "I'm sure glad to see you, Jim Baker." Then, with the inevitable apology of prison greetings, "—Not here, of

course, but if you had to get in, it was mighty lucky for me to find you."

"Certainly," agreed the other calmly. "Have a paper smoke?" He lit a brown wrapper cigarette and questioned: "How about it? What have you been into now? You always were so mild-dispositioned up in San Anton', that I never thought you'd come to an end like this."

"And I only arrived in town six hours ago," Dean related sheepishly. Then, in whispers, he told his story, Baker listening with evident interest.

At its conclusion, Baker swore softly. "I've seen the girl and she's a peach," he commented. "No wonder you are trying to play the gallant cavalier. I don't blame you. Perhaps I can help. That yellow-skinned Gonzalez is a rustler for fair. Since he deserted her, he's tied up again in Guadalajara, that I know of, running through a wad of money. Then as usual, he skipped out. I wouldn't be at all surprised if Mrs. Gonzalez number two would touch off some of the fireworks before we get through. I understand she is with her brother, over in the rebel army."

Dean gripped his friend's hand joyfully. "That is great news. Concha—Miss De La Pena—saw no way out. I believe, Jim," he stated solemnly, "I'm half in love with that girl already."

"Of course you are," the other responded. "Not half—completely. I knew that, as soon as you began your yarn. A Texan doesn't meet a girl and get himself into a Mexican prison all in six hours over any half-way affair."

For an interval the two smoked in silence, their cigarettes glow-points in the dusk as the lamp sputtered and went out. In the silence, only the heavy breathing of their fellow-prisoners was audible, and the monotonous tread of the solitary sentry as he clicked his way over the stone flagging of the *patio*.

"How is it that you don't ask about me? Is a jail my usual address, or in contemplation of the persecuted fair one, are you lost to feelings of commiseration for your friend similarly placed?" Baker presently questioned with sarcasm.

"Neither," Dean replied briefly. "—That is, I'd expect to find such a rolling stone as you anywhere. In the second place, I knew if you wished to enlighten me, it would come without any effort on my part. Fire away: in what scrape are you now involved?"

"None," the other growled. "No episode of a lady for me. I'm a plain prisoner of war. Behold, Captain Baker of the Chihuahua Grays, enrolled in the cause of Mexican liberty, but unfortunately at the present moment a captive."

Dean did not answer his banter. He was suddenly conscious of a great weariness. Momentarily cheered by the unexpected meeting with a fellow-American, and a friend at that, depression had settled again upon him. He was helpless, in prison, with the girl who was uppermost in his thoughts in danger. Dejected, the man fell into a chair.

But Baker was not to be repressed. "What's the matter? Do you approve so cordially of the surroundings that you wish to stay? Inviting, isn't it?" He pointed to the sprawling Mexicans. "Say, Donald, if you're not asleep, let's get out of here."

Dean arose in amazed surprise. "Escape! How?"

"Oh, that's easy," replied the soldier of fortune, removing his shoes and investigating the heels, by the illumination of his cigarette. "They don't half frisk you in this country."

He extracted three small files from one heel and a wad of paper currency from the other. "I guess these will do the business all right. You didn't really expect that I was going to remain in a vile hole like this, did you? And yet, it wouldn't have been so easy, if the Fates hadn't thrown you in with me," he commented. "Take hold of this table, quietly now, when the *gendarme* is at the far end of his promenade." Carefully lifting it over the litter of feet, the two planted the stand below the skylight.

"Now the other" Baker ordered. Placing the smaller table upon the pedestal of the first was more difficult. Dean stumbled over a sleeper's outstretched leg, but after a moment of suspense, the Mexican muttering oaths,

the man rolled over, and in a moment was snoring loudly once more.

The tables firm, Baker made the ascent, crouching upon the topmost one. A few moments of vigorous work and the two bars, sole custodians of the skylight, were in his hands. Swinging the hinged glass frame back, he gripped the edge of the roof and drew himself up. Dean followed, and in a moment the two were breathing the fresh night air, crouching behind a chimney on the flat roof.

"We'd better get the lay of the land first," the Captain advised. "Darned good prison to hold Greasers, I reckon, but not equal to two Yanks."

A lone sentry, muffled in his blue coat, with the folds of his cape drawn tightly about his face—for after the heat of the day the night was chill—paced up and down. As he disappeared at the farther end of his beat, the two crawled to the edge and gazed down into the narrow street. The drop was about twenty feet.

"Possible, but a mean jump," commented Baker. He uncoiled by devious turnings a strand of very thin rope from about his body. "I thought this might come in handy," he remarked. Fastening an end around a projecting corner of the wall, the two descended in safety.

"We'll leave it there," the Captain said, contemptuously. "We might as well inform them how it was done. Now we will have to scoot for it, as the morning's not far away. Will you make a try with me for the rebel lines?"

But Dean refused, though the invitation was tempting. He must save the girl. Unobserved, they stole through the narrow *callejons* and after a time said good-by in the great "Plaza of the Second of April." "I'll conceal myself somewhere," Dean stated, "for I'm not going to leave while that girl is here."

Baker laughed good-humoredly. "Don't do anything rash, Donald," he advised. "Remember that the police force may be considerably peeved when they discover our escape. But our army will be here soon, in any event."

The night had been one of fearful portent to the besieged city. Without in the darkness, the rebel army lurked, only separated by the thin line of the weak, vacillating Federal army. Men of wealth hid their treasures, for none could foresee what the morrow would bring forth. From the alleys, the devious *callejons,* crept the *rateros,* the thieves and pickpockets—those who, having nothing, feared nothing. They were preparing to gorge should there be helpless victims.

Sam Ling, with all the crafty subtlety of his Oriental nature, realized this as he crept through the back passages of the hotel and into the *callejon.* The *Señorita* had money—much money. His slits of black eyes contracted with cupidity as he remembered the lamp-shine on the bills that he had witnessed so well secreted. Only he knew where that precious money had been so craftily hidden.

He paused on his way to the Casa de los Naçionales, where he knew he would find *Señor* Gonzalez at a seat at the roulette table. Don Fernando had promised him a hundred *pesos* if he discovered where the *Señorita* kept her money. Pish! Too little! True, the *Señor* owed him many *pesos.* Perhaps if he revealed the secret, he would be paid; but why hazard the uncertainty? In the morning he felt certain there would be a battle. In the confusion he would have all for himself.

So the Chinaman cautiously retraced his steps, darting up the dark alley back of the Guardiola. He measured with exact accuracy the distance between the window-ledges. Yes, he could enter the *Señorita's* room without difficulty by swinging from the window on the right.

Sam Ling rubbed his hands; there was much money. He thanked his heathen gods that he was only Sam Ling the insignificant laundryman, and could wander around the hotel as he pleased. From the seclusion of the alley he watched and waited with Oriental patience. At last, as he expected, the American departed. An evil smile lighted up Sam's face as he noted the presence of the detectives.

Then, swift-footed, he darted through the Callejon Dolores to a certain tucked-in adobe from which a solitary

light winked and flickered. He knocked on the door, a peculiar, fantastic rapping. In answer, the portal swung and he passed into the gambling-house of his nationality. A dozen of his race grunted greeting, but with a gesture he drew the proprietor into a back-room.

"Hop Ling," he began, "you much wise. You read—you write American. You write letter to lady for me?" He leered in true comradeship. "Much money—I pay."

The other gazed at him suspiciously. "You pay first," he stated, "Then I write. No pay—no write!" The dictum was brief and decisive.

With an imprecation, Sam Ling drew a wallet from his belt. His eagerness had been his undoing. He tendered a hundred *pesos,* but it was not enough, and he had to cap the bill with another.

Then the man of education signified his satisfaction and laboriously indited the note:

> Miss De La Pena:—Will you please meet me at the American Consulate at nine this morning. I think I can help you.
>
> Donald Dean.

Sam Ling sighed with pleasure. It had cost, indeed, but the money was well spent. Very early in the morning the note was despatched; and the Celestial, sleepless, waited around the hotel until his vigil should be rewarded by the departure of the Calendar Lady.

At last, on the hour, she came down the stairs, a vision of calm beauty, with the self-possession of one long tutored to face the world with a brave smile. Out into the sunlight of that wildly discordant morning, she went. Peons were gathered in little groups in the streets; soldiers swung past in squads; officers with spurs a-jingle galloped up and down. From the alleys ever watched the rabble, waiting. Nearer, ever nearer, came the staccato explosions, the bark of guns, the rattle of shot and shell. All about her was the confusion of incipient panic, only deferred until slow retreat should become rout.

Through it all the girl passed secure in her high courage, on her way to the great plaza upon which faced the office of the American Consulate. After a sleepless night, the message had brought relief. She smiled, and the little peon children staring at the *"señorita bonita,"* thought it was for themselves as she tossed them *centavos,* though it was because of her trust in this American who had come so suddenly into her life. The girl had only known him a few hours; but, if he promised, all was well. With the receipt of his note, troubles, cares, and fears had fallen away. Long had she struggled alone. Now Concha experienced the sweet relief which only a woman knows of finding some one upon whom to lean, some one to bear the burden.

They met before the deserted bandstand of the open plaza. After a night passed in the fitful rest of a native *meson* in which he had taken refuge, Dean had abandoned his retreat with the coming of full day. The street noise and bustle, the confusion, the hurrying peons scurrying like the inhabitants of a rabbit-warren turned loose—more than all, the dull roar of heavy guns mingled with the quick pop of small arms—told him that the police of Torreon that day would scarcely be concerned with escaped prisoners. Even if it were not so, he must be with her. So, hatless, with none of the careful grooming of the Texan of yesterday, he was hurrying to her when she came to him.

With his first words, the girl's dream of security vanished. "You here, Concha!" The man was unconscious that he called her by the name of his thoughts. "I was on the way to see of I could help. You're safe! I'm so glad." Joy and more was written in his face, and the heart of the girl beat happily as she read it.

"But, Concha, what of the calendars?" His voice lowered in caution. "Are they safe?"

The girl had realized that there was some mistake, yet her mind was not yet adjusted to the truth of the situation. "They're at the hotel, in my room," she answered. "At least I suppose so. I left everything there, when you wrote me to meet you."

"I wrote you? No! Let me see the letter." The man was all impatience. Treachery and trouble seemed to be everywhere.

"I didn't know your writing, Don-

aid!" Concha's lips trembled. "But when I received the message, I was so glad, and I never thought but that it came from you."

The man swore with wild frontier invective. "That damned Chinese cur, the one I found spying through your key-hole! A clever forgery," he exclaimed.

"Come," he commanded. "We'll go back, Concha, as quickly as we can. I don't quite *sabe*, but they wished you away—that's plain."

Panic was riding down the street, men lashing horses in a frenzy of fear, foot-soldiers fleeing for their lives, riderless horses charging headlong in the swollen stream of flight. The rebels had surmounted the last defense. General Navarro and his men were gone, swept away; down the Avenues of Moreles and Juarez careened the Revolutionists in endless file. *Vivas* of victory reëchoed. The church bells flung wide the wild acclaim of triumph.

Through it all the two passed scatheless to the hotel. Into the now deserted lobby, and up the stairs, they hurried to her room. The girl crossed in breathless haste, then paused with a cry of despair. The calendars were gone, though nothing else was taken. On the floor, bespeaking the haste of an interruption, lay a Chinese laundry ticket, bearing Sam Ling's name.

Concha dropped nerveless into a chair. "What will the company say?" she gasped.

"The company—damn the company," Dean ejaculated. "That's not the question; it's your loss. You remain here," he commanded. "You will be safe in the hotel now."

With a sudden, uncontrollable impulse, he drew her to him and kissed her—once, twice. In that moment, with the turmoil of conflict wafting from the street below, nothing seemed strange. "Stay here, Concha," Dean commanded, the solicitude of possession in his voice. Then he ran down the stairs.

After all, he feared he had been too late, as standing on the top step of the hotel, he gazed into the swirling vortex of humanity below. A block away, before Sam Ling's laundry, men were passing in and out in procession. A shriek, a despairing cry, shots—and the mob was loose in all its wild fury that morning. *"Muerte al Chino!"* was the slogan that swelled upward from a thousand throats. A myriad of long-pent animosities were to find vent in a carnival of fury.

Through the crowd the American hurried, his presence unresented, progress only impeded by the solidity with which the mass were wedged together. At last he squeezed through the doorway. Sam Ling, backed up against the wall, was begging life, all his suavity and nonchalance gone, moaning and crying in pitiful fear. A heap of calendars lay at his feet, as if he had been in the very act of sorting them when vengeance came upon him.

As the despairing Chinaman's gaze swept over the tigers' eyes before him, he discerned Dean. Squirming loose from his captors, he ran to the American, throwing himself before him, clasping his legs in an agony of cringing fear.

"Get up," Dean commanded. "I'll try and save you." And he turned to face the crowd.

But before the Celestial could rise to his feet, a revolver spoke and Sam Ling rolled over on the floor, death gurgling in his throat.

Grim, infuriated faces menaced the American. "We are not after Gringoes, but you must not come between us and those we would kill."

From murder the mob passed to loot, and then to vandal destruction. Dean watched, a silent spectator, until all at once, moved by some sudden impulse, the crowd vanished in a search for new victims. Then the man gathered the calendars, and removed the treasure that they had so faithfully concealed. "My Lady will not lose, after all!" he exulted.

Hardly had Dean disappeared, when another knock, the rap of fresh terror, sounded on the girl's door. Concha hesitated; the man whom she trusted was gone. But realizing that safety lay only in bold defiance, the girl walked to the door and flung it open.

A man stumbled and half-fell, inside.

He was wretchedly dressed in dusty clothes, the short coat of a tradesman covering the remnants of a uniform. Forgetting the open door, the girl shrank across the room from him.

"You here, Fernando?" she cried. "No, I will not. I haven't any money. I can't aid you this time."

The man flung himself into a chair and sat there, swaying inebriately. "But you must, Concha, my dear," he wailed. "It's the last time. I'm going away. I've got to leave. The rebels, they're here and after me. I must have money—I must." His voice trembled. Fear was written large on the pallid, yellow skin.

Suddenly he fumbled in a pocket and produced a revolver. His hand shook as he leveled it. "Now, my girl, give me the money—the ten thousand pesos. Then I go." The weapon swept up and down as his nerveless arm failed to maintain its position.

Concha retreated before him. Her voice failed her. If she only had the money. If Dean—

Then, while the seconds ticked, a form darted through the open door. A wild shriek—a blow—and the man fell forward onto the carpeted floor.

Concha gazed into the wild eyes of a girl, scarcely a woman, whose body swayed in insane passion. A knife, long, red-spotted, waved in her hand. She raised the steel, its point on her breast, then drove it deep, and with an inarticulate cry fell forward beside the man.

The silent forms blurred before Concha's eyes; the room swayed around her. Overpowered by the sight, the Lady of the Calendars dropped unconscious upon the couch.

"Thank God, she's only fainted." The voice was one that she knew, and the girl, opening her brown eyes, smiled softly up at the man she loved. "I'm all right, thank you, dear," she murmured. "Happy and safe, now that you're here." Concha crowded closer into his arms.

The man pressed her tightly. "Yes, you're safe, Concha, my love."

For a long moment she lay quiet, content to be happy; then the inevitable question struggled to her lips. "And he—" She brushed her hand across her eyes. "—There was a woman, too, wasn't there? She came in and struck him with a knife and—"

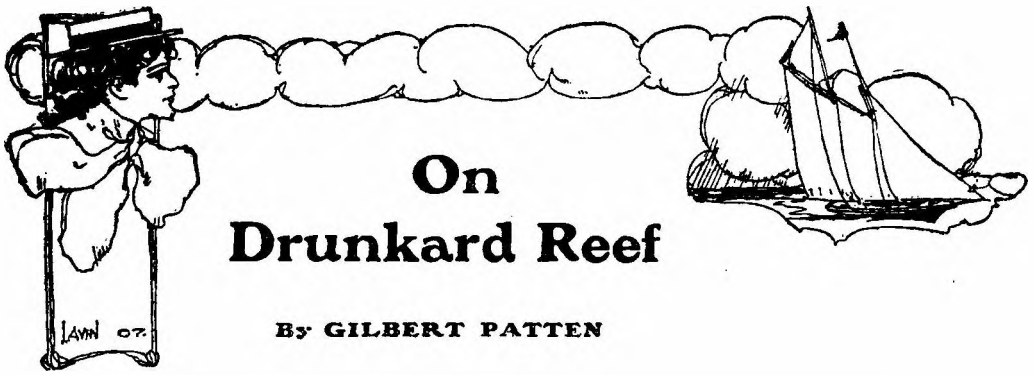
"Yes, dearest," the man answered solemnly. "He is dead. Fernando Gonzalez will never trouble you any more. And Maria Sobrano, who also called him husband, revenged herself, for she had a yet more serious account to settle; and then she died with him. She loved him, which, please God, you never did, as some women will love the unworthy."

"I understand," the girl said weakly. She closed her eyes, endeavoring to shut out from her mind the horror of the picture.

The room was very still. An hour before, the echoes of shot and shell had died away; tumult was no more. The vociferating mob gone, quiet and peace reigned again in the city.

Concha had not moved, and the man thought that she was asleep, so quiet was she. "Concha, my Concha," he murmured, tenderly. Leaning over, he kissed her. "My dear Lady of the Calendars!"

The girl opened her eyes. A happy light shone up at him. "Don't you think, Donald,"—her hand fell softly in his—"that you and I can represent the Union Company pretty well in Texas? Together," she repeated, "together."



On Drunkard Reef

By GILBERT PATTEN

OLD man Foster, in his shirt-sleeves, came out of his store and stopped to roll a sunken, faded eye at the heavy sky. Dun, ragged streamers of clouds were trailing low overhead, and the surf was grumbling like distant thunder on the granite seaward end of Roaring Island. It lacked barely an hour of nightfall. The storekeeper's lean face, hardened like cured leather by ocean brine and winds, wore an anxious look.

Peter Andersen, the "lunger," coming from the fish-house with a bucket of herring for trap bait, was picking his way cautiously down over the high, ragged ledges near by; for the path, though worn in the rock by years of passing, was not one for hasty feet. Besides, Peter was much changed since the days when he, a husky six footer, weighing two hundred and ten without carrying an ounce of superfluous meat on his huge bones, had four times rounded the Horn, once before the mast, the other three voyages as first officer; now he barely tipped the beam at one hundred and forty-three, and there did not seem to be much left of him but his bones.

Foster twisted a chew from a plug of War Hatchet, thrust it into his cheek, and spoke to Peter.

"Looks like it's due to be a rough night, Peter," he said.

"Aye, sir," returned Peter, pausing to glance around. "Ay think it going to be nasty, sir. Ay reckon The Drunkard bane breakin' on this tide."

Unmarked by beacon, buoy, or spindle, Drunkard Reef lay outside the Lower Reach, a league sou'east from Roaring Island. For worthy neighbors it had The Fangs, Spirit Ledge and White Tooth, forever waiting to gnash into foam the seas that came rolling in from the Bay of Fundy or the open ocean itself. Of this dread *coterie,* The Drunkard was most respected by seiners, trawlers, lobstermen or any whose business brought them near by boat.

For while the others stood out bold and snarling, the treacherous Drunkard mostly lay hidden, like a jungle beast awaiting its prey. A sunken ledge, over which the sea slipped calm and serene at any tide in pleasant weather, it had a fearsome way of breaking in storms, or upon the ebb with heavy swells coming in. Sometimes with an old sea running, it would remain hidden for ten or twenty minutes, even for half an hour, at a time; and then, like some mythological monster rising from the deep, with a thunderous sound of parting waters, it would seem to upheave its huge, bare, glittering black bulk into view. A boat, caught in that maelstrom, it would smash like an eggshell; a human life it would snuff out like a candle.

The Drunkard had numbered its victims, too: fishermen lost in storms, a lumber schooner with every soul on board, a pleasure boat sailed without a chart by a foolhardy skipper—these, and more, had crashed upon the murderous rock; and no human soul had ever been saved to tell of the experi-

ence. The fishermen who regularly sought the night shelter of Roaring Island Harbor to the number of at least a dozen, avoided the vicinity of The Drunkard as a person, forewarned, would shun the lair of a man-eating tiger.

"I was wondering, Peter,'" said old man Foster, giving his quid a turn, "if Tom would make in to-night. He said he'd sure get back to-day when he left yesterday with his last catch for the market."

"Ay think, sir," returned the Swede, carefully descending, "it bane his boat rounding the eastern head o' Grand Ay see from the fish house five minute ago."

Foster brightened. "I hope you're right, Peter. He'll be bringing the license with him. The wedding comes off Sunday at the church on Grand, you know. There's only two days between."

Peter beamed congratulatingly. "Tom, he are one good feller. It bane one good thing Molly she make her mind to marry him, and not that Yim Daggett. Ay never like that Yim Daggett."

"Speak o' the devil!" frowned the storekeeper as his eyes discovered a small white sloop nosing in past Mouse Island, which served as a natural breakwater at the mouth of Roaring Island Harbor. "There's Daggett now. What's bringing him here at this time?"

"Ay reckon he hear that Molly bane home," said Peter as they watched the sloop come into the wind, her sails flapping, and take the narrow passage, propelled by a chugging auxiliary. "Better keep your eye skinned, sir. Yim, he make trouble if he can."

"It's too late for that, and Daggett knows it. He kicked up a muss when he found Tom and Molly were engaged, but little good that done him. He's got the Fool with him, as usu'l."

There were two persons on the sloop, a man in grimy oilskins, and a ragged, half-naked boy. With a swish and a rattle of hoops and blocks, the mainsail came down, the boy leaping about like a monkey at the task of furling. At the wheel, the man picked a skillful course through the fleet of fishing smacks riding at their moorings.

"Looks like he's going to pick up my mooring without even askin' lief," frowned old man Foster, as the ragged boy was seen scrambling forward with a boat-hook in his hand. "If Tom makes in, he'll want to lay to that."

The motor had ceased its chugging and the sloop was slowing down in the placid waters of the harbor. With a single deft sweep of the boat-hook, the bay brought up the mooring buoy with the kedge line attached; in a twinkling, almost, the wet line was snapped through the chock and made fast to the bitts, and the sloop swung secure at her anchorage.

"The Fool make good man for Yim," observed Peter, the bucket of trap bait on the ground at his feet. "Ay hear say Yim bate stuffin out o' that boy sometime."

Foster, still frowning, did not seem to hear; he continued to watch the movements of the unwelcome visitors on board the sloop. After a bit, seeing the man shedding his oilskins and the boy drawing the tender alongside by the painter, the storekeeper growled:

"He's in a big hurry to get ashore; aint even stopping to make things shipshape."

The man dropped into the small boat and the boy followed, setting himself to the oars and pulling toward the landing near the store.

"Ay think," said Peter, picking up his bucket, "Ay'll be moving 'long. Ay never like that Yim Daggett much." And he followed the path past the corner of the store.

Foster waited, slowly turning his quid. The boat came alongside an old skow lying against the pilings of the wharf, and the boy held it there with a chapped, grimy hand while the man rose and stepped out.

Not over twenty-five, dark, thin and sinewy, with black hair that crinkled and a blacker moustache that curled—by some Jim Daggett would have been pronounced good looking. It seemed that his razor could have barely grown cold, yet the bluish beard showed through upon his jaw. That he thought well of himself his every movement boasted; he was a braggart in his bearing. He paused a moment to say some-

thing to the boy, who answered in a voice like the whining of a dog; and then he leaped across the skow and swung himself up to the wharf.

"Hello, Foster," said Daggett in a friendly fashion as he came forward.

"How do, Jim," nodded the storekeeper shortly.

"Going to be a bad night, I judge," said the younger man. "If you don't mind, reckon I'll lay to your mooring. Thought you might be planning to run over to Bayport soon, and if you are, I'd like to have you do a favor for me. That's why I dropped in here to-night," he explained with the carelessness of one half lying, at least, to conceal his real purpose.

"Don't cal'late I'll find a chance to get over across this month, Jim," returned Foster. "I've got some traps out, and nobody but myself to 'tend them, besides looking after the store. Can't shet that up in the season, you know."

"Hardly," agreed Daggett. "Well, I'll have to find some other way of sending that compass back to Sam Higgins, or take it myself. I don't want the cussed thing."

"Oh, the compass you bought of Higgins? What's the matter with it?"

"No good. Has fits; switches round crazy; points any old way. I know these waters so that I don't really need a compass, nor a chart, for that matter. The Drunkard was breaking as I came past."

"Peter said she ought to be showing herself on this tide," said Foster, his eyes on the northern entrance to the harbor and his ears listening for the sound of a motor.

"How's Molly," inquired Daggett casually. "Is she home?"

"Yes, she's just back from Bangor, two days."

"Bangor?" exclaimed the younger man. "I thought she was vis'ting over in Bayport. What's she been doing in Bangor?"

"Buying her wedding outfit," answered Foster. "She and Tom hitch up Sunday. Here he comes now," he added with great satisfaction, as the barking of a gas engine came throbbing across the wind, and a good sized seining boat appeared in the northern entrance.

So absorbed was the storekeeper in watching the latest arrival that he failed to notice that Daggett's face had suddenly matched the lowering sky, while into the man's eyes flashed a gleam like red lightning muffled in black clouds. Some one at the wheel of the big power boat waved his hand as, with the motor shut off, the craft swung alongside Daggett's sloop; and Foster, having answered the signal, turned cheerfully to find his companion whittling with a long, keen knife at a piece of soft pine that he had picked up. Lowered lids curtained any light that might have lingered in Daggett's eyes.

"Wasn't sure the boy'd get back to-night," said Foster, in high spirits. "He's had great luck—struck pollock schooling four times within a month and cleaned up nigh a thousand dollars. I expect he's got the license in his pocket. He's making fast to your boat. Guess that mooring will hold you both all right."

"If necessary, one of us can put out a stern anchor," said Daggett a bit hoarsely. "Webster always was a lucky cuss."

"He's a worker," declared the storekeeper, "but he does have luck, too, I'll admit. He's the right sort and he'll make Molly a good husband. She aint seen him or she'd be out before this."

Daggett had displayed no greater haste to get ashore than that shown by the two men on the seining boat, Webster and his assistant, Bill Joyce. Soon the clanking of their oars came from the tender as it swung off and pointed toward the landing.

The boat had nearly touched the skow beside the wharf when a slender girl, with stray, wavy wisps of brown hair afloat and cheeks aglow, came hurrying from the little white house beyond the store and ran toward the wharf, her eyes blind to everybody except the buoyant, clean-faced, healthy young man who leaped from the tender, crossed the skow with a stride and was up in a jiffy to meet her. Unhesitating and unabashed, he kissed her before them all; and though she made a pretense of seeking to baffle such an open demonstration of his affection, it was a weak little pretense that was

more like an invitation. She laughed in happy confusion as her two hands pushed him off and held him; and the glow in her cheeks flowed suddenly over her throat and neck.

Shivering oddly, although he seemed to feel a flare of furnace flame within, Jim Daggett turned away, the taut muscles twitching slightly over his set jaw. For the next few moments he appeared to be somewhat gloomily interested in the harbor craft as seen through the gathering wind-swept twilight; but his intent ear missed no word that passed between the man he hated and the girl he coveted; and every tender note of vibrant bass or soft contralto seemed to stoke that inward fire.

"Hello, Jim." It was Webster speaking to him, and Daggett swung round. "Didn't expect to find you in here tonight, but I knew your boat and took the liberty to tie up to her. If you think it's liable to blow too hard, I'll drop astern of you and anchor." He held out his hand in an open, friendly fashion.

Daggett shrank from taking that hand; his wounded, jealous soul revolted against it; hatred for Webster flowed like virulent poison through his veins. But he mastered his revulsion and gave Webster's finger a quick, fierce grip, as if he would crush them even as he longed to crush the man himself.

"I don't judge she'll blow hard enough for us to drag," he said, doing his best to speak in a natural manner. "If I'd known you was coming in I'd clubbed the old *Frisk* and left the mooring free for you. But then, you shouldn't expect to have *everything* around here all for yourself."

"I don't want everything," returned Webster, relieved by Daggett's apparent disposition to be friendly. "As long as I'm to have what I want most, I'm willing to share 'most anything else." He turned to the girl, who, having seen Daggett at last, had lost much of her high color and could not wholly hide traces of embarrassment and nervousness.

"Perhaps you've heard that Molly and I are to be married Sunday coming?"

"Congratulations," said Daggett, removing his hat and bowing to her. "You always was a rusher, Tom, but seems to me in this case you're in a bigger hurry than usu'l. Strikes me as ruther sudden."

"Oh, not so very," laughed Webster. "We've really been engaged for near four months, but we've sort of been waiting till I could raise the money to buy a little house that's for sale at Bender's Cove, on Grand."

"Understood things have been coming your way. You must have pretty near enough already."

"Almost. If I could strike one more big school it would fix me, and if the weather isn't too dirty I'm going to make a run to the outside grounds in the morning. Got to play the cards when they're coming, you know."

Molly was at his side now and her hand was on his arm. "Don't go out tomorrow, Tom," she pleaded. "The weather's been looking bad for two days now, and I'm sure we're going to get a storm. Father says he's looking for it. I don't want you to go out tomorrow."

"Nonsense, Molly," he laughed. "This wind's likely to blow itself out before midnight and leave nothing but an old swell for to-morrow morning. Think what one more good haul means to us. Of course if it's too bad I wont start."

But she knew him, knew his reputation for taking chances in the teeth of the most threatening weather, and she was far from satisfied. He had a way, however, of jollying her into pouting, remonstrating submission, and this he now proceeded to do.

"It's getting dark," reminded old man Foster. "Mother's lighted up in the house, and supper must be near ready. Come on, Joyce," he invited, turning to Webster's man, who lingered on the wharf. "You don't want to take a snack alone on the boat; come have supper with us. There's a plenty. I'll lock up the store and come right in." Then he suddenly seemed to realize that he had not included Daggett. "You, too, Jim," he said. "There's a plenty; there's a plenty. We'll have a reg'lar party."

But Daggett had little wish to make one of such a party, and, muttering

thanks, he said he reckoned he would take supper on board his boat. "I don't want to butt in on the happy family gathering," he professed, with a half-hidden sneer.

Webster, with Molly at his side, had started for the house. He said something to her, and she stopped and turned round.

"Wont you take supper with us, Jim?" she urged. "We'd really like to have you."

For a moment Daggett was disposed to refuse, but suddenly he changed his mind. "As long as you ask me, Miss Molly," he said, "I believe I'll come." Then, as Joyce passed and followed the young couple toward the house, he spoke to Foster: "I'll send Dick back to the boat; he's been waiting for me. I'll be right along."

In the growing gloom he dropped from the wharf to the skow, beside which the patient Fool sat huddled in the tender. Reaching out, the man sunk his fingers into a thin shoulder that protruded from a big hole in a very dirty and much tattered shirt. The boy cowered and whined; his manner was singularly like that of a dog that has been beaten and terrified.

"Look here, you idiot," hissed Daggett guardedly. "I want you to listen to me and pay attention to what I say. Understand—pay attention. You're going back to the boat alone. There's nobody on Webster's boat; both he and Joyce are staying ashore for supper. You'll be out there all alone, with nobody to see what you do, and you're to do what I tell you, or I'll trim the hide off your carcass."

Cringing and trembling, the boy panted like a hunted animal that has been cornered and is about to be attacked. In the darkness his eyes, fixed fearsomely on the man who held him fast with one clutching, crushing claw, could barely be seen peering through the snarl of dirty hair that fell over his receding forehead. Combined with his panting breathing, the low whining, which continued at intervals, strangely suggested the pleading of an ill-used cur.

"Now get it straight," warned Daggett swiftly and fiercely, "and don't make no blunder if you want to dodge a hiding. You're to take my compass and swap it for the one you'll find on Webster's boat. And make sure no one sees you about it. The two compasses are just alike, so Webster'll never know the diff'rence. But I'll know if you fail, and I'll—" He finished with a threat that made the Fool tremble still more violently.

"Come on, Jim," called Foster, turning the key in the store door.

"Coming," answered Daggett, still gripping the boy's bare shoulder. "Do you understand what you're to do, Fool?" he whispered.

"Yeh, I unnerstan'." The answer was a combined whine and growl, choked and smothered.

"You must swap the compasses soon as you can without being seen. Got that into your head?"

"Yeh, I got."

"All right." The man straightened up and spoke loudly for the ears of the impatiently waiting storekeeper. "There's grub enough aboard for your supper, Dick. Put things trim, set the riding light, and turn in as soon as you please."

He rejoined Foster and followed him toward the lighted house. Borne on the wind gusts, he heard the clanking of the Fool's oars. The darkness was a mask for his face.

The supper was a protracted torture for Daggett. He had been placed opposite Tom and Molly, but mostly he talked to Joyce at his side—when he talked at all; but it was only by an effort that he conversed, and even when speaking himself his ears were reaching for every word of the happy couple he envied. Their happiness, which shone in their eyes, sounded in their voices and was revealed in their every move and gesture, was like gall and wormwood to the bloodless lips of Daggett's jealous soul. True, they did not exchange languishing glances, nor simper, nor thrust and parry after the style of the rustic lovelorn; their talk was free and open and their merriment invited other to join and be merry too; but there was about him the assurance of possession and the gentle authority that is considerate and not domineer-

ing, and about her that indescribable atmosphere of gladness which a woman always feels when she believes she has found "the one man," and that he belongs to her alone; and all of this was far more trying to Daggett than open billing and cooing could have been, for he could have laughed at that, and sneered.

So Daggett crowded down the food, tasteless to him as dry chips, although it was really excellent, for mother Foster was famed as a cook. Sometimes he made a hollow pretense of chatting affably with the old man at the head of the table, and sometimes he exchanged a few words with the bespectacled mistress of the house who presided over the coffee pot; but always he was listening to the talk of the pair who sat opposite, noting the color that came and went in Molly's cheeks, and inwardly cursing Webster for the joy he could not hide. Yet again and again as he sat in that lighted room he seemed to see the ragged Fool, out there on the dark bosom of the harbor, creeping cat-like over the gunwale of Webster's boat and exchanging the compasses. What might come of such an act he did not know, but he had hopes.

Supper over, Foster pushed back his chair and lighted his pipe. Mother Foster sat for a brief time before beginning to clear away the dishes. Occasionally wind gusts rattled the windows.

Suddenly, feeling that he could not remain longer, Daggett rose. "Fine supper," he said, "and surely much obliged for the invitation to it. Got to be going, though, for I'm going to get out early in the morning and try the trawling."

"Cal'late there's going to be a chance for it, do ye, Jim?" asked Foster.

"Oh, sure," was the answer, with a forced laugh of carelessness. "I don't look for this weather to kick up anything to bother a man that knows his business."

Joyce had taken the cue and found his hat. To the surprise of all, as if struck by a sudden thought, Webster likewise rose and prepared to go out. Molly caught his arm.

"You're not going now, Tom?" she said in wondering reproof.

"I'll be back directly," he promised, smiling. "In my rush to come ashore I clean forgot something—something for you—a present."

"Oh, Tom!"

"Something you've been wanting very much. Now, I'm not going to tell you. I'll be back as soon as I can come, and bring it with me. It's a surprise."

Pacified, she let him go. Daggett and Joyce said good-night. Declining the lantern that Foster offered, the three men followed the dark path to the landing, buffeted by the wind. The riding lights of the many moored boats were swaying and dancing above the black bosom of the harbor; the distant grumbling of the surf had risen to a sullen, beating roar that came through the night like far-away cannonading.

"No need to call Dick, Jim," said Webster. "We'll put you aboard. Do you really think there'll be a chance in the morning?"

"I'm going out unless she blows like hell let loose," growled Daggett in reply.

For all of the wind and sea outside, the naturally protected harbor was remarkably smooth, and in a few minutes Daggett stepped from Webster's tender aboard his own sloop.

"I want you to see what I've brought for Molly, Jim," said Tom.

Daggett's lips curled in the darkness. He did not care what it was and he set his teeth to keep himself from saying as much. Joyce lighted the lamp in Webster's cabin. Something whined faintly down there. Then Webster's head appeared above the hatchway, and in his hands he held something small and white and fluffy.

"Here it is," he laughed, holding the thing up, "a Skye terrier puppy. Molly's wanted one ever since she saw one over at Bayport."

"Huh!" grunted Daggett disgustedly. "Don't see what any sensible person can want of one of them useless things. I wouldn't give a trawl hook for the best dog in the country. Dick is dog enough for me."

"Everyone to his taste," returned the other man, unoffended. "Set me ashore, Joyce. I'll whistle when I want you to bring me off for the night."

The small boat containing the two men was quickly swallowed by the darkness, and Daggett descended into his cabin, where he hastily lighted the lamp. Covered by an old quilt, the Fool seemed to be fast asleep in one of the bunks. Again the man seized the boy and shook him, and Dick awoke with a frightened whimper.

"Keep still," commanded Daggett. "Don't set up a howl now. Tell me straight, did you change them compasses?"

His tongue protruding a little, the boy began to pant, shrinking back against the side of the boat. Startled out of sound sleep by the man he feared and for whom he worked like a faithful slave, he seemed to find it impossible to command his voice.

"Hurry up," rasped Daggett. "Joyce will be coming back directly. Tell me the truth; don't dare to lie. Did you change them compasses?"

The Fool caught his breath and swallowed. "Yeh," he said. "I change um."

"Sure? I'll find out if you didn't, and you know what that means."

"I change um," reiterated the boy.

Daggett released him and stepped back, an unholy expression of satisfaction in the smile that exposed his teeth beneath his small, curling mustache. A shifting swoop of wind sneaked into the harbor, rocking the sloop and setting the cordage slapping. It brought with it a louder booming of the hammering surf.

"Good!" said the man. "Let Webster try the outside grounds to-morrow if he's got the nerve. He'll have some fun running back after dark by *that* compass."

Then, hearing the sound of Joyce's oars returning, he made preparations to turn in. Ten minutes later, in spite of everything, he was asleep, and he slept soundly the night through. At the first gray hint of morning he was awakened by sounds made by Webster casting off, followed by the click of a motor fly-wheel thrown over to start the engine, and then the wheezing cough of the exhaust, becoming regular and steady and receding as the motor warmed up and settled down to business. Webster was going out; Daggett had feared that because of the threatening weather Molly might persuade him from his purpose. But he was going out!

Presently, as the barking of Webster's motor grew faint in the distance, Daggett, listening with drowsy satisfaction, began vaguely to realize that something was not as he had expected it would be. Wondering, he lifted himself to his elbow, and in a twinkling he knew what it was that he had missed; the cordage of the little vessel had ceased to flap; the wind no longer whistled overhead; the sloop lay as quiet as a toy boat in a tub. He rose at once, thrust back the half-open hatch and poked his head out.

The sky was still heavy and low, and the sea was yet clamoring at the outer end of the island; but the wind had blown itself out, and Daggett knew that the long, slow-heaving swells outside were running as smooth as oil. Nor was there any absolute assurance that the wind would rise again later; the storm that had threatened so long had seemingly lost its courage, like a faltering gamester with a weak hand. It was even possible that the clouds might burn off before the sun and give a fair day. With a curse, Daggett went back to his bunk.

Molly Foster, roused by the barking motors of the fishing boats as they put forth from the harbor in the gray of the morning, looked from her chamber window and saw Daggett's sloop lying companionless at its mooring. But she also saw that the wind had abated and the dreaded storm was holding off; and this served in a measure to allay the loneliness that pierced her when she knew that Tom was gone.

Coming forth after breakfast to open his store, old man Foster paused and stared, an odd pucker of surprise on his face, at Daggett's boat, which was, with the exception of the dismantled old schooner that lay bedded on the mud flats close to Mouse Island, the only piece of shipping now to be seen in the bare, deserted harbor. All the toilers of the sea who made Roaring Island Harbor their night haven were off about their precarious business.

Nor, despite his protestations of the

night before, did Daggett show any haste to get out; late into the forenoon he lingered, with the Fool puttering around under orders. A hundred times the eyes of the sloop's master were turned toward the shore, but if he procrastinated that he might get another glimpse of Molly, disappointment was his only reward; she remained within the house.

At last Daggett reluctantly prepared to get under way. The Fool cast off the mooring; the motor, primed, spoke with the first flip at the wheel; the sloop headed toward the southern entrance. The grim, dark-faced man at the helm did not waste a backward look.

The air was damp and heavy and hot, with the sun struggling vainly to burn through the thick clouds. On the heaving face of the sea there was at times an odd, shimmering light that hurt the eyes and made them pucker. Somewhere below the indistinct oceanward horizon, Daggett felt certain a fog bank lingered and waited.

He did not bear for the outside grounds, though his course would have taken him there had he continued; it was too late to make the long run and do any fishing that day, had he ever contemplated it. On the inside grounds he lay throughout the afternoon, minding his trawls and cursing the bad luck that seemed to have marked him for its special spite. He saw one or two distant neighbors get up their anchors and start on the homeward run, but still he remained, casting now and then his gaze to the south-east when the sloop rose on the regularly recurring heavier seas that buoyed it like a feather.

Finally, through the dun haze of approaching night, he saw that for which he had watched, and hoped that he would not see. Though the distance and gloom made outlines indistinct, he knew it was Webster's boat; and he growled, dog-like, even as the poor Fool, "marked" before his birth, might have growled. Snarling at Dick, he set about taking in the last trawl.

Webster passed near enough for Daggett to hear the sound of his engine and see that the big seining boat was riding low, as if heavily loaded. That told the story; he had struck pollock again, a big school of them, and the returns from that catch would be enough to make up the sum needed for the purchase of the little house at Bender's Cove.

Webster's boat was a tiny vanishing spot on the water when Daggett got under way. Darkness was shutting down, but it could not come too soon to suit Daggett as he thought of the compass on which Webster would have to depend after nightfall. He ordered the Fool to light the port and starboard lamps and the binnacle; at the task Dick paused to lift seaward one thin, pointing arm and whine, "Fog come."

Daggett looked back and saw it coming, a black band like a swift-rolling curtain of smoke. There was little wind to aid, so Daggett had not set his sails, but the vibrating motor was turning up full speed. Still, fast though the sloop was moving, the fog came faster, and Daggett laughed, knowing that it must overtake the man ahead, as well as himself, long before Roaring Island Harbor could be reached.

The fog rolled over the sloop with a cold, chilling touch like that of a clammy hand; it blotted out the reflection of the red and green side lamps on the water; it was dense, opaque, impenetrable, almost, as the blackness of a cave. It quickly filmed Daggett's oilskins with a dewy grip. Ahead, the prow of the sloop, even, was lost in the folds of that fog, and the man was compelled to bend forward a bit to decipher the points of the compass by the blurred binnacle light. He shifted his course a fraction of a point as the compass directed.

Down there, outside the Great Eastern Bay and off the course of steamers and large vessels, no hoarse-throated foghorn bellowed warnings to groping mariners. There was a lighthouse on Grand Island, but the "mull" had blotted it out like a candle beneath a measure. But, thinking of Webster and the crazy compass, Daggett was glad with a terrible gladness.

The Fool crouched in the cockpit, dumbly watching the blurred figure of his master at the wheel. In the blackness the forging sloop rose and fell on the smooth billows that slipped hissing under her heel. Occasionally Daggett

wiped the moisture from the face of the compass.

It seemed that hours had passed when Daggett suddenly turned his ear to leeward, his manner startled. At first he believed he must be mistaken, but almost immediately he knew that the sullen, fitful grumbling that he heard was made by breakers on a ledge not far away on the starboard quarter. It seemed impossible, but there was no mistaking that sound; and, amazed as well as disturbed, the man put the wheel to port to bear away.

What ledge could it be? He had set his course to give them all a wide berth, and he knew by the time he had been running that it was not the sea churning against the granite walls of Roaring Island. He stared at the compass, which told him that he was now pointing to far to the westward. As soon as he felt that he was safely away from the unknown ledge, he again picked up the course he had been following.

But he was uneasy, apprehensive, fearful. He felt that the ledge whose muttered threats he had heard had no right to be where it was. Something was wrong, and he strained his ears, listening for any sound that might be heard above the steady, dogged chugging of the motor. There was fear in the watching eyes of the Fool, and he panted softly to himself.

Suddenly, smitten by a dreadful thought, the man turned from the helm and seized the shivering boy with one hand, jerking him to his feet and holding him close.

"You lied to me!" shouted Daggett in a terrible voice. "You lied! You didn't change them compasses!"

The Fool whined, seeking to lift an arm to protect his face.

"You lied!" repeated the man hoarsely. "What made you lie? Why didn't you swap the compasses?"

"Dog," whimpered Dick. "I 'fraid of dog."

Daggett dropped the boy, leaped to the wheel. There was only one thing to do; he must anchor if he could find bottom. Webster had the true compass; by this time, perhaps, he was running safely into Roaring Island Harbor, where Molly waited for him. In fancy Daggett heard the sound of church bells pealing merrily.

In reality he heard another sound, a sudden rending and parting of the waters beneath the very prow of the boat, which was sucked back for a moment and then lifted high.

"The Drunkard!" he shrieked. The Fool uttered one howl like that of a dying dog.

Then the iron foundations of the world seemed to rise from the deep and smite the sloop.

Sacrifice

By HAROLD C. BURR

THOSE of you who like as a backdrop for your literature a drawing-room of the idle rich had better lay aside this story right here. No motor cars will whiz up the Avenue through its pages. Your curiosity will not be whetted with champagne suppers. No ravishing *débutante* will listen to shocking gossip behind her gold-spangled fan from a *blasé* and bald-headed millionaire bachelor. Maggie the saleslady, masticating her minted gum, will derive no delicious knowledge of the social intrigues of the Four Hundred.

No, it's just going to be a plain, homely, unadorned tale. The characters will all be poor people, the very marrow of the nation. Theirs is the struggle for bread, existence, the grim romance. In them the strife of life is strongest. After all, it's the tenements where the cradles of the heroes are rocked. In our humble narrative the whole Steevens family are the heroes. It's a history of the Steevens family, of a period of stress and mighty decision in its affairs.

The head of the household and logical provider for it had died long before this story was conceived. The children didn't remember him at all and time had healed the wife's grief. Mrs. Steevens, bereft of her man-mate and forager, and with two small children to support, buckled down to taking in washing by the day. She shrewdly saw that no matter how hard the times grew, people would still wear clean clothes.

Luckily she had been fashioned for wear and tear. She was no fragile flower. Since there would be no more child-bearing, she devoted her healthy, mature energies to child-nourishing. Her world was a world of workers, producers, male and female. She had mothered her little brood; now she must father it as best she could. She bent uncomplainingly over the tubs, a good washerwoman. Her feet puffed and her hands coarsened and swelled redly.

Lydia was the older of the two children. She foreswore high school and went to work in the packing department of Karger's Krisp Kornmeal Co. With a score of other girls, she sat all day before a long table and folded flat pieces of cardboard, notched at the ends, into stiff paper boxes. She did this endlessly, mechanically, monotonously. Sometimes at home her thoughts would wander and she would catch herself listlessly folding the Sunday newspaper as if it were one of Karger's paper receptacles. Other times she worked at her day-time task in her sleep, and then she was deluged and the boxes had to be made into all kinds of outlandish sizes and shapes. Usually the last one was a monster that she had to climb a step-ladder to manage at all.

The other child was a boy. Both mother and daughter looked covertly to him to emancipate them from toil. Edgar was a good boy and smart. The women slaved and saved to give him his start. Every mother has dreams for the son of her loins; Mrs. Steevens looked fondly to Edgar, and plodded patiently on until that day when he would sally bravely out and wring a living for himself and his women-folk out of the selfish world.

Lydia was too plain a mortal to harbor illusions. The continual battle for food and clothes and roof had been too severe, to enervating. She was thin, haggard of eye. The slow-dragging years of dull routine had blunted her wit. No man would look upon her and find the sight good, satisfying. The male of the species can pick and choose, and he invariably picks freshness. Lydia's cheeks might once have worn the bloom of youth, but they were dead now. She was too fagged all the time to care about marriage, anyway. All she wanted was rest and no more paper boxes to make. She also looked to Edgar for freedom.

But neither woman let him see that he was the hope of the family. When they impressed upon him the need of monetary success, honestly attained, it was impersonally. Mrs. Steevens always told him he must get ahead in business for his own sake. Edgar was her boy. The minute his salary began to soar he would know where to bestow it. He mustn't be bully-ragged into any gifts. He must give gladly or not at all. And she knew that he would give gladly. He must have no whining women to retard him, worry him.

Edgar girded on his confidence and went pluckily at it. He got a toe-hold, a foot-hold, a hand-grip. It took him six years to earn twelve hundred a year. Then he got raised to fifteen hundred, eighteen hundred. And then Edgar Steevens showed the stuff that he was made of. He didn't develop a case of swelled head. He fulfilled his mother's confidence in him. When the day arrived, Lydia bid farewell to Karger's Krisp Kornmeal factory; the mother washed no more clothes, either for other people or herself. Edgar

rented a neat little flat for them in a better neighborhood, and bought furniture on the installment plan. He installed a wonderous oak wood piano for Lydia to strum on, and Mrs. Steevens sank contentedly into an easy chair with green plush cushions. The day of plenty had set in.

But the proud mother continued to dream and Edgar never set her right, probably because he wouldn't acknowledge it even to himself. The boy was only a scant twenty-four years old, she reasoned, and earning more by his own unaided efforts than any young man she knew of. The neighbors with whom she gossiped corroborated that. So she had only to close her eyes to conjure up rosy visions. She looked down the vista of the future years and saw her boy the moving spirit of a great business concern. But alas for the vanity of blood!

Edgar Steevens had climbed as high as ever he would climb. In a nutshell, he could take orders, but couldn't give them. In that lies the difference, in striking out for yourself and obeying somebody else. It's an age of small salaries, because of competition. The shadow of the fellow-who-will-do-it-for-less is continually dogging us. Edgar realized this in a vague, uneasy fashion. If he wanted to get married, say, he knew he hadn't enough to support two families. But that was a bridge he hadn't come to yet.

Still the Girl was inevitable. She comes into every man's life. In this particular instance she wasn't half good enough for him, but that's the perversity of love. No man knows whence it comes, why it comes or whither it goes —no man nor no woman.

About Justine Trimble there was a good deal that was artificial—the pink powder on her cheeks, the puffs in her hair and her way with a man. By watching her expression you couldn't tell precisely what she was thinking about—perhaps she wasn't thinking of anything at all. She was pretty much of a doll-girl, with hair that was too yellow and china-blue eyes that were too innocent.

She was a stenographer in the same office where Edgar Steevens was drawing down his little eighteen hundred a year. Edgar sat at one of an identical row of desks, with his name on the side in silver plate. By looking covertly over the roll-top he could see her head bent over her typewriter keyboard. The position veiled her eyes in shadow. Once in a while a tendril of her hair loosened. Edgar was good for nothing until she deftly tucked it back in place with her slim fingers. At such times the sleeve of her white shirtwaist would slip up her smoothly rounded forearm, leaving it bare and lovely save for her silver bracelet. He grew to think a good deal about that symmetrical forearm and the silver bracelet that added the feminine touch that made the whole just right. It wasn't good for the peace of his soul to think about such things.

And slowly the old love call grew in his aching throat until he had to drive it back for fear of premature utterance. His love for this one girl above all others was made known to him by trivial things. Once it was the sidelong glance she directed at one of the firm's customers, a young fellow not averse to flirting back. Miss Trimble flushed and bent her head, pleased. Edgar grew hot and sick and frantic. Another time one of the members of the concern spoke sharply to her about some dictation. Edgar, watching and solicitous, saw her lip tremble sensitively, her eyes film quickly. He was torn between twin desires—to take her in his arms and pet her, and to thrash the boss for his rudeness. But he could do neither.

That night he went home and kissed his mother as if he were going away, and told her all about it. "She's the girl I want, mother," he said with quiet conviction. "And I—I think she—might care for me. I hope you and Lydia'll like her. I've invited her up to dinner Thursday."

Mrs. Steevens clasped her boy—who was giving her notice that he was a man, with a man's healthy yearning—in her arms and, I think, cried a little on his shoulder. She knew how it would end. Edgar would have his own family to support, look after. Other interests would compel him to drift apart from his kin. She and Lydia had talked over the possibility long ago. But neither of

them had once thought of denying the young man his birthright to live and love where he listed. At the beginning we hinted that Mrs. Steevens was one of the heroines of this story.

She patted Edgar affectionately on the back. "Then I'll be losing my boy soon," she said bravely.

"If she'll have a duffer like me," he grinned back ruefully after the approved groveling fashion of the courting male, youthfully thoughtless of what the words meant to his mother.

Behind their locked bedroom door that night, the two women discussed it in hushed whispers in the dark. Edgar mustn't hear them complaining.

"But, mother, why can't we all live together?" demanded the girl petulantly, a little ashamed of the resentment she couldn't rid herself of toward this strange woman who would usurp their happy little household and bid its breadwinner follow her to the exclusion of his own blood.

Mrs. Steevens wrapped her arms lovingly about the nightgowned, rebellious girl in bed beside her. "It wouldn't do, Lydia," she said gently. "I'm older than you are. I know people's tempers in the morning. We'd squabble continually. No house is big enough to roof two families, and we live in a flat! Besides, young married couples always want their homes to themselves. It was like that with your father and me. We must be fair to Edgar."

"Yes," sniffed the girl, "but it's hard on the rest of us. It'll be—be awful going back to that—that drudgery and —and all!"

The older woman didn't say anything for a minute. "Edgar mustn't even suspect we've talked about that part of it, Lydia," she said finally. "Don't worry, dearie; everything will come out for the best."

"Suppose she—she shouldn't want him," ventured Lydia in a small, apologetic voice.

Mrs. Steevens sniffed audibly. "She'll want him fast enough, depend upon it," she said with a mother's proud faith. "What girl wouldn't jump at the chance of landing such a fine-looking, smart young man as Edgar? She'll be a little fool if she doesn't."

But when Edgar precipitately asked Justine Trimble to marry him, thinking to surprise his mother and Lydia by introducing the girl to them as his wife-to-be, the girl herself temporized, laughed nervously, seemed embarrassed. "I'll let you know," she put him off hurriedly. "I'm coming to your house to dinner Thursday. I'll tell you then—when you're taking me home afterward."

Edgar's disappointment over her equivocal behavior was short-lived. After all, when a woman hesitates she's lost. Perhaps he had been a little bit too hasty. No doubt she had never thought of him seriously before. She wanted time to get used to the new order of things before accepting him outright. She wanted first to weigh him in the balance with the other young men she knew.

But on Thursday morning she stopped him on his way to his desk solemnly. "I've come to tell you I wont be able to come up to-night," she explained briefly. "I've got another engagement I forgot all about. You don't mind, do you?"

"When can you come?" he asked more or less inanely.

Miss Trimble frowned as if trying to recall a single open date in her busy young life. "I can't tell you now," she said in the old hurried manner.

Yes, Edgar Steevens could take orders, but couldn't give them—to a woman, least of all. But he was no fool. "All right," he nodded without resentment, "you let me know."

"Yes," she promised in relief and moved swiftly off; but, not being a fool, he knew she never would.

It only confirmed everything that he had suspected when he saw her talking *sotto voce* with one of the younger clerks. Edgar couldn't very well help but overhear what was said between them. At the time he was at the locker end of the office. The long door of his little cubby-hole was open wide and Edgar was well hidden behind it. Steevens knew the young clerk casually for a good fellow, lively and all that. The girl was talking to him close at hand. Edgar paused in the act of lifting his overcoat from the hook.

"Why, no," Justine was saying in a pleased sort of voice, "I haven't any engagement for to-night."

"Then you'll go?" the young clerk pressed.

"Surely, I'd be glad to, and thank you very much for asking me."

Poor Edgar Steevens went pale now that the truth was out irrevocably. The hand that unhooked the overcoat shook. She had lied to him, then. No, Edgar wasn't anybody's fool. She had lied to him. It obliterated her from the reckoning.

He was rather pleased with himself for the calm, collected way he stepped out from the shielding locker door and faced them. Justine hadn't known who it was behind there. She had only seen the bottom of a pair of cuffed trousers, and those only casually. She bit her lip, went chalky white and braced herself to receive whatever he had to offer. But Edgar only smiled a shade bitterly at her and passed them by.

At the supper table he told his family just what had happened, unadorned. Both were sympathetic, but forebore to question him when his recital stopped. Edgar had no excuses, no recriminations. The women had listened in stunned silence to the slight that had been put upon the family name.

"Mother," he said, "I don't want you to worry about it. If she didn't want to come, it's all right. You and Lydia can't spare me anyway—so it's all—all right."

Lydia didn't see her mother shaking her head at her warningly. "No, Edgar, we can't," she chimed in recklessly. "Now that it's all over I don't mind telling you. If you'd taken your money out of the house, mother and I would have been hard put to it. I'd have had to go back to Karger's treadmill, and mother's too old to break her back over the tubs again. If you look at it that way, it may help you."

Edgar breathed noisily. "It's a relief to have it decided, Lyd. I've worried about you and mother—what you'd do without my help with the bills. Now I can work just for you and— and forget. It's been a good eye-opener. Justine Trimble's the girl I want still, but I can't get her, and that settles it. We wont talk about her any more in this house." He reached under the table cloth and squeezed both of their hands hard, hands that had worked lovingly for him and seen him through college. "Let's try not to remember."

And after that the women cried a little and consoled him a little and made a few pointed remarks about a certain young lady's poor taste—all of which is a woman's prerogative.

Well, Edgar Steevens did the best that was in him, grimly. But it was tough sledding. For one thing, he was forced to see her every day at the office. That made it doubly hard. Since he was denied possession, the sight of her was twice as alluring. It's a freak of human nature to want what we can't have. It's the gods' way of making us ambitious, I suppose. In vain he bent over his work and gritted his teeth.

Justine Trimble neither apologized for her rudeness nor treated him pleasantly. When they passed in the office her lip had a well-defined trick of curling. Edgar saw, and her contempt bit deep. At other times she seemed to be hurt, tired, dejected. More than once he caught her looking at him pensively. But she made no attempt to renew the acquaintance. It was up to her. And where Steevens thought it all over and done with, the affair was still hanging fire.

But it remained for Mrs. Steevens to set the ball rolling again, so to speak. It was a stormy night and she had been delayed about her shopping downtown. She entered an up-town elevated train, laden with bundles, puffing, moist with the rain. Halfway down the aisle she espied the single vacant seat. It was a cross-seat, bisecting the long row of rattan. A girl sat hunched forlornly up beside the rain-spattered window. She had been crying. And Destiny waddled down that car aisle personified in the person of the opulent Mrs. Steevens.

Edgar's mother plumped down in the empty seat with a contented sigh. The long years at the washtub had gotten in their work on her feet. It made them ache to stand. Quite by accident she glanced at the girl's lap and received the shock of her life. There was a neglected evening paper on the girl's lap.

Across the margin at the top were written two names, some of the letters crossed out. The names were Edgar Steevens and Justine Trimble.

"Friendship, love, indifference, hate, kiss, court, marriage; friendship, love, indifference—" Mrs. Steevens read.

"Poor little girl! She cares for him, after all!"

Miss Trimble hadn't seen who had appropriated the vacant seat. She had forgotten the tell-tale writing on the exposed paper. The rain ran down the drenched pane in crystaline rivulets. It was a cold, dreary evening for love to go askew.

Mrs. Steevens' toil-roughened hand stole sympathetically over toward the younger woman. "If it's as bad as all that, Miss, why didn't you accept him?"

Justine drew her hand away resentfully. "Who are you?" she demanded.

"Edgar's mother, dearie," said Mrs. Steevens kindly. "Wont you tell me all about it? You'll feel better if you tell some one."

The girl actually laughed constrainedly. "Oh, if you know it already,"—her voice verging on hysteria. "You—he—well, I thought he always would go on caring. I was too sure. He showed it so plainly. He never tried taking other girls around to make me jealous. He was too—good-natured. And now—now I—I guess I want him."

"Yes, dearie, I know how it is sometimes. I nearly lost my husband that way. But it's silly and it doesn't make them care any more for us."

There didn't seem to be anything further to say just then. Justine went back to staring disconsolately out the window; Mrs. Steevens went to work mentally, rearranging her future and her boy's. And deep down in her heart was a glow of satisfaction. By merest chance and one bold stroke, she was bringing Edgar the greatest happiness in the world. She closed her eyes and tried to realize the miracle of it. But another vision entered unawares and she controlled a shiver only by an effort. To her nostrils came the faint odor, little more than a disquieting memory, of soapsuds. She recalled the splitting backaches.

At her station, she patted the girl's hand again reassuringly. "Don't let it fret you, dearie," she advised, rising, bundles and all. "And it wouldn't be an awful surprise to me if Edgar invited you up to dinner again. We'll forget all about that other time. Will you forget it, too, by coming?"

"Yes." Miss Trimble, swallowing her sobs, returned the pressure gratefully.

Mrs. Steevens walked the few blocks from the train to her door as if very tired. After all, she was an old woman. Youth must be served. She would let Lydia decide for both of them. But she was vastly proud of Edgar. He had performed a miracle of love. Manfully, simply, without pose or pretense, he had given love unashamed. And now he was about to be rewarded. The girl appreciated the gift and had planted it within her own heart, where it was flourishing and growing. It was wonderful. But Mrs. Steevens had her duty to perform toward both children. Lydia must decide.

When she got there Lydia was home alone. "Yes, mother," she said steadily, "we must let him hear it right away. The poor boy's haggard and sick for a word of encouragement. Wont he be delighted! What did she say? I'm wild to hear all about it."

"You realize what this is going to mean to us?" her mother put sharply. "It'll be all the old privation slavery over again. You'll have to give up your pretty clothes, the spending money for your purse, the easy life. We'll stew and fret about rent-day again. You'll have to go back to folding cardboard and I'll have to return to the tubs. And we'll be doing it for a total stranger. Think, Lydia—all that it means. Think hard, girl!"

"We're doing it for Edgar," replied the girl steadily.

"You'll have to find another place like you had at Karger's, remember," pressed Mrs Steevens relentlessly. "You'll come home tired and worn and hopeless. It's a terrible thing to come home hopeless. And the older you grow, the worse it will get. And this time we wont have any Edgar, rising in the world, to look to. Lydia, we'll never get out of the rut if we topple back into it You understand?"

"Perfectly, mother," said the tranquil little heroine, unblinkingly. "Edgar must have the woman he loves. It's the only thing in life worth while!"

Not another word did Mrs. Steevens say in argument, but she took her daughter impulsively into her arms—and they were good, capable, motherly arms. "I knew it! I knew it!" she declared a trifle wildly. "Lydia, I'd have turned from you if you'd said anything else. But wasn't it lucky I should get on the same train!"

Edgar took the great news calmly. He looked dubiously from his swiftly explaining mother to Lydia, who was looking radiantly over her shoulder, eyes a-sparkle with vicarious happiness, at him. The women's faces fell at the manifest indifference depicted on his own. It had been such a surprise and it was being received so flatly. It was disappointing to sacrifice so much and not have it appreciated at all. For their sacrifice they had expected to be paid with a sight of his joy. It would have been payment enough. But this lukewarm reception was unsatisfactory.

"Sure," he agreed carelessly, "let's have her up to the big eats."

Mrs. Steevens spun him around until he faced her sheepishly. "Edgar, look at me!" she commanded sternly, to sift this mood of his to the bottom. "You still—care for her, don't you?"

The boy shifted his feet awkwardly. "I—well, I'll own up that I'm older. A fellow's taste in girls changes the wiser he gets. When I popped the question to Justine I was green."

It was Lydia who relieved the lugubriousness of the situation by giving forth peal after peal of nervous laughter. "Oh, you fickle thing, you!" she chided mockingly, wagging a long, bony finger at him. It was the only way she could express the relief she wasn't exactly proud of. "You used to go mooning around the flat here saying you could never love anyone else. Who's the latest, Edgar?"

"No one." Edgar answered her question sulkily, blushing dully. "Go ahead and giggle, Lyd. But I guess I'm wise all right. The sensible fellows all say nowadays, never take a skirt seriously. She'll despise you the minute you do."

"Oh, it's all right," said Lydia airily, the dread specter of a long life of the old hardship fading in full retreat. "We know how you *blasé* men of the world feel, don't we mother! Only don't go moping around any more like a lovesick calf. It gets on my nerves something fierce. You made mother and me positively wretched."

Mrs. Steevens looked from her teasing daughter to her son, who was taking it all in very bad grace. Somehow she couldn't admire him quite as much as when he had boyishly pledged undying fealty to Justine Trimble. But she supposed it was the penalty the mothers paid for the sophistication of their sons. She put the direct question to him again to settle it forever.

"No, mother, I don't—any more," he said frankly. "I'm sorry if she cares—the way I used to. But I—I can't. That's all."

He went off to bed whistling the latest thing in ragtime melodies. But once his bed-room door was locked behind him he reeled dizzily in the dark. Blindly he groped for the counterpane of his bed. Beneath him his legs were weak and tottering. The next second he had flung his arms out at full length, head buried in them.

"God forgive me for lying!" he sobbed prayerfully. "When Lyd started to josh me I thought I'd go crazy for keeping silent. Justine, Justine, I—I wish you understood what I'm doing. It's sacrifice, and sacrifice is bigger than love any day. You'd forgive me if you only knew the kind of a family I've got to provide for. I can't let them give me up, not even to get you."

That's about all there is to this crude, homely story. At the very start off, we said it wasn't going to be anything but a simple chronicle of a family of the people. So if you are disappointed at the outcome, you have no one but yourself to blame. But it's been more than that, after all. It's been a cross-section from the lives of four humble people. It's been about three unassuming domestic heroes. And of these Edgar Steevens was the greatest. His heroism was laughed over, ridiculed unknowingly. His sacrifice was superb, supreme. He was of the elect who die unsung.

Concerning White Rats

By BRUCE FARSON

AN EPISODE IN THE CAREERS OF THE BASEBALL INSEPARABLES

I KNEW this was goin' to happen!" sputtered Shorty Long as he writhed and twisted under the icy spatter of the shower bath.

"Knew what?" queried Curly Wolf from the depths of the arm chair in the hotel bedroom.

"Knew the darn Maroons were goin' to trip us up!'

"Huh!" grunted Curly. "You're some clairvoyant, you are, kid!"

The Leopards had opened their final Eastern invasion against the second division Maroons and, instead of fattening their averages, had dropped two games in as many days.

"I suppose you read in the cards that Peters would work against us in the first game and Speed Boy Thompson to-day, didn't yuh?" carped Curly.

"Worse than that!" growled his pal. He now stood in the doorway sawing his shoulders with a Turkish towel. "When we came through Pittsburgh I saw a big sign advertising Leopard socks, and a painter was daubing out the Leopard part with maroon paint. Can yuh beat that for a hunch?"

Curly scowled unbelievingly.

"Gowan! I saw that myself an' the paint wasn't maroon; it was brown. Anyway, I don't believe in hunches!"

Shorty smiled.

"Well, we've dropped two games, haven't we? An' aint the breaks of luck all goin' against us? You'll see. We'll lose the series in this town, sure thing! Bet yuh a hat!"

"Make it for the gang an' I'll go you!" snapped Curly, and reluctantly Shorty agreed.

Over the savory table d'hôte that evening, Curly stated the "hunch" and the bet to Gardner Wells and Babe Doll, whereat these worthies, being the other members of the aforementioned "gang," allied themselves with the outfielder against the superstitious Shorty. They kidded him about their expensive tastes in head-gear until he departed to keep a theatre engagement. Then they settled down in three leather-covered chairs to smoke and "fan."

"Wonder who they'll pitch to-morrow," opened Gardner Wells.

"That's an easy one," grunted Babe. "We'll be up against Mortimer, and then, the day after, they'll send back either Peters or Thompson to polish us off. Darned if I don't think Shorty's going to win his hat at that."

Red Mortimer, erstwhile of the "bushes," was the season's phenom. Six times, he had worked against the hard-hitting Leopards, and five times he had stood them on their heads. Once they had beaten him in fifteen innings on a bad break in his support. His record for the year stood twenty-seven won and five lost and the scribes had long ago dubbed him "the boy wonder." So there was reason for Babe's pessimism.

The matter of the opposing pitcher having been settled, the three stared around the lobby and began to criticise

the loiterers at cigar stand and desk. At length, a dapper gentleman, whose clothes proclaimed him a professional traveler, purloined an adjoining chair and hunched close.

"You fellows are with the Leopards, aint you?" he asked.

The three Inseparables grunted an affirmative.

"I thought I recognized you," the drummer went on cockily. "I always go out to see you boys play when I'm in your town."

Babe yawned and Curly looked bored. The hotel acquaintance had become too much of a commonplace to them to offer the slightest recreation. The traveler, however, was not to be rebuffed. He was now well under way.

"Funny about baseball," he continued. "Funny how you players get queer streaks. They tell me that more than one good ball player has been kidded back into the minor leagues."

Curly smiled condescendingly.

"There was Yank Pullen," he chuckled. "We sure put him out. That boy had everything. He beat us four straight games, and then we found out that he was in love and bashful about the girl. Her name was Cora. Well, we called him Cora the next time he pitched and we made five runs the first inning."

The drummer puffed up his cigar till its end glowed like a danger signal.

"Queer!" he ruminated. "Don't know as it's confined to ball players, either. I remember when I used to make Columbus, there was a bell boy named Purvis in the Transit House there. He was a nice kid; but he had one awful failing. He was scared to death of rats. Pretty bad fault for a bell hop, eh? Everybody knew it and used to play on it. Why, the very sight of a rat would turn him sick and shaky for half an hour."

Curly leaned forward.

"What d'yuh say his name was?" he questioned.

"Purvis," replied the salesman. "Don't remember his first name. He had red hair and freckles."

Curly gave vent to a long drawn yawn.

"Well, felluhs?" he said tentatively.

The other three arose.

"Bed time?" asked the traveling man, and upon their nodding, he added a "Good-night!"

As the three Inseparables wended their way upwards in the elevator, however, Curly's sleepiness evaporated. He drew them into the room that he shared with Shorty.

"Listen, you fellows!" he snapped. "I've got Mortimer's 'groove!'"

"You've got Mortimer's 'groove?'" howled Babe. "Come again! That lad hasn't got any 'groove.' All he knows how to do is to make monkeys out of us fellows and win games for the Maroons!"

Curly interrupted him.

"Forget that!" he commanded. "An' listen to me! You heard what that drummer said about the bell boy in Columbus—the fellow named Purvis?"

"Sure!" they answered.

"Well, Purvis is Red Mortimer!"

His two team mates stared at him as if he had suddenly lost his mind; but Curly continued unabashed.

"You know old Bill Sykes that scouts for the Maroons. Well, we went hunting for a week together last winter an' all he could talk about was this fellow Mortimer. Told me all about how he found him pitching no-hit games in a tall grass league. Even told me how he used to run ice water in a hotel in Columbus when he was a kid. The only thing he didn't tell me was about his swapping names, an' you know lots of fellows change their names when they break into baseball for a living."

The left fielder stopped abruptly and glared triumphantly at his audience.

"Mortimer's red haired all right," said Gardner Wells.

"Yes, and freckled," put in Curly.

Babe Doll contributed a sigh. Mortimer had damaged his batting average particularly.

"I'm going to call up Fillmore," said Curly.

The Leopard manager rapped on the door a few minutes later.

"What's up?" he asked. "I was just goin' to bed. You fellows better go yourselves. Mortimer'll pitch to-morrow, and you'll need the rest."

"Need nothin'!" snapped Curly. "I know something about this lad that'll

make him curl up and hunt the bench. I've got the Boy Wonder's groove!"

"Help!" yelled the manager. "You've got it? Why, there's only one way you'll ever get that boy's groove. Now, if you'd bat the way I tell you—"

And the irate Fillmore wandered into a detailed account of just how to straighten out the deceitful curves of the Maroon phenom.

"But wait a minute!" Curly broke in. "Let me tell you how we can beat him."

Fillmore scowled.

"Well, how? How can we do it?" he muttered.

"He's afraid of rats!" his three assistants shouted.

Then Curly retailed the story.

"Is this on the level?" cried the manager when he had digested the yarn. His eyes were beginning to gleam with the light of an unholy hope. Then he proffered his cigar case to his modern *Athos, Porthos* and *D'Artagnan* and drew them into executive session.

The whole team heard the story over a late breakfast and they thronged the hotel steps and wished the three Inseparables good luck as they fared forth on their important quest in a sea-going taxicab. In order that no good omen might be overlooked, the trio had even perched Jack Duane, official Leopard mascot, on the seat with the chauffeur. Shorty did not accompany them; but maintained, instead, a haughty aloofness as became the holder of the unpopular end of a bet.

The expedition returned just in time for lunch; but the curious met with nothing but disappointment, for the three turned a deaf ear to all inquiries. Complacent grins were all that they had to offer. Not till they clattered across the lobby in their baseball togs was the outcome of their mission evident. Then their teammates saw that Curly was carrying a tiny wooden box in addition to his spiked shoes and his glove.

The Maroon supporters, in response to the press' prediction that Red Mortimer would give an exhibition of Leopard taming at 3:30 p. m., were out in force. They greeted the victims with a full throated roar of anticipation and then settled down to await the opening of the slaughter.

The Leopards watched Mortimer from their bench as he warmed up and, contrary to their usual custom, they grinned maliciously at his cocky self-assurance.

"This is where we turn his red hair white!" chuckled Curly as he glanced lovingly at the little wooden box that Jack Duane was carefully guarding.

"And fade his freckles."

The starting gong clanged and the Maroon star lounged confidently into the center of the diamond. Bailey popped a feeble "fly" to left field; Wolf rolled an easy "grounder" to the short stop; and was cut down at first base by a rod; and Seymour fanned ignominiously. Then the crowd rose and joyfully told the Leopards to go way back and sit down—and the Maroons scored a run.

Mortimer was having one of his really impressive days and the three goose eggs in the Leopards' run column showed it. Meantime the opposition had piled up a lead of three.

Curly was due to lead off in the fourth inning and he trotted straight from his fielding position to Jack Duane squatting beside the row of bats. For a moment or two, he knelt over the mascot; then he straightened up, hickory in hand.

"If I can only punch one down towards 'first,' I've got him!" Curly told himself.

Mortimer took a leisurely survey of his victim. He nodded an affirmative to the catcher's signal. Then he pitched. Curly waited till the last fraction of a second; then he desperately shoved his bat forward. There came the thud of contact and the ball dribbled along the first base line.

Like a cat, Mortimer sprang forward to field it. His eyes gauged the approach of Curly and told him that fast work would enable him to make the "put out" unassisted. Vaguely he realized that Curly's progress was slower than usual. Then, with an easy swoop, he cuddled the ball into his glove and straightened. His arm shot out to touch the lagging runner.

Then, suddenly, he stumbled, reared back like a frightened horse, and dropped the sphere. His face was

deathly white. His eyes stared fixedly at Curly's neck band. The Leopard almost stopped so that the Boy Wonder might get a close view of the white rat that had run out of his shirt and was perched on his shoulder. Then, while the whole Maroon infield sprinted for the ball, he jogged on to first base.

The angry manager of the Maroons fell upon Mortimer with eyes ablaze and tongue wagging; but the pitcher only shook his head in reply to his superior's inquiries and strode back into the box. His face was still white and his knees trembled. Occasionally, he turned his eyes toward "first" and scrutinized Curly's shoulder where nothing showed now except outing flannel. At last he pitched, and Seymour drove a screaming liner to the fence for three bases. Long walked and Gardner Wells straightened out the first ball pitched to him for a home run. After that, the Maroon manager jerked the disheveled Mortimer from the firing line and sent in Peters, whom he had been saving for the morrow's game. The Leopards had found their batting eyes by this time, however, and they pounded out an easy victory.

The team was as hilarious that evening as their rivals were upset. Mortimer maintained a sulky silence to reporters and team-mates alike.

"I turned my ankle," he muttered, and everyone knew that he lied, even though the byplay of the white rat had escaped all eyes save the victim's. Speed Boy Thompson pitched the fourth game for the Maroons and the Leopards turned the tables on him and made it an even series, with the fifth game still to play.

"They'll send the red-haired boy back to-morrow sure," chuckled Curly, "and what we'll do to him'll be a plenty!"

Curly Wolf was not the only one who knew that Mortimer would be sent to the slab for the final game. The red-haired Maroon pitcher knew it himself, because the manager had button-holed him after the second defeat and growled:

"I'm goin' to give you a chance to square yourself for that ivory domed play to-morrow. Better make good!"

Ever since the frightful bobble that the white rat had caused, the youngster had noticed a growing coolness on the part of his team-mates, and as he sprawled on the front seat of the open car on the way home from the game, he ruminated bitterly.

"Gee whiz!" he muttered, "the higher you climb, the harder you fall! I've kept this bunch in the running all season and now, when I slip up for a minute, they all act as if I'd thrown the game! Where did the Leopards find out about my being afraid of rats?" He had asked himself that question one thousand times in the last twenty-four hours.

Head down, he plodded along the shady street that led to his own door step. Mrs. Mortimer was awaiting his coming on the vine shaded porch. She rose eagerly at sound of his footsteps and bustled forward. The sight of his downcast face restrained her, however.

"Bob!" she cried anxiously. "What in the world's the matter? You wouldn't tell me what was worrying you yesterday; but you're as bad as ever to-night. I'm scared stiff. Is it your arm, or are you going stale, or what?"

Mortimer only shook his head. He had never confided his one great weakness to his comely young wife, and the present was no time to unburden himself.

"Nothin's matter!" he growled and stalked into the cottage. He was headed for his room; but from the kitchen came a summons that brooked no delay.

"Dad! Oh dad! Come here quick!" ordered a clear young voice.

Bob the elder's tanned face lit up amazingly, for little Bob's commands were law and had been ever since his puckered face had stared up into his father's four years ago. Young Bob was squatting on the floor. At sound of his father's step, he sprang to his feet.

"Look what mom's got me!" he crowed delightedly.

Mortimer looked and grew faint. His son held in his cupped hands a white rat! With straining eyes, he watched

the boy slip the rat into his sleeve. A moment later, it dodged through the loose neck of his blouse. The big pitcher stifled a desire to shriek.

"Aint it slick?" cried young Bob.

"G-great!" stammered his father.

The youngster came closer and thrust forth his new plaything.

"Here!" he urged. "Take him in your hands, Dad, an' see how soft he is!"

If one of Gulliver's giants had approached and insisted upon his fondling a savage, red jawed lion, Mortimer could not have been more shiveringly afraid. His feet itched to run blindly to some other part of the house. He felt his scalp prickling, and every nerve in his body jerked in an ecstasy of terror. The sight of the rat's beady, blinking eyes and its pink nose, that continually wrinkled and quivered, threw him into a clammy sweat. He longed to squawk, "Take it away!" and then bolt; but he didn't.

Ever since young Bob had grown old enough to take notice, his father had been his idol and his pattern; and Bob, the elder, knew and cherished this admiration. By word and deed, he had striven to foster it and keep it safe. Now, he was tottering upon his lofty pedestal, because his boy had not inherited his "groove." He realized that young Bob could never understand the loathing that was turning him sick. He knew that if he cringed and showed the terror that filled him, the boy would think he was a coward.

Inwardly, he cursed himself for never having confided in his wife. Then she would never have invested in such a fiendish pet.

Outwardly, he forced a rigid calmness. Warily, he stretched forth a hand and touched the rat. Bob gave it a push, and like a flash it ran up his father's arm and perched on his shoulder. Somehow, Red turned a yell into a sickly chuckle. The room was dancing dizzily about him. From far away, he heard the boy's voice.

"Aint it a bird!"

Not trusting himself to speak, he nodded. His faintness passed. Then, with great suddenness, a white light of hope burst upon him. He forced his hands to his shoulder and grasped the rat.

That night at dinner, Mrs Mortimer chattered gaily, for, while her ball-player husband had no appetite and looked rather pale, he was more than cheerful. After the meal he spent an hour playing with young Bob and the new pet. He even took off his coat and collar and let the rat run up his sleeve and out of his loosened neck-band. Young Bob was highly elated and his mother smiled at the happiness of her two boys.

Red Mortimer, the Boy Wonder, let the slugging Leopards down with a single lonely hit in the deciding game of the series. A squib in the "Notes of the Game" on the sporting page of one of the local newspapers read:

> A spice of novelty was added to the day's pastiming by the introduction of a white rat into the picture. The worthy Mr. Wolf of the Leopards produced it from the neck of his tunic after he had unsuccessfully attempted to beat a bunt to first. Mortimer, who had covered the bag on the play, evinced much interest in the rodent. He insisted upon inserting it in his sleeve and allowing it to tunnel to his manly shoulder. Our demon slabbist was evidently bent upon demonstrating that he tames Leopards or rats with equal facility.

If the scribe who wrote that "Notes of the Game" could have heard the conversation on the Leopard bench just after the incident he might have been enlightened.

"Well, what d'yuh think o' that?" gasped Babe Doll, and stared at the returning Curly in amazement. The man who had discovered Mortimer's "groove" said not a word. He merely returned the rat to Jack the mascot. As for Shorty Long, he whistled blithely and pondered over the respective merits of Panama and Stetson.

Many times since that eventful afternoon, the Leopards in convention assembled in hazy smoking compartment or glaring lobby, have tried to figure out what sort of treatment a man can take to cure himself of *rat-itis* over night. So far, no feasible theory has been advanced. Perhaps this will clear up a baseball mystery.

The Man Who Stopped Slipping

By FRANK H. WILLIAMS

FOR a time life did not seem worth the living. It seemed to him as though the best plan might be to forget honor and duty and everything and race away to some unknown place, or else to end it all by a single, sharp revolver shot. But that attitude of mind was before—

Well, here's the story of Charles Parham, city chairman, who was popularly known as "Fuzzy."

About six weeks before the election, Parham had met Maizie while both were on their way to their offices—for Maizie was a stenographer since hard times had hit her family.

"Maizie," Parham cried, "we're going to win out and when we do and I get a good job out of it, why then—"

He looked long and deeply with unveiled meaning in his eyes at the pretty girl beside him. Maizie met his glance bravely for a moment or two, then blushed and looked away.

"It's like this," Parham went on. "If we can only hold three-fourths of the fellows in line that voted for Leonard for mayor, we've got the election cinched. We can send Fisher in as mayor with a majority of 900. The only question is, can we hold 'em?"

"But why can't you hold them?" questioned Maizie.

"It's on account of the rotten administration that Leonard has given us. He's queered the whole party. Now we've got to go out and plead and pray with all the members of the party to stick. We've got to tell them not to judge the party by what Leonard has done, but by what the party itself has done and by what Fisher will do. If we can get 'em to stick, then we'll win; and then—"

This time Maizie faced Parham bravely enough.

"But if they don't stick by the party—if they prove traitors to the party and Fisher isn't elected mayor, then you wont get that job?"

"No," answered Parham shortly.

"And then—then—"

"Then we'll have to give up—or, rather I'll have to give up any hope of marrying you," he finished.

It was the first time that Parham had ever bluntly stated his intention to Maizie of asking her to marry him, provided he landed that much-needed job. She blushed deeply at his words and then precipitately tore up the stairs to her office, as they had now reached the building where she was employed.

As Maizie left him, Parham's spirits sank. No matter how bright a face he might place on the outlook when talking with Maizie, he knew that the situation was far from cheerful. The members of the party were not sticking.

"Traitors!" he called them to himself. "Any man that would go back on his party is the scum of the earth."

Then his thoughts turned to his own desperate needs. If he didn't land that job, then he would indeed be up against it. He had borrowed money to contribute his share toward the campaign fund, and his little law business was fast leaving him, for his chairmanship demanded so much time that he could not give his business the proper amount of attention. He was fast becoming desperate.

"I'm slipping," he told himself. "The

fight for life and happiness is making me more of a beast than a man. If things go wrong now I'm afraid I'll slip, slip way back."

His thoughts were still running in a channel of commiseration for himself as he climbed the steps to his party's headquarters, which were located on the second floor of a down-town building. Voices, coming through the open transom from the private office, stopped him as he reached the head of the stairs. They were talking about him.

"I don't like the way Fuzzy never gets down here until after noon," declared one voice that Parham recognized as belonging to Fisher, the candidate for mayor. "It sets a bad example to the boys and it looks to me as though it means that Parham is lazy."

"That's the way I feel about it." The speaker this time was Jim Scheffer, the district chairman. "That aint any way to run a campaign."

"You fellows are off," a third voice interjected. This voice was rather high and sweet and Parham recognized that the speaker was "Jigs" Larimer, the young attorney who was the party's star speaker during the present campaign. "I know all about Fuzzy," continued Larimer. "It's not his fault that he don't get down here until afternoon. He's got an old father that's in his dotage and Fuzzy not only has to support him, but has to stay up all night with the old gent to prevent him from yelling his lungs out and scaring all the neighbors. Believe me, Fuzzy has a hard time of it and we aren't the people that ought to say anything against him. He's doing pretty well under the circumstances, I think."

"Is that right?" asked Scheffer, in considerably mollified tones. "I never knew that before."

"No, I don't suppose you did," said Larimer. "Fuzzy keeps pretty quiet about it."

Parham turned hot and cold with shame and anger as he overheard the men talking about his condition. Then this mental state was succeeded by another that rather surprised him at the same time that it gave him a distinct shock: He found himself wondering how he might best utilize this pity that the men evidently felt for himself, in the advancement of his own interests.

"I'm slipping," Parham told himself sarcastically. "I'd never have thought of such a thing three or four years ago, but now I don't care. I—"

Movements in the room startled him. He turned and silently made his way to the foot of the stairs and around the corner. He traversed the entire block and then returned.

All of the men with the exception of Fisher had gone when Parham for the second time reached the headquarters. The candidate for mayor greeted him with more deference and more warmth than ever before, and Parham sensed the fact that this kindly attitude was due to the recent conversation in which Fisher had participated.

"Now's the time to cinch that job," Parham told himself.

"Say, Fisher," he exclaimed, plunging directly to the point, "I believe that we might run over the list of appointments you will make if you are elected. Maybe we can pick out some good fellows for the different jobs and spread around the news that you are going to appoint them and in that way strengthen ourselves. Perhaps we can make some of our weak sisters stick to the party and not be traitors if we can show them that some one of their friends or relatives is going to get a good job under the new administration."

"That a good idea," Fisher assented.

One by one they took up each office, picking out the best man for each place. Finally the only office left was that of city attorney. This office paid a yearly salary of $2,500 and was the best office to which the mayor made appointments.

"And this office," declared Parham bluntly, "I want myself. I want it because if you are elected it will be largely on account of my work. I want it because I need it and need it badly."

Surprise was mirrored in Fisher's face.

"But there are others that are working hard," Fisher suggested, not unkindly. "Perhaps they have a call on the job."

"Not on your life," declared Parham bluntly. "You know it's I that's

pulling the thing through; it's I that invented that 'Stick, brother, stick' slogan that's going to make us as many votes as anything. Of course, others are doing the speech-making, I'll admit. There's Larimer, for instance. He's a grand little talker and he's got a lot of influence and will pull a bunch of votes, but it's I that's giving him the ideas. And it's I that wants that job."

Still Fisher hesitated, and again Parham felt himself slipping.

"And if I don't get the job," he started threateningly, and hated himself for the yellow streak that he was showing. "If you don't promise me that job right now, I'll quit this city chairmanship dead."

"You don't mean that?" ejaculated Fisher quickly.

"Yes, I do. Will you promise?"

Fisher hesitated no longer.

"Sure, you'll get the job," he declared, "if I'm elected."

They shook hands on it, while Parham felt a vast elation at this success.

The moment that Fisher promised seemed to mark the turning point in that campaign. From that time until the election the tide was strongly in his favor. More than anything else the turning was undoubtedly due to the tremendous enthusiasm and hard work with which Parham attacked all the problems. And this vast enthusiasm of his spread to the other party leaders and incited them to strenuous efforts.

"It's Fuzzy that's doing it," Larimer, the district chairman, told Fisher a short time before election day. "I never saw any fellow work as hard as he's working. What's he after, anyhow?"

"Why, you see—" Fisher began, but was interrupted by the sudden arrival of several precinct committeemen.

On election night Parham stood with Maizie in the windows of the office where she was employed, looking across the street at the great scene on which a stereopticon was flashing the returns. It was as good a place as any in the city to get the returns, for Parham knew that the newspapers would be the first to receive the results.

There were others in the office, but they were too busy watching the screen to notice that as Parham stood beside Maizie he held her hand tightly.

"Ten to the good!" shouted Parham, as the returns from the first precinct were flashed.

"Five to the bad," Maizie echoed, a few seconds later when the vote from another precinct was displayed.

But the votes to the good were tremendously ahead of the votes for the bad. Before more than half of the precincts had reported, it was evident that Fisher's majority over his opponent would be in the neighborhood of 1,100.

The telephone in the office rang incessantly now, and all of the calls were for Parham from friends who wished to congratulate him for the success which had crowned his efforts. Up the stairs there presently came a crowd of the precinct committeemen and other workers, who insisted upon carrying Parham off to a jollification meeting. There was no help for it; he must go.

Parham leaned close to Maizie and whispered to her while the men noisily waited his coming. "Maizie, dear," he whispered, "this means that I get that good job. Are you game for the wedding bells and the rest?"

Maizie turned her head away, but she whispered "Yes" in reply and squeezed his hand a tiny bit.

Then Parham went. He was the leader of all the men who gathered at the jollification meeting, and when it was found that Fisher, the new mayor, had already left for the south to rest up after the strenuous campaign, Parham made a speech in his place that is still talked about as being the wittiest impromptu address ever given in that city.

But though the meeting lasted until morning, it finally ended, and Parham returned to his home to find that his father had experienced an extremely bad night and was in a desperate condition.

For days the elder Parham lingered between life and death. The time fled so speedily and Parham was so busy that he could barely snatch a few moments each day in which to communicate with Maizie. Nor did he have time to think that it was strange that he did not hear from the mayor, confirming his promised appointment.

Then, on the first day that Parham was able to return to his office, as his father was on the high road to recovery, the blow fell. As Parham went to his office, he purchased a morning newspaper, but did not open it until he had lolled back in his chair and had propped his feet upon the desk before him.

The first thing that his eyes lighted upon, after the paper had been opened, was a screaming headline announcing that Mayor Fisher had made his appointments. Parham hastily ran through the list until he came to city attorney. Confidently he looked to see his own name appear after the words "City Attorney." Instead he saw the name of Charles (Jigs) Larimer.

For a moment Parham thought that there must be some mistake, that it was due to a typographical error. Then he read further and discovered that Larimer had really been named as city attorney and had accepted.

Parham saw red. He had been "double crossed." Fisher had broken his word.

Down went Parham's air castles to the earth. The job, upon which he had banked so much, was not his but had gone to another. Now there was nothing left but the wearying grind at the little law business he could get in a half day, and the sleepless nights with his sick father.

And he had dreamed such splendid dreams on the strength of Fisher's promise. With the salary which the position of city attorney paid he could have sent his father to some hospital where he would have been well taken care of. Even that heavy expense would not take such a great amount of his salary. He had figured that he would have enough left to support a wife. When he thought of marrying, there was just one face that swam into his view and that face was Maizie's. Now she was lost forever.

It was then that Parham felt that life was not worth the living and that even the single revolver shot which would end it all might be the best way out. But first of all, before he took any such desperate step, there was one thing that he could do.

"I'll show them up!" he cried to himself. "I'll tell all about Fisher's promise to me and how he broke it and I'll tell a few juicy things about campaign contributions and things that I guess will make mighty interesting reading in the opposition paper."

He drew a pen to him and began writing rapidly. He'd show them that they couldn't throw him down like that. He'd show them that at least one fellow had nerve enough to stand up and tell the party where to stop.

Into his mind at that moment there came a remembrance of the things he had said and had made others say during the campaign. "Stick to the party, brother. Don't be a traitor to the party." Those had been his favorite phrases during the campaign, and now he was going to do exactly what he had told others not to do. He was not going to stick to the party and he was going to be a traitor.

He stopped writing and wearily drew his hand across his forehead.

"It's no use; I can't do that," he told himself. "I'm all in, down and out. They've sucked all the sap out of me. I'd better just say nothing and end it all. At least I haven't slipped back."

No, he hadn't slipped—he'd stuck to the party. He tore the sheet upon which he had been writing off the tablet, and tore it into the tiniest of bits. These he placed on the floor and set fire to.

But though he hadn't slipped in the particular of being recreant to his party, he admitted to himself that he was going to slip in another direction. He was desperate, at his wit's end. He had no money. He had borrowed money to pay his share of the campaign expenses and now he could not meet the loan, for the money which he had expected would be forthcoming in the way of salary would not be his. Apparently, there were but two ways out, to run away and forget honor and duty and everything—or to make way with himself.

Which would be the best thing to do? Which—he was startled by the sudden opening of his door; Larimer stepped into the room. Parham felt his anger rising at this entry of his successful

rival, but he managed to greet Larimer civilly enough.

"I—I say," stammered Larimer, his rather boyish face red with embarrassment. "We—that is, Fisher and I—have decided to have the city ordinances codified and we—er—wondered if you'd take the job. We—er—that is, the city, you know, it's the city that'll do the paying—will pay $750 for the job and we'll—er—that is, the city'll pay you $250 down if you'll do it for us."

Parham glanced at Larimer cynically. "No, thanks, Larimer," he exclaimed crisply. "I much appreciate your offer, but I happen to remember that the ordinances were codified just a year ago and they certainly don't need it again. You keep your money, you and Fisher," he sneered as he mentioned the latter's name, "you'll need it badly enough before you get through politics."

In a few moments Larimer left, still greatly embarrassed. "So that's done," Parham muttered.

Then he strode to the window and squared his shoulders. "I'll not slip," he muttered. "I'll stick and see this thing through."

With this resolution made, he felt somewhat better. He glanced at the clock. In half an hour he was to meet Maizie and walk home with her. In the face of the crushing blow he had just received, however, he felt that he could not do it. It would be bad enough when he must eventually tell Maizie that his dream of marrying her was over. He felt that he could not stand any more hard knocks that day.

As he walked down the hallway and the stairs to the street, his shoulders were bent like those of an old man. On the street he blinked in the sunlight as though his eyes pained him and he winced when some one struck him heartily on the back. He turned and faced Jim Scheffer, the district chairman.

"You?" cried Parham.

"Sure," responded the other nonchalantly.

"You're the man that made Fisher break his promise to appoint me city attorney!" cried Parham. "You're the man that made him put Larimer in the place that I should have had. And I know exactly why you did it. You want to be postmaster and before this election you had almost enough influence to land the place for you. Then you knew that Larimer's wealthy dad and a couple more of the rich guys who put up a lot of money for the presidential campaign would also boost you along if Larimer was made city attorney. So you had Larimer put in and now you get the postmaster's job."

"You've got it sized up right, all right," Scheffer responded. "And I want to tell you that it almost broke Fisher's heart to break his promise to you, but when I started financing his campaign I had an understanding with him that I should have the naming of all his appointive offices. And now," he added crisply, "are you going to make a mess of it?"

Again the stoop came into Parham's shoulders.

"No," he muttered. "No, I've preached too much about sticking to the party and not being a traitor, to go back on it now. No, I'll not stir up a mess."

"That's exactly what I expected," cried Scheffer with the greatest enthusiasm. "I knew you'd take it all right. And now I'm going to make a proposition to you. When I'm postmaster, I can't run my garage. So I want you to run it for me on a ten years' contract at an initial salary of $2,500 and a good-sized commission after the first year. That's better than being city attorney, even if it isn't in politics. Will you take it?"

Parham gulped several times.

"Will I take it?" he gasped at last. "Will I take it? For the love of Mike, don't make me laugh. Of course, I'll take it and jump at the chance."

Twenty minutes later he met Maizie, and leaning close to her he whispered ecstatically: "Maizie, dear, I got that job!"

"Oh," she cried, as her face went crimson; and though they were in the heart of the city and on one of the busiest streets, she caught his hand and squeezed it hard.

Ezra Buzzen, Charter Member

By
HUGH PENDEXTER.

EZRA BUZZEN, from his isolated coigne of vantage on Philander Philpot's store steps, closely followed the perspiring maneuvers of Herm Bean, who was endeavoring to line up a score of gaily caparisoned men in some semblance of military smartness preliminary to meeting the Otisville lodge at the station and escorting the same to the lodge room. There was no tincture of envy in Ezra's meditations, and he felt sincere concern as he detected that Joel Fuller's helmet was riding far forward on the wearer's nose; yet he was surfeited with sadness.

He had, as on many similar occasions, aided in carrying the dishes to the lodge room and had critically attended to the coffee and sandwich details. But once the curtain arose, he was forced to quit the stage to brood in the ante-chamber of his moody thoughts.

As his morose inventory of unfulfilled desires was merging in a reverie that threatened to embitter the entire afternoon, the store-keeper ran from the open door, tugging at a refractory gilt button, and loudly requested, "Keep an eye on things, Ez, till I git back."

Herm Bean, rapidly counting his men, adjusted his head-gear so it would not chafe his forehead, and in a parade voice hoarsely barked, "F-forward—March!"

As the double line took the middle of the dusty road and stiffly tramped away, Ezra emitted a low groan and slouched inside.

"If the canning fact'ry hadn't burned down I could have saved enough to be one of that gay throng," he tortured himself into soliloquizing as he slumped into Philpot's private chair. "Wal, mebbe this fall I can scrape up twenty dollars and join. "Yet even as he tasted this bit of optimism, he knew initiation fees would be as scarce three months hence as now.

For more than a quarter of a century, Ezra Buzzen had struggled to attain his ideal. Now at the age of forty-odd years, he found himself this side of even an approximation. As some are born with a mania for travel, a lust for money getting, a yearning for artistic success, so was Ezra in the morning of life obsessed by an unquenchable desire "to belong" to something. In his barefoot days he slaked his thirst at the pure spring of the Independent Order of Good Templars, and he had proven himself one of the staunchest White Ribbonites in Peevy's Mills.

As the barren years trooped down to meet him, he occasionally sought relief in the panacea of youth and joined Men's clubs and Improvement leagues and like civic organizations, where membership was to be had for the asking. These were but mildly palliative, however, and eased the growing irritation only in a minor degree—merely make-believe remedies and sadly lacking the tang and zest of the outer-guard and the softly whispered "open sesame." There had been times when he almost realized on the assets of his dreams and believed he was to awake

and find it all a delectable fact. For in all Peevy's Mills no man so often had asked for application blanks and so frequently been on the verge of the initiatory degree. In each instance a strangulated currency had hindered the consummation of his great hankering.

Before acquiring his small, tumbled-down farm, and while laboring as a hired man, he had been called upon to provide for an aged and indigent uncle, who lingered long to defy the doctor's prophecies. Ezra always believed this steady drain upon his thin purse to have been the indirect cause of his losing Arvilla Whitcum's love; for it kept him very poor, while as a Rebecca she grew away from him and capitulated to the amorous assaults of Herm Bean.

Unhampered by any lack of initiation fees, Herm early in life assumed a leadership in all the social activities of his lodges—such as "Ladies Nights" and the like. Just when Arvilla began to decide that Ezra was a likely young man, with her heart beating out of tune when he came to do her father's ploughing, Herm interested her in the side-lines of his societies. She joyously entered the orbit of the United Females of America, and soon boasted of as many letters behind her name as are usually the daily companions of a president emeritus of a large university. The mediocrity of Ezra's non-assessable affiliations speedily palled upon her; she ignored the hired man and logically married the heavily initiated Mr. Bean.

From this familiar canvass of an insolvent life he jerked his retrospection ahead several notches and with sad complacency allowed it to settle down at the last county fair, when a man, laboring under the influence of rum, had asked him if he did not belong to the Modern Order of Brotherly Workmen. "It showed I had the ways of the M. O. B. W.," he disconsolately insisted to the empty store. "Give me a handful of secret grips and a few pass-words and I'll skate all 'round Herm Bean in running a society. Then, there was the Otisville tailor who said I had the noblest figger for a uniform he ever see. Lawd! There aint one of them fellers,"—and he pointed to the street—"that knows how to wear a sword-knot. Just lemme —Hullo, Arvilla. S'posed you was over to the train."

He dropped his heels to the floor to punctuate his greeting and rose as a faded-faced little woman entered.

"I sha'n't go till the dance to-night. Too bad you can't be there, Ezra."

"I don't care much for such rinktums," he replied, tentatively preparing the scoop for a possible purchase.

"I don't want nothing but the mail," she explained, advancing to the post-office window. "Herm has so much on his mind to-day he couldn't fetch it."

Ezra hurried behind the counter and soon announced, "There aint nothing." As he peered through the opening he beheld the sweet face of his youth and was oblivious to the worried eyes and little lines about the mouth. She caught her under lip between her teeth and urged:

"Look again, please. I was positive I'd hear from my sister to-day. The letter is very important."

"There aint nothing, Arvilla," regretted Ezra, presenting a package of letters for her inspection.

"Here's one for you, " she sighed, passing them back. As she trailed her skirts to the door she remained in Ezra's eyes the same radiant creature he had lost a score of years before through the lure of the First Degree.

"It aint fair," he resented, returning to his chair. "Lawd! I guess if some one was to leave me six hundred dollars it would be on conditions that I didn't join nothing but the church."

The letter, however, served to give a new fillip to his thoughts, and he opened it gingerly—he feared some unknown relative was ill and needed financial assistance. It proved, however, to be only a circular from a mail-order concern, offering to supply him with anything at a minimum cost.

"Wonder if they could furnish a twenty-dollar initiation for three dollars and seventy cents," he ruefully mused.

From pondering over the desirability of cut rates in lodge life he gradually evolved a speculation as to who first thought of selling goods by mail.

"Then you come to the question of who first thought of starting a secret society," he suddenly informed a rack of brooms. "I vum! There must have been a first joiner. Queer I never thought of that before. The inventor of the first lodge must have had everything his own way. Yes, siree! There was a first one. They aint always existed like the bible and hoss-races. Some feller, way back, was mighty smart."

His voice dwindled to nothing as the immensity of the thought engulfed him, and the letter fell to the floor unheeded. His eyes stared far away through the open door and yet did not behold the patched slopes of old Streaked Mountain. His ears were strained to drink in a new and intoxicating salvo of praise, but were deaf to the lively blare of the approaching band.

For the first time in Ezra's simple life the germ of an original idea was crawling upward through his mental system; and once it reached the top full grown, he would take rank with those immortals, who from the beginning were destined to be the first in tearing aside the veil. As the band halted and gallantly serenaded the fair sex adorning the platform of Orrin Furlow's drug-store, the germ accomplished its laborious ascent and essayed a short flight. By the time Ezra reached the door, his eyes blazing with animation, he found his idea circling the farthest horizon, a thing of grace and beauty and strength; and as he hastened homeward it was not the inspiration of the Otisville band that caused him to walk on air.

II

Philpot's bearing was tinged with respect and strongly dashed with curiosity as Ezra, after two weeks' absence, sauntered into the store.

"I was getting anxious about you. Where've you been?" saluted the storekeeper.

"Business trip," replied Ezra, ignoring the eager scrutiny of Philpot's sunken eyes.

"Guess you'll keep being busy the way your mail looks," loudly declared the storekeeper, now frankly interested. "Whole cartload here for you. Had to put it in a cracker box. Working for the government?"

"We have to write back and forth, the government and me," carelessly replied Ezra, testing a shred of herring.

"I should say so," cried the storekeeper, placing an armful of mail on the counter. "Here's a dozen letters and the Lawd only knows what's in them packages, and they're all sent postage free and gratis."

Ezra examined them leisurely, but opened none as he volunteered: "It's the H. A. T. W. G. I. Do you know I'm almost sorry I didn't keep out of it."

"H. A. T.—What!" blankly asked the storekeeper, removing his spectacles.

Furtively gazing inside a long envelope Ezra murmured: "As I expected—from Congressman Dunker."

"But the H. A.—What?" exploded the storekeeper.

"Oh, the H. A. T. W. G. I.? It's a secret society—that's all. I'm the only member in this locality. I can't talk about it. I'll hire a postoffice box, as I'll be gitting lots of important mail. Not but what you're careful, Philander, but in my case it's necessary for me to be able to put my hand on a document at a second's notice."

"The box will be twenty-five cents a quarter, Mister Buzzen," humbly reminded the storekeeper, additional respect battling for supremacy with the inquisition of his gaze. "S'pose you're at liberty to tell what them letters stand for?" he next ventured as Ezra displayed no intention of pursuing the conversation.

"Hardly," replied Ezra, absorbed in some one's speech on reciprocity.

"But how in sin can anyone join it if they don't know what it is?" demanded the storekeeper in desperation.

With an expression of surprise on his deeply fanned face Ezra returned, "I thought I'd explained all that?"

"You aint explained nothing," said the storekeeper in a grieved voice.

"I see," mused Ezra, scratching his chin dubiously. "Wal, Phlander, I don't mind telling you—"

"It sha'n't go a step farther," hungrily promised the storekeeper.

"I don't mind telling you that being a sort of a exclusive society, we can't take anyone in as yet—that is, not from this neighborhood."

The storekeeper dropped the bean measure and stared open-mouthed. Finally he managed to gasp, "What in the name of all git-out is it good for, if you can't meet people who belong to it?"

Ezra closed an eye shrewdly, and confided: "Now you hit the nail on the head. It's a *secret*—secret society. Mind you, I don't say I'm the only one in Peevy Mills that can belong, but I will say it's different than any society you ever dreamed of. That's the cream of it. That's where the poetry comes in. No matter where you go, you'd have hard work finding another member. But when you do find him, you feel sort of meller and cherish him."

"What's the purpose?" whispered the storekeeper, leaning far over the counter.

"Secrecy," replied Ezra in a low voice. Then earnestly, "Philander, I'll trouble you to see that this letter goes out to-night *sure*." And he laid down a fat envelope.

"Gee whittaker!" exclaimed the storekeeper, examining the superscription. "I should say I would be extray careful. 'To the President of the United States!'"

"Yes; he's our president," yawned Ezra, backing away.

Before nightfall it was known from the east to the west, from Pugsley's pond to Sucker brook, that Ezra Buzzen was the local representative of a powerful secret organization, whose president was the nation's chief executive. It also was known that Ezra was in familiar communication with that august official as well as being the daily recipient of important documents from various minor public men, such as representatives and senators. Within twenty-four hours he was urged to join three different societies by as many delegations.

"I'll answer you, Furlow, as I told Herm Bean and the blacksmith: at present I'm too busy with the H. A. T. W. G. I. to bother with anything else," he gravely told the druggist.

"I suppose the responsibility is very great," observed the druggist in an awed voice. His answer was a short laugh, conveying a meaning beyond the eloquence of mere words and leaving Ezra far above the average citizen in public esteem, on a pedestal, as it were—a pedestal of imposing proportions, albeit it's base was shrouded with mists.

With the citizen body baffled in the major quest it naturally followed that Ezra's mail-box became the focal point of interest to the neighborhood. Not only did the Washington grist increase, but packages, parcels, thin and fat letters, now began pouring in from the state capital. Instead of congregating at the station to watch the train arrive, the curious now flocked to the store to behold Ezra obtain his mail. This attendance was almost ceremonious in its nature, silence and sobriety pervading the place as the much-discussed citizen passed down the narrow lane and inserted his key. As he did this, the storekeeper would open and close his fingers at the window to telegraph the total of the day's yield.

"Philander says twenty this time," the blacksmith would whisper over his shoulder. Then like a spark in a fuse the information would traverse the double line to the platform, where it would explode in a general exclamation of wonder.

"I used to think Freem Hubbard got some mail when he did the pension business," observed the town clerk one afternoon. "But I guess Ez lays over him a mile."

"Lays over a dozen of him a million miles," emphatically declared the storekeeper, who now hoped the mantle of celebrity was lapping over onto his own shoulders because of his position as postmaster. "Let him keep this up and us government fellers will have to hyper."

Heretofore the ordinary recipient of infrequent letters had stood aside while the druggist and others of his commercial standing bustled forward and fussily examined their boxes. Mel Rankans, who conducted the only dry-

goods store, always opened his box the moment the shutter was closed and maintained a blockade of all beyond him until the mail was distributed. But Ezra's sudden affluence in printed and epistolary receipts quickly relegated Rankans and Furlow, *et al.* to a humble background; while those who did not boast of lock-boxes acquired an apologetic air.

After ten days of this homage, Ezra accentuated his fame by the use of stationary emblazoned with the mysterious H. A. T. W. G. I.

Near the close of the third week, the storekeeper succumbed and drawing Ezra aside pleaded, "What about taking me into your order, Ez?"

Ezra whistled thoughtfully and studied the ceiling.

"Now, Ez, why not?" begged the storekeeper. "Mebbe, I could take some of the load off'n your hands."

"No one can lighten my work," replied Ezra. "I'll admit our president hasn't any objection to my taking in one, mebbe several members. I'll think about it, Philander."

"Why not decide now?" insisted the storekeeper. "I'm a good moral character. Besides, it seems if I ought to come in, seeing as how I am in the government."

"Wal, if you put it on them grounds I'll think on it mighty careful," slowly replied Ezra. "The initiation fee is ten dollars. That goes to me, of course, for operating expenses."

"I'll pay it now," eagerly offered the storekeeper.

"No," firmly repulsed Ezra, "not now. I can't take a cent till you are about to join. I'll think it over to-night and if I decide favorably on your application I'll come around and put you through to-morrow night. Git rid of the crowd by nine o'clock and lock up. If I come I'll come in the back way."

"But, Ezra," earnestly persisted the storekeeper, "tell me I can hope."

Ezra carved off a wedge of cheese and hefted it critically as if weighing the storekeeper's prayer, and then replied, "Yes, Philander, you can hope. If it isn't just as you imagine you mustn't be disappointed. You see through a cloud darkly now."

"I feel just like calling you brother, or comrade, this very minute," joyously cried the storekeeper.

III

"You don't mean that's all," babbled the storekeeper, as they crouched in the semi-darkness, the low burning lamp being masked behind the stove.

"You're through. You're a full fledged member of the H. A. T. W. G. I., which being interpreted means, 'Happy Are Those Who Git In,' replied Ezra.

"Great Scot!" dazedly exclaimed the storekeeper, "but it's quick work. One second I wa'n't in and the next second I be in. Aint there no ritual?"

"Ritual?" scornfully repeated Ezra. "Didn't I tell you the H. A. T. W. G. I. was different fr'm any other society?"

"Never saw anything so different in my life," feebly assured the storekeeper. "I can't make it feel real. Aint there no grips, or pass-words, or signs, or nothing so's you'll know who belongs?"

"'Taint necessary," lightly returned Ezra. "If a man can tell you the meaning of them mystic letters he's in. If he can't, he's out. You can't make a mistake. What time has Taft for rituals and pass-words?"

"And he's a member," muttered the storekeeper.

"Aint he happy to git in?" challenged Ezra. "Yes, siree! He's our president."

"There's some uniforms, of course," persisted the storekeeper.

"As to regalia," explained Ezra, "you can wear anything you want to. We aint tied down to any one thing. No need of any two of us dressing alike. Now I've got to be going."

"By jinks! but it's the quickest ten dollars' worth I ever got," cried the storekeeper, stumbling after Ezra to the back door. "I swanny! I can't make it seem real yet."

"It'll grow on you like medicine," comforted Ezra. "It'll break out gradually like brown-tail moth poisoning, only it'll be pleasant. By to-morrer night you'll be hugging yourself because you're IN. Good-night, Friend."

Nor was Ezra a false prophet. Before the noon hour Peevy's Mills to a man knew that Philander Philpot had joined the H. A. T. W. G. I. Long before the mail arrived, the greater portion of the village's population had filtered through the store. And as he found himself the pivotal attraction, Philander's spirits soared far above Streaked Mountain, and as a mute evidence of his appreciation, he telephoned to Otisville for stationery bearing the tantalizing six letters.

All efforts on the part of the druggist and other substantial associates to probe into the true inwardness of the society were met with a bland and evasive smile. Only towards Furlow, who once defeated him in the race for school commissioner, did he expand, and say:

"Orrin, I wish you's in. Can't say another word. No, don't ask me."

"But why can't I git in?" demanded the druggist in a wounded voice.

"It all rests with Mister Buzzen. He's the only committee on credentials. But you'd like the work. There! I must keep shut. Tasty, aint they?"

The storekeeper's digression referred to the Otisville stationery, carefully exhibited on the counter. As the druggist gazed, a fierce yearning filled his veins, and on departing he turned his steps up the road to Ezra's home. He was initiated that night.

Once it became known the barriers had been thrown down for the second time, Ezra was besieged with applications. All were refused, with the exception of six. Herm Bean was among the rejected.

"Now, Ezra," the storekeeper reminded one day, "as it's gitting near fall, it's high time you joined my order. I don't yet see what the H. A. T. W. G. I. means, but I'm keenly obliged to you for letting me in and I wont be satisfied till I can take your application into my lodge. Why can't I to-night?"

"You can, Philander," consented Ezra, his face radiant with joy. "Rankans and Furlow and the blacksmith are going to put my applications into their lodges, and I'll git into the four inside a month."

IV

As Ezra forced his new neck-tie into place and exulted at the happy face in the small mirror, he could see only the long lodge room and its daises. He was abut to enter that room as a candidate.

But he turned impatiently as a gust of wind nearly extinguished the lamp. "Arvilla!" he exclaimed, staring at the figure of a woman now hesitating on the threshold. "Arvilla," he repeated, his eyes incredulous.

"Yes, it's me," she panted, closing the door and leaning against it. "My sister couldn't let me have only a part of the money and Herm must account for it all to-night."

Ezra sank limply into a chair, his mouth framing an unvoiced query.

"I know you don't understand," she plaintively continued. "I'll explain everything."

"You shouldn't be here, Arvilla," he managed to observe, in a vague way beginning to sense her presence to be an impropriety. He feebly added, "Good-night."

"I had to come," she defended. "Herm has used up the money of his order. He's treasurer. He had several hundred dollars. He thought he had a chance to make a lot of money in hosses. He borrowed the money. Everything went against him. My sister could only let me have part of it. We scraped together every penny we could and can't raise another cent. He must have it all to-night, or we'll be disgraced forever."

"Took the lodge's money for a hoss deal," cried the horrified Ezra, rumpling his hair.

"Borrowed it, Ezra," she frantically corrected, throwing back her shawl. "He wouldn't steal. And it seemed so safe. Oh, Ezra, can't you help us in some way? I came here once before, several weeks ago, but you were away in Washington."

"I was only up the line ten miles. helping a man in haying," he shamefacedly confessed.

"But can't you help us some way, Ezra? I must save him somehow."

He rose and carefully set the chair

against the wall, and then slowly observed, "A woman ought to stick by her man. I never had anyone to stick to, except sick relations."

"You have been kind hearted to many," she wept. "I've known why you've been poor, Ezra. I've always understood and pitied you."

"Pitied me?" he hoarsely repeated, the new collar choking him. "Bless you for them words, Arvilla. The past is long dead, but I'd rather have your pity than another woman's love."

"My pity is a poor thing now," she whispered. "It is for you to pity me, Ezra."

"And I do, I do," he groaned. "But beyond pity—God forgive me—I am helpless. Of all the people who live in sight of old Streaked, there's no one but what could help you more'n I can. Look at this room, this house, this rocky farm. Why can I live here? Because no one else will live here. I am a broken man, Arvilla. Can't you see, girl, I aint the man I was twenty-five years ago?"

"I see and understand, Ezra," she said, her voice now calm in despair.

"It's terrible," he cried as she turned the knob. "Aint there some way I can take the blame?"

Her face became transfigured with the old gentleness and she forgot her own agony of mind in pitying his, and she attempted to soothe. "I know you would save me if you could. In my misery I didn't stop to reason out everything. I knew you would pity me and somehow I just felt driven to come here."

"But aint there some way?" he pleaded, advancing to her. "Can't I say I stole it?"

She shook her head, smiling pathetically. "Hush, Ezra," she replied. "I would not accept a sacrifice like that. I didn't know but what your secret society might allow you to help me in some way. People say its purpose is to make the miserable happy. I blindly hoped it might be true that by some miracle you could aid us."

"My society?" he blankly repeated.

"The H. A. T. W. G. I.," she prompted, again giving away to piteous weeping.

His eyes flashed with a sudden gleam of intelligence, not unmixed with a sparkle of whimsical humor, and speaking rapidly he said, "I must be plumb crazy not to have remembered that. What is the amount?"

"Just eighty-one dollars," she faltered, not daring to search for hope in his face.

"Huh!" he derided. "What a danged fool a man can be." And walking to the clock, he opened it and took out some money—the total of the H. A. T. W. G. I. initiation fees and the cost of his joining four societies. "Here's just eighty dollars in the 'mergency fund," he gravely informed, placing it in her limp hand. "Of course, Herm must never know. That's one of the rules of the order."

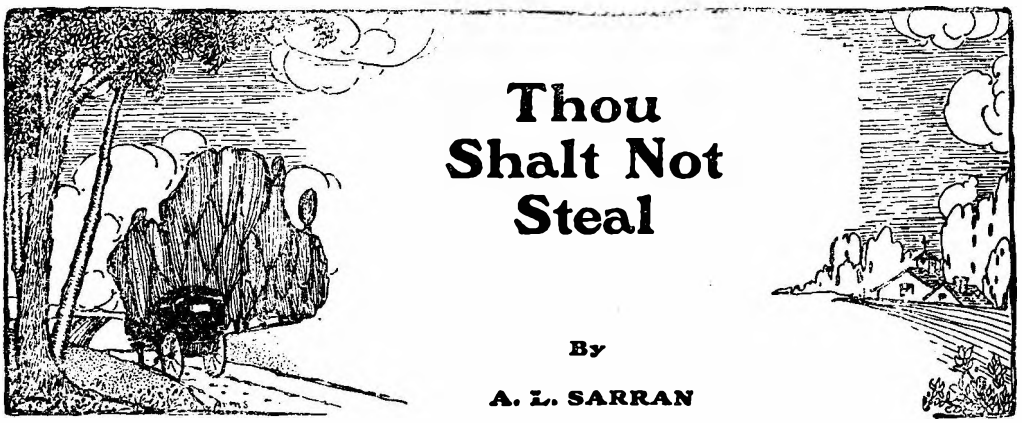
"That means I can never pay it back," she murmured, staring first at him and then at the money. "He must believe my sister sent it."

"The society don't take nothing back," comforted Ezra. "You'd better hurry, or Herm will be late at the hall."

"They tell me you are to join tonight. When you see him, you will remember you have saved a man and a woman," she sobbed, clutching his hand in both of hers.

Closing the door on her and the night, he carefully removed his collar and tie and placed them away in a bureau drawer. From the cupboard he removed a mass of congressional records, pamphlets, monographs on orchard pests, maps and other data, received free for the asking and comprising his official correspondence in connection with the H. A. T. W. G. I.; and placing them in the stove, he applied a match. Then locking the door he methodically wound the clock.

As he took the lamp to retire, he turned in the doorway and explained to the roaring stove: "Once a man has belonged to my order, I guess it's high time he quit hankering to join any others."



Thou Shalt Not Steal

By

A. L. SARRAN

THE telephone rang while the sheriff and his wife were at noonday dinner. He left the table to answer it, and when he returned offered no explanation of the message he had received, but silently passed over his cup to be refilled.

"Well," said his wife, impatiently, as she poured fresh coffee for him, "who was it?"

"Tom Matheny," the sheriff answered, studiously intent on stirring the coffee.

"Are they havin' trouble again?" persisted his wife, who knew the people of Webster County, and the ramifications of its families, as thoroughly as did the sheriff himself.

"Yeah," her husband answered.

"Not Henry?" she asked, her own cup suspended in mid-air.

"Yeah," he answered.

Too astonished to eat or drink, she set down her cup, slowly.

"Is it somethin' new he's been a-doin?" she asked.

"Stole Elmer Downey's horse night before last," he answered.

"Three weeks to a day, from the time his father was buried! Couldn't even wait till his poor old father had got settled in his grave. Aint it turr'ble for a man to be that way? What did Tom say about it?"

"Oh—he didn't say much. Jis' said for me to do my duty without considerin' any o' them."

"Aw—don't be so close-mouthed about anything," she said, impatiently. "Go on! What else did he say?"

"Well, he said none o' the fam'ly'll do anything to help Henry, an' if any warrant was placed in my hands, to go ahead and serve it, same as in any other case. I reckon Mr. Henry Benson'll git what's comin' to him, this time."

"Well, he aint got his father to fall back on now," commented the sheriff's wife. "I wonder what his poor ol' mother'll do?"

"She'll jist have to let him go, I reckon. Ol' Dave died in debt, a-payin' off things to keep him out of the penitentiary, and Tom says they aint goin' to let th' ol' lady throw away what little she's got on him."

"Well, I don't blame 'em," said the sheriff's wife. "I reckon they think if his own father couldn't make a man out of him, there aint no use in his mother givin' up the last cent she's got for him —'specially, when it don't seem to do any good," she added, as a kind of after-thought.

"No—o," said the sheriff, "it don't do no good. He gits out o' one scrape, right into another'n. His father aint been dead a month, yet, an' ever'body knows that the way Henry's done was what killed him; but that don't seem to make any impression on Henry, so I guess the fam'ly aims to jist let him take his medicine this time, an' be done with it. That was th' way Tom talked, anyhow."

It was even as the sheriff had said. The men of Henry Benson's clan had foregathered that morning at Wiles' store; and out behind the salt shed, in the warm October sunshine, had held council and passed judgment.

There were only two of them—these men; one was his only brother, Jim, the other, Tom Matheny, was his sister's husband. As they whittled and chewed and spat and talked, each sought to justify himself for what he was about to do. Unconsciously, they were arguing with the spirit of Dave Benson's life; it was as if they realized that the dead man would not approve the unnatural decision they had made, to abandon (as he would not have done) their only brother, offender though he was, in his hour of trouble.

"I hate like ever'thing to see it happen," said Matheny, "but it looks like it might as well come now as after a while."

"It just looks like somethin' has to be done to protect mother," said Jim, "or she'd spend the last cent she had on him, just like Pa did, an' do no good in the end."

Both men knew well the details of each and every crime that Henry had committed—and they were not a few; and, as though the resolution they had just made should be fortified by a recital of his misdeeds, first one and then the other recounted them.

His offenses were all offenses against the laws of property, and they began early. When he was fourteen years old, he had forged his father's name to a check for ten dollars. Jim was five years younger than his bother, but so long as he lives, he will remember the stern and sorrow-stricken face of his father, and the tears and prayers of his mother, the day Henry's first crime was discovered, and forgiven.

Matheny recalled the year that Henry went to Missouri, where he spent the summer working on a farm; and when he came home in the fall he brought with him a span of big black mules, which, he said, belonged to him by virtue of hard work and shrewd trading. Within a week, he was followed by a stern-faced man, who held a long and serious talk with Henry's father out behind the barn—after which, he went away, carrying with him a check for nearly twice the value of the mules.

There was the time—it happened more than once, too— when Henry wrote his father's name underneath his own name at the bottom of a "judgment note," which he sold to a money lender in Franklin for fifty cents on the dollar. The money lender knew that Henry's father had not written his name on those notes, so he paid Henry just half what the banks would have given for them, had the signatures been genuine; for old Dave's "paper" was accounted good in the banks at the county seat; and while his knowledge that the notes were forgeries enabled him to buy them at fifty cents on the dollar, he knew that Henry's father would pay one hundred cents on the dollar, rather than go into court, and swear that they were forgeries and his own son was a criminal. And this was exactly what old Dave did; the money lender had reasoned well.

Then there was the time that Henry had hitched up the best team on the place, during his father's absence, and had driven them to Indianapolis, where he sold them for money which he "lost" in a bucketshop on Pearl Street.

And so it had gone on. Crimes against property had followed, one after the other, the victim, in every case, being reimbursed by old Dave to save the boy from prosecution.

The old man ate his heart out in silent shame, and, daily, braved anew a life in which there was but little joy, until, one day, his horses drove themselves up from the lower field, dragging the cultivator to which they were hitched; two hours later, the neighbors found his dead body where it had fallen between rows of waving corn.

The coroner and the coroner's jury came, and sat, and viewed, and questioned, as the law directs; and a gaping, curious crowd followed, and listened to, and reveled in, and stored away in memory's cells to be told and retold, the painful story of a family's grief and sorrow. Curious and unsympathetic eyes looked on, and curious and unfeeling ears heard, while a broken-hearted and feeble old woman

sobbed out the story of when and where she had last seen alive him who was her beloved; and it was all a part of the day's show for the gaping crowd, when an unfeeling juror insisted that she relate the story of when and where and how she first looked upon the body —dead—of him who had loved her.

Two verdicts were brought in. One was duly arrived at, as the law directs, by the coroner and his jury—it was written out, and signed, and filed away in the records at the court house; and it certified that David Benson had died from heart disease. But the gaping, curious crowd, and all the neighbors round about, discussed, and dissected, and analyzed, and examined the things they had seen, and heard, and knew, and believed, and said that Dave Benson's death had been brought about by worry; doubtless they spoke more truly than did the coroner and his jury.

In country communities little can be hidden, and the story of Henry Benson's misdeeds had been told and retold many times. The foolishness of Dave Benson, in coming to Henry's "rescue," had long been a matter of general comment, and the neighbors were as one in prophesying that he would reach the end of his financial "string" if he persisted in it. Therefore, no man was surprised when the administrator announced that, after setting aside for the widow the five hundred dollars allowed her by the law, there would remain barely enough property to pay the debts Dave Benson owed.

The dead man had "carried two thousand" in the fraternal order to which he belonged; this was payable to his wife, and, added to the five hundred dollars allowed her by the law from her husband's estate, would make the sum of her worldly possessions. The entire community, individually and severally, had wondered if she would "squander" it on Henry, should further acts of his afford the opportunity; and now its curiosity was about to be gratified.

Two days previously, Henry Benson had disappeared. So quietly had he gone that his employer thought he was at home with his mother; while she, poor soul, had no other idea than that he was at his work, and would be home Saturday night, as usual. The disappearance of Elmer Downey's big black horse, and the investigation which followed, disclosed that the horse had been taken the night the man disappeared. Henry had been in trouble before—with horses, too—so Elmer Downey notified Jim Benson that unless his horse was returned to him within twenty hours, or paid for, he would swear out a warrant for Henry's arrest. Jim had called up his brother-in-law, Matheny, and arranged to meet him at Wiles' store; there, out behind the salt shed, in the warm October sunshine, they had whittled, and chewed, and spat, and talked, and agreed that the law must take its course.

Neither son nor son-in-law was willing to become—alone—the unwelcome bearer of bad news to the mother; they agreed to meet that night at the old home, and, together, tell her the story of Henry's latest crime, insisting that he be abandoned to such fate as might legally overtake him. Jim was to ride by Downey's farm on his way home, and tell him that he would have to go ahead and prosecute; while Matheny was to call up the sheriff, and tell him that, if a warrant for Henry's arrest was placed in his hands, none of the family wanted to know anything about it, but to go ahead and serve it as he would serve any other warrant.

That night they came at the appointed time, and, in their tactless manner, almost brutal in its directness, told her what they had come to tell. As she slowly comprehended the meaning of their story, her old heart sickened within her, and, impulsively, her mind turned to Dave for help. With a shock, she realized again that Dave was dead, and no one was left to help her bear her sorrow. Her children? Yes, there were her children, but they had failed her.

These men, who were even then plucking with rough and heavy hands at her very heart-strings, were her children. Jim was talking to her, now, but she did not hear him. Her mind had carried her back to that day of her sorrow's beginning, the day that Henry's first crime had been discovered.

She was seeing with memory's eyes and hearing with memory's ears. A boyish face was before her, and a boyish voice was promising with boyish extravagance, the loving care he would take of her "when I'm growed up, Mamma;" and suddenly she realized that the boy she saw was the man who sat opposite her, and the boyish promise, so sweet to her ears, had changed to words of brutal indifference to her broken mother-heart. She turned a pleading face, dumbly, from one man to the other, and saw no sympathy. A fresh shame, a new sorrow, had come to her, and she must bear it alone.

And so she heard them through in silence; and when, having finished, they waited for a word from her, she said nothing, but only sat with folded hands and averted face. It was an awkward moment for both men, and they felt relieved when, at last, with a few trembling, half-whispered words, she asked them to go away and leave her.

For a long time she sat there, numbed and helpless, seeing nothing, hearing nothing. The fire in the old-fashioned fireplace blazed up in a last effort at cheerfulness, then died down, and went out. The old cat came, and rubbed her arched back against the old woman's skirt, and purred her contentment that a friend was near, but the old woman knew it not. Two sweethearts drove by the house, where death had lately been, and the girl shrank in fear from the darkened windows and shadowy phantoms and forbidding corners the moonlight could not spy out. And inside sat an old, unhappy woman, a woman whose heart was bruised and sore, and whose days of motherhood were filled with shame and disappointment. The joys that had come to other mothers, and made worth while their going down into the Valley of the Shadow, had never come to her. While they plumed, and prided, and sometimes even boasted that their sons had grown into good men and true, her old heart ached always with the knowledge that her first-born was a thief. Each day's awakening brought to them happy hopes for their children, and their children's children, but to her it brought only a renewed sense of dread and shame. Her sensitive soul shrank from the unmerciful gossip about her boy that, country-bred herself, she knew her neighbors indulged in, country-fashion. Gradually social intercourse with them had come to be measured by the limits of the farm on which she lived; and the little country church that knew her as a girl, and as a bride, and before whose altar her babies had been baptized, had not seen her face for years.

She shivered, and huddled a little closer in her chair. Her lips moved. She was mumbling a prayer that had been hers for many years: "Hide not thy face from me when I am in trouble. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping because of thy indignation and thy wrath." Dave had read that to her out of the old Bible that awful night when they had learned for the first time that their boy was a thief. Dave—he had been so good to her, always at her side to make the way a little easier. And with memories of him there came a rush of tears, and she threw herself across her bed and poured out her soul in a flood of prayers and weeping. By and by, her voice was hushed, her sobs were changed to sighs, and she slept. And as she slept, the Dream Angel came, and wiped away her tears, and gave again to her the knowledge of a mother's joy in the clasp of baby arms; her old face was wreathed in happy smiles while she babbled baby talk; and her old arms once more held to her breast the innocent boy who was her first man-child.

The day of the housewife on the farm begins early, and the habit of years is not easily broken. At four o'clock, still dreaming, she began to waken, and was minded to get out of bed easily, lest she rouse the baby. Turning her head to look at him, the sleepy cobwebs were swept, suddenly, from her brain, and with them went her dream-brought happiness. It had been thirty years and more since he had lain there, the baby boy for whom her eyes were seeking. She covered her face with her hands, while the tears stole down her wrinkled cheeks.

A long while she lay there, weeping and whispering. Finally, she roused, and, sitting on the side of her bed, stared long at the floor with unseeing eyes. "Oh, God!" she whimpered, "how much longer air ye goin' to be hard on me? I caint stand it—I jest caint."

Daylight came—the sun rose; still she sat there, whispering, weeping, praying. She reached to the table, and took from it the old Bible from which Dave had read aloud to her every night and morning—simple hearted, loyal minded Dave, whose love had suffered long and never faltered. Putting on her glasses, she opened it in an aimless way, and read at random:

> He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

She shrank from the printed page as if it had been alive and struck her, and the book fell, unnoticed, to the floor. "Oh, God!" she wept, "I caint. Aint there no other way? I caint do it—I caint—I caint."

That morning, the rural route man knocked long and anxiously at her door, and got no answer. He had a letter for her, sent by registered mail, and it must be receipted for before he could deliver it. The message it brought would have lifted a load from her heart; but miles away, an old woman was feverishly urging an old horse towards town, and repeating over and over, "shall have mercy, shall have mercy."

When the old woman reached town, she drove straight to the office of the land-owner-lawyer, on whose farm she and her husband had lived, while it was even yet his father's farm. He had not yet come, and she sat down to wait for him. It had been years since her last visit to the county seat, and her old eyes saw much that was new and strange. When the lawyer came, he found a shrinking, stooped old woman whose face was hid by an old-fashioned, home-made, black bonnet that matched the old-fashioned dress she wore. Every fold in the rusty dress, and every tuck in the shabby bonnet, the very droop in her shoulders, and the helpless "hang" of her arms, all told their pathetic story of poverty and distress. The lawyer stood, unnoticed, in the doorway, trying in vain to recognize her.

"Good morning, madam," he said, at last. "Were you waiting to see me?"

"Air—air ye Mister Oldham?" she asked, fumbling for her spectacles. "I wanted to see him." And then, as the glasses enabled her to know that he was the man she sought, she exclaimed: "Why, Mister Oldham, don'che know me? Don'che remember Mely Benson?"

The lawyer stood no longer in the doorway; his face lit up with genuine pleasure as he grasped her hands. "Mely Benson? Why, of course I know you. My goodness gracious, Mely, I ought to know you. We went to school together—I declare, I'm afraid to say how many years ago. Let's see. It's been thirty years, hasn't it, since you and Dave moved on our farm? Or, has it been that long?" he added.

"It's thirty-two years, the second day of next Feb'uary," she said, smiling; it was the first smile her lips had known for many months, but she could not resist the warm and unaffected greeting of the friend of old-time days. "Your Pa had the house all ready for us to move in th' day we was married," she added.

"My, how time does fly," the lawyer said. "But you're holding your own, Mely," he cried, gaily. "You're looking mighty well," he added, hoping to cheer her whom he knew to be unhappy.

"No, I aint," she said. "I'm about all gone. I come down here this mornin' to tell you somethin' before it's too late. I want to talk to you awhile, Anse," she said, calling him by his boyhood name.

"All right, Mely, we'll go in the other room where we wont be bothered, and have a good, long talk," he said, picking up his morning's mail, and shuffling over the letters. "Well, well," he added, "here's a letter from up in Canada, addressed to Mister *Anse* Oldham. Who in the world knows me so well that far from home? Wait a minute, Mely, and let's see who it is."

The old woman grasped his arm. "Please, Anse, let's not wait. I feel so —queer. I've got to say it—now—I'm afraid to put it off," she cried out, and added, beseechingly, "Please, Anse, I'll never bother you again."

Alarmed and wondering, the lawyer led her into his private office, and placed her, almost overcome by her emotion, in a big, soft, leather chair, hurriedly pouring a glass of water for her.

"Thank y', Anse," she said, presently. "You al'as was good to me an' Dave; it makes it—mighty hard—what I'm a-goin' to say."

The old eyes were cast down, and the old fingers fumbled, nervously, with the folds of her old-fashioned black apron. "Anse," she half whispered, "you know—about Henry?" The lawyer nodded, and she went on:

"They say—he's stole—ag'in. I don't know—Jim an' Tom, they said—they come to my house last night an' said—he's took—Elmer Downey's horse. They said the's a writ out for him—an' Jim said—his own brother, both of 'em, they said they wouldn't he'p him—an' I caint; I aint got my money yet."

It was the first time in her life she had ever spoken to one, not of her own family, concerning the things which had destroyed her happiness, and the effort was costing her dear. She had come to lay bare the naked shame of her secret soul, and to confess that which she had kept hid, for a lifetime, from the father of her children. It was her Garden of Gethsemane.

"Anse," she said, and her words came slowly, in a half whisper, but none the less brave, "Henry—is a thief; but I—made him one. He caint no more help —doin' what he does, than water can help runnin' down hill." She sat silent, facing the lawyer steadily. He said never a word, but waited.

"When Henry done wrong the first time, I knowed, then, it was because o' what I'd done; and I prayed and begged God to spare him the curse. I tol' Dave I'd die if he turned ag'in th' boy, an' he forgive him, and bore with him, for my sake. An' since then, I've prayed night and day, for God to punish jist me, nobody but me, an' to spare my husband and children. I tell you, Anse, He knows how to punish where it hurts th' most. He didn't spare me by sparin' them I loved the most. You know—all that Henry done. His father stood by him because I begged him on my knees to do it for my sake. Dave never knowed—I couldn't bear to tell him—what I'm a-tellin' you. I made my boy—what he is," she said, in a voice so low that the lawyer could scarcely hear her.

"I—I—marked him," she whispered, her heart sick with the shame of her confession.

She suddenly flung up a hand, as the lawyer attempted to speak. "Don't," she said. "Don't say a word. Jist let me tell it; there aint much time, an' there's so much to be done—to save Henry."

"You know," she went on, "he was our first chil', born the Chris'mas after we moved to your Pa's farm. One Sunday, that first summer we lived there, you and Mis' Oldham come out there, an' she lost her diamond breastpin. D'you remember?"

The lawyer nodded, wonderingly.

"I've brung it back to you," she said.

She held her open hands towards him, and in it there lay a diamond brooch. A ray from the morning sun fell across it, and was broken, instantly, into a million sparkling, twinkling bits, and flung back to the sun to be made whole again. A lump came into the lawyer's throat, and his eyes filled with tears, as he looked upon it. It had been his wedding gift to the wife of his youth. And in the days since he had lost her, he had come to sit by the ashes of his lonely hearth, while the Spirit of the Past painted for him pictures of Her in the long ago. And in the picture of his wedding day, always there was a sunbeam that fell across these very stones, and sparkled, and twinkled, and scintillated, and bubbled, for very joy for him. Reverently, his fingers closed over the brooch, as he took it from her hand.

"She wore it on our wedding day," he said. "Where did you find it, Mely?"

"Caint you understand?" she cried. "I stole it, Anse; and I've jist brought it back, that's all. There aint no excuse for me a-takin' it; I al'as wanted one,

an' we was al'as so poor. An' that day, ever' time I'd see them di'mon's a-flashin' an' a-sparklin', I'd think o' my poor, little cheap breast-pin; an' when I saw it come loose, I got her to go down with me after berries, a-hopin' she would lose it down there where she wouldn't hear it fall. I watched, an' I saw it fall, an' when you-all went away, I run an' got it an' kep' it hid. Ever' day, I'd take it out an' watch th' sparkle in it. I tol' Dave I was a-goin' to put by a tenth o' my butter an' egg money, an' buy me a di'mon'. I knowed it would take years before I could let on like I had bought it, but I was already a-havin' the secret enjoyment of it. I was jist a-gittin' ready to make all of 'em believe I'd bought it, when Henry—wrote that check—the first time.

"All at once, I knowed what it meant. God was a-punishin' me for what I'd done. Anse, since that day I aint never had any peace. I've suffered—oh, God! How I have suffered, a-seein' my husband an' children suffer, an' knowin' I was the cause of it. An' las' night, Jim an' Tom— they come an' tol' me—about Henry—ag'in. Anse, caint you do somethin' fur him? It's me that's the thief. He caint help it."

There were tears in Oldham's eyes, too. This pitiful old woman would have melted the heart of any man. His heart ached to serve her. Gently, he questioned her, and drew out the whole story that Jim and Matheny had told.

Realizing that the only service he could give would be to save her boy from the penalty of his act, Oldham proposed that he himself would pay Downey the value of his horse; and, going into the next room, he called up the "country" operator, and asked her to get Elmer Downey for him, as soon as possible. Waiting there with the receiver at his ear, he bethought himself of the letter from Canada, and opened it—the name at the bottom of the written page was the name of the man whose mother was even then offering herself to be sacrificed that he might escape! Before the lawyer could even call out to the old woman in the next room, "Central" called in to say that Downey was on the line.

In answer to Oldham's hurried questions, Downey said he had been mistaken in assuming that his horse was stolen, but justified his hasty accusation by saying that Henry's reputation was so bad, that "when him an' the horse was both missin', I natcherally thought what I did." The horse had been found that morning, in a neighbor's pasture, into which he had broken through an old water-gap.

Anxiously, then, the lawyer hastened to read the letter he had just opened. It read:

DEAR SIR:

I reckon you will be surprised to get a letter from me, but you was Pa's friend, and I want you to be mine. If you feel that is asking too much, then grant my favor for Ma's sake, while I am proving to you that I have earned the right to ask a favor from you.

I am on my way to Western Canada, to start my life all over, and live it in a different way. Nobody knows where I am going, but you and Ma. I come away without even telling her, but I wrote to her today, and sent it by registered mail, so she would be sure to get it.

I want you to do this for me: if anything should happen to her, let me know at once. Not much for you to do, but it will keep my mind easier to know that so long as I don't hear from you, she is still alive, and well.

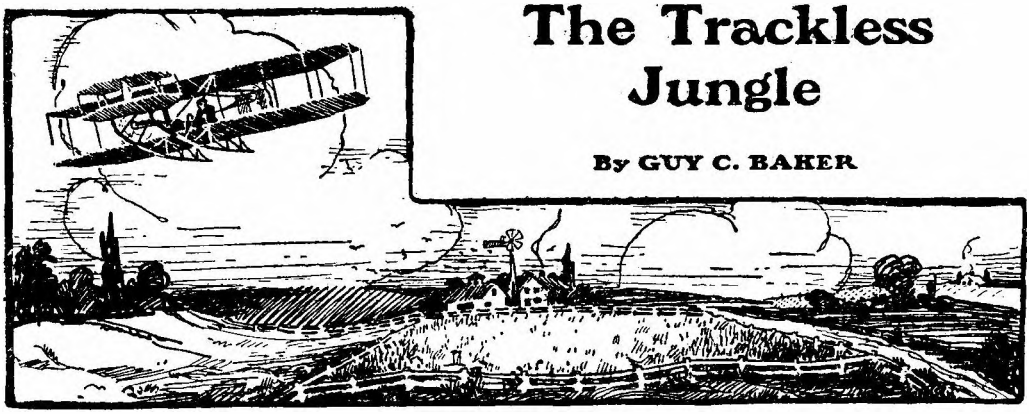
Please keep it a secret, what I have written; only, if you see her, tell her. It may make her feel a little better.

Your friend,
HENRY BENSON.

And then followed an address in the Canadian Northwest, that was to be his destination.

"Thank God," said the old lawyer, and hurried into the next room. "Mely," he called, "everything's come right already. Downey's found his horse, and here's a letter from Henry with good news. Bless my soul, Mely, if it aint the very letter you wouldn't—"

He stopped. A Master Hand had touched her face, and all the lines and furrows that were writ by the finger of pain and shame, and care and sorrow were blotted out; instead there shone a look of peace and joy it had not known for years. She had "confessed and forsaken," and the greatest of mercies had been granted her. She was gone to be with Dave.



The Trackless Jungle

By GUY C. BAKER

DO YOU KNOW who owns the sky? Robert Wilder, the air-ship man, didn't know; and an exciting situation developed which made it mighty important for him to learn. So he went to Josiah Snook—and that crafty old attorney dived into "the trackless jungle" of the law, and found out. How the trouble started, how he proved his case, and how he settled the matter, all makes a most interesting tale.

No. IV—THE OWNER OF THE BLUE, BLUE SKY

JOSIAH SNOOK relighted his partly-smoked cigar, thoughtfully tossed the match over among the larkspurs, once more took up the flower-spray, and continued the painstaking treatment of each precious rose-bush.

"Everything was made for something, eh? Well, what in the thunder were these slugs made for?" Critically he examined another stalk; then, discovering a couple of the troublesome parasites there also, he again took up his grumbling soliloquy—"The pests always pick out the very choicest—"

He stopped short, turned his head in sudden attention, and then, a look of interest leaping to his face, he stepped to the center of his little flower-garden, and gazed skyward.

An exclamation escaped him. High in the heavens, and far to the east, approaching with incredible speed, was a weird, bird-like object that seemed to be neither of the air nor of the earth—a thing that flew with a purring, vibrating noise, that dipped and glided like a monster bird, and that plunged ahead with the purposeful precision of a destroying Juggernaut.

Each second the whirring sound grew more distinct, and the swiftly approaching bird-craft larger, until, with wide-spreading, motionless wings, and a trailing, box-like appendage, the visitor swept high over Snook's head.

Then, as the watcher followed the marvelous flight with his eye, the bird-craft made a wide-sweeping turn, and came hurtling back at a much less altitude. As once more the strange visitor passed over the little garden, Snook suddenly uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"By George! They're *both* in it! Those boys, those boys! Why aren't they satisfied with killing themselves singly?" Then, a note of pride edging his tone, he murmured: "And they used to play here in the garden with me! But—but they haven't forgotten old Snook with all their greatness—no sir-ee!"

And as he watched, the perfectly-controlled machine once more turned with a stately sweep and, this time just skimming the tree-tops, raced with wonderful speed over the gray-haired Snook.

There was a shout of a laughing salutation, the wave of a hand, the glint of a falling missive; then, with a diminishing sound of whirring motors, the wonderful sky-thing was gone.

For several seconds the old man stood silently staring at the point where the craft had disappeared; then, with a sigh, he slowly waved his hand in a tardy Godspeed, and turned his eyes slowly back to his flowers.

With a start, his thoughtful glance caught sight of a small object lying over by the sweet-williams.

"By George! I remember seeing them drop something—I had almost forgotten it!"

Hurriedly he picked up the object and curiously loosened and spread out a scrap of paper that had been tied to a small piece of iron. A look of puzzlement crept into his face as he slowly read a few hastily scribbled words.

> Who owns the blue, blue sky? Come out to the field in the morning — must see you. WILDER BROTHERS.

Snook studied the short message with a smile.

"'Who owns the blue, blue sky'—sounds a trifle dippy, by Jove! Oh, well, if they were just normal fellows, I don't suppose we would have those benzine air-wagons to-day."

The following morning Snook alighted from an inter-urban car at the Wilder Brothers' aviation field—a spot to which the curious world had already beaten a path.

Notwithstanding his intimate friendship with the whimsical, intrepid brother aviators, Snook had consistently manifested his disapproval of their dangerous work—in spite of his secret elation for their marvelous achievements—by making himself conspicuously absent from the aviation field. It was, therefore, with keen interest that the sprightly Snook surveyed the remarkable scene before him.

The field consisted of twenty acres of perfectly level land. At one side were the sheds which housed the aëroplanes, and also the commodious quarters of the bird-men. Also, near by, was the substantial factory-building within whose screening walls these mysterious sky-folk, with mystic skill, fashioned the vindications of the dream of *Darius Green*.

Out on the vast field, a half-dozen aëroplanes were skimming back and forth like so many falcons—soaring rapidly upward, gliding gracefully downward, and sweeping about in perfectly calculated evolutions. It was the daily routine of the testing of new machines, and the drill of embryonic aviators.

It was all so absorbingly fascinating that Snook watched in speechless wonder for a long time. At last, with a sigh, he strolled slowly over to what appeared to be the club-house. An attendant addressed him.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but visitors are not admitted to this part of the field."

Snook smiled amiably as he deliberately readjusted his nose-glasses and regarded the young *attaché* benignantly.

"That's all right, young man; that's all right. I'll just sit down here while you trot out and tell Bob or Dick that an old codger is here to tell them who owns the blue, blue sky."

The young man stared back at Snook with the comical bewilderment of one undecided whether best to turn and run or to pounce upon the lunatic and forcibly overpower him. He ended by gasping helplessly:

"Beg pardon, but—"

A low, calm voice interrupted.

"Hello, Uncle Josiah! How are you this morning?"

Snook turned. A lank, blue-eyed, kindly-faced, ordinary-looking young man stood with outstretched hand.

"Feeling good, Dick, thank you."

"Come up on the porch and make yourself comfortable." Turning to the open-mouthed attendant, he added: "James, bring Mr. Snook the cigars, and then run over to the machine-shop and tell Bob to come here at once." Then, with a low, pleasing laugh, he turned again to his visitor:

"Did you think we had gone suddenly crazy when you received our note yesterday?"

"No, not suddenly. But take it from

your Uncle Josiah—your man-maid looked at me as though he thought I were one of the loons when I informed him that I had come to impart knowledge pertaining to the blue sky."

Wilder laughed good-humoredly. At that moment Robert, much like his brother in action and appearance, quietly joined them, greeted Snook, and drew up a chair.

The Wilder brothers were habitually taciturn. As usual, they did not waste time with useless preliminaries on this morning. Dick, the usual spokesman of the two, at once broached the subject which had prompted the summons of Snook.

"Uncle Josiah, when we asked you who owned the blue, blue sky, we were in dead earnest. Who does own it?"

Snook was silent for a moment; then, his face bespeaking his bewilderment, he asked:

"What do you mean—the air?"

"Yes. For example, who owns the air above this aviation field of ours?"

"Why, you do—clear to the stars."

"And, by the same rule, the man who owns the land beyond us, also owns the air above it?"

"Precisely. The first principle of law that confronts the student is that 'the ownership of land, embracing its unlimited downward extent, and the air to its uttermost height within its lateral boundaries, extended upward, is a positive, absolute right in which the proprietor of adjoining lands does not participate in the slightest degree.'"

There was unmistakable disappointment in his voice as Richard turned to his brother.

"That doesn't sound good, Bob."

Robert simply shook his head. Richard again turned toward Snook.

"There cannot possibly be any mistake about that?"

"No—none."

"And would that ownership carry with it such proprietorship of the air as absolutely to prohibit trespass through it?"

"Certainly."

For a moment the world-famed aviator pondered; then, his voice calm and even, he said: "Then Bob and I are ruined."

"Ruined! Why, Dick, what do you mean?"

"That every dollar we have in the world is sunk in this field and these buildings."

"Well?"

"If that is the law, all you see here is just so much junk."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this: we own but twenty acres, land sufficient only for our aëroplanes to secure the necessary start; and Jasper Roton, the millionaire soap manufacturer, owns every inch of land which surrounds us, excepting only the highway which passes out there."

"Ah, I see—and that grouch of a Roton—"

"Exactly—has positively ordered us to discontinue our flights over his land and through his air."

"When did he give you this notice?"

"Yesterday; a constable served written notice on us."

"Do you mean to say that the old duffer stood silently by and watched you make all these improvements without protest, and only objected after everything was completed?"

"That is it, exactly. You see, we have a ninety-nine year lease from an old fellow by the name of 'Stubborn' Stupe—a man who harbors a lifelong hatred of Roton. There seemed to be some grievances dating years back. At one time both men owned small tracts here, side by side. Roton prospered, but Stupe was a failure. Gradually Roton acquired all the land around Stupe's little tract. Then Roton tried to buy Stupe out, but Stupe refused to sell. Roton has vainly resorted to every possible expedient to get possession of Stupe's land. When Stupe heard that we were casting about for a location, he offered us a lease. His price was reasonable, and the topography of the ground so suitable to our needs that we accepted.

"It never occurred to us that there might be objections on the part of Roton; and if it had, the possibility of his being able to effectually interfere with our plans would not have seemed likely.

"However, we now see that Stupe craftily foresaw just such a *contre-*

temps, because he had a clause inserted in the lease to the effect, that should Roton ever acquire an interest in the lease, dirctly or indirectly, the same should at once become null and void."

Snook meditatively knocked the ashes from his cigar, deliberately relighted it, raised his eyebrows until they merged into the wrinkles of his freckled brow, and said scoldingly:

"I am afraid that you have called in your lawyer for consultation at the wrong end of your venture."

Robert spoke up for the first time.

"But is there no way by which we could compel Roton to accord us this privilege?"

"I fear not: it is his land and his air. A man's property can only be taken by eminent domain when its use is required for some public purpose."

Richard sighed with resignation.

"Then it's all off. For it is certain that our business is very decidedly a private matter."

For a time the three men sat gloomily silent. Snook puffed away at his cigar savagely—heedlessly watching the smoke-wreaths float lazily out toward the aviation field. Several times his hand crept slowly to his tiny goatee, as was his wont when deeply absorbed.

Suddenly he looked up, a light of animation illumining his face.

"By George! An idea! Didn't I read, a few days since, that you had taken a contract to build a number of aëroplanes for the government?"

"Yes—twenty-five." Then, glancing about cautiously, Richard added in a lowered tone of voice: "But the papers did not have all the facts. Confidentially, Uncle Josiah, we have a secret contract to build one hundred machines—machines of a vastly improved type over anything which we have yet undertaken. Our contract requires that we begin on these machines at once; so, you see, we have no time, even though we had the money, in which to duplicate our plant elsewhere."

"Ah!" Snook slapped his knee boyishly, briskly arose, and began to pace back and forth excitedly. Abruptly he stopped before the two brothers, his feet spread apart, his hand thrust into his pocket.

"I have it—demmit all—I have it! We'll make some law that the world, in its thousands of years, has never before heard of. Listen to me." And, rapidly and earnestly, he talked cautiously for many minutes to the two brothers.

When at last, he took his leave, it was to hurry back home, hastily pack his bag, bid a reluctant good-by to his sister Jane and to his flowers, and hurry to the station.

The following morning Josiah Snook and the famous Wilder Brothers registered at the Shoreham hotel in the city of Washington.

For two days the three Ohioans were buried alternately in the mysterious labyrinths of the War and Navy Department and the Department of Justice. During this time, they stampeded the cohorts of red tape; they pleaded, threatened, expostulated, explained; they brushed aside under-secretaries, and boldly assaulted the seclusion of the big chiefs themselves; and at last, to the infinite relief of departmental *attachés*, the "bunch of Westerners" got what they wanted and promptly left for Ohio.

"Now, by George! We're ready for the fireworks," greeted Snook as, a few days later, he dropped off the car at the aviation field, and came face to face with Richard Wilder. "When are the five days up that Roton mentioned in his notice?"

"That? Oh, the time expired while we were at Washington. We haven't flown any since our return."

Snook smilingly lighted his cigar.

"How are atmospheric conditions for flying this morning?"

"Fine."

"Then fly—at once! Fly all your machines—fly them through Roton's air."

"But you haven't yet—"

Snook raised his hand and smiled astutely as he interrupted:

"No, I want wise Mister Roton to make the first move."

Richard grinned comprehendingly as he turned and walked briskly toward the sheds. Ten minutes had not passed before a half-dozen ungainly looking air-crafts were lined up with a fussy fusillade of whirring motors. Aviators

and mechanicians walked scrutinizingly about the machines with critical attention, while helpers and *attachés* hurried about in skilled preparation.

Snook watched with serene, interested attention. He tugged at his little goatee nervously as he watched the first bird-man take his place, carefully try the different levers, glance about in a final, appraising survey, and thrust down a throttle. There followed the fraction of a second's breathless silence; then, with a powerful plunge, the aëroplane glided swiftly along the ground, skimmed lightly into the air, raised rapidly upward, turned and gracefully circled the field a couple of times; then, with great swiftness and certainty, it swept away and over the Roton lands until the sound of its motors died away, and the machine itself became but a speck in the blue of the sky.

Then, one by one, the other five machines went through identically the same maneuver. At the end of an hour, like a flock of swallows, the machines came sweeping back. Snook was joined by Richard and Robert on the wide veranda; they were being served with some refreshments, when the expected happened. The sheriff dropped off a car, came briskly toward them, and formally served the brothers with legal process.

Snook read the papers with complacent interest.

"Well, my lads, guess that you had better not fly any more to-day. Roton has accommodated us by making the first move. You are enjoined by the court from flying through Roton's air. He evidently had everything ready for you."

As usual, Richard was the one to reply.

"Well, Uncle Josiah, what is to be our move?"

"We are going over to your neighbor."

"Who—Roton?"

"Yep."

"Who is going?"

"The two Wilder brothers and their Uncle Josiah."

"What for?"

"I to talk, and you to listen."

Jasper Roton's place was a veritable castle in the woods. Everything that money could buy had been spent for the beauty and comfort of the soap-king's country place. And, as Snook and his two *protégés* made their way through the commodious lawn toward the house, Snook paused repeatedly to effuse over the wealth of beautiful flowers.

They found Roton luxuriating in the cool of a wide veranda. He was engaged in earnest conversation with another man. Snook smiled as he said guardedly:

"We are in luck; that is Mahon—his attorney—with him."

At the sound of the gravel beneath their shoes, Roton glanced up with a look of mingled annoyance and inquiry. A look of hauteur sprang to his face as he recognized the Wilder brothers. He remained seated, however, and continued to watch their approach frowningly.

Mahon was more considerate. With a courteous, pleasing smile, he arose to his feet.

"Well!—how are you, Mr. Snook? And the Wilders—yes, I've met them. Are you acquainted with Mr. Roton?"

The cue was too compelling—Roton surlily arose, bowed stiffly, and coldly invited them into chairs.

Snook chuckled to himself as he noted the embarrassment of the Wilder brothers.

After the usual formalities had been exchanged, Snook turned calmly toward the beefy Roton.

"We came to see you about that injunction suit—I represent the boys, here."

Roton's face clouded angrily.

"I have a lawyer, too—talk to Mahon."

"Fine! Mahon will understand me better, anyway." Then, with professional friendliness, he turned toward the attorney. "Mahon, we want you to dismiss your injunction."

Mahon laughed good-naturedly.

"I don't doubt that in the least."

"And we want you to dismiss it to-day."

"Why the rush?"

"The boys want to fly in the morning—you see, these aëroplanes get

awfully restless when they stand in their stalls."

Mahon sobered and replied earnestly:

"We are very sorry to have been compelled to resort to the courts, but you see, we gave your clients fair warning. Mr. Roton does not care to have the machines flying over his land. And I know, Mr. Snook, that you are familiar with the law which gives him proprietorship of the air above him."

"Perfectly. But that's not the ground upon which we base our request for a dismissal of the injunction case."

"What, may I ask, is the ground?"

"That you have enjoined the wrong party."

Mahon straightened alertly.

"I don't understand you."

"I will explain. You name the Wilder Brothers as defendants, when, in fact, they are no longer lessees of the aviation field."

Roton leaned forward excitedly and broke in:

"What's that—what's that? Did they sell out?"

"They have sold their lease and rented their entire plant."

Roton's mouth gaped open in amazement. Mahon was first to speak—his voice pregnant with curiosity.

"May I ask to whom they sold?"

"Sure. They sold to the United States government."

Mahon whistled. Roton's face turned scarlet, and his voice was tremulous with passion as he burst out:

"The devil they did! But what has even that got to do with these fresh youngsters flying over my land?"

"It has this much, Mr. Roton: the Wilder brothers are now government employees—entrusted with the task of building and testing aëroplanes for the United States government."

"But it is nothing but an infernal trick to get ahead of me!"

Snook smiled complacently.

"Sure it is—and it will do the job, too."

Mahon interpolated, conciliatingly:

"Rather clever, gentlemen. Of course, this *dénouement* will obviate the dismissal of our action. But even the government has not the right to use a citizen's property without due process of law."

"Right you are, Mahon—we expect to begin that due process this very day."

"And that—"

"That will be an action in condemnation—an action to compel the use of Roton's air for the reason that the same is needed by the government to test aëroplanes and drill army officers in the use of them."

Mahon smiled quizzically.

"But what right have you to bring such a suit?"

Snook calmly pulled an official-looking paper from his pocket and handed it to the attorney.

"That's my authority. I have been designated by the Department of Justice as a special assistant for this particular case."

Mahon glanced across at Roton confirmingly.

"I guess Mr. Snook is right in his statement," he admitted. Then, turning back to Snook, he added: "But Roton will be entitled to compensation."

Roton snapped out: "You're sure right—and heavy damages, at that!"

"As to damages—of course, you are entitled to that. But we will let a jury fix the amount."

And the jury did. A couple of weeks later, at the end of a most sensational trial, in which Roton's galaxy of brilliant legal talent had bitterly contended for a million-dollar award as compensation for the use of the Roton sky, and Snook, single-handed, had combated them with all his unlimited wealth of ridicule and satire, and the jury had formally viewed the premises and finally retired for deliberation—then the principals in the remarkable battle relaxed for a few minutes' respite while they awaited the verdict.

There had been no precedents to follow in support of any claims made by counsel for either side; it was the first case in the history of legal jurisprudence where condemnation had been resorted to and compensation fixed for an aëroplane right-of-way through the sky!

Then, after a tense, seemingly interminable delay, the jury filed back into the court-room. Roton, big, beefy, red-faced, fidgeted nervously. Richard and Robert Wilder searched the faces of the jurymen with pale, anxious features.

Snook stood over to one side, his feet spread apart, one hand thrust into his trouser pocket, his other hand holding an unlighted, partly-burned cigar before him, his mottled, freckled face serene and tranquil.

What would the verdict be?—a nominal sum, or an amount so large as to render all the ingenuity of his plans futile? Which would prevail?—the combined craft, skill, prestige, and legal learning of the counsel for Roton, or his own single-handed onslaught of wit and irony?

Amid a breathless silence, the pronouncement of the award fell upon the listening ears. Like a thunderbolt, the few words pounded into the understanding of both sides alike.

"*One dollar and one cent!*"

Roton and his counsel stared at the jury in speechless, impotent incredulity and chagrin. The Wilder brothers sat paralyzed with joy.

Then, smiling complacently, Snook crossed over to the table by Roton's counsel, quietly drew his hand out of his pocket with some loose change, guilelessly laid a silver dollar and a Lincoln penny upon the table, and shoved it over to Mahon.

"Take out your fees, and hand the balance to your client," he said suavely. And, still smiling, he led "his boys" from the room.

The following afternoon, as Snook was once more engaged in deadly combat with the slugs on his roses, the familiar sound of a purring motor again reached his ears. Once again came the wonderful air-craft from out the sky; once again came the laughing hallo, and the little missive as the craft rushed by; and once again the marvelous visitor disappeared into the unknown from whence it came.

Laughing softly, Snook picked up the missive.

"Dog-gone 'em—dog-gone 'em!"

Slowly he unfolded the paper, and read.

Uncle Josiah, *We* are the owners of the blue, blue sky!

The Ainslee Inheritance

By JEAN CARMICHAEL

AS AINSLEE walked through the wide hall on his way to his motor-car, he lingered a moment, forgetting for the time his important engagement with Underwood at the Club. He was looking about him with a new interest. The place had suddenly acquired a charm, a glamour all its own, for Evelyn Harborough had promised to marry him, and to-morrow she was coming for the first time to see this beautiful old home of his ancestors.

He stopped a moment in the wide doorway of the drawing-room. The great paneled room was lying in darkness except where a dim light in the sconces above the fireplace shone directly on the portrait hanging there, and he walked across and stood for a moment with his arms resting on the mantel, looking up into the beautiful eyes of his mother—that mother who was only a dim memory to him, for he had been only six when she and his father were drowned.

"How I wish you were here, Mother mine, to welcome Evelyn," he sighed. "I never knew before how lonely I'd been without you until she loved me. What a lonely little devil I was," he said to himself as he strolled back to the hall. "No brothers, no sisters, no father, no mother. A guardian is all well enough, but even Dr. Harborough couldn't take the place of my very own people. It's a strange situation. I never knew of anyone so bereft of relations. I'm the only one of the Ainslee clan living."

His motor-car was waiting, but he still lingered for a moment on the steps of the white pillared portico, looking thoughtfully across the velvet lawn and rose gardens to the distant sea shimmering in the moonlight beyond the dark woods. He loved it all so, it was all so a part of himself, this home of his. But much as he loved it, he realized to-night for the first time that for all its store of beautiful old furniture and portraits, books and silver, inherited from generations of wealthy ancestors, the house had been singularly empty of the things that really counted. Now that Evelyn was coming to it, the old house would come to life, would find its soul. As he drove through the scented summer night his heart sang.

At the door of the club the steward met him with the message that Mr. Underwood had telephoned that he would be unavoidably detained for an hour. Would Mr. Ainslee wait? In his supreme happiness, Ainslee did not care how long he waited. He strolled out to the great veranda overlooking the sea, and pulling a high-backed wicker chair to the railing, he threw himself down and began to build castles in Spain out of moonbeams.

How long he had been sitting there, absorbed in his thoughts, he did not know; but after an interval he became conscious of a conversation going on behind him between two men who had seated themselves not far away.

"Speaking of suggestion," one of the men was saying, "a peculiar case has come to my notice lately." He stopped to light a cigar; Ainslee could see the flare of the match. Then he heard the wicker chair creak, as the speaker settled himself more comfortably.

"It's the story of a family that was once cursed, so the tradition goes," he continued. "I forget the details. At any rate, for the last hundred and twenty-five years, no male member of that family has lived beyond the age of thirty-five."

"How extraordinary!" the other voice exclaimed. "Do you mean to say, Barton, that not *one* has lived his allotted time?"

"Not one, as far as I can find out, and I've hunted up their genealogy with considerable care. It's an interesting case for us alienists."

"It's strange that the race hasn't died out," the other mused. "It sounds almost incredible."

"They all marry young," Barton explained. "And in every family there has been at least one son. But invariably he has been carried off before his thirty-fifth birthday. Sometimes it has been by accident, sometimes by illness—twice it's been suicide. Three wars have claimed the soldiers of the family. Tragedy has followed them always. Some of them have been high-spirited, brave, light-hearted, and have tried to ignore the thing—then out of a clear sky an accident has come; the candle has been snuffed out. It's the insistence of the thing that must get on one's nerves. There seems to be no escape. It would make me want to shoot myself at thirty-four. It's come down now to one man, the last of his race, who is now within a few months of the fatal time. I don't think he knows the story of his family. His guardian, who is a physician, thought he would see what ignorance of the thing would do. The boy was educated by private tutors, and then sent to a German University, and after that spent several years in traveling in every out-of-the-way corner of the earth, where he would never meet anyone who would know anything about his family. It's a good thing, too, for I do think that suggestion has played a big part in the tragic story. They got into the *habit* of expecting to die young and some of them brooded over it. I am watching the case from a distance with the greatest interest."

"Barton leaned forward and tossed his cigar over the rail. Ainslee could

hear it hiss as it fell into the tidepool on the rocks below, and he felt annoyed at the interruption. He was spellbound by the tale he was listening to, with no thought of eavesdropping.

"He's a splendid specimen of a man, Chalmers," Barton went on, leaning back in his chair, "strong as an ox, clean-blooded, no taint about him. He has everything to live for, poor fellow! He has more money than he knows what to do with, for he has inherited from all branches of the family, you see. But he is a simple sort of a chap, and spends most of his time in the old family home, not two miles from this very piazza. They say it is stuffed with old family silver and portraits and wonderful old furniture. Yes, he has everything to live for. Besides, he's just become engaged to a charming girl, the niece of his guardian, who must think he is coming out all right to allow it. Personally, however, *I* think the man is doomed."

Ainslee had grasped the arms of his chair until the knuckles showed white, as gradually incredulity, then growing suspicion, had merged themselves into full knowledge of the truth.

"Good God!" he whispered. "Is he talking about me?"

"Pleasant outlook," Chalmers remarked, blowing rings of smoke meditatively.

"He'll probably go the way his father did," Barton continued. "I am sure it was a fit of temporary insanity caused by brooding that brought about his death. He got along all right apparently until his thirty-fifth birthday; then suddenly that day he grew excited and started to go rowing on the river that flows through their grounds. His wife became anxious because he acted so strangely, and she pleaded with him not to go; but when she found he was determined, she insisted on going too. She probably thought she could look out for him. It was supposed to be an accident, although he was an expert oarsman, but my theory is he went temporarily insane and tipped the boat over. They were both drowned."

Ainslee suddenly moved his chair back noisily, and walked away, but not before he heard Barton's smothered exclamation, "Good Heavens, Chalmers, that's the man himself—Ainslee. What *have* I done?"

Ainslee walked rapidly down the steps to his car. He had forgotten his appointment with Underwood, forgotten everything but the fact that he must get away by himself. At first he was too angry that utter strangers should have been discussing his private affairs in this cold-blooded way to be conscious of anything else. Then the horror of the story overcame him. It was too strange, too incredible to believe. And yet as he drove rapidly home through the moonlight night, he began piecing together stray bits of family history and tradition that had been stored up in his subconscious mind. As he thought of his father and grandfather and great-grandfather, it seemed to him now extraordinary that they should have died so young, and he wondered that the strangeness of it had not occurred to him before.

As he came in sight of the stately white house on the hill, he caught himself wondering how it could look so calm and peaceful when it had been the background, the setting, for generations of tragedies. Its closets must be overflowing with skeletons of which he, poor deluded mortal, had had never a glimpse. Dr. Harborough had kept them securely locked away from his sight. As he went slowly up the steps, across the veranda, and into the wide hall, he shivered a little. For the first time he was conscious of a strange, haunted feeling. This house was not like other houses. It was full of ghosts of all the poor, dead young Ainslees.

He crossed the hall and went into the long drawing-room, where the family portraits hung, and turning on all the electric lights, he went from one pictured ancestor to another, studying each in turn. Grandfathers and great-grandfathers, uncles and cousins—they were all there, and not one of the portraits was that of an old man! It was singular he had never thought of it before. They were all young—some of them hardly more than lads.

When Dr. and Mrs. Harborough and their niece arrived next day they were

startled at the change in Ainslee. He was white and haggard; his face was lined, his eyes deep-set. He looked as though he had not slept for a week. His guardian's heart sank when he saw him, for he had already had a hasty interview that day with Barton.

"If I could only have got him past his thirty-fifth birthday," he mourned, "we could have broken the chain and proved that it was possible for an Ainslee to live his three-score years and ten."

Immediately after tea on the terrace, when her uncle and aunt went to their rooms to unpack and rest before dinner, Evelyn begged her *fiancé* to show her the famous Ainslee portraits at once.

"Just fancy, dear old Bob, I've never seen any of the Ainslees but you," she exclaimed, gayly tucking her hand in his arm, and smiling up into his face. "You're a good example of the family, I believe."

For the moment in the joy of seeing her again, he had forgotten the nightmare that had been haunting him for the last twenty hours. Now the memory of it, rushing back, turned his face suddenly grave. As they strolled together through the wide, cool hall, whose doors were hospitably open at either end toward garden and sea, he thought with bitterness of the joy with which he had anticipated this moment. His heart ached at Evelyn's little cry of pleasure, as he drew the portière, and they entered the great paneled room, with its beautiful old furniture of a bygone age and its innumerable portraits. Through the French windows one could look into the garden, where a fountain was splashing drowsily. The little breeze that was gently swaying the curtains brought to them the faint perfumes of roses. With all the enthusiasm of a child, Evelyn went eagerly from one picture to another, studying them critically—these generations of Ainslees, whose ranks she was so soon to join. In her own absorption she was quite unconscious of his sadness, until, breaking the silence that had fallen between them, he asked suddenly:

"Evelyn, do you notice anything strange about these portraits?"

She looked up at him questioningly. "Strange?" she repeated. "No, nothing strange. They are wonderfully interesting. As paintings, you know, they are rather remarkable. They are all by famous men—Trumbull, Stuart, Eastman Johnson, Sargent. It's really a splendid collection. What could be strange about them?"

"There are no old men among them," he remarked, trying to speak casually.

She shot a startled glance at him, but he was busily engaged in rubbing a tarnished bit of frame and did not look at her.

"But doesn't that make them seem near and dear and human, to have them all painted in their youth?" she cried gayly. "They might be our very own brothers and sisters dear. Now this one."—She walked over to the famous portrait by Trumbull of handsome young Captain Ainslee, the favorite *aide de camp* of General Washington. "Just fancy his being your—what is it?—great-great-great-grandfather? Why, it's *absurd*. He's a dear, and I wish I knew him."

"Evelyn,"—still Ainslee did not look at her—"did you ever hear any strange stories about our family?"

"Strange stories, Bob?" she tried to parry.

"Stories of a—a curse—that all of us Ainslees die before we are thirty-five?"

The color faded from her cheeks, but she lifted a brave face to his. "Oh, I've heard some silly tales," she admitted. "It's only nonsense, of course."

"But it's *not* nonsense, Evelyn." He seized her hands so that he hurt her a little. His face was haggard. "Every one of these old ancestors of mine has died before he was thirty-five. I looked them all up last night—sat up nearly all night rummaging among old family papers. There's no nonsense about it. And I am the last of the race—and on the twenty-fifth of August I'll be thirty-five. I have just fifty-seven days left."

She caught her breath in a little sob. "Bob, you're hurting me."

"I beg your pardon." He dropped her hands. "I've been so hurt myself I'm a little cruel, I expect. But don't you see what it means to me, to find this out now when I was so happy—

when I had nothing but joy to look forward to with you? And now it's all over." He laid his crossed arms on the mantel under the portrait of his mother, and dropped his head on them.

"Don't talk so," she cried passionately. "You don't believe all that silly stuff. You *can't* be so superstitious. You are strong and well." She drew herself up proudly. "Together, Bob, we can defy anything."

"You darling!" He bent and kissed her, then tore himself from the clinging arms with a little groan, "But I can't let you give yourself to me. You must forget me. You must let me fight it out alone."

"You dear old boy!" Evelyn smiled through her tears. "If you think I am going to give you up, you are mightily mistaken. This is just the time you need me most. You can't get rid of me so easily as that." She laughed joyously again, and in spite of himself he smiled. One could not help responding to her delicious, rippling, joyous laugh, but still in his heart he was unconvinced.

There were guests for dinner that evening, but afterwards by skillful manoeuvring Evelyn managed to escape to the moonlit garden with her uncle and tell him of her conversation with Ainslee. It was evident that Dr. Harborough was much disturbed.

"It's just as I feared," he sighed. "It has got on his nerves already. All the good I've done him is quite undone by the infernal blundering ass of a Barton. Forgive me, my dear, but it's no occasion for ladylike language. Barton rushed up to town first thing this morning and confessed that he had been talking over the case with another alienist last evening at the club, and that by some unfortunate chance Bob had overheard the conversation. He wanted me to know the facts. He was perfectly frank about it. Barton's honest, at any rate. A more phlegmatic, unimaginative man than Bob would pooh-pooh the whole idea of curses and doomed families, but he has taken it to heart. He's a high-strung sort of a chap, inclined to be a bit morbid, although he has never showed it much, for the good reason that he has always been happy, and had his own way up to now. He must be kept as cheerful as possible and have his mind taken off any morbid ideas. That's why I have always felt that a happy marriage would be the saving of him. You are the only person who can help him now, though God knows, Evelyn, I hate to have your youth saddened, your high spirits crushed. If I didn't love Bob Ainslee almost as my own son, I wouldn't have let you get mixed up in it. But you both seemed made for each other."

"We are, Uncle Dick," she said gently. "Don't worry about me. You know my life would be worth nothing without Dick. I'd give all my youth, everything, if it would help him. Why should you want me to stay a happy-go-lucky child, when I want to be a woman and help him? You ought to know me better than that."

"You *are* a good deal of a woman, Evelyn, my dear." He patted her shoulder approvingly, and then took off his glasses and polished them vigorously.

But although his guests did all in their power to cheer him, Ainslee became more depressed as the days passed. His guardian would hear him pacing his room half the night. Sometimes he would wander off by himself for hours and then come back with the brooding look in his eyes that Dr. Harborough dreaded to see.

"He's counting the days, Evelyn," he sighed, as he came upon his niece in the garden one morning. "He marks them off on a calendar every night. The twenty-fifth of August seems to limit his horizon. I believe I'll order change of scene. What do you say to going up to the Adirondacks to a camp I know, thirty miles or more from a railroad?"

Her grave face instantly brightened. "Oh, the very thing, Uncle Dick," she cried. "Go now and persuade him to go. Tell him I'm pining for the mountains." She laid her hand on his arm and led him down the path. "He's over there giving directions to one of the gardeners. I'll wait for you here in this summer house."

"It's rather absurd," Ainslee remarked a moment later, as he and the doctor strolled down the graveled path between the closely clipped box hedges.

"Patrick and I were discussing fall flowers—asters and chrysanthemums and dahlias—just as if I'd be here to see the damned things bloom." His voice was bitter, almost defiant, and Dr. Harborough seized him by the arm.

"Oh, come now; stop that, Bob," he cried. "You have no business to allow yourself to get into this state of mind. There's no earthly reason why you shouldn't live to be a hundred. You're perfectly sound; the only thing that *will* pull you down is this infernal worrying. Cut it out, boy. You ought to think of Evelyn. You're breaking her heart."

"Breaking her heart?" Ainslee repeated, startled.

"You certainly are. The dear girl is growing thin and pale. I'm really worried about her. She doesn't want to leave you, but I think this sea air is not bracing enough for her. I want her to go up to the Adirondacks for a few weeks, and I want you to come too. It will do her no end of good. Think of her and stop thinking about yourself. If you were not selfish, my dear boy, you would marry her to-morrow and go up there without Sarah and me to chaperon you."

Ainslee was angry. "It's just because I *am* thinking of her that I don't," he cried. "If I were *really* selfish I'd marry her to-day and we would go to Timbuctoo, and snap our fingers at Fate. But I can't drag her into this cursed family."

"A little hypnotism would be good for you, to rid you of this insistent idea," Dr. Harborough remarked with the privilege of age. "Well, if you have made up your mind to die, at least devote your last days to her. Make her forget it. Come, promise me that you will go up to the Upper Ausable with us at once, and we'll have the most festive time imaginable, if you'll only brace up. You will make three people happy by letting go this foolish idea."

"I'm afraid I've been a beastly poor host." Ainslee smiled his old winning smile, and Dr. Harborough felt the load on his heart lighten. "You must forgive me. Of course I'll come, Doctor. I'll try to be decent, and perhaps the change will be good for me, too, as well as for Evelyn, and will help to drive away this beastly 'insistent idea' of yours."

"It isn't mine, the Lord knows!" Dr. Harborough disclaimed it so vigorously that Ainslee laughed heartily, and the sound brought Evelyn flying from the summer-house.

"We're all going to the mountains, Evelyn darling," he cried. "And we're going to have the bulliest old time in the world."

One circumstance after another, however, delayed the trip until the last of July, and although at first Ainslee had seemed more like his cheerful old self again, Dr. Harborough, watching him closely, knew that it was only a surface gayety—that underneath, the thought of death was haunting him day and night. He was impatient to get him away to the solitude of the wilderness.

When at last they set out, however, the spirits of all the party rose, as they went farther north; and when at last they left civilization behind them on the shores of Lake Champlain, the long thirty-mile drive into the heart of the mountains was like nothing so much as an hilarious expedition into Arcady. When finally they drove rapidly down the last steep hill, turned a sharp bend in the road and came out on the shores of the Lower Ausable Lake, with the mountains covered with their impenetrable forests dropping precipitously down into still, fathomless water, Ainslee's face lighted up.

"By Jove, it seems as though one had gone back to primeval days," he exclaimed. "Those mountains shut away the world and all its worries and troubles. I can't realize we left the twentieth century only yesterday. We are aborigines. I don't suppose this lake has changed an atom since the Indians were here, except for the boathouse over yonder."

He leaned back lazily in the skiff and listened with half-closed eyes to the rhythmical slap of the little waves against the sides of the boats as the guides rowed them up the lake to the portage leading to the Upper Ausable. Far above them the "Indian Head" was gazing out over the limitless panorama

of mountains and forests, with the far vision in its eyes. Ainslee looked up at the huge stone face thoughtfully.

"I wonder what you have seen in all these ages from your high eyrie, old Sachem," he mused. "I'd like to have your philosophy of life."

In their camp in the heart of the lonely region, the days passed rapidly, crowded full from early morning until the twilight fell, and the moon rose behind the mountains. They explored the forest that clothed the mountain behind their camp; they fished the rushing trout brook that tumbled down to the lake; they floated on the still waters of the Ausable; and Evelyn rejoiced at the change in Ainslee.

Then there came a day when she caught the old brooding look in his eyes again; the next day he was more depressed, and with her woman's sympathy and intuiton she knew he was suffering horribly, hard as he tried to hide it. For several days she pretended not to see it, trying in every way by the sheer force of her own strong will to pull him up, to prevent him from giving way to his melancholy.

One morning she caught a glimpse of him starting away from camp with a strange, wild, determined look in his eyes, and running swiftly by a shorter trail, she intercepted him, spreading out her arms to bar his way in the narrow path.

"Whither away, Faun?" she asked gayly, trying to hide her anxiety. "Come, stay with me, and I'll show you the hollow tree, where I live. For, though you may not believe it, I am a Dryad maid, and if you stay and play with me I'll tell you the secrets of the wood."

"I must go," he cried, rather desperately, and tried to push past her, but she wound her arms around him and would not let him go.

"You are not a Faun; you are only a mortal after all," she cried, and lifted curving red lips to his. "Stay with me and I'll make you immortal." There was a half-veiled look of passion in her eyes. She had never revealed her heart so openly to him. He suddenly crushed her in his arms with a little groan.

"My God, Evelyn, but I love you," he cried, and let her lead him down the little trail to the camp.

All that day she watched over him, surrounded him with her great love until he felt protected, comforted, in some way held up. He found himself leaning on her as though she were the strong one, he only a weak child.

"You have a headache," she challenged him next morning, when he came up from his early dip in the lake.

"Splitting," he admitted, "but it's nothing. I felt that only the ice-cold water down there would cool the fires in my head, but they didn't. I'm a sort of a dead beat, Evelyn darling. It's no use."

He sat down listlessly on a fallen tree trunk beside the path, and buried his face in his hands. She dropped down beside him and laid her arm about his shoulders.

"Bob, get Uncle Dick to give you something for your headache," she pleaded. "Don't suffer so, dear. I'd —I'd give my life to make you well and happy." She trembled and hid her face against his shoulder.

"Why do you care for such a poor old derelict as I am, Evelyn?" He drew her to him almost roughly. "Listen, darling; you are my good angel. You are the only thing on God's earth that is keeping me from climbing up old Indian Head back there and jumping off. I was on my way there yesterday when you stopped me. I don't know what possessed me. I must have been temporarily insane. It's only ten days to the twenty-fifth, you know," he added as an after-thought.

"Oh, Bob!" she clung to him convulsively. "*Don't* talk so. You'll—you'll kill me." She burst into a wild storm of weeping.

Appalled at her grief, he held her against his breast, and tried to comfort her, murmuring little broken sentences such as he would have used to soothe a frightened child.

When they came slowly up from the boat-house a few minutes later, Dr. Harborough's heart ached as he watched them—there was such hopelessness and despair on Ainslee's face.

"It's no use, Uncle Dick," Evelyn

sobbed, when he drew her away to ask her about Ainslee. "Change of air and scene are not helping him at all. He has frightful headaches, and he told me just now that only I kept him from—from—killing himself, and Heaven knows how long I'll serve as a safeguard. If he gets worse he may not think of me at all."

Dr. Harborough, meditatively puffing at his pipe after breakfast, observed Ainslee in a professional way. "I say, Bob," he remarked, clearing his throat, "seems to me you look a bit seedy. I'm going to give you a bracer."

"Thanks, don't bother about it." Ainslee's voice was quite indifferent at first. Then he added, "Still, if you *could* stop this confounded head of mine from beating like a trip-hammer, I'll not object."

The doctor's strong hands, which had performed the most delicate operations without a tremor, trembled the least bit in the world as he handed Ainslee the glass. "There, drink that, my boy," he cried. "It will help you, I'm sure." The tears were in his eyes while he looked down at the handsome bowed head, as Ainslee drank the draught.

With a great effort Ainslee opened his eyes. He could not remember for a moment where he was. His head felt so unaccountably queer, and the process of thinking was a laborious one. His eyes wearily traveled over the scarlet Indian blankets on the walls, over the rustic furniture, the bearskin rugs on the floor, and the great jars of midsummer flowers, and rested finally on Evelyn sewing quietly by the open window. For a moment he lay there in his utter weakness and watched the gentle breeze lift the soft tendrils of her hair, thinking how beautiful she was. Twice he tried to speak before he finally whispered huskily, "Eve."

She dropped her work and came quietly over to the bed with face aglow and yet with an anxious look in her eyes, and laid a cool hand on his head. For a moment he thought he was a little lad again and that his mother had come back to him.

"Where am I? What's the matter with me?" he asked.

"You've been ill, Bob, but now you're better. You really know me, don't you, dear?"

"Know you—why shouldn't I know you?" he asked a little irritably.

"I'm going to tell Uncle Dick that you are better," she said hastily. "He wanted to know when you were yourself again." She bent and kissed his forehead and hurried out of the room.

Ainslee lay still, too weary to open his eyes, and when Dr. Harborough came in a moment later he was only too glad to obey his injunction to lie still and not talk for a while. Later he could ask all the questions he liked. He slept like a tired child for several hours and then when he opened his eyes again to meet Dr. Harborough's he felt so much stronger that he asked at once: "What's the matter with me, anyhow?"

The doctor cleared his throat. "You've been very ill, my boy—a touch of brain fever, but now you're all right again, and we'll pull you up in no time. It's a good place to recuperate in—these blessed woods."

Ainslee lay very still while the other watched the play of emotion on his face. Things were coming back to him, the doctor knew, and he waited for the question he was confident would soon come.

"Dr. Harborough,"—the voice trembled a little—"you say I've been ill a long time." A little anxious line furrowed its way between Ainslee's eyes. "What—what day of the month is this?"

The doctor glanced out of the window. "Let's see, it's the second of September, I believe," he said, trying to be as casual as possible.

With sudden strength Ainslee raised himself to his elbow. "Did you say—the—second—of September?" he whispered hoarsely, his eyes burning.

"You've been ill a long time, old chap." The tears were in the doctor's eyes. "You've been out of your head most of the time, you know. Brain fever is such a beastly insidious sort of thing. We've been very anxious."

"But Doctor!" Ainslee grasped the other's wrist in an iron grip. "Then if it's the second of September, I was thirty-five a week ago."

Dr. Harborough nodded without speaking.

Ainslee sat up in bed, his eyes shining. "Then I'm the first Ainslee in a hundred and twenty-five years who can say that," he cried, and fell back weakly on his pillows. "Tell Evelyn I want to see her, please," he begged.

Although Ainslee's recovery was rapid, Dr. Harborough prescribed perfect rest. "No, you mustn't read yet," he objected, when Ainslee begged for his mail and for the papers. "News will keep and brain fever leaves you in such a weak state you might easily enough have a relapse. I don't want you to do anything but vegetate for the next two or three weeks. I don't want you to even think—that's why you can't have your mail just yet. Now mind what I tell you—you're still under your physician's care."

"I sha'n't want to do anything but sit around and look at Eve and plan the wedding," the other replied. "It's enough for me to know that it's all right for me to marry her. You can't imagine what a load is off my mind. Do you know," he went on a little shyly, "I think I was on the verge of insanity, when this illness came. It wouldn't have taken much more to have pushed me over the brink."

"Well, Bob, you're all right now, thank God," the doctor said hastily, and turned away to hide the tears in his eyes.

The days passed quickly—*dolce far niente* days. In his happiness Ainslee forgot to want his papers or letters. He saw no one but his camp companions, and the world that lay beyond that high wall of mountains was almost forgotten. He would lie for hours on the pine needles, perfectly content, his hands clasped under his head, his eyes resting dreamily on Evelyn, as she sewed or read aloud to him. He felt like a man who has been pardoned as he was ascending the scaffold.

One day as she was reading "Lorna Doone" to him, he suddenly reached over and closed the book. "I don't want to hear about other people's love stories; I'm too busy with my own." He smiled up at her; then his face grew grave. "I never in my life have been so happy, Evelyn, never dreamed I *could* be as happy as I've been since I found out that my birthday was past. I feel that I've got a rise out of Mistress Fate, after all."

"Oh, my dear," she cried with a little sob in her voice, but a smile in her eyes. "Do you know what it all means to me? I'd give my life to make you happy."

It seemed to Ainslee next day that they all watched him a little anxiously and it annoyed him. He was feeling so well—anyone would think they expected him to have a relapse. All day he was consumed with a strange restlessness. The atmosphere seemed charged with electricity. Toward evening clouds came swiftly up over the mountains to the east and a heavy rain began to fall. After supper the men piled the logs up in the great fireplace, and they all drew close together in a little circle about the dancing flames. Outside, the wind roared in the pines and once or twice a crash told of some falling branch. At each unusual sound Evelyn started nervously and looked apprehensively over her shoulder—and then drew closer to Ainslee. The little traveling clock on the mantel chimed ten, then eleven. They all, without admitting it, seemed to dread going to bed.

Then as suddenly as it came up, the wind ceased and there was a profound silence in the forest, except for the splashing of the waves against the little dock, and the gentle drip, drip from the eaves. The clock chimed the half hour after eleven, and Dr. Harborough rose and went to the cabin door.

"The storm's past," he called. "The stars are out. Come out and get a breath of this divinely fresh air. It's been washed clean. Hallo, what's that?"

For suddenly, clear and distinct in the silence, had come a halloo from the dark lake below them. For a startled moment they stood listening until the call came again. Then Dr. Harborough hallooed in answer and snatching down the lighted lantern that hung beside the door, waved it vigorously.

"It's some poor wandering soul out there in the dark," he cried. "Probably one of those fellows that were to come to that camp across the lake. Halloo

there." He started hurriedly down to the dock.

Ainslee would have followed him, but Evelyn held him back with all her strength. "Don't leave me, Bob." There was terror in her voice. "For Heaven's sake, stay here."

He laughed a little and tried to argue with her, but before he could persuade her it was all right for him to go, Dr. Harborough appeared with a stranger soaked to the skin, who was talking to him anxiously.

"One of the fellows over at the camp has broken his leg," the physician explained. "He just came to-day, poor fellow. I must go over at once. Help me to get my things. Sarah, I need the bandages—you know where they are. Evelyn, get my medicine case, please, from my room, while I get together some splints."

Ainslee lead the messenger to the fire and threw on more wood. "It seems strange to see another human being," he remarked, as he mixed a whisky and soda for him. "We've been so alone up here in the wilderness. I haven't even seen a paper for weeks. I've been ill and the doctor forbade all news."

The other reached into his pocket. "Here's yesterday's New York *Tribune,*" he said. "You're welcome to it. I've read it, even to the last advertisement."

With the eagerness of a boy Ainslee spread it out and ran his eye over the first page; then his face clouded. "Oh, it's an old one, after all," he cried. "I thought you said—"

The other looked surprised. "I give you my word that's yesterday's *Tribune.* I bought it in Albany just before we left."

Ainslee laughed. "Why, to-day is the sixteenth of September," he claimed.

The other drew back and looked at him apprehensively. "What sort of an illness have you had?" he asked suspiciously.

"A touch of brain fever, they called it," Ainslee responded. "I was ill three weeks or more."

"Then it's *you* who have lost track of time," the other remarked. "I left Albany yesterday morning. I couldn't be mistaken in the date. I know what I am talking about. *To-day is the twenty-fifth of August.*"

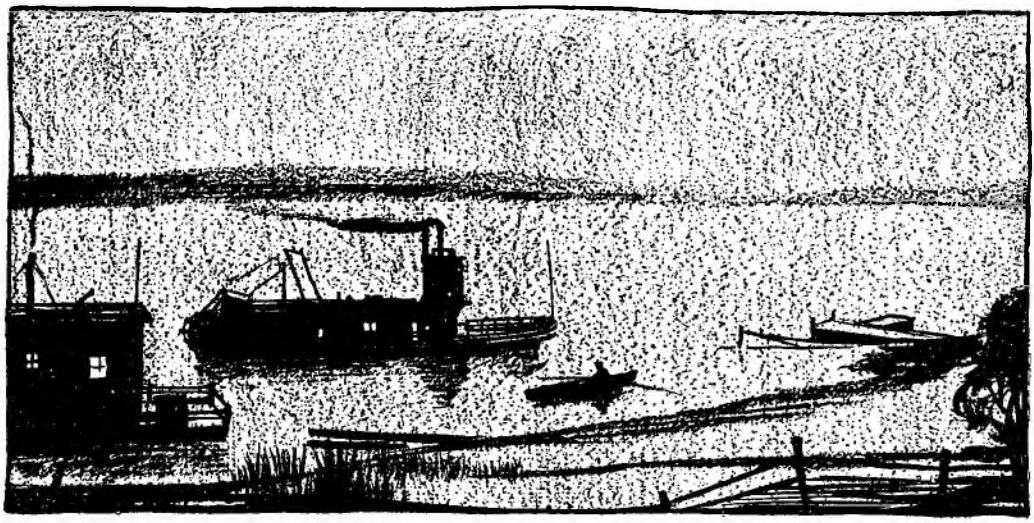
A feeling of deadly faintness came over Ainslee, and he dropped on the low settle before the fire. "The twenty-fifth of August!" he whispered with white lips. Then as Evelyn appeared he turned to her appealingly: "Evelyn, *is* this the twenty-fifth of August? Tell me the truth."

Evelyn turned white as they stared into each other's eyes, oblivious of the stranger, who rose and looked curiously from one to the other. Then before she could answer, in the profound stillness of the room, the clock began to chime midnight and Evelyn's face was transfigured.

"It's the twenty-*sixth* of August, Bob," she cried exultantly. "We did deceive you, dear," she went on after a moment, while she tried to regain her self-control. "You were really ill only two days. Uncle Dick gave you some medicine to make you unconscious. We wanted to get you past your birthday. Oh, Uncle Dick!" She ran to meet the doctor as he came into the room, "Bob knows! He *knows,* but *look!*" She pointed to the clock. "It's to-morrow, it's to-morrow! We've pulled him through!"

"Look after her, Bob." The doctor was wiping his eyes. "I must go." He hurried the stranger out of the room and down to the boat, but in the one backward glance he cast, he saw Ainslee catch Evelyn in his arms, and he saw the radiant look on both their faces, as he heard Ainslee's exultant cry, "You good angel of mine! I defy all the curses in the world *now!*"

"I guess the spell is broken," the doctor said to himself, as he went on in the darkness on his errand of mercy. "It may have been Machiavellian, but I'm sure I'll be forgiven. We've proved our point, Evelyn and I, that an Ainslee *can* live past his thirty-fifth birthday."



The Muskrat's Mistake

By SMILEY IRONBAKER

WHEN the newspapers began to tell of blizzards on the lower Missouri, of hard rains on the upper Ohio, and of deep snows holding on late along the upper Mississippi, the people along Tremen's Reach read the weather reports twice or thrice, and then talked them over with one another on their respective sides of the river. They went out at intervals to look at Old Mississip' himself, trying to read their future in the wide, swaggering send of the mighty torrent. All day long, there were little groups on the levee crown, staring at the water uneasily, and comparing what they saw with other years.

Inch by inch, the water crept up on the levee, and as the water rose, the feeling in the bottoms grew tenser. Little needed they the warnings of the Weather Bureau. They could read in the sullen, throbbing, sea-wide river the terror that was at hand. Never had the ice been so thick in the "run-out," and the black drift came with a persistence that showed the long, steady, irresistible rise of the waters—hemlocks from the Alleghany mountains, pines from the upper Mississippi, and thick mud from the turgid Missouri. Any river man could see these things—a great flood year was upon them.

When the Hackmantek levee plans had been projected, the Lotos Bottom people had opposed them with all the influence and all the political strategy they could bring to bear. They shuddered to think of a Mississippi River in flood, bound within three narrow miles by levees eight feet wide at the crown.

For three years the levee had stood with no real test by flood, and the animosity between the people of the two sides had slumbered fitfully. Even before the new levee went up along the Gronan's Landing side, the iron gauge had read higher at Lotus Landing. Now, after the Hackmantek levee had been built, when the stage was only 40 feet at Gronan, the Lotus Landing marks read 43 feet. What would happen when the tide went above 50 feet at Gronan in a record year? The old men of the Lotus Landing district shook their heads, and wore black scowls at the new levee across the river.

Now, the flood year was at hand. At Gronan, the gauge registered 49 feet, rising; down Tremen Reach, the water was within three inches of the crowns

of the levees and "Still Rising" at all points above to St. Louis and Evansville, where the flood crests, one thirty miles long and the other fifty miles long, were surging by, racing toward the Forks at Cairo. Both levees would be topped before the crest came to Gronan, if—a terrible if—both levees held.

The levees were manned by guards who patrolled back and forth on beats, looking out for the deadly work of craw-fish, "sand-boils," "sipes," flaws and muskrats. They carried rifles or shotguns, not only for alarm-giving purposes, but for bank protection as well. Hard-faced and with worried eyes, night and day, they tramped between the stations, thinking of homes, the crops, the farms that were menaced. The flood was coming —and somewhere, the crevasse.

Out of the bottoms were herded the cattle and hogs, and driven from knoll to knoll to the ridges. Logs were hurriedly towed through the bayous and old rivers and made into rafts. Men made skiffs and other rude craft and kept them on their front porches, or leaning against the sides of their houses. As the "sipe water" crept up across the land, the rafts were moved nearer, and the sewing machines, beds, and other furniture were moved upstairs. Wood was carried up in the garrets, to be used in the second story fire-places when the first story ones should be drowned out. With increasing worry and suspense, the coming of the crest was awaited.

A hundred miles ahead of the crest of the flood came Jerry Glane, a "shanty-boater." He had made his line fast to a sycamore snag, and floated down with the dark drift that covered the river current. He sat on the bow of his little red shanty-boat, smoking a corn-cob pipe, his squinting eyes roving restlessly across the surface of the great flood. A river man with a mountain record and other names than the one he now bore, he was on the lookout for "something doing."

The sycamore snag weaved in and out through the drift, and the shanty-boat swung first to the east bank, then to the west bank, and then for a time down mid-stream—from which point there was no shore visible, nothing but the trees and the wide waters.

It was by mere chance that toward night, the sycamore snag swung the shanty-boat in toward the east bank, and that opposite Lotus Landing, Glane cast off and drifted into the levee on a split in the current.

"Don't you tie in heah!" a man with a rifle warned. "We don't want no shanty-boat bumping through this yer levee!"

"All right, sir!" Glane answered. "I don't reckon you'll mind if I tie to those willers?"

"No suh."

Glane made fast to the willows, got into his skiff, and rowed to the levee, were he joined a little group of Lotus Landing men who were staring anxiously across the river, their ears straining for any unusual sound.

No one more than nodded to the shanty-boater, who refilled his pipe and took in the scene appreciatively. He knew the condition of affairs; he knew the feeling along Tremen Reach, and to his mind it was as good as a play—as a show-boat melodrama—just to see those men worrying, just to see the negroes toting up canvas bags full of dirt, trying to build the levee up high enough to keep out the coming flood-crest.

He looked at the sky; it was bright and sunny, with no reflection of the tragedy that was stalking in the bottoms. The storms that were responsible for this condition were just leaving the upper watershed of the Ohio a thousand miles away. There was a tang in the air—a foretaste of chill that the riverman recognized.

"Hit's going to git cold," he remarked by way of friendliness. "They'll be a mean bad fog now, I reckon."

"A fog!" three men exclaimed, clutching the the word strangely. "A *thick* fog!"

"I reckon so!" the riverman answered, his eyes searching the faces of the men to whom the word "fog" had made such an appeal. The men wet their lips and looked at each other, and then looked in different directions, two at the threatened bottoms, and the other, with cold hate, across the river—

on the far side of which, hidden in the woods, was the other levee.

"Theh—see?" the shanty-boater exclaimed, as the raw chill struck down out of the sky.

They looked, and sure enough, near mid-stream, a wisp of fog whipped up among some churning flotsam and streamed out over the river like a gray rag. Other flecks of mist spurted up and drew out in long lines over the rushing currents till it looked as though the river were boiling. The streamers grew longer and longer as the sun went down, and before dark there was a blanket of fog over the water, above which projected the rushing branches of black snags. When night began to fall, black and thick, the low moaning of the drift as it ground and swirled echoed across the waters.

In the gloom, one of two men touched the shanty-boater on the shoulder and whispered in his ear. They took him down the back of the eddy, across the soggy bottoms to a commissary a quarter of a mile away; and there one of the party went whispering among the four or five who were gathered around the telephone waiting for the call to the levees.

The man who had tapped Jerry Glane on the shoulder now led him into the rear office, and closed the door, and after a time, Jerry slipped down the rear steps in the night, carrying a heavy burden. He returned to the levee, carefully placed the box in the stern of his skiff, and ran out to his shanty-boat. He dropped down the river about a mile, tied up again, and pulled back up stream in the skiff. After a time, he struck out to the edge of the river current.

The fog was thick by this time, thick and higher than the trees, but the river was very quiet. The sounds of early twilight had fallen to low murmurs.

"Sho!" Glane muttered. "I'm lucky; theh's a break in the drift!"

Headed diagonally up the river toward the opposite bank, he pulled out into the fog, rowing hard and steadily, leaving Lotus Bottoms behind him. He rowed swiftly in his "lap-streak" skiff, rejoicing in the break in the drift. In ten minutes, however, he ran into a mass of corn shocks, and pulled around them. A moment later, a snag came whirling down, and he backed up to swing around that. He came to a long raft of *débris,* over which he dragged his skiff to save time.

All the time he kept his eyes turning from side to side, sniffing the air and catching the drift of the fog, to keep his direction in the murk. Once he came to a half-submerged shanty-boat, and wished he could salvage it.

"I'm taking long enough to get across!" he said to himself, when at last he heard the swish of a tree in the current.

With great caution, he watched his chance; and then, as he caught the gloom of timber ahead, he slipped through the swirls along the edge of the current, shot out into a patch of woods, and rowed along zigzag, his heart thumping with excitement. At last he came to an opening in the timber.

"Year I be!" he muttered, sniffing the air. "Theh's shore the smell of mud—year's the levee right of way!"

Ahead of him he heard the sloshing of footsteps on the soft levee crown. He waited, while the footsteps went on past out of hearing.

"The levee watch!" he muttered. "Now I betteh work fast."

He paddled to the levee as noiselessly as a deer hunter. With a shovel he gouged out a hole in the levee and buried in it the contents of the box in the stern of his boat—dynamite. He dragged four or five sacks of earth from the levee crown onto the explosive; and then, listening, he held his breath. Not a sound broke the silence, but he was puzzled, for something seemed wrong.

"Sho!" he muttered. "This year must be a big eddy!"

Pulling the end of a fuse down into the bow of the skiff, he opened his little alcohol lamp lighter and touched the fire to the shredded fuse end. There was a quick flash; Glane dropped the end of the fuse overboard, and it sank in the water, little bubbles of phosphorescent gas breaking over the spot where it sank.

Then he shoved out into the gloom again, and started back toward the

river current. There was no sound in the night, except the faint roar of the running drift which was coming now, ominously heavy, and the strange night sobbing of the submerged woods. He dropped along with the eddy current near timber along the levee right-of-way, seeking an opening in the woods, through which he now hesitated to pass.

"Hit'd be plumb easy to git turned 'round in this fog and woods!" he muttered to himself. "I jes' gotter find a landing right away!"

An instant later, he heard a low murmur of voices as two levee guards talked thirty yards away. He shoved out from the levee, paddling with strong, noiseless strokes toward the main current. The dark shade of the woods had given way to the paler fog of an opening.

"Funny about this eddy," he mused, "it must be two mile long, running up this old levee—um-m. I better be cuttin' right out, for I shore don't want to be ketched on this side when that fuse gits into the cap—they'd drown me in the break! Most time for hit to go up now."

Suddenly a black rectangle loomed ahead of him, and with a sharp down stroke he sought to keep from running into a house-boat that showed in the fog. The skiff swerved, but the current carried him against the stern of the boat with a hard thump.

"Gawd—he'll kill me!" Glane gasped, drawing his revolver, and freezing with sudden terror.

But ten seconds went by with no quiver or sound on the shanty-boat which he had rammed. Hopefully, he began to claw along the stern to make his "get-away." Then there came a low thunder in the night—a terrible, long-drawn, earthy growling that reverberated across the bottoms.

"There she goes!" Glane whispered.

For an instant his hands clutched the shanty-boat and the sound boomed by. He expected it would bring some one in the shanty-boat out on the deck with a bound, but there was no commotion on board.

"Mebbe hit's a drift shanty-boat," thought Glane.

The next moment the "pat-pat-pat-apat" of repeating rifle shots came through the dark, for the guardsmen on the levee knew what had happened. Then came the wash of the flood breaking through the levee, growing louder and louder as the embankment caved. Through the river flood ran a faint springing tremor as the water felt the crevasse release.

"Gawd!" muttered Glane. "Them Hackmantek fellers would burn me!"

His left hand drew the skiff along the stern of the cabin-boat as he clutched his revolver in the other, ready if anyone should discover him. His fingers closed on a wooden anchor line cleat on the stern bumper. His heart almost stopped beating.

"Why—why," he gasped, seizing the cleat with both hands, and then he groaned with amazed wrath. "Why, I whittled out that cleat—hit's my shanty-boat—how come it? This year's the Lotus Bottom side!"

Louder and louder grew the roar of the waters pouring through the crevasse he had blown through the levee. He listened with increasing astonishment.

Then his jaw set. He climbed aboard the shanty-boat and cast the line off the willow tree to which it was made fast. Very cautiously, he set the sweeps and rowed slowly, with no noise, toward the river again. Behind him, he heard men running along the levee toward the break, while far-heard across the bottoms echoed the cries of the men warning those in the path of the flood.

"Dod rat hit!" muttered Glane over and over again. "If I aint went and blowed up the wrong levee. I got all mixed up out there in that old drift and fog. Aint that jes' my luck—go lose three hundred dollars—dod-ratted old numbskull! Sho! Those Lotus Bottom fellers was real friendly, givin' me—shucks! Hyars where I cuts loose and ties to a snag and don't land in ag'in foh two weeks. Aint I a plumb ridiculous old river-rat—doing thataway! I shore better never tie into Lotus Bottoms again. Sho!"

Dan Cupid, Sleuth

THE LATEST EXPLOIT OF "THE MAN IN THE CHAIR"

By FRED JACKSON

THIS morning, in looking through Kristian White's note-books and files, I came upon this case — one of the oddest ever presented to the detective, inasmuch as it so completely bewildered the client and then practically solved itself. It demonstrates so clearly Kristian White's sensible method of procedure, and is, in its details, so interesting, that I am going to relate it here. I have chosen to call it, fancifully, "Dan Cupid, Sleuth"—but in the office records it is known as "Neckorson-Hastings, 19—"

Kristian White's interest in this case was awakened in it one afternoon in September by young Gales Neckorson, a well-known clubman, a rising member of the New York bar, and the last of the prominent Neckorson family of Manhattan. Young Neckorson had been in the office that morning, before White's arrival, but, being pressed for time on account of his numerous legal engagements, he had made an appointment for four o'clock. On account of the young man's prominence, and because of the probable importance of his case, Kristian White awaited his advent impatiently; and when on the stroke of four the client made his appearance, White greeted him warmly.

Neckorson was a very good-looking young man of perhaps twenty-eight years, with a splendid physique, a dominant jaw and chin, a finely modeled acquiline nose, dark hair and gray eyes. As he shook hands with the detective and then sat down in the chair opposite him—tugging at his gloves—his hat and stick on the long flat-topped desk behind him, he plunged at once into the matters that had brought him.

"Your time is probably as valuable, or even more valuable than mine, Mr. White," he said, "so I shall be as brief as I possibly can in telling you what I have to tell. Be assured of that."

"Thank you," put in White grimly.

"Nevertheless," resumed young Neckorson, passing over the interruption without comment, "I shall no doubt be compelled to confuse you with endless details. To begin with, I hardly know whether or not my case comes within your immediate province; but I should like your opinion, whether you consent to interest yourself or not. Is this clear to you?"

"Quite," said Kristian White, nodding.

"To come to my facts, then," said young Neckorson. "My father was Courtney Neckorson. In his youth, he was—well, 'great pals,' I suppose one would say, with Everton Hastings. They married about the same time, built places close together on the Hudson and in town, and reared their fam-

ilies—well, in harmony, let us say. Hastings had one child, a daughter, Molly. I have two younger brothers, but they do not enter into this affair. The point I desire to make is that Molly Hastings was in and out of our house very much as a sister might have been—almost. Until she went off to college and I entered 'prep' school, we were like sister and brother. Later, a different sort of affection arose between us and we became secretly engaged.

"Within a year, however, Molly's both parents and my mother died, and Molly's affairs were left in my father's hands. Our public announcement was postponed and our plans altered. This postponement, you understand, was due simply and entirely to the fact that deaths had occurred in the families. But Molly's bereavement left her in such poor health that she has remained unwilling to discuss wedding plans, though more than a year has passed since her parents died. Are you following me?"

"Certainly," said White. "You are very lucid."

"What I desire to have you understand," summed up Neckorson, "is that Molly was left alone in the world, and in ill health; that her financial affairs were placed in my father's hands; and that the affection and harmony that had existed between us were being jeopardized."

White nodded.

"When I mentioned Molly's poor health," the young man resumed, "I used the term not in the ordinary sense—rather to cover an unusual state of affairs. She is in no sense an invalid, nor, I think, does she suffer from any definite ill. Doubtless she is anæmic. I have sometimes thought so, for there are times when she appears entirely colorless and when there are rings under her eyes, when she seems weak and languid and melancholy. But upon other occasions, she is the spirit of life and merriment—almost, I might say, of deviltry. She seems to have developed whims and moods only since her bereavement. Before that, she was the most evenly-tempered, sensible girl I have ever known—the most highly principled. And that brings me to another curious fact. Before the death of her parents, when she went into society, it was in our own little set—the set in which she grew up, a rather quiet, perhaps a bit old-fashioned set, a set whose doings one does *not* see recorded in the daily papers."

White nodded.

"Since then, however, when she reappeared after her period of mourning," Neckorson went on, "she joined one of the gayest, newest, liveliest sets in town—a set lead by Mrs. 'Jack' Weedon—a bridge-playing, horse-racing, cigarette-smoking set. Molly even has learned to smoke—not constantly as some of them do—but upon occasion. In fact, this new set has seemed to completely alter her. She indulges in rather daring flirtations, enters into imprudent escapades—oh, harmless enough, but the sort to make her conspicuous. And she had always before the gentlewoman's dislike for notoriety. She goes to football games and races; she plays bridge for money; she takes champagne and is seen in public cafés after theatre or the opera—frequently unchaperoned, or chaperoned by Mrs. 'Jack' Weedon or Mrs. 'Billie' Drouthe, two of the gayest young matrons in town."

White was listening interestedly, his eyes upon young Neckorson's frowning face.

"Naturally," the young man resumed, "I remonstrated with her—acting upon my rights as intended-husband, although our engagement had not been made public. She made excuses, at first, said that it was reaction, after her retirement, argued that she was enjoying herself, that she was in need of a little cheering up—and promised to give up her new friends if I desired it, adding that she did not care a great deal for them. I told her that I thought she had better give them up."

"Yes?" White put in eagerly, leaning forward.

"She didn't. It was evidently just a trick to pacify me. When I found out that she was not keeping her word, I—well, we had quite a scene. I taxed her with having tired of me—which she denied, weeping violently. Then I begged

her to regard my judgment in what was best for us both, and drop quietly out of this new set. Again she promised, and again deceived me. So we had a second scene. I suppose I said a number of rather harsh masculine things. I've really forgotten just what did pass between us. But in the end, she gave me back my ring—and we separated."

White was making odd little lines on his pad.

"And—then?" he prompted, as Neckorson seemed absorbed in some gloomy reflection.

"That was two months ago. We've not met since—at close range, I mean—until yesterday. But first I must tell you this: There is a certain man—a doctor, Doctor Fleming—who is, according to her explanations, treating Molly. Until the breaking of our engagement, I hadn't—well, I'd scarcely been aware of his existence. He's a middle-aged chap, short, stout, thickset, with grayish hair and sharp blue eyes. I don't know how good a doctor he is. He seems to have a great deal of time to waste with Molly; for since our engagement was broken, he and Molly have been constantly together. I've seen them, from a distance, a number of times. He seems to belong to this wild set."

"And—what happened yesterday?" White asked, after a short pause.

Neckorson stirred.

"Molly came to the office. My father and I are together, you know—and my father, of course, still retained the management of Molly's financial affairs—even after Molly and I decided not to marry. As a matter of fact, he has been abroad for five months, and although I have written him of the change in our plans, he has made no comment. Well, yesterday Molly came to the office. She desired to see my father on business and sent her card in, and as I am taking over all of my father's personal business during his absence, she was ushered into my office." Neckorson arose suddenly, his hands thrust deep in his pockets—and began to stride up and down the long room.

"The matter that brought her was a trivial thing, but it necessitated my looking into her affairs. And I found that she had squandered practically all of her fortune. In fact, my father had been supplying her for some time, pretending that the money came from her investments. She took little interest in business matters, and the deception was comparatively simple. I tell you, I gasped at the revelation. I couldn't understand how such a comfortable fortune could have been dissipated so rapidly—by a young woman with such inexpensive tastes as Molly. But further investigation completed my bewilderment. Inexpensive tastes! Her extravagances were unbelievable. She had spent small fortunes in gowns and cloaks and hats, in *lingerie,* in slippers and stockings, in knick-knacks—toilet articles and jewels. There were cab bills of amazing proportions, bills for entertaining at various cafés and restaurants—and memoranda of bridge and racing debts. *But the largest share of her wealth had gone to Doctor Fleming."*

White suddenly opened his eyes.

"Your father had kept accounts of all this?"

"He kept her checks—or in the instances where she had had bills sent directly to him for settlement—he kept the receipted bills."

"And these," said White, "you discovered after Miss Hastings' visit?"

"Yes."

"So you were unable to discuss her affairs with her when she called?"

"Yes, when she called the first time. It was in the morning. I asked her to return in the afternoon, or to communicate with me by telephone. She came herself."

"Was it a matter of importance?"

"Not of tremendous importance. The bank notified her that her account was overdrawn, and she called to inquire about it. I had not paid in her quarterly allowance, naturally, not having been told to do so by my father."

"Did you explain the state of her affairs to Miss Hastings?"

"No."

"Exactly what passed?"

"I told her that the bank matter had been adjusted and advised her to economize, as her fortune seemed considerably depleted. She made no comment, save to thank me, and notified

me that she was closing her own house and *moving to Doctor Fleming's.* It seems his sister lives with him, and they sometimes accommodate a patient or two. Molly told me she was taking a rest cure."

"And you? How did you act?"

"Quite business-like—very formally—until the interview was finished. She was, in fact, already at the door—when I—lost control of myself for a moment or two. I cried out that this doctor had some hold upon her. I told her I loved her—asked if she had entirely forgotten—"

"And she?"

"She trembled—seemed frightened. Declared, even swore, that Fleming was only her friend, her physician—that he was in no other way concerned in her affairs."

"Then?"

"I asked her why she was with him so much. I asked her if she cared for him."

"And she?"

"She said, 'no.' She seemed struggling to retain her self-control—seemed laboring under some great excitement. It was almost as though she wanted to confide in me—and didn't dare. Some struggle seemed under way within her."

"What was the end of the whole thing?" asked White.

"She suddenly burst out laughing. I thought at first it was hysteria. Even now, I think it probably was due to that. For she had turned from me a moment before and had put out her hand as though she meant to open the door and end the interview. But she turned back suddenly—and I saw that her cheeks were slightly flushed and that her eyes seemed unnaturally bright. She looked—well, hardly feverish, but something of that sort. And she cried out suddenly: 'You are a bore. You are silly and tiresome. You weary me. I have been wanting for a long time to tell you. Now you understand that there can be nothing between us—ever.' And then she laughed again, opened the door, and fled."

"Is that all?" asked White.

"No, there is one thing more. I had this note this morning."

He laid a square of crisp white notepaper before the detective. White read it through almost at a glance.

DEAR GALES:

I know you will pardon anything I may have said or done yesterday. If I offended you, I am sorry. It was not my intention. But Gales, what is gone is gone, dear. You must forget me. You must put me out of your mind and out of your life completely. I shall never marry you or anyone else. I wish it might be otherwise—but things are as they are—and you and I can't make life what we should like it to be. So this is good-by. Perhaps you had better put my affairs in the hands of one of your assistants, or let me take them to some other firm. It would be better, I think, so we need not meet again.

MOLLY.

White glanced through the note a second time and returned it.

"Well?" asked Neckorson quietly.

White raised his eyes.

"I hardly know," he said, "just why you have come to me?"

"Why?" gasped the young man, staring. *"Why,* I have— Good Lord! Doesn't it strike you as unusual? Don't you think there's something underneath all this—*behind* it? I want to know what it is. I want to know what hold this Fleming has on her. I want the explanation."

"Still," said White, "I appreciate your feelings in the matter, you know. And I sympathize with your point of view—and all that. But, *is* this a case for a detective? Perhaps if you were to go to her and ask frankly for an explanation—"

"She'd evade," cried Neckorson, "or she'd lie. Do you suppose I haven't tried that course? I don't think she'd even see me now—that Fleming has her safely in his clutches."

"You think he's misusing his influence over her?"

"I know that she's given him several thousand dollars in the past two months."

"Have you thought of going to Fleming?" asked White.

"I have no right! I shouldn't be justified in asking for an explanation from him. After all, this is her own affair, you know—but I love her."

White and Neckorson stared for an instant straight into each other's eyes.

And at that very critical instant, Ruth appeared in the doorway and with a little timid questioning glance from one man to the other, came slowly forward to her husband's side. White reached out with a faint smile and drew her close to him—his hand engulfing hers.

"This is my wife, Mr. Neckorson," he said. "I'll take your case."

Neckorson bowed and into his troubled eyes swept a light of tremendous relief.

"Thank you," he said.

"Come to-morrow about this time and I will have the explanation," said White.

Neckerson seized the detective's hand gratefully and shook it; then he bowed low to Mrs. White—and passed out a very, very wretched young man.

"Anything interesting?" asked Ruth, as the door closed behind him.

"I hardly know what it's all about myself," said White. He held out his pad toward her. On it he had written Doctor Fleming's name, and the number of his house on Madison avenue, as he had copied it from the top of Miss Hastings' note to Neckorson.

"Will you have Girton look him up," he said, "and bring me the report at once? Then come back and I'll tell you about it while we are waiting. Some new light may strike me, or you may see through the tangle."

At the end of the recital, Ruth could scarcely express her surprise and indignation that a man should attempt to drag detectives into such an affair. To her, it was all simple enough. Miss Hastings, she declared, had probably mistaken a simple affection or liking for Neckorson for love, and had promised to marry him; then, emerging from the quiet existence she had once found satisfactory into the gayer world of modern fashionable society, she had probably found some one more to her taste—obviously Doctor Fleming—and had broken with Neckorson as gently as she could. That she loaned Fleming money or paid him for medical attention—whichever was the explanation—was surely no concern of Neckorson's or anyone's else. Her money was her own to dispose of, and old man Neckorson's chivalrous conduct in making her an allowance was unknown to her. All this Ruth stated clearly and emphatically; and she demanded of White how he could proceed in the matter.

"First," said White, smiling, "I shall examine the report that Girton brings me. Then I shall telephone Doctor Fleming and ask him to call here this evening. When I see him, I shall know how to get from him the information I want. I can't believe the matter as simple as you make it out."

Even as he spoke, Girton entered, with the slip of paper on which he had written his report. It was brief:

Edwin Stevens Fleming, physician; brain specialist, chiefly interested in criminology; numerous American and foreign degrees; forty-two years old; unmarried; has a private sanitarium on Madison avenue, where patients are occasionally treated under his care; served as alienist for the State in the Thatcher trial and again in the Correschini case. . .

Then there followed a detailed description of him and a brief history of his life and works.

"Well?" White asked wickedly, looking up after he had read the report aloud. "You observe that our doctor is a specialist in mental diseases—an alienist. Do you still find the affair a simple one?"

"You don't think that Miss Hastings is—?" asked Ruth, shocked.

"Troubled with delusions? Possibly. We shall see."

He beckoned toward the desk 'phone and she brought it to him, looking up the number as he waited. Presently he was speaking to the famous physician.

"This is Kristian White," he said. "How do you do! Thank you. I should like to speak with you upon a matter of more or less importance. Can you give me a half hour some time to-night or to-morrow?"

An instant later, he rehung the receiver.

"Doctor Fleming," he said, "will be here about eight o'clock. So if you'll read that new novel aloud to me, I'll wager I shall guess the ending before dinner-time. And we shall not get impatient or tired waiting for the next development in this rather interesting case."

When Kristian White determined to get some certain information from some certain man, resistance was useless. He never failed to get it. He instinctively "sized-up" his man, decided how he might most easily be approached—and then he just persisted until the victim surrendered. Accordingly, in spite of medical ethics, he got Miss Hastings' story from Fleming. Finding him apparently an honest, upright and frank sort of man, he told him simply what Neckorson had told him—dwelt upon the young man's love for Miss Hastings and his grief over the puzzling developments—and very earnestly besought assistance. For a moment or two, Fleming pondered; then, almost reluctantly, he began to speak:

"I am violating a confidence," said he, "in telling you this—even in mentioning it—and violating confidences is one of the most unpardonable breaches a physician can commit; however, I suppose Mr. Neckorson's happiness *is* worth something. No doubt, the violation in this particular case is permissible. I shall consider it so, but you must promise me on your honor that the story I am about to tell you will go no further than Mr. Neckorson."

"I promise, certainly," said White. Mrs. White clasped her hands in her lap and leaned forward breathlessly, wide-eyed.

"Thank you," said Fleming. "You must know, then, that Miss Hastings is not one person. She is *two*. She is suffering from what is known as *dual personality*. It is a branch of disease, if I may so term it, little known to science, although several cases have been carefully studied. Miss Hastings' trouble dates from the death of her parents, over a year ago. At that time, she suffered a severe mental shock; and that, together with her anæmic condition and general ill-health, probably was responsible for the appearance of a secondary personality. This secondary personality is the one that Mr. Neckorson objected to. It—or rather she, for if you were to meet Miss Hastings when this second personality is in possession you would find her a merry, charming companion—she calls herself 'Trix.' She dislikes the other personality, the *real* Miss Hastings, and is continually trying to injure and annoy and humiliate her. She smokes, drinks, is fond of motoring and wild-riding and cards and races and so on—and detests the quiet life and pastimes that Miss Hastings prefers. In short, it is as though two very different women were in possession of one body—which they inhabit alternately."

Both White and Ruth were listening eagerly, wide-eyed.

"This curse, as Miss Hastings has found it to be, at first alarmed her so and made her feel so apart, that she could not bring herself to tell Mr. Neckorson. She felt, also, that she would never be cured—and marriage was obviously out of the question. When she first confided in me, she was on the verge of taking her own life. 'Trix' was making her so notorious, was compelling her to do such distasteful things, that there seemed no chance for happiness. The worst of it was that what 'Trix' did was unknown to Miss Hastings, though 'Trix' seemed aware of everything Miss Hastings did. She alienated all of Miss Hastings' friends and made new ones more to her own taste; she antagonized Neckorson, whom Miss Hastings loves devotedly. In short, she made existence impossible."

"When did this change in personality usually occur?" asked White.

"At first very infrequently. Lately, 'Trix' seems able to manage it very often—just by 'willing.' It is likely to occur at any time."

"Would the onlooker be aware of it?"

"Not unless he were familiar with the outer indications from close study. I can tell at a glance. 'Trix' has more color, brighter eyes, a softer voice, a more graceful carriage. She is much more striking looking than Miss Hastings, but not so ethereal."

"Then," cried White, "the personalities changed in Neckorson's office yesterday."

"Yes. 'Trix' wrote in her diary that she had 'settled Neckorson.' I make them both write in this book. This morning Miss Hastings found the en-

try and wrote to Neckorson apologizing, although she hasn't the least idea what 'Trix' did or said to him."

"Is there the vaguest chance of curing this strange malady?" asked White. "What do you think is the probable outcome of it?"

"There is a very good chance of curing it," Fleming assured him. "At Miss Hastings' request, I have given up some of my other cases and shall devote my time almost exclusively to her. I am confident of driving out 'Trix' or of welding the personalities together —by the use of hypnotic suggestion. It has been uniformly successful in the treatment of other cases. If Mr. Neckorson can be made to understand—and if he still loves Miss Hastings and will be patient—there is no reason why they may not eventually be happily married."

Upon the following afternoon, White explained Miss Hastings' strange behavior to a startled, incredulous young man—who called down the blessings of heaven upon the detective's head before he started cab-haste for Doctor Fleming's to verify the amazing story. And within the year, there came for Kristian White and Ruth, an invitation to the nuptials of Molly Clarke Hastings and Gales Neckorson. And White —spreading out the missive before his wife's delighted face—looked up laughingly and cried:

"My dear, I think I shall go into another business. I seem to have been selected by destiny for match-making. Behold before you — 'Dan Cupid, Sleuth!'"

"You can be proud of this case, at any rate," she said, "even if it doesn't display your remarkable powers of ingenuity and perspicacity."

"If they live happily ever afterward," added Kristian White.

Writing now, after several years, I think I may be safe in saying: "They *did*."

Blue Monday

By ZELLA SLATER BISSELL

CLARISSA opened one owl-like eye and surveyed the morning world dubiously. Then she opened the other eye hastily, sat bolt upright in bed, and stared with horror at the stolid face of her alarm clock.

"My land!" she ejaculated. "Quarter past seven! I must have dropped off to sleep again."

With a flying leap she landed in the middle of the floor, alighting unerringly on the side of a shoe. Groaning with anguish, she limped painfully to the window, and drew it down. Then she surveyed the scene about her with growing despair.

"Oh Lord! It's Monday morning!"

When you come right down to it, the worst thing about Monday is Sunday —the day on which custom has decreed that we shatter to bits the sane and orderly routine of life and remold it nearer to a lunatic's desire. The day on which we restfully sleep ourselves into a Sunday headache, tax our enfeebled consciences with trying to force us to go to church, devour a horror of indigestibility labeled as "Sunday dinner" at some ungodly hour in the middle of the afternoon, and top off the day's insanities by going clear over to the North Side to help a friend eat a Welsh rarebit—when we already had all the dyspepsia we could take care of right at home.

But the very worst thing about Sun-

day is its clothes. On this day we throw aside the simple, humble garments that have served us so faithfully throughout the week, and deck ourselves in the raiment of proud worldliness. Then, on Monday morning—

If you are a well-conducted, methodical person, you, of course, spend an hour Sunday night in putting away your Sunday clothes and getting out your Monday clothes. You hang up your embroidered pongee dress and your all-silk petticoat, and put your best hat tenderly away in its box, and cache your pumps and the pair of silk stockings your aunt gave you at Christmas.

Then you rout out your work suit and your sateen petticoat, and you select a clean shirtwaist—with a wary eye to see that no button has perished in the laundress' wringer—and you place a pair of lisle thread hose where they will be handy on the morrow, and wipe Saturday's mud from your welt oxfords.

I say, you do all these things if you are well-conducted and methodical. Clarissa did them—sometimes. But there are Sunday nights—when the Welsh rarebit has filled you with a sense of the utter futility of all human endeavor—that you go on a horrid orgy. You throw your pongee dress and your silk petticoat recklessly over the back of a chair, and kick off your pumps and silk stockings right in the middle of the room, after which you crawl swinishly into bed with a hypocritical mutter about getting up early in the morning. It seemed to Clarissa a fascinatingly devilish thing to do—on Sunday night.

I do not propose to harrow your feelings by describing Clarissa's frantic efforts to get dressed that Monday morning. I will not tell you that her hair went "slinky," and had to be redone three times; that she broke her barette; that she couldn't find the belt that went with the skirt she put on, and had to substitute another skirt that proved to be too short for her petticoat; that she had to take an untidy reef in the petticoat with three large safety pins.

No, I will merely state that at eight o'clock—she should have been down by seven forty *anyhow*—Clarissa hurled herself into the dining-room of her boarding house, took two bites out of a piece of toast, scalded her throat with a gulp of coffee, and departed on the run toward the nearest car-line.

She caught a car by its tail-feathers, shoved her way through the mob at the back, and finally found a foothold in the uninhabited regions near the front door.

A fat man came plunging down the car under full sail, flattening Clarissa cruelly against the back of a seat. She craftily kicked out backward and ground her heel into the fat man's toe. He gave a grunt of protest, and Clarissa hoped she had landed on his prize corn. Then the pleasing thought passed, to leave the blacker night. Very likely he had no corn.

It was Monday morning. Last week there had been a Monday morning. Next week there would be a Monday morning, and week after next, and week after that again. Clarissa began to figure it out mathematically. She was twenty now, and she would probably live to be sixty. That made forty years with fifty Monday mornings a year (allowing for a two-week vacation). Two thousand Monday mornings to look forward to!

"Oh, it's a gay life," communed Clarissa with her own bitter soul. "It's certainly a gay life!"

Yes, maybe she would marry and give up stenography. But whom would she ever get a chance to marry except some twenty-dollar-a-week clerk? After that she would live in a dingy flat, lighted from a court, and she would have six children for whom she would bake and scrub and wash with her shoulders humped up in a dirty dressing-sacque and her hair wadded into a little tight knob on the back of her head.

No, there was no solace in the thought of getting married—no balm in Gilead, no comfort anywhere. It was Monday morning.

But reflecting on her matrimonial chances had deflected Clarissa's grouch into a new channel. Going back to one's job on Monday morning wouldn't be so bad if there was only somebody nice, and interesting, and congenial, to go back to. But that bunch in Mr. Curran's office—Clarissa groaned in spirit.

There was Miss Peevy, for instance —Miss Peevy, who chewed gum audibly, and whose mountain range of faded store puffs rose sharply defined from the plateau of her natural hair. Miss Peevy would be down this morning, yawning ostentatiously, and proclaiming what a "perfectly grand time" she had over Saturday and Sunday.

Then there was fat, pop-eyed George Graham, with his perennial joke to be made morning after morning to the last arrival at the office.

"Well, well, you must've stayed awake all night to get down so early. 'Taint hardly noon yet."

Then he would smirk his fat, pop-eyed smirk, as if he had said something very witty and original—above all things, original. Clarissa was sure she would try to smash a typewriter on his thick head if he said it to her this Monday morning.

As for Mr. Curran himself—well, at least one could not accuse Mr. Curran of lack of variety. No human soul could predict what Mr. Curran was going to do or say next. He was the sort of employer who would fully and freely forgive you for misdirecting an urgent letter, and another time wipe the floor with you for spelling Smythe in a rational manner.

Relations had been somewhat strained between Mr. Curran and Clarissa on Saturday. Mr. Curran had mislaid a voucher, and had wrongfully accused Clarissa of purloining, abstracting, or feloniously doing away with same. He had become really insulting about the matter, and Clarissa, losing patience with his unreasonableness, had told him that if he ever learned to put things where they belonged and then to remember where he had put them, he would have no need to cherish unjust and unworthy suspicions. Then she had walked out and left him to hunt for his voucher.

Clarissa wondered how Mr. Curran would act this morning. Not that she particularly cared; she felt that she could match grouch for grouch with anybody.

It was twenty minutes to nine when Clarissa finally landed at the office. As she entered, she heard Miss Peevy languidly conversing with Myrtle, the pasty-faced little envelope addresser.

"And, do you know, we never got home till *half past two.* Wasn't that fierce? But my, we did have the grandest time—"

"That's Saturday night she's telling now," thought Clarissa sardonically. "When I get out there, she'll tell me about what she and 'Wilber' did last night."

"Well, well!" began George Graham, confronting her as she turned toward the dressing-room. "You must've—"

But Clarissa pushed unceremoniously past him, and vanished into the dressing-room.

"Lord, *what* a set!" she muttered angrily, as she flung her hat and jacket on their hook.

On her way to her desk, it suddenly occurred to Clarissa that this was a belated pay-day. There had been a tie-up in the bookkeeping department on Saturday, and all the pay envelopes had been held back. This struck Clarissa as being an additional outrage.

"Haven't they brought those pay envelopes up yet?" she demanded truculently of Foster, the office-boy.

"Sure thing!" lied Foster cheerfully. "But we throwed yours out the window —we knew *you* wasn't workin' for the vulgar coin."

"Don't try to be smart," advised Clarissa sourly. "Now stop!" she added, as Foster sought to ingratiate himself by tickling her under the ear with the feather duster.

"Gee, you have got a lovely nature this morning," said Foster in deep injury.

"She sure has," corroborated George Graham.

"I think people ought to try to come down cheerful to work Monday morning," remarked Miss Peevy piously. "Now, me—even though I do get all worn out goin' so much Saturday and Sunday—"

Having no weapon handy with which to kill Miss Peevy, Clarissa began ostentatiously to clean her typewriter. Mr. Curran was apparently not down yet, and till he came, Clarissa had nothing to do.

"Here's the pay envelopes now," re-

marked George Graham, as Frank, the stolid, machine-like youth from the bookkeeping department downstairs, entered with the pile of little yellow envelopes.

Breathes there a man with soul so dead that his heart will not lighten and his eye brighten at the sight of his weekly pay? Clarissa actually smiled faintly as she slit the flap and drew forth her check to see if by some miracle it might not have grown since last week. There was something in the envelope beside the check—a blue, printed slip. Clarissa peered at it wonderingly.

After a minute or so she rose unsteadily, crushing the pay envelope in her hand. She had the impression that Miss Peevy spoke to her as she passed, but Clarissa did not answer. She went back to the dressing-room, carefully shut the door, and drew out the blue slip.

> This is to inform you that after to-day your services will not be required.

A hot sense of anger forced itself through Clarissa's daze of bewilderment. She had been discharged! Mr. Curran! It was Mr. Curran who had done this thing. He had taken offense at her independent speaking of Saturday and had given orders that she be unceremoniously dismissed.

Oh, the injustice of it! The contemptibleness of it! To send her away in such a fashion—without a minute's notice or a word of explanation—as if she were some drunken day laborer. Mr. Curran had not been man enough to discharge her himself—he had taken this underhanded way of getting rid of her.

"Oh the sneak! The miserable, petty sneak!" cried Clarissa to herself, forcing back the hot tears and clenching her little fists fiercely. "I've done good work for him, and I *wasn't* impertinent. The *meanness* of it!"

Then futile anger was succeeded by the agony of humiliation and outraged pride which is youth's most bitter portion. She had been discharged—unjustly, *she* knew—but others could not or would not believe it. She was branded as incompetent, useless, undesirable. She was conscious only of a desire to get away from the place where this horrible thing had happened to her.

"Oh, that crew out there!" Clarissa gritted her teeth. "I never could endure their snickering and gabbing and prying. If I can only get out past them without their seeing me—"

The best thing to do, she decided, was just to put on her things and walk out without a word—they wouldn't get it into their heads what was happening until she was gone. Clarissa reached for her hat.

There was a click-click of high, teetering heels outside the door. Clarissa thrust her hat back on the hook with a groan, and began to wash her hands violently. Miss Peevy opened the door cautiously and thrust in an anxious face, then entered, and closed the door after her.

"Say, kid," she asked abruptly, "what's the matter?"

Then a curious thing happened. Instead of straightening up with haughty nonchalance to assure Miss Peevy that all was well with her, Clarissa found herself thrusting the blue slip into Miss Peevy's hand.

"Read that!" she said, her chin trembling like a grieved child's.

"Well, *what* do you know about that?" ejaculated Miss Peevy, after a stupefied study of the dismissal slip. "Well, what do you *know* about that? Say, kid, it must be a mistake—I thought you were ace-high with Curran."

Clarissa shrugged her shoulders miserably.

"Oh, I guess it's straight enough. Curran went on one of those tears of his on Saturday—accused me of losing a voucher I hadn't even seen—and I told him a thing or two. I wasn't disrespectful—at least, I didn't mean to be—but I guess I must have made him mad. I never thought he'd be as petty as *that*, though."

"They're all alike, dearie—employers are," said Miss Peevy cynically. "But say, this certainly is the limit. I never dreamed it was anything like this. I noticed you looked awful white when you went out, and I thought maybe you was sick—but gee, this is fierce! Say, what you going to do?"

"Why, I'm going to go, of course—I'm fired," laughed Clarissa with shaky sarcasm.

"Don't you do anything of the sort," cried Miss Peevy, catching her arm. "Don't you go without seein' Curran."

"What—beg him to let me stay?"

"Beg, nothin'! Demand an explanation — tell you can't understand—think there's some mistake. Make him write you a recommendation, and anyhow, have the fun of making him squirm."

"Think I'd better?" asked Clarissa, with a gleam of vindictiveness.

"Well, I should guess yes. And say, girlie, don't stick around in this stuffy dressin'-room—come out into the office till Curran comes."

Then, as Clarissa hesitated shamefacedly, Miss Peevy smiled indulgently. "My, you are sensitive, aren't you? Shows you aint been in the business game very long. Well, if you like, I'll go out first and tell the others what's happened—not that you need worry 'bout George Graham—bet he's been fired more times'n you could count."

With this flattering guess concerning Mr. Graham's business career, Miss Peevy teetered away, and in a few minutes, Clarissa plucked up courage to follow. She found her in gesticulatory conversation with Graham, Myrtle, and Foster.

Mr. Graham seemed to have some notion at first of attempting to perpetrate a joke, but at the sight of Clarissa's tremulous smile, hastily amended his intention.

"Aw say, Miss Day, don't feel so bad about it. Shucks! Bein' fired's nothing. You'd be hard up if you couldn't get a better job than anything in this old dump."

"But how am I ever going to get another job?" asked Clarissa forlornly. "They'll want to know why I left here—and I can't give any satisfactory answer—and—and—"

Clarissa choked, as her vivid youthful imagination pictured herself wandering as an industrial pariah spurned by one suspicious employer after another.

"My cousin got fired a while ago," piped up Myrtle, "an' she was only gettin' five dollars a week, and she went right across the street, and got another job at *seven* dollars. Yes, sir, that's just what she did."

"Sure thing," agreed George Graham. "Sometimes the best thing can happen to you, gettin' fired. You take things too serious, Miss Day. Sure, you can get another job. I tell you what. I've got a friend over to Doyle an' Goldsmith's that's sorter in with the office manager. You go over and see Spence, and I bet he can do somethin' for you. Tell you what—I'll write Spence a note for you to take over."

In a fine frenzy of helpfulness, Mr. Graham sat down then and there to write his note, while the others continued to hover sympathetically around Clarissa.

"I suppose I ought to get to work," commented Miss Peevy, "but blamed if I feel any interest in doin' anything for the rotten old firm."

"It's enough to make a man turn anarchist," growled George Graham over his note.

At this point Foster advanced and laid an apple on Clarissa's desk. Then he backed away as hurriedly as if he had deposited a bomb. Clarissa may be pardoned for a suspicious glance—Foster's gifts were likely to be loaded, in truth.

But what she saw in his face prompted the girl to an act sweet and gracious beyond her years and experience.

"Thank you, Foster. I didn't have time for much breakfast this morning," Clarissa said, setting her teeth eagerly into the weazened offering.

"Two for a nickel—at the dago's—didn't care for it myself," explained Foster, gruffly.

Miss Peevy took Clarissa by the arm, drawing her aside and breathing confidentially into her ear.

"Say, dearie, how you fixed for money? Now, don't think I'm buttin' in, but I know how you get rid of money when you board. I thought maybe if you didn't have anything ahead but last week's pay—and didn't get a job that suited you right off—well, you don't want to cut out lunches or anything of that sort. I'm livin' at home, an' I got a little saved up—"

Clarissa chewed frantically at her lip. She had a dreadful idea that she was going to break right down and cry—and then when she went to have it out with Mr. Curran he would think she was crying because she was discharged.

"Thank you, thank you," she whispered to Miss Peevy. "But I've got a little saved too—I promise you, though—"

"There you are, Miss Day," said George Graham, climbing down from his stool. "You take this over—"

He broke off to answer the ring of the telephone.

"Yes—yes. What's that? Huh? Well, of all things! Yes, there was something kinda queer. Say, Lillie, you send the kid up here—tell him Mr. Curran wants him."

George Graham turned an excited face toward his office mates.

"Say, Miss Day, Lillie says she heard that crazy kid of a Petie downstairs snickering about some joke he'd got off about a pay envelope in this department. I'll bet you anything Curran never sent you that slip. Petie's comin' up."

A few minutes later a small, scared-looking boy entered timorously. At the sight of the severe faces awaiting him, he began to snivel violently.

"Honest, folks, I didn't mean nothin.' It was jus' a joke. Mr. Coates sent me into the bookkeeping department, an' Frank put down that bunch of envelopes for a minute— an' I saw one of them—C. Day's—it wasn't sealed. And there was a pad of them blue slips right there—and I just shoved one of 'em in, and sealed up the envelope. I didn't think—it was jus' a joke."

"My boy," said George Graham with high judicial severity, "monkeyin' with pay envelopes is no kind of a joke. 'Course Miss Day didn't take that slip seriously,"—he winked violently at Clarissa,—"knowin' there must be some mistake. But if we was to tell Mr. Coates on you, you'd be losing your job. And serve you right—get me?"

The terror-stricken Petie intimated that he "got" Mr. Graham.

"Don't scold him," broke in Clarissa happily. "You wont ever do anything like that again, will you, Petie?"

"Honest, I wont," promised Petie fervently. "I'm awful sorry, Miss Day. The envelope wasn't sealed—it was jus' a joke."

As Petie departed in moist repentance, the long-lost Mr. Curran came breezing into the room. He seemed to be in a good humor about something, for he beamed a good-morning upon his employees as he passed.

"Miss Day, will you please bring your book in, in about five minutes?" he boomed pleasantly.

"Now, what do you know about that?" giggled Miss Peevy, as the door of the private office closed. "Say, kid, wouldn't it have been comical if you'd have sailed into Curran for firin' you—and him knowing nothing about it?"

"Those fresh kids are something fierce," remarked George Graham gloomily.

Clarissa gave a long sigh, half bliss, half guilt.

"I feel awfully mean about some of the things I thought and said about Mr. Curran," she confessed. "But say, wouldn't it have been *frightful* if I'd have gone away without saying anything to him at all?"

"You would, if it hadn't been for me," remarked Miss Peevy gravely.

"I know it," said Clarissa with humble gratitude. "I'd have looked an awful fool—and probably lost my job in earnest."

She gathered up her pencil and notebook to go into Mr. Curran's office. Miss Peevy patted her discordant puffs, shifted her gum sou' by sou'west, and opened her neglected typewriter. George Graham was pensively manicuring his nails, his mind apparently still brooding on the fierceness of fresh kids.

Clarissa looked at them and smiled—a sudden, warm, understanding smile. She tried to think of some way to say something without saying it.

"You know, people," she ventured bashfully, "when I came down this morning, I thought the worst thing in the world—was to have to come back—to your job. But now I guess—I guess the worst thing is not having any job to come back to."

"You bet your life," said Miss Peevy and Mr. Graham, heartily.

Latest Adventures of a Diplomatic Free Lance

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

THE ASSASSINATION of Lord Trevor—the Diplomatic Free Lance—was decided upon by those sinister powers which he had so long combated. Poison, a bomb, a shot from ambush—these were some of the means employed. How the attack rebounded upon the would-be murderers forms the climax to this most tensely exciting narrative.

No. VI—MARKED FOR MURDER

IN A secluded upper room of a well-known building in the Wilhelmstrasse, Berlin, three men were holding a consultation which had a strong bearing upon the map of Europe.

Two of them were quite evidently personages of rank and power, within the Empire. The other was a heavy man with cold, fishy eyes, a thick black beard and a temperament which considered results—by any means. He was known to every chancellery in Europe as an unscrupulous government agent who had no conception of finesse and no restraining conscience in what he did—an excellent tool for the coarser work which every government disavows, but in no particular a diplomat or a statesman. Colonel August Pfaff—at your service!

The discussion had dealt with various secret machinations which had for their object the establishing of a strong Prussian influence in the Scandinavian States and Holland. Up to the end of the previous year, there had been much reason for self-congratulation. Prussian ideas had been dominant in the land of dikes and ditches—a German prince was established as Royal Consort—and a majority of the Staaten General were said to be secretly in favor of a Germano-Nederland alliance which should have very nearly the effect of making Holland a state of the Empire. Suggestions from the Kaiser were received with courtesy, and given consideration. It was admitted, of course, that Holland preferred absolute independence—overtures having been made to the powers that she might be preserved in such a position. But the feeling that her interests and those of the Empire were closely interwoven appeared to be a damper upon anything in the way of diplomatic interference. It was assumed that she would work out her destiny in one way or another—and really, it wasn't of much consequence to the other powers, you know. The Nederland Inlies were too big a proposition for such a little country to handle, anyhow—be much better to have a larg-

er part of them under some kind of a protectorate.

As a gasp of weakening defiance, it was rumored that fortifications were to be erected at the mouth of the Scheldt, near Flushing—but a courteous protest from the Kaiser appeared to have held up the project, and the insidious encroachment of Prussian influence seemed to be making itself felt among the middle and lower classes. After all—was it not better to be a prominent state in a powerful empire than a little kingdom at the mercy of any political vulture which might swoop down upon it? Up to the previous month, the trio had been well satisfied with the secret propaganda which they had been instrumental in carrying out. But trifling events began to arouse suspicion that matters were not going entirely their way. Suspicion became certainty. The Nederlanders on the street were talking in a more independent way—bringing up little anecdotes of William the Silent and the rise of the Dutch Republic. In those days, Spain was the most powerful nation in the world—but it isn't on record that Spain succeeded in crushing the Nederlands or even maintaining her grip upon them. There was an undercurrent of stiffening backbone—a strange ignoring of the vastness and power of the German empire.

"You've been hinting a good deal, Colonel," remarked one of the three men, above-mentioned, "—have you really an idea of the influence which has been at work against us, or are you merely bluffing? With Holland in the Empire, the Scandinavians are easy—without her, they are proportionately more difficult to get at. With Holland—Belgium is a possibility. Without her, Belgium is French, entirely. And the shifting of the crown in Denmark is not altogether favorable to our ideas. Come, now! What do you know—or *think* you know?"

"Ach! Not so much, Herr Fürst—not so much! And yet, mind you, it is *something*. I can place *mein* little finger upon no single bit of evidence. I have had proof, so many, many times, that all my suspicions of a certain man were absolutely groundless. But it is a disquieting fact that three-quarters of our diplomatic reverses, of recent years, have been traced—not to individuals, but to a cloud of mystery which surrounds this man and certain others with whom he is intimate."

"Who is the man, Colonel?"

"The famous English Viscount—Lord Trevor, of Dartmoor."

"Trevor! Oh, come now! Trevor! Ha, ha—that's rich! Colonel, you've a reputation for discovering mare's nests—it's not the first time, you know."

"*Ja, ja*—laugh if you please. I laugh at meinself when I think of it. For, look you, have I not said it has been proved so many times the idea is ridiculous? You must say that—I have said it meinself. It *is* ridiculous. The man is a sportsman, he has never taken his seat in Parliament; he goes to sleep when one discusses affairs of state. He is the friend of Alfonzo, of Franz Josef, *der* Kaiser, Vittorio Emmanuele. And, mind you, it is not mere acquaintance he has with royalty—he is really the intimate personal friend. It is said no man in Europe so well understands the perfect courtesy due a monarch without detracting one iota from his own personal dignity."

"If he really played at politics, my dear Colonel, it would be necessarily in favor of one ruler—at the expense of others. And he is the friend of all."

"That seems an unanswerable argument—does it not? Very good! I admit it. But, my dear Herr Prince—have you never known a person whose sense of justice would not permit him to be impartial between two friends when he considered one of them in the wrong? For example, you risk your life to save the Graf, here. Afterward, you find him attempting to seduce the charming wife of a man you do not even know—and you block him. You are as good a friend as ever, you would risk your life for him again; yet, because something in your personal code forbids such things, you block him in what may be the dearest wish of his heart. Well, it is possible that Lord Trevor may be that kind of a person. I do not know. I have no shadow of proof that he ever meddled by so much as a word in any diplomatic affair—and I will frankly admit that I have searched for such

proof, even by spies in his own house. But there is one silent accuser which, in the final analysis, must be reckoned with—the *law of coincidence*. Out of ten reverses the Austwärtiges Amt has suffered in the past half-dozen years, a close study will show that Lord Trevor and men with whom he is most intimate have been in localities where if they really *did* know anything of our plans, they *might* have been instrumental in blocking at least eight. We have no proof they ever did know—not the slightest trace of interference on their part. Yet *if* they knew, and *if* they really acted along certain lines, the results would have been identical with those which actually occurred. I have considered other possibilities—eliminating those not present in every instance—and it leaves Trevor, Sir Francis Lammerford and Sir Edward Wray."

"Wray is at the head of the Foreign Office; Lammerford was formerly Dean of the King's Messengers. Why, man—those two are diplomats who stand out in the open, for everyone to see. No one doubts that either one of them would score against us or any other nation if they considered it British policy to do so!"

"Very true, but how about Trevor—who is very chummy with both?"

"Why, as for that, he is such a popular man, so much in demand throughout Europe, so constantly on the move from one court or great house to another, that it would be difficult to mention *any* diplomatic affair as being planned in a locality where he might not have been present in a perfectly natural and legitimate way. For example, he was reported yesterday as being at Scheveningen, with the Duke and Duchess of Wessex, accompanied by his charming ward, Miss Tremaine. Would you argue from such a fact that he was in the Netherlands to block our policy, or for any other purpose than the bathing and the sea-air?"

"Suppose he is granted an audience with the Queen while in that vicinity? Scheveningen is but a few short miles by trolley from The Hague. Americans would call one place the 'Coney Island' of the other."

"Well—well—suppose he *is* granted an audience with Her Majesty! What is there in that? He has talked with her before—more than once. In fact, it would be *more* remarkable if he *doesn't* see her within a day or so. And this undercurrent of opposition in the Netherlands might have been noticed long ago—for that matter, from the day of Prinz Heinrich's marriage to Her Majesty."

"Well, gentlemen, argument is useless—it leads one to an *impassé*, every time. But suppose, merely as a premise, that my suspicions have foundation; would such a man as Lord Trevor be dangerous in secret diplomacy, or would he not?"

"Dangerous! A man of his wide acquaintance and influence, with his *entrée* everywhere—*dangerous!* He would prove the most serious antagonist a Foreign Office ever had to cope with! There is scarcely a limit to what such a man might accomplish under favorable conditions!"

"Well, there you are. If he were eliminated, now—eh?"

"Tut—tut—tut! Of course, we understand you're not suggesting anything of the sort except from natural causes—an act of Providence. Why, Colonel, if the assassination of such a man were traced to one of the European governments, the blow at its diplomatic influence would handicap it for years. It wouldn't be regicide—very true—but it would be about in the next category to that. Suppose the attemped shooting of Vittorio Emmanuele were fastened definitely upon the Wilhelmstrasse? There would be a coalition of all Europe against us! To put it a little more in the same class—suppose the Duke of the Abruzzi were killed by anarchists proved to be in the pay of the French government? Where would France stand in the Congress of Nations? No, no—when a man acquires a certain amount of prominence in the world, he becomes immune from personal violence at the hands of any reputable government."

"That's all very well, Prince—but dangerous men have been removed before this—no longer ago than yesterday, when it was necessary. Even so

prominent a man as Lord Trevor may be removed by a personal enemy—one who has sworn a vendetta against him. Or, he may be assassinated by some anarchist because of his wealth—by a striking employee who bears him a personal grudge—by a fellow club-member who claims to have been wronged."

"Oh, yes—of course. Personally, I don't believe Trevor actually wronged anyone in all his life. He's not that kind of man. He may have thwarted the plans of a good many in one way or another, but only in a fair sporting chance against the other chap. We don't kill men like that; we respect them."

"Still, if he *were* as dangerous as you've admitted he *might* be, and some personal enemy *did* put him out of the way, it would be much better for our foreign policy, would it not?"

"Possibly. But I'd rather have him for a living antagonist. I'd like the excitement of pitting my abilities against such a brain as his, even though he got the better of me. All Europe would regret his death, and execrate his assassin!"

"Even though he acted for the Fatherland?"

"Frankly, Colonel, I've little use for that sort of patriotism."

"And you, Herr Graf—are you of the same mind?"

"W-e-l-l—I'll hardly go so far as the Herr Prince. If a person is really a dangerous menace to one's country, I shouldn't waste useless regrets over his —er—elimination—I think. Such matters are all in the game, you know. 'Who plays—pays.' No, if I were absolutely certain—*positive*, mind you—I should consider the man who killed such a person more of a patriot than assassin. Yes, I'd reward him for it, too—if it could be done secretly."

Sometimes the sun does shine in London—more frequently, in fact, than most foreigners suppose. And Piccadilly, at half past ten of a bright summer morning, presents an attractiveness which lingers in the memory. The "masses" have been up for hours, east of St. Paul's, and are little in evidence. But the "classes," having just breakfasted, are beginning to appear in the cool of the morning for that sort of light shopping which is more pleasant than necessary—not the purchase of household supplies, or of coal, you understand; just a leisurely constitutional for the purpose of visiting one's tobacconist, or picking up the latest novel in the book-shops, or a box of "sweets." Nothing serious or obligatory, you know—just *"petites choses,"* excuses for idling away an hour or so in the shops of Piccadilly and Old Bond Street, and exchanging bits of gossip with this acquaintance or that. Afterward, one may be "going on" to a luncheon, a matinée, one's club—or back home again.

And the gathering of people one knows! The red-faced gentleman with gray whiskers and "spats" who tramps so phlegmatically along the sidewalk—is there anyone in Piccadilly who does not recognize the choleric Earl of Braffton? Ten minutes ago, he was finishing his *Times* and deviled kidneys in the Reform Club, two blocks down, in Pall Mall. At eight minutes to the hour, he discovered that his cigar-case was empty—his tobacconist is over near Piccadilly Circus. The tall, thin man in a felt bell-topper is the Marquis of B———. Possibly you heard his few hesitating remarks in the "Lords," at Westminster, last night? The stout dowager with triple chins, in the polka-dot foulard, is Her Grace of Ormiston, and the Japanese spaniel she carries—disgusting little brute!—is the winner of three blue ribbons. He likes a good half-pound of chocolates each day—and gets them. Thank heaven, his digestion wont stand it much longer!

And the handsome man in the touring-car which comes bowling down from Park Lane? Count the number of times he has lifted his hat in the last two blocks. Notice the lines of his cleanly shaven mouth and chin, the impression of muscular alertness even in his lounging position on the cushions. His photographs are conspicuous in three of the shop windows you passed in coming from Regent Street; you'll find reproductions of them in at least half a dozen magazines or weekly journals upon the news-stands—yes, his face is quite familiar, though you

may never have been introduced. And yet, there is nothing ostentatious about the man. His gray clothes are loose-fitting, but perfectly cut, and of excellent material. He wears but one ring—in which is set a bronze scarabæus—and a three-carat diamond in his gray silk cravat—but it is a perfect Old Mine stone. His feet are encased in spotless white buckskin oxfords. His hat is a "Monte Christo" Panama which you might crumple like silk in one hand without injury. His car is a smoke-colored Mercedes without ornament—but perfectly finished, and complete in every detail. And his chauffeur is quite evidently an Afghan—in a loose-fitting gray silk livery, with gray felt puttees and a gray silk turban. On a country road in the early evening, the car and the two men would be all but invisible. Upon a misty day you'd scarcely notice them, passing in the street. But upon a bright morning in London's West End, they are about the most conspicuous things you'll see.

A quiet remark, and the swarthy chauffeur runs the car gently up to the curb just as a keen-faced, well-built man steps out of a florist's, adjusting a rose in his buttonhole. Lord Trevor smilingly opens the door of the tonneau.

"Get in, Carter, an' run down to Coutts's Bank with me. What brings you across the Channel—an' who takes the responsibility at the American embassy when you're away from Paris?"

"Well," returned the man who had been addressed as Carter—he was an old friend of Lord Trevor's, in the American diplomatic service—"our ambassador is supposed to have *some* ability, you know. As he gets the glory and I do most of the work, it's only fair that he should keep shop once in a while. Besides, there are *some* messages one can't even send in cipher. I've a friend over here whom I consider in imminent danger—in fact, it's a question whether he can escape from London in *any* disguise— whether he will be safe in any country if he does."

"By Jove! What's the poor chap been doin'?"

"*Not a darned thing,* that anybody could *prove!* I believe it to be a case of suspicion which has been a long time culminating: they're just going to eliminate him on general principles, and see if it will change their luck."

"My word! An' who are 'they,' if one might awsk?"

"That's something I don't know—definitely. Our old friend, Colonel August Pfaff, has been ignominiously dismissed from the government service in Berlin—that is, the dismissal has been gazetted in a way that amounts to public disgrace."

"For what?"

"That doesn't appear. It is rumored that he made some proposition to the Auswärtiges Amt so outrageous that they kicked him out of the service in disgust."

"Fawncy that's all imagination, old chap. They daren't let such a man get out of touch with them—he knows too much!"

"That's just the point. The general public has no suspicion of the underlying facts in such a case—but *we know.* If Pfaff is really dismissed, he is in danger every instant of arrest, imprisonment in a government fortress, or a summary and secret execution. No one knows that better than he. The first suspicious action would settle him, and he could hardly get through a day *without* some action that would be considered suspicious—knowing what he does. The man has disappeared—nobody seems to have an idea where he is at this moment. It may be that he is already arrested—or dead. But if he is alive, at liberty, and has given certain instructions to some half-dozen unscrupulous tools whose lives are in his power—you may depend upon it that he is preparing to commit some outrage which the government cannot sanction under any circumstances, even though it may be a brilliant stroke of policy and greatly to the advantage of Prussian diplomacy."

"Er—Raymond, old chap—have you an idea of any partic'lar bit of statecraft they're tryin' to put through, over there in Berlin? Anything special, just now?"

"Hmph! Who can can ever tell what they're up to—until they make some open move! The German propaganda

in the Netherlands seems increasingly active, but that's only to be expected, considering German ideas as to Holland's ultimate fate. I can think of nothing else definite enough to need watching."

"Carter, I'd not be surprised if you've hit the nail on the head, don't you know! Germany's determined to absorb the Netherlands, sooner or later, an' the *exposé* of her intentions which occurred down at Trevor Hall, summer before lawst, is beginnin' to bear fruit. There's been a lot of conferrin' among the smaller Teutonic nations since that night, an' a general stiffenin' up of backbone. I believe, with all I pers'n'ly know of the different elements, it wouldn't be such an impossible job to bring about a minor coalition that would jar Europe—some."

"For God's sake let it alone, Trevor. You're no fool. You know what I've been driving at! *Get from under*—as quick as the Lord'll let you! I'd gamble a thousand pounds to one that Pfaff *hasn't* been arrested, and that you're a doomed man unless you can disappear—absolutely—within the next few hours."

"Carter, our friend, the Colonel, had a spy in my home for a fortn't—ransackin' my desk, private drawers, even a small safe I have in the lib'ry. Result: he found he was a fool for his pains—not a shred of evidence. There never *has* been any evidence where he could possibly get it."

"All right—admit that. Suppose he excludes facts and gets down to the law of coincidence—merely as an algebraic theorem? Suppose he eliminates one possibility after another in every *coup* that's gone against him in the last five years, and figures it down to a couple of men—three men—with you as the only non-diplomatic one of the trio? Do you think him the sort of a man to *act* upon such a theory—or *not?*"

"No question of it, old chap—I'm only surprised it hasn't struck him that way before. Well, it's all in the game, you know. I've lived for several years with just that sort of possibility hangin' over my head. But if I did as you suggest, it would be the most fatal move I could possibly make."

"Why so?"

"It's an undeniable admission they're on the right track—that I'm the man who has beaten them all these years! Once make that admission, an' there's not a spot on earth where I'd be safe under my own identity. On the other hand, I go on just as I always do, apparently unsuspectin' any such pawssibility, an' they finally get me. They'll never know whether I was really the man they were awfter, or not. An' *if they don't make a thorough job of it,* they'll be so sure they were mistaken that I can do about as I please—awfterward—with impunity. *Runnin' away is the weakest, most dangerous policy a man can try.*"

"Great Scott! You'll deliberately risk their killing you at any moment—on such a chance as that! Trevor, either you were born without nerves, or else you're the bravest man I've ever known! A normally healthy man may face a sudden danger, over in a moment, with a fair amount of courage—but to go on calmly with one's everyday affairs, not knowing at what instant the life may be violently torn from his body, or by what brutal means, requires a quality of personal bravery that I fancy very few of us possess. I can see your point of view, of course—and you're dead right about the ultimate effect. But *I* couldn't do it—*damned* if I could!"

"That's where you misjudge yourself, old chap. I know you better than that. The man who went into that Turkish port in the Dardanelles, one night—impersonated a Turkish *Bimbashi*— an' awfterward helped to sink that tramp steamer with the cordite mines in her hold—risked sudden death every minute from the time he left Hamburg."

"What! For the love of Mike, Trevor—*who are you?* There's but one man on earth who ever knew I was that engineer and Turkish officer!"

"Fawncy that may be true, old one. You've suspected my identity more than once since that night we flew out of Paris with the Swiss aviator."

"But—but—damn it all, it's *impossible!* You're an English Viscount! Is there any question as to that?"

"None whatever. It's too long a

story, Carter—here we are at the Bank. An' I cawn't give it you now—pawssibly not for years. But, seein' it may be the 'lawst touch of a vanished hand,' you know, I didn't mind admittin' the fact. An' I'm jolly well sure the chap for whom you went to the trouble of crossin' the channel appreciates your kindness fully."

As the Viscount entered the Bank, Carter stood for a moment on the sidewalk, undecided as to what he should do further in the matter. Presently, hailing a taxicab, he was taken rapidly westward to the mansion in Park Lane, where he asked for Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan, G. C. S. I.—the Afghan prince who had been Trevor's companion for several years and who, with his relatives and fellow-countrymen of the household, was devotedly attached to His Lordship for weighty personal reasons. Fortunately, he happened to be in at the time—and listened with a grim stiffening of the jaw to the American diplomat's warning.

"Carter Sahib may be sure of one thing—there will be no treachery in the *Huzoor's* own houses. My father's son will stake his life upon that. As for what may be in other places, there be this one and that man who will not sleep while the *Huzoor* is abroad. And thou, oh *Sahib Bahadur,* will remember this—it is not my Lord's kismet to die in such a manner. It be upon the knees of Ganesh—who will not permit that such things happen."

Carter was considerably impressed by the Afghan's confidence, though he couldn't understand why, but as a measure of extra precaution, he called upon Sir Edward Wray in Downing Street, and whispered a few words that insured as much protective surveillance as was possible from the Foreign Office. Then he took the Club Train for Paris.

In the meanwhile, Lord Trevor—the "Diplomatic Free Lance," as his intimates sometimes called him among themselves—finished his business at the bank and was driven to the Reform Club, where he frequently lunched. There were always fellow members who gladly accepted an invitation to sit down at his table when he was in the mood for company—but no one ever presumed upon his privacy when the invitation was not forthcoming. The club-waiters, naturally, gave him perfect service and had been even known to give bonuses for the privilege of waiting upon him—not so much on account of the liberal tips as because of his genial and personal interest in each one of them, though he never allowed this preference to interfere with their service to other members. Being himself one of the governors, he made a special point of having the service uniformly good. But, while other members were satisfactorily waited upon, few of them dined with the impression that the man who served them would take infinite pains in doing anything they requested. It happened, upon this occasion, that most of the tables were occupied and the best waiters already in demand. His Lordship's favorite table was always held for him two hours, so he had no difficulty in getting his accustomed place by a window overlooking the gardens, but the waiter who appeared was a recent acquisition in the club—evidently, a Continental, though it was difficult to guess his nationality. Trevor had found that he spoke three or four languages, but had never asked him any personal questions.

"Ah, Henry! The Steward is shifting you about a bit, I see. Well, are you making acquaintances in London? Gettin' to like the bally old town—eh?"

"Why—yes, Sir—thank you, Sir. I to the fog do not accustom myself at once, but it is very interesting."

"Family here with you?"

"No, Milor'—they at home stay until I the money save to bring them."

"But you think they'd like it here? What?"

"Oh, but certainly, Milor'. They very much wish. But first, I must twenty pounds save."

"An' that'll take quite a bit of time, y'know. I say, Henry—here! Here are six fi'-pun' notes. You look up comf'table quarters, an' have 'em over here as soon as they can pack. You'll be more comf'table havin' your own bit of a home, here— have 'em over at once."

"But, Milor'—you're very kind, Milor', but it will take me some time all that to save, Milor'. If sickness there

should be, or anything like that, I should not so soon do it. When to pay you back, I could not say, Milor'."

"But—you're not to pay me back at all, man. I'm *givin'* you the thirty quid, d'ye see. Just to start you here in a comf'table way, don't you know. What? Oh, never mind the thanks—I'm satisfied if you are. Now, let me see—" (Adjusting his glasses and running over the menu.) "A little green turtle soup, I fawncy—filet of sole—a broiled quail—a bit of Romaine *au mayonnaise,* an' a *demi-tasse*. Pint of Chateau Yquem '99, for a change—I've had no wine for a month."

"Very good, Milor'—d'rectly, Milor'."

The man laid a copy of the *Times* on the table and disappeared. In about ten minutes, when His Lordship was deep in a leading article, the waiter returned with the soup and a cobwebby bottle lying upon its side in a wicker basket.

Trevor seemed absorbed in what he was reading, but from the corner of his eye he noticed the man's hands as he placed the soup tureen upon the table and carefully wiped the hot plate. They were trembling slightly. Before he drew the cork from the bottle, however, he seemed to have mastered this —and carefully removed the red sealing-wax which still adhered to the neck of the bottle. The *bottle* had not been tampered with; that was self-evident. But the soup? Why had the man's hand's trembled? Trevor nodded, and the man went off for the rest of the order. Propping the paper up against the carafe, where he could read as he ate, he ladled out a liberal portion of the turtle soup—thick, slightly opaque, and filled with little squares of meat. Apparently, the news article was of absorbing interest. Twice His Lordship lifted a spoonful of the soup to his mouth— and put it down again. The waiter saw him do this as he was returning with the fish-course—and the action was so obvious that he was not surprised when Trevor said:

"By Jove! I was so jolly int'rested in this *Times* leader, y'know, that I let my soup get cold. Never mind—let it go. I'll begin with the fish, an' you'd best fetch the quail an' salad at once—I'm in rawther a hurry."

Again the man's hands trembled as he went off with the cold soup, while the Viscount unconcernedly helped himself to the sole and a glass of wine. Poisons are generally administered in one of two forms—liquid, or powder. Powder will not dissolve upon fish or game, nor can you pour liquid poison over them without apparent discoloration—usually. A hypodermic needle might be used, of course, but that method is cumbersome when applying a deadly substance to food which is fresh from the range. Trevor made due allowance for the fact that his imagination might be overwrought, and that it was extremely improbable the man had the slightest intention of injuring a person who had just given him thirty pounds as a gratuitous kindness. But he couldn't afford to overlook a single bit of suspicious evidence. According to the law of probability, he reasoned that he was safe until the coffee appeared—coffee lends itself excellently to the disguise of deadly potions by its strong flavor. So he ate his fish, quail and salad with evident relish. Then signed his house-card and left the Club without touching the steaming *demi-tasse*. Fifteen minutes afterward, as he was returning along Pall Mall, he noticed an ambulance at the side entrance to the club, on the street leading down to Carlton House Terrace. Subsequently, he learned that one of the cooks had fallen unconscious upon the kitchen floor and had died before reaching the hospital—from cyanide poisoning.

Returning to Park Lane, Trevor sent for his private secretary—a man of thirty-five who passed for a banker in the city, and had been formerly attached to the Foreign Office.

"John, what have you on hand for the next week or so? Anything that cawn't be turned over to Abdool, if neces'ry?"

"H-m-m—Abdool isn't familiar with the Cornwall properties or the Cumberland and Yorkshire investments, but there is nothing concerning them which cannot be postponed for a week, I fawncy. There are four Board Meetings at which I was to have represented

you. If Sir Francis Lamerford is at liberty, he could act as your proxy at two of them—or it might be arranged in some other manner, I presume. There's really nothing of great importance coming up for a fortnight or more."

"I fawncied that might be the case—though I cawn't keep track of everything. Er, what do you know about the stockholders of the Paris *Courier du Matin,* and *L'Echo de Patrie?"*

"I believe the *Courier* is owned principally by a family of Jews—the Morgensterns. *L'Echo de Patrie* is strongly political—owned and managed by Cassard Frères, who have been deputies from their respective departments, more than once."

"Ah—quite so. Er—have both those journals been payin' propositions, right along?"

"Why—in a way—yes. They're not big money-makers, but they must cut up a hundred thousand francs each year."

"That is—they're just about in a claws where a temptin' bid for a majority of their shares wouldn't be refused—eh?"

"Why—just about, I should say. For that matter, ninety per cent of the newspapers are in the same boat. Pay a price which permits their owners to start another paper with a new and well-equipped plant—outside of their original investment—and most of them will take the sporting chance. Why? Because an old established paper gets tied down by precedent—by the likes and dislikes of its subscribers, and various secret affiliations, until the editors can't be quite as independent as they'd like to be. With a new sheet, one may smash heads indiscriminately. It must be intensely partisan to succeed at the start; afterward, it can tone down a bit."

"I think you're right. In fact, I'm bankin' on it that you are. Well, here's a list of thirty-five influential papers in Paris, Bordeaux, Marseilles, Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Groningen, an' Haarlem. If those papers are all syndicated under one ownership, they can be made to pay much better than they're payin' now, d'ye see—better facilities, less operatin' cost, an' uniform policy throughout. I'd say they could be acquired for somethin' over a million, sterlin'—but call it a round two million pounds. I believe the investment could be made to pay fifteen or twenty per cent, properly handled. An' the influence that can be wielded is beyond all calculatin'. My bankers in Paris, Antwerp an' Amsterdam are under sufficiently heavy obligations to exert themselves a lot—an' they've connections who'll carry out their wishes in other cities. I want you to see each of those bankin' houses—have private interviews with the managin' directors themselves—an' *instruct 'em to buy a controllin' interest in those thirty-five papers* just as quickly as it can be done. I'll give you checks for the two millions, which you'll deposit with them for the purpose. The purchases to be made under thirty-five diff'rent names an' then *secretly transferred* to a comp'ny we'll call the 'Consolidated Journals Association.' Mind, I don't wish you to pay more than each paper is actually worth, *but I want the paper even if you have to pay double!* At the end of the next ten days, Manning, I shall expect to own those papers. At the end of two weeks, I shall begin printin' in them a series of syndicated articles I've in mind. Now make your arrangements to cross the Channel as quickly as possible, an' get busy."

"Very good, sir—I can probably leave to-night. By the way, what was the matter with Jeffries and Colburn and Brady? And with the two women in the kitchen?"

"Blessed if I know what you're drivin' at."

"Why, Abdool packed all five off to America on the Southampton boat, tomorrow. Said you wanted them to get settled in your California house. Jenkins refused to go—preferred staying in London—so Abdool discharged him, with three months' advance wages."

"H-m-m, that's a bit odd. However, Abdool manages all my places—subject to Miss Nan's approval."

"That's why I thought it rather queer to send them off during Miss Tremaine's absence."

"Oh, well—dare say Abdool knows

what he's about. Let's see—that leaves no one here outside of the Afghans but 'Stasia Murphy an' her sisters—Grimes, Halloran an' Sykes. I'd trust every one of 'em with my life, or anything I've got. But the ones Abdool sent away are comparatively recent acquisitions. Good, honest servants as far as I know—but they haven't been tried in as many diff'rent ways as the others. Hmph! I should be able to sleep in *this* place without worryin' much over anything. Worth rememberin' when my nerves get a bit on edge."

"Why, what's up?" Manning was beginning to feel considerable alarm—and showed it.

"Oh, nothin' in partic'lar, I fawncy. But a person in my position is bound to antagonize *some* people, y'know. Cawn't very well help it. The money alone would do it—an' then, I mess 'round a bit in matters which aren't supposed to concern me."

The Secretary's apprehension increased. His former duties in the Foreign Office had been largely clerical and, while thoroughly trustworthy, he'd never come into actual contact with the deadly side of the diplomatic game. That "fatal accidents" often happened to king's messengers and secret service men he knew in an abstract way, as one does of calamities which do not touch us personally—but the fact that one who meddled in underground politics could be actually sentenced to death in this twentieth century merely because of his successful activity in matters of state appeared too absurd for credence. Men who were openly connected with the diplomatic corps seemed to run no such risk, but—he now saw this might be, from the fact that they worked largely in the open, where their actions and interviews could be watched and discounted. On the other hand, the unknown men whose intrigues were always secret and unsuspected until the results of them shook the political world, represented forces against which there was no adequate defense save elimination. And when a secret agent is assassinated, who can say whether his murderer is carrying out a personal vendetta or is the tool of some government against which the agent has scored? John Manning was but vaguely aware of the extent to which His Lordship meddled in state affairs—but he now began to realize something of the personal risk he incurred.

"Oh, I say! You're not really serious? Of course some crazy lunatic or ne'er-do-well may attack any man of wealth in a fit of morbid insanity. That may be guarded against to a considerable extent. But an organized conspiracy to injure a man in your Lordship's position is rather absurd, don't you think?"

Trevor calmly lighted one of his long cigars.

"I suppose it would appear so to the general public. Yet, an hour ago—in my own club, don't you know—a waiter, whom I'd just given thirty pounds for the purpose of bringin' his family to London, put cyanide in the soup he fetched me. I let it get cold, an' some one in the kitchen must have tasted the stuff. It killed him before he reached the hospital."

"Great Heaven! Surely, you must have been misinformed!"

"Well, I didn't *see* the man put the stuff in the soup—an' I'll not even swear it was there at all, y'know—but the circumstantial evidence was rawther complete. You'd best forget about this, John—not a word of it to Miss Nan, y'know."

Trevor was dining at Croevour Hall in Surrey, that evening, and left Park Lane in his six-cylinder touring-car shortly after five. The habit of close observation had become second nature to him. With the additional reason that his life might now depend upon it, he seemed to acquire a sixth sense—and, leaning easily back in the tonneau, his alert glance took in every feature of the road, the sidewalks, trees and buildings his car was approaching. Now, as one goes down Park Lane toward Piccadilly, *en route* to Lambeth Bridge, there is a row of thick bushes on the right, just within the Park railing. So, anyone leaving one of the Park Lane mansions—going north to the Marble Arch, or south to Gloucester House on Piccadilly—must pass for a quarter of

mile or more along this line of shrubbery. A man hidden between Grosvenor Gate and Marble Arch, and another one stationed south of Stanhope Gate, would be within a few feet of such a person as he passed, whether he went north or south. At Dorchester House, its ample grounds present another area of shrubbery upon the east side of the Lane. And, looking ahead of the car as it approached this spot at a leisurely speed, it seemed particularly adapted to the sort of attack which does not contemplate injuring other people in the vicinity. At the moment, it just happened that there was no other vehicle in sight—and looking closely at the line of bushes inside the Park railing, Trevor saw one of them move slightly. Bending forward, he spoke quietly to his Afghan chauffeur:

"Slow down a bit, Ali! Very good. Now change to your high gear, but run slowly until you pass the corner of South Street. Then give her all the gas she'll take, an' run top speed to the Fountain. Understand? Let her out suddenly—an' then bend down across the other seat!"

The Afghan obeyed instructions like a well-oiled machine. The machine passed South Street corner at a very moderate pace—then it jumped forward like an arrow from a bow. In less than ten seconds, it had covered the intervening stretch of roadway to the Fountain—an apparently empty car, for Trevor had bent down in the tonneau and the Afghan was concealed by the dash. As they passed Dorchester House, a small, round object hurtled out from the Park bushes—missing the rear of the tonneau by a good twenty feet. When it struck the opposite curb, there was a deafening explosion which broke some of the neighboring windows and wrecked about sixty feet of the pavement, but did no other damage. An officer of the mounted police, near the Fountain, was just spurring up the Lane to see what had happened when Lord Trevor stopped him.

"It was a fellow in a light bowler hat—green suit with black stripes—officer. He threw a bomb from the bushes inside the Park railin', just opposite Dorchester House! If you whistle for a Park 'Bobby' as you go, I fawncy you'll catch him!"

As the officer galloped up the Lane, Trevor gave an order to his chauffeur and they made a detour by way of Downing Street, where he had a five-minute interview with Sir Edward Wray, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Then they crossed Westminster Bridge and went down into Surrey.

For the next five days, nothing unusual happened. The two failures to kill or maim His Lordship seemed to have discouraged further attempts upon him for the present—particularly, as the newspapers got enough hints of the truth to discuss it in double column articles. Nothing was proved against the waiter at the Reform Club or the man who had been arrested in Hyde Park—so, after a couple of days, they were released from custody. But secret service men from Downing Street and Scotland Yard watched their every movement and finally located four other men with whom they seemed to be in touch. About that time, His Lordship and Sir Francis Lammerford left one evening on the "corridor club train" for Dover and Paris—finishing their tea shortly after the train left Tunbridge. Lammerford was the first to leave the table and saunter into the smoking saloon of the next carriage for his cigar. A moment later, as Trevor stepped out upon the platform of the dining-coach, one of the waiters grasped his elbow, apparently to steady him—as the train was making fifty miles an hour and lurching violently upon the bogies. He thanked the man—said he needed no assistance, and stepped across to the next platform. But instead of releasing his arm, the man drew it sharply toward him just as the coach lurched in the opposite direction—throwing Trevor off his balance so that he pitched, head-first, down the steps. As he was in the act of falling, the man whirled and ran back into the dining-coach.

With ninety-nine men out of a hundred, their interest in mundane affairs would have ended right there. With all but one man out of a thousand, years of disuse would have left their muscles far too flabby to withstand the strain of a man's full weight plus the terrific

momentum of the racing train. But it must be remembered that Lord Trevor, in spite of his forty-five years, was a trained athlete in the pink of condition —as well as a superb horseman and swordsman, accustomed to sudden and violent motion. Even as he felt himself falling, his brain was perfectly clear, and his keen glance was flashing about for a hand-hold of some description. As he pitched downward, he noticed the frames were set in skeleton frames of steel—and with an almost superhuman effort, he managed to grip a part of the metal—stiffening his toes, which acted as drags and caught upon the edge of the top step for just an instant. Another second, and the entire weight of his body would have been slammed against the bogies and sleepers—but the check was just enough to give the toe of one foot a grip around the brake-rod so that he hung, head-downward, holding on by toes and hands until a slackening of the train's speed gave him the chance to haul himself up. Brushing some of the dust from his clothes, he made his way along the corridor to a forward carriage, where Abdool was looking after his luggage—and gulped down a stiff glass of whisky to steady his nerves. The strain upon his muscles had been a severe one—he felt lame all over from the effects of it. When Abdool had found him another traveling cap, he went back to the smoking-saloon and gave Lammerford an account of his experience; then he sent for the chief train guard.

"Fellow'd prob'ly claim 'twas an accident, don't you know—say I pulled away from him an' was thrown off my balance awfter he let go. But I'll make the complaint strong enough to hold him until I return from Paris, at all events. He's the red-haired chap with freckles an' pock-marks, in the dinin'-coach, y'know. Fawncy you'll find he's not been in the railway's employ very long. An' you're not to say that he missed out on gettin' me. I prefer he shouldn't know I'm alive when he's taken in charge—or even why he's arrested. I'll telegraph Scotland Yard from the next station, an' have your authority for holdin' him by the time we reach Dover. Faith! We're slowin' up now—I'll write the message at once, an' you can send it off yourself. Here's a ten-pun note for your trouble—an' you're not to make a botch of it, mind. I wish that man *given in charge an' held.* If you carry it through as I awsk, you'll have two hundred pounds when I return—if not, you may be quite sure you'll be sacked. I'm a large shareholder in this Railway."

Returning to his stateroom in the forward carriage, Trevor changed into a suit of different cut and pattern from those he usually wore—gummed a thick brown mustache upon his lip—and returned to the smoking-saloon, where he merely exchanged the courtesies usual among strangers with Lammerford and his fellow travelers.

When the train reached Dover, Abdool and Lammerford lodged a report with the local police that Lord Trevor had disappeared from the train somewhere between Tunbridge and Ashford —being supposed to have been thrown from one of the platforms by the lurching of the train when it was going fifty or sixty miles an hour. The railway authorities promptly ordered a search for his body along the right-of-way, and the startling report was telegraphed to the London papers—appearing also upon the Paris bulletins when the travelers reached that city at eleven-thirty. The guard who had been entrusted with the waiter's arrest supposed the fellow had made a second and more successful attempt upon His Lordship's life—and so was more than ever determined that he should be held. Fortunately, he was a person who'd learned to carry out instructions as they were given him—and the result was that the waiter had no idea he was supposed to have made *two* attempts upon His Lordship, and gossip which he overheard among the jailers at Dover convinced him that he'd been quite successful.

These facts, coupled with the mass of sympathetic comment in all the European papers, enabled Trevor—as a Mr. Arthur Trevelyan—to confer with certain bankers in Paris, Brussels and Amsterdam for a couple of weeks in perfect security—completing the negotiations started by his private secretary. And when Trevor returned to London

in his own person, Manning was fairly swamped with congratulatory messages which poured in from everywhere. He gave out a statement to the papers that His Lordship had slipped and lost his footing just as the train was leaving Tunbridge, had received quite a nasty fall, and had been unconscious in the house of a farmer not far from Tunbridge for several hours—but that he had recovered from its effects in a couple of days and had been staying at Trevor Hall, in Devon, to recuperate.

Upon the day this statement appeared, the secret-service men re-arrested the two former suspects, and with them five others—two of whom were taken in Paris, and one in Vienna. The eight, including the dining-coach waiter, were tried at a private Government hearing and confined in as many different prisons to serve out sentences varying from fifteen to thirty years at hard labor—for conspiracy to kill.

Convinced by this time that Pfaff was behind the various attempts upon his life, Trevor now began to look for an attack by the man himself. His tools had signally failed in what they had undertaken—and the Colonel was the sort of person who believed in making a thorough job of whatever he undertook. With this in mind, His Lordship now habitualy carried an automatic pistol of heavy caliber where he could reach it instantly. Aside from this, however, he did not vary his daily habits in any particular. He rode in the Park upon his black Arab, before breakfast—lunched, dined and called upon friends as had been his custom—stayed a couple of week-ends at country houses, and twice crossed the Channel upon business. But he never for an instant relaxed his vigilance. In Park Lane, he felt secure—his Afghans would have knifed an intruder without a moment's hesitation—and he slept there with relaxed nerves. But in other houses—at clubs, hotels and upon railway trains, he had constantly the feeling that a deadly attack might come at any instant.

Two months of this sort of thing was beginning to interfere with His Lordship's digestion. He had just made arrangements for a long cruise in his famous yacht when—riding along Rotten Row in the early morning—he saw a flash from a cluster of bushes upon the right, or inner side. And before he could throw himself sideways, a heavy bullet struck him in the upper corner of his chest. The blow was a stunning one. A paralyzing nausea blurred his sight as he slipped out of the saddle. Just as he fell upon the ground, however, he drew his pistol with a last conscious effort and fired three crashing shots at a moving something in the clump of bushes from which he had seen the spurt of flame. Then a deadly blackness settled over his brain.

In the meantime, other riders who knew him well were spurring their horses toward the spot. His Arab stood motionless over him, sniffing at the blood which began oozing through his riding-coat. In another moment, several acquaintances had carried him to the soft grass beyond the bushes, while others galloped back to Hyde Park Corner for an ambulance. When it came, his Afghan *syce* insisted that he be taken to his own home in Park Lane—partly because it was much nearer than a hospital, but mostly because of His Lordship's known preference and the excellent facilities there for surgical treatment. As the ambulance drove slowly away, two riders who had seen the shooting and had been searching the vicinity came upon the body of a heavy, black-bearded man in the bushes. In his chest were three gaping bullet-holes. The body was dressed in a stylish morning-suit of excellent material, and had the appearance of being that of a person of wealth and leisure. In the pockets, were letters addressed to "Colonel August Pfaff"—some of them, at St. James' Club, London—some, at the Anglo-American Club, Berlin—and some, at Karntner Ring 320, Vienna.

When the eminent surgeons had finished their examination in Park Lane, it was found that the ball had passed through Lord Trevor's chest—narrowly escaping his left lung, but making the clean perforation which is peculiar to the steel-jacketed bullet. After the wound had been dressed, His Lordship

regained consciousness—and though in considerable pain, assured his sympathetic friends that he should make a rapid recovery, owing to the healthy condition of his muscular tissue—an opinion in which the surgeons concurred.

The first effect of the affair was one of shocked amazement throughout European society. That a man of Trevor's splendid character and well-known popularity should be singled out for assassination seemed incredible. The previous attempts upon his life had been taken jokingly among the clubs as mere newspaper sensation, with little real grounds—but the instances were now recalled, and the fact that his would-be assassin was a discredited secret agent of the Berlin government was commented upon very pointedly. Some papers had it that Pfaff had been dismissed from the Prussian service at Lord Trevor's request, in consequence of some outrageous action which had become known to the Viscount—and that the Colonel had taken this method of revenging himself. Others—scattered through France, Belgium and Holland—published leading articles which insinuated that His Lordship must have interfered with the Berlin government in some way and that Pfaff, though outwardly discredited, had tried to remove an obstacle to German expansion.

Had anyone taken the trouble to look up the ownership of these papers, it might have surprised him to learn their connection with the mysterious Syndicate known as the "Consolidated Journals Association." And it would have surprised him still more to read in as many other sheets belonging to the same organization heated refutations of these insinuations—the result being that a great deal more prominence was given them than would have resulted from their original publication. In all the discussion, one point was emphasized and reiterated. "If any Government supposed for one instant that Lord Trevor ever meddled with state affairs, it simply pilloried itself as a butt for the jokes and gibes of all Europe. A man whose smallest personal habits were as widely known as Trevor's—whose unfailing courtesy, tact and good humor had won for him thousands of friends all over the world—whose attempts to express himself in any foreign language were so ludicrously painful as to have become a by-word—and who invariably went to sleep when people about him began talking politics—was hardly material such as that from which great diplomats were made. Besides, he was the personal friend of the Kaiser, the Czar, Franz Josef, Vittorio Emmanuele! Just the sort of person to plan underhand schemes against them—oh, of course! *Not!*

This discussion and the widespread expressions of sympathy for the stricken Viscount finally reached a point where it could no longer be ignored by the Berlin Government. A most cordial telegram of sympathy and concern had come from the "War Lord" within three hours of the shooting—but the storm of newspaper talk demanded something more official than that, and a diplomatic note was presently sent to the British Cabinet through the Foreign Office. It was supposed to be a secret communication from one Government to the other, but in deference to public sentiment its contents were permitted to leak out in the Berlin newspaper offices, and their first bulletins were telegraphed everywhere. Briefly, the note explained that Berlin had been informed of three previous attempts upon the life of Lord Trevor and the imprisonment of eight men convicted of participation in them; that, as a final attempt had been made by an ex-agent of the Wilhelmstrasse, it might be assumed the other men had acted under his direction—in which case, their punishment was a matter which properly belonged to the Wilhelmstrasse. The note concluded with the grim request that the eight convicts be handed over to the Auswärtiges Amt "in order thoroughly to insure their troubling nobody hereafter." It is needless to say the request was courteously acceded to by the British government.

As the popular invalid was nursed back to health by his anxious but charming ward, Miss Nan Tremaine,

he spent his mornings—propped up against the pillows, dictating minute instructions, syndicate editorials, attacking articles and their replies to his private secretary—who put them upon the wires from another part of London, and over the name of a press syndicate which remains a mystery in newspaperdom to this day.

Week after week, the position of smaller Teutonic nations in relation to the German and Austrian Empires was discussed from Marseilles to The Hague in thirty-five different papers—forming the base of voluminous comment in five times that number of journals which had no suspicion as to their being exploited for just that purpose. A shadowy idea began assuming shape and strength. Neighborly feeling between France, Belgium and the Netherlands perceptibly intensified. Activity was again reported on the new fortifications at the mouth of the Scheldt. There was talk of secret agreements between these nations—and excellent understanding with Denmark and Scandinavia.

Upon the evening when Trevor first appeared at the head of his own dinner-table again, a copy of the *Times* lay by the side of his plate—and its leading article described the enthusiastic reception of Queen Wilhelmina in Paris—the first occasion upon which a Queen Regnant had visited that city in forty years. Trevor glanced over the article and chuckled, as he looked around the table at Miss Tremaine, the Earl and Countess of Peveney, Sir Edward Wray and Sir Francis Lammerford.

"I say—just among ourselves, y'know—it rawther looks as if the shot that poor devil, Pfaff, sent through me was a—what d'ye call those Australian things? Oh, yes—a 'boomerang,' don't y'know. Rawther defeated the very object he was so keen on gainin', as it were—eh? What?"

Michael McCree—Philosopher

By EWING A. WALKER

"Y E'RE a stranger in these parts?" It was Maggie O'Rourke who spoke. All of the boarders, save one, had finished their supper and passed from the dining-room. A large, florid, boyish-looking man glanced up from his plate.

"Oi am."

"Do—do ye loike it hereabouts?"

"Oi do," the stranger said laconically, not deigning to look up.

Maggie, who saw to the proper feeding of a score of uncouth sawmill hands, and who usually found them willing enough to talk with one of her charm, was disconcerted by the newcomer's taciturnity. She hesitated.

"Will ye have a little more o' the gravy on your meat?"

"Oi will—thank ye."

The stranger continued eating; Maggie drew a little nearer him.

"What—what moight your name be?"

"It moight be Murphy and it moight be Flannigan; and, again it moight be Ryan; but the truth is, it's Michael McCree. Oi'll choose a little more o' the turnips, if it please ye."

"The turnips ye can have, whether it please me or no; but 'tis the truth Oi'm speakin' whin Oi say ye're most uncivil, Mr. Michael McCree."

Maggie strode away in dudgeon;

Michael, finishing his pie, rose and passed from the low-ceilinged room.

"Wimmin are queer creatures!" he mumbled to himself as he walked away. "The more ye see of 'em the less ye know about 'em. They're a deal loike a disease, a-takin' hould of ye whin ye least expect it. And as for marryin' of 'em and still bein' yerself, why—at the ind of two months ye can't call yer soul yer own. Oi'm thinkin' 'tis well for ye, Michael McCree, that ye're a woman-hater."

With his clear eye, genial smile and merry laugh, one would scarcely have taken Michael for a woman-hater; but such he obviously was, for he avowed as much himself. In fact, he manifested no little pride as he made the declaration. He was the source of no end of interest to Maggie O'Rourke. Three times a day he ate his meals in the little dining-room, chatting gayly enough with the men, but never offering a word to Maggie. Though she, in turn, said not a word to Michael and merrily bantered the other men, she kept her eye upon the one who purposely disregarded her. Michael was good to look upon; his shoulders were broad and his limbs and body well-knit; his cheeks glowed under the touch of youth and health; a twinkle lurked in his eyes—which were blue. All of this Maggie O'Rourke saw—and liked.

On a Sunday, several weeks after his arrival at the lumber camp, Michael was late to his dinner, and when he strode into the room he found it deserted save for Maggie.

"Oi'll be puttin' ye out to-day by bein' late."

"Not at all, Mr. McCree. We have nothing at all to do but serve ye."

Michael glanced up, perplexed. Maggie observed him defiantly.

"A pleasant day we're havin'," he said.

"Oi've seen better."

"If my ears are good—and Oive nivver been told they're bad—the boot's on the ither foot now. Oi'm thinkin' Michael McCree is not the only uncivil person hereabouts."

For several minutes Michael ate on, if not in silence, at least not speaking; Maggie sat at the opposite side of the room twirling her thumbs. Constitutionally, Maggie hated silence—so she broke it.

"Do ye loike yer work?"

"Oi do."

"What is yer trade?"

"Oi earn me money filin' saws, but me real trade's philosophy."

Maggie observed him wonderingly.

"Yer real trade is what?"

"Philosophy." Michael spoke with great unction.

"And, faith, what moight that be?"

Very deliberately Michael piled up the empty dishes before him, pushed back his chair and assumed a comfortable position.

"'Tis a queer trade, is philosophy. A very queer trade—and 'tis hard to describe. A philosopher's a man who knows a great deal about what ither people ought to be and very little about what they are. He can always tell ye how to get rich but nivver fails to die poor himself. A man can't earn his livin' by philosophy, but he can use it and figure out how ithers can earn theirs. There are two kinds of 'em: those that write books and those that just talk. Though both are great sleepin' powders, warranted to overcome the most stubborn case of insomnia, those that write are the greatest. They have done a great service to the world: their books, which, as a rule, are very thick, have furnished employment for a great many mimbers of the printers' union; they have furnished shavin' paper for an untold number of men; they're as good as the Bible for raisin' the chair-seat of a child that can't reach the table when it would eat; and they've made many junk dealers rich.

"Most philosophers have wives who talk and complain a great deal about meat and milk tickets and grocery bills, but they can always take down their own books on philosophy and shut out their wives' complaints from their sufferin' ears by goin' promptly to sleep. Nearly all philosophers either die a lingering death from starvation or else are hung by a merciful people. As a rule, whin a man's a philosopher he's nothin' else—except a consistent debtor. Oi'm one of the very few that has two trades: Oi have saw-filin' and phi-

losophy. 'Tis a great, great thing! For instance, if Oi were to git in throuble with anither man, it wouldn't be necessary to hit him, for Oi could use philosophy and settle the matter as all such affairs should be settled. 'Tis a great thing for avoidin' trouble and worry, is philosophy. Those of us who are natural philosophers can figure out all diseases and throubles save one."

"And what moight that one be?"

"That one is—wimmin!" Michael spoke impressively.

"Do ye mean to tell me, Mr. Michael McCree, that ye call wimmin 'diseases and throubles?'"

"Oi do. Disease? 'Tis a poor word. They're nothin' short of a malady. Let a woman git a hould of a poor, weak man and what chance has he? None. Woman is a deadly malady, and whin a man is seized by it he loses his freedom of speech, his power to think clearly; often he goes entire mad."

Maggie swept the dishes onto her tray with a clatter and stamped her foot angrily; her blue eyes snapped. "Well, Oi'm thinkin', Mr. Michael McCree, that if wimmin are a malady, 'tis a throuble ye'll nivver be bothered with."

"And Oi'll tell ye, Miss Maggie O'Rourke, that 'tis not Michael McCree that's worryin' over the same at all. Ye see"—Michael leaned forward, grasped the edge of the table tensely and glared at Maggie, a tragic expression upon his face—"ye see, Oi'm a woman-hater!"

"A 'woman-hater' are ye?" Maggie laughed. "Well, 'tis the truth Oi'm speakin' whin Oi say ye'd make a man-hater out of any woman with a drop o' red blood in her veins. 'Tis not a man ye are—a real fightin', red-blooded man. Ye're a pink-blooded sham of a man—and a brayin' donkey to boot." After a mock courtesy Maggie swept from the room, her pretty head held high.

For a moment Michael stared after her, manifestly annoyed.

"Queer, queer! As a philosopher, Oi'd say the girl's possessed; as a man, Oi'd say she's—dumned impertinent!"

When Michael had been at the camp a month, the feud between himself and Maggie was well along. When Maggie wished to draw him into conversation, or more properly controversy, Michael maintained a severe silence; when Michael endeavored to talk with Maggie, she promptly became as uncommunicative as a frozen clam. During those weeks, and many which followed, the boarders, other than Michael, fared as they had never fared before. Maggie saw to their every wish and showered them with little attentions calculated to breed a poignant jealousy in Michael. However, she studied him with covert glances; and Michael, though never suspecting himself of any incipient sentiments unworthy a philosopher and an avowed woman-hater, glanced toward the blue-eyed Maggie whenever he felt that his glances were not likely to be detected.

During the first two or three weeks of Michael's stay, the men looked upon him as a rollicking, merry-natured fellow, a good companion, with a ready retort and sally, and with an apt tale upon the tip of his tongue. His helper swore by him—and at those who did not.

But, even philosophers have their vulnerable spot, and after the feud between himself and Maggie had endured for four weeks, Michael developed an unwonted irritability.

"Git out o' my way! Ye're a hindrance instid of a help!" he'd shout at his assistant, proceeding to hammer his saws and ply his gauges with strange vehemence. "So 'tis a 'pink-blooded sham of a man,' she called ye, Michael McCree," he would mumble to himself. "'Tis beneath yer dignity but, maybe, 'twould be well to show the woman she's color-blind."

Philosophers who are so engaged with others in general, can hardly be expected to understand themselves in particular, so the transition in Michael was not apparent to that individual. He merely knew that he was thinking a deal upon a mere woman's gibes and taunts, and that he'd show that woman (who, if the entire truth be said, was not uncomely) that there was a "bit o' man" in him after all.

"And will ye have some squash, Mr. Michael McCree?"

Michael sat alone at the supper table; Maggie stood near by.

"Oi will, if ye think 'twould do ye no harm to put it within my reach."

"Not at all, at all! Though they do say woman-haters are not the safest of folk."

Michael glowered at her. "Oi'm thinkin' yer food would be better, Miss Maggie O'Rourke, if yer talk were less."

"And Oi'm thinkin', Mr. Michael McCree, that 'tis the sauce o' me talk that ye're payin' for and that makes yer food go down—only ye wont admit it."

"Yer talk? May the Lord preserve us—and keep us sane!"

"'Tis too late, ye are, in askin' that last."

Michael scowled at her but remained silent.

"And how moight ye be loikin' yer work by now?"

"Oi loike it foine, if ye're detarmined to talk to me, and the nearer Oi am to me saws and files, alone with 'em, the happier man am I."

"If signs be thrue," Maggie retorted, observing her irate diner with a look of satisfaction, "if signs be thrue, some o' the steel from thim has got into yer heart."

Michael grunted.

As the days passed, Michael's peace of mind went with them. At night he lay in his bed and read under the light of an oil lamp until an unwholesome hour, and then slept poorly. More than once he arose, dressed and walked about the deserted lumber yard and mill-pond in the night. He ate less, became more irascible, sedulously avoided those between whom and himself there had sprung up a certain comradeship.

"So 'tis a 'pink-blooded sham of a man' she thinks ye, Michael McCree. 'Pink-blooded!'" he would murmur as he strode about alone. "Faith! 'Tis a fool she is, but—it moight be well to show her her folly. 'Tis the duty of philosophers to show people their folly."

As the feud progressed, Michael might have been observed eating not an occasional but a great many meals alone. For some reason he avoided the dining-room until such time as all others were leaving. He manoeuvred with splendid adroitness, timing his arrival at the steaming board with admirable finesse. He usually arrived when the others were beginning on their pie. Such an arrangement would leave him alone with Maggie a considerable time. None attributed to Maggie a slowness of perception, and Michael's strategems were promptly detected and recorded in her mind. As for Michael, that worthy did not notice that however late he might be at his meals, they were brought in delectably hot and that he was served with eggs at a great many meals when the others were given none.

"Oi'm thinkin' ye're gettin' most irregular at yer meals, Mr. McCree," Maggie casually remarked one day.

Michael was silent.

"Are ye workin' hard at yer philosophy trade?"

Michael merely bit viciously into a large and unresisting biscuit.

Maggie's head was held archly; her lips twitched. "Excuse, me, Mr. McCree, but are ye—are ye hatin' of the wimmin as much as ever?"

Michael wheeled upon her, his elbows upon the table, and his knife and fork held aloft. "'Tis very thankful Oi'd be to ye, Miss Maggie O'Rourke, if ye'd let a hungry man eat his food in peace."

"Certainly, Oi will that. Would ye choose a little more o' the potatoes? Wait! Oi'll get ye some hot ones."

There was something in her tone and in the action that mollified, willy nilly, Michael's resentment. "Wimmin are useful things after all," he remarked to himself as Maggie tripped from the room. "And some of them," he added, as he watched through the door her trim little figure bending over the stove, "are not unpleasing to a hale man's eye."

"Now! That'll fix ye. They're fresh from the fire."

"Thank ye!" Michael strove to speak the words with a growl.

"Oi see the buttons of yer coat are holding."

Michael glanced up at her inquiringly. "The buttons of me coat?"

"Shure Oi was cleanin' up yer room and as Oi went to hang up yer coat Oi

saw two buttons were gone from it and another well on its way. So Oi didn't think ye'd moind if Oi fixed them for ye. They seem to be holdin' all right." She leaned over Michael and pulled gently at the buttons; a wisp of her hair brushed his cheek. A strange sensation came over him, and his cheeks grew ruddier.

"Did—did ye do that for—me?" he asked.

"Oi did. Have ye looked at yer socks? They were in a shameful condition."

"Me socks? Did ye sew buttons on thim, too?"

"Nah! Nivver a button, but many a stitch Oi took in thim, bein' as they were little more than holes."

Michael stared at her incredulously. "Oi—Oi thank ye. Are—are ye shure the buttons are on tight?" he held out his coat invitingly. Michael rather liked having her test the buttons upon it.

"Oh, yes! They'll stay there after the coat is gone." Maggie did not offer to try them again but, taking up a tray of dishes, stepped merrily from the room.

Michael was studying her as she returned. He sat in silence as she worked, and listened with a sensation foreign to him as she hummed an old Celtic air. When she had finished she turned to him, her little fists planted upon her hips, a twinkle of sweet deviltry in her eye. "Now, Mr. McCree, Oi am through, and if ye'll promise to be very quiet—for ye're a very talkative man—ye may sit here while I put young Tim to sleep."

"Oi'm thinkin' Oi'd better be on me way," he answered as Maggie went from the room.

When she returned with little Tim, her sister's child, she did not seem surprised to find Michael still there. He straightened up suddenly.

"Oi must have fallen asleep." He wiped his eyes to make good the pretense; Maggie smiled knowingly.

"Now 'tis still he must be, musn't he, Tim-child?"

Maggie sat in an old rocking-chair, took Tim upon her lap and began her nightly task. Michael looked on, with that same queer sensation stealing over him. He heard her softly crooning an old lullaby; he watched little Tim close his eyes, his head pressed upon Maggie's breast; he saw Tim's chubby little hands seek hers as she bent and kissed the child. Nothing was lost to Michael McCree, philosopher, saw-filer and woman-hater—that is, nothing was lost to him except his old self.

After a while Maggie pressed a warning finger upon her lips (Michael noticed they were very red), and noiselessly carried Tim from the room. In a trice she returned and straightened out her skirt with the palms of her hands, a way that was eloquent to Michael. He remembered having seen some home-woman, probably his mother, do it in the same way many years before, and it impressed him as the most feminine thing he had ever seen.

"Now he's asleep," Maggie said. "Tell me, Mr. McCree, can ye put children to sleep with philosophy?"

"Shure ye can. Ye can put anyone to sleep with it. Oi've read two books on it meself and neither ever failed to put me to sleep. But—but—Oi've heard that singin' to 'em is much the better way. It seems they sleep better for the singin', while philosophy gives 'em bad dreams."

Suddenly Michael's expression changed to one of belligerency; he leaned forward and peered into Maggie's eyes.

"Tell me!" he commanded abruptly. "Who is the strongest man in this camp?"

"The strongest man? Well—Bill Simms, Oi'm thinkin'."

"And who's the meanest?" he demanded.

"Bill Simms, without a doubt. They do say he's used up eight pair o' shoes and ivery saplin' within a mile, whippin' his wife and childer."

"And who's the best fighter, o' thim all?" the man persisted.

"Unless they've praised him unduly, 'tis none other than Bill Simms."

Michael rose suddenly from his chair and thrust his hat far down upon his head. "'Tis settled!"

"Faith! and where moight ye be goin'?"

"Well ye may ask! 'Tis a 'pink-blooded sham' ye called me! A 'pink-

blooded' sham—me, Michael McCree! Oi'll show ye the tinge o' me blood!"

"Are ye sheer daft? Have ye lost yer wits?"

"Oi've lost no wits, but Oi've found me proof." Shaking his fist before him, he darted through the door.

In an hour he was back and found Maggie displaying none of that uneasiness and distraction which she had manifested throughout his absence. His coat was gone; his shirt torn to shreds; and his hat was scarce more than a crown—but it was a crown of victory.

"And now will ye look? Does that look pink or red to ye?" he asked angrily, holding out a bleeding hand.

Maggie tore a strip from her apron and scurried away, returning shortly with a bowl of warm water. "Poor man! Are ye hurt?"

"Oi am not! Oi am healed!"

She took the wounded hand in her own and bathed it tenderly.

"Where is Bill Simms?"

"Ivery one knows but him; he'll come to soon."

"Did ye hurt him?"

"He didn't thank me for what Oi did."

"Did—did ye—whip him?"

"Oi did. And at siven in the mornin' Oi'm goin' to do as much for the Gineral Manager—unless he oversleeps—an' then Oi'll wait till he wakes up to do it."

"Ye musn't, ye musn't! Don't talk that way, Mr. McCree."

"An' 'tis 'pink-blooded' ye think Oi am? Oi'll show ye, Miss Maggie O'Rourke!"

Maggie was silent a long while—until, in fact, she had finished binding the wounded member. "Now sit ye down! Maybe a dram would do ye no harm." A softness had stolen into her voice but the old twinkle was still in her eye. "Why—why didn't ye whip him by philosophy, Mr. McCree?" she asked, leaning over him.

For a moment Michael glowered; then, very slowly, a smile stole over his countenance. "Philosophy's a powerful thing," he said loyally, "but there are times whin a man's good fists work better."

Maggie sat before him, her chin resting upon her hands.

"An' what moight ye be thinkin' of?" Michael asked very softly.

"Oi'm thinkin' that 'tis very sorry Oi am for callin' yer blood pink."

Michael said nothing that could be heard, for though one's heart may beat furiously it speaks but inaudibly.

"Oi'm very sorry!" She looked up into his eyes.

For a moment Michael looked into hers; and then, very slowly, he held out his hands and took both of hers in them.

"There—there may be ither buttons comin' loose some day," he said very low. Maggie was silent.

"Ye saw the blood in me veins change, but—there's anither change taken place that ye do not know of—an' ye're the cause of it."

"An' what is that?" Maggie asked, in little more than a whisper.

"He would lie, would the man, who called me woman-hater now."

For a moment longer Maggie looked into his eager eyes; then she drew back and strove to free her hands.

"Will—will ye have a dram, Mr. McCree?" she asked weakly.

He leaned toward her, so close that he felt her breath upon his lips. "'Tis not a dram Oi want! 'Tis a girl called Maggie O'Rourke—and O'm thinkin' 'twould sound better if they called her Maggie McCree!"

"Oi—Oi moight not make a good wife to a philosopher." The twinkle returned stubbornly to her eyes.

"'Tis not a philosopher who wants ye—ye've killed the beggar long since. 'Tis a saw-filer who's hungerin' for ye."

Maggie looked up into his face. "Oi—Oi loike—the name—McCree!" she murmured, as Michael drew her to him.

The silence, which had endured for nearly a half-hour, was broken by Maggie. "What moight ye be thinkin' of?" she asked.

"Oi was just thinkin'," Michael replied pensively, "that if those Lilliputians who fought and tied the giant had only been wimmen, they'd have needed no ropes on the job."

The Winning of Annie Mullay

A COMEDY OF COURTSHIP

By JOHN BARTON OXFORD

IN THE diminutive front hall of the Mullay's suburban cottage, Pinky Teagle smoothed the nap of his hat while he glared more or less balefully at Noodles Foley, whom portly Mother Mullay had just admitted from the frosty darkness without.

Mr. Teagle was merely waiting for Mother Mullay to pass beyond earshot before he voiced himself fully and freely in the matter of what he considered Mr. Foley's butting in; and no sooner had the door leading to the kitchen beyond closed behind her than Teagle was at this self-appointed task.

"You've an elegant crust," was his polite way of opening his little dissertation.

"Have I so?" was Mr. Foley's rather unpleasant response. "That may be true, Pinky, me bold scout, but I'd rather hear it from a bit better authority before I swallyed it for the truth."

"An elegant crust is what I said you had, and an elegant crust is what you've got, to come buttin' in like you've done here to-night, Noodles," said Teagle darkly, at the same time thrusting out his lower jaw in suggestive aggression. "I'll be dead plain wit' yer: You're dee tropp; you're not wanted; so chase yerself. I've a date wit' Annie to go skatin' up to the Park pond. A very pleasant evenin' to yer somewhere else, *Mister* Foley!"

Foley glared savagely at the speaker. It was plain that at that moment the thing most desired by him was the complete and utter annihilation of the young gentleman who smoothed his hat in such maddeningly superior fashion.

"Chase myself nothin'!" said Foley with candor more direct than elegant. "I've a date wit' her myself to go skatin' on the same Park pond you mention. I've no monopoly on crust, it would seem. A good sized wad of it has fallen to yourself."

"Well, of all the nerve," began Teagle, his voice shaking with anger, when he was interrupted by a swish of skirts and a girl's light laughter from the stairs.

"Oh, boys, boys," said Annie, as she came down the stairs, more bewitching than ever in the sauciest little fur toque imaginable, "you mustn't quarrel like that. It's all my fault. I made the date to go with each of you to-night. I meant to make it to-night with you, Noodles, and to-morrow night with you, Pinky, but somehow I managed to tell you both it was to-night I'd go; and since I have, the only thing to do is for all of us to go together, isn't it?"

It was painfully apparent that neither Foley nor Teagle coincided with this view of the matter; it was also plain from the way they stood glowering at each other, that each thought the other should take himself out of the way; but since neither of them seemed inclined to take the initiative in this line, Annie with another rippling laugh and a gay little, "Oh, come on, you two sticks," opened the front door and stepped out into the winter night, all a-glimmer with the snow crystals on the ground and the trees.

With all the diplomacy the occasion required, she gave Foley one of her skates to carry and Teagle the other; then between them, with Foley grip-

ping her left arm and Teagle her right, she walked down the little path and up the snow-clad street, turning now to one, and now to the other with some gay bit of banter.

Annie Mullay's admirers had narrowed down to these two, and which of them had the preference neither Annie herself nor either of the two young men was sure, although each bolstered up a none too certain optimism in the matter with self-assurances, fostered by some bit of confidence Annie had given, that he was the favored one.

And as they moved up the street, outwardly the gayest of little parties, each of the two young men was thinking precisely the same thoughts; that were the other man out of the running, the now troubled atmosphere would take on a most amazing serenity.

Annie too, despite all her bantering words, as she walked along between them, was pondering on the situation. Which was it? Was Pinky the man she wanted, or was it Noodles? It was a question which had harassed her for many weeks now, and which seemed no nearer solution as the days went by, for the virtues and the foibles of Pinky and Noodles were so evenly matched that it would have taken a far older and wiser head than Annie's to have fixed a choice, and even then the older and wiser head would have had to go some.

It was at that moment, like a flash of inspiration, there came to Annie a little affair of a few evenings since, when she was coming home from the office where she worked, an affair which had meant nothing at all at the time, but which, properly magnified, might make an excellent test of the two men beside her. So brilliant did the plan seem at the moment, so anxious was she to see just how each of the two men would act, that she was rattling off the little episode almost as soon as she had thought of it.

"Who'd you say the man was?" Noodles had inquired at the beginning of her recital.

"Butch Cahill," said she. "He lives out here, you know. We'll pass his house in a moment. You've heard of him, aint you?"

In truth, Noodles had heard of Butch Cahill. Any man who at all followed affairs of the squared ring had heard of him; for Butch Cahill had an enviable record in his batttles up to date.

"You know him too, don't you, Pinky?" she inquired, turning to the other man.

"Surest thing yer know," said Pinky. "Belongs to the St. Michael's guild that I do."

"Well, he followed me that night and insisted on going home with me from the corner where I left the car."

This was perfectly true, although there had been no very great necessity for any very strenuous insistence on Cahill's part.

"Yes, he insisted on comin' home with me, and when we got to the gate—it was dark, you know."

She paused.

"Sure. Go on. What did he do?" asked Foley in a strangely quiet voice.

"I—I was a bit afraid of him,"—this had no truth in it; the man that Annie Mullay feared was yet unborn—"and so I held out my hand to him, and I says, 'Thank you for seein' me home, Mr. Cahill. Good night!' and I made as if to go up the path to the house, but he kept hold of my hand and sort of drew me to him.

" 'This is no way to say good-night,' says he. 'I know a lots better one.' And he pulled me yet closer and—and—"

"Well?" said Teagle shortly.

"And—" said Annie haltingly again, but got no farther.

"Did he kiss you?" Foley demanded.

"He tried to," Annie admitted faintly. She neglected to say that her own manner towards him had invited it all.

"The fresh lobster!" burst out Foley hotly. "I'll fix him the next time I lay eyes on him."

Teagle was quiet for a moment. Then, "Say the word, Annie, and I'll give him all that's comin' to him for that," he declared valiantly.

"I don't want too much fuss made about it," she said. "At the same time I'd like him to know I got protectors, even if they aint so big nor got such ring records as he has. This is the very house where he lives," she ended suddenly, waving an arm at a trim cottage they were passing.

"If he was home, I'd go in there now and do a few things to him," Mr. Teagle announced flatly. "But he aint. I seen him down to the guild room just before I come up this evenin'."

Now this statement seemed to Mr. Foley at that moment the height of asinine folly. Had he been in Pinky Teagle's shoes, he reflected, and known that Butch Cahill was somewhere else, he would have rushed madly to the door, stridently demanded that Mr. Cahill come forth, and so taken to himself the glory of a seemingly rash haste, which in reality was nothing of the sort.

It was a burning shame to waste such an opportunity, thought he; had he been possessed of Pinky Teagle's knowledge of the redoubtable Mr. Cahill's movements, he could have covered himself with glory at no personal risk.

Now Foley had no way of knowing that Teagle had not been near the guild room that evening, nor could he surmise that Pinky in his heart was quite sure that Mr. Cahill was at home, since, when Pinky had passed the house on his way to Annie Mullay's that evening, he had seen Butch Cahill's big frame sprawled in one of the easy chairs in the lighted parlor. The curtains, which had been up then, were drawn down now.

Neither could Foley realize that the astute Pinky's mind was working in somewhat the following fashion: "Gee, if I could only make Foley think he was out and egg him on to makin' a grandstand play and rushin' up to the door and demandin' to see Cahill because he thinks Cahill aint there, when all the time he is. Gee! Wouldn't there be somethin' doin'—what? And if Foley got a blamed good poundin' right here in front of her, it wouldn't hurt my chances none, for Annie has got spirit and she aint forgivin' no one that starts a fuss and gets the worst of it, even if it is for her sake."

The three had paused before the house. The air seemed heavy with impending happenings.

"Maybe he's home by this time," said Foley. "I've a blamed good mind to go up there and ring the bell and find out. I aint passin' up no such liberties with you, Annie."

"Aw, he aint home yet," said Teagle wearily, although his pulses quickened and with difficulty he restrained a whoop of joy at the immediate prospects. "He never gits home from the guild till eleven or so."

Mentally Mr. Foley decided to return from the park by some route which would not lead them past Cahill's door. Mr. Cahill would be home then. But for the present he could make his little play in safety, and that it would count with Annie in his favor he had not the least doubt.

"I'm goin' to see, anyway," he announced.

Teagle turned away his eyes that the great, glad light in them might not betray him. Annie clutched Foley's arm.

"Oh, I wouldn't. He's bigger'n you and if he should be there—" she began.

"That's just what I'm hopin' for—that he is there," said the valiant Foley, and gently freeing himself from her restraining fingers, he made his way up the path to the little porch and gave the bell a vigorous tug.

A gray-haired woman opened the door. She blinked uncertainly at Foley standing there, his shoulders squared, his narrow chest distended to its fullest capacity. Truly he was an heroic figure in the winter night.

"Good evenin', sir," said the woman. "What can I do for you?"

"You can have the goodness to inform me," said Foley grandly, "if there's a party lives here I want to get my hands on—a fresh guy that makes it his business to force his company upon ladies that don't always want the same, that insists on seein' 'em home and when he gets there puts his arm around 'em and tries to kiss 'em. I refer, ma'am, to an exceedingly forward young lobster named Butch Cahill."

At the gate Annie was listening with glowing eyes; beside her Pinky Teagle's shoulders were shaking immoderately; he had clapped a hand over his mouth to stifle his uncontrollable laughter.

The woman at the door had made no reply to Foley's grandiloquent inquiry; nor indeed was there any need for her to do so; for with the final words there came from the parlor beyond a sound that was half howl, half roar. A chair

overturned loudly as some one sprang from it; and Foley, dazed, stunned, almost fainting in his terror, saw Butch Cahill himself leap wrathfully into the hall.

It is highly probable that had Foley's shaking legs been in any condition to carry it out, the retreat Mr. Teagle had so gleefully predicted to himself would then and there have taken place. The truth of the matter is that Foley stood his ground from no wonderful valor on his own part, but solely from the reason that the aforementioned legs seemed momentarily paralyzed. Moreover, Mr. Foley's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth; his eyes seemed bulging from their sockets; and he made a series of strange, throaty sounds, which could he have given them the voice he vainly sought, would have been whole-hearted howls of genuine and lusty fright.

As it was, he stood there in terror-stricken helplessness until Cahill's great paw descended upon his collar and a series of mighty shakes bade fair to roll Foley's flopping head from his shoulders.

"Come round here throwin' out yer insults, will yer?" bellowed Cahill. "Take that and that and that!"

The sounds which followed told plainly that Foley's cheeks were being smacked by no gentle palm.

At the gate Annie Mullay vented a half-smothered scream. Teagle caught her by the arm.

"Come away!" he urged, at loss to understand why Foley had stayed even that long. "Yer don't want to see nothin' like what this is goin' to be. Butch'll just about kill him before he's done with him."

But the girl shook his hand from her arm. "No!" she cried. "No! Stop 'em! Stop 'em, can't yer? Oh! *Oh!*"

For Foley's fear had suddenly left him with the pain of those stinging smacks upon his cheek. In its place had come a great, unthinking, unreasoning rage. His sole coherent thought was a lust for the blood of the man who had smitten him, and whether or not he died during his attempt to get that blood was all one to Foley at that moment. So the dervishes rush blindly upon the rifles of civilization; so the shrinking cowards are carried away in battle, once they are caught in the maelstrom of hand-to-hand fighting.

With a yell of defiance, Foley struck back. He struck blindly but with telling effect, in that the other man was not looking for any resistance. Furthermore, Foley, in a veritable Berserker rage leaped upon the shoulders of his adversary, and together they rolled off the porch into the snow.

Cahill was a clever man with his fists; but Cahill was used to some small convention of ruling in the game. A man who fought with his fists, his heels and his teeth, who bit and clawed and gouged, was new to Cahill's experience. Moreover, never before had Cahill been up against a man so utterly reckless of punishment as was Foley in those strenuous moments.

Ere long there was a howl from Cahill as Foley dug viciously at an eye; and a moment later, Cahill breathing hard, manged to disentangle himself from Foley's gouging clutches. Up the steps to the house he ran, banged the door shut behind him, locked it and held it fast against the assaults of the raging Foley on the other side, who beat stridently upon that closed door, demanding that Cahill come forth and be yet further sacrificed.

Some ten minutes later, Foley, the most surprised man on this planet now that he had calmed down sufficiently for coherent thought, walked slowly up the street with Annie Mullay.

"But Noodles, dearie," she protested, not without a certain hint of pride in her tones, "your eye is all black. Come back to the house and leave me put a piece of raw steak on it to take down the swelling."

"'Tis nothing," said he loftily, nothing at all—the merest bit of a bump. We'll go up to the park and have our skate."

Two streets away, his head bent, one of Annie Mullay's skates still clutched fast in his hand, Pinky Teagle wandered along like a man in a dream, the while he muttered thickly to himself: "Now who'd ever've doped it out like that? Who in thunder could 've?"

The Human Factor

By

WILLARD E. HAWKINS

THE game of cards came to a close in a laughing exchange of comment, and the big, jolly-faced traveling man who had been the life of the Pullman-car party, jumped up.

"Sorry, fellows," he announced, "but I get off in twenty minutes, so it wouldn't be worth my while to start another game. Wish I was going on."

"Same here," rejoined the drug salesman, shuffling the cards. His eyes, searching up and down the aisle, fell on a well-groomed young man who had been watching the party with quiet amusement. Pausing for a flicker of appraisal, the drug salesman held up the deck of cards inquiringly.

The young man leaned forward, raising his voice just enough to carry the required distance. "Wish I could join you, but I'm only going as far as Hollendale."

A moment later the drug salesman succeeded in filling the vacancy and the game went on as before. The jolly-faced traveling man dragged his suit case from under a seat and stood beaming down on the last speaker.

"Getting off at Hollendale, are you?" he inquired. "Well, that's my stop, too. What's your line?"

Making room for the big fellow, the young man answered: "I'm with the Longacre Paving Company. Gerard is my name—John Gerard."

"You don't say! Well, you must be a competitor of mine. I'm H. Blumington Ross, of the Hartwell-Fink Municipal Paving and Construction Company. I guess we're both after one piece of venison."

"The Hollendale paving contract?"

"Same thing. Must be a new man with the Longacre people, aren't you?"

"This is my first experience on the road," smiled Gerard. "I've been in their office several years."

Ross was regarding him with interest. Suddenly he broke into a laugh. "Well, I think we'll be the only bidders on the field. I hope the sharpest man lands the contract."

"You are broader minded than I," was the response. "I can't help hoping to get it myself, because this is my try-out and I want to make good."

Ross laughed again. "Of course, I intend to go after the contract in good earnest; but I'll be a good fellow and give you some pointers. The minute we get off the train, we're rivals—until that time, you're welcome to the benefits of my experience."

"Thank you."

"There's one thing about my methods," said Ross, evidently with the intent of proving the good faith of his offer by revealing some of his secrets, "I never go to figure on a job without trying to size up the situation from a human standpoint. I figure the price first; then I turn my attention to

the question of how much dare I ask for it. Do you get my meaning?"

"Presumably. How do you go about it?"

"I make friends right and left—you never can tell who may be able to furnish a tip—and I keep my eyes open generally. Now, here is a case in point: Three months ago I went to figure on a grading job for an Idaho townsite company. Found myself pitted against a sharp-nosed little runt from the Caldwell company of Chicago. Never'd heard of the firm, but I saw he was out for business, so I got down and squeezed the life out of my figures. We were short of work and I wanted it, if only to keep our men busy. Well, just as I was about to hand in my estimate, an under secretary that I'd been chumming with piped me off that the Caldwell company was a bluff—didn't exist. The sharp-nosed fellow was one of the townsite company's employees. They weren't able to get anyone to come out and bid against me, so they rang him in to hold down my estimate."

"What did you do?"

"Do! I kept the information to myself and raised my figures from $13,000 to $19,000. Socked it on all the heavier to make up for the low-down trick they tried to play me."

Both men rose as the train drew into the station. Gerard laid his overcoat carefully over his arm and, carrying his suit case, followed down the aisle behind Ross. The latter added a few words over his shoulder.

"That's what I mean by the human factor. Don't think you've done it all when you simply figure on the job. Keep your eyes open for things that affect the situation. Well, from now on," he finished, good humoredly, "we're enemies. I give you fair warning, I'm here to get the best of you and I'll take every advantage possible."

Hollendale was a thriving town of about twenty thousand. It had some of the features of a metropolis and aspired to still more; hence the paving contract which was to be let. As the hotel 'bus splashed through the quagmire of the main street, it was evident to the two contracting estimators that they had arrived on no mistaken mission.

Gerard registered unostentatiously and followed the bell-boy who darted off with his suit case. The last thing he saw in the lobby, as the elevator whisked him aloft, was his competitor, laughing over the register and making friends with the clerk. When he came down, Ross was still in the lobby, and had attracted a small crowd of loungers, who were eagerly listening to his stories. Gerard smiled and shook his head negatively when his new friend and rival beckoned him to join the circle. He had a little correspondence to get off, and strolled into the writing room, where he had noticed a stenographer's sign.

He took a seat beside the desk of the remarkably pretty girl to whom the sign evidently referred, and dictated a few short letters. As he was leaving, he met Ross. The big fellow grasped him by the shoulder and whispered:

"You darned reprobate, how did you get next so soon? Here, I've wasted twenty whole minutes! If anybody inquires for me, after this, I'm engaged —occupied—busy."

Although Gerard laughed, he was slightly nettled by the other's assumption that he was in the room for other than business reasons. There happened to be some one at home in whose behalf Gerard was inclined to be sensitively jealous.

The date set for the opening of bids by the city council was five days away, which allowed plenty of time for going over and measuring the ground and drawing up an estimate. Gerard worked perhaps harder than was necessary, for this contract meant more to him than its face value. He went over and over his figures, assuring himself that every detail was as low as consistent with a fair opportunity for his firm to come out ahead on the work. His instructions had been: "Get the contract. Things are slack and we need it, even if you have to cut away our margin." Judging from the manner of Ross' speech, his firm was in much the same position.

The contract would evidently go to

him who could figure the closer, and Gerard did not feel at all safe, even though he had figured it down to a starvation price that would take away half the zest of winning it. The Hartwell-Fink Company had some patent machinery that he believed would enable them to handle rock on a more economical basis than his own firm. If Ross figured the other points as closely as he himself, this one detail would land the other people the contract.

How his competitor found time for preparing an estimate was somewhat of a mystery to Gerard—he appeared so busy following out his friend-making policy. When he was not in the bar entertaining members of the city council, he was out driving with Walt Burlow, the mayor, or "jollying" with traveling men in the hotel lobby. And when he was doing none of these things, he was acting as an entertainment committee of one for Miss Helen Cleveland, the unnecessarily attractive stenographer.

This latter occupation was, in fact, rapidly encroaching on the time devoted to all the others. The letters which Ross dictated to his firm were pages in length. When he ran out of business matters, he dictated personal letters to every relative and acquaintance that might or might not have belonged to him. On the second evening after his arrival he took Miss Cleveland to the opera house. On the night following, he called at her home, and on the fourth night he acted as her escort to the "Jolly Bachelors'" ball. Miss Cleveland appeared unsophisticated enough to be flattered by his headlong attentions, and she was not so fastidious as to object because of possible comments.

As the matter was no concern of his, Gerard was not conscious either of approval or disapproval, except that he came near to being annoyed at times when he wanted a stenographer's services and found himself deprived of them by the Ross monopoly.

He could not bring himself to think that it was necessary to emulate the example of being hail fellow with every idle person in town. The contract was to be let strictly to the lowest bidder, and he made up his mind that the council was not composed of men who would be "jollied" into anything crooked. He contented himself, therefore, with being his own quiet, pleasant, and tolerant self.

The morning before the day of opening the bids, Gerard felt that he had figured the work down to the finest point possible, and that he might as well prepare his formal estimate. He entered the writing room, but paused in the doorway on seeing Miss Cleveland engaged in conversation with Ross. Half an hour later, Ross was lazily dictating a letter. Late in the afternoon, Gerard found the girl at liberty.

"Address this," he dictated, "to 'the Honorable Mayor and City Council of Hollendale: Estimate for the paving of Fourth street between High and Ogden streets, and one block on Hester street, according to the specifications hereto attached: We agree to complete the above mentioned work for the sum of—'"

Miss Cleveland glanced up inquiringly; there was a curious, over-anxious look on her features.

"Leave a blank for the amount," instructed Gerard. "Add this line: 'We guarantee to finish the paving within the specified time after receiving your order, and the details of the contract will be carried out in a thoroughly workmanlike manner.' That's all. End it: 'Yours truly, The Longacre Paving Company.'"

Thoughtfully, Gerard took the typewritten letter and sat down at one of the tables. He produced several sheets of paper covered with figures from his inner coat pocket, and carefully went over the totals. He dipped a pen in the inkstand, and hesitated. That curious, over-anxious look on the stenographer's face perplexed him. He remained in a brown study for a few moments; then his face lighted; he would meet guile with guile. Reaching for the dilapidated blotter, he held it up to view.

"Pretty well used up," he remarked with a smile.

Miss Cleveland, who had been regarding him inquisitively as she brushed the keys of her machine, hastily thrust her hand into a drawer.

"Here's a clean one," she said eagerly.

"Thanks," said Gerard. He again dipped the pen in ink, filled in the blank which had been left in his estimate with the amount, $31,000, writing with heavy pressure and using plenty of ink; then he blotted the figures in his methodical manner, and tossed the blotter carelessly aside. As he strolled out of the writing room, he felt the curious eyes of the stenographer following him.

Had Gerard cared to spy upon the girl, he might have observed Miss Cleveland a few moments later engaged in a peculiar occupation. She was peering intently into a mirror. Nothing unnatural in this, perhaps, considering the gratifying story the mirror inevitably told her. On this occasion, however, she was not looking at her own features, but at the reflection of a blotter, which she held slightly tilted between her eyes and the glass.

But canny Gerard did not appear interested in Miss Cleveland's movements. He had nothing in particular to do for the rest of the day, and so he lounged in the lobby until supper, and afterward went out for a constitutional.

When the court house clock proclaimed the hour of eight, he gravitated toward the opera house and stood on the curb, watching the people arrive for the performance. He remained at his point of observation until he saw a laughing couple alight from a hired automobile and enter the garishly illuminated doorway. They were among the very few who had arrived by any other conveyance than that provided by nature.

The girl was Miss Cleveland, and her escort was H. Blumington Ross. They appeared eminently satisfied with themselves and each other.

There was only one girl in the world whom Gerard would have enjoyed taking to the entertainment, and not being within calling distance of this divinity, and having no desire to occupy a lonely seat at the only show afforded by the town, he wandered through the streets for a couple of hours and then returned to the hotel, where he sat down to a newspaper in the lobby.

A vanguard of traveling men who burst through the entrance and dived hilariously into the bar were interpreted by Gerard as indicating that the theatre was out. Others began to drift in, and finally Ross entered, accompanied by Miss Cleveland, evidently for the purpose of having a little supper before he took her home. Ross was beaming. The girl was dressed like a *débutante,* and with her flushed cheeks and eager, excited eyes she looked radiantly pretty. Gerard dropped his newspaper, yawned, and signaled for the elevator.

No great formalities were observed by the council in awarding the paving contract, as there were only two bidders. Ross and Gerard waited in the ante-room, while a quorum of the city fathers deliberated within. Both men were busily occupied in endeavoring to appear unconcerned.

"Well, this decides our fate," laughed Ross. "To tell the truth, though, I'm not much afraid."

"No?"

"Not in the least. You see, I happen to know I've got a little the edge on you. It wont do any harm to say this, now that the bids are in. First place, my folks have got some machinery that allows me to figure the work closer than you dare to—very much closer. Second place—well, I may be mistaken, but I think I had another advantage."

"Enjoy the show last night?" inquired Gerard, to change the subject.

"Oh, pretty good for a Rube town. Did you see the peach I had with me?"

"Miss Cleveland? Yes. Five nights straight is a pretty good record for a stranger."

Ross laughed hugely. "They can't resist me," he confided, half in burlesque. "But say, this girl is the real goods. She's got even me going. If I was a marrying man—"

He paused as if startled by the idea. "Well, anyway, she's a good comrade. She'll help her husband, whoever he is, in a business way, too. I'm glad I discovered her."

The door of the council chamber was opened, and the clerk appeared.

"They're ready to give out the award," he observed.

The two estimates were spread out on the table. While the members of the city council looked on indifferently, the mayor announced:

"The paving contract was to be let to the lowest bidder. The lowest figure which has been presented to us is $29,575, the other, and higher, being $30,700. The contract is therefore awarded to the Longacre Paving Company for $29,575."

Ross gasped. "How the—! Let me see those figures, will you?"

Gerard strolled out. He had no fear that the decision would be altered. He could not keep down a feeling of triumph, for he had obtained the contract against a strong competitor, and at a figure that insured a good big profit. He hastened to the hotel writing room to notify his firm.

"Can you take a letter for me, Miss Cleveland," he inquired genially.

"I should think so."

"'Mr. Sam Joslyn, Manager The Longacre Paving Company,'" he commenced: "'Dear Sir: I have the honor to report that I have secured the Hollendale paving contract on very favorable terms, as you will see by the acompanying figures. My bid was $29,575. There was only one competitor in the field, Mr. Ross, of the Hartwell-Fink Company, and I counted him rather dangerous. In fact, I believe he would have bid in the neighborhood of $25,000, if he had not in some manner made up his mind that I was going to bid considerably over $30,000. One of his methods is—'"

Miss Cleveland had stopped writing and was staring at him with an expression closely resembling horror.

"Am I going too fast for you?" asked Gerard blandly.

"No, no! Not at all," she exclaimed in confusion.

He repeated his last sentence for her benefit and went on: "'One of his methods is to take advantage of what he calls the human factor. I tried it in this case and am very much pleased with the effect. Yours truly—"

As he left her, Miss Cleveland commenced hastily donning her hat.

When H. Blumington Ross arrived a few moments later, he rushed first into the writing room and then to the clerk's desk.

"Where's that — that — stenographer?" he demanded, with a total loss of the good nature which had made him popular on his arrival.

"Miss Cleveland?" said the clerk. "Why, she just went home with a headache. Perhaps you can find a stenographer up in the Bank building, if you—"

But the bar-room door banged shut on the rest of the sentence.

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Willie Bill was a great boy—as you may have gathered from the foregoing quotation. Next month we are going to print the first of his "Adventures." Don't fail to look for "The Cat Party" in the October BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE.

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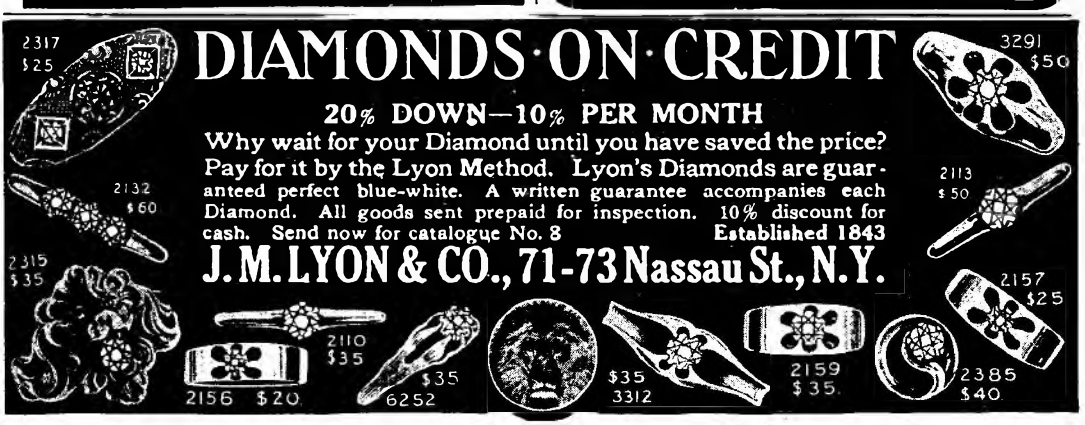

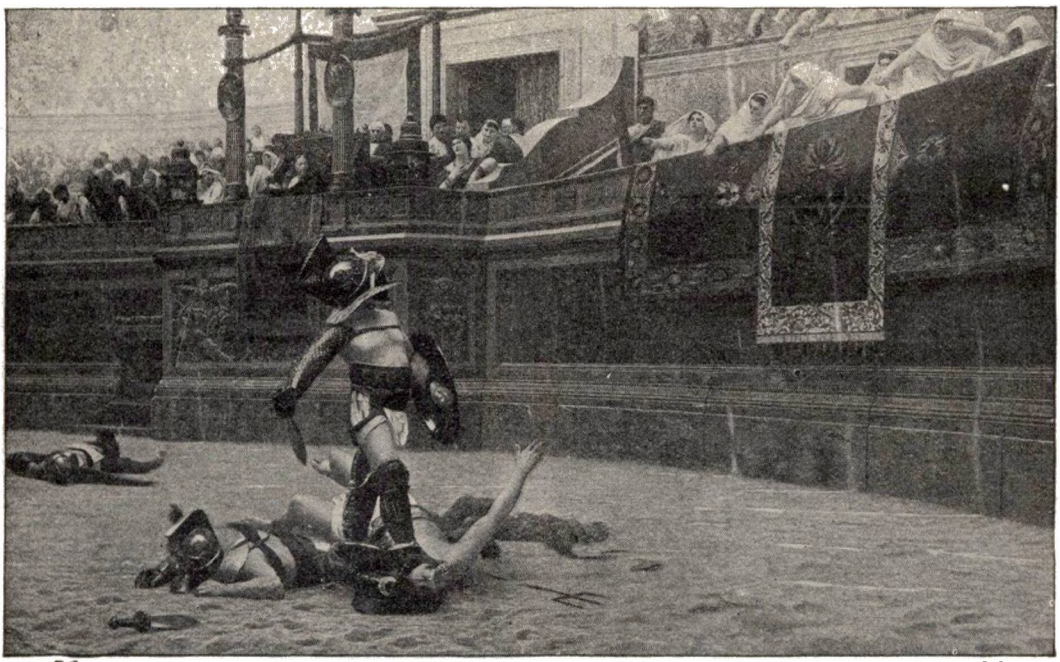

"THUMBS DOWN" for the Untrained Man

In Ancient Rome the fate of the defeated gladiator was decided by the spectators. "Thumbs Up" meant another chance—"Thumbs Down" meant failure. Today the verdict in the business world is always "Thumbs Down" for the Untrained man.

You need not be the under man. If you have a spark of ambition, and can read and write, you ***can*** rise to better things, and win success ***in your chosen line of work.***

Surely you are no different from the thousands of other ambitious men who have won success through the help of the International Correspondence Schools. These men have had their salaries multiplied — have left menial jobs for positions of respect—have left the "thumbs down" arena for a real place in the world.

Mark the attached coupon today and learn how the I. C. S. can help ***you.*** Finding out costs you nothing and does not obligate you. The I. C. S. has a way for you no matter who you are, what you do, or where you live. The I. C. S. will go to you and train you at home, and in your spare time.

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Explain, without further obligation on my part, how I can qualify for the position before which I mark X.

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Architect	Show Card Writing
Building Contractor	Lettering & Sign Painting
Architectural Draftsman	Advertising
Structural Engineer	Salesman
Concrete Construction	Commercial Illustrating
Mechan. Engineer	Industrial Designing
Mechanical Draftsman	Commercial Law
Refrigeration Engineer	Teacher
Civil Engineer	English Branches
Surveyor	Good English for Every One
Mine Superintendent	Agriculture
Metal Mining	Poultry Farming
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Stationary Engineer	Sheet Metal Worker
Textile Manufacturing	Navigation / Spanish
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Automobile Running	Chemist / German

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Present Occupation _____

Street and No. _____

City _____ State _____

Bright's Disease and Diabetes

Under the Auspices of the Cincinnati Evening Post Five Test Cases Were Selected and Treated Publicly by Dr. Irvine K. Mott, Free of Charge.

Irvine K. Mott, M. D., of Cincinnati, Ohio, well and favorably known in that city as a learned physician—a graduate of the Cincinnati Pulte Medical College, and afterward received clinical instructions abroad, believes he has discovered a remedy to successfully treat Bright's Disease, Diabetes and other Kidney troubles, either in their first, intermediate or last stages. Dr. Mott says: "My method aims to arrest the disease, even though it has destroyed most of the kidneys, and thereby preserves intact that portion not yet destroyed. The medicines I use are intended to neutralize the poisons that form a toxin that destroys the cells in the tubes in the kidneys."

The Evening Post, one of the leading daily papers of Cincinnnati, Ohio, hearing of Dr. Mott's success, asked if he would be willing to give a public test to demonstrate his faith in his treatment and prove its merit by treating five persons suffering from Bright's Disease and Diabetes, free of charge, the Post to select the cases.

Dr. Mott accepted the conditions, and twelve persons were selected. After a most critical chemical analysis and microscopic examination had been made, five out of the twelve were decided upon. These cases were placed under Dr. Mott's care and reports published each week in the Post. In three months all were discharged by Dr. Mott as cured. The persons treated gained their normal weight, strength and appetite, and were able to resume their usual work. Anyone who desires to read the details of this public test can obtain copies by sending to Dr. Mott for them.

This public demonstration gave Dr. Mott an international reputation that has brought him into correspondence with people all over the world, and several noted Europeans are numbered among those who have taken his treatment and been cured, as treatment can be administered effectively by mail.

The Doctor will correspond with those who are suffering with Bright's Disease, Diabetes, or any kidney trouble whatever, and will be pleased to give his opinion free to those who will send him a description of their symptoms. An essay which the doctor has prepared about kidney trouble, and describing his new method of treatment, will also be mailed by him. Correspondence for this purpose should be addressed to IRVINE K. MOTT, M. D. 578 Mitchell Bldg., Cincinnati, O

FAMOUS CHEMIST CURES HAIRY ARMS AND FACES

Tells Women Free How to Completely Destroy Superfluous Hair as Mrs. Jenkins Did

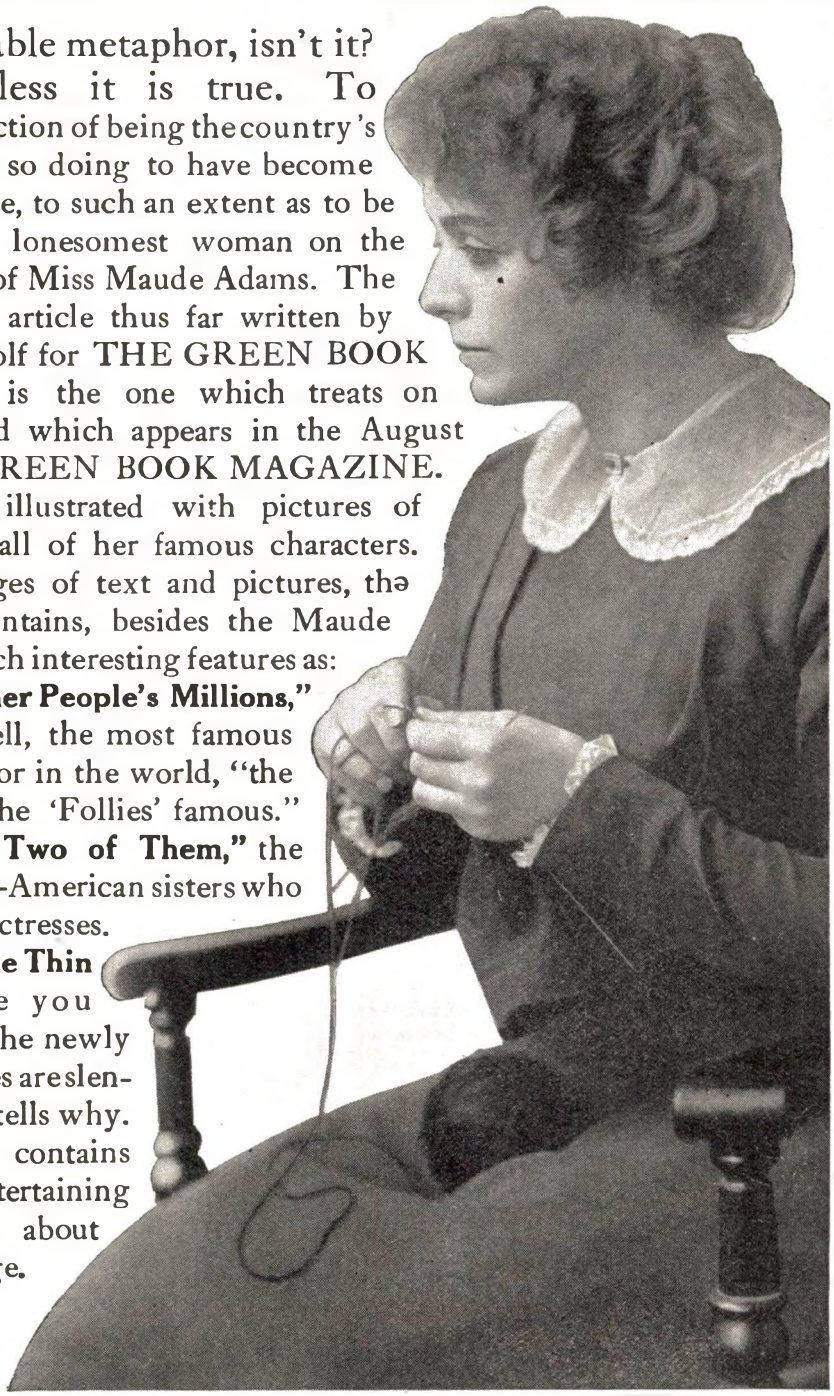
If you are troubled with hairy growths on face, neck or arms, and are tired of wasting your money on worthless depilatories offered by people who lay no pretensions to scientific ability, you will be glad to learn that the well-known English Chemist, Prof. A. P. Smith, formerly a University Science Professor, has discovered a new method which does not fail.

Mrs. Kathryn Jenkins, society leader, who so generously publishes the particulars of her cure

This good news is vouched for by a prominent society lady whose photo is shown herewith, and who says that his method cured her of a distressingly bad growth after all else failed, and that the hair has never returned.

Its distribution in America has been entrusted to a chartered Society of Chemists, who have agreed to send without charge to all who are afflicted, full particulars of this scientific discovery, as well as the opinions of learned doctors who have given it a fair trial. Just send your name and address, (stating whether Mrs. or Miss) and a two-cent stamp for reply, addressed to Lady Secretary, Society of Chemists, 939 T. T. Delta St., Providence, R. I.

America's Most Popular Actress Also Its "Lonesomest" Woman!



AN improbable metaphor, isn't it? Nevertheless it is true. To achieve the distinction of being the country's stage idol, and in so doing to have become isolated, as it were, to such an extent as to be regarded as the lonesomest woman on the stage, is the fate of Miss Maude Adams. The most interesting article thus far written by Mr. Rennold Wolf for THE GREEN BOOK MAGAZINE is the one which treats on Miss Adams, and which appears in the August issue of THE GREEN BOOK MAGAZINE. It is copiously illustrated with pictures of Miss Adams in all of her famous characters.

In the 184 pages of text and pictures, the August issue contains, besides the Maude Adams article, such interesting features as:

"Spending Other People's Millions," by Julian Mitchell, the most famous stage-effect creator in the world, "the man who made the 'Follies' famous."

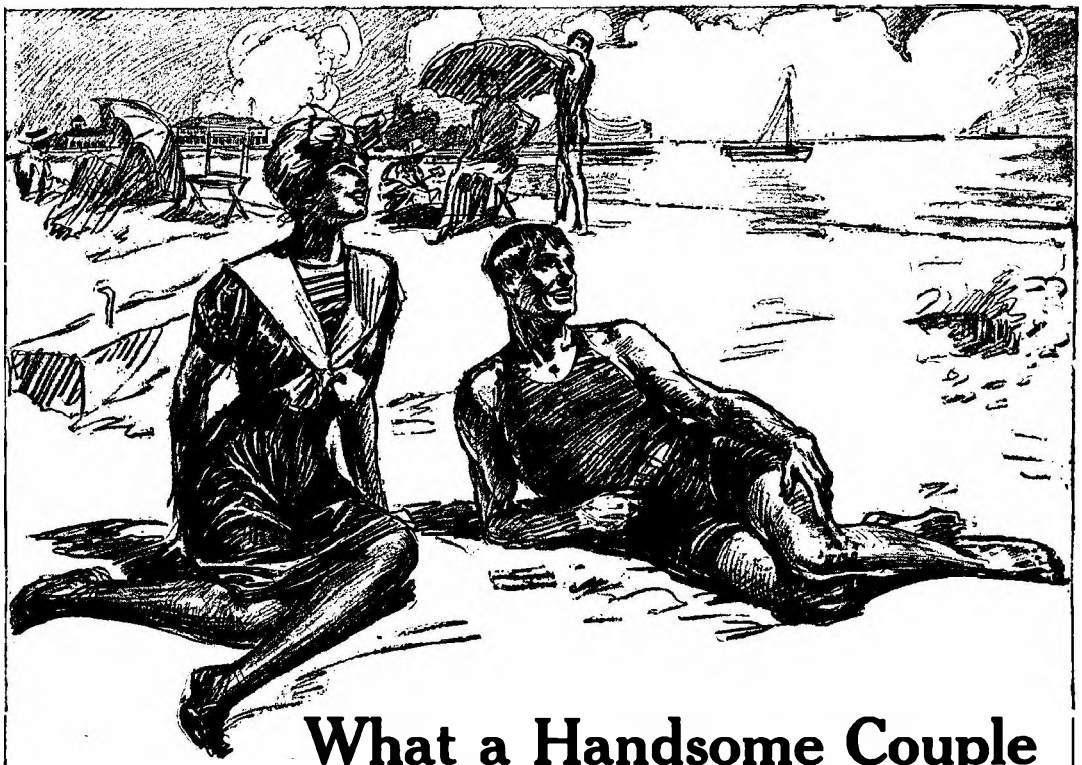
"There Were Two of Them," the story of two Irish-American sisters who became leading actresses.

"The Day of the Thin Actress." Have you noticed that all the newly successful actresses are slender? This article tells why.

The issue also contains many other entertaining features by and about people of the stage.

Price 15 Cents

Get this August GREEN BOOK today—Otherwise your newsdealer may have sold out his supply of the issue before you can get to him.



What a Handsome Couple

Perhaps you yourself have envied the rounded beauty of such figures as these—graceful, well-developed, splendidly healthful—you see them at every bathing beach—admired by all.

Perhaps you dread to don your bathing suit because of your own painful thinness—you wonder bitterly why you are thin—you eat good food and plenty of it—but somehow you can't gain flesh—why is it?

You are thin doubtless because the flesh-producing elements in your food pass away from your body instead of being retained to build it up—your system lacks the power of proper assimilation—a dozen meals a day will not increase your weight—they will only add to the loss.

You need something to stop this waste—you need Sargol.

SARGOL combines with the sugars, starches, fats and albumenoids in your food in such a way that they are readily absorbed by the blood and carried to the parts of the body where they are most needed to nourish and build it up.

As your ***semi-starved*** body gains in flesh and rounds out to its normal beautiful proportions you will find yourself improving wonderfully in looks, in vitality and in vigor.

It costs you nothing to prove our statements.

FREE—50c PACKAGE—FREE

If we did not feel that Sargol would help you we would not offer you this full-size package, for which your druggist would charge you 50c. Cut out the corner coupon and return it to us today with your name and address with 10c to help pay postage and distribution expenses—try this wonderful flesh builder that has made thousands of men and women heavier, healthier and happier.

THE SARGOL COMPANY

280-V HERALD BUILDING BINGHAMTON, NEW YORK

What a Prominent Physician Says About Sargol

I have prescribed Sargol and am exceedingly satisfied with results. It contains all the essentials for flesh forming, is of high value in most cases of malnutrition, thus assuring a rapid recovery from all wasting diseases.

Chemical tests prove it to be free from all narcotics or poison.

DR. HARE CUDDY

Formerly Hon. Staff Physician, St. Luke's Hospital, Michigan.

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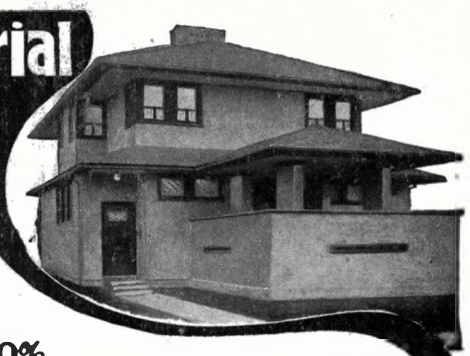

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The object of this advertisement is not to sell plans, but if you are interested in any of the designs shown on this page, we will, to save time, send a complete set of Plans. Specifications and full descriptive Material List, showing sizes, style, quality and catalog number of the material that we furnish. The best part of it is, that the entire $2 will be credited on your order, or if plans do not suit, you may return them and all but 50c will be refunded. In addition, we will also name, upon request, delivered prices for complete Plumbing Outfit and Heating Plant of any kind and furnish complete specifications free of charge.

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Write for our prices on our complete bathroom outfit. We guarantee a saving of 30% to 50%.

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Steam, Hot Water and Warm Air. Let us estimate on rour requirements. Big saving.

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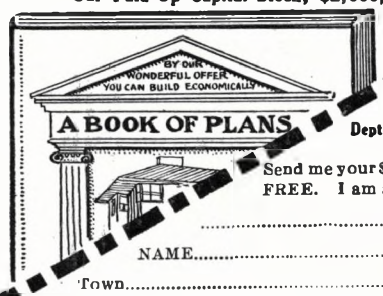

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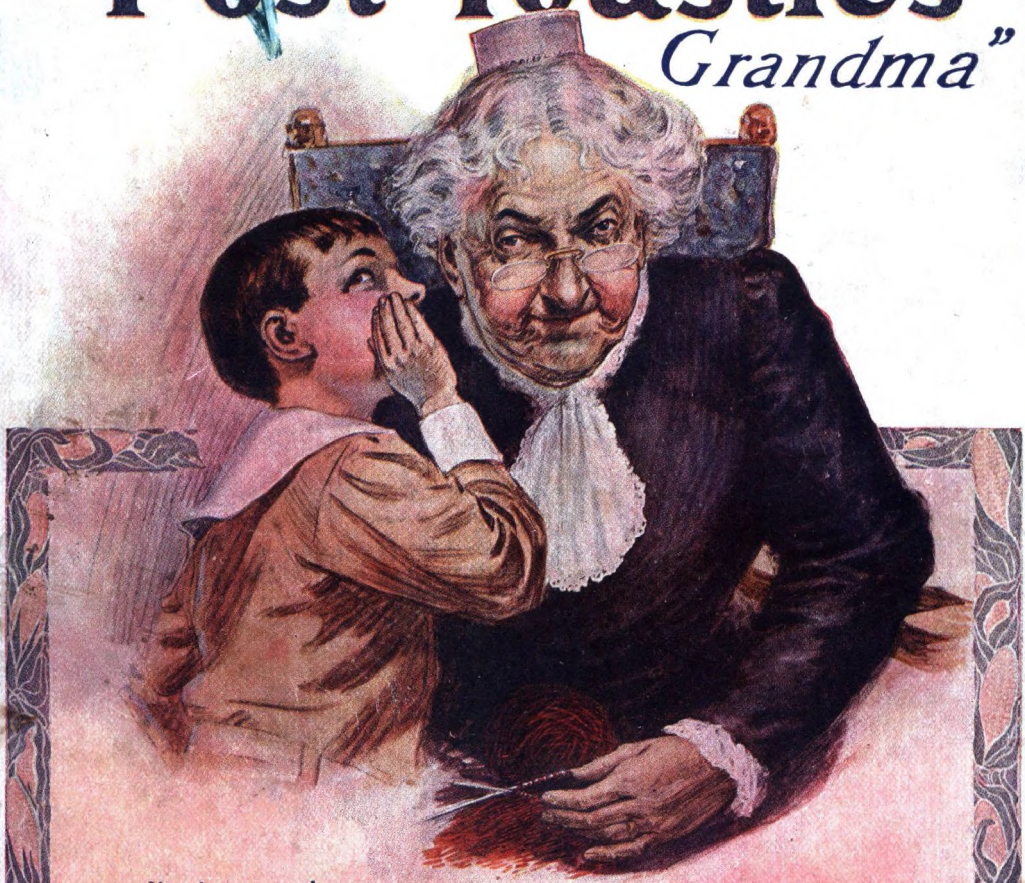

If only parents knew!

If they only realized that the first five years of a child s life are his most important years as far as health is concerned.

If they realized in addition how easy it is to start him right — give him a sturdy foundation of health with

Post Toasties

—the thin, crisp films of toasted corn.

There would be a stronger, happier, more healthy race of people in the land if this or some other simple, pure and nourishing food was more regularly used instead of meats and sweets.

You can actually see a child *thrive* on Post Toasties.

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